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MARTHA'S DIALOGUE WITH JESUS (JOHN 11,21-27) IN LIGHT OF THE PSALMS OF LAMENT

Martha's dialogue with Jesus is at the heart of the sign of raising Lazarus to life in John's gospel (Jn 11,1-54). Although Martha begins with a complaint about the absence of the Lord (11,21), she ends with a profound confession of faith in Jesus as the Messiah and the Son of the God (11,27). While it anticipates and explains the significance of the sign that Jesus is about to accomplish¹, the dialogue also prefigures the evangelist's purpose of writing the gospel (cf. 20,31). G. O'Day (2013, pp. 498-500) is the first Johannine scholar to analyse the structure of the dialogue between Martha and Jesus (11,21-27) in line with the psalms of lament. In this paper firstly we will study the structure of the dialogue between Martha and Jesus as proposed by O'Day and then give its theological interpretation.

1 The evangelist generally describes the sign first, followed by the discourse that interprets the sign (cf. Jn 5,1-47; 6,4-14.26-71). In the healing of the blindman, the sign is interspersed with the discourse before and after (cf. 9,1-41). In the case of the sign of raising Lazarus, however, the pattern is reversed wherein the discourse precedes the sign (D'Souza, 2021, p. 135).

1. STRUCTURE OF THE DIALOGUE BETWEEN MARTHA AND JESUS

1.1 Exposition of the Structure Proposed by O'Day

O'Day analyzes the structure of Martha's dialogue with Jesus in line with the general structure of the psalms of lament² as proposed by C. Westermann (1965, p. 64) in which the petitioner begins with a plea that gives way to praise in the course of the psalm. Westermann enlists the constituent parts of an individual lament psalm as: address – lament – confession of trust/assurance of being heard – petition, and vow of praise³. O'Day (2013, p. 498) sees a similar structure in Martha's dialogue with Jesus which moves from complaint (v. 3) and petition (v. 21) to confidence (v. 24) and confession (v. 26) in comparison with Psalm 13⁴. Accordingly, O'Day (2013, p. 498) proposes the structure with two parts that moves from plea to praise. The plea section begins with the direct address to God ("Lord", Jn 11,3.21) which corresponds to the palmist's address to God ("How long, O Lord", Ps 13,1). It is followed by a complaint ("Lazarus is ill", Jn 11,3; "if you had been here" Jn 11,21) that corresponds to the palmist's complaint ("must I bear pain in my soul", Ps 13,1-2). The complaint gives way to petition ("but even now", Jn 11,22) that corresponds to the psalmist's petition to God ("Consider and answer me, O Lord my God", Ps 13:3). The petition is strengthened by the motivation ("Whatever you ask, God will give you", Jn 11,22), which is also expressed by the psalmist ("lest my enemy", Ps 13,4). Based on this structure, O'Day insists that Martha's words contain the basic elements of the lament prayer. Just as the psalmist can simultaneously complain about God's absence and ask for God's intervention, so also Martha, while she complains about the absence of the Lord, seeks his intervention. O'Day goes on to prove that the second part of Martha's conversation with Jesus also mirrors the praise section of the lament psalm. She sees a double ending in Martha's lament that contain two distinct words of assurance from Jesus, namely about her brother ("your brother will rise", Jn 11,23) and about himself ("I am the resurrection and the life ... do you believe this?", Jn 11,25-26). Martha responds affirmatively to both ("I know my brother will rise in the resurrection on the last day", Jn 11,24; "Yes,

2 W. Brueggemann (1995, p. 105) defines psalms of lament as a complaint which makes the shrill insistence that: (1) the things are not right in the present arrangement; (2) they need not stay this way but can be changed; (3) the speaker will not accept them in this way, for it is intolerable; and (4) therefore, it is God's obligation to change things.

3 A. Weiser (1962, p. 67) lists the constituent parts of the structure of both community and individual laments as: invocation – lamentation – supplication – motivation, and vow. However, scholars generally maintain that it is only a basic structure which never becomes stereotyped, but depending on an individual psalm there could be variations.

4 O'Day follows the numbering of the psalms according to the Masoretic Text (MT) but in the Septuagint (LXX) it is Psalm 12.

Lord, I believed that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, and the one coming into the world”, v. 27). This twofold response is in consonance with the praise of the psalmist (“I trusted in your steadfast love ... I will sing to the Lord”, Ps 13,5-6). O’Day (2013, p. 499) contends that the abrupt shift in tone is typical of the lament psalm and is normally explained by reference to the psalms as hymns in Israel’s liturgy. In the context of the liturgy, a word of assurance may have been spoken that reminded the psalmist of God’s promises, enabling the psalmist to end with praise. Therefore, Martha, like the psalmist, moves from plea to praise, grounded in the assuring presence of God.

One of the difficulties which is clearly visible is that O’Day (2013, p. 498) includes the initial message sent by the sisters, “Lord the one whom you love is ill” (Jn 11,3), as part of the lament. Accordingly, she sees a direct double address to Jesus (“Lord”) followed by the complaint (“the one whom you love is ill”). However, the message sent by the sisters cannot be part of the lament section as the basic elements of the lament, since address and complaint are already contained in Martha’s dialogue with Jesus (cf. Jn 11,21). Moreover, the proposal cannot be accepted for the following reasons: (1) while there is a direct address to Jesus, which is normal in the case of psalms of lament (cf. LXX: Ps. 6,2; 12,2; 73,1), this cannot be a reason to include it as a part of the lament. The direct address to Jesus using the vocative/second person singular form “Lord” could be found elsewhere in John’s gospel with no particular significance of lament (cf. Jn 4,11.15.19.49; 5,7; 6,34); (2) the clause, “the one whom you love is ill”, cannot be a complaint as held by O’Day, but only a report probably sent through someone (“So the sisters sent a message to Jesus ...”, Jn 11,3) without any apparent insistence or request. Moreover, the message was sent by both sisters and not Martha alone; (3) one could also notice a narrative gap between the message sent (v. 3) and Martha’s complaint about the death of Lazarus (v. 21). When the sisters sent the message to Jesus, Lazarus was only ill. But in the complaint of Martha there is the reference to the death of Lazarus. This is because Jesus not only stayed back two days after he received the news about Lazarus’ illness (cf. v. 7), but when he reached the place (Bethany), it was already four days that Lazarus was in the tomb (v. 17). Therefore, from v. 3 to v. 21 the narrative has moved to another level due to temporal changes (two days and four days), spatial changes (from “across the Jordan”, 10,40 to Bethany, 11,17), and Lazarus’ movement from the state of sickness to death.

1.2 Structure of Martha’s Dialogue with Jesus in Comparison with Psalm 13

Following is a slightly modified version of O’Day’s structure in comparison with Ps 13 with two parts, from plea to praise.

	Psalm 13 (LXX: Ps 12)	Jn 11,21-27
<i>from plea</i>		
Address	How long, O Lord ...” (v. 2)	“Lord...” (v. 21) “
Complaint	“will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me? How long must I bear pain in my soul, and have sorrow in my heart all day long? How long shall my enemy be exalted over me?” (vv. 2-3)	“if you had been here, my brother would not have died.” (v. 21b)
Petition	“Consider and answer me, O Lord my God! Give light to my eyes, or I will sleep the sleep of death,” (v. 4)	“But even now” (v. 22a)
Motivation	“and my enemy will say, ‘I have prevailed’; my foes will rejoice because I am shaken.” (v. 5)	“I know that whatever you might ask God” God will give you.” (v. 22b)
<i>to praise</i>		
Words of assurance		“Your brother will rise.” (v. 23)
Words of trust	“But I trusted in your steadfast love; my heart shall rejoice in your salvation.” (v. 6a)	“I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day.” (v. 24)
Words of assurance		“I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me, even though he die, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?” (vv. 25-26)
Words of praise	“I will sing to the Lord, because he has dealt bountifully with me.” (v. 6b)	“Yes, Lord, I have believed that you are the Christ, the Son of God, the one coming into the world.” (v. 27)

From the above representation it is obvious that the lament progresses from plea to praise. While the plea section moves from address/invocation to complaint/lament and from petition to motivation, the praise section moves from words of assurance and trust to praise of God.

The address or the invocation in the lament appears at the beginning and is closely linked with the petition⁵. In the lament, the person usually addresses God directly in the second person singular or in the vocative as “Lord” (Ps 13,2; Jn 11,21)⁶. The address implies a familiarity that is both personal and intense, expressing a fundamental trust and hope that the individual who invokes the name will be heard. Therefore, the direct address presupposes proximity and familiarity with the person addressed. Lament presupposes that it is addressed to someone named, one who is known, one who is and has been close to the psalmist. With the name, contact is made, and the other cannot help but hear.

The address is immediately followed by the complaint or lament. The very fact that the complaint immediately follows the address shows the psalmist’s familiarity with God, since he can at once begin with a complaint⁷. Here, as in the address, the accusation rests on great expectation and trust in God. By beginning in this aggressive manner, the individual attempts to make God aware of the seriousness of the situation in such a way that God would be forced to respond. The complaint thus serves to seek God’s attention and prepares the way for the petition which immediately follows (Leiter, 1995, p. 46). In the complaint of an individual lament the first-person pronouns can be observed (“me”, “I”, “my” in Ps 13,2-3; “my” in Jn 11,21). Unlike the psalmist who complains to God about his own situation, Martha’s complaint is directed to Jesus concerning her brother, and it underlines absence and abandonment.

Based on this trust, which is the foundation of the lament, a specific petition is put forward. In the psalms of lament, the petition is normally introduced with imperatives, whereby God is compelled to act. The petition could begin with

5 K. Koch (1969, p. 173) gives the usual progress in the psalms of lament: “To begin with all that is asked is that the call be heard and the need recognized (Ps 5, ‘remember me’), then the divine intervention is entreated, and it is stipulated which form it should take, ‘rebuke me not ... have mercy upon me’ (Ps 6). Finally, the point is reached where the particular need is stated (‘heal me’, Ps 6)”.

6 In certain cases, the address could be also in the 3rd person. For example, in Ps 142,1, the psalmist addresses God in the 3rd person: “With my voice I cry to the Lord”. But at a certain point the address changes to 2nd person: “I cry to you, O Lord” (v. 5).

7 As in other individual psalms of lament, in Ps 13,2-3, the lament/complaint has three components: namely, God, psalmist, and enemy. Accordingly, the complaint is generally directed against God, against the general situation of the psalmist, and against the enemy. However, these three dimensions are not always obvious, and they do not occur in every psalm of lament (Leiter, 1995, p. 46; Westermann, 1965, pp. 169-170).

expressions as: “consider and answer” or “give light” and so on (cf. Ps 13,4). The petition, while mentioning the prevailing adverse situation, also insists that it would not be too late for God to intervene; it also presupposes God’s capacity to change the present situation. By asking God to respond to the situation, the petition appeals to God’s sense of benevolence (Leiter, 1995, p. 47). In the case of Martha, the shift from lament to petition is characterised by the use of the expression, “but even now” (v. 22). Martha does not articulate her petition clearly, but she indirectly expects from Jesus a certain kind of intervention (cf. also Jn 2,3). Generally, the petition concludes with a purpose clause or a confession of trust which provides a reason why God should act⁸. The purpose clause strengthens the petition by giving God sufficient grounds to heed the petition. Martha’s petition, which seeks intervention from Jesus, gives adequate motivation for such an intervention.

In some psalms of lament, at a certain point there is an internal transition within the structure that shifts from plea to divine praise. This turning point reflects the reality of God’s intervention, when perhaps, the psalmist has received assurance that the lament and the petition have been heard (“God has spoken in his sanctuary”, Ps 60,6; “I hear a voice I had not known”, Ps 81,5; “Let me hear what the Lord God will speak”, Ps 85,8). It gives hope to the one praying even though the situation has not concretely been transformed in a radical way. The sudden change of mood from lament to praise is an interesting element within the structure of a lament. Such a movement from plea to praise is the movement of faith in God. It ranges from deep alienation and pain to profound trust, confidence, and gratitude (Brueggemann, 2002, p. 7). The shift certainly presupposes an intervention on the part of God, who answers the prayer of the psalmist. Although the manner of intervention cannot be ascertained since it generally is not explicit in the psalms of lament, nevertheless, it is evident in the change of mood of the psalmist and the subsequent words of praise. The following are the possible reasons for such a transition. They include: (1) *intervention by a cultic speaker*: the lament would have been answered by an authorised cultic speaker, either a priest or a prophet, with the assurance to the worshipper in the form of an oracle. Therefore, the words of praise towards the end of the psalm of lament could be a response to such an oracle (Koch: 1969, p. 175; Mowinckel, 2004, p. 219); (2) *unconscious psychological change*: the change from lament to praise could be the result of an unconscious psychological change in the mind of the psalmist. Therefore, the sudden shift from lament to praise is an inward process which transpires within the mind and soul

⁸ According to Westermann (1965, p. 57), normally its place is between the lament and the petition (cf. Pss 74,12; 115,9-11; 85,6), but it could also follow the petition or be bound up with it.

of the psalmist while the prayer is delivered to God (Heiler, 1932, pp. 259-260); (3) *direct intervention by God*: it is God who directly intervenes through his words in oracles to the one petitioning or lamenting. Therefore, God's actual intervention in the psalmist's situation of distress is what prompts him to break suddenly into praise. Accordingly, the psalmist has either received an answer from God, or his situation has changed for the better, thus provoking a change in attitude (Kraus, 1986, p. 175); (4) *praise as a rhetorical device*: the situation and mood of the psalmist does not change when the shift from lament to praise occurs. But the introduction of praise serves as a rhetorical device to motivate God to action. By expressing trust in God's deliverance and by promising to praise God when such deliverance takes place, the psalmist encourages God to respond to the appeal. Therefore, the vow of praise is conditional upon God's deliverance (Cartledge, 1987, p. 86). In other words, the psalmist promises something which God desires and the psalmist hopes to maintain God's attention by making this promise conditional upon God's response. As regards Martha's dialogue with Jesus, however, there is a direct intervention from Jesus with a double assurance (Jn 11,23.25-26), which results in Martha's affirmation of the longstanding Jewish hope of future resurrection (v. 24) followed by the confession of faith in Jesus (v. 27), which corresponds to the psalmist's words of trust (Ps 13,6a) and praise of God (v. 6b) respectively. Just as the psalmist has the first and the last words, so also it is Martha who initiates, and she is the one who concludes.

Although Martha's dialogue with Jesus has the form of a classical psalm of lament or petition, there are some notable differences between them: (1) in the case of the individual laments, it is only the psalmist who implores God, who is not physically present (Ps 13,2), but Martha has a direct face-to-face encounter with Jesus as she personally meets him (Jn 11,20); (2) the psalmist addresses his lament to God in the form of a continuous prayer. It is a type of monologue with no direct response from God. The conversation between Martha and Jesus, however, does not have the form of a prayer, but rather a dialogue. Every intervention of Martha is equally reciprocated by Jesus with words of assurance (cf. Jn 11,23 and vv. 25-26); (3) in an individual lament, the psalmist usually places before God his precarious situation and entreats God for intervention. In contrast, the subject of Martha's lament is the death of her brother Lazarus, although Lazarus' death does affect her insofar as he is her brother.

2. THEOLOGICAL INTERPRETATION OF MARTHA'S DIALOGUE WITH JESUS

2.1 Direct Address to Jesus as “Lord”

Martha begins her conversation with Jesus with an invocation “Lord” (κύριε). Towards the end of her dialogue Martha will once again address Jesus as “Lord” as she confesses her profound faith in him (cf. 11.27). In the former, it signifies an invocation or a cry for help in a desperate situation of losing her only brother (cf. also v. 32). It is like the cry of a believer to God, especially in times of trouble and distress, who feels abandoned and isolated (cf. Joel 1,19; Hab 1,2; Ps 27,7; 86,3; Mt 14,30). The invocation is made with the firm trust and confidence that the Lord will hear the cry of his servant and that he will save him from distress (Ps 55,16; 91,15; Is 58,9; Act 2,21; Rom 10,13). Moreover, by addressing Jesus as “Lord” in her confession of faith, Martha not only imitates Peter (6,68) and the healed blind man (9,36.38), but also anticipates the highest post-Easter apostolic confession made by Thomas (cf. 20,28) (D’Souza, 2021, p. 143). The significance of Martha’s address to Jesus as “Lord” should be understood in the larger context of the gospel⁹. In addition to her designation of Jesus as “Lord,” Martha also refers to Jesus as “Teacher/Master” (διδάσκαλος, Jn 11,28). Both “Lord” and “Teacher” are proper addresses made by a disciple, especially in the context of the Last Supper and the post-resurrectional narratives. In fact, Jesus applies both these titles to himself during the Last Supper in the context of the feet washing and the teaching on discipleship (cf. 13,13.14). Jesus manifests his dignity as Lord and Teacher in the humble service of feet-washing and serving at the table (13,4-12; cf. also Lk 22,27). Martha also identifies with her service at the table during another meal at Bethany (cf. Jn 12,2). As a humble and faithful disciple, Martha perfectly imitates Jesus, whom she had addressed as “Lord” and “Master” (cf. 12,26), and thereby she both exemplifies the relationship of Christian discipleship and anticipates Jesus’ status as the glorified Lord (D’Souza, 2021, p. 144).

9 Johannine scholars Moloney (1978, p. 199), Marcheselli, (2016, p. 204), and a few others maintain that the designation “Lord” does not possess the value of a full christological title before the resurrection of Jesus. It merely carries the connotation of “sir” and is used of a person regarded as being in authority. Therefore, Martha’s address to Jesus as “Lord” should be regarded as a mark of respect.

2.2 Complaint in the Form of a Lament

Martha's address to Jesus as "Lord" is immediately followed by a complaint, "if you were here, my brother would not have died"¹⁰. These words have the character of a lament in its true sense as Martha suffers the grief and pain of bereavement. She asserts the importance of the presence of Jesus that could have prevented Lazarus from dying. Moreover, her words underline the anguished moments spent in waiting for the arrival of the Lord in the backdrop of the message sent to him (cf. 11,3). Martha's lament has such an intensity that it presupposes Jesus' intimate rapport with her family. Such a rapport has the human element of "love" as its basis (cf. 11,3.5.11.36). Just as the psalmist verbally expresses his perilous condition before God and seeks timely intervention, so also Martha places before Jesus her sorrowful situation created by the death of her only brother. The absence of the Lord was one of the pressing issues in the Johannine community that affected not only the family of Bethany but also the disciples (cf. 16,20-22)¹¹. Martha expresses a twofold emotion. *Firstly*, her sorrow at the loss of her only beloved brother is an expression of her grief. This sorrow is further manifested in the presence of many Jews who had come to console the sisters (cf. 11,19.31). Mary's sorrow was so intense that not only the Jews were weeping but also Jesus himself was troubled (cf. 11,33) and was moved to tears (cf. 11,35). *Secondly*, the sorrow is further amplified by the lack of an immediate intervention on the part of Jesus. That Jesus' absence was directly linked to Lazarus' death can be explained as follows:

"Lord if you were here" (v. 21a)	↔	Jesus said plainly, "Lazarus is dead" (v. 14)
"my brother would not have died" (v. 21b)	↔	"I am glad for your sake, that I was not there" (v. 15)

The above representation throws further light on how the death of Lazarus directly depended on Jesus. On the one hand, Martha insisted on the crucial presence of Jesus when she says, "if you were here" which is directly contrasted with Jesus' deliberate decision not to be there ("that I was not there", v. 15). On the other hand, the consequence of such a decision, resulting in the death of Lazarus, is also

¹⁰ Structurally, this phrase belongs to the grammatical category of contrary to the fact or to an unreal condition. The normal structure would be $\epsilon\iota$ + indicative mood (aorist or imperfect tense) in the *protasis* and $\alpha\upsilon$ + indicative mood (secondary tense) in the *apodosis* (cf. also Jn 5,46; 9,33; 15,19) (Wallace, 1996, p. 694). Accordingly, Martha's lament also has two parts: (1) "if you were here" (*protasis*) and (2) "my brother would not have died" (*apodosis*). Here the *protasis* represents the condition as not been realized and the *apodosis* likewise indicates the consequence of that unrealized condition.

¹¹ According to W. North (2013, p. 43), the constant persecutions have led to the hope for Jesus' return, since there is a very real danger that Jesus' continued absence will cause a 'falling away'. The prayer in Jn 17 is a true example of how Jesus is praying for unity, including reference to secondgeneration believers (17,20-21).

directly linked to Jesus’ awareness of his death. Therefore, it was not the sickness of Lazarus that decided his fate but the absence of the Lord. The absence of Jesus, which led to the death of Lazarus and is now reflected in the words of Martha, is also an anticipated ground for her belief.

2.3 Petition and Motivation

Martha’s complaint is immediately followed by a petition to which motivation is also added, “But even now whatever you might ask God, God will give you” (11,22). The change of tone clearly shows that Martha has passed from lament to petition. The shift presupposes a certain degree of faith in Jesus. The expression “but even now” is a clear indication that Martha has moved from the past reality to the present moment as such. Hence, the entire complexion of the scene changes from grief and sorrow to that of confidence and hope. Furthermore, Martha highlights the “presence” of Jesus in contrast to his “absence”. The very fact that Martha emphasises the present moment with the adverb “now” shows that she expects an intervention by Jesus. Therefore, what was already a past possibility, now she considers as a future probability.

Martha’s petition is strengthened by an affirmative statement of motivation. The change is obvious in the use of the verb “to know”. Just as the absence of Jesus (“not being there”) resulted in the death of Lazarus, so now Martha “knows” (believes¹²) that the presence of Jesus could change the situation. She expresses her firm knowledge about Jesus’ twofold role as the mediator between a believer and God: (1) of asking God (“whatever you might ask God”) and (2) obtaining from God (“God will give you”). It also underscores Jesus’ power of intercession that stems from his role as the mediator¹³. The implications of Martha’s statement should be primarily analysed against the background of Jesus’ assurance to his disciples towards the end of his farewell discourse (16,23). The two statements, when viewed in parallel will reveal clear points of agreement.

John 11,22

Jn 16,23

“I know that whatever you might ask (αἰτήσῃ) God”	=	“If you ask (αἰτήσητε) the Father in my name”
“God will give (δώσει) you”	=	“He will give (δώσει) you”

12 In John’s gospel, the verb “knowing” (οἶδα) is also used to indicate the process that leads to “believing” (πιστεύω). Therefore, “knowing” is closely linked to “believing” (cf. 4,42; 7,28-31; 11,42; 16,30; 19,35).

13 Johannine exegetes (Infante, 2015, p. 275; Marcheselli, 2016, p. 206; Waetjen, 2005, p. 277) maintain that Martha sees Jesus as an intercessor before God. Therefore, they interpret her words against the background of Jn 9,31, where it is generally held that the prayer of a righteous person is answered. Therefore, as a traditional Jew, Martha sees in Jesus a righteous and pious intercessor, whose prayers would be answered by God.

The two statements agree with each other based on the themes of “asking” and “giving”¹⁴. Martha underscores the mediation of Jesus between God and humankind. Correspondingly, Jesus invites the disciples to place their requests in his name to the Father. Just as Martha expresses her confidence in the favourable response of God when she says: “God will give you”, so also Jesus affirms such a positive response, when he says: “He will give to you”. It is in the name of Jesus that the disciples are exhorted to ask (cf. also 15,16; 16,24.26). Every intercession by the disciples or a believer is always through Jesus. It is not to Jesus (“you will ask nothing of me”, 16,23a) but in the name of Jesus to God/Father (“if you ask anything of the Father in my name”, 16,23b). Martha, anticipates what Jesus would promise to the disciples in his farewell discourse and thus underscores the twofold implications of Jesus’ mediatory role: (1) that every intercession to God takes place through the mediation of Jesus, and it is through him that God grants what is asked for; and (2) such a mediatory role of Jesus presupposes a close relationship between the Father and the Son, namely, his divine sonship (D’Souza, 2021, p. 151). Furthermore, Martha’s emphasis primarily is not on “asking” or “giving” but is on the person “who is being asked” and “the one who gives”, namely God. Consequently, the efficacy of such an asking and being given what is asked for depends upon the degree of relationship Jesus possesses with God. It is a relationship of divine sonship (cf. 3,16; 10,36; 11,4; 14,13; 17,1), of oneness with the Father (cf. 10,30; 17,11.21.22.23), and Jesus’ identity as the one sent by the Father (cf. 5,36; 10,36; 11,42; 17,3).

2.4 Jesus’ Words of Assurance

Martha’s petition conjoined with the motivation gives way to the praise section of the lament. As noted above, in psalms of lament, there is no direct intervention on the part of God as it is only a monologue. Whereas Jesus responds to Martha with a double statement of assurance (cf. 11,23.25-26). In the first statement, “your brother will rise” (11,23), Jesus assures Martha with the hope that the death of her brother is not a definitive death. Nevertheless, such a hope is built upon some expectations since Jesus does not specify when exactly Lazarus would rise. He neither reveals the precise moment and the manner in which her brother would rise nor specifies the person who would raise him. Therefore, Jesus’ assurance to Martha can be interpreted in three ways (D’Souza, 2021, pp. 81-83): (1) Lazarus will come to

¹⁴ Martha uses the subjunctive form of the aorist verb for “asking” (αἰτήσῃ) God, just as Jesus in his exhortation to the disciples uses the subjunctive form of the same verb for “asking” (αἰτήσητε) the Father. Likewise, there is a direct correspondence between the result of “asking”, which is expressed in the future indicative, third person, singular form of the verb “giving” (δώσει).

life physically (resuscitation/re-animation) and regain his vital physical functions¹⁵. In fact, this is how Jesus brings Lazarus back to life (cf. 11,43-44). Nevertheless, it is not explicit from the outset if Jesus intended such a resuscitation for Lazarus; (2) Lazarus will rise on the last day (future eschatology) which opens the dimension of hope. In the discourse on the bread of life, Jesus mostly emphasises the resurrection on the last day (cf. 6,39.40.44.54) and thus confirms that he is the originator of the eschatological resurrection; (3) Lazarus will rise in the immediate future (realised eschatology) which is also highlighted in the revelation that Jesus gives to Martha with a significant “I am” saying (cf. 11,25-26). By resuscitating Lazarus from the dead, Jesus manifests himself as the giver of life (eternal) in the present to Lazarus and to all those who believe in him.

2.5 Martha’s Words of Trust and Confidence

Jesus’ words of assurance help Martha to respond affirmatively with words of trust and confidence that highlight her basic Jewish faith in the resurrection on the last day¹⁶. Her reply that begins with an affirmation “I know that” is not a direct interpretation of Jesus’ statement. In fact, Jesus’ indefinite statement, “your brother will rise” makes Martha hold on to her traditional Jewish belief about the resurrection on the last day¹⁷. Martha’s Jewish faith teaches her to believe that her brother will certainly participate in the promised resurrection on the last day (D’Souza, 2021, p. 85).

2.6 Jesus’ Words of Assurance in the Form of Self-Revelation and Promise

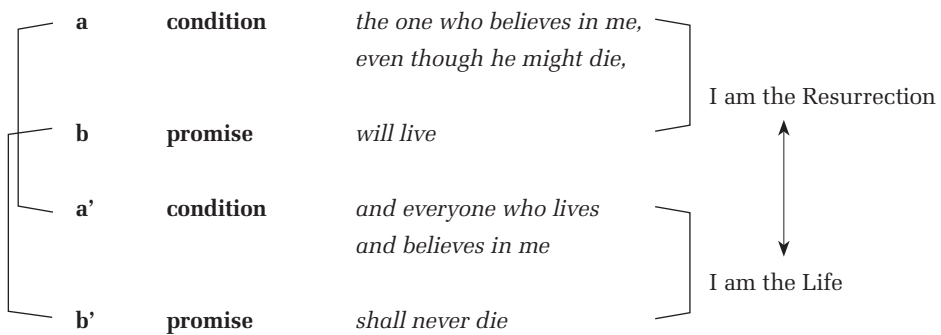
Jesus’ reply to Martha, more than a simple assurance, contains a profound self-revelation and a promise of the gift of life (eternal) to every believer. This is the climactic moment in the dialogue wherein Jesus reveals his identity through the famous ἐγώ εἰμι saying as “the resurrection” and “the life” followed by a double promise (11,25-26). While Jesus emphasises the realised nature of the resurrection in the

15 This is similar to the raising of the son of the widow of Nain (Lk 7,11-15) and Jairus’ daughter (Lk 8,41-42.49-56; cf. also Acts 9,36-42; 20,9-11; 1Kg 17,17-24; 2Kg 4,32-37; 2Kg 13,20-21).

16 Most scholars maintain that Martha misunderstood or misinterpreted Jesus’ use of the verb ἀναστήσεται as referring to resurrection on the last day. R. Culpepper (1983, p. 140) feels that Martha’s misunderstanding lies in her failure to relinquish or modify the traditional futuristic eschatology for the Johannine realised eschatology. Moloney (1996, p. 161) reads too finely into the statement of Martha when he says that Martha does not allow Jesus any space to explain what he means. But she, by her “I know,” tells Jesus what resurrection means. Therefore, Jesus must seize the initiative from the energetic Martha.

17 C. Barrett (1978, p. 395) and D. Carson (1991, p. 412) maintain that the resurrection on the last day was originally not a part of the Jewish belief especially in the Pentateuch, but it came to be accepted especially by the Pharisees. Martha being a Jew shared with Pharisaic Judaism a belief in the future resurrection, a view denied by the Sadducees (cf. Mk 12,18-27; Act 23,8).

present, at the same time, such a promise does not exclude the resurrection on the last day for which Martha had hoped. A. Lincoln (2005, p. 323-324) asserts that by claiming to be the resurrection and life, Jesus declares himself to be the fulfilment of the traditional Jewish eschatological expectations. It is in and through him that both resurrection and life are made available in the present and are no longer reserved only for the last day. According to J. Zumstein (2007, p. 373), the fullness of life is offered to the believer not only as a hope to be realised after his death, but also it is a gift received here and now in faith. The revelatory statement of Jesus could be explained through a parallelism (D'Souza, 2021, pp. 88.198).



Here the clause, “I am the resurrection” is linked to Jesus’ first condition-promise statement [a and b] as it underscores the gift of life (or the hope of the resurrection) to the believer who is physically dead, including Lazarus. Correspondingly, the clause, “I am the life” is linked to the second condition-promise statement [a’ and b’] since it emphasises the gift of continued life to those who live spiritually believing in Jesus. The concept of “resurrection” and “life” are interchangeable as they point to the reality of life in Jesus. In each of the statements, the primary emphasis is on “belief” as the condition [a and a’] upon which the promise of “life” depends [b and b’]. Two categories of believers are mentioned: namely, one who believes in Jesus but experiences physical death and one who lives the life of faith in Jesus [a and a’]. Just as both are united by their continuous belief in Jesus, so also, they will continue to share the life of Jesus in communion with him [b and b’]. In other words, it is through their life of faith that they will participate in the saving mission of Christ (cf. 3,1415; 12,32). Thus, Jesus promises that the eternal life which symbolises the resurrection is already available here and now to the believer who lives a life of faith in him. It is not threatened by physical death but contains in itself the guarantee of the eschatological resurrection. Hence, although Lazarus has died a physical death, such a death cannot interrupt in him the spiritual life lived in faith

as received from Jesus (D'Souza, 2021, p. 91). Jesus' revelation is followed by a decisive question to Martha, "Do you believe this?" which shows that this profound revelation could only be accepted in faith.

2.7 Martha's Words of Praise in the Form a Confession of Faith

Martha's response, while it corresponds to the words of praise of the psalmist, is also the highest confession of faith in Jesus. Martha not only accepts what Jesus has revealed to her, but that revelation prompts her to confess Jesus as the Messiah, the Son of God, and the one coming into the world. This confession marks a notable shift in her perception of Jesus. The shift could be noted from her twofold affirmation "I know" (cf. vv. 22.24) to "I have believed" (cf. v. 27). Similarly, this shift refers to what Jesus could have done (cf. v. 21) or what Jesus could do now (cf. v. 22) to what Jesus is in himself ("you are", v. 27). Hence Martha's confession should not be considered only as her response to Jesus' revelation but needs to be seen in the larger perspective of her relationship to Jesus, which has shaped her belief in him. It is very well expressed by her emphatic, "I have believed," which emphasises both the intensity and the continuous character of Martha's belief in the present (D'Souza, 2021, p. 96). The significance of Martha's confession should be seen *firstly*, in the background of the Jewish hostility against Jesus and all those who believe in him. The episode of resuscitation of Lazarus is preceded by the threat to Jesus' life (cf. 10,31-39; 11,8) and is followed by the Sanhedrin's decision to put Jesus to death (cf. 11,46-54). It is in this context that Martha makes a solemn confession of faith unlike many of the people and the authorities who though they believed yet failed to confess due to the fear of being excluded from the synagogue (cf. 12,42). *Secondly*, Martha's confession appears in the context of the death of a loved one and the delay in the coming of another loved one. The evangelist presents Martha as a symbol of every believer who not only awaits the coming of the Lord in hope but confesses him as the Messiah and the Son of God. *Thirdly*, Martha's confession is significant as it precedes the sign. In other words, Martha arrives at the perfect belief in Jesus even before witnessing a sign¹⁸. Moreover, her belief contrasts with those who did not believe in Jesus even after witnessing many signs (cf. 12,37). While Martha represents those who believe without seeing (cf. 20,29b), her faith foreshadows the faith of every future believer in Jesus (cf. 17,20).

18 In John's gospel there are at least four types of believers: (1) those who demand signs with no intention to believe in Jesus (cf. 2,18; 6,30); (2) those who see signs and still do not believe (cf. 12,37); (3) those who see signs and believe (cf. 2,11.23; 4,53; 7,31; 10,42; 11,45; 20,29a); and (4) those who believe without seeing the signs (cf. 20,29b).

CONCLUSION

The structure of Martha's dialogue with Jesus resembles the general structure of the psalms of lament. The psalmist initiates his lament with a plea to God and then ends with the divine praise. Likewise, Martha begins her dialogue with a complaint emphasising the absence of the Lord which resulted in the death of Lazarus, her brother, and then progressively moves from petition and trust to making the highest confession of faith in Jesus. Although the reason for the shift from plea to praise is not evident in a psalm of lament, it does presuppose a certain intervention on the part of God. In the dialogue between Martha and Jesus, however, the catalyst of change is the self-revelation of Jesus as the "resurrection" and the "life" and the twofold promise of the gift of life to everyone who believes in him. It prompts Martha to move from her initial faith of "knowing" to the profound "confessing" of Jesus as the Messiah and the Son of God. While this is the climax of the theologically rich dialogue, it anticipates the faith of the Johannine community which is expressed in the form a creed, wherein the evangelist invites every believer to confess Jesus as the Messiah and the Son of God and thereby to receive the gift of life in his name (cf. 20,31).

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MARTHA'S DIALOGUE WITH JESUS (JOHN 11,21-27) IN LIGHT OF THE PSALMS OF LAMENT

SUMMARY

First part of this paper is a study of the structure of Martha's dialogue with Jesus (John 11,21-27) in comparison with the lament psalm (Ps 13) as proposed by G. O'Day. While the first part of the dialogue corresponds to the plea section of a lament psalm with the constituent elements of address, complaint, petition, and motivation (Jn 11,21-22), the second part mirrors the praise section of the psalm which consist of words of assurance and divine praise (Jn 11,23-27). The second part of the paper is a theological interpretation of the profound dialogue between Jesus and Martha. While the dialogue explains in advance the significance of the sign of raising Lazarus from the dead, it also highlights the progressive faith journey of Martha from the initial lament to the highest confession of faith in Jesus as the Messiah and the Son of God.

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