

## J. Thomaskutty

Prof. J. Thomaskutty,  
Department of New Testament,  
The United Theological College,  
Bangalore, India; Research  
Associate, Department of  
New Testament and Related  
Literature, Faculty of Theology  
and Religion, University of  
Pretoria, South Africa.  
E-mail: [jesusandjohnson@gmail.com](mailto:jesusandjohnson@gmail.com)  
ORCID: <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-0502-8411>

**DOI:** <http://dx.doi.org/10.18820/23099089/actat.v42i1.9>

**ISSN:** 1015-8758 (Print)

**ISSN:** 2309-9089 (Online)

**Acta Theologica 2022**  
42(1):139-157

**Date received:**  
19 October 2021

**Date accepted:**  
10 March 2022

**Date published:**  
24 June 2022



Published by the UFS  
<http://journals.ufs.ac.za/index.php/at>

© Creative Commons  
With Attribution (CC-BY)



# Reading John 11:1-45 from a post-normal times perspective

## ABSTRACT

*This article re-reads John 11:1-45 in light of post-normal times. It analyses aspects such as 4Ss, 3Cs, and 3Ts, in order to expound on the Johannine community situation and to understand the paradigmatic significance of John's narrative artistry within the contemporary context. The study elaborates on the speed with which the narrative develops from John 11:1-45; the scope of the story that extends from the local Bethany to universal realities; the scale of the story, as it changes directly between both the local and global situations, and the simultaneity of the event, as it initiates multiple interactions within the macro-narrative framework. The article attempts to explore the complexities, chaotic situations, and contradictions embedded within the narrative master plan of the story. In order to suggest a new way forward, the narrator develops her/his arguments by focusing on the three tomorrows of the story, as s/he provides several narrative clues about the extended present, the familiar futures, and the unthought futures. Using hope as a significant hermeneutic key within the Johannine community context, the narrator elaborates on the community's attempts to reframe their faith and praxes and their aspirations to embrace a new normal situation. The article concludes that the Johannine experience of a post-normal situation and the hope for a new normal can be considered a hermeneutic paradigm in the contemporary global scenario.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Post-normal times (PNT) is a concept developed by Ziauddin Sardar with influences from post-normal science (PNS) (Ravetz & Funtowics

1999:641-646; Ravetz 1993:735-755).<sup>1</sup> The expression “post-normal” was first used by Ravetz, a celebrated British philosopher of science, and Funtowicz, an Argentinean mathematician (Sardar 2010:435-444).<sup>2</sup> Sardar (2010:435) explains:

Much of what Ravetz and Funtowicz said about science in the 1990s [is] now equally true about other disciplines – indeed, society as a whole. Everything from economics to international relations, markets to products in local shops, politics to dissent has become postnormal.

Post-normal does not exclude the discipline of Biblical Interpretation and Theology *per se* from its influences. We are stepping into a new world and, hence, our mode of biblical interpretation takes a new turn, in which settings, themes, characters, points of view, and plot structures embrace post-normal axioms. Sardar (2010:435) states:

We will have to imagine ourselves out of postnormal times and into a new age of normalcy – with an ethical compass and a broad spectrum of imaginations from the rich diversity of human cultures.

Sardar attempts to suggest a distinction between normal period, post-normal period, and new age of normalcy (Kapoor 2011:216-220).<sup>3</sup> Sardar (2010:435-444) is hopeful about a new normalcy:

The intellectuals, opinion-makers, and leaders of the world have to exercise their ethical responsibility and creative imagination to enable this new normalcy to emerge.

This framework is very important as we interpret the Scripture during PNT.

PNT introduces novelty in our rapidly changing world, but at the same time a sense of ignorance and uncertainty about the future prevails. We are in a transitional or liminal position. We can neither return to any known past nor hope for a desirable future (Sardar 2010:1). Placed within the PNT context, we

---

1 “Whenever there is a policy issue involving science, we discover that facts are uncertain, complexity is the norm, values are in dispute, stakes are high, decisions are urgent and there is a real danger of man-made risks running out of control.” (Ravetz & Funtowics 1999:641).

2 Sardar (2010:435) describes the present as “postnormal times, in an in-between period where old orthodoxies are dying, new ones have yet to be born, and very few things seem to make sense”.

3 Kapoor (2011:216) critiques Sardar’s theory: “Ziauddin Sardar’s characterization of ‘postnormal times’ elegantly captures the mood of despair, uncertainty and insecurity in the West due to the multiple shocks of terrorism, economic recession and climate change. However, the prevailing mood in India, most of Asia and developing countries in general is confidence and optimism for the future.”

are expected to implement new models of biblical interpretation that consider a rapidly changing period in human history. In this article, John 11:1-45 is chosen as a sample text to address the PTN situation and to develop a contextual hermeneutic spectrum. The article argues that the entire Fourth Gospel reflects post-normal situations of the Johannine community, with a rapid pace from John 11:1-45. The article makes use of polyvalent literary and narrative aspects of the text (Gowler 2000:443; Thomaskutty 2015:19-26; Anderson 2008:93-120),<sup>4</sup> and adopts the PNT theories developed by Sardar and Sweeney (Sardar 2010:435-444; Sardar & Sweeney 2016:1-13). It aims to frame a theory of hermeneutics to meet the new demands introduced by the PNT context; understand John 11:1-45 both within the larger framework of the Fourth Gospel and in relation to the existing PNT realities, and develop a new way forward in biblical interpretation in our “in-between” period.

## 2. THE 4Ss, 3Cs, AND 3Ts OF THE NARRATIVE

The paradigms of PNT mostly deal with the temporal and spatial realities of human struggles. Within its hypothetical framework, some of the well-known alliterations such as the 4Ss (speed, scope, scale, and simultaneity), the 3Cs (complexity, chaos, and contradictions), and the 3Ts (extended present, familiar futures, and unthought futures) are noteworthy. The Johannine story world and the post-normal social dynamics are combined to reframe our faith and praxes with a renewed interest. The Johannine community experienced a post-normal situation through the incarnation of the Word, belief in the Son of Man, signs in the community, and expulsion from the Synagogue in the first half of the gospel. The event of Lazarus' resurrection accelerates the pace of post-normality to the next level. In our rapidly changing and liminal world, the story of Martha, Mary, and Lazarus in John 11:1-45 enables us to foreground a new way forward for our spiritual and social existence. A crosspollination of ideas between the life of the Johannine community and the people's existential struggles in PNT within the present context provide a wider spectrum of understanding that complements each other and leads us further to a “third space” in our interpretative engagements (Soja 1996).<sup>5</sup> We note how the 4Ss, the 3Cs, and the 3Ts are instrumental in developing a new hermeneutics in the contemporary scenario.

---

4 Gowler (2000:443) calls this method a heteroglossia, a term used by Michael Bakhtin to mean “the dynamic interaction of a number of voices, ideologies, and positions, but none of them in pre-eminent, none rules or controls the others”.

5 The German word *Sitz im Leben* means the social context or life setting in which a narrative emerged.

## 2.1 The 4Ss of the narrative

The 4Ss (speed, scope, scale, and simultaneity) set the stage for PNT. Within our context, the movements are faster, from a period of acceleration to acceleration of acceleration.<sup>6</sup> The globe is a village; hence, the scope is universal. A virus from a smaller village affects the globe as a pandemic. This shows how the notion of scale is shrinking. Simultaneity is on the increase; when something happens, it affects the other happenings.<sup>7</sup> The PNT's 4S dynamism can be understood well within the episodic framework of John 11:1-45.

### 2.1.1 Speed

The speed of the Johannine narrative is comparatively much faster and even unpredictable when it accelerates from the events in the first half (1:1-12:50) to the movements in the second half of the Gospel (13:1-21:25).<sup>8</sup> As the glory of Jesus/God is the expected goal in the second half of the Gospel, the narrator prepares the implied reader for that goal, by placing the event of Martha, Mary, and Lazarus at a strategic juncture (11:1-45) (Thomaskutty 2015:368-404). The death and raising of Lazarus are presented towards the end of the Book of Signs to introduce a narrative turn and dramatic attunement to the Book of Glory. By placing the event in 11:1-45, the narrator turns the events from "people's story" in the first half to "Jesus' story" in the second half of the Gospel (Zimmerman 2008:75-101, 82).<sup>9</sup> According to Hanson (2013:69), "[t]he Lazarus story is one of the best examples of dramatic narrative time". While the events described in the first half extend over a period of two and a half years, the events in the second half focus on a mere 24 hours (Estes 2016:57).<sup>10</sup> In order to rapidly accelerate the events, the story of Lazarus is positioned at a critical point with a rhetorical punch (Stibbe 1992:67-84). Although post-normality is already in view in the first half of the Gospel, the event in 11:1-45 further accelerates its pace.

6 See <https://postnormaltim.es/essentials/4-ss> [4 September 2021].

7 See <https://postnormaltim.es/essentials/4-ss> [4 September 2021].

8 In the article, the *speed* of the narrative events focuses on Jesus' death and resurrection. Lazarus' death and raising within the local Bethany context is used as an indication of Jesus' death and resurrection. As there is an exclusive focus on death and glorification, the speed of the events increases comparatively.

9 In the overall movement and tone of events, Jesus' utterances almost always maintain an illocutionary force. They are forceful, forward-looking, target-oriented, and promise-and-fulfilment developmental within the episode. These aspects together draw the reader's attention to the rapidly moving drama in the second half of the Gospel.

10 Estes (2016:57) comments: "Without a 'calendar' or a 'watch' to measure time, the Fourth Gospel does what other premodern narratives do: it tells its story in the way that seems best to convey the truth of the story to its readers. John may seem 'out of time' to modern readers, but this is only because John is 'in time' with itself."

The glory of the Son of Man is a continuous theme in the Fourth Gospel.<sup>11</sup> As the glory of God is ultimately revealed through the death and resurrection of Jesus, the event of Lazarus brings the reader's focus on track thereafter (Blomberg 2009:116).<sup>12</sup> The hour of Jesus is a mystery until Lazarus' raising (see 2:4; 4:21, 23; 5:25, 28, 29; 7:6, 30; 8:20). In chapter 12, however, Jesus proclaims for the first time that "the hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified" (12:23, 27; see also 13:1). After the event in 11:1-45, the narrator takes an altogether different pace of events as s/he tells about the death of Jesus (12:27-37a); uncovers the unbelief of the people (12:37b-43); explains the praxis of foot-washing that culminates in Jesus' own death (13:1-20), and showcases the farewell discourses (Chapters 13-17; Moloney 1998a/b:370-371). Everything comes together at a fast pace. Chapters 18-20 bring the readers to an exclusive focus on the cross of Jesus (Moloney 1998a/b:481-482). The episodic development based on people's story continues until the end of Chapter 11, and the narrator pinpoints the macro-story that takes central place. Hereafter, the pace of the events is unusual, as the narrator directs the reader from one death to another and from one raising to another. The narrator maintains a sudden unimaginable speed after Lazarus' death and raising.

### 2.1.2 Scope

The scope of the story grows from a local Bethany context to the wider regions of Israel, and to the universal spheres. While, in the first half of the Gospel, the events are highlighted mostly from the local standpoints with post-normal effects,<sup>13</sup> the story of Lazarus, in the second half, expands the scope to the gnomic and universal realities. The adjectival form of the word "gnomic" can mean "consisting of or using gnomes or aphorisms or sententious" (Hornby 2000). In the process of interpreting the Fourth Gospel, an interpreter can witness John the classicist who expresses his ideas in a gnomic and timeless way, in order to sustain its effect atemporally. This peculiar feature of the Gospel must be analysed with a renewed interest and for a universal interpretation. The PNT influence us to view the Johannine text with a sense of integration and convergence (Stibbe 1993:15-16). John's message cannot simply be viewed from a "there-and-then" perspective; rather, from the point of view of a "here-and-now" and "everywhere-and-ever" perspective. John includes a

11 See John 2:11; 5:41; 7:18; 8:50; 11:4, 40; 12:43; 17:5, 24.

12 According to Blomberg (2009:116), "[n]arrative [t]ime can play a significant role in indicating what is important to an author. Years may speed by in a matter of a few pages, whereas brief incidents may be narrated at great length."

13 See Jesus' local ministries in Cana (2:1-11; 4:46-54); Jerusalem (2:13-22; 3:1-21; 5:1-47; 7:10-10:42); the Judean countryside (3:22-36); Sychar in Samaria (4:1-45), and Galilee (6:1-71; 7:1-9).

mission agenda that is characterised as an all-inclusive and gnomic entity. Thus, there is a rapid and steady growth from the details to the universals.

Within the Johannine framework, the story of Lazarus functions as a trigger narrative that attunes the reader to the integrated whole of the Fourth Gospel. John 11:1-45 enables us to understand the individual event, by closely integrating a set of interdependent, interacting components and relationships.<sup>14</sup> This happens through several narrative hints and asides within the story:

- The message of the sisters, “Lord, he whom you love is ill” (v. 3), emphasises the theme of Jesus’ love throughout the Gospel (3:16; 5:20; 10:17; 11:36; 15:9, 12-13; 16:27; 17:23, 26; 19:26; Moloney 2013).
- Jesus’ statement, “This death does not lead to death ... so that the Son of God may be glorified through it” (v. 4), brings into focus the overarching theme of the second half of the Gospel, namely the glorification of the Son of Man/God (Moloney 1998a/b).
- Jesus’ statement, “Let us go to Judea again” (v. 7), draws the reader’s attention not only to the micro-level Lazarus story but also to the macro-level Jesus story, as the protagonist journeys to Jerusalem for the last time in the Gospel (Malina & Rohrbaugh 1998:195).
- Jesus’ poetical and metaphorical language throughout the Fourth Gospel shows his interest in the universals rather than in the contingent and parochial aspects (Koester 1995:2).
- Thomas’ proleptic statement in verse 16 turns the reader’s attention away from Lazarus’ death to Jesus’ universal death.
- Jesus’ metaphorical statement to Martha, “I am the resurrection and the life” (v. 25), again turns the attention away from Lazarus’ raising to Jesus’ resurrection (Beasley-Murray 1999:190-191).
- The plot to kill Jesus towards the end of the story (vv. 45-53) now focuses exclusively on Jesus’ death (Beasley-Murray 1999:196-199). Thus, the scope of the Johannine story shifts from the *epi*-centres to the *pan*-centres.

### 2.1.3 Scale

The scale of the narrative is reduced as the focus is now on Jesus’ death. While the events in the first half of the Gospel deal with Jesus’ involvement in the local human situations such as the wedding at Cana (2:1-11), the cleansing of the temple (2:13-22), the Nicodemus event (3:1-21), the woman

---

14 See <https://postnormaltim.es/what-postnormal-times> [19 September 2021].

at the well (4:1-26), the Royal man (4:46-54), the invalid person (5:1-18), the man born blind (9:1-41) and others, the event in Chapter 11 emerges from a local setting with a direct connection to the universal realities.<sup>15</sup> As the local, regional, and universal are integrated, the scale of the narrative is reduced to the main focus of the Gospel (Sardar 2010:435-444). An event in a village setting triggers the universal event; a local event is well aligned to set a stage for the universal event. Now the globe is the setting and Jesus' death on the cross is the focus. A sudden narrative shift from the story of Lazarus at a local level to the universal story of Jesus points towards a single direction away from multiple settings. The narrator's typical style of story-telling is exemplified in the opening statement: "now a certain man was ill, Lazarus of Bethany" (in other words, the diseased is introduced, 11:1a) and "the village of Mary and her sister Martha" (in other words, the setting and two significant characters are foregrounded, 11:1b) (Beasley-Murray 1999:184-187). This is a story-telling strategy as in the expression "once upon a time". The event of Lazarus' death and raising in a village setting is directly aligned with the event of Jesus' own death and resurrection. In this instance, the scale of narration between the two events is reduced to the wider purpose of the story.<sup>16</sup> Moreover, the local, regional, and universal are interlocked as a single whole.

#### 2.1.4 Simultaneity

The aspect of simultaneity is at the core of the Johannine narrative as Lazarus' death leads to Jesus' death, and Jesus' death leads to the death of those who follow the protagonist. The following aspects are important, in order to understand the simultaneous nature of John's story-telling strategy:

- Jesus gives life to a beloved one in a village setting and that ironically leads to the risk of his own life.
- Mary is introduced as "one who anointed the Lord with perfume and wiped his feet with her hair" (v. 2), a reference to the event in 12:1-11. The narrator connects the event of anointment with the death of Jesus, implying that "she bought it so that she might keep it for the day of the burial" (12:7; Malina & Rohrbaugh 1998:194).
- Jesus is introduced as "the good shepherd [who] lays down his life for the sheep" (10:11). Jesus demonstrates how the laying down of the protagonist's life happens in the family of Mary, Martha, and Lazarus. The death of Jesus on the cross underscores the protagonist's life-giving mission with universal implications (Malina & Rohrbaugh 1998:267-274).

15 The events in the first half of the Gospel share multiple settings and address several themes.

16 See <https://postnormaltim.es/essentials> [23 September 2021].

- The question of the Jews in verse 37, “Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?” draws the reader’s attention to an earlier event (see 9:1-41). While the trial of the man born blind in 9:1-41 is a shadow of Jesus’ upcoming trial (Chapters 18-19), the death and raising of Lazarus foreshadows Jesus’ death and resurrection (Moloney 1998:330-331).
- Thomas’ utterance, “Let us also go, that we may die with him” (v. 16), functions as another analepsis to the death of Jesus.
- Jesus’ prayer in verses 41b-42 is thematically and linguistically connected to the prayer in Chapter 17 (Moloney 1998:332-333, 342).
- Themes such as love (vv. 3b, 5, 36), glory (vv. 4, 40), persecution (v. 8), light (vv. 9-10), believing (vv. 15, 27, 40, 45), and resurrection (vv. 24-26, 43-44) are asides to align the event within the larger framework of the Gospel.

As *cause* and *effect* and *analepsis* and *prolepsis* are significant narrative features of the Lazarus story, the episode functions as a catalyst to prepare the reader for the future events and upcoming dialogues. Simultaneity is thus one of the significant phenomena within John’s narrative framework.

The 4Ss of the PNT function in a dynamic and persuasive manner within John’s narrative world. The narrator locates the story of Lazarus as a trigger narrative within the overall framework of the narrative. Essentials such as speed, scope, scale, and simultaneity are rhetorically presented, as the story moves from the post-normal situations in the first half to the rapid pace of the PNT in the second half of the Gospel.<sup>17</sup> Lazarus’ death and raising and the consequent death of Jesus on the cross introduce several new tendencies in the universal scenario. The narrator actualises all those aspects by introducing several ironical situations within the text such as the trial of an innocent person; the passion of the saviour of the world; death on the cross as glorification, and Jesus’ resurrection, even when the tomb was sealed (Duke 1985). These ironical situations in the *Sitz im Leben Jesu* are further reflected in the *Sitz im Leben Kirche*, as the Johannine community experienced a rapid pace of post-normal experiences. Jesus’ death on the cross led to many issues within the Johannine community context, such as identity crisis; expulsion from the synagogue; persecution; minority status, and marginality. The narrator keeps the story of Lazarus at a strategic position, in order to trigger the events thereafter with speed, scope, scale, and simultaneity.

---

17 See <https://postnormaltim.es/essentials> [24 September 2021].



## 2.2 The 3Cs of the narrative

At the heart of the PNT theory, one finds the 3Cs: *complexity*, *chaos*, and *contradictions*.<sup>18</sup> While the 4Ss provide a measuring rod for analysing the height, depth, length, and width of the post-normal situation, the 3Cs enable us to understand the crisis situation and the realisms of the *Sitz im Leben post-normal*. At this level, the focus is on broken orthodoxies, plurality of views, and human vulnerabilities.

First, the post-normal situation is characterised by its *complex* nature, due to the existence of multiple voices and plural realities. Sardar (2010:3) comments:

There is no single model of behavior, mode of thought, or method that can provide an answer to all our interconnected, complex ills.

Similarly, complexity prevails throughout the Johannine story world. In John 11:1-45, the *Sitz im Leben Lazarus*, the *Sitz im Leben Jesu* and the *Sitz im Leben Kirche* are intertwined (Martyn 1968). The dynamic nature of the story world is shown as follows: everything that happens in the local level affects the universal aspects and everything universal is interconnected to the local affairs (Thomaskutty 2000:88-91). It is impossible to differentiate between the universal story of Jesus, the regional story of the Johannine community, and the local story of Martha, Mary, and Lazarus, as the Johannine story world cross-pollinates several levels of dramas into one single whole (Anderson 2008:93-120). The narrator attempts to translate the complexities in the Johannine community situation in a dynamic way. In John 11:1-45, several models of behaviour and modes of thought intertwine, as the voices and the perspectives of God (vv. 41-42); Jesus (vv. 4, 7b, 9-11, 14, 23, 25-26, 34a, 39a, 40-42, 43b, 44b); the disciples (vv. 8, 12, 16); the family members of Lazarus (vv. 3, 21-22, 24, 27-37, 39); the Jews (vv. 31, 34-37), and the narrator (vv. 1-2, 5-6, 17-20) are simultaneously independent and coalescent. As a minority community and a marginal group, John's church faced various ideological and existential struggles within a post-resurrection and post-normal context. Using a multidimensional drama, the narrator foregrounds the prevailing complexities and crises situations in the Johannine community in a dynamic way (Anderson 2007:133-159).

Secondly, the complexities of the Johannine story further develop into several perplexities and into a *chaotic* situation. A *chaotic* situation can be observed when some of the socio-religious and cultural aspects are narrated within the framework of John. According to Sardar (2010:5), post-normal is "a complex, networked world, with countless competing interests and ideologies,

---

18 See <https://postnormaltim.es/essentials/3cs> [4 September 2021].

designs and desires, behaving chaotically". The chaos of the situation in John 11:1-45 can be outlined on the basis of several internal factors networked with various interests and designs, as follows:

- Jesus "went back across the Jordan" and his delay, while a loved one is ill and at the point of death (10:40; 11:6; Beasley-Murray 1999:178).
- The misunderstanding and unknowing nature of the disciples (vv. 7-16).
- While Jesus' own life is at risk, he shows his identity as a giver of life (v. 8; Brodie 1993:385).
- Although Jesus "walks by day", animosity prevails against the protagonist (vv. 9-10; MacGregor 1928:245-247).
- A division emerges among the disciples: while the eleven are in disagreement with Jesus, Thomas is the only one who agrees (vv. 8, 12-13, 16).
- A hopeless situation prevails: Lazarus is in the tomb for four days and there is an odour (v. 17; see 39b; Moloney 1987:327, 332).<sup>19</sup>
- The views of Jesus and Martha are in sharp conflict (vv. 24-26; Moloney 1987:328).
- Mary weeps, the Jews weep, and Jesus also weeps (vv. 33-35; Moloney 1987:330-331).
- A conflict arises among the Jews (vv. 36-37; Beasley-Murray 1999:194).

Ruiz (2021:61) comments:

The Gospel's 'us-against-them' rhetoric stems from the persecution, and even excommunication, leveled at Jesus followers by those Jews who were not.

John 11:1-45 explains how one chaos at a local level in Bethany leads to a massive chaos in the second half of the Gospel (see 11:49; Moloney 1987:334, 343).

Thirdly, the Fourth Gospel also shows some of the prevailing *contradictions* within the narrative world. According to Sardar (2010:5),

contradictions can come in various varieties: they can be complimentary, where the opposed forces are kept in dynamic equilibrium; or destructive, where the struggle leads to collapse; or creative, where the contradiction is resolved by transformation.

---

19 Moloney (1998a:327) mentions that "[t]he body would be in a state of advanced decay".

The inherent contradictions in John's narrative world reflect the following aspects: the contradictory forces are kept in a dynamic equilibrium as John's dualistic framework facilitates such a development (Sardar 2010:5); the reactions of the antagonists are evil and destructive, as they seek an opportunity to kill Jesus (5:18; 7:19-20, 25; 11:45-53; Moloney 1987:317-318), and the protagonist leads some of the antagonists towards transformation, while others remain in darkness and thus doomed to judgement. Contradictions are at the root of the Johannine narrative world, where the ideologies of the "world from above" and the "world from below" are in sharp contrast with one another. On the *macro*-level of the story, Jesus demonstrates the heavenly and remains the light of the world (1:5; 8:12; 9:5), whereas the Jews show their fleshly character and remain in darkness (1:5). John develops the contrasting ideologies within the framework of a synagogue-and-church conflict. The duel and fighting between Jesus and the Jews increase from John 11:45-53; 12:9-11 onwards.

After the Lazarus event, the 3Cs intensify, leading to uncertainties and ignorance (Sardar 2010:6). When the 3Cs are aligned within the purview of the 4Ss, the situation becomes unpredictable and challenging for human existence. The event of Lazarus' death and raising and the resultant popularity of Jesus culminate in a complex, chaotic, and contradictory situation where irregularities prevail and non-normals control everything. The irregularities and non-normals are obvious, as the religious, political, and judicial systems function haphazardly within both the *Sitz im Leben Jesu* and the *Sitz im Leben Kirche*.

## 2.3 The 3Ts of the narrative

The three tomorrows of PNT foresee the future amid complexities, chaos, and contradictions. Changes always happen and have happened in human history, but during PNT, changes are unpredictable, all-encompassing, simultaneous, connected, and interconnected (Sardar & Sweeney 2016:1-13).

Nowadays everything is changing at an accelerating pace on a variety of scales: social, political, cultural, technological, including geologic, as the emergence of Anthropocene or the more radical concept of the Technopocene suggests (Sardar & Sweeney 2016:1).<sup>20</sup>

---

20 *Anthropocene* is "used to describe the most recent period in Earth's history when human activity started to have a significant impact on the planet's climate and ecosystem". See <https://www.nationalgeographic.org/encyclopedia/anthropocene/> [19 September 2021]. *Technopocene* refers to "technology's transformation of people, products and brands". See <https://www.marketresearch.com/EmeraldGroup-Publishing-Limited-v2733/Technopocene-Technology-Transformation-People-Products-10335385/> [19 September 2021].

Rather than monologues and dialogues, polylogues are on an increase, as there are “multiple logics, speeches, and existences” (Sardar & Sweeney 2016:3; Kristeva 1977). Even in the midst of all these, Sardar and Sweeney develop their imagination and creativity, by suggesting the progress and overlap of three futurologies: *extended present*, *familiar futures*, and *unthought futures*. The Johannine eschatology can fit very well within the 3Ts framework, as the Fourth Gospel demonstrates tenets of realised, realising, and proleptic eschatologies in 11:1-45 and the extended narratorial framework.

First, the *extended present* is present-continuous, as it demonstrates that the dynamic network consists of manufactured normalcy and systems (Sardar & Sweeney 2016:5). The present is complex, pluralistic, partly post-normal (already, but not yet) and horizontally examined realities. This phase of the future is populated with global, regional, and local realities. It is liminal between the “here and now” and the “hereafter” realities of human existence (Sardar & Sweeney 2016:5). The normal situations of human life such as illness and death are the focus in the Lazarus story (vv. 1-16). The human normals are expressed by the following narrative hints: the setting of the story delineates the existential time and space concerns (v. 1; Moloney 1987:324-325, 335-336); the movements and the emotions of the flesh and blood characters (for example, Mary and Martha, vv. 3, 20-27, 28-37); the realistic nature of the disciples who are in a fresh conversation with Jesus (vv. 7-16); the Jews who weep and console in the story (vv. 31a), and the overall characterisation of the episode dynamically align within the social norms of the day (Moloney 1987:324-335); the tomb of Lazarus and a stench in his body introduce another familiar situation (v. 39), and the bereavement scene in which Mary (v. 33), the Jews (v. 33) and Jesus (v. 35) weep shows the existential realities of human life (Thomaskutty 2015:391-397). An extended present unfolds when an unexpected immediate future is orchestrated by raising Lazarus from the dead (vv. 38-44). In the narrative, a normal present situation overlaps with an unexpected immediate future that brings awe among the people. The *extended present* in the event of Lazarus has a global, regional, and local impact as Jesus’ doing brought a post-normal change with pace in human culture (Sardar & Sweeney 2016:5).

Secondly, the *extended present* develops into the *familiar futures*. At this stage, the future is imaginable, based on the events in the extended present, within the horizon of human predicament, as well as explorative and challenging (Sardar & Sweeney 2016:6). The story of Lazarus invites the attention of the reader even beyond the extended present through several narratorial hints. The familiar futures of the story can be configured through polylogues within the *macro*-framework of John. Some of the narrative clues in 11:1-45 include the story of Lazarus as a *micro*-form that attunes to one

of the *macro*-themes of the Gospel, in other words, the glorification of God/ the Son of God (vv. 4, 40). Glorification is a *macro*-theme that seems to be related to the death of Jesus in the Gospel (at the *macro*-level) (11:1-45 and Chapters 18-20); the event of Lazarus draws the reader's attention to the familiar futures, as Jesus intends to go to an animosity-centred Jerusalem and Judea (10:31-39; 11:7-8), and Thomas' statement makes it obvious that Jesus goes to Jerusalem for his own death (v. 16; Thomaskutty 2018:21-26); Caiaphas' statement explains, on the one hand, that Lazarus' story was told at the extended present and, on the other, that it was instrumental in drawing the reader's attention to the familiar futures, resulting in the death of Jesus (11:45-53). Mary's anointment in 11:2 is another indication that she was embalming the body of Jesus beforehand (12:7-8; Beasley-Murray 1999:187). The narrative *analepsis* in the story of Lazarus draws the reader's attention to the *prolepsis* in Jesus' death and resurrection. The narrative clues in John 11:1-45 guide the reader toward the glorification of Jesus and the familiar futures in Chapters 18-20.

Thirdly, beyond the *familiar future(s)* lie the *unthought future(s)*.

The unthought future(s) is not unthinkable but rather a horizon where something always remains unthought, which is to say that it is populated with seemingly infinite alternative futures – each necessitating their own polylogue to begin to explore the divergent perspectives surrounding them (Sardar & Sweeney 2016:6).

The Lazarus episode provides the following hints for the unthought future(s): the theme of glory expressed in verses 4 and 40 does not simply rest within the limits of the *Sitz im Leben Lazarus* (in other words, the extended present), the *Sitz im Leben Jesu* and the *Sitz im Leben Kirche* (in other words, the familiar futures). Rather, it draws the reader's attention to the unthought futures, as the glory is destined for the transcendental realm of God (vv. 4, 40);<sup>21</sup> Jesus' utterance to Martha in verses 25-26 draws attention to the third futures:

I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die (Moloney 1987:328).

This is an indication of the unthought futures beyond the earthly spectrum. In Jesus' speech to Martha and in the protagonist's prayer, the unthought futures are indicated with expressions such as the glory of God (v. 40); Jesus' coming from and returning to the realm of God (vv. 41-42), and the sphere of God where the believing community will find their final solace (see 14:1-4; Moloney

21 The event of glorification cannot be limited to the spheres of *Sitz im Leben Lazarus*, *Sitz im Leben Jesu*, and *Sitz im Leben Kirche*. It also extends to the *Sitz im Leben Gott*.

1987:332-333). On the level of the unthought futures, the story draws the reader's attention beyond the *post-normal* to an infinite alternative future or a *new normal* context. A new normal is introduced as a future eschatological hope to the suffering, the dehumanised, and the marginalised sections of the Johannine community.

In PNT terms, the Fourth Gospel gives the reader a panoramic view of the future as the *extended present*, the *familiar futures*, and the *unthought futures* as part and parcel of the Johannine eschatological framework. Although uncertainties, polylogues, and ignorance prevail among the people concerning the future of the world, the Johannine story provides hope to the vulnerable sections of society, irrespective of the current odds. The PNT facilitates imagination and creativity among the readers to unlock the grand narratives of the Fourth Gospel in a people-friendly idiom (Sardar 2010:9).

### 3. A HERMENEUTIC BRIDGE BETWEEN THE TWO PNTs

The post-normal developments of the Johannine narrative can be considered a paradigm within contemporary local, national, and global contexts. As Sardar and Sweeney understand the post-normal context through the lenses of the 4Ss, 3Cs, and 3Ts, the story of Lazarus (11:1-45) at the *micro*-level and the Fourth Gospel at the *macro*-level provide several narratorial and ideological echoes for a reader during the current vulnerable and challenging times. The 4Ss in John's story persuade us to understand how the events progress beyond the limits of normalcy within the Johannine community context. The unusual and rapid *speed* at which things unfold from the first half to the second half of the Gospel, the expansion of the *scope* of the story world from the local Bethany to the universal realms, the way in which the *scale* of the story reduces directly between Bethany and the globe, and the *simultaneity* of the events within the narrative framework demonstrate how post-normal the events were in isolation and in integration. By considering all of this, a reader of the Fourth Gospel can facilitate a hermeneutic convergence between the PNT of the Johannine situation and the PNT of the contemporary scenario.

The 3Cs of the Johannine situation include: the *complexities* emerged from a plurality of thoughts, polylogues, as well as dependent and interdependent aspects; a *chaotic* situation developed out of the death of Lazarus (vv. 1-16); misunderstanding and unknowing among the disciples (vv. 7-16); division among the disciples (vv. 12-16); hopelessness during the four days of death and mourning (v. 39); Martha's conflict with Jesus' views (vv. 17-127); a massive weeping situation (vv. 31-35); arguments and division among the Jews (vv. 36-37), and a context of *contradiction* between the protagonist

and the antagonists that caused a life-threatening situation from the Lazarus episode onwards. A network of events created havoc in the local Bethany, causing issues in the life of Jesus and the Johannine community. Sardar (2010:1) states the following about the contemporary context:

All that was 'normal' has now evaporated; we have entered postnormal times, the in between period where old orthodoxies are dying, new ones have not yet emerged, and nothing really makes sense.

As Sardar considers this a *complex, chaotic, and contradictory* time, it has several resonances with the Johannine community experiences.

The 3Ts (*extended present, immediate futures, and unthought futures*) show that some of the futures extend from the "in-between" post-normal times to an upcoming new normal situation. Although Johannine scholars mostly focus on the vertical eschatological aspect, the new developments enable us to foresee the horizontal eschatological aspects of the Gospel. Just as the Johannine community was hopeful about an eschatological new normal to be freed from the turbulent post-normal situation, our contemporary experiences enable us to remain hopeful, even amid vulnerabilities and life-threatening realities. As a trigger narrative, the Lazarus episode persuades the reader to be optimistic about a pleasant tomorrow. Besides his vertical eschatology, John also has a progressive and horizontal eschatology that assures the community of a new normal experience in the future.

As the Johannine community developed a new hermeneutic paradigm during PNT, the contemporary realities invite a reader of the Fourth Gospel to develop a praxis-oriented and innovatively constructed hermeneutics that breathes life into human situations. By crossing the traditional boundaries of biblical hermeneutics, creating new contextual and ideological constellations, building polylogical relationships and connectivities, and rhetorising the discourse to a "third space", a reader of the Fourth Gospel can imaginatively and creatively construe multiple hermeneutic possibilities and paradigms within the contemporary context.

#### 4. CONCLUDING REMARKS

The post-normal situation persuades a reader of the Fourth Gospel to dynamically engage with, and creatively be involved in the life situations of the people. The 4Ss, the 3Cs and the 3Ts of the PNT invite us to reframe our faith and praxes with creativity within the present context. The story of Lazarus is rhetorically positioned as a trigger narrative to develop *speed, scope, scale, and simultaneity* of the Gospel in a rapid pace from the first half to the second half of the annals. The narrator employs this strategy to emphasise

a local, regional, and global dynamism in a persuasive manner. Some of the situational aspects such as *complexities*, *chaos*, and *contradictions* embedded in John 11:1-45 inform the reader how the story develops as a post-normal narrative masterpiece. The event in Bethany functions as a transitional episode to unfold the universal significance of Jesus' death and resurrection. The narrator also guides the reader towards a hopeful tomorrow as s/he demonstrates the *extended present*, *familiar futures*, and *unthought futures* with cause-and-effect progression, analeptic and proleptic dynamism, and local and universal narrative alignment. By making use of the available literary tools and rhetorical aspects, the narrator orchestrates the post-normal situation of the Johannine community with creativity for the reader. The post-normal experience of the Johannine community and their faith and praxes reflected in the context of Bethany and within the macro-framework of the Gospel can be considered a paradigm for the church in its contemporary struggles. As the narrator draws the reader's attention to a new normal situation within the Johannine community context, a contemporary reader of John can be hopeful about the unthought future(s) ahead of her/him. A new hermeneutics that considers post-normal life situations, the literary artistry of the current times, the pluralistic, polylogic, and complex contextual experiences, the paradigmatic Johannine situation, and a theology of hope derived from the Johannine community realities can offer a transformative and liberative message to the people within the contemporary context.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

ALLISON, JR., D.C.

1992. Eschatology. In: J.B. Green, S. McKnight & I.H. Marshall (eds), *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press), pp. 206-209.

ANDERSON, P.N.

2007. Bhaktin's dialogism and the corrective rhetoric of the Johannine misunderstanding dialogue: Exposing seven crises in the Johannine situation. In: R. Boer (ed.), *Bhaktin and genre theory in Biblical Studies* 63 (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, SBL 63), pp. 133-159.

2008. From one dialogue to another: Johannine polyvalence from origins to receptions. In: T. Thatcher & S.D. Moore (eds), *Anatomies of narrative criticism: The past, present, and futures of the Fourth Gospel as literature* (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press), pp. 93-120.

BEASLEY-MURRAY, G.R.

1999. *John*. 2<sup>nd</sup> edition. Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers. Word Biblical Commentary 36.



BLOMBERG, C.L.

2009. *Jesus and the Gospels: An introduction and survey*. 2<sup>nd</sup> edition. Nashville, TN: B&H Academic.

BRANT, J.-A.A.

2004. *Dialogue and drama: Elements of Greek tragedy in the Fourth Gospel*. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson.

BRODIE, T.L.

1993. *The Gospel according to John: A literary and theological commentary*. New York: Oxford University Press.

CARTER, W.

2008. *John and empire: Initial explorations*. London: T. & T. Clark.

DONHRING ANAL, H.

2020. *Ethics and Christology in John's Gospel*. Delhi: CWI.

DUKE, P.

1985. *Irony in the Fourth Gospel*. Atlanta, GA: John Knox.

ESTES, D.

2016. Time. In: D. Estes & R. Sheridan (eds), *How John works: Storytelling in the Fourth Gospel* (Atlanta, GA: SBL Press), pp. 57-65. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt1g69w8s>

GOWLER, D.B.

2000. Heteroglossic trends in Biblical Studies: Polyphonic dialogues or clanging cymbals? *Review and Expositor* 97: 443-466. <https://doi.org/10.1177/003463730009700405>

HANSON, M.S.

2013. *The new perspective on Mary and Martha*. Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock.

HORNBY, H.S.

2000. *Oxford Advanced learner's dictionary*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

KAPOOR, R.

2011. Is there a postnormal time? From the illusion of normalcy to the design for a new normalcy. *Futures* 43(2):216-220. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.futures.2010.10.012>

KOESTER, C.

1995. *Symbolism in the Fourth Gospel: Meaning, mystery, community*. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press.

KRISTEVA, J.

1977. *Polylogue*. Paris: Seuil. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1208274>

LAWRENCE, A.B.

2018. Polyvalent approach. *Approaches to the New Testament: A handbook for students and pastors*. Bengaluru: SAIACS: 428-430.

MACGREGOR, G.H.C.

1928. *The Gospel of John. Moffat New Testament Commentary*. London: Hodder & Stoughton.

MALINA, B.J. & ROHRBAUGH, R.L.

1998. *Social-science commentary on the Gospel of John*. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press.

MARTYN, J.L.

1968. *History and theology in the Fourth Gospel*. Nashville, TN: Abingdon.

MOLONEY, F. J.

1998a. *The Gospel of John*. Collegeville, PN: The Liturgical Press. Sacra Pagina 4.

1998b. *Glory not dishonor: Reading John 13-21*. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press.

2013. *Love in the Gospel of John: An exegetical, theological, and literary study*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic.

RAVETZ, J.R.

1993. Science for the post-normal age. *Futures* 25(7):735-755. [https://doi.org/10.1016/0016-3287\(93\)90022-L](https://doi.org/10.1016/0016-3287(93)90022-L)

RAVETZ, J.R. & FUNTOWICS, S.O.

1999. Post-normal, science: An insight now maturing. *Futures* 31(7):641-646. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0016-3287\(99\)00023-3](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0016-3287(99)00023-3)

RUIZ, G.A.

2021. Why is Pilate so afraid in John 19:8? Pilate's fear and the dynamics of power in John 18:18-19:16. In: L.R. Huber, S.E. Hulen & W.M. Wright IV (eds), *Narrative mode and theological claim in Johannine literature: Essays in honor of R. O'Day*. Atlanta, GA: SBL Press. <https://doi.org/10.2307/lj.ctv1wgvbk2.6>

SARDAR, Z.

2010. Welcome to postnormal times. *Futures* 42(5):435-444. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.futures.2009.11.028>

SARDAR, Z. & SWEENEY, J.A.

2016. The three tomorrows of postnormal times. *Futures* 75:1-13. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.futures.2015.10.004>

SOJA, E.W.

1996. *Third space: Journeys to Los Angeles and other real-and-imagined places*. Malden, MA: Wiley.

STIBBE, M.W.G.

1993. *John*. Sheffield: JSOT Press. Readings: A New Biblical Commentary.

1992. *John as storyteller: Narrative criticism and the Fourth Gospel*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511598111>

THOMASKUTTY, J.

2000. *The Gospel of John: A universalistic reading*. New Delhi: CWI.

2015. *Dialogue in the Book of Signs: A polyvalent analysis of John 1:19-12:50*. Leiden/Boston: Brill. BINS 136. <https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004301610>

2018. *Saint Thomas the Apostle: New Testament, apocrypha, and historical traditions*. London/New York: Bloomsbury/T. & T. Clark. T. & T. Clark Jewish and Christian Texts Series 25.

VAN DER WATT, J.G.

2007. "I am the Bread of Life: Imagery in John 6:32-51". *Acta Theologica* 27(2):186-204. <https://doi.org/10.4314/actat.v27i2.5506>

ZIMMERMANN, R.

2008. The narrative hermeneutics of John 11. Learning with Lazarus: How to understand death, life, and resurrection? In: C.R. Koester & R. Bieringer (eds), *Resurrection of Jesus in the Gospel of John* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck), pp. 75-101.

*Keywords*

*Trefwoorde*

Postnormal times

Postnormale tye

New normal

Nuwe normaal

John 11:1-45

Joh 11:1-45

Gospel of John

Evangelie volgens Johannes