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**Britt Leslie**

***One Thing I Know: How the Blind Man of John 9 Leads an Audience toward Belief***

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Susanne Luther

Johannes Gutenberg-Universität  
Mainz, Germany

This study, a revision of the author’s dissertation at the Lutheran School of Theology in Chicago, draws on a wide range of different approaches—semantic and linguistic analysis, narrative criticism, social-scientific criticism, and performance criticism—to describe how the pericope of the man born blind in John 9 functions rhetorically “to evoke in hearers a relationship of trust in Jesus as light and an experience of Jesus as light of the world” (1). Thus the

penultimate goal is to discern the impact, logical and emotional, a performance of John, and particularly of John 9, would have on an audience. The ultimate goal is to discern the rhetorical force or pull of the episode in relation to the expressed goal of the Fourth Gospel, “that you might [come to] trust that Jesus is the Christ the Son of God, and that trusting, you might have life in his name.” In other words, ... how does this episode lead an audience towards trust? (186–87).

The argument is developed in six chapters: The introduction presents the thesis, the course of argumentation, and the methodology and with a view to the history of research introduces the seminal works concerning the methodological approaches applied in the study. Chapter 2, “Patterns and Structures in the Text of John 9,” divides the episode into eight scenes (9:1–5, 6–7, 8–12, 13–17, 18–23, 24–34, 35–38, 39–41) according to the

characters or character groups interacting with one another (Jesus, the disciples, the man born blind, the man's neighbors, the Pharisees, the man's parents). The chapter provides an analysis of the central elements in the literary portrayal of each scene, focusing on aspects of semantics and syntax, patterns of words and phrases, and stylistic and rhetorical devices, which reveals that the narrator leads the attention of the audience toward the characterization of Jesus as the light of the world and increasingly portrays the blind man as a positive role model. This serves to "move ... the audience towards a place of trust" (62) in that it "brings the audience to a point of decision and therefore a point of judgement" (62): "Will the audience remain in the category of those who think 'we see' and 'we know' or will the audience accept the vision of Jesus that the author offers?" (66–67).

The "Narrative Analysis" in chapter 3 focuses on to the position of the episode within the overall plot of the gospel, its setting (place, time, and social setting), and the portrayal of the characters or character groups (the static characters of the disciples, the people and the parents, the antagonistic characters of the authorities/Pharisees, and the blind man and the complex character of Jesus). The analysis reads the portrayal of the characters' different points of view toward Jesus as a narrative strategy employed to engage the audience to sympathize with those characters (particularly the man born blind) who encourage the audience to trust in Jesus despite potentially negative consequences. The plot is examined according to the four plot tensions and their respective resolutions, which concern the topics of "sin," "sabbath healing," "identity and origin of Jesus" and "fate of the confessor" (see the table on 110). The overall themes of judicial interrogation and witness link John 9 to the plot thread of judgment that is prominent throughout the gospel, "where 'judgment' has come into the world ... through Jesus" (110). The episode is described as functioning "to encourage and exhort" (114) the audience: "Trust or do not trust. Trust the signs and works, or choose to remain blind and receive judgment" (114).

The "Social-Science Analysis" in chapter 4 considers the central values of honor and holiness/purity, the conception of sight/blindness in antiquity, the ancient Mediterranean notion of a human being (dyadic personality, three-zone person), the associations connected with sickness and healing, the system of patronage and brokerage, as well as the concepts of hidden transcripts and antilanguage. This analysis leads to the conclusion that "the man in our episode begins as a character who [was conceived of as] pitiable, shameful and associated with sin, ignorant, 'better off dead' and perhaps even dangerous to society because of the evil eye. He is transformed in the episode to one who honorably praises and is loyal to his benefactor" (152). The man is restored to a (new) social group through the reinterpretation of sin as not being the origin of illness and through the

removal of the shame and stigma of blindness in the healing as well as through the man's courageous conduct toward Jesus and the Pharisees.

Chapter 5, "Irony, Humor, Sarcasm, and Wit," provides a close focus on the strategies of humor and irony and traces them in each of the scenes in John 9. Pivotal is the point that "both involve a shift in perspective at some point. Both involve a rejection of a particular perspective. Both involve an audience to adopt [*sic*] a different perspective in order to make sense of what is being said. ... Both are tools that help an audience to see things from a particular perspective" (166). This analysis results in the finding that, because of the audience's superior knowledge over against the characters within the narrative, irony and wit work with them and can be specifically applied in order to move the audience to identify with the character of the man born blind rather than with the Pharisees, who are repeatedly the victim of irony.

The concluding chapter particularly focuses on performance criticism with the basic assumption: "the Gospel of John was performed for those already trusting who are part of what has been called the Johannine community as well as for those not part of the in-group or believing community" (22); therefore, "the author's goal was that as a result of the performance those who do not yet trust in Jesus would experience Jesus as light of the world and be moved to trust" (23). After introducing aspects of ancient performance (types, setting, the use of emotion, delivery, audience reaction), Leslie attempts to establish how a performance of John 9 would have looked like in antiquity and to describe the way John 9 works on the audience: a distance is built up in the course of the episode toward the Pharisees, even while sympathy for the blind man is growing; the audience has prior, superior knowledge concerning the identity of Jesus through knowing the gospel story from the beginning. They are hence "indoctrinated with the Johannine world view" (194–95) and are drawn into the story's argument; they share the healed man's knowledge about Jesus and form a bond with this character, and like him they experience this bond as life. "The audience is transformed as they begin to see Jesus in the way that the healed man sees him and as the narrator presents him. The story carries the audience to a tipping point, a point of decision. The audience is also confronted, via the story, with the light of the world" (195). Through the story, so Leslie's thesis, the audience encounters Jesus through the eyes of the characters in the story and must decide whether to trust or not to trust in him. The monograph ends with a basic bibliography (197–208).

This study employs multiple methodological approaches in the analysis of the well-known healing episode in John 9. This multidisciplinary reading of the text, where different approaches corroborate each other's findings and strengthen the argument, allows for a more nuanced, multifaceted interpretation of the text and offers new insights into the narrative strategy of the gospel text and the rhetorical guiding of the reader. Each

chapter presents an analysis of the entire episode from the perspective of the respective methodological approach focused on and seeks to advance the book's principal hypothesis. Due to this structure, repetition and overlap in the presentation are now and again unavoidable; at the same time, this proves that the analytical chapters are strongly dependent on each other and that the different methodological strands of the argument are tightly interwoven. The author *demonstrates* convincingly the impact of rhetorical and performance criticism for the interpretation of text pragmatics. Although some arguments may have benefited from more extensive reference to the overall plot (e.g., the association of John 9 with the theme of ζωή, 114–15), and some analyses (e.g., the character analyses) from a broader acknowledgement of the recent discussion, these minor criticisms do not diminish the value of this worthwhile contribution to the methodological and hermeneutical discussion of the Fourth Gospel. The strength of this book lies in the offer of an easily accessible synthesis of a variety of newer methodological approaches to New Testament exegesis as well as their exegetical application. The brief study is well-written and tightly argued; it may hence prove beneficial to both students and scholars of the Gospel of John alike.