Blindness by José Saramago relates the woes of some ten and more characters stricken with the inexplicable glaring light that ironically obscures\(^1\) their vision. Though an atheist, Saramago weaves arguably biblical allusions throughout the narrative, and his depiction of the Doctor’s Wife is overtly messianic, resulting in a demonstrable allegory of evangelical Christianity.

The first biblical semblance reveals itself when the first blind man is stricken, but no external inspection would reveal anything wrong with his eyes. The omniscient narrator describes how “the man’s eyes seem healthy, the iris looks bright, luminous, the sclera white, as compact as porcelain” (Saramago 2), and through this narrator Saramago crafts a parallel to Matthew’s diatribe “so you also outwardly appear righteous to others, but within you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness” (The Bible, Matthew 23:28). Later the first blind man also plays the role of the first people of creation. Just as Adam and Eve doomed all others to pain and toil (Genesis 3:16-23), so too did the first blind man doom the doctor, the other patients, and eventually the whole populace to blindness.

As the literal blindness is clearly a metaphor for spiritual blindness, it follows that there would be a seeing one in the story, just as the apostles record the blameless Jesus Christ in the Bible. In analyzing Blindness, I find myself grappling with two interpretations of the doctor’s wife: either she embodies the Christian church commenced in the Book of Acts, or she represents Jesus Himself.

The Church interpretation views the doctor’s wife as a symbol of an imperfect, yet well-intentioned church attempting to survive persecution in the form of the incarceration of the blind. Hosea writes “Come, let us return to the Lord; for he has torn us, that he may heal us” (Hosea 6:1), and this is reflected and reversed as a mirror in how first the patients went to the doctor to be healed, but were instead afflicted with

\(^{1}\) Obscure comes from the Latin *obscurus*, meaning dark
blindness after their encounter. If the doctor does represent the Good Physician Jesus as God, then a biblical extrapolation shows that the bride of Christ is the church (Ephesians 5:25). This analogy plays out in how the wife takes on responsibility while the husband is incapacitated (possibly an atheistic sneer by Saramago), just as how the church works on earth while God waits in heaven.

A stronger proposition is the Jesus interpretation, as there is more support for the perspective that the doctor’s wife is Saramago’s allegorical picture of the Messiah. This understanding relies on the fact that she is the sole person who sees, metaphorically discerning the truth; in addition, she guides a small group of people who bear likeness to the original disciples of the Christ. As the disciples were still fallible (unlike Jesus), so too are the doctor’s wife’s companions blind. Both groups, however, benefit from the guidance of their respective saviors. I support this interpretation by citing the doctor’s wife’s initial unwillingness to share her miraculous secret with others. In the Gospel of Mark, we witness multiple attributions of miracles to Jesus. One account holds that Jesus healed a leper and instructed him, “See that you say nothing to anyone” (Mark 1:44). The reason for this was that Jesus knew he would be swarmed by civilians hoping for help (Mark 1:45) which is the exact same reason the doctor’s wife did not want to share her secret vision. In the second act, after her companions know of her vision, the doctor’s wife takes their garments to be cleaned in the rain (Saramago 271-273). All of mankind traipses in filth because of their blindness, their culpability and inadequacy, just as all “fall short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23). Paralleled to Jesus’ washing of his disciples’ feet (John 13:5), the doctor’s wife washes the shoes of the worldly muck. Not only does she serve by cleansing, but she many times demonstrates her humility by getting food for her fellow travelers (Saramago 235). The prophet Isaiah’s words “Even youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall fall exhausted” lend themselves to the weakness of the traveling group who scarce can wake from their stone-dream sleep (Saramago 235), but like Jesus taught, “I am the bread of life;
whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst,” (John 6:35), the doctor’s wife nourishes her own crew of followers.

While a non-religious perspective is tenable, these few of the numerous examples in José Saramago’s acclaimed novel support conclusively the allegorical interpretation of *Blindness*. 