

A Re-Think on the Credibility of Expulsion from the Synagogue in Johannine Gospel and Its Relevance for Contemporary Christians

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Abstract: *Over the years, John's Gospel is often considered a standing unique testimony rather distinct from the Synoptics. Modern Johannine scholarship engagement brings several issues (authorship, prologue, recipient, structure, genre and date, among others) in John's Gospel to lime light; but the focus of this study is ἀποσυναγωγός – 'put out of Synagogue'. Meanwhile, this concept is not found in the Synoptics. The crisis between the Jews and the Jewish Christian has been a hot debate in Johannine scholarship; having to do with the construction of John's community and the credibility of Jesus' life and ministry presented in the account. A reading of John's Gospel with the consciousness of His original recipients might make a critical mind view ἀποσυναγωγός as an interpolation or embellishment. John's style of narrative has brought different questions and opinions from different scholars to play. Notable among which is the 'two-level reading' by L. Martyn in 1968 which has created a landmark. The study explores the opinion of scholars as it concerns the usage of ἀποσυναγωγός by John via interaction with their works. The study observes that are several attempts to often compare and contrast these sections in which ἀποσυναγωγός surfaced in John's Gospel. Therefore, this study is significant in the sense that it undertakes a critical study of the texts in order to come about a reconstruction and synthesis of ἀποσυναγωγός. In other words, the study seeks to critically engage the texts with the aim of ascertaining the nature of ἀποσυναγωγός within its various contextual periscopes and exerting its relevance to believers in the contemporary time.*

Keywords: ἀποσυναγωγός, Believers, Gospel, Jesus Christ, John, συναγωγή.

INTRODUCTION

An interaction with John's Gospel raise questions in the modern-critical mind as to occurrences in the account which might not be said to have possibly occurred not until after the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ in the first century. Ἀποσυναγωγός is the specific issue here; is it that this issue happened during the ministry of Jesus? Considering this time John was writing, why did he included this occurrence in his account? What is the implication and significance of ἀποσυναγωγός to Gospel in its entirety? The stated questions form the theoretical framework of this study.

A notable contribution in this orb is the work of Louis Martyn (1968) who identified a synagogue-church drama as the crucial factor of the Gospel. His thesis has been widely accepted by many scholars (Hägerland, 2003: 309), although some have reasoned another perspective (Brown, 1979; 2003:74; Culpepper, 1975, McGrath, 1996). It is observed that the identity of John's original or primary recipients is somewhat connected with the subject matter of this discourse.

Although the authorship arguments have preoccupied Johannine scholarship (Ramsey, 1989:17; Nickel, 1993:11; Carson, 1991), the study notes that scholars (Dunn, 1999; Boyarin, 2004; Frend, 2006; Moss, 2012; Cohen, 2013) have also explored the concept of 'parting of ways' among the Jews, Christians and Jewish Christians to adequately ascertain the ancient state and community of John's Gospel which is far-fetched from contemporary readers (Eckhard, 2008: 233–270). This is done in order to discover and reconstruct John's original recipients (Du Rand 1993:11), considering the socio-historical setting (Van der Merwe 1995:69-70) and cultural backgrounds of the people who were part of the Johannine community at the time the completion of the Gospel (Kenney 2002:9-15).

Martyn argued that the history of the Johannine community's conflict is reflected by Jesus' conflict with the Jews (Martyn, 1978). The clues he found in the healing of the blind man in John 9 have made the pericope famous, for it is the entry point from which Martyn sees the two-level drama. Martyn's analysis reveals the need to interpret the Johannine Gospel on two levels; the events during Jesus' lifetime and actual events experienced by the Johannine Church. In view of this, Won-Ha Hwang and Van der Watt (2007) argue that there is ample evidence in the Gospel that it invites people to believe, but equally convincing evidence that the Gospel strengthens the faith of believers. However, Ferreira (1998:26) explained that the Gospel presents a double history such that the experiences of the community are read back into the life of Jesus.

Keener (2003:140-232) suggests not only a Jewish Christians readership but a much wider audience, including Samaritans and Greeks; which some were already part of the Johannine community, while others were

still potential believers – the Gospel was written for all of them. Thus, John's Gospel was written with both evangelistic and didactic aims in view (Van der Watt 2002: 89-95). The study notes the occurrences of ἀποσυναγωγός in John as the theological framework of this discourse; such that this research investigate the texts considering its background in order to ascertain the actuality, credibility and veracity of John's usage or inclusion of ἀποσυναγωγός in his account.

An Understanding of συναγωγή and ἀποσυναγωγός

During the first-century, the συναγωγή (synagogue) was the local assembly place of socio-ethnic communities for quasi-political as well as religious functions (Horsley, 1996). Although many scholars argue that the origin of synagogue is unknown (Easton, 1996), Levine (1982) explained that several archaeological discoveries have been made, though probable in its connection with its origin from the Babylonian exile (Ezk 11:16, 14:1). Matassa, (2018: 191) in his monograph deals with the processes by which the five sites at Delos, Jericho, Herodium, Masada, and Gamla were identified as first-century synagogues.

Nevertheless, the reality of συναγωγή and its vital role in the wider Jewish community cannot be discarded. Thus, συναγωγή could mean an 'assembly', 'congregation' or 'a place of assembly' (Balz, 1990). In fact, the synagogues were the focal point of the Jewish community in any town with a Jewish population, Palestinian or Diaspora, and were used for judicial functions, including punishment of Jewish violators of the Jewish law – Mt 10:17 (Myers, 1987). συναγωγή seems to have been much more than just a building for religious activities (Grabbe 1995:62).

John's Gospel reveals that Jesus taught in the synagogue and temple alike (6:59; 7:14, 28; 8:20; 10:23-29). In the same vein, other Gospel accounts establish the relation of Jesus with the synagogue (Mk 1:21, 23, 29; 7:17; 10:10; Mt 4:23; 9:35; 12:9-14) (Spong, 243). In fact, religious activities in the synagogue consisted of (i) prayer - Acts 16:13, 16 (ii) reading of the Scriptures in certain definite portions – Mt 13:54; Acts 14:1; 17:1, and (iii) the exposition of the portions read - Lk 4:15, 22; Acts 13:14 (Achteimer, 1985).

In fact, it took centuries for the synagogue to reach the stage of development reflected in the New Testament. Binder (1999) explains that the synagogue was initially a secular meeting house in post-exilic Judaism whose role was for worship and sacrifices for pious Jews unable to go up to Jerusalem. It developed as an informal alternative to the temple worship which became systematized under the influence of the Pharisees (Olsson, 2001). After the destruction of the Temple that takes place in 70 A.D, the former gathering with patterns of worship and prayer becomes a meeting place for Jews in any given locality for a variety of purposes and not only a centre of worship (Kee, 1990:3).

The study notes that 'ἀποσυναγωγός' (an adjective nominative masculine singular) - "be put out of the synagogue" or "put out of the synagogue"; meaning to be excluded from sacred assemblies of Israelites or excommunicated (Strong, 1996) is from συναγωγή (sunagōgē) a derivative of συνάγω (sunago) meaning; to lead together, that is, 'bring together', 'assemble', 'convey', 'gather' or 'gather together' (Thomas, 1998). The change began in συναγωγή when the ἀπο, a preposition ('away', 'off', or 'away from') is added.

Ἀποσυναγωγός appeared only three times in the New Testament and these appearances are all found in the Gospel of John (Oesterley and Box, nd). It is interesting that nowhere in the synoptic gospels is there found reference to such action on the part of the Jews. Why is it that John alone reports this development (with the usage of ἀποσυναγωγός) when the three earlier gospels apparently know nothing of it? It is quite unthinkable that in Jesus' day such a decision has already been taken! In view of this, the study figures the emergence of the term ἀποσυναγωγός in the succeeding section of this work.

Appearances of 'ἀποσυναγωγός' in John's Gospel

Here, the study sees the need to present the appearances of ἀποσυναγωγός in John's Gospel within its pericope. 9:21-22 "...Ask him, he is of age, he will speak for himself.²² His parents said this because they feared the Jews, for the Jews had already agreed that if anyone should confess him to be Christ, he was to be put out of the synagogue. Therefore his parents said, He is of age, ask him..."

12:39 "...Therefore they could not believe. For Isaiah again said,⁴⁰ He has blinded their eyes and hardened their heart, lest they should see with their eyes and perceive with their heart, and turn for me to heal them.

⁴¹Isaiah said this because he saw his glory and spoke of him. ⁴²Nevertheless many even of the authorities believed in him, but for fear of the Pharisees then did not confess it, lest they should be put out of the synagogue ⁴³for they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God. ⁴⁴And Jesus cried out and said, He who believes in me, believes not in me but in him who sent me..."

15:27 "...and you also are witnesses, because you have been with me from the beginning.^{16:1} I have said all this to you to keep you from falling away.² They will put you out of the synagogues; indeed, the hour is coming when whoever kills you will think he is offering service to God. ³And they will do this because they have not known the Father, nor me.⁴ But I have said these things to you, that when their hour comes you may remember that I told

you of them. I did not say these things to you from the beginning, because I was with you. ⁵But now I am going....”

The study discovered that these are the contexts with which ἀποσυναγωγός is seen in John. Therefore, these texts form the theological framework of the critical examination in the next section of the study.

Analysis of ἀποσυναγωγός in John's Gospel

In the section of the work, the study engages critical analysis of the highlighted texts with the aim of ascertaining its relations with each other considering its distinct and similar features.

Jesus and the Man Born Blind (John 9:21-22)

This portion of John has the story of the ‘man born blind.’ It is observed as the commonly used story for ἀποσυναγωγός argument; therefore, a concerted effort is placed on the other texts while a brief analytic overture is done on this. The account of this event began from the first verse of this chapter through forty-one. Although the account began with *καὶ παραγών* – as He passes by; the subject here refers to Jesus Christ, while the account begins with no definite location. However, the study propose somewhere within the temple precincts (ch. 7 and 8). The singularity and specialty of this account by John is that the blindness is said to have been congenital and has no parallel in the synoptics. The scope of this analysis is John 9:21-22, but a proper understanding call for the need to explore the entire event within its immediate context: the healing of the man (1-12), the Pharisees first interrogation (13-23), the Pharisees second interrogation (24-34) and spiritual sight and blindness (35-41).

This drama brings the character of the man born blind, Jesus, disciples, Pharisees and the man's parent into play. It is noteworthy that Jesus' miraculous act here is not the focus of this research; however, the reality of the signs is cardinal to the issue at hand; pointing to that which actually results to being “put out of synagogue”. The curiosity of the disciples is reflected in their question to Jesus in verse 2: *ραββί τις ἡμαρτεν οὗτος ἢ οἱ γονεῖς αὐτοῦ ἵνα τυφλὸς γεννηθῇ* – *rabbi, who sinned; this man or his parent? But Jesus' response as John presented reveals (τα ἔργα τοῦ θεοῦ ἐν αὐτῷ* – “nobody sinned...so that the works of God might be displayed in him”) the purpose of the blindness as an indirect answer to the source. After this clarity between Jesus and the disciples, the miracle followed (vs. 7-8).

More so, the study notes that this text focuses on Jesus rather than the man born blind. In other words, the man born blind is a means to an end, not an end in itself. Cardinal to the drama is *οἱ οὖν γείτονες καὶ οἱ θεωροῦντες αὐτὸν τὸ προτερον* – the disciples and those who had seen the man before and even *ἄλλοι* – some (vs. 9) is drawn to have affirmed the man's previous state and this could be taken to affirm that a miracle actually took place. This inherently brings about the man's interrogation in verse 10 and 12. Later, the miracle drew the attention of the *φarisaiouς* – Pharisees who also interrogated the man (vs. 16-17) as well as the parent (vs. 18-19). The study observes that the interrogation is put in such a way that the man born blind (vs. 15b; 17b, 24 and 26) and his parents (vs. 20-21; 23) seems oblige to respond to the call to order of the *φarisaiouς*.

The appearance of *σαββατον* – Sabbath (vs. 14 and 16) in the drama presents a motion to strike for the Pharisees. This is reflective of the spurred division among them – *σχίσμα ἦν ἐν αὐτοῖς*. It is logical to think that the division and chaos here has to do the Jewish doctrine and belief ranging from the *σαββατον* to the identity of Jesus as a *προφήτης* – Prophet. This chaos could not affect the response of the man “...ὁ δὲ εἶπεν ὅτι προφήτης ἐστίν – He said he is a prophet” (vs. 17b); unlike the parents who exonerate themselves from their child's statement; *πὼς δὲ νῦν βλέπει οὐκ οἶδμεν ἢ τις ἠνοιξεν αὐτοῦ τοὺς ὀφθαλμοὺς ἡμεῖς οὐκ οἶδμεν αὐτὸς ἡλικίαν ἔχει αὐτὸν ἐρωτήσατε αὐτὸς περὶ ἑαυτοῦ λαλήσει* – “...How he sees we do not know, nor do we know who opened his eyes, ask him; he is of age, he will speak for himself” (vs 20b-21).

The reason for divergence in the statement of the parents and the man is provided with ἀποσυναγωγός (vs. 22). The submission of the man born blind (vs. 33) seems implicating and to his parents; this obviously signify ἀποσυναγωγός as an activity well-known by almost everyone in the community; this stance is reflective of the fact that the Pharisees have the authority to interrogate and investigate since they were the ones whom the people brought the man to – *ἀγούσιν αὐτὸν πρὸς τοὺς φarisaiouς τὸν ποτε τυφλὸν* (vs. 13). A re-reading of this drama often brings several part of this account to bear as to why was the man interrogated? Why the parent's statements seem exonerating? Why did Jesus have to meet (*καὶ εὗρον* – to look for) the man behind the scene (vs. 35)?

Jesus and the Unbelieving People (John 12:39-44)

This account falls in the immediate context of the miraculous raising of Lazarus from the dead (1-11) and Jesus' teaching after the triumphant entry (12-26). Bryant (1998) explained that vs. 37–50 is a pivotal section because it serves as a theological summary where the author reflects on the first half of the story. The study notes that the issues in this text centre on vs. 37 as its framework: *τοσαῦτα δὲ αὐτοῦ σημεῖα πεποιηκότος ἐμπροσθεν αὐτῶν οὐκ ἐπιστεῦον εἰς αὐτὸν* – though Jesus had done so many signs before them, they still did not believe in Him.

In view of this, vs. 38-43 forms the entire pericope in which the situated framework is explored; thus, John presents a penetrating discussion of the root cause of unbelief. Why did the majority of Jews fail to believe that Jesus was the Messiah? In John's attempt to answer this question, he provided three factors which brought

about the sub-division of the text understudy: 37-38; 39-41 and 42-23. People often see faith as a logical, reasonable response to evidence that compels belief; in fact, anyone can be converted if they are given enough evidence. John's presentation of faith is a more complex issue than this.

John observes that there are some for whom even multiple spectacular miracles are not sufficient to cause faith (they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead Lk 16:31). The usage of *πειποικοτος* (to do, produce or construct) signifies that the *σημεία* (signs) could be seen by everyone, one of which is the miracle of the man born blind as earlier discussed. John couples this observation with a quotation of Isaiah 53:1.

John further by reinforcing *οὐκ ἐπιστεῦον* - unbelief (vs. 40) in a modified quotation of Isaiah 6:9-10, a famous text in the New Testament for the spiritual hard-heartedness of the nation of Israel (Mt 13:13-15; Mk 4:12; Lk 8:10; Acts 28:26-27). If there had not been strong unbelief among the Jewish religious leaders, the atoning death of Jesus for the sins of the world might have been avoided (Jn 4:42; I Jn 4:14). Here, prophecy not only described Israel's unbelief (v. 38), but it also explained it. The historic Israel was unable to move forward on its own level and so enter the kingdom of God (Jn 3.3-5). It had to be regenerated through the Word of God and the Spirit; and this regeneration it refused!

τῶν ἀρχόντων which means the principal men in the Sanhedrim (7:26, 32, 48) καὶ ἐκ τῶν ἀρχ. *Κτλ* - even of the rulers, who were most difficult to convince believed on Christ (Nicodemus, 3:1). *πολλοὶ* which mean 'many' could also mean 'large' with *ἐπίστευσαν εἰς αὐτόν* reveals that some of the rulers believed Jesus but fear of the Pharisees' fanaticism - *οὐχ ὡμολόγουν* prevented their belief from showing in open confession of the claims of Jesus. The unbelief is so strong that believers will not be tolerated, but put out of the synagogue - *ἵνα μὴ ἀποσυναγῶγοι γένωνται*. Parallel to this unbelief is a significant group of believers which include many Jewish leaders. Here, unbelief is accompanied by a climate of fear.

The study notes vital dimension to faith as revealed in this text. The first has to do with *ἐπίστευσαν* and *ὡμολόγουν*. *Επίστευσαν* means 'to think to be true', 'to believe', or 'to be persuaded of', while *ὡμολόγουν* means 'to committed unto', 'not to deny', 'to declare', 'to acknowledge', 'to confess' or 'speak out openly'. It is logical to reconstruct the verse this way; some of the rulers are persuaded of Christ, but for fear of the Pharisees they did not acknowledge it. Obviously, some of the rulers accessed the first but could not attain the second; this inherently makes their faith journey incomplete. Therefore, they are still in their previous unbelieving state or position. In John 1:12, the Greek rendering for those are given the right to become children of God is *ἐλάβον* which means 'to claim', 'to procure' or 'to associate one's self as companion'. This implies that *ὡμολόγουν* will cap the true nature of their *ἐπίστευσαν* in Christ and this will result in *ἐλάβον*. This is what Jesus was trying to emphasize to Jews who had believed in Him (8:31-32); "...If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth and the truth will set you free".

Bernard (1926) argued that to be forbidden to enter a synagogue would be a serious matter for a member of the Sanhedrin. To be shut off from the common worship of one's friends and colleagues is a grave penalty, especially for an ecclesiastical personage. *ἠγάπησαν γὰρ τὴν δόξαν τῶν ἀνθρώπων κτλ* - for they loved the honour that men bestow rather than the honour that God bestows. *ἀνθρώπων* and *θεοῦ* are genitives of origin (similar to 5:44) and *δόξα* though rendered as 'glory' by some version could also be translated as 'praise', 'dignity' or 'estimate'. It will be correct to say "...they love the estimate of men more than the estimate of God" (vs. 43). This verse reveals *ἀποσυναγωγός* attached with Christological confession - *ὡμολόγουν* without regard for height or status in the Jewish setting and the Pharisees as enforcement officers.

Jesus and His Disciples (John 15: 27-16:3)

This scenario occurred in Jesus' discussion with His disciples. This part of John's Gospel have received stern attentions from scholars (Bultmann, 1971:459-461; Beasley-Murray, 1987:224), and often referred to (John 13-17) as 'the farewell discourse' (Brown 1970); thus, the text understudy is located within this purview. The interpretation of John 15: 27-16:3 are situated in the farewell-discourse context.

The study notes that the setting of this text is enshrined in 16:1 *Ταῦτα λελάληκα ὑμῖν, ἵνα μὴ σκανδαλισθῆτε* - 'I have said all these things to you, to keep you from falling away'; indicative of an ongoing-discussion before this very verse. John 13:1-38 often regarded as the setting of the farewell discourse (Barrett, 1978) reveals the locale and scenery of the event. In fact, it was *Καὶ δεῖπνον γενομένου* - during supper (13:2). The context of this discourse entails the disciples dinning together with Jesus Christ dishing His final words to them before death, just like kings, heroes, elders, prophets or village heads will do in the ancient or contemporary time (Bammel, 1993:103).

John 15:18-27 presents the reason and nature of the world's rejection and hatred for the disciples, with the usage of the word *μισεῖ* and *μεμίσηκεν*; which means 'pursue', 'hate' and 'detest' (vs. 18), simply on account of Christ's name - *διὰ τὸ ὄνομά μου* (vs. 21). *Ὅταν δὲ ἔλθῃ ὁ παράκλητος, ὃν ἐγὼ πέμψω ὑμῖν παρὰ τοῦ πατρὸς, τὸ πνεῦμα τῆς ἀληθείας...* - But when the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth... (vs. 26); the alleviation of the world's hatred with the gift of the Holy Spirit. The study notes that this statement among others (14:1-3, 15-18; 15:22, 25-27) forms the bedrock of Jesus' statement in

16:1. This suggests that the disciples might σκανδαλισθῆτε - fall away because of the world's hatred and persecution.

The word μισεῖ and μείσηκεν (hatred) are verbs in the present active indicative state; which could mean that the disciples and Jesus are already being hated (ὅτι Ἐμίσησάν με ὡρεάν: they hated me without a cause vs. 25). ἀλλ' ἐρχεται ὥρα ἵνα – indeed, the hour is coming when...” 16:2 This shows that the hour of is yet to come with the usage of the present indicative verb ἐρχεται, which could also mean ‘to come’, ‘to establish’ or ‘to become known’. Bryant (1998) argued that ἐρχεται ὥρα draws a close parallel to Jesus himself, for John has already alerted us that Jesus’ time (for suffering and death) is at hand.

However, Jesus’ statement here (though rendered in the present tense) seems more futuristic as it concerns the disciples; meaning that the hatred they will face will be so severe; because though the world hate them, will later make it known. The reference made to the Holy Spirit beforehand: ὑπομνησεῖ υμᾶς – ‘to your remembrance’ (14:25-26); why does He need to bring to remembrance the things Jesus told the disciples? Why is there emphasis on the disciple’s memory? (16:4). They need to be informed and later remember because it serves as a shock-absorber since the event will happen in the future. The memory will enable them realize that things were not out of control when they seemed to be. This remembrance would actually strengthen their faith in Jesus, rather than weakening it.

Opposition that arises from religious conviction is often a severe and brutal type. This understanding gives the rendering ἀποσυναγωγούς ποιήσουσιν υμᾶς – “they will put you out of synagogue” a clear picture (16:2a). Jesus’ statement here can be referred to as a gloomy prognosis of the future: καὶ ταῦτα ποιήσουσιν – ‘and they will do these things’ (vs. 3). This phrase crowns the argument of the nature of Jesus’ statement; bringing together everything he has highlighted in the preceding verses. This point to the time of the opposition’s action; they have not done it, but they ‘will’ do it. Jesus had not revealed the extent of the opposition His disciples would face, earlier, because He was with them. This implies that Jesus was the focus of unbelieving hostility; but since, He was preparing to depart from them; they needed to be aware of what lay ahead for them. This point is corroborated with the history of the early church (I Cor 4:11-13) where the disciples were hunted and persecuted, so much that many were scattered and killed by Jews who believed they were doing God’s will (Acts 9:1-2; 22:5, 9; 26:9-11; Gal 1:13-14).

From the analysis, it is clear that these texts were written in part to explain why Christians were withdrawing from the synagogue. The texts present experiences of violence and exclusion making anyone who is convenient and expedient with Jesus feels quite unwelcome. Such experiences are recorded as the process of being ἀποσυναγωγός. The study notes that startling nature of the analyzed text does not successfully put the point of contest in obscurity. The observed point of contest as briefly stated in the next section of this study forms the argument and debate premise of scholars for several decades.

The Observed Point of Contest

Having critically considered the texts in which the subject matter is featured, the study observes a crossroad stemming from the variance that surface in the narrative context. Obviously, John 9:21-22, 34 (γὰρ συνετέθειντο οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι - for the Jews had already agreed; καὶ ἐξέβαλον αὐτὸν ἐξω – and they cast him out) and 12:39-44 (ἀλλὰ διὰ τοὺς φαρισαίους οὐχ ὁμολογοῦν – but for the fear of the Pharisees) can be seen as that which gives an impression that ἀποσυναγωγούς is already in place while Jesus was still alive; in fact, it was carried out in the case of the man who received Jesus’ miracle. This impression is closely linked with the Pharisees as an opposition serving in the capacity of policing everyone or anyone who professes Christ. Can this event actually happen while Jesus was alive?

ἀποσυναγωγούς is painted here as hindrance for people to believe in Christ during the miraculous act of the man born blind and the triumphant entry, preceded by the raising of Lazarus to life. Meanwhile, there is no further record of such occurrences in the Gospel; why is it that ἀποσυναγωγούς was only carried out in the case of the man born blind? Is there any peculiarity about this sign among others? On the other hand, the study argues that John 15:27-16:3 out rightly reveal that Jesus’ statement of ἀποσυναγωγούς is impending and futuristic in nature. This implies that this event is best pictured as that which will happen when Jesus departs from the world; it is logical to say from Jesus’ statement that ἀποσυναγωγούς has not come to stay. Jesus statement in 16:3 and John’s account of His meeting with the man born blind is conflicting. Here comes the observed point of contest!

The study observed that this variance might have been better explained if it did surface among two gospels. However, the difficulty of this contest is enveloped in the fact that John contains the two distinctions and no other gospel is connected with this; making the matter twisted! The study notes that the contention is heightened when Jesus’ futuristic use of ἀποσυναγωγούς appeared in later part. How could Jesus himself make reference to what is already happening as that which will happen in the future? Is it that He wasn’t aware that it has occurred before his discussion with the disciples? Or he just decided to ignore this fact? Why did he not say they “they have been putting you out of the synagogues or they will continue to put you out of synagogue?” (16:2); at least, this would have provided relief and consolation for this contention. In reality, John’s direct report in 9:21-22 and 12:39-44 betrays Jesus’ reported statement in chapter 16. If this is the case; how can this

contention be reconciled? How can one ascertain the correctness of these occurrences concerning the reality and credibility of ἀποσυναγωγός in John's account?

Approaches in Different Perspectives

In view of the observe point of contest, the study sees the need to explore the opinion of several scholars. As stated earlier, this issue ravages the modern critical study of Johannine scholarship in the sense that scholars have exerted efforts to contribute enormously. Over time, references have been made to *Birkat ha-Minim* (a rabbinic prayer of blessing against the heretics; curse).

Every student of the Gospel of John since the late 1960's has been greatly advantaged in their reading of the gospel by the two-level reading strategy of J. Louis Martyn (Klint III, 2008). According to Klint (2008), Ashton provides an interesting reason for accepting Martyn's reading of the Fourth Gospel: 'Martyn goes on to build an impressive case, which carries conviction because of the satisfactory ways it accounts for one of John's most puzzling features: why is the Gospel at once so Jewish and yet so anti-Jewish? Martyn's thesis has been heavily criticized by historians of first-century Judaism and early Christianity (O'Day, Wrede), yet, his reading is still a prominent and vital reading of the gospel.

Martyn view ἀποσυναγωγός as the key to his reading of the Fourth Gospel and created the two-level reading of John with the clues he found in the healing of the blind man in John 9. Martyn finds ἀποσυναγωγός as blatantly anachronistic a key term. Although in the narrative this term describes an event during Jesus' earthly ministry, for Martyn it is most certainly dealing with an event that could not have occurred until decades after Jesus' life. Martyn is convinced that the 'expulsion' term 'refers to the action taken under Gamaliel (Acts 5:34; 22:3) to reword the *Birkat ha-Minim* so as to make it an effective means for detecting Christian heresy. Martyn (2003) is convinced that the first-century readers of the gospel would have seen each of the primary characters in the narrative as referring to persons in their present setting, based upon the anachronistic insertion of the 'expulsion from the synagogue' statement.

Martyn's argument is simply put; people could not have feared or treated via ἀποσυναγωγός in Jesus' time because of *Birkat ha-Minim* mechanism in the late first century. But on a contrary, Klint (2008) cited O'Day who argued that;

Martyn's re-reading strategy as a dominant paradigm blocked out for a while all other ways both of reading the Gospel and of reading the historical data. Martyn's reading became totalizing, not because his claims or even his intentions and methods were totalizing, but because he read so well and so easily that we forgot it was a data.

A clear understanding of Martyn's argument might lead to a sceptical conclusion on the credibility of John's gospel. The fact that Martyn's standpoint has brought about several positive and negative resurgences (Stemberger, 1977; Reinhartz, Brown, 1979; Horbury, 1982; Katz, 1984; Wilson, 1995; Motyer, 1997; Daniel, 2001; Bernier, 2014) in this field cannot be overemphasized. This inherently forms the reason for reconstruction and synthesis explored in the next section of this study.

A Rethink on ἀποσυναγωγός: Reconstruction and Synthesis

Having examined the three texts which envelop the subject matter in John's Gospel, the study sees the need to examine and evaluate the analyzed texts with the aim of discovering the background and existing relationship coupled with its relevance to John's Gospel as a whole. There is no how a discourse will be made on ἀποσυναγωγός without reference to John's community. In fact, any interpretation eventually leads an interpreter to constructing a community or locale within which the Gospel of John was written.

The study notes the need to reinstate the ἀποσυναγωγός scenery during Jesus' time and after his death. Before the synthesis can materialize; a reconstruction is needed. This reconstruction will depict the potency or weight with which the term actually occurred in the texts; helping to ascertain the heaviness of the activities in its different manifestation. Attempt to synchronize the texts would probably have been easy and simple enough if the appearances of ἀποσυναγωγός are rendered in a way which conspicuously reveal their significant tenacity, or better still with the usage of different words. Unfortunately, there is no literary evidence for the potential sense of ἀποσυναγωγός. This observation makes the argument linger! The question is; how do we reinstate ἀποσυναγωγός (popularly observed to have begun in the late first century) within the confine of Jesus' time (c.30 C.E)? On this note, the study proposes the experiences during Jesus' ministry and the early church as a vital tool for reconstructing ἀποσυναγωγός.

According to Kloppenburg (2011), the first occurrences of ἀποσυναγωγός in the Greek language are found in John, and all of the subsequent occurrences of the term are found in patristic rather than pagan literature, most of them simply quoting or paraphrasing John 9.22 Whether this is a neologism of John's or of his group, or the coinage of the synagogue in John's locale cannot, of course be known with certainty. Αποσυναγωγός is explained as just the sort of word that would have been coined for use in the Jewish community (Moulton and Milligan 1930).

This is because the term refers to persons negatively, by indicating the social relationships that they *no longer* enjoy. Unlike other pejorative or derisive terms such as πτωχοί – poor (Jn 15:26; Jas 2:5), and probably

Χριστιανός - Christians (Ac 11:26) which were eventually inverted and adopted as badges, there is no indication whatsoever that ἀποσυναγωγός became a self-designation for groups of Jesus-followers. On the contrary, if we set aside the patristic occurrences of the term which simply quote or allude to the Johannine texts, the term always appears of persons who are so designated by the excluding (Christian) group. In other words, patristic usage assumes the perspective of the group from which persons are excluded, and never turns it into a self-designation of the Christian group.

Closely associated with the contextual appearance of ἀποσυναγωγός are the Pharisees. They are often mentioned as perpetrators who will carry out this exercise among the people. The expulsion of which John speaks is a matter of ridding the corporate body of dangerous elements of pollution as a means of maintaining purity. If the Pharisees, with their strong construction of social boundaries, were in control of synagogues, then the presence of Jesus-followers, with different practices or beliefs, might be regarded as pollutants threatening the cohesion of the group (Malina and Rohrbaugh, 1998). From the analyzed texts, the study argues that ἀποσυναγωγός is enshrined on Christological confession. The clash of interest has always been with the Jesus' ministry and His acclaimed identity with Yahweh. The issue the Jews officials have with Jesus cannot divorce the extent to which they can go in getting anyone who associates with Jesus out of the synagogue even while Jesus was alive.

More so, the study observes that Jesus hid his appearance from the sceneries. In 9:35, Jesus later found the man born blind and discussed with him, while in 12:36 Jesus intentionally hid himself; even in 16:3 the discourse of Jesus and his disciples took place behind a closed door. This textual observation suggests ἀποσυναγωγός as an event which was already in place; but has not gotten to the brim. This is because the frontier of the movement itself have not been captured; in John (7:30; 10:39; 11:45-57) and even in parallel reading of Jesus' ministry in the Synoptics (Mt 12:1-14; 26:1-4; Mk 14:1; Lk 6:6-10; 22:1-2) reveals that on several occasions the opposition sought to capture and kill Jesus but he escapes; though eventually killed. The study argues that though *Birkat ha-Minim* has not been fully been activated formally, it was still in the making-process. This stance reveals that though tested, Jesus' existence remains a threat to the full establishment of *Birkat ha-Minim* bringing the chronic mode of ἀποσυναγωγός.

Widely accepted among scholars is that the John was produced in a later date (at the end of first century) (Swindoll, 2010). During this time, Judaism officially recognized the danger from Christianity; Jewish leaders apparently felt the greatest challenge was from the Jewish Christians (*Minim*) the enemy within their midst. The bitterest assault upon Jewish Christians took place from the turn of the first century to the middle of the second century. The hostility against believers here is at a peak level; compared to the experience during the time of Jesus. This is not to say there is no opposition during Jesus' time, in fact, association with Jesus then is capable of questioning and undermining anyone; however, the experience here is not grievous to followers of Jesus (John 11:1-45) unlike after his death (Acts 8:1).

Bernier (2014) argued that if Jesus experienced such during his lifetime and his followers experienced something similar not long after his death it is not unreasonable to expect that some were already experiencing such also during Jesus' lifetime. This reflects the study's discovery of the Pharisees test-running the practice during Jesus' time; presenting ἀποσυναγωγός as that which can be interpreted in two developing stages of "disciplinary exclusion" and "permanent expulsion" (Barclay, 1995).

The study's argument here calls for extreme caution when it comes to taking John's account of expulsion naively as a description of the social situation of his group. The study's *modus* of reconstruction seems congruent with Malina (1984) and Campbell's (2007) argument of John's usage of anti-language. According to Halliday (1975), anti-languages are typically found in subcultures and are characterized by re-lexicalization; the substitution of new words for old words and over-lexicalization the multiplication of terms referring to specific things or acts.

Campbell cites ἀκούειν, βλέπειν, γινώσκειν, μαρτυρεῖν, πιστεύειν and ὑπομνήσκων as examples of words which falls within the argument premise. In fact, the terms Ἰουδαῖοι, Φαρισαῖοι and τέκνα τοῦ Ἀβραάμ - all terms part of John's core concerns have also been re-lexicalized to refer to opponents of the Johannine group. This is also applicable to Κόσμος so that it no longer simply means 'world' or 'order' or 'good behaviour', but takes on hostile overtones and refers to any person or any institution that does not recognize the claims that the Johannine group makes on behalf of Jesus. Also, σκοτία now mean dark forces and principalities present as opposite spiritual force to the λόγος in the world.

This stance is born out of a lucid reflection on the text and scholarly views. This is indicative of the fact that tension had existed from the very beginning of Christianity. Therefore, ἀποσυναγωγός is not only John's theological interest in the past, but also some potential glimpses of the importance of the Johannine Jesus for the readers of John. On this note, ἀποσυναγωγός is a blunt realized event which permeates the early centuries of Christianity, which started within the range of disciplinary exclusion and later became an official Jewish policy during the early Church.

Relevance of ἀποσυναγωγός for Contemporary Christians

John's Gospel, though written several centuries back, remains an important Christian piece applicable and significant to believers even in contemporary time. Specifically, the study notes that the examined issue – 'expulsion from the synagogue' in the preceding part of the research is relevant to believers who are not part of the primary recipients of John's Gospel.

The religious function of Synagogue as a place of communion in the early ancient time is somewhat similar to the function of the church today; a place where believers not only gather to read the Bible, but also gather to pray, worship God and edify the body of Christ. The study argues that the meeting point of these two lies in the fact that they serve apparently the same purpose; the worship of Yahweh.

The nature of persecution Just as it is in the early times of the disciples inherently involves and affects where believers worship. In the contemporary time, mostly experienced in the African world is the occurrences of rising insurgents to the destruction and demolition of Churches in order to stop Christian worship. Although Christianity is often regarded as one of the fastest growing religion; it has attracted several vice and faced with different confrontations on different basis. Although, it seems evident in many continents, the research notes that persecutions of such are not far-fetched from the African continent. Notable among which is the northern part of Nigeria. The study argues that this experience is somewhat similar to the antagonistic, resentful and hostile experience of early believers, it is more or less being ἀποσυναγωγός – but here 'expelled out of the church'.

The persecution and opposition of the disciples were their brothers from the same clan and somewhat the same origin; the Jews persecuting their fellow Jews all in the name of distinct beliefs and religious truths. It is not indignant to refer to them as unbelievers. Likewise, the opponents and persecutors of believers in the contemporary time are unbelievers who do not see in any important in what the Christians uphold. Some of them strongly uphold this hostile movement and exercise through misunderstanding and misinterpretation of Christian faith, belief and scriptures.

The teachers of the law and the priests, who condemned the apostles, boasted that God had appointed them to govern the church; and, indeed, the ordinary government of the church was in their hands, their office as rulers was divine and not human. But by their tyranny they corrupted the whole order which God had instituted. Consequently, the power which had been given to them for building up was nothing but a monstrous oppression of God's servants, which should have been a medicine to purge the church, was used in the opposite way, to drive out the fear of God (Calvin, 1994). Ministers of the Gospel are not only ill-treated by the avowed enemies of the faith, but sometimes endure the greatest reproaches from those who are apparently members, even the so called pillars of the church. This source of persecution and antagonism though unexpected often severe and terrible!

Jesus' statement of persecution in connection with the person of the Holy Spirit in 15:25-17 reveals the need for contemporary believers to understand that Christ does not send his followers into the arena unarmed, and therefore no one can fail in this warfare except through his own laziness. Thus, believers must not wait until they are in the midst the battle, instead they must try to get to know the words of Christ and become familiar, so that the battle can be engaged when necessary. In view of this, believers must not doubt that the victory is in already at hand as long as those warnings of Christ are deeply impressed on mind. ἵνα μὴ σκανδαλισθῆτε – "so that you will not go astray," means that there is no danger of anything forcing us aside from the right course. But how few learn this doctrine properly is clear from the fact that those who seem to know it by heart when they are out of range give way as soon as they actually have to start fighting, as if they are completely ignorant and had never received any instruction.

It is clear that John is prodding some of his readers through actual events that took place during the time of Jesus. The study opines that it is possible that among the first century synagogues there were still those who were in this position; if they come out as believing in Jesus, they risked expulsion as well as the ostracism and economic consequences associated with this expulsion. John chides them by asking, what is more important, praise from men or praise from God? Also, this is providing contemporary believers with elements that debars from believing and standing for Christ? Though the situation is unlike it, terrible, devastating; John is placing an emphasis on the need to be upstanding for the course of Christ as that which worth it. Religion may be considered a private matter in cultural context, but believers must never let Christianity be hidden away like the light under a bowl (Mt 5:16). On this note, contemporary believers today should see the need for taking a bold stand for Jesus, everywhere, every time and anyhow.

CONCLUSION

The discovered nature of the Johannine community as explored by many scholars often tempt interpreters to view John's account as a reflection of the Johannine community's current state while the Gospel was written, instead of viewing the experience of the Johannine community as a result of what began during the life of Christ. The study observes that John's account which entails ἀποσυναγωγός as a vital notion possesses the elements of an actual record of event which occurred during Jesus' time. The occurrence of ἀποσυναγωγός in John 9 gives a picture of an already-happening event, while this is congruent with John's statement in 12:42 and Jesus' discussion with his disciples in 16:2.

The fact that there subsists flair of hostility, antagonism and resentment towards Jesus and His ministry by some Jews (often the Pharisees) cannot be denied; obviously, this ravages Jesus' ministry and even led to His death. Thus, any attempt to see ἀποσυναγωγός as a graft by John into the miraculous account rendered in chapter 9 casts a logical and reasonable doubt on the reliability of John's account in this sphere! Why would he have added such? Won't Jesus' motive for the miracle be achieved if ἀποσυναγωγός was not added? A viable response to the highlighted questions reveals ἀποσυναγωγός in John's gospel as the case of a mob (crowd or multitude) rather than a courthouse (law court); although this stance is plausible, it is still probe-able.

In view of this, the study concludes that Jesus' statement in 16:2 is a reaffirmation and advancement of another mode of ἀποσυναγωγός (compare to the informal mode which is in existence during Jesus time, ch. 9) such that it becomes legit in the society without sympathy. On this premise, John 12:42 can be understood to be that many among the leaders who believed in Jesus could not bear the pain of being informally sidelined, criticized and excluded from the synagogue activities all for the sake of professing what they believe; knowing full well that there will be legal and formal retaliation from the Jewish sect (establishing the 'Birkat ha-Minim') after the demise of Jesus who wreck commotion in the temple order (Jn 2:13-2).

On a lighter mode, the study posits that John attempts to link the commotion and havoc experienced by the readers within the life of Jesus is clearly cut in a critical and lucid understanding of the account; this can be referred to as a means with which the audience would easily grasp the genesis of their contemporaneous experience. Neither does this suggest an interpolation (false insertion), nor in any bit take away the fact that real 'expulsions' of whatever kinds have taken place before or behind the Johannine narrative (Jn 8:31; 10:19), as witnessed elsewhere in the early Christian movement. Ἀποσυναγωγός was part and parcel of what Jesus himself experienced and what those who were seen as threats Judaism proper had faced beforehand.

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