

Conversion in the Fourth Gospel

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Abstract: The essence of the proclamation of the Good News is a call to conversion, which seems absent from the Fourth Gospel due to the lack of any direct reference. The biblical idea of conversion is first expressed there by a call to believe in Jesus as the Son of God; then by the repeated motif of coming out of darkness into the light, approaching and discovering (accepting) the truth; being born of God and the Spirit, approaching Jesus, testifying about him, accepting and following him, and finally glorifying God. This study aims to present this multi-faceted process, whose framework is outlined by John, first in the prologue to his Gospel and then developed in the narrative. The same order is applied in the individual stages of this analysis employing a synchronic approach, which enables the readers to derive the edifying call to turn to Jesus and follow him to gain eternal life from the final, i.e., canonical, version of John's text.

Keywords: conversion, faith, the Fourth Gospel, Jesus Christ, John

Contrary to the Synoptic Gospels, the Fourth Gospel is the only one that does not include a direct call to conversion. Nor does it contain such terms as μεταμέλομαι (to regret), μετανοέω (to change your mind),¹ or μετάνοια (a change of mind), which express this biblical idea. Despite the insufficiencies indicated, John's text does not omit the subject of conversion, which has not been explored in detail until today.²

In the Fourth Gospel, the idea of conversion is expressed by a call to have faith in God's Son, to turn to Him, and to imitate Him.³ The use of the verbs πιστεύω (to believe)⁴ and στρέφω (to turn away)⁵ in John's work implies a change of the approach

¹ The verbs used in the LXX correspond to Hebrew נחם (to change an intention, to regret). More on the frequency and meaning of the aforementioned terms in the New Testament can be found in Tosato, "Per una revisione," 3–45.

² The unsatisfactory results of studies into the concept of conversion in John's Gospel were mentioned by Despotis, "From Conversion," 99, although the subject had been dealt with before by Mollat, "Ils regarderont Celui," 95–114; Cothenet, "La conversion dans le IV^e Évangile," 55–71; Witherup, *Conversion*, 74–87; Cothenet, *Exégèse et liturgie*, 143–159; Ramsey Michaels, "Baptism and Conversion," 136–156; Roberts Gaventa, *From Darkness to Light*, 130–138; Peace, *Conversion*, 353; Malina, "Zagadnienia etyczne," 296–313; and Despotis, "Exploring a Common Background," 105–144.

³ Cf. Malina, "Zagadnienia etyczne," 303.

⁴ The noun πίστις (faith) does not feature at all in the Gospel of John. On the contrary, in the Gospel of Mark, a call to have faith is preceded by a clear indication that the recipients of the Good News should change their mind: μετανοείτε καὶ πιστεύετε ἐν τῷ εὐαγγελίῳ (1:15).

⁵ In the LXX, this term (along with its derivatives) usually corresponds to the Hebrew verb שׁוּב. Cf. Tosato, "Per una revisione," 13, n. 15.

and actions expressed using other terms than mentioned above. This fact, which enables the extension of the study perspective, thus determines the purpose of this analysis to explore the expression of the idea of conversion in the Fourth Gospel along with its Old Testament context of turning to God. The program-like nature of John's prologue, compared with the narrative and speeches included in it,⁶ justifies the primacy of the abovementioned text in the analysis. Another subject of the study is the pericopes of the Fourth Gospel, in which the testimony revealing the identity of Jesus,⁷ introduced in the hymn about God's Word, encourages its addressees to believe in God's Son and evokes their positive response or opens up the prospect of change, indicating the conditions required for it to happen and last.

1. John's Prologue and the Biblical Concept of Conversion

John's prologue about the Word plays a key role in introducing and developing the subject of conversion in the Fourth Gospel. The image of life (ζωή) presented there is the light (φῶς) of people shining in darkness (σκοτία) and not overcome by it. Based on an identical contrast, it develops the biblical vision of the struggle between good and evil and the ability to overcome it thanks to God's intervention, turning to Him following the example set by the righteous and accepting God's wisdom.

According to the Old Testament, God is not only the creator of light (Gen 1:3), separating it from darkness (1:4), but also the One that – as stated in Ps 107[106]:14 – brings his people forth from darkness and the shadow of death, i.e., slavery. Although the text does not say that liberation leads to light, the psalmist's use of *hendiadys* and, above all, the verb "to bring out" leads us to assume – under the biblical dichotomy – that this is the purpose of Israel's historical journey. Divine intervention changes not only the living conditions of the people but also affects their spiritual life. The decisions made as part of it, confirmed by the preservation of the covenant and the change of direction, determine to a significant extent the further development and prosperity of the people (Neh 1:5; Ps 119[118]:1–3; Sir 15:15–17). However, faithfulness to the covenant made with God is, above all, characteristic of a just man's life, embodied by the predecessor of Jesus in the prologue to the Fourth Gospel.

In the spiritual profile outlined by the fourth Evangelist, his mission is entirely subjugated to the task of instilling faith in the addressees of the testimony to the light (1:7). The appearance of Jesus' predecessor on the scene of salvation events

⁶ Cf. Cothenet, *La chaîne des témoins*, 20; Kim, "The Literary and Theological Significance," 424.

⁷ Numerous publications dedicated to the testimony in the Fourth Gospel include Hindley, "Witness in the Fourth Gospel," 319–337; Boice, *Witness and Revelation*; Beutler, *Martyria*; La Potterie, "El concepto de testimonio," 269–298; Trites, *New Testament*; Simpson, "Testimony in John's Gospel," 101–118; Ledwoń, *Świadectwo Ojca*.

is a reference to the activity of the biblical figure of the righteous arising as light to dawn for the upright (Ps 112[111]:4). It needs to be noted that despite the apparent dependence on light, John has his own identity. In the prologue to the Fourth Gospel, it is expressed by being sent from God (1:6) and the testimony to the light (1:8, 19).⁸ These two qualities make it possible to recognize the biblical origin of the mission performed by John, his ability to walk in the light (cf. Job 29:3), and follow wisdom (cf. Sir 51:15; Qoh 2:13). The Old Testament personification of the latter value (see Wis 7:29–30; Prov 9:1–6⁹) is the announcement of God's embodied Word (1 Cor 1:24),¹⁰ which in the prologue to the Fourth Gospel is described as not known or accepted by all (John 1:10–11; cf. 1 Cor 1:21), but those who have faith could see the glory of the Father in the Father's Only Son (1:14) not overcome or not surprised¹¹ by darkness (1:5), even when he was lifted on the cross and drew everyone to himself (12:32; 19:37). The fact that Jesus does not become overcome by darkness corroborates the Evangelist's testimony about him. The last mention of darkness appears in the story about the arrival of Mary Magdalene to Jesus' tomb (20:1). Darkness seems to recede as the woman discovers the truth about the resurrection of the One she expected to find at the burial place. The stone removed from the tomb (20:1), cloth and the burial clothes lying there (20:5–7), the arrival of angels (20:12–13), and finally, the dialogue with the resurrected Lord (20:14–17) unambiguously confirm that Jesus is the light of the world (8:12)¹² present among people (12:35). It will not leave the believers in darkness (12:46), by bringing them peace (cf. 14:27[x2]; 16:33; 20:19, 21, 26), it can lead them, just like the frightened disciples in a boat, safely to the shore (6:21).¹³

⁸ Cf. Harris, *Prologue and Gospel*, 49; Wróbel, "Świadectwo," 225–226.

⁹ In this passage from the Book of Proverbs, it is not only the personification of Wisdom that is significant but also the invitation to participate in the feast. It serves as an invitation for the addressees to change their way of life, to abandon the path of sin offered by foolishness. Thus following the voice of Wisdom is an expression of the personal conversion of those invited to be her guests. On the other hand, the food offered by Wisdom is a foretaste of what is to come for the people participating in the banquet, which the Lord himself will prepare for those who have trust in him and rejoice in his salvation. (Isa 25:6, 9). According to God's promise, it will happen to the one who, by doing penance, not only abandons evil deeds but also undertakes works of mercy in their place. Then his gloom shall become like midday (Isa 58:10), and the Lord will always guide him and satisfy his thirst in parched places (Isa 58:11).

¹⁰ Cf. Szymik, "Słowo Boże," 101.

¹¹ Cf. Grochowski, "Światłość w ciemności świeci," 131.

¹² The image of Jesus as light is present already in Matt 4:16, where the Evangelist refers to the Isa 9:1 prophecy explaining the importance of Christ leaving Nazareth and going to live in Capernaum by the sea, in the region of Zebulun and Naphtali (4:13–15), "the people who sit in darkness have seen a great light, on those dwelling in a land overshadowed by death light has arisen."

¹³ In the cited story about Jesus walking on the Sea of Galilee (6:16–21), the reader's attention is drawn to the external aura of the event. The information about the darkness which had grown when the disciples went across the Sea to Capernaum (6:17) is preceded by the mention of their going down to the sea in the evening (6:16). The noun *ὥρα* used to denote this time of day appears in the Fourth Gospel only one more time – in the narrative about the meeting of the disciples with the resurrected Lord (20:19). What

If the discovery of the truth about the resurrection of Jesus coincides with the receding darkness and awakens the disciples' activity, it can become the image of the transformation occurring during conversion. Undoubtedly, the first stage of this process in the Fourth Gospel is the activity of John the Baptist at the Jordan. It marks the final stage of the story of salvation, which prepares the world to receive the true light, heralds the fulfillment of the messianic promises,¹⁴ and reconciliation with God by the remission of sins (2:23).

2. A Call to Conversion and Ways of Its Implementation

The prophecy of Isaiah concerning making a highway for God (see Isa 40:3–4),¹⁵ cited in indirect speech in the four Gospels, links the presentation of the mission of John the Baptist, which is to accept the coming of Christ. This message in the Gospel of John is not only in the shortest version but is also devoid of the New Testament addition in the form of a call expressing the idea of conversion. On the other hand, it is the most clearly articulated in the Gospel of Matthew, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!” (3:2). It is reinforced by the firm encouragement to “Produce good fruit as evidence of your repentance” (3:8) and the confession “I am baptizing you with water, for repentance” (3:11). In contrast, Mark and Luke briefly mention the baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins preached by the predecessor of Jesus (Mark 1:4; Luke 3:3).¹⁶

In the Synoptic Gospels, Isaiah's prophecy is a commentary on the appearance of John the Baptist; however, in the Fourth Gospel, it is the essence of the statement

both scenes share is the situation of the disciples being afraid. But the unexpected arrival of Jesus and His message to them, “It is I. Do not be afraid” (6:20) and “Peace be with you” (20:19) brings a change of their position – “but the boat immediately arrived at the shore to which they were heading” (6:21) and “The disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord” (20:20). The change of the situation for the characters of the evangelical narrative which occurs in these texts resonates with the image of the change of fate for the chosen people due to God's intervention perpetuated by the Old Testament (cf. Ezek 34:10, 27).

¹⁴ Cf. Grasso, *Il Vangelo di Giovanni*, 77.

¹⁵ Cf. Malina, *Chrzest Jezusa*, 342. Also, Mark the Evangelist attributes the short phrase “Behold, I am sending my messenger ahead of you” to Isaiah as a reference to the prophecy in the Book of Malachi (LXX) “Now I am sending my messenger and he will prepare the way before me; And the lord whom you seek will come suddenly to his temple; The messenger of the covenant whom you desire – see, he is coming! says the LORD of hosts” (3:1). Santi Grasso (*Il Vangelo di Giovanni*, 76, n. 120) and Artur Malina (*Ewangelia według świętego Marka*, 75) also indicate a possible relationship between the biblical quote in Mark's Gospel and Exod 23:20.

¹⁶ Contemporary Polish translations (Biblia Tysiąclecia, Biblia Edycji Świętego Pawła) render the phrase βάπτισμα μετανοίας εἰς ἄφεσιν ἁμαρτιῶν, which is identical in both texts, in a similar way, the difference being the preposition εἰς which is translated alternatively as “on” or “for.”

by Jesus' predecessor himself to the priests and Levites,¹⁷ "I am the voice of one crying out in the desert, 'Make straight the way of the Lord,' as Isaiah the prophet said" (1:23). The answer to the question about the reason for John's baptism subsequently given to the Jewish envoys from Jerusalem leaves no doubt that its purpose is to reveal Christ present among those gathered at the Jordan (1:25–28). The later indication of Him as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world (1:29, 36) resonates excellently with Isaiah's message about salvation and the announcement of the revelation of God's glory.¹⁸ Focused on the proclamation of consolation to the people, the biblical prophecy to which John the Baptist refers does not take up the theme of Israel's conversion but presupposes it. This is evidenced by the call for the people to turn to God (Isa 21:12;¹⁹ 30:15;²⁰ 45:22;²¹ 46:8; 55:7²²), repeated several times in successive chapters of the Book of Isaiah. His coming to Zion as the Redeemer, on the other hand, is the natural consequence of Israel's turning away from ungodliness (Isa 59:20) to follow the way of the Law, which is light (Ps 119[118]:105; Prov 6:23). Although the allegation of its unawareness is combined in the Fourth Gospel with the harsh condemnation of the crowd by accusing Pharisees (John 7:49), it is they who become the addressees of Jesus' allegation that they do not believe the writings of Moses (5:47). The reason for this, according to Christ, is that His opponents have not heard the voice of the Father, nor have they seen His form (5:37). The genesis of this problem, considered by Jesus in the second part of the apologia after the healing of the lame man at the pool of Bethesda (5:31–47), is indicated earlier in John's prologue.

Employing a positive example of those "who were born not by natural generation nor by human choice nor by a man's decision but of God" (1:13), the Evangelist indicates faith as the domain of people who are not guided by the considerations of the body, its sensuality, and desires limited to the earthly way of reasoning, but by openness to God's Word. Moreover, Jesus himself, in his dialogue with Nicodemus, points out to his interlocutor the necessity of being born again (γεννάω) of water and the Spirit, not only as a condition for living according to this supernatural gift but also for entering the kingdom of God (3:5–8). The two elements of rebirth mentioned by Jesus are a clear allusion to God's promise in Ezek 36:25–27 to make a new

¹⁷ Santi Grasso (*Il Vangelo di Giovanni*, 76) notices that in the narrative of John's Gospel, the addressees of the statement directed to the envoys from Jerusalem are also all those listening to or reading the text.

¹⁸ A clear promise of salvation can be found in the version of Isaiah's prophecy cited in the Gospel of Luke: "And all flesh shall see the salvation of God" (3:6).

¹⁹ The Hebrew text contains a clear call to conversion expressed with the plural form of the verb שׁוּב. The LXX ignores this theme completely, replacing it with the encouragement to search expressed in the second person singular form: ζήτη.

²⁰ Currently, the HB word שׁוּבָה (return) is rendered by the verb ἀποστρέφω (revert) in the LXX.

²¹ Instead of the common HB term שׁוּב, there is the verb פָּנָה (return, direct).

²² In the last two cases, the equivalent of שׁוּב in Hebrew is the Greek word ἐπιστρέφω (reverse) in the LXX.

covenant with Israel.²³ It presupposes a complete reorientation of the people's lives, which God is to initiate by sprinkling water on Israel to cleanse it of all corruption and all idols. Communicating to the addressees the promise of a new heart and a new spirit, finally taking away from them the heart of stone and giving them the heart of flesh, complete the work undertaken by God, whose motive is to sanctify the name of the Lord (3:22) and to reveal His holiness to the people (Ezek 36:23). However, the ultimate goal is to establish a relationship with Israel – “you will be my people, and I will be your God” (36:28), which coincides with the return to the land of ancestors. There those who lost the relationship due to unfaithfulness to the covenant, the recipients of the promise of a new one – adopted by God – will establish it anew, observing the Lord's ordinances (36:27). In contrast to the announcement in Ezekiel, the purpose of the change – defined by Jesus as being born again – is not an earthly inheritance (36:24, 28) but participation in the kingdom belonging to Christ, which is not from here, not from this world (see 18:36).²⁴ Inheriting it can only be the consequence of the transformation effected in man, which, on the one hand, involves breaking with sin, with evil deeds, and therefore abandoning, refraining, or turning away from all that is an expression of the love of darkness (3:19) and human praise (12:43). On the other hand, keeping the commandments of Jesus (14:15), remaining in him (6:56; 15:5), in his word (8:31; 15:7), in his love (15:10), and bearing fruit that will remain (15:16) and be revealed in the hour of the resurrection of life (5:29). Thus, it can be assumed that the references in the Fourth Gospel to being born of God or the Spirit fully correspond to the biblical idea of conversion. At the same time, they express the condition typical of the one who has believed in the Son as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world (1:29; 3:18).²⁵

The abovementioned Spirit plays a leading role in the conversion process. As the Paraclete (15:26) – Defender, Advocate, Comforter – announced to the disciples in the farewell address, the Spirit of Truth is to prove the sin of the world, the righteousness which is Christ's legacy and the condemnation of what is contrary to Him (16:8), guiding the disciples of Jesus to all truth (16:13).²⁶ This knowledge

²³ Beutler, *Das Johannesevangelium*, 137.

²⁴ The aim indicated is entirely convergent with the message of the Synoptic Gospels.

²⁵ This idea of conversion is developed similarly by the author of the First Letter of John. In the hagiographer's view, the first example of the transformation occurring in man as a result of his birth from God is the attitude of a righteous person (1 John 2:29), the one who does not sin and in whom the seed of God remains (3:9). He expresses the transformation that has occurred in him by the fact that knowing God makes him listen to Him (4:6). However, the most certain confirmation of this birth is the Christocentrically motivated love for God and one another (4:7–8; 5:1). It is expressed in the fulfillment of the commandments (5:2–3) and the faith that conquers the world (5:4). Living according to it ensures the protection of the One born of God, i.e., the Son of God who protects man from evil (5:18). More information on the indicated identification of the figure of the One born of God in 1 John 5:18 can be found in Giurionato, *Struttura e teologia*, 639; Fabris, *Lettere di Giovanni*, 117.

²⁶ Cf. Johnston, *The Spirit-Paraclete*, 91.

aims to preserve the believers from error, saving them from losing their unity with the Father and the Son, and, through the activity of the Spirit, it also strengthens the testimony of the disciples through which others can believe (17:20).

Although salvation results from God's initiative, the offer addressed by Him to people requires a clear response from the addressees.²⁷ Nathanael sets a positive example of it. Christ speaks of him as a true Israelite in whom there is no duplicity (1:47). His sojourn under the fig tree (1:48), symbolically expressing the Law and considered a place to reflect upon it in the rabbinic tradition,²⁸ suggests that Nathanael, awaiting the fulfillment of the messianic promises,²⁹ is also heir to the blessing given to the sons of Jacob (cf. Gen 28:13–15; Sir 44:23),³⁰ thus a symbol of new Israel.³¹ Encouraged by Philip to come and see “the one about whom Moses wrote in the law” (John 1:46), Nathanael is an expression of seeking and striving to do God's will (cf. 7:17). The promise made to him by Jesus that he would see more than what he had already experienced is interesting in this context. Linked directly to it and related to the Son of Man, the image of angels descending and ascending upon him (1:51), which alludes to Jacob's dream (Gen 28:12), makes it possible to understand that its fulfillment will be a veil-free viewing of the glory of God in Christ.

The outlined characteristics of Nathanael set him radically apart from the Jewish elites of Jerusalem. Their fundamental problem with the access to and acceptance of John the Baptist's testimony to Christ is not only the distance separating them from where John was baptizing³² but also the lack of proper disposition of the heart and the will³³ and seeking praise from one another (5:44). In addition to the lack of auditory and visual perception on the part of the Jews, these are further obstacles, the removal of which makes it possible to straighten the path for the coming of Christ and recognize the Lord in Him.

In the Fourth Gospel, knowledge (γινώσκω) means not so much the acquisition of knowledge as an approximation to the truth, the acceptance of it (3:21), and entering a personal relationship with what is to be known (13:35; 14:7; 17:8).³⁴ This results in faith in Jesus (2:11), liberation (8:32), and finally eternal life (17:3). To achieve it,

²⁷ This is also the case for the addressees of the aforementioned promise of the new covenant in the Book of Ezekiel. Although God is the one who intends to lead them out of the foreign peoples and into the land of their ancestors, Israel itself must make the decision to follow the path set out by Him.

²⁸ Cf. Brown, *The Gospel According to John*, 83.

²⁹ Cf. Brown, *The Gospel According to John*, 111.

³⁰ Cf. Fabris, *Giovanni*, 164.

³¹ Cf. Mędala, *Ewangelia według świętego Jana. Rozdziały 1–12*, 339.

³² The distance between Jerusalem (located 1,165 m above the level of the Dead Sea and 770 m above the level of the Mediterranean Sea) and Al-Maghtas (located 385 m below the level of the Mediterranean Sea), which is traditionally considered the place of Christ's baptism, is about 33 km as the crow flies.

³³ This is also one of the key barriers to recognizing Jesus Christ as God's Son and Savior. See Paciorek, *Ewangelia umiłowanego ucznia*, 176.

³⁴ Cf. Bultmann, “γινώσκω,” 711.

it is not enough to study the scriptures (5:39) because, being one of the testimonies to God,³⁵ they refer the reader to the incarnate Word of God (5:40). Therefore, it is necessary to turn to Jesus, whose word is purifying (15:3). The role of bearing witness to Him is assigned to John the Baptist, who is called by Christ “a burning and shining lamp” (5:35). The purpose of his brief testimony is not to focus on himself but illuminate the path that leads to Christ, indicating him as the Son of God (1:34). John’s fulfillment of his mission is confirmed by the reaction of the two disciples accompanying him at the Jordan, who, hearing him say of Jesus: “Behold, the Lamb of God” (1:36), follow Him (1:37). Being prepared to listen to John the Baptist at his “school” opens the way for them not only to see the environment in which Jesus lived (1:38–39) but also to enter it and then remain in it (1:39).³⁶ This is how the idea of “pitching of the tent” (σκηνώω) of the Word (see 1:14) in the prologue to the Fourth Gospel, where the tent is the place for the further formation of the disciples in the love of God (6:69; 16:26; cf. 1 John 4:16) and dwelling in light (12:46),³⁷ is developed. The aforementioned love is the foundation of the relationship between God and man as well as man and God. The state of human freedom and capacity for perception, sensitivity to the testimony to God, and readiness to seek and acknowledge the truth depend on it.³⁸

Accusing the Jews of not having love (5:42), Jesus is alluding to the message of a prophecy directed against the hardness of hearts,³⁹ which was common throughout biblical history. They first require a profound transformation in the people, which begins with a positive response to the Lord’s call by the mouth of prophet Joel for the people to turn their hearts towards God (Joel 2:12). The divergent attitudes adopted by the protagonists of John’s Gospel towards the Father’s testimony about the Son show how the biblical idea of conversion is realized and the consequences of its rejection. At the same time, they express the actual spiritual condition of the said protagonists of the Gospel narrative, either open or closed to the hope of eternal life offered in Christ (3:16, 18, 36).

³⁵ Along with the Law, works (including signs) of Jesus, and God’s speech. See Ledwoń, *Świadectwo Ojca*, 251.

³⁶ Cf. Ledwoń, “Wychowanie,” 44.

³⁷ An excellent illustration of the situation of moving away from the light, i.e., Jesus, in the Fourth Gospel is the last episode of the scene in which the traitor is exposed in 13:30. The Evangelist’s comment that “it was night” (ἦν δὲ νύξ) when Judas left the cenacle having eaten the morsel is clearly contrasted with the following comment by Jesus about the Son of Man being glorified, and God being glorified in him, which may be naturally associated with brilliance (cf. Ezek 1:28) and light (cf. 2 Cor 4:4).

³⁸ Cf. Heschel, *The Prophets*, 244.

³⁹ In this context, the Old Testament refers to, among others, a wicked (Prov 26:23), devious heart (Ps 101[100]:4), a stubborn heart (Sir 3:26–27), the duplicity of the heart (Sir 1:28), a stubborn and rebellious heart (Jer 5:23, Zech 7:3), an uncircumcised heart (Jer 9:25), and the heart of stone (Ezek 36:26).

3. Eternal life as a Result of Conversion because of Faith in Jesus

Those who are open to the hope of eternal life in the Fourth Gospel include Christ's disciples (2:11), the Samaritan woman and the inhabitants of Sychar (4:1–42), the courtier and his family (4:46–54), the man blind from birth whose eyes were opened by Jesus (9:1–39), as well as those going back across the Jordan (10:40–42), and the witnesses to the resurrection of Lazarus (11:45). Regardless of the circumstances surrounding their encounter with Jesus, all these protagonists of the Gospel narrative make direct auditory and visual contact with him. However, the context of their lives changes radically: the disciples witness for the first time the revelation of Christ's glory at the wedding feast of Cana (2:11), the Samaritan woman returns to the town telling everyone about her encounter with Jesus (4:28–29), the inhabitants of Sychar receive him with enthusiasm (4:30, 39–42), the royal official asks for health for his dying son (4:49, 51–53), and finally, the blind man gains the ability to see (9:7). Most significantly, however, all those going across the Jordan (10:42) and many witnesses to the resurrection of Martha and Mary's brother in Bethany (11:45) profess their faith in Christ (2:11; 4:29, 39,⁴⁰ 41–42, 53; 9:38; 10:42; 11:45). A corresponding reaction in response to His intervention is missing from the narrative about the healing of the lame man at the pool of Bethesda (5:1–18), the scene of Christ's encounter with the woman brought to Him and caught in adultery (8:1–11), as well as the episodes involving Nicodemus (3:1–21; 7:38–42, 45–53). What might be the reason for this?

On the one hand, the attitudes of the first two characters saved from a tragic fate (the lame man from being crippled and the adulteress from being stoned) reveal an inability to read and understand the work of Jesus, shared by many eyewitnesses of the signs he performed.⁴¹ However, on the other hand, these life events aim to provoke a reaction from those who oppose Christ and do not believe in him.⁴²

⁴⁰ Santi Grasso (*Il Vangelo di Giovanni*, 240) rightly notes that the Samaritan woman, like Nicodemus or the lame man at the pool of Bethesda, does not profess her faith to Jesus. It must be said, however, that despite the absence of an explicit declaration similar to that made in the Gospel by the man blind from birth after his healing, the woman's activity among the Samaritans reflects the transformation that occurred in her life. Reporting on her encounter with Jesus, the Samaritan woman poses the rhetorical question, "Could he possibly be the Messiah?" (4:29), which must have been perceived by the listeners as a confirmation of the woman's faith since they say to her later, "We no longer believe because of your word; for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is truly the savior of the world" (4:42).

⁴¹ Cf. Mullins, *The Gospel of John*, 170.

⁴² After healing the lame man on the Sabbath and revealing that Jesus is the performer of the miracle, the Jews begin to persecute him (5:16). The aim also becomes to kill Jesus because "he also called God his own father, making himself equal to God" (5:18). In contrast, in the narrative about Christ's encounter with the woman caught in adultery, the reaction to Jesus' words that he who is blameless should cast the first stone, the congregants go away one by one (8:9). According to Robert Maccini (*Her Testimony is True*, 40) the healing of the lame man fulfills the role of a judicial paradigm that brings about a legal division between those who, like the disciples, recognize the Father's testimony to Jesus and those who reject it.

The attitude and role of Nicodemus are completely different. In John's Gospel, this Pharisaic Jewish dignitary (3:1) and teacher of Israel (3:10) exemplifies the process of maturation in faith:⁴³ from questioning Christ, pointing out the Law as the guarantor of Jesus' righteous judgment to the Jewish elite, to his active participation in the preparations for his burial and in the burial itself. The considerable amount of myrrh and aloe mixture brought by Nicodemus to anoint the body of the Crucified One indicates the recognition of His royal dignity. By accompanying Joseph of Arimathea, Nicodemus tacitly fulfills the demands of the truth and thus approaches the light of faith (cf. 3:21).⁴⁴ Although the author of the Fourth Gospel does not call him a disciple, next to Joseph, who remains in hiding, he becomes a type of disciple maturing in his role⁴⁵ which changes his way of thinking, draws closer to Jesus and finally, by way of facts, accepts him as the Lord.⁴⁶ This element is also absent in the attitude of the man healed at the pool of Bethesda and the woman caught in adultery. In the case of these two, however, the experience of grace (even unconscious) becomes the moment that leads them from the path of helplessness to the path of hope, opening up the prospect of a new life⁴⁷ free from disability (the lame man) or the threat of death (the adulterous woman). This is justified by Jesus' words, "Look, you are well; do not sin anymore, so that nothing worse may happen to you" (5:14),⁴⁸ uttered in the temple to the healed man, and "Neither do I condemn you. Go, [and] from now on do not sin anymore!" (8:11), spoken to the woman caught in adultery. The absence of the demonstration of faith in Christ on the part of the two above-mentioned protagonists does not preclude it in the future.⁴⁹ A person's conversion is not determined by human judgment, which is only partial, but by an inner transformation which, in the light of the Fourth Gospel, Christ alone knows best whether it has occurred.

⁴³ Cf. Grochowski, "Nicodemus," 669.

⁴⁴ Cf. Vignolo, *Personaggi del Quarto Vangelo*, 125–126.

⁴⁵ Francis Moloney (*The Gospel of John*, 97) is more critical in his evaluation of Nicodemus, describing him as "a character who demonstrates a partial faith," and Stanisław Mędała (*Ewangelia według świętego Jana. Rozdziały 13–21*, 261) states explicitly that "Nicodemus is a disciple insofar as he recognizes Jesus as coming from God, whereas he has no understanding of Jesus' salvific mission and actual participation in the life offered 'from above.'"

⁴⁶ Cf. Grochowski, "Nicodemus," 669. According to Beverly Roberts Gaventa (*From Darkness to Light*, 133) the figures of Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea presented by the author of the Fourth Gospel are used to invite the concealed disciples of Jesus to reveal their faith and leave the synagogue.

⁴⁷ Cf. Ridderbos, *The Gospel According to John*, 291.

⁴⁸ According to Xavier Léon-Dufour (*Lettura dell'Evangelo*, 383) through this statement, Jesus does not establish a link between sin and illness but between health and a life free from sin. The observation of the cited exegete is also justified by Jesus' words on the cause of the blind man's blindness, "Neither he nor his parents sinned; it is so that the works of God might be made visible through him" (9:3).

⁴⁹ Referring to the forgiveness Jesus bestowed on the adulterous woman, Antoni Paciorek (*Ewangelia umiłowanego ucznia*, 324) states that it is meant to reinforce a future change in her life.

An excellent example of this can be found at the beginning of John's text, in the narrative about Jesus' sojourn in Jerusalem during Passover (2:23–25), where the Evangelist informs the reader of Jesus' restraint towards the Jews who believed in him (2:23–24).⁵⁰ On the other hand, when addressing them in Capernaum, after the multiplication of bread, Jesus reproaches them for not seeking Him (ζητέω)⁵¹ because of the signs they had seen but because they had satisfied their hunger (6:26). Also, their expressed desire to do the works of God turns out to be apparent (6:28), which is clearly indicated by the Evangelist's description of the reaction to Jesus' eucharistic speech manifested by some of his disciples who left and walked no more with him (6:66). However, the Evangelist's most radical judgment of the unbelief of the Jews, which closes them to the hope of eternal life, is made after Jesus enters Jerusalem (12:37–43), citing in 12:40 the prophecy of Isaiah (6:10), "He blinded their eyes and hardened their heart so that they might not see with their eyes and understand with their heart and be converted, and I would heal them."

The verb στρέφω (to turn away) used in this paraphrase of the Old Testament message occurs three more times in John's Gospel in addition to 12:40: once in the scene of Jesus' encounter with John the Baptist's disciples (1:30) and twice in the narrative about Jesus' encounter with Mary Magdalene, who arrived at the empty tomb (20:14, 16). In the first case, the subject of analyzed action is Jesus, who, having noticed the two disciples following him, turns around and asks them what they are looking for. In the other two cases, the subject of the action expressed by the verb στρέφω is Mary Magdalene, who, having turned towards the stranger, recognizes in him the risen Jesus. None of the three depictions is related to conversion, yet the verb στρέφω used in these texts determines the change in the course of events and the situation of the characters in the Gospel narrative. The relationship established with Jesus stimulates them to make a testimony about him. The disciples enthusiastically share their acquired conviction of finding the announced Messiah (1:41), the One about whom Moses wrote in the Law and the Prophets (1:45). And Mary Magdalene goes to the "brothers" to announce that Christ has risen from the dead and is ascending to his Father and God, who is also their Father and God (20:17–18). The disciples and Mary share the readiness to follow Jesus and seek Him out, not like the Jews, i.e., for personal gain (6:26), but for Him alone.

⁵⁰ Similar remarks by the Evangelist are absent with regard to the healed man at the pool of Bethesda and the woman caught in adultery.

⁵¹ The term indicated may express the biblical idea of conversion when the activity it defines is the establishment of a relationship with Jesus aimed at discovering his identity (1:38) and worshipping God (4:23; 7:18). The seeker is also Jesus (4:27), whose activity focuses on fulfilling the Father's will (5:30; 8:50), and the disciples (13:30; 16:19). Repeatedly in the Fourth Gospel, however, the seekers of Jesus are his opponents (7:34, 36) who intend to exterminate him (5:18; 7:1, 11, 19, 20, 25; 8:37, 40; 11:8, 56) or capture him (7:30; 10:39; 18:4, 7, 8; 19:12) and, seeking their own glory (5:44), distance themselves from the source of eternal life (8:21).

In this context, Peter holds an unambiguous position and, after hearing Jesus' eucharistic speech and the question to the Twelve Disciples whether they wish to depart, too, confesses: "Master, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We have come to believe and are convinced that you are the Holy One of God" (6:68–69).⁵² Peter's radical statement is not merely due to the lack of an alternative (many have departed from Jesus, albeit without a stated purpose) but a personal relationship with Jesus based on faith and knowledge and the link between the testimony to the Son and Christ, who was teaching and performing signs (see 1:41, 45; 2:11). This capacity, however, does not apply to all in the narrow circle of disciples, as indicated by Jesus' question, "Did I not choose you twelve? Yet is not one of you a devil?" (6:70).

The identity of the disciple mentioned by Christ and described using the term διάβολος⁵³ is revealed by the Evangelist, who in 6:71 states that he is Judas, son of Simon the Iscariot ("the man from Kerioth"). The name of Judas' father is mentioned twice more by the author of the Fourth Gospel in the scene revealing the traitor at the Last Supper (13:2, 26).⁵⁴ He omits it, however, in the account of the feast of Bethany, where Judas depreciates Mary's act of anointing Jesus' feet with spices and wiping them with her hair (12:3) by asking why the precious oil of the nard was not sold to the poor (12:4). In each of these scenes involving Iscariot, he is presented both in contrast to Jesus and the protagonists of the narrative of the Fourth Gospel in a close relationship with him: the friends of Christ and his other disciples led by Simon Peter. The spiritual profile of the betrayer of Jesus in John's text consists not so much in his Judean provenance⁵⁵ (common to the vast majority of Christ's adversaries, by the way) but his entanglement in sin by stealing contributions from the money bag (12:6), which is synonymous with his love of darkness (3:19) and not having Jesus (12:8). An expression of separation from Him is Judas' exit from the cenacle after eating the piece of bread Jesus gave him (13:30). An important element in the narrative about this event is the information concerning the circumstances. John the Evangelist states that it was night (νύξ). In addition to the place, the same time of the action occurs five more times in the Fourth Gospel.

The night accompanies Jesus' encounter with Nicodemus, who calls him a teacher coming from God (3:2) and the Evangelist's recollection of the event (19:39). According to Nicodemus, the proof of Jesus' close relationship with God is the signs

⁵² The Synoptics recall a similar confession made by Peter in the narratives of Jesus' stay with the disciples near Caesarea Philippi: Matt 16:13–20; Mark 8:27–30; Luke 9:18–21.

⁵³ Simoens, *Secondo Giovanni*, 343, n. 8, provides the etymology of the term διάβολος defining it in the following way "colui che si mette di traverso per ostacolare il disegno di Dio all'opera nel mondo, nella storia e nella vita stessa del Figlio."

⁵⁴ The Evangelist alludes to the person that betrayed Jesus in the question of the beloved disciple, "Master, who is the one who will betray you?" (John 21:20).

⁵⁵ Apart from Judas, the closest group of Jesus' disciples came from Galilee.

he performed.⁵⁶ It should be noted that, as one of the elements of the Father's testimony about the Son in John's Gospel, they belong to the light (1:7–8) and naturally concern the day (ἡμέρα), which is the proper time for the performance of the works of God (9:4; cf. 11:9).⁵⁷ Its opposite is night. Jesus also alludes to it when he answers the disciples' question about the reason for the man being blind from birth (9:4) and later explains the reason for his return to Jerusalem despite the threat posed by the Jews (11:10).

In the first of the two cases, Christ presents the night as a reality that is yet to come (ἔρχεται), and its occurrence will not allow anyone (οὐδεὶς) to act (ἐργάζομαι). In the second, the night provides an opportunity to stumble. Because Jesus works in the light of day, He is in a continuous relationship with the Father, and nothing can prevent him from fulfilling the task entrusted to him by God (5:17; 6:30). But why does Jesus announce earlier the impossibility of taking action, and what kind of activity is being referred to here?

The lexis of John's Gospel makes it possible to conclude that it is a question of deeds done in God (3:2). In addition to Jesus, the subjects of the action expressed by the verb ἐργάζομαι in John's Gospel are also the addressees of the Eucharistic discourse, among them Jesus' disciples who have to look after the imperishable food (6:27) and desire to do the works of God (6:28; 9:4). As they all enter the night, which is an expression of the loss of their direct relationship with Jesus, they become incapable of undertaking the works mentioned. A perfect example of this is the scene of fishing at night in the Fourth Gospel (21:3).

The narrator observes that despite their efforts, the disciples caught nothing, exposing the fruitlessness of a community devoid of reference to the crucified and risen Lord. However, the disciples' sojourn there at night nevertheless turns out to be different from Judas'. Their situation changes with the arrival of the morning (πρωΐα),⁵⁸ preceding Jesus' appearance on the shores of the Sea of Galilee (21:4). The motif of the disciples' failure to recognize the Risen One, which is marked in the post-ascension narrative, is significant here.⁵⁹ It determines the nature of their subsequent action. It is not based on the fishermen's knowledge or mastery of the work on a lake, nor their personal experience, but their trust in the words of – as yet unrecognized – risen Jesus. Having heard that they have nothing to eat (21:5), He instructs them to

⁵⁶ Defining signs, Peter Riga ("Signs of Glory," 402) states, "The signs of Christ in the Fourth Gospel are both miracles and discourses, and taken together they constitute one revelation."

⁵⁷ In other places, the Fourth Gospel uses the term ἡμέρα to denote a day in the sense of a 24-hour period (1:39; 2:1, 12, 19, 20; 4:40, 43; 5:9; 6:39, 40, 44, 54; 7:37; 8:56; 9:14; 11:6, 9, 17, 24, 53; 12:1, 7, 48; 14:20; 16:23, 26; 19:31; 20:19, 26).

⁵⁸ In the Old Testament, the morning is the time of special divine actions (see Num 9:21; 2 Sam 23:3–4; Ps 46[45]:6; 65[64]:9; 90[89]:14; 92[91]:3). See Paciorek, *Ewangelia według św. Jana*, 218.

⁵⁹ Just like in the scene depicting the encounter of the resurrected Jesus with Mary Magdalene on the first day of the week (20:11–17).

cast the net on the right side of the boat (21:6). The abundant fish exhausts the qualities of a sign, confirms the divine identity of the protagonist and his relationship with the Father, who cares for his children through the Son (cf. 21:5). Unconditional trust in the words of Jesus thus proves to be life-giving. It is not, however, about nourishment alone. The positive response of the disciples to the indications of the Son of God opens them, above all, to the hope of eternal life,⁶⁰ repeatedly promised by Christ during his earthly mission (3:15–16, 36; 5:24; 6:40, 47; 11:25–26).

Moved by the magnificence of the sign made, the disciples begin anew to act in the light. The beloved disciple, recognizing Christ, confesses, “This is the Lord!”⁶¹ Peter throws himself into the water towards the Risen One (21:7); he is followed in the boat by the other disciples, who then pull ashore a net full of fish (21:8). The dynamics and direction of the disciples’ actions are clearly oriented towards Jesus. He is the one who ensures that believers in him do not remain in darkness (cf. 12:46) but become, in accordance with Christ’s announcement, ready to do works greater than He (cf. 14:12). This is achieved through the care for the Church entrusted to Peter by Jesus, which is represented metaphorically by lambs (21:15) and sheep (21:16, 17).⁶²

The shepherding mission assigned to the disciple is preceded by a threefold question of love for Christ, which is crucial for its success. First, each positive response on Simon’s part, though different from Jesus’ intention, nevertheless leads to the announcement that John’s soon will give his life in the future (21:18–19) as the One who is the Good Shepherd (10:11, 14).⁶³ Second, Jesus outlined to Peter the prospect of going where (now) he does not want to go, suggesting an inner transformation about to take place inside him. Third, the transition from one extremity to the other is signaled by a temporal caesura expressed by the juxtaposition: “When you were younger” – “But when you grow old” (21:18). In contrast, the ultimate goal of the aforementioned transformation, which requires the disciple to follow Jesus, is to glorify God.

⁶⁰ Cf. Labahn, “Fishing for Meaning,” 144.

⁶¹ A similar declaration is uttered during Jesus’ second encounter with the disciples in the cenacle by previously absent Thomas, who first formulates concrete, physical conditions regarding his faith in the Risen One (20:25). The words uttered by Thomas at the sight of Jesus, “My Lord and my God” (20:28) turn an unbeliever (ἄπιστος) into a believer (πιστός). This is the kind of disciple Christ desires (20:27). Nevertheless, he calls blessed (μακάριοι) those who believe, though they have not seen (20:29) and follow Him in His humility (13:17). If the transition from unbelief to faith can be described as conversion, then the state of being blessed best expresses its effect.

⁶² According to Timothy Wiarda (“John 21.1–23,” 67) both this dialogue and the entire narrative about the encounter of the resurrected Jesus with his disciples on the shore of Lake Tiberias reflect the live, human experiences of the protagonists of the story rather than a collection of symbolic, ecclesiastical statements.

⁶³ According to Rinaldo Fabris (*Giovanni*, 818–819) Peter did not give his life for the sheep but because Jesus called him to love and follow Him to the point of giving his own life.

4. Following Jesus as a Condition for Preserving the Fruit of Conversion

The motif of following Jesus begins (1:37, 38, 40, 43), intensifies (12:26; 13:36, 37; 18:15),⁶⁴ and crowns the process of gathering and forming his disciples (21:19, 20, 22) in the Fourth Gospel with the use of the verb ἀκολουθέω.⁶⁵ However, it does not only apply to this one narrow group of protagonists in John's narrative. Jesus is also followed by the crowd witnessing His signs (6:2). In this way, they also become the focus of the Father's testimony about his Son (5:36). The Scribes and Pharisees, the Jews⁶⁶ whom Jesus tells he is the light of the world (8:12) and the Good Shepherd followed by sheep (10:4, 5, 27) are also indirectly addressed with the invitation to follow. For the Jews, choosing Christ by following Him would mean breaking up their previous walk in darkness and consequently enable them to possess the light of life (8:12), attain salvation (10:9), and have life in abundance (10:10). In this context, the call to follow Jesus fully reflects the biblical journey of conversion, leading to the knowledge of God (Deut 4:39; Bar 2:31; Ezek 34:40; Dan 3:45), revealed in the Fourth Gospel by Jesus as the Father (3:35; 6:27; 8:18).

In addition to the examples of the use of the verb ἀκολουθέω analyzed so far, two more are of particular interest in John's text. The first is in the narrative about the resurrection of Lazarus (11:31). The second features in the story about the events after Jesus' resurrection (20:6). In both cases, there is no mention of following Him. Instead, it concerns following Mary, the sister of Lazarus, who went out to meet Jesus, even though the Jews accompanying her thought they were going to the tomb of her dead brother (11:31). In contrast, in the story concerning the journey of the two disciples to the empty tomb of Jesus, Simon Peter follows the beloved disciple (20:6). Is there any connection between these two scenes and the theme of the biblical idea of conversion in John's text? Given the development of the depicted events, the answer must be affirmative.

The Jews following Mary become eyewitnesses to the resurrection of Lazarus. The miracle performed by Jesus answers their question: "Could not the one who opened the eyes of the blind man have done something so that this man would not have died?" (11:37). In many of them, the sign arouses faith in Christ (11:45). Following the beloved disciple, Peter, despite being the last to arrive, enters the empty tomb of Jesus first. The sight of the linen and the shawl lying there leads him to understand the Scriptures that speak of Christ's resurrection (21:9). The Evangelist does

⁶⁴ As the fulfillment of Jesus' work is approaching, the call to follow Him and the manner in which this work is to be carried out requires greater determination on the part of the disciples, right up to accompanying Christ on the path of his saving passion.

⁶⁵ Among the Synoptics, the abovementioned term, which appears 19 times in John, is used most often by Matthew (25 times), Mark (18 times), and Luke (17 times).

⁶⁶ Not once do these groups become the addressees of a similar encouragement in the Synoptic Gospels.

not record that Simon believed in it. This act is attributed to the beloved disciple who went inside the tomb behind Peter (21:8). In any case, following the one who is in a close, even intimate relationship with Jesus, such as Mary or the beloved disciple, prepares the other protagonists of the narrative – as yet unaware of the unfolding events – to change their disposition. This time it is not about breaking with moral iniquity but about establishing a relationship with Christ, who is the resurrection and the life (11:25). Following Jesus (ἀκολουθέω) and abiding (μένω) in him (8:12; 12:26; 15:5) are two interconnecting paths leading not only to salvation but also to the realization of one's life vocation.⁶⁷ In this context, the reaction of Simon, who turns away (ἐπιστρέφω) to look at the beloved disciple following Jesus (20:20) and then asks about his fate (21:21), hinders the achievement of this goal. It is telling that the recollection of the Last Supper accompanies the Evangelist's recounting of this event with a fixed image of the beloved disciple resting on Jesus' breast and inquiring about the identity of the traitor (21:20). Taking one's eyes off Christ and the path set by him threatens the loss of peace and instigates confusion. Hence the response to the encouragement expressed by Jesus, "You follow me!" (21:22; cf. 21:19), requires Simon to make a kind of return, a conversion to the risen Lord.⁶⁸ He needs to realize that the mission given to him is part of the testimony by which others will also believe in the Son (17:20) to attain eternal life (cf. 20:31).

Conclusion

Another approach to conversion, different from the one of Synoptics, is developed in the Fourth Gospel using the theological categories of passing from darkness to light, making straight the way before the Lord, faith leading to life, and rebirth as a condition for entering the kingdom of God and abiding in Jesus and following Him. Each of these corresponds to the attitudes adopted by the narrative protagonists to the testimony about Christ as the Son of God. Faith in Him is the factor that determines the spiritual transformation in man, involving turning to the light as life inherent in the Word, which was sent to the world and incarnated for man's salvation. The reactions of the eyewitnesses of the signs performed by Christ, presented against the background of the Jewish environment hostile to Jesus, are the best reflection of the process, which, in the Synoptics, is defined as a change of thinking. Its consequences – abandoning evil, submitting to the will of Jesus, and performing good deeds – stem from turning to Him. The lasting fruit of the relationship thus

⁶⁷ Cf. Grasso, *Il Vangelo di Giovanni*, 797.

⁶⁸ Cf. Simoens, *Secondo Giovanni*, 854.

established is not only a share in eternal life but also a personal testimony that glorifies Jesus' Father.

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