

## THE SIGNIFICANCE OF JESUS' UTTERANCE IN RELATION TO THE JOHANNINE SON OF MAN: A SPEECH ACT ANALYSIS OF JOHN 9:35

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### ABSTRACT

The purpose of my previous article was to continue to show the validity of a speech act approach and to develop it further in the reading of biblical texts. As a successive study, this article aims to present yet another speech act analysis, which will put more focus on a demonstration that this approach is able to deal even with more difficult exegetical and interpretational issues in the text adequately on its own terms. In order to accomplish that, this article will examine the significance of Jesus' utterance in John 9:35, which contains some difficulty in interpreting the meaning of the title Son of Man.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

My article in the previous issue of *Acta Theologica* successfully showed the validity of a speech act approach and developed it further in the reading of a biblical text, with the hope that this approach will stimulate other exegetes to consider its employment in their studies (Ito 2000b). However, it may be difficult for them to seriously consider that possibility if they are exposed to such an analysis only once or so (see also Ito 1999/2000). Therefore, this article aims to present yet another speech act analysis, which will put more focus on a demonstration that this approach is able to deal even with more difficult exegetical and interpretational issues in the text adequately in its own terms. In order to accomplish that, this article will examine the significance of Jesus' utterance in John 9:35, which contains some difficulty in interpreting the meaning of the title *Son of Man*.

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## 2. METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK<sup>2</sup>

Since this article basically follows the methodological framework and the same kind of terminology used before (Ito 2000b), the explanation of the methods is unnecessary (except the notions that have not been explicated there). However, the notions which will be used in this article are pointed out in this section just for the sake of clarity. This utilises primarily Searle's speech act theory along with Bach and Harnish's *taxonomy* as well as *mutual contextual beliefs*, Grice's *principles of conversation* and *implicature*, and Leech's *pragmatic approach*. The concept of *narrative temporality* will be briefly elucidated in the next sub-section for the readers of this article, because this is indispensable for understanding the analysis presented below.

With respect to the basic reading scheme (steps for analysis), there is a slight change from the previous article (Ito 2000b). The first (sentence-type) and second (propositional content) steps are replaced by the step called "General analysis" which gives a grammatical and syntactical scrutiny based on *colon analysis* known as South African discourse analysis, in order to better understand the surface structure of a given text.

### 2.1 Narrative temporality

A central contribution of reader-response criticism is the interpretation of the text through the analysis of narrative temporality or linearity. Critics such as Iser (1974), Rimmon-Kenan ([1983] 1994), Culpepper (1983), Resseguie (1982), Staley (1988), Botha (1991a) and Tolmie (1995) make note of and/or use this linearity trait. The notions of narrative temporality and linearity can be best explained in relation to a significant difference between implied author and implied reader (Tolmie 1995:20, 39-40). While the implied author knows the whole story at any given moment, the implied reader only knows what he has read up to the given time (Staley 1988:35). This can also become an important aspect in a speech act analysis, just as Botha (1991a:85) states in relation to his analysis of the text of John 4:

2 For the concepts, history and development of speech act theory, see Austin ([1962] 1976, 1985), Searle ([1969] 1980, 1976, [1979] 1981, 1985), Grice (1975, 1978), Pratt (1977), Bach & Harnish (1979), Van Dijk (1980), Leech (1983), Levinson (1983), Stubbs (1983), White (1988), Botha (1991a, 1991b, 1991c), Du Plessis (1991), Yule (1993), Neufeld (1994), Cook (1995), Tovey (1997) and Ito (2000a, 2000c).

The amount of information available to the readers at this stage in the narrative must be kept in mind if one is to analyze the speech acts and their perlocutionary effects in the fourth chapter adequately.

Therefore, when dealing with the text of John 9, this study will assume that the implied reader is perfectly aware of what has happened in the story up to the ninth chapter, which includes a vast amount of information given in the Prologue (which the characters in the story do not possess).

In addition, there are a few interesting functions of narrative temporality. Firstly, in relation to my last remark, Staley (1988:47) makes the fascinating observation that one

of the major effects of a text's rhetoric and of our enjoyment in reading comes precisely from the interplay between the characters' knowledge and that of the implied reader.

For instance, this interplay becomes a logical basis where the implied author builds up most of the ironies in the text of John 9 (for a detailed discussion of this, see Ito 2000c, 2000d). Secondly, this temporality or linearity creates the rhetorical devices of suspense and astonishment (Staley 1988:34).

### 3. SPEECH ACT ANALYSIS OF THE TEXT

#### 3.1 The Son of Man as mutual contextual beliefs

It is often pointed out that John's Gospel dramatically differs from the Synoptics. As Culpepper (1998:13) states, John

has its own language and idioms, its own chronology of the ministry of Jesus, its own view of Jesus' identity and works, and its own theology.

The famous term *Son of Man* is not an exception to this trait, either. Although John's use of this term is, of course, not totally alien to synoptic usage, some of the issues debated in synoptic scholarship do not enter into Johannine scholarship. For instance, John regards the Son of Man basically as a title and an expression of Jesus' self-designation (Smith 1986:48; Burkett 1991:16). According to Burkett (1991:16), two most important issues regarding this title in Johannine studies are its possible background and Christological significance. These two issues fit the topic of this section well, namely mutual contextual beliefs (for a brief explanation of this notion, see Ito 2000b:90). And the focus has to be narrowed down in such a way that mutual contextual beliefs concerning this term both among the

characters and between the author and reader in John 9 can be examined.<sup>3</sup> The passages in which the Gospel explicitly refers to this phrase are as follows: i) 1:51; 3:13, 14; 5:27; 6:27, 53, 62; 8:28, ii) 9:35 and iii) 12:23, 34c, 34d; 13:31 (the division is made with the purpose of highlighting narrative temporality).

*Firstly, the Son of Man is discussed from the author's perspective.* What does the author mean by this expression? And, how does the author use this phrase in his communication with the reader? In other words, for our understanding of the specific text of John 9, the identity and role (or function) of the Son of Man in the Gospel should be explored. To begin with, the role will be scrutinised in order to determine the identity. Based on theme, this study proposes to classify the 13 references into four groups:

- (a) The descent/ascent motif — incarnation, crucifixion, exaltation and glorification:  
1:51; 3:13, 14; 6:62; 8:28 / 12:23, 34c; 13:31
- (b) The authority given by the Father to execute judgment:  
5:27
- (c) The power to grant eternal life:  
6:27, 53
- (d) The object of inquiry:  
9:35 / 12:34d

In group (a), the passages can be further sub-divided into three categories (the list is not mutually exclusive): a-i) those references which specifically indicate the Son of Man's glorification — 12:23; 13:31, a-ii) those references which deal only with the ascent motif — 3:14; 6:62; 8:28; 12:34c, and a-iii) those references which express the descent/ascent motif in general — 1:51; 3:13. The passages in category (a-i) tell of the glorification of the Son of Man and God the Father. They are connected to the specific hour indicating the time when Jesus would complete his work on the cross. This glory was shared by Jesus and the Father before the world existed (17:5; Schnackenburg [1968] 1980:403), and Jesus manifested the Father's name

3 From now on, when the terms *the author* and *the reader* are used in this article, they will always refer to *the implied author* and *the implied reader* respectively. Furthermore, the pronouns *he/his/him* instead of *she/her* in this article, especially with reference to the implied author and reader, are used for the sake of convenience alone, and indicates no gender prejudice.

and revealed God by performing the works of God, especially through his signs (eg, 2:11; 9:3-7; 11:4, 40; 17:1-6). The Johannine portrayal of the Son of Man in relation to his glory differs from that of the Synoptics. The synoptic writers emphasise Jesus as an apocalyptic "Son of Man" who is to receive future glory (Ladd 1974:157). In other words, Jesus will come again with great power and glory as the Son of Man.<sup>4</sup> But, according to Burkett (1991:7), "[t]he Johannine 'Son of (the) Man' is not an apocalyptic figure" (for this comparison, see below).

All the references in group (a-ii) describe the Son of Man's journey to the heavenly world by employing the expression *lifting up*, except for 6:62 which uses the word *ascend*. Although scholars debate the issue as to which facet of his journey is referred to in the expression *lifting up*, they generally agree that it has a double meaning (Stibbe 1993a:57, 137). For instance, it refers to "both the crucifixion and exaltation of Jesus" (Smalley 1969:291; also Carson 1991:201). Ashton ([1991] 1993:364-366) also considers it as implying crucifixion and specifically resurrection. Saayman (1995:44) comments on 3:14:

There is.. no indication that the reference is to the ascension of Jesus. If a double meaning is intended, it concerns the glorification on the cross (also Moloney 1978:62; Bruce 1982:51).

For John the 'lifting up' of the Son of Man is the visible aspect of his 'ascent' into the heavenly world and...also of his installation in power and saving authority (Schnackenburg [1968] 1980:400).

At least they all see the starting point of this *lifting up* in Jesus' death on the cross (also Lindars 1983:146). However, it should be noted that the Johannine Son of Man does not bear the suffering motif of the title as is strongly evident in the synoptic portrayal.<sup>5</sup> Regarding this synoptic emphasis, Marshall (1992:776) states:

Jesus speaks of the impending suffering, death and resurrection of the Son of man....The sufferings of Jesus are clearly linked to his role as the Son of man; they are not mentioned explicitly without some reference to him as the Son of man.

4 For instance, Mt 16:27; 19:28; Mk 8:38; 14:26; Lk 9:26; 21:27. Also see Marshall (1992:776).

5 For instance, Mt 12:40; 17:22; 20:18-19; Mk 8:31; 9:12, 31; 10:33-34, 45; Lk 9:22; 18:31; 22:22. Also see Kümmel (1972:87), Ladd (1974:155-157), Bruce (1982:56), cf Brown (1966:84).

It may be important for the text of John 9 to note Moloney's (1978:140) remark on 8:28:

The title appears to be deliberately chosen by John for use in this context of revelation and judgment. It is Jesus, the man who lived, preached and was lifted up upon a cross, who is the unique revelation of God among men.

The general descent/ascent motif is contained in the passages in group (a-iii), but these references pose some interpretational problems, too. For example, 1:51 mentions ascending before descending concerning the angels' activity (Brown 1966:84). In 3:13, the use of the perfect tense causes difficulty (Brown 1966:132) and the stories of the saints who went up to Heaven raise another issue.<sup>6</sup> Saayman (1995:39) states that

as far as v13 is concerned, the usual interpretation was that it asserts that Jesus is the only one qualified to reveal the realities referred to in v12.

Also "it refers to the pre-existence, incarnation and ascension of the Son of man" (Smalley 1969:290). Brown (1966:133) contends that

only in John is the Son of Man portrayed as descending... The whole purpose of vs13... is to stress the heavenly origin of the Son of Man.

Burkett (1991:175) provides possible background for the descent/ascent motif associated with the title: a) Jacob's dream (Gn 28:12; also Dodd [1953] 1968:245; Pamment 1985:59), b) what is attributed to God in Proverbs 30:4 is attributed to the Son of the Man in John 3:13, and c) the Word of Yahweh (Is 55:1-3, 10-11) in connection with John 6:26-62.

The second category on the authority given by the Father to execute judgement (5:27) is unique among the Johannine Son of Man sayings. It is this uniqueness that generates scholarly controversy as to whether one of the traits of this title in John is apocalyptic or not. In terms of the Son of Man as a figure of heaven, judgement and the future, Martyn ([1968] 1979:139) proposes that "John 5:27 appears to be the most 'traditional' Son of Man saying in the whole of the New Testament". In this sense, many scholars find the apocalyptic Son of Man described in the Old Testament as a plausible source. Smalley (1978:94) states:

<sup>6</sup> See Gn 5:24; Heb 11:5; 2 Ki 2:1, 11. Also see Meeks (1965:324-334), Brown (1966:145) and Carson (1991:200).

The background to the Son of man tradition in the Fourth Gospel is probably to be located primarily in Daniel 7 (cf especially verses 13f) and Psalm 80 (cf verse 17); in both of these passages the figure of the Son of man represents the community of Israel, vindicated after suffering.<sup>7</sup>

In relation to Daniel 7, the title “came to be used as a title of dignity of Jesus” (Marshall 1992:781). This kind of understanding is similar to that of the synoptic Son of Man. On the other hand, while this eschatological background remains, some critics have an understanding of John’s strong emphasis on the present aspect of the Son of Man (see Barrett 1955:302-303). Smith (1986:48) indicates:

Although in John it has lost much of its apocalyptic coloration (cf Daniel 7), it is still a term of dignity, not of humiliation (also Harris 1994:119).

Rhea (1990:69) and Burkett (1991:173-174) also conclude that John has no knowledge of an apocalyptic “Son of Man” title or concept in relation to Daniel 7:13. As Schnackenburg ([1968] 1980:112) rightly observes, the judgement in 5:27 in connection with the idea of judgement implied in both 5:22 and 24 denotes “the present judgement that is passed on all men who reject faith and close themselves to the Son’s call (cf 3:18)”.<sup>8</sup> John’s emphasis on this present judgement by the Son of Man seems to have a link more strongly to Jesus’ judgement on the Pharisees in 9:41.

Concerning the references to the power to grant eternal life in group (c), the role of the Son of Man appears to be apparent. According to Schnackenburg ([1968] 1980:38), these verses (6:27, 53) refer:

to the personal bearer of the divine life, also to the saving gift of life which he conveys, and also to the Eucharist in which this shared life and personal link with the mediator of salvation are established in a special way.

The Son of Man sayings from the last group (d) do not supply any additional meaning to our understanding of the title. In 12:34d, the multitude

7 Also Dodd ([1953] 1968:245 fn 1), Brown (1966:220), Martyn ([1968] 1979:137-139), Moloney (1978:219), Lindars (1983:155), Ashton ([1991] 1993:340), Painter ([1991] 1993:322-323), cf Schnackenburg ([1968] 1980:107, 113).

8 For a detailed discussion on the tension between realised and futuristic eschatology manifested in 5:25-29, see Van der Watt (1985).

simply asked the identity of the Son of Man. In 9:35, Jesus inquired from the blind man whether he would believe in the Son of Man. At this point, this question only suggests that the Son of Man could be the object of one's faith.

Based on the above observations, what kind of picture does the author present of the identity of the Son of Man in the Gospel? The Johannine Son of Man would be the one, coming down from heaven with absolute authority, revealing and glorifying the Father by performing the works of God. Upon his return the Son of Man will share in this glory again. His most important work is to lay down his life on the cross as the Father planned so that those who look up to him may have eternal life. However, even before he completes this final work on earth, the Son of Man brings judgement to the world in his present revelatory mission.

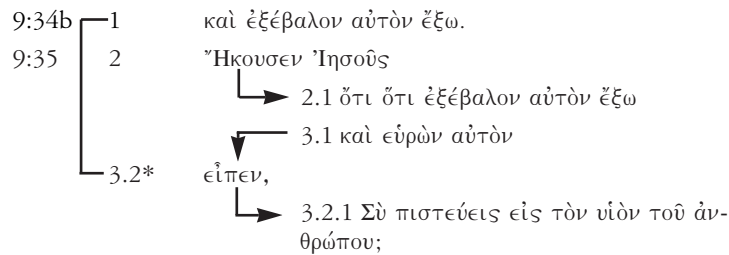
*Secondly, the Son of Man is discussed from the reader's perspective.* From his reading up to chapter 9, the reader is assumed to have knowledge of most of the identity and role of the Son of Man as examined above. What the reader does not know is the explicit reference to the glorification in 12:23 and 13:31. Hence the reader is not aware of the exact time of this glorification. The reader therefore has information regarding the Son of Man's heavenly origin, his signs and judgement as revelations and his authority to judge which is granted by the Father. And it is through the Son of Man that a believer may obtain eternal life. Furthermore, the reader can infer the Son of Man's pre-existence, incarnation and crucifixion implicitly. Therefore, when the reader comes to read Jesus' question in 9:35, it is most likely that the reader can grasp the overall meaning of the title which Jesus employs.

Lastly, the character's knowledge is examined. In 9:35, there are two characters on stage: Jesus and the blind man. Since Jesus is the speaker, Jesus should know what he is talking about. However, we do not know how much about what the blind man knows about the Son of Man from the surface structure of verse 35. To determine the man's knowledge seems to be guess work, but it is not impossible to measure it to some extent. However, this has to be done in the text analysis where the co-text supplies more information.



## 3.2 A speech act reading of John 9:35

## 3.2.1 General analysis



Although no detail is provided concerning how Jesus heard the news of the blind man's expulsion from the presence of the Jewish authorities, the author simply records that fact and uses it as the setting of their conversation. Thus, in colon 2, Jesus is the subject, and the main verb is the aorist indicative verb ἤκουσεν. The content of the news is elaborated upon in enlargement 2.1. This is an exact duplication of colon 1. This synonymous parallelism has a role to play in establishing the link between the current (9:35-38) and previous (9:24-34) scenes. However, the relationship between colon 1 and 2 is logical-reason-result. The author usually supplies a conjunction to establish such a link between scenes at the beginning of each scene, but there is no such conjunction here — a striking fact (see 9:1, 8, 18, 24, 39; cf 9:13). In short, colon 2 narrates that *Jesus heard that they had cast him out*.

When Jesus heard the news, he apparently tried to find the blind man. Hoskyns (1954:359) indicates that the author uses the word εὐρίσκω to describe Jesus' conscious effort to meet the man. The meeting was not by chance. The aorist participle εὐρῶν in 3.1 also shows the temporal-adverbial use describing the circumstances for Jesus' first utterance to the man (Fowler, Larkin & Wright 1985:307). The conjunction καί connects cola 2 and 3 by means of an additive-different relation. The main verb of colon 3 is the aorist active verb εἶπεν, and this word suggests that Jesus was taking the initiative and started the first utterance of the conversation here (cf Barrett 1955:302; Moloney 1978:150; Holleran 1993:377). Remember that this could be one of the literary characteristics of John in the dialogue form (for more on this trait, see Ito 2000a:143-144). In the Synoptics it is not Jesus but an interlocutor who initiates a dialogue in most instances (Dodd 1963:317).

The content of Jesus' utterance is described in enlargement 3.2.1, and his utterance signifies a very important personal question. This question is directed to the blind man, and it is emphasised by the nominative pronoun *σύ* (also Westcott [1882] 1978:149; Morris 1971:494; Holleran 1993:377-378). Barrett (1955:302) rephrases: "Do *you*, over against those who have expelled you, believe?" [Barrett's italics]. And "[t]he form of the question presupposes an affirmative reply" (Bernard 1928:337; also Morris 1971:494 fn 48). The verb *πιστεύει* is the key word in this question. It should even be perceived as a key word in the entire chapter 9 once one of the major themes in the story is recognised as belief/unbelief.<sup>9</sup> Equally significant is the expression *the Son of Man* which is a special term referring to Jesus in the Gospel (see sec 3.1). According to Van der Watt (1985:73), the verb *πιστεύω* is employed 98 times in John. But 9:35 is the only place where this verb is used explicitly with the Son of Man (so Barrett 1955:302; cf 3:15). Holleran (1993:377 fn 219) phrases a similar point differently:

The only two New Testament passages where the Son of Man is made the *object of faith* are here and in Jn 3,14-16.

Therefore, the use of this term here is striking. In short, this verse can now be translated as follows:

Jesus heard that they had cast him out, and when he found him, he said, 'Do you believe in the Son of Man?'

### 3.2.2 Illocutionary force

Hereafter, this study will deal mainly with Jesus' utterance. The previous scene (9:24-34) depicted the blind man's victory over the Jewish authorities in the fierce debate concerning the issue of Jesus who had healed the man. However, on the surface, the blind man — the winner — was thrown out as if he were the loser. Barrett (1955:302) describes this situation, saying that

he has not yet understood what has taken place, or come to faith to Jesus. Jesus, therefore, taking the initiative (cf 5.14), as he must, *finds* the man [Barrett's italics] (also Moloney 1978:150).

When Jesus found the man, Jesus asked the man a simple yet very important question. The interrogative sentence type of Jesus' utterance corresponds to its communicative function of question, that is, to elicit informa-

<sup>9</sup> For some references to this theme, see e.g., Ito (2000a:287-288, 380, 388, 395, 401, 427 and 436).

tion from the hearer (Yule 1996:54-55). In other words, Jesus appeared sincere in wanting to know the blind man's answer to his question. Therefore, Jesus' inquiry would be a speech act of *question*. Bach and Harnish (1979:47) sketch the schema of questions as follows:

- Questions: (ask, inquire, interrogate, query, question, quiz)  
 In uttering *e*, *S* questions *H* as to whether or not *P* if *S* expresses:  
 i. the desire that *H* tell *S* whether or not *P*, and  
 ii. the intention that *H* tell *S* whether or not *P* because of *S*'s desire.

When the schema is applied to this utterance, the result is the following:

- In uttering "Do you believe in the Son of Man?", Jesus questions the blind man as to whether the blind man believes in the Son of Man or not if Jesus expresses:  
 i. the desire that the blind man tell Jesus whether he believes in the Son of Man or not, and  
 ii. the intention that the blind man tell Jesus whether he believes in the Son of Man or not because of Jesus' desire.

Since Jesus appeared to express his desire and intention as described above, the utterance can be considered to be a successful speech act of question. Incidentally, should this utterance be examined with the aid of Searle's ([1969] 1980:67) necessary and sufficient conditions for a speech act of question (see also Ito 2000a:145), those conditions would be satisfied as well. In brief, Jesus had the intention to ask the man, whom he had healed before, a simple yet profound question as to whether or not the man would believe in some significant figure. The author also intends to ask the reader the same kind of question as to whether the reader really believes in Jesus or not.

### 3.2.3 Perlocutionary force

The blind man should respond to Jesus' question adequately, indicating whether he was willing to believe in the Son of Man or not. The reader should also answer in a similar way so that the reader may strengthen his already-existing faith.

### 3.2.4 Communicative strategy

This section scrutinises the ways in which the author deploys various communicative strategies to induce the reader's interest in the story and to communicate his messages effectively to the reader. For the sake of argument here, *the communication on the character and text levels is discussed together*. Schnackenburg ([1968] 1980:253) comments on this verse:

Jesus' question...also contains a promise: if he believes in Jesus as the Son of man, Jesus will take him with him into his glory. Of course, the man cannot yet understand this — and so he asks again — but the reader is meant to understand that Jesus intends to give the man not just sight, but also “the light of life”.

This study does not object to this remark, but intends to draw attention to the part that the blind man would not grasp Jesus' promise in his question. Schnackenburg perhaps assumes, from the fact that the man asked Jesus again, that the man could not understand the promise. But, as will be examined below, the main reason why the man asked Jesus again in verse 36 is because the man did not understand the identity of the Son of Man, not the promise as such (also Hare 1990:106). Therefore, Schnackenburg's explanation is inadequate. However, a speech act approach has an advantage here and is able to elucidate the matter more adequately. The tool which this speech act approach provides is far better than mere guessing. From a speech act perspective, the reason the man did not understand is simply because the promise which Schnackenburg describes is contained neither in the illocution nor in the perlocution of Jesus' utterance (see above). Obviously, the hearer cannot detect an element which is not present in the speaker's utterance. As far as the reader is concerned, however, the reader is able to detect this promise, or more precisely, to deduce such an implication from all the information stored up to this moment. The reader has the ability to utilise this information to understand the character's utterance more adequately. But the blind man simply did not possess such information and could therefore not understand it.

Jesus' utterance is a simple and clear question, and in this sense his utterance observes the *Manner Maxim* (be clear).<sup>10</sup> Simultaneously, the phrase *Son of Man* which Jesus employed in his question appears to violate the same *Manner Maxim*, particularly because Jesus did not use a clearer term which was available to him, such as “me” or the Son of God. It should be noted here that the *Quantity Maxim* (make your contribution as informative as is required) is also involved in this issue. If Jesus had said more than he actually did in this utterance, this issue would possibly not have existed. For instance, if he said, “I am the Son of Man. And do you believe in the Son of Man?”, then the blind man would not have had to ask Jesus another question for clarification. Hence, even when this issue is scrutinised in

10 For the Principles and Maxims mentioned in this article, see Ito (2000b:103-104).

terms of the Manner Maxim, the aspect of the Quantity Maxim should not be forgotten. Speaking of not forgetting, this is not an issue raised only by a speech act approach. More or less from a literary-critical perspective, Burkett (1991:166) poses the issue in the following two questions:

Why is it introduced in the middle of a story portraying Jesus as the Light and...why, as nowhere else, is it the object of a confession of faith?

For the sake of contrast, the same issue is raised in a more simple form from a historical point of view. Why not the Christ, the Lord, or the Son of God (Moloney 1978:150; Carson 1991:376)? This question becomes even more striking with the observation that not the phrase *the Son of God* but the term *the Son of Man* should be the original reading in the text (Brown 1966:375; Bultmann 1971:338 fn 3; Moloney 1978:149). But the heart of the matter remains the same. To begin with, the question as to why Jesus (for that matter, the author) uses this particular title is analysed in order to account for the issue relating to the Manner Maxim. To this question, many scholars have offered diverse solutions. This study intends to outline their points and to examine them briefly one by one, including my responses in some cases. Afterwards, my final conclusion will be drawn at the end.

1. The use of this title was a normal way of confessing faith.
2. There is no significant difference between the Son of Man and the Son of God.
3. The Son of God is reserved especially for the other passage (10:36).
4. The Son of Man is meant as the Christ.
5. The use of this title is designed for use in puns.
6. The use of this title is linked primarily to Jesus' humanity.
7. The use of this title is closely connected to the theme of judgment in 9:39-41.
8. The use of this title is due to circumlocution.

With regard to proposal (1), Hare (1990:106) indicates that it is unlikely.

As we have seen (1:49), the Messiah was popularly designated 'the Son of God', but 'the Son of Man' was not a recognized Messianic title....The man to whom Jesus spoke was evidently puzzled (Bernard 1928:338).

In John's Gospel, a more common expression in the use of confession would be the Son of God (e.g. 1:34, 49; 3:18; 11:27; 20:31).

As for proposal (2), some expositors (eg Richardson 1959:128; Marsh 1968:388-389) claim that there is no important difference in meaning in this context between the use of the Son of Man and that of the Son of God. Marsh (1968:388-389) considers the matter in this way, because of his understanding of the Son of Man as “the heavenly, the archetypal man”. In his case, both phrases refer to Jesus’ divine sonship. Moloney (1978:150) criticises this view by saying that “[t]his is hardly a satisfactory solution”. Burkett (1991:167) provides a more convincing reason for the view that the Son of Man here means the Son of God, because “as the Son of God, the Son of the Man is the Light begotten from the light of God” (also Dodd [1953] 1968:244; Martyn [1968]1979:134 fn 193). And while other people designated Jesus the Son of God, Jesus preferred to call himself the Son of Man (Burkett 1991:167). This view then contradicts with the passages in which Jesus designated himself the Son of God (e.g., 5:25; 10:36; 11:4).

Regarding proposal (3), “John is probably saving up ‘Son of God’ for the climax in 10.36” (Lindars [1972] 1981:350). Even if this view that the author carefully selects the expression is credible, it still does not explain why the author chooses the Son of Man.

In proposal (4), other critics (eg Hoskyns 1947:359; Morris 1971:494; Du Rand 1985:30) contend that the Son of Man is meant to mean the Christ, especially to the blind man and a group of disciples to which the man would belong as a result of his confession. If the author then intends to refer to the figure expressed in the Son of Man this way, why does the author not use the term *Christ*? The author has already used it in 9:22 anyway.

Proposal (5) is one of my suggestions. There may be a *pun* on the word *man*. The blind man was introduced in the beginning of this chapter as “a man” born blind (v1). This man with his eyes open was now meeting the Son of Man face to face. It may be one of the author’s ideas to use this title here. This possibility cannot be dismissed, since Stibbe (1993a:54) describes a contrast between Jesus and Nicodemus in much the same way (Jn 3:1, 13-14). Also Duke (1982:191) puts forward:

In view of the man’s remark in v. 11...and the Pharisees’ contemptuous use of ‘man’ for Jesus in vv. 16, 24, ‘Son of Man’ in v. 35 serves a crucial ironic function, fulfilling and expanding the healed man’s word and mocking the contempt of his accusers.

As Duke indicates, this is an ironic expression, but it is not an instance of irony. This point should therefore also be classified as referring to puns.

Concerning proposal (6), other researchers (eg Westcott [1882] 1978:149-151; Dodd [1953] 1968:244-247; Moloney 1978:213, 220;

Pamment 1985:58-59; Hare 1990:111; Lee 1994:185) attribute the use of the Son of Man primarily to the emphasis on Jesus' humanity (e.g. his incarnate state). Although Jesus' humanity is imperative to form sound Christology, John's characterisation of Jesus places more emphasis on his divine side throughout the Gospel (Culpepper 1983:106-112). In this immediate co-text where the blind man would worship Jesus as a result of his confession in the Son of Man (9:38), too, this phrase seems to point to Jesus' divinity rather than his humanity (see Ito 2000a:442-443, 445 for this; also see v33). Hence, extremely formulated, is there any need to highlight Jesus' humanity in this co-text?

A number of commentators maintain that the use of this title is closely connected to the judgement role of Jesus in the subsequent scene in 9:39-41 (e.g. Schnackenburg [1968] 1980:253; Morris 1971:494 fn 47; Lindars [1972] 1981:350-351; Bruce [1983] 1994:219-220; cf. Beasley-Murray 1987:159). This proposal (7) beautifully corresponds to the authority of judgment given to the Son of Man in 5:27. The only difficulty associated with this view would be, as Burkett (1991:166-167) also points out, that while the "judgement" in the co-texts (9:35-41) strongly places emphasis on the present judgement (see Bultmann 1971:338), many supporters of this view consider the Son of Man to be the apocalyptic-eschatological judge (e.g. Brown 1966:375; Martyn [1968] 1979:140-141; Sanders & Mastin 1968:106, 244; Carson 1991:376; Lee 1994:168, 186). To solve this difficulty, Martyn ([1968] 1979:141) appeals to his two-level drama theory and proposes a solution:

It is precisely the contemporary level of the drama which makes clear that judgment by the Son of Man takes place essentially on earth and in the present, not in heaven and in the future.

As an alternative, Lindars ([1972] 1981:351) suggests that "the future judgment...is anticipated in the confrontation with Jesus in his incarnate life; the response to Jesus *now* determines his verdict as Son of Man in the future" [Lindars' italics]. These solutions may be valid, and can therefore not be ignored. However, as indicated implicitly before (see sec 3.1), my view coincides more with Schnackenburg ([1968] 1980:112) who argues that the "judgment" in 5:27 also denotes the present judgment.

The last proposal (8) relates the issue to Jesus' circumlocution, and has two versions. The first version is presented by Bultmann (1971:338) who states:

The indirectness of the dialogue — due to the fact that Jesus does not ask straight out, "Do you believe in me?" — is designed to show

the difference between the healed man's previous recognition of Jesus and the confession which is now required of him.

Bultmann (1971:338 fn 7) goes on to say that this title "was a naïve way of referring to Christian faith".

The second version seems to be simple and plain, yet one of the most plausible solutions. John 9:35 is a case of circumlocution, a non-titular use of Son of Man (Müller 1991:291). It is a self-designation derived from a unique speech situation. In this scene, the blind man encountered Jesus for the first time with his eyes opened. It is unlikely that the blind man recognised Jesus as his benefactor, because he had not seen Jesus until now. In this situation, Jesus could not say, "Do you believe in me?" (also Lindars 1983:151). Jesus had to reveal himself to the man before the man could place his trust in Jesus. And the man had to come to know that Jesus was the one who could give abundant life in faith. In this regard, Jesus appeared to connect this life-giving role to the title of the Son of Man, indicating a strong connection between the use of the title in 9:35 and the other Son of Man sayings in the Gospel, especially 6:27 and 53 (also Müller 1991:294).

From the above discussion, this study would suggest that Jesus' choice of the phrase Son of Man can be explained more adequately by combining proposals (5), (7) and (8), namely for the use of puns, for the theme of judgement and for circumlocution. Now we are in a better position to determine the original issue regarding a possible violation of the *Manner Maxim* in Jesus' utterance. Since this is a very complicated issue, four possibilities can be proposed:

1. In relation to the reader, the *Manner Maxim* is either violated or observed.
2. In relation to the blind man, the *Manner Maxim* is either violated or observed.

With regard to category (1), the *Manner Maxim* may, at first glance, be violated because Jesus did not use a clearer term, as mentioned earlier. If this is violated, it indicates that the author has something significant to communicate to the reader, and the reader is called on to detect this significance through implicature. It means that this significance is greater in meaning than mere adherence to a *Maxim*. However, this study would opt for the view that Jesus' utterance does not flout the *Manner Maxim*, because the upholding of this *Maxim* seems to be more important than a message which can be conveyed by the breaching of it in this specific speech situation. This study suggests that the author has faith or trust in the reader's understand-



ding of the utterance. Even though Jesus used the phrase *Son of Man* which contains charged concepts, the reader is assumed to be able to understand them all (of course, only those concepts which are presented up to ch 9). At least all three solutions described above should be conceivable to the reader. Here, one gloss should be made. Strictly speaking, the reader has not read the next scene yet at the point of this verse 35. But the reader will soon understand the link between the title and the theme of judgement the minute he reads 9:39-41 (see also sec 3.1).

With regard to category (2), as indicated earlier (sec 3.1), the question as to whether or not the blind man comprehended this title is more difficult. The confusion in this issue is demonstrated by two opposing views. Burkett (1991:165) remarks:

The man probably does not understand the title (cf 12:34), but he shows himself willing to believe in anyone Jesus recommends and asks to know who this person is (also Westcott [1882] 1978:151; Bruce [1983] 1994:220; Rhea 1990:47).

Conversely, Hoskyns (1954:359) comments: "He understands the significance of the title" (also Howard-Gossip 1952:619; Barrett 1955:302; Bultmann 1971:338; Haenchen 1984:40). The former view can be conceivable if one imagines how much this blind man knew about this specific title. The man's arguments in 9:30-33 indicate that this man knew the God of Israel to some extent. In the light of the text including the first eight chapters, however, the man hardly knew the Son of Man sayings. How, then, was he able to understand?

The latter view is, however, equally possible, and this confuses the issue. In 9:36 in the present co-text the blind man asked, "Who is he?" after Jesus' question in 9:35. His inquiry was aimed not at the description but at the identification (so Carson 1991:376; also see Ito 2000a:428-431). The question of who the Son of Man was, or even where he came from, may still be acceptable, but the question regarding what he was is not within the scope of the man's original inquiry. The fact that the man did not enquire separately about the meaning of the Son of Man may imply that he did understand the phrase, at least in his own way. Based on what he said in the previous dialogue scenes thus far, he would have understood the Son of Man as someone who was not a sinner, but rather a prophet, someone who was devout and tried to do God's will, someone who came from God as God's agent and someone who had opened his eyes. The man's portrayal shares some common elements with the descriptions of the Son of Man, such as descending from heaven and glorifying the Father through performing God's works, especially signs (see sec 3.1). The man could even have taken

the title as referring to someone extremely special. And most importantly, the author appears to be completely satisfied with the man's final answer in verse 38. There is no indication that the man's understanding of the title was inadequate.

In this way, it is very difficult to decide the issue. However, if we take the author's communicative strategy in depicting the event in this particular co-text more seriously than the man's supposed knowledge (his knowledge is inevitably limited because the blind man appears as a character in this chapter 9 only), the answer seems to be in favour of the latter view that the man understood the title adequately. From the perspective of Interpersonal Rhetoric, moreover, this conclusion can prevent Jesus' utterance from being accused of violating the *Morality Principle* (a speaker does not ask for information he shouldn't have). If Jesus knowingly asked the blind man something the man could not grasp, Jesus would have transgressed this Principle. It is very important for Jesus to uphold the *Cooperative Principle*, especially the *Quality Maxim* (be sincere), in this speech situation in which Jesus was attempting to draw a prospective believer to himself. As a result, Jesus' utterance aimed at the blind man may not and should not violate the *Manner Maxim*.

*Two remarks should be discussed pertaining to only the communication on the character level.* Firstly, why did Jesus ask this particular question of the blind man? This is an important question in terms of the *Relation Maxim* (be relevant). The answer would be that it was for the sake of the man's faith and because Jesus' question is closely connected to one of the most essential issues in the whole story, namely Jesus' identity. In fact, their following conversation will prove this connection (see vv36-38a).

Secondly, when Jesus found the blind man, Jesus approached him with no greeting prior to his utterance. It is remarkable that there was no introductory or social talk which people usually engage in to create intimacy before becoming involved in such a serious or personal question and that Jesus just went to the heart of the dialogue immediately. Interestingly enough, Jesus used the same conversation opener when he met the Samaritan woman in 4:7 (Botha 1991a:115-116; also Jn 1:43, 47; 5:6; cf 6:5; 18:4). Botha (1991a:116) uses McLaughlin's term *topic initiating openings* to describe this particular type of interaction. Since it is difficult to reconstruct the social norms of the time adequately, it is equally difficult to determine whether Jesus was observing the *Politeness Principle* (be polite) at the start of their conversation. Think about this for a moment. The story thus far reveals that the blind man did not know much about the person who had healed him. Although the man assumed that Jesus was a prophet (v17), the

only thing the man seemed to know for sure is that his name was Jesus (v11). He perhaps did not even know Jesus' face. From this, it becomes apparent that the blind man in 9:35 had no idea who was talking to him. In such a case, one should approach such a person with some kind of introduction about oneself. In this case, Jesus should and could have introduced himself as the miracle worker who had opened his eyes. It is even more desirable to do so, especially when it is taken into account that this man was just thrown out by the authorities. He was indeed rejected by all. If someone is experiencing such a difficult time, it is highly probable that he would become emotionally defensive. It would be hard for him to be asked any serious or personal questions, not to mention answering them. Yet Jesus was very straightforward. Jesus did not introduce himself to the man. The man would probably have been puzzled when Jesus, a complete stranger, just walked up to him and asked him such a question, namely "Do you believe in the Son of Man?" It is really strange, even rude. Perhaps because of the difficult experience the man had just gone through, however, Jesus may have approached the man without any small talk in order to get down to business immediately. As far as Jesus was concerned, the blind man was very familiar to Jesus. A secret bond existed between the two of them, even though the man himself was not aware of it. Here, Jesus acted in this specific situation in accordance with the *Banter Principle* which says that "the more intimate the relationship, the less important it is to be polite. Hence lack of politeness in itself can become a sign of intimacy" (Leech 1983:144).

*Now for a separate discussion of the communication on the text level.* Several points can be noted in terms of Interpersonal and Textual Rhetorics. The use of the *Son of Man* in Jesus' utterance may be unpredictable and fascinating to the reader, indicating that the *Interest Principle* is operative in this utterance. This phrase also makes Jesus' utterance a very economical one, for this short title is rich in connotations. Hence the utterance observes the *Economy Principle*. Because this significant title is placed at the end of the utterance, the *Maxims of End-Focus* and *End-Weight* are upheld. However, though the reader is able to understand the significance of the title fully, to do so requires more decoding time than usual because the reader needs to decipher the meaning from the vast information resources. In this sense, the *Processibility Principle* is jeopardised. As in the case of the Manner Maxim, a possible breach of the *Clarity Principle* with the *Maxims of Transparency* and *Ambiguity* is suspected. But, if the reader understands the title adequately as examined above, these rules need not be transgressed.

### 3.2.5 Summary

Jesus intended to ask the blind man whether or not the man was willing to believe in Jesus. However, Jesus used the phrase *Son of Man* to designate himself. The above analysis concludes that the Manner Maxim is not necessarily violated by Jesus' choice of this title both on the character and text levels, for the blind man and the reader would both understand the title well. The perlocution is for the man to answer Jesus' question adequately. In order to communicate the point of the question effectively, the author adheres to the Principles of Morality, Economy and Interest, and the Maxims of Quality, Relation, End-Focus and End-Weight. Only the Processibility Principle and the Quantity Maxim appear to have been breached.

## 4. CONCLUSION

Many scholarly discussions on the topic of the Son of Man have been produced, as seen above, because of its significance as well as ambiguity. In fact, Jesus' utterance in our text (Jn 9:35) also has generated various views on how to understand it, especially as to its meaning and significance. Even in analysing such a difficult issue, the speech act approach employed in this article was able to deal with it adequately in its own terms, providing a plausible solution. Furthermore, this approach could objectively reveal the "mechanism" of how the author has communicated effectively with the reader by using various conversational principles and maxims. This aspect is one of the greatest advantages of this approach, and it is therefore worth utilising it when biblical texts are to be examined in this way.

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