“PRESENCE” METAPHORS: “LIGHT” IN THE GOSPEL OF JOHN

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DEDICATION

In honor of my brother, Mateo—one day we will dance again,
in that marvelous light.
The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.

—John 1:5
ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

“Presencing” Metaphors: “Light” in the Gospel of John

by

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In this project, I explore the ways in which the nature of metaphors rhetorically contributes to achieving a sense of “presence.” Using the metaphor “light” the Gospel of John as a case study, I argue that metaphors uniquely lend themselves to Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca’s theory through their appeal to the imagination and their aptitude to incite multiple meanings and associations at once.

First, I recount some of the key scholarship on metaphor to highlight some of the various forms and functions of metaphors. While traditionally metaphors were considered to be exclusively poetic, many scholars have demonstrated the ways they are essential and foundational to language. By connecting two previously unrelated terms, metaphors stimulate reason and imagination in the creation of a new meaning and a new way to conceive of a subject. I also evaluate how metaphors function in the Bible to comprehensibly depict a way of thinking of and experiencing the divine, continually making available the grounds for interpretation and belief.

Second, I describe Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca’s theory of presence, defined as the speaker’s ability to make the audience aware of something absent but essential to their argument. Then, I discuss the subsequent scholarship on presence that further examines the ways in which circumstances and stylistic devices awaken the audience’s imagination, achieving an overall or global effect that moves the audience into response. I then connect metaphors to presence, evaluating how the comparison made by the metaphor can have a more permanent and on-going presence through a changed mind.

Lastly, I briefly introduce the context of the Gospel of John before conducting a rhetorical analysis of John’s use of the metaphor light in connection with Jesus. I show how John uses light to presence current first-century understandings of God as light, mostly appealing to Jewish understandings of the light of God’s divine presence, the Law, the Temple, and the light described in the Hebrew Bible and through the figure of Wisdom in Wisdom Literature. Also, by combining an ontological metaphor with a theology of the Paraclete-Spirit, John further presences Jesus’ association with God and life beyond the gospel’s situational context, making it accessible to readers of all times.

I conclude by arguing that John’s message relies on metaphor to presence a multiplicity of meanings about Jesus’ identity, portraying him as a guiding light that reveals truth and extends God’s presence to the world in a unique and dynamic way. Reevaluating the relationship between metaphor and presence in the interpretation of biblical metaphors can have dramatic implications involving an experience of God for people of faith.
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A special thank you to Dr. McClish, for all his advice and support throughout my time at SDSU. To the rest of my committee: Dr. Minifee, thank you for your example and Dr. Moore, thank you for your patient insight. Lastly, I’d like to thank Dr. Matt Williams, who inspired this project. Thank you for sharing your passion, and challenging me to get out of the boat. I am so blessed.
CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

It is indisputable that language determines and shapes one’s perception of reality. Describing something in a new way, perhaps even poetically, can lead to new discoveries and understandings, broadening and challenging conventional categorization. One key literary and rhetorical device that exemplifies this formational attribute of language is metaphor. More than simply a poetic flourish, metaphors fuse together two previously disparate concepts in such a way as to influence a culture’s way of thinking. Analysis concerning the form and function of metaphor has a long, rich history—writings on metaphor can be traced back to Homer, if not further. More recently, George Lakoff and Mark Johnson’s *Metaphors We Live By* evaluates the ways in which metaphors unconsciously inform our daily life. By describing one thing in terms of another, metaphors uniquely highlight certain qualities or characteristics, helping people to conceptualize new meanings. In doing so, they are not only descriptive or informational, but actually influence experience by constructing new perceptions and perspectives.

When it comes to religious rhetoric, metaphors are essential in describing that which evades everyday language. Metaphors are frequently invoked in biblical and religious texts to draw out specific attributes of God and the way God relates to the world. An example of this is the Hebrew Bible’s “titles” for God, exhibiting God’s attributes through metaphor. For example, God is called the “Ancient One,” “Judge of all the earth,” “King,” and “LORD” or “Yahweh” (Daniel 7:9, Genesis 18:25, Psalm 74:12, Genesis 4:26, Exodus 6:2-3). God is frequently described through non-human metaphors as well, such as a “rock,” “shield,” even manifested in a “whirlwind” (2 Samuel 22:3, Job 38:1). The Psalmist relies on metaphors and figurative language to fully express the depth of his emotions, evidencing a dynamic and often times, personal way of relating to the divine. In his book on metaphors in the Psalms,

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William Brown describes the Psalms as operating at the level of the imagination, often “swiveling the universe on the hinges of a single image” that is shared by the surrounding culture (13). These metaphors open up new avenues of understanding and relating to God, and by implication, understanding oneself.

The New Testament extends metaphors originally reserved for the Jewish God “Yahweh” through its descriptions of God’s son Jesus, and the Spirit he sends to those who believe in him. Jesus describes himself in the gospels as the “Way, the Truth, and the Light,” the “good shepherd,” “bread of life,” etc.—all pointing to the role he plays in the lives of those who would believe in him (John 14:6, 10:11, 6:35). This gospel in particular lends itself to examining how metaphors function to define and describe Jesus’ relationship with the world, showing him to serve as an extension of God’s presence as described in the Hebrew Bible. Commonly known by Christians as the more “spiritual” gospel, the Gospel of John features figurative and poetic language to describe Jesus’ relationship with God and the world. In John, Jesus is not only the revelation of God but the incarnate “Word,” the holy Logos of God depicted in bodily form. John’s self-professed purpose is to urge its readers to believe in Jesus as the replacement for the Law and the new means of receiving salvation: “These things were written so that you might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name” (20:31). Those who believe and embrace this life Jesus offers through faith, experience both abundant life lived on earth and the assurance of eternal life lived in heaven. John relies on metaphors to illustrate the way belief in Jesus and his redeeming sacrifice acts as the means to a new relationship with God.

The specific metaphors Jesus uses in John’s gospel are laden with historical and theological meaning, alluding to Jewish religious traditions and specific passages from the Hebrew Bible to appeal to a Jewish audience. Several of these self-referential metaphors begin with ego eimi, or the Greek “I am,” used by God in the Hebrew Bible to refer to the divine Name (Exodus 3:14). In this way, the metaphors become even more forceful. In describing himself through metaphor, Jesus also appears to claim his divinity and connection with God, the I am. While these metaphors are endowed with historical and cultural significance, they are also comprehensible and applicable to modern sensibilities. Incorporating fairly universal concepts expressed in archetypal metaphors such as water,
bread or light, John’s gospel extends its appeal to a wide audience, pointing to a reality that is both historically and currently exigent for those who believe.

Biblical scholars have long recognized John as heavily symbolic, drawing on several traditions in the exposition of Jesus’ identity. Figures such as C. K. Barrett in *The Gospel According to St John* and Rudolf Bultmann in *The Gospel of John: A Commentary*, made great strides in Johannine studies, arguing for the gospel’s authenticity and independence from the Synoptic Gospels—Matthew, Mark and Luke. Such scholars argue that John’s language reflects multiple influences, ranging from Greek philosophy, Gnosticism, Jewish tradition and the Qumran community. In the second half of the twentieth-century, scholars such as Raymond Brown began to argue for a mostly Jewish background for John, proposing that the gospel was formed within a community of Jewish believers. While most would agree that John’s use of metaphor plays a prominent role in communicating John’s argument about Jesus, those like Craig Koester in *Symbolism in the Fourth Gospel* determine metaphor to be at the core of John’s symbolism and message.

To evaluate how John uses metaphors to persuasively portray Jesus’ identity and convey his mission, I will turn to a rhetorical analysis of a specific metaphor, “light.” Generally speaking, rhetorical analysis examines how ideas, facts and values are adapted to speak to a particular audience for specific purposes. As Aristotle famously defined it, rhetoric is “an ability, in each [particular] case, to see the available means of persuasion” (Kennedy 37). John incorporates metaphors as rhetorical devices, highlighting specific religious and cultural understandings and then connecting them to the person of Jesus. Because Jesus’ teachings were controversial and, often times, just plain confusing, the gospel used metaphors to help its audience understand the relevancy and urgency of Jesus’ message, a message that revolutionized the way God was experienced. These metaphors were not chosen at random, but appealed to very specific images and understandings held by their first-century religious and secular context. This particular nature of John’s metaphors applies another persuasive rhetorical technique to achieve its effect, called “presence.”

Chaïm Perelman and Lucie Olbrechts-Tyteca coin the term “presence” in *The New Rhetoric* to apply to rhetorical technique that infuses the concept being described with a sense of vitality and importance. Presence is created through both circumstances and stylistic elements in such a way as to incite the audience’s imagination and imbue the subject matter.
with a sense of importance and urgency. Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca describe presence as the effect of the rhetor’s selection and amplification of a subject for their audience:

> By the very fact of selecting certain elements and presenting them to the audience, their importance and pertinency to the discussion are implied. Indeed, such a choice endows these elements with a presence, which is an essential factor in argumentation and one that is far too much neglected in rationalistic conceptions of reasoning. (116)

When a rhetor highlights a concept or subject, it enters into the audience’s consciousness and takes on a level of importance it did not occupy before: presence “acts directly on our sensibility” (116). Here the object presenced is isolated from the audience’s preexisting mentality or worldview, and so is capable of being thought about in a new way. This technique enables the concept described to maintain relevancy and pertinency for the audience, commanding their full attention. Various scholars have expanded on Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca’s original concept, evaluating how elements work together to achieve an overall or global sense of presence that incorporates the whole of the text.

Though Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca do not discuss metaphors in connection with presence, a reflection on the rhetorical and psychological effects of metaphors suggests that metaphors lend themselves to this rhetorical technique in unique and dynamic ways. Much of the scholarship on presence and metaphors describes their effects very similarly, yet very few scholars connect the two. The conceptual link between metaphor and presence is perhaps initially attributable to Aristotle’s notion of “bringing before the eyes,” but is explicitly referenced by Charles Kauffman and Donn Parson in their “Metaphor and Presence in Argument.” By describing one thing in terms of another, metaphors incorporate visualization to engender new conceptualizations and greater understanding, potentially extending the effects of presence beyond the situational context. When the “presenced” argument is described in metaphorical terms, it is conceived of in a new way and so is more likely to attain a permanence in one’s thought process.

In a biblical context, metaphors are used to presence God’s omnipresence and identity as one active in the world and in daily life. This connection between metaphor and presence is especially apparent concerning Jesus’ self-referential metaphors in John. Here Jesus appears to presence his identity as a paramount re-structuring of how God’s presence is experienced and how salvation is attained. Through metaphor, Jesus shows himself as
essential to living an abundant life; belief in him and acceptance of his teachings are essential if his audience wants to attain the “bread of life,” “living water” and the “light of the world” (John 6:25, 7:38, 8:12). In concurrence with these descriptions, Jesus performs several “signs,” further emphasizing his claims and helping his audience understand the new reality he embodies.

In this essay, I will evaluate how metaphors are used as a rhetorical strategy to uniquely establish and maintain a sense of presence, analyzing the use of the metaphor light in the Gospel of John as a case study. In Chapter 1, I will give some background on the scholarship concerning metaphor, highlighting several key figures in the development of a theory on how metaphors inform our perception of reality. After summarizing a few approaches to metaphor, I will evaluate how metaphors appeal to the imagination in the formation of beliefs. The end of the chapter will discuss the form and function of religious metaphors, evaluating their use in the Hebrew Bible and New Testament. In Chapter 2, I will describe Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca’s theory on presence in more detail, citing other relevant research concerning how presence appeals to the imagination and influences one’s beliefs. I will then link metaphors and presence, discussing how the similar effects achieved through both techniques make metaphors useful tools in creating a sense of presence.

Chapter 3 will provide background on the Gospel of John in order to establish the rhetorical situation, looking at dating, influences, John’s Jewishness, possible sources, audience, the Johannine community, stages of composition, and the general layout of the gospel.

In Chapter 4, I will conduct a rhetorical analysis of John’s use of light as a metaphor for Jesus. After introducing important concepts that serve as the foundation for John’s Prologue, I will look at how John presences understandings of the metaphor light in connection with the Hebrew Bible, the Law, secular ideas of enlightenment, Wisdom literature, and the Temple. The gospel accomplishes this within the context of Jesus’ ministry, drawing on religious and cultural understandings to make a statement about Jesus’ identity that would be accessible for a diverse but mostly Jewish audience. I will then include a brief discussion of the implications of the Paraclete-Spirit in considering John’s use of presence. Chapter 5 will offer some concluding remarks summarizing my main argument concerning the presencing effect of John’s metaphor light.
CHAPTER 2

METAPHOR

THEORIES ON METAPHOR

Writing from the emerging study of rhetoric in Greece, fourth-century B.C.E., Aristotle briefly discusses the concept of metaphors in his Poetics and On Rhetoric, describing how meaning is carried over or transferred from one thing to another with the terms metaphor and epiphora. In his translation of On Rhetoric, George Kennedy describes Aristotle’s metaphor as itself a metaphor, literally meaning “carrying something from one place to another, transference” (199). For Aristotle, the sources of metaphors should be “something beautiful…in sound or in the sense” (201). Metaphors are used to avoid already familiar language, preventing the discourse from appearing too commonplace. As John Kirby points out in “Aristotle on Metaphor,” Aristotle connects the metaphorical with the philosophical in On Rhetoric, for both metaphor and philosophy make connections that aren’t obvious, leading to new insight and knowledge. Aristotle suggests that the metaphor “most brings about learning” by the act of predication, likening two things by saying “this is that” (218). He recognizes the prevalence of metaphors, yet cautions only to resort to metaphor when there is no other way to name something. Hugh White suggests that Aristotle linked metaphor to rhetoric, as opposed to dialectic, because of the effect metaphors had on people. While dialectic was more concerned with logic or truth, rhetoric was primarily about influence (White).

Since Aristotle’s day, there has been extensive scholarship regarding metaphor but it has experienced something of a revival in twentieth-century. There have been several scholars who have significantly contributed to the discussion of rhetoric and metaphor. C. K. Ogden and I. A. Richards, co-authors of The Meaning of Meaning, precedes their discussion of metaphors by evaluating the form and function of language, presenting the study of rhetoric as a “philosophic inquiry into how words work in discourse” (5). They write:
Language, well used, is a completion and does what the intuitions of sensation by themselves cannot do. Words are the meeting points at which regions of experience which can never combine in sensation or intuition, come together. They are the occasion and the means of that growth which is the mind’s endless endeavor to order itself. That is why we have language. (Ogden and Richards 130-1)

For Ogden and Richards, how metaphors are approached is determined by how one views the role of language in the process of meaning-making—individuals make meaning by finding something familiar in a new context, helping them know how to interpret it. This word or symbol pulls together these similar thoughts, and so facilitates the listener’s experience by drawing on comparison. Metaphors, therefore, are products of our mind’s attempt to connect thoughts in order to form meaning, something Ogden and Richards call the “omnipresent principle of language” (92). They write, “In the simplest formulation, when we use a metaphor we have two thoughts of different things active together and supported by a single word, or phrase, whose meaning is a resultant of their interaction” (93). They famously propose that metaphors are composed of a “tenor,” or the underlying idea/subject, and the “vehicle,” the means of conveying that idea through language. For example, in the metaphor “the clouds were fluffy pillows,” the clouds are the tenor and the pillows are the vehicle. The new meaning that results from this comparison or connection between the tenor and vehicle would not be possible without the interaction between the two.

Max Black further develops Ogden and Richards’ theory, which he calls the “interaction view” of metaphors, in his famous essay “Metaphor.” He describes three perspectives on metaphor: the substitution view, the comparison view and the interaction view. According to the substitution view, a metaphorical expression is used in place of a literal one, and so may potentially be “substituted” for it. Black shows that this marks a return to the old view of metaphor as “saying one thing and meaning another” (280). According to this view, metaphors function as words created to fill a gap in the vocabulary when there is no literal equivalent. If the existence of the metaphor meets a genuine need, then the word will soon become literal, as seen with the word “orange” which came to refer to the fruit, not just its color. In the comparison view, metaphors are either similar or

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2 For further discussion of how metaphors transfer insight on several levels and dictate how meaning is categorized, see section on Ernesto Grassi in *Contemporary Perspectives on Rhetoric* (Foss, Foss, and Trapp).
analogous to their original or literal meaning. This is similar to the substitution view in that the metaphor can be replaced by a literal comparison. In contrast, the interaction view is consistent with C. K. Ogden and I. A. Richards, deeming metaphors as capable of producing new meaning. Black writes, “No doubt metaphors are dangerous and perhaps especially so in philosophy. But a prohibition against their use would be a willful and harmful restriction upon our powers of inquiry” (294). For this reason, metaphors serve an essential function and analysis inherent in philosophical thought.

Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca briefly analyze the form and function of metaphors in argumentation outside of their discussion on presence. They describe what they call “awakened” metaphors, as opposed to “dormant” or undetected metaphors that have become so much a part of colloquial language, they are forgotten to be metaphorical. Awakened metaphors go beyond simply suggesting a resemblance between two things, they make a comparison in a new way. In this sense, Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca write “It is not surprising that metaphor, with its fusion of spheres and transcendence of traditional classifications, should be, par excellence, the tool of poetic and philosophic creation” (Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca 404). Kari Syreeni quotes Harald Weinrich’s description of metaphors in her essay on metaphor, “Metaphorical Appropriation.” Weinrich refers to this metaphor as a “bold” metaphor, because the “extravagance of the utterance excludes a naïve this-is-that understanding” but calls for an higher level of comprehension (Syreeni 325). Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca conclude by describing the “masters” of rhetoric as using the metaphor as a way to overcome the “poverty of language,” coloring the everyday with a poetic lens, creating new comparisons and connections for their audience.

Philosopher Paul Ricoeur developed a notable theory concerning the classification of metaphor and its relation to semantics, rhetoric and philosophical discourse. In The Rule of Metaphor, he classifies metaphor as a single-word figure of speech, defined as a trope of resemblance. Following in the tradition of metaphorical theorists, Ricoeur emphasizes the

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3 For more on the various approaches to interpreting metaphor, see Peter Macky’s The Centrality of Metaphors to Biblical Thought. Macky describes metaphors as essential to describe unobservable realities such as inner-experience or the supernatural; “Metaphor is that figurative way of speaking (and meaning) in which one reality, the Subject, is depicted in terms that are more commonly associated with a different reality, the Symbol, which is related to it by Analogy” (49).
metaphor’s agency in the re-description of reality: “metaphor is a strategy of discourse that, while preserving and developing the creative power of language, preserves and develops the heuristic power wielded by fiction” (6). In this way, Ricoeur negates the dichotomy between the poetic and real or literal; metaphor, rather, is the rhetorical process by which discourse re-describes reality. Therefore, metaphor’s place is in “neither the name, nor the sentence, nor even discourse, but the copula of the verb to be. The metaphorical ‘is’ at once signifies both ‘is not’ and ‘is like’” (7). In other words, the metaphor simultaneously states what “is” true about the comparison and what “is not” true. Ricoeur cautions against the old-fashioned disdain for metaphors as distracting deviants from literal description, suggesting quite the opposite—metaphors reduce deviation through their ability to redefine terms. Thus, metaphors represent discourse’s answer to “the threat of destruction represented by semantic impertinence” (152). Ricoeur advocates for a plurality of approaches, in rhetoric, semantics and hermeneutics, to trace the path of meaning from the word to the sentence, and from the sentence to discourse.

In their treatise on metaphor Metaphors We Live By, Lakoff and Johnson broaden the scope of metaphors by exposing our reliance on metaphors in everyday language and their role in shaping how one perceives the world. Like those who came before them, Lakoff and Johnson attribute the metaphor’s influence on one’s perception of reality to the power of language to shape thought: “[Metaphors] are pervasive in everyday life, not just in language but in thought and action. Our ordinary conceptual system, in terms of which we both think and act, is fundamentally metaphorical in nature” (3). In other words, our very thought processes are “largely metaphorical,” due to our need to conceptualize or talk about the new or unfamiliar (6). Through their famous example “argument is war,” Lakoff and Johnson demonstrate how a conceptual metaphor can govern the way our culture not only talks about a subject, but how it comprehends that subject. For example, the metaphorical perception of “argument (as) war” is evidenced by the ways our culture talks about arguments: arguments “won” or “lost” and involve an “opponent,” “strategy,” “attack” and “defense.” The argument can be “weak,” “missing the point,” or “right on target.” Because our minds understand objects in terms of conceptual categories, ontological and structural metaphors create the possibility of further comparisons. For example, the structural metaphor “ideas are food” is based on the metaphor that “ideas are objects” and the “mind is a container.”
simultaneously facilitating multiple similarities between ideas and food: both can be digested, ruminated and can provide nourishment (148). Lakoff and Johnson deem this reliance on metaphors in everyday discourse as producing far-reaching consequences, influencing our very perception of reality.

The metaphor’s departure from the literal appeals to the imagination to make interpretation possible. Lakoff and Johnson define metaphor as representing the combination of reason, which involves categorizing and thinking about something like it is something else, and the imagination. Therefore, they call the effect of metaphors “imaginative rationality” (193). New metaphors rely on both of these cognitive functions to create new meanings and perceptions. In his essay “The Role of Metaphor in Christian Thought,” Peter Macky quotes C. S. Lewis, who proposed that “reason is the natural organ of truth; but imagination is the organ of meaning” (243). As discussed in the previous section, unobservable experiences or concepts that evade literal language are not any less factual—their analysis and interpretation are dependent on metaphors. Similarly, William Brown attributes the metaphor’s agency to its capacity to accesses the imagination through its dramatic interruption of normality by way of a violation of language. By exploiting this difference, metaphors create a sort of “semantic shock” that allows for associations outside of the text itself and in the realm of the imagination (W. Brown 8). This disruption created by connecting two previously unconnected terms requires a re-imagining for any sense to be made, requiring a willingness on the part of the audience to form an interpretation.4

**BIBLICAL METAPHORS**

As texts grounded in spiritual concepts, both the Hebrew and Christian Bible rely heavily on metaphors and parables to make accessible profound theological statements about

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4 For a fascinating discussion on recent findings on metaphor in the field in cognitive linguistics, see Mary Therese DesCamp and Eve E. Sweetser’s “Metaphors for God: Why and How Do Our Choices Matter for Humans? The Application of Contemporary Cognitive Linguistics Research to the Debate on God and Metaphor.” DesCamp and Sweetser show research to determine primary metaphors as grounded in our primary senses, showing a correlation between our perceptual experience and our response. They describe metaphors to stimulate our thought-processes to link various images to the new concept being described. They also cite the work Giles Fauconnier and Mark Turner, who call this unconscious process “cognitive blending.” This occurs when the mind draws on already established “cognitive structures” when trying to interpret new information or create new meaning.
the nature of God, the world and humanity. In fact, many would argue any knowledge or
description of the divine is only expressible through metaphor. In his book *Faithful
Persuasion*, David Cunningham proposes that since humans cannot achieve complete
knowledge of God, then metaphor is central to theology because it “helps bridge the gap
between the familiarity of empirical language and the relative strangeness of talk about God”
(86). By stretching language beyond literal limits, metaphors also function to remind readers
of the difficulty in talking about God. Because God is, by definition, a being who is
transcendent or wholly other, simple referential language does not suffice when attempting to
categorize God’s nature. For example, in “Language, Metaphor and Pastoral Theology,”
Belden Lane refers to John Bunyan’s *Pilgrim’s Progress*, which does not present doctrines
but instead allegorically describes the Christian life as a journey. In defending his choice of
using metaphors, Bunyan equates the storyteller with a fisherman who must use all his
faculties: “Yet fish there be that neither hook nor line / Nor snare nor net nor engine can
make thine; / They must be groped for and tickled, too, / Or they will not be catch’d whate’er
you do” (Lane 495). Similarly, in his *Pilgrim’s Regress*, Lewis describes the parables,
visions and metaphors of the Bible as what God would call “My mythology”:
The words of Wisdom are also myth and metaphor...But this is My inventing, this
is the veil under which I have chosen to appear even from the first until now. For
this end I made your senses and for this end your imagination, that you might see
My face and live. (Macky, “The Role” 246)
By evoking images and appealing to the imagination, biblical metaphors uniquely determine
one’s perception of the supernatural.

Yet it is important to remember that the interpretation and meaning of biblical
metaphors are intimately linked to their context. As a literary text, the Bible reuses names
and images, uniting stories and traditions passed down through generations. Its rhetoric is
informed by the history of the Israelites, as well as the historical traditions and practices of
the time. Therefore, understanding a passage by way of its context is essential to
comprehending its full meaning and significance. For example, in the Lukan parable of the
Pharisee and the tax collector who go to the temple to pray (Luke 18:9-14), the scandal of the
story is missed if readers do not look at the passage through a first-century lens, in which the
Pharisee was a respected religious leader and the tax collector was a hated traitor. John
Dominic Crossan suggests a modern equivalent might be: “The pope and a pimp went in to
St. Peter’s to pray,” and the pimp ends up as the one justified (Lane 493). This interpretation might also be missed if the readers are operating with an understanding of the Pharisees solely based on Luke’s gospel, which narrated Jesus’ condemnation of them seven chapters earlier in his “Woe to you Pharisees” (Luke 11). If this were the case, the Pharisee in the parable would already be viewed as a hypocrite deserving of God’s rejection, causing the reader to miss the expression of God’s grace.

When taken out of context, biblical metaphors confine the perception of God to the literal words themselves, denying them their intended effect. In *Metaphorical Theology*, Sallie McFague describes what she calls a tyranny of the literal in biblical interpretation. To combat this, she suggests incorporating a theology of metaphor by which readers can interpret the language used to describe God as models, rather literal statements. As described by Ricoeur, McFague argues that biblical metaphors have an “is” and “is not” relationship to the object they describe. For example, in the metaphor “God is king,” God “is” king in that God is a ruler of the world with authority and justice. But God “is not” king in that God is not inaccessible or does not live in a palace. These two attributes of metaphors must hang in balance in order to prevent the reader from taking a description too literally. For many already familiar with religious language, the metaphors for God have lost this dynamic tension, and have become like a “boring creed repeated too many times;” the meaning they presence is lost (McFague 8). For others, entry into the biblical world can feel like a time warp; on a literal level, the metaphors seem irrelevant, reflective of another time and place. Consequently, McFague’s goal is to include those who feel excluded from the Bible, and to question Western theology’s models. Many feminists take issue with the biblical/religious language, in which the entire structure of divine-human or human-human relationships is patriarchal (for example, God as “Father”). McFague describes this as resulting when a model metaphor becomes an idol—when one way to see God becomes the only way.

This kind of idolatry of the literal operates at the expense of the many other “model” metaphors used to describe God in the Bible. Model metaphors are both descriptive and explanatory, giving readers an interpretative framework for how to perceive the divine. This specific type of metaphor helps frame thoughts about unfamiliar topic. For example, models are the dominant metaphors used in science as a way of validating and explaining reality. But according to McFague, theses models have “usurped the right to the false exclusion of other
metaphors” (28). For this reason, she cautions against the overemphasis of the model-as-
metaphor for God, showing how, in many of the Psalms, the psalmist will “pile up metaphors
for God in riotous melee, mixing ‘rock,’ ‘lover,’ ‘fortress,’ ‘midwife,’ ‘fresh water,’ ‘judge,’
‘helper,’ ‘thunder,’ and so on in a desperate attempt to express the richness of God’s being”
(24). This multiplicity of biblical metaphors used to describe God depicts divine attributes in
a dynamic way, preventing any single metaphor from overpowering the other. It combines
attributes of the divine with the familiar, encouraging interpreters to accept this new
perspective; God can simultaneously be both a loving comforter, and a just and powerful
king—a kind parent who disciplines out of love while maintaining authority over the created
order.

Metaphors such as these appeal to the imagination to illustrate a new way of
perceiving or experiencing the divine. In his essay “Naming God,” Ricoeur suggests that the
texts written about God exist to point to the world outside of the text. For Ricoeur, naming
God is what texts do when they “escape from their authors, their redactional setting, and their
first audience, when they deploy their world, when they poetically manifest and thereby
reveal a world we might inhabit” (223). In this way, the text appeals to the imagination in
order to guide readers into the world of the possible—accessible only through metaphorical
or poetic language. Ricoeur references Kant’s notion of the “Idea,” which surpasses an image
and the concept, demanding that the receiver think more in order to draw out the fullness of
meaning. Illustrating theology through metaphor portrays the divine in an accessible way,
generating a greater possibility of acknowledgment and acceptance.

Kari Syreeni describes many critics as reducing the poetic creation of metaphors by
either ignoring their symbolism, or by assimilating the concept they describe into the text
itself. This approach is consistent with classical rhetoric, which defined the creativity of the
metaphor as linguistic; it was a new word formed to “cathartically” fill a gap in the language,
and so had nothing to do with ideology (Syreeni 332). In either error, there exists a “new
mode of ideological innocence,” or first naiveté, in which the reader, unable to look at the
“formidable brightness” of the text’s symbolic world, runs to the safer or more familiar world
of the text (332). Syreeni identifies this pretense as potentially lurking behind the study of the
Bible as literature. Yet this does not imply that a renewed interpretative approach to
metaphors discounts the rational. When it comes to interpreting metaphors, Ricoeur
advocates a sort of second naiveté—still naiveté in the sense that the approach is uncritical in some respects, but “second” because it follows a critical, historical, literary investigation. This approach acknowledges the rhetorical situation in which the metaphors were formed, but does not restrict their meaning to the literal.

Certain metaphors that appear generic or widely comprehensible are sometimes referred to as “archetypal” metaphors. These metaphors seemingly synonymous to Lakoff and Johnson’s ontological or structural metaphors, in that they rely on broad correlations to engender multiple associations. For the most part, archetypal metaphors appeal to fairly universal experiences or concepts, making connections that are continually relevant or applicable. In his article on metaphors, Michael Osborn describes how archetypal metaphors are generally evoked at the most critical moments in a speech, using down-to-earth language in the process of “establishing a mood and a perspective in the introduction, reinforcing a critical argument in the body, and synthesizing the meaning and force of a speech at its conclusion” (117). Two examples of common archetypal metaphors are those involving light and darkness. Light, which is essential for sight and often associated with knowledge, is evoked in contrast to darkness, which suggests fear and the unknown or hidden. According to Osborn, archetypal metaphors have a unique function in times of distress, pointing the audience back to eternal realities or rhythms. By referencing already-familiar experiences, these metaphors help the audience know how to conceptualize what is being presented.

Similarly, the possibilities implied by many of the archetypal metaphors found in scripture redefine secular experience by fusing familiar concepts with the divine. Lane describes theology as only comprehensible through the use of the imagination: “The imaginative openness of language is what finally makes possible the relating of theology to all the ambiguities of lived experience” (487). By appealing to the imagination, biblical metaphors rhetorically construct a view of reality through the lens of a belief in God. For example, if readers imagine God through the metaphor “the good shepherd,” they will understand God as the provider of comfort, protection and direction for their daily lives. However, this does not discount the importance of evaluating all biblical metaphors in their literal and cultural context as well, which always encourages a more informed interpretation of the metaphors’ meaning. McFague would argue that these comprehensible metaphors move away from abstract theology by describing ideal ways to relate to God, thus motivating
reflection and leading to actual experience. The reality implied by the metaphor inspires reflection and a subsequent desire to create and experience that reality. This concept is what Martin Medhurst describes in his connection between metaphor and myth, both of which tell a story about the past, but only in order to say something about the present and the future….Like the user of other forms of metaphor, the user of myth says to his audience, ‘Here is a lens which has helped me to understand the world you and I live in; look through it yourselves and see what I have seen.’ (Medhurst 216)

The metaphorical and parabolic relate a familiar experience to convey a foreign, divine reality, connecting the two by way of the metaphor.

By highlighting an already-familiar concept to describe God, archetypal or ontological metaphors enhance comprehension and consequently, stimulate a more continual application of the text. In other words, by describing God in a tangible way, these metaphors present God as a fundamental or foundational reality, encouraging believers to re-interpret their experience in light of this new concept. In his article “Transfiguration: Poetic Metaphor and Theological Reflection,” Frank Brown describes biblical metaphors to help avoid the “idolatry of the new” as well as the “tyranny of the same” (8). The majority of biblical metaphors for God are largely understandable to modern audiences without the need of extensive exegesis, eliminating a temptation to flock to the newest description of or definition for God. But at the same time, metaphors operate as figurative language with the potential to create new possibilities of application and perception. Changes in culture and society contributes to the need for reinterpretation and the communication of meaning in new and fresh ways. In other words, metaphors are “epistemologically immediate” (52). This immediacy implied by biblical metaphors has historically and contemporarily enhanced their relevancy, describing characteristics of God in comprehensible and applicable ways. In the next chapter, I will describe Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca’s theory of presence, evaluating its rhetorical effect before discussing how metaphors uniquely lend themselves to achieving presence.
CHAPTER 3

PRESENCE

In 1969, the English translation of Chaïm Perelman and Lucie Olbrechts-Tyteca’s ten-year project, *The New Rhetoric: A Treatise on Argumentation*, brought their theories of argumentation to American rhetoricians. Originally published in France in 1958, *The New Rhetoric* began as a partnership in which Perelman was the “philosopher and theorist” who provided the overall theoretical framework, and Olbrechts-Tyteca was the “empiricist and analyst” who discussed the argumentative function of stylistic devices and the role of values in various discourses (Foss, Foss, and Trapp 84). They were initially interested in how philosophers in various fields used reason to talk about values, hoping to develop a way to assess values rationally: “we called this new, or revived, branch of study, devoted to the analysis of informal reasoning, the new rhetoric” (85). What began as an analysis of the rationale of lawyers, politicians, philosophers and journalists in situations where empirical evidence did not suffice, led to Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca’s rediscovery of classical writings on rhetoric and Aristotelian logic. In their work, Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca emphasize the centrality of audience in the construction of argument, defining argumentation as “the study of the discursive techniques allowing us to induce or to increase the mind’s adherence to the theses presented for its assent” (4). Essentially, argumentation is the culmination of various rhetorical techniques evoked to persuade the audience, “securing an efficient action on [their] minds” in order to move them to response (9). One of these described techniques is their theory of presence.

Though the concept of presence is important to *The New Rhetoric*, it receives little amplification and can appear fairly abstract in the text. Initially, presence rhetorically raises awareness of a particular subject the rhetor wants to emphasize, as demonstrated in Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca’s example of a king and an ox; “A king sees an ox on its way to sacrifice. He is moved to pity for it and orders that a sheep be used in its place. He confesses he did so because he could see the ox, but not the sheep” (116). Because the ox is presenced, the king is persuaded to act on its behalf. Yet it is not simply the ox’s literal presence that
persuades the king, but also the way the ox is noticed that leads to the king’s conviction. Or, as Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca note, the effect of presence is achieved by an intermingling of both substance and form. In this way, presence can be enhanced through stylistic elements and techniques, the goal always being to persuade:

Accordingly one of the preoccupations of a speaker is to make present, by verbal magic alone, what is actually absent but what he considers important to his argument, or by making them more present, to enhance the value of some of the elements of which one has actually been made conscious. (117)

For the audience, the effects of presence are initially psychological, but then become “an essential element to argumentation” and persuasion (118). Once the audience is made conscious of the selected topic and shown how it is important, they are more apt to be persuaded by the rhetor’s argument.

In their section on Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca in Contemporary Rhetoric, Sonja Foss, Karen Foss and Robert Trapp describe presence as the phenomenon occurring when certain elements are deemed more important than others. For example, presence is the rhetorical technique used when a lawyer ties to sway a jury by describing the crime in such a way that the jury can picture themselves there; or when a preacher transports the congregation to biblical times through vivid descriptions, or helps them think about eternity. Foss, Foss, and Trapp highlight Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca’s point that what is physically present is not always the most persuasive. Values like freedom or liberty are abstract, so how they are described can potentially imbue them with a sense of importance for the audience—”To use intangible and abstract starting points successfully, an arguer needs to endow them with presence” (Foss, Foss, and Trapp 95). These intangibles could be events in history, values, scientific concepts such as in physics, or forces in the spiritual realm. Presence is used to help the audience recognize the relevancy of these values in such a way that they can agree to and accept the values’ importance.

Analyzing the various rhetorical techniques that contribute to creating and enhancing presence has led many rhetoricians to describe presence’s influence in synergistic terms. For Alan Gross and Ray Dearin, Perelman’s concept of presence is, in “its most interesting form,” a “superordinate concept,” or a “second-order effect” created through the synergy of “first-order effects” such as style, delivery and disposition (or arrangement; 135). For this reason, the theory of presence is the “keystone in the Perelmanian rhetorical arch,”
encompassing the whole of a text rather than isolated instances (xii). Similarly, Gross and Dearin highlight the influence of rhetorician George Campbell on Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca’s theory. Campbell described a presence-like force created when various circumstances all work together to awaken interest and passion, adding to these attributes a quality he called “vivacity,” adapted to “please the audience’s imagination” and to draw their attention (Gross and Dearin 137). Presence therefore can be conceived of as an over-arching effect, made up of the repetition or variation of other rhetorical devices, such as diction, arrangement, etc.

Nathan Atkinson, David Kaufer and Suguru Ishizaki’s “Presence and Global Presence in Genres of Self-Presentation: A Framework for Comparative Analysis” further extends Gross and Dearin’s elaboration of Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca’s original theory. Their article traces the scholarship on presence, expanding on Gross and Dearin’s initial definition from the “cumulative effect of a single rhetorical device,” to include “the cumulative effect of heterogeneous rhetorical devices for creating global presence” (362). This “global” or “superordinate” presence as described by Gross and Dearin accounts for how rhetors presence a worldview through the combined effect of rhetorical devices (Atkinson, Kaufer, and Ishizaki). The authors describe the evolution of presence from the effect of individual elements in The New Rhetoric—their occurrence, quality and quantity—to Gross and Dearin’s global nature of presence. So again, rather than focusing on the individual elements, “global presence” is the overall effect achieved. Atkinson, Kaufer, and Ishizaki then evaluate the elements that contribute to a global presence in a collection of texts to see how “micro-rhetorical elements combine to produce distinct, macro-rhetorical patterns such as genres” (364). When placed in a comparative framework, global presence allows for certain reoccurring elements that, despite their difference, trigger a generic response.

**Presence and Belief**

As a rhetorical technique, presence is not to be underestimated as a persuasive determiner of audience acceptance and response. Rhetorically, presence acts upon the audience’s mind by instilling certain concepts with a relevant vitality so that the audience is able to connect with them and even change their current beliefs or mentalities. In her discussion on presence in “Presence in The New Rhetoric,” Louise Karon describes presence
as a mode of securing links between elements of discourse that can change premises—it is “the means by which reality is constructed...transporting a phenomenon from the realm of the contingent to the realm of the absolute” (Karon 97). According to Karon, presence relies on rhetorical enhancement to generate belief and therefore, is essential to Perelman’s theory of knowledge. Karon shows presence to work in five ways: creating a felt quality in the hearer’s consciousness, fixing the audience’s attention while altering their perceptions/perspectives, appealing to the imagination as “its strongest agent,” generating action or judgment as its purpose, while incorporating techniques such as style, delivery or disposition (97). The overall effect is to invite the audience to participate in something new or controversial, encouraging the “intellectual risk taking necessary to overcome dogma and produce assent” (93). In this way, presence enables the audience to conceive of a new reality in a new and convincing way.

The relationship between presence, belief and experience is explored by Robert Tucker in his article on Perelman, “Figure, Ground and Presence.” Tucker seeks to “breathe new life” into Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca’s theory by approaching it phenomenologically—by looking at how presence appears in different forms to one’s conscious experience (397). Tucker explains the effect of presence by likening it to how we visually interpret our surroundings, postulating that our rhetorical capacity works in much the same way. Because people act on what they see, demonstrated by The New Rhetoric’s example of the king and the ox, they base their interpretation on what is presented to them. Tucker describes this process of presencing in terms of distinguishing figure from ground. For example, in a landscape the “ground” would represent the entirety of the landscape, while the “figure” would be a specific object, such as a sunflower. By using discourse to rhetorically focus on the sunflower, it is presenced, causing it to stand out while the rest of the landscape fades to the background. This rhetorical effect is equivalent to the way a single lens reflex (SLR) camera lens narrows the depth of field, focusing on a single image in the foreground and causing everything else in the background to blur.

As a rhetorical technique, presence capitalizes on the quality of interpretation that is contingent on that which is distinguishable. Tucker describes how, when presented with new stimuli, our eyes sweep the room and focus on things that appear unfamiliar; the familiar or expected is easily broken down and comprehensible, and so does not need to command our
attention. We then attempt to understand the unfamiliar by translating it into something comparable. Tucker argues that this approach is the same in rhetoric, where rhetors take new or complex ideas and translate them for their audience. Because familiar or habitual words and narratives take root in one’s consciousness, they can be accessed by the effective rhetor who can then present them. Presence is thus created when the speaker “‘shows’ the audience ways to ‘see’ ambiguous experience as meaningful by emphasizing certain aspects of that experience” (399). As with visual experience, in language we “see” and “hear” different shapes; it the job of the rhetor to imbue certain shapes with presence at the expense of others. Tucker echoes Karon’s discussion of belief when he concludes, “presence is inextricably intertwined with the process by which we distinguish figure from ground, meaning from meaninglessness, and as such is a notion of great ontological significance” (410). Presence, therefore, is an integral part of how our minds process and conceive of the information being communicated.

Because presence involves that which is not physically present, it acts upon the audience’s beliefs and perceptions largely by way of the imagination. Karon emphasizes the relationship between the imaginary and the real in the formation of belief, citing David Hume’s definition of an agreed-upon idea as “[involving] an act of mind, which renders realities more present to us than fictions, caus[ing] them to weigh more in the thought, and giv(ing) them a superior influence on the passions and imagination” (103). An idea presenced is one imbued with increased influence, constructing a reality that is felt by the audience. In this way, Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca’s description of presence is intimately tied to a definition of belief as a “strong and lively idea derived from a present impression related to it” (Karon 104). In other words, presence links the rhetorical to the epistemological, integrating current impressions to generate understanding of a new concept.

To further illustrate the rhetorical effect of presence, Gross and Dearin translate Ranier Maria Rilke’s poem about a headless sculpture of Apollo, “Archaic Torso of Apollo.” In the poem, Rilke describes the sculpture’s torso as so full of a sense of lively vivacity, that the viewer can feel the sculpture’s gaze as if it were not headless:

We did not know him when he was alive, when the eyes in that astounding head ripened like fruit. Still, even now his torso glows like a candelabra; though turned low, his gaze penetrates steadily outward. If his state did not do so, the surge of his breast would not dazzle you;…if his state did not do so, this stone would seem
ill-formed…it would not glisten like the fur of some wild animal; it would not burst from its marble confines like a star; for there is no way—no way whatever—that you can escape its penetrating gaze. You must change your life. (Gross and Dearin 151)

In their analysis, Gross and Dearin write, “Rilke describes a mental transformation analogous to the one to which Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca allude when they speak about presence as a psychological phenomenon” (151). Here, perception becomes illumination, and the presence created by the sculpture does not just fill one’s consciousness, but transforms it, altering one’s perception of the real. The effect is not just psychological but existential, and the viewer comes away from the experience changed. Rilke represents his impression and the ensuing transformation by use of metaphors—themselves rhetorical devices that uniquely inform our perception of the real.

**METAPHORS AND PRESENCE**

Before the introduction of the term “presence,” a similar rhetorical effect was described in what Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca call an “awakened” metaphor, or what Aristotle calls a metaphor with *energeia*. Gross and Dearin rightly turn to Aristotle’s descriptions of metaphor as an important precursor to a concept of presence. In *On Rhetoric*, Aristotle distinguishes between metaphors with or without “energy.” For example, Aristotle uses the description of an arrow as “eager to fly” as an example of a metaphor with energy, because personifies the arrow as having life (222). In tracing Aristotle’s use of *energeia*, Sara Newman quotes Richard Moran’s description of *energeia* in metaphor as “progressively refined from the representation of movement, to the representation of something alive, to the more specific trope of personification” (3). The effect is initially psychological, drawing the audience’s attention to the fact that the arrow can fly, but also has a persuasive influence by depicting the arrow as full of force. Wayne Booth similarly defines good metaphors as those which are “active,” lending energy to something with less energy in a way that is concise, appropriate and accommodated to the audience in such a way that the hearer “cannot resist” the association the metaphor creates (54, 56).

The presencing force of a subject results from the rhetorical technique of deliberately choosing one form of expression, such as a specific metaphor, in lieu of another. Gross and Dearin cite a metaphor used by Abraham Lincoln as an example, where he compares the
number of hanged men to the amount of Spanish moss growing on the trees. Lincoln notes how the hangings were once limited to gamblers and Negroes, but now inclusive of every man, until “dead men were seen literally dangling from the boughs of trees upon every roadside; and in numbers almost sufficient, to rival the native Spanish moss of the country, as a drapery of the forest” (Gross and Dearin 118). In doing so, Lincoln relies on hyperbole and metaphor to “increas[e] their presence in the interest of condemning mob violence” (136). By using a metaphor that would have been familiar, such as Spanish moss, Lincoln helps his audience better understand and visualize the prevalence of the hangings, enabling them to act upon their heightened awareness.

In addition to appealing to the imagination, metaphors and presence have similar effects through their appeal to the visual for emphasis. Aristotle describes the effect of metaphors in elevated or eloquent speech by way of what he calls “bringing-before-the-eyes,” or what Kennedy translates as visualization. Aristotle uses this phrase to describe how metaphors make something more apparent and observable for the audience, for “things should be seen as being done rather than going to be done” (Kennedy 219). Here it seems Aristotle defines an effective metaphor as one which presences the subject of the rhetor’s text, connecting the force of metaphors to his notion of *energia*: “I call those things ‘before-the-eyes’ that signify things engaged in activity…And [energia], as Homer often uses it, is making the lifeless living through the metaphor…In all these something seems living through being actualized [energia]” (222). An example of a metaphor with *energia* that is also “before the eyes” is Aristotle’s description of spears that “stood in the ground longing to take their fill of flesh” (222). The personification of the spears gives them a living quality that draws the audience’s attention and interest by presencing them in their mind.5

As with presence, the effect of the metaphor depends on the elements of the rhetorical situation, such as the setting or the metaphor’s historical background, as well as rhetorical techniques such as the tone of voice, to help clarify or enhance the metaphor’s meaning and

5 For more discussion on “bringing-before-the-eyes” see Sarah Newman’s “Aristotle’s Notion of Bringing Before the Eyes.” Newman suggests Aristotle’s definition to be prolific in terms of its allowance for an larger audience role in the persuasion process. She describes this process to work through an appeal to pathos, immediately actualizing something not physically present for the audience as a means of persuasion. While Newman does not link this rhetorical effect to the theory of presence, they are essentially synonymous.
interpretation. In this sense, the meaning of the metaphor is created through the combination of both the circumstances and characteristics of the terms being connected. Black notes that in the selection of the metaphor, the speaker chooses what will serve as the “ground for the metaphor,” so that the word only conjures up a selection of characteristics implied by the literal use of the word (287). For instance, in Black’s metaphor “the man is a wolf,” any human traits that can be discussed in “wolf-language” without awkward strain will be “rendered prominent,” and all else will be pushed to the background (289). To put it simply, using the metaphor “wolf” presences the qualities of man that are wolf-like. The vocabulary of the metaphor “filters and transforms” our perspective, organizing our thoughts by bringing forward (or presencing) attributes of what is being described that would not be seen any other way (290).

Charles Kauffman and Donn Parson are perhaps the first to specifically discuss how metaphors lend themselves to the creation or silencing of presence. They describe both metaphors and presence as powerful rhetorical tools that “command attention to new ideas,” working to gain assent or to “hide the power of ideas behind a screen of orthodoxy” (Kauffman and Parson 93). Both metaphors and presence are the means by which discourse makes itself accessible to audiences, coloring new ideas in accordance with their author’s purpose. What Newman describes as the collaboration between the cognitive and the perceptive/sensory in achieving the effect of the metaphor, Kauffman and Parson locate in the fusion of discourse and the symbolic, creating a new kind of understanding. They quote Susanne Langer when she argues, “Metaphor is our most striking evidence for abstractive seeing, of the power of human minds to use presentational symbols” (94). Through metaphors our minds are capable of connecting an image or symbol to an concept, allowing for more in-depth thought about that concept.

For metaphors to serve as the comprehensive link between two symbolic forms, or between the new and the familiar, the grounds for that comparison have to be made “available” to the audience. In other words, metaphors presence a potentially abstract association by creating a new category or new way of perceiving that subject. Similarly, the suppression of presence removes the discourse from a broad audience and reaches only the select few. Kauffman and Parson claim that the metaphors’ fusing function establishes a sense of urgency and relevancy similar to that which is central to Perelman and Olbrechts-
Tyteca’s theory of presence. And, because “awareness is a precondition for assent,” metaphors heighten the probability that the comparison or connection made will lead to a changed mind (101). Once understood, metaphors continually make available the necessary grounds for the formation of new beliefs.
CHAPTER 4

THE GOSPEL OF JOHN: INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, I will briefly review the background for the Gospel of John, noting relevant scholarship on John’s authorship, influences, sources, and intended audience in order to establish the rhetorical situation at the time of John’s publication. This will serve as the foundation for my next chapter, in which I perform a rhetorical analysis of John’s use of the metaphor “light” as a case study, evaluating how John incorporates this metaphor for Jesus to present certain attributes and beliefs held by a first-century audience. Drawing from my discussion of the nature of metaphors and presence, I argue that the author of John relies on the dynamic nature of metaphors—their capacity to appeal to multiple associations at once, fusing together two previously unrelated concepts by evoking the imagination—to demonstrate multiple layers of meaning so as to present Jesus’ identity, appealing to Jewish imagery while remaining comprehensible and accessible to a non-Jewish audience.

While all four gospels in the New Testament portray Jesus in a unique way, the Gospel of John is by far the most unique in its approach. Since its composition, John has sparked much debate as to its authenticity, authorship and message. It omits many of the key stories of Jesus that are included in the other gospels, and spans three years of Jesus’ ministry. The vocabulary in John is also distinct, as is its style. In John alone is Jesus the divine Word, who existed with God, as God, since before time began. He comes to earth to perform signs, pointing to his identity as one sent from God. The Johannine Jesus does not try to conceal his identity, asserting it several times through striking “I am” statements.

For a long time, many scholars believed that the striking difference between John and Mark, Matthew and Luke existed because the author of John knew the other gospels, but wanted to write a more spiritual version. Others pointed to John as an authentic and essential reflection of Jesus’ identity, regardless of whether or not he used the other gospels as sources. William Wright quotes Augustine’s description of the author of John as one who “had in view that true divinity of the Lord in which He is the Father’s equal, and directed his efforts above all to the setting forth of the divine nature in his Gospel in such a way as he
believed to be adequate to men’s needs and notions” (2). Now there is a strong tradition that understands John as written independently of the Synoptics due to its unique style, reflecting its origins in a Palestinian community of mostly Jews who believed in Jesus as the revelation of God.

The self-professed purpose of John’s gospel comes in the penultimate chapter: “These things have been written that you might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name” (20:31). The Greek word used here for “believe” can either be translated as “continue believing,” or as “come to believe.” Though there is evidence for both translations, many scholars describe both forms of the verb as interchangeable. Whether the gospel was intended to inspire believers to continue their faith or to convince its audience to come to faith is largely connected with questions concerning John’s intended audience. The metaphorical language and style that permeate the rhetoric of John’s gospel make it readily accessible to a diverse readership, going beyond an apparent Jewish influence to appeal to a wide audience. But comprehensibility does not imply simplicity—the implications of John’s metaphors are only fully understood through a knowledge of the Jewish scripture and tradition. For this reason Leon Morris compares the gospel to “a pool in which a child may wade and an elephant can swim. It is both simple and profound” (3). In his classic commentary *The Gospel According to John*, Raymond Brown similarly characterizes the gospel as written to “intensify people’s faith” while reaching out to a relatively diverse audience (152). In other words, the symbols and metaphors evoked in John uniquely presence rich religious and cultural traditions, but in such a way that recognizing them is not necessary for understanding the basic meaning of Jesus’ teachings.

**PROVENANCE**

The date of John’s composition has been the subject of much debate, but the majority of biblical scholars date the gospel’s composition between 75 C.E. and 95 C.E. Raymond Brown cites the Johannine theme of Jesus’ continual presence, as established by the Paraclete-Spirit and by Jesus’ claim to fulfill the Jewish sacraments, as suggestive of a post-70 date, when Jews would still be dealing with the ramifications that came with the loss of the Temple. In this context, John’s emphasis on the way Jesus eliminated the need for an intermediary between God and humanity would have offered a solution for the Jews. The
discovery of Papyrus 52 demonstrated that the gospel was already well known in Egypt by 100 C.E. As described by Gail O’Day in *The New Interpreter’s Bible*, some scholars attribute the conflict with the Jewish leadership and threatened expulsion from the synagogues in John (9:22, 12:42, 16:2) to the “Benediction Against Heretics,” which occurred around 85-95 C.E. O’Day describes this conflict and the role it played in shaping the community that read John’s gospel as pointing to 75-80 C.E. as the earliest possible date, though most scholars date the gospel in the early 90s.

The potential influences on John are numerous. In *New Readings on John*, R. Kysar is quoted as describing the influences on John’s gospel as such: “Nearly every conceivable religious and/or philosophical movement in the Roman world has been proposed as the intellectual setting of the Fourth Gospel” (Nissen and Pedersen 17). Probably the oldest twentieth-century scholarship on John suggests that it was written to refute the teachings of the Gnostics yet none of John’s parallels to gnosticism are exclusively Gnostic. Though earlier attention was given to the Roman world or the Gnostics as potential influences, later scholars determined the gospel to have been influenced by Hellenistic Judaism. Yet even these separate influences intersect, as there was already a Hellenistic influence in the biblical Judaism at the time of John’s composition. Similarly, even though John’s gospel generally strays from Greek rhetorical conventions there are several examples of its influence in John. For example, David Ball cites the use of “specific dramatic irony,” a technique in which the characters are not aware of the irony at hand but the readers are, as uniquely prevalent in John, evidencing Greek influence (272). Also, in *What’s in the Word*, Ben Witherington III argues the gospel should be read through the lens of the ancient Greek social and rhetorical conventions, deeming the Gospel of John as the most rhetorically effective (and affective) telling of the gospel story.

**John’s “Jewishness”**

There has been a marked shift in Johannine scholarship in the last century, with a growing trend among scholars to start their investigation with Jesus and the gospel’s Jewish identity. Currently, John is considered to be mostly influenced by Judaism, and is possibly even, as Stephen Smalley suggests, “the most Hebraic book of the New Testament” (60). Scholars such as Raymond Brown agree to a strong Jewish influence in John’s gospel,
initially claiming that it was limited to Palestinian Judaism but later including Hellenized Judaism as well. This Hellenized Judaism had undergone Persian and Greek influence, which would explain the gospel writer’s command of irony and familiarity with certain elements of Greek rhetoric. Yet the finding of the papyri at Qumran show that Hebrew and Aramaic-speaking Jews in Palestine had a vocabulary similar to John’s, suggesting a Palestine-area origin for the gospel. Thus, even though the gospel was written in Greek, it clearly reflects a Semitic environment.

The similarities between John’s gospel and the Qumran texts have led to several attempts to link the two. Beyond similarities in language, both prominently incorporate dualisms. For example, light and darkness are prominent motifs in the Dead Sea Scrolls, particularly in the scroll “The War of the Sons of Light with the Sons of Darkness.” But again, light and dark form a natural opposition, and the theme occurs frequently in the Hebrew Bible and other Jewish texts. In addition, there are essential differences between the interaction between the light and the darkness in the Scrolls, where people of darkness are chosen by fate and do not have the power to choose the light for themselves, and in John, where people have the ability to choose or reject the light Jesus evidences.

One of John’s key rhetorical strategies involves the realization, or presencing of verses and figures from the Hebrew Bible in connection with the person of Jesus. For example, the Johannine Jesus has several parallels to the figure of Moses; both are described as God’s spokesmen, sent with a mission and empowered by the Spirit, shepherds who perform signs or miracles of God, providers of bread and water in the wilderness, those with the desire to do God’s will, and so on (Davies). Like the Prophets in the Hebrew Bible, Jesus has immediate access to God. As Martin Warner writes in *The Bible as Rhetoric: Studies in Biblical Persuasion and Credibility*, John’s gospel communicates Jesus’ identity by “reliving and climaxing the stories of others,” whose lives “thereby become part of (Jesus’) story” (181). The images evoked by Jesus’ “I am” (*ego eimi*) statements also strategically presence sacred foundations of the Jewish faith in order to connect them with the person of Jesus. These images and figures would have been sacred to a Jewish audience—one reason the Gospel of John is thought to be primarily addressed to Jews. There are also many similarities between the discourse of John’s Jesus and the speeches of divine Wisdom, found in books
like Proverbs, Sirach, and Wisdom of Solomon, something that will be further discussed in the context of John’s Prologue.

**Authorship**

The authorship of John has been subject to much speculation and debate. As Margaret Davies points out, it was common for first-and second-century authors to not name themselves, and so their texts circulated anonymously. A popular assumption is that the author is Jesus’ disciple John, who is also the “beloved disciple” described in the gospel—which is why the early church held the gospel in such a high regard. In John, the phrase beloved disciple is mentioned five times, suggesting that this beloved disciple might be John the author. Irenaeus (130-200 C.E.) is the first to attribute the gospel to John, the disciple, writing that John lived until the reign of Emperor Trajan: “Afterwards John, the disciple of the Lord, who also had leaned upon his breast, did himself publish a gospel during his residence at Ephesus in Asia” (Davies 245). Others, such as Polycrates, bishop of Ephesus (189-198 C.E.), identified John with the beloved disciple and says he was martyred and buried in Ephesus. But the most likely theory is that the author or source for John was a Judean follower of Jesus, rather than one of the Galilean twelve. The gospel stresses eyewitness testimony and evidences a knowledge of the topography Jerusalem. Witherington even suggests that the gospel’s composition was prompted by the dying-out of the eyewitness and the need to preserve their memory. These testimonies would have been cherished due to the strong preference of oral testimony over written records in the first-century.

In questions concerning John’s authorship, some scholars differentiate between the author or evangelist, the source for the gospel’s content, and the redactor, the one responsible for the final arrangement of the gospel as it exists today. The author/evangelist is considered the one to have depicted Jesus as the Word incarnate, whose miracles are “signs” that reveal a divine truth about Jesus as one sent from God. This is the person referenced in John 19:35 (“He who saw it has borne witness—his testimony is true, and he knows that he tells the truth—that you also may believe”) and John 21:24 (“This is the disciple who is bearing witness to these things, and who has written these things; and we know that his testimony is true”). The redactor is thought to have been a disciple of the evangelist, who preserved the material for the gospel and put in as much as possible—something R. Brown determines as
the cause for the gospel’s awkward narrative flow in some places, as well as the duplicate passages. The work of the redactor is clear when comparing John’s arrangement of the events of Jesus’ life with the other gospels’. For example, in John Jesus is declared Messiah right from the beginning, proceeding to make a scene at the Temple in the second chapter. In the Synoptic gospels, the same scene occurs near the end (Mark 11, Matthew 21, and Luke 19).

**Audience**

In light of John’s Jewishness, it is reasonable to conceive of John’s intended audience (or implied reader) as having at least a basic understanding of the Jewish scriptures, though many differ on just how essential this knowledge is to understanding John’s message. Those like Ball point to John’s frequent appeal to quotations from the Hebrew Bible and demonstrated understanding of the Torah as evidence for John’s mission, connecting Jesus and the well-known scriptures of the Jewish faith. A study by A. T. Hanson describes the author of John as heavily reliant on scripture, “deploying the full resources of scripture” to emphasize Jesus’ significance (Nissen and Pedersen 18). Others argue that even though an understanding of scripture and theological concepts may give John’s audience a good background, it is not essential due to John’s rearrangement of old concepts in new ways.

John’s reflection of a variety of potential influences and use of figurative or poetic language has lead many to suggest that the gospel was written for a more diverse audience. As a text written in Greek, the implied reader of John would have been Greek-speaking and able to understand the double meanings of words. While most Jews spoke Greek, John frequently explains terms and customs that would not have been known to a non-Jewish audience, such as Jesus’ burial and the reason Jesus was being tracked down (for breaking the Sabbath and claiming to be God). For this reason, John might be considered to “attempt an entire restatement of the Christian message in terms of the current philosophy” (Smalley 124). An increased interest in John’s writing style in the twentieth century has highlighted this notion of John’s broad scope. In *An Introduction to the Gospel of John*, Raymond Brown describes how rhetorical criticism has shown John’s “dramatic skills in characterization” to appeal to readers/hearers throughout history (29). He cites G. W. MacRae’s description of John’s unique diction as intended to “reach out to as many religious backgrounds and experiences as possible,” appealing to the universalizing and transcendent Hellenistic
religious world (R. Brown, “An Introduction” 182). Nevertheless, it is undeniable that many of John arguments and analogies reflect essentially Jewish concerns, leading most scholars to determine that John’s audience was meant to at least understand the significance of Jewish tradition and beliefs in order to grasp the fullness of Jesus’ Christology in John.

Johannine Community

The uniqueness of the gospel and its use of “we” implies that its composition was the result of a collaborative effort, leading most late-twentieth-century scholars to trace its origins to a community of believers, known as the “Johannine community.” This community probably began as a group of Jews who identified Jesus as the Messiah and had separated from their families to form their own community, whether by choice or by force. The exact nature and purpose of this community are subject to debate. Many scholars view the themes of the gospel as reflective of a community suffering persecution for its beliefs. Once alienated from the Temple and synagogues, these Jews created a gospel in which Jesus appears the fulfillment of the sacraments and the Temple. Those such as Andreas Kostenberger describe this emphasis in the gospel as a clear sign that the destruction of the second Temple in 70 C.E. was the motivating factor for the gospel’s publication. Therefore, John’s approach to the story of Jesus was to create a permanent solution: a faith in Jesus, who “fulfilled the underlying symbolism” of not just Temple but all Jewish festivals (Kostenberger, “Destruction of Second Temple” 85). The loss of the Temple would have seemed like a permanent loss of God’s presence, leading John to “draw on existing strands in the Jewish religion [to] open the way to direct experience of the divine presence in the heavenly realms” (86).

The community’s expulsion from the synagogue might also be an explanation for the gospel’s high Christology: the depiction of Jesus as the revelation of God as God himself. This is evidenced by allusions to Jesus found in the Prologue, his ego eimi statements, and the overall use of Hebrew traditions and scriptures to show Jesus as the replacement of those traditions. If this was the case, it would make sense that much of the gospel was written to encourage Jewish believers coping with the loss of the Temple, liturgy and rituals. Other New Testament scholars claim that the community’s purposes were largely evangelistic, intending to teach the Greeks about their faith. But whether or not the writer’s motivation
was evangelistic, it would appear that the gospel is primarily written for a community of Jewish-Christian believers, with an emphasis on how they can conform their lives to that of Jesus by becoming: “sons, living from God in faithful obedience to him as recipients of his Sprit, laying down their lives for their friends in a new community united in love” (Davies 358).

Book of Signs/Book of Glory

While there are several different ways to topically organize the gospel into various sections, the most common division used is “The Book of Signs,” the first twelve books, and “The Book of Glory,” the last nine. John has fewer miracle stories than the other gospels, but the miracles that are described are performed publicly are called signs. Jesus describes four of his miracles as signs: changing water to wine, healing the royal official’s son, the feeding of the five thousand, and raising Lazarus from the dead. John incorporates these signs into the description of Jesus’ identity to help the audience better understand the full implications of Jesus’ claims. They are intimately tied to the gospel’s purpose of promoting belief: “Jesus did many other miraculous signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ…” (20:30-1). These signs are also tied to Jesus’ discourse, more specifically his I am statements, providing the audience concrete examples of what Jesus’ more spiritual or symbolic claims entail.

The Prologue

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it. There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. He himself was not he light, but he came to testify to the light. The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world.

He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him. He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him. But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God.
And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory of the Father’s only Son, full of grace and truth. (John 1:1-14)

To better understand the nature of John’s argument, I will first discuss how the Prologue introduces some of John’s foundational claims about Jesus’ identity, as both the revelation and dwelling place of God. With this foundation, I will then trace through the specific instances of light as a metaphor in the Gospel of John, analyzing their function in the specific passages.

**Background**

It is important to precede our discussion of how John incorporates the metaphor light to presence certain aspects of Jesus’ identity by evaluating the descriptions for Jesus in the “Prologue,” or the first eighteen verses of John. Often considered a pre-Johannine hymn due to its poetic style, this introduction to the gospel establishes the perspective through which readers are to view Jesus: as the divine “Word,” the foundational metaphor for all other metaphors. The Word is the English translation of Logos in the Greek, which also means “reason.” Though the Logos was originally a Greek philosophical concept, described as the wisdom or rationality through which God created the universe, in John it is associated with both God’s presence and creative action through Jesus. The descriptions of the Logos as light reflects the influence of both Greek and Jewish perceptions of Wisdom and the divine—something John presences in his Prologue to describe the Jesus’ eternal nature as one who is both of God’s essence and sent from God.

When read from a Jewish perspective, the Prologue would have been stunning in its presumptions of Jesus as the Logos of God. In the first verse, the use of the Word links Jesus’ identity to the divine word, davar, suggesting he was not only present at creation, but involved in creation. The davar has its origins in Genesis 1, where it is associated with the word by which God spoke creation into being. The Psalmist speaks to this as well: “By the word of the LORD were the heavens made, their starry host by the breath of his mouth” (Psalms 33:6). This word of God contains the power to create and to bring life. In *What’s in the Word*, Witherington describes the sacred biblical texts as having a “presence” because the word of God was a “speech act, an action word that changed things, affected persons” (16). In this way, the Word/words of a living powerful God were considered living and powerful
in themselves: “In the beginning was the (spoken) Word” (10). John’s Prologue incorporates this understanding of God’s word by connecting Jesus with the eternal and divine Word, who has “life in himself” and speaks the very “words of God” (5:26; 3:34). Thus the Prologue grounds all of Jesus’ other claims, infinitely increasing the relevancy of his actions as acts of God. Witherington writes: “John intends the whole of his Gospel shall be read in light of this verse. The deeds and words of Jesus are the deeds and words of God” (130). In this sense, the Johannine Jesus is the scripture come to life and the physical manifestation of the presence of God.

Through John essentially appeals to Jewish sensibilities, the description of the Logos in the Prologue also finds origins in Stoic philosophy, which defined the logos, or universal reason, as the governing principle of the world. Stoicism, often considered the most influential development in Hellenistic philosophy, defined the world as made up of matter and spirit. For Stoics, moral virtue and happiness came from understanding the nature of the world as governed by the logos, and consequently, understanding humanity’s place in it. As the rational principle laid out in the beginning of the world, the logos connected and governed all things. Its influence was described in terms of speech and reason, serving as the connection between God and humanity through its rationality. According to Stoicism, events as a series of causal links, all sanctioned by the universal law of the Logos. Therefore, to live according to the logos was to live in right relationship with God and the world. John’s gospel draws on several principles of Stoicism when linking God’s creative and governing activity with a initial and foundational Logos. Like the logos of Stoicism, the Johannine Logos is essentially the word and speech of God. But unlike the Hellenistic notion of the logos, John’s Logos is infinite, representing something wholly other. More importantly, John’s Logos “became flesh,” whereas the Greeks viewed the physical as corrupt.

In the Gospel of John, Jesus’ words and actions take on a new significance and have a life-giving function, both physically, as seen in his signs, and spiritually. In God and the Creative Imagination, Paul Avis describes this idea this way: “A person not only becomes a statement, but is stated by an image. A life not only serves as a symbol, but its significance is expressed by a symbol” (51). In other words, Jesus doesn’t just use metaphors in his discourse, but his very acts are metaphorical. Based on the Logos, it is not surprising that in John, faith is dependent on “the truth-bearing capacity of metaphors” (Avis 52). John relies
on other metaphors to signify Jesus’ form and function—Jesus as a metaphor uses metaphors to convey his identity. Even the literal acts of Jesus are often symbolic, preventing John’s audience from ignoring John’s message about Jesus. For example, when Jesus describes himself through metaphors such as “living water” or “the bread of life,” he not only uses a literal object to declare something about his identity, but as the revelation of God, Jesus points to an experience of God. In this way, the Logos prefaces a gospel full of metaphorical and figurative language, acting out Jesus’ role as an essential revelation of God.

The Dwelling Place of God

The rhetorical force of John’s depiction of Jesus in the Prologue is grounded in the Jewish understanding of the presence of God. In the Prologue, the Logos was said to have been “with” God and “was God.” Then, this essence of God’s reason and truth manifest is said to become “flesh” and “live” on earth. The Greek word for “lived” used in this verse is eskenosen, often translated as “dwelt” or “made his dwelling.” It comes from the Greek word for tabernacle or tent, the same word used to describe the dwelling of God’s presence on earth in the Hebrew Bible. John uses this term to show that the glory and presence of God, once contained in the tabernacle, is now realized in the human person of Jesus. Jesus’ words and actions while on earth are intended to manifest God’s glory, which dwelt on earth with Jesus and now dwells in believers through the Spirit/Paraclete.

To understand the full meaning of John’s metaphor, it is helpful to have some background concerning how God traditionally interacted with the world according to Hebrew Bible. In A Portable God: The Origin of Judaism and Christianity, Risa Levitt Kohn and Rebecca Moore trace the way Judaism and Christianity developed around this idea of the place where God dwells. In Ezekiel and Zechariah, God promises that the tabernacle, referred to as both a “dwelling place” and a “meeting tent,” will be with God’s people (Kohn and Moore 36). In Exodus, God gives detailed instructions for the consecration of the priests and the offering requirements, in return for which God promises to dwell with them, not in heaven but on earth:

For the generations to come this burnt offering is to be made regularly at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting before the LORD. There I will meet you and speak to you; there also I will meet with the Israelites and the place with be consecrated by my glory…I will dwell among the Israelites and be their God.
They will know that I am the LORD their God, who brought them out of Egypt so that I might dwell among them. I am the LORD their God. (29:42-6)

The glory of God was said to rest in this dwelling place, indicating his nearness through what was known as the Shekinah or glory.

John’s uses of the word glory twice in reference to the Logos’ “tabernacling,” connecting Jesus to the descriptions of God’s glory in the Hebrew Bible. Kohn and Moore claim that John uses “glory” to remind the intended readers of the glory and presence of God described in Exodus. After the tabernacle is set up as God instructs, God’s glory appears in a cloud that covers and fills the tent, preventing Moses from going inside. Glory also alludes to the story of when God places Moses in a cleft in a rock to shield him from the divine glory:

‘I will cause all my goodness to pass in front of you, and I will proclaim my name the LORD, in your presence. I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion. But,’ he said, ‘you cannot see my face, for no one may see me and live.’ (Exodus 33:19-20)

In both cases, a “theophany,” or an appearance of God, occurs (131). This same glory is linked to Jesus in John’s Prologue, and to Jesus’ prayer before his crucifixion: “I have brought you glory on earth by completing the work you gave me to do. And now, Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you before the world began” (John 17:4-5). By linking Jesus to God’s dwelling place, John’s gospel shows Jesus to be an essential revelation of God, making that glory present for those who accept his teachings.

John introduces the concept of Jesus’ preexistence and divinity in the Prologue by utilizing metaphors to presence several realities and understandings of God that were familiar to the Jewish audience. By using language for Jesus reflective of God’s dwelling or tabernacling among the people, John evokes all the reverence, power and comfort associated with God’s presence to emotionally engage readers and open up the possibility for a new way to perceive God. John frames Jesus’ coming as a new expression of God’s revelation in such a way that the effect is, as Gross and Dearin observe, both psychological and existential. In doing so, John uses the physically present to manifest the spiritually present, linking the two through the concept of the Logos.

The Prologue introduces the metaphors life and light in connection with Jesus, metaphors John repeats throughout the gospel in various contexts and demonstrating their truths through Jesus’ signs. The repetition of these archetypal or structural metaphors draws
out their full meaning, creating a sense of global presence threaded throughout the gospel by appealing to emotional and intellectual associations, demonstrating the extent to which Jesus’ coming fundamentally reconstructs reality for those who believe. By evoking the common symbol light to demonstrate the association between the *Logos*, Jesus and God, John presents a new reality, making the intangible tangible. The rest of this chapter will focus exclusively on evaluating how John’s use of light as a metaphor for Jesus’ identity is informed by a theory of presence via its dynamic appeal to a mostly Jewish but potentially diverse audience.
CHAPTER 5

RHETORICAL ANALYSIS: “LIGHT” IN JOHN

So far, I have evaluated some of the key issues concerning John’s origins, reflecting on the historical and cultural factors surrounding the gospel’s formation. It is most likely that the gospel was written at the end of the first-century, with the majority of scholars placing it in the 80s or 90s. John’s influences were mostly Jewish, evidenced by the gospel’s demonstrated knowledge of Jewish tradition, the Law and the Prophets, and through the gospel’s links to the Qumran. Though there is some debate concerning whether or not John’s audience was exclusively Jewish, it is generally understood to be mainly addressed to Jews. But this does not deny the influence of Hellenistic Greece, Greek rhetoric and philosophy, and Stoicism on John—all of which are represented in the gospel’s style and themes. In addition, use of “we” and the emphasis on Jesus’ replacement of the underlying symbolism of Jewish tradition and sacraments have lead to theories concerning a Johannine community that served as a background for the gospel’s composition.

In this chapter, I will evaluate how John incorporates these influences and appeals to a first-century audience, specifically though the use of the metaphor light. This analysis will be informed by a theory of presence, showing how John repeatedly uses the metaphor light to illustrate Jesus’ identity in order to appeal to the already-established symbolism and tradition surrounding the various notions of light. I will argue that John invokes this metaphor to presence existent associations, engaging the audience by associating Jesus with sacred Jewish beliefs and traditions in order to define Jesus’ as the new source for salvation, life and wisdom. In this way, John capitalizes on familiar associations between God and light, appealing to emotionally charged and deeply held beliefs, helping the audience better understand the significance of the new light Jesus brings. Through the combination of selection and presentational technique, John uses metaphor to, as Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca describe, fill the audience’s whole consciousness with presence so as to isolate certain qualities of Jesus from their overall mentality.
In John’s gospel, familiar metaphors are used to select or presence elements of religious, cultural and historical significance, dynamically depicting Jesus’ identity in connection with the God of the Hebrew Bible. John uses stylistic and literary techniques to incorporate the recurring motifs of light and darkness, night and day, presencing the various understandings of and associations with light already existent in the worldview of John’s audience. By using the metaphorical to make emotional and psychological associations, John illustrates divine realities that extend beyond their situational context and lay the foundations for a new theology centered on Jesus. While the meaning of light and darkness is dependant on the rhetorical situation, these terms function as archetypal symbols for the foundational truths of John’s understanding of the world. Koester describes John’s use of light and darkness as conveying divine realities that cannot be “fully defined in human terms,” rendering them in such a way that they are accessible to both a religious and secular audience (32). These symbols are threaded throughout the gospel, evoking different meanings depending on their context:

Although light and darkness may signify many things, the Gospel creates a literary framework that focuses their meaning without completely delimiting it. The text establishes basic configurations of meanings by connecting light with God, life and knowledge, and by associating darkness with their opposites. This network of associations recurs in the narrative with considerable consistency, making the cumulative effect of the light and darkness motif greater than any single occurrence of these images. (142)

This description of John’s use of light and darkness reflects Gross and Dearin’s characterization of presence as that which encompasses the whole of a text, rather than isolated incidences. By locating the literal description within a symbolic universe, John’s gospel extends itself to those who would otherwise feel excluded, defining all life as connected with the Word that provides light and life for the world.

THE WORD AS LIGHT AND LIFE

We now turn our attention to the specific occurrences of light as a metaphor, evaluating the potential sources John draws on to presence a specific portrayal of Jesus. The first of these occurs in the Prologue, where the Word and God are depicted as the foundations for life and light: “What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all” (1:4). The darkness threatens to “overcome” the light, but the light of God’s Logos keeps it at
bay. John frequently appears to use life and light synonymously to presence the life-giving function of Jesus as the “true light.” John uses life thirty-six times, more than twice as much as any other book in the New Testament, contrasting life through Jesus with the death that results from unbelief (Morris). As O’Day points out, John uses light and life as signs of the Word’s relationship with the world, and consequently, ways in which humanity experiences the Word incarnate.

The Prologue incorporates several literary techniques to emphasize the primacy of the light in contrast with the darkness. For example, in verse 5 the Greek form of the word “shine” is placed in the present tense—the way the Greeks would emphasize a word; the shining of this light is not a one-time event relegated to the past, but something that has been continual. This verse is distinguished from verses such as 6 or 11, which describe John the Baptist as one “sent” at a particular moment in time. The language here is intended to presence both the immediacy of the Word’s light, demonstrating its current availability, but also to presence its eternality. By locating the light of the Logos in the eternal opposition between light and darkness, John’s Prologue establishes itself as the lens through which all of Jesus’ statements and interactions can be viewed. John’s gospel shows the light of the Word is the light of Jesus and the light of God, linking all that is good, true and divine, as associated with light, with Jesus in attempts to engage the audience’s on a deeply emotional and ideological level.

One way John uses light to illustrate Jesus’ identity is by appealing to the metaphorical use of light and life that describes the God of the Hebrew scriptures. These texts describe God’s various manifestations, as well as the Law and the Prophets, in terms of life-giving light. In the Prologue, John appeals to the Jewish belief of God as the source for all light and life, presencing the creation story to emphasize Jesus’ relationship to the God who created life itself. Verse 1 of the Prologue echoes the very first verse of the Hebrew Bible in Genesis, where “In the beginning” God created an originally dark and formless world (Genesis 1:1). For John, the light of Jesus is fundamentally tied to the physical light created and sustained by God, for without it “not one thing came into being” (Genesis 1:3). As the first creation, this light is what made all other life possible; when God created light, he saw that it was “good,” and then separated it from darkness, creating “Day” and “Night” (Genesis 1:4-5). Similarly, the Word is described to be the source of light, which was not
only present at the moment of creation but active in the act of creating as well. Just as God’s words in the creation narrative brought life, so too is life found in the Word. The Word shines in the darkness in the same way God created the light to shine in the darkness in Genesis, illuminating the rest of creation so all might see God’s glory. Like the physically and emotionally life-giving light of God, so too is life found in the Logos (John 1:4).

Besides the literal connotations of the creation and function of light, light is also depicted on a spiritual level in John’s gospel. The connection between light and life reflected in Genesis is repeated in the Hebrew Bible’s Psalms. Here, descriptions of God navigate between literal and metaphorical light and life, where God is frequently viewed in lieu of God’s creative acts to emphasize the life-giving function of the light; “For with you is the fountain of life; in your light we see light” (Psalm 36:9). The light of God is also praised for its guiding and protective function, exposing all potential evils: “The LORD is my light and my salvation—whom shall I fear? The LORD is the stronghold of my life—of whom shall I be afraid?” (27:1). John presences these functions of God, as described in terms of light, to capitalize on sacred descriptions of God that provided emotional comfort for the Jewish people. This light of God was not an abstraction, but a real force that had a direct influence on their lives.

In connection with the association between life and light, the Hebrew Bible associated darkness with sin, ignorance and death. For example, in Psalm 85, the Psalmist pleads for God to rescue the weak and needy from the darkness of misunderstanding: “They have neither knowledge nor understanding, they walk around in darkness” (vs. 5). In Job, darkness is linked with evil: “But when I looked for good, evil came; and when I waited for light, darkness came” (30:26). In John’s Prologue, the light is depicted as triumphant over the darkness, suggesting the Word is uninhibited by literal or metaphorical darkness. By referencing the contrast between light and darkness, life and death, John presences long-standing associations to appeal to the Jewish understanding of God, the author and creator of both literal and spiritual life and light, opposing the forces of darkness.

John’s Prologue depicts Jesus as the true light, making spiritual light available to everyone by reflecting God’s glory (1:10, 14). Lesslie Newbigin describes this concept in The Light Has Come: An Exposition of the Fourth Gospel, showing that through the light of the Johannine Jesus, things appear as they really are—”he is the word through whom they all
came to be. It follows that all men, whether they believe or not, live under the light just as they live by the creative work of God” (6). In this way, John presents the Hebrew Bible’s praise of God’s literal and metaphorical life-giving light to associate it with the light of Jesus, who was God and was with God “in the beginning,” providing the same light. Combining the light of Jesus with the light of God, believed to have been active throughout the Jew’s history, suggests that the true light Jesus brings will actively exist even after he is no longer physically present. Therefore, John appeals to metaphorical and literal meanings of light to demonstrate Jesus’ involvement with the actions of God. Craig Keener puts it this way: “For John, ‘life’ and ‘light’ are not simply abstractions: the Life raises Lazarus; the light gives light to blind eyes” (382). In presencing Jewish understandings of God in the Prologue, John references spiritual truths already understood in metaphorical terms, appealing to the audience’s imagination to extend the presence and influence of Jesus beyond the physical.

Light and Wisdom

The gospel’s depiction of Jesus as light also bears many similarities with the figure of “Wisdom” in the Jewish literature and scriptures. The texts of this tradition are diverse; for the Jews, wisdom was gained by studying parables, riddles and other forms of metaphorical speech by Jewish sages. The Hebrew Bible contains poems dedicated to Wisdom, such as those found in Job 28 or Proverbs 1-9. There is also a distinct tradition known as Wisdom Literature, which appears to blend mythology with Greek philosophy, eventually extending into Gnosticism after the Biblical period. An example of this form of literature is 1 Enoch, where Wisdom is personified as a female figure who leaves the heavenly realm and goes to earth, only to be rejected by her own: “Wisdom went forth to dwell among the sons of men, but she did not find a dwelling. Wisdom returned to her place, and sat down among the angels” (42:2). This description echoes that of the Word in the Prologue, who “came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him” (John 1:11).

In both the Hebrew Bible and Wisdom Literature, the figure of Wisdom is often described in terms of light. The Jewish book of Sirach describes Wisdom’s instruction to “shine forth like dawn,” illuminating her truth from far away (24:32). Also, the Wisdom of Solomon contains many similar descriptions of the illuminating effects of Wisdom. In this book, Wisdom is a “reflection of eternal light, a spotless mirror of the working of God” who
is preferred to any natural light, for her “radiance never ceases” (Wis. of Sol. 7:26, 10). Later in the chapter, the light of Wisdom is contrasted with natural light: “She is more beautiful than the sun, and excels every constellation of the stars. Compared with the light she is found to be superior, for it is succeeded by the night, but against wisdom evil does not prevail” (7:29-30). Texts such as Wisdom of Solomon reflect a later tradition in Wisdom Literature in which Wisdom began to be connected with themes like eternal life, resurrection and salvation, similar to the themes found in John. For this reason, scholars like Raymond Brown conceive of John’s Jesus as more than just a parallel to the figure of Wisdom, but rather, a culmination of the descriptions of Wisdom.

Even though 1 Enoch, Sirach and Wisdom of Solomon were not accepted in the Jewish canon of the Hebrew Bible, they would have been familiar to a first-century Jewish audience. The influence of Sirach and Wisdom of Solomon is reflected in their preservation in Greek form in the Septuagint, and then in the Catholic and Orthodox Old Testaments. By describing the Word in terms of the light of Wisdom, John presents an understanding of Jesus as one from God who reveals eternal truths and brings life. In doing so, John is able to capitalize on already-established metaphorical correlations, helping the audience better grasp how Jesus manifests God’s truth and presence through his identification with the figure of Wisdom. For John, Jesus is not created but is the means by which the world was created. Also, Wisdom is described in very ethereal terms, like “she covered the earth like a mist,” whereas in John, Jesus comes at a particular time and place in history (Sirach 24:3). John portrays the Word as the key to truth, salvation and eternal life to present a correlation with Wisdom and convey specific attributes of Jesus. By doing so, John appeals to the Jewish reverence for Wisdom to engage them emotionally and broaden their view of Jesus.

**Light and Enlightenment**

The association of life and light finds parallels in Judaism but is also a natural connection made within multiple first-century worldviews. The Wisdom of Solomon, originally composed in Greek in the early first-century C.E., reflects many of the Greek literary and philosophical conventions of the time, appropriating them for a diverse audience. Many scholars consider John’s gospel as similarly motivated, reflected by its integration of concepts familiar to a Greek and Jewish audience. Both John and Wisdom describe
intangible realities in terms of light and darkness, an antithesis common in Greek and Jewish rhetoric and that implied moral dualism. In Greek philosophy, the world was perceived in terms of opposites, where light was associated with the good and dark with the bad. Greek texts also frequently called those who were dead as “banished from the ‘light,’” recognizing the darkness of the shadowy netherworld of deceased souls” (Keener 386). For example, Homer described a man’s death as when “darkness enfolded his eyes” (Koester 146). Similarly, life was marked by the ability to see the light of the sun, or to “look upon the light” (146).

Light was also associated with enlightenment, which the Greeks described in terms of “illumination.” In Plato’s writings, he distinguishes between heavenly and earthly reality, describing the transcendent realm of God as pure light and the light perceived by the senses as reflection of that light. This distinction is reflected in verse 9 of the Prologue, where John describes the Word as the “true [alethinos] light that gives light” or “enlightens” every man. The Stoics described enlightenment as an “inner illumination of reason and conscience,” (Newbigin 6). This language is perhaps reflected in John’s description of the Word as the “true light that gives light” or “enlightens” every man.

Macky discusses this Johannine use of the word “true” to describe Jesus’ light in The Centrality of Metaphors to Biblical Thought. The Greek adjective for “true” or “real” is the word alethinos, typically used to distinguish between spiritual or heavenly realities and physical or earthly ones. This word used in verse 9, as well as when Jesus is described as the “true bread” or the “true vine” (John 6:32, 15:1), emphasizes the contrast between the physical symbol and an eternal counterpart. For example, the true light that Jesus brings is different than the physical light, but because both the physical and the spiritual realities are real/literal in John, this use of alethinos is distinctive. So while the Johannine Jesus is the metaphorical vine or bread, he also produces literal wine and bread through his signs. This term might be read as synonymous for “original,” but Macky suggests that John most likely uses it to mean “super-real,” implying a “higher degree of reality” (203). Because biblical writers did not only think of the real in dualistic terms but in terms of levels of reality, John is not just calling attention to the dichotomy between the real and the imaginary, but speaking of Jesus as the “super-real” light, or “the highest in the trichotomy of imaginary/ (ordinarily) real/ super-real” (204). Consequently, John’s use of alethinos expresses this notion of a new
reality in the highest sense—a concept familiar to a Greek audience but uniquely expressed here in terms of metaphor.

As discussed, John’s Prologue introduces Jesus as light and life to rhetorically presence the first light of creation, the expression of God’s presence in the Hebrew Bible, the depictions of Wisdom in Jewish Wisdom tradition, and the concept of enlightenment described in various forms of Greek philosophy. John introduces these metaphorical and literal meanings and images associated with the concept of light to foreshadow the teachings and actions of Jesus in the rest of the gospel, presencing these religious and philosophical beliefs already conceived of as light to construct a dynamic picture of Jesus’ identity. John relies on the metaphor’s ability, as Ogden and Richards put it, to pull together several thoughts at once, producing meaning through their interaction. By doing so, John presences the network of familiar meanings associated with divine light that existed for a first-century audience to depict certain aspects of who Jesus was. However, in John the “true light which enlightens everyone” goes beyond philosophical truth (enlightenment), or the Jewish Law. The light of the Word came for all people, showing the way to life and combating the darkness associated with sin and death. The rest of John’s gospel builds on this initial description, using the secondary effects of individual metaphors to achieve a superordinate effect, presencing Jesus’ identity through the narrative of his life and ministry. In doing so, John actualizes the way Jesus’ divine nature and sacrifice replaces the need for the Jewish Law and sacraments.

JOHN 3 AND 4: LIGHT AND JUDGMENT

In Chapters 3 and 4, John presences another metaphorical affiliation with the function of light, as something that exposes falsehood and illuminates sin. In John 3, Jesus addresses Jewish messianic expectations in his conversation with the Pharisee Nicodemus. When Nicodemus approaches Jesus at night to ask him questions regarding his teachings, Jesus identifies himself as the “Son of Man,” who must be “lifted up” so that “whoever believes in him may have eternal life” (3:14-5). Here, Jesus equates the light with belief and judgment, revealing truth and exposing evil:

And this is the judgment, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For everyone who does evil hates the light, and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be
exposed. But he who does what is true comes to the light, that it may be clearly seen that his deeds have been wrought in God. (3:19-21)

By describing the present judgment he brings, Jesus expresses a sort of realized eschatology consistent with the Jewish belief that associated the revealing and judgment of a person’s works with an eschatological time. Yet, as C. K. Barrett emphasizes in his commentary on John, the same light of Jesus that illuminates evil deeds simultaneously illuminates truth, affirming judgment to be an essential component of salvation. Though the light brings judgment, its purpose is to lead the way to truth: “Indeed God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him” (3:17). When faced with the light, some people prefer darkness due to their “evil” deeds. John again uses antithesis as a rhetorical strategy to emphasize the importance of faith in Jesus; those who do not believe and do not “come into the light” are defined as lovers of darkness due to their false and evil deeds. John utilizes the dynamic quality of metaphors to highlight the risks of rejecting Jesus. This further imbues John’s message with a sense of urgency, showing Jesus to be both an expression of God’s salvation, but also God’s judgment. The audience is faced with a choice, and is moved either to accept or reject Jesus’ dramatic claims.

In Chapter 4, Jesus acts out the exposing function of the light just described to Nicodemus by demonstrating himself to be a metaphorical light in a conversation with a Samaritan woman at Jacob’s well. In this chapter, Jesus shows himself to be a light for all people by reaching out to a Samaritan woman despite the intense hostility between Jews and Samaritans and the inferior status women, especially divorced women. Many commentaries make much of Jesus’ trip into Samaria, suggesting that Jesus intentionally went out of his way in order to minister to the Samaritans (4:4). In his conversation with the woman at the well, Jesus exposes her deeds by telling her “all [she] ever did,” but because of her belief she is not condemned (4:39). Because of the truth exposed by the light, many came to faith; “Many Samaritans from that city believed in him because of the woman’s testimony, ‘He told me everything I have ever done’” (4:39). This passage demonstrates the grace extended to those who come into the light, emotionally appealing to John’s audience through Jesus’ compassion and power—Jesus’ light is made available to the Samaritan woman, regardless of her past or initial intellectual hang-ups. Through the narrative of this story, John exhibits
how the light of Jesus is tangible, realizing or bringing “before the eyes” some of the real consequences of the symbolic light so that the audience might better understand the nature of the light of Jesus. The audience is able to see themselves in the narrative, as people potentially displaced or rejected looking for an experience of God’s presence.

**JOHN 8: “I AM THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD”**

This function of the light exhibited in Chapters 3 and 4 foreshadows perhaps the greatest Johannine expression of Jesus as light: when Jesus declares himself to be the “light of the world” (8:12). Here John again describes Jesus in terms of light and life, this time linking the metaphors to an I am statement in order to presence the imagery of light in connection with the Prologue, the light of God the Hebrew and also the existing images surrounding the time and place in John’s narrative. In this chapter, John strategically connects Jesus’ light with the light of God’s Law and presence in the Temple, as well as the commemoration of God’s past deeds and the light of the eschatological time evoked in the celebration of the Jewish festival of Sukkot. In doing so, Jesus’ statements are infused with a sense of relevancy and urgency; this light of God is essential, greater than other lights and without which one will “walk in darkness” (8:12). Because scholars almost universally reject verses 1-11 of Chapter 8 as an inauthentic later addition, I will begin my analysis with verse 12. The narrative begins with Jesus’ declaration to be the “light of the world,” following his claims to be “the bread of life” in Chapter 6 and “living water” in Chapter 7. As with the images of bread and water, John uses light as a *topos* to explain Jesus’ mission and identity. This preliminary verse reemphasizes the connection between life and light, in contrast with darkness: “Again Jesus spoke to them ‘I am the light of the world; whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life” (8:12). Most scholars consider this chapter to be a continuation of the discussion with the Pharisees at the Temple in Chapter 7, with both chapters constituting a narrative unit.

One way John initially evidences Jesus’ identity as the true light in contrast with the other lights is through the grammatical structure of Jesus’ claim. In his commentary on John, Herman Ridderbos explains how in the Greek text, the “I” in verse 12 of Chapter 8 is emphasized to the extent that it is no longer just the subject of the sentence, but it also serves as the predicate with light as the subject, reading “The light of the world am I” (292).
Consequently, Jesus himself is the emphasis, distinguishing the light inherent in his person from the abundant light of the Sukkot or the light of the Temple. While most scholars believe Jesus to be referencing the Sukkot through this metaphor, some consider the events of Chapter 8 to be after the festival. But even if this is the case, and Jesus’ claim was made during a second visit to the Temple, the absence of the festival’s lights would have made Jesus’ claim to be the “light of the world” even more pronounced. The darkness after the festival would have dramatically contrasted the time of celebration and joy in the presence of God, leading John to emphasize the light of Jesus as a superior replacement. Either way, the association between Jesus and light would have appealed to John’s audience, who no longer had the light of the Temple as a symbol of God’s presence due to its destruction in 70 C.E. John presences these lights in connection with Jesus’ claim to be light, showing him to be the new and greater guide for all those who believe in him, independent of other lights.

**Sukkot (Feast of Tabernacles)**

Most consider the background for both Chapters 7 and 8 to be the Jewish festival of Sukkot, otherwise known as the Feast of Tabernacles, or the Feast of Booths. This festival originated as an agricultural ritual associated with rainfall—those who didn’t go to the feast would not get rain that year. Exodus refers to this event as the “festival of ingathering,” in which people would celebrate the fall harvest by gathering the first fruits of their labor to offer to the Lord (23:16). In Deuteronomy, it became known instead as the “festival of booths,” celebrating God’s provision in the wilderness as was as the harvest:

> Rejoice before the Lord your God…at the place that the Lord you God will choose as a dwelling for his name. Remember that you were a slave in Egypt, and diligently observe these statutes. You shall keep the festival of booths for seven days, when you have gathered in the produce from your threshing floor and your wine press. Rejoice during your festival, your sons and your daughters, your male and female slaves, as well as the Levites, the strangers, the orphans, and the widows resident in your towns. Seven days you shall keep the festival to the Lord your God at the place that the Lord will choose; for the Lord your God will bless you in all your produce and in all your undertakings, and you shall surely celebrate. (16:11-15)

In both biblical times and during the period of the second Temple, Sukkot was the primary festival to attend as one of most sacred Jewish festivals. Pilgrims would come from everywhere for the feast, and it was not uncommon for entire Jewish towns to go to
Jerusalem together. During the festival, people would camp out in tabernacles, also called booths, to commemorate the tents the Israelites stayed in during the desert wanderings.

Light was a big part of the festivities, especially in the simhat beit hasho’eva, or the “rejoicing at the place of water-drawing.” As part of the festival, four large golden lamps in the Temple’s Court of Women were continually lit. Jeffery Rubenstein cites the Mishna as describing the ceremony this way:

There were golden lamps there, with golden bowls at their tops. There were four ladders at each lamp. Four boys from the Young Priests, with full pitchers of oil that help on hundred-twenty log (30 log=about 15 gallons) in their hands, would pour into each and every bowl. They made wicks from the worn-out undergarments and belts of the priests, and kindled [the lamps] with them. There was no courtyard in Jerusalem that was not illuminated from the light of the beit hasho’eva (place of water-drawing). Pious Men and Men of Deed used to dance before them with torches and recite praises before them... (135)

The people then danced all night in what became known as the torchlight ceremony, each one with a torch in their hand. There were even contests to see who could have the torch that shone the brightest. Each evening, worshipers crowded at the Court of Women until daylight, when they would march to the east gate that led out of sanctuary. They would then turn towards the Temple, with their backs to the rising sun, saying: “Our fathers when they were in this place turned with their backs toward the temple of the Lord and their faces to the east, and they worshiped the sun to the east; but as for us, our eyes are turned toward the Lord” (Koester 158). What had once been a pagan sun-worship ritual as described in Ezekiel 8 had become an “expression of reverence for the Creator of light” (Rubenstein 135). During Sukkot, the people would also recite the Jewish Hallel, which was reserved for times of celebration and thanksgiving. The Hallel consisted of Psalm 113-118, the end of which proclaims: “Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord. We bless you from the house of the Lord. The Lord is God, and he has given us light” (118:26-27).

Light was so much a part of the festival that it eventually became associated with the festival of fire from 2 Maccabees, known by different names until it was called the Festival of Dedication/Lights, or Hanukkah. Some sources show that many Jews viewed Hanukkah as an additional Feast of Tabernacles, only celebrated in the winter. In other words, the light of Sukkot was invoked in establishing this eight-day festival in which an additional candle is lit every night on a menorah, celebrating the Maccabean victories and commemoration of the
Second Temple in second-century B.C.E. If this is the setting for this passage, it would also link Chapters 7, 8, 9 and 10 of John, in which the festival of Hanukkah is mentioned. Regardless, the context for this passage was, in essence, a festival of light, celebrating God’s presence and provision.

The lights at the ceremony also commemorated the pillar of light that guided the Israelites during the Exodus:

The Lord went in front of them in a pillar of cloud by day, to lead them along the way, and in a pillar of fire by night, to give them light, so that they might travel by day and by night. Neither the pillar of cloud by day nor the pillar of fire by night left its place in front of the people. (Exodus 13:21-22).

This physical manifestation of God’s presence reminded the Jewish people of God’s power and provision for them, and that God was with them. Therefore, God’s light served as both a literal guide to the Israelites, showing them the way to go and illuminating their camp so they could survive, but it also served as a comforting presence. Later in the passage, the illuminated cloud that manifested God’s presence also demonstrated God’s judgment; while the Israelites remained in the light on one side, the Egyptians, because of their persecution of God’s chosen people, were kept in spiritual and physical darkness on the other. The Psalmist uses this event as an example of God’s enduring faithfulness and promise to the Jews, whom God brought out with joy and singing (Psalm 105). In Nehemiah, this act is also listed with the giving of the commandments at Mount Sinai as another example of God’s guidance.

The Sukkot was rich with symbolism and tradition that remember past events, but also looked forward to a messianic or eschatological time when all nations would celebrate together. The rejoicing and celebrating was such that those who had never been were said to have never seen “true rejoicing,” showing how much the festival represented idealized worship (135). For example, the water-drawing ceremony as part of Sukkot both commemorated God’s provision of water in the desert and looked forward to an eschatological time when living water would flow from Jerusalem. This ceremony recalled Zechariah 14, which describes a day when the Lord would intervene and save Jerusalem from its attackers, when “living waters will flow out of Jerusalem” and when the Lord would be “king over all the earth…the Lord will be one and his name one” (14:8-9). It is in this context that John shows Jesus to call for all who believe in him to come to him and drink so that scripture might be fulfilled: “‘Out of the believer’s heart shall flow streams of living
water”” (John 7:38). Similarly, the light rituals celebrated both what God had already done and what God would do in the future. The lights that illuminated the city symbolized God’s presence and provision, but were also symbolic of the time described in Zechariah 14. In addition to living waters, this passage also describes light to be a marker of God’s presence in the messianic period: “And there shall be continuous day (it is known to the Lord), not day and not night, for at evening time there shall be light” (Zech 14:7). Jesus’ statement references a time of continual light, in which believers would “never walk in darkness.” Their light would be the light of life—a metaphorical light not subject to the laws of nature.

By appropriating the metaphor light in the context of Sukkot, John presences multiple traditions that described God’s presence as a metaphorical light, proclaiming Jesus to be the embodiment of those lights. Like light of God’s guiding presence in the Exodus, Jesus also serves as a “guide” for the Jewish people. Jesus’ light is also linked to the light described in the eschatological scriptures associated with the feast—joyfully abundant and never-ending. For John, the God who manifested himself physically and metaphorically in the Jewish scriptures, celebrated in Jerusalem at the Sukkot, culminates in the person of Jesus, whose mission is to bring this light to all people. In this context, the metaphor light enables John to create a sense of vivacity that presences the rich traditions of the Jewish people, acknowledging the sacred truths they celebrate while defining Jesus as a relevant counterpart. By evoking God’s light in the Exodus and the Sukkot, John presences a depiction of Jesus that is both tangible and dramatic in its proportions. This provides a foundation from which John’s audience is invited to, as Karon describes, participate in something new or controversial in their perceptions of Jesus’ identity.

**Light of the World**

By showing Jesus to be “the light of the world,” John emphasizes that Jesus’ saving message is intended for everyone, not just those believed to be God’s chosen people like the Jews. Jesus’ claim restates the universalizing effect of the light introduced in the Prologue, where Jesus is the “light of all,” for “everyone” who accepts him (1:4, 9). Even though the Law was “given through Moses,” and “salvation is from of Jews,” Jesus is the “light of the world” (1:17, 3:22). The Sukkot festival itself was already fairly inclusive; the Deuteronomy passage which describes the feast tells the Jews to bring “your sons and your daughters, your
male and female slaves, as well as the Levites, the strangers, the orphans, and the widows resident in your towns” (Deut 16:11). But the Johannine Jesus takes it a step further, proclaiming himself to be a light for the “world.”

Many scholars find a close parallel between Jesus’ claim to be the “light of the world” and the descriptions of a global leader found in Isaiah. In its introduction to Isaiah, The New Oxford Annotated Bible emphasizes that Isaiah’s image of a new ruler would usher in a new age of justice, righteous and peace, serves as the foundation for the Messiah figure found in early Jewish and Christian writings. Jesus’ claim to be the light of the world is also reminiscent of the figure described in Isaiah’s “Servant Songs” (42:1-4, 49:1-6, 50:4-11, 52:13-53:12). In these chapters of Isaiah, the Lord’s servant is said to establish justice on the earth, given to the world as “a covenant to the people, a light to the nations” (42:6). This description is repeated in Isaiah 49, where the servant presents itself to the whole world: “I will give you as a light to the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth” (6). In addition, Isaiah 60 states that “Nations shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn…Then you shall see and be radiant” (vs. 3, 5).

Similarly, Koester determines Jesus’ claim in Chapter 8 to be a response to the Pharisee’s accusation in Chapter 7, that no prophet could come from Galilee. He considers Jesus’ claim to be the light of the world as linked with the Davidic king described in Isaiah 9, who is marked by light and said to make glorious the Galilee of the nations: “The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness, on them has light shined” (vs. 1, 2). These descriptions from Isaiah would have been familiar to John’s Jewish audience, who looked forward to a time when all nations would come under God’s sovereign rule. Koester concludes that the Johannine Jesus is both Messiah and Prophet, something the image of light helps integrate.

“I Am” (Ego Eimi)

To understand the significance of Jesus’ I am claims in John, it is important to have some background on the way this phrase functions in the Hebrew Bible. Unlike the parables spoken by Jesus in the Synoptics, the Johannine Jesus identifies himself through I am statements. In John, Jesus’ ego eimi or I am claims are followed by various metaphors used to describe his identity and relationship to God. In John, Jesus refers to himself as: the bread
of life (6:35, 41, 48, 51), the light of the world (8:12, 9:5), the gate for the sheep (10:7, 9), the
good shepherd (10:11, 14), the resurrection and the life (11:25), the way the truth and the life
(14:6), and the true vine (15:1, 5). Ball notes that the I am sayings without an image point
more to Jesus’ identity as one who is God and was with God, while the I am sayings with an
image illustrate his identity in relation to his role. So when Jesus declares “I am the light of
the world,” he makes certain claims concerning how, as the divine light, he performs certain
functions that are similar to the way light functions.

The most evidence for John’s use of Jesus’ I am statements comes from Jewish
tradition and scriptures. *Ego eimi* is the Greek translation for the name God used in the
famous statement given to Moses: “eyeh ‘asher ‘eyeh” or “I AM that I AM,” or “I shall be
that I shall be” (Exodus 3:14). John’s strategic use of *ego eimi* had tremendous implications
for the Jewish people, who considered the event of God’s naming to point to the limits of
language to contain God’s full nature. In Exodus, God is initially revealed to Moses through
a burning bush:

> Moses said to God, “Suppose I go to the Israelites and say to them, ‘The God of
your fathers has sent me to you,’” and they ask me, ‘What is his name?’ Then what
shall I tell them?” God said to Moses, “I AM WHO I AM.' This is what you are
to say to the Israelites: ‘I AM has sent me to you.’ Say to the Israelites, ‘The
LORD the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob—has sent me
to you.’ This is my name forever, the name by which I am to be remembered from
generation to generation.” (3:13-15)

Consequently, this phrase functions in the Hebrew Bible as both a revelation of God and
foundation for divine promise, grounded in God’s identity. Because God is who God is, the
words and promises of God are true and never-failing. In the Passover Midrash, this term was
translated to imply “God’s own person being present,” or as “I Am and no other” (Ball 38).
This interpretation is evidenced in John 18, where Jesus’ use of I am is described in terms of
physical force: “Jesus, knowing all that was going to happen to him, went out and asked
them, ‘Who is it you want?’ ‘Jesus of Nazareth,’ they replied. ‘I am he,’ Jesus said…When
Jesus said, ‘I am he,’ they drew back and fell to the ground” (18:4-6). By evoking the *ego
eimi*, Jesus essentially is claiming himself to be equivalent to this God, the one and only.

In his book *‘I Am’ In John’s Gospel: Literary Function, Background and Theological
Implications*, Ball discusses the origin and implication of this phrase used by Jesus in John,
arguing that the ontological identification of Jesus with the Jewish God is not only the basis
for many of Jesus’ I am sayings, but the foundation for John’s Christology. In the Hebrew Bible, the I am is a euphemism for God that is, “by its breadth and all-embracing significance, the sum of all God’s statements about himself” (Ball 33). Ball cites Schweizer’s discussion of the I am statements as “real speech”; not simply comparisons between Jesus and God, but as that which unites Jesus with the term used by God in the Hebrew Bible. Therefore, Jesus’ words could be interpreted as saying “I am the Bread of Life/the Light/the Vine etc. of which the Scriptures speak” (204). Or, as C. K. Barrett states, Jesus claims to be “life and light in himself” as the means by which God “bestowed life and light upon the world” (132).

If John is indeed drawing on this background in Jesus’ claim in Chapter 8, it would only add to the rich tradition John presences in order to describe Jesus’ divinity. The God who appeared to Moses in the burning bush and gave Moses a “name” in which God’s presence was thought to dwell is also the God who appeared as a pillar of fire in the wilderness to guide the Israelites, who dwelt in the Temple and who was being commemorated by the torchlight ceremony of the Sukkot. By combining the metaphor light with the divine name, the Johannine Jesus draws on revered Jewish scriptures and symbols to emphasize his divinity. This is another example of how John introduces Jesus’ divinity in familiar terms, awakening the audience’s passion by evoking what they held most sacred. By connecting the ego eimi to Jesus’ metaphors, John emotionally engages the audience in a profound way, inviting them to understand Jesus in similar terms to how they understand God.

**Light and the Law**

John 8 depicts the light of the world as coming up against the Jewish Law (Torah), which is also described in terms of light. Jesus’ statement in this chapter is prefaced by his discussion with the Jews in Chapter 7 concerning his identity in relation to the Law. In Chapter 7, Jesus is said to go privately to the Temple during the middle of the feast of Sukkot to teach, surprising his audience with his extensive knowledge of the Law. Jesus’ knowledge of the Law, exhibited here and in other parts of John’s gospel, is important considering John’s audience and message; Jesus’ words and deeds do not do away with the Law, but supersede it due to the nature of Jesus’ superior revelation. In this passage, Jesus tells the
Jews that his teaching is from the one who sent him, questioning them concerning their Law, the Law of Moses. He turns around their accusation that he broke the Sabbath, asking them to consider the intent of the Law and not to “judge by appearances” but with “right judgment” (7:24). Yet the chapter ends with the Pharisees inability to see the light, as they determine all who follow Jesus to be ignorant of the Law. Following this discussion, Jesus stands at the Temple and says that he is the light that alone brings life.

As with the other descriptions of Jesus as light, the connection between God’s Law and light is also grounded in the Hebrew Bible. Isaiah 51 describes a time when the Lord will comfort and deliver Zion, and when the Law and justice will go forth as light: “Listen to me, my people, and give ear to me, my nation; for a law will go forth from me, and my justice for a light to the peoples” (51:4). In Proverbs 6, the Law is described metaphorically as a guiding light: “When you walk, they will guide you; when you sleep, they will watch over you; when you awake, they will speak to you. For these commands are a lamp, this teaching is a light, and the corrections of discipline are they way to life…” (6:23). Also, the Psalms describe the God’s Law as “a lamp to my feet and a light for my path” (119:105). Since the destruction of the Temple, the Jews considered God’s presence to dwell in their prayers and in the word of the Torah: “[The Pharisees and their successors] read The Torah as an ongoing encounter with God who reveals himself to all generations—past, present and future” (Kohn and Moore 127). Consequently, Jewish teachers are called righteous sages or lights, including Abraham, Jacob, Moses, David and the coming Messiah. But for John, Jesus is now the light that provides this on-going encounter with God’s truth and teachings. God is described to provide a light for all humanity through the Word in the Prologue and through Jesus in the gospel, just as Torah described as a light to all nations at Sinai (Keener). But just as nations rejected the Torah in the Hebrew Bible, so too the world rejects Jesus in John.

The same way that the Law is described as a guiding light in the Jewish scriptures, lawlessness and evil are associated with darkness. For example, in Job, those who rebel are those who “are not acquainted with its ways, and do not stay in its paths” (18:24). Later in Chapter 24, Job continues in his lament of the evil in the world:

The murderer rises in the dark, that he may kill the poor and needy; and in the night
is as a thief. The eye of the adulterer also waits for the twilight, saying, “No eye will see me;” and he disguises his face. In the dark they dig through houses; by day they shut themselves up; they do not know the light. For deep darkness is morning to all of them; for they are friends with the terrors of deep darkness. (24:14-17)

In addition to the parallels between the light and the Law found in the canonical Hebrew Bible, several scholars suggest that Wisdom Literature serves as the primary background for Jesus’ statement. The Wisdom of Solomon describes God’s “flaming pillar of fire” in the Exodus, and punishment of the Egyptians “deserved to be deprived of light and imprisoned in darkness, those who had kept [God’s] children imprisoned, through whom the imperishable light of the law was to be given to the world” (18:3-4).

By presencing the Jewish perception of God’s Law as a guiding light, representing God’s truth, John exhibits how Jesus as the Word takes on a similar role. As a direct expression of God, one of the Word’s purposes is to bring God’s truth and revelation to the earth. This parallel, established through the common metaphor as well as Jesus’ own knowledge of the Law, helps John’s audience reconcile the light of the Law with the light Jesus brings, fusing Jesus’ discourse with John’s presentational symbol of light. For John, Jesus’ light provides a guidance similar to that of the Jewish Law, only now it is applicable to new historical circumstances. As the light of the world, Jesus’ words are imbued with a meaningful relevancy, actualizing this principle of God’s truth so that John’s audience might perceive of a new expression of God’s Law in physical form.

**Light and the Temple**

The dialogue between Jesus and the Jews in Chapter 8 takes place in the Jewish Temple, believed to be the dwelling place of God’s presence and Law and frequently described in terms of metaphorical light. The Temple was also the focal point for the Sukkot, with the various ceremonies as taking place in its courts. Deuteronomy 16 instructs that the Sukkot be held at the “place that the Lord your God will choose as a dwelling for his name” or the locus of God’s divine presence, which, prior to 70 C.E., was the tabernacle in the Temple (16:11). The Court of Women, where celebration of lights took place for the Sukkot, was not far from the hall where the Sanhedrin met as the final authority on the Jewish Law. In addition to the lights of the ceremony, Jewish Law required there to be a light always
burning in front of the veil of the tabernacle as a symbol for God’s presence, making light a permanent fixture at the Temple. Also, as the center of God’s Law, the Temple is where the original Torah scrolls were kept. For this reason, the Temple Mount was considered the seat of “authoritative Torah teaching” (Skarsaune 93). For the Jewish people, there was an intimate connection between the metaphorical light that described the Temple and the metaphorical light that described in the Torah, both of which were believed to possess God’s anointing and presence.

In John’s gospel, Jesus is associated with the Temple early on in the narrative. After Jesus’ Temple incident in Chapter 2, he refers to himself as a temple, foreshadowing his death and resurrection when he says, “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up” (2:19). A few chapters later, the woman at the well mentions the differences between Samaritan and Jewish beliefs about places of worship, leading Jesus to predict a time when he will make Temple-worship unnecessary by replacing the light of the Temple: “the hour is coming when neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father” (4:21). Since both the Samaritan and Jewish temples would have been destroyed at the time of John’s publication, Jesus emphasizes how the portable nature of the light he brings is not relegated to a physical, earthly location. In other words, the Johannine Jesus evokes the metaphor’s ability to combine reason and the imagination to illustrate how God’s presence is experienced through Jesus in a way that extends beyond the situational context. This would have had a significant emotional pull for John’s audience, most of whom would have personally remembered the light of the physical Temple. But, as described by John, the light of Jesus’ “temple” cannot be destroyed but is continuously available to those who believe in him and accept his teachings.

In concordance with Jesus’ earlier statements referencing the Temple, Chapter 8 further demonstrates the ways in which Jesus represents a change in the way God’s presence is accessed and experienced. By employing the metaphor light to frame Jesus’ discussion with the Pharisees, John shows Jesus to bring the judgment and illumination associated with the light of God and the Law. Like the pillar of fire/cloud in the book of Exodus, and later the Law given to Moses, Jesus becomes the occasion by which humanity is “separated into the two groups of those who love, and do not love, the light” (Barrett 280). During the Sukkot in Herod’s magnificent second Temple, Jesus’ audience was initially
incredulous as to who gave Jesus the authority to declare himself a superior light, the light of the world. But, as stated in the Prologue and presenced by the *ego eimi*, John defines Jesus’ light as existent before creation, as God and with God. In John, Jesus’ revelation and atoning sacrifice serves as a replacement of the Temple: “the perishable tabernacle of flesh is replaced by the imperishable temple of Jesus’ resurrected body…just as Moses’ tabernacle is replaced by the imperishable temple of Solomon, and eventually, the dwelling of God in the Torah” (Kohn and Moore 132).

In depicting Jesus as the light of the world, John conveys how the glory and presence of God, which previously resided in the Temple, now exists in the person of Jesus, thus appealing to an audience that no longer had the physical and symbolic light of the Temple in Jerusalem. In John, the physical light of the Temple that represented the symbolic light of God’s presence is replaced with Jesus’ light, creating a sense of presence that extends beyond the situational context of the text. By portraying Jesus as a replacement for the lights of the Temple and God’s Law, John endows the intangible experience of God with a sense of presence, representing a profound shift in the way some Jews interacted with and conceived of the divine.

**JOHN 9: PHYSICAL AND SPIRITUAL SIGHT**

Following Jesus’ claim to be the “light of the world” in Chapter 8, Chapter 9 presences the degree to which Jesus provides spiritual light by aligning it with his ability to bring physical light as well, demonstrated in the healing of a man born blind. Whereas the darkness threatened to destroy the light in Chapter 8, Chapter 9 shows the light “overcoming” the darkness (Newbigin). Through its contained and dynamic literary narrative, Chapter 9 reflects a Johannine motif that relates knowing God with “seeing” God, using vision a natural metaphor for knowing. Here, John’s narrative intertwines and contrasts the two levels of physical and spiritual blindness by using light as a metaphor for Jesus’ revelatory function, characterizing the persons of the narrative based on their response to Jesus: the formerly blind man comes to see both physically and spiritually through faith, and the Pharisees who can see physically are blind spiritually due to their rejection of the sign. By aligning the literal miracle with spiritual enlightenment, this narrative extends the meaning for John’s metaphor for Jesus as light.
In the narrative, Jesus and his disciples come across a blind man, leading the disciples to ask Jesus whether the man’s blindness was a result of his sin or his parent’s sin. This reflects a common belief in the ancient world that illness and disease were punishments for sin. This blind man was probably well known in the community, and was ostracized for his perceived sin. Jesus responds that it was neither the man’s nor his parents’ sin, but according to God’s purpose of revealing his glory in Jesus. He tells his disciples they must do the work of God while it is still light: “We must work the works of him who sent me, while it is day; night comes, when no one can work. As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world” (9:4-5). This highlights the temporary nature of the light Jesus brings, suggesting the physical manifestation of God’s presence must be taken advantage of while it is on earth. Jesus then makes mud with his spit to rub on the man’s eyes, telling him to go wash at the Pool of Siloam to restore his sight. Raymond Brown deems this chapter’s narration of Jesus’ healing miracle as reflective of Elisha’s miracle described in 2 Kings, where both sight and blindness are results of Elisha’s prayers to the Lord. In the same way the ancient prophets often accompanied their speech with symbolic actions to dramatize their message, Jesus acts out the triumph of light over darkness through his healing miracle. In the end, the Pharisees are unable to accept Jesus’ miracle, and throw the man out of the synagogue.

Like the endless light anticipated by the lights at Sukkot, the restoration of sight is also something associated with both God’s own activity and that of the messianic chosen one described in the Hebrew Bible. When Moses protests against God’s calling, reminding God of his slowness of speech, God rebukes him, saying “Who has made man’s mouth? Who makes him dumb, or deaf, or seeing, or blind? Is it not I, the LORD?” (Exodus 4:11). The Psalmist also describes this activity of God: “the LORD sets the prisoner free; the LORD opens the eyes of the blind” (146:7-8). As with the metaphor “light of the world” from the previous chapter, Jesus’ motifs of sight and blindness in Chapter 9 find parallels in the book of Isaiah. For example, the “light to the nations” described in Isaiah 42 is also said to restore sight and bring justice as one anointed by the Spirit. In this same passage, God gives the chosen people a covenant, or a “light to the nations” who will “open the eyes that are blind, to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon, from the prison those who sit in darkness” (42:7).
While this blindness is mostly interpreted as literal, it was also a common metaphor for religious insensitivity. The passage quoted in the Synoptics and alluded to in this chapter of John, describing the blindness and consequential judgment of the Pharisees, is from Isaiah 29, which describes a people who “draw near with their mouths and honor (God) with their lips, while their hearts are far” (29:13). In response, the Lord professes to do “shocking and amazing” things, when the “wisdom of their wise shall perish” and “out of their gloom and darkness the eyes of the blind shall see” (29:14, 18). It is also notable that another reality of the messianic age is the elevation of the lowly: “The meek shall obtain fresh joy in the Lord, and the neediest people shall exult in the Holy One of Israel” (29:19). Because of the belief in antiquity that blindness was a result of personal or familial sin, it is likely this man would have suffered from condemnation and isolation his entire life, leading him to resort to a life of begging from passers by. This deliberate parallel between John’s narrative and these passages in Isaiah enhances the sense of presence created by Jesus’ miracle and the repeated motif of sight and blindness.

As with the lights of the Sukkot and the Temple in Chapter 8, this chapter incorporates the literal qualities of light to presence the function of the metaphorical or spiritual light, contrasting increasing insight with hardening blindness. For example, the three times the man confesses ignorance as to where Jesus was or how he healed him (9:12, 25, 36) is paralleled by the three times the Pharisees make statements about what they “claim” to know of Jesus (9:16, 24, 29) (R. Brown, Gospel According to John). After the formerly blind man professes his faith in Jesus, Jesus declares: “For judgment I came into this world, that those who do not see may see, and that those who see may become blind” (9:39). When the Pharisees ask if they too are blind, Jesus replies they are not because they claim to see, and so their “guilt remains” (9:41). Because the Pharisees claim to know God and God’s Law, but have also seen the light exuded through Jesus’ sign, they are not blind but simply have rejected the light. Barrett describes their blindness this way: “Those who enjoy the light of the Law are unwilling to leave it for more perfect illumination, and so become blind, losing the light they have” (304). If Isaiah 29 is the backdrop for this narrative, then according to John the Pharisees are those whose wisdom is shown to perish through the coming of the light, due to their hardened hearts.
In this chapter John uses the literal events of Jesus’ miracle to presence a new reality, described in terms of literal and metaphorical sight/blindness. In his commentary on John’s gospel, Rudolf Bultmann describes how, with the coming of the light of the world, both seeing and blindness receive a new and definitive meaning. In this way, John demonstrates one of the tangible consequences of the light of Jesus while presencing certain beliefs and understandings of a messianic time, in which the sight of the blind would be restored. The rhetorical effect achieved by the narrative’s metaphorical and literal motifs combines with other second-order effects, such as metaphors describing Jesus as light, contributing to a sense of global or superordinate presence. Like Jesus’ conversation with the Samaritan woman at the well, the discourse in this chapter allows John to transport the phenomenon of Jesus’ metaphorical light “from the realm of the contingent to the realm of the absolute” (Karon 97). John’s rhetoric presences Jesus’ identity as one sent from God, moving the audience to either recognize the light Jesus brings, or choose to remain blind.

**John 11 and 12: The Departure of the Light**

John uses the metaphor light twice more to demonstrate the temporal and universal qualities of Jesus’ revelation before concluding Jesus’ public ministry. One of these metaphors occurs in Chapter 11, preceding what is often described as the climax of Jesus’ signs: the raising of Lazarus from the dead. This sign parallels Jesus’ healing of the man born blind in Chapter 9. In both passages, John employs the contrast between day and night, light and darkness, to describe the spiritual blindness and ignorance of those who don’t choose to believe, and the complete illumination of those who do. John also emphasizes the light’s limited time on earth, heightening the narrative’s sense of urgency. In Chapter 11, Jesus receives a message that his friend Lazarus is sick but delays going to Lazarus for two days before telling his disciples that they are going to Judea to see him. When his disciples protest, reminding Jesus that the Jews there just tried to stone him, Jesus responds with a rhetorical question: “Are there not twelve hours of daylight? Those who walk during the day do not stumble, because they see by the light of the world. But those who walk at night stumble, because the light is not with them” (11:9-10).

While the metaphor in this passage evokes the physical, guiding light of the sun, it is mostly referring to an internal state of being, connected with belief. The phrase “the light is
not with them” can be more literally translated as “there is no light in them,” indicating a shift from the text’s description of an outside light to an internal, symbolic light (Kostenberger, *John*). In first-century Jewish and Greek thought, the eye was believed to actively emit light rather than receive it from external sources. Or, to describe it metaphorically, the eye was not so much a window but as a lamp or torch, depending on one’s spiritual standing: “The ability or inability to see depended not only on a person’s external circumstances but on one’s internal condition—one’s belief or unbelief” (Koester 163). This belief is expressed in John 9, where blindness was believed to be a result of sin; as punishment, the blind were kept in literal and spiritual darkness.

In Chapter 11, Jesus knows his time on earth is drawing to a close and so, demonstrates again how the light he brings does not just have spiritual or eternal consequences, but physical, earthly consequences as well. Jesus’ sign of raising Lazarus from the dead aligns with the descriptions of his identity in the Prologue and the demonstration of his identity in the healing of the man born blind, presenting the one who is God and is sent from God as the true light that brings life. The dramatic nature of Jesus’ sign exhibits the extent of the light of the world’s power over darkness and death, reflecting the darkness’ inability to overcome the light. For John’s audience, this miracle serves as the culmination of all of Jesus’ claims linking the light he brings with life. Just as God demonstrated power over darkness and death in the Hebrew Bible, Jesus exhibits this same power by raising Lazarus from the dead. John’s audience would not have believed this miracle was possible apart from a divine anointing, and so would have felt the weight of this narrative’s claim about Jesus. As demonstrated in Chapter 4 and 9, here the symbolic light exerts its influence over the physical realm, engaging the audience’s imagination concerning what might be possible in this new life Jesus brings. This exhibits what Lane described as the metaphor’s ability to relate ambiguities to lived experience. Through realizing the implications of Jesus as light in the events of the narrative, John establishes a sense of presence that connects Jesus’ circumstances with his characteristics, asserting a new reality the audience is invited to experience.

In Chapter 12, Jesus reasserts the temporary nature of the light he brings during his earthly ministry. Five days before Passover, Jesus re-enters Jerusalem in what is called the “triumphal entry” and begins to teach those who came to worship him—both Jews and
Greeks (Gentiles). John notes the coming of the Greeks to see Jesus signaled the end of Jesus’ public ministry, another example of John’s aim to portray Jesus as, at least partially, Isaiah’s “light to the Gentiles.” In this passage, Jesus prophesies about his death, telling his audience:

> The light is with you for a little longer. Walk while you have the light, so that the darkness may not overtake you. If you walk in the darkness, you do not know where you are going. While you have the light, believe in the light, that you may become children of light. (12:35-36)

The notion of walking in the light in John is similar to concepts found in Dead Sea Scrolls that describe two ways for people to walk, in darkness or in light. Both texts most likely draw on parallels from the Hebrew Bible, such as passages like Isaiah 50, where those who walk according to their own lights are said to be headed for ruin (50:10-11). John uses antithesis to portray the conflict between the light of Jesus and the darkness of closed-mindedness. By believing in Jesus, those who see the truth he reveals become “children of light.” The use of this phrase suggests a fundamental change in identity, where people’s “lives have been so revolutionized that they may be characterized with reference to the light” (Morris 534). This is not a half-hearted belief, but a full commitment leading to a fundamental change. Just as the light cannot exist with darkness, those who do not follow Jesus are characterized by darkness.

At the end of Chapter 12, the redactor adds that even though Jesus had performed many signs among the people, they still did not believe. The authorities who did believe were afraid the Pharisees would throw them out of the synagogue, and so kept it to themselves. In a final plea, Jesus cries out, saying, “He who believes in me, believes not in me but in him who sent me. And he who sees me sees him who sent me. I have come as light into the world, that whoever believes in me may not remain in darkness” (12:44-46). This marks the end of Jesus’ public ministry in John, after which Jesus’ discourse is mainly addressed to his disciples. John’s audience would probably have related to the precarious situation of those who believed in Jesus described in this passage. As a group of Jews renegotiating their faith as believers in Jesus suffering from the loss of the Temple and a potential exclusion from the synagogues, Jesus’ words would have brought comfort. He reasserts his relationship with God, the one who sent him, as well as his identity as a light for anyone who believes in him.
This light has the power to guide, to reveal truth and falsehood, to restore physical and spiritual sight, and to bring the dead to life.

**The Continual Light: John and the Paraclete-Spirit**

One final layer to John’s use of metaphor to presence an understanding of Jesus is the incorporation of the “Paraclete” (*parakletos*) or “Spirit” as later translated by Christians. For John, the Paraclete-Spirit transfers God’s indwelling from Jesus to the community of believers, so that they might continue to encounter God even after Jesus left the earth. This Spirit “remains” (1:32) with Jesus after his baptism, and is alive in Jesus’ words: “For he whom God has sent utters the words of God, for it is not by measure that he gives the Spirit” (4:34). As one who possesses the Spirit, Jesus also gives the Spirit via his atoning death, for unless Jesus goes away, the “Counselor” will not come to them (16:7). This “Advocate,” also translated as “Helper,” “Counselor,” or “Spirit,” will live with believers forever—”I will pray to the Father, and he will give you another Counselor, to be with you forever, even the Spirit of truth, who, the world cannot receive…you know him, for he dwells with you, and will be in you” (14:17). Jesus promises this Spirit will teach and remind his followers of all the things he said: “when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth…He will bring glory to me by taking from what is mine and making it known to you” (John 16:13-14). This Spirit functions as both an interpreter and reminder, helping believers understand and see God’s glory as revealed in Jesus.

John’s Paraclete-Spirit rhetorically presences Jesus’ teachings by suggesting the possibility of deeper meaning and revelation, applicable to all audiences regardless of location or time period. The Paraclete-Spirit infuses the teachings of Jesus with a perpetual relevancy for those who accept them, believing in Jesus as one sent from God. John emphasizes this by undervaluing the importance of eye-witness, demonstrated by Jesus’ response to Thomas’ confession of belief upon seeing him in resurrected form: “Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe” (20:29). Moody Smith describes John’s Paraclete-Spirit as the essential link between the Jesus described by the eye-witness source of John’s gospel, the Johannine community, and readers today. Therefore, Jesus’ role as a light is continued by way of John’s Paraclete-Spirit,
whose function is to “disclose the abiding significance of what Jesus had said and done in the conviction that Jesus himself continues to abide among people” (Koester 3). What the Torah is for the Jews, Jesus and the Paraclete are for Christians: “both provide for an encounter with God in the present” (Kohn and Moore 136).

The Paraclete-Spirit reflects John’s goal to demonstrate the way Jesus provides immediate access to God, without the intermediary Temple or priest. As one who will continually make Jesus’ teachings known, the Paraclete-Spirit adds an increased sense of presence to John’s archetypal metaphors for Jesus, encouraging John’s audience to extend the metaphor’s interpretation beyond the context of the gospel itself. Even though John uses the metaphor light to incorporate historically and culturally specific images, presencing the fullness of Jesus’ identity, the Paraclete-Spirit encourages John’s audience to apply those implications to a current encounter with Jesus. In the same way Jesus was a light in his earthly ministry, he continues to operate as a light in the lives of believers, bringing guidance, judgment and comfort, exposing evil and illuminating truth. For this reason, John’s metaphors for Jesus work in coordination with the Paraclete-Spirit to illustrate the revolutionary change Jesus represents, presencing Jesus’ teachings to engender a continual spiritual encounter.
CHAPTER 6
CONCLUSION

In this study, I initially reviewed some of the key scholarship on metaphor, showing how it has come to be regarded as an essential rhetorical device in the formation of meaning. I discuss how metaphors combine two subjects in a new way, uniquely highlighting certain features or characteristics to inform one’s perception on a fundamental level. Metaphors are frequently evoked to describe religious concepts, making the unfamiliar familiar by connecting the divine with a comprehensible image. I then introduced Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca’s theory of presence—a rhetorical technique that employs circumstances and stylistic devices to enhance the pertinency and relevancy of a subject, bringing it to the forefront of the audience’s mind. When an argument is presenced, there is a greater possibility it will be understood, accepted and then integrated into its audience’s core beliefs. When combined, metaphors uniquely contribute to achieving a sense of presence by way of their appeal to the imagination and ability to make multiple associations available to the audience. By highlighting the familiar and appealing to the imagination, this rhetorical technique move the audience to a new understanding of the subject being presenced.

I then examined the use of the metaphor light in the Gospel of John to evaluate how metaphors contribute to achieving a sense of presence. After describing the various factors of the gospel’s rhetorical situation, I then traced the ways in which light depicts various attributes of Jesus by presencing foundational cultural and religious beliefs. These descriptions of Jesus as light appeal to Jewish understandings of the light associated with God’s divine presence, the Law, the Temple, the light described in the Hebrew Bible and the light of the figure of Wisdom in Wisdom Literature. By repeating and expanding on the multiple meanings and conceptual links presenced by the metaphor light, John develops a dynamic network of associations to demonstrate Jesus’ identity. Beginning with the refashioned creation story in the Prologue, in which the Word was with God in the beginning of the world and was active in creation, John uses metaphor to introduce the connection between Jesus and God, appealing to sacred Jewish images and scriptures to present
something altogether new. Because Jesus and the Temple were not physically present, John emphasizes Jesus’ divinity and connection with God, as well as the Paraclete-Spirit, to extend the meaning of the metaphors.

Yet even though the metaphor light was already rich with meaning for John’s Jewish audience, its archetypal and natural quality make it accessible to a broad readership. By incorporating selection and technique, John capitalizes on the metaphor’s ability to conjure several different understandings and associations at once, poetically manifesting, as Ricoeur puts it, “a world we might inhabit.” The gospel’s use of metaphor, among other literary techniques, reflects a common theological goal: “to open up the world of the Gospel’s story to the world of the reader’s own experience (O’Day 494). Consequently, John’s metaphors for Jesus become Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca’s first-order effects, evoking various historical, cultural and religious meanings that encompasses the whole of the gospel. John, through “verbal magic alone,” infuses Jesus’ message with a vivacity and urgency that engage the audience emotionally and incite their imagination, spurring them into response (Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca 117). In doing so, John demonstrates the scope and pertinency of Jesus’ claims, as one who provides direct access to God for all people.

In this way, John uses metaphor to presence the full extent of Jesus’ identity and revelation. By evoking the metaphor light, John rhetorically presences a portrait of Jesus unlike any other. From the poetry of the Prologue to the realized light of Jesus’ signs, John’s gospel portrays Jesus as one beyond literal description. The effects of the metaphors combine to create a global presence, moving the audience to first conceive of this world they might inhabit, a world marked by true light, before making the mental changes necessary to dwell there. Jesus’ claims, in conjunction with the Paraclete-Spirit, assure John’s audience Jesus’ light is still capable of providing comfort and guidance, reminding them of his teachings. In this sense, John’s metaphors continue to presence a divine reality—for John’s readers, Jesus still exists as “light of the world,” providing the “light of life” for all who believe.

The implications of this study show that the presence achieved by metaphors extends beyond semantics, working on a cognitive level to inform how one interprets and perceives of reality. These metaphors evoke emotions and associations that fundamentally determine how one conceives of the subjects they describe. When used in a religious context, these metaphors are able to depict abstract concepts of the divine in dynamic ways, contributing to
a sense of presence that extends beyond the world of the text. Therefore, the consequences of using metaphors to presence a definition of God are far-reaching, and for those who would take the time to engage their meaning, entertaining the reality they depict, they can be transformational. If effective, these metaphors attain a presence that informs all of life. It is as Rilke describes; there is nowhere to escape their implications, “You must change your life.”
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