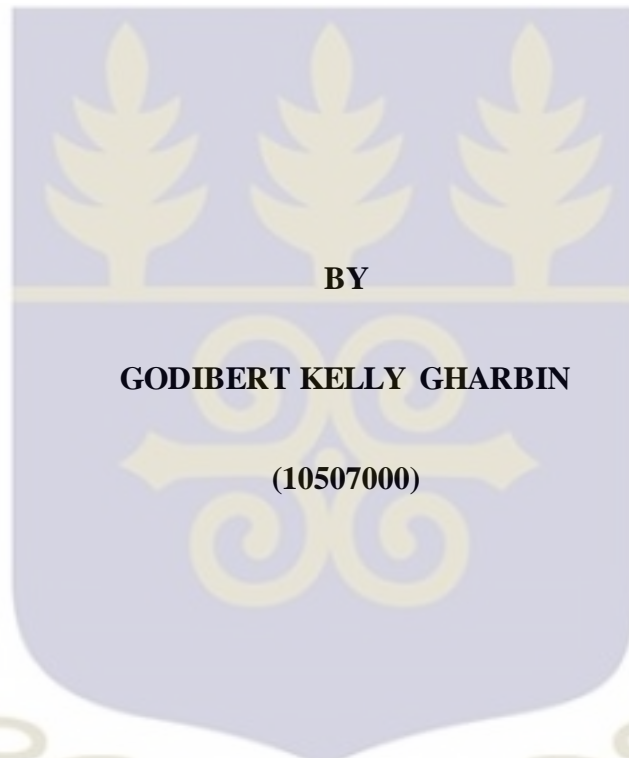


**SOLITUDE IN A MUTITUDE: AN INTERCULTURAL READING OF JOHN 5:1-47**

**THIS THESIS IS SUBMITTED TO THE DEPARTMENT FOR THE STUDY OF  
RELIGIONS, UNIVERSITY OF GHANA, LEGON**



**IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENT FOR THE AWARD OF  
M.PHIL RELIGION DEGREE**

**JULY 2016**

## DECLARATION

This is to certify that this thesis is the result of research undertaken by Godibert Kelly Gharbin under the supervision of Dr. Nicoletta Gatti and Rev. Fr. Dr. George Ossom-Batsa towards the award of M. Phil degree in the Study of Religions in the Department for the Study of Religions, University of Ghana (Legon).

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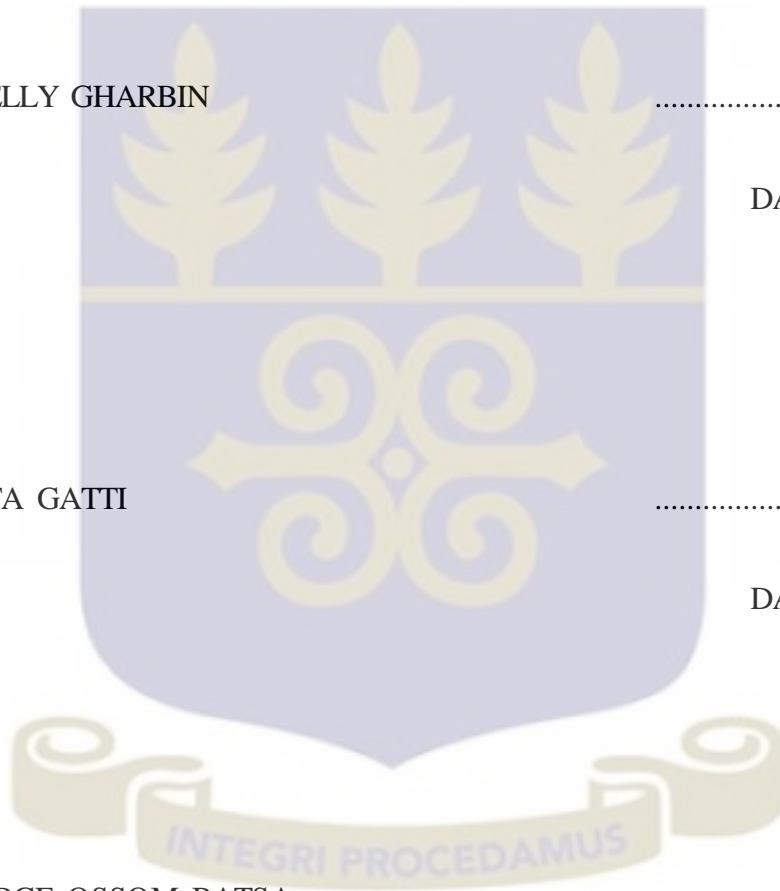
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## ABSTRACT

The idea of the church as a family of God is present in the practices of Ghanaian Mega Churches. Consequently, various structures have been established to promote that agenda. However, like the paralytic at the pool of Bethesda (John 5:5-9), members of these churches feel isolated in the crowd. Even though the congregants belong to multitudinous Christian communities — often captured in national mass media, donating to people outside the walls of their churches — they do not experience the love and care they expect from their churches, especially in challenging times. Against this background, the research analyses John 5:1-47 in order to examine the problem of ‘solitude in the multitude’ present in the text, and the solutions offered to the Johannine community. Furthermore, it examines the relevance of these remedies to the Ghanaian Mega Churches.

The research follows the Intercultural Reading approach proposed by Loba Mkole. The scholar describes Intercultural exegesis as an engagement between a bible culture and an interpreter’s culture. To read the text interculturally, the communicative approach theorized by Ossom-Batsa was employed as theoretical framework. The Ghanaian scholar proposes a three steps method: adherence to the text; attention to the call of action and engagement between the text and the interpreter’s context. The narrative criticism proposed by Daniel Marguerat and Bourquin is applied to reach an informed understanding of the text (first step) and to discover its call to action (second step). Primary and secondary sources were used to ‘exegete’ the interpreter’s context, constituted by three Ghanaian contemporary mega-churches: A.C.I, L.C.I, and I.C.G.C.

From the engagement between text and context, the study establishes that the problem of isolation is present in communities where people forget their original call to be ‘humans,’ image and likeness of God (cf. Gen 1:27). To be ‘human’ is to feel the pain of ‘the brother’ and to feel responsible to remedy the situation. Furthermore, the analysis reveals that there cannot be such a society unless that human community is modelled after the divine community. In fact, studying the fourth gospel with the lens of community, it becomes evident that the role of the human community is to reflect the divine community. As a result, attributes characteristic of the relationship between the Father and the Logos (1:1-2), namely, trust (3:35), love (13:34; 15:20), cooperation (5:20), life giving (3:16; 5:8; 11:38-44), etc. must become operative in the community of the disciples, a community called by God to be testimony and ‘conduit’ of the divine Life.

The study ends with recommendations concerning further research on the concept of the ‘family of God’ in the fourth gospel and its significance for Ghanaian Mega Churches. It further recommends that Mega Churches in Ghana should replicate the ‘divine community’ on earth by being ‘person centred’ and exhibiting the attributes, characteristic of the relationship between the Eternal Distinctions. Leaders of Ghanaian Mega Churches, therefore, should follow Jesus’ pastoral approach (5:5-9), ‘knowing’ their members (10:4-5.14), ‘seeing’ the debilitating circumstances that confront them (9:1; 11:36; 19:26), and ‘addressing’ them (9:6-7).

## DEDICATION

To my wife Priscilla A. A. Gharbin and our baby Nicoletta Bdelium Gharbin.



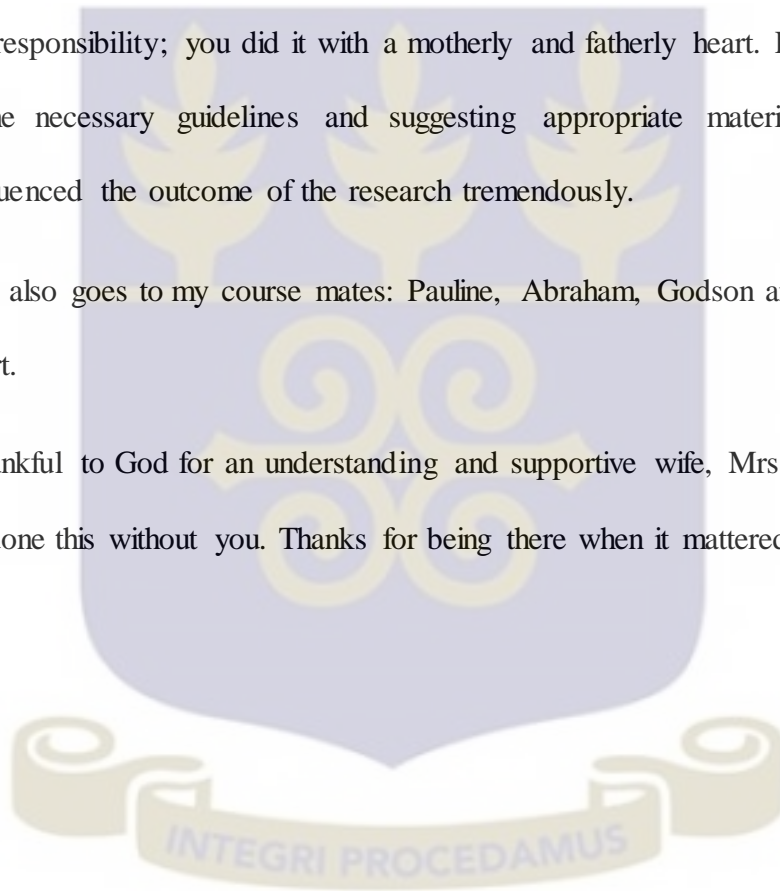
## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

First and foremost, I am thankful to God for His protection and the necessary provisions He showered me with to be able to both embark and complete this study. Moreover, I wish to acknowledge the human instruments used by God to make this dream a reality.

With a sincere and appreciative heart, I wish to express my profound gratitude to my supervisors, Dr. Nicoletta Gatti and Rev. Dr. George Ossom-Batsa for taking time out of their busy schedules to give me the necessary support needed for the completion of this work. You did not only see this as an academic responsibility; you did it with a motherly and fatherly heart. Reading through the work, giving the necessary guidelines and suggesting appropriate materials challenged my thinking and influenced the outcome of the research tremendously.

My appreciation also goes to my course mates: Pauline, Abraham, Godson and Magnus for their relentless support.

Finally, I am thankful to God for an understanding and supportive wife, Mrs Priscilla Gharbin. I could not have done this without you. Thanks for being there when it mattered most.

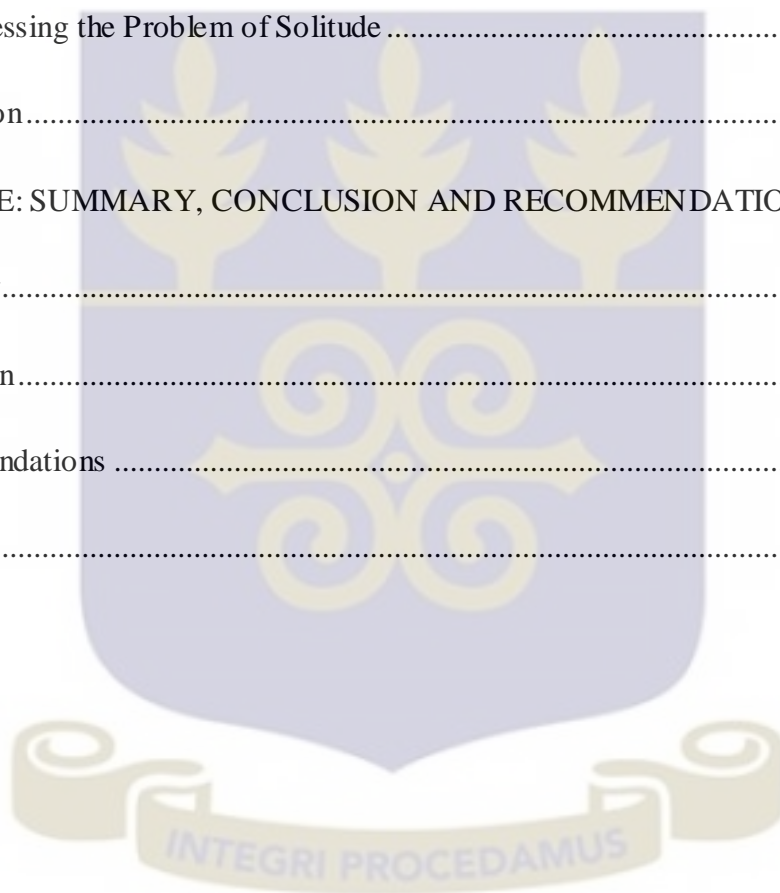


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## CHAPER ONE

### INTRODUCTORY ISSUES

#### 1.1 Background of the Study

The indigenous African places a lot of emphasis on the family. A person's family is not just the nuclear one in which he or she has been born, but the extended family and the community as a whole. Consequently, communality is considered above individuality, to the extent that one cannot exist alone, except corporately.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, the community is seen as the life and soul of the society. Therefore, the individual's self-identity is always situated within the family and the community.<sup>2</sup> Thus, rites are performed as a means of incorporating the person into the society, because his or her survival is contingent on that.<sup>3</sup>

Moreover, communal living of traditional Africans is expressed in various forms. One way in which it is conveyed is through their proverbs. For instance, Gyekye explains that the Akan proverb, *Onipa firi osoro besi a, obesi nipa kurom*, which literally means, "When a person descends from heaven, he/she descends into a human society,"<sup>4</sup> is one of such. For Gyekye, this proverb shows that the Akan concept of society is one in which people considered themselves as social beings, making a life of isolation foreign. The implication is that collectivity and communality subsist in such a society.

Again, in the presence of such attributes, people live for each other, thereby, fostering togetherness, collectivity, and common ownership of property.<sup>5</sup> Due to this, caring and sharing are part of the natural constituent elements of African cultural values.<sup>6</sup> It should be

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<sup>1</sup> John S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Heinemann Educational Publishers, 1989), 106.

<sup>2</sup> Gerald K. Tanye, *The Church as a Family and Ethnocentrism in Sub-Saharan Africa* (Berlin: Lit Verlag, 2010), 27.

<sup>3</sup> Mbiti, *African Religions*, 106.

<sup>4</sup> Kwame Gyekye. *An Essay on African Philosophical Thought: The Akan Conceptual Scheme*, rev. ed. (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1995), 155.

<sup>5</sup> Tanye, *The Church as a Family*, 27.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 28.

noted, however, that they are not restricted to properties alone, but transcend all spheres of human life. Traditionally, Africans care and share in the good, the bad, and the ugly circumstances that members of the society are bewildered with. Accordingly, nobody faces the vicissitudes of life alone. One neither rejoices nor suffers alone. Anything that happens to an individual happens to the community,<sup>7</sup> making it impossible to have ‘solitudes in multitudes’.

Unfortunately, with the advent of urbanization, some of these cultural heritages are dissipating. Life in the city is totally different from life in a typical African setting. Mfaniseni F. Sihlongonyane rightly affirms that with the advent of urbanization in Africa, strong sentiments for individualism started gaining popularity, and has become more meaningful to the economic life than social life of the urban environment. “Materialism and individualism eventually became synonymous with urban life.”<sup>8</sup>

Certainly, the situation is not different in Ghana. Urban-rural migration has become necessary due to limited resources and personal satisfaction.<sup>9</sup> Certainly, one cannot expect to see the value of the virtue of sharing, in a setting where personal gratification and a struggle over limited resources exist. This is primarily because, where resources are limited, there is the urge for people to satisfy themselves first, before thinking about others; thereby, replacing communality with individuality.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Mbiti, *African Religion*, 106.

<sup>8</sup> Mfaniseni F. Sihlongonyane, “The Invisible Hand of the Family in the Underdevelopment of Africa Societies: An African Perspective,” Scholarly Papers Series 1, accessed May 6, 2015, <http://www.gdrc.org/icm/country/scholarly/fanafrica.htm>.

<sup>9</sup> Rhoda E. Howard, *Human Right in Commonwealth Africa* (Totowa: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 1986), 28.

<sup>10</sup> Howard, *Commonwealth Africa*, 25.

Regrettably, Mega Churches in Accra are faced with this problem.<sup>11</sup> These churches believe in having a ‘small beginning,’ but a ‘great end.’<sup>12</sup> They start with few people, and then put in place strategies to increase their numbers. One good thing about their beginning stages is that they focus on the individual, because the number is small. Conversely, as numerical growth becomes evident with the passage of time, their concentration shifts to the collective agenda, at the detriment of the individual need, to the extent that the individual loses his or her place. They are in a community of faith, yet, they face life alone.

The story of the man at the pool of Bethesda seems to be a biblical paradigm of present prevalent trend in Ghanaian Charismatic Mega Churches. The invalid man was in an environment where many had gathered to be healed. Yet, after a long period of waiting at the pool, his expectations never collided with his experience. In his encounter with Jesus, he reveals what has been a stumbling block to his healing: “lack of a man” (5:7).<sup>13</sup> His answer, however, seems astonishing, considering the information provided by John’s gospel concerning life in this community.

There are internal evidences in the fourth gospel that point to the fact that communal living is promoted in John’s gospel. Right from the prologue, community life is addressed. The author commences the book with a ‘divine community,’ consisting of God and the Logos (1:1-2). The preposition *πρὸς* suggests two distinct personalities, relating with one another in a community.<sup>14</sup> Tenney takes the argument further, postulating that the preposition carries

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<sup>11</sup> The term is used here in reference to Ghanaian charismatic churches which begin with few people, but see numerical growth as God’s plan for the church, and so seek to fill their churches until there is an overflow during church services. This paper will seek to explore this concept into detail later in the work, looking at how its major exponent, Dag Heward Mills, elucidates the concept.

<sup>12</sup> Dag Heward-Mills, *The Mega Church: How to Make your Church Grow*, 2nd ed. (Accra: Parchment House Publishers, 2011), 2.

<sup>13</sup> Andreas J. Köstenberger, *John: Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004), 180.

<sup>14</sup> K. S. Wuest, *Wuest’s Word Studies from the Greek New Testament*, vol. 3 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1973), 51.

the idea of “association in the sense of free mingling with others of a community on terms of equality.”<sup>15</sup> Thus, John 1:1-2 could be described as expressing a heavenly society. To elucidate this notion, John gives his readers some attributes of an ideal society, i.e., cooperation and collectivity. These qualities are evident in how they collaborated; both in the creation of the universe (1:3) and in the earthly ministry of the incarnate word (14:9-11).

Furthermore, God the Father and the Son demonstrate during Jesus’ ministry, how people must live in a community. This is seen in the family relationship and love that they exhibit. Both the family bond and love are seen in various pericopes (3:16; 10:30; 14:31; 15:9, 17:23-29).

Again, the characteristics of community displayed by the eternal distinctions, even in the days of Jesus’ incarnation, are meant to serve as a model for the ‘human community’. Thus, in John’s gospel, human beings should live in a community because God is a ‘community.’ Consequently, Jesus, the Word made flesh, builds a ‘community’ with His disciples, giving us a paradigm of a perfect community. It is a society where individuality does not rule, because, His love for them is to be translated into the way they relate with each other (13:34). The commandment to love each other, nurtures a sense of communality and unity. The reason is that if they love each other, they would stand by each other in every circumstance. Wuest concurs that unity will of necessity be present where love is, because love “produces the incentive to unity.”<sup>16</sup>

The concept of community takes a new dimension in John 14:23, where the ‘divine community’ is presented as coming to abide in the disciples, and forming a new community, consisting of the divine and human (14:23).

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<sup>15</sup> Merrill C. Tenney, *John: An Analytical Study of the Gospel of Belief* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 64.

<sup>16</sup> Wuest, *Word Studies*, 111.

Moreover, at the crucifixion of Christ, the community is finally and formally inaugurated by the Spirit (19:30). The expression παρέδωκεν τὸ πνεῦμα (gave up the Spirit), is not used here euphemistically for death, but in reference to the pouring of the Spirit upon the small community at the foot of the cross.<sup>17</sup> The idea that this small group merits the term ‘community,’ can be deduced from Jesus’ address to two of these people. He did not refer to Mary as His mother. Rather, he used the term ‘mother’ (v. 27). It symbolises the church, thereby, making the people present at the foot of the cross a new family<sup>18</sup> or a new community.<sup>19</sup> Thus, John’s obedience to Jesus’ words, by taking Mary to his own home (19:27), could be regarded as showing concern and care for the community or its members.

The centrality of community in this gospel can be deduced also from the two proofs associated with the idea. First of all, Jesus indicates that demonstrating the love which He lavished on them towards one another is a proof that they are His disciples (13:35). Most importantly, it also authenticates Christ as the ‘Sent One’ (17:21-23).<sup>20</sup> It is pertinent to note that the idea of the ‘Sent One,’ is prevalent in this book. From the prologue, John the Baptist is presented as a man sent from God (1:6-8) to bear witness of Christ. As the narrative unfolds, Jesus shows through His teachings (3:17) and works (9:7), that He is the Sent One. Again, Mary Magdalene participated in the ‘sending’ when Jesus sent her to His brethren (20:17). Interestingly, Jesus used the expression, “my brethren,” instead of “my disciples”. It shows the implementation of the promise that those who believe in Christ are given the

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<sup>17</sup> Francis Moloney, *Glory and Dishonor: Reading John 13-21* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress Press, 1998), 146.

<sup>18</sup> Moloney, *Reading John 13-21*, 146.

<sup>19</sup> Ben Witherington III, *Women in the Ministry of Jesus: A Study of Jesus’ Attitudes to Women and Their Roles as Reflected in His Earthly Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 97. See also Francis Moloney, *Sacra Pagina: The Gospel of John*, ed. Daniel J. Harrington (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1998), 511.

<sup>20</sup> Andreas J. Köstenberger, *The Missions of Jesus and the Disciples According to the Fourth Gospel: With Implications for the Fourth Gospel’s Purpose and the Mission of the Contemporary Church* (Grand Rapids-Cambridge: Eerdmans, 1998), 107.

authority to become children of God.<sup>21</sup> Jesus affirms it when He indicates further, that His Father is also their Father (v. 17). By this, it becomes clear, that the concept of the ‘sending,’ gives the ‘human community,’ the opportunity to become a part of the ‘divine community’. Accordingly, to make the sense of ‘community,’ a proof that Jesus is the ‘Sent Son of God,’ shows that so much significance is given to the concept of communality.

In addition, we can conjecture that the purpose for emphasising the concept of community in John’s gospel makes the paralytic’s answer problematic. Indeed, John’s presentation of the work of the Holy Spirit supports the notion that the idea of life of loneliness was not embraced in the Johannine society. Jesus, admonishing His disciples, speaks of an imminent moment where they would not feel His bodily presence (14:1-4). However, He promises not to leave them comfortless (14:18), but prays the Father to send the Comforter (14:16), to abide with them forever, as ὁ παράκλητος (The Advocate, 14:26). To have the Advocate with them forever implies the provision of perpetual assistance.

Again, the mention of Sabbath, strikes a note worth investigating. In the socio-religious life of the people, the Sabbath was meant to enhance community life.<sup>22</sup> For instance, the cessation of common activity provided an opportunity for a holy community to be generated.<sup>23</sup> In a society where a holy communal living has been created, assistance from a ‘man’ should be easily available. These specified factors prove that the paralytic’s inability to get help was due to the fact that the Bethesda community had neglected their responsibility towards ‘the brother’ (cf. Gen. 4:9).

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<sup>21</sup> Moloney, *Reading John 13-21*, 166.

<sup>22</sup> Margaret Davies, *Rhetoric and Reference in the Fourth Gospel* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1992), 229.

<sup>23</sup> William P. Brown, *The Ethos of the Cosmos: The Genesis of Moral Imagination in the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 121.

## 1.2 Statement of the Problem

Against the background of the neglected responsibility for ‘the brother’ in both Ghanaian Mega Churches and the Bethesda community, this work examines the idea of solitude in a multitude, by analysing John 5:1-47, and explores its relevance for contemporary Ghanaian Mega Churches.

## 1.3 Research Questions

The main research question is:

What is the narrative role of John 5:1-47 in in the context of the fourth gospel?

Additionally, the sub research questions are:

How does the pericope address the problem of solitude in a multitude?

How can the text be relevant in the spirituality of contemporary Ghanaian Mega Churches?

## 1.4 Significance of the Study

The idea of the church as a family of God is a prominent concept in Ghanaian Mega Churches. Yet, in practice, the problem of solitariness abides in them. Therefore, in pastoral practices, it is hoped that the study provides a better understanding of the concept of the church as ‘family of God’ in Ghanaian Charismatic Christianity. We also hope that it offers alternative solutions to the problem of solitariness. Moreover, it is hoped that the work contributes to the on-going debate on the concept of the church as God’s family.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> The ‘church as family of God’ is a developing theme in the ecclesiology of African Roman Catholic Churches. The reason for the emergence of the theme, stems from the alternative solutions it provides for some of the issues that confront the church and the continent. Consequently, various scholars have used it to address different challenges in their contexts. See Lievin Engbanda Lingonge, *The Church as Family of God: A Guide in the Praxis and Ethics of Reconciliation and Peacemaking in the Democratic Republic of Congo* (Maitland: Xylon Press, 2004), 44-58; and Christian Mhagama, “The Church as Family of God: A Biblical Foundation?” in *The Model of Church-as-Family: Meeting the African Challenge*, ed. Patrick Ryan (Nairobi: Catholic University of Eastern Africa, 1999), 36-45. Moreover, the Roman Catholic Church in Ghana, in an attempt to

## **1.5 Literature Review**

### **1.5.1 Introduction**

The review of the literature related to this study is divided into two parts, focusing on problems related to John 5:1-47 and hermeneutics. The study focuses on issues related to the text because an original biblical culture is required when reading a text interculturally. However, an informed understanding of the pericope, and the culture of the Bible, can only be obtained when the issues raised about the text are analysed.

In addition, hermeneutics is considered in this study for two reasons. Firstly, the significance of its bipolar nature: exegesis and interpretation. Exegesis helps to arrive at an informed understanding of what the first readers of the text understood it to mean. Also, interpretation aids the ramifications of that understanding to be drawn out for contemporary significance.<sup>25</sup> Secondly, Intercultural Reading is a branch of hermeneutics. Consequently, review of literature in that field of study is important.

### **1.5.2 John 5:1-47**

There are many issues in the above pericope which have necessitated scholarly debates. Among them, the attitude of the man and the Sabbath theme are considered below.

#### **A. The Attitude of the Man**

In juxtaposing this narrative to other stories in the gospels, many scholars have raised concerns regarding the attitude of the man. In John's gospel for instance, the story of the healing of the congenitally blind man (John 9) shares some commonalities with this healing

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see how it can also inculcate the theme into its ecclesiology, has necessitated many scholarly works on the subject. A recent one is the advancement of the debate by John Kobina Louis, a priest in the Roman Catholic Church in Ghana. See John Kobina Louis, "Reception of the Ecclesiology of Vatican II: Some Prospects for the Catholic Church in Ghana (PhD dissertation, University of Ghana, 2014), 207-266.

<sup>25</sup> W. Randolph Tate, *Biblical Interpretation: An Integrated Approach*, rev. ed. (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 1997), xix.

narrative. In the two cases, Jesus “saw a man.”<sup>26</sup> Additionally, the sick people had no idea of Jesus’ identity prior to their healing (5:13; 9:11). Furthermore, both received their healing by a pool. The paralytic was healed at the pool of Bethesda (5:1-9), while the congenital blind man received his healing, after washing at the pool of Siloam (9:7). Moreover, in the two healings, people raised different questions about them. In the case of the blind man, the questions were about how he was healed and who the healer was (9:10, 15-17). Regarding the healing of the paralytic, the questions focused on the reasons for carrying his mat on a Sabbath, and the one who authorised him to do that (5:10-12). Finally, both of them were healed on a Sabbath day (5:9; 9:14).

Despite these similarities, there is one main divergence: their attitudes. While the congenital blind man, after the healing, worshipped Jesus when he became conscious of His identity (9:38), the paralytic only went to inform the Jews (5:15), without following Jesus or accepting His words.<sup>27</sup> Also, the blind man defended Jesus, even when he had not fully known His identity, and still stood in the face of excommunication (9:24-34). In contrast, the paralytic took the side of the Jews,<sup>28</sup> without even showing any appreciation to Jesus for his healing.<sup>29</sup> For these reasons, some scholars have labelled him as an informant<sup>30</sup> and a betrayer.<sup>31</sup>

Even though the man may have betrayed Jesus through his actions, the motive was to present Jesus as the One who ordered him to carry the mat, to save himself from the repercussions of contravening a law of the Sabbath (v. 10). The Jews would have excommunicated him

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<sup>26</sup> Herman Ridderbos, *The Gospel of John: A Theological Commentary* (Grand Rapids-Cambridge: Eerdmans, 1997), 190.

<sup>27</sup> Francis Moloney, *Signs and Shadows: Reading John 5-12* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996), 7.

<sup>28</sup> Ridderbos, *The Gospel of John*, 190.

<sup>29</sup> Köstenberger, *John*, 183.

<sup>30</sup> James Louis Martyn, *History and Theology in the Fourth Gospel*. 3rd ed. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003), 74.

<sup>31</sup> Paul X. Coxon, *Exploring the New Exodus in John: A Biblical Theological Investigation of John Chapters 5-10* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2014), 124.

from the religious community, just like the blind man (9:34). Having tasted loneliness for many years, he wanted to avoid a repetition of his past state. Unfortunately, the desire to avoid a life of seclusion and gain a sense of belonging, made him choose the Jews' community instead of the one Jesus offered him.

## **B. The Sabbath Theme**

John introduces the Sabbath theme in v. 19, by indicating that the day on which the miracle transpired was a Sabbath day. This is a clear deviation from the synoptics, where the Sabbath theme usually precedes the healing.<sup>32</sup> Undoubtedly, it does not only set the stage for the drama that follows as Martyn suggests,<sup>33</sup> but also triggers controversy over the Sabbath, and precipitates a Christological dialogue,<sup>34</sup> which are the main components of the discussions that follow the healing.

Unlike the parallel passage in John 9 where the questions revolved around how the congenital blindness was cured, the questions raised in this pericope focused on the man's motivation for carrying his mat, and on the authority of the one who instructed him to do so (v. 12). Even when the man's answer captured how he was cured, the healing, which was encapsulated in the first part of the statement was ignored,<sup>35</sup> concentrating on sabbatical rules. An issue on the Sabbath was a great concern, because, it was one of the three religious practices that defined the identity of the community of first-century Judaism. Therefore, a challenge to the Sabbath was tantamount to challenging the very identity of the community.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Gail R. O'Day and Susan E. Hylén, *John: Westminster Bible Companion* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006), 64.

<sup>33</sup> Martyn, *The Fourth Gospel*, 74.

<sup>34</sup> D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John* (Grand Rapids-Cambridge: Eerdmans, 1991), 244.

<sup>35</sup> O'Day and Hylén, *John*, 65.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 64.

In fact, it was precisely the reason why the ‘Jews’ questioned the identity and authority of the one whose instruction to the healed man, in their view, contravened a Sabbatical law. For such a man was worth knowing, considering the value they placed on the Sabbath. It was this question which necessitated the Christological dialogue that unveiled the identity and authority of the Healer, making it the only place where the relationship between the Son and the Father, became a focal point of Jesus’ defence for working on a Sabbath day.<sup>37</sup> It is essential, because, from this relationship, His identity and authority emanate. His relationship with God, as His son, gives Him ontological equality with the Father (v. 18), thereby warranting this authority, by which He can work on the Sabbath.

Moreover, the Jews had always postulated that there is only one Lord of the Sabbath.<sup>38</sup> Consequently, any claim of ontological equality with God, was met with great resistance. Jesus does not deny the Father’s position as the Lord of the Sabbath. Rather, He considers the Father as such. In Moloney’s assessment, He does not in any way assert to have any authority, but shows that He is “what He is only in humble obedience to and complete dependence upon the Father.”<sup>39</sup>

Since He has established His authority through His relationship with the Father, who is the Lord of the Sabbath, did He deliberately decide to break the rule to show that He is Lord over the Sabbath? First of all, it is legitimate to ascertain the veracity of the accusation of breaking a law, before probing into Jesus’ motive. Köstenberger and Moloney cite Exodus 31:12-17; 20:8-11, Jeremiah 17:21-27 and Nehemiah 13:15-19 as the possible motivation of the Jews’ accusation.<sup>40</sup> Taking the argument further, Carson suggests that rabbinic opinion

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<sup>37</sup> Carson, *John*, 244.

<sup>38</sup> Moloney, *Reading John 5-12*, 13.

<sup>39</sup> C. K. Barrett, *The Gospel According to St. John: An Introduction with Commentary and Notes on the Greek Text*, 2nd ed. (Philadelphia: Westminster John Knox Press, 1978), 257.

<sup>40</sup> Köstenberger, *John*, 181; and Moloney, *The Gospel of John*, 168.

had organised the prohibitions into thirty nine groups of work, including carrying something from a domain to another.<sup>41</sup> So, it was this law that the Jews accused the paralytic for breaking.<sup>42</sup> According to Köstenberger, carrying a mat was only permissible when someone is on the bed, not when it is empty. Both Carson and Köstenberger assert that the man broke the law by carrying the mat from one domain to another. However, Carson opines that if one is judging from the OT perspective, then the perspicuity of contravening a law is absent, since that was not the man's work.<sup>43</sup>

Clearly, this and many more issues, raise the argument that the Jews and Jesus had different understanding of the right way of worshipping God on a Sabbath day.<sup>44</sup> Therefore Jesus, by this attitude, sought to recall the real meaning of the day to them.<sup>45</sup> For instance, the Sabbath existed to render honour and praise to God.<sup>46</sup> Thus, if carrying the mat was a sign of victory over suffering, and of glory to God,<sup>47</sup> then the act can be seen as honouring the Sabbath day, but not breaking a rule of the Sabbath. Moreover, by affirming that His authority is from the Father, and that He is what He is only in humble obedience to His Father,<sup>48</sup> Jesus would not disobey Him by suggesting to the healed man what is antithetical to the Father's will.

In summary, the Sabbath is a significant part of this pericope because, it compelled the Christological debate which gave Jesus the opportunity to reveal His identity as an obedient Son of the Father, His authority which stems from His ontological equality and functional subordination to the Father, and most importantly, provided an avenue for Him to give a

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<sup>41</sup> Carson, *John*, 244.

<sup>42</sup> Köstenberger, *John*, 181.

<sup>43</sup> Carson, *John*, 244.

<sup>44</sup> Moloney, *The Gospel of John*, 167.

<sup>45</sup> Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John: The New International Commentary on the New Testament*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 271.

<sup>46</sup> Moloney, *Reading John 5-12*, 13.

<sup>47</sup> Ridderbos, *The Gospel of John*, 188.

<sup>48</sup> Barrett, *The Gospel According to St. John*, 257.

new perspective on observance of the Sabbath. Again, the Sabbath gave the paralytic rest, from his former life of seclusion, and led to his incorporation into the community.

### 1.5.3 Hermeneutics

Hermeneutics has been defined differently by various scholars. Carl Braaten defines it as “the science of reflecting on how a word or an event in the past time and culture may be understood and become existentially meaningful in our present situation.”<sup>49</sup> According to Tate, Hermeneutics is the “study of the locus of meaning and the principles of interpretation.”<sup>50</sup> He argues further that it is bipolar: exegesis and interpretation. To exegete a text, the scholar seeks to arrive at an informed understanding of what its first readers understood it to mean. But in interpretation, the ramifications of that understanding are drawn out for contemporary significance. In line with these scholars, Brown also affirms that the analysis of what we do, when we seek to understand the Bible, including its appropriation to the contemporary world, is hermeneutics.<sup>51</sup> Osborne sums it all by suggesting that hermeneutics “encompasses both what it meant and what it means.”<sup>52</sup> Primarily, what all these scholars are suggesting is that the hermeneutical process is meaningless without contextualization. It is the search for a contemporary significance of the text, which has necessitated different approaches of Hermeneutics. One of such is African Hermeneutics.

#### A. African Hermeneutics

In his panoramic view of the various approaches in African Biblical Hermeneutics, Ossom-Batsa opines that Biblical Hermeneutics followed the Western cultural point of view until

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<sup>49</sup> Carl Braaten, *History and Hermeneutics* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1966), 131.

<sup>50</sup> Tate, *Biblical Interpretation*, xix.

<sup>51</sup> Jeannine K. Brown, *Scripture as Communication: Introducing Biblical Hermeneutics* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 21.

<sup>52</sup> Grant R. Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral: A Comprehensive Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*, 2nd ed. (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2006), 21.

the 1960s, where some African scholars launched models of interpretation, with the motive of inculturating the Bible.<sup>53</sup> Ukpong claims that he coined the term “Inculturation Biblical Hermeneutic,” to mean “an interpretation derived from the methodology of inculturation theology.”<sup>54</sup> It is pertinent to note that the attempt to situate faith within a culture that is foreign to the original culture of the Bible is all an attempt to make the Bible applicable to contemporary cultures. Consequently, Intercultural Hermeneutics is proposed by some scholars as a means to this end.

As one of the means of contextualising the message of the Bible, Intercultural Hermeneutics is an interaction between two languages (text and reality), their underlying cultures, as well as their value systems, calling for a reading of the ancient text in the receptor culture and context.<sup>55</sup> Loba-Mkole traces Intercultural Hermeneutics in Africa to Antoine C.N. Cilumba and Chris U. Manus. He notes, however, that the works of these scholars are as well traceable to Ukpong. After the publication of Ukpong’s article in 1996, Jean-Bosco Matand used the same method for the interpretation of Galatians 2:11-14 and Acts 15:1-35. Antoine C.N. Cilumba and Chris U. Manus then adopted it in 2001 and 2003 respectively, calling it Intercultural Hermeneutics. Cilumba applied the method to John 2:23-3:36, whereas Manus used it to interpret Mark 1:40-45 and other passages.<sup>56</sup>

Cilumba, the first African to have labelled the method as Intercultural Hermeneutics or exegesis, used Gadamer’s philosophical Hermeneutics as the substratum of his work. The philosopher proposes three stages in the process of understanding a text: fore-understanding

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<sup>53</sup> Inculturation has been defined by Shorter as “the creative and dynamic relationship between faith and culture or cultures.” See Aylward Shorter, *Toward a Theology of Inculturation* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2006), 11. For various approaches in African biblical hermeneutics, see George Ossom-Batsa, “African Interpretation of the Bible in Communicative Perspective,” *Ghana Bulletin of Theology* 2 (2007): 91-92.

<sup>54</sup> Jean-Claude Loba-Mkole, “Rise of Intercultural Biblical Exegesis in Africa,” *HTS* 64, no. 3 (2008): 1349.

<sup>55</sup> C. U. Manus, “Methods and Relevance of the Study of Religions in Nigerian Universities,” in *Selected Themes in the Study of Religions in Nigeria*, eds. S. G. A. Onibere and M. P. Adogbo (Lagos: Malthouse Press Limited, 2010), 10.

<sup>56</sup> Loba-Mkole, “Intercultural Biblical Exegesis in Africa,” 1357.

or conception of the reader,<sup>57</sup> a fusion of horizons,<sup>58</sup> and appropriation of the text by the reader.<sup>59</sup>

The interaction with the scholars above has meaningfully affected this research in two main ways: African Hermeneutics and the exegesis of the text. Regarding African Hermeneutics, it has helped to gain an informed understanding about Intercultural Hermeneutics, which helped in contextualising the biblical message. Concerning the analysis of the text, it has brought to bear the significance of the Sabbath theme, which is a controlling idea in the fifth chapter of John's gospel. Again, on the basis of the thematic unity of the pericope, it has helped to resolve the conundrum about the delimitation of the passage. Finally, the discussions on the Sabbath have further aided to arrive at an informed understanding of the individual's role as an agent of liberation in the community.

In this work, Intercultural Hermeneutics, as a branch of African Hermeneutics, is adopted. Due to the need to have two cultures to engage each other during the process of Intercultural Reading, the culture of the text and the culture of three Mega Churches were selected for this purpose.

## 1.6 Methodology

The communicative approach, proposed by Ossom-Batsa, was used as the theoretical framework for this research. The Ghanaian scholar proposes a tripartite level; adherence to the biblical text, attention to the call of action proposed in the text, and the interpreter's context, as a frame of interpretation.<sup>60</sup> Adhering to the text, he surmises, is to pay attention

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<sup>57</sup> Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 2nd rev. ed., trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall (New York: Crossroad, 1989), 294.

<sup>58</sup> Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 317.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 408.

<sup>60</sup> George Ossom-Batsa, "Biblical Exegesis in the African Context: A Communicative Approach," in *Unpacking the Sense of the Sacred: A Reader in the Study of Religions*, eds. Abamfo O. Atiemo and Ben-Willie K. Golo (Banbury: Ayebia Clarke Publishing Limited, 2014), 128.

to the linguistic and non-linguistic elements, to get an informed understanding of the communicative force of the text which has been deliberately put there by the author to aid his audience on their journey of reading. The call to action in the text, on the other hand, is the communicative function of the text. Primarily, it is the understanding that emanates from respecting the text and the journey of the implied reader, that become a call to action for real readers.<sup>61</sup> Furthermore, the interpreter's context is the frame within which the dialogue between God and humanity transpires.<sup>62</sup> The context is pertinent because the realization of the call to action in the text is conditioned by the context of the real readers.<sup>63</sup> It must be noted, however, that the community of readers must guard against 'enslaving' the text, or rendering it docile to its context. Rather, it should always have the central position.<sup>64</sup> Finally, though the contextual theologian annotates that the tripartite levels are not sequential steps, but rather a frame of interpretation,<sup>65</sup> some steps must necessarily precede others. For instance, to arrive at the call to action in the text, the text must be respected. Again, it is the call to action which emanates from respecting the text that is engaged in an interpreter's context. It simply means that before engaging the text in a contemporary context, one must respect the text, discover the call to action and then, engage it in his or her context. Thus, the communicative approach was applied using the tripartite levels as a frame of interpretation.

Applying the communicative approach, the narrative criticism proposed by Daniel Marguerat and Bourquin was used in the first step (adhering to the biblical text). They define narrative criticism as "a method of reading the text which explores and analyses how

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<sup>61</sup> Ossom-Batsa, "A Communicative Approach," 129.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 129-130.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 130.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 130.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 128.

narrativity is made concrete in a particular text.”<sup>66</sup> In their view, this approach focuses on the axis of communication, i.e., the method used by the author to communicate his message to the reader or the strategy by which he organizes the decipherment of meaning by the reader.<sup>67</sup> In this regard, Osborne suggests that two things demand the reader’s attention: “poetics, which studies the artistic dimension of the text; and meaning, which recreates the message that the author is communicating.”<sup>68</sup> Accordingly, the poetics (how) of the pericope was studied to know how the author has constructed the text, and the meaning (what) to arrive at an informed understanding. This method was chosen because it helps to adequately analyse a biblical narrative.<sup>69</sup> Moreover, it equips readers with the skill to understand the codes and signals of a narrative.<sup>70</sup> Finally, it aids the exegete to do proper structural, stylistic and exegetical analyses.<sup>71</sup>

After this, the call to action in the text, discovered through narrative analysis of the text, was situated within the interpreter’s context, using the Intercultural Reading which was adopted by Loba-Mkole, to facilitate an engagement between the text and reality. This scholar avers that the Bible is a “living example of Intercultural Hermeneutic between the word of God and human cultures.”<sup>72</sup> Since Intercultural Reading entails a “constructive dialogue between an original Biblical culture and that of a receptive audience,”<sup>73</sup> two realities were used. These include the reality of the text (John 5:1-47) and the reality of a contemporary context (L.C.I, A.C.I and I.C.G.C).

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<sup>66</sup> Daniel Marguerat and Yvan Bourquin, *How to Read Bible Stories: An Introduction to Narrative Criticism*, trans. John Bowden (London: SCM Press, 1999), 3.

<sup>67</sup> Marguerat and Bourquin, *How to Read*, 5.

<sup>68</sup> Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral*, 203.

<sup>69</sup> Marguerat and Bourquin, *How to Read*, 8.

<sup>70</sup> Mark Allan Powell, *What is Narrative Criticism?* GBS (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990), 18.

<sup>71</sup> Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral*, 216-19.

<sup>72</sup> Loba-Mkole, “Intercultural Biblical Exegesis in Africa.” 1354.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, 1359.

The *Qodesh*, which is the headquarters of the Lighthouse Chapel International, headed by Bishop Dag Heward-Mills, Christ's Temple, the headquarters of I.C.G.C, headed by Pastor Mensa Otabil, and the Prayer Cathedral, the headquarters of the Christian Action Faith Ministries, headed by Archbishop Nicholas Duncan Williams were used for the study.

These churches are significant to the study because they fit into the organizational, demographic and leadership criteria that characterize Mega Churches. Kendra King outlines four of the attributes. Mega Churches are churches with massive number of persons in attendance,<sup>74</sup> a charismatic, authoritative senior pastor, a very active seven-day-a-week congregational community, a multitude of social and outreach ministries, and a complex differentiated organizational structure.<sup>75</sup>

In addition to the fact that they fit into the above criteria, Lighthouse Chapel identifies itself explicitly as the Mega Church. Even Dag Heward Mills' media program is dubbed 'Mega Word,'<sup>76</sup> and in his book, "The Mega Church: how to make your church grow," he brings to the fore his Mega Church concept. Unlike Heward-Mills, Duncan Williams and Mensa Otabil do not unequivocally identify their ministries as a Mega Churches. However, in practice, some of their ministerial practices are in harmony with Kendra's Mega Church attributes. In light of this, these three ministries are crucial for this study.

To have an informed understanding of the reality of the Mega Churches, information from both primary and secondary sources were used. The secondary sources were books written by the leaders of the selected Mega Churches. The primary information was gathered

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<sup>74</sup> Kendra King and many like-minded scholars assert that one basic criterion is to have an average membership of 2000 people. See Kendra King, *African American Politics* (Cambridge-Malden: Polity Press, 2010), 175.

<sup>75</sup> King, *American Politics*, 175.

<sup>76</sup> Paul Gifford, *Ghana's New Christianity: Pentecostalism in a Globalising African Economy* (London: C. Hurst and Co. Ltd., 2004), 31.

through observation and interviews. Then the data gathered was analysed, allowing the text and the reality to engage each other in an Intercultural Reading.

### **1.7 Organization of the Work**

The thesis is organized into five chapters. The first chapter deals with the introductory issues, which include the background of the study, statement of the problem, research questions, literature review and research methodology. In chapter two, the focus is on an exegetical analysis of John 5:1-47. It starts with the journey of the reader, followed by discussions on the delimitation of the text and the exegesis of the pericope. Chapter three looks at the exegesis of reality, focusing on the commonalities among Mega Churches and how they relate with individuals in the churches. Chapter four presents an Intercultural Reading of the text. This section begins with a summary of the two cultures: text and Mega Churches. It is then followed by the component of a society and how the churches can address the problem of solitude. Finally, chapter five presents the summary, discussion of major findings and recommendations for future research.



## CHAPTER TWO

### EXEGETICAL ANALYSIS OF JOHN 5:1-47

#### 2.1 Introduction

This chapter analyses how the narrator discusses the idea of community in the pericope. To realize this aim, the work has been organized into five sections. The first part takes a look at the journey of the reader. Every reader of John 5 comes with a pre-understanding of community, because of what the preceding chapters reveal about the subject. In view of that a critical look at chapters 1 to 4 is crucial to the study. In the second segment, a delimitation of the text is considered to determine the literary unity of the pericope. Furthermore, the thesis examines various structures proposed by scholars on the passage and decides on an appropriate one for the study. On the basis of the structure, an exegetical analysis is done in the fourth section. Finally, a theological synthesis concludes the chapter by synthesizing the various strands of ideas revealed about community in the pericope.

#### 2.2 Journey of the Reader

A critical analysis of the Johannine gospel shows that the evangelist has put in place strategies to educate the reader about community. The plan commences right from the prologue. In John 1:1-4, the concept of community assumes a significant expression. A ‘divine community’ is suggested, comprising of God and the Logos.<sup>77</sup> The distinction between the two divine personalities is captured by the preposition *πρὸς*, making the distinct personality of the Logos which *ἦν* would have obscured, very conspicuous.<sup>78</sup> In spite of their distinctiveness, they are one in essence. Scholars like Wuest and Tenney concur that the

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<sup>77</sup> The Holy Spirit is part of this community (Gen. 1:2; Matt. 3:16-17). But in John 1, only the two eternal distinctions are mentioned.

<sup>78</sup> Edward L. Balcour, *A Definitive Look at Oneness Theology: Defending the Tri-unity of God* (Lanham: University Press of America, 2005), 72.

absence of the article in 1:1c means that the emphasis is on quality.<sup>79</sup> That makes the designation ‘divine community,’ a suitable label, since they share the same divine essence.

In addition, the mention of these two Eternal Distinctions shows that even God the Father does not live alone, but in a community with the Logos (1:1-2). For the preposition *πρὸς* also implies ‘association in the sense of free mingling with others of a community on terms of equality.’<sup>80</sup> It means that *πρὸς*, as used in 1:1, brings with it the notion of fellowship or relationship among co-equals in a society. The same could be said of the relationship between these members of the divine community, since the use of the preposition with the accusative, presents a plane of equality and intimacy.<sup>81</sup> To have another of the same kind to relate with, suggests that community is God’s idea.

Again, implicit in the view of the divine society is the connotation that the concept of community goes back to eternity. John dates the relationship between God and the Logos to the beginning (1:1). *Ἐν ἀρχῇ* refers to a time before creation.<sup>82</sup> It means that the author of the Fourth Gospel is not referring to “a definite localized point of time, but rather to the indefinite eternity.”<sup>83</sup>

Moreover, the concept of community did not just exist from eternity, but was brought into time. In John, the divine community is the reason for the existence of a human community. If there can be distinct personalities in the Godhead and still abide together, then humanity should follow their example. Humankind can have unity in diversity, living in a community. Therefore, Jesus, a member of the divine community enters into a human community (1:11, 14) to give us a model of a society.

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<sup>79</sup> Wuest, *Word Studies*, 52; See also, Tenney, *The Gospel of Belief*, 65.

<sup>80</sup> Tenney, *The Gospel of Beliefs*, 64.

<sup>81</sup> Balcour, *Defending the Tri-unity of God*, 71.

<sup>82</sup> Moloney, *The Gospel of John*, 35.

<sup>83</sup> Tenney, *The Gospel of Beliefs*, 64.

The incarnation was a medium through which God's concept of society was concretised in a human community. The process began with the calling of the disciples. Two disciples of John the Baptist who decided to become Jesus' disciples questioned Jesus about where He lives (1:38). Their question did not only necessitate an invitation to see where Jesus lives (v. 38) to abide there, but it also commenced the process of gathering members for this new community. The joy of having found a new community was what made Andrew to bring Simon Peter, his own brother (v. 42). Jesus, the founder, also invited Philip to become part of the community (v. 43). Philip found Nathaniel and asked him to come and see Jesus (vv. 45-46). Together, they became a new community that even started attending functions as a group (2:2).

With this new community thriving, the author begins to explain issues relating to the society, using encounters of individuals. Apart from the disciples who encountered Jesus prior to chapter five, there are two encounters with individuals that give the reader some ideas about this community: Nicodemus and the Samaritan woman.

Going to see Jesus at night, Nicodemus reminds the reader of the conflict between τὸ φῶς (the light) and ἡ σκοτία (the darkness), anticipated in the prologue (1:5). It makes Nicodemus' journey a movement from darkness towards the light,<sup>84</sup> thereby, indicating that the people of this society are those who have moved from darkness into the light.

Again, their conversation further shows that for one to gain entrance into this community, one's biological birth is not enough, except one is born ἄνωθεν (from above, 3:3).<sup>85</sup>

In addition, the encounter with the Samaritan woman at the well also reveals something significant about this new community that Jesus formed. Jesus' words to the woman show

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<sup>84</sup> Francis Moloney *Belief in the Word: Reading the Fourth Gospel: John 1-4* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 108.

<sup>85</sup> Köstenberger, *John*, 123.

that the new community neither belongs to Jews nor Samaritans, but it is for anyone who drinks the water supplied by the Son (4:9-14). Such people also worship the Father in truth and in spirit (vv. 23-24).

Having in mind these qualities, the reader is reminded that one of the Son's aims is to make God (the Father) known.<sup>86</sup> Making the Father known includes, showing to the people He encounters the cooperation, unity, and love that exist in the divine community; for God is a community (5:17; 15:9; 14:31; 17:21, 23). So, Jesus sets out to demonstrate how people should live in a society through the healing of the paralytic.

On this background, the pericope is analysed to get an informed understanding of the role of the 'human community' on earth.

### 2.3 Delimitation

There is general agreement among scholars concerning where the pericope commences. However, there are two main divisions regarding where the text ends. Borgen and like-minded scholars avow that the pericope begins from v.1 and ends in v.18. On the contrary, majority of scholars, including Andreas Köstenberger,<sup>87</sup> Francis Moloney,<sup>88</sup> Ben Witherington<sup>89</sup> and Talbert<sup>90</sup> assert that vv. 1-47 form a literary unity.

Borgen's assertion is informed by his view that "vv. 1-18 not only draws on oral tradition, but is itself an oral unit written down."<sup>91</sup> Indeed, this is not the only passage in John's gospel that scholars have arrived at that conclusion. It is widely accepted by scholars that John used

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<sup>86</sup> Moloney, *John 1-4*, 49.

<sup>87</sup> Köstenberger, *John*, 174.

<sup>88</sup> Moloney, *Reading John 5-12*, 2.

<sup>89</sup> Ben Witherington III, *John's Wisdom: A Commentary on the Fourth Gospel*, 3rd ed. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1995), 134.

<sup>90</sup> Charles H. Talbert, *Reading John: A Literary and Theological Commentary on the Fourth Gospel and the Johannine Epistles*, rev. ed. (Macon: Smyth and Helwys Publishing Inc., 2005), 127.

<sup>91</sup> Peder Borgen, *The Gospel of John: More Light from Philo, Paul and Archaeology: The Scriptures, Tradition, Exposition, Settings, Meaning* (Koninklijke Brill: Leiden, 2014), 138.

some traditions. Dodd, for instance, thinks that such a possibility cannot be denied.<sup>92</sup> Citing examples for such probabilities, Stibbe, arguing from the organization of the wine miracle (John 2:1-11) and the healing of the nobleman's son (John 4:46-54), concludes that they emanate from the same oral tradition.<sup>93</sup> It shows clearly that there are examples of such phenomenon, and the healing story could be one of them. On the other hand, has Borgen not overstretched it? Dodd argues that even when John narrates a traditional healing story, he uses an idiosyncratic approach.<sup>94</sup> As Labahn rightly affirms, "using traditions includes the establishment of new meanings".<sup>95</sup> In light of this we can say that John's intention was not to replicate the story, and as consequence, Borgen's view that vv. 1-18 is an oral unit written down, could not be so accurate. His historical critical perspective is problematic because it mutilates the text and fails to see how John used vv. 1-18 in the fifth chapter. A text is properly understood when the immediate and larger contexts are considered. Therefore, a better approach would be a synchronic approach which denies not the possibility that vv. 1-18 could be a borrowed material, but also takes into consideration how John used the material within 5:1-47. Such an approach will help the reader to have an informed understanding of the communicative force of vv. 1-18 in its immediate context (vv. 1-47).

Moving the attention to scholars who use synchronic approach, Köstenberger, focuses his argument on the thematic unity of vv. 1-47. In his opinion, the key to understanding the Christological symbolism the narrative is projecting is the day on which the event occurred: Sabbath. For him, the mention of the day on which the healing occurred in v. 9b is crucial, because it necessitated everything that followed.<sup>96</sup> It brought about a debate on proper

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<sup>92</sup> C. H. Dodd, *Historical Tradition in the Fourth Gospel* (Cambridge-New York: Cambridge University Press, 1963), 180.

<sup>93</sup> Mark W. G. Stibbe, *John's Gospel: New Testament Readings* (London: Routledge, 1994), 80.

<sup>94</sup> Dodd, *Historical Tradition*, 179.

<sup>95</sup> Michael Labahn, "Living Word(s) and the Bread of Life," in *What we have Heard from the Beginning: The Past, Present and Future of Johannine Studies*, ed. Tom Thatcher (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2007), 61.

<sup>96</sup> Köstenberger, *John*, 174.

Sabbath observance, discussions on Jesus' relationship with the Father,<sup>97</sup> and the defence put up by Jesus against the charges that He has broken the law concerning the Sabbath (vv. 17-47).<sup>98</sup> Since these accusations were levelled against Him as a result of an act in the preceding verses (vv. 1-16), the cause of the accusations, it cannot be detached from vv. 17-47, which is the effect.

Moloney concurs with Köstenberger on the unity of vv.1-47. Moving the argument further, the Australian scholar chooses the thematic unity of the text as a support for his assertion. He sees Sabbath as an essential literary and theological background of the fifth chapter of the fourth gospel.<sup>99</sup> Such presupposition sees the Sabbath theme as the basic concept that binds the various strands of ideas in the chapter together. Developing his claim, he avers that v. 19 is a direct response to the problem created by Jesus' Sabbath activity in the preceding verses.<sup>100</sup> He argues further that while vv. 19-30 shows a close link between the commencement and end of Jesus' Sabbath acts, vv. 31-47 advances the Lord's argument, presenting series of witnesses to the Jews. As a result, vv. 19-47 serves both as a continuation of the narrative which started from vv. 1-18, and the end of that unit.<sup>101</sup>

Witherington advances Köstenberger and Moloney's position. First of all, he affirms that the focus of the story is on the day on which the healing transpired, i.e., the Sabbath day. He adds that the story follows the pattern adopted by other healing narratives, where the illness is stated, followed by an encounter with Jesus, a demonstration of healing by an action undertaken by the healed person, and reactions from spectators.<sup>102</sup> If his assertion is considered carefully, one discovers that by placing the focus on the Sabbath, the pericope

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<sup>97</sup> Köstenberger, *John*, 181.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, 183.

<sup>99</sup> Moloney, *Reading John 5-12*, 27.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.

<sup>102</sup> Witherington III, *John's Wisdom*, 134.

cannot be limited to v. 18, since further discussions on the subject continues from v. 19. Again, measuring with the pattern of other healing narratives as he suggests, v. 47 is the only logical ending since vv. 1-47 encompasses all the proposed features.

Contrary to the above premises, Talbert argues using a linguistic indicator to delimit the pericope. He asserts that the phrase ‘after this,’ which begins chapters 5 and 6 of the fourth gospel, warrants vv. 1-47 to be seen as a literary unit.<sup>103</sup> He sees the phrase as a ‘beginning marker,’ thus, concludes that the text ends in v. 47 since 6:1 begins another narrative.

The researcher is inclined towards the position of the latter scholars for the following reasons: First of all, the use of *μετὰ ταῦτα* in 5:1 and 6:1 creates an inclusion, denoting that everything within these verses form the boundary of this pericope.<sup>104</sup> Moloney asserts that the phrase features on many occasions in this gospel to mark a new section.<sup>105</sup> It implies that since the phrase appears again in 6:1 where a new section begins, everything that follows after *μετὰ ταῦτα* in 5:1 to 5:47 belong to the ‘old section’.

It must be noted, however, that the appearance of the phrase in v. 14 does not indicate the commencement of something new. Carson<sup>106</sup> and Ridderbos<sup>107</sup> indicate that the phrase only means ‘later’ in v. 14. Köstenberger further opines that it carries the idea of ‘later the same day’.<sup>108</sup>

However, there is sufficient evidence, pointing to the conclusion that *μετὰ ταῦτα* in 6:1 stands a better chance to be considered as the beginning of a new pericope. Firstly, there is

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<sup>103</sup> Talbert, *Reading John*, 127.

<sup>104</sup> Coxon, *A Biblical Theological Investigation*, 99.

<sup>105</sup> Moloney, *The Gospel of John*, 165; See also R. Alan Culpepper, “John 5:1-18: A Sample of Narrative-Critical Commentary,” in *The Gospel of John as Literature: An Anthology of Twentieth-Century Perspectives*, ed. Mark W. G. Stibbe (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1993), 196.

<sup>106</sup> Carson, *John*, 245.

<sup>107</sup> Ridderbos, *The Gospel of John*, 190.

<sup>108</sup> Köstenberger, *John*, 174.

a change in geographical location from Jerusalem (5:1) to “over the sea of Galilee” (6:1) to indicate a new section. Furthermore, the theme of the Sabbath mentioned in v. 9 sets the stage for the discussions that follow in vv. 10-18, and Jesus’ reply in vv. 19-47.<sup>109</sup> Therefore, vv. 10-47 should necessarily belong to the pericope. Finally, there is a thematic change. The theme of Sabbath which resulted in Jesus’ response ends in v. 47, and 6:1-2 gives a geographical setting for a new subject. It is, therefore, not wrong to concur with Moloney that “The oneness of place, time, characters and theme guarantees the unity of 5:1-47.”<sup>110</sup>

#### **2.4 Structure of John 5:1-47**

Scholars who accept that 5:1-47 forms a literary unit have proposed different structures for the above pericope. Köstenberger, for instance, has proposed the structure below:

- I. The setting: vv. 1-3
- II. The healing: vv. 5-9a
- III. The aftermath: vv. 9b-15
- IV. The Sabbath controversy: vv. 16-47
  - a. Jesus’ response to the charges of Sabbath-breaking and blasphemy: vv. 16-30
  - b. Testimony regarding Jesus: vv. 1-47.<sup>111</sup>

Moloney divides the pericope as follows:

- I. Jesus’ healing work on a Sabbath: vv. 1-18
  - a. Introduction: vv.1-4
  - b. The Sabbath event: vv. 5-18
- II. Life and judgment: vv. 19-30
  - a. Theological introduction: vv. 19-20
  - b. The Son exercises authority to give life: v. 21

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<sup>109</sup> Martyn, *The Fourth Gospel*, 73.

<sup>110</sup> Moloney, *John*, 165.

<sup>111</sup> Köstenberger, *John*, 175.

- c. The basis of the Son's authority to judge is explained: v. 22
- d. Theological reflection: v. 23
- e. The Son as the life-giver: vv. 24-25
- f. The basis of the Son's authority as life-giver is explained: v. 26
- g. The Son's authority to judge: v. 27
- h. The Son as judge and life-giver: vv. 28-29
- i. Theological conclusion: v. 30

III. Witness and accusations: vv. 31-47

- a. The problem of an acceptable witness to Jesus: vv. 31-32
- b. A series of witnesses presented to "the Jews": vv. 33-40
  - 1. John the Baptist: vv. 33-35
  - 2. The works of Jesus: v. 36
  - 3. The word of the unseen Father: vv. 37-40
- c. Two contrasting understanding of *doxa*: vv. 41-44
- d. The Jews are accused by the writings of Moses: vv. 45-47.<sup>112</sup>

Moreover, Witherington III structures the chapter as follows:

- I. The miracle: vv. 1-9
- II. The dialogue: vv. 10-18
- III. The discourses: vv. 19-47
  - a. First discourse: 19-30
  - b. Second discourse: 31-47.<sup>113</sup>

Adding his voice to the discussion, Bystrom provides the structure below:

- I. The Pool of Bethzatha: 1-3
- II. Jesus Heals the Man at the Pool: vv. 5-9a
- III. Jesus Finds the Man in the Temple: vv. 5b-15

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<sup>112</sup> Moloney, *Reading John 5-12*, 2-19.

<sup>113</sup> Witherington III, *John's Wisdom*, 136-141.

IV. Jesus' Authority as the Father's Son: vv. 16-30

IV. The Witnesses to Jesus: vv. 31-47.<sup>114</sup>

As helpful as the above structures may be, what follows would not be patterned after any, because of the focus of the work. Every structure has an intended purpose. The proposed structures of Köstenberger and Moloney focus on the Sabbath, because of their view that the Sabbath theme makes the pericope a thematic unit. On the other hand, Witherington III gives attention to the discourses in the pericope. Finally, Bystrom's structure projects the identity of Jesus. The above structures do not give a place to the concept of community which is very important to the research. Therefore, the researcher proposes a different structure as follows, with concentration on the idea of community.

I. Bethesda Community: vv. 1-3

II. Healing in the Bethesda Community: vv. 5-9a

III. Sabbath Controversy in 'The Jews' Community: vv. 9b-13

IV. 'The Jews' Community Persecutes Jesus: vv. 14-16

V. 'The Jews' Community's Misconceptions about the 'Divine Community' corrected: vv. 17-30

VI. Witnesses: 31-40

a. John the Baptist: vv. 31-35

b. Jesus' works: vv. 36

c. The Father: v. 37-38

d. The Scriptures: vv. 39-40

VII. Two types of honour and two types of people: vv. 41-44

VIII. Moses, the Accuser of 'the Jew's' Community: vv. 45-47

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<sup>114</sup> Raymond Bystrom, *God Among us: Studies in the Gospel of John* (Winnipeg: Kindred Productions, 2003), 98-106.

## 2.5 Exegetical Analysis

This section focuses on the analysis of the pericope. As indicated above, the researcher's proposed structure concentrates on the concept of community, an essential subject in the study. Thus, the analysis follows that division.

### 2.5.1 The Bethesda Community: vv. 1-3

Μετὰ ταῦτα ἦν ἑορτὴ τῶν Ἰουδαίων καὶ ἀνέβη Ἰησοῦς εἰς Ἱεροσόλυμα. <sup>2</sup> Ἔστιν δὲ ἐν τοῖς Ἱεροσολύμοις ἐπὶ τῇ προβατικῇ κολυμβήθρα ἢ ἐπιλεγομένη Ἑβραϊστὶ Βηθζαθὰ πέντε στοᾶς ἔχουσα. <sup>3</sup> ἐν ταύταις κατέκειτο πλῆθος τῶν ἀσθενούντων, τυφλῶν, χωλῶν, ξηρῶν.

After these, there was a feast of the Jews. And Jesus went up into Jerusalem. <sup>2</sup> And in Jerusalem there was by the sheep *gate* a pool called in Hebrew tongue Bethesda, having five porticoes. <sup>3</sup> In these laid a multitude of sick people, of blind, of lame, of withered.

v. 1: Μετὰ ταῦτα serves as a linguistic indicator to show that the narrator is introducing a new section.<sup>115</sup> Placing it at the beginning of the pericope, the author reminds the real reader that the section that precedes it has ended. Therefore, a change in subject or geographical location is to be expected.<sup>116</sup> In this verse, the narrator uses μετὰ ταῦτα for both a change in setting and theme. John is drawing the attention of the reader that the narrative has moved from the Cana community and the theme of life sustenance (4:46-54) to the healing at the Bethesda community, and debates about the Sabbath.

Furthermore, the author of the fourth gospel is known for tying his narrative to various Jewish feasts. In verses like 2:13 and 6:4, he links the narrative to the Passover. In 2:13, the Passover is alluded to as a reason for Jesus' presence in the temple. Moloney avers that the author mentions the feast in 6:4 to show the timing of the events in that pericope.<sup>117</sup>

<sup>115</sup> See Moloney, *The Gospel of John*, 165; Culpepper, "John 5:1-18," 196; and Talbert, *Reading John*, 127

<sup>116</sup> Judith Schubert, *The Gospel of John: Question by Question* (Mahwah: Paulist Press, 2008), 41.

<sup>117</sup> Moloney, *Reading John 5-12*, 30.

However, in 7:2 and 10:22, the feast of Tabernacles and Dedications are collocated to the narrative respectively.

Interestingly, in 5:1, he departs from his *modus operandi*, offering no name for the feast he mentions. The absence of the name of the feast has necessitated scholarly speculations. Guzik suggests that these scholarly conjectures revolve around Passover, Pentecost or Purim due to the uncertainties surrounding the specific feast John has in mind.<sup>118</sup>

On this subject, many scholars have argued in favor of the Passover. Though Jamieson-Fausset-Brown<sup>119</sup> and Barnes<sup>120</sup> see the Passover as a possibility, they do not provide any evidence to support their assertion. On the other hand, scholars like Matthew Henry, Matthew Poole and Morris provide reasons for their stance. Henry bases his argument on the recurring nature of the Passover in John's gospel. For him, the Passover is the most celebrated feast of the Jews, therefore, it is the one referred to in the passage.<sup>121</sup> Poole, gives two reasons. Firstly, he suggests that this feast was the second of the four Passover feasts Jesus celebrated in the gospel of John. Secondly, he sees a four-month interval between 5:1 and the harvest mentioned in 4:35 as an indicator.<sup>122</sup> Morris' argument is based on probability. In his view, the feast can only be considered as such if the chapter be held to follow chapter 6. In that case, it could refer to the Passover mentioned in 6:4.<sup>123</sup>

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<sup>118</sup> David Guzik, "John 5," *Guzik Bible Commentary*, accessed on August 05, 2015, <http://biblehub.com/commentaries/guzik/john/5.htm>.

<sup>119</sup> Robert Jamieson, Andrew R. Fausset and David Brown, "John 5," *Jamieson-Fausset-Brown Bible Commentary*, accessed on August 05, 2015, <http://biblehub.com/commentaries/jfb/john/5.htm>.

<sup>120</sup> Albert Barnes, "John 5," *Barnes' Notes on the Bible*, accessed on August 05, 2015, <http://biblehub.com/commentaries/bengel/john/5.htm>.

<sup>121</sup> Matthew Henry, "John 5," *Matthew Henry's Commentary on the whole Bible*, accessed on August 30, 2015, <http://biblehub.com/commentaries/mhcw/john/5.htm>.

<sup>122</sup> Matthew Poole, "John 5,"

<sup>123</sup> Morris, *Gospel According to John*, 265.

Contrary to the view that the feast referred to is the Passover, scholars like Bengel<sup>124</sup> and Calvin subscribe to the notion that the narrator was referring to the feast of Pentecost. While Bengel affirms without further elucidation, John Calvin opines that the order of times is suggestive of the feast of Pentecost as the probable conjecture. According to him, if what is narrated in 5:1-9 transpired immediately after Christ's entry into Galilee, then his guess is right. He argues further that Christ reckoned four months to the harvest while in Samaria. Therefore, if the feast came afterwards, then it can lead to a conclusion that He went to Jerusalem to celebrate Pentecost.<sup>125</sup>

Interestingly, some scholars seek to use the month on which Jesus spoke in 4:35 to predict the feast mentioned in 5:1. Meyer and Ellicott use the time limits, starting from Jesus' speech in 4:35 to calculate in favor of the feast of Purim. Even though there is a little divergence on the precise month when he uttered those words, they arrive at the same conclusion. For instance, Meyer suggests that in 4:33, the Passover was still approaching. As a result, the speech in 4:35 could be dated to a Jewish month that corresponds to December.<sup>126</sup> Again, he indicates that the only feast that falls between December and the Passover is Purim. Therefore, John was talking about the feast of Purim. On the other hand, Ellicott dates the speech in 4:35 to the month Tebeth (January), stating that the four-month interval refers to the time between 3:35 and the next Passover in 6:4.<sup>127</sup> Taking the argument further, he notes that the year was an intercalary one with the month Adar added. Thus, the only feast that is likely to fall in the stipulated interval is Purim.

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<sup>124</sup> John Bengel, "John 5," *Gnomon of the New Testament*, accessed on August 30, 2015, <http://biblehub.com/commentaries/bengel/john/5.htm>.

<sup>125</sup> John Calvin, "John 5," *Calvin's Commentaries*, accessed on August 30, <http://biblehub.com/commentaries/calvin/john/5.htm>.

<sup>126</sup> Heinrich Meyer, "John 5," *Heinrich Meyer's Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament*, accessed on August 30, 2015, <http://biblehub.com/commentaries/meyer/john/5.htm>.

<sup>127</sup> Charles J. Ellicott, "John 5," *Ellicott's Commentary for English Readers*, accessed on August 30, 2015, <http://biblehub.com/commentaries/ellicott/john/5.htm>.

Finally, there are other scholars who do not support any of the positions above. To these scholars, the import should be on why John did not categorically indicate which feast it was. So, they focus on the significance of this unnamed feast to the narrative. For Moloney, its place in the narrative is to indicate a directional change.<sup>128</sup> The issue of belief in Jesus has been dealt with from 2:1 to 4:54; at the moment, the narrative must face other questions.

Carson avers that the phrase serves one main purpose: historical marker. He argues that John deliberately left the feast unnamed for a reason. Juxtaposing this story to some of the events in the fourth gospel where feasts are mentioned, Jesus either did or said something related to the theme. So, if this is not named, it is because the material in John 5 is not meant to be thematically related to it. Therefore, it could be inferred that the phrase is used here to explain the reason Jesus travelled to Jerusalem.<sup>129</sup>

From the above discussion, it is obvious that the author of the fourth gospel is gradually directing the focus of the reader to new communities after leaving Cana. To achieve that, he carefully prepares the mind of his readers, showing them the change of location. In fact, this change, according to the author was necessitated by the Passover. By that the mind of the reader is thereby prepared for what will transpire after Jesus left the Cana community (4:54) to the Jerusalem community. Again, the Passover background also aids the reader to anticipate the paralytic's journey from slavery to freedom.

v. 2: The narrator begins to describe a community which is in one of the vicinities in Jerusalem, focusing on its name and the location. Scholars have given different names to the pool. They include Bethesda, Bethzatha, and Bethsaida.<sup>130</sup> The scholars who prefer to use Bethzatha are motivated by the fact that the word is identical with a northern suburb of

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<sup>128</sup> Moloney, *Reading John 5-12*, 2-3.

<sup>129</sup> Carson, *John*, 241.

<sup>130</sup> Moloney, *The Gospel of John*, 171.

Jerusalem.<sup>131</sup> Those who translate the name as Bethsaida, do so due to confusion with a fishing town mentioned in 1:44.<sup>132</sup> However, Bethesda is chosen by many scholars because of the support it has from the corresponding Hebrew name in the Copper scroll from Qumran.<sup>133</sup>

On the location of the pool of Bethesda, the narrator situates it near τῆ προβατικῆ κολυμβήθρα (sheep pool). However, many scholars, including Köstenberger, Carson, and Bruce agree that a better rendering is the ‘Sheep Gate.’<sup>134</sup> They refer to the Sheep Gate mentioned in Neh. 3:1; 32; 12:39, which was an opening in the north east corner of the city wall.<sup>135</sup>

Concerning the meaning of the name, most scholars translate it as ‘house of mercy’.<sup>136</sup> The general opinion is that it derives its meaning from the healings at the pool, which were considered as acts of divine mercy.

In the light of the above, the reader is confronted with an important question as to why Jesus would go to the house of mercy after the narrator has indicated that the directional change from Cana to Jerusalem was necessitated by the celebration of the Passover. If Jesus went to Jerusalem for that purpose, then He should be seen in the temple before any other place. Visiting Bethesda indicates that He had something to teach in that community. The subsequent comments of the narrator prepare the reader for what Jesus intends to show.

<sup>131</sup> Manfred Siebald, “Bethesda,” in *A Dictionary of Biblical Tradition in English Literature*, ed. David Lyle Jeffrey (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), 84.

<sup>132</sup> Frederick Fyvie Bruce, *The Gospel of John: Introduction, Exposition and Notes* (Grand Rapids-Cambridge: Eerdmans, 1993), 122.

<sup>133</sup> This was published in 1960. See Bruce, *The Gospel of John*, 122; Moloney, *The Gospel of John*, 171; and Carson, *John*, 241.

<sup>134</sup> Köstenberger, *John*, 179; Bruce, *The Gospel of John*, 122; and Carson, *John*, 241.

<sup>135</sup> John’s use of the present tense (is) to describe the pool does not necessarily point to a pre-A.D 70 date for the composition of the fourth gospel. The sheep gate may have been destroyed by the time the gospel of John was composed. The writer’s use of the present tense, envisaging it as it was when he knew it. See Bruce, *The Gospel of John*, 121.

<sup>136</sup> Urban C. Von Wahlde, “Archaeology and Theology,” in *Jesus and Archaeology*, ed. James H. Charlesworth (Grand Rapids-Cambridge: Eerdmans, 2006), 561.

v. 3a: The narrator gives a description of the members of the Bethesda community in this section. They include τῶν ἀσθενούντων, τυφλῶν, χωλῶν, ξηρῶν (the weak, blind, lame, and withered).<sup>137</sup>

### 2.5.2 Healing in the Bethesda Community: vv. 5-9a

<sup>5</sup> ἦν δέ τις ἄνθρωπος ἐκεῖ τριάκοντα [καὶ] ὀκτὼ ἔτη ἔχων ἐν τῇ ἀσθενείᾳ αὐτοῦ· <sup>6</sup> τοῦτον ἰδὼν ὁ Ἰησοῦς κατακείμενον καὶ γινούς ὅτι πολὺν ἤδη χρόνον ἔχει, λέγει αὐτῷ· θέλεις ὑγιῆς γενέσθαι; <sup>7</sup> ἀπεκρίθη αὐτῷ ὁ ἀσθενῶν· κύριε, ἄνθρωπον οὐκ ἔχω ἵνα ὅταν παραχθῇ τὸ ὕδωρ βάλη με εἰς τὴν κολυμβήθραν· ἐν ᾧ δὲ ἔρχομαι ἐγώ, ἄλλος πρὸ ἐμοῦ καταβαίνει. <sup>8</sup> λέγει αὐτῷ ὁ Ἰησοῦς· ἔγειρε ἄρον τὸν κράβαττόν σου καὶ περιπάτει. <sup>9</sup> καὶ εὐθέως ἐγένετο ὑγιῆς ὁ ἄνθρωπος καὶ ἦρεν τὸν κράβαττον αὐτοῦ καὶ περιπάτει.

<sup>5</sup>And a certain man was there who had been thirty (and) eight years in his sickness. <sup>6</sup>Jesus saw him lie down and knew that he had been there for a long time already, he said to him, “Do you desire to become whole?” <sup>7</sup>The sick man answered to him, “Lord, I have no man to put me into the pool whenever the water is troubled; but when I’m going in, another goes down before me. <sup>8</sup>Jesus said to him, “Rise up! Take up your bed and walk.” <sup>9</sup>And immediately, the man become well and took up his bed and walked.

v. 5: A character is identified only as τις ἄνθρωπος (a certain man). This is not the only instance John uses that mode of identification. In verses like 1:6, 3:1, 5:5, 9:1, and 11:1, John talks about ‘a man’. However, in these cases, there are two main distinctions. In 1:6, 3:1, and 11:1, the names of the specific individuals are revealed to enhance a quick identification of these figures. For instance, 1:6 refers to John the Baptist; 3:1 is identified as Nicodemus; and 11:1 as Lazarus.

<sup>137</sup> The list provided are made up of people who are prohibited to enter the temple. See Passages like 2Sam 5:8 and Lev 21:18. Moving forward, it must be noted that vv. 3b-4 are not included in this discussion because they are inauthentic. They are scribal insertions, serving as marginal glosses to capture the popular belief of the people about the reason behind the stirring of the water and its consequence. See Carson, *John*, 242; Bruce, *The Gospel of John*, 122; and Moloney, *The Gospel of John*, 171. Again the poor external attestations and the presence of seven non-johannine words in one sentence render it inauthentic. See Köstenberger, *John*, 195.

On the other hand, there are two instances where the characters are identified by their sicknesses: 9:1 and 5:5. The narrator uses the terms ἄνθρωπον τυφλὸν (blind man) in 9:1 as the only source of identification for him and τις ἄνθρωπος ἐκεῖ τριάκοντα [καὶ] ὀκτὼ ἔτη ἔχων ἐν τῇ ἀσθενείᾳ αὐτοῦ (a certain man who had an infirmity for thirty and eight years) in 5:5, without revealing their names.<sup>138</sup> Based on the omission of his name, scholars have concluded that he was either not popular or significant in that society. Porter is therefore right to aver that he had no status within the social structure of the times.<sup>139</sup>

Though we are left in the dark concerning his name, we are furnished with some clues regarding his condition: sick for thirty-eight years. From first century Jewish perspective, the description calls the attention of the reader to both the severity and consequences of his predicament. In the Jewish societies then, the man's paralysis and the punishment would seem justifiable, considering some of the rabbinical teachings that were circulating around. The Rabbis postulated a direct cause-and-effect relationship between sin and suffering.<sup>140</sup> It made them consider sickness as a form of punishment from God.<sup>141</sup> In the light of that a person who has been sick for thirty-eight years would be looked upon by the community as a sinner who deserves no sympathy. Therefore, John's comment could be seen as one that further highlights both the severity of the malady and the hopeless state in which the man was.<sup>142</sup>

<sup>138</sup> Possibly, the man was not so significant or popular in the community like John the Baptist, Nicodemus and Lazarus. For John the Baptist came as a witness (1:15), making him a significant figure in the community. Again Nicodemus was also identified as ὁ διδάσκαλος τοῦ Ἰσραὴλ (the teacher of Israel, 3:10). We can safely conjecture that he was a prominent character. It is therefore not surprising that he came to Jesus at night (3:1-2). Another key figure who also fits in this discussion is Lazarus, who was also identified as the one who Christ loves (11:3). Indeed, the community expressed their wonder concerning Christ's love for him when they observed how He wept at the tomb of Lazarus (11:36). These personalities who were both identified in the same manner with the paralytic raise questions why the narrator excluded his name from the narrative.

<sup>139</sup> Stanley E. Porter, *John, His Gospel and Jesus: In Pursuit of the Johannine Voice* (Grand Rapids-Cambridge: Eerdmans, 2015), 54.

<sup>140</sup> Köstenberger, *John*, 281.

<sup>141</sup> It explains why the disciples associated congenital blindness to either the man's sin or his parents (9:2). See also Eric Eve, *The Jewish Context of Jesus' Miracles* (London: A & C Black, 2002), 351.

<sup>142</sup> Köstenberger, *John*, 179; Ridderbos, *The Gospel of John*, 185; and Tenney, *John*, 104.

v. 6: The steps to the man's healing are carefully outlined through the actions of Jesus. The narrator purposefully slows down the narration to let the reader see the man through the eyes of Jesus. He uses the verbs ὁράω (to see), γινώσκω (to know) and λέγω (to say) as a guide for his readers to get the import of the message.

According to the narrator, the process that led to the man's healing started with Jesus 'seeing' the man. In the fourth gospel, the verb appears 82 times. In these occurrences, the verb indicates the act of taking notice of someone. For instance, in 5:6, 19:26 and 21:21, that idea comes out clearly. Consequently, it could be interpreted to mean that Jesus took notice of him. Possibly, it was the level of his misery that caught Jesus' attention.<sup>143</sup>

Again, the narrator uses the verb γινώσκω (to know)<sup>144</sup> to show the process that led to the healing of the paralytic. The verb appears in 79 verses in the fourth gospel. It is interesting to note that the word carries the connotation of comprehending or understanding someone or something (8:43; 10:6). We could safely conjecture that the author wants the reader to know that in spite of the fact that no one in the community understood the paralytic, he finally found someone who comprehended his plight.

Moreover, there are scholarly debates on how Jesus 'knew' the predicament of the paralytic. On this argument, Moloney compares Jesus' encounter with this man to His encounter with Nathaniel (1:47-48) and the Samaritan woman (4:18), showing that they are similar. The conclusion that emanates from his comparison is that what Jesus displayed in this passage was a miraculous knowledge of the man's state, just as He did in the other two scenarios.<sup>145</sup>

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<sup>143</sup> Ridderbos, *The Gospel of John*, 185.

<sup>144</sup> To attempt to understand what this means, scholars are turned between interpreting the verb based on Christ's divine nature or human. Probably, the very fact that the verb could either represent knowledge gained supernaturally or by diligent enquiry warrants such interpretations. See Köstenberger, *John*, 180; and Carson, *John*, 243.

<sup>145</sup> Moloney, *Reading John 5-12*, 5. It is pertinent to note that Köstenberger's position is contradistinctive to Moloney. Though he admits that the word can represent both supernatural and knowledge gained through

Finally, considering how the verb is used in John's gospel, conclusions can be drawn that the source of Jesus' knowledge was divine. In the first place, the narrator does not explicitly indicate that Jesus enquired of the man from people at the pool. Secondly, in 6:15 where the word is used, the context suggests that Jesus knew the intention of the people without any prior enquiry. Such is only possible if that knowledge was supernaturally acquired. A similar thing is suggested in 5:6. He knew the longevity of the man's predicament without asking either the man or someone. So the knowledge exhibited is similar to the supernaturally gained information displayed in the cases of Nathaniel and the Samaritan woman (1:47-48; 4:18).

Moreover, the next action taken by Jesus after He 'saw' and 'knew' was to speak (λέγω) to him about his desire to be ὅγιος (whole). Clearly, the narrative diverges slightly with the parallel passage in Ch. 9. In 9:1-7, Jesus did not speak to the congenitally blind man about his condition. He addressed the issue straightaway, and engaged him in a conversation later when they met (9:35). Possibly, he asked questions in this case to elicit the man's perspective on the hindrances to his healing.<sup>146</sup>

v. 7: The man's answer brings out two main issues: lack of awareness of Jesus' identity and lack of a man. The first thing evident in the response of the sick man is his unawareness of the one he was dealing with.<sup>147</sup> This is further proven in the narrative in vv. 11-13. It is a characteristic which the above verse shares with the parallel passage in 9:1. For in both stories, Jesus' identity was unknown to them prior to their healing (5:13; 9:11). Again, it seems that the journey from lack of knowledge of Jesus' identity to an awareness of His

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enquiry, he suggests that Jesus possibly realised the man's condition because he asked Him for alms. See Köstenberger, *John*, 180. However, the problem with this assertion is that it is not in congruity to the narrative because John does not show that the man asked for alms from Jesus. This is not to say that knowledge by enquiry is excluded from the various usage of the word. Rather, the point is that it is not explicitly indicated in the narrative.

<sup>146</sup> Köstenberger, *John*, 180.

<sup>147</sup> Moloney, *Reading John 5-12*, 5.

personality is part of the pedagogy of the fourth gospel. The Samaritan woman, for instance, also embarked on such journey; from ‘not knowing’ to knowing (4:3-29).

Furthermore, the man attributed the reason behind the long years of struggle to lack of a human being to facilitate the process by putting him into the pool. In the mind of this man, what people had failed to do for him was the sole reason why he was still in his condition.<sup>148</sup> Therefore, the only remedy for his malady is another human being who can meet this physical need.<sup>149</sup>

It must be noted however, that the paralysis of his body did not necessitate a partial paralysis of the will, as Tenney intimates.<sup>150</sup> The man indicates his willingness to be healed by the various efforts he made whenever the pool was troubled. Therefore, he was not one who did not want to be actively involved in the healing process. He was not waiting for a person who will do everything for him, but one who will give him the needed push. As a result, his problem could not be lack of will.<sup>151</sup> In fact, his persistent presence at the pool shows the depth of his desire or willingness to be healed.<sup>152</sup> Nonetheless, the problem he faced was that his attempts could not yield the expected result because others went down before him (ἄλλος πρὸ ἐμοῦ καταβαίνει). This could account for the reason behind his belief that assistance from another human being could bring the needed breakthrough.

vv. 8-9a: Interestingly, the reader is not given any information regarding the man’s sickness until v. 8. Even in this verse, it can only be deduced from Jesus’ words, ἔγειρε ἄρον τὸν κράβαττόν σου καὶ περιπάτει (“Rise up! Take up your bed and walk”). The command of Jesus shows that the man was a paralytic.

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<sup>148</sup> Tenney, *John*, 105.

<sup>149</sup> Moloney, *Reading John 5-12*, 5.

<sup>150</sup> Tenney, *John*, 105.

<sup>151</sup> Bruce, *The Gospel of John*, 124.

<sup>152</sup> Carson, *John*, 243.

In addition, the fact that the man was seen lying on a mat (κράβαττος) gives further elucidation on his condition. Made of straw,<sup>153</sup> the mat was meant for the impoverished in the society.<sup>154</sup> It clearly shows the social status of this paralytic. Again, it could be seen as a further intensification of his condition. The reader now knows that he was a religious outcast, due to the nature of his sickness, and one who was socially disenfranchised; being part of the underprivileged in that community.

Furthermore, Jesus' encounter with the man brings to the reader's mind the original intent of the Sabbath to the community; becoming the image and likeness of God. The freedom from servitude which was given to slaves (Deut. 5:12-14) proves that God's intention for the institution of the Sabbath included the removal of the walls of segregation that had been built by the social structure of the people, and help them see each other as belonging to one class (image and likeness of God).<sup>155</sup>

On the other hand, the mat does not always imply something negative in the narrative. Jesus' instruction to the man was that he should lift up his mat. It is significant because it shows that he has received a remedy for his malady, since only a healthy person can do that.<sup>156</sup> The lifted mat is an acknowledgment of his healing and an appreciation to the Lord of the Sabbath for making it a meaningful day for him. His healing is supported by the statement, καὶ εὐθέως ἐγένετο ὕγιής ὁ ἄνθρωπος καὶ ἤρεν τὸν κράβαττον αὐτοῦ καὶ περιεπάτει (And immediately the man became whole and lifted up his mat). In addition, the man's wholeness preceded the lifting of the mat, making the lifting of the mat a sign of victory over suffering.<sup>157</sup>

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<sup>153</sup> Bruce, *The Gospel of John*, 124.

<sup>154</sup> Köstenberger, *John*, 180.

<sup>155</sup> For further reading, refer to pp. 68-69 (theological synthesis) of the work.

<sup>156</sup> Köstenberger, *John*, 180.

<sup>157</sup> Ridderbos, *The Gospel of John*, 188.

### 2.5.3 Sabbath Controversy in the Jews Community: vv. 9b-13

Ἦν δὲ σάββατον ἐν ἐκείνῃ τῇ ἡμέρᾳ. <sup>10</sup> ἔλεγον οὖν οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι τῷ τεθεραπευμένῳ· σάββατόν ἐστιν, καὶ οὐκ ἔξεστίν σοι ἄραι τὸν κράβαττόν σου. <sup>11</sup> ὁ δὲ ἀπεκρίθη αὐτοῖς· ὁ ποιήσας με ὑγιή ἐκείνός μοι εἶπεν· ἄρον τὸν κράβαττόν σου καὶ περιπάτει. <sup>12</sup> ἠρώτησαν αὐτόν· τίς ἐστὶν ὁ ἄνθρωπος ὁ εἰπὼν σοι· ἄρον καὶ περιπάτει; <sup>13</sup> ὁ δὲ ἰαθεὶς οὐκ ᾔδει τίς ἐστὶν, ὁ γὰρ Ἰησοῦς ἐξένευσεν ὄχλου ὄντος ἐν τῷ τόπῳ.

And that day was a Sabbath. <sup>10</sup>The Jews said to him who was healed, “It is Sabbath, and it is not *lawful* to carry your mat. <sup>11</sup>But he answered them, “The man who made me whole, the same said to me, take up your bed and walk.” <sup>12</sup>They asked him, “Who is the man who asked you to take up *your bed* and walk? <sup>13</sup>But he did not know the one who healed him: for Jesus had withdrawn from the multitude in that place.

v. 9b: The Sabbath theme is introduced by the comment, Ἦν δὲ σάββατον ἐν ἐκείνῃ τῇ ἡμέρᾳ (and that day was the Sabbath). By this statement, the narrator sets the tone for everything that follows, warning the reader that difficulties could arise from this act of Jesus.

v. 10: The first resistance the healed man encounters is from οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι (the Jews). John’s gospel is replete with passages in which either Jesus or those on His side came into confrontation with a group identified as ‘the Jews’ (1:19; 2:13-22; 5:10, 18 and many more). Who are ‘the Jews’ the narrator constantly refers to in the fourth gospel? Certainly, John does not have all Jews in mind, because there were those who received Christ and believed in Him in this same community (1:12).<sup>158</sup> As legitimate as an enquiry of the meaning of the expression may be, the major issue here is their concern: proper observance of the Sabbath.<sup>159</sup> The leaders who were supposed to welcome him to the community were more concerned about legal prescriptions of the Law. Their insistence on strict observance of laws of the Sabbath, and prosecution of culprits, makes it laudable to agree with Dunn’s

<sup>158</sup> See, Robert Kysar, *John: The Maverick Gospel*, 3rd ed. (Louisville-London: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007), 80-84; and Robert Kysar, *Voyages with John: Charting the Fourth Gospel* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2005), 151-156.

<sup>159</sup> Witherington III, *John’s Wisdom*, 138.

conclusion that John uses the term (the Jews) in the pericope to refer to the Jewish religious leaders.<sup>160</sup>

vv. 11-13: The man's answer to the Jews reveals his lack of knowledge of the identity of Jesus. He only knows Him as ὁ ποιήσας με ὑγιῆ ἐκέινός μοι (The one who made me well). Even when he was directly asked, 'Who is the man?' (τίς ἐστὶν ὁ ἄνθρωπος), he was unable to mention His name because he was still oblivious to Christ's identity. The narrator's comment, 'But the one who was healed did not know who it was' (ὁ δὲ ἰαθεὶς οὐκ ᾔδει τίς ἐστὶν) confirms this.

In all of this, the two central issues that the man and 'the Jews' are trying to discover is the right way to observe the Sabbath and the identity of Jesus.<sup>161</sup>

#### **2.5.4 The Jews' Community Persecutes Jesus: vv. 14-16**

<sup>14</sup>μετὰ ταῦτα εὐρίσκει αὐτὸν ὁ Ἰησοῦς ἐν τῷ ἱερῷ καὶ εἶπεν αὐτῷ· Ἴδε ὑγιῆς γέγονας, μηκέτι ἀμάρτανε, ἵνα μὴ χειρόν σοί τι γένηται. <sup>15</sup> ἀπήλθεν ὁ ἄνθρωπος καὶ ἀνήγγειλεν τοῖς Ἰουδαίοις ὅτι Ἰησοῦς ἐστὶν ὁ ποιήσας αὐτὸν ὑγιῆ. <sup>16</sup> καὶ διὰ τοῦτο ἐδίωκον οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι τὸν Ἰησοῦν, ὅτι ταῦτα ἐποίει ἐν σαββάτῳ.

<sup>14</sup>After this, Jesus found the man in the temple and said to him, "See, you have become well. Sin no longer in order that something worse does not befall you. <sup>15</sup>The man departed and reported to the Jews that Jesus is the one who made him well. <sup>16</sup>And on account of this, the Jews persecuted Jesus because he was doing these things on a Sabbath.

v. 14: The writer uses μετὰ ταῦτα to suggest that what is recorded in the verse, transpired later after the healing.<sup>162</sup> Thus, the event, i.e., the man's second encounter with Jesus is separated from the time the paralytic was healed.<sup>163</sup>

<sup>160</sup> James G. D. Dunn, *The Evidence for Jesus* (Louisville: The Westminster Press, 1985), 41.

<sup>161</sup> Moloney, *The Gospel of John*, 169.

<sup>162</sup> Köstenberger, *John*, 181.

<sup>163</sup> Moloney, *Reading John 5-12*, 6.

Moreover, another salient issue that distinguishes this healing from the parallel passage in John 9 is the connection between sin and sickness. Unlike the case of the blind man where his sickness is neither connected to his sin (9:3) nor was he warned to sin, the healed man is given a warning not to sin. Jesus' command stresses some sort of urgency and a need to desist from sinning, in order not to attract a worse scenario.<sup>164</sup> Possibly, Jesus is not referring to another physical illness (even though that is also possible) which is temporary, but something more damaging than sickness,<sup>165</sup> such as the judgment of God.<sup>166</sup>

Furthermore, the meeting in the temple is a proof that the paralytic is now living a new life; he has been moved from a life of isolation and integrated into the religious community. Having been freed from the sickness that prohibited him from entering the temple, he could now worship God with the community of the children of Israel in God's place of dwelling.

v. 15: Finally, the man becomes conscious of his healer. It makes his response questionable. His reaction is captured in two verbs: ἀπέρχομαι (to go away) and ἀναγγέλλω (to report). It suggests that his purpose of going away was to report Jesus to the Jews.

However, his motive remains unclear since the narrator does not state it. It is possible that one of his reasons for doing that was to give an answer to their question in v. 12.<sup>167</sup> The Jews were the ones who took the initiative to ask him about the identity of his healer (v. 12). Probably, the fear of being punished for contravening one of the laws of the Sabbath (v. 10) pushed him to take that action, in order to shift the blame to Jesus.

Furthermore, if we compare the man's healing to the healing in 9:11, it will be difficult to think that his motive was to show appreciation to Jesus. For in the healing of the congenitally

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<sup>164</sup> Köstenberger, *John*, 181.

<sup>165</sup> Moloney, *The Gospel of John*, 169.

<sup>166</sup> Ridderbos, *The Gospel of John*, 189.

<sup>167</sup> Moloney, *The Gospel of John*, 169.

blind man, the man's answer shows his relentless effort to defend his healer (9:16, vv. 24-33) and even maintains his stand in the face of excommunication (v. 34-35).<sup>168</sup> On the other hand, the paralytic was only questioned once, yet went back to them uninvited. Thus, conclusions can be drawn that unlike the congenitally blind man, the paralytic did so not to show appreciation to Jesus,<sup>169</sup> but to present Him as the one behind the breaking of the law (v. 10) According to Moloney, the characteristics displayed by the man are not ones that can be likened to a person who is making progress in the journey of faith. He is only depicted as one who goes away from Jesus and reports Him to protagonists called the Jews.<sup>170</sup> Therefore, he cannot be likened to the blind man who responded by showing appreciation to Jesus.

v. 16: The information provided by the healed man became the basis for the persecution of Christ by the Jews. This is affirmed by the narrator's statement, καὶ διὰ τοῦτο ἐδίωκον οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι τὸν Ἰησοῦν. The persecution was done καὶ διὰ τοῦτο (on account of this)<sup>171</sup> The man's statement is crucial to the persecution because of the significance of the verb διώκειν. It can both be translated as "to persecute" or "to bring a charge against."<sup>172</sup> Therefore, the report furnished them with evidence to bring a charge against or persecute him,<sup>173</sup> because, the Jews saw it as a religious obligation to set a process of inquisition in motion when Sabbatical laws are violated.<sup>174</sup>

Also, the imperfect tense suggests an action that was repeated and ongoing.<sup>175</sup> That indicates that the process of persecution was not a one-time event, but something that was repeatedly done.

<sup>168</sup> He was summoned on two instances (v. 24). On both occasions, he faithfully defended Jesus.

<sup>169</sup> Carson, *John*, 246.

<sup>170</sup> Moloney, *Reading John 5-12*, 7.

<sup>171</sup> τοῦτο refers to the report made by the man.

<sup>172</sup> Moloney, *Reading John 5-12*, 8.

<sup>173</sup> Ridderbos, *The Gospel of John*, 189.

<sup>174</sup> Witherington, *John's Wisdom*, 139.

<sup>175</sup> Moloney, *The Gospel of John*, 174.

The reason behind the persecution is established as what Christ did on the Sabbath (ὅτι ταῦτα ἐποίει ἐν σαββάτῳ). After discovering the personality behind this drama, His authority was questioned because of the healed man and the Jews understanding of who He is. It is pertinent to note that prior to his healing; the paralytic was looking for a human being who could assist him (v. 7). After Jesus gave him the desired healing, the Jews were interested in the man who gave that order. From both parties, Jesus is only ὁ ἄνθρωπος (the man). Therefore, from where does He derive such authority to give that order for such an act to be done on the Sabbath? <sup>176</sup>

### 2.5.5 The Jews Community's Misconceptions about the 'Divine Community'

**corrected: vv. 17-30**

<sup>17</sup> Ὁ δὲ [Ἰησοῦς] ἀπεκρίνατο αὐτοῖς· ὁ πατήρ μου ἕως ἄρτι ἐργάζεται καὶ ἐγὼ ἐργάζομαι· <sup>18</sup> διὰ τοῦτο οὖν μᾶλλον ἐζήτουν αὐτὸν οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι ἀποκτείνειν, ὅτι οὐ μόνον ἔλυεν τὸ σάββατον, ἀλλὰ καὶ πατέρα ἴδιον ἔλεγεν τὸν θεὸν ἴσον ἑαυτὸν ποιῶν τῷ θεῷ. <sup>19</sup> Ἀπεκρίνατο οὖν ὁ Ἰησοῦς καὶ ἔλεγεν αὐτοῖς· ἀμὴν ἀμὴν λέγω ὑμῖν, οὐ δύναται ὁ υἱὸς ποιεῖν ἄφ' ἑαυτοῦ οὐδὲν ἐὰν μὴ τι βλέπη τὸν πατέρα ποιῶντα· ἃ γὰρ ἂν ἐκεῖνος ποιῇ, ταῦτα καὶ ὁ υἱὸς ὁμοίως ποιεῖ. <sup>20</sup> ὁ γὰρ πατήρ φιλεῖ τὸν υἱὸν καὶ πάντα δείκνυσιν αὐτῷ ἃ αὐτὸς ποιεῖ, καὶ μείζονα τούτων δείξει αὐτῷ ἔργα, ἵνα ὑμεῖς θαυμάζητε. <sup>21</sup> ὥσπερ γὰρ ὁ πατήρ ἐγείρει τοὺς νεκροὺς καὶ ζωοποιεῖ, οὕτως καὶ ὁ υἱὸς οὗς θέλει ζωοποιεῖ. <sup>22</sup> οὐδὲ γὰρ ὁ πατήρ κρίνει οὐδένα, ἀλλὰ τὴν κρίσιν πᾶσαν δέδωκεν τῷ υἱῷ, <sup>23</sup> ἵνα πάντες τιμῶσι τὸν υἱὸν καθὼς τιμῶσι τὸν πατέρα. ὁ μὴ τιμῶν τὸν υἱὸν οὐ τιμᾷ τὸν πατέρα τὸν πέμψαντα αὐτόν. <sup>24</sup> Ἀμὴν ἀμὴν λέγω ὑμῖν ὅτι ὁ τὸν λόγον μου ἀκούων καὶ πιστεύων τῷ πέμψαντί με ἔχει ζωὴν αἰώνιον καὶ εἰς κρίσιν οὐκ ἔρχεται, ἀλλὰ μεταβέβηκεν ἐκ τοῦ θανάτου εἰς τὴν ζωὴν. <sup>25</sup> ἀμὴν ἀμὴν λέγω ὑμῖν ὅτι ἔρχεται ὥρα καὶ νῦν ἐστὶν ὅτε οἱ νεκροὶ ἀκούσουσιν τῆς φωνῆς τοῦ υἱοῦ τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ οἱ ἀκούσαντες ζήσουσιν. <sup>26</sup> ὥσπερ γὰρ ὁ πατήρ ἔχει ζωὴν ἐν ἑαυτῷ, οὕτως καὶ τῷ υἱῷ ἔδωκεν ζωὴν ἔχειν ἐν ἑαυτῷ. <sup>27</sup> καὶ ἐξουσίαν ἔδωκεν αὐτῷ κρίσιν ποιεῖν, ὅτι υἱὸς ἀνθρώπου ἐστίν. <sup>28</sup> μὴ θαυμάζετε τοῦτο, ὅτι ἔρχεται ὥρα ἐν ἣ πάντες οἱ ἐν τοῖς μνημείοις ἀκούσουσιν τῆς φωνῆς αὐτοῦ <sup>29</sup> καὶ ἐκπορεύσονται οἱ τὰ ἀγαθὰ ποιήσαντες εἰς ἀνάστασιν ζωῆς, οἱ δὲ τὰ φαῦλα πράξαντες εἰς ἀνάστασιν κρίσεως. <sup>30</sup> Οὐ δύναμαι ἐγὼ ποιεῖν ἄπ' ἑμαυτοῦ οὐδέν· καθὼς ἀκούω κρίνω, καὶ ἡ κρίσις ἡ ἐμὴ δικαία ἐστίν, ὅτι οὐ ζητῶ τὸ θέλημα τὸ ἐμὸν ἀλλὰ τὸ θέλημα τοῦ πέμψαντός με.

<sup>17</sup> But he answered them, “My Father is working until now, and I am working. <sup>18</sup> For this reason, the Jews accordingly sought the more to kill him, because not only did he break the Sabbath, but also said God was his own Father, making himself equal to God. <sup>19</sup> Then Jesus

<sup>176</sup> Moloney, *The Gospel of John*, 173.

answered and said to them, “Truly, truly, I say unto you, the Son is not able to do anything himself if not something he sees the Father doing; for that which He does, the Son also does likewise. <sup>20</sup>For the Father loves the Son and shows to him all things which He Himself does: and He will show him greater works than these in order that you will marvel. <sup>21</sup>For just as the Father raises the dead and makes them alive, so does the Son makes alive one whom He wishes. <sup>22</sup>For the Father judges no one, but have entrusted all judgment unto the Son. <sup>23</sup>In order that all may honour the Son even as they honour the Father. The one who does not honour the Son honours not the one who sent him. <sup>24</sup>Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears my word and believes Him who sent me has eternal life and does not come into judgment, but has departed from death into life. <sup>25</sup> Truly, truly, I say to you, the hour is coming and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God; and those who hear shall live. <sup>26</sup>For just as the Father has life in Himself, even so He has given to the Son to have life in himself. <sup>27</sup> And He has given him authority to *execute* judgment because he is the Son of man. <sup>28</sup>Marvel not at this: because the hour is coming when all those in the tombs will hear his voice. <sup>29</sup>And they will come out: those who have done good into resurrection of life; and those who have done evil into resurrection of judgment. <sup>30</sup> Of myself I am unable to do anything: as I know, I judge, and my judgment is right; because I do not seek my own desire, but the desire of the One who sent me.

v. 17: The verb ἀπεκρίνατο has a legal undertone. Consequently, Jesus’ answer can be seen as His defence for all the charges leveled against Him.<sup>177</sup> His response is geared towards revealing the basis of His authority. He brings out two pertinent issues in this verse: His personal relationship with the Father and His motivation. Jesus’ personal relationship with the Father is captured in the expression, ὁ πατήρ μου (“My Father”). In the mentality of the

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<sup>177</sup> Carson, *John*, 247.

Jews, such a claim is tantamount to blasphemy, because it makes the one making those assertions coequal with God.<sup>178</sup>

Furthermore, He reveals that His motivation for doing these things is because His Father is working ἕως ἄρτι (until now). His Father had not stopped working even until the present time during which He uttered those words.<sup>179</sup> Jesus was actually arguing from their tradition, which held that God's work did not cease at creation.<sup>180</sup> Carson argues further that the consensus amongst rabbis was that God works even on the Sabbath, otherwise providence would weekly go into abeyance.<sup>181</sup> It further suggests that God does not have to obey the laws of the Sabbath. In view of this, if Jesus' motivation for working is that He does what He sees His Father doing, it cannot be tantamount to contravening sabbatical laws, especially when He has already established that He has a special personal relationship with the Father. Again, the Sabbath had an intended meaning which the Jews had missed. Jesus, by this attitude, sought to recall the real significance of the day to them.<sup>182</sup> They were to sanctify the Sabbath day unto the Lord,<sup>183</sup> because it existed to render honour and praise to God.<sup>184</sup> Therefore, if carrying the mat was a sign of victory over suffering, and of glory to God,<sup>185</sup> then the act can be understood as honouring the Sabbath day and not breaking a rule of the Sabbath. Additionally, the Sabbath existed for the benefit of humankind.<sup>186</sup> Some of these

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<sup>178</sup> In John 10:30, Jesus made a similar claim which resulted in 'the Jews' picking up stones to stone Him (v. 31). They argued that as a man, He was making Himself God (v. 33). See also, Ridderbos, *The Gospel of John*, 191.

<sup>179</sup> Moloney, *Reading John 5-12*, 9.

<sup>180</sup> Köstenberger, *John*, 183.

<sup>181</sup> Carson, *John*, 247.

<sup>182</sup> Morris, *Gospel According to John*, 271.

<sup>183</sup> In the Deuteronomy code, Israel is commanded to keep the day and sanctify it unto God (5:12).

<sup>184</sup> Moloney, *Reading John 5-12*, 13.

<sup>185</sup> Ridderbos, *The Gospel of John*, 188.

<sup>186</sup> In the gospel of Mark, Jesus reveals that the Sabbath was meant to bring benefits to humankind (Mk 2:37).

benefits include rest for themselves, families, animals and strangers.<sup>187</sup> It is also meant to bring freedom in the society.<sup>188</sup>

v. 18. Jesus' defence further aggravated the issue. Unlike in v. 16 where the healed man's report became the basis for leveling charges against Jesus, the opposite occurs in v. 18. This time, His own defence in v. 17 became a cause for the Jews to seek to kill Him. The narrator's word διὰ τοῦτο (on account of this) reiterates the fact that what precedes it immediately necessitated the desire to μάλλον ἐζήτουν (seek more) to kill Him.

The charge leveled against Jesus was compounded by His defence, thereby, adding blasphemy to the previous charge of breaking of sabbatical rule. This was as a result of declaring that God is His Father.

vv. 19-20: The attitude of the Jews provided an opportunity for Jesus to clarify their misconceptions of the divine community. He put forth His argument, starting with the notion of His dependence on the Father for whatever He does. The emphasis (ἀμήν ἀμήν) is a way of totally rejecting the idea that the Son would ascribe to Himself the freedom and authority which belong exclusively to God.<sup>189</sup> Unlike the Jews who understand equality with God as independence from God, Jesus sees it rather as a total dependence on Him.<sup>190</sup> Hence, what He does are only in obedience to what He sees the Father initiates.<sup>191</sup>

Again, Jesus still depends on the Father even to be able to see what He wants to show Him. Indeed, the verb δείκνυσιν suggests that the Father shows to Him (the Son) πάντα (all things). The ramification is that the Son has to depend on the Father to see what He is doing

<sup>187</sup> This is part of the provisions made in the Deuteronomy code (Deut. 5:14).

<sup>188</sup> Gerhard F. Hasel, "The Sabbath in the Pentateuch," in *The Sabbath in Scripture and History*, ed. Kenneth A. Strand (Washington, D. C: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1982), 32.

<sup>189</sup> Ridderbos, *The Gospel of John*, 191.

<sup>190</sup> Moloney, *Reading John 5-12*, 9.

<sup>191</sup> Bruce, *The Gospel of John*, 128.

at every time. Moreover, possibly, the change in tense from the present (δείκνυσιν) to the future (δείξει) further suggests Jesus' dependence on the Father for both what He shows in the present and what He will show Him in the future. The difference is that what the Father will show in the future are greater works that will make even the Jews marvel. So, if they are scandalized by His comment and previous action, they should watch out for greater works, by virtue of His relationship with the Father.<sup>192</sup>

Moving the argument further, it is pertinent to note that the language of agency used to describe the Son's relationship with the Father is worth considering. The Jewish concept of agency involves a legal relationship. It is this relationship that gives agents the authorization to perform those tasks that are assigned to them, and the right to be treated as the one they represent.<sup>193</sup> In view of this, Jesus seeks to convey a message to the Jews that the legal relationship between Him and the Father, and the fact that He acts as His agent makes Him qualify to be seen as One who is above the Sabbath, just like the Father.

Also, another significant thing that surfaces in this relationship is the love that exists between them. First of all, γὰρ states the basis of the Son's dependence on the Father,<sup>194</sup> which is the love the Father has for the Son. In fact, it is the reason why the Father shows the Son all things. The love breaks the barrier of secrecy,<sup>195</sup> thereby, making the Father to reveal everything He does to the Son.

v. 21: Jesus seeks to give perspicuity to the conundrum of the Jews through further explanation on His relationship with the Father. This is carefully outlined to show what He meant by greater works in the previous verse.<sup>196</sup> The first act of these works mentioned, is

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<sup>192</sup> Bruce, *The Gospel of John*, 129.

<sup>193</sup> Witherington III, *John's Wisdom*, 140.

<sup>194</sup> Köstenberger, *John*, 187.

<sup>195</sup> Moloney, *Reading John 5-12*, 13.

<sup>196</sup> Köstenberger, *John*, 184.

the giving of life. The Jews consider the act of giving life as the prerogative of God.<sup>197</sup> Therefore, if Jesus claims to have the ability to perform that act, then He is just like the Father. It is with this in mind that He claims this parallel authority with God. So, the Son does not see Himself merely as an instrument used to give life (like Elijah),<sup>198</sup> but, as one who exercises the divine prerogative of imparting eternal life.<sup>199</sup> By this, Jesus indicates that there are things which He and His Father do together. It further raises the argument that sometimes, what they do may differ. The narrator shows the difference in the next verse.

v. 22: There are things the Father does not do, but has willingly entrusted to the Son. Jesus indicates that, ὁ πατήρ κρίνει οὐδένα (The Father judges no one). The word ἀλλά (but) is not showing the similarities in what the divine community does as οὕτως does in v. 21. Rather, it shows a contrast between what the Father does not do and what the Son does. However, the Son does that because the Father has τὴν κρίσιν πᾶσαν δέδωκεν τῷ υἱῷ (given all judgment to the Son).

v. 23. The purpose of entrusting judgment to the Son is explained by the use of ἵνα (in order that). The Father has done that in order that all will give the same honour they give to Him to the Son. The Son's honour is not less than the Father's, but καθὼς (just as) the Father's. The primary reason is that any honour given to the Son is honour given to the Father who has sent Him. The converse is also true, that when the Son is dishonored, it still goes back to the Father.<sup>200</sup>

Again, the idea of ontological equality and functional subordination can be gleaned from Jesus' statement. His subservience to the Father does not take away from Him His

<sup>197</sup> Bruce, *The Gospel of John*, 129; and Moloney, *The Gospel of John*, 17.

<sup>198</sup> Carson, *John*, 253.

<sup>199</sup> Bruce, *The Gospel of John*, 129.

<sup>200</sup> This is basically in line with the Jewish concept of agency, which authorizes the agent to enjoy the right to be treated as the one he or she represents. See Witherington III, *John's Wisdom*, 140.

ontological equality with the Father. If this were the case, He would not be a partaker of the honour given to the Father. Sharing in this honour makes Him more than a mere ambassador.<sup>201</sup> He is one (ontologically equal) with the Father.<sup>202</sup>

vv. 24-25: In these verses, Jesus begins with the phrase, Ἀμὴν ἀμὴν λέγω ὑμῖν ὅτι (“truly truly, I say to you that”). The double ἀμὴν is only used by Jesus to indicate the divine authority of what is being said.<sup>203</sup> With the authority from His Father in mind, the Son picks up the issue of life again in vv. 24-25. He qualifies the noun ζῶην (Life) with the adjective αἰώνιον (eternal), bringing in the element of soteriology.<sup>204</sup>

Salvation, as captured in these verses is for anyone who “hears My word and believes in the One who sent Me” (ὁ τὸν λόγον μου ἀκούων καὶ πιστεύων τῷ πέμψαντί με). Though it is open to everyone, those who access this gift must hear His word and believe in the One who sent Him.<sup>205</sup>

Of course, the Jews have no problem with having faith in the Father, but seeing God as Jesus’ Father is problematic. However, one cannot choose to believe the Father and ignore the Son’s words, because, He imparts this life by His word which is spoken by the Father’s authority.<sup>206</sup> Therefore, anyone who hears His word hears the word of the Father.<sup>207</sup>

Going further, Jesus’ words on soteriology give the impression that anyone who meets the above criteria receives the promised life in the present world. It is a divergent from the soteriological teachings of Judaism which proposes ‘future life’. For expressions such as

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<sup>201</sup> Carson, *John*, 254.

<sup>202</sup> Bruce, *The Gospel of John*, 130.

<sup>203</sup> Ridderbos, *The Gospel of John*, 197; and Thomas L. Brodie, *The Gospel According to John: A Literary and Theological Commentary* (New York-Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 280.

<sup>204</sup> Ridderbos, *The Gospel of John*, 197.

<sup>205</sup> Here again, the idea of agency is present. Jesus does not disconnect faith in the Father and obedience in Him (Jesus). He makes the two inseparable, i.e., one must have both to access eternal life.

<sup>206</sup> Bruce, *The Gospel of John*, 131.

<sup>207</sup> In John, hearing ought to be coupled with a believing response. Therefore, what is meant by hearing has the idea of hearing that stimulates a believing response from the hearer. See Köstenberger, *John*, 189.

“has eternal life” (ἔχει ζωὴν αἰώνιον) and “but has come from death into life” (ἀλλὰ μεταβέβηκεν ἐκ τοῦ θανάτου εἰς τὴν ζωὴν) are not in the future. They show actions that have already transpired.<sup>208</sup>

Again, on the basis of all that have happened to the one who meets these requirements, εἰς κρίσιν οὐκ ἔρχεται (will not come into judgment), suggests that he or she does not need to wait for the last day to see the outcome of the verdict, because he or she has already received eternal life, therefore, should not fear damnation.<sup>209</sup>

Furthermore, the eternal life spoken about in v. 24 is not only restricted to the living, but οἱ νεκροὶ (the dead). However, only the dead who hear the voice of God’s Son can access this life. It is not merely a future event as ἔρχεται ὥρα (a time is coming) suggests, but something that is καὶ νῦν ἐστίν (and now is). For the resurrection of life for the physically dead in the end time is already being demonstrated as life for the spiritually dead.<sup>210</sup>

v. 26: Jesus further strengthens His argument of the legitimacy of His claims. The use of γάρ (for) aids the logicity of the Son’s claims and offers an opportunity for the explanation of Jesus’ authority.<sup>211</sup>

Motivated by the need to appeal to sonship as the basis for His authority, He begins as a good teacher, from the known to the unknown. Generally, Judaism held that the Father is both the possessor and dispenser of life.<sup>212</sup> However, Jesus has moved that argument further, postulating that what the Jews believe to be true of God is also true of Him, because the Father has given to the Son to have life in Himself. This is not to be taken as an act which

<sup>208</sup> Köstenberger, *John*, 188.

<sup>209</sup> Bruce, *The Gospel of John*, 131; Frederick Dale Bruner, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids-Cambridge: Eerdmans, 2012), 315.

<sup>210</sup> Carson, *John*, 256.

<sup>211</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>212</sup> Ridderbos, *The Gospel of John*, 198.

happened in time, but as something which transpired in eternity.<sup>213</sup> For life is and has always been an attribute of Jesus, prior to the incarnation (1:4).

v. 27: Καὶ (even, also) is a conjunction that is connecting the Son's function in v. 27 to what has been described in v. 26. It suggests that apart from the Son's attribute in v. 26, He also has ἐξουσία (authority) to execute judgment.

Jesus' authority to judge is already made known in v. 22. The idea is reiterated and given further elucidation. In the former, the idea of the right given to the Son to judge is connected to honour given to the Father. However, in v. 27, the Son has the right to judge ὅτι υἱὸς ἀνθρώπου ἐστίν (because He is Son of Man).<sup>214</sup>

vv. 28-29: The idea of judgment introduces an eschatological perspective in these verses as a follow up of ideas previously postulated. In v. 20b, the Son refers to things (future) that the Father δείξει αὐτῷ (will show to Him) in order that the Jews may marvel. In v. 21, the idea of raising and giving life to the dead is connected with the great things that will cause the people to marvel.

Here in v. 28, a similar formula is used to present an eschatological perspective. Jesus reminds them not to marvel at this (μὴ θαυμάζετε τοῦτο), and proceeds to show them what He means by τοῦτο. It refers to an event in which πάντες οἱ ἐν τοῖς μνημείοις ἀκούσουσιν τῆς φωνῆς αὐτοῦ (all who are in the graves will hear His voice).

The timing of the event is distinguished from v. 25 which shows that the same ἔρχεται ὥρα (a time is coming) is καὶ νῦν ἐστίν (is even now). In v. 28, the latter is eliminated, leaving only the phrase, ἔρχεται ὥρα. This makes the event a future one.<sup>215</sup>

<sup>213</sup> Carson, *John*, 257.

<sup>214</sup> For further studies on the term 'Son of Man,' see Moloney, *Reading John 5-12*, 16; and Carson, *John*, 257.

<sup>215</sup> Moloney, *Reading John 5-12*, 16; and Ridderbos, *The Gospel of John*, 199.

Furthermore, the specific events that will transpire in the future are pronounced from vv. 28-30. The first occurrence is that the dead will hear the voice of the Son. Then τὰ ἀγαθὰ ποιήσαντες (those who did good) will εἰς ἀνάστασιν ζωῆς (resurrect into life). Conversely, τὰ φαῦλα πράξαντες εἰς ἀνάστασιν κρίσεως (those who practiced evil will resurrect into judgment). Primarily, the fate of the two groups is contingent on what they have done.<sup>216</sup> It must be pointed out that these events match traditional Jewish eschatological expectations.<sup>217</sup>

v. 30: Jesus' arguments changes from referring to Himself using the third person to the first.<sup>218</sup> However, the use of the first person in His submission does not shift the attention from the Father to Himself. On the contrary, He uses that to reiterate vv. 19-20, pointing out that whatever He does is in the will of the One who sent Him.

In conclusion, the clarifications given by Jesus achieve two purposes. First of all, it uses the healing as an opportunity to clarify their misconceptions about how the members of the 'divine community' relate with each member and work. Additionally, it illumines the reader's mind on salient point about an ideal community. Jesus suggests that in such a society, there should be cooperation (v.19), love (v. 20) and life (vv. 24-25).

### 2.5.6 Witnesses: 31-40

<sup>31</sup> Ἐὰν ἐγὼ μαρτυρῶ περὶ ἑμαυτοῦ, ἡ μαρτυρία μου οὐκ ἔστιν ἀληθῆς· <sup>32</sup> ἄλλος ἐστὶν ὁ μαρτυρῶν περὶ ἐμοῦ, καὶ οἶδα ὅτι ἀληθῆς ἐστὶν ἡ μαρτυρία ἣν μαρτυρεῖ περὶ ἐμοῦ. <sup>33</sup> ὑμεῖς ἀπεστάλακατε πρὸς Ἰωάννην, καὶ μεμαρτύρηκεν τῇ ἀληθείᾳ· <sup>34</sup> ἐγὼ δὲ οὐ παρὰ ἀνθρώπου τὴν μαρτυρίαν λαμβάνω, ἀλλὰ ταῦτα λέγω ἵνα ὑμεῖς σωθῆτε. <sup>35</sup> ἐκεῖνος ἦν ὁ λύχνος ὁ καιόμενος καὶ φαίνων, ὑμεῖς δὲ ἠθελήσατε ἀγαλλιαθῆναι πρὸς ὥραν ἐν τῷ φωτὶ αὐτοῦ. <sup>36</sup> Ἐγὼ δὲ ἔχω τὴν μαρτυρίαν μείζω τοῦ Ἰωάννου· τὰ γὰρ ἔργα ἃ δέδωκέν μοι ὁ πατὴρ ἵνα τελειώσω αὐτά, αὐτὰ τὰ ἔργα ἃ ποιῶ μαρτυρεῖ περὶ ἐμοῦ ὅτι ὁ πατὴρ με ἀπέσταλκεν. <sup>37</sup> καὶ ὁ πέμψας με πατὴρ ἐκεῖνος μεμαρτύρηκεν περὶ ἐμοῦ. οὔτε φωνὴν αὐτοῦ πώποτε ἀκηκόατε οὔτε εἶδος αὐτοῦ ἑωράκατε, <sup>38</sup> καὶ τὸν λόγον αὐτοῦ οὐκ ἔχετε ἐν ὑμῖν μένοντα, ὅτι ὃν ἀπέστειλεν ἐκεῖνος, τούτῳ ὑμεῖς οὐ πιστεύετε. <sup>39</sup> ἐραυνάτε τὰς γραφάς,

<sup>216</sup> Köstenberger, *John*, 189.

<sup>217</sup> Moloney, *Reading John 5-12*, 17.

<sup>218</sup> Köstenberger, *John*, 190.

ὅτι ὑμεῖς δοκεῖτε ἐν αὐταῖς ζωὴν αἰώνιον ἔχειν· καὶ ἐκεῖναί εἰσιν αἱ μαρτυροῦσαι περὶ ἐμοῦ· <sup>40</sup> καὶ οὐ θέλετε ἐλθεῖν πρὸς με ἵνα ζωὴν ἔχητε.

<sup>31</sup> If I bear witness of myself, my witness is not true. <sup>32</sup> There is another who bears witness of me, and I know that the testimony he bears about me is true. <sup>33</sup> You sent to John, and he has testified to the truth. <sup>34</sup> But I do not receive testimony from man, but I said these things that you might be saved. <sup>35</sup> He was a burning and shining light: but you were willing to rejoice in his light for a while. <sup>36</sup> But the witness which I have is greater than that of John, for the same work which the Father has given to me to fulfill, the very work which I am doing now bears witness of me that the Father has sent me. <sup>37</sup> And the Father Himself who sent me has given witness about me. None of you has ever heard His voice nor seen His shape. <sup>38</sup> Also, you do not have His word abiding in you, because you do not believe in him whom He sent. <sup>39</sup> You search the Scriptures because you think you have eternal life in them. And it is these that testify concerning me. <sup>40</sup> And you do not wish to come to me in order that you will have life.

vv. 31-35: The section begins with the series of witnesses Jesus mentions to strengthen His defence. It is a continuation of the defense of Jesus against the charges leveled against Him on the basis of the healed man's report (v. 16). However, this time around, He presents witnesses to support His arguments.

Witnesses are necessary in judicial proceedings, because their testimonies are needed apart from what the accused will say. Therefore, Jesus' words 'Ἐὰν ἐγὼ μαρτυρῶ περὶ ἐμαυτοῦ, ἡ μαρτυρία μου οὐκ ἔστιν ἀληθής' ("If I bear witness about myself, my witness is not true"), should be read in that light. For Him, He does not receive testimony from men (v. 34) to validate His claim, but the law does. It is therefore in the light of this that Jesus spoke.

The Son justifies the need for presenting His witnesses by the use of ἐγώ. The emphatic nature of the personal pronoun implies that what Jesus meant in v. 31 was that a solo

testimony (“all by myself”) is not true.<sup>219</sup> Therefore, there was the need to present more witnesses to validate His claims. It was in line with the legal proceedings of the Jewish people. In their law, a person’s claims alone are not enough, unless they are supported by witnesses.<sup>220</sup> So, to satisfy this requirement, Jesus provides witnesses, appealing first to another witness in v. 32.<sup>221</sup>

By ἄλλος (another), the Son is referring to God (the Father).<sup>222</sup> He deliberately used the term to avoid the name of God, just as the Jews do. The idea that the Father also testifies about the Son is further stated in v. 37.<sup>223</sup>

Apart from God, John the Baptist is mentioned as a witness. The reiteration of John’s work as a witness, and the fact that the Jews sent people to him, brings back the mind of the reader to the prologue. For his role as a witness is affirmed in 1:6-8. Additionally, John’s identity as a witness is not unfamiliar to the Jews, since he had clarified that to them when they sent priests and Levites to enquire of his identity (vv. 19-24). It forms part of the reason why Jesus presented him as one of His witnesses.<sup>224</sup>

vv. 36-38: As good as John’s testimony is, there is a τὴν μαρτυρίαν μείζω (greater witness): Jesus’ works. From the beginning of His defence, He consistently refers to the work which the Father has given Him to do (vv. 19-20). As discussed earlier in this paper, the language of agency comes with the notion that the sender and the sent deserve the same honour, since the sent represents the sender. Representing the Father, the Son’s ontological equality with

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<sup>219</sup> Bruner, *The Gospel of John*, 336.

<sup>220</sup> Ridderbos, *The Gospel of John*, 202; and Köstenberger, *John*, 190.

<sup>221</sup> Bruner, *The Gospel of John*, 336.

<sup>222</sup> Moloney, *Reading John 5-12*, 20; and Köstenberger, *John*, 191.

<sup>223</sup> The notion that the Father testifies about Him is a central idea because it validates His identity and mission. As established in v. 18, the ‘Jews’ have a problem with Jesus identifying Himself as God’s Son, because it makes Him God. Therefore, if the Father witnesses about Him, then they have to face the challenge of accepting who He says He is because the Father’s testimony is the highest form of validation.

<sup>224</sup> Moloney, *Reading John 5-12*, 21; and Köstenberger, *John*, 191.

the Father, coupled with the work which the Father has sent Him to fulfil, is far a greater witness than John's.<sup>225</sup>

Furthermore, Jesus appeals to the testimony of the Father as a greater witness. The word *μεμαρτύρηκεν* which is used to describe the Father's witness is in the perfect tense. It proves that the Father's witness occurred in the past, but has present effects.<sup>226</sup> Therefore, the Father's testimony was still relevant when the Son spoke these words, and still is. For such is the nature of the Greek perfect tense.

vv. 39-40: Jesus continues parading His witnesses before the Jews, identifying *τὰς γραφάς* (the Scriptures) as the next witness. The Jews were people who diligently searched and scrutinised the Scriptures, as the verb *ἐραυνάω* suggests.<sup>227</sup> Yet, their study was misguided<sup>228</sup> because they saw it as a life-giving end in itself, and failed to see the testimony given in them concerning Jesus, which is rather the life-giving power.<sup>229</sup>

The presentation of witnesses is significant to the idea of community. If Jesus' claim of ontological equality with the Father must be accepted, a testimony from a credible source is crucial. The principal source must be a Being in the 'divine community,' since no one has either visited the community (3:13) or seen the Father (1:18). Again, even though the Son can bear witness of Himself, there is the need for another (v. 33) to testify about Him. The Father is the right witness, since He is another of the same essence, as v. 33 suggests. Therefore, His testimony validates Jesus' membership of the divine community.

Furthermore, the testimony of John is significant because it serves as a proof of true incorporation into the community. Many people who were incorporated into the community

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<sup>225</sup> Carson, *John*, 261.

<sup>226</sup> Bruner, *The Gospel of John*, 340; and Köstenberger, *John*, 192.

<sup>227</sup> Witherington III, *John's Wisdom*, 144; and Bruce, *The Gospel of John*, 136.

<sup>228</sup> Köstenberger, *John*, 193.

<sup>229</sup> Moloney, *Reading John 5-12*, 23-24.

after their encounter with Jesus became witnesses. For instance, the Samaritan woman (4:28-29), the blind man (9:30-33) and the disciples who saw the resurrected Jesus (20:25).

### 2.5.7 Two Types of Glory and two Types of People: vv. 41-44

<sup>41</sup> Δόξαν παρὰ ἀνθρώπων οὐ λαμβάνω, <sup>42</sup> ἀλλὰ ἔγνωκα ὑμᾶς ὅτι τὴν ἀγάπην τοῦ θεοῦ οὐκ ἔχετε ἐν ἑαυτοῖς. <sup>43</sup> ἐγὼ ἐλήλυθα ἐν τῷ ὀνόματι τοῦ πατρὸς μου, καὶ οὐ λαμβάνετε με· ἐάν ἄλλος ἔλθῃ ἐν τῷ ὀνόματι τῷ ἰδίῳ, ἐκείνον λήμψεσθε. <sup>44</sup> πῶς δύνασθε ὑμεῖς πιστεῦσαι δόξαν παρὰ ἀλλήλων λαμβάνοντες, καὶ τὴν δόξαν τὴν παρὰ τοῦ μόνου θεοῦ οὐ ζητεῖτε;

<sup>41</sup>I do not take glory from men. <sup>42</sup>But I know that you do not have the love of God in you yourselves. <sup>43</sup>I have come in my Father's name, and you do not receive me. But if another comes in his own name, you will receive him. <sup>44</sup>How are you able to believe when you receive glory from one another, and the glory from the one and only God, you do not seek?

vv. 41-44: Jesus brings to the notice of the Jews, two types of glory and people. He mentions in v. 41, δόξαν παρὰ ἀνθρώπων (glory from men) and in v. 44, τὴν δόξαν τὴν παρὰ τοῦ μόνου θεοῦ (the glory from the only God).

The term δόξα connotes the idea of praise<sup>230</sup> and glory that is necessitated by human achievements.<sup>231</sup> It informs Jesus' motivation for not receiving the δόξα from men. He does not need them because all He does is done through total dependence on the Father (v. 19). Therefore, the only praise or honour He receives is the one the Father bestows upon Him (v. 32).

On the other hand, v. 44 shows that the Jews seek for δόξαν παρὰ ἀλλήλων (glory from one another). This is what v. 41 refers to as δόξαν παρὰ ἀνθρώπων. In the Rabbinic schools, most people saw their religious studies as a means of self-advancement.<sup>232</sup> Accordingly, it is possible that many studied and expounded the Scriptures just to receive praises from one

<sup>230</sup> Carson, *John*, 264.

<sup>231</sup> Moloney, *Reading John 5-12*, 24.

<sup>232</sup> Köstenberger, *John*, 194.

another. Unfortunately, the quest for human praises made them lose the most important thing: the revelation of God in Jesus.<sup>233</sup>

Furthermore, there are two types of people. They include; Jesus, who comes in the Father's name, and the one who comes ἐν τῷ ὀνόματι τῷ ἰδίῳ (in his own name). The Son's accusers reject the former and accept the latter because they do have love for God.<sup>234</sup>

### 2.5.8 Moses, the Accuser of the Jews' Community: vv. 45-47

<sup>45</sup> Μὴ δοκεῖτε ὅτι ἐγὼ κατηγορήσω ὑμῶν πρὸς τὸν πατέρα· ἔστιν ὁ κατηγορῶν ὑμῶν Μωϋσῆς, εἰς ὃν ὑμεῖς ἠλπίκατε. <sup>46</sup> εἰ γὰρ ἐπιστεύετε Μωϋσεῖ, ἐπιστεύετε ἂν ἐμοί· περὶ γὰρ ἐμοῦ ἐκεῖνος ἔγραψεν. <sup>47</sup> εἰ δὲ τοῖς ἐκείνου γράμμασιν οὐ πιστεύετε, πῶς τοῖς ἐμοῖς ῥήμασιν πιστεύσετε;

<sup>45</sup> Do not think that I will accuse you before the Father: the one who accuses you is Moses; in whom your hope is. <sup>46</sup> For if you believed Moses, you would believe me: because it was concerning me that he wrote. <sup>47</sup> But if you believe not his writings, how will you believe my words?

vv. 45-47: At the conclusion of the Son's defence, the Jews become the accused. Jesus is not even the one who accuses them, but Moses is the accuser (v. 45). He accuses them because; their injudicious reading of the Law of Moses has not helped them, just as their misguided searching of the Scriptures could not lead them to Jesus.<sup>235</sup> They failed to grasp the very essence of what Moses wrote about. The writings of Moses and the words of Jesus are so linked that the Jews should have no problem accepting Jesus' claims.<sup>236</sup> Unfortunately, they failed this test. Their failure reveals their lack of faith in Moses and

<sup>233</sup> Moloney, *Reading John 5-12*, 25.

<sup>234</sup> Köstenberger, *John*, 194; Carson, *John*, 264; and Moloney, *Reading John 5-12*, 25.

<sup>235</sup> Köstenberger, *John*, 195.

<sup>236</sup> Carson, *John*, 266.

Jesus. For faith in the former will necessarily lead to faith in the latter (v. 46). In view of this, Moses accuses them.<sup>237</sup>

## 2.6 Theological Synthesis

The exegetical study of the pericope has brought to light diverse concepts about community. In view of that this section synthesises the various ideas and gives a clearer picture of the issues raised above concerning God's ideal community for humanity.

This healing story provokes an interaction between three communities: the divine, Bethesda and the Jews. It throws light on the concept of society, and challenges the two communities' (Bethesda and the Jews) concept of community. Jesus' work in Bethesda revealed what that community had neglected, and what the Jews society had failed to grasp in spite of their studious lifestyle. To the reader, what the Son demonstrated serves as a call to action.

The call to be 'human' is the first thing the reader meets, viewing Jesus' encounter with the man. The man's response to Jesus (v. 7) intensifies the argument of this call. The Greek word ἄνθρωπος is a generic term, used without distinction of sex. Therefore, it refers to a human being, whether male or female. Thus, the man was not looking for a person per se, but for a caring 'human being' who will be able to see the hidden image of God in that outcast, irrespective of his or her sex. Sadly, he found none in that community until Jesus came to fill that gap.

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<sup>237</sup> 'The Jews' had the predilection for appealing to Moses in all matters pertaining to their civic, social and religious lives to support their actions. In fact, they viewed him as the authority, therefore, opined that his teachings must be the standard. In view of that, we see in the fourth gospel that 'the Jews' in the Johannine community used his teachings even to test the authenticity of the teachings and ministry of Jesus. A clear case of such incidence is the woman caught in the act of adultery (8:5). Again, they sought to disassociate themselves from Jesus, claiming to be the disciples of Moses (9:28). Therefore, Jesus' words show that if their 'master' and 'standard' accuses them, then they are indeed guilty.

To the man, Jesus became the one. His answer, ὁ ποιήσας με ὑγιῆ (The one who made me well), shows that the man who once had no one (ἄνθρωπον οὐκ ἔχω), has someone now, who is ‘human’ enough to be responsible for his healing and freedom.<sup>238</sup>

Moreover, to be human is to be “in the image and likeness of God” (Gen. 1:27). The text, as well as the whole Johannine narrative, offers an exegesis of the syntax, ‘image and likeness of God’. Throughout the fourth gospel, one image of God which is projected is the image of God as community (1:1-2) in which there is equality (1:1-2; 10:30), and individuals cooperate with each other in all that they do (5:17-23). Therefore, being ‘human’ in the Bethesda community requires that these attributes are replicated by the individuals, making them responsible for one another. Unfortunately, due to the lack of these qualities, the invalid’s healing delayed. The absence of such attributes in any human community contributes to a state of misery, exclusion and prolonged problems that could be settled easily.

In addition, the Sabbath and the celebration of the Passover further reveal the absence of the responsibility for the brother at the pool. For instance, in the Deuteronomy code, Israel is commanded to keep the Sabbath and sanctify it unto the Lord (5:12). They are also to bear in mind that it is a day of rest for themselves, their sons and daughters, animals, strangers on their land and even their servants (v. 14). It suggests that the rest, provided by the Sabbath is not subject to one’s social class (slave or alien). Rather, it transcends one’s social status, gender (sons and daughters) or even species (animals).<sup>239</sup>

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<sup>238</sup> As expounded earlier, the carrying of the mat indicated that the man was now healed and free. Therefore, his response in v. 11 makes Jesus responsible for his freedom and healing.

<sup>239</sup> Richard D. Nelson, *Deuteronomy: A Commentary* (Louisville-London: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004), 83.

Again, with the idea of the social structure of biblical Israel in mind as the background, the Sabbath celebration and proper observance of the command in v. 14 was aimed at breaking down the wall of segregation that grouped individuals into classes by virtue of one's gender or achievements in society, and reenacting in the community humankind's original status (equality before God).<sup>240</sup>

Furthermore, the Sabbath is also meant to bring freedom in the society.<sup>241</sup> On the Sabbath day, there is both freedom from work and from servitude in any shape or form. Nonetheless, this agenda cannot be achieved, independent of human actions. Consequently, those who exercise authority over the people listed in v. 14 are to ensure that they give them the opportunity to enjoy the freedom required by the law, bearing in mind that they were also once slaves who have been freed (v. 15). So, the man's liberation from the bondage of sickness on a Sabbath day is not only meant to depict Jesus' ontological equality with the Father as has been discussed earlier, but also to remind the community of its role as agent of emancipation to those whose present conditions reflect their former state (slaves or bond men).

Moreover, the notion of freedom is further projected by the Passover background of the pericope. The celebration of the Passover was to remind the people of the freedom given to them from the Egyptians.<sup>242</sup> In fact, the significance of the message of the Passover is seen in the numerous verses in which the Israelites are reminded of that experience (Exod. 12: 26-27; 13:8-10; Deut. 6: 20-24). Therefore, if the narrator devotes an entire chapter to an event that shows the paralytic's journey from bondage to freedom, and Jesus' defense of His

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<sup>240</sup> Hasel, "Sabbath in the Pentateuch," 32.

<sup>241</sup> *Ibid.*, 32.

<sup>242</sup> Jonathan Sacks, *Faith in the Future: The Ecology of Hope and the Restoration of Family, Community, and Faith* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1997), 138.

role of helping to bring liberation to the man, then the reader is reminded of his or her role of helping to free people in the community from any form of slavery.

Taking the argument further, it must be noted that apart from the idea of freedom from slavery, the Passover also reminds the people of emancipation from death.<sup>243</sup> Israel was offered an opportunity to experience a new life after the Passover. The same impression is given in the healing of the paralytic. First of all, Jesus' first command to the man was, "Arise!" The Greek word ἐγείρω is used. It is the same word used in v. 21 to press the argument that the Father raises the dead. The word indicates an arousal from the sleep of death to new life. Jesus' word caused an awakening from death, so that the man could experience a new life.

Secondly, the idea of life is very prominent in the fifth chapter. Jesus justified the act of raising the invalid with the assertion that He has life in Himself (v. 26), and can also make alive whom He wills (v. 21). Thus, He acted in the man's case not merely as an instrument used to give life,<sup>244</sup> but, as One who exercises the divine prerogative of imparting life.<sup>245</sup>

Also, the meeting at the pool throws more light on Jesus' assertion as the giver of life. It reminds the reader of the woman at the well who had to choose between two different kinds of water: the ordinary and the living water (4:14-15). The invalid is also confronted with a similar situation, to choose between a pool which can only bring life after it has been stirred (v. 7), and Jesus, the living water (4:10) which gives everlasting life (v. 14). By giving him a new life, the divine community demonstrates to the community of the Jews and the Bethesda community to serve as conduits for others to experience this new life.

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<sup>243</sup> Jacob Neusner, *The Social Teaching of Rabbinic Judaism: God's Presence in Israel* (Leiden-Boston: Brill, 2001), 142.

<sup>244</sup> Carson, *John*, 253.

<sup>245</sup> Bruce, *The Gospel of John*, 129.

Another significant thing to consider is the absence of mercy in the house of mercy.<sup>246</sup> The pool was called Bethesda because it represented a place where God's mercy was demonstrated in healing.<sup>247</sup> Therefore, the multitude gathered there so that they could be beneficiaries of the divine mercy. The man's testimony in v. 7 suggests that many had benefited from the mercy bestowed upon those who went down into the pool after the angelic stirring. Unfortunately, he remained there because nobody showed him mercy, not even those who stepped ahead of him.

Jesus' appearance at the pool raises issues that must be interrogated. Since the feast is mentioned to give a reason for His voyage to Jerusalem,<sup>248</sup> what was He looking for at the pool? The narrative never mentions that He was there to celebrate the feast either. However, the impression the reader gets is that He went to Bethesda to show mercy to a man who needed it most.

Apart from the fact that He demonstrated God's mercy to the paralytic, He also became the 'temple' at the Bethesda community. It is significant to note that the types of sick people listed in 5:3 were those who were prohibited by the Law to enter the temple.<sup>249</sup> Jesus, the new temple, reaches them no matter how and where they are. He shows that for Him, no one is an outcast except those who do not embrace the 'logic' of the divine community, in which mercy triumphs over judgment. This is directly opposite to the Jews community where there is judgment that can even lead to people becoming outcasts (9:34).

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<sup>246</sup> Bethesda means "House of mercy." See Wahlde, "Acheology and Theology," 561.

<sup>247</sup> D. J. Wieand, "Bethesda," in *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, vol. 1, ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids-Cambridge: Eerdmans, 1979), 467.

<sup>248</sup> Carson, *John*, 241.

<sup>249</sup> Passages like 2Sam 5:8 and Lev 21:18, for instance, indicate that the blind and the lame were not allowed into the temple.

By supernatural knowledge, Jesus was aware that the man had been there for a long time.<sup>250</sup> However, it was the level of his misery that caught Jesus' attention,<sup>251</sup> making him a recipient of divine mercy. Jesus demonstrated God's mercy by going to a pool for sick people and selecting one man out of the multitude to be healed.<sup>252</sup> This illustration of mercy, demonstrates to the communities that they have a responsibility to show mercy, especially to those who need it most. It should be done by 'seeing' them in their misery (not ignoring them), and taking the initiative to speak to them and give the needed assistance (vv. 6-8).

Finally, the import of this healing narrative is the notion that God's concept of community must be replicated in our societies (v. 17, 19 and 21). One prominent attribute of the divine community is a relationship founded on love (v. 20). From vv. 17-23, we see how significant such a relationship is to the Eternal Distinctions; by the way Jesus appeals to the rapport and love that exist between Him and His Father to defend Himself. In this relationship, the element of love introduces the component of responsibility. So, the author uses  $\gamma\acute{\alpha}\rho$  to show that love is both the basis of the Son's dependence on the Father,<sup>253</sup> and the Father's desire to show the Son all things. If love could make the Son depend on the Father, and the Father to show Him all things, a relationship based on love can make one do all things for another person who is depending on him.

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<sup>250</sup> Moloney, *Reading John 5-12*, 5.

<sup>251</sup> Ridderbos, *The Gospel of John*, 185.

<sup>252</sup> Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary: New Testament*, vol. 1 (Colorado Springs: Cook Communications Ministries, 2001), 304.

<sup>253</sup> Köstenberger, *John*, 187.

## CHAPTER THREE

### EXEGESIS OF THE REALITY

#### 3.1 Introduction

In chapter one of this work, it was indicated that an Intercultural Reading requires two cultures: the text and a contemporary culture. Therefore, the culture of the text was examined in the second chapter. The purpose was to enable the researcher to have an informed understanding of the culture of the text. Again, it was meant to aid the researcher to derive the call to action in the text; that which defines the parameters of the contextualisation of a biblical text in a contemporary context.

In this chapter, the culture of three selected Ghanaian Mega Churches, meant to engage the text through Intercultural Reading in chapter four, is examined. They include A.C.I., L.C.I and I.C.G.C. It is organised in three sections, namely, the emergence of the phenomenon in Ghana, the commonalities among them and how they deal with the problem of solitude.

#### 3.2 Emergence of Mega Churches in Ghana

Following the definition of Kendra King, the term Mega Churches, is used in this research to refer to evangelistic churches with massive number of persons in attendance,<sup>254</sup> a charismatic, authoritative senior pastor, a very active seven-day-a-week congregational community, a multitude of social and outreach ministries, and a complex differentiated organizational structure.<sup>255</sup> Some of the churches which reflect these characteristics include Action Chapel International, International Central Gospel Church, Lighthouse Chapel International and many others.

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<sup>254</sup> Kendra King and many like-minded scholars assert that one basic criterion is to have an average membership of 2000 people. See King, *American Politics*, 175.

<sup>255</sup> *Ibid.*, 175.

It is difficult to assert that the Charismatic phenomenon or neo-Pentecostalism in Ghana has not been influenced externally. Over the years, the views of Ghanaian charismatics have been directly or indirectly influenced by voices, such as Oral Roberts, Kenneth Hagin, Kenneth Copeland, Lester Sumrall, Gordon Lindsey, T. L. Osborn, Morris Cerullo and Yonggi Cho.<sup>256</sup> Otabil, for instance, confirms that Kenneth Hagin influenced his thinking.<sup>257</sup> Heward-Mills has also been greatly influenced by Kenneth Hagin through his tapes and books.<sup>258</sup> In the light of this, he is acknowledged in Heward Mills' book, "*Catch the Anointing*".<sup>259</sup> For Duncan-Williams, the American preacher who has influenced his theological thinking is Oral Roberts. Being a disciple of the late Benson-Idahosa, this is not a surprise, since the late Archbishop was a disciple of Oral Roberts.<sup>260</sup>

One is therefore, not wrong to surmise that the Mega Church concept could be part of the ideas borrowed from American televangelists who had either physical contacts or connections through tapes with the leaders of this movement in Ghana. As Larbi affirms, the phenomenon was preceded by evangelistic crusades from preachers such as Oral Roberts and his disciple, Benson-Idahosa.<sup>261</sup> Again, after the crusade, some of the present day leaders of the Mega Churches in Accra were given scholarships to study at Benson-Idahosa's Bible School at Benin, Nigeria. Nicolas Duncan-Williams was one of them. In view of that, we

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<sup>256</sup> It is pertinent to note that apart from Yonggi Cho, who is a South Korean, the rest are US citizens. For the influence of these pastors on Ghanaian Charismatic Christianity, see Emmanuel Kinsley Larbi, *Pentecostalism: The Eddies of Ghanaian Christianity* (Accra: SAPC, 2001), 307-311.

<sup>257</sup> Larbi, *Pentecostalism*, 309.

<sup>258</sup> According to Larbi, Hagin's main sources of influence are his books and messages. See Ibid., *Pentecostalism*, 309.

<sup>259</sup> Dag Heward-Mills, *Catch the Anointing* (Accra: Parchment House, 2000), 92-93.

<sup>260</sup> Larbi, *Pentecostalism*, 308.

<sup>261</sup> Even though Benson-Idahosa was not an American citizen, his Mega Church concept was borrowed from America. Having followed Oral Roberts and receiving theological training from Oral Roberts University, it is legitimate to intimate that he learnt it from America and brought it to the leaders of the Ghanaian Mega Churches who came into contact with him. See Ibid., 308.

could safely conjecture that this was also part of the influence of Oral Roberts on Duncan-Williams since Idahosa was his disciple.<sup>262</sup>

On the other hand, it must be noted that not everything practiced by these churches are solely due to the influence of American televangelists. For instance, the Home cell system, which is prevalent among Mega Churches in Ghana, is solely Cho's overall influence on the charismatics.<sup>263</sup>

### 3.3 Commonalities among Mega Churches

Kendra's definition of Mega Churches reveals four characteristics that are prevalent among these churches. Even though these features are not practiced in the same way among them, the principles are so similar. Using the definition, the researcher seeks to demonstrate how this can be applied to the three churches which are the objects of this study.

#### 3.3.1 A Charismatic, Authoritative Senior Pastor

Kendra's definition of Mega Churches does not only provide what is prevalent among these churches in the United States, but also, something that represents the reality in Ghana. Mega Churches in Accra have charismatic, authoritative senior pastors.<sup>264</sup>

These churches are usually led by leaders who are influential, both domestically and globally. The founder of A.C.I is one of such charismatic leaders. *Paapa*,<sup>265</sup> as he is called

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<sup>262</sup> As part of Duncan-Williams' influence, he is recognized by many as the father of Ghanaian Charismatic. Indeed, while Heward-Mills considers him as his father, Otabil has confessed that he was attending his meetings to take inspiration from him to commence I.C.G.C. Therefore, it is possible that the two leaders also learnt the concept from Duncan-Williams. Assuming that did not happen, their acceptance of the fact that they have been influenced by televangelists from the United States also points to the possibility of having borrowed the concept from the US preachers. Both scenarios lead to a logical conclusion that the Mega Church idea is foreign.

<sup>263</sup> Larbi, *Pentecostalism*, 309.

<sup>264</sup> In this case, the term is used in reference to the national headquarters of the three Churches under study. King suggests that being a charismatic, authoritative pastor means being locally and internationally influential. See King, *American Politics*, 175.

<sup>265</sup> J. Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu, *Contemporary Pentecostal Christianity: Interpretations from an African Context* (Oxford: Regnum Books, 2013), 36. It is a term of affection and recognition of his fatherly role. Bishop James Saah (Senior Bishop at A.C.I). Interview granted the researcher, October 12, 2015.

by his members, pastors and people over whom he exercises oversight responsibility, Archbishop Nicholas Duncan-Williams is a household name among charismatic churches in Ghana. Though his claim of being the father of *Charismatism* in Ghana is contested by those who feel there were precursors that precipitated his emergence, he was the one who gave impetus to the charismatic movement.<sup>266</sup> His initiative in establishing ACI in 1979 made him the pioneer of contemporary Neo-Pentecostalism.<sup>267</sup> He has impacted the lives of many church leaders in the country, including Dag Heward-Mills, who is one of his spiritual sons. Mensa Otabil also confesses that at a time when he needed the inspiration to start his ministry, he visited Duncan Williams a couple of times.<sup>268</sup> On the international front, his extensive media ministry and intercontinental expeditions has extricated his influence beyond the shores of Ghana.<sup>269</sup>

Mensa Otabil, the founder of International Central Gospel Church is also one of the leaders of charismatic churches in Ghana with both national and international influence. Gifford avows that there are two things that necessitated Otabil's emergence as a national figure: the establishment of Central University College, Ghana's first private university in 1998 and his preaching on radio and television from the late 1999.<sup>270</sup> While the establishment of the university enhanced his reputation, his messages, which focus on human development and social renewal, won for him the best motivational speaker award during the year 2000 national Millennium Excellence Awards.<sup>271</sup>

Furthermore, His messages have extricated his influence beyond the borders of Ghana to Africa and afar. The reason is that they focus not only on Ghana, but on the African continent

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<sup>266</sup> James Saah (Senior Bishop at A.C.I). Interview granted the researcher, October 12, 2015.

<sup>267</sup> Asamoah-Gyadu, *Contemporary Pentecostal Christianity*, 36.

<sup>268</sup> Larbi, *Pentecostalism*, 336.

<sup>269</sup> Asamoah-Gyedu, *Contemporary Pentecostal Christianity*, 36.

<sup>270</sup> Gifford, *Ghana's New Christianity*, 116.

<sup>271</sup> Larbi, *Pentecostalism*, 359. For further reading on Otabil's national influence, see Gifford, *Ghana's New Christianity*, 113-114.

and the blacks in the diaspora in general.<sup>272</sup> Gifford suggests that his black theology distinguishes him from the new charismatic leaders in Ghana.<sup>273</sup>

Finally, Dag Heward-Mills is also a Mega Church pastor with nationwide and international influence. In the nation, his influence was necessitated by various factors. His books are read and used by many churches and bible schools in the country. Again, his radio programs attract people from various parts of the nation. Finally, his Iron Sharpens Iron (I.S.I) Conference brings pastors from different countries to the Qodesh.<sup>274</sup>

Furthermore, the I.S.I Conference coupled with his ‘Healing Jesus Crusade,’ makes him an influential figure globally. The I.S.I Conference is attended by both people in Ghana and many from different parts of the world. According to Bishop Eddie Fabin, people from Kenya chartered a flight to one of these conferences. Also, the ‘Healing Jesus Crusades’ are organized both within and outside Ghana; thereby, making Bishop Dag influential beyond Ghana.<sup>275</sup>

### **3.3.2 Active Seven-day-a-week Congregational Community**

Most Mega Churches have weekly activities that necessitate the gathering of the members of the church. This is not to say that they congregate throughout the week. Rather, what happens is that during the week, most of the churches gather for a mid-week service (mostly on Wednesdays). However, church services are intensified on weekends, with most churches having more than two services on Sundays.

L.C.I, for instance, personifies the Mega Church model of weekly meetings. Their week starts on Tuesdays with various services through to Sundays. On Tuesdays, there is the

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<sup>272</sup> Larbi, *Pentecostalism*, 349-353.

<sup>273</sup> Gifford, *Ghana's New Christianity*, 124.

<sup>274</sup> Bishop Eddie Fabin (Bishop at the Qodesh). Interview granted the researcher, November 25, 2015. The Qodesh is the headquarters of L.C.I.

<sup>275</sup> Ibid.

‘Inspiration mid-week service,’ which starts from 6:30pm and ends at 9pm. On Wednesdays, the ‘French mid-week service’ is held between 6:30 to 9pm. It is followed on Thursdays with the ‘Prophetic Turning Point Service,’ from 9am-12pm, and a Bible study meeting in the evening, from 6:30-8:30pm. Then, there is a ‘Prayer clinic,’ held on Saturday mornings, from 6-8am, and an ‘Evening sacrifice,’ from 6:30-8pm.<sup>276</sup> On Sundays, there are many services that are held at the Qodesh. Some of them are the ‘Inspiration service’ (6:30-8:30am), ‘Impact service’ and first service of the ‘French service,’ held simultaneously in different auditoriums (from 8:30-10:30am).<sup>277</sup> There are also the ‘Encounter,’ ‘French’ and second service of the ‘Twi service,’ held concurrently in different auditoriums (10:30-1pm).<sup>278</sup>

In Christ Temple (I.C.G.C), the system is a little dissimilar. Throughout the week, the church organizes general services on Tuesdays and Sundays. On Tuesdays, there is a teaching service from 6-8pm. There are Friday meetings which are held on the last Fridays of the month, from 6-8pm. On Sundays, two services are held: first service, from 7:30-9:30am, and second service, from 10am-12pm. Apart from the general meetings, the rest of the days are dedicated to the various groups in the church.

A.C.I starts the weekdays with a departmental meeting on Tuesday evenings. On Wednesdays, the church holds its mid-week service from 5:30-8pm. Thursday mornings are dedicated to the ‘Dominion Hour,’ which is held between 9am-12pm.<sup>279</sup> Then on Fridays, an all-night service is held between 10pm-4am on Saturday morning.<sup>280</sup> Moreover, there is

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<sup>276</sup> “A week at the Qodesh,” Lighthouse Chapel International, accessed December 15, 2015, <http://www.lighthousechapelqodesh.org/qodesh/index.php/a-week-at-the-qodesh>

<sup>277</sup> On Sundays, there are two French services at the Qodesh.

<sup>278</sup> Some of the interviewees asked for anonymity. Therefore, with their consent, only their positions are used for the citation. Church member at the Qodesh. Interview granted the researcher, November 10, 2015.

<sup>279</sup> This service was started by Bishop James Saah as ‘Jericho Hour’. It has only assumed a new label.

<sup>280</sup> The all-night service is not compulsory for all members. It has been designed for people who have issues that require intense prayer.

a service on Saturday mornings, from 7-9am, labeled as 'Morning Glory'. Finally, Sundays are the busiest days at the Prayer cathedral. Three services are held on Sundays. It starts from 7-9:30am (First service), 9:30-11:30 (Second service), and ends with the evening service, from 6-8pm.

### **3.3.3 Social and Outreach Ministries**

As part of their activities, these churches have social and outreach ministries that give various forms of assistance to the communities in which they operate, as part of their social responsibility programs.

Action Chapel International has a department called Compassion in Action (C.I.A). It is in charge of the church's social and outreach ministry. It focuses primarily on six areas, which include; Basco Orphanage in Suhum, Chosen Orphanage in Darkuman, Compassion Rehabilitation Centre in Prampram, Single Mothers and Widows Ministry, Student Scholarship Foundation and Community Bore Hole Projects.

Concerning their functions, Basco and Chosen Orphanages have over two hundred and seventy children from different backgrounds under their care. They are fed, given medical care, and offered holistic training for their wellbeing. The organization further provides primary and junior high education for the children.

Even though the focus is to reach out to orphans, the Chosen Orphanage is also a home to few women deprived of accommodation.

Furthermore the Single Mothers and Widows Ministry also gives assistance to single mothers who have difficulties in taking care of their children, and widows who are financially incapacitated.

The Compassion Rehabilitation Centre aids drug addicts who want reformation. Consequently, the ministry consistently makes provision for boarding facilities, food, medical care and other things needed for the achievement of this aim.

In addition, under the C.I.A, the church provides educational funds through the Students Scholarship Foundation. From September 2009, the foundation has given over two hundred scholarships worth over GHC 114, 000 to brilliant but needy students in the church.

Finally, the Community Bore Hole Project drills bore holes to provide safe drinking water for different communities.<sup>281</sup>

The International Central Gospel Church believes that it has a divine mandate to demonstrate God's wisdom and creativity, through bringing solutions to some of the problems the society is bewildered with. Central Aid was, therefore, established for this purpose.<sup>282</sup> This unit of the church covers five main areas. They include; educational grants and scholarships, relief and development, community and social development, advocacy, and career guidance and counseling.<sup>283</sup>

Central Aid was established in 1988 as an Educational Scholarship Scheme by the founder of the church, due to his personal experiences, to help others who may encounter what he experienced.<sup>284</sup> Over the years, it has catered for many people, irrespective of their religious and ethnic backgrounds. However, applicants should be students of proven academic abilities.

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<sup>281</sup> I.T. officer at C.I.A. Interview granted the researcher, October 10, 2015.

<sup>282</sup> "Central Aid," Central Gospel, accessed November 09, 2015, <http://www.centralaidgh.org/>

<sup>283</sup> "Central Aid," Central Gospel, accessed November 09, 2015, <http://www.centralgospel.com/?id=12224>

<sup>284</sup> Otabil went through a difficult moment when his father had a stroke. During those moments, the family almost became paupers. Due to that, his education was hindered. See Larbi, *Pentecostalism*, 335-336. This is the reason he sought to do that to help others who have experienced similar situations.

Though Central Aid started as an Educational Scholarship Scheme, its scope has been expanded to include other areas, such as relief and development, community and social development, advocacy, and career guidance and counseling. Through the relief and development program, the church gives assistance to communities that have been affected by disasters. In addition, the community and social development program is basically about engaging in developmental projects to better the lives of underprivileged communities. Finally, the church has career guidance and counseling sessions to provide direction for people in diverse professions.<sup>285</sup>

Moving to the social intervention programs of the L.C.I, the church, according to Bishop Eddie Fabin, produces exercise books that are freely distributed to some selected Junior High Schools. It also offers further assistance to some schools. The Mampong School for the Blind is one of such beneficiaries. The school has received various forms of assistance from the church. Finally, the L.C.I has established a hospital that helps to cater for the health needs of the communities around.<sup>286</sup>

### **3.3.4 Complex Differentiated Organizational Structure**

As part of the characteristics they share in common, Mega Churches have a complex differentiated organizational structure. In A.C.I, they have two organs that cooperate to ensure the running of the church. There is the Spiritual Administration<sup>287</sup> and the Resource Operating Centre, which is the administrative wing of the church.

The term ‘Spiritual Administration’ is employed because of the functions of this board. It handles issues relating to pastors and the spiritual day to day activities of the church.

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<sup>285</sup> “Central Aid,” Central Gospel, accessed November 09, 2015, <http://www.centralgospel.com/?id=12224>

<sup>286</sup> Bishop Eddie Fabin (Bishop at the Qodesh). Interview granted the researcher, November 25, 2015.

<sup>287</sup> The term is used here to indicate administering of activities with spiritual emphasis.

Archbishop Duncan-Williams and the College of Bishops are the members of the Spiritual Administration.

The Resource Operating Centre (R.O.C) serves under the chief of staff of the church. The duty of the R.O.C is to manage anything that requires proper administration.<sup>288</sup>

The I.C.G.C, as an organization, is distinct. According to the church's website, I.C.G.C's organizational structure is as follows: General Church Council, the Presbytery, Ministerial Association, Regional Church Council, District Church Council, and the Local Church Council.

The General Church Council is considered as the highest policy making body in the church. In view of this, it has the power to approve the appointments of the General Overseer, Deputy General Overseer and Secretary General. It is composed of ministers of ICGC and the Legal Advisor of the Church.

The Presbytery, which is also referred to as the Executive Board, is the next board. It is in charge of the spiritual and temporal affairs of the church. It is constituted by eleven pastors who are heads of some branches of the church.

Moreover, there is a Ministerial Association, which is responsible for the selection of candidates for ordination.<sup>289</sup> However, the proposed candidates must be approved by the Executive Board. The board also disciplines ministers of the church, as well as promote their welfare.

In addition, each region has a Regional Church Council made up of a Regional Overseer and all the District Supervising Ministers in that region. The council is set for administrative

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<sup>288</sup> Rev. Sam Lokko (Bishop Elect at A.C.I). Interview granted the researcher, October 12, 2015.

<sup>289</sup> The candidates could be either from the church or outsiders.

expediency. As a result, it reviews the decisions of the District Committee, co-ordinates and plans strategies for the growth of the Church in the Region.

Apart from the Regional Council, there are District Church Councils in every District, composed of a number of Local Assemblies in the same area. They are to advise and assist the District Supervising Minister in the administration of the district and the development of the work.

Finally, there is a Local Church Council, which is constituted of the pastor(s) and duly elected deacons of the local assembly, which formulates policies in the church.

Focusing the attention on L.C.I, their leadership structure is designed as follows: Bishops, General Superintendents, Pastors and Lay Pastors, and Shepherds.<sup>290</sup>

The consecrated Bishops in the church have a council, known as the Bishops Council. The council governs the churches worldwide. The church has branches spread across different parts of the world. Therefore, the Bishops are placed in charge of regions to supervise what transpires in those areas.<sup>291</sup>

Additionally, General Superintendents perform similar functions as the Bishops. They also oversee a number of churches in a country. However, the areas they oversee are not as wide as the regions under the supervision of Bishops. Moreover, they are not part of the governing body which takes decisions for the church.

In addition to the above, the church has Pastors. Primarily, they are put in charge of single churches. Nevertheless, they are not autonomous; rather, they are under the supervision of the General Superintendents.

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<sup>290</sup> Pastor of L.C.I. Interview granted the researcher, November 15, 2015.

<sup>291</sup> A region may be an entire country or countries, depending on the number of churches in the area.

LC.I has leaders, known as Lay ministers or minister shepherds, who serve in the church. The difference between these and the Pastors is that the former is made up of those who have not yet been ordained as pastors. Nonetheless, they are also allowed to be in charge of single churches.

Finally, the Shepherds are those who are in charge of smaller groups or ministries in the church. They also assist the pastors in the churches where they serve.

### **3.4 Relating with Individuals**

Mega Churches in Ghana usually start with few people, and put together strategies that can aid them to grow numerically. A prominent Ghanaian proponent of the Mega Church concept, Dag Heward-Mills, extrapolates from some biblical verses the motivation for Mega Churches.<sup>292</sup> On the basis of these verses, he explains that even though a church may begin ‘small,’ it should end ‘large,’ because God wants His house to be filled. He writes: “Through the story, God is showing His will for the Church. His will is more people! His will is filled rooms! His will is overflowing Churches! His will is the Mega Church!”<sup>293</sup> This is a true image of the phenomenon in Ghana. Charismatic churches in the city of Accra begin with few people, and increase in numbers with time.

However, what accompanies the growth is the shift in their ‘focuses’ as churches, affecting their relationship with members. In their commencement stages, the attention is on the people. On the other hand, as their number increases, they stand the risk of shifting their concentration on structures, sometimes, with little attention to the individuals. What follows seeks to examine how the churches under consideration seek to overcome this temptation.

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<sup>292</sup> He cites Job 8:7, "Though your beginning was insignificant, yet your end will increase greatly." And Luke 14:23, And the lord said unto the servant, "Go out into the highways and hedges, and compel *them* to come in, that my house may be filled."

<sup>293</sup> For further reading, refer to Heward-Mills, *The Mega Church*, 1-23.

### 3.4.1 Action Chapel International

Action Chapel International was founded by Nicholas Duncan Williams in 1979<sup>294</sup> when he returned from Benson Idahosa's Bible School in Benin City, Nigeria.<sup>295</sup> It began as a prayer group at his father's residence at the airport diplomatic shop, with a handful of people. The group held its services there for few months. In the process of time, it became necessary to relocate. Therefore, the search for an appropriate place of worship necessitated the ministry's movement from one venue to another, through the beginning stages. Venues such as the Students Hostel,<sup>296</sup> Association International School, Teachers' Hall, Trade Fair and others were used.<sup>297</sup>

With time, what commenced with a handful of people started experiencing phenomenal numerical growth. Many factors could account for the statistical growth. Primarily, the main reason was that Ghana had not witnessed such a charismatic movement. Of course, there may have been forerunners, but the Archbishop gave impetus to the movement.<sup>298</sup>

According to a senior bishop of the church, "prayer and the apostolic thrust" necessitated the growth of the church.<sup>299</sup> Perhaps, these activities were what others saw as 'action'. During those days, prayer was so much accentuated to the extent that prayer and 'apostolic' meetings were constantly held by Archbishop Duncan-Williams. It is, therefore, not coincidental that the headquarters of ACI is regarded as the prayer cathedral. The

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<sup>294</sup> J. Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu, *Contemporary Pentecostal Christianity*, 64.

<sup>295</sup> Gifford, *Ghana's New Christianity*, 24.

<sup>296</sup> Currently, this is where the Foreign Affairs Ministry is situated.

<sup>297</sup> Rev. Sam Lokko (Bishop Elect at A.C.I). Interview granted the researcher, October 12, 2015.

<sup>298</sup> James Saah (Senior Bishop at A.C.I). Interview granted the researcher, October 12, 2015. Recounting the experience then, one minister who is an outsider suggests that to many, the name 'Action' meant the place where the 'action' was. And those who wanted to be part of the 'new action' trooped to the church.

<sup>299</sup> James Saah (Senior Bishop at A.C.I). Interview granted the researcher, October 12, 2015.

participants who could identify with the trend, joined, increasing the membership of the church.<sup>300</sup>

As the church began to grow numerically, it became necessary to put in place measures, to ensure that people had a sense of belonging. In a 5000 capacity auditorium such as the Prayer Cathedral,<sup>301</sup> there is always a possibility for people to feel that they are not given the needed attention. Indeed, it was this reason that gave birth to some of the strategies discussed below.

The first mechanism the church adopts to relate with individuals in the A.C.I is their mode of integrating new members into the church. Similar to the *modus operandi* of most Mega Churches, ACI gives opportunities during their Sunday services for visitors to identify themselves. After the process of identification, the temple ministers<sup>302</sup> give them forms to fill. It is on these forms that the intentions of first timers are made known to the church. At that moment, those who show interest in becoming part of the church are taken through the systemic arrangement put in place by the church to train its members. To the church, this is essential because it helps them to start building a relationship with the individuals in the church.

ACI has four different classes for this purpose. They include the new converts, discipleship, membership, and leadership class. Until a person completes the first three classes, he or she cannot be considered as a church member.<sup>303</sup> It suggests that becoming a member of the church does not happen overnight; because, the completion of the classes requires time.

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<sup>300</sup> It must be noted that the above assertion is not explicitly or implicitly denoting that the Church has lost the prayer thrust. As churches grow, their emphases change. Currently, the prayer meeting has assumed a new identity, called Prayer Summit. Unlike before, the meetings are held in different part of the world, and sometimes at the Prayer Cathedral.

<sup>301</sup> Asamoah Gyadu, *Contemporary Pentecostal Christianity*, 36.

<sup>302</sup> They are those who are in charge of ensuring that visitors are attended to.

<sup>303</sup> The fourth class, which is the leadership class is only meant for leaders, especially, those who may occupy a pastoral position.

Furthermore, those who are taught in these classes are allowed to serve in some of the departments in the church. In fact, ACI believes that every Christian has something to offer in the house of God. As a result, attending these classes also helps the church and the people to identify specific areas they can serve. Then, based on their various abilities, they join other smaller groups, where their services are needed. However, it must be noted, that joining these groups is of great significance to the individuals in a church with thousands of members. They do not only get the opportunity to exercise their gifts, they also stand a better chance of not feeling lost in the crowd. Primarily, the various departments serve as smaller families within the bigger family, i.e. the church. In view of that when they are bewildered with issues beyond their individual capacities; they have a family that could offer to give some form of assistance. By that the people are given a sense of security and belonging.

Apart from working in any of the departments in the church, the church operated Home cells as a means of giving a voice to individuals, and to build a relationship with the individuals in the church. Thus, Home cells became necessary, when the numerical growth became phenomenal, and the church needed a way to relate with the individual members of the church, in order not to breed too many 'lost in the crowd'.

Home cell is the church at one's doorstep. For that reason, people were given groups to join, based on their geographical location. However, in 2015, the church replaced it with the Shepherd system. These groups had a dual purpose, which includes addressing spiritual and material needs of their members. As a result, members met on Sunday evenings to pray and share the word of God. At the same time, material needs of members were not neglected, but taken care of. On the other hand, on occasions where the gravity of the issues was beyond the Home cell, they were referred to the headquarters for support.

Currently, the Home cell system is not in operation. The main reason is that a prayer meeting has been fixed on Sunday evenings, colliding with the meeting day for Home cells. Meanwhile, they have put in place the Shepherds system to address what the Home cell system was instituted for. Nonetheless, the church is considering reverting to the Home cell system, because the substitute has not successfully addressed the problems which the Home cells were addressing.

The Shepherds system is a method of relating with individuals, where a group of people are assigned to a shepherd. The shepherds are church leaders who have been trained to relate with a group of people assigned to them, serving as intermediaries between the church and the groups under their supervision.<sup>304</sup> The system shares some similarities with the Home cells, while maintaining its distinctive features.

Like the Home cells, their primary aim is to help curb the problem of solitudes in a multitude. Consequently, when the individual members have a problem that needs to be solved, or need any form of assistance, they notify the shepherd, who stands in for the church. However, if it is something that is beyond him or her, he or she petitions the church. Similar to the responsibilities of the Home cell leaders, the shepherds have the duty of calling the members and ensuring that they attend church services.

On the other hand, some of its operations are dissimilar to the Home cell system. For instance, unlike Home cells where people converge on Sunday evenings at various homes, shepherds do not have any meeting days outside the normal church services. As a result of that, time for sharing the word of God depends on the arrangement between the shepherd

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<sup>304</sup> The sizes of the groups are contingent upon the leader's ability.

and the people under his or her supervision. It can be initiated either by the shepherd, or a member of the group s/he supervises.

Concluding on the measures put in place to curb the problem of the feeling of isolation from the crowd, the prayer cathedral uses its mode of unification as one of the means to curtail the situation. The stipulated process, which members are introduced to, helps the church to develop a relationship with the congregants, offering them an opportunity to join any of the smaller groups in the church. In these groups, members have a chance to relate with other members who act as ‘family members’ in both joyous and difficult times, to rejoice and mourn with them. The church also instituted a Home cell system for such purposes. Unfortunately, that system has been replaced with the Shepherd system, because they could no longer meet on Sundays because of the church’s prayer meetings on Sunday evenings.

#### **3.4.2 International Central Gospel Church**

Recounting the history of the church, Larbi avows that Otabil began to talk to people about his intention to establish a church, as far back as 1982. Around this time, he was the president of the Kanda Fellowship. Through his inspirational and farsighted leadership, the vision of the group was expanded, necessitating a conflict between him and some of the members. Therefore, he publicised his intention of starting a church during their camp-meeting in 1983. The idea was supported by some of the members of the Kanda Fellowship, resulting in the birth of I.C.G.C on 26th February, 1984.

As a new ministry, it held its meetings at the Kanda Primary School. However, due to issues like ejection from meeting places, the church kept moving from one place to another until

the Baden Powell Memorial Hall was acquired and fully renovated for church services in 1986.<sup>305</sup>

Sharing on how the experience was during those moments, Rev. Christopher Yaw Annor, who is currently a District Supervising Minister (D.S.M), and a member of the Executive Board of the church,<sup>306</sup> reveals that the emphases were on how they saw themselves in that era. According to him, the church emphasised on fellowship and evangelism. Above all, they saw themselves as a family.<sup>307</sup> This was evident in the bond of togetherness, unity and brotherly love that existed among them, giving people a sense of belonging.

Concerning evangelism, it was not a surprise that the church embarked on many evangelism programs regularly, considering the background of the leader. He became attracted to evangelism at the Power House Fellowship, carried that passion to Kanda Fellowship, and was put in charge of evangelism in that group.<sup>308</sup> Possibly, that could account for the reason why he emphasised on evangelism during the early stages of I.C.G.C. Again, he probably saw the role evangelism played in the expansion of the fellowship during his tenure as the president, consequently, the transposition of the practice to the church. Indeed, it paid off, because in April 1987, the membership of the church rose from 700 to 1500 within a week of evangelism.<sup>309</sup>

Apart from evangelism and fellowship, the idea of belonging to one family, as suggested above by Rev. Annor, could possibly be one of the precipitating factors of growth. Being a family is more than just being a member of a group of people who congregate on certain

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<sup>305</sup> When the I.C.G.C left that hall, Global Revival Ministries, which is headed by Rev. Ampiah Kwofi used the facility until latter part of 2015.

<sup>306</sup>“Organization and Structure,” Central Gospel, accessed November 09, 2015, <http://www.centralgospel.com/?root=about&t=60>

<sup>307</sup> Larbi, *Pentecostalism*, 338.

<sup>308</sup> Ibid., 336.

<sup>309</sup> Ibid., 338.

days of the week. It is accompanied by solidarity; cooperation, and relationship that make each member feel needed. If indeed, Central Aid was established in 1988 to assist people, then it gives a clue to the sense of brotherliness that existed during the period when fellowship was one of the emphases of the church. The reason is that where there is emphasis on fellowship, the attitude of caring and sharing is often not hindered (Acts 4:33-37).

Under such atmosphere, the sense of belonging is present. However, as the church continues to grow numerically, challenges are bound to come. Therefore, there was the need to put together strategies that would ensure that the sense of brotherliness continues to abide in the church. Some of these strategies are discussed below.

The I.C.G.C which started with few people has about 6,000 adults now. However, the number could be about 10,000 when the youths and children are included.<sup>310</sup> Unlike the beginning stages, when identification was easy due to the number, the case is different today. In view of this, the church uses two strategies to handle the situation. They are the process of incorporation and the Covenant Family system.

During Sunday services, a call is made for first time visitors to rise. They are then given visitors cards, which gives them access into the Visitors Reception of the church. There, specially trained hosts and hostesses interact with them to find out the purpose of the visit, and how they enjoyed the service. If it emerges from the interaction that they have interest in becoming part of the church, the details provided to the hosts and hostess are forwarded to the I.T department to enter into the church database, so that the Membership Experience Department can contact the individuals on phone. This does not make them members automatically, but serves as the commencement of the process.

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<sup>310</sup> Member of Membership Experience Ministry. Interview granted the researcher, October 12, 2015.

In I.C.G.C, there are processes one needs to complete to be recognized as a member. After giving your details to the church, prospective members are required to go through 15 weeks training, during which you are schooled in issues like the doctrines of the church, life after giving your life to Christ, and how to mature in the faith. This training is mandatory for everyone who wants to be a member. To the church, it is beneficial because it helps them to be informed about the number of people they can call as members, and where these people can serve in the church.

Primarily, there are two main reasons why the church encourages that people participate in various ministerial activities in the church. The first motivation is that they believe that everyone has a God-given talent which must be utilized. In fact, this is in line with Otabil's laws of productivity.<sup>311</sup> His messages are, therefore, geared towards helping people discover what they have, in order that they can be fruitful. So, during the 15 weeks training, participants are taken through some of these teachings to aid them identify their gifts, and are also encouraged to join any of the ministries in the church.<sup>312</sup>

Moreover, becoming a member of any of the ministries<sup>313</sup> helps to address the problem of feeling lost in the crowd. The ministries serve as subsets (or smaller groups) of the universal set (or whole church). In these subsets, the numbers are not as huge as the entire congregation at the headquarters. Consequently, it is easy to be noticed and identified. For instance, one who leads the church during praises and worship time, intercessory prayers or any activity, often has the benefit of getting to know the pastors, and many people in the church. Juxtaposing such characters to those who are not actively involved in various

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<sup>311</sup> He extrapolates these laws from Gen. 1:28. According to him everyone must "Be fruitful", implies that everyone has a God-given seed. See Larbi, *Pentecostalism*, 353-357.

<sup>312</sup> The church has smaller groups within which members get the opportunity to serve. Some of them are the praises and worship team and the ushering department, just to mention a few. These are termed ministries because people who join serve in the church.

<sup>313</sup> The ministries are the small groups in the church which affords members the opportunity to serve. Some of them are the ushering department, choir and so on.

ministries in the church, the probability for the latter to feel ‘lost’ is greater than the former. The joy of being known by pastors of the church, in spite of the number of members, gives people a sense of belonging.

Again, as these groups hold their weekly meetings in preparation for their various assignments, they are bound together by a common goal. For the sake of this goal, members look out for each other when one is absent from church, or one is bewildered with an unpleasant situation. In fact, in some cases, members of various ministries make contributions and donations to congregants who belong to these small groups. Putting it in a scriptural term, they “mourn with those who are mourning, and rejoice with those who are rejoicing” (Rom. 12:15). These qualities foster a sense of brotherliness and belonging.

In spite of the benefits of joining any of these fraternities, the church does not subscribe to this as the only remedy. The basis is that not everybody in the church is willing to join a ministry in the church. Therefore, there is the need to have something that can give everyone an opportunity to belong to a group, to reduce the problem of solitude in the multitude. Thus, the Covenant family was introduced when the numerical growth started becoming phenomenal, to deal with the issue of “depersonalization, the inevitable syndrome of growth.”<sup>314</sup>

Covenant families became necessary as the church multiplied numerically. Unlike the other churches where these small groups are called Home cells, the church adopted this name, because of the message they wanted to convey to members. The term ‘family,’ suggests that the people who belong to these groups are to see themselves as members of a family. The addition of the term ‘covenant,’ however, is meant to make the family bond stronger. Just

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<sup>314</sup> Larbi, *Pentecostalism*, 360.

as families are bonded together by blood, these groups of people are similarly united through the covenant of Christ.<sup>315</sup>

Basically, a church member does not become a member of these ‘families’ by preference, but by his or her topographical location. Thus, when someone becomes a member of the church, his or her details are sent to the head of a closer Covenant family, for the leader to follow up on the individual. Currently, the ministry is looking at getting a system where new members’ details would be flagged on the computers of the various leaders, immediately they become members. This would enable the leaders to send rapid feedbacks to the headquarters, to enable them follow up on the progress.<sup>316</sup>

The church is concerned about these groups because of the essential role they place in salvaging the issue under consideration. First of all, they serve as the mouthpieces of the members to the church. Sometimes in a crowd, people may have legitimate concerns which they want the church to address. However, a legitimate concern must have a legitimate mode of communication, before it can be addressed. A better way to communicate these concerns is to channel them through the leaders of these groups, so that they can notify the appropriate quarters to handle them.

The advantage one has when one’s message is channeled through the leaders of the Covenant families is that one stands a better chance of receiving the needed attention.<sup>317</sup> The reason is that it is possible for a person to be regular in church and still not be known by the pastors of the church. On the other hand, the probability for a Covenant family leader to be unknown is very minimal, because, as part of the church workers, they have regular meetings with the pastors to address issues confronting their groups. As a result of that working relationship,

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<sup>315</sup> Rev. Reiches Osei-Bonsu (Associate Minister, Church Ministries). Interview granted the researcher, November 16, 2015.

<sup>316</sup> Member of Membership Experience Ministry. Interview granted the researcher, November 16, 2015.

<sup>317</sup> Church Member at Christ Temple. Interview granted the researcher, November 17, 2015.

it is easy for what they present as a need to be considered as more credible. Conversely, a report by someone, other than these leaders, may not receive the needed attention, especially when the person's identity is in doubt.

Furthermore, the frontrunners represent the church at the grounds level. In other words, the formation of these groups is the church's way of relating to the individuals, in order to give them a sense of belonging. In view of this, the leaders are empowered to stand in place of the church to perform some 'pastoral functions,' such as naming ceremonies, visitation and many others.

In addition, the Covenant families are part of the problem solving processes of the church. Since they consider themselves as families, whatever befalls one, affects all members. Therefore, in times when a member encounters a problem that requires financial assistance, the process starts at this level, with members making contributions to aid this 'family member'. However, if it is something that is beyond the capacity of the Covenant family, the church steps in. This role is significant because it makes the Covenant families replicate the idea of family, in order that individuals within the multitude do not stand alone through the vicissitudes of life.

In spite of the benefits the church community derives from these small groups, there are other issues that seem to militate against their advancement: genuine and deliberate absenteeism. There are groups of people who absent themselves from meetings with genuine reasons. These are mostly the working class. Their busy schedules during week days, coupled with the heavy traffic situation in Accra, make them absent themselves, mostly, with the permission of their leaders. However, to show that they have a genuine case, they attend meetings when it is favorable.

The second group is those who absent themselves deliberately without any reason. These are people who attend services at Christ Temple, but do not participate in the Covenant family meetings, because, they choose not to belong to any 'family'. For them, attending the general service is enough.

In conclusion, the Christ Temple of I.C.G.C admits that as a Mega Church, it is bewildered with the issue of people feeling as 'solitudes in the multitude.' In view of this, the church uses various means to address the issue. The process begins from the membership process, with series of classes, meant to aid the church to get to know the individuals. The new members are then offered an opportunity to belong to a ministry in the church, through which they can have a sense of belonging. Finally, the church uses the Covenant family to build a strong family bond among members, to create an atmosphere where every member can feel as being a part of the church family.

### **3.4.3 Lighthouse Chapel International**

According to the church's website, the history of Lighthouse Chapel International can be traced from Bishop Dag Heward-Mills' days as a student at the University of Ghana. When he gained admission into the Medical School of the University of Ghana in October 1982, Heward-Mills started a branch of Calvary Road Incorporated (C.R.I), a group which sort to reach the world through music and drama. Later on, the activities of the group were halted because the then government closed down universities for a period of eight months. However, immediately after the re-opening of the school in March 1984, it resumed its meetings.

In September 1985, Heward-Mills and his class were transferred to Korle-Bu. Maximising the transfer; he started the Korle-Bu chapter of the Calvary Road Incorporated. Unfortunately, attacks from drug addicts and armed men disturbed their meetings. Yet, the

group, through their propagation of the gospel at dawn, added more people to their number. At this point, Heward-Mills handed over the leadership of the branch to his assistant, because he felt led to start a church.

The Korle-Bu branch soon began to meet for Sunday Services at the Korle-Bu Christian Centre, and subsequently, held services at the School of Hygiene Lecture Room. However, various factors, such as conflict with students and school authorities, and the CRI Headquarters' disapproval of their Sunday services, led to the resignation of both Dag Heward-Mills and his assistant from the CRI.

In 1987, Heward-Mills decided to respond to God's call to become a Pastor. Therefore, he took the final decision to take up the role of pastoring the remnants of Korle-Bu Christian Centre (KCC); a decision which made CRI Headquarters to officially dissociate themselves from him and KCC. Now as their pastor, he changed the name from KCC to 'The Lighthouse' in that same month, explaining that the vision is beyond Korle-Bu.

In April 1988, the new church relocated to the School of Hygiene Lecture Theatre (downstairs) with 100 members, but doubled soon. It compelled them to hold services upstairs. Later, KCC became officially known as 'The Lighthouse Chapel,' and then changed again to 'The Lighthouse Chapel International' on December 23rd, 1989.<sup>318</sup>

From the 1990s, there has been tremendous numerical growth, with branches of the church scattered all over Ghana.<sup>319</sup> According to Bishop Eddie Fabin who is currently the pastor in charge of the impact service at the Qodesh, the headquarters has a membership of about 10,000.<sup>320</sup> With such a number, many feel lonely in the absence of proper mechanisms to

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<sup>318</sup> "Our History," Lighthouse Chapel International, accessed November 09, 2015, <http://www.Lighthousechapel.org/lci2/index.php/about-us/history>

<sup>319</sup> Gifford, *Ghana's New Christianity*, 25.

<sup>320</sup> He annotates that, on paper, the church has a membership of 10,000. It must be noted however, that it could be more or less depending on various factors. Therefore, the number is an estimated figure.

reach the individuals. Consequently, the church put together a strategy to meet the needs of the individuals in the group.

Like every other Mega Church, the first thing the church does is to use the process of membership, as a means to make the individuals experience a sense of belonging. During Sunday services, a call is made for visitors to step in front. These guests are then welcomed by the Akwaaba Ladies,<sup>321</sup> and directed to a room, where the First Timers Ministry attends to them. In the process of attending to them, the visitors are refreshed with drinks and given forms to fill. Those who indicate that they want to be part of the church are immediately registered as members. Nonetheless, this is only the beginning to an end, but not an end in itself.

As follow up, the church organizes classes that give the new members an opportunity to be taught basic Christian doctrines and what is required of every Christian. L.C.I is one of the churches that believe that every Christian has a requirement to meet. One of such is his or her duties in the church. In view of that every member is supposed to join any of the ministries at the Qodesh.<sup>322</sup> Joining a group makes it possible for the person not to feel lost in the multitude; because the smaller group serves as a family which the individual can lean on in times of trouble. Moreover, it is much easier for such a person to get assistance from the church in difficult times, than one who is not known, since his or her service in the church are very conspicuous. In fact, the assignment of the smaller groups is to “provide a smaller cosy family of love, care, teaching and support within the larger Qodesh family.”<sup>323</sup> For that reason, being a participant is more profitable than being a mere observer in the church.

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<sup>321</sup> They are part of the welcoming ministry who see to it that guests are given a warm welcome so that they can feel at home.

<sup>322</sup> At the Qodesh, there are smaller groups such as the choir, the worship choir, the hymns choir, the musicians and technical team, the ushers, the akwaaba ladies (welcoming ministry), the first timers’ ministry and the prayer ministry.

<sup>323</sup> Bishop Eddie Fabin (Bishop at the Qodesh). Interview granted the researcher, November 28, 2015

Furthermore, the smaller groups are not the only approach the church adopts to address the problem of solitude in a multitude. The church also operates 'Bussels'. They are actually the same as Home cells. The name was coined by Bishop Dag Heward-Mills to imply cell groups that are bussed to church on Sundays.<sup>324</sup> 'Bussels' are smaller church families that meet in various neighbourhoods and suburbs of Accra. In view of the fact that the leaders are to transport them to church on Sundays, they meet on Saturdays for any convenient hour, between 4pm to 8pm, to help them organize themselves for Sundays.

As one of the smaller groups in the church, they have the same purpose as stated above. Thus, members of the church must join one of the 'Bussels' for their own good. The church has structured it in such a way that members channel their problems through the shepherds<sup>325</sup> of these groups. The reason is that verifying the veracity of the problems reported by members is easier when it is done that way. To belong to any of these small groups, a criterion which is considered before one is assigned a 'Bussel' is the proximity of one's house to the 'Bussels' in that locality. Due to that, people who join, live not too far from the meeting place of these small groups. Under such situation, both members and shepherds can easily investigate complaints, because they live in the same neighbourhood.

The structure is such that the member is just two steps away from the church, since he or she is under the supervision of a shepherd, who also reports to a pastor. As a result, processes which other church members go through to have their voices heard is shortened for those who belong to the 'Bussels'.

The complex nature of human behaviour makes anything connected to humankind so complicated that a multifaceted approach is sometimes needed to minimise it. The

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<sup>324</sup> Bishop Eddie Fabin (Bishop at the Qodesh). Interview granted the researcher, November 28, 2015

<sup>325</sup> Every 'Bussel' is overseen by a shepherd who is also under the supervision of a pastor of the church.

researcher's subject of enquiry cannot be exempted. In light of this, the church uses some of the ideas in what Bishop Heward-Mills calls P.V.T.I. (Prayer, Visitation, Teaching and Interaction) as a one of the ways to address the problem.<sup>326</sup>

Visitation of church members, according to him, is an expression of love to the one being visited.<sup>327</sup> For him, the act of visitation, sometimes, does what the preaching of the word does not do; making people feel loved. Again, when people feel loved, they have a sense of belonging, which causes them to stay in the church.

Finally, interaction with people is a means by which the church ensures that a family bond is kept. Interaction is defined as an act of making personal contact with people and establishing an important connection between the pastor and congregants.<sup>328</sup> Out of the numerous reasons Dag Heward-Mills gives for the need to interact with people in the crowd, one significant purpose he proposes, is that it "makes people feel that they are not just a number or statistic".<sup>329</sup> The aim of making people not to feel to be just a part of the number is significant, because people want to feel as members of the large family, but not merely as numbers. It is in feeling to be a member that gives people the security as being an essential part of the larger group, thereby, curbing the feeling of being lost in the multitude.

It is evident from the situation in LCI, that the church understands that having a multitude of people in one branch of a church comes with its own disadvantages. One of such disadvantages is that people do not always have a feeling of belonging. Consequently, they have put together mechanisms that help to deal with the issue. They range from the process

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<sup>326</sup> P.V.T.I simply means prayer, visitation, teaching and interaction. However, with regards to the problem of feeling lost in the crowd, their concepts of visitation and interaction cannot be ignored. See, Dag Heward-Mills, *Transform your Pastoral Ministry* (Accra: Parchment House, 2001), 155.

<sup>327</sup> Heward-Mills, *Pastoral Ministry*, 98.

<sup>328</sup> *Ibid.*, 145.

<sup>329</sup> *Ibid.*, 146.

of incorporation into the church family, joining a small group in the church, the use of 'Bussels', visitation of church members and interaction between pastors and members.

Finally, the three Mega Churches under study accept that there are many who either feel lonely or are potentially lonely people in their churches. In view of that, they generally use three steps to address the issue. It includes giving fresh members a 'new' identity, incorporating them into a 'family' to give them a sense of communality, and encouraging their active involvements in issues relating to these 'families,' to have a sense of belonging.

This process has its own merits and demerits. Talking about its advantages, it affords people who feel rejected because of what they have encountered in life, to feel accepted. Again, people who may not have families to stand with them through the vicissitudes of life are provided with one that could be looked up to in these times.

On the other hand, because these are human institutions, there are issues that militate against the progress of the process. On some occasions, the acts of omission or commission of both members and leaders, destroy the significance of the established process meant to remedy the situation. Additionally, one issue that is worth considering is that these churches offer some form of assistance to some communities, without demanding that they meet any criteria, but require members to meet certain criteria before getting the needed assistance when necessary. In fact, throughout the three steps in the process, the participants are given requirements that qualify them for any aid from the churches.

These and many other issues reveal that even though the Mega Churches have the will to remedy the situation, the approach has lapses that need reevaluation. In view of the above, an Intercultural Reading is suggested in the next chapter, as a platform to engage the reality

of the Mega Churches with the idea of community in John 5:1-47, to see how these churches can benefit from the idea of community, present in John's gospel.



## CHAPTER FOUR

### INTERCULTURAL READING

#### 4.1 Introduction

Intercultural Reading involves the engagement of two cultures: the text and the reader's. Loba-Mkole suggests that the Bible exemplifies Intercultural Hermeneutic, because it is an engagement between the Word of God and human cultures.<sup>330</sup> It presupposes that whenever an interpreter's culture engages the culture of the word of God, an Intercultural Reading transpires. In this work, the culture of the biblical text has been examined in chapter two. Also, the interpreter's culture, which in this case is the culture of the three selected Ghanaian Mega Churches, has been explored in chapter three. As a result of that the fourth chapter seeks to engage the two cultures, with the intention of trying to find alternative solutions to the various approaches used by the Mega Churches to address the problem.

#### 4.2 Summary of the Culture of the Text

The idea of 'community' is a central theme in the gospel of John. The evangelist presents two communities; the divine and human. The incarnation of the Logos serves as a link between the two communities, giving the second person in the Godhead an opportunity to build a human community which is modelled after the divine community.

Beginning from the prologue, the idea is introduced, stating the existence of God (the Father) and  $\acute{\omicron}$   $\lambda\acute{\omicron}\gamma\omicron\varsigma$  (1:1), and moving further to show the relationship that exists between them. Indeed, their relationship elucidates and originates the idea of community. However, in John's prologue, the divine community is mentioned, not just to prove the existence of a community of eternal distinctions, but to justify the need for a human community. In view

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<sup>330</sup> Loba-Mkole, "Intercultural Biblical Exegesis in Africa," 1354.

of that, a member of the divine community comes to dwell among a human community, through the incarnation (1:14).

Primarily, the purpose of the human community, according to John's gospel, is to mirror the divine community on earth. It is a mission that is impossible to achieve until due procedures are followed. The process of building this type of community commences with one's acceptance to become a member of the community of God's people. To accept this offer, one must believe in the Son and be born from above (3:3). Being born from above gives one the privilege to be granted the authority to become part of God's children (1:12-13), thereby, qualifying to be a member of the family of God. However, that is only a means to an end. It is not enough to be part of this community; the individual must allow the word to be made flesh in him (1:14).

In addition, the one who allows the word to be made flesh in him or her also becomes part of the community of the 'sent ones'. Just as John the Baptist, a man sent from God, came as a witness (1:6-7), so are the sent ones called to be witnesses, to bring others into the community of God's people (14:23).

Furthermore, as people enter into this community, there are some characteristics expected of them to demonstrate. In the fourth gospel, these features become evident, especially through how the Son relates with His Father. Their relationship is based on love (3:35: 5:20), cooperation (5:19), sense of communality and mutuality (1:1).

Among these attributes, love is worth considering because of its significance in John. It is the only law in John (13:34) and a proof of discipleship (v. 35). Again, the new command, as Christ calls it, is a command of reciprocity, to demonstrate to each other the love of the Son. Loving each other will make them serve each other as Christ demonstrated (13:1-17).

Since the human community exists to mirror the divine community on earth, it should exhibit these attributes, as part of its identity and mission.

Moreover, the idea of reflecting the divine community on earth suggests that the Johannine community, like any other human society, lacked the attributes of the divine community. In societies where these characteristics are absent, it is possible to find people living in the midst of multitudes, yet, lacking the necessary support needed for the health of their survival.

The good news is that the attributes above, show that the problem was not left unattended to; the author of the fourth gospel used them to address the problem of solitude in the multitude. He suggests a holistic approach which proposes various roles that stakeholders must play to rectify the problem. These roles will be the substratum for the discussions in the intercultural reading of the text.

#### **4.3. Summary of the Culture of the Mega Churches**

The general practice of Mega Churches is to build churches with membership of 2,000 and more. To them, numbers are so important that they put in place programmes as a means to this end. The programmes are both internal and external. Internally, they organize meetings that can attract people into the church. What they do outside is that the outreach ministries of these churches make donations to the societies in which they operate. Even though they mostly say that they are only fulfilling their social responsibilities, there seems to be more reasons behind those works. Sometimes, these things are done as a way of advertising the church to the communities around in order to gain their acceptance, and at times, to win new members.

As the expected growth is realised, it comes with its accompanied problems. One of these problems is that many feel lost as they become part of these church communities. In view of that the churches put in place structures that seek to curb the situation. Primarily, they can

be grouped into three; giving fresh members a 'new' identity, incorporating them into a 'family' to give them a sense of communality and encouraging their active involvements in issues relating to these 'families,' to have a sense of belonging.

This process has its own merits and demerits. Talking about its advantages, it aids people who feel rejected because of what they have encountered in life to feel accepted. Again, people who may not have families to stand with them through the vicissitudes of life are provided with one that could be looked up to in these times.

On the other hand, because these are human institutions, there are issues that impede the progress of the process. On some occasions, the acts of omission or commission of both members and leaders destroy the significance of the established process, meant to remedy the situation. Additionally, one issue that is worth considering is that these churches offer some form of assistance to some communities without demanding that they meet any criteria, but require members to meet certain criteria before getting the needed assistance when necessary. In fact, throughout the three steps in the process, the participants are given requirements that qualify them for any aid from the churches. First of all, you are required to go through the various classes instituted by the Mega Churches before you become a member. After that, you are required to belong to any of the smaller groups (Bussels, Covenant families or Shepherd system) and make financial contributions as a member of the group, to warrant the necessary assistance when the need arises.

These and many other issues reveal that even though the Mega Churches have the will to remedy the situation, the approach has lapses that need reevaluation. In view of the above, an Intercultural Reading is suggested below as a platform to engage the reality of the Mega Churches with the idea of community in John 5, to see how these churches can benefit from the idea of community, present in John's gospel.

#### **4.4 Intercultural Reading**

The two cultures in this context are the cultures of the text and the Mega Churches. As a result of the aim of this work, the two are engaged with the motive of seeking to address the problem of people in Mega Churches, feeling lonely, in spite of the fact that they worship in churches which have multitudes as members and present themselves as families.

Considering the centrality of the theme of 'community' in the gospel of John, we can deduce that there were problems about the concept of community which the author sought to correct. Possibly, his community was bewildered with some of the challenges the Ghanaian Mega Churches are encountering today. If that were the case, then 5:1-47 could be conjectured to mean a Johannine approach of salvaging the situation. Contemporary audience can benefit from these solutions when an important concept such as the concept of community is carefully considered, along with the different roles various compartment of the society should play to ensure its survival.

##### **4.4.1 The Components of a Society**

Before every human society or community is formed, certain vital elements must come together to culminate it. Basically, in every human society, there are individuals, families and leaders who come together to be known as a community. Consequently, they form an integral part of the society, and must not be neglected.

Furthermore, it is pertinent to note that the coming together of the various components is crucial because that is what makes it a community. This does not merely mean that any group of people gathered in a particular geographical location can be considered as a community, because the various components are duly represented. There can be individuals and families living in a topographical location without necessarily being a community, especially if there is no bonding and a sense of communality. The ramification is that in the

true sense of the word community, isolation and individualism are not encouraged. Additionally, it implies that the constituents have various roles to play to ensure that what binds people together as a community exists between them. This is the only way individuals will not feel secluded from the crowd.

#### **4.4.2 Addressing the Problem of Solitude**

The multifaceted nature of the problem requires that many things are considered when seeking for possible solutions to the problem. Communities are made up of different individuals, groups and leaders. In view of this, stakeholders, consisting of individuals, groups (the community itself) and leaders have various roles to play in ensuring that the situation is remedied.

##### **A. The Role of Individuals**

The individual is the basic unit of the community. He or she is not just a 'number,' therefore; he or she must understand his or her place, for the health of communal life. It is pertinent to note that the individual is significant because the behaviour of the individuals in every society is a reflection of what is done collectively. Like the Bethesda community, societies need human beings, but not just individuals.

##### **i. The Individual must be 'Human'**

Just like the Bethesda community, it is possible for communities to have 'multitudes,' constituted not by 'human' beings, but by 'individuals'. In societies where there is the absence of 'human' beings, the miserable continue to live in their miseries since the individuals focus only on themselves. On the other hand, the idea of being 'human' is antithetical to a life of selfishness. The reason is that being 'human,' is to be and see others as people created in the image and likeness of God (Gen. 1: 26-27). Such understanding of

the human being affects the 'self' and the 'other'. It makes one feel responsible, not just for one's self, but 'the brother' (Gen. 4:9-16).

In John's gospel, Jesus demonstrates this through His interactions with individuals and communities. Out of the twenty one appearances of the Greek word *ἄνθρωπος* (human being), fourteen was necessitated by the various things Jesus did to give life to human beings in the Johannine community. For instance, in 4:50, Jesus gives life to the noble man's son. Also, while the paralytic's healing occurs in 5:9, Jesus defends another healing act that transpired on a Sabbath day in 7:23. He teaches us through His exemplary lifestyle that the human being is the one who becomes an answer to the puzzles of the lonely in the community, by helping to give them life and a sense of belonging.

## **ii. Individuals must be the 'Merciful Ones'**

Like Bethesda, one of the attributes of the divine community which has not been given the needed attention in the Mega Churches is 'mercy'. At the pool of Bethesda, God's mercy expressed itself in the various forms of healings that people received. The multitudes saw themselves as people who were seeking the mercy of God. To be healed was, therefore, considered as being a beneficiary of God's mercy. In John 5, God chose not to heal through the water, but the Sent One (5:19-23). Since healing at Bethesda was ascribed to the mercies of God, Jesus occupies the place of the Merciful One.<sup>331</sup>

Unfortunately, the society, whose name Bethesda, was to be a continual memorandum to them that they were objects of divine mercy, failed to be merciful to the paralytic. Moreover, the authorities who should have sought what God seeks (Mt. 9:13), were only concerned about strict adherence to trivial issues, ignoring weightier matters of the law.<sup>332</sup> The Mega

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<sup>331</sup> Since the text is intended to show the deity of Christ, the act of mercy connects the reader to the God of the exodus (Exod. 34:6).

<sup>332</sup> Mercy is one of the weightier matters of the law (Matt. 23:23).

Church finds itself in this dilemma, whether to respond to the needs of ‘family members’ by mercy or by the laws of the church. Sometimes, these laws are so inflexible that mercy is lost in the way family needs are addressed in these churches. For instance, when an individual is incapable of meeting some financial responsibilities such as contributing to the welfare scheme or paying dues as a ‘small family member,’ he or she does not receive any financial assistance when in need.<sup>333</sup>

The problem of loneliness can be addressed if individuals allow God’s mercy to flow through them to others. It is only when we have such people in the church that it can reflect the meaning of Bethesda: ‘the house of mercy’.

## **B. The Role of the Community**

Just as the individuals in a community have a role to play, there are collective responsibilities that the community must play. In John’s gospel, the principal role assigned to the human community is to be a reflection of the divine community. It simply means that the former must operate like the latter. In what follows, some of these attributes are considered.

### **ii. It must be Family Oriented**

Mega Churches in Ghana accept that one of the major challenges they face is how to be able to relate with various individuals in the multitudes of congregants who worship with them. Over the years, they have sought to use the idea of ‘church as a family,’ to give people a sense of belonging. In spite of that, the problem still persists. Could it be that their concept of church as a family of God needs to be re-evaluated? Can the gospel of John prescribe a remedy for the malady?

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<sup>333</sup> Church member at Christ Temple. Interview granted the researcher on November 16, 2015.

The fourth gospel suggests that the human community must reflect the divine community on earth. In accomplishing this assignment, one of the attributes that should be exhibited within the human community is that it should be as family oriented as the divine community. In the context of this work, the Mega Church, which is a community of Christians, is expected to be family oriented. The centrality of this assertion is seen in the relationship between the eternal distinctions and the formation of the community patterned after the divine community.

Throughout the fourth gospel, the relationship between the eternal distinctions is developed in various pericopes. It begins from the prologue, where *πρὸς* is used to describe the dynamic, mutual<sup>334</sup> and intimate relationship between God and the Logos.<sup>335</sup> The prologue concludes, showing that the relationship is within the context of a family. So, Jesus is identified as *μονογενῆς θεὸς ὁ ὢν εἰς τὸν κόλπον τοῦ πατρὸς* (God, only begotten, who is in the bosom of the Father).<sup>336</sup> Clearly, a Father-Son relationship concludes the prologue, opening a way for the reader to expect in the narrative, further development of this relationship.

Indeed, “the prologue is the ‘telling’ while the narrative is the ‘showing’”.<sup>337</sup> Subsequently, in the narrative, the author shows the family oriented relationship which the prologue ‘tells’. In fact, everything Jesus did in the fourth gospel is recorded to prove His relationship with the Father (20:31). Thus, His motivation for driving people out of the temple in Jerusalem is attributed to the zeal of His Father’s house (2:13-17). They were not wrong, since Jesus Himself demonstrated that His works are in the interest of the Father (4:17), because doing His Father’s will is His food (4:34). The Father correspondingly shows His commitment to

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<sup>334</sup> Moloney, *Belief in the Word*, 49.

<sup>335</sup> Carson, *John*, 116.

<sup>336</sup> Jesus also identified Himself as the only begotten Son of God (3:16).

<sup>337</sup> Moloney, *Belief in the Word*, 24.

the family relationship in various ways. He has given all things into His Son's hands (3:35), shows Him all things (5:20), testifies about him (5:37), honours Him (8:54), and grants that the community receives only through the name of the Son (16:23).

Moving the discussion forward, we should be reminded of the human community's role: replicating the divine community on earth. It presupposes that the above is a pattern that ought to be followed. From the cross, Jesus demonstrates something significant to the community that had gathered at His feet. Present at the scene were His mother, His mother's sister, Mary Magdalene and the disciple whom He loved. Jesus commits His mother into the hands of the beloved disciple, and the latter to the former. The narrator intimates that the disciple took her to his own home from that hour (19:25-27).

The scene illumines the reader's mind on two essential things; the composition and commission of the church as a family of God. Unlike earthly families where people are bonded together by blood, this new family is made up of people who are born of God, but not of blood, nor the will of the flesh, nor the will of man (1:13). It does not mean that these are not 'human beings,' rather; the point is that they have in addition to their 'natural birth,' been born from above (3:3). What distinguishes them from people, who have been born only 'naturally,' is that they have received and believed Christ (1:12). This makes faith in the Son a condition that must be fulfilled to be part of God's family.

Secondly, Jesus' words on the cross to the 'new family' suggest that He wanted them to relate with each other as members of one family. Mary is therefore to see the beloved disciple as her son ("Behold your son"). Similarly, the beloved disciple must reciprocate that by seeing Mary as his mother ("Behold your mother"). They were expected to be as family oriented as the divine community. The beloved disciple's immediate response to that instruction suggests that he understood it in that light. How can the Mega Churches emulate

this? The principle is that the Mega Churches should see themselves as one family and be family oriented.

## **ii. It must Exhibit the Attributes of a ‘Family of God’**

Gleaning from various verses that deal with the relationship between God the Father and the Son, there are things that solidifies their relationship. They did not just consider each other as a ‘relative,’ they showed what members of a family ought to do. If the Mega Churches see the church as a ‘family of God,’ they must endeavour to demonstrate what exists within the divine community, to merit that title.

First of all, there is a peculiar relationship that exists between the Father and the Son. It is on the basis of this relationship that Jesus addresses Him as “My Father” (2:16) and identifies Himself as God’s “only begotten Son” (3:16). Moving the argument further, it is vital to note that the idea of relationship is not merely expressed in how Jesus addresses Himself and the Father, but also in how they relate with one another. From the prologue to the epilogue of the fourth gospel, the author of the gospel of John shows that the creation, incarnation and the ministry of the incarnate word were borne out of this relationship. Creation is a product of the relationship between the members of the divine community (1:1-3). Again, the incarnation became possible as a result of the same relationship. Jesus (the Word) became flesh because He was sent by the Father (3:17). In addition, Jesus shows in various pericopes, how He relates with the Father. He obeys the will of the Father (6:38), loves the Father (14:31), and does His work (17:4).

It is on this basis that the fourth gospel’s concept of community advocates for a sense of relationship among members of the human society. The fact that the eternal distinctions relate with one another, suggests that human beings should not live in a community without relating with one another. It explains the reason why people who encounter Jesus are always

sent back into the community. We see the Samaritan woman returning to Samaria (4:28-42), the paralytic going back home (5:5-15), the congenitally blind man being incorporated into the society (9:7-34) and many others.

Furthermore, the relationship between the Father and the Son is one which hinges on love. Love is demonstrated by the parties in various forms. For instance, the Father exhibits His love towards the Son by committing everything into His hands (3:35) and showing Him all things (5:20). The Son, on the other hand, shows His love for the Father by keeping His commandments and abiding in His love (15:10). Again, to demonstrate that this is not only expected in the divine community, the human community, which exists to mirror the former, is commanded to emulate by exhibiting love towards each member of the community (13:34; 15:12). In fact, love is the only commandment present in the fourth gospel.

Loving each member of the family as Christ loves requires sacrifices from the one who loves to the object of one's love. Christ's love is God's kind of love, and one which sacrifices to the object loved (3:16). Consequently, 'family members' are required to sacrifice for each other, giving up what is precious to them ('Only begotten') for the welfare of each other.

In addition, the idea of 'giving life' is presented in the gospel of John. The theme of life is introduced in the prologue, describing the *λόγος*, as the source of life (1:4). However, being the source of life means nothing if it is not given. As a result, the incarnate word is portrayed as a life giver who restores the lives of Lazarus (11:38-44) and the man at the pool of Bethesda (5:8). Above all, He gives His own life as the ultimate sacrifice for His friends (15:13-15) and anyone who believes in Him, so that they might have life (3:16).

Similarly, members of the 'family of God' must give life to each other. Even though they are not 'sources' of life, they can be 'conduit' of life. They should allow themselves to be used to make other lives better than they met them.

Finally, love encourages cooperation and communality in a human community. If love can propel a great sacrifice, such as God, giving His only begotten Son (3:16), or make a person lay down his life for his friends (15:13), it can be the basis for cooperation and communality. For it is more difficult to give one's life than to cooperate with people in a society for the betterment of all members.

In as much as the roles of individuals and the community or family are significant; they are not the only stakeholders. Every community has leaders, including the Mega Churches. In view of that, a holistic approach will mean, considering what all the parties involved can contribute to solve the problem. Therefore, what follows takes a look at the role of leaders.

### **C. The Role of Leaders**

In Charismatic parlance, a leader is one who is able to influence people. It is therefore not surprising that national and global influence is part of the things they have in common. Dr. Mensa Otabil, a major proponent of this concept, declared the year 2016 as a year of influence for I.C.G.C. He has also been adjudged the most influential person in Ghana for the year 2015, in the recent Ghana's Most Influential (G.M.I) Personalities lists released live on e.TV Ghana's State of the Nation current affairs programme on May 11, 2016. Both Archbishop Nicolas Duncan-Williams and Bishop Dag Heward-Mills were part of the 75 most influential people.<sup>338</sup>

Taking the discussions further, because of the influence that these leaders have in the communities, their contributions are very important. It is in the light of this that Jesus' model of leadership becomes crucial to contemporary Ghanaian Mega Churches. How would Jesus have acted in these churches if He were here in bodily form? In John 5, Jesus furnishes us

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<sup>338</sup> "Citi 97.3 fm," Citifmonline, accessed May 12, 2016, <http://www.citifmonline.com/2016/05/12/otabil-named-most-influential-ghanaian-check-the-full-list/>

with important clues that serve as a model for leaders to follow. It can be gleaned from the various verbs used in Jesus' interaction with the paralytic at Bethesda.

### **i. Leaders must 'Know' the 'Family Members'**

The Greek word γινώσκω (to know) is very prominent in the gospels. It appears in 147 verses in the gospels and 79 verses in John's gospel alone. Though the direction of the text is to place emphasis on Christ's deity, it also furnishes us with ideas about the leader's role in the family of God's people.

Among the various appearances of the verb, it appears 7 times in the pericope of the Good Shepherd alone (10:4, 5, 14, 15, 27 and 38), making the concept of leadership projected in that passage worth considering. First of all, Jesus, by identifying Himself as the Good Shepherd, suggests to the reader that He epitomizes good leadership. As a result, His actions are worth emulating. Moreover, it makes the phrase καὶ γινώσκω τὰ ἐμὰ (And I know my sheep) in v. 14 inseparable from ἐγώ εἰμι ὁ ποιμὴν ὁ καλὸς (I am the Good Shepherd). That means that every good leader (shepherd) must know his 'family members' (sheep). The converse is also true, that one sign of a bad leader is that he or she does not know his or her 'family' (sheep).

In view of the above, it must be stated that leaders of Mega Churches have a responsibility of knowing the congregants, if they consider them as part of the 'family'. The reason is that it makes the family members have a sense of belonging. However, we must admit that trying to know individuals in these churches is not always easy, considering their multitudinous nature. Nevertheless, that can be achieved if the structures in the churches are operative and 'person' oriented.

## ii. Leaders must ‘See’ what Members go through

In 26 occurrence, John describes how Jesus saw various people in different conditions using the Greek verb ὁράω (to see). In most of the appearances, especially when it relates to the vicissitudes of life, the import is to see people in their condition, especially in misery.<sup>339</sup> This idea surfaces in various passages where Jesus demonstrates how a leader should see what ‘family members’ go through. John uses the verb to show how Jesus ‘saw’ the congenitally blind man in his miserable state (9:1). Furthermore, we see on two occasions that the word has been used to describe how Jesus saw Mary in her mournful state (11:36) and the ‘new family’ in their sorrowful moments (19:26).

By Jesus’ actions in the passages above, He models for leaders a pattern that must be followed. Leaders have a responsibility to ‘see’ what members encounter in life. To see implies, being able to take notice of what happens in the various stages of their lives, especially, their trying times. The vicissitudes of life are such that no one is given exemption. Their inevitability requires the availability of people to share with, during those times. As ‘family heads,’ leaders are required to notice when family members are going through such hard times. This is precisely why knowing the family members is crucial for leaders. Knowing people can easily help to recognise a change in attitude, and to inquire about what is going wrong in their lives.

As leaders take notice of these moments, Jesus prescribes what they are to do: seek to address. This introduces us to the third verb λέγω (to say).

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<sup>339</sup> Ridderbos, *The Gospel of John*, 185.

### **iii. Leaders are to ‘Speak’ to the Issues**

The verb λέγω, within the context of Jesus’ encounter with the paralytic, takes the leaders to another dimension of their expected roles within the ‘family’. Jesus did not only know and notice the man; but also, He spoke to the issues confronting him. Again, the scenarios listed above to show how Jesus ‘saw’ people in their sorrowful moments also indicate that He acted afterwards. In all these cases, Jesus responded by speaking or addressing the issues. For the congenitally blind man, He prescribed a remedy, which brought the solution (9:6-7). In the case of Lazarus’ sister, He went ahead to raise Lazarus after seeing her sister weep (11:33-44). Finally, He established a ‘family’ at the foot of the cross when He saw them in that mournful state (19:26-27).

These examples show that the essence of ‘seeing’ what family members encounter in life is to be given an opportunity to respond appropriately, to ensure that the situation has been salvaged. If positive actions are not taken to remedy the situation, ‘seeing’ what people face in life bears no fruit. Therefore, leaders must emulate this attribute which is symptomatic of Jesus’ leadership style.

### **4.5. Conclusion**

Loneliness remains a problem in various assemblies of Ghanaian Mega Churches. In view of that, A.C.I, L.C.I and the I.C.G.C have sought to use their three steps; giving a ‘new identity,’ incorporation into a ‘new family,’ and encouragement of active participation of members, to address the problem. In spite of the steps taken to remedy the situation, there are still challenges. In this chapter, the research sought to employ Intercultural Reading as a means to give alternative solutions to the already existing ones in the Mega Churches.

Reading the text interculturally, through the lens community, it becomes clear that the first thing which the Mega Churches must do is to review their concept of community, and to

understand their mission. In the light of the concept of community extrapolated from the gospel of John, a 'human community' is one made up of people born of God (1:12-13) or from above (3:3). By virtue of their 'new birth,' they become a 'family of God'.

Furthermore, even though they become one family, there are various people constituting the 'new family'. They are made up of individuals, groups and leaders. These components do not only enjoy the right of becoming 'family members' (1:12), they also have responsibilities enshrined in their mission. Their mission is to mirror the divine community on earth.

In view of that they have various roles assigned to them, which they must strive to accomplish. The individual is called both to be 'human' and the 'merciful one' in the community. The community itself has a collective responsibility of being family-oriented, and to exhibit characteristics worthy of its identity and mission. Finally, the leaders are called to know the 'family members,' 'see' what they experience in life and seek to address them. By this, the answer to the problem is not only left in the hands of leaders, but everyone does his or her part to provide answers to the questions raised against the identity of the Mega Church as 'God's family'.



## CHAPTER FIVE

### SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### 5.1. Summary

The Mega Church phenomenon is a new and growing occurrence in the Ghanaian religious landscape. The major Ghanaian proponent of the concept opines that the phenomenon is God's idea of how a church must be. According to him, God wants His churches filled, though they might begin with few people.<sup>340</sup> The emphasis on numerical growth makes these churches put together strategies that can give them that desired outcome. As they grow numerically, the challenge of dealing with multitudes surfaces; one of this is the problem of having people who feel lost in the crowd. As a result, they devise means that can help them build a true community, in which such feelings do not exist.

Moving the discussion further, it is significant to note that the problem of building a true community is neither peculiar to Mega Churches nor something new. In the gospel of John, the idea of 'community' is a central theme. John presents two significant communities: the 'divine' and 'human' communities. The 'divine community' is presented as an ideal society in which there is a good family relationship which hinges on love. On the other hand, the 'human community,' especially the one at Bethesda, proves to be deficient in many areas, just like contemporary Ghanaian Mega Churches.

Against this background, this work explored the idea of solitude in a multitude, by analysing John 5:1-47, and examined its relevance for three selected Ghanaian Mega Churches (I.C.G.C, A.C.I and L.C.I).

Concerning the methodology, the communicative approach proposed by Ossom-Batsa was used as the theoretical framework for this research. The Ghanaian scholar proposes a

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<sup>340</sup> For further reading, refer to Heward-Mills, *The Mega Church*, 1-23.

tripartite level; adherence to the biblical text, attention to the call of action proposed in the text, and the interpreter's context as a frame of interpretation.<sup>341</sup> To adhere to the text, the researcher paid attention to the linguistic and non-linguistic elements, employing the Narrative Criticism proposed by Marguerat and Bourquin to get an informed understanding of the communicative force of the text. This method was chosen because it helps to adequately analyse a narrative text.<sup>342</sup> It also equips readers with the skill to understand the codes and signals of a narrative.<sup>343</sup> In addition, it aids the exegete to do proper structural, stylistic and exegetical analyses.<sup>344</sup> After adhering to the text, the call to action, which is the understanding that emanates from respecting the text, was engaged in the researcher's context (Mega Churches) through Intercultural Reading of the pericope.

Since an Intercultural Reading warrants an engagement between an original biblical culture and the reader's culture, the second chapter focused on the exegetical analysis of 5:1-47, from which the original biblical culture was derived.

Studying the text through the lens of community, the study reveals that the Bethesda community was rich in multitudes, but poor in 'humanity'. The absence of a 'human being' (5:6-7) in the midst of multitudes lengthened the paralytic's stay at the pool. This makes the call to be 'human' very paramount in the text, considering the benefits it brings to the human community.

Moreover, the narrator introduces the appearance of Jesus at Bethesda (5:6), a turning point in the paralytic's life, and the narrative as a whole. To the paralytic, He was the 'human being' he had been waiting for. He only needed one who would be 'human' to see his

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<sup>341</sup> Ossom-Batsa, "A Communicative Approach," 128.

<sup>342</sup> Marguerat and Bourquin, *How to Read*, 8.

<sup>343</sup> Powell, *Narrative Criticism*, 18.

<sup>344</sup> Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral*, 216-19.

challenge and help (5:7), but he had a God-man who also embodied the divine mercy at Bethesda, the 'house of mercy'.

Also, Jesus' approach to the problem of solitude gives us a paradigm for leaders. In the church community, there will always be people, who by virtue of their circumstances will feel lonely. Leaders can curb some of these instances when they get to know the people, 'see' them in their miseries and address the issues.

Furthermore, the healing triggers controversy among 'the Jews community'. Stating the day on which the healing transpired, the reader's mind is prepared for the conflict between the man, Jesus and the Jews. The Jews are in the picture because a man is carrying a mat on a Sabbath day (5:10). For them, it raises issues about proper observance of the Sabbath.<sup>345</sup> The study revealed that if the concern of the Jews was about the right way to celebrate the Sabbath, then, Jesus committed no crime for ordering the man to pick up his mat. The reason is that the Sabbath was meant to bring freedom in the society.<sup>346</sup> Consequently, helping the man to gain his freedom was in line with the celebration of the Sabbath.

Additionally, the Sabbath controversy continues with the Jews, seeking to lay a charge against Jesus. The narrative changes to a court scene, where both parties seek evidence to support their assertion. Jesus used the opportunity to correct their misconceptions about the 'divine community,' and presented John the Baptist, the Father, the Scriptures and Moses as witnesses of His claims. Finally, the accused (Jesus) becomes the accuser of the Jews, accusing them for failing to recognise His identity.

The third chapter focused on the exegesis of reality (Mega Churches), with emphasis on the commonalities among L.C.I, A.C.I and I.C.G.C in dealing with the problem of solitude.

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<sup>345</sup> Witherington III, *John's Wisdom*, 138.

<sup>346</sup> Hasel, "Sabbath in the Pentateuch," 32.

According to Kendra's definition of Mega Churches, there are four elements that are common among these churches. Firstly, they have charismatic and authoritative senior pastors. The understanding derived from the study is that the three founders are influential both locally and globally.

Also, they have a seven-day-a-week congregational meeting. These meetings include general, congregational, and departmental meetings. Usually, most of the attention is on weekends, with Sundays being the most eventful day. In light of this, it is symptomatic of Mega Churches to see two or more services on Sundays.

Additionally, the churches operate social and outreach ministries in the communities, cities or nations in which they operate. The aim of these programs is binary: it is seen both as their social responsibility and a means to gain favor in the sight of those in these communities, in order to win new members to their churches.

Finally, the Ghanaian Mega Churches have complex and differentiated organizational structures. It is significant to note that the structures used by these churches give the founders so much power that they have the final say in most decisions.

Apart from structures put in place for the purpose of the day to day running of the churches, they have designed ways and means of handling the problem of solitude in the churches. From the interviews conducted during the research, the selected leaders confirmed their awareness of the problem, and indicated that they have put together strategies to address the issue. While they have different names, the concepts are similar in practice. The first step the churches take is to use their method of incorporating people to make 'potential members' feel a sense of belonging. When people who visit the church for the first time indicate that they have interest in becoming part of them, they are taken through various classes, during which they are introduced to the beliefs and practices of these churches. It is a way of

opening themselves up for the potential members to get to know them and be given a ‘new identity’ (big family member).

After a successful completion of the various classes, they are incorporated into ‘new families’ (smaller groups). These smaller families have different names to suggest what they are meant for. For instance, the I.C.G.C calls them ‘Covenant families,’ to indicate that they are God’s families bonded together through the covenant of Christ. The L.C.I also uses the terms ‘Home cells’ and ‘Bussels’ interchangeably. They are Home Cells because they meet at various homes. The ‘Home Cells’ are also known as ‘Bussels,’ because members in these small groups who do not have cars are bussed to the Qodesh on Sundays. A.C.I on the other hand, has adopted the term ‘Shepherd System,’ suggesting that they relate with the members as a good shepherd relates with his sheep.

To the Mega Churches, these ‘small families’ are significant because they are there to help solve the problem of people feeling lonely in the assembly. In view of this, members are encouraged to be actively involved, to warrant the necessary attention and intervention in times of trouble.

The fourth chapter sought to make the two realities; the text and Mega Churches, dialogue with each other through an Intercultural Reading. Reading the text interculturally, the study reveals that the process of finding solutions to the problem of solitude in a multitude begins when we discover what constitutes a community. Communities are primarily made up of individuals and families.

Furthermore, these components of the community must understand and play their roles appropriately, before the problem can be properly dealt with. The individuals are not just numbers; they must see themselves and others as ‘human beings’. Also, they are to be the

‘merciful ones’ in the ‘Christian community,’ reflecting the image of God as the Merciful One (Exod. 34:6).

In addition, the communities themselves, the Mega Churches, have roles to play. They must first of all be family oriented. That means that they are to see themselves as families, and do things in the interest of the entire family. Again, they are to replicate the divine community on earth by exhibiting the attributes of the divine community in these churches. It is only when the bond of relationship, love, communality, mutuality and cooperation are seen in the Mega Churches that they can be seen as the ‘family of God’.

Apart from the above, leaders in the communities are to emulate Christ by addressing the problem the way He addressed it in the text. This is a three step pattern. They are to ‘know’ their family members, ‘see’ what they go through and ‘speak’ to those issues. It is only when all these groups play their roles that the Mega Church can reflect the idea of the family of God.

## **5.2 Conclusion**

The researcher set out to examine the idea of solitude in a multitude, by analysing John 5:1-47, and explore its relevance for contemporary Ghanaian Mega Churches. To realise this objective, Intercultural Reading was employed. It was used because it offers the researcher an opportunity to engage his reality with an original biblical culture.

The study reveals that a perfect paradigm of an ideal community is the ‘divine community’. In this society, the pre-incarnate word and God demonstrate a close relationship in which there is mutuality (1:1) and cooperation (1:3). Furthermore, in the incarnation, the reader discovers that different attributes that make the community a perfect one are expressed. Among these characteristics, love (14:31; 15:9, 17:23-24) and unity (10:30; 17:22) are predominant; making the divine community one in which love and unity are cherished.

On the basis of this, the study established that there cannot be an ideal human community unless it is patterned after the divine community. Such a society eliminates human boundaries which militate against the progress of the idea of community such as race, social status and family backgrounds. The reason is that they all become children of God (1:12) through a new birth (1:12-13 and 3:3-8). Again, as they become 'God's family,' they exhibit the attributes of the divine community, such as unity (17:20-23), mutuality (1:1), cooperation (1:2-3), and love towards members of the society (13:34; 15:12), to reflect God's idea of community on earth.

Additionally, the study pointed out that the divine community's family oriented relationship is the idea of the church as a 'family of God,' that the Mega Churches want to represent. However, they fall short in many ways when placed in juxtaposition to the Johannine concept of an ideal community. Being God's family goes beyond just labelling groups in churches to carry the idea of family; it is using the 'family of God' as proposed by John as a model to regulate the activities of the various groups (Home Cells, Shepherd system, Covenant families and others).

To model these groups by the Johannine pattern implies that the Mega Churches should reflect the divine community in their churches. That means that the various characteristics that God and His Son show in their relationship, both in the time of the Son's pre incarnation (1:1-3, 18), and the incarnation (3:16; 10:30; 14:31; 15:9, 17:23-29), should be seen in the Mega Churches. The approach is appropriate for these churches in their fight against the problem of solitude in the multitude, because, it provides various roles for the interested parties, who are the individuals, the church as a whole and the leaders.

The individual's role is to be 'human' and merciful towards the other family members. The church or various family groups in the churches must be family oriented in their approach

and exhibit the nature of the ‘family of God’. Finally, the leaders are to be able get to know the people, take notice of what they go through and help to address them. By this, they can collectively tackle the problem.

### **5.3 Recommendations**

From the study, it has become increasingly clear that even though the Ghanaian Mega Churches are adopting measures to address the issue, it is still not enough, considering their concept of community and their practices. In view of that, the researcher would like to make twofold recommendations. The first set of recommendations is academic oriented while the second is pastoral in nature.

The following topics could be considered for future researches:

- a) An In-depth Study of the Concept of Community in John and Implications for Ghanaian Mega Churches.
- b) A Christ-like Approach: The Role of Charismatic Leaders in the Ghanaian Mega Churches.

For pastoral purposes, I recommend that the concept of church as a ‘family of God’ should be reconsidered in Ghanaian Charismatic Christianity. It is unambiguously true that human families have their frailties by virtue of the fact that we are prone to mistakes. However, we are to bear in mind that when we adopt the divine community’s concept of family, it comes with responsibilities that must be fulfilled. We are therefore required to allow the characteristics of the divine community to influence our concept of community.

Moreover, the leaders of charismatic churches are to emulate Christ’s model of leadership proposed in the text. The iconoclastic proclivities in some leaders that make them see ministry as function, should give way to the proper meaning of ministry, which is service. It

is only in this way that leaders can get to know their people, see their miseries and address them.

Again, the 'weightier matters of the law' should be placed above 'lighter matters' (church laws). The Ghanaian Mega Churches have allowed the Pharisaic attitude, which places more emphasis on the less important and abandons the most important issues, to infiltrate their churches. So, in offering help to people in the church, strict adherence to church laws are often applied. I do not encourage people to be 'irresponsible' in church. However, churches also need to know that mercy is one of the weightier matters of the law (Mt. 23:23) which ought to be seen in the church.

Churches must make laws for men, not men for laws. Laws are good in every human society, because, they help to regulate various activities in these societies. Nevertheless, they must put on a 'human face' in the application of laws. We must remember that the call to be 'human' is something Jesus advocates for in the text.

Finally, the church, at the pastoral level, can read the biblical text interculturally to engage their culture with the culture of the text. It will help them to see the questions the text poses to their culture, in order that the necessary changes can be made.

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