

**Johannine Sabbath Conflicts As Juridical Controversy**

An Exegetical Study of John 5 and 9:1-10:21

Submitted by

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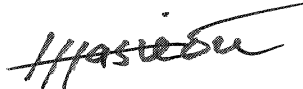
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## ABSTRACT

### AIM

The study examines the two Sabbath conflict narratives in the Fourth Gospel (Jn 5 and 9:1-10:21) from a narrative-critical perspective. It seeks to determine the precise nature of the Johannine juridical metaphor as reflected in these narratives, the specific purpose of its use as a distinctive narrative genre in the text under study, as well as the plausible social function it would have played within the Johannine *Sitz im Leben*.

### SCOPE

The scope of the study is determined by the above-stated three-fold objective. Thus, it begins with the examination and critical evaluation of previous Johannine scholarship concerning the nature of the Fourth Gospel's juridical metaphor which, at least since Théo Preiss, is generally understood as corresponding to a *trial*. It then goes on to establish that, in the light of recent understanding of the Old Testament *rib*-pattern as a two-party juridical controversy, Jn 5 and 9:1-10:21 are best understood *not as a trial*, but *as a two-party juridical controversy* as found in the Old Testament. This formal analysis of the text is then followed by an exegetical study of the Johannine Sabbath conflict material (Jn 5 and 9:1-10:21). The exegetical analysis underscores the fact that the juridical process in the text under study is throughout *bilateral* in nature and therefore corresponds to the *controversy as a juridical procedure* and not to a *trial* (which is not encountered until chapters 18-19). The study closes by examining the specific role that the juridical controversy, as a

narrative strategy, plays in terms of the communication to the reader of the christology which emerges from the two narratives, and the social function which the use of this distinctive genre would have had within the Johannine *Sitz im Leben*.

## CONCLUSIONS

In terms of major conclusions, the study establishes firstly that the Johannine Sabbath conflicts are essentially *bilateral* in nature with Jesus as the accused and "the Jews" as the accusers. This means that we are dealing here with a *juridical controversy* and not a *trial* which is *trilateral* in nature. As a bilateral procedure, the juridical controversy is marked by a strong rhetoric of persuasion which is always aimed at one's opponent in a bid to convince him/her of the truthfulness of one's position in order to bring the conflict to a peaceful end and effect reconciliation. Secondly, it demonstrates that the narrator of the Fourth Gospel uses the juridical controversy as a narrative strategy for the purposes of the christological persuasion of the reader. This means that the narrator places the rhetorical techniques inherent in the juridical controversy at the service of the christological credo which he/she is seeking to communicate to the reader. Finally, the study shows that the recourse to the juridical controversy as a narrative strategy in the Fourth Gospel would have been necessitated by the Christian-Jewish conflicts of the post 70 C.E. period. The use of the juridical controversy in Jn 5 and 9:1-10:21 would therefore have been part of the effort of the Johannine Christians to convince their opponents of the truthfulness of their christological claims and to lead them to faith in Jesus. In this perspective, the juridical controversy christology would have functioned within the Johannine *Sitz im Leben*, among other things, as *a means of persuasion of and an appeal to* first-century Jewish non-Christians to acknowledge the true identity and significance of Jesus.