

A LINGUISTIC-THEOLOGICAL STUDY OF THE CONCEPT OF TA ERGA IN THE JOHANNINE GOSPEL

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ABSTRACT

The concept of *ta erga*, is a central thread in John's theological tapestry. However, John's multifaceted presentation of *ta erga* has generated a lot of scholarly debate. This paper examines the concept of *ta erga* in John's Gospel through an integrated linguistic-theological methodology, investigating how he employs this significant motif to develop his Christological and theological narrative. The purpose of this study is to demonstrate that John's strategic deployment of *ta erga* motif serves both a revelatory and legitimating function in his theological narrative. Again, the research aims to show how *ta erga* functions as key theological concept that bridges divine initiative and human response, particularly in relation to faith and understanding Jesus' identity. Most significantly, the study reveals that John gradually expands the semantic range of *ta erga* beyond miraculous activities to encompass Jesus' entire salvific mission. The research aims to contribute to Johannine scholarship by highlighting the sophisticated interplay between *ta erga* and *semeia*, in John's narratives. The findings revealed that *ta erga* motif in John, serves multiple functions: authenticating Jesus' divine origin, revealing his unity with the Father, and providing a basis for faith. The research concludes that John's presentation of *ta erga*, forms an integral part of his theological strategy, demonstrating Jesus' divine identity and mission through both word and deed.

Keywords: *ta erga* (the works), *semeia* (signs), *thelema* of the Father (will of the Father), *hoi ioudaioi* (the Jews), *diabolos* (devil).

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

The Gospel of John distinguishes itself among the canonical gospels through its profound theological depth and distinctive literary style. Among the various theological motifs that permeate this gospel, the concept of *ta erga*, emerges as a critical element that shapes John's Christological narrative. The frequency and strategic placement of this terminology throughout the gospel suggests its fundamental importance to the evangelist's theological program. While scholars have long recognized the significance of this theme, the precise nature and function of *ta erga*, within John's theological framework, remains contested terrain in Johannine scholarship.

This paper seeks to contribute to the ongoing scholarly conversation by employing an integrated linguistic-theological methodology to examine how he deploys *ta erga*, throughout his narrative. By analyzing both the linguistic features and theological significance of this motif, the paper aims to demonstrate that *ta erga*, functions as a multivalent concept that serves John's broader theological and Christological purposes. Through this investigation, the paper argues that *ta erga*, in John's Gospel, operates simultaneously on multiple levels - as miracle-signs, as revelatory actions, as testimonial evidence, and as the fulfillment of divine commission-creating a complex theological construct that illuminates the relationship between Jesus, the Father, and the believing community.

The study employs an integrated linguistic-theological methodology to explore the concept of *ta erga* ("the works") in the Gospel of John. The linguistic analysis includes lexical-semantic, syntactic, discourse, and narrative approaches to understand how *ta erga*, functions within the gospel's language and structure. The theological analysis draws on intertextual, Christological, soteriological, and ecclesiological perspectives to examine how *ta erga* reveals Jesus' identity, mission, and its implications for faith and the believing community. Together, these methods provide a comprehensive understanding of *ta erga*, as both a literary and theological motif.

The significance of this study lies in its potential to illuminate not only our understanding of Johannine theology but also his literary craftsmanship. By examining how linguistic choices inform theological expression, one gains insight into the fourth gospel's distinctive contribution to New Testament Christology and soteriology.

2.0 THE SCHOLARLY DEBATE ON TA ERGA

The concept of *ta erga*, in John's Gospel has generated significant scholarly discussion, with various interpretive traditions emphasizing different aspects of this multifaceted motif. This section surveys the major scholarly positions that have emerged regarding the nature and function of *ta erga*, in Johannine thought.

2.1 Traditional Approaches

Early scholarship on *ta erga*, in John's Gospel typically approached the concept through doctrinal or historical lenses. Bultmann viewed *ta erga* primarily as a theological construct reflecting the John's attempt to articulate Jesus' divine authority.¹ For Bultmann, *ta erga* functioned primarily as symbolic acts that revealed the divine reality manifested in Jesus. This interpretation emphasized the revelatory dimension of *ta erga* while downplaying their historical character.

Dodd pioneered a more nuanced approach, suggesting that *ta erga* in John reflects both historical tradition and theological interpretation. According to Dodd, John appropriates historical memories of Jesus' miracles and invests them with profound symbolic significance.² In this view, *ta erga* functions as "signs" (*semeia*) that point beyond themselves to the deeper reality of Jesus' identity and mission.

Brown further developed this perspective, arguing that *ta erga* in John represents a deliberately ambiguous concept that encompasses both Jesus' miraculous signs and his entire saving work,

¹ R. Bultmann, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary*, trans. G. R. Beasley-Murray (Philadelphia: Westminster John Knox Press, 1971), 138-144.

² C. H. Dodd, *The interpretation of the Fourth Gospel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1953), 175-186.

including the culminating "work" of his death and resurrection.³ Brown suggested that this ambiguity was intentional on the part of John, allowing *ta erga* to function as a multivalent concept within the narrative.

2.2 Recent Developments

More recent scholarship has witnessed a linguistic turn in the study of *ta erga*. Barrett and Culpepper have drawn attention to the literary and rhetorical dimensions of the concept, examining how John employs specific linguistic features to develop *ta erga* motif throughout the narrative. This approach has revealed patterns in the distribution and development of *ta erga* terminology that suggest a deliberate narrative strategy on the part of the evangelist.⁴⁽⁵⁾

Carson and Keener have argued for understanding *ta erga* as a dynamic concept that evolves throughout the gospel narrative, serving different theological functions in different contexts. According to this view, *ta erga*, operates as a multivalent motif that John employs to articulate various dimensions of Jesus' identity and mission, with particular emphasis on the relationship between Jesus and the Father.⁶⁽⁷⁾

Thompson and Köstenberger have emphasized the relational aspects of *ta erga*, suggesting that the concept primarily serves to articulate the unique relationship between Jesus and the Father. In this perspective, Jesus' *erga* demonstrate his perfect alignment with the Father's will and purpose, establishing his divine identity through his actions rather than merely through titular claims.⁸⁽⁹⁾

Despite these valuable contributions, several gaps remain in the scholarly understanding of *ta erga* in John's Gospel. First, while many studies have noted the linguistic features associated with *ta erga*, few have systematically analyzed how these linguistic choices contribute to the theological significance of the concept. Second, the relationship between *ta erga* and other key Johannine themes—such as witness/testimony, belief/unbelief, and glory/glorification, requires further exploration. Finally, the narrative function of *ta erga*, in structuring John's Christological presentation remains inadequately addressed.

This paper seeks to address these gaps by employing an integrated linguistic-theological methodology that examines both the semantic features and theological significance of *ta erga* in the Fourth Gospel.

3.0 TA ERGA IN JOHN'S GOSPEL: LINGUISTIC ANALYSIS

3.1 Lexical-Semantic Analysis

The term *ergon*, appears 27 times in John's Gospel, with notable concentration in chapters 5-10 and 14-15. This distribution is significant, as these chapters contain major Christological discourses and controversies. The plural form with the definite article (*ta erga*) occurs 18 times, while the singular form appears 9 times. This preference for the plural form suggests that John conceptualizes Jesus' *erga*, as a collective whole rather than as isolated incidents.

The semantic range of *ergon* in John, is broader than in the Synoptic Gospels. While the term can refer to specific miraculous actions (as in 7:21, where it clearly refers to the healing at Bethesda), it also encompasses Jesus' entire mission (4:34; 17:4), his revelatory words and actions (14:10-11), and even his death and resurrection (5:36; 19:30). This semantic breadth allows John to develop a multifaceted concept that serves various theological purposes throughout the narrative.

³ R. E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John*, Vol. 1 (New York: Yale University Press, 1966), 529-532.

⁴ C.K. Barrett, *The Gospel According to St. John: An Introduction with Commentary and Notes on the Greek Text*, 2nd ed. (Philadelphia: Westminster John Knox Press, 1978), 261-263.

⁵ R. A. Culpepper, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel: A Study in Literary Design* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983), 88.

⁶ D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 285-495.

⁷ C.S. Keener, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary*, Vol. 1 (Peabody, MA: Baker Academic, 2003), 670-675.

⁸ M.M. Thompson, *The God of the Gospel of John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 186.

⁹ A.J. Kostenberger, *John* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004), 98.

Collocations with *ergon* further illuminate its semantic profile. The term frequently appears with verbs of doing or performing ("to do/make," occurs 11 times with *ergon*), seeing or showing ("to see," and "to show"), and believing (to believe). These collocations establish important connections between *ta erga*, divine revelation, and human response-connections that are central to John's theological program.

3.1.1 Syntactic Analysis

The syntactic patterns associated with *ta erga*, reveal several important features. First, possessive constructions are prominent, with *ta erga*, frequently qualified as "my works," (referring to Jesus) or "the works of my Father." This syntactic pattern emphasizes the intimate connection between Jesus' *erga* and the Father's activity-a key theological concern in John.

Second, *ta erga* often appears as the object of verbs of perception or cognition (e.g., "see the works," "know the works"), suggesting its evidential function within the narrative. The works are presented as observable phenomena that provide a basis for believing in Jesus' claims about his identity and relationship with God.

Third, *ta erga*, frequently appears in purpose clauses introduced by *hina* (in order that), indicating that the works serve specific theological purposes within John's narrative. This syntactic pattern underscores the teleological character of *ta erga*, as actions directed toward particular ends-notably, revelation and eliciting faith.

3.1.2 Discourse Analysis

At the discourse level, *ta erga* serves several important functions in John's Gospel. First, it functions as a cohesive device that links different sections of the narrative, creating thematic unity across diverse episodes. The repeated references to *ta erga* in contexts of controversy and debate (particularly in chapters 5, 7, and 10) establish continuity in John's presentation of Jesus' identity claims and the responses they evoke.

Second, *ta erga* serves as a marker of intensification in John's narrative, with references to the works becoming more frequent and theologically loaded as the narrative progresses. This pattern culminates in the Farewell Discourse (chapters 14-17), where *ta erga*, is connected with the disciples' future mission and the coming of the *Paraclete*.

Third, *ta erga* functions as a point of contestation in the narrative, becoming a focal point for debate between Jesus and his opponents. This is particularly evident in the controversies recorded in chapters 5-10, where *ta erga* becomes a key element in Jesus' self-defense against charges of blasphemy.

3.1.3 Theological Analysis

The idea of *ta erga*, is intrinsic in the Gospel of John.¹⁰ It appears twenty-seven (27) times in the Gospel.¹¹ The concept of *ta erga* and its cognates and synonyms, such as deeds, doing, performing and others, appear on multiple levels in John's Gospel.¹² *Ta erga*, despite its extensive use presents some difficulty to readers of John's Gospel, since it is not only presented through various action-oriented expressions, but also in literal, figurative and metaphorical expressions. Most importantly, the term, *ta erga*, has serious theological implications for understanding the Fourth Gospel as it seeks to define the Gospel's soteriological message, preconditioning the action for attaining eternal life and carries some ethical dimensions for the Johannine community and Christians today (6:27-29).

¹⁰ Bertalan Józsa, *Work in the Gospel of John-A Cognitive Perspective* (PhD Thesis: University of Edinburgh, 2021), 142.

¹¹ Chul-Hae Kim, "Three Exegetical Key Points to Interpret the Gospel of John," *Touch Trinity Journal* 4 (2001), 119.

¹² Alexander Drews, *Semantik und Ethik des Wortfeldes "Ergon" im Johannesevangelium*, WUNT II 431 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2017), 18.

The Johannine theology of *ta erga* can be classified into three, namely *ta erga* of God, *ta erga* of Jesus and *ta erga* of the people. Thus, throughout John's Gospel, it is essential always to ask the question: who is doing *ta erga*? Thus, we can speak about the *erga* of God when God is doing the *erga*, the *erga* of Jesus when Jesus is doing the *erga*, and the *erga* of the people. The Johannine discourse on *ta erga* is on the tripartite level of God, Jesus and the people. *Ta erga* of the people could comprise *ta erga tou ioudaioi*, *ta erga tou kosmou*, *ta erga tou Abraam*, or *ta erga tou diabolos*. Alexander Drews posits that the expression, "the works of God," does not refer solely to the works that God performs, but also to the works God requires.¹³ Don A. Carson supports this assertion.¹⁴ This part of the paper therefore discusses the theological implications of the concept of *ta erga* by paying particular attention to how John deals with the concept in the various chapters in the Fourth Gospel.

4.0 THE THEOLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF TA ERGA IN JOHN'S NARRATIVES

4.1 *Ta erga* of the People (Jn. 3:19-21)

The first appearances of *ta erga* are seen in John 3:19-21. John 3 captures the story of Nicodemus' encounter with Jesus. Nicodemus is presented not only as a religious leader but also as a political leader who has "enjoyed prominent social, economic and religious status."¹⁵ This is later reinforced in 7:45-52, where Nicodemus is present at a meeting of the chief priests and Pharisees.¹⁶ After the generous introduction of Nicodemus, the story, however, takes a sudden turn in v. 2, and the narrator goes on to tell his readers that Nicodemus came to Jesus at *nux*. Raymond E. Brown asserts that the use of *nux*, here, may function as a symbol that indicates "the realm of death, lies, and ignorance ... the sphere of moral and spiritual opposition to God."¹⁷ However, considering 7:50-52, it is more likely that Nicodemus visited Jesus at night in order not to lose face before his colleagues.

After, the chiastic response between v. 2 and v. 3, Jesus introduces the concept of *gennethe anothēn* and we see Nicodemus' limited understanding which further highlights his *nux* origin and the fact that Jesus had come from above. R. Alan Culpepper asserts that among the various literary devices John utilises in the Gospel, misunderstanding is one of John's most important literary devices to transform his readers' worldview.¹⁸ Jesus makes a metaphorical statement then his dialogue partner responds inappropriately with a question which leads Jesus or the narrator to explain the higher meaning of Jesus' words.¹⁹

Here, the narrator focuses on Nicodemus' misunderstanding in order to emphasise both the necessity of rebirth and the means through which one can achieve that. At the end, Nicodemus is introduced as someone who seems to be an ideal candidate for the *basileia tou Theou*, but readers soon find out that Nicodemus surprisingly fails to understand Jesus' words. The narrator therefore leaves the readers wondering as to who may attain the *gennethe anothēn* and *basileia tou Theou*. This makes the *gennethe anothēn* and one's entry into *basileia tou Theou*, *ta erga of God*. As Teresa Okure puts it, thus it has become clear in the story of Nicodemus that conversion is not a human endeavour but a divine initiative.²⁰

Careful readers will notice that from verses 16, the tone of the narrative changes from Jesus to the narrator.²¹ One sees that the phrase "the Son of man," which is Jesus' self-designation is no longer

¹³ Drews, *Semantik und Ethik des Wortfeldes "Ergon" im Johannesevangelium*, 261.

¹⁴ D.A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John* (Leicester, IVP/Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 285.

¹⁵ Cornelis Bennema, *Encountering Jesus: Character Studies in the Gospel of John* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2009), 78.

¹⁶ Urban C. von Wahlde, "The Relationship between Pharisees and Chief Priests: Some Observation on the Texts in Matthew, John and Josephus." *NTS* 42 (1996): 506-522.

¹⁷ Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John* 2 vols (New York: Doubleday, 1966), 1:130.

¹⁸ R. Alan Culpepper, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel: A Study in Literary Design* (Philadelphia Fortress, 1983), 164.

¹⁹ Culpepper, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel*, 152.

²⁰ Teresa Okure, *The Johannine Approach to Mission: A Contextual Study of John 4:1-4* WUNT II/31, Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1988), 159-164.

²¹ Sookgoo Shin, *Ethics in the Gospel of John: Discipleship as Moral Progress* (Leiden: Koninklijke Brill, 2019), 71.

used in vv. 16ff, and the conjunction *gar*, which often functions as a way of “introducing authorial comments or narrative asides in the Gospel,” is used throughout.²² Scholars posit that verses 16-21 represent the authoritative, narratorial response to readers on why one has to be born from above by believing in Jesus and what such a belief implies for humans.²³ Readers up to this point may think that the cause of unbelief lies in a cognitive realm since the whole narrative is dominated by Nicodemus’ misunderstanding, but in verse 19 one sees another aspect of unbelief, namely, the affective side of unbelief.²⁴

What is even more significant is that John uses the noun *erga*, in connection with unbelief three times within the three verses, vv. 19-21, in order to bring out the intentional aspect of unbelief.²⁵ In other words, the comparative adverb, *mallon*, along with the heavy use of *erga*, emphasises the fact that one comes to love darkness not out of ignorance but out of “conscious prioritising.”²⁶ Here, *ta erga*, speaks of deeds that demonstrate that one is of the *phos* or *skotos*. To put it simply, in vv. 19-21, one sees the ethical implications of *ta erga*.

Weyer-Menkhoff posits that John’s readers are already aware of the ethical implications that the word *erga*, carries in the Gospel as seen in 3:19-21.²⁷ As a result, the moral consequence of unbelief is clear: it results in loving the darkness and avoiding the light to prevent the evil doer’s evil deeds from being exposed (v. 20). Such moral reasoning prepares readers for the upcoming events where readers will see that the Jews who did not believe in Jesus, continually misconstrued the significance and meaning of Jesus’ teachings and signs, and ended up falsely judging Jesus’ identity and mission because of their false love and perverted standards (6:42; 7:27; 7:41; 9:29).²⁸ Furthermore, one sees that the rejection of Jesus in John’s Gospel is not usually passive but “issued in murderous hostility - so demonstrating the extent of their ethical deficiencies.”²⁹ Thus, it is clear from the narrative that *ta erga* in John 3 points to deeds that demonstrate that one is of the *phos* or *skotos* and it has to do with *ta erga* of the people.\

4.2 *Ta erga* of God (Jn. 4:34-38)

Ta erga is used in John 4 (4:34, 38) in Jesus’ discourse with the Samaritan woman. In contrast to Nicodemus, the Samaritan woman may be perceived as one who seems to be the most unsuitable character to meet the readers’ expectations. However, she rather seems to have believed the *Messias*-Jesus and fulfilled the *thelema* of the Father-Sender by going to Samaria to call on others to come to Jesus. After Jesus’ self-declaration of his identity, *ego eimi ho lalon soi* (v.26), we see that the woman no longer speaks in the first-person plural (*hemon*) but rather in the first-person singular (*moi*). Sookgoo Shin asserts that such a move may reflect that the woman now sees herself as a thirsty human being who longs for living water, and that is the kind of attitude that Nicodemus and other Jews lack.³⁰

One sees that in 4:34, Jesus no longer uses the imagery of *hudatos*, but brings in the new term, *broma*, which refers to *poieso to thelema tou pempantos me kai teleioso autou to ergon*. Again, Jesus shifts the conversation from the notion of being sent by the Father (1:14, 18, 34; 2:16; 3:16-17, 35-36), to the notion of doing the will of the Father (5:30; 6:38; 7:17; 9:31). Here, Jesus used *ta erga*, for fulfilling the *thelema*, of the Father (4:34).

²² J. Ramsey Michaels, *The Gospel of John* (NICNT, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 200-201.

²³ Shin, *Ethics in the Gospel of John: Discipleship as Moral Progress*, 71.

²⁴ Shin, *Ethics in the Gospel of John: Discipleship as Moral Progress*, 73.

²⁵ Shin, *Ethics in the Gospel of John: Discipleship as Moral Progress*, 73.

²⁶ Shin, *Ethics in the Gospel of John: Discipleship as Moral Progress*, 73.

²⁷ Karl Weyer-Menkhoff, *Die Ethik des Johannesevangeliums im sprachlichen Feld des Han-Delns* WUNT II/359 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2014), 87-88.

²⁸ John Painter, “Eschatological Faith in the Gospel of John” in *Reconciliation and Hope*, edited by Robert Banks (Carlisle: Paternoster, 1974), 45.

²⁹ Murray Hogg, *The Knowledge of God: John’s Gospel and Contemporary Epistemology* (Th.M. diss.: Melbourne School of Theology, 2011), 29-30.

³⁰ Shin, *Ethics in the Gospel of John: Discipleship as Moral Progress*, 93.

The narrative offers, however, more than the mere description of what the *thelema* of the Father is but contains information that sheds light on the kind of work ethics that the harvesters should possess as they enter into labour.³¹ J. Ramsey Michaels posits that the *broma*, is closely tied to the notion of *therismos*, in vv. 35-38 and the harvest Jesus has in mind is a harvest of souls, not of grain.³² The adverb *ede*, in v. 35 hints at the urgency of the task, which lies before Jesus and the disciples, and the present tense verbs, *lambanei* and *sunagei*, in v. 36 signify that the task is yet to be finished. Again, the will of the Father indicates the gathering of those who are ripe (*leukai*, literally meaning 'white') for harvest.

Jesus makes it clear that the harvesters are simply gathering the crops, which had been planted and cared by others (*alloi*). Thus, no credit is to be taken by any harvesters since they simply enjoy the fruit of the harvest that they did not work for. Thus, this last portion of the narrative implicitly emphasises the fact that having the right kind of work ethics is as important as being a harvester for the Father-Sender. Thus, the harvesters are to understand that they are reaping the labours of others hence the call for humility in doing *ta erga* of the Father-Sender (4:37-38). Accordingly, *ta erga*, here, is used to describe *ta erga* of God and the true satisfaction and fulfilment Jesus gained in doing *ta erga* of God.

With Jesus' helpful commentary on the meaning of *broma*, readers see that it is the woman who does the will of the Father-Sender by hurrying off to her town to share the good news which later results in "gathering fruit for eternal life" (4:36). Whereas the disciples came back with the wrong kind of *broma*, which spoils and is not good for eternal life.³³ Knowingly or unknowingly, the woman is taking up the role of *therizo* and is soon going to share the joy of the harvest with the *speiro*. Teresa Okure posits that the reason why the *therizo* and *speiro* can rejoice together is that they "operate in view of the same goal and reality, eternal life."³⁴ Shin argued that the plural pronouns, *humas* and *humeis* in 4:38 may be read as to challenge not only the disciples but also readers to take up the mission of joining other harvesters in gathering fruit and thus fulfilling both the *thelema* and *ergon* of the Father-Sender (4:34).

4.3 *Ta erga* of Jesus (Jn. 5:17-36)

In John 5, Jesus goes up to Jerusalem and performs another sign of healing, which ignites the flames of conflict between the Jews and Jesus. Here the cause of conflict is due to the obvious disparity in terms of viewpoint; the Jews claim that Jesus has no authority to heal on the Sabbath (5:16), whereas Jesus counterclaims that he has such authority by referring to the two activities-giving life and judging (5:19-30) which he claims to have been authorised by the Father to perform. If Jesus is the Son of God and his healing is the result of imitating the Father (5:19, 21), the Jews' accusation against Jesus is not valid since Jesus is simply doing a legitimate Sabbath activity.

Gerry Wheaton suggests that the Jews' increasing hostility towards Jesus is also evident by the fact that the verb *zetew*, which carries a connotation for discipleship in 1:38, begins to take "a dark turn in chapters 5-10 (7:1, 11, 19, 20, 25, 30, 34, 36; 8:21, 37, 40), where the Jewish leaders begin 'seeking Jesus to kill him' because of his work on the Sabbath and claim to be the Son of God."³⁵

One of the most dominant themes in chapters 5-10 is the theme of judgment. Thus, the verb *krino* (5:22, 30; 7:24, 8:15-16, 26, 50) and noun *krisis* (5:22, 24, 27, 29-30; 7:24; 8:16) appear heavily in this part of the narrative. We also see Jesus' riposte-challenge as he attempts to exonerate himself of the Jews' accusation of breaking the law. Shin asserts that the fact that "the Jews and Jesus judge each other based on the law, indicates that understanding the role of the law in John's Gospel is crucial

³¹ Shin, *Ethics in the Gospel of John: Discipleship as Moral Progress*, 93.

³² Michaels, *The Gospel of John*, 262.

³³ Shin, *Ethics in the Gospel of John: Discipleship as Moral Progress*, 96.

³⁴ Okure, *The Johannine Approach to Mission*, 155.

³⁵ Gerry Wheaton, *The Role of Jewish Feasts in John's Gospel* (SNTSMS 162; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 132.

for understanding Johannine ethical dynamics.” Here, Jesus simply wants the Jews to understand that he came to fulfill what had been promised in Moses’ writings, and a correct understanding of the Torah would naturally lead them to believe in him (5:46). Despite the Jews’ zeal for the law, Jesus condemns them for not listening to God’s voice (5:37), not believing in (receiving) him (5:38, 40, 43), lacking the love of God (5:42), not seeking God’s glory (5:44) and not believing Moses (5:45–47).

Thus, in John 5 (5:17, 5:20, 5:36), John used *ta erga* in the discourse that ensued between Jesus and *hoi ioudaioi* after Jesus healed on the Sabbath. In 5:17 Jesus declared that his Father is working (*ergazomai*), and this makes the expression, “*ta erga* of God the Father,” a key motivational factor which gives the reason to all other works.³⁶ The root of all *erga*, is the fact that God himself is at work (5:17) and both Jesus and the people would want to work accordingly and congruently. Thus, Alexander Drews is right in referring to God as the originator or initiator and primordial basis of all *erga*.³⁷

God is not only working on his own but also working or doing *ta erga* in Jesus or through Jesus (5:17).³⁸ In other words, because the Father is working, Jesus also works. Thus, God’s *erga* is the source of Jesus’ *erga*. Willis Hedley Salier argues that “the testimony of the Father consists in the works that Jesus does.”³⁹ In other words, the fact that Jesus performs *ta erga* of the Father, is the ultimate proof that Jesus is from God. We are already familiar with the ethical implications that *ta erga* carries in the Fourth Gospel (3:19–21), and such an ethical force of the term is reemphasized in 5:29, where doing *agathos*, which is believing in Jesus, leads to eternal life, whereas doing *phaulos*, which is rejecting Jesus, leads to judgment.

Furthermore, one sees that it is not only *ergazomai* that appears as the verb form of *ergon*, but also *poiew*. The verb *poiew* (to do) is used in connection with God. Thus, *ta erga*, here, is used to describe the miraculous works God did in the healing of the lame man on the Sabbath. Jesus adds that *ta erga* that he does, bears witness to who he is and that it is his Father who has sent him. Hence, *ta erga* of Jesus in this case, is meant to portray his divine identity to his audience, thus serving as *semeia* to *hoi ioudaioi*.

4.4 *Ta erga* of God and the thelema of the Father Compared (Jn. 6:28–30)

In John 6 (6:28, 6:29, 6:30) also *ta erga* of God is related implicitly to “food that endures for eternal life” (6:27–29). Here, John rhetorically used the verbs *poiew* and *ergazomai* to give the literal notion of human labour in conjunction with *ta erga* of God. Commenting on the rhetorical function of this particular combination of words, Ruth Sheridan states: “...the texts 6.28–29 use the concept of God’s ‘works’ in conjunction with the literal notion of subsistence labour, employment or otherwise general human ‘working’, creating a nuanced interplay between the noun (*ta erga*) and the verb (*ergazomai*) and thus producing a classic Johannine double entendre.”⁴⁰ In 6:28 the Jews asked: “What must we do (*poiew*) to perform (*ergazomai*) the works of God?” Though, this is an ethical question, as Jan G. van der Watt argues⁴¹, yet we see that the verb *pisteuō* is linked to the term *erga* as seen in Jesus’ answer (v.29). Van der Watt tackles this important discourse by comparing the Johannine concept of *pistis* with the *erga* of God.⁴² According to him, “salvific faith in the Gospel of John is a self-sacrificing, intellectual, and existential acceptance of the message and person of Jesus to the extent that it

³⁶ Drews, *Semantik und Ethik des Wortfeldes “Ergon” im Johannesevangelium*, 18.

³⁷ Drews, *Semantik und Ethik des Wortfeldes “Ergon” im Johannesevangelium*, 139.

³⁸ Weyer-Menkhooff, “The Response of Jesus: Ethics in John by Considering Scripture as Work of God” in *Rethinking the Ethics of John: Implicit Ethics in the Johannine Writings*, edited by Jan G. van der Watt and Ruben Zimmermann, WUNT 291 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2012), 162.

³⁹ Willis Hedley Salier, *The Rhetorical Impact of the Sēmeia in the Gospel of John* (WUNT II/148; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2004), 81.

⁴⁰ Ruth Sheridan, *The Figure of Abraham in John 8: Text and Intertext* (London: T&T Clark, 2020), 299.

⁴¹ Jan G. van der Watt, “The Gospel of John’s Perception of Ethical Behaviour” *IDS* 45 (2011): 431–447; Craig S. Keener, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 2003), 678.

⁴² van der Watt, “The Gospel of John’s Perception of Ethical Behaviour”, 441–444.

completely transforms a person's thoughts and deeds in accordance with this message and leads to an obedient life of doing what a child of God should do."⁴³

Thus, faith or belief becomes work because one needs to make a conscious decision to believe in Jesus as the Son of God who brings true light to a world full of darkness (8:12).⁴⁴ Thus, *ta erga* of God described here, has to do with the belief and faith in the one God has sent (6:29). Van der Watt calls this the "functional overlap" between faith and work.⁴⁵

For the Jews, *ta erga* of God is knowing and keeping the law of Moses, and whoever does not know or keep the law is considered accursed under traditional Jewish thought (7:49). For Jesus, however, *ta erga* of God is to believe in the one whom God has sent (6:29). This is consistent with the Johannine discourse on *aionios zoe*, for we are also told in 17:3, that *aionios zoe* is to know the only true God and Jesus Christ, whom he has sent. Craig R. Koester suggests that this makes eternal life in John's Gospel relational, in that, it is gotten only by believing in God and the incarnate Jesus.⁴⁶ Readers are aware that faith in God and the one whom he has sent is life-giving in a way that alienation from God is not. They are thus encouraged to pursue *ta erga of God* which is to believe in the Sent-Son so they may attain *aionios zoe*.

Moreover, *ta erga* of God is later brought into close connection with the *thelema* of the Father (6:40), which is described as giving eternal life and raising those who look on the Son and believe in him (6:40). Thus, here *ta erga* of God (believing in Jesus) fulfills the will of the Father. Urban C. von Wahlde argues that in John's Gospel, working the works of God is equivalent to the phrase, "doing the will of God."⁴⁷ Thus, doing *ta erga* of God is the same as doing the *thelema* of the Father, and the Jews' rejection of Jesus can then be understood as a failure to do both *ta erga* of God and the *thelema* of the Father.

4.5 *Ta erga* of Jesus (Jn. 7: 3-21)

In John 7, one sees Jesus' discourse with the brothers and how they attempted to persuade him to go to the Jews' feast of booths in order that his *erga* will be seen by all. Here, Jesus' *ta erga* seems to be concealed from all others except his brothers. Jesus connects the concealment of his *erga* with *ho hora ego oupo heko*. This is consistent with the Johannine discourse on *ta erga* as it seems to put the *apokalupsis* of Jesus' *erga* within a certain time frame. John puts this idea further in 9:4, where the *hemera* is coming fast to an end and *nux* will soon take over when no one will be able to do *ta erga* (9:4).

In John 7(7:3, 7:21), it appears that Jesus is doing *ta erga* by himself. In all of these cases, one sees that the verb, *poiew*, is used for Jesus. We read in 7:3-4 that Jesus is doing his *erga* (7:3), and *ta erga* are described by Jesus' brothers as "doing these things" *en kruptos* (7:4), albeit he later rejects the belief that *ta erga* are his own (7:16-18). Again, in 7:21 Jesus tells *hoi ioudaioi* that he was doing one *ergon*, thus referring to the healing of the man on the Sabbath from chapter 5. Here again, we see that *ton ergon* refers to the miraculous healing of the lame man on the Sabbath as well as other acts of Jesus seen by the brothers. In all, one sees that *ta erga* of Jesus comes from God (7:16-18) and thus, God becomes the source of Jesus' *erga*.

4.6 *Ta erga* of Jesus and *Ta erga* of the People Compared (Jn. 8:39-41)

John 8 (8:39, 41) continues Jesus' long confrontation with *hoi ioudaioi* after healing the lame man on the Sabbath. Jesus claimed that *hoi ioudaioi* are not Abraham's children or else they would do *ta erga* of Abraham and he concluded that they are doing *ta erga* of their *patera* who is *diabolos*. Thus, here

⁴³ van der Watt, "The Gospel of John's Perception of Ethical Behaviour", 436.

⁴⁴ Shin, *Ethics in the Gospel of John: Discipleship as Moral Progress*, 17.

⁴⁵ van der Watt, Jan G. "'Working the Works of God.' Identity and Behaviour in the Gospel of John" in *Paul, John, and Apocalyptic Eschatology*, edited by Jan Krans et. al. *SNT* 149 (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2013), 139-150.

⁴⁶ Craig R. Koester, *The Word of Life: A Theology of John's Gospel* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans, 2008), 31.

⁴⁷ Urban C. von Wahlde, "Faith and Works in Jn VI 28-29," *NovT* 22 (1980): 304-315.

one sees that *ta erga* of the people may be described as *ponera* or *phaulos* (evil or bad) and such *erga* comes from the *diabolos*. In this sense, *ton ergon* of the people here refers to the act of attempting to kill Jesus, a deed that makes them *teknou tou diabolos*.

In 8:38, one sees the difference between *ta erga* of the people, *ta erga* of the forefathers, Abraham, and Jesus, respectively. Jesus does what he learnt from his Father, the people claim they are doing what they have learnt from Abraham (8:39), but Jesus describes their *erga* as works that are evil, thus having come from their father, the *diabolos* (8:44). If they were the *teknou* of Abraham, they would do *ta erga* of Abraham (8:39). Thus, *ta erga* of Abraham is to believe in the one whom the Father has sent (8:42). Hence, *ta erga* of Abraham is also *ton ergon* of God. Yet, in vv. 44, the people chose to do the *epithumia* of *diabolos*.

4.7 *Ta erga* of God Defined (Jn. 9:3-4)

John 9 (9:3,4) records Jesus' healing of a man born blind. The story of the blind man like the story of the Samaritan woman gives a reader pause. The man who seemed most inadequate and unqualified to do *ta erga tou Theou* became the role model par excellence of discipleship for both witnesses and readers.⁴⁸ The blind man's obedience and perseverance made his physical blindness a means by which *ta erga tou Theou* were manifested in Jesus, and the man's earnest search for truth is sharply contrasted with the opponents' hardened mindset that refuses to accept anything contrary to their status quo.

One sees that Jesus' answer to the disciples subverts popular Jewish connection between sin and illness by giving a whole new perspective on the matter. The blindness functioned as a means for unfolding *ta erga* of God (9:3; cf. 11:4) in the discourse. Jesus used the first-person plural pronoun (*hemas*) in urging people to do *ta erga* of God but it is not clear what this plural pronoun refers to (9:4). Does it refer to the disciples, the blind man or both of them? In the immediate context, the plural pronoun seems to refer only to the blind man and Jesus himself since the disciples disappear from the scene as if they are not yet ready to engage in *ta erga* of God as evidenced by their inadequate question.⁴⁹

If this assumption is correct, then as J.W. Holleran observes, "the narrator is anticipating not only the '*erga* of God' in the miracle about to follow but also the '*erga* of God' in the witness, central to the narrative, of the man once he gains his sight."⁵⁰ At the end of the story, we see a reversal of role, thus the blind became the sighted and the claiming-to-be sighted ended up being blind. The blind man is no longer blind both spiritually and physically because he gave heed to the words of Jesus and expressed faith in him, whereas the Pharisees are now confirmed to be spiritually blind despite their ability to see Jesus and his signs.

Jesus then gives the final verdict; *Ei tuphlos ete, ouk an eichete hamartian nun de legete hoti blepomen, he hamartia humon menei* (9:41). Shin posits that the discourse which started as a trial against the man and Jesus ended up as a trial against the Pharisees.⁵¹ The readers who remember Jesus' initial request to the man in 9:4 to do *ta erga tou Theou* are also encouraged to evaluate themselves in light of the progress the man has made and to decide whether to follow the route of the Pharisees or of the man, for there is no middle grounds.⁵² Here, *ta erga of God* may refer to expressing absolute faith in Jesus and boldly confessing him as Lord amidst all dangers including *aposunagogos*.

Readers go on to find out why Jesus urgently emphasises doing *ta erga* of God. The day (*hemera*) is coming fast to an end and night (*nux*) will soon take over when no one will be able to work (9:4). We are already aware of the ethical dualism from chapter 3 where *erga* is associated either with *phos* or *skotos*, and a similar pattern is also found in 9:4 except that there is a temporary dimension added to it (cf. 12:35-36). Jesus' time limitations have been made clear in several places (2:4; 7:6;

⁴⁸ Shin, *Ethics in the Gospel of John: Discipleship as Moral Progress*, 120.

⁴⁹ Shin, *Ethics in the Gospel of John: Discipleship as Moral Progress*, 105.

⁵⁰ J.W. Holleran, "A Narrative Reading of John 9. II," *ETL* 69 (1993): 354-382, 357.

⁵¹ Shin, *Ethics in the Gospel of John: Discipleship as Moral Progress*, 119-120.

⁵² Shin, *Ethics in the Gospel of John: Discipleship as Moral Progress*, 119-120.

7:30; 7:33; 8:20), and in light of this, readers would naturally come to understand “night” in 9:4 as referring to a limited time that Jesus is given on earth before returning to the Father (7:33). From the readers’ point of view, it also gives them a limited time within which they must make a decision of faith. Thus, in John 9, one sees that the activity of working is closely related to the idea that God is also working. It also looks like the verb *ergazomai*, is used in careful reference to activity of the Father.

4.8 *Ta erga* of Jesus and *Ta erga* of the Father Compared (Jn 10:25-38)

In John 10 (10:25, 32, 33, 37, 38), Jesus continues his discourse with *hoi ioudaioi* after healing the man born blind. Here again, one sees the close relationship between Jesus and his Father. Adesola J. Akala points out, “The SFR ‘Son-Father Relationship,’ not only shapes the narrative and literary style of the Gospel, it also acts as an integrative force by giving the symbolic network structure and cohesion.”⁵³ Jesus is either doing his Father’s *thelema* (4:34), or he does what he has heard from his Father (5:30), or he does *ta erga* of his Father (5:36; 10: 37-38), or he does *ta erga* in the Father’s name (10:25, 32).

Furthermore, Jesus is doing some of his *erga* because he sees that the Father is also working (5:17, 20), and all his *erga* testify that the Father sent him (5:36; 9:4, 33; 10:25,32,37; 15:24; 17:4). From 10:38 it is clear that his *erga* and *ta erga* of the Father are one and the same, thereby highlighting the idea that the Father is in him and he is in the Father (8:16; 14:10). Thus, Jesus’ *erga* is *ta erga* of the Father. Hence, *ta erga* represents all the activities of Jesus that reveal the Father.

In 10:33, when the Jews told Jesus: “It is not for a *kalos ergon* that we will stone you, but for blasphemy, because you, though only a human being, are making yourself God.” Here, the Jews’ reference to *kalos ergon*, inherently alludes to the fact that they might have had some idea about good works, that is, works that are seen as good in the eyes of God. This *kalos ergon* ideology might have come from their long-standing tradition of the Torah, the deeds of their forefathers and their laws. An allusion that can also be inferred from chapter 8, where the Jews called themselves the “descendants of Abraham.” Thus, the *kalos ergon* may be in reference to some form of Jewish piety which they sought to measure Jesus’ *erga* with.

4.9 *Ta erga* of Jesus Defined (Jn. 14:10-12)

In chapter 14, the term *erga* appears in 14:10, 11 and 12. Here too, the verb *poiew* (to do), is used in connection with God or the Father as seen in 14:10. In 14:10, Jesus says the Father is doing his *erga* in him. This again emphasizes the fact that Jesus’ *erga* would not be possible unless the Father acts first. Put differently, Jesus as the Son, derives *ta erga* he does from *ta erga* of the Father. Thus, God is not only working on his own, but that he is also working through Jesus his Son, revealing his *erga* in Jesus. Additionally, in 14:10, one sees how the *rhemata* of Jesus is included in *ta erga*. This makes it impossible to define *ta erga* in terms of the *semeia*-narratives or miracles only.

In 14:11, Jesus appeals to *ta erga* as the basis for belief in his unique relationship with the Father. Again, in 14:12, he promises his followers that they will do greater *erga* because he goes to the Father. The term, *ta erga*, in these verses seems to encompass all the activities of Jesus that reveal the Father. Thus, *ta erga* of Jesus refers to all the activities of Jesus that brings revelation of the Father. This may include the *semeia* narratives, *rhemata* and other acts and words of Jesus that brings about the *apokalupsis* of God. Thus, there is nothing in the Johannine discourse on *ta erga* that suggests its exclusive reference to the *semeia* narratives or miraculous deeds as some contemporary Pentecostals claim.⁵⁴⁽⁵⁵⁾

⁵³ Adesola Joan Akala, *The Son-Father Relationship and Christological Symbolism in the Gospel of John*, LNTS 505 (London/New York: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2014), 108-109.

⁵⁴ Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 495.

⁵⁵ D. Moody Smith, *John* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1999), 269-271.

4.10 Rejection of Jesus' *erga* meant the Rejection of God's *erga* (Jn. 15:24)

In Chapter 15, after the vine imagery, Jesus reiterated that the disciples will also face vehement opposition in the world because of him. Thus, responses to Jesus' disciples, whether for good or for ill, finally turn not on who they are but on who Jesus is.⁵⁶ This thought is expanded in vv. 22-24, where Jesus talks about the guiltiness of *hoi ioudaioi* because of his coming, as though his coming introduced for the "first time sin and its attendant guilt before God."⁵⁷ Here, Carson asserts that "by Jesus' coming and speaking to them, Jesus incited in them the most central and controlling sins, that is, the rejection of God's gracious revelation, rebellion against God, and decisive preference for darkness rather than light".⁵⁸

Readers are already aware that Jesus' *erga* were nothing less than God's *erga*, hence to reject Jesus' *erga* was to reject God and to hate Jesus is to hate God. So tightly is the Johannine Jesus bound up with his Father, both in his person and his words and deeds, that every attitude directed toward him is no less directed toward God. This profound Christology is attested to not only by the flow of argument but also by the almost incidental and frequent use of "my Father" as opposed to "the Father" in John's Gospel.⁵⁹

Again, in 15:24 it appears that Jesus is doing *ta erga* by himself and the verb *poiew* is used for Jesus. Here, Jesus referred to *ta erga* the people have seen him do and their refusal to still believe in him as the basis for their condemnation. Thus, the rejection of Jesus' words (v. 22) and *erga* (v.24) constitutes "the rejection of the clearest light, the fullest revelation; and therefore, it incurs the most central, deep-stained guilt."⁶⁰ Carson asserts that the word *prophasis*, used in v. 22 is a little stronger than "excuse," it rather implies that they "have no pretence or pretext for their sin."⁶¹ Jesus says of his *erga* in v. 24 - *oudeis allos poiew*. This, in effect, refers exclusively to *ta erga* that only he could do and still the people did hate him and his Father.

4.11 Jesus' *erga* and God's *erga* are one (Jn. 17:4)

In 17:4, the verb *teleio*, is used in reference to *ta erga* of Jesus. The verb *teleio* (appears three times in this Gospel), is always used in connection with Jesus and *ta erga* of God. Here, Jesus claimed that his mission is to fulfil *ta erga* of the one who has sent him (4:34; 5:36) and in 17:4 he says he has finished or completed *ta erga* the Father gave him to do. Thus, one sees the close relationship between the Father and Jesus, represented also in the same *erga*. This affirms Salier's earlier assertion that the fact that Jesus performs *ta erga* of the Father, is the ultimate proof that Jesus is from God.

In 17:6, Jesus used the phrase *phaneroo su ho onoma* to demonstrate the actual meaning of his *erga*. Jesus' *erga* is about revelation. Jesus' *erga* is meant to reveal the Father to the world. This makes Jesus' *erga* also *ta erga* of God. William Arndt, Frederick W. Danker and Walter Bauer assert that *ta erga* refers to "that which displays itself in activity of any kind."⁶² In John's context, *erga* also indicates "the deeds of God, that of Jesus, and people, including, miracles."⁶³ All the deeds and acts that leads to the *apokalupsis* of the Father can be classified as *erga*.

It is certain that *ta erga* of Jesus, his deeds and thus his whole mission is defined and appointed by the Father. Jesus either does something because of the *thelema* of his Father (4:34) or he is not doing anything because his *hora* has not yet come (2:4), and this is another indication of his obedience (8:28-29). Jesus is either doing his Father's *thelema* (4:34), or he does what he has heard from him (5:30), he does *ta erga* of his Father (5:36; 10:37-38), or he does *erga* in the Father's name (10:25, 32).

⁵⁶ Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 526.

⁵⁷ Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 526.

⁵⁸ Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 526.

⁵⁹ Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 527.

⁶⁰ Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 526.

⁶¹ Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 527.

⁶² William Arndt, Frederick W. Danker and Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 390.

⁶³ Arndt, Danker and Bauer, *A Greek - English Lexicon*, 390.

Furthermore, Jesus is doing some of his *erga* because he sees that the Father is also working (5:17, 20), and all his *erga* testify that the Father sent him (5:36; 9:4,33; 10:25,32,37; 15:24; 17:4). It is clear that Jesus' *erga* and *ta erga* of the Father are one and the same, hence affirming his saying that the Father is in him and he is in the Father (8:16; 14:10).

4.12 *Semeion and Erga*

There is some interconnectedness between *erga* and *semeion* as affirmed by most scholars.⁶⁴ The word *semeion*, appears in John's text, for the first time in 2:11 and it was used by the author to clear the ambiguity regarding Jesus' actions and interactions.⁶⁵ If we consider the semantic significance of the word, *semeion*, as it is seen to be used by John throughout his Gospel, we realized that like *ta erga*, it is much more than just a miraculous work; it is "something that points to a reality with even greater significance." Craig R. Koester concurs, in that he also believes that "a sign is not an end in itself but a visible indication of something else."⁶⁶ John Painter also posits that John's use of *semeia* exceeds the miracle motif because of the way John's use of *semeia* overlaps with *erga* in the Fourth Gospel.⁶⁷ Thus, Craig R. Koester and John Painter are both asserting that *semeia* like *ta erga* are simply beyond miraculous deeds.

It is with regards to this that Painter calls our attention to the curious fact that *semeia* "is the term used by the narrator and characters other than Jesus; while Jesus prefers rather to speak of his works."⁶⁸ In fact, only twice does Jesus mentions *semeia* in relation to his *erga*, and then somewhat indirectly (4:48; 6:26).⁶⁹ For the most part, though, John portrays Jesus as the obedient Son who sees every action he takes and every word he speaks as doing his *erga*; which is the same as doing his Father's *erga* (5:17).⁷⁰ By highlighting this overlap rather than the synonymity between *semeia* and *erga* of Jesus, the John reinforces that there is more to the *semeia* than the miracle motif, that everything around the action - the time, setting, individuals involved, the words spoken are potentially a part of the cluster of messages being conveyed by that *semeion*.⁷¹

This assertion is affirmed by Sandra Marie Schneiders who in her book, "Written That You May Believe", argued that John chose *semeion* rather than *symbolon*, in order to retain the Septuagint's translation of the Hebrew word for "sign" ('ot), Schneiders therefore concludes that the "Johannine *semeia* are ... not signs but symbols,"⁷² considering how John uses both miraculous and non-miraculous actions interwoven together in the narrative [to] reveal facets of Jesus' identity.⁷³

Schneiders believes that both *semeion* and *symbolon* are "sensible realities [but] the sign ... merely points to or stands for an absent reality that is totally other than itself [whereas] the symbol presents the transcendent because and insofar as it participates in what it re-presents."⁷⁴ Schneiders believes that this expanded concept of *semeion* as *symbolon* accord with John's usage given the twofold conviction of the author of the Fourth Gospel for the use of the *semeia* as indicating, not only a transcendent reality, but demanding the observer's involvement in an experiential way as a condition for entering into this revelation in order to possess the God-given faith that Jesus is the true Son of

⁶⁴ John Painter, "The Signs of the Messiah and the Quest for Eternal Life," in *What We Have Heard from the Beginning: The Past, Present, and Future of Johannine Studies*, ed. Tom Thatcher (Waco, Texas: Baylor University Press, 2007), 242.

⁶⁵ Jim Kerr, "Sign as Symbol: The Sign Theme in the Fourth Gospel" in *Stimulus*, July 2016, 31.

⁶⁶ Craig R. Koester, *Symbolism in the Fourth Gospel: Meaning, Mystery, Community* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), 74.

⁶⁷ John Painter, "The Signs of the Messiah and the Quest for Eternal Life," 242.

⁶⁸ Painter, "The Signs of the Messiah and the Quest for Eternal Life," 242.

⁶⁹ Kerr, "Sign as Symbol", 32.

⁷⁰ Painter, "The Signs of the Messiah and the Quest for Eternal Life," 242-243.

⁷¹ Kerr, "Sign as Symbol", 32.

⁷² Sandra Marie Schneiders, *Written That You May Believe: Encountering Jesus in the Fourth Gospel* (New York: Crossroad Pub, 1999), 66.

⁷³ Koester, *Symbolism in the Fourth Gospel*, 74.

⁷⁴ Schneiders, *Written That You May Believe*, 66-67.

God.⁷⁵ Thus, the above discourse shows that most scholars are tempted to connect *ta erga* of Jesus to only the *semeia* narratives.⁷⁶ It is clear from the discourse that whiles *erga* and *semeion* are interconnected, they are not synonymous.

Christos Karakolis posits that both *semeion* and *erga* in John's Gospel are interconnected because they both show the true identity of Jesus as the Son of God. Karakolis defines *semeion* as "any deeds of Jesus that even slightly bears a supernatural character and therefore are an indirect call towards people to believe in him."⁷⁷ On the other hand, he defined the word *ton ergon* in the singular with the definite article as signifying "the soteriological activity of Jesus as a whole (4:34;17:4),"⁷⁸ whereas *ergon* without the definite article or *erga* in the plural refers to "concrete deeds of Jesus that normally bear a miraculous character, thereby revealing his divine sonship (5:20; 36; 7:21; 9:3-4; 10:25, 32, 37-38; 14:10-11; 15:24)."⁷⁹

One can see that most scholars interpret John's use of *ta erga* in terms of "miracles" or "power" or "signs."⁸⁰ May be, they saw the miracles as "non-verbal Christological signposts" that portrays Jesus' *erga* and *ta erga* of God as Carson argued.⁸¹ However, it is clear that the concept *ta erga* in John's Gospel cannot legitimately be limited to *semeion*, though they never exclude them.⁸² In fact, John does not use the word, "miracles" in his Gospel, hence, it will be far-fetched to refer to *ta erga* in such terms. Moody Smith asserts that considering the context of the Fourth Gospel, it is more natural to think of *ta erga* in terms of miracles or signs, but it is broader than these.⁸³

Thus, it is important to note that when Karakolis examines the seven *semeia*-narratives and *erga*, much of his analysis is on how *semeion* and *erga* contribute to the understanding of John's ethics and not an attempt to limit the Johannine concept of *ta erga* to the *semeia*-narratives. John's concept of *ta erga* then includes all of Jesus' ministry, including the *semeia*-narratives, and the deeds of the people that leads to the *apokalupsis* of the Father.⁸⁴

Ta erga of the people are supposed to lead to the singular *ergon* of God, that is to believe in him whom God has sent (6:29). As seen in chapter 5, *ta erga* of God which are displayed in Jesus' *erga* prove the identity of the Son in his relationship to the Father. If such relationship between *ta erga* and *ton ergon* of God is valid, then it is reasonable to conclude that all the other *erga* that the people gloried in, are subordinate or ancillary to the one *ergon* of God, which is believing in Jesus. Thus, all acts, apart from the acts that make the people the *teknou tou diabolos*, comes under *ton ergon* of God and it is primarily meant for the *apokalupsis* of God or the Father.

G. van Belle concludes, "Thus *ergon* does not mean 'miracle' only and it is not restricted to Jesus' activity."⁸⁵ He further argues that for the disciples, it has an ecclesiological sense.⁸⁶ Thus, *ergon* can be translated in different ways as "human actions, miracles and acts of signs, tasks set by God, advertising deeds, rules and principles of the law, the conduct of a person as such, the soteriological

⁷⁵ Schneiders, *Written That You May Believe*, 68.

⁷⁶ Udo Schnelle, "The Signs in the Gospel of John," in *John, Jesus, and History, Volume 3: Glimpses of Jesus Through the Johannine Lens*, eds. Paul N. Anderson, Felix Just, S.J., and Tom Thatcher (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2016), 236-237.

⁷⁷ Christos Karakolis, "Semeia Conveying Ethics in the Gospel according to John," in *Rethinking the Ethics of John: Implicit Ethics in the Johannine Writings*, edited by Jan G. van der Watt and Ruben Zimmermann, WUNT 291 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2012), 192-212.

⁷⁸ Karakolis, "Semeia Conveying Ethics in the Gospel according to John," 195.

⁷⁹ Karakolis, "Semeia Conveying Ethics in the Gospel according to John," 196.

⁸⁰ Andreas J. Köstenberger, *John* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004), 432-433.

⁸¹ Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 495.

⁸² Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 495.

⁸³ Smith, *John*, 269-271.

⁸⁴ Craig S. Keener, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary* vol. 2 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2003), 946.

⁸⁵ G. van Belle, *The Signs Source in the Fourth Gospel: Historical Survey and Critical Evaluation of the Semeia Hypothesis*, BETL 116 (Leuven: Uitgeverij Peeters, 1994), 385.

⁸⁶ Belle, *The Signs Source in the Fourth Gospel*, 385.

act of Christ.”⁸⁷ Thus, all acts that lead to the *apokalupsis* of God. Thus, an emphatic aspect of work is defined with the term, *ta erga* in John’s discourse in relation to the Father.

5.0 PASTORAL REFLECTIONS

The Johannine concept of *ta erga* offers rich resources for contemporary ministry, particularly in how it integrates divine initiative and human response in the context of discipleship.

1. Christ-centered ministry

John’s presentation of Jesus’ *erga* as the perfect fulfillment of the Father’s will, provides a model for Christian spirituality; centered on alignment with the Father’s *thelema* (will) rather than self-directed religious activity.

2. Holistic Ministry

Given that John’s concept of *ta erga* entails both miraculous signs and the broader fulfillment of the Father’s redemptive purpose, suggests a holistic understanding of ministry that may integrate evangelism, social action, healing ministry, and advocacy for justice. This affirms that Johannine perspective of ministry is multifaceted as demonstrated by his concept of *erga*.

3. Ministry must be shaped by the cross mentality

John’s presentation of Jesus’ death as the ultimate culmination of his *erga* suggests that ministry must be characterized by self-giving love or the cross mentality rather than self-promotion. The cross mentality of ministry challenges “Prosperity Gospel” or “Compulsory Wealth Gospel” which is often characterized by self-aggrandisement and the quest for material wealth.

4. Spirit-empowered ministry entails participation in Jesus’ *erga*

John 14:12-17 connects the Spirit-empowered ministry to participation in Jesus’ *erga*. This connection suggests a ministry that is simultaneously dependent on divine empowerment and actively engaged in continuing Christ’s mission. This dual understanding of ministry is essential in contemporary discourse because each mission of the church should be seen as a continuation of Jesus’ *erga*, and thus require the enabling power of the Spirit.

6.0 CONCLUSION

The examination of *ta erga* throughout John’s Gospel, reveals a richly nuanced theological motif that transcends simple categorization. This multivalent concept functions as a carefully crafted literary and theological device through which John articulates fundamental aspects of Jesus’ identity and mission. The idea of *ta erga*, therefore, functions dialogically within John’s narrative framework to crystallize the division between those who recognize and those who reject divine revelation. Our analysis demonstrates that *ta erga* in John, operates across several semantic domains. In the physical realm, *ta erga* manifests as human actions, miracles and acts of signs, tasks set by God, advertising deeds, rules and principles of the law and other tangible demonstrations of divine power. Yet John consistently elevates these physical manifestations beyond mere wonders to serve as *semeia*, pointing to deeper theological realities. The concept of *ta erga* therefore function simultaneously as demonstrations of Jesus’ power and revelatory indicators of his divine identity.

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⁸⁷ Drews, *Semantik und Ethik des Wortfeldes “Ergon” im Johannesevangelium*, 160.

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