

The Word of God as Life Giving Power in the Fourth Gospel with Particular Reference to the Raising of Lazarus from the Dead (John 11:1-44)

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Introduction

Last year the Roman Pontiff, Benedict XVI, proclaimed October 2007 – October 2008 as the year of the Word which will climax in the 12th Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops in October this year.¹ The recent CIWA Theology Week with the theme “The Word of God Meeting the Millennium Development Goals in Africa” is in line with the Holy Father’s intention. In January this year the MSP Major Seminary Gwagwalada Abuja organised a lecture for the Annual Feast of St. Paul where Prof. Sr. T. Okure delivered a paper titled “Alive and Active: God’s Word in Africa”, and our present conference with the theme “Alive and Active: Images of the Word of God in the Bible” are all in view with this year’s celebration of the Word of God. The need and the value of the Word of God cannot be over-emphasised.

Hence we wish to discuss the importance of the Word in the Fourth Gospel with particular reference to the raising of Lazarus in chapter 11. The Greek term for word is *logos* and in the prologue, apart from other passages in the gospel, the evangelist affirms that Christ is this divine *logos*. He utters the *logos* which the Father has given him, and so gives it to men to be power unto life. One reason why this Gospel was symbolised in the ancient church by the eagle is the lofty heights attained by its prologue. With skill and delicacy, John handles issues of profound importance. It comes as no surprise that this prologue has been foundational to the classic Christian formulation of the doctrine of Christ. Here divinity and humanity, pre-existence and incarnation, revelation and sacrifice are each discussed by John with deceptive simplicity.

The prologue may well have been an ancient Christian hymn. We know of other hymns extant especially in Paul’s writing, and here too there is an artful flowing of language and theology.² The prologue is also an overture to the story of the rest of the Gospel, since themes mentioned there will be picked up later and given fuller development: the pre-existence of Christ (1:1; 17:5), divine light entering the world (1:4, 9; 8:12; 9:5), the opposition of light and darkness (1:5; 3:19).

In John 1,4 without the article the evangelist stresses the quality of the *Logos*: in the *Logos* was “life”, life in the fullest, highest sense, the eternal, blessed life of God.³ The stress is on the phrase which heads the statement, “in him” was life. This life corresponds with his being of the *Logos*, forever inherent in his very essence. This Light of the *Logos* is still alive and active since it continues to shine on men and women of this world. Indeed it is this *logos*, the divine *logos* God, that restores life to a dead man Lazarus. We shall first of all search for the meaning of word (*logos*), then this will be followed with the usage of the word (*logos*) in the Fourth Gospel. Finally we shall treat the power of the word (*logos*) in giving Life to a dead Man (John 11).

The *Logos*

The term *logos* has an exceedingly extensive range of meanings.⁴ Those which most concern us here are

¹ The theme is “The Word of God in the Life and Mission of the Church”. The Synod will take place in Rome from October 5-26.

² Other NT hymns are found in Eph 5:19; Phil 2:5-11; Col 1:15-20; 3:15.

³ The edition of New Revised Standard Version (Catholic edition) is used throughout, unless otherwise indicated.

⁴ Cf. A. Debrunner – H. Kleinknecht, et al., “*lego, logos etc.*”, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* IV, 69-143.

the two which the Stoics distinguished as *logos* in the mind and the uttered *logos* – that is, ‘thought’ and ‘word’. For us these concepts are distinct as they were not for Greek-speaking persons. *Logos* as ‘word’ is never the mere word as an assemblage of sounds but the word as determined by a meaning and conveying a meaning⁵. *Logos* as ‘thought’ is neither the faculty nor the process of thinking as such, but an articulate unit of thought, capable of intelligible utterance, whether as a single word, a phrase or sentence, or a prolonged discourse, or even a book. Whether or not it is actually uttered (or written) is a secondary matter, almost an accident; in any case it is *logos*. Behind it remains the notion of that which is rationally ordered, such as ‘proportion’ in mathematics or what we call ‘law’ in nature. These are examples of the same thing that we experience as articulate thought or meaningful speech⁶.

In the LXX *logos* almost always translates *dābār*, a term whose range of meaning overlaps that of *logos* but is not co-extensive with it. It is derived from the root *dbr*, which means to speak, and, *dābār* is fundamentally the spoken word as means of communication. In the Old Testament *dābār adonai* is frequently employed of God’s communication with men, His self-revelation, especially through the prophets, to whom ‘the word of the Lord came’. The totality of God’s self-revelation is denominated by Torah a term which is often parallel or virtually synonymous with *dābār adonai*⁷.

The whole notion of revelation in the Old Testament is determined by the analogy of the word spoken and heard, as distinct from the idea of revelation as vision. It preserves the ontological distance between God and man, while affirming that God, of His personal choice, approaches men and deals with them in a way they can understand, and expects their response; as one man communicates with another by means of spoken words, inviting a response, without invading the prerogatives of individual personality. The idea that God similarly addresses a ‘word’ to what we call inanimate things, and that by means of such a ‘word’ He called the ordered universe out of primeval chaos, is a refinement upon the idea of the ‘word’ that came to men through the prophets, to bring order and justice into human affairs under the rule of Torah.

We have to observe that for the Hebrew the word once spoken has a kind of substantive existence of its own.⁸ A blessing, for example, once pronounced continues to bless, and a curse once spoken works itself out. This is true even of your words or mine, still more of the Word of God.⁹ Consider such expressions as the following:

“For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return there until they have watered the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater. So shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and succeed in the thing for which I sent it” (Isa 55:10-11).

“Your all-powerful word leaped from heaven, from the royal throne, into the midst of the land that was doomed, a stern warrior, carrying the sharp sword of your authentic command, and stood and filled all things with death, and touched heaven while standing on the earth” (Wisd 18:15-16).

If it be said that these are mere poetical embellishment of language, it must nevertheless be accepted that the readiness to employ such language alludes to an habitual tendency of thought to attribute to the spoken word an existence and activity of its own; and in fact such an aptness is strongly impressed upon the Hebrew language.¹⁰

The Use of *Logos* in the Fourth Gospel

⁵ Cf. Aristotle, *De Inter.*4.

⁶ Cf. C. D. Dodd, *The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel* (Cambridge: University Press, 1953) 263.

⁷ Cf. Dodd, *The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel*, 263.

⁸ For an informative example of the persistence of this notion among Semitic speaking people in Palestine, see A. Merx, *Die vier kanonischen Evangelien* (1920, on Matt v.47).

⁹ Cf. T. Okure, *Alive and Active: God’s Word in African Context* (Unpublished Lecture delivered at the Annual St Paul’s Lecture (MSP) Gwagwalada, Abuja, 2008) 3-4.

¹⁰ It is not, however, exclusively Hebraic. It would appear to be common in primitive thought, and has left traces in various languages. Homer’s “winged words” which “escape the barrier of the teeth”, and “fly” are an example. But in Hebrew the conception appears to be more continuously alive: the word is sent, comes, goes, endures, and so forth.

Here we may distinguish the following ways in which *logos* is employed by the author in the Fourth Gospel and find out its many nuances. First the term *logoi* in the plural is employed in the plain and simple sense of ‘words’ spoken by Jesus or by others.

Secondly the singular *logos* is used for a ‘saying’, ‘statement’, or ‘discourse’. Thus, in John 2:19-22, Jesus says, “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up”. He is misunderstood by both the crowd and the disciples; but the latter, after His resurrection, are said to have understood and believed it: “and they believed the scripture and the **word** that Jesus had spoken”. In 4:39 “many of the Samaritans believed in him because of the woman’s testimony,¹¹ “He told me everything I have ever done”. In 4:37: For here the **saying** holds true, the *logos* (in our translation saying) here is a proverbial saying. In 12:38; 15:25 it is a passage cited from the OT (12:38 “This was to fulfill the *word* spoken by the prophet Isaiah: “Lord, who has believed our message, and to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?”). A *logos* in this sense is composed of *logoi* in the sense of sayings. The expression in 19:8 “When Pilate heard this does not differ in sense from “When Pilate heard these words” in 19:13.

Thirdly *logos* is used collectively for the whole of what Jesus said to his disciples and to the world, his ‘message’, conceived as revelation and as a ‘command’ to be obeyed. Thus Jesus says in John 5:24 “Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears my **word** and believes him who sent me, has eternal life”, and to his disciples, John 15:3 “You have already been cleansed by the **word** that I have spoken to you”.

While, however, in all such cases *logos* is that which is spoken and heard, it is, in accordance with the fundamental connotation of the Greek term, to be understood as the spoken word with its meaning, or rational content. As such it is distinguished from speech (*lalia*). “Why do you not understand my *lalia* (speech or manner of speaking)? asks Jesus of the Jews (8:43), and replies, “because you cannot hear my *logos*. Thus to ‘hear the word’ is not simply to receive with the sense of hearing a connected series of sounds, but to apprehend the meaning which those sounds convey—much as a Hermetic writer says that all men of every nation have one *logos*, whether they be Greeks, Egyptians or Persians (or Africans emphasis mine), though their sound differs.¹² Thus the *logos* of Christ is the sum total of his spoken words, regarded as containing his thought or meaning, but his uttered words, nevertheless, as is shown by the fact that what is said of his *logos* can also be said of his sayings. Compare, for example, John 8:31 “If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples” with 15:7 “If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask for whatever you wish, and it will be done for you”.

It is clear that for the evangelist the uttered words of Christ, constituting his *logos*, his total message to the world, are in a specific sense a life-giving power,¹³ and the medium through which He gives Himself to men. We may probably trace here something of the Hebraic conception of the word as having in some sort a substantive existence and a power of its own. When Yahweh, for instance, commissioned the prophet Jeremiah “to pluck up and to pull down, to destroy and to overthrow, to build and to plant”, the prophet had only one instrument: the prophetic word which he learned to speak, though he was a child (Jer 1:6-10). This seems to be the experience with Moses (Exod 4:10-17; 6:10-13) who existed before Jeremiah as well as the other OT prophets. Isaiah, for instance, was sent to employ the prophetic word to ‘blind’ the eyes, ‘deafen’ the ears and ‘make dull’ the hearts of the people (Isa 6:10-13). Okure, rightly, observed that “no word is ever neutral to the recipient, much less God’s word. Whether one receives it positively or negatively, one cannot but be affected by it; ignoring it is still a response; and in such cases word becomes a judgment. This is particularly true of God’s word”.¹⁴

Finally *logos* is employed of the ‘Word of God’, that is, His self-revelation to men. In accordance with Jewish tradition, adopted by the Christian Church in general, this is conceived as embodied in the Old Testament. Thus in John 10:34-35; Jesus quotes from Ps 81(82):6 “I say, You are gods, children of the

¹¹ In the original Greek the term employed is *logos*. The Latin Vulgate speaks of *verbum* which is also good.

¹² Cf. Dodd. xii. 12-13

¹³ Cf. Okure, *Alive and Active*, 4, where he says that “Word has the power to destroy, blame, generate quarrels and fights or to build, celebrate, affirm, console, instruct and praise”

¹⁴ Okure, *Alive and Active*, 4.

Most High, all of you”; and comments by saying he called them gods: “If those to whom the word of God came”. A similar idea is implied in 5:37-8 “And the Father who sent me has himself testified on my behalf. You have never heard his voice or seen his form, and you do not have his word abiding in you, for you do not believe him whom he has sent”. We might paraphrase thus:

“God bears witness to me. True, God has not a voice to be heard, any more than He has a form to be seen; nevertheless there is such a thing as the Word of God. You believe that you have that word in the Scriptures, and you study them in the hope that they will give you that knowledge of God which is eternal life. But you fail to understand their true purport, which would point you to me as the real mediator of eternal life. That shows that though the *words* of Scripture are in your minds, the *logos* of God, which they embody, is not a power in you”.¹⁵

The established distinction is suggested between sound, and word. God has, unlike men, no sound, or at any rate none which can be heard by men.¹⁶ But He has a *logos*, which can be recognized in the Scriptures by those who have it abiding in them. But in a more profound and ultimate sense the Word of God is to be found in the *logos* of Christ: ‘the word which you hear is not my word, but the one who sent me. So in 17:14 Jesus says, “I have given them your word”. He adds, in 17:17, “your word is truth”. Thus the *logos* of Christ is the *logos* of God, and that is truth, the ultimate reality revealed. *Logos* is clearly the content of Christ’s teaching, the thought or meaning it conveys, and not merely the utterance.

We conclude that, along with other quite ordinary uses of the term, the Fourth Evangelist employs the term *logos* in a special sense, to denote the eternal truth revealed to men by God. This truth as expressed in words, whether they be the words of Scripture or, more especially, the words of Christ. *Logos* in this sense is distinguished from speech and sound,. The divine *logos* is not simply the uttered words. It *is truth*.

In the prologue (1:1-18) Christ is this divine *Logos*. Christ utters the *logos* which the Father has “given” Him, and so “gives” it to men to be a power unto life. But in view of the equation of the divine *logos* with truth, it is significant that Christ says, in John 14:6 I am the truth. He not only “gives” the word which is truth, He is the truth, just as He not only gives life, but *is* life. This is admirably illustrated in the discourse of chapter 6. There Christ gives the bread of life, but He *is* the bread; and His comment on this is, “The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life” (6:63). All that Christ is, is in His words, and He is the truth and the life. It is only a step from that to say, He is the *Logos*. This step is taken in the Prologue.

The high point is reached in the affirmation: “the Word was God”. Nothing higher could be said. All that may be said about God may fitly be said about the Word. The author is affirming that he is God.¹⁷ He lays it down unequivocally that nothing less than God will do for our understanding of the Word. John intends that the whole of his Gospel shall be read in the light of this verse. The deeds and words of Jesus are the deeds and words of God; if this be not true the book is blasphemous.¹⁸ This is the theme that will be echoed throughout the Gospel. He is the greatest of all people. He is the Messiah of Jewish expectation; but more (this is John’s unique message), Jesus is the Son of God, the divine Messenger from the Father. Any reading of the Fourth Gospel that omits this supreme and ultimate claim for Jesus misses its central affirmation.

The Power of the *Logos* in Giving Life

¹⁵ Cf. Dodd, *The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel*, 266.

¹⁶ The voice from heaven of 12:28 (which is understood by the hearers to be either a thunder-clap or the voice of an angel) is to be understood in the light of the rabbinic belief in the *bat qôl*. This is described as an echo of the heavenly speech; that is to say, it is not the voice of God, but represents the word of God. See S.-B. on Matt 3,17; similarly Judaism 1, 421sq.

¹⁷ Cf. E. M. Sidebottom, “One cannot help feeling that the tendency to write.....” cited in Morris, *The Gospel according to John* (ICNT; Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1971) 77.

¹⁸ Cf. C. K. Barrett, *The Gospel according to John: An Introduction with Commentary and Notes on the Greek Text* (London: SPCK, 1970) 130.

to a Dead Man (John 11:1-44)

In chapter 11, we cross an important literary divide in this Gospel. Here Eternal *Logos* makes his final move to the region of Jerusalem by coming to the village of Bethany (a short from Jerusalem) to attend to his friend Lazarus. Here we read the story of the most dramatic, provocative sign in the Fourth Gospel. Jesus is master of life and death and proves it by bringing Lazarus from the grave. The Lazarus story is a story about one man whom Jesus liberates from the grave; but it is also a parabolic story, informing us far more about Jesus, his power, and his upcoming experience in the grave.¹⁹

This chapter 11 has provoked numerous scholarly criticisms over the years, but it is not within the scope of this work to address them here. Objections have been raised, for instance, against the absolute enormity of the miracle itself. This is clearly Jesus' most dramatic sign. Scholars who have difficulty with the miraculous will see themselves stumbling here. However, John's entire theology aims to state that God has indeed intervened in the history of the world. An incarnational theology at once makes room for a narration like this, in which this God who comes into history has power over the natural human processes over which he is the master through his spoken word.

Similarly, some other scholars have posited that this story is clearly a reworking of the Lazarus parable of Luke 16:19-31. True, both stories employ the same name and center on a resurrection motif. But actors in Jesus' Synoptic parables generally remain anonymous, and in this case the parallels between the two accounts are limited.²⁰ The name of Lazarus was common in the first century (as can be attested from both literary and archaeological findings). Furthermore, the two stories serve different purposes. The Lazarus parable in Luke is an exhortation to obey the words of the prophets; while the Lazarus sign²¹ in John point to Jesus' lordship (the Incarnate Word) over the grave.

In John 11:1-41 we have a compact periscope which has the aspect of a single continuous narrative – the longest in this gospel outside the Passion narrative. The narration commences, “Now a certain man was ill”, and ends with the restoration of the sick man, who meantime has died and been buried.²² The story is told with a peculiar elaboration of events. No separate discourse is annexed; after 11:44 we pass, through a short connecting link, to a different scene. On examination, however, the *pericope* 11:1-44 is found to contain a large proportion of discourse, in the form of dialogue, in which the interlocutors, apart from Jesus, are Mary, Martha and Thomas, as well as the messengers from Bethany, the disciples in a body, and the ‘Jews’ who serve as chorus and comment on the action.²³ The lively interchange of dialogue, which is characteristic of John's style, runs through the entire *pericope*. Hence, it is diffused through with the distinctive ideas of Johannine theology, as they appear in discourse and dialogue throughout the gospel.

The double themes, those of life and light, dominate the Book of Signs.²⁴ The present episode is wholly concerned with the theme of life. In the programmatic discourse of John 5:19-47 (where the activity of the Father in the Son is characterized as consisting of Life and Judgment), the work of Life is shown in two stages; or on two levels. First, to hear and believe the word of Christ is to possess eternal life; it is to have passed from death to life. In that sense the time is coming *and now is* when the dead will hear the

¹⁹ Cf. G. M. Burge, *John: Application Commentary* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2000) 311.

²⁰ Lazarus “from Bethany” named here is a specific as “Philip from Bethsaida”, whom we met in 1:44, or “Judas Iscariot” (meaning “Judas, man from Keriath” 6:71)

²¹ Often miracles in John are called “signs” since they point to Jesus as the Eternal and Incarnate Word of the Father.

²² Such manner of narration is quite normal to a healing-pericope. Compare Mark 1:23; 3:1, with some additional details about the sick person (See Mark 10:46). The story ends after the restoration of the patient, with a note of the effect on spectators, and some indication of the remoter results (John 11:45; compare Mark 1:27; 2:12; 5:42; 7:37; Luke 7:16). What I am indicating is that this exceedingly long periscope, therefore, has traces of the convention.

²³ Cf. C. H. Dodd, *Historical Tradition in the Fourth Gospel* (Cambridge: University Press) 228.

²⁴ Scholars have been quick to note these divisions and label them. Chapters 1-12 are called the “Book of Signs” since they record Jesus' numerous revelatory miracles. Chapters 13-21 (uniting the Upper Room and Passion sections) are called the “Book of Glory”, since on the cross Jesus is glorified (13:31).

voice of the Son of God and come to life (John 5:24-5). Secondly, the time is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear His voice and come out (John 5:28-9). With this we may compare John 6:54, which also moves in two stages or on two levels: “He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood possesses eternal life, and I will raise him on the last day”.

The discourse of chapter 11 plainly returns to this line of thought, and once again we identify the two stages, or levels, upon which it moves. “He who believes in me, even if he dies, will come to life, and everyone who is alive and believes in me will never die” (John 11:25-6). *Prima facie*, all these passages affirm, first, that eternal life may be enjoyed here and now by those who respond to the “word of Christ”, and, secondly, that the same power which assures eternal life to believers during their earthly existence will, after the death of the body, raise the dead to renewed existence in a world beyond. In John 5:24-9 this final resurrection is associated not only with eternal life but also with judgment (5:27), but in the present passage the theme of judgment is not in view.

The regulative idea is that the word of Christ, and indeed Christ Himself who is the Word of God is the Life on both levels. In John 11:23-6 this idea is set in contrast with the current belief in resurrection “on the last day”: set in contrast, for it seems that Martha is here playing the normal part ascribed to interlocutors in Johannine dialogues; she is misunderstanding a saying of Jesus to open the way to further explication. “I know he will rise again on the last day”, says Martha. “I am the resurrection and the life”, is the reply. In other words, whether the gift of eternal life is conceived as a present and continuing possession (“he who is alive and has faith in me will never die”), or as a recovery of life after death of the body at the end of this world (“even if he dies he will come to life”), the thing that matters is that life is the gift of Christ-and Christ’s gift to men, we know, is Himself (John 6:51).

If it is true that in Jesus the power of resurrection life is present in Bethany, the logical implication is that this may lead to something for Lazarus. Lazarus’ resurrection becomes a proof of Jesus’ word. At this point – however – Martha cannot draw this conclusion directly. Her declaration (11:27) demonstrates that she is following Jesus’ reasoning. She says “yes” when unquestionably the implications of this “yes” are beyond her understanding. She is trusting in Jesus’ power as a personal commitment, but she is also ready to make cognitive commitment to who Jesus must be.²⁵ If he (Jesus) has this kind of authority, by extension he must also be the “Christ (the Messiah), the Son of God, the *Logos*” whom Judaism sought on its future horizon.

The dramatic high point of the narration is attained in 11:43 when Jesus calls to Lazarus “in a loud voice” to come out. This is not a whisper or a firm request. It is a shout of raw authority. The Greek verb *kraugazo* is employed six times in John – in addition to here, once for the crowds on Palm Sunday (12:13) and four times for the cries of the crowds calling for Jesus’ crucifixion (18:40; 19:6, 12, 15). When Lazarus emerges from the tomb, he is bound in grave wrappings, which were strips of fabric wound around his limbs and filled with burial spices. Jewish burials likewise tied the jaw closed and covered the face with a linen cloth.²⁶

Lazarus’s coming from the grave on account of the word of the *Logos* must have been an amazing spectacle witnessed by a growing crowd of people, many of whom take news of this sign back to Jerusalem (12:9, 17). Lazarus stands before the Incarnate Word wrapped tightly. Jesus is no doubt talking to him (what does he say?), and the crowd obviously shrinks back in awe. Jewish superstitions took great interest in cemeteries (as do most cultures), and strict ritual laws of purification (clean/unclean) were attached to dead bodies. Should anyone come near the man? Martha? Mary? Jesus loved Lazarus, and it is not far to imagine him (Jesus) being the first to embrace his friend. Jesus had a reputation for touching those deemed “untouchable” (Matt 8,3; 9:20), and while the text is silent, such an embrace here would have left the crowd stunned. Jesus remains in command and issues a word (*logos*) that someone unbind him (11:44).

Are we then to conclude that the Raising of Lazarus is given as a sample fulfillment of the prediction in John 5:28? In a sense it is so. Any moment in which Christ presents an action, a sign of His divine functions of Life and Judgment is, in some sense, the destined hour of his manifestation. At Cana,

²⁵ Cf. Burge, *John*, 317.

²⁶ Often one discovers that coins had been placed on the eyes of buried first-century Jews.

when Mary intervened, his hour had not yet come (John 2:4); but when he showed his glory in turning water into wine (John 2:11), it had, in some sense, come. Likewise, when Jesus was in hiding in Galilee, his ‘appointed hour’ was not yet present (John 7:6), but when at the Feast of Tabernacles He declared himself the source of light and of living water it was, in some sense, present.

A certain resemblance of structure in the Lazarus’ story would indicate that when Jesus delayed in Trans-Jordan, his time was not yet, but the moment when the dead heard his voice and came out was the appointed time in which His glory was manifested, and so, in some sense, a fulfillment of the prediction, ‘there will be a time when all who are in the tomb will hear his voice’, or at least a first part of the fulfillment. But it now becomes important to ask, in what sense the resurrection of which John 5:28-9 speaks is final? Of those who thus come out of the tombs at the voice of the Son of God to “the resurrection of life” it must plainly be understood that they die no more.

But the man Lazarus, upon the level of events in time on which the story moves, will die again when his time comes. If therefore his resurrection is, in some sense, a fulfillment of the prediction in John 5:28-9, it must be in a symbolical sense. Not the raising of Lazarus, as sign, is the fulfillment, but that which the sign signifies.²⁷ Now the resurrection to which John 5:28-9 alludes to is the general resurrection “on the last day” (cf. John 6:54 “Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood have eternal life, and I will raise them up on the last day”); but the raising of Lazarus is put in contrast with the resurrection on the last day, to which Martha, the sister of the dead man, had pinned her faith. It appears we might argue in this way: the evangelist has taken an event associated with the “last day”, and transferred it into the historic ministry of Jesus, thus making of it a “sign” of the Life which that ministry (when consummated) brought into effect.²⁸ The implication is that the absoluteness and finality which belongs to the resurrection on the last day belong also to the Life which Christ has effected. We might go so far as to say that if it were possible for us to contemplate the resurrection on the last day as a *fait accompli*, it would still be, as is the Raising of Lazarus, no more than a sign of the truth that Christ is Himself both resurrection and life – the giver of life and the conqueror of death; and this truth was as certain, as potent, and, for those who could ‘behold his glory’, as manifest in his historical activity and its consequences as it ever will be.

If something like this is the intention of the evangelist, we may say that the sign of the Raising of Lazarus adds to the presentation of Jesus, God’s Word Incarnate as giver of life, which has already taken such varied forms of expression, this especial new element: that the gift of life is here presented expressly as victory over death. This indeed is one of the functions of the Word of God, who is Jesus Christ par excellence, God and Man. “The Son is the Eternal Word, ever-present in God, because he himself is God”.²⁹

Conclusion

John 11 touches on the themes that are immediately relevant to the modern mind. Every age struggles with the finality of the grave and the incomprehensibility of death. Throughout history societies have surrounded death and burial sites with mystery and superstition, and this is no less true of our modern society. However, through the word uttered by the Incarnate *Logos*, the meaning of all this changes.

Indeed, from the above study we have seen this dynamic character of word (*logos*) from different perspectives: both from the side of God and from the side of human beings, since human beings created in God’s image and likeness share with God the power which word has to convey and call for a response.³⁰ Word is a medium of communication. Primarily what matters most is what the word communicates and the response it demands. Therefore, word should not be an end in itself. This is the case with our

²⁷ Cf. Dodd, *The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel*, 366.

²⁸ Cf. Dodd, *The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel*, 366.

²⁹ Cf. *Instrumentum laboris* of the XII Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops on the “Word of God in the Life and Mission of the Church”, 4. Jesus Christ Himself is the Life and Mission of the Church.

³⁰ Cf. Okure, *Alive and Active*, 16.

understanding of the Scripture as God's inspired word par excellence.

Jesus, God-Word Incarnate holds for us the fullest and truest key for understanding the Scripture.³¹ The power of the spoken word is seen in the dialogue between Jesus, God's Word Incarnate³² and a dead man. It seems clear, therefore, that the desired effect of a spoken word cannot be under-estimated, since the word has the power to destroy and build. The Word also has a power to raise. This theme is elaborated in the dialogue between Jesus, God-Word Incarnate and the sisters of the dead Lazarus, as well as in the significant narrative of the raising of the dead. The Word of God, Jesus Christ Himself, transforms the lives of those who approach him in faith. The Word never fails. This is very evident in the raising of Lazarus.

³¹ Cf. Okure, *Alive and Active*, 16.

³² Who is the "Way, the Truth and the Life" John 14:6.