

**EGŌ EIMI TO PHŌS TOU KOSMOU (JOHN 8:12) AND THE CHALLENGES OF
NEO-PAGANISM/POLYTHEISM IN AFRICA TODAY: THE WAY FORWARD**

By

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A look at the situation in Africa today with regard to the rise of neo-paganism will surely make one believe that Christianity is about getting into her dark ages in Africa. The Western world believed few years back that Africa would surely be the hub of Christianity considering the speedy growth the religion experienced. The recent unprecedented rise in neo-paganism in Africa especially indicate a very conspicuous and worrisome downward curve in Christianity. Statistics show that most young people believe that Christianity is a stranger in Africa. They feel that our ancestors were fooled into embracing Christianity and so they see it as their duty to return to the religion they believe is properly African. In the face of this obvious concern, one wonders the place of Jesus as the Light of the world. This paper adopts exegetical tool to examine the real meaning of John 8:12. It discusses the possible causes of the relapse into neo-paganism. It proposes proper catechesis, orthodoxy and development of a theology that addresses African issues as the indisputable panacea to this perilous malady.

Key Words: I am, Light, World, Neo-paganism, Africa

INTRODUCTION

Like a drop of ink in a bucket of water, so Christianity spread to different parts of the world. It started with firebrand preaching by Jesus, popularly known as ‘the Christ’ in company of twelve men chosen by him as apostles (Mark 3:14). His scandalous death on the cross, planned and executed by the members of the Sanhedrin out of jealousy (John 11:49-52) was believed to mark the end of the movement as recounted by Gamaliel in Acts 5:34-39. On the contrary, and with persecutions, the movement registered unprecedented growth even to other parts of the middle East, Greek and Roman world of the time (Acts 8:1ff). Historical records show that spread to many other parts were not without strict oppositions and persecutions. However, the more the persecutions, the more the spread so much so that Tertulian, the great

theologian holds that the blood of the martyrs is the seed of Christianity. It was not until 313 A.D with the Edict of Millan by Constantine the Great, the then Roman Emperor, that Christianity got a reprieve and was accepted as the state religion in the then European world. The researcher believes that this spread with its gory stories is not just a matter of coincidence. It is so, because Jesus is the Light of the World in fulfilment of the prophecy of Isa 42:6. What started with the Founder Jesus and twelve men, albeit, *agrammatotai kai idiotai* (Acts 4:13) grew into a big shrub all over the continents of the world, thanks to the commitment of later missionaries despite strict oppositions and dangers of death. Africa witnessed the relentless and altruistic evangelism from European Missionaries during the colonial times in the twentieth century. The African culture and religion appear to be a fertile ground for Christianity. It is in our culture to welcome strangers. Thus, the missionaries were accorded a befitting welcome. Africa is deeply religious. Most of her religious beliefs have some similarities with Christian teaching. It is therefore understandable how Christianity thrived largely after the initial difficulties. With the introduction of education, pastoral care by the missionaries and the desire of the African countries for western civilization, Africa became a hub for the future of Christianity. The twentieth century and part of this twenty-first century could in the least be described as the golden age of Christianity in Africa. Just as Europe is indebted to Christianity for her civilization, so Africa owe a debt of gratitude to Christianity for graduating from the dark part and abominable practices of her culture to what is fundamentally human and civilized. For instance, the killing of twins, subjugation of women, superstition and most fetishism have become facts of history. The researcher is concerned that despite this registered progress, recent years have witnessed a relapse into what some call ‘revival of African Traditional Religion’. Africa has witnessed proliferation of cultism, ritualism and organized crimes in the name of African Traditional Religion. In August of 2023, the Catholic Bishops of Nigeria’s Metropolitan Archdiocese of Owerri (the Owerri Ecclesiastical Province) expressed their collective concern over the rising trend of Neopaganism among Nigerian youth, a viewed described by Moreno (2024) as anti-pagan rhetoric. They note that young people are increasingly turning to magical and ritualistic means to acquire wealth, demonic powers, and assurances of protection. The bishops contend that these practices inevitably lead to intimidation and criminal activity. The declarations have reportedly sparked concern among practitioners of traditional religions, such as the Yoruba religion or Ịṣẹṣẹ often referred to as Ifá or Orisha worship. The Yoruba religion spread beyond West Africa due to the Transatlantic slave trade. It syncretized with other religious traditions in the Americas, resulting in practices such as Lucumí or Santería in

Cuba, Candomblé in Brazil, and Vodou in Haiti (Moreno, 2024). In as much as this paper in line with the teaching of the Catholic () is not against the religious belief of the Africans provided it is not against the teachings of Christ; it is worried at the increasing wave of return to ‘paganism’ with her unpopular and long repudiated ritualism with her devastating impact on the youths and Africa as a whole. Some Nigerians had turned to blaming Christianity for Nigeria’s rising insecurity, poverty, and other challenges. Under the guise of reviving our Traditional Religion and culture, some of our intellectuals are attacking Christianity as if it is the cause of our present woes. Surprising, the story of the revival of ancient religious practices is not just in Africa. It is a global malady. Winnall (2024) documents that the twenty-first century has witnessed remarkable historic events—the rise of Russia after the demise of the USSR, the resurgence of militant Islam, the rise of China, the fragmenting of the European Union, and ever-deepening divisions in the United States. However, one of the most surprising events has been the reemergence of ancient pagan ideas and traditions in Western nations once considered “Christian.” As part of this global trend, Iceland has constructed its first temple in over 1,000 years to worship the old Nordic gods Thor and Odin. In England, thousands gather at Stonehenge on the summer solstice to greet the rising sun—as ancient pagans once did. In Edinburgh, Scotland, performers painted as red devils entertain crowds to celebrate the ancient Celtic Fire Festivals of Beltane and Samhain, while many gather at ancient U.K. sites to burn a wicker man—as Druids once did. In America, thousands travel to Burning Man festivals catering to uninhibited behavior resembling old pagan practices. In Greece, Hellenists are promoting the worship of the ancient deities Zeus, Apollo, and Athena, while at the Getty Museum in Los Angeles, children write prayers to Aphrodite or Venus, the Greco-Roman goddess of love and lust—and patron goddess of prostitutes. In Eastern Europe, people celebrate ancient fertility rites by dancing around and jumping over fires, customs from a pre-Christian past. In Russia, church leaders note with concern the growing interest in pagan traditions. In America, the fastest-growing religion is witchcraft, and statues promoting satanism appear on public grounds. The U.S. Air Force Academy has even constructed a pagan chapel. Using exegetical lens, the researcher sees understanding and application of John 8:12 as the ultimate solution to the recent worrisome development. The methodology used is purely exegetical and qualitative. The paper recommends preachers of the gospel to be more exemplary, less materialistic, more altruistic and pastoral in their approaches so as to be able let Christ be the Light of the World.

An Excursion into Clarification of Concepts

A cursory look at the meaning of some of the key words in the topic is very necessary both for reasons of clarification and limitation of the purview of the researcher.

Bonewits (2024) writes that the term “Pagan” comes etymologically from the Latin “paganus,” which originally means a “villager,” “country dweller,” or “hick.” It was used by the Roman army to refer to civilians. The early Roman Christians used “pagan” as a reference to everyone who preferred to worship pre-Christian divinities, whom the Christians understood as “really” demons in disguise, based on the habit of rural folks holding on tenaciously to their old faiths longer than city folks, and also because the polytheists were unwilling to enroll into Christian religion. Many years later, the term “pagan” became simply a pejorative term, applied to the adherents of Islam by the Christians (and vice versa). Protestants and Catholics also use it to insult each other as it gradually gained the connotation of “a false religion and its followers.” By the twentieth century, the word evolved into a term to describe an “atheist,” “agnostic,” “hedonist,” “religionless,” etc., (in reference to an educated, white, male, heterosexual, non-Celtic European) and “ignorant savage and/or pervert” (in reference to everyone else on the planet). Today, “Paganism” is a general term for polytheistic religions old and new, with “Pagan” used as the adjective as well as the membership term. Initially, the term was used to describe anyone who did not believe in the God of the Bible or follow biblical guidelines. The pagan Greco-Roman world, engrossed in idol worship and adopting gods and practices of other religions as if they were interchangeable, is a perfect example. Such pagans had no knowledge of the God of the Bible (cf. Acts 17:23). The idea of one true, personal God was generally foreign to them. In its Latin origin, paganism is associated both to non-Christian ancient religions and rituals as well as to illiterate peasants, the main actors in these cults. During the colonial period, paganism was associated to local and indigenous practices. African traditional religious practices unfortunately fall into this category. Paganism appears in opposition to Abrahamic monotheism and in particular to Christianity.

Maluf (2015) maintains that Neopaganism, or contemporary paganism, is a concept used to designate a variety of religious and spiritual movements from the second half of the twentieth century, which claim a pagan influence and ancestry based on different lines of paganism: classic or ancient paganism, ethnic paganism (Celtic, African cults to the Orixás, American shamanism, Melanesian rituals), and the popular pre-Christian European paganism. Among the best-known expressions of neopaganism is the Wicca religion and contemporary

witchcraft, druidism, Germanic neopaganism, and others. Neopaganism also refers to aspects and elements present in other contemporary spiritual movements, mainly those linked to the New Age universe. Neopaganism or contemporary paganism originates in the esoteric and spiritual renaissance of the nineteenth century and early twentieth century. It became more evident after the second half of the twentieth century in Europe, the United States, and in some Latin American countries. The countercultural and feminist movements of the 1960s and 1970s and with ecological and naturist ideas of the late twentieth century gave it greater impetus. It shares some meeting points with these movements, such as community living, sexual liberty, empowerment of women, and criticism of rationalism and institutions. They are characterized by rituals and ritualism, emphasis on the feminine, feminization of deities as against the monotheist God of the Abrahamic religions, and the questioning of the ontological dualism between the natural and the social and the transcendent and the mundane or material realms. Another characteristic of contemporary paganism is ambivalence between a diversity of practices and rituals and a search for homogeneous and common elements that define it as a religion or as a carrier of a common central line.

Further, Neopaganism is a general term for a variety of movements both organized and (usually) nonorganized, started since 1960 c.e. or so (though they had literary roots going back to the mid-1800's), as attempts to recreate, revive or continue what their founders thought were the best aspects of the Paleopagan ways of their ancestors (or predecessors), blended with modern humanistic, pluralist and inclusionary ideals, while consciously striving to eliminate as much as possible of the traditional Western monotheism, dualism, and puritanism. The core Neopagan beliefs include a multiplicity of deities of all genders, a perception of those deities as both immanent and transcendent, a commitment to environmental awareness, and a willingness to perform magical as well as spiritual rituals to help both ourselves and others. Examples of Neopaganism would include the Church of All Worlds, most heterodox Wiccan traditions, Druidism as practiced by Ár nDraíocht Féin and the Henge of Keltria, some Norse Paganism, and some modern forms of Buddhism whose members refer to themselves as "BuddheoPagans." Neopagan belief systems are not racist, sexist, homophobic, etc. There are hundreds of thousands of Neopagans living and worshiping their deities today. As "Neo-Paganism," this term was popularized in the 1960's and 1970's by Oberon Zell, a founder of the Church of All Worlds.

The researcher prefers to align with Magliocco (2012) in his view that Neopaganism, also called modern Paganism or simply Paganism, is an umbrella term for a number of new religious movements that strive to revive, reinterpret, and experiment with pre-Christian polytheistic religions. While the impulse to revive ancient forms of worship is widespread in the early twenty-first century, this term is usually reserved for those groups that focus on the ancient religions of Europe, the Near East, and North Africa, although they can also be inspired by the indigenous religions of Africa and the Americas. Necessarily, this group of religions is broad and eclectic; thus, it is more correct to speak of modern Paganisms in the plural.

Paganism and other Related Concepts (“Paleopaganism,” “Mesopaganism,” and “Neopaganism,”)

Generally, “Paleopaganism” or “Paleo-Paganism” is a term referring to polytheists, or nature centered faiths of tribal Europe, Africa, Asia, the Americas, Oceania and Australia, when they were (or in some rare cases, still are) practiced as intact belief systems. Some of the “Great Religions of the World” like Hinduism, Taoism and Shinto fall under this category. Some Paleopagan belief systems may be racist, sexist, homophobic, etc. There are billions of Paleopagans living and worshiping their deities today.

“Mesopaganism” or “Meso-Paganism” is a form of syncretistic religion. It is a general term for a variety of movements both organized and nonorganized, started as attempts to recreate, revive or continue what their founders thought were the best aspects of the Paleopagan ways of their ancestors (or predecessors), but which were heavily influenced by concepts and practices from the monotheistic, dualistic, or nontheistic worldviews of Zoroastrianism, Judaism, Christianity, Islam, or early Buddhism. Examples of Mesopagan belief systems would include Freemasonry, Rosicrucianism, Theosophy, Spiritualism, etc., as well as those forms of Druidism influenced by those movements, the many Afro-Diasporatic faiths (such as Voudoun, Santeria, Candomble, etc.), Sikhism, several sects of Hinduism that have been influenced by Islam and Christianity, Mahayana Buddhism, Aleister Crowley’s religion/philosophy of Thelema, Odinism (most Norse Paganism), most “Family Traditions” of Witchcraft, and most orthodox denominations of Wicca. Also included as Mesopagans would be the so-called “Christo-Pagans,” those who call themselves “monotheist Pagans”.

These three prefixed terms do not delineate clear-cut categories. Historically, there is often a period, whether of decades or centuries, when Paleopaganism is blending into Mesopaganism, or Mesopaganism into Neopaganism. Furthermore, the founders and members of Mesopagan and Neopagan groups frequently prefer to believe (or at least declare) that they are genuinely Paleopagan in beliefs and practices.

Some Pagan Practices in the Ancient World

Winnall (2024) observes that in Greco-Roman paganism, there were few fixed creeds. Truth was relative—there was little comprehension of absolute right and wrong, and no real concept of sin, guilt, or judgment. Each person decided his or her own path through life. Pagans focused primarily on earthly life, gratifying physical desires, and pursuing personal happiness. The philosophy of hedonism comes to mind here. Their approach appears appealing but it contrasts with the teachings of the bible. Unlike the God of Scripture, the gods of the Greek pantheon, for example, were promiscuous. Myths abound with tales of their lust, envy, murder, and other gruesome deeds. Open sexuality and debauchery characterized many pagan ceremonies—especially the spring and midsummer fertility festivals. The worship of Aphrodite involved visits to temple prostitutes that generated revenue for the temple, which the Bible also condemns (Leviticus 19:29; Deuteronomy 23:17). In Greco-Roman society, fornication, homosexuality, and the sexual abuse of children—advocated by Plato and practiced by the Spartans—were common and accepted. Art that we would term pornography was everywhere. The Roman baths, inns, and taverns were locations for gratifying any kind of physical desire. One reason pagans saw biblical religion as a threat was that they feared the Bible’s teachings about sex would “turn the lights out on that merry dance” (Smith, 2018, p. xiii). The Bible teaches that children are a gift from God (Psalm 127:3–5) and that they are precious in His sight (Matthew 19:13–15). However, in the ancient pagan world, infanticide was common. Aristotle advocated killing children for population control and to eliminate malformed infants. History records the case of a Roman citizen advising his wife that if she had a child while he was away, she should keep it if it were a boy but kill it if it were a girl (Spiro, 2020). The pagans of ancient Canaan and Carthage burned babies alive as sacrifices to the god Baal, hoping to receive, in return, rain or safe voyages—a practice the Scriptures clearly condemn (Leviticus 18:21; Deuteronomy 18:10). The Bible also states that human beings are made in God’s image (Genesis 1:26–27) and not to kill each other (Exodus 20:13). Yet, in the pagan world, human life had little value.

Not only killing in battle, the Romans also killed for entertainment on a massive scale, and thousands of people died as crowds cheered in arenas scattered across the empire.

Polytheism in Africa is a little less diabolic and inhuman. An African person has awe for the unseen and fear for repercussions. Thus, sense of justice is upheld. Africans traditionally are religious and believe in many gods and goddesses including ancestor worship. Cases of killing of twins before the advent of Christianity abound. It was believed to be an abomination. Shedding of blood and destruction of lives through preternatural means were also obtainable. However, sanctity of life was respected. Polygamy was encouraged instead of promiscuity. With the advent of Christianity, most of these practices became stories of the past. The researcher is worried because, what was considered obsolete is today undergoing unprecedented geometrical rise all over the world especially in Africa.

Neopagan movements disseminated internationally in the 1960s and 1970s. New age movement also got contextualized in the growth in counterculture, feminism and emergence of new spiritualities. There also appeared new modalities of Wicca and of the religion of the Goddess; other movements such as neo-druidism or Celtic reconstructionism, seeking reference in druid Celtic religions, and other lines such as eco-paganism, LGBT paganism, polytheist reconstructionisms. The coven is the basic structure of Wicca organization and the site of initiation of new members. It should remain as a small group, of at most 13 members, which impedes institutionalization. The ties between the members are ritual, spiritual, based on trust and loyalty, and organized around a priest or priestess. The motto of the coven, declared in many ceremonies, “perfect love, perfect trust,” represents the idea of the coven as a spiritual family, with some more hierarchical and others more egalitarian. Other neopagan movements include:

- ▶ Neo-Esotericism
- ▶ Neo-Shamanism
- ▶ New Age
- ▶ Romanticism
- ▶ Sacred and New Age

Reasons for the Revival of Paganism

Many reasons account for the revival of paganism. Below are some of the selected ones:

i. Literature and Quest for more Knowledge

The nineteenth century and early twentieth century were moments of spiritual-religious effervescence, with the founding of various orders and organizations of a spiritualist, mystic, Orientalist, or occultist character, such as the Theosophical Society (1875), the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn (1888), and later the Ordo Templi Orientis (1906) among others. Some of these groups were born in the wake of Spiritism and at the same time in which they incorporated some of its elements were distinguished by some important aspects, one of them the option to work with occult knowledge, considered to be rejected by Spiritism and by hegemonic religions. At this time, a vast literature was produced seeking to systematize ritualistic and magic doctrines and practices. Individuals such as Eliphas Lévy (and his *Transcendental Magic, its Doctrine and Ritual*, 1854–1856), Helena Blavatsky (*The Secret Doctrine*, 1888), and others produced a literature aimed at systematizing doctrines and dogmas, magic rituals and practices, and at the same time came to have important influence on some lines of neopaganism. A few years later, in 1929, Aleister Crowley, writer, poet, and occultist, who had an important influence on Gerald Gardner, the great systematizer and publicist of contemporary witchcraft and Wicca, published *Magick in Theory and Practice* (suggesting this unique spelling for the word magic), considered to be one of the central references of occultism in the twentieth century. Some historians of contemporary paganism consider the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn and in particular the writings of Crowley as central to the doctrinary formulations and practices of contemporary paganism and the new witchcraft. This mystical-esoteric effervescence in the period, in addition to Orientalist elements from a romantic influence that were very present in the esoteric and occultist movements of the nineteenth century in Europe and the United States, revive aspects from different paganisms and eclectically recombine them. Latin America was not isolated from this process, and the first Theosophical lodge in Brazil was created in 1902, in the city of Pelotas in Rio Grande do Sul. In Africa, many people especially the youths and elites involve themselves not only in reading but in practicing the contents of some of these works all in a bid to satisfy curiosity for more knowledge about the unseen powers. Most of these literatures sound as logical as they are convincing.

ii. Disenfranchisement with Main line Churches

Human being by nature is a composite of body and soul. Search for meaning is part of him. Thus, religion is a matter of personal experience. The fact is that most often, people do not feel satisfied with the teachings of the Christian churches. Even with consistency in religious practices and fellowship, the feeling of a gap yearning to be filled is evident. In most main

line churches, people are taught formulated systems. There is scarcely any room for personal expressions in encounter with the Divine. The consequence is that people feel unfulfilled and so seek for solutions often in what was obtainable before the advent of Christianity.

iii. False Teachings Especially by Church Leaders

Religion ought to provide spiritual and community benefits. Unfortunately, most church leaders get more occupied with the fruits of the ministry than with its primary purpose. They, therefore, prioritize financial gain leading to criticism about 'religion business'. Preference for gain in religion has resulted into prosperity gospel preaching, 'arrangee miracles', development of healing centres, prayer ministries, friendship with the rich without care about the source of wealth etc.

iv. Scandals in the church's hierarchy

Preachers ought to live by examples. In situations where the life of the preacher contradicts the gospel he preaches, the result is usually mass exodus from the church. The sex scandal that rocked the Church in the Western world comes to mind here. In Africa, similar stories abound. The consequence is frustration and disbelief on the part of the flock.

v. Economic Woes

One of the disadvantages of capitalism is that the rich get richer while the poor get poorer. Naturally, everyone wants to succeed in life and struggle for survival is part of human being. Amidst economic woes and the sequent lack of basic amenities, the propensity is to seek for any possible solution. This is not unconnected with the didactic belief on the part of Christians that the rich ought to help the poor. Thus, when the poor see the rich living in affluence with least concern for the poor and worse still church leaders living also in affluence and befriending the rich, the result is suspicion and criticisms. Many begin to see Christianity as a cheat. Hence, a return to traditionalism.

vi. Culture and Tradition

Many believe that some of the Christian teaching is anti-African culture. Monogamy as against polygamy is a good example. The African has high sense of morality and so, rather than promiscuous life, she opts for marriage of more than one wife. Christianity on the other hand condemns polygamy and insists on one man, one wife. Some see it as the remote cause of sexual promiscuity and lack of marriage for some girls.

Orientation of the Text

A prior look at the few textual problems posed by our text gives us an ample opportunity to give a proper translation and interpretation.

a) *Textual Problems*

Nestle-Aland's John 8,12 reads *Palin oun autois elalēsen ho Iēsous legōn, Egō eimi to phōs tou kosmou. Ho akolouthōn emoi ou mē peripatēsē en tē scotia, all'exei to phōs tēs zōēs.*

Not many textual problems are observable in the text. Part of the text reads *ho Iēsous*. The definite article ο` is omitted by $\hat{\Gamma}^{75}$ B. Since the text studied is witnessed in vast majority of the MSS, we understand it to be closer to the original.

Also *BT Or* have *moi*, as an alternative reading to *emoi*. The paucity and dating of the MSS that have this alternative reading cast question as to its originality. On the other hand, the text used is witnessed in $\hat{\Gamma}^{66}$ ⋈ D L W Θ Y 0250 $f^{1.13}$ 33 Ū. Considering the number of the MSS that testify to this together with their ancient nature, we confidently interpret it as closer to the original.

b) *Translation*

The researcher proposes the following as the working translation of the text: "Then again Jesus spoke to them saying, 'I am the Light of the World' the one who follows me will not walk in the darkness, but will have the light of life".

c) *Delimitation*

The text could be delimited from the point of view of the structure, audience and the theme under discussion.

The researcher understands *palin oun* as resumptive indicating the beginning of a new section. This delimits the text from the pericope shortly before it. John 8,9-10 which forms part of the section just before the text under study presents Jesus as acquitting the woman caught in adultery after her accusers have left. It is part of a larger section of John 7,53-8,11 dealing on the adulteress. Metzger (1998) documents its conspicuous absence in some early and diverse MSS like $\hat{\Gamma}^{66.75}$ ⋈ B L N T W X Y D Q Y 053 0141 0211 22 33 124 157 209 565 788 828 1230 1241 1242 1253 2193 *al.* In the East, the $\text{syr}^{\text{c.s}}$ and syr^{p} MSS as well as Sahidic, Sub-Achmimic versions and Boharic MSS all omit it. In the West, it is absent from the Gothic and Old Latin MSS. No Greek Church Father before Euthymius Zigabenus (12th) commented on the passage. The pericope is therefore considered as secondary and did not

make part of the original Fourth Gospel. It was after Jesus has completed the acquittal that he then began to speak again. By implication, John 8,12 is entirely independent of this pericope because the action of the preceding text already came to a completion. It is also delimited from the subsequent unit by the same fact. In fact, in v. 21 one meets the resumptive *oun palin* which gives an introductory linkage to what comes after.

The audience addressed also delimits our text. The personalities involved in the pericope antecedent to the text studied are the scribes and Pharisees (John 8,3.4.6-7.9); the woman caught in adultery (John 8,3.4.10.11) and Jesus himself (John 8,2.4.5.6-11). In the text studied, the audience are still the Pharisees (John 8,13); perhaps some other Jews (John 8,2.20) and Jesus himself (John 8,2.12). In the section following the text, the audience is basically the same but whereas in John 8,12, the Jews were inactive except the Pharisees who challenged Jesus' claim as Light of the World, in the text that follows, the Jews were very much involved in the event.

The theme of John 8,12 is on the personality of Jesus, posited by Jesus himself. He calls himself the Light of the World. The preceding text is on the woman caught in adultery and the subsequent text is on where Jesus was to go.

d) Exegesis

John 8,12 is dominated by the semantics of speech and movement. The location of the preaching is in the temple area. Thus, it immediately recalls John 7,37-38 which is addressed to all and sundry.

Palin oun indicates the beginning of a new section as well as a continuity with what has gone before but does not fix the context of the discourse. However, the *autois* helps locate the context. Already in John 8,2 we read that Jesus was in the temple area. All the people gathered about him and he sat down and taught them. This is followed immediately by an intervention by the scribes and Pharisees who brought in a woman caught in adultery. We are prone to see this other group as coming from some other part of the temple. Perhaps they were not originally part of the people that gathered around Jesus. In John 8,9 we read that they all left leaving Jesus and the woman. The text did not say anything about "all" the people that gathered around Jesus and were taught by him. We only know that in John 8,21, we see the Jews with him again. They were being taught by him most probably in the same location. Evidently, it is not the scribes and Pharisees that left in shame that he was telling that he is the Light of the World. The inclination therefore is to favour the conclusion that after the accusers of the woman had dispersed, some people came back probably to see what

he would do to the woman. Jesus then used it as an occasion to reveal his identity as the Light of the World. It is the position of the researcher that as Bernard (1928) observes the *autois* refer to this group that gathered later, Pharisees included, hence their reaction in John 8,13.

With the linkage indicating another beginning, coupled with the verbs of speech — *elalēsen* [...] *legōn* Jesus goes on with his discourse which commenced in John 7,52. There is no indication of change of place. Jesus is still in the temple. The verbs of speech used introduce the words spoken (cf. John 3,11; Matt 14,27). John's adoption of two different verbs of speech here — *lalein* and *legein* arrests attention. These two words generally appear synonymous. They both mean "to say". The only subtle difference is that *lalein* has to do with the fact and manner of utterance while *legein* concerns with the substance of what is said. Bernard (1928) observes correctly that in John "*lalein* suggests frankness or openness of speech" (p. 109). Hübner (1994) is of the view that *lalein* is only distinguished from *legein* in that it only rarely means "say that" or is followed by indirect discourse as in Rev 17,1; 21,9; Matt 28,18; John 8,12. Debrunner (1995) traces the difference to the historical meaning of the words. He discovers that originally *laleō* is related to Latin *lallare* (to lull to sleep); German *lallen* and English *lull*. It means "to babble or prattle", while *legō* means "to gather, to count, to narrate, to enumerate, to say".

The words spoken present one of the great "I am's" of the Gospel coupled with a Christological neologism. Jesus says: *Egō eimi to phōs tou kosmou*.

Egō, is a nominative personal pronoun. It is often used in the NT as in classical Greek to make an emphasis. It occurs about 494x in John. In the NT it enjoys a preeminent theological significance because of its revelatory nature. Schweizer (1974) made a thorough study of this expression. He gave its manifold interpretations and uses in religious history and different cultures. He then narrowed his excursus down to Johannine understanding in relation to predicative nouns. In the Fourth Gospel, Jesus uses it to express what he is (John 6,35; 8,12; 11,25); where he comes from (John 7,29; 8,42); what he gives (John 4,14; 17,14); what he speaks and to what he bears witness (John 5,36; 6,63) and that he is to judge the world (John 7,7; 8,16; 16,30). Using *egō*, as a revelatory term, Jesus expresses two things. One is transcendental, the other is immanent. In the same *egō*, he teaches his relationship to the Father on the one hand and the gift of salvation to mankind on the other (Schottroff, 1994). John uses various soteriological terms and metaphors to express this salvation that is effective in the revelation — the True Vine (John 15,1,5); the Bread of Life (John 6,35); the Door (John 10,9); the Good Shepherd (John 10,11); the Resurrection and the Life (John 11,25) and

the Way, the Truth, and the Life (John 14,6). John 8,12 comes under this category. In the manifestation narratives in the Synoptic Gospels, it serves a mode by which the revealer introduces himself to the recipient of the revelation. Cf. Acts 9,5. The recipient is then commissioned. Cf. Acts 22, 15. He also uses it to convey a message to the recipient. Cf. Mark 6,50 and Luke 1,19. Mark 13,6 holds that one of the signs of the eschatological disturbances is that false prophets shall arise presenting themselves as *egō eimi to phōs tou kosmou* is therefore self-representative. Stauffer (1995) notes that the logic of the *egō eimi* revelatory sayings together with the predicative nouns used indicate an equality rather than subordination. In other words, he uses these predicative nouns in a supreme and ultimate sense. Used by Christ, it expresses God-consciousness as well as his redemptive role for man. It is indicative of Christ's mediatorship. It expresses *in nuce* the *onoma* of Jesus. It gives a defense of his identity and personality. In John 8,12, Jesus calls himself *to phōs tou kosmou*. The figure of speech used is not a simile. He does not say 'I am like [...]' He calls himself the Light of the World. The expression is very akin to his words about himself as the Living Water (John 7,37.38) or the Living Bread (John 6,51). The nature of the saying indicates a reference to a light known to the audience. A brief historical excursus into the significance of light will perhaps set us right in understanding this image of Jesus as presented by John. In the ancient oriental world, light is rooted in nature. Light, sun, life and salvation all go together. The Hebrews believed that God gave them light. Ps 27,1 for example says "The Lord is my Light". Isa 60,19 promises that God shall be everlasting light. It is notable that for the Hebrews, God is not light. Light for them denotes relation, not being. God is the cause of light (Job 37,3). He is the sovereign Lord of light and darkness (Amos 5,8). Light for them is God in action (Hab 3,4). S. Agrelo (1975) gives a good summary of the significance of light for the Hebrews in his conclusion to his research on the biblical theme of light. He believes that

La simbología de la luz en el Viejo Testamento, simbología compleja y unitaria, depende fundamentalmente del hecho que Dios se manifiesta en la luz, y se manifiesta como Salvador.

La teología de la salvación considera el mundo como algo perdido, que de por sí marcha hacia la muerte, y que sólo Dios puede librar de la ruina (pp. 389-390).

In the NT, *phōs* occurs 73x. It occurs 15x in the Synoptics, 23x in John's Gospel, 6x in 1John, 10x in Acts, 6x in Paul, 5x in Ephesians, 4x in Revelation and 1x each in Col 1,12; 1Tim 6,16; James 1,17; 1Pet 2,9. Conzelmann (1995) notes that for the Greeks, light is not just a medium of sight, but also its object. Light in connection with vision is the possibility of

grasping and hence of mastering the world. He further observes that the Pre-Socratics interpret light as a moving and emanating substance. While the Pythagoreans understand it as one of the antithetical principles, light is for Plato true being. In cults, it is believed that light drives out darkness.

In the Synoptics, it is used in three senses — literal, figurative and transferred senses. Literally, it refers to appearance of light at an epiphany. Example is Matt 17,2; Acts 9,3; 22,6.9.11; 26,13. Figuratively, it is used of person and his teaching (Matt 5,14.16; Luke 2,32; Acts 13,47; Rev 2,19). It is used of the Christian proclamation of salvation grounded in the person of Jesus, his words and works so much so that the follower of Christ now also becomes light of the world (Ritt, 1994). In its transferred sense, it signifies openness (Matt 10,27). Paul's usage lies within the bounds of Jewish understanding. Between light and darkness is always a polemic. Thus, he renders the plan of salvation before and now with the contrast of darkness and light (Cf. 2Cor 4,6; Rom 12,1-13,14; Eph 5,8-14; Col 1,12). In the Apocalypse, the extinction of light is viewed as the end of all signs of life (Rev 18,23). This short historical tradition behind the understanding and uses of light gives us an idea of the possible meaning of the concept for John. Strayer (1900) traces the saying to a possible influence by the Feast of Dedication which was called *ta phōta* because the whole city was brilliantly illuminated at the time of the feast. It is the belief of the researcher that John's usage in our text transcends the common denotation of light for the Hebrews. God for them is not light. He is the cause of light. To think of the Feast of the Dedication as the only tradition behind John's idea of Jesus as the Light of the World will be an excessive limitation of the meaning of this concept for John. Wiles (1960) has made an extensive study of the Fathers and their interpretation of the idea of Light and World.

In John's "Light of the World" is a clear marriage between soteriology and cosmology. Isa 45,7 comes to mind here where God created light and darkness, salvation and destruction. John's Gospel sums up the NT use of light and darkness. Lee understands the symbolism of darkness in the Fourth Gospel in threefold senses: It symbolizes the power of sin and evil in opposition to God; it symbolizes lethal estrangement from God resulting in death and finally it is pointer to human ignorance and unbelief in the face of revelation. John makes use of *phōs* in various senses. He adopts the literal sense of it for example in John 5,35 where he talks of the lamp set aflame and burning. Another example is in John 3,20 where he talks of it as brightness avoided by the wicked who shun the light. Close to his literal use of light is his

figurative use of it. John 12,35 is a good example of the figurative use of *phōs*. Here light is likened to the brightness of the day which figuratively represents the presence of revelation or even the revealer himself. By identifying light with revelation and revelation with the revealer, John differs from the Gnostics who see God as emanation of light. John never called God the light. The concentration of his teaching is on the person of the revealer — *Egō eimi*. This implies that for him, there is no light independent of the revealer. The revealer gives his revelation to the world. Thus, he is light of the world — *tou kosmou*.

Tou kosmou is genitive. It expresses the functionality of Jesus the Light in relation to the world. Jesus, the Light as revealer confronts the unenlightened world orientated to illumination. In the synoptics, the word used often for earth is *gē*. This word is used 13x in John's Gospel. The word *kosmos* occurs about 78x in John with wide range of meanings. In John 15,5; 21,25 it refers to the universe and the earth. In John 16,21 it is used as a reference to the human inhabitants of the earth. In John 7,4 it denotes the general public. John 3,19 gives it an ethical bent of thought referring to it as humanity alienated from God and in need of salvation. In John 4,42 it refers to nationality. John 7,7; 8,23 presents it as referring to the realm of evil. Hendriksen (1969) notes seven different meanings of the term in John. It includes the world of moral agents as well as the sum of physical forces. It stands for mankind at large as well as for the earth which is man's habitation (John 6,51; 7,4; 12,19). Barrett (1978) documents that in John, it does not refer to the totality of creation but to the world of men and human affairs. He notes John 11,9; 17,5.24; 21,25 as exceptions. It is more an ethical term. Ferreira (1998) sees John's proximity to Gnosticism in his understanding of the world but with a striking departure from Gnostic depiction in that for John, *kosmos* refers to the world that has fallen away from God but yet not rejected by God. Instead, the Father loves the world and sends the Son into the world to save the world. We do not intend to give any strict definition of the meaning of *kosmos* for John. The term is too ambiguously used to be streamlined to a particular definition. John 7,7; 8,23; 14,17 give an antithesis between Jesus and the world and then again in John 3,16, God is said to love the world and Jesus is sent to save the world (John 3,17; 12,47) as its saviour (John 4,42) taking its sin away (John 1,29). Again John 6,33.51 talk of Jesus as giving life to the world. Also, in the prayer of Jesus in John 17,9, he does not pray for the world but then later in John 17,21 he prays that the world may be saved. It is sufficient to interpret the term to refer to that which opposes Jesus' mission but yet having a potentiality of coming to belief. Unlike Paul, John does not see God

as reconciling the world to himself (Cf. 2Cor 5,18-19; Eph 2,16). For John, the world is overcome (John 16,33).

If we bring our interpretations of the individual parts of “I am the Light of the World” together, John’s message stands prominent. The *Egō eimi* is emphatic. It is like saying in Italian “Io devo dire la verità” or in Spanish “Yo mismo lo he hecho”. It strikes a note of emphasis on the person of the subject — I. Thus, in calling himself the Light of the World, Jesus is not being figurative. He is the true light. The definite article denotes the exclusiveness. No other person is the light of the world. He alone is. Again, since the presence of light means absence of darkness it follows that when Jesus describes himself as the Light of the World, he is also expressing the functionality of his person. He is using metaphorical language adopting what is known to them to express his personality. It is another way of saying; I am the Saviour of the World. This explains why he said that whoever walks in him can never walk in darkness (John 8,12) because for him, God is Light and in him there is no darkness (1John 1,5). This is why the one who follows him cannot walk in darkness but will have the Light of Life. John consistently depicted Jesus as the Light. The prologue presents the Word of God as the Light while John the Baptist only testifies to it (John 1,8). This Light who is the *verbum incarnatum* lights every man. This Light is Jesus (John 3,19; 12,46). It is therefore comprehensible why John puts *Egō eimi to phōs tou kosmou* into the mouth of Jesus in John 8,12 (cf. also John 9,5).

The second part of the verse follows logically from the understanding above. If Jesus is exclusively the true Light, it means there is no darkness in him and so, his follower cannot walk in darkness but will enjoy the Light, the salvation which is life itself — *Ho akolouthōn emoi ou mē peripatēsē en tē scotia, all’exei to phōs tēs zōēs*

Akolouthein refers to the act of discipleship. John 1,37 presents it as the first act of discipleship. John 21,22 enjoins it as something essential. It means conducting (*peripathein*) oneself after the example of Christ who is the way, the truth and the life (John 14,6). The LXX often renders the Hebrew term *hālak* with *peripathein* eg. Prov 8,20; Eccles 11,9. It is used in this sense in many parts of the NT. Cf. Mark 7,5; John 12,35; Acts 21,21; 1John 1,6.7; 2,6.11; 2John 6; 3John 3.4. It is expressive of the obedience of faith. It designates the specific character of human life (Cf. John 11,9-10; 12,35). The one following him will not walk in darkness but will have the Light of Life because Jesus is Light as well as Life (John

11,45; 14,6). In John 1,4-5 we read: *Quod factum est in ipso vita erat, et vita erat lux hominum; et lux in tenebris lucet, et tenebrae eam non comprehenderunt.*

Evaluation and Conclusion

In conclusion we opine that for John *egō eimi to phōs tou kosmou* describes a soteriological function rather than a cosmological one. As the Light, Jesus is the Saviour of the world. He is actively saving the world. It is because of this that the followers are said to be delivered from the world (John 1,5; 12,35.46). They are not just delivered. They are blessed with life because Jesus, the Light has life in himself and therefore gives life (Cf. John 4,10.14; 6,35.51). The Church as harbinger of the good news is not against the culture of any people. Her job is purely salvific. It is not within her domain to solve people's economic woes. She, rather, through her evangelisms seek to let the leaders discharge their duties most responsible well. In doing this, her leaders ought to be exemplary in demonstrating the universal and altruistic love of Jesus, the Light of the World. Attacking the Church and renouncing Christ rather than solving our problems rather compound it. Acceptance of Jesus as the Light of the World irrespective of the life of the people we look at and then doing what we ought to do as human beings remain the ultimate panacea to a better life. Relapse into paganism in the name of the religion of our forefathers as if Jesus is responsible for our economic woes will rather breed more problems instead of solution. It is important to note at this concluding stage of this research that whereas Jesus as Light of the World is universal and his salvation wholistic, the gods of polytheists are territorial and sectionalistic. The god in a town wields presume power over that particular town and not beyond it. The practice of the rituals for this god is also unique to the town in question. Jesus as the Light of the world is not discriminatory. He is not sectional. He is the same everywhere.

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