

Rethinking the Ethics of John

Edited by
JAN G. VAN DER WATT and
RUBEN ZIMMERMANN

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Rethinking the Ethics of John

“Implicit Ethics”
in the Johannine Writings

Kontexte und Normen neutestamentlicher Ethik /
Contexts and Norms of New Testament Ethics

Volume III

Edited by
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The Response of Jesus. Ethics in John by Considering Scripture as Work of God <i>Karl Weyer-Menkhoff</i>	159
Ethics of/and the Opponents of Jesus in John's Gospel <i>Jan G. van der Watt</i>	175
Semeia Conveying Ethics in the Gospel according to John <i>Christos Karakolis</i>	192
Ethics of Life in the Gospel of John <i>Mira Stare</i>	213
"Εἶπεν as an Element of Moral Language in John <i>Hermut Löhr</i>	229
"Abide in Me". The New Mode of Relationship between Jesus and His Followers as a Basis for Christian Ethics (John 15) <i>Chrys C. Caragounis</i>	250
The Joys and Dangers of Ethics in John's Gospel <i>Glen Lund</i>	264
Discernment-Oriented Leadership in the Johannine Situation – Abiding in the Truth Versus Lesser Alternatives <i>Paul N. Anderson</i>	290

Ethics in 1 John

Ethical Theology in 1 John <i>Udo Schnelle</i>	321
Transacting Virtue within a Disrupted Community: The Negotiation of Ethics in the First Epistle of John <i>Jeffrey E. Brickle</i>	340
Cain the Jew the AntiChrist: Collective Memory and the Johannine Ethic of Loving and Hating <i>Tom Thatcher</i>	350

Semeia Conveying Ethics in the Gospel according to John

Christos Karakolis

1. Introduction

As has often been observed and underlined, the Fourth Gospel is not overly explicit when it comes to ethics.¹ Wayne Meeks notes that “the Fourth Gospel meets none of our expectations about the way ethics should be constructed”.² The main ethical theme of the Fourth Gospel is undoubtedly love within the community of Jesus’ disciples.³ This theme is developed within the farewell discourse, while it seems to be absent in the first, mainly narrative part of the gospel (chapters. 1–12).⁴ The latter contains the seven miracles of Jesus that are usually called the semeia-narratives in Johannine research.⁵ Provided that ethics in Christian theology refers to the way of life and specifically to the behavior of Christians after their conversion, or in other words to how they practically apply or

¹ Cf. the reference to the relevant scholarly discussion in Jan van der Watt, “Ethics and Ethos in the Gospel according to John”, *ZNW* 97 (2006): 147–176, here 147–149.

² Wayne A. Meeks, “The Ethics of the Fourth Evangelist”, in *Exploring the Gospel of John: In Honor of D. Moody Smith* (eds. R. Alan Culpepper and C. Clifton Black; Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox, 1996), 317–326, here 320.

³ Cf. Eduard Lohse, *Theologische Ethik des Neuen Testaments* (Theologische Wissenschaft 5.2; Stuttgart et al.: Kohlhammer, 1988), 104–107; Wolfgang Schrager, *Ethik des Neuen Testaments* (4th ed.; GNT 4; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht 1982), 296–301; Frank J. Matera, *New Testament Ethics: The Legacies of Jesus and Paul* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox, 1996), 92; Richard B. Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament: Community, Cross, New Creation: A Contemporary Introduction to New Testament Ethics* (New York, N.Y.: HarperOne, 1996), 144–146.

⁴ There are of course significant references to the generic theme of love also in the first part of the Gospel (3:16, 19, 35; 5:20, 42; 8:42; 10:17; 11:3, 5, 36; 12:25, 43). However, these references do not address, at least directly the concrete ethical dimension of practicing love within the community of Jesus’ disciples.

⁵ Cf. Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel according to John* (2 vols.; AB; Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1966) vol. 1, ix–xii; Francis J. Moloney, *The Gospel of John* (SP 4; Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 1998), 23, who among others name the first 12 chapters of the Fourth Gospel as “the Book of Signs”.

should apply their faith within their everyday life,⁶ the above mentioned first part of the gospel actually depicts an either direct or indirect call of Jesus (and of the implied author of the gospel) towards unbelievers to watch (or read about) his deeds and believe in him, thus attaining eternal life (cf. 20:30–31).

Consequently, the seven semeia-narratives reveal Jesus' real identity and the aim of his mission on a symbolic level, thus calling people to faith. How people apply this faith in everyday life situations is not expressly mentioned in these narratives. In light of these introductory observations it would appear that finding an explicit or even an implicit ethical teaching in the semeia-narratives of the Fourth Gospel is a very difficult if not an impossible task.⁷

Trying to resolve this problem I will deal (1) with the content and meaning of the Johannine term *σημεῖον*, (2) with its relation to the relevant Johannine term *ἔργον* and the implications of this relation on the level of ethics, (3) with the connection of both terms to the family imagery of the gospel and to the gospel's main ethical theme, namely love. (4) Finally, I will attempt to verify my conclusions by applying them in concrete Johannine passages of the relevant semeia-narratives.

I am here following the nowadays more or less established scholarly consensus in favor of the literary unity of the Fourth Gospel,⁸ with the possible exception of its 21st chapter.⁹ This is a basic presupposition for the present study, as a number of theories in favor of the literary stratification of the Fourth Gospel and the supposed possibility of recovering the content of its sources or redactional layers have more or less been based upon the semeia-narratives speculating on the existence of a so-called semeia-source.¹⁰

⁶ Cf. Lohse, *Ethik* (n. 3), 9; Schrage, *Ethik* (n. 3), 9; Leander E. Keck, "Rethinking New Testament Ethics", *JBL* 115 (1996): 3–16, here 7.

⁷ Cf. Rainer Hirsch-Luipold, "Prinzipiell-theologische Ethik in der johanneischen Literatur", in *Jenseits von Indikativ und Imperativ* (eds. Friedrich Wilhelm Horn and Ruben Zimmermann; Kontexte und Normen neutestamentlicher Ethik/Contexts and Norms of New Testament Ethics 1 = WUNT 238; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2009), 289–307, here 290, especially n. 3.

⁸ Cf. Eugène Ruckstuhl and Peter Dschulnigg, *Stilkritik und Verfasserfrage im Johannevangelium: Die johanneischen Sprachmerkmale auf dem Hintergrund des Neuen Testaments und des zeitgenössischen hellenistischen Schrifttums* (NTOA 17; Göttingen and Freiburg, Switzerland: Universitätsverlag, 1991), 536–544.

⁹ See on the literary problem of the relationship of John 21 with the previous chapters of the gospel Udo Schnelle, *Einleitung in das Neue Testament* (6th ed.; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2007), 523–524.

¹⁰ Cf. Gilbert van Belle, *The Signs Source in the Fourth Gospel: Historical Survey and Critical Evaluation of the Semeia Hypothesis* (BETL 116; Leuven: Peeters, 1994). For a critical review of classic source-critical approaches to the problem of the semeia-

2. The Meaning of σημεῖον in John

In Johannine research under the term σημεῖα we usually understand the miraculous deeds of Jesus during his earthly ministry¹¹ that are represented in an exemplary way through the seven miracle narratives of the Fourth Gospel.¹² However, on the basis of 2:18–22, as well as of 20:30, it would seem that the term is broadened by the implied author to an even more general meaning than that which seems to be prevalent throughout the narrative part of the gospel. In 20:30 the implied author seems to include in the category of semeia any deed of Jesus that is (or even is not) included in the gospel narrative, and that invites people to believe in him.¹³ Through the words καὶ ἄλλα in the epilogue of the gospel in 20:30–31, the author clearly refers to the previously narrated post-Easter appearances of Jesus to his disciples, especially the last one (20:26–29).¹⁴ These appearances without being usually characterized as typical miracles, are, nevertheless, clear manifestations of Jesus' divine identity, calling the disciples (and through them the implied reader) to faith (20:31). Of course, a couple of supernatural elements are also present in these stories such as, for instance, the appearance of the resurrected Jesus in the house where the disciples are lodging without the opening of any door (20:19, 26). Interestingly enough, the implied author seems to consider even the resurrection of Jesus as such

source see also Christos Karakolis, *Ἡ Θεολογικὴ σημασία τῶν Θαυμάτων στό κατά Ἰωάννην Εὐαγγέλιο* (Thessaloniki: Panagiotis Pournaras, 1997), 32–90.

¹¹ Cf. 2:11, 18, 23; 3:2; 4:48, 54; 6:2, 14, 26, 30; 7:31; 9:16; 10:41; 11:47; 12:18, 37.

¹² 2:1–11; 4:46–54; 5:1–18; 6:1–15, 16–21; 9; 11:1–44.

¹³ Cf. Wolfgang J. Bittner, *Jesu Zeichen im Johannesevangelium: Die Messias-Erkennntnis im Johannesevangelium vor ihrem jüdischen Hintergrund* (WUNT 2.26; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1987), 285; contra Hans-Christian Kammler, "Die 'Zeichen' des Auferstandenen: Überlegungen zur Exegese von Joh 20:30+31", in Otfried Hofius and Hans-Christian Kammler, *Johannesstudien: Untersuchungen zur Theologie des vierten Evangeliums* (WUNT 88; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1996), 193–201. It is evident that the evangelist does not also include in the category of semeia the words of Jesus. This can be concluded quite easily by the use of the verb ἐποίησεν in 20:30, which can semantically only refer to deeds and not to words.

¹⁴ On these grounds, the opinion of Andreas J. Köstenberger, *The Missions of Jesus and the Disciples according to the Fourth Gospel: With Implications for the Fourth Gospel's Purpose and the Mission of the Contemporary Church* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1998), 73, according to which signs "are limited to Jesus' public activity", cannot be accepted; see also for a similar opinion Willis Headley Salier, *The Rhetorical Impact of the Semeia in the Gospel of John* (WUNT 2.186; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2004), 148–154. Due to the fact that verses 20:29–30 are actually an epilogue to the whole gospel the term σημεῖα most probably summarizes the whole of the miraculous activity of Jesus throughout the gospel.

to be a sign; when after the cleansing of the temple (2:15–16) the Jews request a legitimation sign from Jesus (2:18) he symbolically refers to his resurrection after having remained dead for three days (2:19).¹⁵

On the basis of the two examples mentioned above, Johannine signs are not just ordinary miracles performed by Jesus. I would define signs in the Fourth Gospel as referring to any deeds of Jesus that even slightly bear a supernatural character and, therefore, are an indirect call towards people to believe in him.¹⁶ In this sense I would even characterize as a sign every incident in the Fourth Gospel, in which Jesus manifests his omniscience (1:42, 48; 2:24; 4:17–18 etc.) or the powerlessness of people who intend to seize him, to stone him or to arrest him (7:44; 8:59; 10:31 etc.) until the moment he himself allows them to (18:4–12).

The Johannine Jesus himself mentions the term σημεῖον only twice throughout the gospel (4:48; 6:26), while the word appears 17 times in the gospel as a whole. The “Jews” (including the members of the Sanhedrin) use the word seven times (2:18; 3:2; 6:30; 7:31; 9:16; 10:41; 11:47), whereas the narrator¹⁷ speaks of σημεῖα eight times (2:11, 23; 4:54; 6:2, 14; 12:18, 37; 20:30).

In the two cases that Jesus mentions the word σημεῖον, he does so from the perspective of his audience. In 4:48 he says to the royal officer: “Unless you see signs and wonders you will not believe.” In 6:26, he says to the people following him the day after the multiplication of the loaves: “You are seeking me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves.” In both cases Jesus does not speak about his signs from his own viewpoint; he rather speaks about signs from his audience’s point of view.

This is why he uses the verb ὁράω in the second person plural in both instances. According to the coherent logic of the Johannine narrative as a whole, this means that any miraculous deeds performed by Jesus are

¹⁵ Cf. *ibid.*, 52; contra Köstenberger, *Missions* (n. 14), 65–67, who does not take into consideration that even the Johannine Jesus himself characterizes his resurrection as a sign in 2:18–19.

¹⁶ Generally speaking, σημεῖα are any acts, appearances, facts and so on, which point implicitly or symbolically towards a hidden reality, thus in a sense revealing it to their witnesses and at the same time hiding it from them, cf. Rudolf Bultmann, *Theologie des Neuen Testaments* (ed. Otto Merk; 9th ed.; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1984), 396–398.

¹⁷ See about the difference of “implied author” and “narrator” in Daniel Marguerat and Yvan Bourquin, *How to Read Bible Stories: An Introduction to Narrative Criticism* (London: SCM, 1999), 13–14, especially as applied in the Fourth Gospel cf. R. Alan Culpepper, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel: A Study in Literary Design* (Foundation and Facets: New Testament; Philadelphia, Pa.: Fortress, 1983), 15–18; also James L. Resseguie, *The Strange Gospel: Narrative Design and Point of View in John* (BIS 56; Leiden: Brill, 2001), 21–22, who does not make this distinction.

actually signs not to himself, but only to his public audience or – understanding the text as an act of communication – to the gospel's audience, since both Jesus' public and the gospel's audience have to decipher his deeds in order to understand their proper meaning.¹⁸ On the other hand, Jesus himself does not have to interpret his own deeds because he already knows their meaning. Speaking from his perspective, his miraculous deeds are not signs, but works, i.e. ἔργα.¹⁹

3. Σημεῖα and ἔργα

Provided that the term σημεῖα does indeed refer to all the deeds of the Johannine Jesus that bear an even slightly miraculous character (since all these deeds reveal to the world the identity of his person and his mission), σημεῖα and ἔργα are terms of a very similar meaning.

When referring to Jesus, the word τὸ ἔργον in the singular with the definite article refers to the soteriological activity of Jesus as a whole (4:34; 17:4), while ἔργον in the singular without the definite article or ἔργα in the plural imply 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).²⁰

Without necessarily accepting the idea of Ernst Käsemann about a supposed naive docetic christology in the Fourth Gospel, according to which the Johannine Jesus is God walking on the face of the earth,²¹ the high christology of the gospel is so intensive, that everything Jesus does

¹⁸ Cf. Craig S. Keener, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary* (2 vols.; Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 2003), vol. 1, 275–276.

¹⁹ It is to be noted that σημεῖα or ἔργα are never identified with Jesus' words in the Fourth Gospel, contra Köstenberger, *Missions* (n. 14), 73. Jesus' words form another category of his activity, as they convey the true meaning of his signs or works, cf. 14:11: πιστεύετε μοι ὅτι ἐγὼ ἐν τῷ πατρὶ καὶ ὁ πατὴρ ἐν ἐμοί: εἰ δὲ μή, διὰ τὰ ἔργα αὐτὰ πιστεύετε. Even the syntactical connection of σημεῖα or ἔργα with the verbs ποιέω, ἐργάζομαι, ὁράω, δεικνύω, θεωρέω, τελειῶ, and the one of λόγος or λαλιά, with the verbs λέγω, ἀκούω, μένω, χωρέω, τηρέω, γινώσκω, πληρόομαι, λαλέω, γίνομαι, δίδωμι, ἐξέρχομαι, when in a christological context, proves that the deeds and the words of Jesus are understood as two different categories of his activity that may be inter-related, but not identified with each other.

²⁰ On the meaning of ἔργα as miracles in John see Roman Heiligenthal, *Werke als Zeichen: Untersuchung zur Bedeutung der menschlichen Taten im Frühjudentum, Neuen Testament und Frühchristentum* (WUNT 2.9; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1983), 139–142; Christian Dietzfelbinger, *Das Evangelium nach Johannes* (2 vols.; ZBK 4; Zurich: TVZ, 2001), vol. 1, 138.

²¹ Ernst Käsemann, *Jesu letzter Wille nach Johannes 17* (4th ed.; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1980), 26–28.

can, in a sense, be understood both as a σημεῖον and as an ἔργον. As already noted above, the narrator himself summarizes all deeds of Jesus at the end of the gospel by characterizing them as σημεῖα (20:30).

On the other hand, it gradually becomes clear within the narrative that the exclusive function of Jesus' presence in the world is to accomplish the work of his Father as a whole by doing the concrete works of his Father. Everything he does has a deeper meaning, revealing his true identity and the divine plan for the salvation of the world. In this regard we could even go so far as to claim that everything Jesus does in the gospel's narrative also bears a supernatural character. From this very point of view, even his sole presence as such could be considered to be a sign, since it is the presence of the preexisting Logos in the world as a human being (cf. 1:14).

The parallel use of both σημεῖα and ἔργα, as well as their interconnectedness can be easily pointed out within the gospel narrative. For instance, in 6:30 the Jews ask Jesus: "what sign do you do, that we may see and believe in you? What work do you perform?" While the Jews may use the verb ἐργάζομαι (and not the noun ἔργον), the two words belong together both etymologically and semantically.²²

The Jews use the words ἔργον or ἐργάζομαι for characterizing Jesus' deeds only twice in the gospel (6:30; 10:33). In both cases they adopt Jesus' terminology within the framework of a discussion with him (see 6:27–40; 10:25–38), whereas in other similar cases they usually prefer the word σημεῖον. There is an analogy when Jesus only uses the word σημεῖον twice in the gospel, but, as noted above, from the perspective of the Jews and not from his own viewpoint.

In 7:21, referring to the sign of the healing of the lame man, Jesus says (ch. 5): "I did one work, and you marvel at it." Also, already in 5:20, referring to the same miracle, Jesus states: "(The Father) will show him (the Son) even greater works than these, so that you may marvel." In 10:32 Jesus again refers to the signs he had performed naming them "good works from the Father" and asks the Jews for which of them they are going to stone him. While the narrator speaks about the inability of the Jews to truly believe in Jesus despite the many signs he had performed in their presence (12:37–42), Jesus himself speaks about the sin of the Jews, who have seen his unique works and, nevertheless, hate him, as well as his Father (15:24). It seems that within christological contexts both terms refer to Jesus'

²² The Jews use the words ἔργον or ἐργάζομαι for characterizing Jesus' deeds only twice in the gospel (6:30; 10:33). Both of these times they adopt Jesus' terminology on the basis of an ongoing discussion with him (see 6:27–40; 10:25–38, while in similar instances they usually prefer the word σημεῖον. It is an analogous phenomenon when Jesus only uses the word σημεῖον twice in the gospel, but, as I have noted, from the perspective of the Jews and not from his own viewpoint.

deeds, but each one of them from a different perspective. While signs refer to the hidden meaning of Jesus' deeds that has not yet been fully revealed, thus representing the Jewish or even the Christian post-Easter perspective, works refer to the already revealed meaning of Jesus' deeds. It is for this reason that whenever Jesus explains the character and the meaning of his deeds and of his mission as a whole, he does not use the word σημεῖα, but rather the word ἔργα.

In light of the above demonstrated interconnectedness of σημεῖα and ἔργα, it is not a trivial detail that the word ἔργον bears among other meanings a solid ethical one.²³ According to BDAG the Greek word ἔργον can refer to any deed that "exhibits a consistent moral character".²⁴ The word ἔργον is used 27 times throughout the Fourth Gospel and appears first in 3:19. In 3:19–21 the narrator comments on the two different kinds of works that are done by people and that influence their attitude towards Jesus (in this context being characterized as the light that has come to the world): There are evil and good works. People are divided into two categories according to the quality of their own works. Although this division is perhaps not to be understood solely on an ethical basis, but also on an existential one,²⁵ it is clear that ethics play a crucial role in this passage.²⁶ The works of the people are evaluated according to their ethical quality. Their attitude with regard to the light is analogous to their works or even dependent upon them. The works as ethical actions reveal the moral character of the people who perform them.

Later on in the narrative, Jesus urges the Jews not to work "for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures to eternal life". This food will be given to them by the son of man (6:27). The meaning of this second kind of working is revealed in the next verses: The Jews ask Jesus how they can do the works of God (6:28). This is a question on ethics.²⁷ The Jews have the self-consciousness of believing in God (cf. 8:41, 54). They ask Jesus how to practice their faith within their life, how to produce works according to the will of God. They do not understand that they fail in the one work of God, which is to believe in him whom God has sent (6:29). Their failure to believe in Jesus is connected with their doing evil

²³ This semantic background of the term is not considered by Heiligenthal, *Werke* (n. 20), 135–141, when dealing with its Johannine usage.

²⁴ BDAG, "ἔργον", 390.

²⁵ The works representing actually the one work of God, i.e. faith towards the one, whom God has sent to the world.

²⁶ Cf. Schrage, *Ethik* (n. 3), 291; Keener, *Gospel* (n. 18), vol. 1, 573–574.

²⁷ Cf. Van der Watt, "Ethics" (n. 1), 157; idem, "Radical Social Redefinition and Radical Love: Ethics and Ethos in the Gospel according to John", in *Identity, Ethics, and Ethos in the New Testament* (ed. Jan van der Watt; BZNW 141; Berlin: De Gruyter, 2006), 107–133, here 114.

works and not the good works of God (7:7). They do not do the works of Abraham (who believed in God and even in God's preexisting Son [8:56]).²⁸ They only do the works of their own father (8:41), namely the devil (8:44). Hating Jesus is obviously the culmination of their evil works (cf. 13:2).

According to the above mentioned definition, ἔργον as "exhibiting a consistent moral character", only applies to the "deeds of humans" and not to the "deeds of God and Jesus". Whenever applied to God and Jesus ἔργον simply means miracle.²⁹

Ἔργα performed by Jesus or his ἐργάζεσθαι refer indeed mainly to his miracles, just like σημεῖα, but from another perspective. In 5:17, 20, 36 Jesus refers to the previously narrated healing of the lame man in order to show that he performs the works of his Father. He predicts that even greater works, i.e. miracles, than this healing will take place, resulting in the marveling of his audience. Jesus' miraculous works witness his having been sent by his Father. In 7:21 Jesus again refers to the healing of the lame man. In 9:3 he refers in advance to the healing of the blind man as one of God's works, which in the Fourth Gospel are identified with his own works (5:17; 10:37). In 10:25 Jesus once more refers to the works that bear witness to him. The discourse of chapter 10 is located just after the narrative of the healing of the blind man, while the reference of 10:25 should be understood as concretely implying this very healing.³⁰ In 14:11 Jesus urges his disciples to believe in him on the basis of the works he performs. This is analogous to the epilogue of the gospel, according to which Jesus' signs have been written in the gospel so that its readers believe in him and thus attain eternal life (20:31).

Since in the Fourth Gospel Jesus' miracles or signs are also called ἔργα and since the term ἔργα has, generally speaking, a clear ethical meaning, even a miracle performed by Jesus could very well include an ethical dimension. Jesus' works depict the way he is related to his Father. His works are the fulfillment of his heavenly Father's will (4:34). He has witnessed all works of his Father and reveals them to the world (5:20). He has to accomplish and fulfill these works in obedience to his Father (5:36; cf. 17:4). The ἔργα of Jesus also reveal the way he relates himself to the world and connect the world with his Father. Since the word ἔργον is mainly used by the Johannine Jesus in order to describe his own deeds and only

²⁸ Cf. the analysis of this verse in Michael Theobald, *Das Evangelium nach Johannes: Kapitel 1–12* (RNT; Regensburg: Pustet, 2009), 618–619.

²⁹ BDAG, "ἔργον", 390.

³⁰ Cf. Leon Morris, *The Gospel according to John* (NICNT; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1995), 462.

rarely by the Jews or the narrator,³¹ we can easily reach the conclusion that the implied author of the gospel deems the term as the most appropriate in order to demonstrate the theological depth of Jesus' deeds, by bringing to the foreground among other things also their ethical dimension.

4. ἔργον, ἔργα and Family Ethics

Since the terms ἔργον(-α) and ἐργάζομαι express, also from an ethical perspective, the relationship of Jesus to his Father and to the "world", whose people are invited to become children of God (1:12), their ethical significance appears to be clearly related to the gospel's family imagery and especially to the ethical part of this imagery. The Johannine family imagery has already been exemplarily reconstructed and analyzed by Jan van der Watt in his monograph *Family of the King: Dynamics of Metaphor in the Gospel according to John* published in the year 2000. According to this study, there is a family imagery network in the Fourth Gospel that is interwoven with the gospel's narrative.³²

At this point I will briefly present the most basic elements of the gospel's narrative substructure that are based on this family imagery and are also connected with the term ἔργον.³³

According to the above mentioned family metaphor there is a father who has an only begotten son (cf. 1:14, 18; 3:16, 18). His love for his son is exceptional because he is his only heir both from a biological and a legal point of view. The father teaches his son everything he knows and reveals to him all his secrets (cf. 5:20, 30; 8:26, 38, 40), so that the son will be able to represent him in all of his responsibilities (ἔργα) and finally to succeed him. Moreover, the father transfers to his son all of his power and authority (cf. 3:35; 5:22, 27; 13:3). On this basis, the father, after having completed the education of his son,³⁴ sends him on a very demanding, dangerous and confidential mission (ἔργον) of vital importance (cf. 3:17; 10:36; 11:42; 17:3, 8, 18, 21, 23; 20:21). He expects him to accomplish this mission and return back to him in order to be reinstated (13:3; 14:28; 16:5, 10, 17; 17:5; 20:17).³⁵ On the other hand, the son is eager and willing to learn everything the father teaches him and to listen to everything he

³¹ Even then ἔργον is used within the context of Jesus' sayings.

³² See Jan van der Watt, *Family of the King: Dynamics of Metaphor in the Gospel according to John* (BIS 47; Leiden: Brill, 2000), esp. 406–432.

³³ The following three paragraphs are based for the most part upon the research and the conclusions of *ibid.*, esp. 161–393.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 206–209, 266–284.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 296–302.

reveals to him. The son accepts the mission (ἐργον) the father sends him on in obedience to him (ἐργον, cf. 4:34; 5:30; 6:38–40). While on his mission, he performs the works (ἐργα) his father has taught him (4:34; 5:20, 36; 9:3–4; 10:25, 37–38; 14:10–11). He is devoted to working for the glory of his father (11:4; 13:31–32; 14:13; 15:8; 17:1, 4), even though this leads him to his very death (12:27–28; 13:31; 17:1, 4).

He expresses his gratitude to his father because his father always listens to him (11:41–42). He asks his father for favors knowing that his father will provide him with everything he asks for (14:16; 16:26; 17:9, 15, 20), whereas these favors will finally contribute to the glorification of the father (11:4, 40, 42).

The ethical implications of the above portrayed imagery of the family relationship between God and Jesus are evident. The relations of the two persons depict the ideal ethical character types of a father and his only son within the socio-historical setting of the Fourth Gospel, which is, generally speaking, the ancient Eastern Mediterranean world.³⁶ The attitude of the two persons to one another is characterized among other things through love, trust, respect, selflessness, unity, openness and gratitude. It is also evident that the term ἐργον plays a crucial role in portraying the ethics of the internal relations within God's family.

There is also a further dimension in family ethics with regard to the term ἐργον. The work of Jesus originates from his heavenly Father, but it also has receivers who are the people of the world. To return to the basic narrative substructure of the gospel's family imagery, the son's mission is actually to expand his father's family and to include in it the whole world. All people of the world are invited to become members of this family by believing in Jesus and thereby receiving the power to become children of his father (1:12; 11:52). In the process of expanding his fathers' family the son reveals to his audience, sometimes in an enigmatic way, who he is, what his mission is, where it is leading him, and what the people need to do in order to receive the benefits of this mission. The son does not reveal everything the father has told or taught him, but he reveals everything he should, so that his audience is persuaded by him and accepts his invitation to become members of his father's family. In the Fourth Gospel the above portrayed mission of Jesus to the world is characterized as τὸ ἐργον τοῦ θεοῦ (4:34; 17:4).

Not all of the people who listen to the invitation of the Son respond to it in a positive way. Most of them prefer to stay out of the Father's family (1:11). They are under the impression that they already belong to this family (8:41), while they actually belong to another family (the one of the devil) that is hostile towards the family of the Father and the Son (8:42,

³⁶ See *ibid.*, 166–168, as well as the relevant bibliography cited there.

44).³⁷ The only way for someone to become a member of the Father's family is to accept the Son who was sent by the Father for this very purpose and believe in him (1:12). The Son asks his Father to protect the new family members (17:15) and to keep them all united with himself and with each other (17:11, 21–24). The difference remains of course, as the natural Son is related to his Father on another level compared to the people who finally become his children (20:17).

At this point the ethic of the family imagery of the gospel is expanded, as part of it can refer to the new members of the family. These new members on their part also have to be united, to love each other, to love the Father³⁸ and to perform the works that Jesus has already done and even greater works than his (14:12).

According to the above mentioned, the terms *ἐργον* and *ἐργάζομαι* do indeed express ethical values in the Fourth Gospel from the viewpoint of its family imagery network. The terms are used in connection with the education of the Son from his Father, his being sent by his Father to the world, his concrete deeds within the framework of his Father's work, but also in connection with the response of the receivers of this mission and the continuation of the Son's work from those who have believed in him, thus having become members of his Father's family. Over against this, however, the term *σημεῖον* only refers to the call of its receivers and/or eye-witnesses to believe in Jesus. This term does not seem to have any ethical implications per se.

5. The Works of Jesus and the Works of the Disciples

Since everyone who believes in Jesus acquires the state of being a child of God, he or she also participates, at least partly, in God's knowledge, in the fulfillment of God's plan and in performing God's works, in a manner

³⁷ Cf. János Bolyki, "Ethics in the Gospel of John", *CV* 45 (2003): 198–208, here 202; Van der Watt, *Family* (n. 32), 357–359; idem, "Ethics Alive in Imagery", in *Imagery in the Gospel of John* (eds. Jörg Frey et al.; WUNT 200; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2006), 421–448, here 423.

³⁸ Although, as van der Watt, "Ethics" (n. 1), 160; *Family* (n. 32), 308, rightly observes, there is no direct reference of the love of the faithful towards the Father, 5:42 is no exception because it is the exact parallel of 17:26, which refers to the love that is directed from God to Jesus and to the faithful. It would seem that the faithful cannot possibly love God directly because none has ever seen him (1:18). However, they can love Jesus and they will, therefore, be loved by God (14:21). Jesus asks his Father that they be allowed to follow him to the place where he was before the creation of the world and see his glory (17:24). This implies, perhaps, that then they will also be able to love the Father directly, and not only through his Son. But this has to remain an open question considering the sparse evidence of the Johannine text on this point.

comparable to God's only begotten Son, Jesus Christ (1:17–18). Concretely: In 9:4 Jesus says: "We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming, when no one can work." This statement is somehow odd because Jesus starts speaking in the first person plural (ἡμᾶς) while in the same sentence he also refers to himself in the first person singular (τοῦ πέμψαντός με). Consequently 9:4 seems to be a collective saying, in which the situation of the post-Easter community is implied (cf. 3:11). The first person plural signifies that the works of God will not only be performed by his only begotten Son, but also by the members of his post-Easter community.

In 14:12 we read an even clearer statement about this issue: "Whoever believes in me will also do the works that I do; and greater works than these will he do, because I am going to the Father."³⁹ According to 6:29 the work (ἔργον) of God is to believe in him, whom God has sent. However, there is a great difference between ἔργον in the singular and ἔργα in the plural. As we have already observed, in christological contexts τὸ ἔργον in the singular means the soteriological mission of Jesus as a whole that was assigned to him by his Father. ἔργα in the plural refer to the concrete deeds of Jesus that reveal his divine identity, call people to faith and are steps towards accomplishing the one work of the Father, that is saving the whole world. It would seem that this christological and soteriological differentiation between ἔργον and ἔργα is on another level also valid for everyone who believes in Jesus. According to 6:29 doing the work of God (singular) as a human being would in the first place be to believe in Jesus; according to 14:12, on the other hand, doing the works of God (plural) would be to do exactly the same works that Jesus did, and even greater ones than his.

This has very much to do with the family imagery that is being utilized for expressing the relationship among the Father, the Son and the faithful. The most basic characteristic of this relationship is love. The Father loves his Son and surrenders everything to his power (3:35; 17:24). He also loves the world and that is why he gives away his Son in order that the world be saved (3:16). The Son also loves the Father (14:31). He shows his love through his obedience to the will of the Father (4:34; 5:30; 6:38; cf. 9:31). The believers shall participate in this loving relationship (13:1, 34–35; 14:15, 23; 15:9–10, 12–13, 17; 17:23, 26).⁴⁰

³⁹ Cf. the relevant discussion in Keener, *Gospel* (n. 18), vol. 1, 946–947. Keener seems to be interpreting the word μεῖζονα not only by "greater", but also by "more". This usage, however, does not seem to be attested in ancient Greek literature, cf. BDAG, "μέγας", 623–624; LSJ, "μέγας", 1088–1089.

⁴⁰ For a detailed analysis on the loving relationships of the members of God's family in John see van der Watt, "Ethics" (n. 1), 159–166; idem, "Redefinition" (n. 27), 115–120.

On the other hand, the Fourth Evangelist never mentions, at least explicitly, that Jesus does love the world. The plan for saving the world belongs to the Father, who loves the world limitlessly (3:16). Jesus is the means, through which the world will or can be saved (3:17; 12:47). Nevertheless, the narrator only tells us expressly that Jesus loves the ones who belong to him (13:1; 17:9). His call is directed towards the whole world (1:29; 7:37–38; 12:32).⁴¹ However, his love (ἀγάπη) is only directed to his own, to the ones who believe in him, thus – following the imagery of the family – becoming members of the divine family (cf. 17:9). If they are truly members of this family they have to have joy for hearing that Jesus will return to his Father (14:28). They also have to love each other the way Jesus has loved them. The love of Jesus is so strong that he is willing to sacrifice his life for their sake (15:13). The world hates Jesus because he demonstrates that its works are evil (7:7; cf. 3:20). Since the world hates Jesus, it also hates his Father (15:23–24). The world hates his followers too because they do not belong to it (15:18–19; 17:14). However, we never find any saying about hatred that is directed in the reverse direction. Jesus, God and his followers do not hate the world.⁴² They are also not indifferent towards the world. On the contrary, if the followers of Jesus are in unity, just as the Father and the Son are in unity (10:30; 17:11, 21–23), then the world will believe that God has indeed sent Jesus (17:21).⁴³

Consequently, there are, it would seem, two main categories of divine love in the Fourth Gospel, the love of God towards the world as a whole, and the love of Jesus towards the people of the world who have believed in him. These people do not belong to the world any more (17:14, 16); they belong to the divine family. They have become friends (11:11; 15:13–15) and in a sense even brothers of Jesus (20:17). They have received the authority to become God's children (1:12; cf. 11:52; 20:17). There is a strict analogy between the unity of God with Jesus and the unity of his

⁴¹ The problem of the predestinative sayings of the Fourth Gospel and their interpretation cannot be solved within the narrow limits of this paper. In this regard I am simply presupposing the solution that Rudolf Schnackenburg, *Das Johannesevangelium* (Freiburg et al.: Herder, 1965), vol. 2, 344, has proposed.

⁴² As opposed to the Qumran Community (1QS I, 3:10); cf. Allen Verhey, *The Great Reversal: Ethics and the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1984), 144; contra Adele Reinhartz, "The Grammar of Hate in the Gospel of John: Reading John in the Twenty-First Century", in *Israel und seine Heilstraditionen im Johannesevangelium: Festgabe für J. Beutler SJ zum 70. Geburtstag* (eds. Michael Labahn et al.; Paderborn: Schöningh, 2004), 416–427, here 425.

⁴³ Cf. Schrage, *Ethik* (n. 3), 292, 300; Meeks, "The Ethics of the Fourth Evangelist" (n. 2), 324; contra Käsemann, *Jesu letzter Wille* (n. 21), 124, who famously does not accept that the concept of Johannine love included love towards the neighbor, but only towards the Christian brother and sister.

own to one another (17:11, 21–22, 26). Accordingly, there is also an analogy of God's mission accomplished by Jesus and Jesus' new commandment towards his followers, who have to obey him and observe his commandment the way Jesus himself obeys his Father and accomplishes his work (15:10, 12; cf. 13:34).⁴⁴

This brings us to the question about ἔργα performed by the faithful. Jesus' followers have to do the works Jesus has showed them (14:8–14), in the same way Jesus does the works that his Father has showed him (5:20). His followers will even do greater works than Jesus did (14:12). They are entitled to do so because they now belong to the family of God. However, they are not entitled to do the one work of God, which is saving the world (3:17; 12:47; 17:4).

Their one work of God is to believe in Jesus (6:29). They will not perform signs, which is a term strictly applied to Jesus.⁴⁵ On the contrary they will perform works in connection with Jesus and the Father (14:12). The Father dwells in Jesus and does his works through him (14:10). The works of God are works of love, so Jesus' works are also works of love. Thus, the works of the faithful will also be works of love.⁴⁶

Why are then the terms ἀγάπη-ἀγαπάω never used in order to characterize Jesus' works for the world? In my opinion, in order to distinguish the divine love towards the believers as children of God and the love to the people who have not yet acquired this status. The same applies when it is said that God loved (ἡγάπησεν: aorist) the world (3:16), but, on the other hand, also that God will love (ἀγαπήσει: future) the ones who will believe in Jesus (14:21, 23).⁴⁷ Exactly as in a family, the love of the members of the family among themselves is much deeper (ἀγαπήσας τοὺς ἰδίους τοὺς

⁴⁴ Cf. Van der Watt, "Ethics" (n. 1), 159–166.

⁴⁵ See the explanation given by Köstenberger, *Missions* (n. 14), 170: "The 'signs,' a unique part of Jesus' ministry, point beyond themselves to Jesus and his sender (the signs' revelatory function) ... the fourth evangelist is careful never to apply the working of 'signs' to Jesus' disciples: he takes pains not to rival Jesus' role...."

⁴⁶ There is no such thing as "theoretical love" in the Fourth Gospel. Love presupposes concrete personal relations and brings with it concrete loving works as its practical consequences, as Van der Watt, "Ethics" (n. 1), 161, stresses. The works of love include also the "actualization of the realities to which the works of Jesus point, the bestowal of the blessings and powers of the kingdom of God upon men and women", as George R. Beasley-Murray, *John* (2nd ed.; WBC 36; Waco, Tex.: Word, 1999), 255, rightly formulates.

⁴⁷ Cf. on the ethical function of love in the world of the New Testament and its connection with the circles of family members and friends Michael Wolter, "Die ethische Identität christlicher Gemeinden in neutestamentlicher Zeit", in *Woran orientiert sich Ethik?* (eds. Wilfried Härle and Reiner Preul; Marburger Jahrbuch Theologie 13 = Marburger Theologische Studien 67; Marburg: Elwert, 2001), 61–90, here 80–82; cf. also Michael Wolter, "Ethos und Identität in paulinischen Gemeinden", *NTS* 43 (1997): 430–444, here 442–443.

ἐν τῷ κόσμῳ, εἰς τέλος ἡγάπησεν αὐτούς [13:1]) than the love towards people who do not belong to it. This does not mean, however, that Jesus does not actually love the people of the world. His works are works of love because they call people to faith and thus to receiving the gift of the eternal life. His signs are a manifestation of this divine gift to the world. His death and his resurrection are presented as fulfilling God's loving plan to save the world (3:14–17; 19:30).

This means that the works of the faithful, which will be analogous or even greater than the works of Jesus (14:12), will also be works of obedience and love.⁴⁸ Jesus' obedient and loving attitude functions as an example of the attitude that his followers should adopt having become themselves members of the divine family.⁴⁹ The semeia-narratives offer to the implied reader an illustration of this ideal attitude, without of course being the only narratives that have this function in the Fourth Gospel.⁵⁰

6. Semeia-Narratives Conveying Ethics

What follows here is an attempt to extract and underline some of those elements out of the semeia-narratives that convey the expected ethical behavior of the faithful as members of the divine family towards God, one another and the world. This kind of reading of the semeia-narratives is justified, in my opinion, on the basis of the above analysis about the meaning and the function of the terms σημεῖα and ἔργα in the Fourth Gospel.⁵¹

In the first sign at Cana (2:1–11) Jesus offers his help in a hopeless situation by rescuing the bridegroom from the shame of not having enough wine for his guests at the feast of his wedding and by extending the joy of the guests. From an ethical point of view this miracle of Jesus is an action of caring. Jesus is furthermore, in a sense, obedient to his mother. Although he makes it absolutely clear that she has no authority over him and

⁴⁸ Cf. Hirsch-Luipold, "Ethik" (n. 7), 305. In my opinion, ethics offers us a more solid basis for interpreting the "greater works" of 14:12 than eschatology, according to Köstenberger, *Missions* (n. 14), 171–173.

⁴⁹ See Van der Watt, *Family* (n. 32), 288–289.

⁵⁰ The most characteristic example of Jesus' loving humility towards his disciples that is expressly interpreted by Jesus himself as an example of how they should act towards one another is the footwashing in 13:1–17, cf. Matera, *Ethics* (n. 3), 104–105; Van der Watt, "Redefinition" (n. 27), 122–128.

⁵¹ Schrage, *Ethik* (n. 3), 294, is of course right when claiming that the miracles "sind nicht so sehr reale Hilfe für die Leidenden als vielmehr Symbole und Illustration dessen, was in der irdischen Sphäre transparent werden soll". However, he does not see the possibility of a second reading of the corresponding narratives from an ethical point of view, which is the aim of the present study.

his actions (2:4), as his heavenly Father does,⁵² he, nevertheless, does what she indirectly asks him to do, i.e. he helps.⁵³ This means that family ethics has a noteworthy place in this narrative:⁵⁴ If Jesus is obedient to his earthly mother and caring for the needs and problems of the people he encounters, then obedience to each other is something that should also characterize the relationships of the members of the divine family and care should characterize their relationship to the people of the world.⁵⁵ In the second sign of Cana (4:46–54) Jesus cares for a father and his dying son by giving life to the child. At the end of the narrative the whole household of the royal officer believes in Jesus (4:53). The family imagery is also present here.⁵⁶ The believers should follow the example of Jesus and help anyone who asks for their help, even if his or her faith is lacking (cf. 4:48). As a result, not only the one who receives help, but also his or her whole household may believe and become members of the divine family. In the narrative of the healing of the lame man (5:1–18) Jesus picks up a suffering human being in a hopeless situation, and gives him a new life. According to his example, believers should not only care for people asking for their help, but also for helpless people who are in need, but do not ask for help not having anyone to assist them (5:7). The law on the observation of the Sabbath does not stop Jesus from helping the lame man (5:9). No law can be used against helping someone in need.⁵⁷

In the story of the multiplication of the loaves (6:1–15) Jesus cares for the people who surround him and provides them with food (6:5). This is also a loving work and a caring attitude that the believers should imitate in their relation to the people of the world. In the story there is a common dinner with a great number of people whose faith proves to be misdirected (6:14–15).

Nonetheless, the attitude of Jesus towards them is loving and caring, even though they fully misunderstand the character of his mission and the

⁵² See Van der Watt, *Family* (n. 32), 261.

⁵³ Cf. Dietzfelbinger, *Evangelium* (n. 20), 67.

⁵⁴ Cf. Jey J. Kanagaraj, "The Implied Ethics of the Fourth Gospel: A Reinterpretation of the Decalogue", *TynBu* 52 (2001): 33–60, here 49–51.

⁵⁵ Cf. on the interrelationship of the heavenly and the earthly family imagery in this narrative Eva-Maria Gerigk, *Wahlverwandschaften: Die Herkunfts- und Verwandtschafts-metaphorik im Johannesevangelium als Suche nach den jüdischen Wurzeln christlicher Identität: Ein Zugang unter besonderer Berücksichtigung des Gebetes zum Vater* (Joh 17) (Münsteraner Theologische Abhandlungen 71; Laer: Oros, 2008), 364–369.

⁵⁶ Cf. Van der Watt, *Family* (n. 32), 263.

⁵⁷ Cf. Bolyki, "Ethics" (n. 37), 201–202.

identity of his person.⁵⁸ Jesus' thanksgiving (6:11) is among other connotations⁵⁹ an example for the gratitude the believers should have towards God.⁶⁰ When Jesus comes to the rescue of his disciples walking upon the sea and subsequently brings their boat safely to the coast (6:16–21), he gives an example of caring for the believers and helping those who are in need. The believers should also care for one another in the best possible way.

The story of the healing of the man born blind (ch. 9) has many analogies to the story of the healing of the lame man mentioned previously (5:1–18). In this story too Jesus decides to help a man who is a hopeless case and whose burden no one can take away from him (9:32). Jesus gives him his light not only on the corporeal, but also on the spiritual level making out of him a believer (9:35–38) and, consequently, a member of the divine family. In this story too the observation of the Sabbath (9:16–18) is totally unimportant compared to the life-giving care of Jesus.

In the narrative of the resurrection of Lazarus (11:1–45) Jesus performs a miracle on someone he loves. The use of the verbs φιλέω and ἀγαπάω⁶¹ at the beginning of the narrative (11:3, 5) shows that Lazarus is already a believer, i.e. he does not belong to the "world" (cf. 13:1; 17:14). On the ethical level, the story of Lazarus shows the love and care that the members of the divine family should have for each other.⁶² The unity of Jesus with the Father in Jesus' prayer in front of Lazarus' tomb is an example of the unity the believers should have with God and even with each other (cf.

⁵⁸ See for instance Rudolf Bultmann, *Das Evangelium des Johannes* (14th ed.; KEK 2; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1956), 158; Mark W.G. Stibbe, *John* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993), 83; Hartwig Thyen, *Das Johannesevangelium* (HNT 6; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2005), 341.

⁵⁹ See the relevant discussion *ibid.*, 339–340.

⁶⁰ It seems obvious that the primary meaning of Jesus' thanksgiving is a combined reference of the fourth evangelist to the Jewish berakhah and to the Christian eucharist, cf. among others James D.G. Dunn, "John VI: A Eucharistic Discourse?", *NTS* 17 (1970/71): 333; Francis J. Moloney, "John 6 and the Celebration of the Eucharist", *DRev* 93 (1975): 245–251; Christian Welck, *Erzählte Zeichen: Die Wundergeschichten des Johannesevangeliums literarisch untersucht; mit einem Ausblick auf Joh 21* (WUNT 2.69; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1994), 160. However, a second reading could lead the implied reader to an interpretation of this act of Jesus in ethical terms, namely as an example for the gratitude we should express towards God for the goods he has provided us with.

⁶¹ See on the interchangeability of the two verbs in the Fourth Gospel Van der Watt, "Redefinition" (n. 27), 115, n. 89.

⁶² Jesus' delay of two days before starting off to Bethany has been wrongly interpreted as waiting for Lazarus to die in order to perform a resurrection instead of a healing, see for instance Hirsch-Luipold, "Ethik" (n. 7), 290, n. 3. This interpretation is incompatible with the express love of Jesus towards Lazarus and his two sisters (11:5, 36), as well as with his strong emotions due to Lazarus' death and to the pain it had caused to those close to him (11:33, 35, 38); see the relevant analysis in Karakolis, *Θεολογική* (n. 9), 258–260.

17:11, 21). The strong emotions of Jesus (11:33, 35) reveal the quality of his love for Lazarus and the genuineness of his compassion (cf. 11:36).⁶³ According to the implied author, the aim of the semeia-narratives is to lead people to faith (20:31). Receivers and also eyewitnesses of the signs are called to faith, whether they finally respond to this call in a positive or in a negative manner (cf. 2:11, 23–24; 4:53; 12:37–42). Even the faith of believers can grow when they witness a sign. The royal officer and his household, the lame man, as well as the blind man had belonged to the world before the signs that were done to them, but they became members of the divine family after receiving Jesus' life-giving gift. The disciples believe more strongly after seeing the first sign at Cana, although they had already believed in Jesus in the narrative of their call (1:35–51).

Is loving care enough to make people believe, when it is not accompanied by a miracle? It should be, according to 20:30–31. However, it seems at least plausible that the Johannine community also has the self-consciousness of being a miracle-working community that continues Jesus' loving works and even exceeds them according to Jesus' promise, that he would provide his believers with anything they would ask from him (14:13–14).⁶⁴ While an active mission of the believers to the world is certainly attested in the Fourth Gospel (cf. 4:35–38; 17:18; 20:21),⁶⁵ this mission should be based upon a loving attitude.⁶⁶ The Johannine Jesus speaks among other things of an indirect mission through ethics.⁶⁷ The believers should continue the works of Jesus by calling people to faith not only through their preaching words, but also through their loving attitude to one another and their unbreakable unity:

⁶³ Cf. Charles K. Barrett, *The Gospel according to St. John: An Introduction with Commentary and Notes on the Greek Text* (2nd ed.; Philadelphia, Pa.: Westminster John Knox, 1978), 400; Klaus Wengst, *Das Johannesevangelium* (2 vols.; THKNT 4.2, Stuttgart et al.: Kohlhammer, 2001), vol. 2, 33–34.

⁶⁴ Cf. Salier, *Impact* (n. 14), 144–145.

⁶⁵ Cf. Matera, *Ethics* (n. 3), 111.

⁶⁶ Cf. Van der Watt, "Ethics" (n. 1), 174–175; contra Jack T. Sanders, *Ethics in the New Testament: Change and Development* (Philadelphia, Pa.: Fortress, 1975), 100, who claims that "Johannine Christianity is interested in whether he (i.e. a person of the world) believes" and not in assisting him according to his need. The Johannine ethic as conveyed in the semeia-narratives demonstrates that although faith remains a central issue, Jesus does indeed perform signs also upon people who do not already believe in him. The believers of the Johannine community should do the same works that Jesus did, which in this concrete case would mean to encounter non-believers in their need by helping them in the best possible way.

⁶⁷ Cf. Andreas Dettwiler, "Umstrittene Ethik. Überlegungen zu Joh 15:1–17", in *Johannes-Studien: Interdisziplinäre Zugänge zum Johannes-Evangelium: Freundesgabe der Theologischen Fakultät der Universität Neuchâtel für Jean Zumstein* (ed. Martin Rose; Zurich: TVZ, 1991), 186–187.

Οὐ περὶ τούτων δὲ ἐρωτῶ μόνον, ἀλλὰ καὶ περὶ τῶν πιστευόντων διὰ τοῦ λόγου αὐτῶν εἰς ἐμέ, ἵνα πάντες ἐν ὧσιν, καθὼς σὺ, πάτερ, ἐν ἐμοὶ κάγω ἐν σοί, ἵνα καὶ αὐτοὶ ἐν ἡμῖν ὧσιν, ἵνα ὁ κόσμος πιστεύῃ ὅτι σὺ με ἀπέστειλας ... ἐγὼ ἐν αὐτοῖς καὶ σὺ ἐν ἐμοί, ἵνα ὧσιν τετελειωμένοι εἰς ἐν, ἵνα γυνώσκῃ ὁ κόσμος ὅτι σὺ με ἀπέστειλας καὶ ἡγάπησας αὐτοὺς καθὼς ἐμὲ ἡγάπησας (17:20–21, 23).⁶⁸

In the semeia-narratives there is, furthermore, another model for ethical behavior, namely the one represented by the characters of the signs' receivers and eyewitnesses. In these narratives the implied reader of the gospel is also informed about the pre-Christian ethic, i.e. about the ethical attitude of people before believing in Jesus. In the Gospel of John this is the ethic of the observation of the mosaic law. Symbolically, the end of this ethic is designated also in the semeia-narratives.

The water in the stone jars in 2:6 is transformed into wine. The abstinence of work on a Sabbath should not get in the way of saving a life (5:9; 9:14) and its breaking does not have anything to do with sin.⁶⁹ The confession of Jesus as a unique miracle worker who was sent by God leads the believer outside the Jewish community as a blasphemous law-breaker (9:22, 34). Following the ethic of the law, as interpreted by the "Jews" is an obstacle for believing in Jesus and attaining eternal life (cf. 1:17).⁷⁰ It is necessary to embrace the new ethic of love of the divine family in order to become its member and thus be saved from belonging to the world.

The ones who are able to leave the Jewish ethic behind after having witnessed a sign show a deep devotion to Jesus even if they do not understand him completely and even if this attitude of theirs entails serious consequences for their personal life (9:35; cf. 9:22; 12:42). After being healed, the lame man confesses Jesus to the Pharisees although he should be aware of the danger this action implies (5:15).⁷¹ Peter makes an impressive christological confession one day after the multiplication of the loaves and the discourse about the bread of life (6:68–69). The healed blind man insists upon attributing his healing to Jesus (9:15–34), which results in his

⁶⁸ The Johannine concept of κόσμος, which is also the object of Christian mission in John, according to our analysis, includes consistently throughout the Fourth Gospel both Jews and Gentiles.

⁶⁹ Cf. Bolyki, "Ethics" (n. 37), 201–202.

⁷⁰ According to Van der Watt, "Ethics" (n. 1), 156–157, Jesus interprets the law in a totally different way from his Jewish opponents without actually rejecting it.

⁷¹ The opinion of a significant number of exegetes that the crippled man betrays Jesus to the Jews (see for instance Wengst, *Johannesevangelium* [n. 63], vol. 1, 190) is wrong. These exegetes usually ignore that the healed man speaks to the Jews about his healing (5:11, 15), while the Jews intend to pursue and to kill Jesus because he had done this on a Sabbath (5:10, 16), cf. Christos Karakolis, "Εὕρισκει αὐτὸν ὁ Ἰησοῦς ἐν τῷ ἱερῷ (Ἰω. 5,14α): Συνάντηση καὶ ἀποκάλυψη", in idem, *Θέματα ἐρμηνείας καὶ θεολογίας τῆς Καινῆς Διαθήκης* (Bibliotheca Biblica 24; Thessaloniki: Panagiotis Pournaras, 2002), 191–192.

expulsion from the synagogue (9:35). These cases are positive examples of a transformation of people's ethical character and behavior on the grounds of their new faith in Jesus Christ.

On the other hand, the Jews, the Galileans and the Pharisees function in the Johannine semeia-narratives and their wider context as negative examples of unethical behavior. They do not believe in Jesus even if they witness signs (2:23–25; 4:43–45; 5:10–12, 16–18; 12:37–42). Because of that, they ask for even more (2:18; 6:30). Even if sometimes they seem to believe at first, their faith is superficial and disappears at the sign of the first doubt (7:31–33; 9:16–18). They feel threatened (11:47–49), they are not honest (7:45–52), they are hostile, trying to protect their own ethical norms (5:16, 18; 9:24–26).

Summarizing the above, Jesus' signs are a call and a challenge not only on the level of faith, but also on that of ethics. The relevant narratives present the implied reader with positive and negative examples of ethical standpoints and behaviors. Provided he believes, he is understandably urged to follow the positive examples and to avoid the negative ones.

7. Summary – Conclusion

In this paper I have attempted to examine the way ethics is conveyed through the johannine notion of σημεῖα. At first I examined the term σημεῖον within the Johannine narrative, especially in its parallel use with the closely associated term ἔργον. Since the term ἔργον includes a strong ethical meaning, contrary to the term σημεῖον, I investigated its Johannine use and connected it with the gospel's family imagery network determining that its use conveys typical notions of ancient family ethics throughout the johannine narrative. In light of the above analysis I isolated relevant details of the seven semeia-narratives of the Fourth Gospel in order to find out whether and in which way ethics is implicitly conveyed by concrete narrative elements that belong to them. In the course of this investigation I reached the following conclusions:

Under the term σημεῖα the implied reader should understand every supernatural deed of Jesus that is or is not narrated in the Fourth Gospel and that reveals his divine identity and the soteriological character of his mission. In the epilogue of the gospel all deeds of Jesus are defined as signs.

The Johannine Jesus uses the term σημεῖον rarely and only from the perspective of his audience. The term is mainly used by the "Jews" on an Old Testament background and by the narrator from a post-Easter viewpoint.

Jesus uses the term ἔργον when referring to his own deeds (and not to his words). The term also has a solid ethical meaning contrary to the term σημεῖον, and also characterizes the deeds of ordinary people.

While σημεῖα refer to the deeds of Jesus that need to be properly interpreted in order to be understood correctly, when within a christological context ἔργα refer to the same deeds of Jesus as interpreted by himself.

When attributed to God or Jesus, ἔργα normally mean miracles. In this regard ἔργα are semantically very close to σημεῖα in the Fourth Gospel. However, since the term ἔργον also has a clear ethical meaning, it seems that even God's and Jesus' miraculous actions can take such a meaning in the understanding of the implied reader.

The term ἔργον can express the ethical dimension of the relations between the Father and the Son, as well as between the Son and the world. This dimension can only be understood against the background of the family imagery network of the Fourth Gospel.

The work of the Father consists in expanding his family and including all of the world in it. This work is done by the Son in obedience to the Father. Everyone who believes in the Son becomes a member of the Father's divine family.

The believers will do the same or even greater works in comparison to Jesus' works. Since Jesus' works aim at saving the world, they are an expression of his Father's love to the world. In an analogous way the work of the believers is also to practice love in their relations to one another and even to the world, following the example of Jesus.

The seven semeia-narratives are concrete examples of Jesus' loving care for the people of the world, as well as for those who already believe in him. In this sense they serve as models for the loving care his believers shall show to the world, as well as to one another.

The semeia-narratives also demonstrate on both a symbolic and a narrative level the end of the mosaic ethic and its replacement by the new commandment of love. The decision of Jesus' audience to believe or not to believe in him bears corresponding ethical consequences.

Finally, the ethical character of the receivers or the eyewitnesses of Jesus' σημεῖα, and especially their deep devotion to Jesus, could (independently of the serious consequences they may face due to this devotion) be functioning as a model for the ideal ethical character of his post-Easter believers.