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“BLESSED ARE THOSE NOT SEEING...”

John 20:29 in the Light of John 20:30-31 & Rev 1:3; 22:7

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In John 20:29 the evangelist addresses the readers of the Gospel with a *makarism*, “Blessed are those not seeing and believing.” With this he seems to provide authenticity and encouragement for the contemporary “not-seeing” believers. The question that naturally arises is: Why are the “not-seeing” people called blessed and in what consists their blessedness? It is true that while this *makarism* bolstered the faith of the readers, it has left behind a perplexing enigma involving other related questions: What is the significance of the *makarism* at the closing unit of the Gospel where this genre is not in frequent use? What relation can it have to the beginning and closing *makarisms* of Revelation 1:3 and 22:7? How does the author intend this particular *makarism* to function exactly in the situation where the physical absence of Jesus is described?

Indeed, these questions are important for a precise study of the *makarism* in John 20:29. The *makarism* genre and its closing function in the background of its usage in the biblical literature provide an expansive hermeneutical power to the whole Gospel. This *makarism* appears as the climax of the Thomas episode where its unexpected proclamation, in fact, expresses a veiled contrast between “seeing and believing” and “non-seeing and believing.” This makes sense only if it is understood as referring to those who are in the situation of those

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who experience the physical absence of Jesus but still believe. Hence the *makarism* seems to distinguish between the period of the historical Jesus and the “now” of the absent Jesus. It seems clear that the occurrence of the *makarism* at this point of the Fourth Gospel leaves a hopeful note of something which is sufficient to evoke faith. It is noteworthy that it is immediately followed by a mention of the “book” which must follow Jesus’ historical presence as an eye-witness record. The present study aims in particular to interpret this link of the *makarism* (20:29) to the first conclusion of the Gospel (vv. 30-31) and to the framing functions of the *makarisms* in Rev 1:3 and 22:7 besides undertaking a contextual study of the genre of *makarism* in general.

Organization of the Work

The present study is divided into four chapters with a general introduction and a general conclusion. The first chapter deals with a small historical survey of the development and application of *makarism* genre with its biblical functions. It further analyzes all the *makarisms* of Johannine literature, which serves as a *prelude* to the understanding of the *makarisms* of John 20:29 and Rev 1:3; 22:7.

The contextual study of the *makarism* John 20:29 is the object of the second chapter. Thomas is criticized for refusing to accept the word of his fellow disciples and for insisting on the appearance of Jesus as a condition for his believing in the Risen Lord. Thus Thomas is virtually in a position like that of the later Christians who have no possibility of seeing the Risen Lord but are dependent on the words of the eye-witnesses for their encounter with him. This *makarism*, therefore, clearly focuses on the transition from physical experience of the earthly Jesus to the “not-seeing” experience of the Risen Jesus by the later believers. Moreover, its position at the closing of the Gospel unifies both the “seeing” disciples and the “not seeing” future believers and leads the latter to experience the Risen Jesus and to attain the true faith as that of the “seeing” disciples by means of the words of the book.

In the third chapter, the particular significance of the beginning and closing functions of the *makarisms* 1:3 and 22:7 in the book of Revelation, is dealt with. Their framing function takes the readers back to the written form of the Fourth Gospel (20:30-31) and facilitates interpreting in a better way the *makarism* 20:29 as highlighting this written form as a fortune for the not-seeing believers of the present time.

The fourth and final chapter answers the questions raised by the *makarism* of 20:29 and summarizes the study undertaken in the previous chapters. The dynamic character of the “non-seeing” motive is related to a written book, which contains an interpreted history of

the events of the historical Jesus. Furthermore, this book substitutes the historical Jesus and offers the readers the opportunity of experiencing the physically absent and yet living Jesus. The theological and pastoral implications of the *makarisms* could principally be seen in the celebration of the sacred liturgy where the combined activity of the Spirit and of the Word of God renders the proclaimed words "spirit and life."

At the close of this research, considering all the factors examined in the course of this study, one can now draw the following conclusions:

1. With regard to the nature of the literary genre of *makarism*, the historical study and the literary analysis help to arrive at a conclusion that this is employed as an exhortation and as a promise of fortune or blessing for the future believers.

2. The contextual study of John 20:29 makes it clear that the disciples and Thomas are blessed in that they were able to see the Risen Jesus and to believe in him but for those who come after them "seeing" cannot be the criterion for believing in Jesus. The *makarism* marks a transition that will come into effect after Jesus' final departure to Father and serves to encourage the future believers to consider their faith equal to that of the seeing disciples.

3. The *makarism* John 20:29 analyzed in its closing function is an obvious closure to the Gospel and a climax to its narration. The opening and closing functions of Rev 1:3 and 22:7 conform to the closing function of 20:29c and, as such, refer to a particular significance of highlighting the book for reading/hearing in the public assembly. Hence "seeing" is replaced by "reading/hearing" in the post-Easter Church. This framing function further refers to the closing *makarism* of the Fourth Gospel where it is intrinsically related to its original conclusion (20:30-31) which synthesizes the whole process and purpose of writing the Gospel. Therefore the concluding and framing functions of *makarisms* in both the books point to the importance of the "written book" for the benefit of the future believers. These *makarisms* have similarities in both functions and theological content.

4. Therefore it is not hard to arrive at a conclusion that the "not seeing" people of the *makarism* are blessed because they have *the book*, the eye-witness record, as a source of their believing in the Risen Jesus. They are reassured, through the *makarism*, that seeing Jesus is not a prerequisite for believing in him. Thus its function invites the readers to move from the narrative time of the Gospel (pre-Easter) to a post-Easter time of not seeing the Risen One. In fact, what the *makarism* provides is a basic insight into the meaning of the Gospel and the purpose for which it is compiled. Therefore it becomes an interpretative key for the exegesis of the Fourth Gospel, namely the

need of the written Gospel for believing in Jesus and for having eternal life.

5. The principal scope of the *makarism* 20:29c is to reveal and exhort the future believers about the possibility open to them for accessing the person of Jesus through the "written book."

6. The *makarisms* have a particular and precise function for the Christian communities, namely, to make present the Risen Jesus through the written books. However this function is rather vast as is proved from the cross references to the biblical texts in the study. The book of Apocalypse actually depicts a time of the Church when the believers did experience the presence of the absent Jesus through the public reading of the written book. Thus the *makarisms* have a bridging function because it moves the reader from the narrative time of both the Gospel and the Apocalypse to the reader's own time.

7. Lastly the theological nuances of "the book" as an interpreted history of many witnesses are also evident. Since "the book" contains the discourses, the words and deeds of Jesus, interpreted by the Spirit and the eye-witnesses, there is no chance of the hearers/readers misunderstanding the truth of Jesus but of arriving at a right decision of faith. In fact, it is a history not only interpreted but also made up with selected episodes as is clear from John 20:30-31. The pastoral implications of the *makarisms* are thus to be seen in the liturgy of the Church where the Word of God and the Spirit are active and make present to the believers the Risen Jesus.

In other words, the *makarisms*, on the one hand, address the situation of the intervening time when the Christians are challenged to believe despite the physical absence of Jesus Christ and on the other, the readers who have to live as Christians without ever seeing Jesus, but are blessed with a book of eye-witnesses. Therefore the life of Jesus is spatially extended in the written book. Moreover, the one who reads the *makarisms* certainly feels invited to have faith in Jesus and to be a disciple. Indeed, this is an invitation for anyone to become his *makarioi* in the various situations of life to hold on to the word of God and believe in the Risen Lord. Hence the *makarisms* are Christological revelations through the intermediary of the written book for Christian living. In this way, for the readers the *makarisms* constitute a promise as well as an exhortation to accept the apostolic testimony enshrined in the book, rather than to demand "signs" similar to those Jesus had performed during his earthly ministry for their believing. In fact, the revelatory word of God becomes the source of identity and the ground of being as followers and disciples of Jesus. This is forged by each one's response to this word that comes to him/her as both promise and warning, as challenge and comfort. Every disciple is called to be a servant of the words of the written book.