

A social analysis of 1 John, contributing to the understanding of groups in the Johannine Corpus

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Thesis accepted in fulfillment of the requirements for the degree
Doctor of Philosophy in New Testament at the North-West
University

Promoter: Prof FP Viljoen

Graduation: October 2023

Student number: 23841419

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ABSTRACT

During the time of the early church, there was much syncretism of religious thought in Asia Minor given the level of intellectual activity in those cities. A crisis arose in John's group because of individuals who advocated a different understanding of Christ and the nature of Christianity. The author of 1 John tries imaginatively bond his readers to and involve them in a specific kind of family life. He binds people together for collective action and to distinguish them from other groups. This research project aims to demonstrate that a socio-rhetorical analysis on 1 John makes a unique contribution to the understanding of groups in the Johannine Corpus. The thesis focuses on (1) the collective binding action and the different groups seen in this Johannine group, and (2) applies social scientific models to 1 John, or better said, reads it through social scientific lenses to gain a new perspective on the groups in this circle. The result is an investigation into the relationship between identity and behavioural norms. During the time of the writing of 1 John, identity was threatened, and boundaries were renegotiated. The approach put forward in this thesis helps to form a better understanding of the interrelationships, values and symbols that characterize the Letter.

Key Words

Norms, Group, In-group, Out-group, Categorization, Prototype, Social identity theory, Stereotyping, Identity, Embodiment.

To my husband and mom, it would have been impossible to finish my studies without your unwavering support over the years. You never stopped believing. Love you always.

Chapter 1	INTRODUCTION	8
1.1.	Background and problem statement	8
1.1.1.	Background	8
1.1.2.	Problem statement	12
1.2.	Research question	12
1.3.	Aim and objectives	13
1.4.	Objectives	14
1.5.	Central theoretical argument	15
1.6.	Proposed layout of the study	15
1.6.1.	Chapter 2: Methodology	15
1.6.2.	Chapter 3: Tradition	15
1.6.3.	Chapter 4: Identity	16
1.6.4.	Chapter 5: Mission	16
1.6.5.	Chapter 6: Ethos	16
1.6.6.	Chapter 7: Groups in 1 John	16
1.6.7.	Chapter 8: Conclusion	17
1.7.	Conclusion	17
Chapter 2	METHODOLOGY AND APPROACHES	18
2.1.	Introduction	18
2.2.	Cognitive psychology and 1 John	19
2.3.	Socio-rhetorical analysis to understand the social system in 1 John	22
2.4.	Understanding the multi-dimensional approach	26
2.4.1.	Douglas's grid and group model	27
2.4.2.	Social identity model	34
2.5.	Three major components of social identity theory	38
2.5.1.	Categorization through <i>sententiae</i> and stereotyping	38
2.5.2.	Identification through prototypes	41

4.1.	Introduction to identity	109
4.2.	Understanding identity	112
4.2.1.	Conceptualizing identity in ancient times	113
4.2.2.	Self-discovery in 1 John	114
4.2.3.	Categorization and stereotyping influencing identity in 1 John	116
4.2.4.	Social identity as social glue	118
4.3.	In-group understanding	120
4.3.1.	The author shaping identity with the writing style	124
4.3.2.	“Otherness” in the construction of Johannine identity	126
4.3.3.	Defining the group identity through community	128
4.3.4.	From community to group	132
4.3.5.	Group loyalty	134
4.3.6.	Worldview shaping identity in 1 John	136
4.4.	Out-group boundaries	141
4.4.1.	Conclusion on deviants and marginal groups and the formation of the identity of a group	143
4.4.2.	Rhetoric to understand the out-group identity	144
4.5.	Conclusion	147
Chapter 5	MISSION as a third social marker	150
5.1.	Walking like Jesus	152
5.2.	Principles/norms as bridge between values and actions in the group	157
5.3.	From norms to mission	159
5.3.1.	Actions as expression of the person	160
5.3.2.	Symbolic actions – confirming and projecting	161
5.4.	The role of images and lived experiences in the group	164
5.4.1.	Images from Chapter 1 – Seen, heard, touched and fellowship	164
5.4.2.	Images from Chapter 2 – The use of metaphors	165
5.4.3.	Images from Chapter 5 – The life of Jesus	165
5.5.	The author’s use of <i>alētheia</i> in 1 John	168
5.6.	<i>Koinōnia</i> as shared view of God and life	169
5.7.	Spirituality as lived experience in the group	171

5.8.	Symbolic actions as the world of remembrance in 1 John	175
5.9.	Love as ethic shaping the group mission	176
5.10.	Understanding sin to understand mission in 1 John	180
5.10.1.	Jesus is the paraclete (1 Jn 2:1)	182
5.10.2.	Jesus is the atoning sacrifice (1 Jn 2:2)	183
5.11.	The understanding of <i>Kosmos</i> for the mission of the group	184
5.12.	Conclusion	191

Chapter 6 ETHOS as marker **193**

6.1.	Ethos and ethics	194
6.2.	The influence of oral tradition on group ethos	197
6.3.	Ethics language in 1 John	200
6.4.	Differences between two distinctive groups regarding ethics	206
6.5.	Imitation's role in group ethos	207
6.6.	The role of the antichrist in group understanding	211
6.7.	Tradition further explored as ethos	214
6.8.	Dualism as ethics marker	219
6.9.	The practical life of the in-group and ethos	220
6.10.	Conclusion	223

Chapter 7 GROUPS IN 1 JOHN **227**

7.1.	The primary rhetorical mode of the text and the social situation in which it was written	228
7.1.1.	Brown	230
7.1.2.	Lieu	231
7.2.	Antithetical remarks creating an alternative social reality for groups	233
7.3.	Johannine distinctiveness and intergroup comparison	237

7.4.	Dualism to better understand contrasting patterns in groups	238
7.5.	<i>Koinonia</i> – what is shared, to better understand the group	241
7.6.	Understanding loyalty and association with the function of addressees	241
7.6.1.	The “us” group (author)	244
7.6.2.	What is true of “us” must be true of “you” also (1 Jn 1:5–10)	245
7.6.3.	The “you” as group in between	246
7.7.	Familial images in 1 John and their influence on group understanding	249
7.7.1.	Patriarchal Father figure	254
7.7.2.	Familial associations	254
7.7.3.	Archetypal force	254
7.7.4.	Tightening of group adherence	254
7.7.5.	Son of God imitation – deliberative rhetoric	254
7.7.6.	Antithetical parallelisms	255
7.8.	Looking closer to understand the opponents	255
7.8.1.	Different views on the opponents	256
7.8.2.	Brown and Lieu’s understanding of the opponents	263
7.8.3.	Rhetorical technique of amplification of opponents	271
7.8.4.	Polemical and non-polemical reading to better understand the opponents	274
7.8.5.	Two antichrist groups visible in the out-group	276
7.9.	Distinguishing the in-group	278
7.9.1.	The social categorization process of the in-group in 1 John	280
7.10.	Conclusion	282
Chapter 8	A conclusion of the social analysis of groups in 1 John	285
8.1.	Final remarks on the insights derived from the different markers in this study	286
8.2.	Embodiment as final binder in Johannine group understanding then and now	292
8.3.	Where I position my study in the New Testament field	296
8.4.	Relevance of this study	297
8.5.	Future studies	299
	Reference List	300

CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background and problem statement

1.1.1. Background

This study follows closely on the heels of the Covid-19 pandemic. Over a brief span of time, much around us has changed – the way we move, the way we socialize, and even the way in which we “do church”. But one thing remains: we all need a community, we all long to still belong. During this period, it has become ever clearer that the communities of which we form part, shape our being. In Africa we have the term “Ubuntu”, the meaning of which can be translated as “I am because we are”. This shows the importance of a group, because as an individual, I understand better who I am through the identity of a group. For this reason, it is so important to ask the question: How do we understand the formation of groups and our belonging? This question pertains to ancient times as the focus of this study, but also to our present day. Individuals are generally motivated to identify with groups because it gives them a sense of security, belonging, or meaning. A social identity is a psychological sense of *us*, of belonging to a group. This has a cognitive dimension that relates to ideas and concepts according to which people categorize themselves as group members. Social identities are often expressed as habits or practices.

Understanding the social, cultural, and historical setting of the New Testament is an essential part of any exegete’s toolbox. It also helps us to better understand the group. However, a social identity approach does not substitute for earlier forms of exegesis. Rather, it enhances and supplements them to reach a fuller perspective on social interaction and social construction in the work done on the Johannine group.

In recent years, studies have started to turn to scientific explanations of human thought and behaviour to understand the cognitive processes¹ behind the creation and use of biblical texts, including the biblical concepts of the divine, rituals of the first Christ-believers, and the social interactions that influenced the formation and growth of their communities (Czachesz,

¹ In this study, I situate those efforts within the larger framework of the changing humanities, and the increased interest among humanistic scholars and social scientists in drawing on the growing body of knowledge on the cognitive and evolutionary roots of human thinking and behaviour. I also suggest how cognitive historiography can be helpful in shedding new light on issues discussed by New Testament scholars.

2017:62–87). As István Czachesz (2017:73-94) has pointed out, the cognitive approach to biblical studies is not actually a new method at all, but “the cognitive turn has the potential of shedding new light on many, if not all, traditional questions of the methodology of biblical interpretation”.

Cognitive studies affect all disciplines that reflect the connection between the mind–brain and human behaviour. This study argues that cognitive science can provide us with theories, frameworks and tools that can contribute to historical and cultural analyses. The aim is to show how the 1 John interfaces with human cognition to affect behaviour in specific contexts. Memory has been researched in the fields of neurology, neurobiology, psychology, history, literature, philosophy, political science, law, folklore, and religion. Techniques of memorization have been carefully studied and practised. A specialized area of research is collective memory, which is the notion that people remember together with other people and that memory is constructed in, by and for a social group. Collective memory in relation to smaller groups is sometimes called social memory, whereas in relation to whole cultures, it tends to be called cultural memory. Both types of collective memory include memory sites such as works of art, ritual acts, symbols, celebrations, memorials, libraries, writings and much more, all of which reinforce the collective identity of a people. The main interest of this study is collective memory and the historical question on what the 1 John meant for the original group audience?

The New Testament writings gives a complex interpretation of society and gospel, of context and *kerygma* (the proclamation of faith). We cannot hope to understand without an appropriate methodology to examine the social side.

Every society faces the problem of ensuring that its values and beliefs are transmitted from one generation to the next. This transmission occurs through socialization, which refers to the ways in which each new generation is taught to live the ethos of the group to which they belong or with which they identify². “Like memory, tradition is refracted through the contemporary social realities of the communities in which it is enacted, such that it comes in important respects to reflect, even to signify those realities” (Kirk, 2010:62). In oral societies,

² Memories help us make sense of the world we live in; and memory work is embedded in complex class, gender and power relations that determine what is remembered (or forgotten), by whom, and for what end (Assmann, 2008).

the carrier of traditions is memory³. In 1 John, memory is used as a "database", as can be seen from the opening words of the letter:

1:1 Ὁ ἦν ἀπ' ἀρχῆς, ὁ **ἀκηκόαμεν**, ὁ ἐωράκαμεν τοῖς ὀφθαλμοῖς **ἡμῶν**, ὁ ἐθεασάμεθα καὶ αἱ χεῖρες **ἡμῶν** ἐψηλάφησαν, περὶ τοῦ Λόγου τῆς ζωῆς,

1:2 καὶ ἡ ζωὴ ἐφανερώθη, καὶ **ἐωράκαμεν** καὶ **μαρτυροῦμεν** καὶ **ἀπαγγέλλομεν ὑμῖν** τὴν ζωὴν τὴν αἰώνιον, ἥτις ἦν πρὸς τὸν Πατέρα καὶ ἐφανερώθη **ἡμῖν**,

1:3 ὁ **ἐωράκαμεν** καὶ **ἀκηκόαμεν**, **ἀπαγγέλλομεν** καὶ **ὑμῖν**, ἵνα καὶ ὑμεῖς κοινωνίαν ἔχητε μεθ' ἡμῶν. καὶ ἡ κοινωνία δὲ ἡ ἡμετέρα μετὰ τοῦ Πατρὸς καὶ μετὰ τοῦ Υἱοῦ αὐτοῦ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ.

The author⁴ takes his addressees back four times to what 'they' saw (1:1–3), two times when they focus on what they heard (1:1, 3) and 2 times when he recalls what was proclaimed (1:2–3). This dependence on the group's memory is a method the author uses to show them that the tradition of which they are part is reliable and trustworthy. Halbwachs (1992a:248) made it quite explicit that in this course, memory does not preserve the past as such or as it was, but parts that have been put into perspective. When recalled, these parts are re-found, but constructed anew according to the needs of those who recall it.

The use of verbs in this first part of the letter helps the group to see that Jesus is visible in the past but it also gives meaning to his place in the group. Halbwachs (1941;1990;1992a)⁵ shows us that memory depends on socialization and communication. Memory enables us to live in groups and communities, and living in groups and communities in turn enables us

3 Insights from memory studies have been used in biblical scholarship for some decades, including the concept of collective memory, which was originally proposed by Maurice Halbwachs. More recently, biblical scholars discussed so-called "flashbulb memories" in the context of the gospel tradition. A more nuanced engagement with the current state of memory studies have yielded new understandings of the transmission and performance of sayings and miracle stories, as well as the process of literary composition and production in the cultural context of ancient literacy (Czachesz 2017: 62–87).

4 The names "author" and "the Elder" will be used throughout this essay to refer, respectively, to the authors of 1 John.

5 Many scholars consider Halbwachs (1877- 1945) foundational to the study of memories said to be shared, social, cultural, or collective. Halbwachs argued that individual memories are situated in a collective context. Disruptions of community life, such as migration or conflict, disrupt memories. Although it considers individual memories rather than collective memory. Halbwachs argued that all memory is collective, grounded in the life of the community. Transformations of the community result in transformations of memory. This insight raises fundamental questions that occupy scholars of collective memory: the dynamics of collective memory as social circumstances change, and the relationship between collective memory and social power. Important insights for this study.

to build memory. The author in 1 John feels that the opponents have lost the memories connected with the original identity of the in-group, which causes an identity crisis in the group (1:6; 2:9–11, 22):

1:6 Ἐὰν εἴπωμεν ὅτι κοινωνίαν ἔχομεν μετ' αὐτοῦ καὶ ἐν τῷ σκότει περιπατοῦμεν, ψευδόμεθα καὶ οὐ ποιοῦμεν τὴν ἀλήθειαν·

2:9 Ὁ λέγων ἐν τῷ φωτὶ εἶναι καὶ τὸν ἀδελφὸν αὐτοῦ μισῶν ἐν τῇ σκοτίᾳ ἐστὶν ἕως ἄρτι. **10** ὁ ἀγαπῶν τὸν ἀδελφὸν αὐτοῦ ἐν τῷ φωτὶ μένει καὶ σκάνδαλον ἐν αὐτῷ οὐκ ἔστιν· **11** ὁ δὲ μισῶν τὸν ἀδελφὸν αὐτοῦ ἐν τῇ σκοτίᾳ ἐστὶν καὶ ἐν τῇ σκοτίᾳ περιπατεῖ καὶ οὐκ οἶδεν ποῦ ὑπάγει, ὅτι ἡ σκοτία ἐτύφλωσεν τοὺς ὀφθαλμοὺς αὐτοῦ.

2:22 Τίς ἐστὶν ὁ ψεύστης εἰ μὴ ὁ ἀρνούμενος ὅτι Ἰησοῦς οὐκ ἔστιν ὁ χριστός; οὗτός ἐστιν ὁ ἀντίχριστος, ὁ ἀρνούμενος τὸν πατέρα καὶ τὸν υἱόν.

These verses show how the loss of memory creates split in the group. An important remark about in-group and out-group formation is that forgetting can also emerge as a significant component in the creation of new identities. When taking this closer look at the group, it becomes evident that it is not only important to know what the shared knowledge and beliefs are; the focus should also be on understanding what lies behind the knowledge and beliefs transmitted in groups. This knowledge and beliefs that lie behind the text in 1 John is of interest in this study. It shows how culture influences communication.

Robbin's socio-rhetorical approach uses rhetorical analysis and interpretation based on both oral and literary dynamics in social, cultural, and religious contexts of interaction during the first century CE to interpret New Testament literature (Robbins, 2009:3). This socio-rhetorical discipline with the focus on social identity theory is developed specifically to comprehend the social dimensions of the human experience in ancient texts. This aspect is important for this study. According to Tannehill (1997:132), the need for this integration of methodologies is clear from a literary perspective: ancient texts can be read with understanding only if the reader has access to the extra text – a complex body of knowledge consisting of language codes, literary conventions, social codes, and cultural scripts. The socio-rhetorical approach helps with the interpretation of the social, cultural, and religious contexts of interaction in 1 John. The author gives a voice to traditions and norms that are present in the behaviour of the group. This shows that the nature of what is mutually shared shapes the character of the group (Van der Merwe, 2001:131–148).

This research project aims to demonstrate that a socio-rhetorical analysis of 1 John can contribute to our understanding of groups in the Johannine Corpus. In the early church, there was much syncretism of religious thought in Asia Minor because of the level of intellectual activity of the cities there. A crisis arose in John's circle because of individuals who advocated a different understanding of Christ and the nature of Christianity. The author of the first letter tries to get his readers imaginatively bonded to and involved in a specific kind of family life. He binds people together for collective action and to distinguish them from other groups. As such, this thesis examines (1) the collective binding action and the different groups seen within this Johannine group, and (2) by applying a social scientific model to 1 John, or better said, by reading it through social scientific lenses, a new perspective on the groups within this circle.

Identity was threatened and boundaries were renegotiated, and the social identity theory is used to distinguish between these boundaries and the groups. This approach helps to form a better understanding of the interrelationships, values and symbols that characterize the Epistle.

1.1.2. Problem statement

The problem to be addressed is how one should distinguish different groups and their identity in 1 John. This will shed new light on the meaning of the groups visible in 1 John. In this endeavour, an investigation into the relationship between identity and behavioural norms in the group becomes important. A better understanding of the social world of 1 John will offer a better understanding of the groups visible in the bigger Johannine group.

1.2. Research question

In an effort to explore these social boundaries, the main research question is:

How could a closer look at the distinctive behaviours and role players in 1 John through the lens of the multi-dimensional approach aid our understanding of groups in the first letter?

The application of social-scientific models offers NT studies heuristic tools that uncover layers of understanding of the text. As such, the following sub questions guide the inquiry:

- Can a better understanding of the historical situation of the recipients of 1 John offer a better understanding of the groups visible in the bigger Johannine group?
- How does the author of 1 John tell the story to form boundaries and to re-establish the importance of tradition for identity understanding?
- In which way did the groups in 1 John develop their own symbols, their own language, and their own stories to reinforce their identity?

The text operates as a mirror to its context, precisely because the text is a product of its context (Robbins, 1996a:34).

1.3. Aim and objectives

This study hopes to contribute to the field of New Testament studies, specifically 1 John and the wider groups in this circle. Among other things, the aim of this study is to analyse the social concepts of identity, tradition, mission, and ethos to try to understand the groups and their dynamics as they are portrayed in 1 John⁶. Using the multi-dimensional approach and the social identity theory model, this study's focus is on a new understanding of the worldview of this group. When we belong to a group, we are likely to derive our sense of identity, at least in part, from that group. Social identity, according to Tajfel (1981:144), has three major components: categorization, identification, and comparison.

- The first component, categorization, is the process of putting people into categories.
- The second component, identification, is the process by which we associate with certain groups.
- The third component, comparison, is the process by which we compare our groups with other groups, creating a favourable bias toward the group to which we belong.

These components determine the extent to which people identify with a particular social group, and this in turn determines their inclination to behave in terms of their group

6 Many students find it difficult to understand the difference between aim and objectives. In the academic context there is a clear distinction between these terms. Aim = What you hope to achieve. Objective = the action(s) you will take to achieve the aim. So, for this study the aim was to analyse the social concepts of identity, tradition, mission, and ethos to try to understand the groups and their dynamics in 1 John. The objective of this study was the multi-dimensional approach with the main focus on socio-rhetorical analysis and SIT, for organizing and categorizing data as well as making connections between data to form a understanding of the Johannine group. The aim refers to the researchers intentions or desired outcome, and the objective is a more specific goal and steps in this process.

membership. Tajfel insisted that “social groups are not ‘things’; they are processes” (Tajfel, 1982:485). Social structure is thus analogous to the structure of language: the rules and resources of a language are simultaneously drawn upon and reproduced in the process of speaking or writing. This theoretical focus on social life as a process in time, and on the production, reproduction and transformation that occur over time, is essential for our understanding of all social relations and structures. It is especially crucial for the study of a group undergoing rapid change and development as in 1 John. Together these four concepts (identity, mission, tradition, ethos), highlighted by the components of social identity theory, form the different chapters in my study.

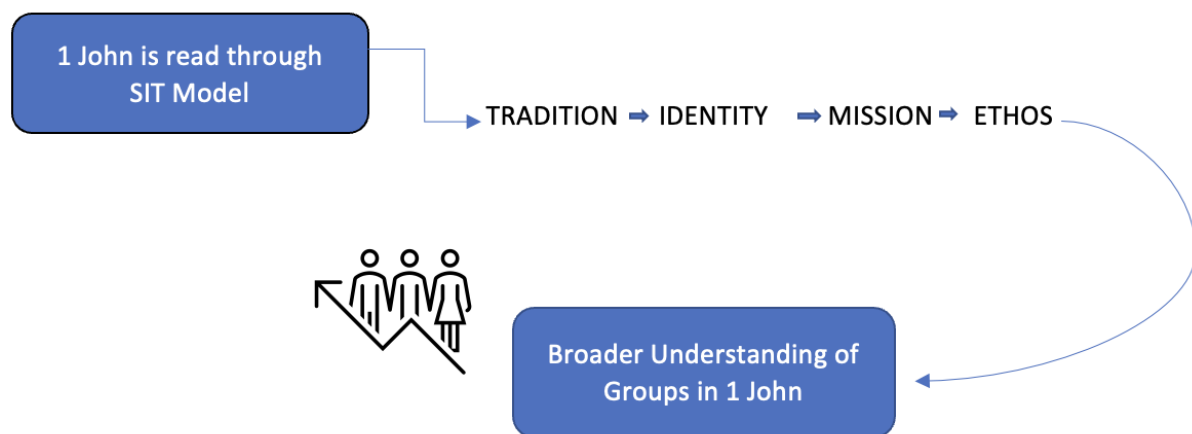


Figure 1-1: The four markers as boundary shapers for the group.

1.4. Objectives

The primary objective of this research project is to reach a better formulation of the social world of the 1 John group. Such a deeper understanding depends on a better understanding of the identity, tradition, mission, and ethos visible in this group. Based on social identity theory, these four concepts form the heart of this study. The secondary objectives that flow from this are:

- To describe the socio-rhetorical approach to 1 John with the help of social identity theory;
- To apply TRADITION as a sociological group marker in 1 John;
- To apply IDENTITY as a sociological group marker in 1 John;
- To apply the group’s MISSION as a sociological marker in 1 John;
- To apply ETHOS as a language and behavioural social marker in 1 John; and
- To gain an understanding of the situation and strategy of groups in 1 John.

1.5. Central theoretical argument

Social identities give people a sense of place in the world. It shows who they are, what they should do and how they relate to others. The “sense of us” of a group is always a constructed identity (Esler, 2000a:145–184). This study aims to show that social memory plays a crucial role in the cohesion and self-understanding of groups. The focus of the study is on the cohesion and identity of the group. This is a matter of collective imagining (social memory). It is a matter of becoming and being constructed through the memory for the group. Narrative worlds are always constructed from contextual worlds, symbolic universes, and symbolic forms. We are thus studying “worlds within worlds”. The socio-rhetorical analysis of these four concepts (identity – tradition – mission - ethos) forms the basis for understanding the groups in 1 John. Implicit to this study is the suggestion that communities develop their own symbols, their own language, and their own stories to reinforce their identity. This idea grows and becomes more visible in the chapters that follow.

1.6. Proposed layout of the study

1.6.1. Chapter 2: Methodology

This chapter looks closer at the relevant social-scientific practices. Certain approaches are followed throughout the study to show that the text is a social product rooted in a social system. The social identity theory model is used to look closer at the interrelationships, values and symbols that characterized the early 1 John group process. Socio-rhetorical analysis is also applied as part of this process, giving the study a multi-dimensional approach that can yield numerous new insights into the text of 1 John. This approach can help us organize and categorize the group data and make connections between the data.

1.6.2. Chapter 3: Tradition

A group's tradition is the means by which it affirms and celebrate what is important about its origins and about its past. For Berger, religion is the human enterprise by which a sacred cosmos is established (Berger, 1969:25). Chapter 3 asks how this sacred cosmos was shaped, formed, and transferred in the 1 John group.

1.6.3. Chapter 4: Identity

Tradition is important for the formation of the identity of the group. In group-orientated societies, individuals receive their identity from the group. Identity is discovered in relation to fellow group members by sharing their worldview. Chapter 4 studies the worldview and understanding of the group to establish how the entire text functions as an attempt to forge a “sense of us” to bring together the author and the addressees (Hogg, 2000).

1.6.4. Chapter 5: Mission

Chapter 5 takes a closer look at the group’s understanding of God and love, to better understand the words and deeds that give expression to values or principles. It forms part of the continuum of action formation. For this chapter on mission, deeds and words are important. A lived experience becomes a shared experience and a shared experience a lived experience. That is what the Author tries to communicate to the group.

1.6.5. Chapter 6: Ethos

Ethos is understood as the language and behaviour that flow forth from a missionary understanding of identity. Every society faces the problem of ensuring that its values and meanings are transmitted from one generation to the next, in other words the ways in which each new generation is taught to live the ethos of the group. In 1 John we only find remarks on ethics, not a developed ethics system. Chapter 6 focuses on these remarks and what they illustrate. In a functional sense, the aim of ethos is to express and illustrate the identity of a particular group (Van der Merwe, 2008:360), outlining inclusive and exclusive behaviour. The question is how this cognitive identity is translated into ethics identity in the group.

1.6.6. Chapter 7: Groups in 1 John

Several years ago, Malina (2001:214) suggested that a useful way to analyse ancient letters with a lack of information about recipients of the communication is to set the taxonomy of social groups. For this chapter, it is important to understand how groups distinguish themselves from other groups: insiders and outsiders. This chapter explores the role group processes play in the Johannine identity forming situation. The text operates as a mirror to

its context, precisely because the text is a product of its context (Robbins, 1996a:34). This is done to better understand the 1 John group.

1.6.7. Chapter 8: Conclusion

In Chapter 8 the contemporary significance of this group study is discussed. This study shows how the author aimed to create a group climate that would increase cognitive certainty and thereby commitment to the group. Cognitive science presents a radical challenge: it calls upon us to situate our work within the larger framework of the changing humanities and of interdisciplinary efforts to understand the cognitive and evolutionary roots of human religiosity. Chapter 8 presents the study's conclusion on this effort. Final remarks are also made on the study of group identity and behaviour in 1 John.

1.7. Conclusion

Socio-Rhetorical analysis together with social identity theory draws several temporary boundaries around a text for the purpose of close examination from one point of view at a time. This approach presupposes that what is discovered in one bounded area will be put into dialog with discoveries in other bounded areas. This process, in Robbins' words, "can be compared to piecing together patterned squares, which have been knitted, crocheted or hand-sewn separately" (Robbins, 1996:20). Only when the squares are placed in right relation to each other does the overall design emerge. Similarly, when the results of a variety of approaches to studying a text are compared and related, a more complete and aesthetically pleasing interpretation of the text emerges. This is also true for 1 John and the understanding of groups in this Johannine world.

CHAPTER 2 METHODOLOGY AND APPROACHES

2.1. Introduction

The cognitive social sciences can be defined as disciplines and research programmes that aim to integrate the social sciences (e.g., sociology, anthropology, political science, and economics) with the cognitive sciences (e.g., cognitive psychology, cognitive neuroscience, and cognitive science). Mark Turner (2001) traces the origin of human choices to conceptual blending — a subconscious cognitive process that affects how people make sense of complex environments. This is relevant to the schismatic circumstances in the First Epistle of John. Turner's (2001) work demonstrates the substantial benefits that emerge from integrating cognitive scientific principles into social scientific practice. A social identity is a psychological sense of *us*, of belonging to a group. This has a cognitive dimension that relates to the ideas and concepts through which people categorize themselves as group members. Social identities are often embedded in several habits or practices. For this study, the social dynamics of the groups reflected in 1 John is studied to better understand the identity of the group from this perspective. I argue that a closer look at four social concepts: tradition, identity, ethos, and mission – through the social identity theory lens will show the collective memory that shaped the Johannine group identity.

It is important to note that this social perspective on 1 John is not a projection of modern identity on the biblical text that stands at odds with the normal methods and results of biblical exegesis. Rather, I would argue that this study opens dimensions of the exegesis that previously remained obscure. This work is dependent on a thorough understanding of the text itself, so it builds on the results of lexicographical, grammatical and discourse analysis⁷. Moreover, this cognitive social-scientific approach is dependent on understanding the text in its historical and cultural context, so it integrates results from historical and anthropological studies of the Johannine group culture. This analysis shows how the letter functioned as a tool for identity group formation to shape the group's socio-religious identity.

⁷ See, for instance, Du Toit (2009:107-152).

2.2. Cognitive psychology and 1 John

The cognitive social sciences are, broadly speaking, the sciences of the mind. It asks how our minds process and structure sensory input, memories, thoughts, and attitudes? How does the mind relate to the body and to the social and cultural context? How is culture, society and group dynamics formed by our cognitive setups and vice versa? These are some of the questions discussed in the broad field of the cognitive social sciences. The cognitive sciences are a multi-disciplinary network of sciences, including for instance neuroscience, philosophy, linguistics, and social psychology.

However, this study focuses mainly on the different branches of cognitive psychology and the sciences that study the social and cultural consequences of the character of our minds, such as social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), the Douglas grid and group model (1970:50), and socio-rhetorical analysis (Robbins, 2009:3).

At first glance, it may seem problematic that a historical study uses a science that relies on experimentation as its most important practical method. A historian cannot do experiments on dead subjects. However, this study works in analogy with the methods of cognitive anthropology. As a historian, I had to carry out a “field study”. In other words, I conducted a hermeneutical reading of texts, but used explanations and analytical categories that are informed by results from the cognitive sciences in a heuristic manner⁸.

There are several reasons for using the cognitive social sciences. First, this study is a study of the mental constructs governing the experience of identity and behaviour in the group climate of 1 John. Cognitive science is a research paradigm that has within its various subdisciplines (important for this study specifically social identity theory) analysed just about the whole range of human experience. These sciences can therefore help us piece together the interaction between culture, group dynamics, narratives, spirituality, and beliefs about what causes humans to act into a coherent account of how identity relates to behavioural norms. The constructs we find in the 1 John texts can be understood with reference to the properties of the human mind – a mind that interacts with a social and cultural world. This

⁸ I agree with Esler (2000); Horell (2000); Theissen (2007:15-19) that psychology and social sciences must be used as “hermeneutical” or “heuristic” tools in relation to historical texts.

enables the historian to discuss the relationship between texts, experience, and social reality in a more qualified manner.

Secondly, this study asks how we can understand the constructs of identity among subjects from the past. Some historians think that we can understand the experience of subjects from other epochs and cultures through empathetic studies of textual artifacts. Other historians deny the possibility of cross-cultural artifacts⁹. The cognitive social sciences can help us find a way forward in this debate.

Biblical scholars have gained a greater acceptance of social approaches in recent years¹⁰. However, we can never know beforehand whether a certain model is applicable in a context. The acceptance of these approaches should come from their success in shedding new credible light on the meaning of the text. This approach presupposes that what is discovered in one bounded area will be put into dialog with discoveries in other bounded areas.

Cognitive psychology asks very basic questions about the human mind: How do we categorize? How do we understand intentionality? How do we think in narratives? How do we construct analogies and metaphors? What is the definition of language and cognition? Such questions bring us very close to the linguistic expressions of the 1 John text and helps us to discuss the text and cognitive processes, which in turn are the fruits of interaction with the material, social and cultural world of the Johannine group (Roitto, 2011:11).

Insights from socio-cognitive approaches are important to this study too. Samuel Byrskog and Philip Esler have used cognitive research on memory transmission in groups to understand how Jesus was remembered in the group (Byrskog, 2008; Esler, 2003).

The study also takes a closer look at Douglas's grid and group¹¹ model as cultural theory to analyse a society's rules, structures, and leadership because of the important role it seems to play for the author who wants to shape the identity of the group.

9 Prominent works in the field are e.g., Ellens and Rollins (2004); Kille and Rollins (2007); Theissen (1983; 2007).

10 Esler (2000a); Horrell (2005); Malina (2001); Rohrbaugh (1996) helped to shape my view of social scientific exegesis.

11 Cf. the work of the context group, inter alia, Malina, Neyrey, and others.

Social identity theory is perhaps the most important theory in this study because it analyses the connections between social reality and New Testament texts (Esler, 1994). Social identity theory also helps to analyse the negative aspects of the opponents of the relevant group, which enhances the self-image of the in-group. The author of 1 John obviously thinks that being a Christ-follower (the identity of the in-group) implies a certain lifestyle (behavioural norms). In a situation where we have no record of the immediate reception of the text, we can only speculate as to the extent to which 1 John reflects shared cognition. Social identity theory helps us give a voice to the traditions and norms that form identity in the Johannine group. This identity is visible in the text when the group formation in 1 John is studied. By means of inductive study, we can gain some insight into John's group.

While models run the risk of introducing anachronism, they also supply controls to a study. That is why one specific model is not applied throughout all the chapters in this study. Rather, each model brings important insights that offer us a better understanding of the text. 1 John presupposes a particular pastoral situation. The letter was written to an actual church of believers united around a common confession of faith in Christ¹². This confession establishes the group being studied. The text supplies these answers, not the model (Brown, 1971:18–20). The boundaries of this group and the relationship between insiders and outsiders are explored by reflecting on tradition, identity, ethos, and mission.

We share many cognitive features with the first readers of 1 John since they were, just like we are, humans with the same cognitive features. If we use knowledge about these cognitive capacities to make better assumptions about how they probably organized their experience cognitively, we can to some extent bridge the divide of time and culture and better understand their culturally unique construction of identity and behavioural norms in the Johannine group.

12 The letter was not written in a vacuum, but rather to a specific group of second or third generation Asiatic churches faced with doctrinal and moral conflicts. Brown (1982:69-115) argues that the letters were written by a later leader in the Johannine community. Judith Lieu (2008: 2-9) adopts a polar-opposite position and emphasizes both the anonymous quality of these letters and their differences in purpose and form from one another. She recognizes that they have certain qualities in common, and so can be gathered into a group under the label "Johannine" but emphasizes their uniqueness from one another and their anonymity. Judith Lieu is very helpfully in emphasizing authorship in that all the documents in the Johannine tradition mask the identity of their authors. Lieu (2008: 9) refers to "the chosen anonymity of the letters" as "a deliberate technique in the Johannine literature".

2.3. Socio-rhetorical analysis to understand the social system in 1 John

The Christian rhetoric of the New Testament reflected much of the dominant rhetorical practice of the Greco-Roman world, although it did not rely on the same values and hierarchy of values in the invention of its arguments. There is debate about the extent to which Greco-Roman rhetorical theory influenced the epistolary genre in antiquity. This debate is naturally important for discerning the relationship between rhetoric and the epistles of the New Testament, particularly 1 John. Rhetoric is understood to have only a secondary influence in the writing of the New Testament epistles – mainly matters of style. However, there is also a different stance, namely that the New Testament epistles should be seen as speeches in epistolary form to be read orally, and thus constructed according to matters of invention, arrangement, and style. There is much middle ground as well, with differing amounts of influence ascribed to epistolary and rhetorical concerns in the epistles.

Rhetorical criticism shows us the way in which biblical authors used rhetoric to shape their communities' values and perceptions¹³. Finding the underlying values and assumptions of the argumentation the original authors assumed they shared with their group gives us insight into the cultural and social background of the Johannine group. Studying the rhetorical strategies used in these texts help us understand how the authors and audiences perceived themselves in relation to their own group and the outsiders.

In his book of 1984, *New Testament Interpretation through Rhetorical Criticism*, the classicist G.A. Kennedy was the first to provide a methodology using Greco-Roman rhetoric to analyse New Testament texts. His methodology has been very influential and lists five interrelated steps:

- (1) Determine the rhetorical unit. The rhetorical unit can be either a well-defined pericope (e.g., Sermon on the Mount) or an entire book (e.g., First Epistle of John). These units

13 The rhetorical portrait in the letters is our only access to the opponents. On one level, then, the rhetoric of the letters is an obstacle to reconstructing the opponents and the problems plaguing the community. The veil of silence that covers the opponents is a veil of words. Duane Watson (1989a; 1989b; 1993) has argued not only that the rhetorical style and shape of the Letters of John rely on ancient rhetorical categories but also that particular categories were chosen in order to respond to specific problems in the Johannine orbit.

should correspond to units in rhetorical handbooks, speeches, and letters of the classical period.

- (2) Define the rhetorical situation, that is, a situation in which the persons, events, and exigence necessitate a verbal response.
- (3) Determine the rhetorical problem or stasis and the species of rhetoric.
- (4) Analyse the invention, arrangement, and style in detail.
- (5) Evaluate the rhetorical effectiveness of the rhetorical unit using invention, arrangement, and style to address the rhetorical situation.

Kennedy's steps create an understanding of the underlying values and assumptions between the author and reader. In this study, the steps take us closer to socio-rhetorical interpretations of the text of 1 John.

Socio-rhetorical interpretation as an approach to texts (Robbins, 1996a, 1996b, 2009a; Porter & Olbricht, 1997:24–52) are guided by a multi-dimensional hermeneutic (Robbins, 1998a, 2004, 2005a). Robbin's socio-rhetorical approach uses rhetorical analysis and interpretation based on both oral and literary dynamics in social, cultural, and religious contexts of interaction during the first century CE to interpret New Testament literature (Robbins, 2009:3). Scholars such as Troeltsch (1894:23) and Farley¹⁴ (1988:60) were the first to work with this paradigm. When these two approaches (oral and literal) are integrated in the reading of biblical texts, it is referred to as "socio-rhetorical interpretation" (Robbins, 2009:3). Ancient texts can be read with understanding only if the reader has access to the "extra text" – a complex body of knowledge consisting of language codes, literary conventions, social codes, and cultural "scripts". In other words, the narrative text is socio-historically and socio-culturally conditioned (Darr, 1992:21–22). Rather than being one more method for interpreting texts, socio-rhetorical interpretation is an interpretive analytic – an approach that evaluates and reorients its strategies as it engages in multi-faceted dialogue with the texts and other phenomena that come within its purview (Robbins 1996a:11–13;

14 I share the presupposition of Farley (1988:61) "that religion is not a region or entity but an aspect of human, historical, and personal processes, events, and relations. The grasp of this aspect calls for a complex and flexible posture of interpretation which includes, among other things, philosophical scrutiny of the strangeness of the human being and its experience of the world, as well as a probing of the complex strata of human language".

Porter & Olbricht 1997:25–33). I think this critical multi-faceted dialogue is important for this study, especially for the cognitive social science, which relies heavily on these exegetical tools.

The socio-rhetorical analysis helps this study to remain critical, as it invites methods and methodological results into the environment of its activities, but those methods and results are always under scrutiny. Using insights from sociolinguistics, semiotics, rhetoric, ethnography, literary studies, social sciences, cognitive science, and ideological studies, socio-rhetorical interpretation applies an interactive interpretive analytic that juxtaposes and interrelates phenomena by drawing and redrawing boundaries of analysis and interpretation (Lawson & McCauley, 1990:22–31). The socio-rhetorical analysis helps this study with the full exposure of both the social situation and the rhetorical strategies of the 1 John text. Because the reasoning and themes of 1 John are so interwoven, this comprehensive methodology is helpful to investigate the social, cultural, and biblical context of the author's message and purpose, and his rhetorical means of convincing his audience to think as he does (Barentsen, 2015:49–80).

It is important to remember that speech was part of the historical and social situation that produced it and in which it was used. Rhetoric is a liaison between text and social context. Social-rhetorical analysis is concerned with the situation of the authors of 1 John and their audiences. The interpreter can glimpse the dynamics of the text through analysis of rhetoric, arguments and the strategies selected, especially as these are informed by the cognitive studies of the social, cultural, and ideological milieu of the Johannine world (Aune, 2010:169–171).

This is a new development in socio-rhetorical analysis, suggesting an interpretive analysis that creates a dialogue between different disciplines and approaches to the Johannine letters. It explores the inner texture, intertexture, social and cultural texture, ideological, and sacred texture of a letter. The rhetoric reveals old and new dialogues with many related fields. This is important to this study. Rhetorical criticism using modern rhetoric is a philosophical reconceptualization of Greco-Roman rhetoric, a synchronous approach to argumentation. It is not as suited to historical concerns in interpreting New Testament texts as Greco-Roman rhetoric. However, modern rhetoric may go beyond historical questions without neglecting them altogether. It does not ignore the historical nature of a text, nor does it solely depend upon it. It takes historical information into account, but rather than being descriptive, it tries

to understand the intention of the text and how values of the time are used in the argumentation. It does not try to reconstruct the original situation (the tradition spoken about in Chapter 1), but rather attempts to discover the argumentation of the text. It looks at the social, cultural, and ideological values assumed in the premises, topics, and argumentation used.

It seems as if this approach will make clear the rhetorical strategy of 1 John, while incorporating the relevant aspects of the different textures into the exposition. This approach holds two challenges:

- The first challenge is to discern the various group arguments in the Johannine group at work in this specific text in the words of the author.
- The second similar challenge is to identify the multiple modes of hermeneutical rhetoric at play in 1 John, and to elucidate its role in the understanding of the group's norms and traditions.

Ricoeur's¹⁵ (1991) words are important for this form of analysis, although he is not a social scientist. His view that we do not want to recreate the world behind the text, but rather interpret the world in front of the text, stresses the deep interconnection between following and understanding a story. It explains how culture is positioned to influence the story. 1 John speaks to us from a particular social world, and it should be investigated using disciplines that can comprehend the social dimensions of human experience. A proper understanding of the story in the letter is important for this behavioural study. Readers are constantly involved in making sense of the story by arranging plot elements. Attention to the text itself should always be the basic point of departure in the process of interpretation.

Socio-rhetorical analysis used in conjunction with social identity theory draws temporary boundaries around a text for the purpose of close examination from one point of view at a time. This approach presupposes that what is discovered in one bounded area will be put into dialog with discoveries in other bounded areas. The socio-rhetorical approach helps us

15 Ricoeur's (1991) hermeneutics aims not only to define the methodological character of interpretation, subject matter in explanation and understanding dialectics, but also to bring forth the ontological presuppositions of interpretation, in other words, the ontological involvement of self as an individual that actively interprets and interprets itself in textual or non-textual symbolic systems. Ricoeur argues that, freeing itself from the author and from the narrowness of the dialogue situation, the text reveals the intention to project a world.

interpret the 1 John within the social, cultural, and religious contexts of interaction in the letter. In a carefully worded text, designed to be read aloud, the author attempts to persuade his audience to remain in the truth, to stay connected to what they have known “from the beginning.” The author’s rhetoric, intended to confirm his audience’s pre-existing values and opinions, is characterized by strong contrasts between what is true and what is false, between praise and blame. To accomplish his purpose, the author of 1 John used rhetorical techniques that are discussed and illustrated in numerous ancient Greco-Roman rhetorical handbooks. Watson¹⁶ (2006) has shown, for example, that the author of 1 John skilfully uses recognized techniques of amplification common to Greco-Roman rhetoric as a major part of his intentional strategy. In fact, Watson points out that virtually every known rhetorical technique for amplification is used in the letter. Another aspect of the author’s rhetoric is seen in the connection of his thoughts through intricate transitions. These transitional techniques reinforce in the readers and hearers’ minds the author’s main points and would have made it easy for a first century Mediterranean audience to follow and remember his train of thought. Bruce Longenecker (2005) affirms that transitional links enhance the audience’s chance of grasping an author’s intent in an oral culture. One can only look at the audience with the help of the text – a text construed by the interpreter. We only have a text-author and a text-audience. For further discussion of this multi-dimensional approach and the insights gained on rhetoric, the discussion now takes a closer look at the different approaches.

2.4. Understanding the multi-dimensional approach

The study uses insights from different models to better understand the Johannine group, their self-perception, and their world as they lived in and experienced it. Bruce Malina (2001) shows that such models illustrate relationships among the persons, things, and events that form a group. If we are to take a still picture of the 1 John group according to Malina, if we freeze all activity for a moment, analyse what is going on, through the picture, we will get consensus on meanings, values, and norms. Appropriate interpretation of biblical texts requires interaction with these social-cultural values, beliefs, and customs of the people who

¹⁶ Epideictic rhetoric is used by a speaker whose audience already holds the values he intends to praise or that already rejects the values he intends to speak against. In fact, it is typical that both praise and blame are found in this type of rhetoric, with the intention of increasing the audience’s adherence to the speaker’s point of view.

wrote and received the written documents being studied. Without knowing the presuppositions and common knowledge of a people, including their cultural frame of reference, modern interpreters cannot really grasp the meanings behind the words they use, even if those words sound familiar. Esler (2003) points out that, “the explicit use of models brings the interpreter’s values and perspectives out into the open,” an important remark for this study.

Since the Johannine group is a social organization, we must uncover who plays what role and who enjoys what status. This can help us understand the meaning and cultural frame behind the words in the text of 1 John. “Status” differs from “role” in that status is the recognized position a person occupies in society, important when looking closer at the status of the author. Status also shows where someone fits in relation to everyone else and other groups in society. “Role” has to do with behaviour, and the “socially recognized position of a person entails rights and duties inside a group”. This is important to understand the group dynamics in the letter.

Put simply, status defines who one is socially – male or female, slave or free, Judean or Gentile – whereas role defines what one is expected to do socially based on status. A person has status but plays a role. To better understand the role of social status and how a position entails certain rights and duties, the study looks at the Douglas grid and group model to gain an understanding of the position of the author in the Johannine group. When we belong to a group, we are likely to derive our sense of identity, at least in part, from that group. Social identity theory will help to see this in 1 John.

2.4.1. Douglas’s grid and group model

Douglas saw that the future of anthropology was “comparative,” which would require some theoretical mechanism with which to compare different societies. It was this concern that inspired what would become the grid-group framework and cultural theory. Applying the theory to the selection of danger and dealing out of blame, Douglas and colleagues developed a simple heuristic model that accounts for variations in the social organization of groups in societies. They argued that social organization can be categorized into four “world views.” This model focuses on two major features of societies: “Grid” refers to a society’s rules, structure, and leadership (or the lack of them), while “group” refers to the extent to which the members of the society do or do not consider themselves to be part of a group that defines their values and practices. The model

considers the distribution of values in a community. It aids our understanding of the social dynamics of the text. Certain social settings encourage certain ways of seeing the world. Grid/group is designed to make the connection explicit.

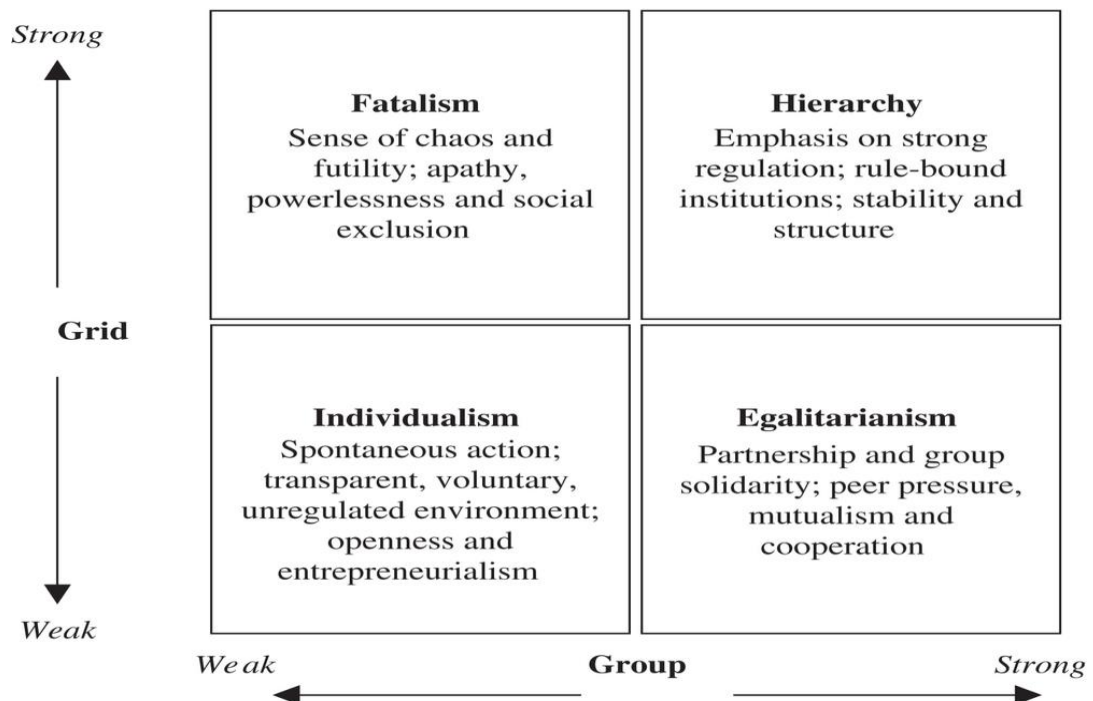


Figure 2-1: Some descriptive words for each cultural division of Douglas's grid and group model (1970:50).

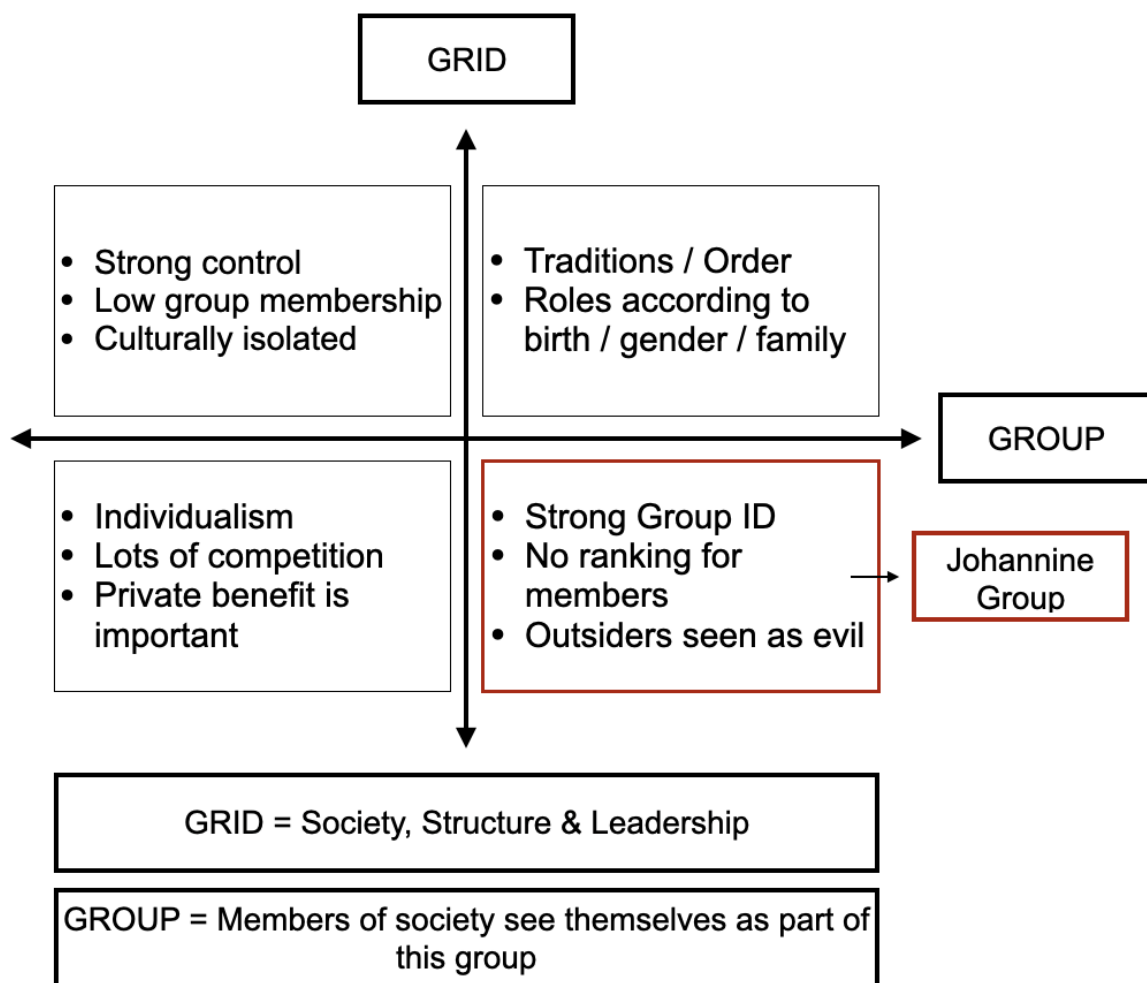


Figure 2-2: The grid-group diagram as applied to the Johannine group.

The combinations of the categories seen in Figure 2-2 above can be graphed into four quadrants, with grid as all the regulations as the vertical axis and group, a general boundary around a community as the horizontal axis. The first iteration of the grid-group diagram appeared in Douglas's (1970:50) book *Natural Symbols: Explorations in Cosmology*.

This study focuses on descriptions of the low grid, high group society, as these are most characteristic of the general first century Mediterranean world. Malina's (2001) description of groups in this lower right quadrant explains some of the group dynamics found in the Johannine group. There was a strong concern for maintaining social boundaries, but these boundaries seemed under attack, with the deviants present in the group. It also became clear through group studies that groups are characterized by a concern to ferret out people who do not belong within the boundaries. The group dimension measures how much of people's lives are controlled by the group in which they live. An individual has to accept

constraints on his/her behaviour from the mere fact of belonging to a group. For a group to continue to exist at all, there will be some collective pressure to signal loyalty.

At one end of the scale, one can be a member of a religious group and only turn up on Sundays, or perhaps annually. At the other end, there are groups such as convents and monasteries that demand full-time, lifetime, commitment. Apart from the external boundary and the requirement to be present, the other important difference between groups is the amount of control their members accept. This is supplied by the other dimension: grid gives a measure of structure. When the two dimensions are put together, group and regulation, it creates four opposed and incompatible types of social control and plenty of scope for mixing, modifying, or shifting between the extremes.

Michael Thompson and Aaron Wildavsky (1990) collaborated to produce a textbook in which they examined the relationships between cultures in the same community. They showed that any group has several cultures, and that each culture defines itself by contrast with the others. Those persons who share a culture maintain enthusiasm for it by charging the other cultures with moral failure. At this point in the development of this model, the title “grid and group” was superseded by cultural theory. The theory, renamed and sharpened, now holds that four types of cultural bias are normally present in any ensemble. An isolated person can easily change an opinion because it is not stabilized by any strong loyalties. Ideas and values only become strongly entrenched when they are embedded in communities. Emmanuel Sivan¹⁷(2003) in *Strong Religion* adds a new, necessary, element to grid-group analysis – not just the internal organization of a given set of community types, but also their *external environment*. As such, this study also looks at the external environment of the Johannine group (with the help of social identity theory). In the early Christ movement, members of groups shared beliefs and norms and their relationships were determined by these shared cognitions. In other words, they too had a culture. We must imagine the text of 1 John in dialogue with a culture, both drawing from it and constructing it.

Top Right: At the extreme top right, strong on grid, strong on group, would be a society in

17 Emmanuel Sivan is a professor of history at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem and author of a number of books, including *Interpretations of Islam and Radical Islam*. His work, *Strong religion* draws on the results of the Fundamentalism Project, a decade-long interdisciplinary study of antimodernist, anti-secular militant religious movements on five continents and within seven world religious traditions. He analyses the various social structures, cultural contexts, and political environments in which fundamentalist movements have emerged around the world.

which all roles are prescribed, all behaviour governed by positional rules, all the constituent groups contained within a comprehensive larger group. It is a hierarchy, perhaps despotic, perhaps consensual; the diagram does not show the political variables. Its cultural bias supports tradition and order. Roles are ascribed according to birth, gender or family, and ranked according to function and tradition. We originally called this sector “hierarchy” in the sense of a rational system.

Bottom Right: At the bottom right, there is a kind of community that also features a strongly bounded group. It has no ranking or grading rules for the relationships between its members. A sect¹⁸ might be placed here on the diagram. Leaders of a sect support group boundaries by declaring all outsiders evil. Dealing with internal dissent is difficult for them as they are withdrawn from and outside the main society. They cannot invoke the law to punish their offenders. Their only penalty for disaffection is expulsion, but they do not want to use it. This danger of defection is why sectarian groups tend to have a black-and-white vision of the world. Such a group would be handicapped by problems of leadership, authority, and decision making.

Bottom Left: In the bottom left quadrant, extreme individualism is weak in both group controls and grid controls. The main form of control that is available here is by competition. This culture is bound to be at logger heads with the positional culture and with the sect. The individual is only concerned with private benefit. Group commitment is weak here by definition.

Top Left: The extreme top left quadrant has strong grid controls, without any group membership to sustain individuals. Anyone who arrives here is a cultural isolate. Prisoners

18 A sect can be understood as group-oriented persons, moreover, are socialized from birth to know the ways and customs of their group and to live up to these expectations; the “common good” outweighs personal desires. Such persons constantly seek to know what others think about them or expect of them, to know what they should do. Failure to live up to the group’s expectations results in “shame” It is also important to understand “Honour and Shame” in the ancient biblical world. The writers of New Testament texts aimed at forming communities based on values and ideology that differed from the social and cultural values of their society. How did they do it? One of the strategies that can help us in understanding this process is the role played by honour and shame discourse in for example Matthew and how this can open the meaning of the text for the 1st century readers. In an honour culture a person is brought up to seek the approval of the important members of the community and to avoid falling into disgrace. Honour is like an umbrella extending over all the behaviours and attitudes that preserve the culture. Individuals will furthermore see adhering to the values of the group as self-fulfilling. This becomes more complex in a world where there are competing or at least alternative cultures which then may lead to the author having to reinterpret those other values and to show how they are opposed to the divine order and to reaffirm one's own values (DeSilva 1999a:4).

may be located here, or slaves, any strictly supervised servants, soldiers, or the very poor, or royalty, like the deceased Queen of England, hedged around as she was by protocol. Also, note that some individuals come voluntarily to this situation as it avoids responsibility and pressure. The hermit or the monk may choose it a culture to live in.

By analytically applying this cultural theory¹⁹ model to 1 John, I have concluded that the Johannine group fits into the bottom right quadrant. This is an insulated group where social and class classifications are rigid. It was an unstable environment because of the schism within the group. There is a clear distinction between insiders (in-group boundaries) and outsiders (out-group boundaries) are clearly defined. There was a strong concern for maintaining social boundaries, but these boundaries seemed under attack, with the deviants present in the group. Group studies (discussed in chapters to follow) have revealed that groups are characterized by a concern to ferret out people who do not belong within the boundaries.

Malina's (2001) description of groups in this lower right quadrant explains some of the group dynamics that were likely present in the Johannine group:

- Strong group/low grid
- Generates societies of fixed rites
- A focus on group boundaries rather than on stable caste classification

Life in this quadrant usually results a proliferation of competing groups, each attempting to be self-contained to win out over its competitors, defending its gains. There is a strong concern in the respective groups about maintaining social boundaries, but these boundaries seem under attack. This description fits very well with the competing groups described in 1 John, and the model explains the likelihood and necessity of a public ritual²⁰ or letter to deal

19 The cultural theory applied is the Douglas grid and group model.

20 Looking through the cultural lens of the ritual model provides evidence that the author or editor of 1 John has presented the reader with two separate rituals that have been antithetically intermingled to create the text as we have it now. Understanding the genre of 1 John as a unique combination of rituals side-steps the usual debate over whether it is valid to consider the book to be within the epistolary genre. Ritual is used here in the sense of a written documentation of a public performance, designed to change the perception of a group about a given topic or person. Two rituals potentially applicable to 1 John are described in Malina and Neyrey's edited volume, *The Social World of Luke-Acts: Models for Interpretation*, namely a "Status Degradation Ritual," and a "Status Transformation Ritual." Malina and Neyrey state that "status degradation rituals publicly categorize, recast, and assign a moral character to deviant actors," while status transformation rituals involve passage from one status to another, including christening, baptism, marriage, or ordination. In 1 John the believers are

with the deviant group authoritatively once and for all. Without the ritual/ letter, the conflict and competition for the allegiance of group members could continue indefinitely since leaving a group voluntarily is unlikely in a strong group society. The group forms the identity of the individual (Kingship)²¹. “In the Mediterranean once one joins, it is rather difficult to leave since the unit is the collective self not the individualistic self, and groups cannot see themselves dissolve without dishonour” (Malina, 1996:155–156). The author of 1 John makes it clear that one of the two competing groups in the Johannine group were dishonourably deviant from group norms. He labels them as “children of the Devil,” as seen in 1 John 3:8–10. In this study they are called the out-group.

Given the above, I would argue that the scope of the model is anthropological, and deals with culture. This is where it is beneficial to this study. An attempt to transform it into a model of textual analysis would be unhelpful. Therefore, it is my contention that the model ought to be used in conjunction with other textual approaches that serve to help the researcher build a profile of the group and author. All the questions on in-group identity in 1 John cannot be answered by the cultural theory model. It did not help this study to examine how the Johannine group formed concepts of “self” or “others”. But without the grid and group model, it would not be obvious that 1 John meets the criteria of ritual conflict confrontation, the typical means of addressing conflict in low grid, high group societies. This insight is valuable for this study’s examination of the nature of the Johannine group and the reason why the letter was written in the group. I subsequently apply the social identity theory model to better understand the in-group and out-group dynamics. For this endeavour, the focus is more on the identity of the group’s behaviour, values, and norms.

The challenge is to develop an approach that takes both the social context and the text into account equally. The development of such an approach is our primary aim in this study. We therefore embark on an experiment in method.

having their status transformed (or re-confirmed) as children of God (3:1) while the opponents are having their status downgraded to children of the devil (3:10).

21 Each of these rituals, preserved in 1 John as a written text, was most likely meant to be read or recited aloud in the oral-literary environment of 1st century Mediterranean culture. It could have been read or recited to Johannine communities in various locations to help them understand the new (out-group) status of the opponents as well as their own (in-group) status in relation to God.

2.4.2. Social identity model

The central hypothesis of social identity theory²² is that the group members of an in-group will seek to find negative aspects of an out-group, thus enhancing their self-image. Social identity theory was developed by Tajfel and Turner in 1979. Henri Tajfel's definition of social identity is as follows:

"Social identity [is]... that part of an individual's self-concept which derives from his knowledge of his membership of a social group (or groups) together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership... however rich and complex may be the individuals' view of themselves in relation to the surrounding world, social and physical, some aspects of that view are contributed by the membership of certain social groups or categories. Some of these memberships are more salient than others; and some may vary in salience in time and as a function of a variety of social situations" (Tajfel, 1981:255).

The theory was originally developed to understand the psychological basis of intergroup discrimination. Tajfel attempted to identify the *minimal* conditions that would lead members of one group to discriminate against an out-group in favour of the in-group to which they belong. This theory of Tajfel offers two reasons for group belonging:

- People generally seek and act to achieve high self-esteem. Groups serve to provide a positive social identity that facilitates self-esteem (Tajfel & Turner, 1986).
- People seek to avoid anxiety about their behaviour. Belonging to groups provides a set of norms on which to model behaviour and assess the behaviour of others (Tajfel & Turner, 1986).

Members of groups categorize themselves according to the norms and expectations of the group. Members are accepted by the group to the extent to which they conform to the norms of the group (Hogg, 2001:63–66; Marques *et al.*, 2001:402). The group can view tendencies to act against expected norms as deviancy and this can lead to marginalization and rejection (Hogg, 2001:63–68; Marques *et al.*, 2001). There are strong social pressures to adopt the norms of the group to which members belong (the in-group), for this guarantees acceptance. Knowing the norms of the group also provides members with a code of conduct that offers

²² This study will use SIT as acronym for social identity theory.

a frame of reference for behaviour (Hogg & Mullin, 1999; Sherif, 1966). Group norms tend to accentuate similarities between members and minimize differences (Hogg, 2001:63).

An Ideal prototype of the group emerges; the more the member conforms to the prototype, the more likely he/she is to gain the acceptance and approval of the group. In-group members have a vested interest in portraying their in-group in the best possible light, for this reinforces their own self-esteem. We often speak of ancient Christian identity as if Christian identity was a fixed identity. In social identity theory, a person has not one “personal self”, but rather several selves that correspond to widening circles of group membership. Different social contexts may trigger people to think, feel and act based on their personal, family, or national “level of self” (Turner *et al.*, 1987). Apart from the “level of self”, an individual has multiple “social identities”. Social identity is the individual’s self-concept derived from perceived membership of social groups (Hogg & Vaughan, 2002). In other words, it is an individual-based perception of what defines the “us” associated with any internalized group membership. This can be distinguished from the notion of personal identity through self-knowledge. After receiving group membership, individuals seek to achieve positive self-esteem by positively differentiating their in-group by comparison with an out-group based on some valued dimension. This quest for *positive distinctiveness* means that people’s sense of who they are is defined in terms of “we” rather than “I”.

While studying social identity theory, I had to ask whether it can account for the complexity and multidimensional nature of ancient Christian identity? An increasing amount of New Testament scholars recognize that people can belong to several different groups at the same time. What these scholars have investigated is what influence multiple group categorization may have on in-group bias. Also important then, is the perception and evaluation of other people and groups.

Tajfel and Turner (1979) identify three variables that contribute to the emergence of in-group favouritism:

- the extent to which individuals identify with an in-group to internalize that group membership as an aspect of their self-concept;
- the extent to which the prevailing context provides grounds for comparison between groups; and

- the perceived relevance of the comparison group, which is shaped by the relative and absolute status of the in-group.

When we belong to a group, we are likely to derive our sense of identity, at least in part, from that group. According to this theory, social identity has three major components: categorization, identification, and comparison²³. The first component, categorization, is the process of putting people, including ourselves, into categories. Labelling someone as a Muslim, a female, or a soldier, are ways of defining these people. Similarly, our self-image is associated with the categories to which we belong. The second component, identification, is the process by which we associate ourselves with certain groups. In-groups are groups we identify with, and out-groups are ones we do not identify with. The third component, comparison, is the process by which we compare our groups with other groups, creating a favourable bias towards the group to which we belong. As group identity affects individual behaviour, many experiments in social psychology have aimed to assess whether and to what extent people interact with in-group and out-group members differently. These experiments confirm Tajfel's finding that group membership creates in-group enhancement in ways that favour the in-group at the expense of the out-group.

Tajfel insisted that "social groups are not 'things'; they are processes" (Tajfel, 1982:485). Social structure is thus analogous to the structure of language: the rules and resources of a language are simultaneously drawn upon *and* reproduced in the process of speaking or writing. This theoretical focus on social life as a process in time and on the production, reproduction and transformation that occur over time, is essential to the understanding of all social relationships and structures. It is crucial for the study of a group undergoing rapid change and development like those in the earliest period of Christian origins. Social identity theory allows us to examine the ways in which the Johannine group formed its conceptions of "self" and "other."

But is the concept of social identity²⁴ applicable to the first century Mediterranean world? An important question to ask focuses on social identity theory. Hinkle and Brown (1990:48–70) have proposed two criteria for the application of social identity and self-categorization models. They argue that for appropriate use of these models, group identity must be salient

²³ These three components are discussed in detail in 2.4.

²⁴ Social identity can be described as an individual's knowledge of belonging to certain social groups.

for members, and in-groups and out-groups must exist in an atmosphere of competition. Malina (2001:58–67), studying the ancient Mediterranean world from an anthropological perspective, claims that both these criteria apply to the ancient Mediterranean world. He argues that group identity was more important than personal identity, for the first century personality was group orientated. In addition, Malina (1993:103–112) claims that the pivotal values of the Mediterranean area were honour and shame – such values naturally led to an atmosphere of competition between opposing groups in a time when resources were limited. Esler (1998:45–48), using these insights of Malina, provides an extensive justification for using social identity theory in his studies on the *Letter to the Romans*.

My interest lies in the hermeneutical question about what the texts could have meant to their original audience. The explicit use of models brings the interpreter's values and perspectives out in the open. At the same time, the social identity theory is also comparative²⁵. In such an analysis, the social identity theory helps to answer the following questions:

- Who are the implied readers and how is their situation portrayed in the document? In other words: Can a social profile of the audience be constructed?
- How are the reflection on and response to the situation presented in the document? This question relates to important matters such as how the document evaluates the situation, what norms and values are involved in such an evaluation, what kind of response is urged by the document, and whether any dominant symbols are used to characterize the identity and actions of the audience and author?
- Who are the producers of this document as evident from either explicit or implicit internal information? (Elliot, 1991)

The goal of the approach is to predict how culture influences communication. Social identity theory analyses the connections between social reality and psychological processes. For the Jews, the world was ethnocentrically divided between us and them, between insiders and all the rest. But when we project our view back into the first century, we realize that this

²⁵ Tajfel and Turner developed social identity theory in 1979. The theory begins with the premise that individuals define their own identities with regard to social groups and that such identifications work to protect and bolster self-identity. The theoretical focus on social life as a process in time and on the production, reproduction and transformation that occur over time, is essential to the understanding of all social relationships and structures. The goal with this theory is to predict how culture influences communication. Social identity theory analyses the connections between social reality and psychological processes.

in-group, described or named as the Jews, is divided into another “insider” group in 1 John. The group listens to and follows the teachings of the Elder (referred to as the author in this study) against the deviants of this group. So, the social reality of 1 John is that the author wants the in-group to keep the traditions, to love one another and walk in the light. He is testifying about everything he has seen and heard first and from Jesus as an eyewitness. The psychological process at play is that some of the group members understand the Christology and love for a brother differently from the author’s views. These members are starting to form a deviant out-group. According to social identity theory, groups exist in relation to perceived out-groups. The language of social identity theory makes it evident that the Johannine group acts as an in-group according to its own texts. With the in-group emphasizing true knowledge, loyalty to Christ, and lived experience of Jesus’s teachings, the out-group could be seen as threatening due to their ability to persuade members about the failure of their Messiah, changing loyalties toward the Roman Empire or even Judaism, or drawing some away an intimate relationship with God through the Paraclete.

2.5. Three major components of social identity theory

It is perhaps prudent to venture into an explanation of the three major components of social identity theory: categorization, identification, and comparison. An analysis of these components can reveal the connections between the social reality of the group and the New Testament text. It helps to show the extent to which people identify with a particular social group, which in turn determines their inclination to behave in terms of their group membership. The three components are explored below in the following manner:

- Categorization is studied by examining *sententiae* and stereotyping.
- Identification is studied by exploring prototypes.
- Comparison is studied by looking at deviants and marginal groups

2.5.1. Categorization through *sententiae* and stereotyping

Social identity theory contributes to our understanding of intragroup and intergroup processes (Tajfel, 1978; 1982). The theory shows that individuals not only adopt a personal identity, but also form a social identity, which is reflected in their membership of the groups to which they belong.

Tajfel (1978:63) states that social identity is defined as that part of an individual's self-concept that derives from his knowledge of his membership of a group, together with the emotional significance attached to that membership. In the ancient Mediterranean world, people did not really form a self-concept. They understood their being through community and kinship. Comparison then allows one to perceive the in-group as better than relevant out-groups.

The process of social identification is further explained in self-categorization theory (Turner *et al.*, 1987), an extension of social identity theory. The theory suggests that individuals categorize themselves.

Being a group member signals that a person shares a group belief. Group beliefs unify group members and differentiate them from out-groups (Turner *et al.*, 1987). Group members are aware that they share the same beliefs, which defines their "groupness". Group beliefs draw the line between the in-group and the out-group. The "we-experience" sets the boundaries for the out-groups. Members of groups categorize themselves according to the norms and expectations of the group. Members are accepted by the group to the extent that they conform to the norms of the group (Hogg, 2001:63–66; Marques *et al.*, 2001:402). When they act against the expected norms, fellow group members view them as deviant, leading to marginalization and rejection (Hogg, 2001:63–68).

Sententiae rely on the common devices of antithesis and paradox. This device exploits the various possible meanings of a word or adds a prefix to a word to create a surprising expression. 1 John expresses the paradoxes and antitheses of its theological vision with a similar style of discourse. Equally common is *paronomasia*.

To identify the presence of *sententiae* in the letters of John, though, is to say simply that these letters were written in the first century in the Roman Empire, a time, and a place when *sententiae* were common and popular. The bigger question is: How do these *sententiae* function? Patrick Sinclair (1995:33) provides an answer to his question with an elegant phrase, "*Sententiae* speak to those who understand." *Sententiae* have a social function, drawing boundaries and establishing a social connection between author and audience.

The stark separation that the *sententiae* draw is intended to show the necessity of choosing one side or the other. The author is writing to people within his orbit, urging them to live in

such a way that they remain in the realm of light. Light and darkness may be separate and apart, but people are not irredeemably consigned to one realm or the other. They can—and must—choose by their actions which realm they will inhabit.

In 1 John, several *sententiae* exploit antithetical realities:

1:5: *God is light; in him there is no darkness.*

2:9: *Anyone who claims to be in the light but hates a brother or sister is still in the darkness.*

2:15: *If anyone loves the world, love of the Father is not in him.*

2:17: *The world and its desires pass away, but whoever does the will of God lives forever.*

Within the framework of social identity theory, stereotypes²⁶ are described as a form of categorization²⁷ that allows for the establishment of identity and its delineation. It is a means of social stratification. *Sententiae* that point to sides between which the audience should choose, stands close to stereotyping. Both help the author to urge the audience to live in such a way that they remain in the realm of light. Stereotyping forms these two groups. George Parsenios (2010:13) has analysed these *sententiae* in the Gospel of John. He defines a *sententia* as "a maxim that expresses some broadly held truth in a pithy, pointed style". He finds that in these *sententiae*, "social, cultural and religious divisions find their rhetorical expression" (Parzenios, 2010:14). In 1 John, the author speaks in these *sententiae* to associate himself with the members of the in-group in contrast with the out-group members.

Figures that typologically represent the qualities of the group (and more especially those figures in the group's historical memory that shape the group's figurative memory), must

²⁶ Stereotyping was instrumental in making sense of social realities in ancient times. It can be described as the identification of groups based on rather rigid general characteristics attributed to that group. Stereotypes required maintenance, in other words, fixed stereotypes required ongoing assertion and reaffirmation. These stereotypes of the "other" were usually shared by members of the same in-group based on what they regarded as being common of various out-groups. They functioned as a "cognitive map", working with general categories into which people are classified (Van der Watt, 2018).

²⁷ Social categorization is the process through which we group individuals based on social information. Categorization is central to all classification and knowledge. It is also central to sociology (Jenkins, 1996). With respect to social identity, it is defined as the identification of others (in contrast to self- and group identification). Social identification, involving both similarity and difference, is constituted in a dialectical interplay between internal and external identification. The latter is categorization.

naturally be studied since they occupy a central place in the social identity consciousness of the group. By employing these typological stereotypes in a rhetorical manner, people are effectively categorized either positively or negatively through the process of association. It therefore becomes an effective instrument for the exercise of power and the entrenchment of power in a group. The setting of these typological figures and associations (positively or negatively) determines the qualitative nature of the communities in question. The author of 1 John makes effective and ample use of this technique. Some examples are negative – Cain, the antichrist, the children of the devil – and positively, Jesus or Abel, Cain's brother. Through the power of language and the use of typology, the author differentiates his group from the opponents and by implication characterizes them. Put differently: using the power of language, the author causes the opponents to appear to be the antichrist in the eyes of the Johannine group. Thus, the recipients of the letter are given a positive identity, and the opponents are negatively characterized. To strengthen the positive identity of the in-group, the norms and characteristics of out-groups can be vilified, particularly when the in-group feels threatened by the out-group (Hewstone, 2002:580). Such vilification leads to derogatory stereotyping of out-group members, which then leads to prejudice. Negative characteristics are attributed to out-group members to enhance the feelings of superiority of these members of the in-group (Hewstone, 2002:579–580).

2.5.2. Identification through prototypes

Groups normally exist in relation to other groups; they derive their descriptive and evaluative properties, and thus their social meaning, in relation to these other groups. Intergroup relations involve a process of competition for positive identity where groups and their members strive to protect or enhance positive distinctiveness and positive social identity (Turner, 1981). Individuals cognitively represent social categories as prototypes²⁸. These are fuzzy sets, not checklists, of attributes that define one group and distinguish it from other groups. In other words, they accentuate intragroup similarities and intergroup differences (Tajfel, 1981). The property of a group that makes it a coherent and distinct entity that is

²⁸ All categories in our minds are centered on a prototype, that is, a representation of the ideal or typical member of the category. Prototypes emerge from the need for identity. In this study, the prototype is the author of the Letter. An understanding of how the author sees the in-group prototype reflects what social effects this prototype could have if it became the shared cognition of the group. The author aims to create a group climate that increases cognitive certainty and thereby commitment to the group.

similar and well structured, has clear boundaries, and the members share a common fate. When we categorize people, we reconfigure our representation of them to conform to the context-dependent prototype of the category. Once categorized, people are viewed through the lens of the relevant group prototype and are represented in terms of how well they embody the prototype. Since group prototypes specify how people feel, perceive, think, and behave, social categorization generates stereotypical expectations and encourages a stereotype-consistent interpretation of vague behaviours. Self-categorization causes our thoughts, feelings, perceptions, and behaviour to conform to our prototype of the in-group. Group prototypes are grounded in consensual views that constitute a repeatedly reinforced social reality. Prototypes tend to be shared; people in one group in the same context share their prototype of the in-group and relevant out-group (Turner, 1991).

The social identity theory-based distinction between group prototypes and group norms helps the processes underlying similar distinctions, such as those between perceived norms and collective norms. People use accessible categories to make sense of their social context. They investigate how well the categorization accounts for similarities and differences among people and how well the prototypical properties of the categorization account for why people behave as they do. The rigid force of the prototype is likely to be stronger when the in-group is important to who we are, when we identify strongly or have a strong desire to be accepted as members of the group, and when the group's value, definition, or very existence is under threat. However, out-group norms also affect behaviour. From a social identity perspective, out-group norms can have a significant effect on how we construct in-group norms, particularly in the absence of clear in-group normative information. Stories embedded in narrative and discourse manage bonds among group members construct representations of social categories (Edwards, 1997), and such representations of group norms influence what people talk about. Social groups enabled our ancestors to nurture their children and to gather and share the resources and information necessary to survive in a hostile environment. At the same time, however, group living introduced social dilemmas that created rifts between group members and destabilized groups. In 1 John, behaviour is defined by God's commandments and Word (or revelation). The authoritative or hierarchical nature of the argumentation is clear: behaviour in the group (family of God) is determined by God, who conveys his commandments through Jesus to the rest of group, who in turn must obey. The beliefs that are integrated in the prototype will therefore be important in the analysis of how the text presents the relationship between identity in Christ

and behaviour norms.

2.5.3. Comparison of deviants and marginal groups

Members who espouse non-normative positions are often discredited as marginal members or deviants. Direct criticism of group norms is more effective and better tolerated by the group if the group views the critic as an in-group member, not an out-group member (Hornsey & Imani, 2004). Marginal group members are not highly prototypical and therefore they are not particularly liked as group members or trusted to the same extent as more prototypical members. This is not to say that marginal members do not affect group norms—as discussed above, leaders often use marginal members as reference points to define what the group is not. Marginal members are often treated as deviants. Deviants (Becker, 1963) do not have to be lone or disparate individuals. Often a group can contain a minority subgroup or some other collective that represents a profound schism in the group's normative structure. Sani and Reicher (1998; 1999) describe how sudden normative change brought about by the actions of a subgroup or a leader, can produce an acute sense of identity threat and self-conceptual uncertainty, impermanence, and instability. The group is no longer what it used to be—its normative attitudes, values, perceptions, and behaviours have changed irrevocably; thus, its identity has changed, and members are no longer sure whether they fit into the new group. Under these circumstances, members can try to re-establish the group's original identity through discussion, persuasion, and negotiation, or they can split into a separate subgroup that conflicts with the rest of the group. A split, or schism, is most likely to occur if members feel the group is intolerant of dissent, unable to embrace diverse views, and inclined to marginalization of dissenting individuals. A schism effectively transforms one group, a single category, into two separate groups that are engaged in often highly charged intergroup conflict. The split rests on a profound social identity threat that engages a powerful drive to reduce the acute self-conceptual uncertainty that has been aroused. Not surprisingly, schisms can sometimes be destructive for groups. However, schisms may spur on critical thinking, creativity, and innovation if properly managed in the larger group.

Do these three components help to answer the question if social identity theory is applicable to the first century Mediterranean world? Hinkle and Brown (1990:48–70) propose two criteria for the application of social identity models. They argue that for the appropriate use of these models, group identity must be salient for members and in-group and out-groups

must exist in an atmosphere of competition. Malina²⁹ (2001:58–67), studying the ancient Mediterranean world from an anthropological perspective, claims that both these criteria apply to the ancient Mediterranean world. He argues that group identity was more important than personal identity for the first century personality. Considering this, 1 John can be studied to see what the Johannine group identity was and the role it played in group formation.

2.6. The Epistle viewed against social identity theory dimensions

Having established the value of the social identity theory criteria for an analysis of 1 John, we take a closer look at the letter against the backdrop of the social identity theory dimensions. Three of these dimensions are relevant to the study. The linguistic³⁰ forms visible in these dimensions highlight the development of identity in the group. The group used different markers of identity to create stronger boundaries around themselves. The interrelationships, values and symbols that characterized the early 1 John group can be divided into the cognitive dimension, evaluative dimensions, and emotional dimension.

Group orientation was the primary level of socialization for people across the Mediterranean and ancient world (Malina, 2000). In 1 John, the author addresses an audience of a particular type within this larger context, namely the Johannine group. They were a group of Christ-followers in a state of tension with other people and groups in the surrounding environment. The identity and status of this group as members of *the Familia Dei* suggest that the social identity theory may be useful to explicate the identity of this group. An important point conceived by Tajfel (1987) is that a group has to establish a positively valued distinctiveness from other groups. This gives the members of the in-group with a positive social identity. The members of these in-groups learn who they are through this identity. They develop an appreciation for this and become perceptive of the ways in which they were differentiated from out-groups. The empirical stimulus for this view lies in research that indicates that the categorization of people into a specific group leads to social comparison with other groups. The members in the group favour one another while they discriminate against members of out-groups (cf. Esler, 2000a:158f.). Tajfel (1987:63–67) interprets this process as a concern

29 Malina (2001) shows that these people were strongly group-embedded, collectivistic persons. Therefore, they were socially minded and attuned to the values and beliefs of their in-group.

30 What is meant with linguistic forms is the study of human speech (through the text) including units, structure, and development of language in the Johannine group to form identity.

to establish a "social identity", which refers to that part of a person's self-understanding that derives from their belonging to a group. He (Tajfel, 1987:63) defines social identity as "that part of an individual's self-concept which derives from his knowledge of his membership of a social group together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership". Tajfel's definition shows that there are at least three classes (dimensions) of variables that influence intergroup differentiation or identity in concrete social situations.

The application of Tajfel's theory to 1 John necessitates an examination how the author maintains the distinctive identity of this group in each of the cognitive, evaluative, and emotional dimensions. The sections below apply the different elements of social identity theory to the author's depiction of the Johannine group as a fictive family/group to distinguish them from out-groups.

2.6.1. The cognitive dimension

According to Tajfel, the cognitive dimension refers to the simple recognition of belonging. Individuals must internalize their group membership as an aspect of their self-concept. They must be subjectively identified with the relevant in-group. The author articulates to his readers this cognitive dimension, the sense of belonging to the Johannine group. In 1 John, God is depicted as the Father (1:2, 3; 2:14,15, 22–25; 3:1), as the *Pater familias*. He is depicted as the head of the family. The nature of the father determines the new status and rules of conduct to which his newborn children must conform. The Elder tried to strengthen "familial associations" to express and bring out "familial responsibilities and conduct" and in-group identity.

2.6.2. The evaluative dimension

According to Tajfel (1978), the evaluative dimension refers to positive or negative connections with belonging. The social situation must be such as to allow for intergroup comparisons that enable the selection of relevant relational attributes. Central to these attributes are group norms. These norms are a scale of values that define a range of acceptable and unacceptable principles (doctrines), attitudes and behaviours of the group's members. It coordinates and regulates behaviours and include ideologies and traditions. It also assists the members of the group to act appropriately. Such norms maintain and enhance the identity of the group (Brown, 1979).

Throughout the Letter, the author makes use of dialectic discourse. Dialectic discourse is defined as a rhetorical technique that makes extensive use of antithetical and binary language to convince others of the truth and correctness of one's position. Dialectical discourse also makes special use of metaphors that refer to transformation or "becoming" to persuade the reader that change is possible (Murphy, 1971). In the case of 1 John, each new dialectical choice becomes an opportunity to guide the reader in their life decision, which gives an indication of the right conduct. This way of life, according to the Elder, involves loving rather than hating, to live a life of righteousness rather than a life of unrighteousness, and to live in the light rather than to live in the darkness. The author explains how the readers should live as children of God. This distinguishes them from other groups. The admonitions of the opponents strengthen the induction of the family. It is thus visible that 1 John presents a scale of values to define a range of acceptable and unacceptable attitudes and behaviour in the group. These norms enhance their identity.

2.6.3. The emotional dimension

According to Tajfel (1978), the emotional dimension refers to attitudes such as love and hate. Members hold these attitudes towards insiders and outsiders. One extreme feature of social comparison is the tendency of the in-group to stereotype out-groups. In social identity theory, stereotypes are described as: "...beliefs that all members of a particular group have the same qualities, which differentiate the group from other groups." There is a tendency to attach positive stereotypes to the describer's in-group and negative stereotypes to out-groups (Esler, 2000:162). However, identifying with a social category is not to stop introspection; it is merely to belong. The individual who identifies with a social identity thinks of him- or herself as a group member. They reflect on inner thoughts and desires to fulfil what he or she experiences him- or herself to be within this social identity. This would infer that the in-group members will love and honour one another. Identification of oneself as belonging to a group means that the self is experienced as similar to the in-group prototype and is interdependent on other group members. In 1 John the children of God are called to love one another several times. Love seems to be the *sine qua non* for the ethics of the Johannine group (cf. Schnackenburg 1992:217). The focus is not on the emotional side of love, but the practical, prototypical behaviour of a group member distinguished by love. Love creates community (1 Jn 1:3, 6, 7). Community with the Father comes through community

with the children of God, and that community is expressed as love for one another. This was the identity of the in-group.

2.7. Social identity theory and the role of the author

In small interactive groups, people tend to infer the group's norms most directly from what people say and do. For example, we may infer the normative attitudes of our group from the expressed attitudes or actual behaviours of fellow group members. This shows the potential for people to use what they say and do to intentionally manipulate the group's perception of what is normative. People who are good at this can be considered "entrepreneurs of prototypicality," which may be a skill that is closely associated with effective leadership in 1 John. Leaders can talk up their own prototypicality and talk down aspects of their own behaviour that are non-prototypical. They can target deviants or marginal members to highlight their own prototypicality or construct a prototype for the group that enhances their own prototypicality. The most prototypical member appears to have the influence. Dunderberg (2006:165)³¹ says that "the more aware early Christian writers became of the diversity in early Christian traditions, the more important it became to convince their audiences that the specific branch of tradition they were representing was the most reliable." The author of the first Johannine letter can be regarded as partaking in the production of a distinct early Christian social identity rather than as a mirror image of some historical person –whether or not we speculate that it was an actual person (Dunderberg, 2006:203), an otherwise unknown and anonymous early Christian teacher behind this figure, or whether we are content to conclude that this figure is a literary device.

A social identity theory of leadership views leadership as a group process generated by social categorization and prototype-based depersonalization processes associated with social identity (Barentsen, 2011). Social identity theory assumes that people's identities are based on the social groups to which they belong (Tajfel & Turner, 1979; 1986). Leadership is about how some individuals have the power to define that identity (in this case the author of 1 John). They have influence through tradition, attitude, and behaviour. The prototypicality empowers them to have influence over the group. It is about more than just being the

³¹ The work of M. Meyer (2003:135-148), "Whom Did Jesus Love Most? Beloved Disciples in John and Other Gospels", is also helpful to form a new perspective on the role and place of the author in the Johannine first Epistle.

prototypical member, it involves influence. A leader who acts as “one of us” by showing strong in-group favouritism and intragroup fairness is not only more socially attractive but also provides legitimacy.

Examining the issues of leadership from a social identity perspective makes it clear that in periods of social change, successful group leaders are able to root their account of who they are and who their group is in common cultural and historical traditions. They know how to select and reshape collective symbols and use them in new combinations. In this way they establish “a continuity over time within the context of the salient group membership” so that “the speaker’s version is no longer one version amongst many but rather the only valid version of identity”³².

The Johannine prototypical member is an idealized form of group member. Using multiple references to “writing,” the author of 1 John influences his readers affectively and effectively. In 1 John 2:1 he uses the phrase “I write these things to you” (ταῦτα γράφω ὑμῖν) as a mechanism that strategically influences his readers. With this phrase he grasps the readers’ attention, and he establishes credibility with respect to his understanding of and testimony about Jesus’s identity. This facilitates his defence against the deceivers’ teachings about Jesus. He also successfully applies this phrase as a mechanism to create certain lived experiences so that the readers would know that Jesus is the Son of God. The readers therefore believe him, which helps him achieve the various objectives he connects to this phrase. 1 John gives us a glimpse into the nature of first-century apostolic authority and the so-called elder or leader’s use of it. The author uses the pronoun ταῦτα (1 Jn 1:4; 2:1; 26–27; 5:13) so that the readers can use their imaginations to create lived experiences of the divine when they give meaning and content (about the identity of Jesus) to it. He also uses indefinite verbs (ὁ ἀκηκόαμεν, ὁ ἐώρακάμεν τοῖς ὀφθαλμοῖς ἡμῶν, ὁ ἐθεασάμεθα καὶ αἱ χεῖρες ἡμῶν) to refer to the life of Jesus so that the readers have to give content and meaning. The author appeals to the witness of those who saw, touched, and heard. With this he reminds his readers that what he is saying is what they themselves had experienced. He also makes the appeal that he is testifying about what was from the beginning. An important constituent in the literature of early post-biblical Judaism is the belief that

32 Various (religious, ethnic, and national) imagined communities claim their cultural and historical tradition to be the uniquely authentic story out of which their people collectively live. Lieu (2005:62-95), speaks on Christian identity: “Claims about past history and continuity are constitutive of nearly all articulations of identity.”

revelation and revealed wisdom play a significant role in human salvation.

The author evokes lived experiences (affect) among his readers to influence them rhetorically so that they would believe his testimony and adhere to his exhortations (effects) through his preaching and *writing*. They must experience the Son and the Father. Those who hear or read the author's proclamation experience (see, hear) the divine in their minds, thoughts, and feelings. The inventors of Christian identity – including the writer of this Johannine letter – do what successful group leaders have always done; these pioneers “don't just repeat traditional stories of identity ... [but] weave familiar strands into novel patterns. They are careful not to violate what we know of ourselves. Their genius is to make the new out of elements of the old and thereby to present revolution as tradition” (Lieu, 2005:62–95).

In 1 John, the nameless author is simply “we” (1 Jn 1:1-5) or “I” (e.g., 1 Jn 2:1, 7–8, 12–14). Meyer says that selfhood comes to light in the discovery of “I” and “we” in a context of communication (Meyer, 1986). How a person understands him- or herself hinges on how that person is treated in their world, and the person's understanding of it is a projection of interpersonal experience. So how did the 1 John group make themselves what they were?³³ They realized their own identity through Christology. With this new identity they had to learn to live in a world with more than one human meaning. In the process they modified this world's understanding of them. Social groups engage in line drawing to determine what is right and what is wrong, who is in and who is out. In 1 John, the author has this role and task. “Identity” then, is not a marginal epiphenomenon. It is the answer to bedrock questions: Who are we? What ought we to be?

The application of social identity theory shows that leadership is a process of influence that mobilizes the group and answers these important questions. It is not a process during which power is exercised over others. They and their suggestions are persuasive because they embody the norms and beliefs of the group. A look at 1 John through the lens of social identity theory brings the insight that the Johannine prototypical figure is an idealized form of group member, rather than a specific “John” as a historical figure.

³³ On the current discussion of sociology and biblical studies, see Robin Scrogg's (1980:164-179) work.

2.8. Conclusion

This chapter aimed to show the value of the multi-dimensional approach for calling attention to the many ways in which a text relates to phenomena in- and outside of itself. The meaning of a text does not reside alone in the creative genius of its author; there is a complex correlation between a text and the contexts in which a text has been read and reread, including various dynamic interrelations between creator and contemplators, past and present. The cognitive social science interpretation provides a powerful interpretive analytic to explore these dialogic interrelations among author, text, and readers/interpreters. Considering these various relationships may open new avenues for interpretation of the Johannine group. The text from 1 John seldom gives us straight forward reports about social realities. Our cognitive and linguistic capacities are such that they enable us to both interpret and manipulate our surroundings. This is also true of the 1 John group. The author often aims to interpret and manipulate the surroundings. This discussed further in the chapters to follow. In the practical work of analysing the text of 1 John, we should imagine the text as a text in dialogue with the group, both drawing from it and constructing it. The group exists because people believe in it and identify themselves with it. The group has certain characteristics because people share a certain way of thinking about, feeling about, and evaluating their group. We can see this more clearly with the help of models. Once people have categorized themselves and identified with the group, they compare themselves with relevant out-groups and seek positive distinctiveness. The social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) is especially helpful to this process. The chapters that follow explain the markers that stood out in this 1 John text and ask the important question: How did the group members use their culture to create new cultural patterns that could help them interpret social identities in the collectivist culture?

CHAPTER 3 UNDERSTANDING TRADITION IN 1 JOHN

3.1. Introduction to tradition as first social group marker

Group-oriented persons must in some way assimilate the code of conduct that govern the roles and statuses of the group in which they are embedded. This process of assimilation is what the transfer of tradition is about. In times of conflict and radical change, group identity is often threatened, and boundaries have to be renegotiated. This was the case in the Johannine group at the time when the 1 John was written. The first letter witnesses to a continued struggle to define, preserve and responsibly apply that tradition in a difficult context. In these times, different markers of identity stood out and the group had to conserve, change, and adapt to new situations continually (Lieu, 1991).

In the following close reading, the focus falls on the first of the four group identity markers examined in this study, namely tradition. The application of these four markers shows the boundaries around the group as expressed in linguistic form (socio-rhetorical analysis).

Robbins (1994:75–91) shows that when we understand the relationship between tradition and the original audience, the group's identity is more evident. For this reason, the discussion starts with tradition as the first group marker.

The illustration below (Figure 3-1) shows the interaction between tradition and the addressees in relation to the formation of the identity of the group. Evidently, the in-group holds the past in great esteem. Today we tend to be future-oriented, but the Johannine group assigns corresponding value to the past. The preferred model of time in the Johannine world was one of social devolution, with the past imagined as the golden age (see Aratus, *Phenomena* 36–136). The value placed on the greatness of the past and on tradition shows up in the author's words about imitating Christ (1 Jn 1). That is the social expectations to which one is socialized in the group.

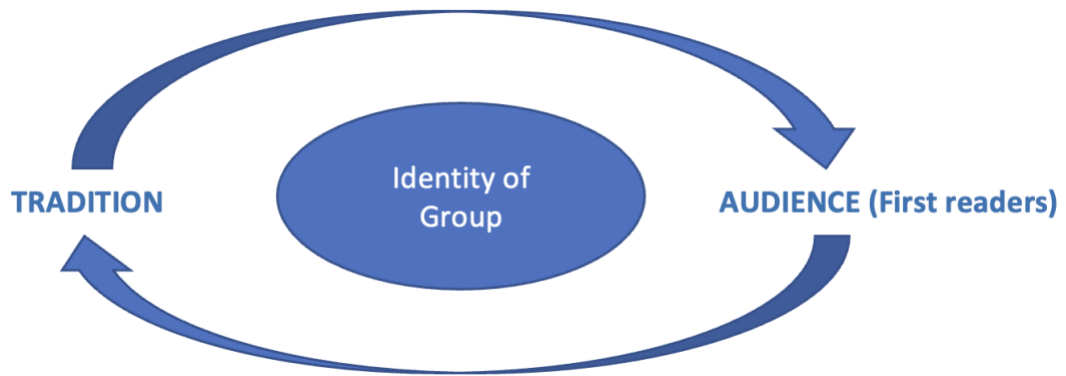


Figure 3-1: The role of tradition to identify the original audience and group

Behaviour is influenced through belonging. The figure above shows the dynamic interaction between tradition and identity. The writer of 1 John aimed to form a group based on values and ideology that differed from the social and cultural values of the society. This model shows that the interaction (interconnection) between tradition and identity offers us a better picture of the first readers and groups in 1 John. The traditions they were part of and the world they lived in had a constant effect on each other and formed the identity of the group.

3.1.1. Understanding tradition across time and culture

This chapter asks the question: Can we understand the cognitive constructs of people who took part in the early Johannine group by interpreting the texts they produced and used?

There is an increasing amount of research from social developmental studies and neuroscience that indicates that people who interact regularly tend to share similar (not identical) cognitive patterns, that is, similar beliefs, emotions, and values³⁴. The words of Robin George Collingwood³⁵ (D'oro, 2006), a philosopher of history, is poignant. He argued that history is not primarily a science that should reconstruct the events of the past, but a science that should aim to understand the minds of the past. As New Testament scholars, we cannot internalize the cognitive patterns of the Johannine group, because we are

³⁴ See also Baars 2003 on neuroscience. The most concrete evidence comes from cognitive neuroscience, where brain scans reveal that brain activity correlates with subjective experience.

³⁵ Collingwood 1946; 1999, summarized by D'Oro in 2006.

incapable of overriding our own intuitions³⁶. Hans-George Gadamer (1975)³⁷, one of the most prominent philosophers of hermeneutics in the 20th century, offers a valuable insight in this regard. The preunderstanding for him is that of a scholar interacting with the historical text in a hermeneutical dialectic, so that the scholar gradually reaches a “fusion of the horizons of the author and the interpreter” (Vardoulakis, 2004:9). This shaped our understanding today that historical understanding is always reached from a certain perspective. Gadamer was quite optimistic with his view that the hermeneutical process could lead to an understanding of authorial intent³⁸.

Gadamer debated his hermeneutic approach extensively with Jürgen Habermas³⁹. Although they agreed that interpretation is dependent on preunderstanding, Habermas argued that Gadamer did not appreciate enough how careful deliberation could help the scholar scrutinize and criticize their own culturally learned preunderstanding. Habermas developed a “theory of communicative action,” which aimed to enable intersubjective understanding through deliberation. A central component in this theory is to develop a “reconstructive science.” It analyses the universal⁴⁰ structures of human thinking that are the prerequisites of any human understanding. If such universal structures of human understanding exist and we can recognize these structures, then it is possible to find common ground with the subjects of the past. For this chapter, the common understanding centres on the role tradition played in influencing this Johannine group. This understanding is not a re-enactment of their minds or emotions, but an intellectual analysis of textual expressions (like the understanding of the role tradition played) which produced their subjective experience.

3.1.2. Tradition in 1 John

The term tradition can refer to two things: the body of beliefs accepted by a society that gives it continuity with past generations and unity within itself, and the process through which

36 Chaiken and Trope 1999. According to the dual-process theory, our minds have two kinds of mental processes. One is deliberate and conscious; the other is intuitive and unconscious and not possible to control. This shows that scholars cannot appreciate to what extent intuitions differ from those of a historical subject or group.

37 Read more on Gadamer in Vardoulakis’s work in 2004 on Gadamer’s understanding of *Horizontverschmelzung*.

38 According to Gadamer, hermeneutics is “the art of grasping what someone really wanted to say.” (1989: 117- 118).

39 The “Habermas-Gadamer Debate” has been summarized by Mendelson 1979.

40 “Universal”, should be interpreted as “typical in all cultures”.

these beliefs are transmitted. A tradition must be formulated in such a manner that transmission is possible. The formulation takes different forms depending on time and place and the circle within which it takes place. An explanation on transmission follows highlighting the importance for this study.

In the Gospel of John 20:30–31, the author states that the presence of the resurrected Son of God continues in what is written in the Gospel, thus suggesting that the Gospel should serve as a traditional basis for the ethos of the Johannine group⁴¹. It offers a body of existing, shared knowledge that is implicitly or explicitly part of the social know-how of the Johannine group (“canon of institutionalized actions⁴²”= also called *ethos*) (Wolter, 2009) and is passed on from generation to generation, thus forming a constitutive part of the identity⁴³ of this group. 1 John, written at the end of the first century as a situational document, stands in this tradition, reflecting the language and theology of the Gospel, despite the differences between these two writings. The Johannine Group were social and cultural beings, and their cognition was formed in relation to the world in which they lived, including the traditions of which they were a part (Von Wahlde, 1990). Although we can assume that the experiences of the 1 John group were formed by their social reality, we as historians should ask the question: Can this help us gain insight into the influence and role their tradition played in their identity? Can we gain insight into the social reality “behind” the texts by reading the text through this traditional lens?

Judith Lieu (2004), in her multi-faceted analysis of “Christian identity” in the first and second centuries, expresses serious doubt about whether we can really know anything about how the communities understood their identity by reading texts from the movement. Her problem is not related to the hermeneutical discussion. Neither does Lieu question that the texts were formed by real communities and social experiences. The problem for Lieu is the nature of the historical evidence. For Lieu, the important question is not how groups constructed their identity, but rather how the texts themselves construct identity (Lieu, 2004:60–61). I could in principle agree with Lieu’s cautious method, but it is also clear to me that many of the texts

41 Cf. J.G. van der Watt (2019:39-44), *A grammar of the ethics of John. Reading John from an ethical perspective* (Vol 1), Tübingen.

42 M. Wolter (2009:127), *Theologie und Ethos im frühen Christentum*, Tübingen.

43 On the importance of ancestry in determining identity in ancient times, see Aristotle (Rhet. 1.5.5, 1360b), Plato (Menex. 237) and Quintilius (Inst. Orat. 5.10.24); B.J. Malina & J.H. Neyrey (1996:23-26), *Portraits of Paul. An archaeology of ancient personality*, Louisville.

of the 1 John group are in dialogue with realities outside the text and were influenced by the tradition of which they had been part of⁴⁴ for a very long time. This means that we are bound to misunderstand the texts unless we ask what they are in dialogue with. We are therefore caught in a dilemma. On the one hand, speculation about social realities is fragile, on the other hand, attempts to isolate the text from social reality is bound to lead to misinterpretation of the dialogical character of the text. For this study, I ask how behavioural norms are based on the tradition of Christ as it is presented in 1 John. The next line of thought would then be how these norms have functioned if a group embraced and applied them. In the practical process of analysing the text, we should imagine the text as a text in dialogue with a culture, both drawing from it and constructing it. Identity and behavioural norms are shared and constantly negotiated perceptions in the group. Lieu argues the following in her commentary:

"The position taken here is that there is no compelling evidence of a direct literary relationship between 1 John and the Gospel, the consistent subtle differences of wording, inference, context, and combination even where parallels appear close suggest that both writings draw independently on earlier formulations" (Lieu, 2008:18).

This argument is relevant to the study on the role of tradition because she chooses to refer to a collective "Johannine tradition" in a way that implies nothing about whether one document is a source or model for the others (Lieu, 2008:18). The prologue of 1 John indicates that the letter is based on tradition – not only self-generated knowledge is involved, but part of the knowledge is based on established knowledge that was conveyed and accepted by the group. This goes back to "the beginning" (Ὁ ἦν ἀπ' ἀρχῆς – 1 Jn 1:1) when the (metaphorically expressed) Life and the Word of life were physically experienced⁴⁵ on earth in the person of the Son. Life is revealed or manifested (ἡ ζωὴ ἐφανερώθη – 1 Jn 1:2) and people testify about it and proclaim it (μαρτυροῦμεν καὶ ἀπαγγέλλομεν ὑμῖν τὴν ζωὴν τὴν αἰώνιον – 1 Jn 1:2). The testimony and proclamation are based on the physically

44 The author's frequent references to the apocalyptic future also confirm that the Gospel was not his only source of shared information, but he also developed his message with reference to more general Christian convictions. This leaves one with the picture, not of an isolated, closed, Johannine group, but of a group that were aware of and open to broader Christian views and traditions.

45 1 John 1:1-4, "Which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we looked upon and have touched with our hands" (ὃ ἀκηκόαμεν, ὃ ἐώρακάμεν τοῖς ὀφθαλμοῖς ἡμῶν, ὃ ἐθεασάμεθα καὶ αἱ χεῖρες ἡμῶν ἐψηλάφησαν).

experienced revelation, creating fellowship with the group and their God.

Brown's argument on the relationship between the Gospel of John and 1 John is helpful here. He dismissed most of Dodd's stylistic arguments as about the respective genres of the Gospel and the letter (Dodd, 1946). However, he took up and expanded several of the thematic issues and the life situation of the letters. According to Brown, the Gospel writer was relatively simple and clear in his expressions, while the author of the letters wrote with "infuriating" obscurity. Brown cited five major differences in thought between the Gospel and the letters that he found damaging to the notion of common authorship:

- The Gospel focuses on the incarnation of the Word, while 1 John testifies to the message about Jesus.
- The Gospel says Jesus was the light (Jn 8:12, 9:15), 1 John says the light is God (1 Jn 1:5).
- The Gospel says the paraclete is the Holy Spirit, 1 John says it is Jesus (1 Jn 2:1).
- The Gospel eschatology is predominantly realized, while the letters place more emphasis on Jesus's second coming (1 Jn 2:28–3:3).
- The Dead Sea scrolls have closer parallels with 1 John than the Gospel.

Brown's objections are valid. In the end, what is ultimately decisive for Brown and his followers is their historical reconstruction of the Johannine group. 1 John, unlike the Gospel, shows no struggle with those outside, but rather with those who from within the group's own ranks (1 Jn 2:19).

John and 1 John share two peculiar structural features. The first is the use of a stylistic prologue or poem at the beginning of the text (Jn 1.1–18; 1Jn 1:1–4). The presence of these passages is surprising enough; they are not required by the genre of either text (narrative gospel/*bios* and tractate). More to the point, these passages "though by no means identical ... stand together against anything else in the New Testament, sharing a large number of common features in a short space" (Painter, 2002:69):

- They introduce the term ἀρχή in their first clauses.
- They refer to Jesus as the λόγος.
- They identify the λόγος with "life" (ζωή).

- They affirm that Jesus was “with the Father” (πρὸς τὸν πατέρα) in the beginning.
- They adopt a first-person plural narratorial voice.
- They position the narrator among those who “have seen” (ἑώρακαμεν) Jesus.
- They share other key terms (e.g., μαρτυρῶ).

Secondly, both texts incorporate statements of purpose where the author indicates his rationale for writing. Tellingly, these statements are also remarkably close in language. In both, the narrator links the task of writing to the idea that one may possess life by believing in the name of the Son of God:

But these have been written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing, you may have life in his name (Jn 20:31).

I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life (1 Jn 5:13).

The author of 1 John crafts the “sense of us” in terms of loyalty to (“abiding within”) “our” tradition: “As for you, what you heard from the beginning should abide within you. If what you heard from the beginning abides in you, also you will abide in the Father and the Son” (1 Jn 2:24). In periods of social change, successful group leaders can root their account of who they and their group are in common cultural and historical traditions. They know how to select and reshape collective symbols and use them in new combinations to establish “a salient group membership” so that the author’s version is no longer one version amongst many, but rather the only valid version of tradition. The author’s construction of shared tradition turns any competing teaching into a deviation from what is (and has always been) common to “us”. In effect, this strategy places anyone propagating or approving any other teaching outside of “us⁴⁶”. The important verses in 1 John for this part on tradition is:

1“Ὁ ἦν ἀπ’ ἀρχῆς, ὃ ἀκηκόαμεν, ὃ ἑώρακαμεν τοῖς ὀφθαλμοῖς ἡμῶν, ὃ ἑθεασάμεθα καὶ αἱ χεῖρες ἡμῶν ἐψηλάφησαν περὶ τοῦ λόγου τῆς ζωῆς —

46 This plural “we” may represent (a) an exclusive or editorial plural (we, not you), in which the narrator reads himself into a body of individuals distinct from the readers, (b) an inclusive or associative plural (you and I).

2 καὶ ἡ ζωὴ ἐφανερώθη, καὶ ἐωράκαμεν καὶ μαρτυροῦμεν καὶ ἀπαγγέλλομεν ὑμῖν τὴν ζωὴν τὴν αἰώνιον ἣτις ἦν πρὸς τὸν πατέρα καὶ ἐφανερώθη ἡμῖν —

3 ὃ ἐωράκαμεν καὶ ἀκηκόαμεν, ἀπαγγέλλομεν καὶ ὑμῖν, ἵνα καὶ ὑμεῖς κοινωνίαν ἔχητε μεθ' ἡμῶν. καὶ ἡ κοινωνία δὲ ἡ ἡμετέρα μετὰ τοῦ πατρὸς καὶ μετὰ τοῦ υἱοῦ αὐτοῦ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ.

4 καὶ ταῦτα γράφομεν ἡμεῖς, ἵνα ἡ χαρὰ ἡμῶν ᾗ πεπληρωμένη.

5 Καὶ ἔστιν αὕτη ἡ ἀγγελία ἣν ἀκηκόαμεν ἀπ' αὐτοῦ καὶ ἀναγγέλλομεν ὑμῖν, ὅτι ὁ θεὸς φῶς ἐστὶν καὶ σκοτία ἐν αὐτῷ οὐκ ἔστιν οὐδεμία.

6 Ἐὰν εἴπωμεν ὅτι κοινωνίαν ἔχομεν μετ' αὐτοῦ καὶ ἐν τῷ σκότει περὶπατοῦμεν, ψευδόμεθα καὶ οὐ ποιοῦμεν τὴν ἀλήθειαν.

7 ἐὰν δὲ ἐν τῷ φωτὶ περὶπατοῦμεν ὡς αὐτός ἐστιν ἐν τῷ φωτί, κοινωνίαν ἔχομεν μετ' ἀλλήλων καὶ τὸ αἷμα Ἰησοῦ τοῦ υἱοῦ αὐτοῦ καθαρίζει ἡμᾶς ἀπὸ πάσης ἁμαρτίας.

8 ἐὰν εἴπωμεν ὅτι ἁμαρτίαν οὐκ ἔχομεν, ἑαυτοὺς πλανῶμεν καὶ ἡ ἀλήθεια οὐκ ἔστιν ἐν ἡμῖν.

Tradition permits humans to discern and deal with the “new” in terms of what they learned in the past, and to relate particulars to the generic patterns into which they fall (Levine *et al.*, 1998:283–308). Tradition is a set of social representations of the past each group produces, guards, and transmits through the interaction of its members. The past structures the group in the text through legacy, but it is the present group in the text who, through the author, selects this legacy, preserving some aspects and forgetting others. They constantly reformulate the group identity by repeatedly recounting the story (tradition).

3.2. Identifying the tradition in 1 John

For any group, the “past” plays a crucial role. Group-oriented people tend to look to the past and hope to embody the traditions of their ancestors. It is therefore prudent to examine how the group understood this embodiment⁴⁷ through the words of the author. For a relatively

⁴⁷ Embodiment is discussed in detail in Chapter 8 as concluding remarks on the Johannine group study.

short letter, 1 John is rich in material related to existing knowledge⁴⁸. Tradition functions as common ground for determining what is acceptable in a particular group and what not based on their accepted group identity. References to what was heard, taught, or known also suggests a common traditional frame of knowledge.

3.2.1. References to tradition in 1 John

People often take their tradition seriously in dealing with novel situations, allowing for both a conservative and a creative element. This was especially true of ancient group-orientated societies (Lieu, 1991:102). References to tradition in a document may be identified in different ways, for instance, using phrases like “you/we know that...”, “you have heard...”⁴⁹. References to what was heard, taught, or known also suggests a common traditional frame of knowledge. Terms related to traditional knowledge that increase or confirm that knowledge include for instance οἶδα, γινώσκω, φανερώω, ἀκούω, γράφω, μαρτυρέω, ἀγγέλλω and derivatives (Schnackenburg, 1982:324–325).

This is also the case in 1 John, where these terms refer to areas of knowledge that cover a large spectrum of life, from knowing God and Jesus (1 Jn 1:1, 3, 5; 2:20–21; 5:20), receiving identity as part of the group through salvation (1 Jn 3:5, 14–15; 5:13, 18, 19), acting accordingly in love (1 Jn 2:29; 3:11; 4:16; 2 Jn 6), following commandments (1 Jn 2:7), to unfolding eschatological realities while they wait for the return of Jesus (eschatology) (1 Jn 2:18; 3:2; 4:3). Edwards (1996) also refers to the importance of terms like “antichrist”, “Chrism” and “God’s seed” in 1 John. These are introduced without explanation, presuming that the readers are familiar with them, thus suggesting traditional material. In the letter the authenticity and authority of this tradition is increased by linking it (implicitly or explicitly) to the Johannine concept of truth, which refers to what is authentically divine (Van der Watt, 2010:344–359)⁵⁰.

The prologue of 1 John (1 Jn1: 1–4) already give clear indications of the importance of tradition in the letter based on the author’s proclaimed direct eyewitness experience. This

48 C. Bennema (2007:129), *Christ, the Spirit, and the knowledge of God: A study in Johannine Epistemology*, in M. Healy & R. Parry, (eds.), *The Bible and epistemology: Biblical soundings on the knowledge of God*, Milton Keys, remarks, “Looking at the Sitz im Leben of the Johannine church(es), we may learn why John puts so much emphasis on knowledge”.

49 Cf., for instance, 1 Jn 2:29; 3:5.13-15; 4:16; 5:18-20.

50 Cf. 1 Jn 1:6.1; 2:4,27.

eyewitness account goes back to “the beginning” when the (metaphorically expressed) Life and the Word of life were experienced physically on earth in the person of the Son, the One who reveals the divine reality on earth. Life eternal is thus revealed or manifested (ἡ ζωὴ ἐφανερώθη – 1,2) and was physically experienced from the very “beginning”. The reference to “the beginning” (1:1) establishes the authority of this information, forming the starting point of this tradition⁵¹. This forms the fixed message the author proclaims and witnesses as the eyewitness basis for the Johannine tradition⁵².

3.2.2. The author writes, proclaims, and witnesses the established knowledge

Another way in which the author confirms shared knowledge is when he notes that he “writes” for a specific purpose or reason (phrases including ὅτι or ἵνα)⁵³. These references serve as reminders of what is known and are thus related to their tradition. He similarly uses the phrase *ταῦτα γράφω* (I write *these things*) where *ταῦτα* not only refers to the immediate context⁵⁴, but often implicitly refers to the broader contents of the letter⁵⁵. For instance, 1 John 5:13 states, “I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life.” This refers to what is stated in 1 John 5:10–12 and to God giving eternal life through his Son (for instance, 1 Jn 4:9), echoing the essence of the Gospel message on this matter (for instance, Jn 3:16, 20, 31), thus reaffirming the tradition. The author writes about things that both he and the addressees are aware of as part of the tradition: They know the Father and Son (14:7–11); their sins are dealt with (Jn 1:29) and they should not sin any more (Morgan 2007:162);⁵⁶ they are in conflict with but victorious over evil (Jn 10:28–29; 12:31); they know the truth (Jn 3:21; 8:32; 18:37); they know the commandments from the beginning (Jn 13:34; 14:15–21; 15). This has the rhetorical effect of cognitive cohesion between author and addressees, sharing in this common knowledge. This is confirmed in 1 John 2:13–14 where the identity of the addressees is described as those who know God and whose sins are forgiven, in contrast to the antichrist. There are also the few references to his proclamation and witness,

51 In ancient times older information was usually preferred and was regarded as more authoritative. This explains the importance of tradition in groups.

52 Cf. the words in the phrase in 1 Jn 1, 2: μαρτυροῦμεν καὶ ἀπαγγέλλομεν.

53 Cf. 1 Jn 1,4; 2,1.12.13.14.21; 5,13.

54 1 Jn 2:7-8 and 2 Jn 5 are the only texts where there is reference to what the author writes – he writes them a command they had from the beginning, although it is new.

55 Cf. 1 Jn 1:4; 2:1,26; 5:13.

56 Morgan’s work is important here for informative material on the views of some ancient moral philosophers.

expressed by ἀγγέλλω and derivatives and μαρτυρέω, two concepts that are often used in combination. This proclamation and witnessing indeed relate to some basic and well-known elements of the Johannine message, namely to his witnessing of the life (Jesus – 1:2–3), that they must love one another (1 Jn 3:11), or that the Father sent his Son (1 Jn 4:14), as well as to the light (1 Jn 1:5). This obviously serves to confirm the eyewitness tradition of which the author is the witness.

3.2.3. Reciprocity and mimesis to understand the role of tradition in 1 John

Mimesis and reciprocity are studied as part of a socio-rhetorical analysis. The rhetorical force in 1 John is aimed at arguing with the opponents, but to convince the “you” to move closer to the “us” group and to cooperate with them. It was written to strengthen the relationship between the “us” and the “you” (cf. Klauck, 1990:33), or as Kysar (1992:906) puts it:

“The general purpose of 1 John, then, was to preserve a Christian community from dissolution, to protect the identity and composition of that community, and to arrest a movement which threatened the very heart of what the author understood to be a genuine faith and life...”.

The idea of *imitating* Jesus as foundation of correct behaviour is evident. This idea of a person copying or emulating another person’s actions or attitudes, especially in relation to ethical behaviour, was common in Greco-Roman and even Hellenistic-Jewish contexts. But what motivation can be given for this exhortation, in other words, why and when should one copy the behaviour of another? Two ancient phenomena *inter alia* motivated this expectation, namely the phenomenon of *reciprocity* and of *mimesis*.⁵⁷

Reciprocity

Reciprocity was a common phenomenon in ancient times (Morgan, 2007:42–43), and although anthropologists acknowledge its presence in modern cultures too (cf. Van Wees, 1998), it was “a more central value and practice in ancient than in modern societies”. The

⁵⁷ The word *mimesis* is only used once in the Johannine Corpus (3 Jn 11) where it is used in its typical meaning of imitating the good rather than evil. Apart from that the word does not occur, although the idea is found frequently, being motivated in different ways.

essence is to repay what has been given to you, and this takes many forms depending on the situation. Social and even ethical pressure was not enough to force a person to reciprocate – the person could still decide not to, obviously with the expected (negative) social consequences. Seaford notes that reciprocity was to be found “as an ethical value, as factor in interpersonal relations... as a way of structuring human relations with a deity, as shaping the pattern of epic and historical narrative.” As such it was critically discussed in ancient philosophical discourse⁵⁸, not the least because it was important for the social networking and structuring of the ancient societies.

Reciprocity is a social phenomenon that has much to do with social expectations and the creation or confirmation of social relations; it formed part of the socially standardized roles people played (Van Wees, 1998:16). In this way a network of interrelations and interdependency was created and maintained within a group (cf. Seaford, 1998:2). It served as a cohesive power and facilitated things like what we today would regard as generosity. Reciprocity created a moral framework in which social obligation and expectation *inter alia* ensured the strength of the social fibre of a group in the form of enduring relationships of dependency (Schwartz, 1991). In this case the generosity was expected to be requited. Reciprocity therefore also served as a form of division of goods within the society, with the assurance that it would remain available to the group. Reciprocity itself is described as a moral norm (Schwartz, 1991) or ethical value (Seaford, 1998:1), while it simultaneously influences and motivates moral behaviour. Not doing it is ethically negative, while doing it has direct social and ethical impact.

Mimesis

Mimesis refers to the principle of imitation. It cannot be limited to a single theory; it refers instead to a way of behaving or letting yourself be influenced, or “a fundamental outlook shared by most authors, philosophers and ancient educated audiences in the classical period”⁵⁹. It has to do with a social attitude and can even be seen as a convention in a particular society. Although the terms μιμητής/ μίμημα are primary, other terms also seem to express the same concept, for instance, ὑπόδειγμα, εἰκών, ὁμοίωμα. These words are

58 Cf. the articles in Gill et al. (1998).

59 Gebauer and Wulf (1995:5) also prefer to use the term “mimesis as a label for manifold social processes summarized conceptually”.

also used in a variety of different contexts and areas of reality (Castelli, 1991:4), motivating the behaviour of children, followers of a rabbi, friends, and so on⁶⁰. The concept of imitation and not the specific word should be the guide in determining the presence of this phenomenon in a text. Harrison (Mack, 1995:146) remarks that “Morrison observes that the Greek philosophers had nominated three areas in which mimesis occurred, namely, (a) the realm of nature; (b) the realm of art; and (c) the realm of moral reproduction...”. We are of course especially interested in the idea of moral reproduction⁶¹. Tradition in 1 John is relationally motivated and is the obvious product of relationships, as is evident from concepts like fellowship or filial language (cf. Van der Watt, 2012). An important way in which this relational ethics is developed in 1 John is by way of an exemplary standard. A standard is set by God and Jesus, which the believer is obliged to follow. Expressions like “as,” “like” or “ought to” functionally relate the behaviour of Jesus to that of the believers. The incarnated Jesus mediates the divine transcendental reality through his presence in words and deeds. The idea of *imitating* Jesus as foundation of correct behaviour dominates, as Chilton and Neusner (2000:115) remark: “The central insight of the first letter of John is that the *imitatio Christi* is not only an injunction, but the constitutive element of who the people of God are.” This idea of a person copying or emulating another person’s actions or attitudes was common in Greco-Roman and even Hellenistic-Jewish contexts, expressed by the term *mimesis* in ancient times (Bennema, 2013). “Mimesis is always articulated as a hierarchical relationship, whereby the ‘copy’ is but a derivation of the ‘model’ and cannot aspire to the privileged status of the ‘model’” (Castelli, 1991:16). *Mimesis* is therefore always asymmetrical,

“for imitation does not involve both elements moving simultaneously toward similarity, but rather one element being fixed and the other transforming itself or being transformed into an approximation of the first. It is the struggle to write the identity of the model onto the copy” (Castelli, 1991:22).

60 These words takes on different guises in different historical contexts, masquerading under a variety of related terms and translations. That is why no single definition will be used, since that might be too exclusive. An effort will rather be made to understand the concept in its nature and functionality.

61 “The concept of mimesis, to copy a pattern or an example, strikes deeply into the Greek tradition of philosophy, education, and ethical teaching” (Mack 1995:146).

Mimesis presupposes growth and development of the one who imitates. Following a model initiates changes (good or bad) by way of transformation.

According to the author, “Christ, the Son of God”, is the template for the conduct of believers. He is the tradition to follow or the model to imitate. This was probably what the author had in mind in his two “ought to” (2:6; 3:16) references to Christ. Through their active participation or sharing in the way Jesus lived, they have a common ground that not only moulds the character of the children of God, but also constitutes the *koinonia* in the family. Since believers are now part of the *Familia Dei*, they must act according to their status and knowledge, which must relate to the social conduct (rules and values) of the family into which they were born. This conduct in the family was determined by the character of the Father and was embodied in the conduct of Jesus. This characterization of Jesus closely relates to the characterization of the Father in 1 John. It is to these qualities in Jesus’ life that believers must conform to experience the *koinonia* in the *Familia Dei* “now”. The following verses in 1 John instruct the readers:

- To be pure as Jesus is pure (1 Jn 3:3). In 1:5 God is depicted as the light in whom there is no darkness. In Jesus there is also no sin (1 Jn 3:5). Therefore, the same must be true of God’s children. This implies that they must walk in the light as Jesus walked in the light and “purify themselves, just as he is pure” (1 Jn 3:3).
- To be righteous as Jesus is righteous (1 Jn 3:7). God (1 Jn 1:9; 2:29) and Jesus (1 Jn 2:1; 3:7) are both depicted as being righteous (1 Jn 1:9; 2:29; 2:1). Jesus has shown that righteousness is a quality of God (2:1). Therefore, the children of God are called righteous when they do what is right. People are known by their deeds. Only through faith in Jesus (1 Jn 5:1), through birth from God (1 Jn 2:29; 5:1), will a person be able to follow the example of Jesus. Such behaviour is nurtured by the familial bond (Van der Watt, 1999a:506).
- To love as Jesus loved (1 Jn 3:17). In 4:8 and 16, God is depicted as love. According to 3:16, Jesus shows what love is by laying down his life for humankind (1 Jn 3:16; cf. also 1 Jn 4:9, 10, 14). Therefore, believers ought to lay down their lives for one another (1 Jn 3:17). In this way the love of Christ (and God; cf. 1 Jn 4:9–14) continue through believers into the lives of other believers. Jesus acts in love (1 Jn 3:16). Believers are exhorted to love (1 Jn 3:16; 4:12). Thus, the *Familia Dei* is a family of love, the sphere where God’s love is communicated, shared, and experienced.

- To walk just as Jesus walked (1 Jn 2:6). The above three statements explain this statement. Reciprocally they converge in this statement. It is frequently attested in the New Testament tradition that the exemplar of Jesus must lead to imitation. The indicative of the Jesus event (ought to) effects the imperative of Christian life (cf. 1 Jn 4:11; 5:12–13). In comparing Christian behaviour with that of Jesus, part of the author’s rhetoric is to motivate God’s children to live in the *Familia Dei* “now” as Jesus did, influencing the person and not only the deeds of a person.

There was also an expectation that the deeds to be copied should reflect the virtues of the person in question, implying that his words and deeds should correspond. The result of mimesis should not be moral copies, but moral formation. This is an important distinction for understanding the role of tradition in the Johannine group. For example, the following is said about Zeno in an Athenian decree⁶² honouring him, “...having offered to all as example his own life, which agreed with the theories he professed”.⁶³ This, of course, recalls the earlier philosophical debates (going back to the Sophists and Aristotle) as to whether a virtuous man can indeed act against his own virtuous nature. Quintilian makes it more explicit when he says that imitation involves discussing and pondering these examples of words and deeds:

*“It is still more important that we should know and ponder continually all the noblest sayings and deeds that have been handed down to us from ancient times... Who will teach courage, justice, loyalty, self-control, simplicity, and contempt of grief better than men like...”*⁶⁴

Influencing the whole person and not only the deeds of the person lies at the heart of the intent of the author of 1 John and is the reason for writing the letter. Mack (1995:146) observes the crucial point here, namely that mimicking implies a deeper cognitive involvement than simply copying. The pattern to be copied represents not a physical deed alone, but especially the “structure, character and the very being of things... To imitate the

⁶² Cited by Diogenes Laertius 7:10-12.

⁶³ This example comes from Harrison (2013:235) – he also gives others.

⁶⁴ Quintilian Inst 12.2.29-30. Some more examples of remarks confirming the importance of mimesis in ancient times are Cicero (Sect 64.136) “I rouse you to imitate the example of your ancestors”. Tacitus Hist 2.68 remarks “Keep and preserve, Conscript Fathers, a man of such ready councils, that every age may be furnished with its teacher, and that our young men may imitate Regulus, just as our old men imitate Marcellus and Crispus”. Tacitus Ann 3.55 “Nor was everything better in the past, but our own age too has produced many specimens of excellence and culture for posterity to imitate”. Valerius Maximus (Facta et Dicta Memorabilia – 1st CE) also provides example dealing with virtue and vice, religious practice, and ancient custom.

pattern of an example meant to become like it, to share its character and meaning.”⁶⁵ Mimesis is not a stagnant mechanical process but involves active reflection and novel expression of what is being imitated. There should be a proper balance between what is given (*traditio*) and what is produced (*innovatio*). Indeed, what is important is the *performative* aspect, the actualization, a presentation of what has been mimetically indicated (Gebauer & Wulf, 1995:5).

Mimesis is described in terms of shaping yourself to become like somebody by mastering his art (τέχνη). In this sense you are a follower, you understand and are familiar with the ideas of the one you follow. The fact that it is not a mechanical process is evident from the rest of the discussion, which does not describe a precise mechanical process, but similarity in character, attitude and even way of instructing. It is clearly a dynamic process of which parallel behaviour forms the basis. Gebauer and Wulf (1995:2–5) speak of “intentional construction of an analogy”. It is a matter of understanding and being familiar with the thoughts and character of a person, which then models the follower’s behaviour. The past behaviour structures the present group in the text through legacy, but it is the present group in the text who selects this legacy through the author, preserving some aspects and forgetting others. It shapes the Johannine character of the group.

3.2.4. A brief comparison between reciprocity and mimesis in 1 John

Both reciprocity and mimesis are ancient social phenomena that aim to influence behaviour in a particular way for particular reasons. It is suggested that both are “at work” in 1 John. Van der Watt (1999c) distinguishes between the similarities and differences of these two phenomena as depicted below in Table 3.2.

Table 3.2 Comparison between reciprocity and mimesis as markers to indicate the group’s way of following

Reciprocity	Mimesis
Voluntary but socially expected	Voluntary but socially expected
Relates to socio-ethical fibre of group	Relates to socio-ethical fibre of group

⁶⁵ According to the ancient and especially the Platonic view, perception is a kind of impression or process in which “individual objects deliver their individual shapes and qualities, but not their matter, to the mind” (Sörbom, 1974). An object like a picture or a sculpture cannot share all the properties of the thing represented but is only a mental picture thereof. The person then responds according to this mental picture.

Normally operative in group	Normally operative in group
Gift given and must be returned	No gift, just example to follow Nothing to be returned to the giver
More often equal social structure (though not always)	Hierarchical social structure (an important person influences a less important one)
Seen as ethical value or norm	Seen as a fundamental outlook
Always within social structure (between people/groups)	Broad social application: art, politics, ethics, etc. It is to the advantage of the individual and group
Forms part of the social networking and strengthening of social interrelatedness	Aim is predominantly “educational”, i.e., it aims to foster ethical values Strengthens moral fibre

God and Jesus set a standard that the believer is obliged to follow. Expressions like “as,” “like” or “ought to” functionally relate the behaviour of Jesus to that of the believers. This imitation leans on the Greek meaning of mimesis, “imitation with focus on the “re-presentation,” rather than the “copying” of certain behaviour in the group. Surveying the letters, the idea of imitation is expressed in a variety of ways (both implicitly and explicitly).

Table 3.3 Expressions that imply imitation of being or behaviour

1 Jn 1:5, 7	ὁ θεὸς φῶς ἐστίν... <i>ἐάν</i> δὲ ἐν τῷ φωτὶ περιπατῶμεν ὡς αὐτός (God) ἐστίν ἐν τῷ φωτὶ...	God is light... if we walk in the light as he is in the light...
1 Jn 2:6	ὁ λέγων ἐν αὐτῷ μένειν ὀφείλει <i>καθὼς</i> ἐκεῖνος περιεπάτησεν καὶ αὐτὸς [<i>οὕτως</i>] περιπατεῖν	He who says he abides in him ought to walk in the same way in which he walked.
1 Jn 2:29; 3:7	<i>ἐάν</i> εἰδῇτε ὅτι δίκαιος ἐστίν, γινώσκετε ὅτι καὶ πᾶς ὁ ποιῶν τὴν δικαιοσύνην ἐξ αὐτοῦ γεγέννηται/ ὁ ποιῶν τὴν δικαιοσύνην δίκαιος ἐστίν, <i>καθὼς</i> ἐκεῖνος δίκαιος ἐστίν	If you know that he is righteous, you know that also he who does righteousness has been born of him/ He who practices righteousness is righteous, as he is righteous

1 Jn 3:3	καὶ πᾶς ὁ ἔχων τὴν ἐλπίδα ταύτην ἐπ' αὐτῷ ἀγνίζει ἑαυτὸν, καθὼς ἐκεῖνος ἀγνός ἐστιν	And everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself as he is pure
1 Jn 3:12	οὐ καθὼς Κάϊν ἐκ τοῦ πονηροῦ ἦν καὶ ἔσφαξεν τὸν ἀδελφὸν αὐτοῦ	Be not like Cain, who was of the evil and murdered his brother
1 Jn 3:16	ἐν τούτῳ ἐγνώκαμεν τὴν ἀγάπην, ὅτι ἐκεῖνος ὑπὲρ ἡμῶν τὴν ψυχὴν αὐτοῦ ἔθηκεν· καὶ ἡμεῖς <i>ὀφείλομεν</i> ὑπὲρ τῶν ἀδελφῶν τὰς ψυχὰς θεῖναι	By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers
1 Jn 4:11	εἰ οὕτως ὁ θεὸς ἠγάπησεν ἡμᾶς, καὶ ἡμεῖς <i>ὀφείλομεν</i> ἀλλήλους ἀγαπᾶν	if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another
3 Jn 11	μὴ μιμοῦ τὸ κακὸν ἀλλὰ τὸ ἀγαθόν	do not imitate evil but good

These expressions all imply imitation of being or behaviour. A model is given which should be imitated.⁶⁶ This relationship is hierarchical and authoritative (it cannot be turned around). The question is whether there was a social expectation that could explain this command that a person should imitate an authoritative person? This question is relevant, since the requirement to imitate Jesus is not motivated in detail, but simply stated as a fact. This creates the suspicion, or even more, the expectation that there were shared social conventions or an ethos⁶⁷ behind these remarks. It was not a matter of precise copying, but of imitating the character, being and attitude that lie behind the act itself – there will usually be sameness and difference in mimetic activities.

In 1 John 2:6 the exemplary authority of Jesus's behaviour as a model is deontologically linked to the behaviour of the believer. This is based on an intimate relationship between

66 Plato (Prt 325c-326d) mentions that children were educated to mime good and important people from the past. In this way proper and acceptable values are ensured. The link between paraenesis and mimetic activity is also noted by Pitts (2016). Mimesis was common as pedagogical technique in Hellenistic schools – It is consistent with practices in epistolary paraenesis.

67 For this reason Chapter 6 examines the ethos in the Johannine group with a closer look on ethical language and dualism as ethical marker.

the two (Brown, 1986:263; Lieu, 2008:74): “whoever says he abides in him *ought to walk in the same way in, which he walked,*” (ὁ λέγων ἐν αὐτῷ⁶⁸ μένειν ὀφείλει καθὼς ἐκεῖνος περιεπάτησεν καὶ αὐτὸς [οὕτως]⁶⁹ περιπατεῖν). This remark occurs in a theologically dense context that brings together several important notions, like knowing and remaining or existing in God/Jesus, keeping the commandments, or loving your brothers. The comparative καθὼς...[οὕτως] links the behaviour of the model, Jesus, to those who abide in him. The idea of mimesis is evident. Brown (1986:262) opines, “The Law is the source of Jewish obligation, while the example of Jesus is the source of Christian obligation”. Indeed, “The test of our religious experience is whether it produces a reflection of the life of Jesus in our daily life” (Marshall, 1978:128). At the outset the question was posed: How can those hearing the exhortation be motivated to follow the examples of Jesus, in other words, why should a believer copy the behaviour of Jesus? Two important social phenomena were identified that helped to answer this question, namely reciprocity and mimesis. The analysis of the texts in 1 John showed that although there are clearly different emphases in the different texts, both reciprocity and mimesis were present as motivation for the behaviour of the believer. It even seems plausible to argue that they overlap and mutually strengthen the ethical argument. This new group identity “in Christ” provides a social identity, which cuts across and encompasses previous social identity distinctions (Gal 3:28).

Yet at the same time, the identity establishes a new boundary between insider and outsider, a boundary that in ideological terms owes much to its Jewish roots. It is built on the contrast between the idolatry and depravity outside the group and the holiness and righteousness within.

This boundary rhetoric may certainly be seen in terms of Tajfel’s⁷⁰ two principles of accentuation and assimilation, heightening the sense of distinction between in-group and out-group members, while minimizing the distinctions among group members. Those who

68 The reference to “him” is most probably to God but then also implicitly to Jesus. Cf. Smalley (2002:50).

69 “The external evidence for and against the presence of οὕτως is rather evenly divide for; and against. From a transcriptional point of view, the word might have been accidentally omitted following αὐτός. On the other hand, it might have been added as an emphatic correlative with the preceding καθὼς. Considering such considerations, the Committee considered it best to include the word but to enclose it within square brackets” (Metzger, 1994:639-40). Brown (1986:262-63), and Lieu (2008:74), gives detailed descriptions of the use of the comparative particle in the Gospel and Letters of John.

70 These two principles of accentuation and assimilation of Henri Tajfel is discussed in detail in Chapter 2 on SIT.

are inside are holy, righteous, brothers and sisters, children of light, while those who are outside are unrighteous, unbelievers, destined for destruction — stark examples of stereotyping. This idea of a person copying or emulating another person's actions or attitudes (*mimesis*), especially in relation to ethical behaviour, was common in Graeco-Roman contexts. Ancient biographers indeed aimed at instructing and propagandizing.⁷¹ Morgan (2007:125) refers to the remark of Pliny, "We need example more than we need rule. Fear is an unreliable teacher of what is right. Men learn better from examples, which are particularly good because they prove that what they teach can be done"⁷². He then quotes Quintilian saying, "It is not only the content of [philosophy] which we should know and constantly turn over in our minds as tradition; even more important are the records of the notable sayings and actions of the past." For this reason, *mimesis* is so important for insight into tradition and the role of tradition in our understanding of the Johannine group.

3.2.5. Paraenetic literature to teach the tradition of the group

The word paraenesis transliterates the Greek *parainēsis*, which originally meant any kind of advice, instruction, or counsel. In New Testament studies it has been used in three different ways. Beginning with the form critics of the 1920s, paraenesis was understood as a literary genre for a string of loosely connected ethical imperatives, often including lists of vices and virtues, household codes, and examples to be followed or shunned. In this view, paraenesis consisted of traditional moral teaching that was appended to several New Testament letters, without intrinsic connection to the letter's theological concerns. Closer analysis has not confirmed the existence of paraenesis as a literary genre, and therefore the form-critical view has largely been abandoned. By way of reaction, paraenesis is understood in terms of its ancient meaning as an umbrella term for any kind of instruction or moral understanding. This preserves the meaning of the term as understood in the Greco-Roman world, but it has the disadvantage of including so much that the term ultimately becomes meaningless. If all the New Testament is described as paraenesis, then the term does nothing to advance our understanding. Moreover, defining paraenesis as (moral) instruction fails to consider the genuine insights of form criticism that certain texts in fact distinguish themselves by their style and character. Although no consensus yet exists, paraenesis is now viewed in terms

⁷¹ Plutarch (Nicias 1.5) claims that he selects his material when describing his characters "handing on such as furthers the appreciation of character and temperament" (Loeb, 1916).

⁷² Pliny Panegyricus 45.6.

of its social function, as an amicable reminder of moral practices entailed by agreed-upon convictions. This style of moral exhortation had developed in the psychagogy of Hellenistic philosophical circles and Jewish wisdom traditions, and it found natural expression in 1 John's correspondence with the congregations.

The Greek word paraenesis means "advice" or "exhortation," and a large body of paraenetic speeches and letters survive from antiquity, designed to give advice and exhortation. Essentially, paraenetic discourse has two functions: to encourage people to follow one course of action, and to dissuade them from following another. 1 John certainly fits these broad criteria for paraenetic discourse: its basic concerns are to urge people to follow the true teaching enshrined within the group and to avoid the false teaching associated with those who have left the group. This true teaching is the tradition of the group.

Aune (2003: 334) and Fiore (1992: 382-383) acknowledge paraenesis as style⁷³, while Wolter also opines that paraenesis is not a literary genre, but refers to the intention of the text to influence the reader to follow a specific line of (positive) action.⁷⁴ Although the idea of paraenesis received attention as far back as pseudo-Isocrates (to Demonicus) and the writings of Seneca, it was Dibelius⁷⁵ who in more recent times (the first part of the previous century) drew attention to this phenomenon. The word paraenesis means "to give positive advice, to suggest positive action adequate to what is needed under circumstances" (Popkes, 2004:16–17)⁷⁶. In his influential view Malherbe, however, approached the matter from a more functional angle⁷⁷ by describing the characteristics of paraenesis as follows: it represents conventional rather than new teaching, with a general application, aimed at moving people to a particular way of behaviour.⁷⁸ This means that it is frequent repetition of what is known with the aim of encouraging the addressees to use prior knowledge for determining actions. Using examples (*paradeigmata*) for imitation or avoidance is important in paraenesis. Paraenesis is normally used between a respected person and a person who

73 In Pardee (2014:115).

74 Wolter (2011:311). For a detailed discussion of the link between ancient letter writing and paraenesis, cf. Pitts (2016).

75 Popkes (2004:14) sets the date of renewed interest in paraenesis in 1900, but it was Dibelius – acknowledging his predecessors Harnack and Seeberg – who gave the real stimulus.

76 Popkes (2004:28) also remarks, "Paraenesis can be persuasive, jussive, hortatory, admonishing, warning and the like, always trying to convince, never enforcing".

77 Malherbe (1986, 1992; cf. also 2004); Levine (1990:144). Cf. Perdue (1990) who focuses on functional aspects of paraenesis.

78 Malherbe (2004:297); Fiore (1986:45-78).

is lower in the hierarchy,⁷⁹ but who is nevertheless closely acquainted with the respected person. In 2000, Malherbe attended the so called “Lund congress”. The congress was clearly influenced by Malherbe’s views, and they reconsidered the concept paraenesis and came to the following “tentative understanding”.

Paraenesis is:

- a heuristic, modern term used to describe
- a text or communication in which
- a person of authority, A, addresses
- a party, B, who shares A’s basic convictions about the nature of reality and God
- to influence B’s behaviour in the practical (ethical) issues of everyday life, and possibly
- to strengthen B’s commitment to the shared ideological convictions in 4,
- where A may incorporate traditional ethical material, and
- where A may employ some or all these literary devices:
 - brevity of style (e.g., precepts, lists)
 - *Haustafeln*
 - antithetical statements (not a, but b)
 - The offering of examples to be imitated.

In 2001, a second conference took place at Oslo. Here a modified and shorter working definition was used,⁸⁰ namely:

Paraenesis is:

A concise, benevolent injunction⁸¹ that reminds⁸² of moral practices to be

79 Cf. Wolter (1988:138-39).

80 Cf. Popkes (2004:34); Aasgaard (2004:239).

81 In his redefinition Popkes (2004:42) formulates this point thus: “clear, concrete, benevolent guidance”, thus moving away from the idea of brevity, as well as injunction. Guidance allows for a much wider application.

82 This is another way of saying the paraenesis is based on previously acquired and shared knowledge.

*pursued or avoided*⁸³ (that) expresses or implies a shared world view⁸⁴ (slightly modified: 'expresses a shared, articulated world view'). Consequently, *paraenesis does not anticipate disagreement*⁸⁵.

The new definition also departs from the long-held position (cf. Dibelius) that paraenesis is purely based on traditional material,⁸⁶ but emphasizes the link between paraenesis and ethics, which is central to understanding the tradition. That is where the focus in paraenesis lies, and this obviously limits the scope of the Oslo definition (Popkes, 2004:41). Along the same lines, Aune maintained that "paraenesis refers to moral exhortation that is traditional, reflecting conventional wisdom generally approved by society" (Aune, 2003:334). Paraenetic instructions are more general than specific and "require no polemic to convince the audience of their validity". Although paraenesis may be used to persuade but also divert or prevent, it is more than often used to build and sustain a group (Porter & Adams 2010:262) to form identity. Obviously, there are no passages in 1 John of the kind we primarily associate with the term "paraenesis" as we would 1 Thessalonians 5:12–22, Philippians 4:1–9 and Galatians 5:13–6:10. Nevertheless, quite several exegetes have termed some passages in 1 John as paraenesis. One example is Georg Strecker, who identifies no less than about 65 per cent of 1 John as paraenesis, namely, the sections 1 John 1:5–2:17, 2:28–3:24 and 4:7–5:4a. In addition, he calls the section 1 John 5:13–21 "final paraenetic remarks" (Strecker, 1997). Another example is Rudolf Schnackenburg (1992), who is somewhat more moderate in this respect, but still regards the passages 1 John 2:15–17, 3:11–21, 4:7–12 and 1 John 4:19–5:3 as paraenetic (Schnackenburg, 1992). What Strecker and Schnackenburg have in common is that they see a continuous alternation between paraenetic and dogmatic or kerygmatic sections in the letter. How we answer the question whether paraenesis is to be found in 1 John depends of course on how we define the term "paraenesis." But it also has to do with our notion of how the letter is organized. The suggestion that 1 John may contain paraenetic sections is not new, even though in most cases where New Testament paraenesis is discussed, Johannine literature is not considered. Schnackenburg⁸⁷ and

83 Popkes (2004:43) redefines this phrase in the following way, "reminds of practices to be pursued or avoided in the Christian way of life". Again, the definition is broadened, moving further than simply ethical aspects by including doctrines or convictions (cf. also Starr 2004:79).

84 Amicability is possible because of the shared convictions (Starr 2004:80).

85 Libanius (Epist. Styles 5) remarks, "Paraenesis is horatory speech that does not admit of a counter-statement".

86 Not only traditional material is used, but also personal advice by the author him or herself.

87 Schnackenburg (1992) mentions 1John 2:15-17; 3:11-21; 4:7-12; 4:19-5:3.

Strecker⁸⁸ both accept the presence of paraenetic material in 1 John, while Holmstrand confirms their opinion by claiming “a part of the letter has most of the characteristics of Paraenesis.”⁸⁹

The first aspect of paraenesis in 1 John

One of the first aspects to consider when thinking of paraenesis in 1 John, is the following:

Paraenesis makes use of conventional rather than new material. There is consistent reference to what is known, serving as motivating reminder of commonly held knowledge. It is usually general in application.

Starr noted that “paraenesis assumed its greatest role in social groups that had *already* adopted the new worldview and become established in the new social group” (Starr, 2004:111). 1 John refers to a rich source of known material⁹⁰ shared by the author and his addressees.⁹¹ Terms used to refer to this shared knowledge include οἶδα, γινώσκω, φανερώω, ακούω, γράφω, μαρτυρέω, ἀγγέλλω and derivatives. The paraenetic nature of 1 John is clearly reflected in the warning against the antichrists. There it is stated that the group knows everything and does not need to be taught anything (1 Jn 2:20–25). This friendly reminder of what is known is typical of paraenesis. This fostering of identity by reminding and thus binding people to their traditions was central to paraenesis.⁹² It is further notable that the author of 1 John seems to hide behind the authority of his material, which is also a characteristic of paraenetic literature. The authority lies in the authority of the content and message shared, and not so much in the person conveying the message.

88 Strecker (1989: xlv) mentions 1John 1:5-2:17; 2:28-3:24; 4:7-5:4a, with 5:13-21 as final paraenetic remarks. Popkes (1996:120) criticizes Strecker for the fact that the distinctions are not sharp enough to warrant his results.

89 Aasgaard (2004:254). Popkes (1996:118) pointed out that if Dibelius’s definition of paraenesis is applied, John’s literature would not qualify as paraenesis.

90 A note of caution: Starr (2004:80) argues that traditional material is not used that frequently in paraenetic material and are widely used in all first-century moral discourse and should therefore not be seen as a specific characteristic of paraenesis. The same applies to the general nature of paraenesis. John does not call his shared knowledge “tradition” although depending on semantics, it might be called tradition. The emphasis in the text is however on what is shared. Important for 1 John.

91 Malherbe (1986:125) refers to the phrase “as you know” as a key phrase in paraenesis. Cf. also Aasgaard (2004:248-251).

92 Cf. Aasgaard (2004:264-65) and Popkes (2004:263) regards this as an important aspect of paraenesis, whichever way paraenesis is defined. Quinn (1990:189) phrases it as follows, “The social functions of paraenesis included socialization, legitimation of a new world, and the reinforcement of identity”.

Paraenesis is used to employ shared knowledge as encouragement in determining the ethical actions and promote moral virtue.

The use of paraenesis is obviously aimed at giving a particular group advice on ethics, reminding them of their ethos. Popkes (2004:33) also indicates that “paraenesis was addressed to adherents of a given group at all stages of their moral or spiritual development”, as Starr also confirmed (Starr, 2004:111). This fits well with the material of 1 John, since according to the proposed scenario, the author tries to convince people who already share knowledge with him (whom he does not need to teach anything – 1 Jn 2:20–25) to cooperate more closely with the group of the author. The author wants to draw the addressees⁹³ into closer communion and partnership with him and his group – he wants to improve the *koinōnia* between the two groups (1 Jn 1:3–7). The behaviour of the addressees must change according to what they already know, obviously implying that they are ethically in error now (1 Jn 1:8–2:2), although the author does not state that bluntly. Of specific interest to the paraenetic nature of 1 John is the observation of Aasgaard (2004:252) that the task of paraenesis *inter alia* is to encourage love within groups or among family members. This forms the central theme, especially in 1 John 3 and 4, where it is argued that God is love and that if a person is a child of God, he should love his brothers (to use the masculine language of John). This indirect way⁹⁴ in which the author reminds his addressees of their responsibility by considering what they know, namely, that if they do not love their brothers (or sisters) they are not of God, is typical of paraenetic language, showing clear paraenetic influence in the latter part of the letter.

Rhetorically, paraenesis is presented in a variety of styles or genres like examples, antithetical arguments, lists or Haustafeln.

According to Popkes (2004:20), “paraenesis makes clear how to behave and why to behave that way, and it makes possible the actual practice of that behaviour”. It is, for instance, evident from the negative example of Cain (1 Jn 3:11–18), or the example of the poor who must be helped (1 Jn 3:16). Essential to the ethics of 1 John is also the call to mime Jesus, who serves as example of love (1 Jn 3:16), righteousness (1 Jn 2:1, 29) or purification (1 Jn

93 The addressees are not the same group than the antichrists – the letter was not addressed to the latter group.

94 Cf. for instance, 1 John 4:7-8, “Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love”.

3:2). The mimetic references are mostly brief (Van der Watt, 2016), but in chapters 3 to 5, the emphasis falls on the love of God that must be reciprocated in the love for the brother.

The use of antithetical arguments in 1 John is also well known, since some see it as reflecting the position of the opponents (cf. for instance, 1 Jn 1:6–10; 2:9–11) (Brown, 1986:42–47). They argue that the knowledge of the secessionists is contrasted with that of the author. They deviated from this orthodox knowledge, earning them the title of antichrists (1 Jn 2:18ff.) who do not know God (1 Jn 4:6). By contrast, they are no longer regarded as part of the Johannine group. Only those who keep Jesus's word (ὅς δ' ἄν τηρῇ αὐτοῦ τὸν λόγον) are in him (ἐν αὐτῷ ἔσμεν) and of course the converse also applies in this regard. Again, the example of Cain that should be contrasted with his brother serves as illustration of this reality. Even if the view that the antitheses refer to the position of the opponents is not accepted,⁹⁵ this material would suggest a form of paraenesis. The antithesis might then be aimed at the addressees of this letter to encourage them to behave correctly by reminding them of what the opposite position implies, for instance, “if we say that we have fellowship with him while we are walking in darkness, we lie and do not do what is true; but if we walk in the light as he himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another” (1 Jn 1:7–8).

Although there is no *Haustafel* in 1 John, ethics remarks in 1 John 2:12–14 have list-like characteristics, starting with “I write to you (γράφω ὑμῖν) little children (τεκνία), fathers (πατέρες), young people (νεανίσκοι) and children (παιδιά) respectively”⁹⁶. The statements made in each case are largely repetitions of what is known and is confirmed throughout the letter (cf. for instance 1 Jn 1:1–5; 2:13–14, 24; 3:5; 4:7; 5:3–4, 18, 20). By rhetorically using such a list confirming known information regarding different groups seems to function in the same way *Haustafeln* would, although the contents are different.

Paraenesis is normally found between a respected authoritative person who addresses a person or group of lower status with whom he or she is usually closely acquainted.

⁹⁵ Cf. Lieu (1991:5-6, 13-16, 66).

⁹⁶ Schnelle (2010:94) therefore prefers to speak about *Gemeindetafel* in this case. Berger and Luckman (1966:120) also pointed out that paraenetic utterances strengthened social formation and assisted in inducing individuals into a society, reminding persons of their shared values.

Although the author hides behind the authority of his message, as was pointed out earlier, his authoritative position is fixed as the eyewitness who represents the orthodox group who shares *koinōnia* with the Father and Son. His aim is to convince the addressees to cooperate more closely with him and his orthodox group, in other words, to share *koinōnia* with them and with God. By emphasizing their shared tradition and views, the author uses the general approach so common of paraenesis to convince the addressees to cooperate more closely with them and restore the loving relationships between them (cf. 1 Jn 3–4). The close relationship between the author and the addressees is expressed in the way the author addresses them as beloved or little children (1 Jn 2:1, 7, 18, 28; 3:18, 21; 4:1), as was mentioned earlier. Apart from this he also addresses them as if they are part of his group, including them in his reference to “us/ we” (for instance, 1 Jn 3:11–12, 18–19), although there are some problems with cooperation (*koinōnia*) and with the love between him and his addressees, requiring a paraenetic approach to rectify the situation.

Dryden (2006:35) points out that “paraenesis works in three primary modes: by providing moral advice, contextualizing moral instruction, and reorientating affective commitments.” All three these modes are clearly present in 1 John. Moral exhortations are often repeated to remind recipients of expected behaviour and to reconfirm the guidance given when one formerly enters a new stage of life or a new group (Gammie, 1990:23–26). It provides moral advice, especially in the contexts of love. It contextualizes the moral instruction within the framework of the schism, encouraging the addressees to cooperate with the orthodox group, and it reorientates commitments through the invitation to loving *koinōnia*.

A paraenetic style is meant to persuade someone to pursue something or to avoid something. With respect to 1 John, paraenesis shows the intention of the text to influence the reader to follow a specific line of action. The frequent repetition of what was known in the group encourages the addressees to use prior knowledge to direct their actions. It shows the traditional markers in the group under specific circumstances. Paraenesis contributes to the overall argument and aim of the author. The purpose is to provide guidance for the moral life of the group. This is done either by preserving/ confirming the social order or by converting the old social order in favour of a new one. Using paraenesis, the author does not introduce a significant quantity of new information in the group or call upon the audience to pursue a different or unaccustomed way of life but rather relies on familiar material (in 1 John this familiar material is the tradition the author relies on) that is presented in such a

way as to serve the author's special aim. Finally, the paraenesis is aimed at reinforcing a sense of identity with a group and sense of separation from those who do not believe or do not conduct themselves as the group does. Paraenetic exhortation sketches in black and white, with clear lines between those inside and those outside.

3.3. Original audience visible in tradition

Collectivist, group-oriented, ancient Mediterranean's viewed themselves "sociologically" in terms of generation, gender, and geography, with constant concern for public awards of respect and honour. They thought quite differently about who a person might be and what might be the expected range of human behaviour. This second part of Chapter 3 takes a closer look at collective memory and social identity as part of the role of tradition in the group. This will offer a better understanding of the original audience.

As point of departure the author assumes that the "us" and the "you" have heard the same message and thus share in the same tradition. Heckel (2004:433) argues that the "you" indeed knew the oldest tradition about Jesus, but the differences between them and the author ("we") in this regard is that they have no means to prove it, and it was therefore dependent on the witness of the "us". In the argument in 1 John 2:7–8 about the old and new commandment, the author seems to identify his message with that of the "you". He does not bring a new message but relies on the old message that the "you" has heard from the beginning.⁹⁷

The second example comes from 1 John 2:24–25:

"Let what you heard from the beginning abide in you. If what you heard from the beginning abides in you, then you too will abide in the Son and in the Father. And this is the promise that he made to us—eternal life".

What they heard from the beginning is the message the author wants to communicate in to 1 John 1:1–4 and 1 John 5:9–13, 19–20. The messenger of life comes from God, is proclaimed by the "us" and should abide in "you". In 1 John 3:11, references to "you" and

⁹⁷ Strecker (1989:50) interprets the contrast between the old and the new as indication that the letter comes from a later period in the tradition, and he also explains the differences between the letters and the Gospel likewise. Schnackenburg (1984:15-16) sees the situation in which the Letter was written as "...ein schon fortgeschrittenes Stadium der christlichen Gemeindebildung".

“us” overlap. The message “you” heard from the beginning is that we (“us”) – that includes both the author and addressees – should love one another.⁹⁸ In 1 John 5:11 and 1 John 5:13 it is said that both the “us” and the “you” have eternal life. They clearly share in the same reality. In 1 John 2:12, 13, 14, 15 words that are used for the “us” are also used for the “you”. They know forgiveness of sin (1 Jn 2:12 with 1 Jn 1:8–10), know God (1 Jn 2:13, 14 with 1 Jn 3:3) and the word of God abides in “you” (1 Jn 2:15 with 1 Jn 1:10 [implicit]). This also points to common identity. In some cases, there is no distinction between the “us” and the “you” or the references are used alternately, which points to shared identity. Since the author makes use of imperatives that are preceded by relational terms like children or beloved,⁹⁹ it shows that he sees himself in a position to address the “you” with authority (Painter, 2002:82). The above argumentation shows that the relation between the “us” and the “you” indeed seems ambiguous. The author regards them as one group, sharing tradition, expectations, and spiritual reality.

This understanding shows that the “us” and “you” indeed stood in a relationship where they shared tradition, realities, and expectations, in other words, both the “us” and “you” belonged to the Johannine group. On the other hand, these two groups are not sharing *koinōnia*, suggesting separation and lack of participation and cooperation between them. In the opening of the letter (1 Jn 1:3), the eyewitness message is proclaimed to the “you” so that the “you” may have fellowship with “us” and thus with God. What becomes apparent is that the two groups should be distinguished in some way, but in another way, they represent the same group and share identity. In this we see that the author struggles to emphasize continuity with the past in a situation where novel beliefs and practices influence the group identity. Now it is important to look at what the author proclaimed in the text.

3.3.1. What did the group hear?

Related to what they know is what they have heard (ἀκούω), assuming shared accepted knowledge, something to which the author refers consistently. By referring to what they have heard (ἀκούω), the author is using another method to emphasize what they already know as a group (see 1 Jn 1:1–4). As one would expect, there is a fair measure of overlap between

⁹⁸ It may be argued that the author says something about the “us” to the you, but it seems more plausible that the remark includes both.

⁹⁹ With relational term – 1 Jn 2:28; 3:7, 13; 4:1, (7, 11); 5:21. Without relational term – 1 Jn 2:15, 24, 27, 28; (3:1).

what they have heard and what they know. The author is referring to things that are within their frame of reference, namely that they know the Father and the Son, that their sins are forgiven, and they must no longer sin, and that they *know* the truth. The rhetorical method of the author is thus to join himself to the knowledge of the group. By referring to a specific knowledge base concerning God, salvation, identity, ethics, the future, etc., an authoritative framework is created through which people are judged either positively or negative. In this manner it functions as an instrument of power, not only to support and affirm certain social and theological positions, but also to disqualify certain persons and groups as being without knowledge and without the Spirit. Malina and Neyrey (2008; also refer to Malina & Rohrbaugh, 1998) call this “negative labelling”: Negative labels, in fact, are accusations of *deviance*. Behaviour is deviant when it violates the sense of order or the set of classification that people perceive to structure their world (Van der Watt, 2014:9). The content of what they heard partially overlaps with what they know, but with some differences.

- They heard about the Word of Life from the beginning (1 Jn 1:1, 3; cf. also 1 Jn 2:24)
- They heard an old commandment from the beginning (2:7)
- They heard that they should love one another from the beginning (3:11)
- They heard the message that God is light (1:5)
- They heard about the antichrist that is coming (2:18; 4:3)

Based on what is heard *from the beginning* (a–c above), the author proclaims and writes (1 Jn 1-5), confirming that his message is grounded in the tradition of the historical Jesus (1 Jn 1:3). This is the “original” message they heard, which in ancient times suggested authenticity. What was heard concerns the Word of life, Jesus, and the commandment to love one another, thus echoing similar ideas than in the Gospel tradition¹⁰⁰.

3.3.2. Statements the author used and the group heard

The author presents himself as the carrier of the eyewitness tradition. As was indicated above, he often refers to what his addressees know and have heard, implying a shared

100 When the author refers to what the Johannine group had heard (or what was proclaimed to them) some emphasis falls on what is expected in terms of their behaviour: they should obey the commandment to love one another, based on their knowledge of Jesus as life and God as light. Again, this reflects the tradition about Jesus and echoes of what is proclaimed in the Gospel.

tradition that forms the basis for the ethical dynamics in the letter. Although the author does not use imperatives, he does make statements in a variety of ways to argue his points. In many cases these statements are simply assumed to be true (cf. *gnōmê* or *sententia* – cf. Parsenios, 2010), in other cases they are argued elsewhere in the letter or seem to suggest a common belief. These statements serve as anchor points for his arguments. A few of examples from the 1 John will suffice to show the varied use.

- There are absolute statements as basis for further argumentation: A first example is the statement that “God is light,” which serves as basic truth for the ethics arguments that follow (1 Jn 1:5–10). There seems to be no motivation for the truth of this statement – it is simply accepted. Another example of such statements is found in 1 Jn 5:4 where it is stated that victory over the world belongs to those who are begotten by God. This is then contextually explained further on (cf. also 1 Jn 2:15–17; 3:7, 22; 4:8,19; 5:17).
- There are statements that logically lead to another: A person who claims to remain in Jesus should live as he lived (1 Jn 2:6; cf. also 1 Jn 2:3–5; 3:16). This is a composite statement linking two secondary but related statements. Similar composite statements are found in 1 John 4:11 where it is remarked that if God so loved “us”, “we” ought to love one another also. The combination of God as love and the *immanenz* of God and believers are aptly expressed in the composite statement made in 1 Jn 4:16 (cf. also 1 Jn 4:20). John offers a different logical argument in 1 Jn 3:6, where it is first stated that the person who remains in Jesus will not sin; he who does sin, does not know God and has not seen him (also an absolute statement).

1 Jn 3:7–10 may serve as example of how conceptual logic holds the argument together.

1 Jn 3:7: *Imperative*: Do not let anyone deceive you.

Statement: He who does what is right is righteous like Jesus.

1 Jn 3:8: *Statement*: He who sin is of the *devil*.

Reason (oti): The *devil* sin from the beginning.

Statement: For this purpose, Jesus came, to destroy the works of the *devil*.

1 Jn 3:9: *Statement*: He who is *born* of God does not sin.

Reason (oti): Because God's seed remains in him,

Statement: he cannot sin.

Reason (oti): He is *born* of God.

1 Jn 3:10 *Statement:* By this it is evident who are the *children* of God and of the devil: Those who do not practice righteousness and do not love their brothers are not of God.

The arguments are logically developed, starting with the devil and sin, moving to Jesus destroying the works of the devil, making it possible for those who are born of God not to sin but to practice righteousness and love. In this way the relationship between sin, Jesus, birth, and ethical behaviour is logically developed using statements that are conceptually linked.

- There are statements that are motivated: A remark, namely, "God is love" is found in 1 John 4:8,16 with the difference that the statement is motivated by the act of God sending his Son. Linking a statement to a motivation to support it is common in the ethics argumentation in 1 John. John remarks in 1 John 3:8 that he who sins is of the devil because the devil sins from the beginning. On the other hand, John states and then motivates the opposite: he who is begotten by God does not sin since the seed of God is in him, which means that he cannot sin because he is begotten by God (1 Jn 3:9). In 1 John 5:3, commandments should be kept because that is what it means to love God. 1 John 4:9–10 (cf. also 1 Jn 3:23) states that God revealed his love and then it is explained how, which leads to the motivation for believers to love in a similar fashion (1 Jn 4:11). Closely associated with the above, are statements that are motivated by or based on (reflecting) dogma: In 1 John 2:1–2, the salvific significance of Jesus is simply spelled out: Jesus is the paraclete, the atonement for the sin of the world. These remarks are dogmatic remarks that are not motivated, but simply stated. It seems as if they formed part of an accepted and shared set of "truths" about Jesus. These "truths" are then used to explain the way God deals with sin.

In 3:13–14 a statement opens the development of a series of remarks¹⁰¹:

¹⁰¹ Cf. also 1 John 4:7-10, 19:21; 5:1-2; 3 John 4-8.

1 Jn 3:13: *Statement*: do not be surprised if the world hates you.

Tradition: We know we passed from death to life.

Reason (oti): We love our brother.

Statements: He who does not love his brother remains in death.

Tradition: You know a murderer does not have eternal life.

The above example shows the way in which John combines tradition (what they know) with his own directives and statements, adding reasons where necessary. In this way his message (and directives) is imbedded in tradition and thus gain more authority. Statements are logically developed, are linked to tradition, and then logically used for “patterning life.” Certain statements are made based on what is known from tradition. This shows that tradition was interpreted, leading to conclusions and statements that logically echo tradition. Motivating ethical behaviour is by no means a stagnant repetition of tradition, but a reflective process in which tradition serves as final control. It may be asked why the author in some cases refers to the common tradition in his language by using phrases like “we know”, or “you have heard”? But in other cases, simply makes statements and even argues them as if the addressees need motivation for what is being said. Obviously, no certain answer is possible. An informed guess might be that the author wants to inform, confirm, or convince the addressees about these facts, or at least feels that he needs to explain them. This would imply that although they shared in a common tradition, certain aspects still had to be re-emphasized or clarified. What would such a situation contribute to the scenario of the group (“us”, “you” and “they”) initially suggested? It would imply that the addressees (the “you”) indeed shared the tradition with the “us”, but that they were dogmatically not so well versed as the eyewitness author. That is why he informs them about the message they heard from the beginning (1 John 1:1–4). They needed some explication and explanation of what the tradition entails. The message as it is presented *inter alia* in the statements of the author should convince them to choose for *koinōnia* with the author and God and not for following the false teachers. These statements do not only focus on theological statements, but also on ethical aspects of the message, especially on love.

3.3.3. Authority and the traditional message

Noteworthy is that the author is hesitant to identify himself as authoritative figure in the letter. He does not even do so at the beginning, and when he does refer to himself, he identifies himself as part of the eyewitness group adhering to the traditional message they have heard from the beginning. There is little evidence of an appeal to personal authority to influence his addressees. However, in his dictum he shows awareness of considerable authority. Many of his statements seem to be absolute, or at least reflect absolute facts, as was clear even from the remarks above. It seems that what he says or the statements he makes is based on solid, accepted, and undeniable truths, in other words solid, and accepted tradition. What seems to happen is that he “hides” behind the authority of the tradition, allowing the tradition to authoritatively speak for itself. He simply conveys the authoritative tradition as the one who writes, witnesses, and proclaims that tradition. Focus remains on the authority that is inherently part of the tradition itself. In 1 John 5:9-12, there is a reference to the witness of God concerning his Son: “he who does not believe God has made Him a liar, because he has not believed *the testimony that God has given of his Son*”. God’s testimony is that his Son brings life, which overlaps with the basic traditional message the author is witnessing about, confirming that it is true (cf. 1:2; 4:14). What the author testifies about is confirmed by the testimony of God himself, confirming where the source of all authority lies. To disbelieve this (his) message is to make God a liar (5, 10). This elevates the proclamation and witness of the author to a considerable level of authority since it is in line with the testimony of God himself.

3.3.4. Memory and tradition

Memory is the faculty that enables us to form an awareness of selfhood (identity), both on the personal and on the collective level. Identity, in its turn, is related to time. A human self is a diachronic identity, built of the stuff of time. This synthesis of time and identity is effectuated by memory. Time, identity, and memory can be distinguished at three levels: inner (neuro-mental), social and cultural. On the inner level, memory is a matter of our neuro-mental system. This is our personal memory, the only form of memory that was recognized until the 1920s. On the social level, memory is a matter of communication and social

interaction. It was the great achievement of the French sociologist Maurice Halbwachs¹⁰² (Halbwachs, 1992) to show that our memory depends, like consciousness in general, on socialization and communication, and that memory can be analysed as a function of our social life. Memory enables us to live in groups and communities, and living in groups and communities enables us to build a memory. Memory is knowledge with an identity-index, it is knowledge about oneself, that is, one's own diachronic identity, be it as an individual or as a member of a family, a generation, a community, a nation, or a cultural and religious tradition. Groups are formed and cohere by the dynamics of association and dissociation, which are always loaded (to varying degrees) with affection. Remembering is a realization of belonging, even a social obligation. A group member must remember to belong: This is also one of the most important insights in Nietzsche's *Genealogy of Morality* (Nietzsche, 1887)¹⁰³. Assimilation, the transition of one group into another one, is usually accompanied by an imperative to forget the memories connected with the original identity. These words ring true to the situation in 1 John and for the role of the author to communicate the tradition he remembers and which he relies on to form the identity of the in-group.

The oral tradition was a tradition of remembered words and deeds, so that principles of remembering were involved from the very beginning. In 1 John there are many verses that focus on the tradition of which the addressees formed part. For a relatively short letter, 1 John has a rich source of material related to traditional knowledge and to increasing or confirming that knowledge (Lieu, 1991:102) as stated above. FC Bartlett (1932) conducted an important study to understand modern day memory. These studies dealt with the remembering of narrative material. The narrative included both narrative of events and narrative sayings. Memory of the material was checked at various intervals of time, from a few weeks to several months, and the remembering occurred under normal conditions, without the distorting influence of special incentives. Bartlett's conclusions may shed light on the ways in which the in-group of 1 John must have remembered the narratives of events and sayings, which came to them from the tradition through the author. By analogy with the

102 Maurice Halbwachs, an internationally known French sociologist, died in the concentration camp at Buchenwald. He maintained throughout the German occupation an active interest in political affairs. As a sociologist he had been especially influenced by Durkheim, and, like him, interpreted social behaviour in terms of collective representations. Halbwachs included in his *Les Cadres Sociaux de la Memoire* (1952) the significance of the collective memory operating on the systems of family, religion and social communities. For this study I used Halbwachs, *On collective memory*, Chicago, The University of Chicago Press, 1992.

103 The book consists of a preface and three interrelated essays that expand and follow through on concepts Nietzsche sketched out in *Beyond Good and Evil* (1887).

development of pre-literary forms of oral tradition in other societies, form criticism believes that we can learn something of "the laws, which operate as formative factors in tradition," and "certain definite principles of transformation". These "laws" or "principles" of transformation have several specific features:

- As time goes on, the oral tradition becomes embellished by the elaboration of simple themes and by the addition of new details. It becomes both longer and more complex. Consequently, it can be taken as virtually axiomatic that "the simpler version represents the original."
- As time goes on, there is a tendency for the particular to become general, and for a statement with local significance to become a statement with universal significance. In the situation faced by the expanding church, this tendency was accentuated.
- As time goes on, the material then changes in form, becoming more dramatic due to the addition of fluid detail and the transformation of indirect into direct narration.
- And, as time goes on, concepts are added that would have been unfamiliar and unnatural in the original situation.

Bartlett's conclusions agree with those of form criticism on one point, namely the pervasive effect of psycho-sociological influences. Bartlett insists that the changes that occur in remembering are not an individual matter. They are primarily a product of the habits of thinking, attitudes of mind, and emotional patterns created in the individual by the society of which he is a part. Bartlett advanced the concept that memories of past events and experiences are mental reconstructions that are coloured by cultural attitudes and personal habits, rather than being direct recollections of observations made at the time. They clearly reflect the cultural setting to which he belongs. This is of utmost importance in 1 John and for the role of tradition in the prologue in Chapter 1 where the remembering takes place.

Where does tradition or custom come in? Tradition refers to the convictions of the past being confirmed and accepted by a group in current day situations, confirming certain patterns of connotative images in the worldview of such a group. That is why adhering to tradition requires certain actions in certain situations. Coertze (1979:37) drew attention to the fact that values relating to what is good or bad are not objective norms that automatically form part of a community, but that the judgement, insight, and knowledge of the ancestors played a part in formulating and establishing these values.

This emphasizes the importance of the tradition within which a group stands, which also motivates and expresses identity. In the case of John, the Jewish tradition is clearly the root from which the Johannine group emerged. The text frequently refers to the Jewish values that are taken up and cherished in the newly formed Johannine group. It forms part of their identity. In the Johannine group, this feature plays a central role. Connotative images, like Jesus, God, or love are constantly confirmed based on convictions of the past (tradition), and they serve as motivation for believers to adhere to the traditional worldview of the eyewitnesses (1 Jn 1:1–4).

People may even be challenged to change their worldview. The result may be that the alternative worldview that is on offer is confirmed, extended, modified, or rejected. By doing this, the person's position will be defined/redefined accordingly. As worldviews overlap, so do identities overlap. The prologue of the 1 John indicates that the letter is based on tradition – not only self-generated knowledge is involved, but part of the knowledge is based on a set of established knowledge that (was) is conveyed and accepted by the group. This goes back to “the beginning” (“Ὁ ἦν ἀπ’ ἀρχῆς – 1 Jn 1:1) when the (metaphorically expressed) Life and the Word of life, was physically experienced¹⁰⁴ on earth in the person of the Son. Life is revealed or manifested (ἡ ζωὴ ἐφανερώθη – 1 Jn 1:2) and is witnessed about and proclaimed (μαρτυροῦμεν καὶ ἀπαγγέλλομεν ὑμῖν τὴν ζωὴν τὴν αἰώνιον – 1 Jn 1:2). on the author bears witness and proclaims the revelation that was physically experienced from the very beginning to create fellowship with the group and their God. The letter stands in this token.

The rhetorical style in 1 John confirms the importance of the tradition for the existence of the Johannine group. The Johannine group was still experiencing the effects of a schism that occurred in the group and the author *inter alia* uses the letter to convince the addressees to move closer to and cooperate with those who hold the traditional eyewitness view. In doing so, the author uses words that emphasize what the group already believed. Words like οἶδα, γινώσκω, φανερόω, ἀκούω, γράφω, μαρτυρέω, ἀγγέλλω refer to the existing traditional knowledge of believers, knowledge that is accepted and transmitted within and by the group. This knowledge is not disputed in the “us” and the “you” group.

104 “which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we looked upon and have touched with our hands.”

Based on this shared traditional knowledge, he then argues his case in a paraenetic-like style¹⁰⁵. He presents the tradition as the backdrop for his case. What he wants to say emerges from and agrees with the shared knowledge of the group, allowing him to position himself squarely within the ethos of the group. “Like memory, tradition is refracted through the contemporary social realities of the groups in which it is enacted, such that it comes in important respects to reflect, even to signify those realities” (Kirk, 2010:62).

3.3.5. Collective memory and social identity

Collective memory is the notion that people remember together with other people and that memory is constructed in, by and for a social group. It is the memory of a group of people, passed from one generation to the next. This is visible in 1 John 1:1–3

1 Ὁ ἦν ἀπ’ ἀρχῆς, ὃ ἀκηκόαμεν, ὃ ἐώρακάμεν τοῖς ὀφθαλμοῖς ἡμῶν, ὃ ἐθεασάμεθα καὶ αἱ χεῖρες ἡμῶν ἐψηλάφησαν περὶ τοῦ λόγου τῆς ζωῆς — 2 καὶ ἡ ζωὴ ἐφανερώθη, καὶ ἐώρακάμεν καὶ μαρτυροῦμεν καὶ ἀπαγγέλλομεν ὑμῖν τὴν ζωὴν τὴν αἰώνιον ἣτις ἦν πρὸς τὸν πατέρα καὶ ἐφανερώθη ἡμῖν — 3 ὃ ἐώρακάμεν καὶ ἀκηκόαμεν, ἀπαγγέλλομεν καὶ ὑμῖν, ἵνα καὶ ὑμεῖς κοινωνίαν ἔχητε μεθ’ ἡμῶν. Καὶ ἡ κοινωνία δὲ ἡ ἡμετέρα μετὰ τοῦ πατρὸς καὶ μετὰ τοῦ υἱοῦ αὐτοῦ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ. “

Collective memory in relation to smaller groups is sometimes called social memory, whereas, in relation to whole cultures, it tends to be called cultural memory. Both types of collective memory include memory sites such as works of art, ritual acts, symbols, celebrations, memorials, libraries, writings and much more, all of which reinforce the collective identity of a people. There are also specialists, or “memory men,” who preserve collective memories, and specialized acts of commemoration. The Author has this role in 1 John. The amount of research on collective memory is rapidly increasing. A little over a

105 Detailed understanding in 3.2.5 on 1 John as example of paraenetic literature. The epistle is not written in the same form as the other biblical epistles, as it lacks an epistolary opening or conclusion. The epistle is written in a simple style, without syntactical flourishes. In contrast to the linear style used in the Pauline letters, biblical scholar Ernest DeWitt Burton suggests that John's thought "moves in circles", forming a slowly advancing sequence of thought. This is like the parallel structure of poetry in Hebrew, in which the second verse of a couplet often carries the same meaning as the first, although in this epistle the frequent recapitulations of already expressed ideas serve also to add to what has previously been said. In summary, the epistle may be said to exhibit a paraenetic style (as previously discussed in this chapter) which is "marked by personal appeal, contrasts of right and wrong, true and false, and an occasional rhetorical question".

decade ago, memory theorists Jeffrey Olick and Joyce Robbins described such research as a “nonparadigmatic, transdisciplinary, center less enterprise”, which they labelled social memory studies (Olick & Robbins, 1998:106). The ancient Greek and Roman rhetoricians observed the human propensity to remember in relation to place or space and so developed the memory aid of associating the themes of oral discourse with various rooms, corners, and statues of an imaginary “memory palace” (Cicero *De Oratore* II.lxxxvi, 350–353). In the 17th century, philosophers shifted from visual to linguistic – semantic and logical – memory aids. “Knowledge henceforth resided in texts and memory was a process of simply storing and retrieving information” (Fentress & Wickham, 1992:14).

The father of collective memory is generally acknowledged to be Maurice Halbwachs (1992). Some of Halbwachs’s key ideas are:

- Memory is usually related to images and places (the rhetoricians’ “memory palace” mentioned earlier).
- Memory does not recall the real past, but only constructions of it; it distorts the past in its need to show that an event has a significance beyond the event itself.
- Memory constructs the past for the present, especially in relation to one’s social group.
- Social groups identify themselves and are identified by collective memories.
- Different groups may have different or even competing versions of the same persons or events (which amounts to memory contestation).
- The past tends to be constructed as a narrative with a beginning, middle and a satisfactory ending.

The incorporation of social memory studies into biblical study has been driven in part by the initiative and work of Alan Kirk and Tom Thatcher (2007: 486-505), who edited and contributed to *Memory, tradition, and text uses of the past in Early Christianity* (2005) and who chaired the section *Mapping memory: tradition, texts, and identity* at the Society of Biblical Literature. It has also found a place in the Society’s social-scientific criticism of the New Testament (Duling, 2006).

Bultmann’s view is that multiple layers of oral tradition characterize the gospels and that secondary accretions must be removed from these traditions to restore them to their earliest forms. This reveals the developing oral tradition – “the history of the tradition”. Social

memory is simultaneously individual and social. It is in society that people recall their memories. The sociology of remembering also indicates that there is an interrelationship between memory, identity, and narrative: identity (e.g., of a group) is constructed by the remembering (retelling) of narratives from the past, and the present is reframed (identity) by telling (narrative) through remembering (memory). With this understanding of social memory as a point of departure, a social-scientific model of social memory can be developed. The social-scientific model used in this study is the social identity theory, which gives us a broader picture of the ancient Johannine group. The analysis indicates that memory plays a crucial role in the cohesion and self-understanding of groups, especially to define boundaries and suggest behaviour.

In the 1 John group, it is the author who recalls his memories “from the beginning”, which include the gospel material. By recalling these memories and making them explicit in his letter, he is giving identity to the recipients. Through this remembering, the present is reframed with respect to their current identity. This kind of memory is called “collected memory,” memory that is based on individualistic principles (Olick, 1999:338). Bergson suggests that memory is not an objective reproduction of the past; it is fluid and always changing.

Memory, secondly, is a social enterprise; it is in society that people normally acquire, recall, recognize and localize their memories. This is then what is happening in the 1 John group. They are recalling the past, recognizing certain truths, and localizing their memories. According to Halbwachs (1992), it is therefore impossible for individuals to remember coherently outside their group context (i.e., the social frameworks of memory), which means that groups themselves share publicly articulated images of collective pasts. Collective memory is therefore concerned with “how what we say and do—as individuals and together—is shaped by a not often obvious combination of traditions, interests, and opportunities” (Olick, 2006:9). As such, collective memory refers to a wide variety of mnemonic products (e.g., stories, rituals, statues, speeches, images) and practices (reminiscence, recall, representation, and commemoration). As such, social memories—as part of an archaeology of collective memory—could be seen as the “production of history,” that is, a specific group’s perception of historical events.

When the author of 1 John speaks about the tradition these group members are part of, he refers to the historical events that some of the followers saw with their own eyes and heard

from disciples (1 Jn 1:1–3). These are the historical events of the 1 John group. Since the author of 1 John works with broad theological concepts like eternal life, love, truth, there is always the temptation to interpret the documents primarily theologically, easily leading to an ahistorical approach.¹⁰⁶ The opposite is the truth, as became clear from the above analyses. The letter is firmly embedded in a historical situation. The theology is intensely interwoven with the situation that is addressed (cf. the references to the conflict, antichrists, opponents). It deals with the unity of a group which has experienced a schism and must now protect those who are exposed to misleading influences. 1 John cannot be read in isolation from this situation, theological concepts are concretized in practical ways and the practical ways illustrate the theological dimensions (1 Jn 3:16–17).

The rhetorical style in 1 John confirms the importance of the tradition for the existence of the Johannine group. In drawing the addressees closer, the author uses several words emphasizing the existing traditional knowledge of believers, knowledge that is accepted and transmitted within and by the group. Based on this shared traditional knowledge, he then argues his case in a paraenetic-like style¹⁰⁷. Social memory and social identity are constructed by the remembering (retelling) of narratives from the past. Put differently: the present is reframed (identity) by telling (narrative) by means of remembering (memory). To understand this within the 1 John framework: the author is recalling events and truths from history to give identity in the present for the 1 John group. Historical narration is an important feature of collective life and plays a crucial role in the cohesion and self-understanding of groups. The cohesion and identity of a group is a matter of collective imagining (social memory), and “made in large part by telling and retelling stories, which define boundaries and suggest moral purposes” (Olick, 2006:6). Storytelling about the past is thus not merely something communities do; it is, in important ways, what they are. Rather than being a mechanism that underwrites cohesion, *storytelling about the past “performs” the group by “remembering” it*. Identity through time is always a relationship between past and present, established using memory. As a result, identity is not an already accomplished fact; it is a production that is never complete, always in process and always constituted within and through representation. It is also a matter of becoming and being constructed through memory. “Memory is a central, if not the central, medium through which identities are

¹⁰⁶ Frey consistently warns against this sterile approach in his 2012 article.

¹⁰⁷ Cf. the earlier discussion on the paraenetic style of 1 John.

constituted” (Olick & Robbins 1998:133). Social memory, as a result, is in a certain sense a “power play,” a mechanism to either criticize or legitimize the present, and, of course, an effort to control the future; to control the past is to control the present (and future). 1 John opens with memory verses in the first chapter (1 Jn 1:1–5). In 1 John, the power play is about Christology and the place given to Jesus. The author is criticizing the outsiders about their understanding of Jesus and love for your brother. According to the author, the “you” takes a middle position between the “us” and the “they”, although the author is convinced that the “you” are still closer to the “us” than to the “they”. The “they” tried to mislead the “you” with their false message to make them part of their group. The “they” are warned against idols (1 Jn 5:21 – cf. Frey, 2013), in other words against turning away from the true God.¹⁰⁸ This presents an imminent danger to the group (Painter, 2002:90). For those of the “you” (as part of the “us”) who already moved in that direction, there is always the righteous God who will forgive their trespasses through the blood of Christ and who will restore their relationship with Him (1 Jn 1:8–2:2). The relation between the “us” and the “you” remains fluid, porous and open. The author therefore (= “us”) wants to convince the “you” to remain steadfast in the orthodox tradition and to relationally move even to the “us” through their partnership and cooperation (*koinōnia*). As a result, the one that remembers thus always speaks “from a particular place and time, from a history and a culture which is specific. What we say is always ‘in context,’ *positioned*.” The context here is the Greco-Roman world in which the 1 John group formed groups of believers. Assmann (2008:110–111) summarizes the above characteristics of social memory (which he calls cultural memory) as follows: Social memory is the concretion of identity, it is reconstructed in relation to a contemporary frame of reference, it leads to a culturally institutionalized heritage of a society, it is cultivated, always takes place within a set system of values, and it reinterprets, criticizes and censures common practice in the light of the self-image of the group in which it takes place.

108 This might indicate a movement back to Judaism from where they came. (cf. Griffith 2002). Painter (2002:79-80) sees it differently. The point is then that the movement away from God, as is defined by that author, would mean no fellowship, and therefore association with the antichrists, and their evil works.

3.4. Identity of the group

In the field of sociological studies, the conceptualizations of group have gone through a change from approaching groups as forms of actual social interaction to regarding them as expressions of ideal collective identities (Jenkins, 2014:134). Van der Watt (2019) argues that the Johannine group ethics had a subjective character. This subjective character was because of their understanding of truth. There is an objective reality outside of this worldly reality. Memory does not recall the real past, but only constructions of it; it distorts the past in its need to show that an 'event' has a significance beyond the event itself. Memory constructs the past for the present, especially in relation to one's social group. Social groups identify themselves and are identified by, their collective memories. The sense of belonging to a group of people is not necessarily based on the actual similarity of its members, but it may be achieved through the "participation in a common symbolic domain" that allows individual group members to imagine themselves as a unified whole despite all their mutual differences. According to the social identity theory, when persons recognize themselves as a member of a distinct group, they go through the process of self-stereotyping. As a result of this process, they experience themselves and other members in the group not as differentiated individuals, but as approximating common characteristics of the group. Judith Lieu (1991)¹⁰⁹ has remarked how claims to revelation or exclusive knowledge are "egocentric" because they "conjure a self-legitimizing territory". Lieu continues that the knowledge revealed as mystery is naturally "intangible" for outsiders and "hence its rhetorical evocation works rather for those inside, for whom it might also substitute for more tangible barriers." The emphasis on knowing thus generates the sense of unity among the members of the author's imagined group, but also sets them apart from the surrounding world. In this last part of Chapter 3, I take a closer look at what the group knew and the role of the Spirit in preserving tradition.

109 Lieu has seen how the interrelatedness of knowledge, language and community in John is in line with how these concepts are bound together in Cohen's notion of symbolic construction of communities and in Anderson's imagined communities, see Lieu, *Ambiguous Admittance*.

3.4.1. What did the group know?

The authors use two words, οἶδα and γινώσκω, *inter alia* to refer to what was known in the group as social memory¹¹⁰. Klauck correctly remarks that the phrase “you know” brings “*vorgegebene Glaubenstraditionen ins Spiel*” (Klauck, 1991:185), while Malherbe (1986:125) notes that an indication that:

“...content is traditional and not new is indicated by such phrases as ‘as you know’...related to this feature is its general applicability...since what is advised is already known, the exhorter disavows the need for further instruction, but merely reminds his listeners of what they already know...He similarly complements them for what they are already doing and encourages them to continue...” (Malherbe, 1986:125).

Although Painter opines that “the two verbs seem to be used without difference in meaning”¹¹¹, closer scrutiny shows that they are rhetorically used in different ways. In the end they emphasize the same thing, namely sharing existing knowledge, in other words traditional knowledge. Considering the use of the two terms οἶδα and γινώσκω in 1 John, what the group knew – what might be considered as their tradition material – could be summarized as follows¹¹²:

Table 3.4 Traditional knowledge of the Johannine group

Examples of verses	Content
1,3; 2,24	They have heard the message from the beginning and are therefore solidly <i>embedded in the eyewitness tradition</i> that was revealed by, and deals with, Jesus.
1,4-5; 2,13-14; 3,1.6; 4,7; 5,20	The group was intimately aware of <i>their relationship and co-operation (κοινωνία) with and knowledge of the Father and Son</i> ; they knew God and Christ. Jesus also gave them

110 The word οἶδα is used 15 times in 1 John and once in 3 John, mostly with ὅτι to refer to something the people know (i.e., οἶδα ὅτι...). This is the favourite way the author refers to existing knowledge. The word γινώσκω are used in two ways – i) referring to knowledge of something – a person knows another object, very similar to οἶδα; ii) with the phrase ἐν τούτῳ (γινώσκομεν) ὅτι... linking two aspects usually in a pattern that you know the one thing because of the other. See also Menken, 1,2 and 3 Johannes (n. 11), p. 57.

111 J. Painter (2002:223), *1, 2, and 3 John*, Collegeville. In 1 John 2:29 these words are used without apparent difference in meaning (ἐὰν εἰδῇτε ὅτι δίκαιός ἐστιν, γινώσκετε ὅτι...), but in 1 Jn 5:20 the two verbs are used together in the same context, the one (οἶδαμεν) emphasizing facts that are known and the other (γινώσκωμεν) that a person is known, which might point to a semantically differentiated use of the words.

112 The table summarizes only contexts where the two terms in question are used and is not comprehensive.

	the insight that they know the true God and are in the true God and that they are in the light (<i>Immanenz</i>).
3,14-15; 5,13.18.19	They are acutely aware of their new <i>identity</i> as children of God, having passed from death to life by being <i>born of God</i> and receiving <i>eternal life</i> .
2,20-21; 5,20	The birth of God places them squarely within the framework of the <i>truth</i> ; they know the truth since God is the truth.
3,11; 4,16	They know the <i>love</i> of God that they must reciprocate by <i>miming</i> the love of Jesus.
2,7	They know the <i>commandments</i> , especially of mutual love. They are also aware of the new Christological framework of the commandments, i.e., the new commandment that also reflects the old commandment.
2,29;	They know Jesus, as their moral example, is <i>righteous</i> hence they must be <i>righteous</i> .
1,8; 3,5; 5,18	They knew that Jesus conquered and <i>took away their sin</i> ; evil has no grip on the child of God. They may live a <i>conquering life</i> , since sin was dealt with and will be dealt with through the blood of Christ.
5,15	They know that <i>God listens</i> to them and so that <i>they could ask</i> from Him according to his will.
2,18, 3,2. 4,3	They were conscious of <i>eschatological realities</i> . They have heard about the coming of the antichrist in the last days. They also knew that Jesus is coming again and then believers will be like him. They shared in the tradition of early Jewish and Christian apocalyptic expectations.

The table above shows that the author covered a wide spectrum of Christian life, which may be regarded as traditional material. The impression is thus created that the group is well versed in the tradition and its structure, ranging from the birth of a person, his identity, behaviour, to what is to be expected in future, with an emphases on being born to life, being saved from sin, acting like Jesus, receiving what is needed through prayer, suggesting rather fixed borders for what might be called their “tradition.”¹¹³ This confirms an established set of

¹¹³ I can therefore not concur with Lieu (2004:105), who argues that the actual expressed content of the tradition “is surprisingly meagre, neither is there any interest in the process of transmission or present authentication”. The missionary references, though not in focus, as well as the strong argument in 1 John 1:1-6 argues against the point Lieu makes.

knowledge, in other words a rather established tradition, outlining a strong sense of identity and self-awareness by the group, in contrast with sparse, loose or unrelated information that would point to a weak tradition in its initial stages. The repetition of the phrase “we know that...” in 1 John 5:18–20¹¹⁴ poses the question whether the author wants to *remind* the addressees of what they have in common in their tradition, or whether he wants to *establish* the common tradition in this way, or both. These remarks do not really seem to convey any novel knowledge, although some of the phrases are not formulated in precisely the same way in the rest of the letter. This re-affirmation of what is already known seems to favour the idea that the author wants to confirm their shared tradition.

It should, however, be noted that these two words rarely refer to knowledge of love *per se*, although connections between their existing knowledge and love are not absent (like in 3:14; 4:7).¹¹⁵ The people in the group firstly know who God is, what Jesus did, who they are. The use of these words focuses more on identity than on behaviour. It should be noted that all the above-mentioned aspects are well attested in the Gospel of John, implying knowledge and acceptance by the addressees of the content of the Gospel.

3.4.2. Role of the Spirit in preserving tradition in the group

The Holy Spirit has a specific role to play in 1 John (Olsson, 1999:156–157), which is linked specifically to the tradition of the group¹¹⁶. In the Johannine jargon, the close relationship between God, his Son and the believers is expressed in terms of mutual indwelling, even though there is a notable difference in how this language is developed in the Gospel and in the Epistles. In the Gospel, it is exclusively Jesus who abides in the believers or the believers in Jesus (Jn 6:56; 15:4–7), while 1 John speaks of the direct mutual abiding between God and those who believe (1 Jn 3:24; 4:15). Furthermore, the Epistles lack the idea of the mutual indwelling of the Father and the Son that forms the foundation for the indwelling of the believers in God in the Gospel (John 14:10–11, 20; 17:21). The point is not so much what Jesus reveals of God but how John’s portrait of this knowledge provides “a reinforcement for the group’s social identity.”

114 1 John 5:18: Οἶδαμεν ὅτι; 5:19: οἶδαμεν ὅτι; 5:20: οἶδαμεν δὲ ὅτι.

115 This is most probably because love is a key problem with the addressees as well as the schismatics.

116 References to the Spirit are found in the second part of the Letter (3:24; 4:1.2.3.6.13; 5:6.8) and show a consistent and interrelated pattern of use.

The work of the Spirit of truth

The word πνεῦμα is used in the following verses, showing the foci of the activities of the Spirit in 1 John:

Table 3.5 Activities of the Spirit in the Johannine group understanding

Verse	What is said
1 Jn 3:24	Now he who keeps His <i>commandments abides in Him, and He in him</i> . And by this we know that He <i>abides in us, by the Spirit</i> whom He has given us.
1 Jn 4:1	Beloved, do not believe <i>every spirit</i> , but <i>test the spirits</i> , whether they are of God.
1 Jn 4:2	By this you know the <i>Spirit of God</i> , every <i>spirit</i> that <i>confesses</i> that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God.
1 Jn 4:3	and every <i>spirit</i> that does <i>not confess</i> that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is not of God. And this is the <i>spirit</i> of the <i>antichrist</i> .
1 Jn 4:6	We are of God. He who knows God hears us; he who is not of God does not hear us. By this we know the <i>spirit of truth</i> and the <i>spirit of error</i> .
1 Jn 4:13	By this we know that we <i>abide in Him, and He in us</i> , because He has given us of His <i>Spirit</i> .
1 Jn 5:6	And it is the <i>Spirit</i> who <i>bears witness</i> because the <i>Spirit is truth</i> .
1 Jn 5:8	And there are three that bear witness on earth: the <i>Spirit</i> , the water, and the blood; and these three agree as one.

The above table shows that the Spirit is especially involved in the *correct confession* about the person of Jesus, in contrast with what the false spirits (i.e., those not of God – 4,1)

confess or do not confess (1 Jn 4:1–3)¹¹⁷. The confession of Jesus is described as the primary focus of the work of the Spirit. This view echoes the function of the paraclete, the Spirit of truth, in the Gospel¹¹⁸. The test for distinguishing between false spirits, i.e., the spirit of the antichrist (1 Jn 4:3) and the Spirit of God (who is of God) indeed lies with the correct confession, in other words the tradition about Jesus that is related to the baptism and death of Jesus (1 Jn 5:6–9), dealing with the salvific earthly mission of Jesus as Christ and human who brings eternal life to this world (cf. Jn 20:30–31). Since the Spirit works within the framework of the confessed tradition about the mission of Jesus, he is identified as the true Spirit or Spirit of truth (1 Jn 5:6).

Moving closer to 1 John the purpose of knowledge is ethical (Bennema, 2007). This shows how the knowledge that is available to the group members can be transformative. In 1 John an important implication can be drawn in Spirit and ethics. If the Spirit facilitates cognitive perception and transformative knowledge, and if orthodoxy (right thinking inside the group) is linked to orthopraxis (right acting by the ingroup), then the Spirit is also related to right morality for the ingroup. For the author of 1 John knowledge and belief inside the Johannine group have a spiral relationship: knowledge of the tradition is available to the group member through the aid of the Spirit, and this knowledge stimulates and informs further belief, which guarantees access to the ingroup. This line of thought shows why Pseumathology was so important to the author of 1 John.

Anointing in 1 John 2:18–28

The discussion in 1 John 2:18–28 may be of some help in understanding the dynamics of the Spirit in relation to the Johannine tradition. Here the author addresses the problem of schism in the group¹¹⁹, distinguishing the Johannine group from the antichrists with the following statement: “But you have an anointing (ὕμεις χρίσμα ἔχετε) of the Holy One, and all of you have knowledge” (1 Jn 2:20). He continues by pointing out that the Johannine group knows the truth, resulting in their correct confession of the Son, illustrating their union with the Father (1 Jn 2:22–23). In 2:27 the author deals with the concept of anointing, “but

117 Cf. Painter, 1,2, and 3 John, p. 258; R. Schnackenburg (1984:210-211), *Johannesbriefe*, Freiburg.

118 Cf. Schnackenburg (1984: 201-211), *Johannesbriefe*; Van der Watt, *Grammar*, pp. 251-256.

119 See 1 John 2:18-19,21-22,26.

the anointing which you received from him abides in you¹²⁰, and you have no need that anyone should teach you; as his anointing teaches you about everything, and is true, and is no lie, just as it has taught you, abide in him". In the latter case the anointing is personified: "it" teaches, making any other teaching unnecessary. Apart from that, the union (*Immanenz*) of believers with God (being in or having God) is consistently linked to the anointing and the knowledge resulting from that union¹²¹. This knowledge is the knowledge they heard from the beginning (1 Jn 2:24) and it is thus linked to the tradition of the group. By having this "anointing," believers can detect and even understand the errors of the secessionists, because of the spiritual insight resulting from the "anointing" (Smalley, 1978:153). Based on their tradition they can distinguish between right and wrong. The question now is: what exactly is intended by the term "*anointing*"? It is not directly clear from the passage and several possibilities are proposed¹²². In 2:20 the term seems to refer to an act (of anointing) (Bultmann, 1973:37) or it may also refer to an object (like the oil), which may then symbolically refer to the Spirit¹²³. It can also remind the reader of baptism.¹²⁴ The gift of the Spirit is, of course, often associated with baptism¹²⁵, but Smalley (1984) points out that there is no evidence of people being anointed during baptism in the first century. One should therefore be careful not to associate anointment too quickly with baptism¹²⁶. Several

120 The phrase "remaining in them" emphasizes the permanence of the "anointing" among them; cf. S. S. Smalley (1984:124), 1, 2, 3 John, Dallas.

121 1 John 2:23-24.27-28.

122 W. Arndt, F.W. Danker & W. Bauer (2000), *A Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament and other early Christian literature*, Chicago, ad loc., distinguishes between two views: "anointing (so lit. Ex 29:7) 1 John 2:20, 27 is usually taken to mean anointing with the Holy Spirit (differently Rtzst., *Mysterienrel* 27, 396f, who thinks of the 'formal equation of the baptismal proclamation w. the $\chi\rho\iota\sigma\mu\acute{\alpha}$ ')". These two views may also be combined. H.G. Liddell and R. Scott (1968), *A Greek-English lexicon*, Oxford, ad loc., point out that in classical Greek the word is used to refer to anything that was smeared on. It may also be used in the sense of an assignment (see J. P. Louw and E. A. Nida, *Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament: Based on semantic domains*, New York, 1996, ad loc.). Brown, *Epistles of John* (n. 23), pp. 342-347 and G. Strecker, *Johannesbriefe*, Göttingen (1989:126-128), provide a good overview of positions taken in this regard. Cf. also Klauck, *Johannesbrief* (n. 15), pp. 156-158; The uses in the LXX are usually to kings, priests and prophets being anointed. In the church fathers the anointment at baptism is often referred to.

123 Cf. Lieu, *Johannine Epistles* (n. 8), p. 29. Haas et al., *1 John* (n. 59), p. 65, distinguish between the possibilities in the following way: "The noun 'anointing' occurs only here and v. 27 in the New Testament. It may refer, (1) to an object, 'the means of anointing,' that is, 'anointing oil' (cp. Ex. 29.7; 30.25), or (2) to an event, either (2a) 'the (act of) anointing', or (2b) 'the (result of) being anointed.' Meanings (1) and (2b) are both possible here". Menken, *1, 2 en 3 Johannes* (n. 11) p. 49, favours the idea that "anointing" refers to the result of the action in this instance.

124 Lieu, *Johannine Epistles* (n. 8), p. 30, rejects this notion.

125 See Mark 1,10; Luke 4,18; Acts 10,38 – this might refer to the baptism of Jesus – Luke 3,21-22. Cf. also 2 Corinthians 1,21-22. Klauck (1995: 57), *Johannesbrief* (n. 15), p. 157 supports this idea strongly. Cf. also T. F. Johnson, 1,2, and 3 John, Grand Rapids; Painter, 1,2, and 3 John (n. 17), p. 198.

126 Cf. also Marshall, *Epistles of John* (n. 56), pp. 153-154.

commentators read “anointing” as a parallel expression for *Spirit*¹²⁷. It is argued that anointing in the Old Testament is often associated with the presence of the Spirit¹²⁸, while in two cases in the New Testament Jesus was anointed with the Spirit¹²⁹. The association of “anointing” with the Spirit is also supported by the personification of “anointing” in 1 John 2:27, namely that the Spirit *teaches* believers everything. This sounds like an echo of a similar view in the Gospel, namely, that the Spirit will lead the disciples in the truth¹³⁰. Smalley is therefore convinced that there are good grounds for accepting that “anointing” refers to “God’s indwelling Spirit acting as teacher and guide in all matters of truth.”

However, some scholars are of the opinion that the “anointing” refers to the *word of God*, “the teaching of the Christian gospel itself”¹³¹ that also indwells in a person, enabling him to teach. Gnostics argued that anointing equalled initiation into supernatural knowledge, which could serve as a parallel to receiving the word of God. Apart from this there is evidence elsewhere in the Johannine literature that the word remains in the believer¹³². This is further born out in this context where it is said that what they have heard from the beginning remains in them – this might refer to the word of God. Smalley (1984:107) mentions Dodd’s view in this regard: “Thus Dodd concludes that *χρῖσμα*, in vv. 20 and 27, ‘which confers knowledge of God, and is also a prophylactic against the poison of false teaching, is the Word of God, that is, the Gospel, or the revelation of God in Christ, as communicated in the rule of faith to catechumens, and confessed in Baptism’”. Several scholars sensibly argue that perhaps the concept of “anointing” includes both these latter views. “John is deliberately using the idea of *χρῖσμα* to signify *both* the Spirit and the word of God. The faithful are those who have (inwardly) received the gospel of truth and made it their own *through* the activity of the Spirit (cf. Thess 1:5–6); thereby they possess the antidote to heresy”¹³³.

127 Westcott, *Epistles of St. John* (n. 47), p. 73; Haas et al., *1 John* (n. 59), p. 65; Marshall, *Epistles of John* (n. 56), p. 153; Schnackenburg, *Johannesbriefe* (n. 48), p. 210; Klauck, *Johannesbrief* (n. 15), p. 157; Johnson, 1,2, and 3 John, (n. 62), pp. 57-58; S. J. Kistemaker, *Exposition of James and the Epistles of John*, Grand Rapids, 2001, 279, to mention but a few.

128 Cf. 1 Samuel 16,13 or Isaiah 61,1.

129 Luke 4,18; Acts 10,38.

130 Jn 15,26; 16,8-15; For further discussion, cf. Schnackenburg, *Johannesbriefe* (n. 48), pp. 151-154; Smalley, 1, 2, 3 John (n. 53), pp. 107, 126; Menken, 1,2 en 3 Johannes (n. 11), p. 49.

131 Haas et al., 1 John (n. 59), p. 65; Smalley, 1, 2, 3 John (n. 53), 106; Lieu, *Johannine Epistles* (n. 8), p. 35; Klauck, *Johannesbrief* (n. 15), p. 157; Menken, 1,2 en 3 Johannes (n. 11), p. 49.

132 1 Jn 1,10; 2,14; 2 Jn 2; Jn 5,38; 15,7.

133 Haas et al., *1 John* (n. 59), p. 66, are of the same opinion: “The two do not exclude one another, for the Gospel cannot give true knowledge unless through the Spirit, and the spirit is to be tested by the Gospel”. Cf. Marshall, *Epistles of John* (n. 56), p. 154.

For our purposes there is no need to distinguish between these two options, since both strongly emphasize the importance of the tradition for the Johannine group. Their identity, who they are, what they believe and should believe is deeply embedded in the Johannine tradition and the *χρῖσμα* has a role in this process. What is required is *both* the Spirit *and* the truth, the Spirit does not operate independently. These considerations in 1 John 2:18–28, read with the remarks about the Spirit in 1 John 4:1–4, show that the Spirit works within a well-defined traditional framework, outlined by the authenticity of the confessions linked to the Jesus tradition (Westcott, 1886 :79). The Spirit confirms what is known, additional revelation was not needed. Spiritual illumination of the received traditions was the pattern they should follow. This implies that the remark that they need not be taught anything confirms and protects the borders of their tradition, perhaps against the (Gnostical inclined) secessionists who claim their own special knowledge¹³⁴.

3.4.3. The established and self-generated knowledge of the group

The debate on whether there are values that are universally true (objective) or whether values are always dependent on situations or societies (subjective), is as old as Western philosophy, dating back to the debates of the Sophists or Socrates¹³⁵. These debates show that identity, ethics, and tradition cannot be separated. Reflections on identity and behaviour are always embedded in and argued from a theoretical framework as part of the accepted tradition of a particular group (Assmann, 2008: 110-111).

For example, discussions about ethics in the Western philosophical tradition reveal numerous different subjective perspectives. The Sophists, for instance, relativized ethics as a cultural phenomenon, while philosophers like Socrates, Plato and Aristotle *inter alia* focused on what lies behind human behaviour in the form of virtue to live a good and virtuous life on a rational basis. Emphasis later shifted among the Stoics for instance, from the virtuous ethical agent to the question of which deeds express moral virtue. Stoics valued contemplation as part of the good life, being able to reflect rationally on theoretical truths¹³⁶. Open and diverse discussions about different aspects from different perspectives related to

134 Cf. R.E. Brown, *The community of the Beloved Disciple: The life, loves, and hates of an individual church in New Testament Times*, New York, 1979, 142; Schnackenburg, *Johannesbriefe* (n. 48), p. 162; Smalley, *1, 2, 3 John* (n. 53), p. 126; Johnson, *1, 2, and 3 John* (n. 62), p. 58.

135 Cf. van der Watt, *Grammar* (n. 2), pp. 20-21, 57-59.

136 Cf. Diogenes Laertius (7.130) as evidence that Stoics believed that the best life is not theoretical or practical, but rational.

behaviour (for instance, virtue, the benefit of the society, religious views, etc.) were part and parcel of reflections on ethics from the very beginning and indeed produced a variety of views, not to mention the diversity of views we know today. In line with this tendency, the Johannine tradition functioned within the confines of the religious convictions of the Johannine group based on their faith in the Father and Son, giving it a subjective character (i.e., theoretically it does not depart from reason, social responsibilities, the necessity for virtue, etc.). However, their tradition also claims that their theological (religious) conviction is solidly based on the revelatory presence of the pre-existent, true God¹³⁷. The divine reality represented by this God is transcendental, suggesting a pre-existent and objective reality outside this relative, worldly, human, reality, thus claiming objectivity (universal truth) for the Johannine theological system¹³⁸. The so-called linguistic intergroup bias means that behavioural patterns among the members of the in-group tend to be described in quite abstract, morally uplifting terms (love, good, true), whereas the behaviour of out-group members is often summarized in quite general morally defamed terms (hatred, evil, untrue). When groups are described using this kind of general language, the actions of individual group members are detached from specific situations. The characterizations of these actions as good vs. evil, true vs. untrue, or hate vs. love are too vague to be tested and are therefore impossible to verify. The portrait of an imagined group whose members continue to embrace mutual love in the face of the world's hatred is thus particularly attractive as a way of strengthening a distinct social identity.

3.4.4. The role of memory in the Johannine group

Groups are formed and cohere based on the dynamics of association and dissociation. It determines how people relate or dis-relate to the identity of the group. This process is always loaded with emotion, and it was no different in biblical times. This study explores the in-group and the opponents that formed from in the in-group. They are the ones who are struggling with association and dissociation with the group in 1 John. Halbwachs (1992) spoke of "*communautés affectives*". These "affectivities" give memories their special intensity or their place in a group as stated in previous parts of this chapter. In oral societies,

137 Cf. Jn 1,1-4; 17,3: This creator God is the God referred to as the Light or Love in 1 John.

138 It might be argued that this is also subjective, since it is based on the set of beliefs of the Johannine group. However, from the perspective of the author, it lies within the objective transcendental world.

the carrier of tradition is memory. Memory is used as a "database". Consider the following parts of the text:

1:1 Ὁ ἦν ἀπ' ἀρχῆς, ὃ **ἀκηκόαμεν**, ὃ **έωράκαμεν** τοῖς ὀφθαλμοῖς **ἡμῶν**, ὃ **έθεασάμεθα** καὶ αἱ χεῖρες **ἡμῶν** **έψηλάφησαν**, περὶ τοῦ Λόγου τῆς ζωῆς, —

1:2 καὶ ἡ ζωὴ **έφανερώθη**, καὶ **έωράκαμεν** καὶ **μαρτυροῦμεν** καὶ **άπαγγέλλομεν ὑμῖν** τὴν ζωὴν τὴν αἰώνιον, ἥτις ἦν πρὸς τὸν Πατέρα καὶ **έφανερώθη ἡμῖν**, —

1:3 ὃ **έωράκαμεν** καὶ **ἀκηκόαμεν**, **άπαγγέλλομεν** καὶ **ὑμῖν**, ἵνα καὶ ὑμεῖς κοινωνίαν ἔχητε μεθ' ἡμῶν. καὶ ἡ κοινωνία δὲ ἡ ἡμετέρα μετὰ τοῦ Πατρὸς καὶ μετὰ τοῦ Υἱοῦ αὐτοῦ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ.

In 1 John there are four times when the author takes the addressees back to what "they" saw (1 Jn 1:1–3), two times when they focus on what they heard (1 Jn 1:1, 3) and two times when he recalls what was proclaimed (1 Jn 1:2–3). There are also eight affirmations named, "in-this-we-know." This dependence on the group's memory is a method the author uses to show them that their tradition is reliable and trustworthy. The use of verbs helps the group to see that Jesus is visible in the past, but also it gives meaning for his place in the group. The author starts his letter with this special place that he gives to tradition. This tradition is remembered through memory. The author in 1 John feels that the opponents have lost the memories connected with the original identity of the in-group (1 Jn 1:6; 2:9–11, 22). 1:6 Ἐὰν **εἴπωμεν** ὅτι κοινωνίαν **έχομεν** μετ' αὐτοῦ καὶ ἐν τῷ σκότει **περιπατῶμεν**, **ψευδόμεθα** καὶ οὐ **ποιοῦμεν** τὴν ἀλήθειαν.

This loss of memory resulted in a split in the group. The two groups differ in that the in-group believed that you should love God and people (1 Jn 2:6; 2:9–11) and the opponents believed that love for God is enough, and you need not focus on brotherly love (1 Jn 3:15). Both groups stand in the tradition of the Light, but the author wants to show that only the one group is really part of the Light. The tradition both groups rely on, is Love.

3.4.5. Social identity theory within the framework of tradition

Social memory is a social phenomenon and therefore has significance for the social-scientific study of the New Testament. In the first century Mediterranean world, personality was dyadic or group-oriented, which means that individuals tended to represent their group

and the views of their group (Malina & Neyrey, 2008). “Individual” beliefs were usually the beliefs of the group, formed by its inherited traditions (social memory). Group-oriented persons are acutely sensitive to the family or group’s traditions, as seen in 1 John. Belonging is basically the process of learning the proverbs and aphorisms that indicate social expectations and behaviour. All are subject to this milieu of socialization, instigating an ongoing experience and continued relationship with others and their shared traditions (social memory). Taking into consideration that first-century Jewish (and Greek) culture was mainly oral, social memory has significance for the social-scientific study of the New Testament. Malina and Neyrey (2008) argue that social memory is about *who* (memory makers) remembers *what* (cultural traditions) *when* (historical factors) *for whom* (memory consumers). To these four factors we can add the “why question”. This question relates to what has been argued above: people remember because memory and identity go together.

A social-scientific model of social memory should therefore concentrate on “who wants whom to remember what, when and why.” The *who*, *whom* and *when* in this maxim refer to the “situatedness” of the act of social remembering. Understanding the who, whom and when in 1 John paints a picture of the insiders and outsiders of this group. Put differently: social remembering takes place especially where there is a need to transform the structure of current society (Schwartz, 1982). Social remembering thus relates to community or identity, with the aim of mimesis being to determine the way it should be and how we (the *whom*) should act. Memory thus plays a crucial role in the cohesion and self-understanding of groups, it is used to define boundaries and suggest moral purposes (Olick, 2006:5–6).

Thus, people (*who*), together with other people (*whom*) remember at times (*when*) certain events (*what*) for specific reasons (*why*). In dealing with the development of Johannine identity, we are dealing with social as opposed to personal identity; that is to say, with identity based on belonging to a particular and defined group¹³⁹. Henri Tajfel’s definition of social identity makes this clear:

“Social identity [is]... that part of an individual’s self-concept which derives from his knowledge of his membership of a social group (or groups) together with

139 Tajfel and Turner define a group as follows: “a collection of individuals who perceive themselves to be members of the same social category, share some emotional involvement in this common definition of themselves, and achieve some degree of social consensus about the evaluation of their group and of their membership in it” (quoted in Turner, 1979).

the value and emotional significance attached to that membership...however rich and complex may be the individuals' view of themselves in relation to the surrounding world, social and physical, some aspects of that view is contributed by the membership of certain social groups or categories. Some of these memberships are more salient than others; and some may vary in salience in time and as a function of a variety of social situations (Tajfel, 1981:255)."

The work of Tajfel and his followers in developing social identity theory may therefore be helpful for understanding the development of Christian identity. Various strategies are available to groups and group members to enhance their own positive identity, ranging from leaving the group and joining another (where this is possible) to redefining or shifting the grounds of comparison between groups to give the in-group a positive identity against the out-group(s) (Esler, 1998:49–55). Clearly, acting as a group or engaging in intergroup comparisons is most likely in a situation where there is “a widely shared belief that ‘passing’ to another group is undesirable, impossible, or very difficult” (Tajfel, 1982:491). According to Brown, categorical dimensions — race, gender, religion, etc. — tend to dominate in real-life situations, though “which category dimension will assume pre-eminence in any situation is very dependent on particular local circumstances” (Brown, 1996:172–73). Investigating and understanding these “local circumstances” are therefore crucial and the social identity theory helps us with this. What may be especially interesting to consider in the case of Johannine group understanding is the issue as to the conditions under which the sense of a particular group identity develops and assumes predominance for its members. Situations of perceived threat, or of unclear boundaries, or of experienced hostility may all provide such conditions. The new identity-designation “in Christ” cuts across previous group designations and creates a new and wider group identity. Indeed, without of course using modern sociological language, this is explicitly what the early Johannine group members saw themselves doing.

3.5. Conclusion

Chapter 3 focused was on three different elements to better understand the tradition of the group:

- Understanding tradition in 1 John;
- The original audience; and

- The identity of the group.

1 John is rich in material related to existing knowledge. Tradition functions as common ground from which a group can determine what is acceptable and what not based on their accepted identity within their group.

This chapter showed that references to what was heard, taught, or known also suggests a common traditional frame of knowledge. The prologue of 1 John (1Jn 1:1–4) show clear indications of the importance of tradition in the letter as the author states that the letter is based on direct eyewitness experience. This eyewitness accounts go back to “the beginning”¹⁴⁰ when the (metaphorically expressed) Life and the Word of life, was physically experienced on earth in the person of the Son, the One who reveals the divine reality on earth. Life eternal is thus revealed or manifested (ἡ ζωὴ ἐφανερώθη – 1:2) and was physically experienced from the very “beginning”. The reference to “the beginning” (1:1) establishes the authority of this information, forming the starting point of this tradition¹⁴¹. This formed the fixed message the author *proclaimed* and *witnessed* about as eyewitness basis for the Johannine tradition¹⁴². Convictions of the past serve as motivation for believers to adhere to the traditional worldview of the eyewitnesses (1 Jn 1:1–4). For this reason, collective memory is important for this study on the Johannine group. People remember together and memory is constructed in, by and for a social group. The analysis showed that memory played a crucial role in the cohesion and self-understanding of Johannine groups, specially to define boundaries and suggest behaviour.

The application of socio-rhetorical analysis and the social identity theory revealed that the Gnostic-oriented group in the 1 John gradually began to make doubtful interpretations of the Johannine tradition within which they stood. This caused unrest and schism. The author of the letter rejected the erroneous interpretations based on the solidarity of the Johannine group. This did not mean that the opponents as such had already imported gross heathen doctrines or practices. They had merely perverted the truth from the background of their own Gnostic interpretations. Due to a schism, there are two distinct and opposing groups, namely

140 The phrase “Ὁ ἦν ἀπ’ ἀρχῆς” in 1 Jn 1,1 most probably refers to the beginning of the ministry of Jesus. Cf. M. J. J. Menken (2010:52), *1,2 en 3 Johannes*, Kampen.

141 In ancient times older information was usually preferred and was regarded as more authoritative.

142 Cf. the words in the phrase in 1 John 1, 2: μαρτυροῦμεν καὶ ἀπαγγέλλομεν.

the orthodox “us” and the antichrist(s) who are labelled as liars and false prophets.¹⁴³ Between these two groups there is a third group, the addressees of the letter who stand in danger of being misled by the antichrist(s) and false prophets (cf. Painter, 2002:90). The identity and lives of the individuals were dependent upon and determined by the group ethos of their family. Belonging to two families will result in split loyalties and eventually conflict. Important questions that arise in this situation are which group’s ethos should be favoured and followed, and which family is primary in forming a person’s identity and ethos? According to Johannine tradition, it is the family that belongs to God. He is the light and believers should act as people who belong to the light (1 Jn 1:5–8). The strong ethical undertone is generally acknowledged. In the light of the above, care should be taken not to deal with material on ethics in this letter in a too general way. They are pastorally aimed at a conflict situation that threatened the unity of the Johannine group. This forms the motivation behind these remarks on ethics, and it also shaped and formed the understanding of the tradition.

In the 1 John group, it is the author who recalls his memories. With the recalling of his memories, he is giving identity to the group of 1 John. With the author’s construction of shared tradition, he turns any competing teaching outside of the “us”. He is crafting a sense of us (2:24). Through the remembering, the present is reformed and given identity. The cohesion and identity of a group is a matter of collective imagining (social memory). So, belonging is basically the process of learning the proverbs and aphorisms that indicate social expectation and behaviour. An example of this in 1 John is sayings like “being in the Light” or “walking in the truth” as markers of the identity of the “us” group. 1 John offers a model that should be imitated, and this is the process of mimesis or reciprocity as discussed in detail in this chapter. There is a synergy tradition, identity, and ethics in the Johannine group. It is based on the revelation of God through Christ. Who they are as a group and how they should behave are not to be determined by human decision. However, the author proclaims that they should be understood through the God-given message as it is expressed in and prescribed by their eyewitness tradition. If somebody does not live within the confines of this

143 Von Wahlde (1990:261) argues that the reason for the schism went back to different interpretations of the Johannine tradition, including the Gospel tradition. One group emphasized the Spirit, degrading the Christology. From this an attitude of ethical freedom resulted which did not promote care for one another. However, the author of John introduces the commandments to provide a test for belonging to the group.

tradition, he or she is not of God and his or her actions not according to the truth or God's will.

CHAPTER 4 IDENTITY AS A SECOND SOCIAL GROUP MARKER

4.1. Introduction to identity

The earliest modern approaches to understanding early Christian identity focused on the relationship between Judean and non-Judean Christ followers and their struggle for supremacy in the nascent Christ movement. This approach focused on identity in terms of ethnicity and ethnic distinctions made between groups. The pioneer of this perspective was F.C. Baur (1878), who argued that the early church was marked by severe conflict along ethnic lines; that is, between a Judean (Petrine) group and a non-Judean (Pauline) group. Albrecht Ritschl¹⁴⁴ (1887) maintained that Baur failed to acknowledge greater diversity in both non-Judean and Judean Christianity. For Ritschl, early Christian identity could not be understood merely in terms of ethnicity, nor could it be limited to two traditions. Rather than merely examining ethnicity and the ethnic conflict involved in the formation of early Christian identity, scholars began to realize that much more was involved in the process of identity formation than negotiating ethnicity. One of the most influential approaches to understanding early Christian identity focused on the role of theology in identity formation and maintenance.

One factor that emerged in the early twentieth century was the definition of identity in terms of right belief, that is, along the lines of theological orthodoxy and heresy. Walter Bauer (1934 [in English 1971]) argued that early Christianity was far more diverse in terms of theology. In his monumental study, Bauer claimed that in some regions the original expression of Christianity would later become labelled as “heresy.”

According to this view, Christian identity was closely connected with correct theology, which became the determining factor of one’s identity; if one did not believe rightly, she or he was labelled deviant and an outsider. With out-group members the problem is not within a person but outside a person, namely, in faulty interpersonal relations. We can therefore suggest the following definition for the in-group and out-group that will be used through-out this chapter:

“Our first-century person would perceive him or herself as a distinctive whole set in relation to other such wholes and set within a given social background; every individual is perceived as embedded in some other sequence of

¹⁴⁴ Ritschl was one of Baur’s students and his main focus was on Christology.

embeddedness.” (Malina, 1993:68)

The discussion in the study thus far has shown that Johannine group members identified and defined themselves as situated and embedded in various other persons with whom the author formed a unity of sorts. Embeddedness is a social-psychological quality describing group-oriented persons by which all members of the group share a common perspective.

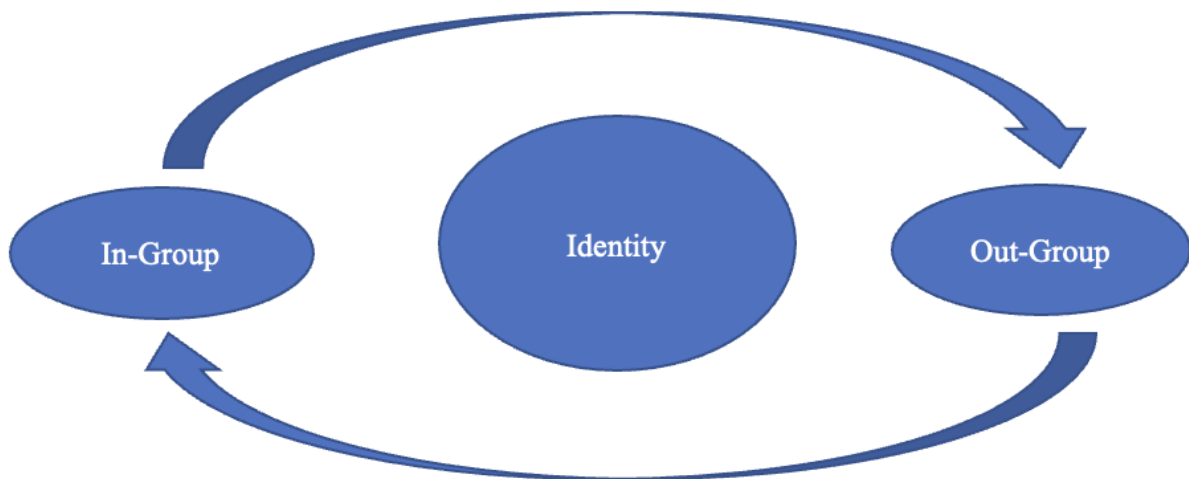


Figure 4.1: The role of identity in understanding group formation

Bruce Malina (2001:58–80) argues that a typical Mediterranean person has a “dyadic personality”, that is, an understanding of himself or herself as interconnected with others. Social identity theory, on the other hand, explores how people understand themselves as members of a category. The social identity theory considers social differentiation based on group membership and salient group norms, boundaries, and rituals. These are two different cognitive constructs. This chapter attempts to distinguish which construct is better when the identity of a group is studied. In an honour culture, a person is brought up to seek the approval of the important members of the community and to avoid falling into disgrace. Honour as category is like an umbrella extending over all the behaviours and attitudes that preserve the culture. In a world where there are competing or at least alternative views, the author of a specific stance has to reinterpret those core values to reaffirm one’s own identity (DeSilva, 1999a:4). Figure 4.1 shows this process of reaffirm the in-group identity with the opposed identity of the out-group.

According to cultural anthropologists, in-group/out-group¹⁴⁵ divisions are fundamental to Mediterranean views of the world. Several years ago, Malina and Neyrey (1996:153–157) suggested that a useful way to analyse ancient letters with a lack of information about recipients of the communication is to set the taxonomy of social groups. For this study it is important to understand how groups mark themselves off from other groups: insiders and outsiders. This is done to better understand the 1 John group formation.

William Graham Sumner (1906) coined the term “ethnocentrism”¹⁴⁶, but it was McGee who wrote a paper on ethnocentrism first (McGee, 1900:825–851). The term describes a view of things in which one’s own group is the centre of everything, and all others are scaled and rated with reference to it. This chapter focuses on the ethnocentric orientation of the Johannine group, in other words the identity of the Johannine group.

Identity entrepreneurship is well attested in the Johannine letters, especially in 1 John. Its self-designated purpose is to effect fellowship between the author and his addressees (1 Jn 1:3). Accordingly, the entire text functions as an attempt to forge a “sense of us” to bring together the author and the addressees. While the author distinguishes between the group of eyewitnesses of Jesus (to which he belongs) and the addressees— “us” and “you” (1 Jn 1:3, 5), respectively. He also constantly designates the addressees as being part of “us” and strictly differentiates them from other people.

This chapter examines identity entrepreneurship as marker for groups in the Johannine tradition by looking at three elements: 4.2) identity understanding; 4.3) in-group understanding; and 4.4) out-group boundaries.

¹⁴⁵ An in-group is a social group with which a person psychologically identifies as a member. In-groups are based on a consciousness of kind. The members of an in-group identify themselves with the word ‘we’. In-groups are relative to a particular social circumstance, like the schism in 1 John. By contrast, an out-group is a social group with which an individual does not identify. When seen from the perspective of the inside, the out-group member behaves in a way that deviates from prototype. The out-group is always defined in relation to the in-group. In the Johannine group, the description of a deviant is an indirect description of the author’s vision for the identity of the group. They do not share the norms that unite a specific Johannine in-group. Out-group members share their own similarities and contribute to the development of out-group stereotyping in the words of the author in 1 John.

¹⁴⁶ Ethnocentrism is a belief that the norms, values, ideology, customs, and traditions of one’s own culture or subculture are superior to those characterizing other cultural settings. The term was coined by William Graham Sumner in his *Folkways* (1906) and has long served as a cornerstone in the social analysis of culture.

4.2. Understanding identity

Identity is a complex and multi-dimensional phenomenon, variously and not always clearly defined across disciplines. The term *identity* is a difficult concept to define (Horrell, 2005:91), although it is widely used in human sciences (for instance, psychology, sociology, anthropology, religion, gender studies, etc.) in a variety of ways and with different definitions.¹⁴⁷ Again it is necessary to be more precise about what is meant here, since identity is central to the discussion of group understanding in 1 John.

Identity, as used here, takes two aspects into consideration. Firstly, it considers the way in which a particular person conceptualizes and expresses him or herself based *inter alia* on their particular worldview (self-perception).¹⁴⁸ Secondly, it includes the way the individual with his identity is conceptualized and defined in terms of relationships and affiliations with others,¹⁴⁹ influencing their relative position in the world. The person approaches reality and seeks meaning from this vantage point. Holland (2003:5) formulates it as follows: identity is “a concept that figuratively combines the intimate or personal world with the collective space of cultural forms and social relations.” Most individuals in the 1 John group can potentially think of themselves as belonging to several social categories, for instance, a first century woman would see herself as a woman, a household member, a slave, and a Christ-believer.

Identity is important when you study the past from texts. At the individual level, identity answers the question: Who am I in relation to other people? At a group level, it answers the query: Who are we in relation to other human groups? (Robbins, 1996:34). Neither question is easy to answer. In both cases, issues of integration, conflict and the symbolic nature of human communication must be considered. Kinship identities could be said to form a hierarchy of superordinate categories: household, clan, tribe, and ethnos. Other social identities are also available: religious groups, burial societies, schools, and philosophical sects. All of these provide a complex web of possibilities for social identification in any given situation. A question to ask in further studies would be: in what practical situations should I

147 See for different approaches Cohen (1994); Jenkins (2008); Ricoeur (1991).

148 This focus on individuality is normally focused on in psychology. There are also some other factors that influence the identity of a particular person like birth, family (Meeks, 1993), area of origin, ethnicity, education, etc.

149 Sociology normally focuses on this aspect using terms like social identity.

identify with my household and my ethnos and in what situations should I identify with my identity in Christ?¹⁵⁰

From a social perspective, Staples (2002:203) argues that human ethical agents, after internalizing their symbolic universe, externalize these views through their actions and behaviour, concretely expressing the nature and identity of their society and themselves. Identity is expressed by concretizing certain values, i.e., living out ethos (Van der Merwe, 2008: 360). This important statement on the role of living out the ethos is further discussed in Chapter 6, where the focus is on ethos as group marker.

4.2.1. Conceptualizing identity in ancient times

Identity usually refers to one of several related but distinct notions:

- The collective set of characteristics by which something is recognized;
- The set of personal or behavioural characteristics by which an individual is known as a member of a group;
- The quality or condition of being the same as something else; and
- The distinct personality of an individual regarded as a persisting entity.

Any attempt to understand identity in the ancient world must take these fundamental properties into account. All things are defined in comparison with something else. In this study, the comparison is made between the insiders of the Johannine group and the outsiders (deviants) of the Johannine group. It is important to remember that what may be constructed as a core identity or essence is a changing social accomplishment: certain identities simply become dominant over time as they are continually reaffirmed by social institutions and cultural practices (Sampson, 1993:86, 112–113). As Lieu states, “the same history can be used differently by different claimants, while different histories may be reconciled with each other in a single text or author” (Lieu, 2002:191–209). For example, Christ-followers continued to use the stories of ancient Israel to shape their identity. Lieu acknowledges that this identity-forming activity builds on existing identities to shape a distinctive group identity.

150 Scholarship on identity is Meyer 1980; Sanders 1980-1981; Neusner and Frerichs 1985.

Group identity is no longer seen as static, homogeneous, and normative. Rather, it is defined as “untidy”, fluid, and transient (Jones, 1997:131). Group identity is a dynamic process, involving inclusion and exclusion and active maintenance of cultural boundaries in the process of social interaction (Jones, 1997:28). A person consciously defines him- or herself in terms of a worldview but is also part of that worldview through self-perception (a person's mental image of him- or herself, also expressing uniqueness and individuality as part of that worldview). Since this is a self-conscious process through which a person relates and positions him- or herself in relation to other connotative images in the worldview, it results in acknowledging the relative role and significance of the other connotative images in terms of self-perception. Throughout this process, identity is continuously being formed. As Horrell (2005:94) puts it: identity “is constructed, not given, produced, and reproduced not fixed... social identity is constantly in process, as it were, reinforced or transformed over time...”. In spite of the constant dynamic formation of identity, the identity of a person ensures stability and continuity in their self-perception, also in relationships with others. If the structure of a person's worldview overlaps with somebody else's, they will share identity to the extent that their cognitive worlds and their evaluations of their relative positions in their cognitive worlds overlap. According to Staples (2002:202), people sharing identity will therefore always try to coordinate their actions – thus forming group identity.

4.2.2. Self-discovery in 1 John

The first generation of Christians lived through changes in Christianity unmatched in Christian history for depth and rapidity. Yet they emerged assured of their own profound rootedness in Christ and the first apostolic community. They assimilated great changes in perspective and to their roles in their communities. By one's own act of meaning, a person defines and redefines themselves, defines and redefines their world. Self-definition is at the very heart of the process through which a person actively engages in shaping their world. In the 1 John, group this was a constant process. Self-shaping entails a prior act of self-understanding. For this self-understanding, the individual or group needs resources such as knowledge and insight into what one loves. Under a variety of influences there may emerge a new self-understanding, and so the goal of shaping a new self¹⁵¹. In the 1 John context,

¹⁵¹ The author of 1 John thinks that being a Christ-believer (identity) implies a certain lifestyle (behaviour norms). The traditional way of analysing the meaning of behaviour norms was to ask how the ethics motivated their

the people already had a self-understanding of who they were and where they belonged. But then through the gospel, they became part of a new group (family) with new ideas and beliefs. So, in time, redefining would have taken place to understand their role and place in the 1 John group.

Meyer (1986:27) says that selfhood comes to light in the discovery of “I” and “we” in a context of communication. How I understand myself hinges on how I am treated in my world, and my understanding of it is a projection of interpersonal experience. So how did the 1 John members make themselves be what they were?¹⁵² They realized their own identity through Christology. With this new identity, they had to learn to live in a world with more than one human meaning and understanding. In the process they modified this world’s understanding of them, the insider identity. Social groups engage in line drawing to determine what is right and what is wrong, who is in and who is out. In 1 John, the author played this role by using the tradition and what the addressees already know to form the boundaries of the group.

The author upholds the following central affirmations about the person of Jesus Christ as identity forming for the group:

- Jesus is the Christ (1 Jn 5:1; 2:22)
- He came in the flesh (1 Jn 4:2)
- He is the Son (1 Jn 2:23), the Son of God (1 Jn 5:5)
- He came by water and blood (1 Jn 5:7)

On the other hand, the author rejects the identity of the out-group members who do not uphold these basic tenets:

- He who denies that Jesus is the Christ is a liar (1 Jn 2:22)
- He who denies the Father and the Son is the antichrist (1 Jn 2:23)
- He who does not confess that Jesus has come in the flesh, is not of God (1 Jn 4:3)

This brings us at a point to better understand how these ancient people categorized and

theology. This study will re-conceptualize the question into a question about interaction between social identity, norms, and in-group narratives. Members share a common identity and try to conform their behaviour to it.

152 On the current discussion of sociology and biblical studies, see Robin Scroggs, “The Sociological Interpretation of the New Testament: The Present state of Research,” *New Testament Studies*, 26(1980):164–79.

stereotyped themselves when in a group.

4.2.3. Categorization and stereotyping influencing identity in 1 John

According to Roitto (2009), categorization is one of our most basic skills. It is difficult to even imagine how a culture could do without categorization. All categories in our minds centre on a *prototype*, that is, a representation of the ideal or typical member of the category. A group exists because people believe in it and identify themselves with it. The group also has certain characteristics because people share a certain way of thinking and feeling. Once people have categorized themselves, they compare themselves with relevant out-groups and seek positive distinctiveness. Malina (2001:58–80) argues that the typical Mediterranean person has a “dyadic personality”, understanding themselves as interconnected with others. In a collectivist culture, the self is not understood as distinct, but interdependent and integrated with others. Therefore, who I am, what I feel, think, and do, are according to my social identity and role in the group. The picture of a group as a body, where different parts interact in harmony and need each other, was a widely used picture of society, a prototype. Therefore, behaviour can be seen as a direct result of belonging to a certain category of people, like the Johannine group. The in-group prototype was probably constantly under negotiation since there are no absolute laws that determine the formation of the group’s identity. With this negotiation the Johannine in-group members would have formed a counterculture against dominant culture values. Prototypes and stereotypes emerge from the need for identity. This means that the question of what the prototypical group member is like should be asked in relation to out-groups meeting the in-group or deviants forming in the in-group in the 1 John group.



Figure 4.2: Identity markers for the prototype and stereotype

Plutarch, another first-century AD author (died ca. 120), commented that all people in his world were situated in some sort of hierarchical relationship (Mossman, 1997:99–111), subject to some authority figure. The defining characteristics of persons in antiquity were nearly always understood in terms of the group of origin and place of origin (Malina, 2001:58–80). This social classification of persons constituted the categories by which people understood each other (Malina & Neyrey, 1996:3). If we wish to understand the people of the ancient Mediterranean world, people from the world of 1 John, we should learn to assess them on their own terms. For this we need an understanding of their social structures. Stereotyping shows the society's ideal, the person who embodies a culture's definition of the ideal human being or group member.

Individuals were thought to be shaped, moulded, and formed by their mentors, whose stamp they bore. That is why living in an ancestral tradition was very important. Stereotypes emerge from the need for identity. This can be seen in 1 John, with the author forming a group identity with which the recipients of the letter could identify. With stereotypes, it is also important to look at the out-groups and their relationship with the in-group. This is done in 4.4.2. To this end, we may begin with a rudimentary definition of identity, which involves ideas of boundedness, of sameness and difference, of continuity, perhaps of a degree of homogeneity, and of a recognition by self and by others. Such a definition will certainly

demand further discussion and refinement, but that it can be applied to the past with which we are concerned is undeniable.

4.2.4. Social identity as social glue

Identity can be taken for granted. We seem to know who we are, and we have a good enough sense of the others in our lives and the way they relate to us. In ancient biblical times, this understanding of oneself was different; it was always group-oriented with kinship, playing a big role in identity. Although identification always involves individuals, something else – collectivity and history – may also play a role. To begin the thinking process on identity, there is a basic starting point: identity is the human capacity – rooted in language – to know “who’s who.” This involves knowing who we are and knowing who others are. In this study it means understanding who the in-group is and being able to define the “they”. It is a multi-dimensional mapping of the ancient world. Identification also makes no sense outside of relationships. Who we think we are is intimately related to who we think others are, and vice versa. When the author of 1 John describes who the in-group is or how they should act, he is also describing the outsiders of this group and their actions. For example, in the following verses the author describes the out-group’s actions, but by doing this he is also speaking about the identity of the “we”:

- He who says he abides in him ought to walk in the same way in which he walked (1 Jn 2:6). = WALK
- He who says he is in the light and hates his brother, is in the darkness still (1 Jn 2:9). = LIGHT
- He who says “I know Him” but disobeys his commandments is a liar and the truth is not in him (1 Jn 2:4f). = TRUTH

Identification matters because it is the basic cognitive mechanism that humans use to sort out individually and collectively. For this study, it is important to understand who the in-group was and what the threat was from the they-group. Tucker (2014:75) correctly argues that “understanding social identity evident in a text should be anchored in the historical situation of the recipients.”

The welfare and existence of many voluntary groups, small or large, depend on the willingness of group members to make regular investments in those groups. Although each

member may acknowledge the importance of these investments, it can be difficult to maintain groups because it is attractive for members to free ride on the contributions of others in the group. In the social-psychological literature, such group maintenance problems are commonly referred to as *social dilemmas* (Levine & Moreland, 2002). In social dilemma groups characterized by a low system integrity, we might expect that many members will weigh the costs and benefits of their group membership in the face of an attractive alternative and will realize that they are better off by leaving the group. As a result, the group may cease to exist. In contrast, in social dilemma groups with high system integrity, counterforces are likely to be produced within the group to fight off the threat of an attractive exit option, thus preserving the integrity of the group. One important psychological and behavioural force contributing to group stability and integrity is a member's *group loyalty*. Loyalty is a complex, multifaceted construct, consisting of emotive, cognitive, as well as behavioural elements. For example, loyalty may be manifested through the experience of strong, positive emotions (happiness, joy, empathy) associated with group membership. Cognitively, loyalty may be manifested as depersonalized trust in other members and optimism about the group's future. And, behaviourally, loyalty may be evidenced in the sacrifices that people make to help their group, including staying when it is personally costly (Levine & Moreland, 2002). The inseparable link between identity and behaviour is clear from the above – Jesus (and God) is righteous – and a person who acts accordingly is also righteous.¹⁵³

It is not the deed that makes one righteous – the deeds reveal the inner nature of the one who is acting righteously. Righteousness¹⁵⁴ refers to doing what is right and it is measured against God, who is righteous. Doing what is right is acting according to what God expects, i.e., his will. Marshall (1978:167) describes this righteousness as “correct, moral behaviour, acceptable to God.”

In sum, all the contexts where righteousness is at play, directly address ethics, like behaviour, sin, evil deeds, and in all the cases the link between identity and deeds are brought into direct focus. Righteousness as quality (identity) and righteous deeds go hand

153 Smalley (2002:166) speaks of “doing is the test of Being”, meaning that “the truly ‘right’ person is the one who acts rightly (cf. Matt 7:16 [Luke 6:44])”.

154 For background information see the following remark of Smalley (2002:167): “There is a clear OT background to the concept of acting ‘righteously,’ and being ‘righteous’ (δίκαιος)”. See Gen 18:23–26; Ps 1:6; Isa 60:21; Dan 12:3. In the NT this language is particularly associated with Paul (cf. Rom 1:17; 3:21–26; 5:1); but it is also found elsewhere (cf. Matt 23:28; Luke 18:14; 1 Pet 4:18; Rev 22:11)’.

in hand, even more, the righteous deeds should be inspired by the righteous identity, which is derived from God and Jesus. Group relationships where identity is expressed within a particular group are presupposed here.

It remains to be seen whether social identity also elicits feelings of group loyalty when people are confronted with an attractive exit option. So far, there is only indirect evidence to suggest that social identity may act as some kind of “social glue” in preserving group integrity when the group is under threat. Social identity thus contributes to the integrity and stability of groups. It ensures that if an external threat is imposed on the group, a counterforce is produced to reduce the impact of the threat. Social identity plays a key role in promoting group integrity by increasing members’ loyalty to their group. “Identity” then, was not a marginal epiphenomenon. It was the answer to bedrock questions: Who are we? What ought we to be?

4.3. In-group understanding

Who we are deeply influences how we are. Our sense of identity is intimately connected to the manner in which we live and interact in all our relationships. In a reciprocal manner, the relationships that we cultivate are inseparable from our sense of identity. These defined words of identity are also important to remember when moving closer to an in-group understanding in 1 John. This early period of Christian origins is clearly the crucial period for the development of a distinctively “Christian” identity. Initially, there was a group of disciples, followers of the earthly Jesus, who became a group of messianic Jews, convinced that the risen Jesus is God’s anointed one, the Messiah. Yet even this new social identity was rooted in the past, not only because the very notion of the “Christ” was a Jewish one, but also because the positive social identity of the “in-Christ” group was based on the claim that they came to possess the special status of Israel: sons of Abraham, inheritors of God’s promises, God’s special people. This new group identity “in Christ” provided a social identity that cuts across and encompasses previous social identity distinctions. Yet at the same time it established a new boundary between insider and outsider, a boundary, which in ideological terms owed much to its Jewish roots, was built on the contrast between the idolatry and depravity outside the group and the holiness and righteousness within. Those inside were holy, righteous, brothers and sisters, children of light, while those outside were unrighteous, unbelievers, destined for destruction — stark examples of forms of stereotyping. Hostility from outsiders, both Jews and Gentiles, focused on the Christian confession of Christ,

though Jews and Gentiles would clearly have had different reasons for finding the confession offensive. This had the presumably unintended consequence of heightening the salience of this aspect of a Christian's complex social identity, increasing the extent to which this factor bound the group together and distinguished them from outsiders. Indeed, the distinctive name "Christian" emerges from the context of hostility, initially voiced as an accusation by outsiders, then proudly claimed by in-group members and eventually coming to serve as the fundamental group designator. With this information, we are moving closer to an understanding of the Johannine in-group.

The in-group prototype is a central part of a group's culture, that is, the group members' shared cognition. The in-group prototype was probably almost constantly under negotiation, both within and between the different groups present in 1 John. There are no absolute laws that determine the formation of a group's identity. There are, however, recurring trends in identity formation. These can be explained by the cognitive setup of our minds. The list below shows these trends as they appear in the text. This will help us form a heuristic framework, which will help us interpret how texts reflect and construct identity and behaviour norms in relation to the in-group.

Table 4.1: Vocabulary used by the author for in-group identity formation

In-group:	
that which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon,	1 Jn 1:1
that also have fellowship with us, and that our fellowship also may be with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ.	1 Jn 1:2
God is light, and in him is no darkness.	1 Jn 1:5
we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ	1 Jn 2:1
we are sure that we know him, if we keep his commandments.	1 Jn 2:3
But he that keep his word, in him is the love of God perfect indeed	1 Jn 2:5
so to walk as he walked.	1 Jn 2:6

He that love his brother, abides in that light, and there is no occasion of evil in him.	1 Jn 2:10
ye have known him that is from the beginning	1 Jn 2:14
abide in him	1 Jn 2:28
he is righteous, know that he which does righteously, is born of him.	1 Jn 2:29
we shall be like him: for we shall see him as he is.	1 Jn 3:2
Whosoever abides in him, sin not	1 Jn 3:6
he that does righteousness, is righteous, as he is righteous.	1 Jn 3:7
For this is the message that we heard from the beginning, that we should love one another,	1 Jn 3:11
though this world hates you	1 Jn 3:13
Hereby have we perceived love, that he laid down his life for us: therefore, we ought also to lay down our lives for our brothers.	1 Jn 3:16
My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue only, but indeed and in truth.	1 Jn 3:18
he who keeps his commandments, dwell in him: and hereby we know that he abides in us, by the Spirit which he has given us.	1 Jn 3:24
Every spirit which confesses that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God.	1 Jn 4:2
Spirit of truth	1 Jn 4:6
Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God, and everyone that loves are born of God, and knows God.	1 Jn 4:7
begotten Son into this world, that we might live through him	1 Jn 4:9

Hereby know we, that we dwell in him, and he in us: because he has given us of his Spirit.	1 Jn 4:13
For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments	1 Jn 5:3
He that has the Son, has life: and he that does not have the Son of God, have no life.	1 Jn 5:12
we know that the Son has come, and gave us a mind to know him, and we are in him that is true, in his Son Jesus Christ	1 Jn 5:20

We cannot automatically assume that every group seeks to improve its self-esteem in relation to other groups. However, groups tend to describe themselves in a positive light and out-groups in a less positive light to maintain a positive self-image. If we take into consideration the importance of honour and shame in the first century Mediterranean world, we realize that self-esteem bias could not have been entirely irrelevant for the group dynamics of the Johannine group.

This multitude of expressions in Table 4.1 refer to all kinds of life spheres. They all express the same basic point: the in-group has a privileged status in relation to God. They are in Christ and in God and Christ lives in them. This tells the story of why belonging to the group is valuable. These narratives also motivate in-group norms in various ways and are therefore important for our understanding of the behaviour norms. This also sets the standard for who they should be. Consensus about prototypes and stereotypes emerge from the need for an identity that brings maximized distinctiveness to the group in the current context. This means that the question of what the prototypical Johannine in-group member is like should be asked in relation to out-groups encountering the in-group. To answer this question, we first must consider the role of the author in shaping the identity with his writing style and the place he gives to the out-group, because people are emotionally dependent on affirmation from others to maintain beliefs. In groups the members typically need to affirm each other's beliefs about the rationale of the group to remain convinced about the meaning of their social identity.

4.3.1. The author shaping identity with the writing style

The author uses multiple references to “writing” 1 John to influence his readers affectively and effectively. He uses the phrase “I write these things to you” (ταῦτα γράφω ὑμῖν) as a mechanism at strategic points to influence his readers. With this phrase he attracted the readers’ attention and established credibility about his understanding of and testimony about Jesus’s identity. This facilitated his combatting of the deceivers’ teaching about Jesus. He also successfully applied this phrase as a mechanism to create certain lived experiences so that the readers would know that Jesus is the Son of God and therefore believe in him to achieve the various objectives he connected with this phrase. The characters in the text represents the lived experience of those behind the text (Robbins, 1996:34). This is the only book in the New Testament where such a high frequency of an author’s reference to his own writing (γράφειν) occurs. In 1 John, it is used as part of a fixed phrase (ταῦτα γράφω / ἔγραψα ὑμῖν ἵνα) in the author’s rhetoric. He uses these references, “I am writing to you,” at strategic points in this document and when he points out various objectives for writing using a ἵνα-clause (“so that”, 1 Jn 1:4; 2:1, 26–27; 5:13; cf. also 1:3). By doing this, it seems as if the author uses the fixed formula, ταῦτα γράφω/ἔγραψα ὑμῖν ἵνα, instrumentally and rhetorically to gain the reader’s attention to allow the reader to focus on the objectives the author wants to communicate and achieve. The repetition of him (the author) writing these things to them (the readers) can create in the reader a specific affect (spirituality) to achieve a definite effect (objective achieved). “We declare to you what we have seen and heard so that you also may have fellowship with us” (1 Jn 1:3): The author perceives himself “declaring” an authoritative message to his readers¹⁵⁵ and announces that the immediate purpose of this declaration is to experience fellowship (with both others and the divine, 1 Jn 1:3), fostered by a consecutive objective that is joy (1 Jn 1:4; cf. Stott 2009[1964]:63). According to Smalley (1984:11), the author wants his congregation, who at the time of writing is divided in their perception of Jesus, to continuously experience “fellowship” with him about what he “is writing.” Then, together, they must corporately enjoy fellowship (a lived experience) “with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ” (1 Jn 1:3; cf. 1 Jn 1:6–7) through their faith and conduct.

155 This is evident in the replication of certain words and semantic-related words in 1:1–3: ἀκηκόαμεν, ὃ ἐώρακαμεν; ζωὴν; μαρτυροῦμεν καὶ ἀπαγγέλλομεν, γράφομεν.

In Johannine literature, *κοινωνία* (fellowship)¹⁵⁶ denotes “sharing in” or “participation with” (Thomas, 2006:70). The practical and experiential dimension of the author’s theology is apparent here. Knowledge of Jesus leads to experience of Jesus and consequently leads to action (cf. 1 Jn 2:3, know, sure, obey). The effect of “hearing,” “seeing” and “touching” Jesus is a declaration (*ἀπαγγέλλομεν*) and testimony (*μαρτυροῦμεν*) about him (1 Jn 1:2–3), and an invitation to have fellowship in him (Smalley, 1984:11–12) and with him. The protasis of 1:3 refers to the act of fellowship among these believers: a communion on the human level, deriving from the communal indwelling in Christ. The author uses the pronoun *ταῦτα* (1:4; 2:1; 26–27; 5:13) so that the readers can fill it with their imaginations to obtain lived experiences of the divine as they give meaning and content (about the identity of Jesus) to it. For the author to influence his readers rhetorically into believing his testimony and to adhere to his exhortations (effects) spelt out in his objectives through his preaching and writing, he attempted to evoke lived experiences (affects) in his readers. They must experience the Son and the Father. Those who heard or read the author’s proclamation could experience (see, hear) the divine in their minds, thoughts, and feelings. Waaijman (2002:742) contends that readers shape the portrayal “of sacred texts in their imagination.” This gives them agency to effectively participate in the texts. Such participation means that sincere and contemplative reading of biblical texts can produce various lived experiences of both the divine and the text. These lived experiences are dependent on what the text content communicates about the divine and who the reader is. When reading 1 John, it may at first glance look like an informative text about Jesus’s identity. However, it also has some transformative potential. It can work to inspire action in the world, to inspire the believer to experience imaginatively the divine in everyday life through living in the light and loving one another. The author wrote these things so that his readers could experience Jesus the Christ, who is the Son of God, and so that they can experience through him something of God as Father.

156 Danker (2002:552) defines it as “close association involving mutual interests and sharing, association, communion, fellowship, close relationship”. The analytical lexicon of Friberg, Friberg and Miller (2000:233) describes it as “a relationship characterized by sharing in common fellowship, participation”. The semantic dictionary of Louw and Nida (1996: I, 445) defines it as “an association involving close mutual relations and involvement – ‘close association, fellowship’”. From these three dictionaries, it seems that the noun ‘fellowship’ is defined as an event (experiential) word to denote a “close relationship, participation, close mutual relations and involvement” to complement and substantiate Thomas’s interpretation.

4.3.2. “Otherness” in the construction of Johannine identity

For a group to experience that their group is meaningful, there must be something distinctive about them. If this were not the case in 1 John, the group would be superfluous. Therefore, consensus about prototypes and stereotypes arises from the need for an identity that will bring distinctiveness to the group. According to the *meta-contrast* principle in self-categorization theory, groups prefer to perceive reality in a way that makes the group identity maximally distinct¹⁵⁷. This is achieved by cognitively:

- Maximizing the similarities of the in-group;
- Maximizing the similarities of the out-group; and
- Maximizing the contrast between the in-group and the out-group.

This process makes it easier to identify with the in-group. They feel they have something in common, the out-group has something contrasting in common and the in-group is different from them. Therefore, the in-group makes sense.” This means that the question of what the prototypical 1 John group member is like, should be asked in relation to the out-groups encountering the “us” group in 1 John. This chapter focuses on otherness, insider and outsider identity, presuppositions, and stereotyping. This will make the similarities and contrasts between the two groups visible.

Jonathan Smith’s (1992:6–7) observation on “otherness” and identity is pertinent to this study. The “other” is an integral component in the process of self-definition. The 1 John letter creates certain “others” who no longer participate in group life. The author applies rhetoric against former members and other leaders who exhibit potentially divisive attitudes and sentiments (1 Jn 4:1–3). Through this engagement, the Johannine group takes its first steps on the path towards self-definition. By echoing the final words of Jesus, the author also tries to assert his leadership within a tradition resistant to overt expressions of personal authority. The most common way a concept of self is formed is through models of binary opposition, by means of which the defining group characterizes and distinguishes those who belong from those who do not.

157 Haslam et al. 2001; Turner 1985; Turner et al. 1987. The meta-contrast principle is based on general tendency to maximize distinctiveness between categories in our patterns of categorization.

Smith notes that two of the most common types of binarism's are "metonymical" and "topographical". The metonymical binary is designed to identify a specific cultural attribute that the defining group possesses, and its opponents do not. This causes the defining group to rethink its own history and sense of identity. With this, the other simply mirrors and represents what is deeply familiar to the centre. The "topographical" model is a literal exploration (Smith, 1992:6–7).

If such oppositions are culturally inspired and are reflections of a group's ongoing encounter with its environment, then the categories are not absolute but relational. The construction of a group that is "wholly other" is thus an impossibility. At the heart of these binary formulations lies an attempt to categorize and make sense of one's identity in relation to one's surroundings. As Smith notes, "otherness is not so much a matter of separation as it is a description of interaction" (Smith, 1992). In its interactions with its opponents, the Johannine group constructs an "antilanguage" (Malina & Rohrbaugh, 1998:4–16) based on metonymical binarism's, such as light vs. darkness, those of the spirit vs. those of the flesh, those seeking the glory of God vs. those seeking human glory, children vs. antichrists, righteous vs. the lawless, those of truth vs. deceivers (1 Jn 1:5; 2:4, 8–11, 22; 3:4, 7, 19; 4:1, 6), while topographical oppositions include those who are faithful to the group vs. those who have departed from the group and those who love the Father vs. those who love the world (1 Jn 2:15–17, 18–20; 3:1; 4:6). Such formulations clearly distinguish "insiders" from "outsiders."

Through their claims to "know God," to "abide in Him" and to exist "in the light," the opponents take a claim to be the true inheritors and representatives of the Johannine tradition. This is inferred from the fact that the author of 1 John repeatedly exhorts his audience to remain true to what they had been taught "from the beginning" (1 Jn 1:1; 2:14, 24; 3:11). Because the author of 1 John likely made the same assertions (1 Jn 2:4, 6, 9; cf. Culpepper, 1998:259), he finds his adversaries to be insidious, for they are not prototypical "outsiders" but rival Johannine exegetes drawing on the same vocabulary, but using it to reach different conclusions (Culpepper, 1975:283; Painter, 1984:50; Brown, 1982:47–103). Smith terms these opponents the "proximate other". It would thus be natural for the author to raise his level of polemic against these figures. In fact, 1 John identifies his adversaries more frequently and heightens the divisiveness of his rhetoric (Lieu, 1991:100). Perhaps the group boundaries were not as secure as the author's rhetoric might suggest. This hypothesis is

confirmed by a second series of explanations: “I write to you”; the author adds, “so that our joy may be complete”, “so that you may not sin” and “so that you may know that you have eternal life” (1 Jn 1:4, 2:1, 5:13). These words suggest that some movement between the binary poles is possible: the walls can be breached. This deeper look into otherness highlights that the “we” group needed the identity of the “other” for the author to describe their own identity. The authors rhetoric against the “others” is not to form a dialogue with the others, but to form self-definition (strong group identity and relatability) in the Johannine group. It is therefore not easy to determine to what extent the accusations in texts from the 1 John reflect real deviance¹⁵⁸ from a norm and to what extent the author is constructing a deviance to promote a contrasting norm.

4.3.3. Defining the group identity through community

A community usually refers to people with common interests who live in a certain place. However, in Spanish the word “*comunidad*” does not refer to an area or the place in which a person lives. It refers to a love or concern between people, binding them together. This is a higher use of the word community. Community can also be described as a group of people held together by a common cause. Jewish community organization at the time of 1 John showed oligarchic, democratic, and monarchic expressions, and frequently all three aspects functioning together. Authority belonged to the community and “the assembly of men of the city.” Not all, however, carried equal influence (in the sense of “one person, one vote”). Normally a council of older men provided the leadership. Sometimes a learned scholar, the rabbi, or in special circumstances some other influential person was the effective leader (Reicke, 1957). The Greek word *koinonia* in the New Testament gives us the biblical meaning of community, which translates as “fellowship” or “partnership.” It implies being involved in something with someone. When considering the social group in 1 John, one can translate community as “*we-ness*”. We-ness fits into this study due to the role of identification, because individuals identify with the groups in their context to which they perceive they belong. Social identity then arises when these individuals begin to know themselves based on group membership.

158 The deviant is a member of the group. From inside the group, he or she behaves in a way which deviates from prototype and makes claims which deviate from consensus. The deviant can sometimes be treated with tolerance. However, if the deviant does things that threaten any of the group norms and values, the subjective needs of the group call for action against the deviant.

Four things are certain about the 1 John group:

- They were the in-group;¹⁵⁹
- The community appears to be well known by the author;¹⁶⁰
- They were facing a threat; and
- 1 John was written to reassure and strengthen the group¹⁶¹.

Recognizing a “sense of us” and groupness stems from the awareness that things are done differently “there” and the sense that it poses a threat for how things are done “here”. The more pressure there is on groups to change, the more vigorously boundaries will be symbolized. Difference will be constructed and emphasized, and we-ness asserted in opposition to “them.” Emphasizing the symbolic structure of community, Cohen (1989:14) advances three arguments:

1. Symbols generate a sense of shared belonging (shared rituals).

Community is itself a symbolic construct on which people draw. It claims to act in the best interest of the group. It not only says how things are, but also state how things should be. It gives boundaries that symbolizes exclusion as well as inclusion.

2. Community membership means sharing a similar “sense of things.”

It is also in talking together about community – which is after all public doing – that its symbolic value is produced and reproduced.

So, who was the Johannine community?

It was a network of churches located in **Asia Minor** responsible to produce four New Testament writings: the Gospel of John and the three letters known as 1 John, 2 John, and

159 It is important to keep in mind that although 1 John contains a fair amount of polemic against the opponents, it is not directed at the opponents themselves, but is intended for the members of the Johannine group to whom John is writing. Thus, it is written against the opponents, but not directly to the opponents.

160 Considering this threat, the author of 1 John is writing both to reassure and strengthen the faithful members of that community, and to warn them to continue to resist the efforts of the false teachers who have gone out from among them.

161 Judith Lieu has argued that while a schism occurred in the church(es) to which 1 John was addressed, the letter's purpose was not to deal with the effects of the schism but to promote theological debate within the author's own community (Lieu, 1991:16).

3 John. Together, these books reveal how a particular Christian group dealt with religious tensions during the last few decades of the first century after Christ.

Whatever tensions the Johannine group may have faced, the Gospel of John presents Jesus as praying for unity among his followers and as insisting that they love one another (Jn 13:34–35). This “new commandment” in the Gospel becomes an old commandment in the Johannine letters (1 Jn 3:11), indicating that concern for internal cohesion was a particularly prominent debate of this group from the time of its founding to the end.

Symbols visible in the 1 John group:

- The symbol and role of tradition in the group (1 Jn 1:1–3)

1 Ὁ ἦν ἀπ’ ἀρχῆς, ὃ ἀκηκόαμεν, ὃ ἐώρακάμεν τοῖς ὀφθαλμοῖς ἡμῶν, ὃ ἐθεασάμεθα καὶ αἱ χεῖρες ἡμῶν ἐψηλάφησαν περὶ τοῦ λόγου τῆς ζωῆς — **2** καὶ ἡ ζωὴ ἐφανερώθη, καὶ ἐώρακάμεν καὶ μαρτυροῦμεν καὶ ἀπαγγέλλομεν ὑμῖν τὴν ζωὴν τὴν αἰώνιον ἣτις ἦν πρὸς τὸν πατέρα καὶ ἐφανερώθη ἡμῖν — **3** ὃ ἐώρακάμεν καὶ ἀκηκόαμεν, ἀπαγγέλλομεν καὶ ὑμῖν, ἵνα καὶ ὑμεῖς κοινωνίαν ἔχητε μεθ’ ἡμῶν. καὶ ἡ κοινωνία δὲ ἡ ἡμετέρα μετὰ τοῦ πατρὸς καὶ μετὰ τοῦ υἱοῦ αὐτοῦ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ.

- Symbol of Light as identity marker (1 Jn 1:7)

7 ἐὰν δὲ ἐν τῷ φωτὶ **περιπατῶμεν** ὡς αὐτός ἐστιν ἐν τῷ φωτί, κοινωνίαν ἔχομεν μετ’ ἀλλήλων καὶ τὸ αἷμα Ἰησοῦ τοῦ υἱοῦ αὐτοῦ καθαρίζει ἡμᾶς ἀπὸ πάσης ἁμαρτίας.

- Symbol of the New Law (1 Jn 2:10)

10 ὁ ἀγαπῶν τὸν ἀδελφὸν αὐτοῦ ἐν τῷ φωτὶ μένει καὶ σκάνδαλον ἐν αὐτῷ οὐκ ἔστιν·

- Symbol of the anti-christ (1 Jn 2:18–19)

18 Παιδιά, ἐσχάτη ὥρα ἐστίν, καὶ καθὼς ἠκούσατε ὅτι ἀντίχριστος ἔρχεται, καὶ νῦν ἀντίχριστοι πολλοὶ γεγόνασιν, ὅθεν γινώσκουμεν ὅτι ἐσχάτη ὥρα ἐστίν. **19** ἐξ ἡμῶν ἐξῆλθαν ἄλλ’ οὐκ ἦσαν ἐξ ἡμῶν· εἰ γὰρ ἐξ ἡμῶν ἦσαν, μεμενήκεισαν ἂν μεθ’ ἡμῶν· ἀλλ’ ἵνα φανερωθῶσιν ὅτι οὐκ εἰσὶν πάντες ἐξ ἡμῶν.

- Symbol of being named children (1 Jn 3:9)

9 Πᾶς ὁ γεγεννημένος ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ ἁμαρτίαν οὐ ποιεῖ, ὅτι σπέρμα αὐτοῦ ἐν αὐτῷ μένει, καὶ οὐ δύναται ἁμαρτάνειν, ὅτι ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ γεγέννηται.

- Symbol of love (1 Jn 3:11–14)

11 Ὅτι αὕτη ἐστὶν ἡ ἀγγελία ἣν ἠκούσατε ἀπ’ ἀρχῆς, ἵνα ἀγαπῶμεν ἀλλήλους, **12** οὐ καθὼς Κάϊν ἐκ τοῦ πονηροῦ ἦν καὶ ἔσφαξεν τὸν ἀδελφὸν αὐτοῦ· καὶ χάριν τίνος ἔσφαξεν αὐτόν; ὅτι τὰ ἔργα αὐτοῦ πονηρὰ ἦν τὰ δὲ τοῦ ἀδελφοῦ αὐτοῦ δίκαια.

13 [Καὶ] μὴ θαυμάζετε, ἀδελφοί, εἰ μισεῖ ὑμᾶς ὁ κόσμος. **14** ἡμεῖς οἶδαμεν ὅτι μεταβεβήκαμεν ἐκ τοῦ θανάτου εἰς τὴν ζωὴν, ὅτι ἀγαπῶμεν τοὺς ἀδελφούς· ὁ μὴ ἀγαπῶν μένει ἐν τῷ θανάτῳ.

- Symbol of the Spirit of God (1 Jn 4:2)

2 ἐν τούτῳ γινώσκετε τὸ πνεῦμα τοῦ θεοῦ· πᾶν πνεῦμα ὃ ὁμολογεῖ Ἰησοῦν Χριστὸν ἐν σαρκὶ ἐληλυθότα ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ ἐστίν,

It is common for us to think of a distinctive Johannine community, a specific Christian group from among whom these texts were originally written. Although this community likely did exist, we do not really know where it was located. The reference in 2 and 3 John to traveling suggests that the "community" may have been spread out over several nearby cities and towns. It seems likely that this group underwent some development over the course of time (Rensberger, 2006). From the 1960s onwards, the Johannine group has been widely accepted as a community. Most Johannine scholars use the expression "the Johannine community" without further explanation. Various factors account for the rise of this paradigm:

- This conception is linked to the historical-critical method and the shift away from historical reconstruction to that of the social context in which each letter was composed.
- It is linked to growing social-scientific interest in communities.

Culpepper (1995) started this shift away from authorship to an examination of the social context. Culpepper's hypothesis (Culpepper, 1975) is that the group associated with the letter writing was a school after the pattern of other ancient schools – Greek, Qumranic and Rabbinic. It was thus a person who played a significant role in the life of the Johannine

community¹⁶². The modern supposition is that the Johannine writings are the product of a distinct religious community in the life of the early church with its own theological outlook and social history.

I subsequently mention some of the work associated with the rise of the community paradigm. I do now wish to interact in any depth with the various positions set out, but merely to set out reasons for their popularity. Cullman (1976)¹⁶³ focuses on the fact that the distinctive traditions of this group were carried on by a Johannine circle. He also then focus on the “we” interpretation as the strengthening of the existing faith alongside a constant concern to demonstrate the legitimacy of the group. Brown’s (1977:379–393) focus is on the “beloved disciple,” who is not the Apostle, but represents Johannine Christianity in contrast to other forms. Meeks (1993) is of the opinion 1 John is “a book of insiders,” a small group isolated from others, not geographically but by their own worldview. Meeks opened the door for commentators like Bruce Malina (Malina, 1981:54) and Jerome Neyrey (2008)¹⁶⁴ with their sociological commentary.

The move from text to context depends greatly on the methodology adopted by scholars. As I seek to apply a multi-dimensional approach of moving from text to context, I too am aware that this is not a purely scientific process. What I do hope to achieve is a modest contribution to the understanding of how a text may convey something of its social context. Most scholars address the letter with reference to the Gospel. My stance is with Lieu, a position rarely adopted but surely defensible, namely, to treat the letter on its own. A big question to ask then is: what can be discerned from the letter alone about its intended audience? It appears that 1 John addresses issues that arose in the group since the writing of the Gospel of John. These issues centre on controversies swirling around certain members of the Johannine group, some of whom had left it. But in this study the focus is on the author of 1 John telling a story to form boundaries and to re-establish the importance of the tradition for the in-group.

4.3.4. From community to group

To understand the Johannine group, we should envision a network of smaller congregations

162 Culpepper, R. School, p. 265.

163 The Johannine school

164 Social science insights and models in the New Testament world discussed by Neyrey in Pilch, 2008.

or house churches, sharing a theological heritage and historical roots¹⁶⁵. The author, who has pastoral responsibility for the larger group, is now writing both to interpret the split that has torn the church apart and to warn other congregations about the problem. Stowers (2011) points out how much intellectual baggage comes with the concept of “community” as found in early Christian studies. One key problem is that it creates the image of a group that is of a special kind—one “with a deep social and mental coherence, a commonality in mind and practice.”¹⁶⁶ As Stowers delineates, the use of “community” carries the implication that all members of a group were equally committed to the convictions proclaimed in our sources. It is impossible for us to know how deeply committed to those beliefs’ individual members of groups of early followers of Jesus may have been. It cannot be taken for granted that all, or even most, members of any such group were actively engaged in controversies about right theology and practice. The discussion about the social impact of the authors of our sources may benefit from the concept of “entrepreneurs of identity.” Theorists of social identity theory coined the term in their studies about leadership. This idea notes that leaders are actively at work in crafting a “sense of us” for the groups to which they belong. This does not mean that all members equally share or actively reflect on the leader’s vision of the group identity. Nevertheless, it would also be a mistake to assume that people are indifferent about the groups to which they belong. Membership matters and is subject to reflection by group members: “social identities are immensely important to individual group members. They give us a sense of place in the world: who we are, what we should do, and how we relate to others.” Such issues matter, since group membership involves “a process of self-stereotyping: that is, people ascertain the terms of the group definition ... and then seek to conform those norms.” The “sense of us” in a group is thus always a *constructed* identity. Such constructions of identity come from leaders who actively forge the social identity in ways that best serve the goals they want to achieve with and through their respective groups.

The Gospel of John and the Johannine letters are so similar in their language and in the

165 For over fifty years, scholars have assumed that the Gospel and Letter of John were written within a particular kind of social matrix: a single, close-knit network of churches sharing a distinctive theological outlook (the Johannine community or Johannine Christianity). Popularized in works by J. Louis Martyn (1968), Raymond Brown (1966) and Wayne Meeks (1993), the hypothesis drew inspiration from the earlier discovery of a sectarian community and literature at Qumran. By the late 1980s, it had become a paradigm for Johannine studies – “knowledge generally received and held to be valid” in “standard works, such as commentaries and textbooks”, as well as the framework for hundreds of studies (Smith 1990: 293). More recently, however, this hypothesis has found itself under attack and, to some extent, in retreat.

166 Stowers (2011), esp. 242.

scope of their ideas that scholars speak of a “Johannine circle” (Brown, 1966; Meeks, 1972).” This concept is useful for explaining the close relationship between the Johannine writings as well as comprehending their independence from each other.

This “Johannine tradition” does not merely refer to a style of writing or speaking but also to a way of thinking, with distinctive Johannine vocabulary that reflects a distinctive worldview and provides for an understanding of the coming of Jesus Christ. A successful leader has a knack for using the shared pool of cultural knowledge (“tradition”) in a creative manner:

*“great leaders ... don’t just repeat traditional stories of identity. They innovate. They draw on less well-known strands of group culture. They weave familiar strands into novel patterns. Their genius is to make the new out of the elements of the old and thereby to present revolution as tradition.”*¹⁶⁷

For this study it is important to distinguish between the school and the community, as does Brown (1979:101). The reason for this distinction is that the letter bears witness to a distinction between the “we” and the “you” (1 Jn 1:2) Here the “we” refers to those who saw themselves as the tradition carriers whose task it was to see that the traditions were handed down faithfully. The “we” would then correspond to the school within the framework of the wider group (the “you”). It is from within this school that the presbyter speaks in the letter to warn the group against those attempting to split it from within. At this point it is important to talk about group loyalty, because group identification promotes group loyalty.

4.3.5. Group loyalty

Traditionally, social dilemma research has almost exclusively focused on “closed” groups in which there are no exit opportunities available for group members. However, many groups are, in fact, open systems that allow people to enter or leave at will, thus adding or removing potentially important group resources. This was also the case in the Johannine in-group. Social psychologists have often adopted a simple cost-benefit approach to group stability, analysing members’ exit and entry decisions in terms of the personal costs and rewards associated with group membership (Thibaut & Kelley, 1959). Yet, this approach has been revised and complemented in recent years by several alternative approaches, most notably

¹⁶⁷ Haslam, Reicher & Platow (2011).

social identity and self-categorization theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1986; Turner *et al.*, 1987). These theories assume that once people start to identify with their group, their welfare becomes intertwined with the welfare of the group. According to this view, people who identify with their group may engage in activities to help the group even if it involves making a personal sacrifice. A key determinant of someone's group loyalty is the strength and nature of their identification with the group. Consistent with the social identity and self-categorization Theories (Tajfel & Turner, 1986; Turner *et al.*, 1987), people's sense of *who* they are, their *identity*, is partly shaped by the social groups to which they belong. When people identify greatly with their group, they see themselves primarily as group members. In contrast, when group identification is weak or absent, people view themselves primarily as unique individuals. In the immediate context, references to typical Johannine relationships are found, for instance, to know God and Jesus (1 Jn 2:4 – ἔγνωκα αὐτόν) or to be in God (1 Jn 2:5 – ἐν αὐτῷ ἔσμεν). Based on this intimate relationship between the model and the copy, mimesis seems to be expected. In the direct context, God is also called Father (1 Jn 2:1). When love is discussed, the term brother is also used (1 Jn 2:9), which echoes filial language. In short, God is the Father, they are the children, which suggests a filial basis for the relationship and accordingly a filial motivation for mimesis¹⁶⁸. This interrelatedness is only possible if they remain in Him, i.e., in the case of such an intimate relationship.¹⁶⁹

Finally, a study by Zdaniuk and Levine (2001) is noteworthy. They found that group identification promoted group loyalty in a task that involved some degree of personal sacrifice. In this study, *group loyalty* was defined as either (a) staying in the group when doing so benefits the group rather than oneself; or (b) leaving the group when doing so benefits the group rather than oneself. Group identification promoted the first form of loyalty, but not the second type of loyalty. This perceptual process could also be explained by using Thibaut and Kelley's (1959) notion of comparison level. When people identify with their group, we should observe a shift in their evaluations so that their expectations about their

168 Mimesis is discussed in detail in chapter three under tradition as marker of identity.

169 Brown (1986:285) sees the point of this verse to underline the fact that abiding in God or Jesus and the way one lives one's life cannot be divorced. Akin (2001:95), follows Strecker and formulates it a bit dogmatically: "... the indicative and the imperative of the Christian life are joined together as a cause and effect. This union occurs only to the degree that the soteriological significance of the death and resurrection of Jesus the Christ precedes the ethical imperative, so that the indicative of the Christ-event becomes the foundation for and the content of the imperative". It is however a question of whether the concepts of imperative and indicative are appropriate analytical categories for the Johannine literature.

current group (“comparison level”) increases and their expectations about alternatives (“comparison level of alternatives”) decreases. This is shown graphically in Figure 1 with the 1 John group as focus point.

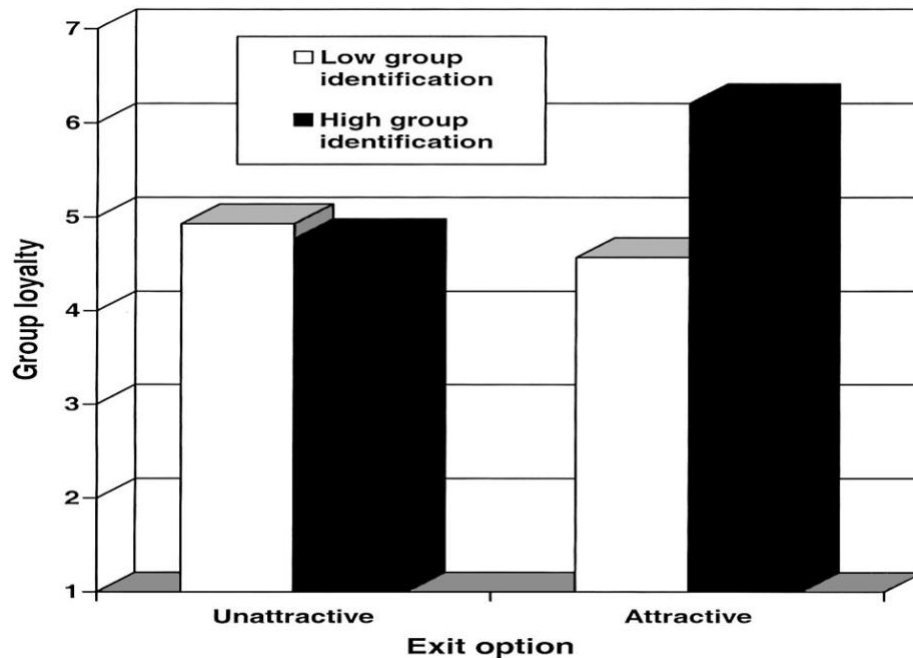


Figure 1: Thibaut and Kelley’s (1959) graphic representation of group loyalty as a function of group identification and the attractiveness of an exit option

When there is low group identification, group loyalty is unattractive. In these circumstances the identity of the “we” is not so desirable or clear for the group. When there is high group identification, members are clear about identity and belonging and group loyalty is higher. This figure again shows that the author creates a “sense of us” that is of pivotal importance to the group. In 1 John the entire text functions as an attempt to forge a “sense of us,” to bring together the author and the addressees through a shared group identity that creates loyalty to the group.

4.3.6. Worldview shaping identity in 1 John

People who are confronted with the world around them form perceptions based on their experience of reality. The totality of a person’s experience (including objects, actions, or abstracts like love or hope) thus exists in the mind of a person in the form connotative

images.¹⁷⁰ These connotative images are then cognitively interrelated in different ways¹⁷¹ to form a cohesive mental world that constitutes a particular person's worldview. The word *worldview*¹⁷² is used here to refer to the totality of a person's world of perceived knowledge made up of connotative perceptions that are mentally related and integrated into a meaningful pattern through language.¹⁷³ Johnson (1987:140) formulates it in another way, saying that our worldview is constructed by "gestalt structures, consisting of parts standing in relations and organized into unified wholes, by means of which our experience manifests discernible order." This worldview again (in a circular way) serves as basis for a person in evaluating the world around him and to respond accordingly, resulting in new experiences of the world. In this way people can make sense of objects and events around them, as well as of their lives as such¹⁷⁴, which again elicits responses and behaviour.¹⁷⁵ This implies that the relative positions of the connotative images should be carefully noted if we are to understand the worldview of a person. The motivation, not only for people's identity, but also for their values and their deeds, can be found in this relative organization of the connotative images. Obviously, worldviews are not objective or universal, since a particular worldview is constructed as a person discovers reality – in that sense it remains individual.¹⁷⁶ Although

170 Staples (2002:202) discussing Lloyd, remarks that symbolic realists see society as "a symbolically constructed order of meanings, rules, conventions, and so on. Such an Umwelt, or cognitively constructed environment, is not only the structural context of human action but also the locus of power, morality, and beliefs. It is continually reproduced by the 'agential powers' of human actors." Cf. also Kee (2002:341).

171 According to Geertz (1973:127) it is the stories, that structure the worldview, form the identity, and shapes the values and practices of a group.

172 Geertz (1973:127) defines worldview as follows: it "is their picture of the way things in sheer actuality are, their concept of nature, of self, of society. It contains their most comprehensive ideas of order". The term worldview will be used to designate the total structured and dynamic cognitive world (universe in Berger and Luckmann's sense) of a person, including the totality of his or her experience of reality. A worldview is an all-encompassing picture of reality touching all spheres of human knowledge and activity that serves to integrate human existence into a comprehensive unity", it "finds embodiment in a particular cultural ethos" and "Functionally, a worldview is a means of ascribing meaning and value to the particularities of life". It also allows individuals to locate themselves within reality. This brings significance and meaning to their reality.

173 Johnson (1987:140), for instance, defines "imagination" as "our capacity to organize mental representations... into meaningful, coherent unities".

174 Horrell (2005:84) sees as a strength of the symbolic universe that it shapes and orders human life for all who lives under its canopy. It creates a framework of meaning and significance and determines the boundaries for what is right and wrong and structures human relations and actions. This connects ideas with practice.

175 Horrell (2005:93) presents Geertz's view as follows: a "narrative myth which presents and constructs a specific symbolic universe, and which undergirds the identity of a particular social group, both establishes a view of the way the world is and shapes moral values and practices of its adherents".

176 Singer (2007: ad loc.) calls the search for a "objective, or rationally justifiable, ethics" a search for what is in fact an illusion: "no moral principle can be valid except in the societies in which it is held". Berger (1976:196ff.) also pointed out that considering the development of pluralist societies, traditions, implying choices and points of views that are simply taken as "the way things are", came under pressure and it is realized that any position is just one among several possible choices and commitments. In other words, traditions only exist within the confines of perceived worldviews.

worldviews are not universal, they could be and are shared by individuals with similar outlooks. A child's discovery of reality¹⁷⁷ is done on the knee of his parents and grandparents (involving tradition, cultural practices, value judgments, etc.) and this will inevitably result in overlaps in their worldviews. This is also how groups are constituted. A person may also be converted, which means accepting and sharing the group's worldview. Different situations may locate the person in different positions within a worldview. The connotations the person assigns to images remain the same, but the relative position to the images may shift depending on the situation.

Values, as understood here, are the formulations of what is regarded or believed to be important or valuable to a person or his group within his/their worldview. In terms of worldview, values relate to the cognitive images and their relations to one another, ordering¹⁷⁸ them hierarchically based on their importance or value for the individual or group. In other words, they are those cognitive images that are held dear and are regarded as valuable and which normatively orientate an individual towards behaviour that is positively desirable. It is what ought to be and these values are internalized by a group to which the individual belongs.¹⁷⁹ In short, the source from where actions are informed is the worldview, whether the decision is made consciously or unconsciously. Without going into detail, it should be mentioned that the structuring and interrelating of the connotative images in the universe *inter alia* takes place under the influence of faith (what someone believes), convention (what your significant others tell you - tradition), reason (what sounds right) or experience (what experience has taught a person). Simply mentioning these influences makes clear that this is an extraordinary complex process that cannot be discussed in detail here. The important point is, therefore, that a person responds to a particular situation according to the hierarchical interrelatedness of connotative images forming his worldview. It was already mentioned that worldviews could change (some in minor ways, but with paradigm shifts worldviews are completely rearranged). However, there are mechanisms in a group that try to curb such influences that could change the internal structure of the worldview.

177 See Berger and Luckmann (1966: ad loc.).

178 Ordering is necessary within a worldview (symbolic universe) according to Berger and Luckmann (1967:97-103), putting "everything in its right place" (p. 98).

179 Van der Merwe's (2008:364-65) broad description is used as a basis.

This is also part of the purpose and aim of both the Gospel and the letters of John. They do represent a certain worldview, but they actively explain, motivate, confirm, defend, and encourage a particular worldview based on certain images of which the connotations are clearly defined. This worldview forms the rationale behind the identity and behaviour of the Johannine group. The role and function of faith in the process that leads to a change in the worldview of a person should be considered, because that is what occurs in the group with the “they” group. Engberg-Pedersen (2000:34-35) describes this process in terms of the change in a person related to identity and relations to the world. The hierarchical worldview is challenged and changed by reassessing the cognitive images and re-structuring them. When this new reality or worldview is ordered in such a way that God stands central as the most important point of orientation, the rest of the worldview is determined by the reality of God, changing perceptions and identity. In 1 John, the role of faith in this process is that it facilitates this change of the worldview by accepting, cognitively and emotively, the reality Jesus stands for. New information is allowed to dominate and reorganize the worldview of group members. Another and perhaps a more correct way of stating it is that a person is taken up in the new worldview within which he or she will be influenced to accept the values of that worldview.

The core value in the Johannine worldview is love. In 1 Jn 4:7–21 the emphasis falls on the love of God in relation to the love among each other. Although there are frequent repetitions of ideas (i.e., God is love – verses 8, 16; As God loves believers, they should love one another – verses 7, 11, 19, 21) there is also what could be called a cluster-like development of ideas in these verses. This guides our analysis of this passage (1 Jn 4:7–21¹⁸⁰).

1 John 4:7–8:

7α Ἀγαπητοί, ἀγαπῶμεν ἀλλήλους,

(A) ^{7b} ὅτι ἡ ἀγάπη ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ ἐστίν,

180 Although breaks are not absolute in most of 1 John, the change of theme from verse 7 to love, as well as the vocative indicates that there is a forward movement in argumentation which allows for considering these verses together as sub-section.

(B) ^{7c} καὶ πᾶς ὁ ἀγαπῶν ^{7d} ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ γεγέννηται

^{7e} καὶ γινώσκει τὸν θεόν.

(B¹) ^{8a} ὁ μὴ ἀγαπῶν οὐκ ἔγνω τὸν θεόν.

(A¹) ^{8b} ὅτι ὁ θεὸς ἀγάπη ἐστίν.

The readers are addressed as ἀγαπητοί, suggesting a close relationship. This echoes what is to follow and links that to the readers (Schnelle, 2010:88). Following an exhortation to love one another (present subjunctive), an antithetical chiasm (AB-B¹A¹) binds together a cluster of ideas that supports why believers should love one another. These statements are structurally presented in an antithetical parallelism, introduced by a hortatory subjunctive (7a – subjunctive of encouragement or exhortation): “we” should love one another. The expression loving ἀλλήλους is notable, since this expression is limited in ancient Greek to family and friends. Wolter (2005) ascribes this to the fact that love of one another lowers or indeed eliminates the social boundaries between those who love.¹⁸¹ Thus the egalitarian¹⁸² reciprocal principle is stated as a basic quality of the love of believers.¹⁸³ Their love is in reciprocity aimed at one another. This is inherently part of New Testament paraenesis (Wolter, 2001:61–90). This expression is used five times in 1 John (3:11, 23; 4:7, 11, 12; cf. also, 2 Jn 5¹⁸⁴). The frequency underlines the importance of the egalitarian reciprocity in the love commandment.¹⁸⁵ Love indeed draws and binds people who love one another together so that they become close-knit. When group members came to understand or interpret this core value differently, the boundaries of the group shifted, and a schism occurred in the

181 Wolter (2005) provides the following evidence: TestSeb 8,4-6; TestDan 5,3; TestGad 6,1; TestJos 17,2f; Jub 36,4; Xenophon, Mem. 2,7,1; Dio Chrysostomus, Or. 74,12; Philo, Virt. 225. It is frequent in the New Testament: Mk 9:50; Jn 6:43; 13:14,34; 15:12,17; Rm 12:10,16; 13:8; 14:13,19; 15:3,7; 1 Cor 11:33; Gal 5:26; 6:2; Col 3:9; 1Thes 4:9; 5:11,13,15; 2 Thes 1:3; Heb 10:24; Jas 4:11; 5:9; 1 Pet 5:5; 1J3:11,23; 4:7,11; 2J5.

182 The egalitarian aspect applies to believers and not to God.

183 Cf. Wolter (2001:61-90) who quotes 1 Cor 7:19; 12:13; Gal 3:28; 5:6; 6:16; Col 3:11.

184 In 1Jn1:7 ἀλλήλους used with κοινωνία expressing basically the same idea of reciprocity.

185 Kittel (vol 1:28) describes the relationship between God's love and the response of humans as it is reflected in the Old Testament in the following way, “Thus we find such favourite combinations as to love Yahweh and keep His commandments (Ex. 20:6; Dt. 5:10; 1 Ki. 11:1; Dn. 9:4; Neh. 1:5), or to love Him and serve Him (Dt. 10:12; 11:13; Is. 56:6), or to love Him and walk in His ways (Dt. 10:12; 11:22; 19:9; 30:16; Jos. 22:5; 23:11). These powerfully link love with cultic and ethical conduct and thus militate to some degree against a deeper understanding. As against this, Dt. 30:6 impressively teaches us to understand love for God as a deeply inward and finally God-given experience... The prophetic picture (Jer. 4:4) ... serves, with a characteristic modification in sense of Jer. 31:33 (and also of Ez. 11:19), to indicate the irrational origin of the most powerful vital forces of the community.” In John these two approaches are linked, with God's love as the source and the love of the believers as the reciprocal and obedient response.

members' understanding of Christology and pneumatology. The author's rhetoric against the out-group members is not to start a dialogue with them, but rather to form self-definition in the Johannine group and their worldview.

4.4. Out-group boundaries

There are different ways to differentiate between society and the strangers. There are also many ways in which "the other" affects "us". In 1 John, we encounter the most complex "other" Jewish thinkers of late antiquity had to contend with, namely the outsider who was not depraved, not barbarian, not pagan, not beyond the realm of the Torah, but who was also not inside. How did the people of 1 John speak of "the outsider"? The group's history shows that they saw the whole world as "pagan", so the deep rhetorical structures of their language and mode of thought lay embedded in the distinction between "we" and "everybody else". But there is something subtler, namely the difference between outsiders (who were part of the group at first) and the insiders in 1 John. The focus is on passages where discourse repeatedly avoids saying things straight out, but rather turns to language and images meant to say something in terms of something else.

Table 4.2: Vocabulary used by the author for out-group identity formation

Out-group:	
and walk in darkness	1 Jn 1:6
unrighteousness.	1 Jn 1:9
is a liar, and the truth is not in him.	1 Jn 2:4
He that said that he is in that light, and hate his brother, is in darkness	1 Jn 2:9
But he that hate his brother, is in darkness, and walk in darkness, because that darkness has blinded his eyes.	1 Jn 2:11
Love not this world, neither the things that are in this world. If any man love this world, the love of the Father is not in him.	1 Jn 2:15
For all that is in this world, is not of the Father, but is of this world.	1 Jn 2:16

that antichrist shall come, even now there are many antichrists	1 Jn 2:18
They went out from us, but they were not of us	1 Jn 2:19
Who is a liar, but he that denied that Jesus is the Christ?	1 Jn 2:22
Whosoever committed sin, also transgressed the Law: for sin is the transgression of the Law.	1 Jn 3:4
and the children of the devil: who is not righteous is not of God, neither he that does not love his brother.	1 Jn 3:10
Not as Cain, which was of that wicked one, and slew his brother	1 Jn 3:12
My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue only, but indeed and in truth.	1 Jn 3:18
believe not every spirit but try the spirits whether they are of God: for many false Prophets are gone out into the world.	1 Jn 4:1
And every spirit that confess not that Jesus Christ came in the flesh, is not of God: but this is the spirit of antichrist	1 Jn 4:3
He that love not, know not God, for God is love.	1 Jn 4:8
If any man says, I love God, and hate his brother, he is a liar	1 Jn 4:20
He that has the Son, has life: and he that doesn't have the Son of God, does not have life.	1 Jn 5:12
And this is that assurance that we have in him, that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us.	1 Jn 5:14
We know that we are of God, and this whole world lies in wickedness.	1 Jn 5:19
keep yourselves from idols,	1 Jn 5:21

The epistolary author attacks his opponents verbally; he seems strangely unable to invoke any ruling authority in correcting them. He only appeals to the inner guidance of the group to whom he is writing, a guidance that stems from the knowledge of the truth and from having been anointed. It is strongly suggested that there was a different understanding and style of authority in the Johannine group (Brown, 1982:93). By *labelling* his opponents, the author refers to unnamed people who had once been members of the Johannine group but had subsequently abandoned their association with this group (1 Jn 2:19). It seems that the controversy in the Johannine group was based on differences in the interpretation of a shared tradition about the pneumatology and Christology, which subsequently resulted in a difference in ethics. This had catastrophic consequences for the future existence of the Johannine group. This controversy and schism, as reflected in this letter, reveals that the Johannine group was an embattled group in their experience of internal conflict (and external conflict with the synagogue according to the Gospel according to John). In time the group withdrew further from the world and adhered to the teachings and new commandment of Christ, mediated to them by the author. The adherents of the author were probably assimilated into other streams of Christianity during the early second century, while the opponents of the author found their way into the Gnostic groups of the mid-second century (van der Merwe, 2007:1167).

4.4.1. Conclusion on deviants and marginal groups and the formation of the identity of a group

Members who espouse non-normative positions are often discredited as marginal members or deviants. Direct criticism of group norms is more effective and better tolerated by the group if the groups view the critic as an in-group member, not an out-group member (Hornsey & Imani, 2004). Marginal group members are not very prototypical and therefore they are not particularly liked as group members or trusted as well as more prototypical members. This is not to say that marginal members do not affect group norms—as we discussed above, leaders often use marginal members as reference points to define what the group is not. Marginal members are often treated as deviants. Often a group can contain a minority subgroup or some other collective that represents a profound schism in the group's normative structure. Sani and Reicher (1998, 1999) describe how sudden normative change, brought about by the actions of a subgroup or a leader, can produce an acute sense of identity threat and self-conceptual uncertainty, impermanence, and instability. The group

is no longer what it used to be—its normative attitudes, values, perceptions, and behaviours have irrevocably changed; thus, its identity has changed, and members are no longer sure whether they fit the new group. Under these circumstances, members can try to re-establish the group's original identity through discussion, persuasion, and negotiation, or they can split into a separate subgroup that conflicts with the rest of the group. A split, or schism, is most likely to occur if members feel the group is intolerant of dissent, unable to embrace diverse views, and inclined to the marginalization of dissenting individuals. A schism effectively transforms one group, a single category, into two separate groups that are engaged in often highly charged intergroup conflict. The split rests on a profound social identity threat that engages a powerful drive to reduce the acute self-conceptual uncertainty that has been aroused. Not surprisingly, schisms can sometimes be very destructive of groups. Schisms may inspire critical thinking, creativity, and innovation, if properly managed in the larger group.

There is a strong tendency in our field to assume that all members of “communities of faith” are constantly preoccupied with issues pertaining to right doctrine and praxis. I am more inclined to the view that such issues were probably subject to debate first and foremost among religious experts who had sufficient knowledge and interest (and time) to wage battles of right interpretation. These people were of pivotal importance to their respective groups as entrepreneurs of identity who forged the “sense of us” for those groups. These specialists provided members of their groups with narratives that brought their “us” together. The specialists’ constructions of social identity mattered (and continue to matter), since membership matters to group members. It is therefore salient to consider the author of 1 John when considering the identity of the Johannine group. To better understand the author is to better understand the in-group (us).

4.4.2. Rhetoric to understand the out-group identity

If the author of these letters has obscured himself behind a veil of silence, that same veil obscures the people to whom he writes and, even more, the people whom he opposes. The gaps in our knowledge provide room for scholarly debate, and interpreters have found different ways to reconstruct the opponents against whom the author writes. Scholarly opinion varies so widely because the author does not consistently tell us who the opponents are, or even what they believe—even as he says a great deal about them. He paints a rhetorical portrait of them to interpret them for his readers. The opponents are “antichrists”

and “false prophets” (1 Jn 2:18–22; 4:1, 3), and these labels tell us how the author of 1 John understands the opponents and how he wants his readers to understand them, but he does not tell us what the opponents think. The rhetorical portrait in the letters is our only access to the opponents. At one level, then, the rhetoric of the letters is an obstacle to reconstructing the opponents and the problems plaguing the group.

Duane Watson (1993) has argued not only that the rhetorical style and shape of the letters of John rely on ancient rhetorical categories but also that categories were chosen to respond to specific problems in the Johannine orbit. For instance, Watson shows that 1 John relies on the rhetorical technique of “amplification,” where an author repeatedly returns to and develops a particular set of ideas to “amplify” their importance. He argues that 1 John relies on “amplification” to win the greater adherence of its readers to the Johannine tradition in the face of the opponents who undermine that tradition. Rhetoric and historical reconstruction are interwoven in his work.

Other interpreters connect the rhetoric of the letters to historical reconstruction in a different way. Perkins (1978: xxi–xxii) deserves to be quoted at length for clarity:

“Scholars who are not sensitive to the language of oral cultures often misinterpret statements about opponents in ancient writings. You would get the impression from reading some modern interpreters of the Johannine letters that the community was being violently ripped apart by the debates to which the author refers. In an oral culture, infused with rhetoric at every level, minor debates could produce major rhetorical responses that were often not indicative of the nature of the problem. The point of rhetoric was to use every means possible to see that one’s own position, the true or good one, prevailed over its “bad” opposition. Even sciences and medicine were discussed in terms of conflicts between forces, of battles that had to be won.”

The heated rhetoric of the Johannine letters might not imply such an elaborate schism. Perkins writes:

“When the author speaks of his opponents having broken fellowship with his community, we perhaps have to think of the various types of feuds and breaking of association that occur in close-knit oral societies. Such disputes do not destroy the whole fabric of a community. Several hours after the direst

exchange of insults and threats, the opponents may be going about their business as though they had never fought” (1978, xxii–xxiii).

We should not imagine some grand schism behind these letters, but rather something more like a family quarrel that, once it blows over, is forgotten as a thing of the past. The letters of John regularly rely on familial language when they refer to the members of the church, for instance in the regular practice of addressing the readers as children (1 Jn 3:1, 2; 5:2; 2 Jn 1, 4, 13; 3 Jn 4) or “my little children” (1 Jn 2:12, 28; 3:7, 18; 4:4; 5:21). This may be an important sociological move on the part of the author.

In antiquity, when people converted to a minority religion like Judaism or Christianity, they often strained or completely severed their ties to their natural families. Philo of Alexandria writes about the situation of Gentiles who became Jewish proselytes. By abandoning the polytheism of their past to follow the one God of Israel, they also abandoned the various family, social, and political ties connected to Greek and Roman religion. Since such proselytes had lost their former friendly and familial relations, Philo writes, “Let them not be denied another citizenship or other ties of family and friendship and let them find places of shelter standing ready for refugees to the camp of piety” (Spec. Laws 1.52). Jews or pagans who followed Christ experienced the same loss of family and friends, and so authors use kinship language to describe their relationships to members of their new faith (see “Theological Issues” following section 2:12–3:10). This familial character of Christian community plays a subtle role in the conflict behind these letters¹⁸⁶.

For example, 1 John 2:9–10 refers to those who remain in the group as those who love their brothers, and to those who leave the group as those who hate their brothers. But the familial character of the conflict raises the issue of how complete and total the conflict was. While some interpreters follow Perkins in downplaying the polemical edge, viewing the struggle as minor, or at least not central to the argument of the letters (Lieu, 1991:5–6, 13–16, 66), others argue against this view. Raymond Brown (1982:48–49) is prominent in this group. He thinks that Perkins too quickly dismisses passages like 2 John 10–11: “If someone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not receive him into your house and do not say to him, ‘Greetings!’ For the one who says to him, ‘Greetings,’ has fellowship with his wicked

¹⁸⁶ Familial Images and their role in 1 John are discussed in Chapter 2 in 2.7. in Groups and Familism.

deeds.” These verses imply a serious break of fellowship that is more extreme than Perkins’s approach allows. Brown’s position has broad support (see Painter, 2002:88–90). One is left to ask: Is the heated rhetoric mere rhetoric, or does it reflect historical reality?

I take the middle ground in this study. Perkins and Lieu may very well be correct that the division in the group was not so great, at least not at that time. While certain people had left the fellowship (otherwise 1 Jn 2:19 could not have said, “They went out from us”), an ongoing relationship with these people seems to exist, since 1 John 3:7 tells the readers that they “are trying to deceive you.” A group of people have separated themselves from the original Johannine group and are seeking to persuade others to follow them. Following the argument of Perkins, the rift might not have seemed great to all members of the group at the time. First John is written to make the danger plain. The forceful rhetoric of the letter may not imply that they were already in crisis. Perhaps instead it seeks to produce a crisis. Understood this way, the rhetoric is not simply “mere rhetoric” but is to be taken seriously as reflecting the grave situation the author of 1 John perceives. The group, as tightly knit as a family, is nevertheless susceptible to pollution by false teaching and is already experiencing some degree of division. All the group members may not yet know the danger that lies before them, and the author writes to oppose this teaching and to marginalize his opponents¹⁸⁷.

4.5. Conclusion

By distinguishing “insiders” from “outsiders,” a distinct group ethos is formed. It was out of the crucible of conflict with various “others” that a Johannine self-identity was forged. 1 John has its roots in a particular situation of conflict from which a social schism resulted, in other words, what has been one group became two. Of course, both new groups retained elements of the original group from which they split: for example, both would claim the guidance of the Holy Spirit (1 Jn 4:1 and beyond), both continued to confess faith in Jesus, although differently. When such a split takes place there is automatically a need for boundaries to be clarified within each group and between the two groups, since the two groups come from the same original group and thus share in the qualities of the original group. If both lay claim to the Spirit or Jesus, there would have to be some boundaries to

187 This Rhetorical information on 1 John is also in Chapter 2 in 2.6 important for the understanding of groups in 1 John.

differentiate between these claims, since a split would assume that two distinct positions had emerged.

It is precisely in the drawing of social boundaries that power and authority come to the fore. In 1 John there are a variety of identity descriptions that differentiate the Johannine in-group from the out-group. In this process, the author of 1 John appeals to the core symbolic language of his group. As identity is never fixed or absolute, it is more reasonable to expect that the group continued to debate its place in the world and assess its own sense of self. As Horrell (2005:94) says: “People may, of course, choose to leave the group, or redefine its basis and criteria for membership in ways which a leader regards as ‘beyond the pale’, as compromising the very identity of the group. Alternatively, someone’s conduct may be so contrary to the norms of the group that they will be deemed no longer to share the common group identity and will be re-categorized as an outsider.”

As a person’s identity cannot be understood separately from their relationship to their worldview, likewise identity determines the rest of the process on the continuum of action formation. Identity is abstract and cannot be seen empirically or physically – it is only discoverable in its expressions in words and deeds, i.e., in formulating values, or principles, which also form part of the continuum of action formation. Identity has the quality of distinguishing between insiders and outsiders. Actions that do not fit this ethos will be regarded as damaging to their identity and as signs of separation from the in-group. The implication is that the actions of preserving and continuing in the value system forms a central prerequisite for guaranteeing the continuity and the identity of this in-group.

The “sense of us” that is of pivotal importance for the group does not simply evolve; it must be actively created. Hence, entrepreneurs of identity are required to work, create, and maintain a coherent sense of “we.” In the letter, this is the role of the author. The entire text functions as an attempt to forge a “sense of us” to bring together the author and the addressees. The author of 1 John showed a clear self-understanding and group identity through his choice of words; the way in which he used the words; the images used to create social constructs; his association with the tradition; and so on. His intention was to influence readers positively by employing this rhetorical approach. His letter was not addressed to his opponents, but to his own group, which means that his intent was to use performative language to address specific issues in the group and influence their choices, thoughts, and actions. Even the negative language that is used to characterize the opponents was

intended to contribute to the positive development of the recipients of the letter. This is the identity forming process in the Johannine group.

This chapter started with a distinction between Bruce Malina's (2001:58–80) argument of a typical Mediterranean person who has a "dyadic personality", that is, an understanding of himself or herself as interconnected with others, and social identity theory, which explores how people understand themselves as members of a category. These are two different cognitive constructs. This chapter tried to distinguish which construct serves us better when the identity of this group is studied? The answer is that although people do not attribute action to individual traits to the same extent, they are quite keen on attributing behaviour to the disposition of groups and social categories. For explanation, take a closer look at 1 John 2:5–6:

⁵ but whoever *keeps his word* (behaviour), in him truly *the love of God is perfected* (disposition). By this we may know that *we are in him* (social identity/spiritual status):

⁶ whoever says *he abides in him* (social identity/ spiritual status) ought to *walk in the same way in which he walked* (behaviour)."

The in-group member is characterized by prototypical dispositions and spiritual states that cause his/her actions. Dispositions were, however, used in the ancient Mediterranean culture to explain action and form identity. According to social identity theory, to identify with a social category is not to stop engaging in introspection. The individual who identifies with a social identity reflects on themselves as a group member to conform to what they experience to be the social identity.

In sum, identification of oneself as belonging to the Johannine group meant that the self was experienced as similar to the in-group prototype (in this case, the author) and interdependent on other in-group members. It is important to note that it does not mean this is the only identity or group a Mediterranean person could identify with. There were different collectivist cultures with which an individual could identify. Chapter 5 examines identity forming process through mission to better understand in the Johannine group.

CHAPTER 5 MISSION AS A THIRD SOCIAL MARKER

Mission is understood as the expansion of early Christianity. It entailed a call or a responsibility to share a particular view of God and life. When the word “mission” is used in this study, it is a rephrasing of the traditional analytical vocabulary of mission. One could speak of a code of conduct, a commission, or a purpose to explain this rephrasing process to use mission as a marker in this study on identity and behavioural norms. A theological concept becomes practice, and the practice illustrates the theological dimensions. In 1 John, mission is incarnational and framed by the identity of the group as an internal identity forming process. It is not an external responsibility as the traditional understanding the word tends to prompt.

With this rephrasing of the analytical vocabulary in mind, the focus can now shift to the introduction of mission, understood as one of the important group markers of 1 John. As the chapter unfolds, the reason for choosing mission as the third marker will become clearer. Founding principles and beliefs are needed to remind the group of their purpose, core values, and guidelines for future group life. The use of certain words evokes experiences and can motivate people to act in a certain way. Knowing the norms of the group through the words of the author, also provides members with a code of conduct which helps to remove anxiety and provides a frame of reference for behaviour when you are part of the in-group (Hogg & Mullin, 1999; Sherif, 2001). This chapter edges in closer to see what the code of conduct and frame of reference was for the Johannine group. Through internalization, individuals who were part of the Johannine group identified with social meanings. These meanings of traditions¹⁸⁸ became their consciousness.

The noun *koinonia* denotes active participation or sharing in what one has in common with others. This chapter therefore also considers the role of *koinonia*. For Berger (1969:25), religion is the human enterprise by which a sacred cosmos is established. Thus, a lived experience becomes a shared experience¹⁸⁹ and a shared experience a lived experience.

188 Detailed discussion on tradition as marker on this group study in Chapter 3.

189 During the past few decades, a paradigm shift has taken place from a general approach to theology towards a greater reflection on human experience as an authentic source of divine revelation. This brought about substantial changes in the way the Christian life has been studied. The studied concept of spiritual theology made way for a more fluid spirituality. Spirituality became more of a dialectic tension. On the one hand, there is the historical concreteness of revelation in Jesus and subsequent Christian tradition. On the

The nature of what is mutually shared shapes the character of the group (Van der Merwe, 2013:6). Chapter 5 takes a closer look at the norms and values of the group that created a mission for the group to live by. In other words, the mission of the Johannine group is a call or responsibility to share their view of God in the way they live. God is the original cause and fundamental rationale of their identity in Christ. The in-group has a privileged status in relation to God. They are in Christ and Christ lives in them. This truth tells the story of why belonging to the in-group is valuable. When we look closer at the mission of the group, we will ask, what was it like to participate in the communal life of the group? With their narrated identity, what were their ideals? How did they interact?

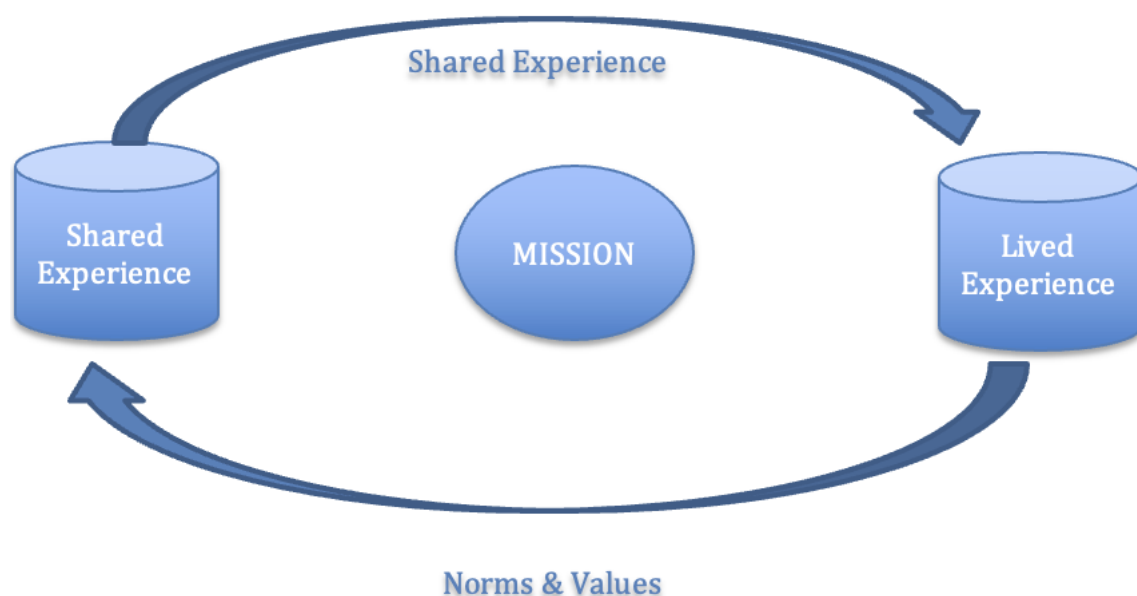


Figure 5-1: The role of mission in understanding group formation and participation in the group

Figure 5-1 demonstrates how the nature of what is mutually shared shapes the character of the group (Van der Merwe, 2013:6). The shared experience of the group in time forms the lived experience, and the lived experience brings the norms and values of the group to the forefront. In time these values and norms became the mission of the Johannine group to form their Christ-like identity through mimesis. In a world where there are competing or at least alternative views, the author of a specific stance should reinterpret those core values

other hand, there is the personal assimilation of salvation in Christ by each person within changing historical, cultural and social circumstances that demand new approaches to Christian conduct (Scheldrake, 2000:22).

to reaffirm the readers' identity. This was the case with the author of 1 John. Mission should here be understood as a noun that activates participation in what one has in common with others in the Johannine group.

Every group nourishes a narrative about who they are – why their group exists and has value. The previous chapter discussed the various attributed character traits. The next step is to relate these traits to behavioural norms and social dynamics in the group. But firstly, we ought to ask to what extent it is probable that the norms in the Johannine group during the time of the letter, or at least a similar set of norms, were ever embraced in their contemporary groups?

5.1. Walking like Jesus

In 1 John 2:6 the exemplary authority of Jesus's behaviour as a model is deontologically linked to the behaviour of the believer. This is based on an intimate relationship between the two (Brown, 1986:263; Lieu, 2008:74): "whoever says he abides in him *ought to* walk in the same way in which he walked" (ὁ λέγων ἐν αὐτῷ¹⁹⁰ μένειν ὀφείλει καθὼς ἐκεῖνος περιπατήσεν καὶ αὐτὸς [οὕτως]¹⁹¹ περιπατεῖν). This remark occurs in a theologically dense context that brings together pivotal notions, like knowing and remaining or existing in God/Jesus, keeping the commandments, or loving your brothers. The comparative καθὼς...[οὕτως] links the behaviour of the model, Jesus, to those who abide in him. The idea of mimesis is evident. Brown (1986:262) opines, "The Law is the source of Jewish obligation, while the example of Jesus is the source of Christian obligation." Indeed, "The test of our religious experience is whether it produces a reflection of the life of Jesus in our daily life" (Marshall, 1978:128). Malherbe (1986:135) underlines the importance of example in ancient moral discourse, especially personal examples, which were "regarded as more persuasive than words...A virtuous person was to offer an example... a philosopher's practical example of the principles he taught... was thought to be a most important demonstration of his integrity." This relates well to the idea that Jesus is the example that

190 The reference to "him" is most probably to God but then also implicitly to Jesus. Cf. Smalley (2002:50).

191 "The external evidence for and against the presence of οὕτως is rather evenly divided (κ C Ψ 81 al for; A B 33 2464* al against). From a transcriptional point of view, the word might have been accidentally omitted following αὐτός. On the other hand, it might have been added as an emphatic correlative with the preceding καθὼς. Brown (1986:262-63), and Lieu (2008:74), give detailed descriptions of the use of the comparative particle in the Gospel and Letters of John.

should be mimed – he is virtuous and could therefore serve as example. The idea of mimesis is evident.

The word περιπατέω (walking) refers to general behaviour (moving/walking around) among people during everyday life. Believers should thus structure their everyday behaviour, i.e., moving around among people, in the same way that Jesus did.¹⁹²

What exactly typifies the “walking around” (περιπατέω) of Jesus that group members are obliged¹⁹³ to imitate? There are ample references in 1 John that convey a message with the assumption that the implied readers knew the message.¹⁹⁴ This creates the impression of a tradition of knowledge according to which this group functioned. Somehow people were expected to know what Jesus did and how he behaved. The best assumption of where this knowledge comes from is from the Johannine tradition itself, since it is also expressed in the Gospel, which is probably a reference to the earthly life of Jesus.

Is there any clue as to *why* a group member should behave like Jesus? Behaviour is qualified in this context with references to keeping His commandments (τὰς ἐντολὰς αὐτοῦ μὴ τηρῶν) or His word (τηρῆν αὐτοῦ τὸν λόγον), motivated *inter alia* by the fact that they know God (1 Jn 2:3). Thus, behaviour is defined based on God's commandments and word (or revelation). The authoritative or hierarchical nature of the argumentation is clear: behaviour in the group (family of God) is determined by God, who conveys his commandments through Jesus to the rest of group, who in turn must obey. He is the Father, they are the children, which echoes a devoted basis for the relationship and accordingly a respectful motivation for mimesis. This interrelatedness is only possible if they remain in him, i.e., in the case of an intimate relationship.¹⁹⁵

192 “The particular aspect of obedience mentioned on this occasion is Christlikeness” (Smalley 2002:52).

193 Klauck (1991:118), speaks of a “Verpflichtung”. Cf. Haas (1972:43); Painter (2002:170).

194 Cf., for instance, 1John 2:13-14, 20-21; 3:1, 5, 6, 14-15; 4:7; 5:13, 18, 19, 20 etc.

195 Brown (1986:285), sees the point of this verse to underline the fact that abiding in God or Jesus and the way one lives one's life cannot be divorced. Akin (2001:95), follows Strecker and formulates it a bit dogmatically: “... the indicative and the imperative of the Christian life are joined together as a cause and effect. This union occurs only to the degree that the soteriological significance of the death and resurrection of Jesus the Christ precedes the ethical imperative, so that the indicative of the Christ-event becomes the foundation for and the content of the imperative”. It is however a question of whether the concepts of imperative and indicative are appropriate analytical categories for the Johannine literature.

A key expression of ethics in 1 John is that “whoever says he abides in him ought to walk in the same way in which he walked” (1 Jn 2:6 – ὁ λέγων ἐν αὐτῷ μένειν ὀφείλει καθὼς ἐκεῖνος περιπάτησεν καὶ αὐτὸς [οὕτως]¹⁹⁶ περιπατεῖν). Similarity in behaviour based on the pattern of Jesus is the result of remaining in Jesus. This echoes what is said above about the exemplary standard Jesus sets.

The word περιπατέω refers to general behaviour (moving around) among people during everyday life. The behaviour of the one who claims to “remain in him”¹⁹⁷ ought to be (i.e., obligation or duty) like that of Jesus, which is probably a reference to the earthly life of Jesus (Haas, 1972:43).¹⁹⁸ “The aspect of obedience mentioned on this occasion is Christlikeness” (Smalley, 2002:52). The key for understanding this expression of ethics is the concept of “remaining in him” – the proof of the union between the believer and God lies in the imitation of Jesus. Smalley (2002:50) notes that the expressions “to be or exist in him” (ἐν αὐτῷ ἐσμεν) and “to abide in him” (ἐν αὐτῷ μένειν) are used synonymously and that they should be read in parallel with “knowing God” (ἔγνωκα αὐτόν). They describe an intensive and intimate relationship between believer and God/Jesus¹⁹⁹. Already in 1 John 1:6–7 the idea of behaving (περιπατέω) in the light establishes the idea of behaviour determined by fellowship and group adherence.²⁰⁰ You behave according to the ethos of the group to which you belong, which is also implied in 1 John 2:6 where “being in him” is again linked to life in the light based on love. From the immediate context the behaviour is qualified by keeping his commandments (τὰς ἐντολὰς αὐτοῦ μὴ τηρῶν) and his word (τηρῇ αὐτοῦ τὸν λόγον), based inter alia on the fact that they know God. The implication is that knowing God and

196 “The external evidence for and against the presence of οὕτως is rather evenly divided (x C Ψ 81 al for; A B 33 2464* al against). From a transcriptional point of view, the word might have been accidentally omitted following αὐτός. On the other hand, it might have been added as an emphatic correlative with the preceding καθὼς. Considering such considerations, it is considered best to include the word but to enclose it within square brackets” (Metzger 1994:639-640).

197 The reference to “him” is most probably to God but then also implicitly to Jesus”. See also Smalley (2002:50).

198 So also, Smalley (2002:52); Akin (2001:94). Marshall (1978:128) remarks: “The test of our religious experience is whether it produces a reflection of the life of Jesus in our daily life; if it fails this elementary test, it is false”.

199 This quote from Smalley (2002:51) underlines the intimacy of the union between believer and God/Jesus: “The use of μένειν at this point suggests an intensely personal knowledge of God; it presupposes an intimate and committed relationship with him, through Jesus, which is both permanent and continuous. To abide ‘in (ἐν) Jesus,’ moreover, indicates a close and ongoing relationship between the Father and the Son”. See also Haas (1972:42); Akin (2001:94).

200 This word is only used in these two contexts.

Jesus, being in him, i.e., belonging to and being determined by this group, leads to behaviour like that of Jesus based on what he said and commanded.

Thus, the relationship between identity, knowledge (words and commandments) and behaviour are used as the basis of the ethics argumentation. The authoritative or hierarchical nature of the argument is clear: in the group (family of God) behaviour is determined by God, who conveys it to the rest of group, who must obey. The central point of departure is the claim to remain in him.²⁰¹ In ethics terms this moves close to the so called *exemplarist* view.²⁰² Obedience and commitment to an example are presupposed. Smalley (2002:192) puts it this way, “The author develops the theme of obedience (as a condition of living as a child of God) by studying the *pattern* of loyalty to the love command. In contrast to the models of hatred, typified above all by the attitude of Cain (vv. 12, 13, 15), the writer turns to a consideration of the positive exemplification of obedient love, supremely to be found in Jesus himself (cf. vv. 10, 11, 14).” and “the Christian duty of self-surrender is probably best understood in this context as a direct response to the work of Jesus on the cross. The cross is an example to copy, and not simply a revelation of love to admire.” The remark that people ought to behave like Jesus because they remain in him motivates behaviour based on ethos or group behaviour as expressed in Jesus. This of course implies that somehow people should have known what Jesus had done and how he behaved based on the words of the author of the letter. The ample references to conveying the message and the things they know create the impression of a tradition of knowledge. The best assumption of where this knowledge comes from is the Johannine tradition as it is also

201 Akin (2001:95) follows Strecker and formulates it a bit dogmatically: “In this verse the indicative and the imperative of the Christian life are joined together as a cause and effect. This union occurs only to the degree that the soteriological significance of the death and resurrection of Jesus the Christ precedes the ethical imperative, so that the indicative of the Christ-event becomes the foundation for and the content of the imperative”.

202 “The idea of the ‘imitation of Christ,’ which this v presents, appears with some frequency in 1 John (cf. the comment on 2:6; also 2:29; 3:2, 3, 7; 4:[11], 17). The concept is also deeply embedded in the theology of the NT generally (cf. 1 Cor 11:1; Phil 2:5–8; 1 Thess 1:6, using μιμηταὶ τοῦ κυρίου, “imitators of the Lord”; 1 Tim 6:13–14; Heb 12:2–3; 1 Pet 2:21); and, according to Dodd (85), it may have influenced the selection of incidents from the life of Jesus recorded in the Gospels. The Christian’s “mimesis” of Jesus is not a superficial exercise; like the “miming” of Israel’s exodus, in the OT (Exod 12:24–27; 13:8; Deut 8:2), it carries with it a deep sense of obedient participation in Christ, whose resources make this “imitation” possible. A supreme example of “imitatio Christi” (the imitation of Christ) is to be found in the “footwashing” scene of John 13:1–17, where Jesus is found to be the perfect model of love and service, and enjoins this “example” (ὑπόδειγμα, 13:15) on his followers. There is every reason to suppose that, with John 15:13, the paradigm of humble Christian self-surrender described in John 13 was in mind throughout the present passage of 1 John. Smalley (2002:195).

expressed in the Gospel. There Jesus's example and behaviour is also primarily defined in terms of unrestricted love (Ch. 13), as is the case here.²⁰³

Another reason seems to be the concept of “remaining/abiding in him” (*Immanenzformeln*). The proof of this union between the believer and God lies in the imitation of Jesus, which is also expanded by the references to “knowing God” (ἐγνώκα αὐτόν –2:3–6).²⁰⁴ Knowledge does not only imply being aware of, but having and sharing the knowledge of God in such a way that it determines the person's behaviour accordingly.²⁰⁵ Smalley (2002:50) notes that the expressions “to be or exist in him” (ἐν αὐτῷ ἔσμεν) and “to abide in him” (ἐν αὐτῷ μένειν) are used synonymously and that they should be read in parallel with “knowing God” (ἐγνώκα αὐτόν), since they describe an intense and intimate relationship between the believer and God/Jesus.²⁰⁶ True behaviour therefore emanates from this relationship. References to typical Johannine relationships occur in the immediate context, for instance, to know God and Jesus (1 Jn 2:4 – ἐγνώκα αὐτόν) or to be in God (1 Jn 2:5 – ἐν αὐτῷ ἔσμεν), or to be in his love or truth (1 Jn 2:4–5). Based on this intimate relationship between the model and the copy, mimesis seems to be expected. In the direct context, God is also called Father (1 Jn 2:1), and when love is discussed, the term brother is also used (1 Jn 2:9) that echoes filial language. In short, God is the Father, the addressees are the children, which suggests a filial basis for the relationship and accordingly a filial motivation for mimesis. This interrelatedness is only possible if the believers remain in Him, i.e., in the case of such an intimate relationship.²⁰⁷

203 See also Smalley (2002:52).

204 Lieu (2008: 75) also underlines that walking as Jesus walked specifies the earlier image of light.

205 Louw and Nida (1988:27) define the denotative meaning of knowledge thus: “to learn to know a person through direct personal experience, implying a continuity of relationship—to know, to become acquainted with, to be familiar with”.

206 Smalley (2002: 51) underlines the intimacy of the union between believer and God/Jesus: “The use of μένειν at this point suggests an intensely personal knowledge of God; it presupposes an intimate and committed relationship with him, through Jesus, which is both permanent and continuous. To abide ‘in (ἐν) Jesus,’ moreover, indicates a close and ongoing relationship between the Father and the Son”. See also Haas (1972: 42); Akin (2001: 94).

207 Brown (1986:285) sees the point of this verse to underline the fact that abiding in God or Jesus and the way one lives one's life cannot be divorced. Akin (2001:95), follows Strecker and formulates it a bit dogmatically: “... the indicative and the imperative of the Christian life are joined together as a cause and effect. This union occurs only to the degree that the soteriological significance of the death and resurrection of Jesus the Christ precedes the ethical imperative, so that the indicative of the Christ-event becomes the foundation for and the content of the imperative”. It is however a question of whether the concepts of imperative and indicative are appropriate analytical categories for the Johannine literature.

In short, if a person knows God, has fellowship with him, remains in him and lives in the light, that person should walk like Jesus walked by keeping his words and commandments. This requires the person to love his brothers so that the love of God can reach its aim in him or her. This is the *koinonia* and group mission.

The expectation of walking or living like Jesus is grounded in the intimate relationship with God. In this narrower context (1 Jn 2:3–6), there is no gift that is emphasized, although on a spiritual level one can argue that love, truth, commandments, God's word, and of course Jesus are all gifts. However, the focus is not on these, but on the evidently hierarchical relationship of authority between God and believers that forms the basis of behaviour (mission). This tips the scale in the direction of mimetic behaviour. This relationship unfolds as an authoritative or hierarchical relationship: the behaviour in the group is determined by God, who conveys his commandments through Jesus to the rest of group, who in turn must obey.²⁰⁸ Ethically it is expected in the group that the moral behaviour of believers should mime that of Jesus. God and Jesus as the external points of ethical orientation that leads to solidarity within the group, seem to be in focus here.

5.2. Principles/norms as bridge between values and actions in the group

Groups may hold values, but these values do not necessarily function as group beliefs. A value is defined as "an enduring belief that suggests a specific mode of conduct." This allows members to feel, think and act as group members. By living these values, people see themselves as members of the group. There are strong social pressures to adopt the norms of the group to which members belong (in-group), for this conformance guarantees acceptance. Knowing the norms of the group also provides members with a code of conduct that helps to remove anxiety and provides a frame of reference for behaviour (Hogg & Mullin, 1999; Sheriff, 2001). Group norms tend to accentuate similarities between members and minimize differences (Hogg, 2001:63). Thus, an ideal prototype of the group emerges; the more the member conforms to the prototype, the more likely he/she is to receive acceptance

208 Brown (1982), sees the point of this verse to underline the fact that abiding in God or Jesus and the way one lives one's life cannot be divorced. Akin, (2001), follows Strecker and formulates it a bit dogmatically: "... the indicative and the imperative of the Christian life are joined together as a cause and effect. This union occurs only to the degree that the soteriological significance of the death and resurrection of Jesus the Christ precedes the ethical imperative, so that the indicative of the Christ-event becomes the foundation for and the content of the imperative." It is however a question of whether the concepts of imperative and indicative are appropriate analytical categories for the Johannine literature?

and approval from the group.

The terms *principle* and *norm*²⁰⁹ refer to a broader guiding framework, fundamental assumptions or standards of behaviour that underlie and motivate actions.²¹⁰ The formulation of these principles relies on the expressed and ascribed values that reflect the identity of a person.²¹¹ In this way, they bring order and predictability to life and are indeed needed for the maintenance and enhancement of the identity of the group. Principles or norms do not spell out specific actions but serve as the guiding ethics framework or vision, which must be expressed as an action – the principle and ensuing action must correlate. A principle should be rationally converted into concrete prescriptions that will lead to appropriate actions in a particular situation. Take the example of loving one another. This is apparently an imperative, but what is expected is not directly explained.

Again, this principle should be explored semantically: What is love? For instance, does the “one another” include everybody or only some people? A principle stated as an imperative (you should love) may ordinarily be distinguished from a command (rule) by the inability to do it directly – a secondary step or question of how it should be done or applied (a rule) follows. For instance, the principle (or moral vision) of love could be expressed in the action of helping the person in need (1 Jn 3:16), or in the case of God, sending his Son into the world (1 Jn 3:16).²¹² Different principles may also overlap, and they usually do. For instance, say you have the principle of love (but what is love?). Add the principle of honouring God. Now the expressions of love must also incorporate expressing honour to God. Immediately the action of expressing love is more defined and less general. Add the principle that you

209 This should not be confused with the meaning of norm in the expression “this is the norm here”, where norm refers to something customary or normal. Roitto (2011:17) defines norms as “the group’s shared ideas about proper attitudes, beliefs, behaviors, etc.”. Group norms are the spoken or unspoken rules that guide how group members interact. A norm is any shared standard or rule that specifies appropriate, expected attitudes. Philip Esler (1994:149) says we can call norms “identity descriptors”.

210 The contention is that the terms norm and principle basically cover the same semantic field, though the emphasis differ slightly. The term principle might remind one more of the fact that the point of orientation for a particular action begins here, it is the fundamental point of departure. A norm might not place the same emphasis on the beginning of the process, but rather on the authority implied by this point of orientation. In the end the nuance is so small and artificial, that it seems feasible to me to use the terms as synonymous.

211 Esler (2003:55) argues that norms “constitute frames of reference, or signposts, through which the world can be interpreted” and against which concrete actions could be qualitatively judged.

212 The same principle may underlie different types of actions. For instance, honouring God may lead to specific cultic activities (prayer, sacrifice, etc.) or social behaviour (helping others, not killing, etc.). Applying a principle requires reflection: the question of how should it be done or applied is usually (implicitly or explicitly) asked and often the answers differ as to the concrete action lines to follow.

should be loyal to your fellow disciples, and the resulting actions are even more defined. This interrelatedness of principles creates a matrix within which actions are performed. The more principles there are, the more refined the resulting ethics structure would be.

Social formation took place in the Johannine group. A scale of values was presented to define a range of acceptable and unacceptable attitudes and behaviour of the family members. This was to assist the members of the Johannine group to act appropriately in new and ambiguous situations. These principles enhanced the identity of the group.

5.3. From norms to mission

What leads a person from a particular principle or norm to an action? As was argued above, principles do not prescribe specific actions, but simply provide guidelines, a vision, or points of orientation for actions in particular situations. This is where the prescriptive phase comes in. Prescriptions bridge the gap between principles and concrete actions, and they indicate which actions ought to be performed to give proper expression to a particular principle (or set of principles). As Childress (1980:379) remarks: "Principles are more general and fundamental than moral rules and offer grounds for rules." The aim of prescriptions is basically to guide or inspire a group or individual's actions and behaviour in a desired direction, usually indicating what is good, right, or acceptable. These terms echo the link between principles and the values of a particular group. Prescriptions are given in different ways and with different intensities and aims. Commands, laws, rules, guidelines, examples, or advice may be used. Rhetorically these different terms function in different ways. They differ, for instance, in their directness, authority, or desired effect. Some prescriptions intend to be binding (normally in an absolute way) and enforced by authority. There is an absolute obligation to obey, and disobedience usually carries the risk of punishment. The term usually used in this regard is *law*, although in some cases the word "rule" may also be used.

Then there are prescriptions that are also binding, but not with the same intensity or at the same level as those just mentioned. If one wants to participate in something or be part of a group, it is expected that one follows these prescriptions for proper behaviour. Morality is thus pledged to obey the prescriptions of a particular group. The word *rule* is usually used

for these types of prescriptions.²¹³ The term *guideline* refers to actions that are expected and strongly recommended for good results, but they need not be followed to the letter and could often serve as a general indication of the direction in which one should plan actions. The terms *advice* and *suggestion* refer to prescribed actions that are suggested or recommended, but not enforced. If these prescriptive suggestions are not followed for some or other reason, people will not be punished, although their deviant actions may be questioned. The term *request* politely or courteously communicates a person's wish or preferred action to others in the hope that another person will follow or allow the action. No emphasis is placed on authority (obligation) or prescriptiveness, it depends on the situation and actors involved.

5.3.1. Actions as expression of the person²¹⁴

The purpose of the prescriptions is to influence actions, and this influence is determined by the *will* of the ethical agent to oblige.²¹⁵ This highlights the role of discernment. Does he or she accept the prescription and put it into action, or not? The reaction to a prescription (the will to do) will, of course, result in a corresponding action. In this light one should distinguish between what ought to be done (what one should do), what one wants to do and what one indeed does (real or intended action). If what you ought to do overlaps with what you want to do, then the action is usually morally positive. If someone does not oblige, various forms of punishment by the group may result. The two poles of prescription and reward/punishment (implicit or explicit) are constantly in balance, depending on the authority

213 Rules may be formulated in lists (i.e., virtue and vice lists) but they may also be communicated linguistically through, for instance, imperatives or even examples. It should be noted that linguistically there might be imperatives that do not function as imperatives or expressions that do not contain imperatives that function as imperatives. However, rules should not be used without context. The semantic content of the rule should also be determined. Take, for instance, the rule: You shall not murder. One should not do something called murder, but what is the semantic content of murder? What does it include and what not – only intentional killing or unintentional killing too? Does it include execution or killing somebody in a war? The semantic content is often determined by the context or by contextual arguments.

214 Since the spectrum and nature of possible actions is so wide, the process becomes quite complex. There can, for instance, be actions that are classified as moral (stealing, lying), others as sometimes moral (what I should wear to work is not a moral choice, but if the choice of clothes is intended to tease it might be a moral choice) and others not moral at all (the choice of the colour of my toothbrush). Depending on the situation, actions that were not intended to be moral might become moral in a different situation (like the wearing of a head covering or discomfiting others with bad breath).

215 In the process of action formation people consciously or unconsciously keep the value system of the group they belong to in mind. They constantly evaluate their actions against that value system. Cf. also Sorokin (1948:40-47). Coertze (1979:34) also maintains that individuals build their personal value systems through evaluation.

behind the prescription. The most prescriptions can do is to a) create expectations that the prescription will be followed', and b) implicitly warn about the consequences of not obliging. An ethical agent should make decisions based on the willingness to oblige.

5.3.2. Symbolic actions – confirming and projecting²¹⁶

Actions can be distinguished from *symbolic* actions,²¹⁷ which may be associated with the notion of *sacralization*.²¹⁸ Symbolic actions have a wider impact on moral behaviour. They function referentially: by performing a particular action, you refer (connotatively or emotionally) to other analogous actions (i.e., by washing feet, love is signified; or by eating bread, the body of Jesus is implied). Symbolic actions usually remind the participants of a system of relevant meaning that lies behind them. Because they draw the participants into a world of remembrance, they confirm certain historical positions. In this way their views on reality are safeguarded and reinforced by these symbolic actions. They remind participants, for instance, of their adherence to a particular group with a particular identity and particular responsibilities. For 1 John it was the reminder that they should walk in the light (1 Jn 1:3–7). This usually forms part of the *ethos*²¹⁹ of that group, is highly resistant to change, and is often defended by referring to important symbolic signifiers.²²⁰

Thus, schematically:

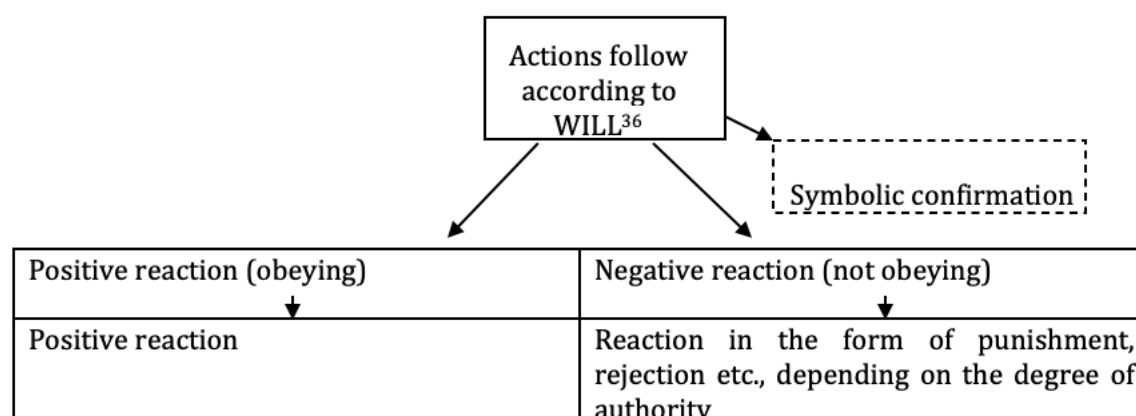


Figure 5-2: A person's identity and worldview as shaped by motivation of actions

216 "The uses of ritual to reify the symbolic moral universe are one example." (Meeks, 1993:15).

217 A communicated symbol contains a "programmed response". Symbolic communication creates in the hearer the same idea that the speaker has.

218 Staples (2002-2004). Meeks (1993:15) remarks, "The uses of ritual...reify the symbolic moral universe".

219 Ethos is defined as customary and fixed patterns of behaviour within a group.

220 Cf. Staples (2002-2004).

Clearly, a choice for a particular moral action involves the whole continuum of a person's identity, since the prescription is linked to what the person regards as valuable and ultimately to his identity. Thus, the will becomes an expression of a worldview, and actions resulting from choices based on the will also reflect something of the totality of such a person's identity and worldview. A leading scholar on the moral philosophers, Malherbe,²²¹ emphasizes that even with the ancient moral philosophers, the focus in moral behaviour is not on actions (different groups may act similarly) but on the motivation for those actions (the reasons for the action as expressed in the continuum described above). Actions therefore express or confirm/deny the content of the continuum. A discrepancy between actions and the continuum indeed creates tension (deviant behaviour/sin).²²² Bolyki (2003:198) points out that in Greek tragedies there is an integrated structure linking morals (deeds) and identity: "tragedy itself is an imitation of human deeds and these human deeds are nothing else but individual decisions hardened into customs, which we call the character or personality or ethos of a person" (Bolyki, 2003:198). The will of the actor (consciously or unconsciously) indeed plays a determining role in resulting actions. This of course leads to notions such as responsibility, guilt, etc. The dynamics of the will are often complex. In John there are external influences that could influence and even overpower the individual will. On the other hand, the will of a person could be guided by the Spirit. Analysing the action lines in a narrative forms part of this process. An individual action is usually a single expression within a larger system of ethics. The more action lines are available, the easier it would be to draw conclusions as to the underlying social system. If one has a series of actions, one could interrelate and systematize them and draw conclusions as to the profile of the value system.

For instance, if one finds in one document mention of actions such as refraining from stealing, not committing murder, honouring one's parents, keeping the Sabbath, and honouring the only true God, one might justifiably conclude that one is dealing with a value system represented by the Decalogue. According to Gilroy (1997:301–302), identity is always as much about differences as about shared belonging. Gilroy's remark is relevant to

221 Cf. Malherbe (1983, 1986, 1989, 1992).

222 Here it should be remembered that in ancient Mediterranean times identity and actions were not sharply separated. Ancient philosophy, from the time of Aristotle, has asked the question of whether a good man can do something that is not good, and this has remained an issue of discussion. There was the commonly held opinion that actions represented identity and identity actions. Cf. also Malina and Rohrbauch (1998).

this study on social identity in 1 John, because the in-group has internal differences²²³ the author warns against, but they also have similarities, first and foremost their being part of the in-group. Gilroy also states that the formation of every “we” must leave out or exclude a “they”. So, identities depend on the marking of differences. It is important to keep in mind that although 1 John contains a fair amount of polemic against the opponents, it is not directed at the opponents themselves, but is intended for the members of the group to whom John is writing. Thus, it is written *against* the opponents, but not *directly to* the opponents.

In sum, moral actions are indeed part of a much larger process and cannot be separated from what leads up to and influences them. The different aspects mentioned should not be thought of as a linear process, starting with the worldview and ending with actions. One should rather think of an interrelated and dynamic process in which deeds influence worldview and *vice versa*, and perceptions about identity might be challenged by doubts about norms or lines of action. This interaction plays out in the cognitive and emotive dimensions of the individual, visually shown below:

Table 5-1: The interrelated and dynamic process through which deeds influence worldview and *vice versa* in 1 John

Deeds influencing the worldview:
By walking in light (1 Jn 1:3–7)
By confessing sin (1 Jn 1:8–10)
By the advocacy of Christ (1 Jn 2:1, 2)
Worldview that will influence actions (deeds):
God is love (1 Jn 4:8)
God is Life (1 Jn 5:12)

223 False teachers were originally members of the Christian community to which the author is writing. They appear to have “gone out” from among this community “into the world” (4:1). Thus, the author is addressing a community, which has undergone a schism or split in which a substantial part of the community – maybe even a numerical majority – has withdrawn from fellowship. This is a key point, which affects the interpretation of almost every part of 1, 2, and 3 John. This group (which has split off and withdrawn from fellowship with the community to which the author writes) is continuing to propagate its own beliefs. The secessionists are seeking to win converts for their own views, even from among the community to which they formerly belonged. Considering this threat, the author of 1 John is writing both to reassure and strengthen the faithful members of that community, and to warn them to continue to resist the efforts of the false teachers who have gone out from among them.

5.4. The role of images and lived experiences in the group

Iser (1978) points out that in any reading process, the readers' imagination composes images related to what they are reading. The reader subjectively and selectively composes, "the images out of the multifarious aspects of the text as well as the metaphors²²⁴ embedded in the text" (cf. Iser, 1978:150; Van der Merwe, 2015:5). For Iser (1978) almost everything in texts, such as:

...physical images, material objects, attitudes or events described in the text are imaginatively experienced. The reading process then facilitates the passive fusion between the meaning of a text and the experience of the text in the mind of the readers. This entails a connection between the text and the readers: The readers themselves, ... in constituting the meaning, is also constituted (Iser, 1978:150).

The following images occur in the texts where the author refers to "writing these things" (ταῦτα ἔγραψα). His reference to ταῦτα ἔγραψα prepares the reader for the implied images created by the text to foster lived experiences of the divine. This will result in the realization of the objectives referred to in fixed phrases (ταῦτα γράφω ὑμῖν ἵνα).

5.4.1. Images from Chapter 1 – Seen, heard, touched and fellowship

In 1 John 1:1–3, the author repeatedly refers to the fact that they "have heard, seen with their eyes and touched with their hands the Word of life," which in this context refers to Jesus Christ, the Son of God. The readers, acquainted with the Gospel of John, had to give content to these indefinite verbs. For each reader, their lived experiences would have been subjectively different, depending on both the reader's knowledge of the Gospel and their imagination. Which miracles are imagined, which discourses are abstracted? How real do they envisage Jesus? All this will create real and different lived experiences of Jesus. Even when they try to conceptualize "fellowship," a mental experience of God can be imagined.

²²⁴ The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language (Pickett 2000:1104) defines the word metaphor as a "figure of speech in which a word or phrase that ordinarily designates one thing is used to designate another, thus making an implicit comparison" and "one thing conceived as representing another, a symbol". For the different kinds of metaphor, the dynamics of metaphor, ambiguities in metaphor and the transformative power of metaphor, see Paprotté and Dirven 1985; Lakoff and Johnson 1999; Stern 2000; Aaron 2001.

5.4.2. Images from Chapter 2 – The use of metaphors

The author introduces the family metaphor 1 John 2²²⁵. He uses a coherent network of metaphors that relate to first century family life²²⁶(cf. Van der Merwe, 2010:209; Van der Watt, 1999c:491) to explain certain vital concepts, the Christian identity and Christian conduct. The author uses this household metaphor to draw the reader into the text and to experience his teaching. He included mostly accepted and familiar conventions from everyday life and linked them with how the readers lived in the group. He adapted to the idiom of his day by using generally accepted customs in family life (obedience, love, to know the truth) to express Jesus and God's relationship and their relationship to the members of the group and what the Christian life comprises (cf. Van der Watt, 1992:272–279).

5.4.3. Images from Chapter 5 – The life of Jesus

In 1 John 5, the author again uses water and blood as metaphors referring to the baptism and crucifixion of Jesus²²⁷. In fact, he wants to incorporate Jesus's entire ministry to serve as a testimony from God that Jesus is the Son of God: "Those who believe in the Son of God have the testimony of God in their hearts." The reader can thus imagine the entire ministry of Jesus. This again reflects on the unity that exists between God and his Son. The lived experience of the one constitutes a lived experience of the other. Waaijman (2002:744) also points out that when:

...a text is descriptive; it arouses images in the imagination of the reader. These images emerge against the background of what the reader has already read and (during repetitions) against the background of what still lies ahead to be read. The text continues to disclose itself at every moment of reading (Van der

225 The 20th century brought about a change in the understanding of a metaphor: "the basic semantic unit is larger than the word" (Reinstorf & Van Aarde 2002:722). This semantic change was reflected by Richards (1981:51) in his description of the metaphor. According to him: "... when we use a metaphor, we have two thoughts of different things active together and supported by a single word, or phrase, whose meaning is a resultant of their interaction." This description caused Reinstorf and Van Aarde (2002:722; see also Van der Watt 2000:1–24) to distinguish the following factors: (1) Juxtaposed in a metaphor are not just words but thoughts (or worldviews); (2) the thoughts find expression not only through individual words, but phrases (or whole stories); and (3) the meaning of the metaphor is not the result of a literal word being substituted by a figurative word, but interaction; that is, two (often diverging) thoughts being juxtaposed.

226 See the references for a more elaborated discussion on family life in antiquity in chapter 7.

227 See Painter (2002:302–309) for a thorough analysis of the interpretation and meaning of "water and blood" referred to by the author in 1 John 5:6–8. It seems, according to him, as if there is no consensus amongst scholars about the meaning and usage of these two metaphors by the author. For this researcher to interpret it as referring to the beginning (baptism) and ending (blood) of Jesus's ministry makes sense.

Merwe, 2015:7).

This dialectic produces numerous lived experiences. The disclosing of the text then happens against “the combined background of memory and expectation” (Van der Merwe, 2015:7; Waaijman, 2002:744). The repetition of words, phrases and concepts strengthens this mechanism in the constitution of affects. Take for instance eternal life: the author already introduced this concept in the prologue of 1 John. He refers to life²²⁸ three times in the prologue and relates it to Jesus Christ, the Son of the Father. In 1 John 1, it is personified and refers to the identity of Jesus. At the end of 1 John, eternal life (1 Jn 5:11–13) is also attached to Jesus. In this context, the author uses eternal life as a word event. Therefore, for the author, having faith in Jesus would lead to the experience of Jesus. In 1 John 2:6, the author writes that “whoever says, ‘I abide in him,’ ought to walk just as he walked”.

The reference “I am writing” complements all his references to his “testimony”, proclaiming, confessing, and declaring. He uses it here to invite the reader to become involved in the experience of eternal life, which refers here to a new quality of life: living in the light, righteousness, love, and truth. In the last reference to γράφειν in 1 John 5:13, the author writes, “I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know that you have eternal life”. In this statement, the author’s witness testimony about Jesus culminates in his rebuking of the false teaching of his opponents about the identity of Jesus. Gaps that occur in the reading (or listening) process, can only be filled by the reader based on the reader’s experiences and knowledge. For Iser (1978:46), the reader must “work it out for himself if he is to make the experience his own”. Gaps develop when certain information is missing. This is what stimulates the reader into filling the blanks with projections (Iser, 1978:168). According to Smalley (1989:11), the author wants his congregation, who at the time of writing were divided in their perception of Jesus, to continuously experience fellowship with him with respect to what he is writing. Then, together, they must corporately enjoy fellowship (a lived experience) “with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ” (1 Jn 1:3; cf. 1:6–7) through their faith and conduct. In Johannine literature, κοινωνία (fellowship) denotes “sharing in” or “participation with” (Thomas, 2006:70). The practical and experiential dimension of the author’s theology is apparent here.

²²⁸ In 1:1, he refers to “the word of life”, and in 1:2 to both “life” and “eternal life”.

Knowledge of Jesus leads to an experience of Jesus, which consequently leads to action (cf. 1 Jn 2:3, know, sure, obey).

The effect of hearing, seeing, and touching Jesus is a declaration (ἀπαγγέλλομεν) and testimony (μαρτυροῦμεν) about him (1 Jn 1:2–3), and an invitation to have fellowship in him (Smalley, 1989:11–12) and with him. The author uses the pronoun ταῦτα (1 Jn 1:4; 2:1; 26–27; 5:13) so that the readers can complete the idea with their imaginations to create lived experiences of the divine when they give meaning and content (about the identity of Jesus) to it. For the author to influence his readers rhetorically into believing his testimony and adhering to the exhortations (effects) spelt out in his objectives through his preaching and writing, he evokes lived experiences (affects) in his readers.

The readers must experience the Son and the Father. Those who heard or read the author's proclamation could have experienced (see, hear) the divine in their minds, thoughts, and feelings. Waaijman (2002:742) contends that readers shape the portrayal "of sacred texts in their imagination". They become agents who participate in the text. Such participation denotes that sincere and contemplative reading of biblical texts can produce various lived experiences of both the divine and the text. These "lived experiences" are dependent on the text content on the divine and on who the reader is. When reading 1 John, at first glance it may look like an informative text about Jesus's identity. However, it also has some transformative potential. It can work to inspire action in the world, to inspire the believer to experience imaginatively the divine in everyday life by living in the light and loving one another. In other words, the text operates as a mirror to its context, precisely because the text is a product of its context (Robbins, 1996:34). This lived experiences is the foundation for this mission chapter.

Before looking at the nature of the knowledge the readers had, the way in which knowledge constitutes the *ethos* of a group must first be considered. The term *ethos*, as understood here, draws attention to two important elements: a fixed pattern (*Kanon*) of behaviour in a group that is based on their shared knowledge (Wolter, 2009:128–132),²²⁹ and the

229 Wolter (2009:133-136) explains what difference the use of the analytical category of *ethos* makes in analysing the material by saying that i) a much wider variety of actions, not only moral rules, inter alia institutionalized actions such as the observance of food laws, circumcision, observing feast and meals, are included in the analysis and ii) a wide variety of contexts, including the ordinary everyday contexts as well as the unusual special contexts (such as religious feasts, etc.) may be considered.

interrelatedness of behaviour and identity, which provides the rationale for why people act as they do. Two important words for mission understanding – *alētheia* (1 Jn 5:5) and *koinonia* (1 Jn 5:6) – highlight the importance of living within the tradition or ethos of the group. These are discussed below.

5.5. The author's use of *alētheia* in 1 John

The Law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ, and although no one has ever seen the Father, the Son has made him known (Jn 1:17–18). For John, *alētheia* denotes “divine reality”, a reality which is different from that in which humans find themselves. Moreover, *alētheia* discloses itself and thus becomes revelation. C.H. Dodd²³⁰ (1979) speaks for many commentators when in his *Johannine Epistles*, he defines *alētheia* as “the ultimate reality as revealed in Christ”. In *The Interpretation of the Gospel of John* he describes *alētheia* as “the eternal reality as revealed to men— either the reality itself or the revelation of it”. The heart of the Gospel of John lies in its theology of revelation: the Father is revealed in the Son. Bultmann (1964:239) argues that *alētheia* develops out of Hellenistic dualism, and this determines its unique use in John. For John, *alētheia* denotes “divine reality”, a reality that is different from that in which humans find themselves. God is only known through revelation.

Although the Fourth Gospel is written in Greek and draws on a Hellenistic environment, its language has a Semitic flavour, and its message is filled with Jewish religion and culture. In Hebrew there is no exact equivalent for *alētheia*. The Septuagint contains the Hebrew word *‘emet* as *alētheia* and yet the two words do not have identical meanings. *‘Emet* primarily has the connotation of “trustworthiness” or “steadfastness” and is used as an attribute of God in this sense. In Hebrew *‘emet* is, in other words, moral rather than intellectual. Expressions such as “doing the truth” and “walking in the truth”, have a rich, distinctively Johannine connotation that emphasizes the power of the *alētheia* that abides in “us” as group identity.

At the very beginning of his letter, the author of 1 John carefully sets his argument in the context of a non-Hellenistic view of truth. Truth is to be done, not contemplated. Christ's revelation of the Father was truth because he reveals not his essence (what the Father is),

230 Dodd, on Historical tradition in the Fourth Gospel.

but what he does for his people. Thus, he can say in 1 John 2:4, “He who says, ‘I know him’, but disobeys his commandments, is a liar and the truth is not in him”, because his life and words are not connected. In 1 John 2:21 he can say, “I write to you, not because you do not know the truth, but because you do know it and know that no lie is of the truth.”

The author of 1 John knows that giving lists of moral actions will not adequately describe the power of *alētheia*, which is made available through the revelation of God in Christ. In his desire to establish and defend his vision of truth for the in-group, the author resorts to truth talk. In so doing he established himself and set himself apart from those propounding falsehoods to the group. He affirms that the revelation of God is in Christ himself. God has entered our realm of experience, and he is to be found in our relationships with other people. To be “in the truth” and to “do the truth” is to follow Christ.

Malina and Rohrbaugh (1996) in their social-scientific commentary on Johannine literature argue that the group deliberately withdrew from society and established itself as an alternate society. This highlights the author’s habit of creating new phrases, assigning new meaning to words, and creating ways of saying things with a deep group meaning or group truthfulness. In my view, this is done:

- For the 1 John group to redefine itself and its boundaries;
- To hollow out a space for themselves as a group in society with a specific identity; and
- To clarify social values peculiar to the in-group derived from their norms or principles.

5.6. *Koinōnia* as shared view of God and life

The point of the entire letter is clarified near the close of the prologue with the mention of fellowship (*koinōnia*) in 1 John 1:3: “...in order that you might have fellowship with us, and our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ.” The rhetoric of these opening lines forces a decision on the readers. They have to answer the question, “Are you with us or not?” The immediacy behind that question is now clear, since having fellowship (or not) with “us” implies having fellowship (or not) with God.

The term *koinōnia* does not appear in the Gospel, and the noun appears in 1 John only in this cluster of verses in 1 John 1:3–7, where it is used four times. Having such fellowship with other believers, however, is not at all alien to John’s Gospel, where the image is that of

“being one” with fellow Christians (Jn 17:11, 21, 22, 23). The Gospel of John, the idea of having fellowship with God is also an extension of the notion of “abiding”, especially in the famous image of the vine in John 15. The language of abiding in God is very common in 1 John (cf. 2:5–6 and comments thereon). But this promise of fellowship with God is mentioned after a circuitous series of clauses that underscore the importance of the incarnation and the divine status of the human Jesus. Jesus was with the Father, and then was revealed in the flesh. The point is clear: fellowship with God is possible through the incarnation, and only through the incarnation.

If the opponents have a false view of the incarnation, they are jeopardizing their fellowship with God. The readers of 1 John are thus being advised on the immediacy of their decisions about their faith. Creating fellowship between the author’s group (we) and the addressees (you – verse 3) and thus introducing them into the fellowship with the Father and Son, establishes a closed social group characterized by mutual fellowship, trust, sharing, etc. In this way social boundaries are drawn, and social expectations are established. Having *κοινωνία* with the Father and Son and with fellow believers implies that such a person is fully embedded in this divine transcendental relationship and is accordingly determined by all that *κοινωνία* implies, transcending ordinary human relations. The relational borders between God and humans become porous in the sense that the influence and presence of God penetrates the life of the believer and the believer’s identity, and actions are integrated with those of God. Towards and within this transcendental fellowship, people should orientate themselves and seek their identity and patterns for behaviour. This should be the nature of the behaviour according to 1 John.

Brown (1986:232) rightly points out that although the term *koinōnia* is not used in the rest of the letter, the idea continues in terms like “*being in*” and “*remaining in*” indicating the close relationship between those sharing *koinōnia*. Although the word *koinōnia* is only used in the beginning of 1 John, the tone is set of sharing and belonging in an intimate way. This idea of social interrelatedness and cooperation with all it entails, remains intact throughout the letter. It is further developed by employing related conceptual expressions like filial metaphorical language or thorough words expressing close union like “being in” or “remaining in” and acting accordingly. These expressions of unity conceptually form a cluster buttering out the intimate relationship between God and believer and developing the consequences of such a relationship in the group.

5.7. Spirituality as lived experience in the group

There are of course numerous ways in which to approach and describe the phenomenon of spirituality. The approach chosen here is descriptive since the interest lies in the way in which the author of 1 John wanted believers in Jesus Christ to express their relationship with God in their everyday lives. The word “spirituality”²³¹ is used here to refer to a lived experience. The difference between a physical lived experience and a spiritual lived experience is as follows: with a physical lived experience, a person experiences the physical presence of something or someone. With a spiritual lived experience, the believer perceives through faith the deeper meaning of the identity of the person whom the believer has seen physically: Jesus is the Son of God. Those who study the origins of Christianity will agree that it goes back to certain deeply significant experiences of the first disciples – experiences of the incarnated and resurrected Jesus²³². This investigation can help us to better understand the experiences and the faith that gave Christianity its distinctive character (Dunn, 1990). A sympathetic study of the language with which (Jesus and) the first Christians articulated their religious experience should offer some insight into the religious experiences of the 1 John group. This will in turn bring insight into the 1 John group’s spirituality. 1 John 1:1-4 is especially helpful for delving into the spirituality of the Johannine group:

“Ὁ ἦν ἀπ’ ἀρχῆς, ὃ ἀκηκόαμεν, ὃ ἐώρακάμεν τοῖς ὀφθαλμοῖς ἡμῶν, ὃ ἐθεασάμεθα καὶ αἱ χεῖρες ἡμῶν ἐψηλάφησαν περὶ τοῦ λόγου τῆς ζωῆς —

231“Spirituality, points to those aspects of a person’s living or commitment that concern his or her striving to attain the highest ideal or goal. For the Christian this would mean his or her striving for an ever more intense union with the Father through Jesus Christ by living in the Spirit” (Principe, 2000:51).

232 A variety of spiritualities occur in the Bible: “... the dialogical spirituality of the Deuteronomistic tradition in which God intervenes directly and participates in Israel’s history, the profoundly Christocentric spirituality of Paul, the contemplative Jesus-centered spirituality of John, the ecclesiastical spirituality of the pastorals, the apocalyptic spirituality of Revelation. In the Psalms we find expressed in prayer and poetry the full range of Old Testament spiritualities that have been practiced by Christians in the light of the mystery of Christ” (Schneiders, 2002:135). We can even add more to this. Schneiders (2002:135) is certainly correct that we find in the Bible a variety of biblical spiritualities, a few of which she has named except 1 John. The spirituality in 1 John is fellowship centred. In 1 John 1, the author explains how the Christian believer moves through three different configurations of spirituality to the lived experience to enjoy fellowship with the divine. These three configurations relate as follows to Schneider’s explanation of spirituality (2002:134): Ultimate horizon: (1) physical configuration: hear, see, experience the gospel (2) spiritual configuration: perception of Jesus’s identity; Basic coordinates: (3) corporate family configuration: live in the gospel.

2 καὶ ἡ ζωὴ ἐφανερώθη, καὶ ἐωράκαμεν καὶ μαρτυροῦμεν καὶ ἀπαγγέλλομεν ὑμῖν τὴν ζωὴν τὴν αἰώνιον ἣτις ἦν πρὸς τὸν πατέρα καὶ ἐφανερώθη ἡμῖν —

3 ὃ ἐωράκαμεν καὶ ἀκηκόαμεν, ἀπαγγέλλομεν καὶ ὑμῖν, ἵνα καὶ ὑμεῖς κοινωνίαν ἔχητε μεθ’ ἡμῶν. καὶ ἡ κοινωνία δὲ ἡ ἡμετέρα μετὰ τοῦ πατρὸς καὶ μετὰ τοῦ υἱοῦ αὐτοῦ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ.

4 καὶ ταῦτα γράφομεν ἡμεῖς, ἵνα ἡ χαρὰ ἡμῶν ᾗ πεπληρωμένη.

The following discourse analysis of 1 John 1:1–4 reveals the structure of the text, the rhetorical account of argumentation and the focus areas in the text.

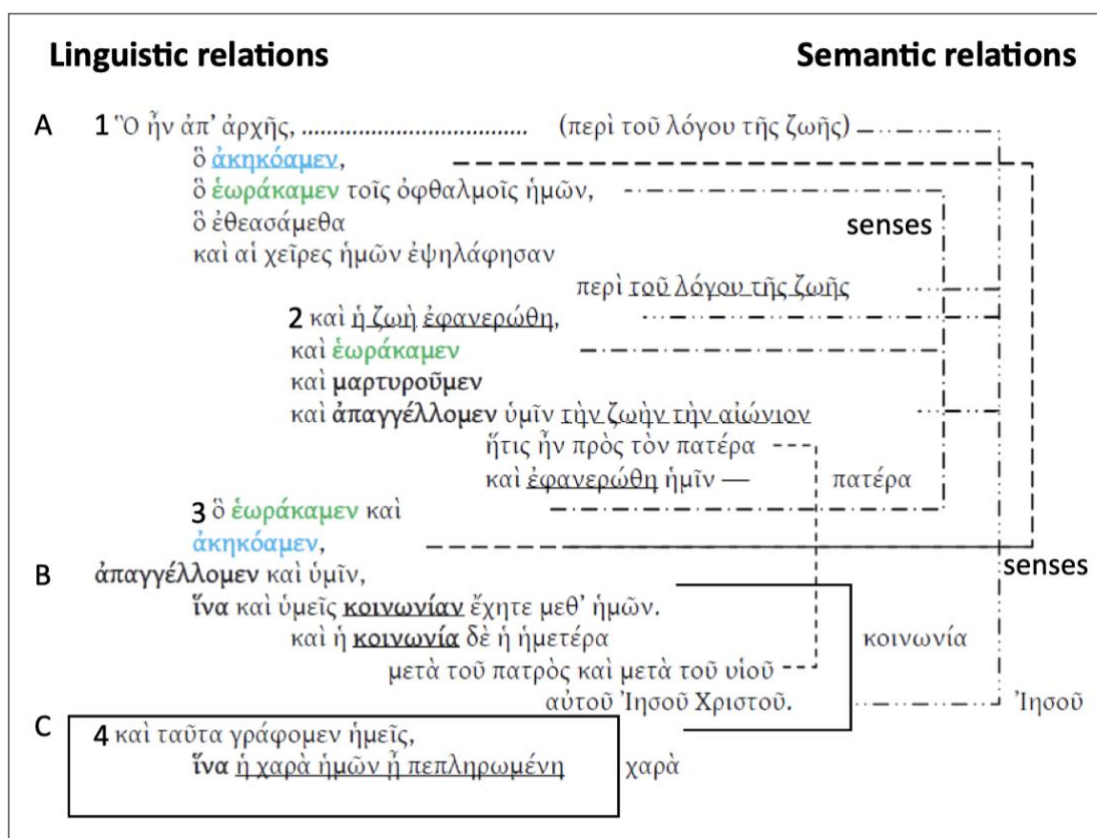


Figure 5-3 Discourse analysis of 1 John 1:1–4

The text begins in 1 John 1:1 and is interrupted by the parenthesis of verse 2. It resumes in verse 3 and concludes in verse 4. The author recalls the sense of the authoritative message, which he is proclaiming to his readers; he announces his deeper insight into these events. He has discerned that the person they have seen, heard and touched is indisputably Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the eternal life. From 1 John 1:1–4 we can see that Christian

spirituality refers to the lived experience of Christian faith. According to Schneiders (2002:134), the ultimate horizon of faith is God, who has been revealed in Jesus Christ. Through his divine life, Christian believers are incorporated by the gift of the Spirit. The basic coordinates of the life of faith would be this believing early Christian Johannine group (i.e., the church) who lived that faith. Thus, Christian spirituality is a self-transcending faith in which union with God in Jesus Christ through the Spirit expresses itself in service to other members in the Johannine group and in participation in the realization of the reign of God in this world. The immediate context of this expression in 1 John 1:1 makes it clear that an actual first-hand hearing of the proclamation of Jesus is implied. The Word of life that was heard is described as that which “we have seen with our eyes” (ὃ ἑωράκαμεν τοῖς ὀφθαλμοῖς ἡμῶν). This expression, found only here in the NT, is used to reinforce the claim that the proclamation of the word of life comes from one who is an eyewitness. That which “we have seen” implies first-hand sensory perception. The Word of life is furthermore described as something that their hands have touched (αἱ χεῖρες ἡμῶν ἐψηλάφησαν).

The author is clearly using the verb to mean physical touching with the hands. By doing so, he claims that his proclamation rests on the experience of not only seeing and hearing, but also touching the Word of life with his own hands. Three times he refers to what they have heard (ἀκηκόαμεν, 1 Jn 1:1, 3, 5), three times to what they have seen (ὤωράκαμεν, 1 Jn 1:1, 2, 3; cf. also θεασάμεθα) and once to what they have touched with their hands (αἱ χεῖρες ἡμῶν ἐψηλάφησαν, 1 Jn 1:1): Jesus Christ (1 Jn 1:3). He uses the forensic verb “testify” (μαρτυροῦμεν, 1 Jn 1:2) once, but “proclaim” (ἀπαγγέλλομεν, 1 Jn 1:2, 3, 5) is also used three times. Therefore, when the Elder says “we proclaim” the Word of life, he has in mind something much more than a spoken message. He proclaims the Word of life, which he has heard, seen, and touched. He proclaims a message that has been embodied and personalized – the person of Jesus Christ, the Son of God (Kruse, 2000:54).

Another configuration of spirituality, as depicted from the selected text, is the lived experience through spiritual senses. It is only when people have encountered Jesus Christ physically or by the hearing of the Gospel and consequently perceiving the otherness and identity of this person (to be the Son of God or the Word of life), that a new and different lived experience emerges. The noun “fellowship” (κοινωνία) is a significant theological term in 1 John. It occurs twice in the prologue and twice in the rest of Chapter 1 (1 Jn 1:6, 7) to create a chiastic pattern. The function of the chiastic structure is to emphasize the

interrelatedness and interdependency of the fellowship amongst believers and their corporate fellowship with God. One kind of fellowship demands and constitutes the other. The noun “fellowship” denotes the active participation or sharing in what one has in common or does in common with others. Thus, a lived experience becomes a shared experience and a shared experience a lived experience. The nature of what is mutually shared shapes the character of the group (Van der Merwe, 2013:6). During the time of Jesus’s ministry, the physical seeing, hearing and touching of Jesus created a specific lived experience of him (e.g., his teaching in parables and his performance of miracles). That is what the author tries to communicate when he refers three times (1 Jn 1:1–3) to the physical experience of Jesus. Years later, the Johannine group has these lived experiences of Jesus Christ through the preaching (μαρτυροῦμεν καὶ ἀπαγγέλλομεν, 1 Jn 1:2–3; ἀναγγέλλομεν, 1 Jn 1:5; καὶ ταῦτα γράφομεν ἡμεῖς, 1 Jn 1:4) and through the written word of the author and the apostolic witnesses about the incarnation of the Son of God.

This brings us to the very nature of the spirituality of this group, as Smalley (1984:127) also puts it: “To ‘abide’ or ‘dwell’ in Jesus, as he instructed his disciples, is only possible when there is a genuine relationship with God through Christ; and this is guaranteed and confirmed by the indwelling knowledge of the truth imparted through the anointing Spirit”. From this it seems more than plausible that spirituality according to 1 John consists of living within the tradition or ethos of the group and being taught and guided by the Spirit, or as Painter (2002:198) formulates it: “The approach of 1 John was to tie the teaching activity of the Spirit to the foundational words of Jesus”.

Spirituality emerges from this symbiosis. The above description does not suggest a mystical or meditative type of spirituality but rather a spirituality that is based on the interpretation of the tradition through the guidance of the Spirit.²³³ How should we envisage the individual person’s active contribution to this type of spirituality? In 1 John 4:1 the Johannine group is warned not to believe anybody who makes claims to speak through the Spirit, but to use their knowledge in distinguishing between the spirits. This implies that the basis of this spirituality has to do with conscious consideration and decision making, weighing up what is being said and believed and acting accordingly. The claim to abide in God should be

233 Lieu (1991:42) is sceptic about interpretations that allows “any particular ‘spirit activity’”. She notes, “The spirit is not a key theme, and little is said about it” (p. 45).

“matched by a life of obedience and love” (Lieu, 1991:41). Believers also have a responsibility to “abide in the words of Jesus” (1 Jn 2:24). Part of their spirituality is to constantly rethink their situation in light of the tradition with the help of the Spirit (Strecker, 1996). Added to this is the remark of Malherbe (2004:300) that it was “...commonplace (in ancient moral philosophy) that one’s deeds should agree with one’s words.” Being in the words means doing those words.

In summary, the basis for this discernment is the ethos or tradition of the group based on their dependence on their anointing, the Spirit of truth who will teach them. The basic coordinates of the life of faith would be this early Christian believing Johannine group who lived that faith. Thus, Christian spirituality is a self-transcending faith in which union with God in Jesus Christ through the Spirit expresses itself in service of other members in the Johannine group and in participation in the realization of the reign of God in this world. It is a transformative process of personal and communal engagement with the text.

Finally, it is evident that the author creates spiritual lived experiences in the minds of the readers using devices such as the portrayal of Jesus's identity and dialectic language. The family metaphor creates another kind of spiritual experience. The use of certain words evokes experiences and can motivate people to act in a certain way. The author uses every resource he can muster to connect his arguments and to persuade the believing group to stay connected to God and to each other.

5.8. Symbolic actions as the world of remembrance in 1 John

Symbolic actions also affect moral behaviour on a larger scale. There are *symbolic* actions,²³⁴ which may be associated with the notion of *sacralization*.²³⁵ Symbolic actions usually recall and remind the participants of an underlying system of relevant meaning. Since they draw the participants into a world of remembrance, they confirm certain historical positions. In this way their views on reality are safeguarded and reinforced through these symbolic actions. For instance, they remind participants of their adherence to a particular group with a particular identity and particular responsibilities. This usually forms part of the *ethos*²³⁶ of that

234 The explanation on symbolic communication forms a key to understanding the interaction between the group and the individual. A communicated symbol contains a “programmed response”. Symbolic communication creates in the hearer the same idea than the speaker has.

235 Staples (2002;2004); Meeks (1993:15) remarks: “The uses of ritual...reify the symbolic moral universe”.

236 Ethos is defined as customary and fixed patterns of behaviour within a group.

group and is normally highly resistant to change. The symbolic actions are defended by referring to important symbolic signifiers.²³⁷ By obliging, an individual confirms his or her membership of the Johannine group, which means accepting and sharing the structure of the cognitive world of the group and therefore sharing its identity.

The implication is that an individual's values, norms, acceptance of laws and rules, and projected actions will be in line with those of Jesus and the rest of the Johannine group. Certain actions could therefore function as symbolic actions, integrating the identity with projected actions by accepting the values and norms of that particular group. As such there may be a constant appeal to the person to act accordingly as a type of exemplary "law".

Thus, the will becomes an expression of a worldview. Actions resulting from choices based on the will also reflect something of the totality of such a person's identity. Even with the ancient moral philosophers the focus of moral behaviour is not on actions (different groups may act similarly) but on the motivation for those actions (the reasons why as expressed by the continuum described above). Actions therefore express and confirm/deny the content of the continuum. A discrepancy between actions and the continuum indeed creates tension (deviant behaviour/sin).²³⁸ This confirms that one cannot just focus on the exhortatory sections or specific sections dealing with moral actions, one must also consider the formation and identity description of the Johannine group. Social identity theory draws temporary boundaries around the text for the purpose of a close examination from one point of view. This approach presupposes that what is discovered in one bounded area will be put in dialog with discoveries in other bounded areas. When the results of a variety of markers to studying a text are compared and related, a more complete and pleasing interpretation of the text on mission emerges.

5.9. Love as ethic shaping the group mission

Throughout 1 John, in-group love takes the form of being loved by God (1 Jn 2:5; 3:1, 16–17; 4:7–13, 16–19), loving God (1 Jn 2:15; 3:17, 4:7–21; 5:1–3) and loving one another (1 Jn 2:10; 3:10–11, 14–17, 23; 4:7–21; 5:1–2). This social category is used to differentiate the

²³⁷ See Staples (2002;2004).

²³⁸ Here it should be remembered that in ancient Mediterranean times identity and actions were not sharply separated. Ancient philosophy asked the question whether a good man can do something that is not good from the times of Aristotle, and it remained an issue of discussion. There was the commonly held opinion that actions represented identity and identity actions. See Malina and Rohrbaugh (1998).

in-group from the out-group, who does not love (1 Jn 3:10, 14; 4:8, 20). Finally, in-group love is understood in both descriptive and prescriptive social categories; both a reality for the in-group and an action to be taken up by the in-group. Will the members of the Johannine group continue to walk in love for one another and in belief in Jesus as the Christ, or will they stumble by allowing former members of the group to deceive them into abandoning their faith and their love for each other? This is the pastoral emergency the author of 1 John is addressing. In a carefully worded text, designed to be read aloud, the author attempts to persuade his audience to remain in the truth, to stay connected to what they have known “from the beginning” (1 Jn 1).

When studying love as ethic shaping the group mission, the words of Schudson (1992:155) are important to consider:

“When people make judgements...not about how people will act but about how they should act, they start from a moral baseline of codes, conventions, laws, sentiments, and sometimes... a powerful remembrance of past transgression.”

A question to ask is: How did the Johannine group rationalize the love command and Christian example? The author’s understanding of his ethical obligation to outsiders was not based on a fixed set of maxims drawn from the Mosaic Law or Jesus tradition but was rather based on a sacred past that provided an interpretive framework for current experience. The author interpreted his relationship with outsiders through a complex set of values drawn from the LXX account of Cain and Abel (Gen 4:1–16), who functioned inside the group identity and prescribed correct behaviour (Assman, 1992:52, 58–59, 139–168). Abel becomes the archetypal group member, while the out-group members play the part of Cain, who murdered his brother. By linking the present experience to a familiar episode, the author could vilify his opponents. 1 John 3 draws on the story of Cain and Abel to rationalize situations of conflict in mythological terms. No person in society can remember every place, person, and event in history. So, to make the past more manageable, information is “conceptualized”, a cognitive process that reduces the bulk of the past to a limited number of essential images that are easily recalled. These images are then learned from the social group. Groups thus provide this image from which individuals store, retrieve, and share information. The name Cain is used in this way in the Johannine group because it evokes information and a certain understanding of brotherly love. In the Johannine drama, antichrists play the role of wicked Cain while the insider group resembles Abel. Ancient world honour is symbolized by blood. A person can always trust his family. Thus no one outside

the family of blood can be trusted until their trust can be validated and verified. The story of Cain shifts the focus to this truth. But the author speaks of a new family, the family of Christ that can be trusted. Loving one another (1 Jn 3:11) is a sign of living as the family of God (1 Jn 3:14). Otherwise, you are dead (1 Jn 3:14). Thus, love is directly linked to identity by way of obligation (Brown, 1986:473–74) namely, being a child of God.

1 John 3:8–15 is the text that refers most explicitly to the Cain and Abel story, and it is also the text that includes, not coincidentally, the most overtly hostile statements about opponents²³⁹. Thus, just as Cain's diabolical ancestry was revealed by his actions, the in-group defined themselves as God's children by showing Christ-like love. To summarize, 1 John 3 draws on the story of Cain and Abel to rationalize situations of conflict in theological terms. The themes of light and darkness is used to describe these two ways of living. To have fellowship with God is to live in the light. With no fellowship one lives in darkness. To walk in darkness means not so much sinning in the generic sense as rejecting the message of eternal life in Christ. The mission of the group was thus to imitate Christ: Love is an inward force, a vitality that expresses itself outwardly.

It is an all-encompassing emotion with the capacity to guide behaviour. The text repeatedly states that loves work reciprocally. 1 John 4:11 states the obligation to love one another because God loved the "us": "Beloved, if God so loved us, we also *ought to love* one another" (Ἀγαπητοί, εἰ οὕτως ὁ θεὸς ἠγάπησεν ἡμᾶς, καὶ ἡμεῖς ὀφείλομεν ἀλλήλους ἀγαπᾶν). The word "ought to" is used for the obligation to meet certain social and moral expectations.²⁴⁰ The group's ethical responsibility was to witness to the truth and give freely of themselves in a spirit of love. Ethically it means that the actions of believers should create an atmosphere that corresponds with the ethos of the life-giving and loving God wherever they go. Wherever they had been, God's love must be evident. People's behaviour is understood based on their role in the group. The behaviour of a group is called their ethic. According to 1 John 4:11

239 Lieu similarly observes that, while Cain is mentioned specifically only once in this context, his "presence...extends beyond 1 John 3:12 to cast its shadow over both language and thought of the whole chapter 1" (1993:470).

240 Louw and Nida, formulates it the same, "necessary, to be obligatory in view of some moral or legal requirements". Cf. also Jn 19:7; 1 Jn 2:6; 3:16; 3 Jn 8. "The verb ὀφείλομεν ("we ought") suggests the intensity of the constraint laid upon every believer to follow the pattern of self-surrender set by Jesus in his life and death" Smalley (2002:194). In Jn 19:7 it is stated that Jesus's ought to dies because he trespassed the law. The expression "ought to" is therefore used to indicate that if a person stands in a particular legal or authoritative relation, certain behaviour is required. In 1 John a law is not the basis of the obligation, but the love of God.

the practical expression of this divine love of God in the present group is loving one another (see the definition in 1 Jn 3:16). God is not only the source of love, but also its inspiration.²⁴¹ Lieu (1991:54) opines, “the author sees the believer’s life in relation with God as the *source* of ethical behaviour”. Deeds cannot be separated from who a person is, and who a person is cannot be separated from his relationship with God, who is the starting point of the relationship.²⁴²

Social memory theories depart from the premise that remembering is inherently collective, rather than a personal phenomenon. This statement is important for understanding the relational purpose of deeds in a group. Approaches like the social identity theory build on this truth and approach memory as a cultural process that is deeply embedded in group experiences and social structures. In the words of Schudson (1992:155) again: “The past makes itself felt in the present as a set of expectations about what the world will be like and should be like.” This shows that social memory theory put forward a close correlation between a group’s commemorative activities and its ethical norms. This means that the past both shapes and is shaped by group values.

Representations of the past are continually modified in ways that speak to present circumstances, allowing the group to maintain continuity with its heritage. This fits well with the opening chapter of the letter and the words and thoughts of the author. This process of naming and doing commemorative activities both reflect and reinforce a group’s beliefs about itself and the surrounding world, a fact that binds memory to ethics in an essentially reciprocal relationship. So, the love ethic should be viewed as the product of memorial processes that merged recent experiences in the group with the biblical story of Cain and Abel in support of a sustainable group identity. This is a social identity, creating a sense of heritage that provides the group with resources for understanding its origins and charting a course for its future.

Another important point is that memory is not simply a product of culture, but also a producer of culture. The two are inseparably intertwined, since the notion of a “common past” allows the individuals in a group to maintain a shared identity (Fentress & Wickham, 1992:25).

241 Smalley (2002:244); Johnson (2001:105); Haas et al. (1972:124).

242 Olsson (1999:160) correctly remarks that the word love, although it can be defined in many ways, always seems to include a relationship of some kind.

“Commemoration transforms historical facts into objects by defining their meaning and explaining how people should feel about them” (Schwartz, 1982). These shared meanings function as the glue that holds a group together.

To conclude, Genesis 4 functioned as an interpretive frame for Johannine experience. The author drew on this narrative to develop a vocabulary for thinking and talking about situations of conflict with the deviant members of the group. This is a move that allowed them to affix the present to an understanding of the sacred past. Genesis 4 thus became the window through which the author viewed reality and provided a resource for rationalizing present experience and predicting future outcomes. The 1 John 3 narrative went far beyond the LXX text to encompass the larger ancient story of the cosmic conflict between good and evil. This narrative linked the past and the present in a sacred story with pre-defined values and outcomes, providing the group with a distinct identity.

The author in 1 John does speak to his followers about love and is unsatisfied with the love shown by the deviants leaving the group. The question can just still be asked: How did the elders and the members of the in-group show this love ethic for the deviants? It is visible that love and the understanding of love and the application of this love was a big issue in the Johannine group.

5.10. Understanding sin to understand mission in 1 John

The social identity theory shows that there are two contradictory social categories for the in-group, one being sinners, and one being sinless. At points throughout the text, it seems that the in-group has either at one time struggled and/or presently struggles with sin (1 Jn 1:8–10; 2:1; 5:16). Along with this, it seems clear that the in-group has received and/or is currently receiving forgiveness of sins (1 Jn 1:7–9; 2:1–2, 12; 4:10). However, there are seemingly contradictory comments throughout the letter that appear to state that the members of the in-group *do not presently* sin. (1 Jn 3:5–6, 8–10; 5:18) These social categories seem to each have a unique placement in the letter. The references of in-group sinlessness are consistently and directly connected with intergroup comparison (1 Jn 3:4–10, 5:18–19), often presenting in-group positivity at the expense of the out-group (positive distinctiveness). However, the present sins of the in-group (1 Jn 1:8–10; 2:1; 5:16) are typically connected to the forgiveness of the in-group (1 Jn 1:7–9; 2:1–2, 12), thereby continuing the argument of in-group positivity.

As a result, it seems that in-group sinlessness is a motif that is uniquely used for intergroup comparison. As discussed earlier, John's prototypicality demands a sense of idealized dualism. Along with this, John's dualistic prototypicality seems to use intergroup comparison to pin the in-group's prototype against the out-group's prototype. As mentioned above, evidence for this is that in-group's sinlessness is consistently and directly used for intergroup comparison (1 Jn 3:4–10, 5:18–19). If it is true that the in-group's *prototype* and the in-group's *sinlessness* re motifs primarily used for intergroup comparison, then a link can be seen between the use of the prototype and the social category of sinlessness. It appears that the author of 1 John is using the tool of prototypicality to discuss the sinlessness of the in-group.

So why does the author of 1 John choose to speak about sin and to speak about sin in the way that he does? The author of 1 John has a good deal to say about sin. The clue is found in the way in which the imagery of light and darkness, introduced in 1 Jn 5–7, is used. The author's ethical and doctrinal definitions of sin shape the mission understanding of the in-group. He wants to underline what is appropriate behaviour in the group. The image of light and darkness, the concept of truth and falsehood, and the experience of forgiveness and loving one another within the circle of the fellowship of believers, all combine to strengthen the sense of groupness, and to define its limits. The theological statement of 1 John 1:5 that God is light and in him there is no darkness at all, is developed in terms of the word "sin" (ἁμαρτία) in 1 John 1:6; 2:2. The term is not defined in this section. Rather, the emphasis falls on the benefits of walking in the light, namely, that we are cleansed from sins by the blood of Jesus and thereby continue in fellowship with other Christians (1 Jn 1:7). The author is careful to argue that the group described by light is not a group of sinless perfection (1 Jn 1:8–10). Christians remain Christians and remain in fellowship with each other precisely because they have atoned (ἱλασμός) for sins (1 Jn 2:2). The cross is at the centre of the group, and paradoxically believers remain in the light as God is in the light, only in as far as they remain under the shadow of the cross.

The treatment of sin in 1 John is coherent. It deals with sin that is handled in the group, and sin puts the sinner outside the group. So, it again defines the in-group and out-group. The author portrays the Christian life as living as part of a family, with God the father as head (Van der Watt, 1999a:148ff). The opponents of the author are depicted as remaining outside the family's ethics understanding. The life of obedient members is totally determined by their

group adherence. We are most definitely not dealing with issues of orthodox and heretical perfectionism or alternative Christian understandings of the nature of sin. We are dealing with a set of given features of Christian existence summarized by the dual command given in 1 John 3:23. In that text the matter of conduct is clearly mentioned and derived from the group's confessional beliefs.

At this point, the short but interesting last verse of 1 John should be considered: "Children, beware of the idols". What is the author referring to here? Schnelle's (2010:187) suggestion fits into but also expands on the material considered up to now. He argues that the text addresses apostasy. Some of the members of the group were most probably in danger of giving way to the pressure of the evil that rules the *kosmos* (1 Jn 5:20). The word "idols" suggests that pagan cults or worship of Caesar were part of the problem. Participating in these activities would confirm loyalty to the society and state. There were members of the group who were in danger of leaving the Johannine group, while others could have considered partaking both Christian and pagan practices. This short but powerful ending warns against this, just as the letter in general encourages the threatened "you"-group to cooperate more closely with the "us" group.

Effectively, it is not the *real* group member who is sinless, but the *ideal* group member who is sinless. Along with this, it is the *ideal* out-group member who is wicked. However, when taken out of this dualistic, prototypical, idealized framework, sin is described as a present reality, alongside forgiveness. If read in this way, sinlessness is an ideal to be sought after, rather than a demand to be held over the church. Instead, the reality of the group is one of being forgiven sinners.

5.10.1. Jesus is the paraclete (1 Jn 2:1)

To encourage the believer, the author approaches the obstacle of sin positively: "if anyone does sin, we have an advocate (παράκλητον) with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous (δίκαιον)". God has provided a Redeemer (Smalley, 1989:36). Again, Jesus is the focus point. He is the paraclete, the intercessor with the Father (παράκλητον ἔχομεν πρὸς τὸν πατέρα). In his position as Son and intercessor, he petitions for sinners "with" (πρός)²⁴³ the Father (Danker, 2000:875). The description of Jesus as paraclete emphasizes his actions

²⁴³ Danker (2000:875): "be (in company) with someone".

when a believer commits sin. It also reveals Jesus's role in facilitating fellowship between the Father and believers, as well as bringing additional meaning to Jesus's work of cleansing earlier (1 Jn 1:7; Thomas, 2006:89). Jesus Christ is here also called δίκαιος [righteous]. This reference to Jesus being righteous emphasizes his ability to intercede on behalf of sinners. He shares in the natures of both God and humans. Therefore, he is the one who has "fulfilled all righteousness" (Smalley, 1989:37).

5.10.2. Jesus is the atoning sacrifice (1 Jn 2:2)

Moving to address the work of Jesus Christ, the author adds another related thought using the conjunction particle καὶ [and] in 1 John 2:2. He identifies Jesus's propitiation as the basis for the forgiveness of sin and the effect of abiding, not only for them, but also for alike (cf. Akin, 2001:77). The author has already indicated in 1 John 1:7 that those who have fellowship with God are those who live in the eternal life God has revealed in Jesus.

The primary denotation of ἱλασμός in this verse is to emphasize the atoning death of Jesus, the foundation on which both cleansing and forgiveness rest. It constitutes the foundation of his intercession with the Father. The present tense verb ἐστίν, connected with ἱλασμός, means that the atoning death of Jesus has a continuing significance for those believing in him (Thomas, 2006:90). For Painter (2002:158), this sequence of presentation of ideas reflects how the author perceives God the Father dealing with human sin through the sending of the Son. This view also helps to give perspective on the author's thoughts on the opponents' wrong doings discussed later in the study.

Thus, it seems clear that the controversy in the Johannine centred on differences in the interpretation of a shared tradition (Culpepper, 1998:253). For this reason, the author writes to urge his readers as follows: "Do not believe every spirit but test the spirits to see whether they are from God" (1 Jn 4:1), which implies that they are to measure the charismatic utterances of all so-called prophets by the norm of the sound Christian tradition, at the centre of which is the real incarnation of Christ (1 Jn 4:2–3). This Christian tradition characterizes the family of God.

An important remark on the cosmology typical of Johannine theology, should be noted here: becoming part of the family of God means passing from death into life (1 Jn 3:14; Painter, 2002:239–241). The people's view is that they are all dead and are therefore part of the reality of the evil one and are indeed in his power, except if they become part of the family

of God (1 Jn 5:19) through Jesus. In other words, by believing in him, they receive the ability to enter an intimate relationship with the transcendental God – they are born into the family of God (see the filial language such as being born, father, son, etc., in the letters; see also van der Watt, 1999; Van der Merwe, 2006). They are part of the divine reality, but physically remain in this physical world with its existential and ethical challenges. Two realities merge in one person, the transcendental and the earthly. Obviously, this could create problems of its own, especially in a group-orientated society where the identity and lives of individuals were dependent on and determined by the group ethos of their family. Belonging to two families will result in split loyalties and eventually conflict. Which group's ethos should be favoured and followed? Which family is primary in forming a person's identity and consequent behaviour? According to the author, it is the family that belongs to God. He is Light and believers should act as people who belong to the light (1 Jn 1:5–8). Any action that serves a person's own desires is regarded as loving this world and not as love of God (1 Jn 2:15–17). The point the author wants to make is that a person who is born of God cannot continue to live in sin because a new principle of life has been implanted in that person (Strecker, 1996:100). This is what shapes the mission of the group member (1 Jn 2:29; 3:3, 7, 10). At this point it is important to take a closer look at the group's understanding of *kosmos* to understand the cosmological identity shaping the mission of the group.

5.11. The understanding of *Kosmos* for the mission of the group

The general purpose of 1 John was to protect a Christian group from dissolution, to protect the identity and composition of that group, and to apprehend a movement that threatened the very heart of what the author understood to be a genuine faith and life. What is said should therefore not be interpreted in an apologetic tone (as is often done) but rather in a pastoral tone. This implies that in interpreting the texts, a guiding question should be: How does this remark assist the author and the addressees in curbing the danger presented by the false teachers? On the one hand there is the crossing of the boundaries between the insider group and the outsider group, and on the other, there is the crossing of the boundaries between “above” and “below”. If the receivers of this letter were in any way acquainted with the contents of the Gospel – which they most certainly were²⁴⁴ – they would

244 For the relation between the Gospel and the Letters, cf. Marshall (1978:31-42); Brown (1986:14-35); Painter (2002:58-74); van der Watt (2007:22-25).

recall the idea of heaven, or the above from where Jesus came, which stood over and against the earth or below (Jn 3:31; 8:23). Spatial contrasts like heaven and earth, above and below, which are typical of the Gospel, are not directly mentioned in the Johannine letters. It is *inter alia* indirectly referred to in what could be called spatial terminology, but that is not all. Qualitative descriptions dominate, giving the cosmology its distinct theological and ethical character. In the Johannine traditions this second boundary of status is crossed with the schism about the exalted beliefs in Christ and the author warning the in-group against these beliefs. When studying the role of cosmos in 1 John,²⁴⁵ the main question is how reality, especially cosmic reality, is received in the group. What now follows is a discussion on the author's understanding and use of the word *cosmos* throughout the text.

The aim is not to present a comprehensive cosmology, but to describe the cosmological views as they are found in 1 John. The major question is how reality, especially cosmic reality, is perceived in the group.

Oden (1992:1162) explains: "A cosmology (*cosmos* + *logia* = 'report') is a blueprint or map of the universe as a comprehensible and meaningful place". Based on this definition, this study treats the concept of cosmology as a total mental picture of the universe, including both the physical and transcendental realities as they are described in 1 John.

The term κόσμος is used 23 times in the letters of John. The word κόσμος²⁴⁶ is not used with one single meaning in the Gospel of John, nor in his letters.²⁴⁷ This is of course in line with the lexicographical potential of the word, which includes a wide range of possible uses.²⁴⁸ A

245 The article of Van der Watt, "Cosmos, reality, and God in the letters of John" (2013), shaped my thoughts on Cosmology in 1 John.

246 There are other words that also belong to the same semantic domain as κόσμος, like γῆ, κρίσις, but they are not treated, since they are not used in the Letters.

247 It is used 22 times in 1 John (2:2, 15[3x], 16[2x], 17; 3:1, 13, 17; 4:1, 3, 4, 5[3x], 9, 14, 17; 5:4[2x], 19) and once in 2 John 7.

248 According to BDAG (2000) κόσμος was used to refer to "that which serves to beautify through decoration, adornment, adorning" or "condition of orderliness, orderly arrangement, order" in Homeric times. However, the reference to "the sum of everything here and now, the world, the (orderly) universe" is attested much wider, even in the New Testament. In a more specific sense, it is also used to refer to "the sum of all beings above the level of the animals, the world" or more specific, "humanity in general". In a broader sense it is used to refer to "planet earth as a place of inhabitation, the world", indicating the habitation of humans, standing in contrast to heaven. BDAG (2000) further distinguish "the system of human existence in its many aspects, the world", including joys, possessions, sufferings, etc. as a possible reference. In a very broad sense, it may refer to the 'collective aspect of an entity, totality, sum'.

survey of the use of this term in 1 John allows for a division into four major categories²⁴⁹, namely, a) the physical/earthly reality in which people live; b) all human beings (the whole world); c) human beings not believing in God; d) the ungodly reality that stands in opposition to God (see also Brown, 1986:223–224).²⁵⁰ Discussed below:

a) The physical/earthly world in which people live

In an explanation of what love involves, the author of 1 John gives an example of what it means for a believer to lay down his life by saying in 1 John 3:17: “But if anyone has the world’s goods (τὸν βίον τοῦ κόσμου) and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God’s love abide in him?”²⁵¹ This fictive description addresses a person who has τὸν βίον τοῦ κόσμου, which he should share with the brother in need.²⁵² The reference is to things that are found in this physical world or reality as habitat for humans and that we need to survive as is implied by the reference later on in the verse to a brother who is in need. Here we have a neutral reference to creation, and although there is no reference to creation in the letters, it may be assumed that the creation theology of John 1:1–18 lies behind the thinking in the Johannine letters.

b) All human beings (the whole world).

The word κόσμος is also used to refer to human beings as such. For instance, many false prophets (1 Jn 4:1) or deceivers (2 Jn 7) have gone out into the world (εἰς τὸν κόσμον) indicating that the spirit of antichrist is in the world already (ἐν τῷ κόσμῳ in 1 Jn 4:3), in other words, among people in general. It may be argued that these references to the false

249 The underlying theory used in analysing the meaning of the concept of cosmology is based on two pillars. The lexicographical potential of a word was it is reflected in major dictionaries like BDAG (2000) and Louw and Nida (1996). This potential of the word is then considered with its associative use in the text (co-text) which associatively activates a particular usage. However, the presence of a concept in a document is not restricted to the use of a single term or terms, but also to the presence of comparable ideas or concepts. The analysis of the cosmology in the Johannine Letters will therefore not be restricted to the use of the word κόσμος.

250 It must be noted that 1 John is the major source of information, although 2 and 3 John also makes some contribution. If there is reference to 1 John only the chapter and verse(s) will be referred to (i.e., 3:14) while 2 or 3 John will be added if the reference is to them (i.e., 2 John). When the reference is to another book the name of the book will be placed before the chapter and verse.

251 ὃς δ' ἂν ἔχῃ τὸν βίον τοῦ κόσμου καὶ θεωρῇ τὸν ἀδελφὸν αὐτοῦ χρεῖαν ἔχοντα καὶ κλείσῃ τὰ σπλάγχνα αὐτοῦ ἀπ' αὐτοῦ, πῶς ἡ ἀγάπη τοῦ θεοῦ μένει ἐν αὐτῷ;

252 Surveying some translations, the word is translated as

- “world’s goods” (NKJV; ESV; NASB; NRSV)/ “goed der wereld” (Statenvertaling)/ “Welt Güter” (LU 84)/ “goed van die wêreld” (1983 Afrikaans translation), “world’s means” (NAB);
- “earthly possessions” (ISV)/ “irdischen Besitz” (REB); “material possessions” (NIV).
- “In de wereld een bestaan heeft” (1951 Dutch translation); “qui est riche” (BFC).

prophets and antichrists are to the world as a place (Bultmann, 1973:63). Like Jesus, others are also at work among all the people of the world, in this case believers and unbelievers. As Smalley (1984:259) says, the world is “not only the place where God is at work for man’s salvation, but also the sphere where evil forces may be active”.²⁵³

c) Human beings who do not believe in God

In 1 John 4:9 it is said that God sent his Son into the world (εἰς τὸν κόσμον). God sent Him as saviour of the world (σωτῆρα τοῦ κόσμου). He is also the propitiation for the sins of the whole world (ὅλου τοῦ κόσμου in 1 Jn 2:2), showing that the intention of God is not to save only some, but everybody who cares to believe in Jesus (1 Jn 5:11–13, Smalley, 1984:40; Brown, 1986:224; Painter, 2002:159). This typifies them as people who need salvation, thus as people not belonging to God (yet – see Brown [1986:517] who notes that Weiss wants to see the use as negative but that incarnational uses of κόσμος like this one are positive; so also, Painter [2002:159]. Menken [2010:88]; Marshall [1978:214] by implication; Smalley [1984:227] want to see the use as neutral, thus missing the emphasis on people in need of salvation). Jesus’s initial mission was to a world in total darkness, in need of salvation. This corresponds to the negative anthropology of the Johannine material, typifying all people as being in darkness and in need of salvation. It should, however, be noted that this use is contextually determined. Jesus was initially sent to an unbelieving world, but when some came to believe, this did not mean that Jesus was not sent for them any longer. In these contexts, this latter aspect does not come into focus in the use of κόσμος.

In 1 John 3:1, 13 it is stated that the world does not know God and his people and that it hates believers. The reference to “world” here is to people who do not know God/Jesus and stand in active opposition to believers by hating them.²⁵⁴ The same reference seems to apply to the uses of κόσμος in 1 John 4:4, 5. In 1 John 4:4 believers are said to be “of God” (ἐκ τοῦ Θεοῦ) and are therefore victors, since he who is in them (ὁ ἐν ὑμῖν) is greater than he who is in the world (ὁ ἐν τῷ κόσμῳ). The comparison between “them” and the world seems to focus on people in whom spirits of error and/or the antichrist(s) can work, implying that “world” here should be understood in terms of unbelievers (Smalley, 1984:225; Painter,

²⁵³ See also the discussion later under point c where it is argued that the reference in 4:17 might also be to people in general.

²⁵⁴ Cf. 3:13; Marshall (1978:190) - διὰ τοῦτο ὁ κόσμος οὐ γινώσκει ἡμᾶς, ὅτι οὐκ ἔγνω αὐτόν (v. 1)/ εἰ μισεῖ ὑμᾶς ὁ κόσμος (v. 13).

2002:262). In 1 John 4:5 the word κόσμος is used with different meanings. The first two uses (ἐκ τοῦ κόσμου) in this verse are treated in the next point, but the last reference to the world who listens to those (ὁ κόσμος αὐτῶν ἀκούει) who speak “of/from this world” (ἐκ τοῦ κόσμου λαλοῦσιν) evidently also refers to the people who do not believe.

d) The ungodly reality standing in opposition to God

In several cases, the word κόσμος is used in a way that seems to refer to a more general, inclusive reality, including more than just humans (against Kruse, 2000:149). It seems to refer to an ungodly reality, including spiritual powers (though not necessarily) that may be distinguished from and stand opposed to God (Brown, 1986:498 refers to the “realm of hostility to God”). In 1 John 4:5 it is mentioned that there are people “of/from the world” (ἐκ τοῦ κόσμου), a phrase that stands in direct opposition and in contrast with those who are ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ (of/from God) in 1 John 4:4 (Painter, 2002:263 recognizes the references between God and the world in verses 4 and 5 as an “antithetic parallelism”). They are of/from this world, meaning their origin is from the world – in this context world may refer to evil as individual entity encapsulating everything that is evil. This is where these people come from. The cosmos in this context is this ungodly, evil reality from where these people come and whose language they speak (Smalley, 1984:227). It typifies them as not being of God, to the contrary.

In 1 John 5:4 God’s children (τὸ γεγεννημένον ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ) are described as overcoming this world (νικᾷ/νικήσασα τὸν κόσμον) through faith. Those people who are “of God” stand as victors over the world. This seems to describe an existential contrast. The reference here could obviously also be to unbelieving people (point c), but in this context it seems more plausible to understand the use as referring to the world as entity opposed to God, including everything, also the evil spirits and the devil.

In 1 John 5:19 we read: “We know that we are of/from God, and the whole world lies in the power of the evil one”. This expression (especially “whole” world) creates some problems with respect to how one should understand it. Brown (1986:623) rejects the possibility of translating it as “the world as a whole”, something Westcott suggested. On the other hand, it cannot carry the same meaning as is the case in 1 John 2:2 (see c above; Smalley, 1984:304), referring to all the people of the world, since believers are clearly excluded here; the opposition to God and his people is clear. The evil one is distinguished from the world since he is holding the world in his power – there is a dependence on the evil one (Brown, 188

1986:623). It therefore seems as if the world as entity, both people and what else could be associated with the world, namely, lust, pride, etc., is intended here. The reference seems to be bit broader than simply unbelieving people.

The brief survey above shows that the word κόσμος is used in different ways in the letter, depending on the co-text. Van der Watt (2013:8–9) helps to shape the main features of the use of the word κόσμος in the letters:

- The word is used to refer to a) the world as physical reality forming the habitat people need to exist; b) people, both in general and people without a relationship with God; and c) the evil reality that stands in opposition to God.
- As habitat it refers to the created order in which people live, without any moral or other underlying implications. No indication is given of how and where the world comes from, but in the light of the creation theology of John 1:1–18 it can be assumed that God is the creator. The devil, who sinned from the beginning (1 Jn 3:8), is also simply announced without any indication of the origin of the devil and without any discussion why the devil has power over the κόσμος. His works must be destroyed (1 Jn 3:8). Looking at these statements, it must be assumed that there were theological explanations behind these statements that are not developed or discussed in the letters. In other words, the letters are embedded in an assumed broader theological framework. In Johannine studies it is assumed that the gospel tradition forms this interpretative framework.
- The reference to people in general picture them as people who are by implication also moral agents amongst whom the false prophets work. They are portrayed as people who should and can make a choice. These are the people to whom God sends his Son, who we should believe in (Jn 3:16).
- The references to unbelievers and to the evil reality (c and d above) are basically theological in nature and present these evil realities according to their relationship to God. The cosmology is here formulated and developed in terms of relationships with God, i.e., in theological categories.
- The view of the cosmos, based on the use of κόσμος in 1 John, is that there is a physical reality with people living in it. This physical reality is influenced by spiritual realities, and this becomes evident through the attitude and actions of people. However, there is no indication that God or the Spirit is included in the reference field of κόσμος.

- The word κόσμος never includes references to God. Although God is in or active in the κόσμος, he is not designated as part of the field of reference or semantic field covered by the word κόσμος. The word κόσμος does not refer to the all-inclusive universe but distinguishes God from the earthly world with the people in it, including their goods, and lusts, both as the creation and creator is distinguished, or ethically as good and evil is distinguished.
- The diverse use of the word κόσμος means that the uses may refer to the different existential situations of people. People who are begotten of God are described as not being part of the κόσμος and indeed stand in opposition to the κόσμος (1 Jn 5:4). In another sense they were part of it before their spiritual birth, and as physical people they remain dependent on the goods of this world (1 Jn 3:17). In this sense they are still part of the κόσμος as a physical reality, but spiritually they cannot be designated as being part of the κόσμος in the same way as unbelievers or of the evil reality. This way of using a word requires a certain semantic sensitivity. The word does not have a fixed meaning, and the reader is dependent on the context to determine its meaning. However, one should not conclude that the word brings nothing of its own to the text – the fact that the author does not use the word to refer to God shows that he does respect the lexicographical potential of the word in the sense that God cannot be part of the κόσμος.

Since God may be distinguished from the κόσμος, his people are also to be distinguished, as the contrast between God's people and the world (1 Jn 5:19) or evil (3 Jn 11) illustrates. By receiving eternal life, they can be qualitatively distinguished from the κόσμος, and this becomes visible in their ethical behaviour. In this sense the qualitative and ethical overlap, which is central to the understanding of mission. Although people are all present on this earth, they are spiritually to be distinguished – evil will not be able to touch God's people (1 Jn 5:19) and they will not imitate evil (3 Jn 11), another illustration that the cosmology is expressed in theological categories. It seems plausible to argue that whatever happens in the group that is in line with the truth, can be attributed to the Spirit. Cosmology and anthropology thus overlap.

The earth, specifically people, are the sphere where different cosmological realities overlap and interact. In this sense humans are the space of unfolding cosmology, although the cosmology is theologically determined. The Johannine letters do not conform to the three-level cosmology that is common in the Bible, for instance in the apocalypse. This reminds

us that we should refine the way we deal with the view of reality in the New Testament. There is not necessarily only one cosmology functioning in ancient texts, but several. In the Johannine letters the theological perspective dominates, and from there a quite incomplete but nevertheless clear cosmology is presented; clear not in the sense of complete, but adequate to form a clear idea of what was intended. There is no single cosmology that is *the true and correct* cosmology. Taking the letters as example, the cosmology in 1 John follows on the theology. In such a case the argumentative authority lies with the theological assumptions. Not natural distinctions but theological categories dominate, and this is an important reality for this study with the focus on mission and the identity of the mission of the group. It further implies that several cosmologies may function at the same time in the same person, which we can believe was the case in the 1 John group member's life. For instance, the theologically dominated cosmology of the letters may co-exist with a natural scientific view in the same person, each functioning within its own context with its own presuppositions. As such, cosmologies are constructs of reality that serve as vehicles to address specific issues and questions related to cosmic reality and to explain reality.

The theology is intensely interwoven with the situation that is addressed. It deals with the unity of a group that experienced a schism and must now protect those who are exposed to misleading influences. 1 John cannot be read in isolation from this situation. Theological concepts are expressed in practical ways and the practical ways illustrate the theological dimensions. 1 John does not offer a full cosmology, but a functional theological cosmology that branches out in spiritual and ethical categories. We should appreciate and evaluate the view of reality found in the Johannine letters based on this framework.

5.12. Conclusion

Mission assumes a task or goal that is to be completed. Ideally said, goal influences behaviour, so that one acts and makes choices that align with one's mission. The group or groups to which a person belongs, shapes presuppositions. Summarizing statements of founding principles and beliefs are needed to remind the group of their founding purposes, core values, and guidelines for future group life. There are guidelines to show them who is "inside" and who is "outside" of the group. These perceived similarities in belief and practice influence the way the present interpreter views and explains the Johannine circle's group dynamics, including in-group and out-group distinctions, and the author's readiness to characterize those who do not fit group norms. The text of 1 John shows that the author is

particularly adamant to confirm his audience's belief in Jesus, their love for one another, their loyalty to the truth, and their confidence in having eternal life. The aim of missionary activity in 1 John is that the world should know and believe that a saviour has been sent. In Johannine thought, the means to make this known is by communicating God's love in authentic and tangible ways in the in-group. Theological concepts are enacted in practical ways and the practical ways illustrate the theological dimensions. Mission is thus incarnational in 1 John and is formed by the identity of the group.

CHAPTER 6 ETHOS AS MARKER

As proposed by social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), people gain personal esteem from their membership in groups. They also strive to distinguish their group from other groups. These motivations may be especially strong when people's feelings of esteem are challenged (Simon & Brown, 1987) as is the case in the 1 John group dynamic. The argument in this chapter is that the Johannine writings present a moral narrative world where a moral God saves immoral people by bringing them into his moral world. When people live in God's moral world, their character and conduct are shaped in accordance with the moral beliefs, values, and norms of the divine reality. Work from the social identity perspective demonstrates that members of minority groups value the distinctive qualities of their group. Ethical actions are therefore expressions of a group member's relationship with the Father. Actions cannot be separated from identity; the one flows naturally into the other. Categories like virtue and vice lists or house tables are no longer the only analytical categories; the dynamics of ethics starts with the change in identity caused by faith in Jesus.

When viewed against Graeco-Roman virtue ethics, I contend that the Johannine corpus has a strong moral dimension. One of the author's goals in writing 1 John is that people may have ζωή [life] by believing in Jesus (1 Jn 5:13). I suggest that this goal is not only soteriological but also ethical in nature, firstly because the good life is a moral goal, and secondly, the author presents belief in Jesus as the singular moral work for obtaining this moral goal. In the Johannine literature, ζωή is the closest equivalent to this highest good (cf. Van der Watt, 2011:433–435). If ζωή is the highest moral good people can achieve when they enter into a relationship with the Father and Son (since it is only there that ζωή is available), then the entire Johannine narrative is a moral one. An analysis of ethics in 1 John should then start from this point. Its focus is on the existing knowledge that is implicitly or explicitly part of the social know-how and consequent behaviour of the in-group. To establish what the nature of the ethos of a group is, one should consider their set of knowledge on which they base their canon of institutionalized actions. The thoughts of the group are important because it constructs a symbolic world within which the individuals act; it also provides a window onto the social reality of the group, on their ethos. This chapter subsequently looks closer at the thoughts and ideas that shaped the group tradition and formed the ethos they lived out.



Figure 6-1: Existing knowledge formed the ethos and behaviour of the in-group

The ethos of the group is shaped by the knowledge and beliefs of the group, which in part shape their behaviour to strengthen the “us” and “you” identity. This model shows that ethics is a reflection on the deeds of the group as well as the rationale behind them. The identity and behaviour of the individual is determined by the group. Awareness of this interrelatedness is the key to Johannine ethics.

6.1. Ethos and ethics

The word ethos is used to describe the lifestyle of a group or society. This ethos is shaped by shared knowledge and beliefs in a group, it can be conscious or unconscious. The concept *ethos* is an analytical category that could be helpful in explaining the nature of the behavioural patterns in the letters.

The ethos of a group is the intentional and unintentional conventions and agreements that exist within a particular group, which then influence the behaviour of such a group. The term ethos therefore draws attention to two important elements – the relationship between behaviour and identity, and the fact that behaviour becomes fixed (Wolter, 2009:128–132).²⁵⁵ Ethos is not just about knowing what this shared knowledge and beliefs are, but more about understanding what lies behind this knowledge and beliefs. Ethos is understood as the language and behaviour that flowed forth from an understanding of identity. So, ethics is a reflection on the deeds of the group and the rationale behind them. In this sense, ethics

²⁵⁵ Wolter (2009:133-136) explains what difference the use of the analytical category of ethos makes in analysing the material by saying that i) not only moral rules but a much wider variety of actions, inter alia institutionalized actions such as the observance of food laws, circumcision, observing feast and meals, are included in the analysis and ii) a wide variety of contexts, including the ordinary everyday contexts as well as the unusual special contexts (such as religious feasts, etc.) may be considered.

reflects the norms, values and eventually the identity of a particular group. 1 John is also replete with examples of this correlation between identity and behaviour. I mention a few:

- anyone claiming to have communion with God (identity) must show matching behaviour; conversely one who walks in the light or darkness (behaviour) is in the light or darkness (identity) (1 Jn 1:6–7; 2:9–11);
- keeping God's commandments (obedient behaviour) affirms one's communion with God (one knows God and is in him) and one's share in the divine attributes of truth and love (identity) (1 Jn 2:3–6);
- identity and behaviour are inseparable in either family – to do right (to do no sin) is to be right, to be of God; to commit sin is to be outside the group ethos (1 Jn 3:7–10);
- when God's love abides in the believer (identity), it must result in corresponding behaviour (1 Jn 3:17), just as to love in truth (behaviour) demonstrates that one is of the truth (identity) (1 Jn 3:18–19);
- to love (behaviour) is to be (born) of God, who is love, and it guarantees one's communion with him (identity) (1 Jn 4:7–8, 12);
- to testify (behaviour) shows communion with God (identity) (1 Jn 4:15);
- love (identity) is inextricably linked with, even defined by, obedience (behaviour) (1 Jn 5:2–3).

The picture that emerges is that in-group members' inclusion in the divine identity must precipitate transformational behaviour in that they are expected to behave according to the divine family code. In-group members should behave like children of God because that is who they are. The member's ongoing access to the divine reality results in a growing awareness of who God is, what he does and what he expects from people. This moral knowledge should motivate a believer to do what is right. At the same time, behaviour is transformative – right behaviour affirms and shapes one's identity. Thus, there is a reciprocal, transformative dynamic between identity and behaviour; each has the potential to shape the other.

An important distinction should be made between ethics IN John and ethics OF John. In 1 John we only find remarks on ethics (ethics OF John), not a developed ethics system. In a functional sense the aim of ethos is to express and illustrate the identity of a particular group

(Van der Merwe, 2008:360), outlining inclusive and exclusive behaviour. Cognitive identity is therefore translated into ethical identity. The letter is firmly embedded in a historical situation. It deals with the unity of a group that experienced a schism and must now protect those who are exposed to misleading influences. 1 John cannot be read in isolation from this situation. Ethics is determined by an orientation toward Jesus and his Father. The exemplary authority lies with them. This forms the basic ethics structure of 1 John. Ethical behaviour involves an obedient relational orientation towards Jesus and the Father, and not an adherence to a list of do's and do not's.

This means that the ethos, i.e., the generally accepted and assumed behaviour of the group, becomes crucial, since life is lived in that ethos. In the light of the above, care should be taken not to deal with ethical material in this letter in too general a way. They are pastorally aimed at a conflict situation that threatened the unity of the Johannine group. This forms the motivation behind these remarks on ethics. Identity and behaviour cannot be separated and should be understood as a continuum with porous borders. Identity is determined by the relationship between the believer, and the Father and Son; deeds are an expression of this identity.

It should be kept in mind that a rhetorical focus in the letter is not to argue with the opponents, but to convince the "you" to move closer to the "us" group and to cooperate with them (cf. Klauck, 1991:33)²⁵⁶. 1 John was not written for the opponents, confronting them consistently; it was written to strengthen the relationship between the "us" and the "you". Although there was a schism between the "us" and the "they", the "they" were still in contact with the "you" and were indeed trying to mislead them (Marshall, 1978:14). The letter is an effort to prevent this from happening and thus to prevent further loss of the orthodox group, as Kysar (1992:906) puts it.

Durkheim's broad view²⁵⁷ is that a religion was entirely a product of society. For him, the

256 As discussed in chapter 8 on groups.

257 It was not till 1924 that the German philosopher Max Scheler coined the phrase "the sociology of knowledge" (*Soziologie des Wissens*) to encapsulate the insight that all knowledge has a social genesis. Durkheim, however, had been a practitioner of at least the rudiments of this variety of sociology before it had acquired a name. Yet, at the same time, the sociology of knowledge was to an extent indebted to Marx and Engels for the view, forcefully expressed in *The German Ideology*, that human consciousness is determined by social setting. The work of Peter Berger, and of Thomas Luckmann in collaboration with him, in the sociology of knowledge owes much to these pioneers.

religious life was the concentrated expression of the collective life of a particular group. Religion was really a society's idealized image of itself. He (Durkheim, 1976:423) wrote:

“Thus, the collective ideal which religion expresses is far from being due to a vague innate power of the individual, but it is rather at the school of collective life that the individual has learned to idealize...”

For society has constructed this new world in constructing itself, since it is society itself which these expresses”.

The words of Elliot (2011:1) plays an important role in understanding the concentrated expressions of the in-group:

“Biblical texts, like all texts, embed, encode and presume elements of social and cultural systems in which they are produced, which means that the genre, content, structure and meaning of these texts are all socially and culturally.”

When this truth is internalized as part of the exegetical process, the question can be asked if the text also shows contra-cultural opinions and positions, which is important for understanding the role of ethos in 1 John.

6.2. The influence of oral tradition on group ethos

Recent archaeological work in Galilee has given us a much better idea of the physical settings in which the early formulation of the Jesus tradition took place. Here a trite but necessary reminder is that there were no newspapers, no television or radio in the first century. Have we done enough to think through what that must have meant for groups? In the villages and small towns of Galilee, when the day's work was done and the sun had set, what else was there to do but to sit around and talk, to share the news of the day, to tell stories, to recall matters of importance to the group? Kenneth Bailey (1995:26–48) suggests that the traditional evening gathering of Middle Eastern villagers to listen to and recite the tradition of the group, the *haflat samar*, is the continuation of a practice that stretches back to the time of Jesus and beyond.

The problem is that we do not know how to imagine the oral period. In an overwhelmingly literary culture, our experience of orality is usually restricted. For this study of groups in the Johannine corpus, we must endeavour to imagine the oral period for the sake of historical

authenticity, to re-envisage how tradition was transmitted in an orally structured society and how this determined the ethos of the group (Gardner *et al.*, 2000).

There are four characteristic features of oral transmission of tradition that deserve attention (Bailey, 1995:26–48):

- An oral performance is not like reading a literary text. In reading a text it is possible to go back a few pages to check what was written earlier. In oral tradition the auditor cannot go back a few pages, or delete, edit and revise.
- Secondly, oral tradition is essentially communal in character. The oral tradition continues because there are groups to whom the tradition is important. The tradition is performed with greater or lesser regularity (depending on its importance) at the gatherings of the group, kept alive for the group by the elders, teachers or those acknowledged as proficient performers of the tradition. The performer's awareness that the tradition is already familiar to the group is a factor in the performance. The performance is heard within the group's horizons of expectation. The performance's gaps of indeterminacy can be supplemented by the audience's prior knowledge of the tradition.
- Thirdly, as already implied, in the oral group there would be one or more who are recognized as having primary responsibility for maintaining and performing the group's tradition. An ancient oral society had no libraries or dictionaries or encyclopaedias. It instead relied on individuals whose role in their group was to function as, in the words of Jan Vansina (1985), "a walking reference library". In Johannine terms this certainly agrees with the role of the author in providing what can properly be called foundation tradition.
- Fourthly, oral tradition is characteristically (I do not say distinctively) a combination of fixity and flexibility, of stability and diversity. In oral tradition there is characteristically a tale to be told, a teaching to be treasured, in and through and precisely by means of the varied performances. Oral tradition is oral memory; its primary function is to preserve and recall what is of importance from the past to form the identity of the group.

Understanding orality is important for a study of 1 John. Written documents like this letter would not have been read by more than a very few. For the great majority of recipients, the letter would have been heard rather than read. This letter was used in the group to describe the codes of behaviour that governed or characterized their daily life.

Another important truth that stands out in this oral understanding of the text is recognizing

that the oral tradition served as communal memory. A group's tradition is revealed by and understood in how the group celebrates what is important about its origins and about its past. In 1 John it was living tradition; that is, a lived-in-and-through traditions of the group. It was not so much kept as it was used as a code of conduct, not so much preserved as performed, not so much read as heard in the group²⁵⁸.

What was heard can be distinguished into two groups or types of stories: The *master story* and *smaller stories*. Ethics arguments in 1 John make use of narratives to develop its ethical ideas. There was a "master narrative" that was part of the ethos and tradition of the Johannine group. God plays a central role in this "master narrative" – it is primarily a narrative about him. The way in which God is qualitatively described, focusing on his actions and participation in this world, not the least through Jesus, dominates the ethics in the letter. Jesus as the Son who was sent by the Father reveals the love of the Father and should be confessed as his Christ and Son. There are also smaller "stories" or illustrations used with the intent to comment on ethics in the letters.

- There are conditional stories like that of a poor man who is in need and a brother that has the world's but is not touched by the situation and does not help. This practical illustration is then used to express the requirements of the love of God (1 Jn 3:16). In another case a conditional situation is pictured where a false teacher comes to the door of a believer to visit. The believer then shows him the door and does not even greet him. This is to illustrate what should be done with false teachers who do evil things (2 Jn 10–11). Both these conditional descriptions are assumed to be real to the group and not just fictional. They nevertheless serve as conditional examples of ethics expectations.
- The story of Cain is also used in the ethics argumentation (1 Jn 3:11–14), stereotyping him as a murderer of his brother and therefore an evil person who does not have life. Believers should behave the opposite. This story serves as an example of evil behaviour and an understanding of love.

258 This was discussed in detail in the chapter on tradition.

These smaller stories shaped the thoughts of the group because they constructed a symbolic world within which they acted; it also provides a window onto the social reality of the groups – their ethos.

6.3. Ethics language in 1 John

The last two decades have seen a surge in scholarly interest in topics surrounding Johannine ethics or ethos. Recent publications are generally more affirmative of the place and importance of the (implicit) ethics in John's Gospel and letters, in contrast to some previous works that tended to be relatively negative about this matter. Several recent works have approached the ethics in 1 John from the sociological perspective of family relationships and group identity. For example, Jan G. van der Watt²⁵⁹ has shown that 1 John evokes the social conventions of the ancient Mediterranean family to foster the believers' group identity and thereby encourage certain behaviours. For Jörg Frey (2013: 167-203), "the family ethos lays the strongest basis" for Johannine thinking on ethics. Dirk G. van der Merwe (2015) notes that the "ethos of the ethics in the Johannine epistles" is fundamentally "a matter of 'fellowship' in a family".

1 John is indeed the letter of love, and ethics is generally regarded as a core focus in this letter, together with the Christological issues. As a topic, ethics is mentioned in virtually all commentaries on the letters,²⁶⁰ with an obvious emphasis on aspects like the commandment of love. It is widely assumed that the letters of John are situational documents (cf. Lieu, 1986:168), implying that their aim, content, composition, and rhetoric should be related to and was determined by the situation in which they originated at the turn of the first century.²⁶¹ Rensberger (1997:35) for instance, notes: "The epistles are not concerned with ethics... The only ethical category of interest to the author is love for one another". Lieu (1991:106) remarks, "It is true that the 'ethical' dimension is very unspecific, and that behaviour seems primarily directed at other members of the group; there is no consideration of how they are to behave 'in the world'".

259 See Jan G. van der Watt, 'On Ethics in 1 John' in *Communities in Dispute: Current Scholarship on the Johannine Epistles*, ed. R. Alan Culpepper and Paul N. Anderson (Atlanta: SBL, 2014): 197-222.

260 Cf., for instance, relevant sections in Brown (1986); Schnackenburg (1984); Smalley (2002); Klauck (1991); Painter (2002); Lieu (2008), Menken (2010).

261 Locating the time of writing of the letters at the turn of the first century is widely accepted (cf. for instance, Marshall (1978:47-48); Smalley (1984: xxxii); Brown (1986:101); Johnson (1993:4); Menken (2010:16).

Schnelle (2010) emphasized what he calls a theological ethic, while van der Watt and van der Merwe²⁶² focused on the communal basis of ethics in the letters. This is partly due to the apparent simple and straight forward language on ethics (cf. Schnackenburg, 1984:316) that simply calls for brotherly love. This underlies the lack of social awareness in the letters, since there seems to be no interest in issues or situations outside the circle of the Johannine group.

The lack of attention to more general ethical themes like social responsibilities, economic or political behaviour, individual issues related to interpersonal relations, marriage, children, etc., frustrates interpreters. No comprehensive list of virtues and vices appears. Terms like truth, righteousness, purity, or sinlessness are used, but not filled with concrete content, even though these terms are constantly linked to the example Jesus has set. Remarks focus on “brotherly love” without treating the contents or implications of this love in detail. There are also aspects of the ethics in the letters that seem strange or may even be questioned by the modern reader. Furthermore, in the light of modern personal rights and freedom in making one’s own decisions, the modern reader may even question the absolute requirement to do as Jesus has done or the purpose of “self-destructing love” as is prescribed in 1 John 3:16. The point, however, is that such ethics discussions should not only describe what the texts says about ethics, but also try to interpret and understand²⁶³. This becomes possible with a multi-dimensional approach, combining grammatical, rhetorical, social, and historical information in a communicative synergy. The letters are short but condensed. A major problem is therefore the lack of information on certain issues, not least the identity of the opponents or the precise figures addressed in the different situations. The interpreter is by default forced to depart from certain presuppositions. As Lieu (1991:8) remarks, “it is

262 Van der Watt (1999c) and van der Merwe, D.G. (2005, 2006).

263 Creating fellowship between the author’s group (we) and the addressees (you – verse 3) and thus introducing them into the fellowship with the Father and Son establishes a closed social group in which mutual fellowship, trust, sharing, etc. are characteristic. In this way social boundaries are drawn, and social expectations established. For a person to have *κοινωνία* with the Father and Son as well as fellow believers implies that such a person is fully integrated into this divine transcendental relationship and is accordingly determined by all that *κοινωνία* implies, transcending ordinary human relations. The relational borders between God and humans become porous in the sense that the influence and presence of God penetrates the life of the believer and the believer’s identity, and actions are integrated with those of God. Towards and within this transcendental fellowship people should orientate themselves and seek their identity and patterns for behaviour. This should be the nature of the behaviour according to 1 John.

impossible to understand the thought of 1 John without a number of prior decisions, even if only implicit, about its nature as a piece of writing”.

Moral behaviour is expressed in different ways. It is notable that the letters do not work with standardized words or phrases on ethics, but several different expressions.²⁶⁴ By doing this the author succeeds in integrating the different important themes in the letters, for instance, one must live (περιπατέω) in the light, in the truth and according to the commandments. These are overlapping statements, indicating that living in the truth also implies that one keeps the commandments and live in the light. In this way the different expressions, each with their own particular emphasis, become complementary in expressing the overall message of the letters. Two of the major terms (περιπατέω and ποιέω) expressing actions may be catalogued as follows:

περιπατέω	ἐν τῷ σκότει (σκοτία)/ ἐν τῷ φωτὶ	1 Jn 1:6, 7; 2:11
	καθὼς ἐκεῖνος	1 Jn 2:6
	ἐν (τῇ) ἀληθείᾳ	2 Jn 4; 3 Jn 3, 4
	κατὰ τὰς ἐντολὰς αὐτοῦ	2 Jn 6
(οὐ) ποιέω	τὴν ἀλήθειαν	1 Jn 1:6
	ψεύστην... αὐτὸν	1 Jn 1:10; 5:10
	τὸ θέλημα τοῦ θεοῦ	1 Jn 2:17
	τὴν δικαιοσύνην	1 Jn 2:29; 3:7, 10
	τὴν ἁμαρτίαν	1 Jn 3:4, 8, 9
	τὴν ἀνομίαν	1 Jn 3:4
	τὰ ἄρεστὰ ἐνώπιον αὐτοῦ	1 Jn 3:22

264 A reason for this might be the stylistic feature also prevalent in the Gospel where John consistently integrates and relates his concepts with one another. By using them in similar semantic frameworks, such interrelatedness is effectively expressed and developed.

τὰς ἐντολὰς αὐτοῦ	1 Jn 5:2
πιστὸν	3 Jn 5
καλῶς	3 Jn 6
τὰ ἔργα	3 Jn 10

Another key word in 1 and 2 John with ethical nuances is ἐντολή (commandment). This word also displays a rich variety of uses.

ἐντολή	τηρῶμεν (μὴ)	1 Jn 2:3, 4; 3:22, 24; 5:3
	ποιῶμεν	1 Jn 5:2
	καινὴν/ παλαιὰν	1 Jn 2:7, 8; 2 Jn 5
	περιπατῶμεν	2 Jn 6
	ἔδωκεν (most probably God)	1 Jn 3:23
	ἔχομεν ἀπ' αὐτοῦ (most probably God)	1 Jn 4:21
	ἐλάβομεν παρὰ τοῦ πατρός	2 Jn 4
	βαρεῖται οὐκ εἰσὶν	1 Jn 5:3
	ἵνα πιστεύσωμεν τῷ ὀνόματι τοῦ υἱοῦ αὐτοῦ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ καὶ ἀγαπῶμεν ἀλλήλου	1 Jn 3:23
λόγος ²⁶⁵	ὁ λόγος αὐτοῦ (οὐκ) ἔστιν/μένει ἐν ἡμῖν	1 Jn 1:10; 2:14
	ὃς ὃ ἂν τηρῇ αὐτοῦ τὸν λόγον	1 Jn 2:5

²⁶⁵ The word λόγος is used in a variety of ways in the Letters (1Jn 1:1,10; 2:5,7,14; 3:18; 3Jn 10). It does in certain contexts refer to a fixed base of knowledge, which also relates to the tradition of the Johannine group. These will be noted above. It should also be noted that λόγος is not used in 2 John and in 3 John 10 it does not refer to the tradition, but to bad words spoken against the Elder.

ἡ ἐντολὴ ἡ παλαιά ἐστὶν ὁ λόγος ὃν 1 Jn 2:7
ἠκούσατε

The following are the key issues when it comes to commandments in the letters (the word [ἐντολή] is not used in 3 John at all):

- The most common expression related to ἐντολή in 1 John is “keeping (τηρέω) the commandments”, which is related to the idea of obedience to the tradition. This term is not used in 2 or 3 John.
- Another issue that is prominent in both 1 and 2 John (but not in 3 John) is the old and new commandment, which has a specific function in the letters, related to the identity of the Johannine group in their relation to Christ.
- Three different expressions (1 Jn 3:23; 4:21 and 2 Jn 4) refer to God as the source of the commandments.
- The commandments are directly linked to love (1 Jn 3:23).
- Two of the three relevant uses of λόγος display some similarity with the keeping of the commandments, namely, keeping God’s word (1 Jn 2:5) and 1 John 2:7 where the old commandment is linked to the word that was heard.

Lies and misleading someone is another prominent ethics concept:

ψεύδομαι Ἐὰν εἴπωμεν ὅτι κοινωνίαν ἔχομεν μετ’ 1 Jn 1:6
αὐτοῦ καὶ ἐν τῷ σκότει περιπατῶμεν

ψεύστης ἐὰν εἴπωμεν ὅτι οὐχ ἡμαρτήκαμεν, 1 Jn 1:10
ψεύστην ποιοῦμεν αὐτόν

ὁ λέγων ὅτι ἔγνωκα αὐτόν καὶ τὰς 1 Jn 2:4
ἐντολὰς αὐτοῦ μὴ τηρῶν

ὁ ἀρνούμενος ὅτι Ἰησοῦς οὐκ ἔστιν ὁ 1 Jn 2:22
Χριστός

	ἐάν τις εἴπῃ ὅτι ἀγαπῶ τὸν θεὸν καὶ τὸν ἀδελφὸν αὐτοῦ μισῇ	1 Jn 4:20
	ὁ μὴ πιστεύων τῷ θεῷ ψεύστην πεποίηκεν αὐτόν	1 Jn 5:10
ψεῦδος	πᾶν ψεῦδος ἐκ τῆς ἀληθείας οὐκ ἔστιν	1 Jn 2:21
	ἀλλ' ὡς τὸ αὐτοῦ χρίσμα διδάσκει ὑμᾶς περὶ πάντων καὶ ἀληθές ἐστιν καὶ οὐκ ἔστιν ψεῦδος	1 Jn 2:27
πλανάω	ἐὰν εἴπωμεν ὅτι ἁμαρτίαν οὐκ ἔχομεν, ἐαυτοὺς πλανῶμεν	1 Jn 1:8
	Ταῦτα ἔγραψα ὑμῖν περὶ τῶν πλανώντων ὑμᾶς	1 Jn 2:26
	μηδεὶς πλανάτω ὑμᾶς	1 Jn 3:7

The following areas are addressed when it comes to lies and misleading people:

- Most references to lies occur in conditional sentences (ἐὰν εἴπωμεν; ἐάν τις εἴπῃ [ἐάν plus the subjunctive]; ὁ λέγων; ὁ ἀρνούμενος [present participle]). There is difference of opinion whether these conditional sentences refer to the positions held by the opponents or whether they represent fictive rhetorical arguments for the sake of better understanding the message. Be that as it may, these references point to the areas that represent lies. The references to people who mislead the Johannine group and the warning against being misled (1 Jn 2:26; 3:7) do suggest that there were people telling lies, which may account for the conditional sentences above.
- Three expressions (1 Jn 1:6; 2:4; 4:20) display the same semantic structure, namely, that one thing is said, for instance that a person has fellowship with God, knows or loves God, but another thing is done – that amounts to a lie. The close link between identity and actions found in the Gospel, is thus affirmed in the letters.
- Those who do not want to accept the message about Jesus (1 Jn 2:22; 5:10) are also called liars.

- To deny that one has sin is also a misleading lie (1 Jn 1:8, 10).

These overlapping statements show the spiralling chain of ethics throughout 1 John. In this way different expressions of ethics, each with their own emphasis, become complementary in expressing the ethical character of the letter. Identity and behaviour cannot be separated and should be understood in terms of a continuum with porous borders. Identity is determined by the relationship between the believer, and the Father and Son; deeds are an expression of this identity. The underlying structure of ethics in 1 John is theology (origin lies with God), revelation, and therefore deontology (obligatory). Knowledge of God and his revelation (knowing God) and not reason (in the sense of human abilities to discover right or wrong within themselves or somewhere else) is the key to unlocking the ethics of the letter.

6.4. Differences between two distinctive groups regarding ethics

Table 6-1: Ethics differences between the two groups

In-group Ethics	Out-group Ethics
In-group admit that they have sinned (1 Jn 1:7, 9; 2:1; 3:5)	Out-group boasts that they are free from sin (1 Jn 1:8, 10)
In-group keeps commandments (1 Jn 2:3–9; 3:22; 4:21; 5:2,3)	Opponents do not keep commandments (1 Jn 2:4; 4:20; 5:1–5)
In-group love the brothers (1 Jn 2:10; 3:14; 4:7–12; 5:1)	Opponents do not focus on loving the brother (1 Jn 3:17–18; 4:19–21)

The above summary on group ethics showed that the author uses alternative words or word forms to exhort people to love and act morally. When encouraging them to love or act like Jesus, the author chooses alternatives to the imperative. This most probably points to a “softer” approach in the sense that the obligation is stressed, especially when it is noted that in most of these cases there is a motivation that goes with the exhortation. The author does not want to command but wants to point out the obligation in light of the situation. Facts like God’s love or Jesus’s example motivates the exhortation and therefore supplies the authority behind the exhortation.

The discussion above has shown clearly how power is exercised using language in 1 John (see also Van der Watt 2010:139–167). The author of this letter showed a clear self-

understanding and group identity through his choice of words, the way in which he used the words and images to create social constructs. His intention was to influence readers positively by employing this rhetorical approach. His letter was not addressed to his opponents, but to his own group, which meant that his intent was to use performative language to address specific issues in the group and to influence their choices, thoughts, and actions. It shaped the ethic of the group. Even the negative language that is used to characterize the opponents had the intention of contributing to the positive development of the recipients of the letter.

6.5. Imitation's role in group ethos

Michael Jensen in his article: *Imitating Paul, Imitating Christ: How does imitation work as a moral concept?* states that the moral self is constructed from the impress of other selves, usually consisting of an amalgam of parental and societal influences. This is both a conscious and unconscious process. The analogy between the believers and Christ their model is possible because, though their situations are very different, they should have a common attitude in their own circumstances—most particularly as they share their common life together. They are not merely to mimic Jesus's actions mindlessly, but rather to apply thoughtfully the same virtues he displayed (Yoder, 1994:112). It is, of course, quite clear that imitation can't be divorced from conformity, for otherwise the relationship of indicative and imperative becomes very disordered. Christians' conformity to and participation in Christ prohibits two theological moves. It will not allow us to envisage an absolute gap between Christ and the Christian, nor will it allow us to affirm their identity of being. We may not, in other words, think of Jesus Christ in such a way that he merely furnishes the occasion, stimulus or incitement for our own moral projects initiated and sustained from within ourselves. Nor may we think of Jesus Christ in such a way that he is the innermost reality of human agency such that the Christian's acts are not in any real sense his own, but purely an extension of Christ's agency. So, I find myself ill at ease with an idea that recurs in some discussions of the imitation of Christ, namely that of sharing Christ's experiences. Perhaps one of the terms we could deploy to try and catch this precise arrangement of conformity and imitation is that of correspondence or analogy. The actions of man in Christ correspond with Christ's own acts.

Every group nourishes a narrative about who they are, why their group exists and why it has value. The narrative rationale of the group in 1 John is that God has chosen them, and they

should live like he lived. Their identity is founded in the Christ-event. The author has a rich vocabulary for the privileged status before God that they have received in and through Christ:

- Communion with the father and the Son (1 Jn 1:3)
- God is the light; we live in the light (1 Jn 1:5–6)
- His word is in us (1 Jn 1:10)
- Loving your brother (1 Jn 2:10)
- Don't love the things of the world (1 Jn 2:15)
- Live in him (1 Jn 2:28)
- Love each other (1 Jn 3:12)
- Believe in the name of the Son (1 Jn 3:23)
- If we love each other, God lives in us (1 Jn 4)
- To know God through Jesus (1 Jn 5:12)

1 John 2:6

The first clear instance of the imitation of Christ is found in 1 John 2:6. It is asserted that whoever claims to abide in God/Christ, ought to walk just as Jesus walked. There is a progression of ideas from an existence in God (ἐν αὐτῷ ἐσμεν, “we remain in him”) in verse 5 to a perpetual remaining in God/Christ (ἐν αὐτῷ μένειν, “to remain in him”) in verse 6. The verb μένω (remain) occurs a total of twenty-four times in 1 John. Its first appearance in 1 John 2:6 is linked with the motif of obedience to God's commandments in the preceding verses. In 1 John 2:6 a permanent union with God/Christ implies the status of being God's people. It gives the ethics bearings for how one should live in this world. Considering the use of the verb περιπατέω (walk), the scope of Jesus's example that the believers must follow suit encompasses the whole way of living. This verb occurs twice in 1 John 2:6. The perfective aspect of the aorist indicative verb περιεπάτησεν (he walked) serves to portray Jesus's way of living. The imperfective aspect of the present infinitive περιπατεῖν (to walk) underlines the believer's ongoing way of daily living in the present. While the metaphorical use of walking to signify the whole of living is rare in classical Greek, such a usage can be seen in several passages in the LXX (e.g., 2 Kings 20:3; Prov. 8:20; Eccl. 4:15; 11:9; Isa.

59:9; cf. Prov. 2:7, 10).

1 John 3:3

In 1 John 3:3, the imitation of Christ is thematically associated with the Christian identity and hope. As underlined in the preceding verse 2, the fact that the believers are God's children in the present is the firm assurance of their hope that "when he appears/is revealed" (ἐὰν φανερωθῇ) they will be "like him" (ὅμοιοι αὐτῷ; cf. Rom. 8:29; Col. 3:4). The adjective ὅμοιος ('like') occurs only once in 1 John and is not found in 2 and 3 John. The referent of the aorist passive subjective verb φανερωθῇ (he is revealed) and the related pronoun αὐτῷ (him) is unspecified, but most likely stands for Jesus. Thus, in 1 John 3:2, the eschatological promise regarding the believers' conformity to the Son's likeness is affirmed in view of their present identity as God's children. There is a close connection between eschatology and ethics in Johannine thinking.

In view of the certainty of the Christian hope, the believers should try to purify themselves just as Jesus is pure (v. 3). A similar movement of thought (from the hope of Jesus's Parousia to a practical application in the present) is already seen in 1 John 2:28–29, where the believers are encouraged to do what is right to reflect God's righteous character. Later in 1 John 3:7, the statement, "just as that one [Jesus] is righteous" (καθὼς ἐκεῖνος δίκαιός ἐστιν) is akin to and parallel to that of "just as that one [Jesus] is pure" (καθὼς ἐκεῖνος ἁγνός ἐστιν) in 1 John 3:3. Both statements stress the nature of Jesus as a basis of the believers' pursuit of moral transformation. In 1 John 3:3, both the cognate verb ἁγνίζω (purify) and adjective ἁγνός (pure) are *hapax legomena* in the whole letter. Yet the related verb καθαρίζω (purify) has occurred twice in 1 John 1:7 and 1:9 to figuratively denote the moral cleansing of the believers because of Jesus's death. In the same vein, the notion of purity in 1 John 3:3 does not mean ceremonial cleanness but rather is pertinent to morality. The connotation with ethics is evident considering the ensuing discussion about avoiding sin (vv. 4–9) and Jesus's sinlessness (v. 5). Since the believers have the sure hope of Christlikeness, they should pursue diligently to reflect Jesus's pure and sinless nature by abstaining from evil deeds. In fact, the purity of Jesus does not only provide the model for ethics, but also the Christian impetus to stand firm against the temptations and sins in a hostile world.

1 John 3:16

In 1 John 3:16, Jesus's sacrificial act of laying down his life for others is presented as an

exemplary pattern the believers should follow. It is also the source of power and motivation for the Christian conduct of mutual love. In the context of 1 John 3:14–17, the frequent occurrence of the term ἀδελφός (brother) underlines the believers' interrelationship as brothers and sisters in God's family. In contrast to Cain's negative example of killing his brother (1 John 3:12), the believers should follow the example of Jesus's self-sacrificial love by willingly surrendering their lives for the benefit of other members of God's family. The emphatic wording "we ought" (ἡμεῖς ὀφείλομεν) in 1 John 3:16 is reminiscent of the words "you ought" (ὁμεῖς ὀφείλετε) in Jesus's instruction to his disciples in John 13:14. In 1 John 3:16, the Christian duty to demonstrate mutual love by laying down one's life for others alludes to Jesus's command to the disciples to love one another, just as he had loved them (Jn 13:34; 15:12–17).

1 John 4:17

In 1 John 4:17, the notion of the imitation of Christ is further associated with the perfection of God's love for his people and their confidence in the day of judgement (cf. 1 Jn 2:28; 3:21). The articular expression "the day of [the] judgement" in this verse probably evokes other related eschatological events that have already been mentioned in 1 John 2:28 and 3:2. It is likely that some scribes had difficulty with the twin statements of "we will be like him" (1 Jn 3:2) and "we are like him" (1 Jn 4:17) and so made alterations to the latter wording to resolve the difficulty. For example, the present indicative verb ἔσμεν (we are) in 1 John 4:17 is replaced by the future indicative verb ἐσόμεθα (we will be). However, as Marshall (1978:224) says, instead of seeing the two statements as incompatible, it is better to consider that an example of "the portrayal of the 'eschatological reality' of the Christian life" is given in 1 John 4:17 to encourage the audience to let the ideal become a reality. The themes of "abiding in God" and "love" in the surrounding context, the unspecified analogy between Jesus and the believers, most likely pertain to the continually loving relationship with God. As will become evident in 1 John 4:20–21, one's union with God must involve a commitment to mutual love in his family. The Father has already demonstrated his great love for his people by sending his Son to die as an expiation for their sins. Thus, God's love in Christ is the source that gives the believers power and motivation to love one another (cf. 1 Jn 4:10–11, 19). By doing so, not only they will become more like Christ in the present, but God's love can be fully expressed in them in the sinful world so that they will not be afraid at the Last Judgement.

These expressions show the same basic point: They demonstrate that the ethical exhortation to imitate Jesus in 1 John is related to the believers' identity and vocation as God's people. The in-group has a privileged status in relation to God. They are in Christ, and Christ lives in them. To be part of this in-group in 1 John, they had to imitate Jesus and show his love. The letter thus expresses quite basic beliefs about what is required to belong to the in-group. Having the spirit then also distinguishes the in-group from the out-group. Life in Christ is imagined as an ongoing process, where the Christ believers must reinforce the presence of the Spirit by the way they conduct their lives. When making decisions are in focus, the work of the Spirit also comes into focus, because the *Immanenz*²⁶⁶ between God and believers are constituted by the Spirit (1 Jn 4:13). The presence of the Spirit is identified in a person based on the person's confession about Jesus (1 Jn 4:1–2), i.e., accepting Jesus and his words (Lieu, 1991:45). This presence of the Spirit should not be interpreted in individual terms, the Spirit is given to the group. The idea is not personal charismatic inspiration, but the spirit working in the group (Lieu, 1991:47). That is why John can claim that the Spirit of truth may be distinguished from the spirit of error by listening to the group who expresses the things that are from God (1 Jn 4:4–6). People who do not want to listen to that do not have the Spirit of truth. The interrelatedness of the commandments and the Spirit is also evident in 1 John 3:24: "Whoever keeps his commandments abides in God, and God in him. And by this we know that he abides in us, by the Spirit whom he has given us." The reference to the last day, together with the references to the antichrist and ensuing judgement, squarely puts the events narrated in 1 John within an apocalyptic eschatological frame. The role of the antichrist in ethics is subsequently discussed.

6.6. The role of the antichrist in group understanding

The polarization between the family of God and the unbelievers as family of the devil (1 Jn 3:10; cf. also 1 Jn 3:1–2) creates ethical tension in the letter. Absolute loyalty and love seem to be an inter-communal phenomenon.²⁶⁷ What about the people who do not belong to the family of God? Does the believer have any responsibility to them? Clearly this question is not a problem addressed in the letter. It is a question put to the text from an outside

²⁶⁶ The Immanenz formulas are discussed by Brown in 1986: 195-196 for the comparison of the Gospel and Letters. The basic information will not be repeated here. In the Letters it also explains the relationship between believers and God in terms of being in, or remaining in.

²⁶⁷ Cf. Marxen (1989:263); Van der Watt (1988:75); Klauck (1991:277-280).

theological perspective. In 1 John 1:1–4 the message of life is communicated to others. In the rest of the letter, it becomes clear that the love of God – expressed in the mission of Jesus – brought people from death to being living children of God forever. As children of God, they can experience the familial love. This does not mean that God does not love the world.²⁶⁸ Every person born from God was originally dead and thus part of the world. The main expression of God’s love was giving eternal life. In similar vein the believer should love the world in the sense that this love should be focused on the communication of the message of life and love. Love for the unbeliever is love focused on bringing the unbeliever into the community of God.²⁶⁹ As soon as such a person becomes a believer, he finds himself within the circle of brotherly love.

Related to sin in 1 John is the figure of the devil. Within the spiritual reality there is also opposition, namely, between the reality characterized and defined by God and the reality characterized by the devil. Both spiritual realities overlap with the earthly/physical world, but they do not overlap one another; they stand in absolute opposition. The devil was there and has sinned from the beginning (3:8) as transcendental opposing power to God, forcing the Son to come and destroy the devil’s work. Di Tommaso (2009:1174) argues that because of the dualism and good angels (cf. also John 1:51; 20:29) “the existence of adversarial forces is naturally assumed” in these ancient texts. They acted in the second temple writing of Judaism (cf. 1 Chr 21:1; Jub 17:16) and “are the cause of evil” (cf. 1 En 6-16, 86-88). In line with these, 1 John 5:19 says that the whole world lies under the power of the evil one. No indication is given of where the devil comes from and why the devil opposes God. Knowledge about these things is simply assumed. What is stated is that the power of the devil was such that the Son of God had to appear to destroy his works; however, it is not destroyed, since the devil, or the evil one, still has power over the *kosmos* (= those who are not of God, 1 Jn 5:19). His powerful expressions come in the form of: a) the antichrist (1 Jn 2:18) whose works are evident in the actions of those who are no longer in the midst of the believers,²⁷⁰ b) the spirit of error or of the antichrist whose presence is visible through the false prophets

268 Schnackenburg ([1965] 1982:328) motivates the more universal trends with love. The Christians should not hate the world and therefore the borders of love should not be drawn so tightly.

269 Klauck (1991:277-280) emphasizes the group forming of the Johannine community and then says: “*Dazu würde es passen, wenn die mehr unreflektierte, aus sozialen Zwängen erwachsende Einschränkung die Liebesgebotes auf die Gemeinde zu einem förmlichen Programm erhoben würde*” (280). In essence, he concludes, the attitude of John does not differ from the synoptic attitude regarding love for one’s neighbour.

270 Cf. Schnackenburg, *Johannesbriefe*, 145-49; Brown, *Epistles*, 333-37; Klauck, *Johannesbrief*, 149-50. Menken (2012:7) places this terminology within early Jewish and Christian future expectations.

(1 Jn 4:1–6); and c) Cain, as symbolic expression of those who murdered his brother like, yes, all those who do not care for believers (1 Jn 3:11–18).²⁷¹

In short, opposing spiritual realities (of God and the devil) overlap with the earthly reality, and as such influence the earthly reality. The influence is evident in the actions of people who are influenced by (S)pirit(s) representing each reality. There is also some echo of the danger of the devil getting hold of a person, where believers are warned to be on their guard so that the devil cannot touch them (1 Jn 5:18, 21; 2 Jn 8). It should be noted that this religious (fictive) family relationship dominates and transcends the natural or earthly relationship. This can be seen from the behaviour of Cain towards Abel (1 Jn 3:13–18).²⁷² Since the two brothers belonged to different (religious) families, they acted accordingly. Their natural love as brothers was overpowered by their allegiance to their real fathers. That is why Cain murdered; and that is why people even of the same earthly family turn against one another. A bigger religious perspective dominates.

This confirms that the letters view this reality essentially theologically and it is presented and described in those terms. The events on earth are understood and explained in terms of the presence of spiritual realities that determine the morality of the people on earth, while there is no development of, for instance, biological, or natural, cosmological categories. The worldview and its narrative are not developed in these terms. The opponents of God and the “us” group are also described in strong negative terms, like antichrists. Perkins (1979: xxi-xxii) notes that such strong language was typical of ancient communication. The reference to the last day, together with the references to the antichrist and ensuing judgment, squarely puts the events narrated in 1 John within an apocalyptic eschatological frame.

In this regard Lieu (1991:28) points out that concepts like life, knowledge, victory, strength (1 Jn 2:12–14) are viewed as eschatological realities in the rest of the New Testament. In John they represent part of the present reality of believers and form the context for their experience of reality. Confidence in who they are and what they can expect strengthens their experience and behaviour as victors in this world. It also defines the behaviour of their

271 Cf. Painter, John, 238-40; Thatcher (2012).

272 This is the only direct reference to the First Testament in the Letter (cf. Marshall 1978:189), although allusions to the First Testament is more common (cf. Lieu, 1993:458-77).

opponents in opposite terms. Ethically this means that believers are enacting the eschatological reality in this world. This involves having fellowship with God, being one with him, mimetically behaving like Jesus and loving one's fellow believers. The author emphasizes that it is not complete yet and what this means in full is still to be revealed (1 Jn 3:1–3). The ethical task of believers is nevertheless to create the eschatological reality through their behaviour in this world. They should not love the world, but love God.

6.7. Tradition further explored as ethos

With the focus on tradition, the author creates a link to the ethos of the 1 John group. Soon after human beings began to write, they began to write about morality. Many of the earliest moral texts are largely lists of laws and prohibitions (e.g., the Code of Hammurabi; the older parts of the Old Testament). As the Axial Age progressed (800 BCE – 200 BCE), many cultures East and West began to develop a more sophisticated psychology of the virtues. We find explicit discussions of virtues, often in the context of stories about the role models who exemplified them (e.g., Homer and Aesop in Greece; the Mahabharata in India). A second feature of these virtue-based approaches is that they emphasize *practice* and *habit* rather than propositional knowledge and reasoning. Virtues were excellences that people were expected to cultivate in themselves, depending on their social roles and stations in life. The debate on whether moral values are timeless or whether moral values are dependent on situations and therefore relative, is as old as Western philosophy. It dates to Sophists and Socrates.

Van der Watt (1999a:1-21) argues that the Johannine group ethics had a subjective character. This subjective character was the result of their understanding of truth (as discussed in 6.8) as an objective reality outside of this worldly reality. During my study I realized that morality in most cultures is in fact much broader, including issues of in-group/loyalty, authority/respect, and purity/sanctity. John 8:12 perhaps highlights tradition in this Johannine group. Jesus is engaged in dialogue with his opponents about identity. He then argues that a person's identity becomes evident through his/her actions. This maxim about a person's behaviour is based on two aspects, namely birth and education. Both these aspects have a formative influence on how a person acts (Van der Watt, 2014). According to John 8:28, a clear reason why children do what their fathers do is the imagery of education (see van der Watt 2007b:748).

Ancient Mediterranean people's identity was defined by traditional group principles. The individual member found his/her self-definition within the framework of the group. Senior members were to preserve the traditions, customs, and characteristics of the group. These show the importance of distinguishing between in-group and out-group characteristics. In most cultures, however, people believe that there are things worth protecting besides individuals. The "ethic of community" functions to protect groups, institutions, and other collective entities, using concepts such as duty, respect, honour, loyalty, and tradition. The ethic of divinity functions to protect and glorify God, particularly as God is manifested in each person. Philo (Spec. Leg. 239ff.cf also Sir 3:6-16; Philo Deus Im. 17) is convinced that loyalty, respect and responsibility towards his/her group and traditions were part of a person's self-definition. This implies that a person should act according to the requirements set by the head of the group, since these traditions will determine their identity. Fathers also had the responsibility to teach their children responsible moral behaviour in the ancient Mediterranean world (Neyrey, 2008:120). Considering the description of the Father teaching the Son in John 5:19-20, the pattern resembles a common pattern of Jesus doing what he was taught by his Father to do, to such an extent that in 14:10 Jesus's deeds are described as God's deeds.

In the light of this, my argument is that the Johannine group in 1 John had to behave according to the social expectations described above. This meant they had to apply God's characteristics and customs. He is their Father in heaven, which shows their subjective character through their understanding of truth with a reality outside of this worldly reality. The underlying value system in 1 John could plausibly be linked to the Jewish law and tradition²⁷³ that goes back to the Decalogue. To "Love one another" is the only moral rule given by John. The prologue of the 1 John indicates that the letter is based on tradition – not only self-generated knowledge is involved, but part of the knowledge is based on a set of established knowledge that (was) is conveyed and accepted by the group; this goes back to "the beginning" ("Ὁ ἦν ἀπ' ἀρχῆς – 1 Jn 1:1)²⁷⁴ when the (metaphorically expressed) life and the Word of life, was physically experienced²⁷⁵ on earth in the person of the Son. This is

273 See Tomson (1997: 70) on the role of the law in Jewish societies in outlining social identity both internally and externally.

274 Most probably referring to the life of Jesus.

275 Which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we looked upon and have touched with our hands (ὃ ἀκηκόαμεν, ὃ ἐώρακάμεν τοῖς ὀφθαλμοῖς ἡμῶν, ὃ ἐθεασάμεθα καὶ αἱ χεῖρες ἡμῶν ἐψηλάφησαν).

linked to revelation. Life is revealed or manifested (ἡ ζωὴ ἐφανερώθη – 1 Jn 1:2) and is witnessed about and proclaimed (μαρτυροῦμεν καὶ ἀπαγγέλλομεν ὑμῖν τὴν ζωὴν τὴν αἰώνιον – 1 Jn 1:2). Based on the revelation experienced from the very beginning, the witness and proclamation create fellowship with the group and their God. The letter stands in this token.

The Johannine group shared not only the information contained in the Gospel, but there is ample evidence in the letters of the set of knowledge the believers shared.²⁷⁶ Ethical awareness indeed forms part of this set of knowledge.²⁷⁷ Judging from the references to what the readers already knew, they were, for instance, ethically aware of the old law²⁷⁸ and of the fact that they should love. If they were simply told: “Behave as is expected of you” the Johannine believers would at least have had some idea of what is expected of them by recalling existing knowledge of ethics or appealing to the ethos of the group. They knew about the old law (1 Jn 2:7 Ἀγαπητοί, οὐκ ἐντολὴν καινὴν γράφω ὑμῖν ἀλλ’ ἐντολὴν παλαιὰν ἣν εἶχετε ἀπ’ ἀρχῆς· ἡ ἐντολὴ ἡ παλαιὰ ἐστὶν ὁ λόγος ὃν ἠκούσατε.), that they should be righteous like Jesus (1 Jn 2:29 ἐὰν εἰδῇτε ὅτι δίκαιός ἐστιν, γινώσκετε ὅτι καὶ πᾶς ὁ ποιῶν τὴν δικαιοσύνην ἐξ αὐτοῦ γεγέννηται.) and that they should love one another like God/Jesus loved them (1 Jn 4:7 Ἀγαπητοί, ἀγαπῶμεν ἀλλήλους, ὅτι ἡ ἀγάπη ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ ἐστὶν, καὶ πᾶς ὁ ἀγαπῶν ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ γεγέννηται καὶ γινώσκει τὸν θεόν.). John does not spell out specific actions, but rather reminds his readers of what they know. Part of their ethos was to act like Jesus acted and to love and serve one another because they are part of God’s people. This has more to do with embeddedness within a social framework or tradition and less to do with an objective abstract set of fixed rules of what is right and wrong. Johannine tradition offers

276 A rather detailed picture may be painted of what the author thought was the basic reservoir of knowledge of the Johannine group by analyzing what is intended when relevant terms are used, for instance, οἶδα, γινώσκω, φανερώω, ἀκούω, γράφω, μαρτυρέω, ἀγγέλλω and derivatives. These areas of knowledge cover the whole spectrum of life, from knowing God and Jesus (1Jn 1:1,3,5; 2:20-21; 5:20; 2Jn1), receiving identity as part of the group through salvation (1Jn 3:5,14-15; 5:13,18,19), acting accordingly in love (1Jn 2:29; 3:11; 4:16; 2Jn6) following commandments (1Jn 2:7), to unfolding eschatological realities while they wait for the return of Jesus (eschatology) (1Jn 2:18; 3:2; 4:3).

277 [Bennema (2007:110): “This cognitive darkness is a characterization of the general epistemic human condition.” ... (111): the “epistemic deficiency is by a lack of sensory and cognitive perception – people do not “see”, “hear” (i.e. understand) or know the meaning and significance of Jesus’s words”. Bennema (2007:111-112) “...consider the Jewish religious authorities, who become increasingly alienated from Jesus because they are not able to take in his words (6:41, 52; 8:12-59; 10:1-39). Even many of Jesus’s own disciples turn their backs on him because they find his teaching too difficult to understand (6:60, 66). Ironically, these people who are entrenched in epistemic darkness nevertheless make claims to knowledge (Nicodemus 3:2; “the Jews” in 5:38-40; 6:43; 7:27; 8:54-55; the Pharisees in 9:24, 29).”]

278 The relationship between the old and new law is debated. Judging by the context in 1Jn 2:7-8 the new law refers to the new perspective thrown on the old law they knew by their relationship with Jesus. They should love, but in line with their relationship with Jesus in the light. The link between deeds and identity as people who stand in a relationship with Jesus is also evident in 13:34-35.

a new symbolic universe where the transcendental reality becomes the central and dominating reality of believers. As children of God who are in the light, they must live according to the requirements of the family of God. This new reality is described and can be known in the tradition of the Johannine group. Within this tradition they formulate their own identity. Once one moves out of this tradition, this identity is lost.

Abandoning this tradition or changing it radically should be regarded with scepticism, of course, taking sound hermeneutical principles seriously. For a relatively short letter, 1 John has a rich source of material related to traditional knowledge and increasing or confirming that knowledge²⁷⁹ The relevant terms are for instance, οἶδα, γινώσκω, φανερόω, ἀκούω, γράφω, μαρτυρέω, ἀγγέλλω and derivatives. The question here is: What is the knowledge that formed the framework for self-knowledge and determined the behaviour of the people described and addressed in 1 John?

In 1 John 2:18–28 the author distinguishes the Johannine group from the antichrists with the following statement: “But you have an anointing (ὑμεῖς χρίσμα ἔχετε) of the Holy One, and all of you have knowledge” (1 Jn 2:20). He continues by pointing out that the Johannine group knows the truth and thus confess the Son, which illustrates that they have the Father (1 Jn 2:22–23). In verse 27 he returns to the concept of anointing (which most probably refer to the Spirit or his activities): “but the anointing which you received from him abides in you²⁸⁰, and you have no need that any one should teach you; as his anointing teaches you about everything, and is true, and is no lie, just as it has taught you, abide in him.” In the latter case the anointing is personified and taught, making any other teaching unnecessary. The knowledge believers have is thus linked to their tradition, i.e., their ethos (Smalley, 1984:104). By having this anointing, believers can detect and even understand the errors of the secessionists because of the spiritual insight resulting from the anointing (Smalley, 1984:105; Marshall, 1978:153).

The Spirit indeed works within that traditional framework or ethos. The work of the Spirit is identified by the authenticity of the confessions linked to that tradition (Westcott, 1902:79),

279 Schnackenburg (1982:324-325) also emphasizes the link between knowledge through Jesus and ethics. Bennema (2013) remarks, “Looking at the Sitz im Leben of the Johannine church(es), we may learn why John puts so much emphasis on knowledge. Both the gospel and letters testify to the existence of defective or inadequate Christology’s”.

280 The “remaining in them” emphasizes the permanence of the anointing among them (Smalley, 1984:124).

especially about Christ. The Spirit confirms what is known. As Akin (2001:125) puts it: “Additional revelation was not needed; indeed, it could be deadly. Spiritual illumination of the received traditions was the pattern they should follow”.

The following texts reveals what the followers have “heard” ἀκούω. It is the author’s way to highlight the importance of tradition (1 Jn 1:1–4). In these different texts it becomes visible that there is an overlap between “what they have heard” and “what they know”:

- Words of Life (1 Jn 1:1, 3; 1 Jn 2:24)
- God is light (1 Jn 1:5)
- The old commandment (1 Jn 2:7)
- To love one another (1 Jn 3:11)
- Antichrist (1 Jn 2:18; 1 Jn 4:3)

With the focus on tradition, the author makes a link with the ethos of the 1 John group. The absorptive way in which the work of the Spirit and the tradition overlaps illustrates the intimacy of the union between God and believers. Put differently: The Spirit confirms and works according to the correct interpretation of the tradition as it is reflected in the ethos of the Johannine group. If one sticks to this tradition, you can be sure that the Spirit works in you and that you are in union with God. Moreover, if the Spirit of truth works in a person, that person would communicate the truth. The work of the Spirit of truth cannot stand in conflict with the true tradition, and *vice versa*. Menken (2010:53-54; cf. also Lieu, 1991:46-47) emphasizes that the Johannine tradition and the Spirit cannot stand in contradiction with one another. This, then, is how the union with God is manifested in them.

From 1 John it is clear that at least this set of knowledge formed the tradition of the Johannine group. On this common shared basis, the letter communicates with the Johannine group. The secessionists who deviated from this set of knowledge are called antichrists (1 Jn 2:18), not knowing God (1 Jn 4:6). They are no longer regarded as part of the Johannine group. Only those who keep Jesus’s word (ὃς δ’ ἂν τηρῇ αὐτοῦ τὸν λόγον) are in him (ἐν αὐτῷ ἔσμεν) and of course the converse also applies in this regard. Indeed, “if we are to speak of tradition in 1 John, it is something heard and proclaimed, something that dwells within the believer and becomes part of her or his relationship with God” (Lieu, 1991:105). The observation of Lieu (1991:28-29) should be noted here. She argues that in

the Fourth Gospel, “knowledge denotes relationship rather than factual knowledge or a perception of reality... this is equally true in the Old Testament... where it belongs to the covenant relationship with God... It is even more true in the Qumran literature”. She then observes, “However, 1 John never develops a covenant framework, and instead knowledge of God belongs to a complex of other expressions of religious experience which have fewer parallels in Jewish thought”. On this basis the idea of knowing God is often linked to Gnostic ideas, which is an error, since much of what we have in the Gnostic documents are foreign to the 1 John group, as it is to the Gospel. She then remarks that in 1 John, love and knowing God goes hand in hand. Keeping God’s commandments through love forms a basic framework within which the thought of John unfolds, also in relation to knowledge.

This takes us beyond the letter to the wider Johannine tradition. From this a wider perspective may be gained of what it practically means to be a moral Johannine group member. The analytical category of ethos therefore broadens the perspective on the relevant data. In this sense it goes beyond the confines of single documents and allows for the construction of larger scenarios using the combined data.

Tradition and ethics are interrelated. Since the Johannine tradition is the result of the revelation of God through Christ, its essence is revelatory and not self-conceived. Who group members are and how they should behave are not to be decided independently but are to be understood based on their tradition. Their social universe is constructed along these parameters. The implications for ethics are important. What one should do and how one should behave is prescribed by the tradition. This tradition comes from God and reflects God’s will. If somebody does not live within the confines of this tradition, he or she is not of God and his or her actions not according to the truth. In this sense Johannine ethics has a strong deontological character. Christians should indeed behave according to God’s will. The ethics of John is also objective and universal for those who form part of this tradition.

How should Johannine Christians respond in questions of ethics? This chapter showed that they should consider these issues by following the tradition given to them through the revelation of Jesus and confirmed in them by the Spirit-Paraclete.

6.8. Dualism as ethics marker

The broad religious-cosmological framework within which the author chooses to present his message during this conflict, places him in a position of power. As in the Gospel of John,

219

the author of 1 John works with a dualistic structure in which there are no grey areas, only light or dark, truth or lies, life and death (Lincoln, 2000:20)²⁸¹. The dualistic structures, especially ethics structures, were well known in Second Temple Judaism (e.g., in Kumran literature [1QS 3:19-21, 4:15-16; 4QFlor 1:8] The Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs [T. Dog 2:1; 3:2; 4:7; Leviticus 3:3; T. Zeb 9:8; T. Ash. 1:8 f.; 3:2; 6:5; Jud. 19:4; T. Dan 1:7 f. 5:1] and in the Palestinian Targums on Gen 3 [Tg. Ps.-J. on Gen 3:6]). This makes classification significantly easier, since the distinction between who is in the light and who is in the dark, can be made in more absolute language with more specific emphasis. Examples of this on an ethical level are for instance the example of God as light; someone who says he is in a relationship with God and does what can be associated with the darkness of sin is categorically not of God. Such a person is not in relationship with God. The reverse is equally true (1 Jn 1:6–8). Or, the person or persons who harm the group, like Cain who killed his family, cannot say that they are part of the family, on the contrary, they are murderers (1 Jn 3:11–18). There is no middle way, in other words, the person is either on the side of the author, and therefore on the side of God, or he or she is in the dark and is a child of the devil.

Lieu (1991:36-37) refers to the static quality of the identity of the believer, who is, to underline the significance of the dualistic setting of the theology of John. It suggests “two divinely intended groups fixed in an unchanging opposition which has been mysteriously generated by the polarity in the divine world between God and the devil”. She opines that the nature of the sharp conflict in the group necessitated the dualistic formulation of the message. If this is the case, it seems excessive to typify the whole cosmos as being on the side of evil. In answer to this problem, Lieu (1991:40) thinks that the letter was written to a beleaguered minority needing affirmation. For this reason the negative side of the dualism is less developed than the positive and there is limited interest in the supra-natural dimension.

6.9. The practical life of the in-group and ethos

An interesting feature of ethics in the letters is the way in which practical life and teaching are linked. It is done by using the expression: ἐν τούτῳ γινώσκομεν ὅτι (by this we know

²⁸¹ Dualism is explained in detail in chapter 7 in 7.11

that...). Two things are related: what a person does or experience and what he can learn from that.

Table 6-2: The way practical life and teachings are linked together

Verse	What you do	What you learn
1 Jn 2:3	if we keep his commandments ²⁸²	we have come to know him ²⁸³
1 Jn 2:5	whoever keeps his word ²⁸⁴	we ²⁸⁵ are in him ²⁸⁶
1 Jn 2:18	now many antichrists have come ²⁸⁷	it is the last hour ²⁸⁸
1 Jn 3:16	he laid down his life for us ²⁸⁹	(nature of) love ²⁹⁰
1 Jn 3:19–20	God is greater than our heart, and he knows everything ²⁹¹	we are of the truth ²⁹²
1 Jn 3:24	by the Spirit whom he has given us ²⁹³	he abides in us ²⁹⁴
1 Jn 4:2-3	every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God ²⁹⁵	the Spirit of God ²⁹⁶

282 ἐὰν τὰς ἐντολὰς αὐτοῦ τηρῶμεν

283 ἐγνώκαμεν αὐτόν

284 ὃς δ' ἂν τηρῇ αὐτοῦ τὸν λόγον. In the case of 1Jn2:5-6 it may be that the reference is to walk like Jesus walked.

285 In this case ὅθεν γινώσκομεν is used.

286 ἐν αὐτῷ ἐσμεν

287 νῦν ἀντίχριστοι πολλοὶ γεγόνασιν

288 ἐσχάτη ὥρα ἐστίν

289 ἐκεῖνος ὑπὲρ ἡμῶν τὴν ψυχὴν αὐτοῦ ἔθηκεν

290 τὴν ἀγάπην

291 μείζων ἐστὶν ὁ θεὸς τῆς καρδίας ἡμῶν καὶ γινώσκει πάντα

292 ἐκ τῆς ἀληθείας ἐσμέν

293 ἐκ τοῦ πνεύματος οὗ ἡμῖν ἔδωκεν

294 μένει ἐν ἡμῖν

295 πᾶν πνεῦμα ὃ ὁμολογεῖ Ἰησοῦν Χριστὸν ἐν σαρκὶ ἐληλυθότα ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ ἐστίν, καὶ πᾶν πνεῦμα ὃ μὴ ὁμολογεῖ τὸν Ἰησοῦν ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ οὐκ ἔστιν

296 τὸ πνεῦμα τοῦ θεοῦ·

1 Jn 4:6	Whoever knows God listens to us; whoever is not from God does not listen to us ²⁹⁷	the Spirit of truth and the spirit of error ²⁹⁸
1 Jn 4:13	he has given us of his Spirit ²⁹⁹	we abide in him and he in us ³⁰⁰
1 Jn 5:2	we love God and obey his commandments ³⁰¹	we love the children of God ³⁰²

Consequential language, explaining what could be concluded from certain actions, helps the addressee to understand his position in the wider reality of God as represented by the “us”. For instance, when one keeps God’s commandments, it can be concluded that one knows him and vice versa. When keeping his Word, it may be concluded that the person is in Him. Having his Spirit should lead to the same conclusion of *Immanenz*³⁰³. In this way, practical reality and theological truth are interrelated. This provides an interesting insight gained from this analysis, namely that the shared traditional knowledge of the Johannine group addressed in 1 John includes a comprehensive body of knowledge covering the whole spectrum of Christian life, from the knowledge of the transcendental reality to salvation, ethics and even eschatology. These different aspects are also structurally linked through imagery, like light or family. For instance, God is light, and therefore his family must also be in the light (1 Jn 1:5-6), binding the transcendental reality to people and thus defining their ethical behaviour. This provides some insight into the ethical argumentation of the author. Moral behaviour is not something that can be separated from worldview or identity. It is intimately related to God and the transcendental reality to the extent of being absorbed (being in) and determined by that reality. Anthropologically it implies that the identity and

297 ὁ γινώσκων τὸν θεὸν ἀκούει ἡμῶν, ὃς οὐκ ἔστιν ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ οὐκ ἀκούει ἡμῶν

298 τὸ πνεῦμα τῆς ἀληθείας καὶ τὸ πνεῦμα τῆς πλάνης

299 ἐκ τοῦ πνεύματος αὐτοῦ δέδωκεν ἡμῖν

300 ἐν αὐτῷ μένομεν καὶ αὐτὸς ἐν ἡμῖν

301 τὸν θεὸν ἀγαπῶμεν καὶ τὰς ἐντολὰς αὐτοῦ ποιῶμεν

302 ἀγαπῶμεν τὰ τέκνα τοῦ θεοῦ

303 Explained in 6.5 footnote.

behaviour of the individual is determined by the group, i.e., the family of God. Awareness of this interrelatedness is the key to Johannine ethics.

From 1 John it is clear that at least this set of knowledge formed the tradition of the Johannine group. On this common shared basis, the letter communicates with the Johannine group. The secessionists who deviated from this set of knowledge are called antichrists (1 Jn 2:18ff.), not knowing God (1 Jn 4:6). They are no longer regarded as part of the Johannine group. Only those who keep Jesus's word (ὅς δ' ἂν τηρῇ αὐτοῦ τὸν λόγον) are in him (ἐν αὐτῷ ἔσμεν) and of course the converse also applies in this regard. Indeed, "if we are to speak of tradition in 1 John, it is something heard and proclaimed, something that dwells within the believer and becomes part of her or his relationship with God" (Lieu, 1991:105).

6.10. Conclusion

Ethics in this study is understood as a reflection on deeds as well as the rationale behind them. It is therefore the conscious contemplation on behaviour and the things that motivate behaviour in the group. In this sense, ethics reflects the norms, values and eventually the identity of the Johannine group. For this reason, the study examined the oral Johannine group tradition together with the role of imitation. The spiral thought chain of the author, the way in which the group perspective (norms, values, and identity) was shaped, was held tightly together in a loving creative tension in this chapter. At this point an important distinction should be made between ethics *IN* the Johannine group and ethics *OF* the Johannine group, as stated in the introduction of this chapter. The point here is that the author did not develop an ethics system in which he motivates what a person should do and why. Labahn (2012:5-6) states that the books of the New Testament do not resemble philosophical essays like the works of Aristotle or Seneca. There are remarks on ethics in the letter, but it is not a list of what is expected on a practical level when it comes to marriage, lying, stealing, etc. In this sense there is no ethics *IN* 1 John, but there are ethical indicators (like the role of the antichrist in group understanding) that is part of a system that lies behind the text. A system that provides guidelines on how to be part of the in-group of the Johannine group or what kind of behaviour will distinguish you to be deviant from the group norms and rather make you part of the out-group morale (Dualism helped to distinguish this, groupness in 1 John).

It became evident in this chapter that the essence of ethics in 1 John is relational, in other words, the actions are motivated by and are done in terms of relationships (belonging). These relationships are hierarchically dominated by God – behaviour should reflect what he stands for. What is expected of the group member is living in an obedient relationship to Jesus and not according to a list of expected rules.

This is possible when the ethos of the group is clear, which presupposes a clear definition of identity. In the Gospel, the disciples of Jesus and the disciples of Moses both claimed to worship the same God. The major question underlying the conflict was: Where, and with whom, is God? God was now with Jesus and cultic activities were no longer important. The importance now rested with the presence of God. The cultic activities pointed to a God who is not visible, but now God was visible in Jesus. This same question is the undertone of the 1 John text and the ethical search.

In the letters the conflict is internal to the group, but the author still focuses on Jesus and living like Jesus. He also still prompts the group to live in the “light” of Jesus. This explains the emphasis on the Pneumatological and Christological ethos that is seen in the letter. The Pneumatological focus is on the Spirit guiding the Johannine group in being the “light”. The Christological focus is on Jesus being the *Christos*. The author of 1 John also focuses on the imbedded tradition of the group (1 Jn 1; 2:24 and 3). In the ancient world this was a great foundation on which to build your truth. This group also knew that they were now part of a new family structure with God as their Father. They had to be obedient to this structure and their role in this family. So, God the Father was their primal ethos example, shown in Jesus’s life on earth (1 Jn 4:5-6). I would like to suggest that the protection and survival of the group is a central point in case that determines the ethical thinking in 1 John.

Loader (2012:234) also remarks that the author focuses “on the danger or neglect of mutual support for survival”. We have seen that rhetorically; the author aims at drawing the “you” group that are finding themselves in between the “us” and the “they” into his fold by encouraging their partnership with God and the eyewitness-group. He is therefore trying to prevent them from becoming part of the schism. Now they still seem to share the traditional beliefs with the author, but they are under threat of false teachers who want to mislead them. It can therefore be said that the basic ethical motivation of the letter is to preserve the identity

and existence of the eyewitness group and its tradition.³⁰⁴ The demands of ethics are in service of preserving the group. Other ethics issues are not on the radar of the Johannine group now, although the section of the love for the world (1 Jn 2:15-17) might indicate that they were exposed to the ordinary social temptations like everybody else was. These matters are simply not made a point of discussion in the letter, because of a more pressing issue: the protection of the group. This should not be interpreted as a sectarian closedness of the group. It just describes the situation relating to the false teachers and their circumstances. In 3 John, as in John 20:21-22 or 17:18, the Johannine church had a missionary vision for the outside.³⁰⁵

Through this study it is visible that *ethics*, *tradition*, and *Spirit* are always interconnected. Within this framework of *Spirit* and *tradition*, the ancient group member had to make all their choices. By doing this they were constantly close to God. Since the author works with broad theological concepts like eternal life, love, truth and so on, there is always the temptation to interpret the documents primarily theologically, easily leading to an a-historical approach.³⁰⁶ The opposite is the truth, as became clear from the above analyses – the letter is firmly embedded in a historical situation.

The theology is intensely interwoven with the particular situation that is addressed. It deals with the unity of a group that experienced a schism and must now protect those who are exposed to misleading influences. 1 John cannot be read in isolation from this situation, theological concepts are expressed in practical ways and the practical ways illustrate the theological dimensions. Not rules, but the example of Jesus determines the groups behaviour. This example should be mimed, in other words, the character of the deeds should

304 Lieu (1986:184) views that protection of the boundaries of the group of prime interest to the group.

305 An intriguing question in Johannine research is why evidence of the existence of a Johannine group so abruptly disappears in the early second century. Smalley (1984:xxx) reflects in the following way on this: "What happened to Johannine Christianity we can only guess" (cf. also Brown 1986:103-115). It is as if these groups simply disappeared in the early second century. The raging conflicts in the Johannine sphere of influence that is far from solved might help in getting some idea why the groups disappeared. This places a question mark behind the influence and success of 1 John that aims at keeping the "us" and "you" together. The signs in the letter that the "they" group had more influence in the world (4:5-6) however signals nothing good for the efforts of the author. The question remains: What would have been the consequences if the letter was not successful, in other words, if the "you" group joined the "they" group? Then only the "us" group remained and in the light of history they apparently did not remain in that form for long. Nevertheless, the message that was heard and seen by the "us" from the beginning, still exercise authority within present day Christianity by way of this letter.

306 Frey consistently warns against this sterile approach in his 2012 article.

be expressed and not necessarily the deeds themselves. This comes closer to a moral vision of what should be done than a set of fixed rules that implies moral legalism.

Two poles are kept in synergy, namely, the requirements set by Jesus and the consistent application of these requirements in new situations, visible in the authors words. This also balances a norm bound ethic with deontological characteristics, with ethics that are driven by the eschatological vision of Jesus that his people will be like (1 Jn 3:2-3) and with him (17:24), implying theological ethical features.³⁰⁷ The underlying ethical structure in 1 John is theological (origin lies with God), revelational, and therefore deontological (obligatory). Knowledge of God and his revelation (knowing God) and not reason (in the sense of human abilities to discover right or wrong within themselves or somewhere else) is the key to unlocking the ethics of the letter. This knowledge is conveyed within a relational framework, expressed with terms like fellowship, familial terms and *Immanenzformeln*. This relationship must be expressed in actions that reflect the ethos of God. The life of Jesus, particularly his intimate relationship with the Father and his sacrificial love for others, provides not only the model for ethics but also the motivation for the believers to abide in him and consequently live out authentic love in the world they find themselves in.

³⁰⁷ Barton (2003:70) finds the same features in the Hebrew Bible.

CHAPTER 7 GROUPS IN 1 JOHN

Our journey has taken us through four different markers in Chapters 3 to 6 on groups in the 1 John. This journey has more than adequately indicated that the author of 1 John lived in a collectivist society, populated with group-oriented persons. In contrast, modern western societal forms stand at the individualist end of the spectrum. Viewing themselves “psychologically”. In this approach, the comparison is between two broad cultural constructs: on the one end the ancient Mediterranean world, dominated by collectivist and honour-driven values, on the other end the modern world of individualism, and our take on an ancient text.

Group-oriented, ancient Mediterranean’s viewed themselves “sociologically”. This means that they thought quite differently about who a person might be and what might be the expected range of human behaviour. This chapter considers good knowledge of their status system and how it shaped the group understanding. The knowledge collected in the previous three chapters, is applied to form a group understanding.

According to cultural anthropologists,³⁰⁸ in-group/out-group divisions are fundamental to Mediterranean views of the world. Years ago, Malina and Neyrey (1996:154-167) suggested that a useful way to analyse ancient letters with a lack of information about recipients of the communication is to set the taxonomy of social groups. The focus of this study is to build a detailed understanding of this taxonomy. This was done using the social identity theory and multi-disciplinary approaches. The use of cognitive science can provide us with theories, frameworks and tools that can contribute to historical and cultural analyses.

The big question asked throughout this study was whether applying social identity theory to the 1 John texts point us towards an understanding of the identity of the in-group and opponents to this group. Hopefully, the answer to this question will help the study to better understand group formatting in 1 John. The social identity theory helped to look closer at the interrelationships, values and symbols that characterized the early 1 John group. Social identity theory helped to identify the extent to which members identified with a particular Johannine group that determined their inclination to behave in terms of their group

308 John Davis (1977) and David Gilmore (1982).

membership. This inclination draws attention to the true words of Tajfel, “Social groups are not ‘things’; they are processes” (Tajfel, 1982:485). The rules and resources of a language are simultaneously drawn upon and reproduced in the process of speaking or writing. This theoretical focus on social life as process in time, and on the production, reproduction and transformation which occur over time, is essential for the understanding of all social relations and structures. It is especially pertinent for the study of a group undergoing rapid change and development as in the earliest period of Christian origins, which is the case of the Johannine group when the letter was written. The chapter organizes and categorizes the data from previous chapters that will form the connections with Johannine groups (Garrett, 1992:89-99).

It has become clear that the insider group should establish a positively valued distinctiveness from other groups. The rationale behind this is to provide the members of the in-group with a positive social identity. William Graham Sumner coined the term “ethnocentrism” in 1996. It is the technical name for this view of things in which one’s own group is the centre of everything, and all others are scaled and rated with reference to it. The previous chapters (3-6) shows that social remembering takes place, especially when there is a need to transform the structure of current groups (Schwartz, 1991:375). Put differently: People together with other people at times remember certain events for specific reasons. This chapter’s focus will be on the ethnocentric orientation of the Johannine group, which defines the different groups visible in the Johannine group.

Let’s firstly ask how this group of readers are like other groups in their area of the world during that period of history.

7.1. The primary rhetorical mode of the text and the social situation in which it was written

When reading 1 John, it becomes clear that two different viewpoints emerge when reading through the text. The two groups had much in common: a commitment to the teachings of the Hebrew Bible; a worldview that spiritual reality consists of opposites (something is either true or false, light, or dark, righteous, or evil); practical demonstrations of love for fellow group members. But apparently these new followers of Jesus never fully accepted Jesus as the Christ. Assuming them to have become the “opponents” of 1 John, Johannine texts indicate they did not acknowledge that Jesus came in the flesh to take away the sin of the

world (Jn 1:29; 1 Jn 3:5) and to destroy the works of the devil (1 Jn 3:8, also see Jn 12:31). In this conflict situation, 1 John was written as a combination of rituals, according to the hypothesis of this narrative, one to denounce the “children of the devil” and the other to label believers as “children of God.” The resulting combination of rituals could be viewed as a liturgy to confirm Johannine believers in the truth and to prevent them from being deceived by the contentious out-group believers.

In addressing the conflicting perspectives of the Johannine group and the opponents from the Essene community, the author of 1 John reinterpreted a variety of concepts found in the first Qumran Scroll considering the Johannine concept of Jesus. This group was under stress and new relationships were being developed between traditions and Spirit. The antithetical statements³⁰⁹ throughout 1 John showcase the difference the author sees in the behaviour and beliefs of those following Jesus (“walking in the light as he is in the light,” 1 Jn 1:7), and those who do not acknowledge the authority and example of Jesus in their lives (“walking in the dark and not knowing where he is going” 1 Jn 2:11). Johannine believers each had to choose which group to follow. The full text of 1 John was written to confirm believers in making the right choice; to separate themselves from the teachings of any of the false religions and heresies rampant in Ephesus and the Mediterranean world at that time.³¹⁰ An important question that comes to light at this point in the study is to ask to whom this letter was written or directed, since the answer to this question will determine the perspective from which the letter should be interpreted. The analysis of 1 John is complicated by the fact that neither the author nor the addressees are specifically mentioned, although a specific situation seems to underlie this document (cf. Lieu, 1991:12) as discussed in the previous chapters.

309 Will be discussed in detail in 7.2 Antithetical remarks and their meaning for groups in 1 John.

310 The biblical text gives evidence that Ephesus was the home of the temple of the goddess Artemis (Acts 19:35), a place where magic was practiced (Acts 19:19), and the location where the evil works of the Nicolaitans were practiced (Revelation 2:6, 14, 15). Speculations about the heresy being combated by the text of 1 John, the city of Ephesus is mentioned in connection with Cerinthus, the “enemy of the truth” in Polycarp’s story. Ephesus was part of Asia Minor where Ignatius combated heresies a decade or two later. The accounts in Acts 19:19 and Ignatius to the Eph. 19:3 demonstrate that the practice of magic was considered by early Christian leaders to be evil, a work of the devil, that needed to be destroyed. “Consequently, all magic and every kind of spell were dissolved, the ignorance so characteristic of wickedness vanished, and the ancient kingdom was abolished when God appeared in human form to bring the newness of eternal life, and what had been prepared by God began to take effect” (Ignatius to the Ephesians 19:3).

7.1.1. Brown

In the secondary literature, the impression is frequently created that the letter has the opponents in mind and that the statements of 1 John should be interpreted as if they are somehow directed at the opponents. This means that the conditional expressions (if ... then) are addressed at them (the opponents) with the express intention of convincing them that they are wrong. According to this approach, the outside group would be directly or indirectly addressed and attacked. If the letter is understood as a polemical reaction against the opponents, setting up counter arguments against their views, all the contrasting remarks in the letters will be seen as describing the views of the opponents.³¹¹ This will result in a certain view of the teachings of both the author and addressees, not the least regarding the Christology, ethics, or anthropology. If the letter is written with a conscious awareness of the Gospel, Brown approached the issue from another point of departure. He (Brown, 1982:42, cf. also 47) presupposes that,

*“the author of 1 John took slogans from his adversaries, wherefrom the Gnostic tone³¹² and opposed them with slogans of his own. The slogans echoed the themes and wording of the Johannine tradition found in GJohn. The author then commented on such contrasting slogans”.*³¹³

The basis for the structured antithetical remarks lies with the views and opinions of the opponents (contemporary adversaries – Brown, 1982:47; cf. also Johnson, 1993:12-14; Menken, 2011:221), which also reveal their theological positions (for instance, 1 Jn 1:5-10 should be used in this way). In the reactions of the author, his theology becomes transparent. The above approach influenced the Johannine research significantly (Schmid, 2004:25). A question that remained was whether there was any evidence in, for instance 1 Jn 1:1-10, of

311 Since the major conflict in the Gospel was between the Johannine group and the Jews. In the Letters the emphasis shifts to a crisis within the group itself. The question is asked whether this group was also Jewish? If one can talk of a majority opinion it would be that this group was more non-Jewish than Jewish (Klauck 1991, Painter 2002). Nevertheless, the Qumran community (Jewish) is often linked to the Letters (see Lieu 2008, Menken 2010) based on the dualism or the sectarian nature of the groups. The people who caused the schisms are then seen as Jews who decided to move back to their Judaistic roots (Griffith 2002, Lieu 2008).

312 Von Wahlde (1990:184) points out that one cannot realistically link the Letters to Gnosticism, since the Letters predates the gnostic texts, and secondly the links with contemporary Jewish text are so clear, according to him that they should take precedence.

313 Cf. Klauck (1991:23). Marshall (1978:15) also warns that the text should not be over-interpreted when identifying the opponents; care should be taken. Cf. also du Rand (1979:163); Edwards (2001:58-60).

opponents that justifies one to attribute the antithetical remarks to them and consequently build their theology on that.

Lieu (1981; 1991:5-6, 13-16, 66; 1993)³¹⁴ and others (for instance, Edwards, 1996:37-38, 57-60, 64-65; Painter 2002:85-88; Schmid, 2004:24-25) challenged the above opinion of Brown (1986)³¹⁵ by proposing that the letter was not intended for the opponents and therefore should not be read as if it is apologetical³¹⁶ or polemical³¹⁷, but rather takes up the arguments of the opponents³¹⁸ and then defeats them.³¹⁹ It is rather a pastoral letter that intends to encourage the addressees and aims to protect and strengthen them in unity.³²⁰ The opponents should not be regarded as the main figures in the letter, but the focus rather falls on the “you”. (Klauck, 1991:33).

7.1.2. Lieu

Judith Lieu’s work on 1 John is done with linguistic rhetoric with the focus on the rhetorical understanding of the text. The link between the Gospel of John and 1 John plays an

314 Cf. Smalley’s (1986: xxxi) criticism of Lieu. It did not stop the position of Lieu to win ground.

315 In criticizing the so-called dominant model, Lieu (2008a:805) gives the following summary of the basic plot accepted by this model: “the audience has experienced some form of schism, whether passively or actively as its initiators; the author is seeking to reassure them in the face of the assault on their (deterministic) sense of assurance, but also to retain their loyalty. The problem that divides the two parties is understood as Christological and behavioral, although the precise balance between these two aspects is open to debate inasmuch as it depends on interpreting other earlier nonspecific references (e.g., 1:6, 8, 10; 2:4) in the light of 2:18. Once described, it may be illuminated by reference to known Christological debates in the early church even if it is not to be identified with one of them”. Although Lieu (2008a:8-5-6) uses this description in her introduction as a reading that are and indeed should be criticized, the analysis done above broadly supports the basic plot as is described here.

316 Every contrasting or negative remark becomes the voice of the opponents.

317 Griffith (2002:255) was one of the first to use the term “non-polemical”, suggesting a more pastoral reading. Schmid (2004:24) acknowledges that most exegetes would agree that 1 John is a polemical text although he proposes reading it non-polemically. Lieu (2008a:806) draws attention to the influential presence of the “history-of-the-community” reading of the Johannine corpus, as was pioneered by Louis Martyn. This theory tended to influence the interpretation of aspects of the Letters to stay in sync with the basic assumptions of this reading.

318 Lieu (1991:6) correctly notes that the antithetical sections need not be interpreted as representative of the opponents (cf. also Edwards, 1996:65-67). It is rather to express his own ideas that the author wrote the Letter than combating the opponents.

319 The impression should not be created that Brown approached the letter solely as polemical. Brown (1986:47) himself denies that and states that “the primary purpose of the work might well be to strengthen the author’s own Community in a time when adversaries are causing trouble”. Cf. Kruse (2000:3).

320 Painter (2002:18) emphasizes that 1 John was not written to the opponents but to a “traumatized and disturbed community whose assurance of faith has been undermined. The letter’s aim was to ‘restore that assurance’” (cf. Kruse 2000:27). Painter’s view is a bit narrow since the letter is about more than simply encouragement. Schmid (2002; 2004) supports a non-polemical reading by interpreting the Gospel of John and 1 John within the systems theory of Luhmann. The two texts are read as an interrelated body of data which makes sense in their interrelatedness. Historical questions then become largely irrelevant and redundant.

important role in her studies. When the socio-historic situation of the 1 John group is studied, the most important factor that stands out is identity (Du Randt, 2006:10-29). It is vital to remember that the first historic readers were at a difficult point with political, economic, social, and cultural views. Therefore, “identity” played such an important role. Lieu (1991), however, showed convincingly that the letter was not written to the outside group, but rather that it was address to the remaining part of the Johannine group. The author is the one who interprets the theology for the 1 John group. This highlights the importance of understanding the social situation in which 1 John was written and received by the first readers. The author is not an outsider throwing rocks, nor a comfortable insider who only defends the status quo; but one (or a group) who lives precariously with two perspectives held tightly together in a tension: the faithful insider and the critical outsider role in one.

Lieu (2008) acknowledges that there was a schism according to 1 and 2 John but makes the important point that neither 1 nor 2 John was directed at the opponents, but at the Johannine group. It suggests a non-polemical situation for which the letters were written (see also Schmid, 2004). The schism does not form the centre of the letters, and neither is the main aim to criticize the opponents. The aim is rather to convince the readers to adopt the position offered in the letters. Even so, one must acknowledge that the schism did have a major effect on the social consciousness of the group. Lieu (1991:24-26) argues strongly for the idea that “for most of the letter ‘we’ denotes not the author and his fellow authorities, an exclusive circle, but the group together with the author”. In group-orientated societies, this is to be expected. Indeed, the author, who is the voice of the true teaching, represents the group who defines its identity in terms of this tradition. Judith Lieu understands rhetoric in the sense of “new rhetoric”. Her focus is on grammatical nouns used in the Greek text. Words like “us” and “them” play a central role in understanding the letter to the group. Lieu looks at 1 Jn 1:1-4, the prologue, and highlights that the words “us” and “them” form a connection between the author and the readers. The “them” is according to Lieu outsiders.

My stance is with Lieu. Of course, if this is the case, it changes the rhetorical situation significantly. What is said is not intended to address the outsiders, but rather than to admonish the in-group to strengthen and build their identity considering what has happened between them and the secessionists. The exercise of power with language and rhetoric in 1 John must thus be judged from this perspective. The primary rhetorical mode of the text is thus not attack, but encouragement and strengthening of the in-group. The letters are short

and condensed. A major problem is therefore the lack of information on certain issues, not the least the identity of the opponents or the precise figures addressed in the different situations. The interpreter is by default forced to depart from certain presuppositions. As Lieu (1991:8) remarks, “it is impossible to understand the thought of 1 John without a number of prior decisions, even if only implicit, about its nature as a piece of writing”.

Now, with this knowledge, the question can be asked how this Johannine group differs from others around them.

7.2. Antithetical remarks creating an alternative social reality for groups

Richard L. Rohrbaugh (2007:177) says that it is important to stress that anti-language does not consist of new words. It uses old words, common to the vocabulary of the dominant culture, but it gives them distinctive meanings. An anti-language is a metaphor for everyday language. The use of the metaphor is to cement relationships between members of an anti-society and to distinguish their group. This is not for secrecy but to create an alternative social reality. In this process of using anti-language, a person becomes part of a new group. Halliday says that the early Christian community (in this study specifically the 1 John group) was an anti-society and its language an anti-language. To be able to interpret the real significance of anti-language texts will have to be subjected to exegesis, which relates them to the social context. Only then will it be clear how they embody a social system. Malina (1995) agrees with this line of argument by saying that 1 John has very different vocabulary. He refers to two groups of words denoting contrasting spheres:

- Spirit, the above, life, light, not of this world, truth, love.
- Flesh, the below, death, darkness, this world, hate.

He also cites several terms referring to the believer’s relationship with Jesus: believing in, following, abiding in, loving, keeping, receiving, having, seeing. So, it is visible that the same words are used but the meaning is different for this group. When using this argument of anti-language, it is also important to remember that the Jewish people was itself in a subordinate position to wider society. This understanding fits well with the idea of the Johannine group as a small, struggling group surrounded by any in conflict with a dominant Jewish society.

The letter is not aimed at combating the opponents but strengthening the Johannine group. The focus in all these remarks about the opponents falls on one central theme, namely Christology (Menken, 2010:8).

In laying out our argument, we shall deal first with the slogans or claims of an ethical nature. This provides us with the identification of the boundary between groups. It is generally agreed that the slogans or boasts of a set of opponents can be isolated in the text of 1 John after the following introductory phrases:

- if we say/claim (ἐὰν εἴπωμεν ὅτι)
 - “We have fellowship with God” (1 Jn 1:6)
 - “We have no sin” (1 Jn 1:8)
 - “We have not sinned” (1 Jn 1:10)
- Whoever says/claims (ὁ λέγων [ὅτι])
 - “I know God” (1 Jn 2:4)
 - “I abide in God” (1 Jn 2:6)
 - “I am in the light” (1 Jn 2:9)
- If anyone says (ἐάν τις εἴπῃ ὅτι), “I love God” (1 Jn 4:20)

In each case, the supposed claim is contradicted by a counter-assertion, which is related, explicitly or implicitly, to ethical conduct. It is widely assumed that this debating and antithetical style is driven by a polemical purpose, so that the “claims or the claim/behaviour mismatches which are rejected can be assigned to the schismatics and used to profile and identify them” (Lieu, 1991). Raymond Brown argues that these reported statements are claims made by the schismatic antichrists introduced in 2:18-22. He asserts:

“In 1.6 the author is fearful that his own adherents in the Johannine Community will be misled by the secessionist interpretation of the Gospel of John perfectionism whereby the privilege of divine indwelling makes subsequent behaviour, even wicked behaviour, irrelevant toward salvation”³²¹.

³²¹ Brown, Epistles, 241.

However, it is far more likely that 1:5-2:11, indeed the whole of 1 John, has a pastoral rather than a polemical outlook, since nowhere are the views of opponents positively stated and refuted. The opening context suggests this. 1 John 1:6-2:2 is linked to the prologue by the term *κοινωνία*, which occurs only four times in the letter, all of which are found in 1 John 1:3-7. Indeed, the only reference to anything outside this intimate circle of fellowship, in this context, is the *κόσμος* (2:2), and even here the world is viewed with the possibility of extension of fellowship via divine forgiveness.

It seems natural, then, to take the first-person plural “If we say/claim” (*ἐὰν εἴπωμεν*) as a *pluralis sociativus*, which was widely used in Greek literature as a means by which the writer or speaker “brings the reader (or hearer) into association with his own action”³²². Judith Lieu (1986) has championed this new approach. She argues:

“However serious the schism, the polemic against specific views and claims of opponents does not control the letter or its thought.

The so-called ‘moral debate’ is not explicitly related to the schismatics and so should not be interpreted purely as a reaction against them”³²³.

She prefers to describe this passage as a self-interrogation (Lieu: 1986). Thus, as she describes it, the author and group together deliberate the authenticity of their own religious claims and how such claims may be proved invalid. This might, of course, not be genuine debate but rhetorical persuasion; perhaps the author seeks to convince his readers by inviting them into a process of deliberation, whose conclusions are as inevitable as they are implicit in the starting point, he has chosen³²⁴.

Similarly, Dietmar Neufeld advances the proposition that John has deliberately set up a series of antithetical statements that function as rhetorical devices by which he engages the audience to consider carefully what he has to say:

“Our speech act analysis shows that these slogans may be taken as

322 The first-person plurals in 1:1-5 perform a different function as an authority device, in distinction to those addressed by the second person plurals.

323 Lieu, *Theology*, 15-16. See the fuller argument in, “‘Authority to become children of God’: A Study of 1 John”, *NovT* 33 (1981) 210-28, 221-24.

324 Painter notes the possibility, only to reject it, that the opponents could be a “literary sounding board against which the author could express own views” (*Quest*, 373).

hypothetical acts of speech that make plain the attitudes and beliefs of the author... He deliberately formulated them as antithetical slogans to show the readers a type of speech which cannot be uttered in sincerity unless they are also willing to accept the full consequences. In this way the author was able not only to present his views about God, light, darkness, love, and sin but also to persuade his readers to accept them. Thus, it could be said that the slogans enabled the author to make the world rather than simply mirror it. They enabled him to bring about states of affairs rather than simply report on them and correct them” (Neufeld, 1994:94-95).

In other words, there is no need to see these statements in 1 John as anything more than rhetorical devices that reinforce commonly held beliefs and values and promote his stated aim “that you also may have fellowship with us” (1:3). They do not represent views held by real or imagined interlocutors or opponents; such persons are simply not required to make good sense of 1 John 1:5-2:11.

In sum, the letter is not to argue with the opponents (Lieu, 1991:16 who repeatedly emphasizes that the opponents are not the main concern in the letter), but to warn the “you” against the false prophets who try to mislead them (Marshall, 1978:14) and to convince the “you” to move closer to the “us” group and to cooperate with them, since that will lead to *koinōnia* with God (cf. Klauck, 1991:33). The lack of reference to the opponents in the key section on love in 1 John 4:7-21(5:3)³²⁵ underlines the emphasis on the group and not on the opponents. The letter is not aimed at combating the opponents but strengthening the Johannine group. The letter is an effort to prevent the “you” from moving closer to the “they” and thus to prevent further loss by the orthodox group, as Kysar (1992:906; cf. also, Klauck, 1991:33; Culpepper, 1998:262) puts it:

“The general purpose of 1 John, then, was to preserve a Christian group from dissolution, to protect the identity and composition of that group, and to arrest a movement which threatened the very heart of what the author understood to be a genuine faith and life. It sought to assure the remaining group that they stood within

325 Lieu (1991:66) points out that the negative statements (1 Jn 4:8, 20) “probably serve to sharpen the argument of the section rather than to pillory opponents”.

the fold of the tradition and ethos and to reinforce their position to prevent further disintegration”.

The author of the letter not only warns the “you” against this (cf. Painter, 2002:90), but aims to bind them more intimately to the “us” through *koinōnia* as discussed in the previous chapters. Part of the scenario of the conflict in which the schism between the “us” and the “they” occurs is the ongoing struggle for the loyalty and association of the “you”. The question is which group the “you”, or at least members of the “you” are going to join? To highlight for a last time, the letter is not aimed at combating the opponents, but strengthening the Johannine group. The focus in all these remarks about the opponents falls on one central theme, namely Christology (Menken, 2012:8).

7.3. Johannine distinctiveness and intergroup comparison

John Davis (Davis, 1977:239), would highlight the shortcomings of a purely synchronic perspective and would stress the importance of a diachronic analysis, thus on the significance of history to explain the ancient biblical present of Mediterranean societies. The past had to be considered to explain the circumstances of the group. The focus of the Johannine author is not only to determine objective events, but mainly to observe how they are perceived by those who are touched by these events. When Paul Ricoeur talks about the efficiency of history, he is referring specifically to that close connection between the *interpreting present* and the *interpreted past* (Ricoeur, 1985:320). To move beyond a too positivistic notion of history, we must be prepared to examine the spaces of experience as well as the horizons of expectation of a given society as they are constructed and perceived by its members. Therefore, as Jean Pouillon (1975) upholds, history is composed of all the versions that the members of a group³²⁶ collectively regard as truth. Instead of taking the antithetical language in the letter as a reflection of reality, we should first and foremost take this language as part of the author’s claim to a clear identity. The Johannine letter can be taken as attempts to build a secure identity by creating imaginary symbolic worlds where those who share the author’s beliefs are set much more clearly apart from the rest of the

³²⁶ A set of persons who all shares a sense of “us”. This sense of us refers to the psychological processes that are at work within individuals as they join the group or understand their place in the group. The self, inside the group is not understood as distinct, but interdependent and integrated with others. Therefore, who I am, what I feel, think and do is according to my social identity and role in the group. We cannot escape the impression that Jewish people had a sense of belonging and often also collective responsibility.

world than they ever may have been in real life. Since the author has already recognized clear categorical boundaries for the Johannine group, the need for optimal distinctiveness must now be met. Tapping into the in-group's social memory, the author emphasizes this out-group "ἐξ ἡμῶν ἐξῆλθαν" (2:19), thereby representing a sort of out-group origin story. Along with this, the author outlines the antichrist's narrative conclusion, specifically that they are bringing about the eschatological last hour (1 Jn 2:18). These elements of origin and conclusion serve as narrative elements that guide the Johannine group to begin the process of creating distinctiveness from an out-group or visible threat.

Along with the out-group narrative-identity, the doctrinal identity of the out-group is described as antithetical to the doctrinal statements of the in-group. As described earlier, in-group knowledge is formed based on *χρῖσμα*, thereby presenting doctrinal differences as products of the larger social category and affecting intergroup comparison. First, the out-group is described as those who say that *Ἰησοῦς οὐκ ἔστιν ὁ χριστός* (1 Jn 2:22), whereas the in-group has the knowledge that *Ἰησοῦς ἔστιν ὁ χριστός* (1 Jn 5:1). Second, those who deny the Father and Son (1 Jn 2:22) are described as separate from the in-group who affirm the reality and relationship of the Father and Son (1 Jn 1:3, 4:14). Finally, the out-group is described as those who do not confess Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh (2 Jn 7), which certainly stands against the in-group's claim that they have touched the word with their hands (1 Jn 1:1). By highlighting how the in-group's beliefs differ from the out-group because of the *χρῖσμα* and *kerygma*, the author achieves intergroup distinctiveness while maintaining intragroup assimilation.

7.4. Dualism to better understand contrasting patterns in groups

Typical of the Johannine structure and theology is the use of contrasting, dualistic thought patterns.³²⁷ Lieu (1991:80) calls it a dualist pattern. Accordingly, the author divides reality into two parts without a middle ground. A person either lives or is dead, is considering darkness, has the truth or not. The effect is of course the lack of nuance that often allows

³²⁷ There are different types of dualism in the Johannine though, for instance, transcendental dualism (God vs devil); cosmic dualism (above and below, heaven and earth; perhaps also light vs darkness; life vs death), qualitative dualism (holy vs unholy; glory vs no glory); ethical dualism (good vs bad); chronological dualism (present vs future eras); (Cf. also Lieu 1991:80 with similar descriptions).

for grey areas or for different positions between the two extreme poles. For the author, the extreme poles are the focus.

The reason for this dualist pattern may be the constant conflict, first against the Jewish opponents and then against the secessionists, which requires clear identity and border lines, working with concepts like us and them. It may also have been inspired by sectarian attitudes, of which we have examples in Qumran, although this link is often questioned. It might even go back to Greek ideas about the “spiritual and non-physical” (Lieu, 1991:80). The reasons will remain just possibilities.

The broad religious-cosmological framework within which the author chooses to present his message during this conflict, places him in a position of power. As in the Gospel of John, the author of 1 John works with a dualistic structure in which there are no grey areas, only light or dark, truth or lies, life and death, as stated above (Lincoln, 2000:20). This is discussed in detail in Chapter 6 in 6.8. Motyer (1997:186-190) showed that dualistic structures, especially ethical structures, were well known in Second Temple Judaism (e.g., in Kumran literature [1QS 3:19-21, 4:15-16; 4QFlor 1:8], The Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs [T. Dog 2:1; 3:2; 4:7; Leviticus 3:3; T. Zeb 9:8; T. Ash. 1:8 f.; 3:2; 6:5; Jud. 19:4; T. Dan 1:7 f. 5:1] and in the Palestinian Targums on Genesis 3 [Tg. Ps.-J. on Gen 3:6]). This makes classification significantly easier, since the distinction between those who are in the light and who are in the dark, can be made in more absolute language with more specific emphasis. Examples of this on the level of ethics are for instance the example of God as light; someone who says he is in a relationship with God and does what can be associated with the darkness of sin is categorically not of God. Such a person is not in relationship with God. The reverse is equally true (1 Jn 1:6-8). Or, the person or persons who harm the group, like Cain who killed his family, cannot say that they are part of the family, on the contrary, they are murderers (1 Jn 3:11-18). There is no middle way, in other words, the person is either on the side of the author, and therefore on the side of God, or he or she is in the dark and is a child of the devil.

One of the basic observations of the social identity approach is that human social behaviour varies along the “interpersonal and intergroup continuum” (Tajfel, 1981:228–253). At the interpersonal extreme, social encounters are determined by personal relationships between human beings, while at the intergroup extreme, membership in different social groups determines human behaviour. This continuum explains how, under certain conditions, social

identity may become more salient than personal identity for the behaviour of individuals. In Mediterranean antiquity, people were commonly seen as deeply embedded in different groups that were essential for their sense of who they are (Esler, 1994).

I think the extreme dualistic worldview evident in both the Gospel of John and the Johannine letters is a case in point of how social categorization often results in exaggerated and polarized beliefs concerning the relationship of the in-group to the relevant out-groups. An important remark for this group study.

From a social identity perspective, the unifying tendency described above can be seen as an example of how members of an in-group tend to “treat members of the out-group as undifferentiated items in a unified category, independently of the individual differences between them.” Furthermore, in-group members attribute to out-group members “traits assumed to be common to the groups as a whole” (Tajfel, 1981:243). This phenomenon has been called the out-group homogeneity effect, which refers to the inclination of in-groups to regard out-groups as homogenous. It has been emphasized that the out-group homogeneity effect is not a universal principle, and scholars have proposed that such variables as group size, group status, in-group identification and the context of intergroup relations quite often moderate this effect (Haslam *et al.* 2001; Rubin & Badea 2007). Using dualistic images and themes that were prominent in many Second Temple Jewish sources, not only in the Qumran scrolls, but for Johannine writers, also create imaginary symbolic worlds where Jesus’s true followers are visibly distinct and separated from those described as murderers, liars, and the children of the devil (Jn 8:44; 1 Jn 3:18–22). Lieu (1991:36-37) refers to the static quality of the identity of the believer, who “is”, to underline the significance of the dualistic setting of the theology of John. It suggests “two divinely intended groups fixed in an unchanging opposition which has been mysteriously generated by the polarity in the divine world between God and the devil”. She argues that the nature of the sharp conflict in the group necessitated the dualistic formulation of the message. If this is the case, it seems excessive to typify the whole cosmos as being on the side of evil. In answer to this problem, Lieu (1991:40) thinks that the letter was written to a beleaguered minority needing affirmation, “hence the negative side of the dualism is less developed than the positive and there is limited interest in the supra-natural dimension”. The use of strong dualistic images by the author can be seen as an attempt to present the boundaries between close social groups as fixed and naturalized, even though these borders remained open and fluid.

One can now ask how this group dissociated themselves from other groups to form distinct separate groups?

7.5. *Koinonia* – what is shared, to better understand the group

Life in the family is a matter of having *koinonia* (fellowship). Mutual fellowship among one another and fellowship with God the father. 1 John 1:3-4 describes how a person is invited into *koinonia* with other members of the family. The noun *koinonia* is a significant theological term in 1 John. It occurs twice in the prologue (1 Jn 1:3) and two more times in the rest of chapter one (1 Jn 1:6, 7) to create a rhetorical chiasmic pattern. The function of the chiasmic structure is to emphasize the interrelatedness and interdependency of the mutual fellowship among believers and their fellowship with God. The one kind of fellowship demands and constitutes the other. The semantic meaning, according to Louw and Nida (1988:446), is “an association involving close mutual relations and involvement – close fellowship.” The noun denotes the active participation or sharing in what one has in common with others. The nature of what is mutually shared moulds the character of the group. In this context, it means the “new life” (1 Jn 1:1; 2:25; 5:11-13) that the believers share with Christ and with one another. This horizontal fellowship is essential for true vertical fellowship. The author makes the reference 1 John 1:7, and this opens up *koinonia* with the Father and the Son. 1 John 2:29 describes a close and intimate relationship. That relates to 1 John 1:17 “we walk in the Light”. Used metaphorically, the verb “*gennaw*” serves to indicate the beginning of a relationship, in other words that between a parent and his/her child. Through their rebirth, God's children enter a new relationship, they become His children (1 Jn 3:1, 2; 5:2). For the author the highest claim these believers could make for their lives is to claim fellowship with God. Fellowship (κοινωνία) between God and believer is a framework within which the dynamics of the relation is explained and motivated. The concept of κοινωνία expresses an intimate relationship, emphasizing ideas of sharing, having in common, in other words a dynamic interrelatedness with porous boundaries. The idea of unity is also expressed in familial language and by way of *Immanenzformeln*. The familial language idea is discussed in more detail in 7.6 when the focus falls on the addressees of the letter.

7.6. Understanding loyalty and association with the function of addressees

The letter is in its core an effort to prevent the “you” from moving closer to the “they” and to prevent further loss by the orthodox group, as Kysar (1992:906; cf. also, Klauck, 1991:33)

states:

“The general purpose of 1 John, then, was to preserve a Johannine group from dissolution and to protect the identity and composition of that group. It sought to assure the remaining group that they stood in the fold of the truth and faith and to reinforce their position to prevent further disintegration”.

As is well known, the word “we” is either exclusive (I and they, but not you) or inclusive (I, they, and you). “They” can refer to non-Israelites and Israelite non-Jesus group members. The word “all” seldom, if ever, refers to some universal everyone, everything or everyplace (e.g., Rm 1:5 “all nations”; Rm 1:8 “all the world”). It usually marks some discrete entity known from the social or textual context: all the out-group, all the in-group, all in Israel, with the qualifying group specified at times, but usually unspecified. Similarly, the word “God” invariably refers to “the God of Israel,” since Gentiles have “many gods and many lords” (1 Cor 8:). “Christ,” of course, means “Israel’s Christ”.

Part of the background to the conflict in which the schism between the “us” and the “they” already took place, is the ongoing struggle for the loyalty and association of the “you”. The open question is which group the “you”, or at least members of the “you” are going to join? The warning in 1 John 3:13, addressed to the “you”, namely that they should not be astonished if the world hates them, underlines the rhetorical approach of the letter to adjust the “you” with the “us”. In this way he rhetorically tries to emphasize that the “you” are closer to the “us” than to these antichrists.³²⁸ The “they” are evidently compared with Cain, while the “us” and “you” are compared to Abel. This again confirms the view that the author aims at trying to draw the “you” group out of the sphere of influence of the “they” group, trying to prevent them from aligning with the opponents (Painter, 2002:84). Contact between the “them” and the “us” is not mentioned in the letter, except if the “us” and the “you” are regarded as one group, which would then imply that the “them” still had some influence among the us.

Lieu (2008a:814) clearly saw the dynamics in the letter between the “us” and the “you”. Within the dualistic framework of the letter the presence of the “they” confronts the “we” and

³²⁸ The strong language like antichrists, murder of family members, as well as the negative use of the First Testament character of Cain, results in a rhetorical dramatic negative emotional image of the opponents.

“you” with and “alternative oppositional possibility”. This means that “we” and “you,” when confronted only with each other, might be in opposition, but once placed in the presence of “them” are bound to make common cause. What becomes apparent is that in some way, the two groups should be distinguished, and, in some way, they represent the same group and share identity.

The various relative clauses that follow in 1 John 1:1—that which we have heard that which we have beheld with our eyes, that which we have seen and touched with our hands—share two qualities in common. They all refer to sensory perception (hear, see, touch), and they all have first-person plural (“we”) verbs. The “we” subject of the verbs continues in 1 John 1:2–4 and is so common in 1 John that Raymond Brown refers to “the striking “we” motif” of this letter (Brown, 1982:158). In these opening lines, there is a strong separation between “we” who send the letter and “you” who receive it. The separation between the two groups will soften as the letter proceeds, since the “you” who are addressed also seem to have access to the knowledge of what was given in the beginning (1 Jn 2:7). Likewise, the author later refers to himself as “I” when he describes the task of writing (1 Jn 2:1, 7, 8, 12–14, 21, 26; 5:13, 16). In these early lines, though, there is an important rhetorical reason for referring to the author as “we” and the recipients as “you.”

Among Greek and Roman authors, the careful use of such personal pronouns helped to reinforce group boundaries (Parsenios, 2010). The Roman historian Tacitus often separates Romans from non-Romans in his writing by referring to the Romans as “us.” By referring to “we” in this way, Tacitus “clearly and unmistakably co-opts his reader into an ‘us-against-them’ relationship based on Roman partisanship and solidarity” (Sinclair, 1995:19). Tacitus regularly draws the reader into his view of reality with the careful and selective use of first-person plural verbs and pronouns. This use of *nos* and *noster* in Tacitus should be understood not as something akin to the so-called royal we, but as the *pluralis sociativus*, the “associative plural” that establishes a bond with the reader (Sinclair 1995:19). The author of 1 John author uses the same device in the same way.

Three groups have for a long time been perceived in 1 John, and the use of pronouns is related to these groups. Jesus refers to himself and those who believe in him as “we.” Other people are not in this group and reject Jesus. But there is a third group, a middle group standing between the “we,” who stand around Jesus and “those” who oppose Jesus. The point of separating people into groups is not to suggest that they are locked into

predetermined states they cannot escape, but precisely the opposite. As Leander Keck (1996:277) so rightly argues, the author does not emphasize the distinction between people of the Spirit and people of the flesh to define two polar realities to which people are irrevocably bound. Rather, he emphasizes the difference between the two to underscore the immediate necessity for people to cross from one pole to the other, from flesh to Spirit.

The following structure shows all the different groups visible in 1 John:

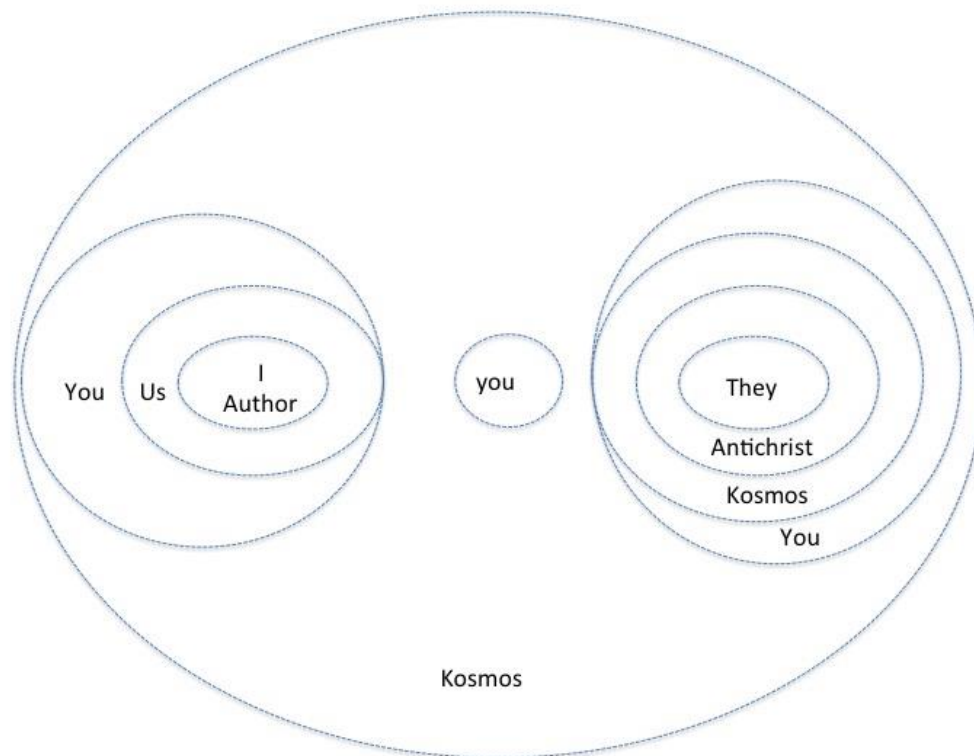


Diagram 7.1 Loyalty and association through addressees in the groups in 1 John

7.6.1. The “us” group (author)

1 John 1:1-4 starts with several references to “us”³²⁹ who heard, have seen and touched Jesus. Three important action lines can be identified.

³²⁹Brown (1986:94-97) for a discussion on who the “we” could have been. He argues that they were not a group of established church leaders or authoritarian teachers, but rather the carriers and authentic interpreters of the tradition that goes back to the Beloved Disciple. Their authority does not lie with themselves but is granted by the guidance of the Spirit.

- Observing Jesus, the Life and Son, as ear and eyewitnesses is determinative for the identity of the “us”. They are the representatives of the Jesus tradition. It is noteworthy that the author does not identify himself in person, but hides and thus defines his identity through the Jesus tradition that was revealed. The message is important, and not the messenger.
- A second action line focuses on the strong relation between God, Jesus and believers as is expressed through the term *koinōnia* (1 Jn 1:3) as discussed in 7.4. This relationship transcends the separation between the earthly and transcendental realities, since people can have fellowship with God and Jesus. Through this relationship the transcendental reality of God and the earthly, material reality are interrelated. The use here of the word life suggests the same.
- Proclamation to “you” (1 Jn 1:3) counts for the third action line. This happens *inter alia* through the letter.

These initial action lines are determinative for what follows in the letter. It identifies the “us” (of the author) as the true witnesses and proclaimers of the Jesus tradition. They indeed stand in a close relationship and cooperation *koinōnia* with God and Jesus. This gives them the moral high ground as true representatives of God in this letter. For our purposes, it is important to note that a relational gap due to the lack of relation and cooperation (*koinōnia*) is suggested between the “us” and “you”. The aim of the letter is to mend this gap and encourage cooperation. This implies that these two groups should be distinguished. To what extent is a new question to ask?

7.6.2. What is true of “us” must be true of “you” also (1 Jn 1:5–10)

The above line of argumentation leads to 1 John 1:5-10, where it is stated: “And this is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you”, emphasizing the continued relationship between the message that was heard and that is now further proclaimed. Tradition is continued through proclamation of the truth that was heard and seen to the “us”. What this proclamation involves is further explained in the rest of the letter, starting in 1 John 1:5-10. Here the author consistently uses the first person (“us”) in giving his explanation. This is significant, as will be seen later. Here is no reference to opponents or secessionists – only to the “us” and the “you”. The “us” proclaims to “you”. The aim is that “you” should have fellowship with “us”.

7.6.3. The “you” as group in between

Who is the “you” in this text? They are presented as a group in between the “us” and the opponents (schismatics = “them”) who separated from the “us”. But what was their relationship to the “us” and “them”? It was seen that in 1 John 1:1-10, the “us” and the “you” are distinguished and the “you” are invited to *koinōnia* with the “us”. Does this mean that the “us” and “you” should be sharply distinguished? To the contrary, in the letter they are in many respects identified with one another. From the rest of the letter, it becomes evident that the author (“us”/“I”) allows for a fluidity of group borders. In some cases, the “us” and “you” are clearly distinguished, like in 1 John 1:1-10, but in other cases these two groups are closer identified. There is a distinction between the two groups, but also a clear overlap, as Painter also argued.³³⁰ As point of departure the author assumes that the “us” and the “you” heard the same message and thus share in the same tradition.

- In the argument in 1 John 2:7-8 about the old and new commandment, the author seems to identify his message with that of the “you”. He does not bring a new message, but the old message that the “you” had heard from the beginning.
- The second example comes from 1 John 2:24-25: “Let what you heard from the beginning abide in you. If what you heard from the beginning abides in you, then you too will abide in the Son and in the Father. And this is the promise that he made to us—eternal life”. What they heard from the beginning is the message the author wants to communicate according to 1 John 1:1-4 and 1 John 5:9-13, 19-20. The message of life comes from God, are proclaimed by the “us” and should abide in “you”.
- In 1 John 3:11, references to “you” and “us” overlap. The message “you” heard from the beginning is that we (“us”) – which includes both the author and addressees – should love one another. In 1 John 5:11 and 1 John 5:13, it is said that both the “us” and the “you” have eternal life. They clearly share in the same reality.
- In 1 John 2:12, 13, 14, and 15, words that are used for the “us” are also used for the “you”. They know forgiveness of sin (1 Jn 2:12 with 1 Jn 1:8-10), know God (1 Jn 2:13,

³³⁰ Painter (2002:82) also points out that in some cases the “us” are separated from the “you” (3:14-16; 4:4-6), but in other cases they are presented as inclusive (2:18-21,24,25; 3:19-24).

14 with 1 Jn 3:3) and the word of God abides in “you” (1 Jn 2:15 with 1 Jn 1:10 [implicit]). This also points to common identity.

In some cases, no distinction is made between the “us” and the “you” or the references are used alternately, that points to them sharing identity.

- The subjects in the same sentence are used interchangeably. In 1 John 2:28, there is reference to the “you” that must abide in Him so that “us” (that includes the “us” and “you”) may have confidence when He returns: “And now, little children, abide in him, so that when he appears we may have confidence”. In 1 John 2:1 and 1 John 3:13-14, similar changes in subject occur, which implies that what is true of the one is true of the other also.
- In 1 John 3:2 the “you” is addressed as “beloved” and then it is said that we (“us”) are children of God. It may be argued that the author only refers to the “us” here, but the context shows that the beloved (“you”) is part of us.

In 1 John, a group designated as “we” is writing to a group designated as “you.” But there is a third group—the opponents of the author and his allies. We hear of them when we read, “They went out from us, but they were never of us; for if they had been of us, they would have remained with us” (1 Jn 2:19). The addressees, designated as “you” and lying somewhere between “we” and “they,” seem to be in danger of falling away just as “they” did. The recipients of the letter are still in the fold, but they are in danger of leaving it. In this sense, the use of plural pronouns to describe separate groups is of a piece with the regular use of rhetorical sententiae (maxims, or aphorisms), which is common in the Johannine literature (see also my work on Sententiae). A long tradition of interpretation has attempted to sort out more precisely the identities of these various groups in 1 John. The opponents of the author are often understood to represent some form of Docetism or Gnosticism because they seem to accept that the human Jesus was truly God, but not truly human. In this way of thinking, his divinity is certain but not his humanity. He entered the world in a way that seemed human but was not actually and fully human. At least some of the opponents seem to ascribe to such a belief. The use of these two words in 1 John is to shape the audience. The careful interplay between “we” and “you” reaches a crisis in 1 John 4:4-6.

The big question to ask is: Was the audience positioned as the “us” or distanced from the “they”?

In verses 4 and 5, an emphatic “you” is set in uncompromising opposition to an equally anonymous “them”. Verse 6 then introduces the first-person plural “we”. Previously in the letter, “we” fluctuated between the authoritative “we” and “we” that is inclusive, with which the audience can identify themselves (1 Jn 1:7-9; 2:2). In verse 6 the audience is interpolated as “us,” and in this, the rhetorical strategy to create *koinonia* is also achieved. Here in 1 John 4, the idea of a “group” has become central to the letter. From this understanding of group emerges a cohesive, undifferentiated body, which possesses no characteristics of status, ethnicity, or religious background. This is remarkable especially when compared with other early Christian letters, which regularly address issues surrounding status and ethnicity. These identity markers show that the group does not have a “sectarian” characteristic (Culpepper & Anderson, 2014:140). According to Gilroy (1997:301-302), identity is always as much about differences as about shared belonging. Gilroy’s remark is very important for this study on social identity in 1 John, because the in-group has internal differences³³¹ against which the author warns, but they also have similarities, first and foremost being part of the in-group. Gilroy also states that the formation of every “we” must leave out or exclude a “they”. So, identities depend on the marking of differences.

The use of “you” and “we” in 1 John 4:4-6:

4 Ὑμεῖς ἐκ τοῦ Θεοῦ ἐστε, τέκνία, καὶ νενικήκατε αὐτούς, ὅτι μείζων ἐστὶν ὁ ἐν ὑμῖν ἢ ὁ ἐν τῷ κόσμῳ. 5 αὐτοὶ ἐκ τοῦ κόσμου εἰσὶν· διὰ τοῦτο ἐκ τοῦ κόσμου λαλοῦσιν καὶ ὁ κόσμος αὐτῶν ἀκούει. 6 ἡμεῖς ἐκ τοῦ Θεοῦ ἐσμεν· ὁ γινώσκων τὸν Θεὸν ἀκούει ἡμῶν, ὃς οὐκ ἔστιν ἐκ τοῦ Θεοῦ οὐκ ἀκούει ἡμῶν. ἐκ τούτου γινώσκομεν τὸ πνεῦμα τῆς ἀληθείας καὶ τὸ πνεῦμα τῆς πλάνης.

331 False teachers were originally members of the Christian community to which the author is writing. They appear to have “gone out” from among this community “into the world” (4:1). Thus, the author is addressing a community, which has undergone a schism or split in which a substantial part of the community – maybe even a numerical majority – has withdrawn from fellowship. This is a key point, which affects the interpretation of almost every part of 1, 2, and 3 John. This group (which has split off and withdrawn from fellowship with the community to which the author writes) is continuing to propagate its own beliefs. The secessionists are seeking to win converts for their own views, even from among the community to which they formerly belonged. Considering this threat, the author of 1 John is writing both to reassure and strengthen the faithful members of that community, and to warn them to continue to resist the efforts of the false teachers who have gone out from among them.

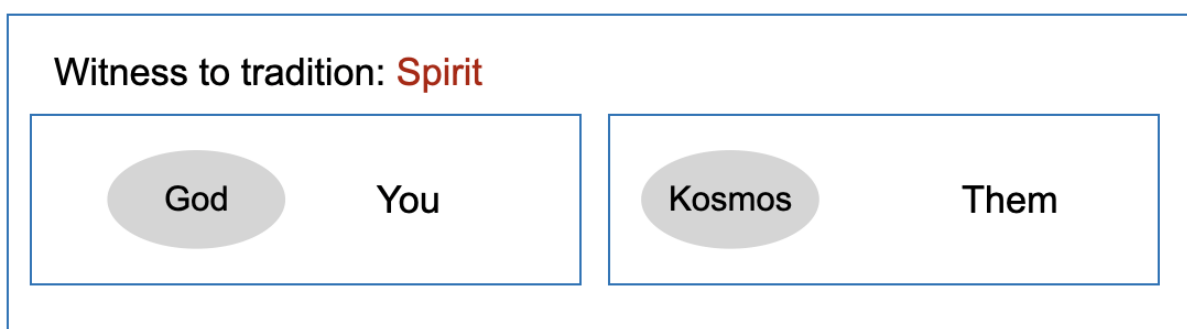


Diagram 7.2 The importance of Spirit in the Johannine group

Although there is a “we” in the letter, which is distinguished from “you”, it is nevertheless true that the basic role of both groups in the Johannine tradition was that of a *witness* to a tradition. This shows the important role of the Spirit in the Johannine group. When the author thus speaks of the Spirit in 1 John, he must be careful, for he is not simply speaking of a group that does not have the Spirit (as is the case in the Gospel context) versus those who do have the Spirit (the Christians); it is rather two groups who proclaim the possession of the Spirit. This understanding is also what makes it so difficult to distinguish between “we” and “you” and “them” in 1 John.

The above argumentation shows that the relationship between the “us” and the “you” is indeed ambiguous. The author regards them as one group, sharing tradition, expectations, and spiritual reality. But, on the other hand these two groups are not sharing *koinōnia*, suggesting separation between them. This argument shows that the “us” and “you” indeed stood in a relationship where they shared tradition, realities and expectations, in other words, both the “us” and “you” belonged to the Johannine group. It is stated that the “you” are distinguished from the “us,” but that they also share parts of the same identity.

7.7. Familial images in 1 John and their influence on group understanding

When reading 1 John, the reader becomes aware of the author's frequent use of kinship language and household relations. Some New Testament authors use the metaphor of the family to reflect on the relationship between God and the early Christians. Kinship, especially spiritual kinship, is perceived as representation and reflection of identity and pragmatic values. In this study I try to reveal how the author succeeds in using the most basic characteristics of family life to reflect on the relationship between God and the 1 John group.

It is also pointed out how the author used the family concept metaphorically and rhetorically in 1 John to guide his adherents in their understanding of their identity.

According to Rosenblatt (1994:1), a metaphor is a figure of speech that uses words that literally denote one kind of object or idea in place of another, suggesting a resemblance or analogy. Metaphorical language forms an important part of any culture. Much of the human world is constructed by metaphors. It is a way of taking what we know and applying it to an area that is less understood. It enables us to understand human behaviour and to explain feelings. In theological writings, these two functions of metaphor frequently converge. On the one hand a metaphor is used to describe that which is unknowable, the divine. On the other hand, it describes how members associated with one another, and must behave towards one another.

In 1 John, the author uses a coherent network of metaphors (Johnson, 1993) . By using the family metaphor, he not only makes it possible to talk about this God, but he also explains to the reader the character of the relationship between God and his children. He succeeds in drawing the reader into the text to experience life in the household of God via the group members and events described in the text. He incorporates conventions from the everyday family life of the first-century Mediterranean environment that used to be widely accepted in his description of the household of God. He then applies these conventions to the actions and events in the Johannine group. In so doing, the author attempts to initiate and establish images of the social interrelatedness between a father and his children in the minds of the readers (cf. Van der Merwe, 2010:209; Van der Watt, 1992:272–279).

This reminds of Malina's (1996:64) words, that these people were strongly group-embedded, collectivistic persons. Malina (1982, 1986, 1993), Esler (2000:147), and Harland (2003) pointed out that these people were socially minded, and attuned to the values, attitudes, and beliefs of their in-group. Individual behaviour was constituted and regulated by the group to which such a person belonged. For societies that are group-orientated, the major group or dominant institution tends to be the family (Esler, 2000:151). Although many other kinds of groups existed, the basic social distinction in society was the one between kin and non-kin. Among a person's kin (insiders) there were strong bonds of affection. There was an attitude of suspicion and competition towards non-kin (outsiders).

Thus, the teaching of 1 John is a group teaching. This is in line with the Mediterranean worldview. The group is of utmost importance. Individual behaviour is constituted and regulated by the group to which such a person belongs. Neither the individual nor any outsider determines the behaviour in the group. What matters to the author is the in-group of the Johannine group and how the common life is lived in this group, and this is the focus of his doctrine to shape identity and ethos (Botha, 2005:395).

By using familial terms, the author applies personal cognitive and emotional attachments that exist in early life in the extended family to the koinonia of believers. Relational images have a "bonding power" that differs from other references of categorization³³². For example, the category "brothers and sisters" is a much more powerful reference for unification than "people" (Adams, 1983:56). When it is applied in a specific situation to a certain group of people, it unites these people into a coherent group.

Du Randt's article, *1 John: 'Effects' in biblical texts that constitute 'lived experiences' in the contemplative reading of those texts*, formed my thoughts on family images in 1 John and the role they play in distinguishing groups. When biblical texts are read, the readers' imagination composes images of what the text presents to them. The reader subjectively and selectively composes "... the images out of the multifarious aspects of the text³³³ as well as the metaphors embedded in the text" (cf. Isler, 1978:150; Van der Merwe, 2015:5). The physical images, material objects, attitudes or events described in the text are imaginatively experienced. The reading process then facilitates the passive fusion between the meaning of a text and the experience of the text in the mind of the readers. This entails a connection between the text and the readers: The readers themselves, "... in constituting the meaning³³⁴, is also constituted" (Isler, 1978:150).

332 Sandnes (1997:156) points out that "in the family terms of the New Testament" old and new structures come together. There is a convergence of household and brotherhood structures. The New Testament bears evidence of the process by which new structures emerged from within the household structures.

333 Texts are linguistically polysemous: A text is, by virtue of its linguisticity, polysemous (see Ricoeur, 1973:97–111). A text cannot be reduced to a single, univocal, literal meaning. The polyvalence of words and the semantic richness of larger linguistic units generate various valid interpretations in different readers - The tradition that is operative in the contemporary interpreter helps him or her to draw from the text richer meanings than were available to the original readers (see Gadamer, 1975:300–307; Ricoeur, 1976:43–44; Schneiders, 2003:185).

334 Total reader involvement: Schneiders (1982:59) indicates that the embodiment of a text finds its meaning (and gestalt) in some literary genre that operates in such a way as to engage the reader, cognitively and affectively. For her then, the literary genre is not so much a tool for classifying different texts but rather a strategy for total reader involvement with the subject matter of the text (Schneiders, 1982:60). Even Bultmann (1984:145–153) argued over three decades ago that exegesis without presuppositions is not possible.

At this point, various perspectives on parts of the text move into focus in relation to and in comparison, with preceding parts. In this reading process, readers constitute a sequence of these images in their minds. The successive images again progressively constitute a certain configuration to generate both a field of meaning and experience (Isler, 1978:108–118). Such a configuration is then understood, interpreted, and applied in the lives of the readers.

When the author tries to get his readers imaginatively bonded to and involved in this kind of family life, he discloses a collective orientation as stated above. Such an orientation is imperative because one of the paradigms designed in 1 John was to bind people together for collective action and to distinguish them from other groups (Van der Merwe, 2010:207–226). The author had at his disposal a range of familiar familial images to which he could refer to create such a collective experience and bond. The family relationship among believers constitutes and strengthens a unity spelled out by means of cultural or religious norms. In this sense, relational images have a bonding power that distinguishes them from other references of categorization. The taxonomy of “brothers and sisters” (1 Jn 3:10) is a more powerful reference for unification and affection than people, because people lack the familial connotation and force (cf. Adams, 1983:56f.).

In contrast with the *Familia Dei* [household of God], the author displays the *Familia diabolus* [household of the devil] in the paragraph (1 Jn 3:4–10) he uses household terminology. He namely refers to those in opposition to the “children of God” as “children of the devil” (1 Jn 3:8, 10) (Van der Merwe, 2015:5). This is the dominant structural family marker of this paragraph (1 Jn 3:4–10); (Du Rand, 1979:13).

The above account underscores the strong rhetorical dynamic and imaging of the family metaphor. When the family metaphor is applied to a particular group of people in a specific situation, bonding power, images and lived experiences are created, and the reader is drawn imaginatively into the sphere of the household of God where the children of God are united into a coherent group. It reminds the Johannine group of their fictive kinship and of their

Thompson (2001:204) refers to Iser (1978:275), who declares that the meaning of a written text occurs not in the text itself but in the connection between the text and the reader. It “brings the literary work into existence” Thompson (2000:204). Meaning, then, is found only when “... the imaginative activity of the reader seeks to create coherence while reading progressively through the imaginatively composed biblical text” (Thompson, 2000:204).

common identity and values. This sets them apart from other groups (the Kosmos) in their society. With this the author entrenches their identity as a group and serves to regulate social behaviour in this group. This injunction together with Paraenesis serves to strengthen their identity and unity in a world, which seems somewhat hostile towards the Johannine in-group.

Familial imagery also plays an important heuristic role. The motivation is based on ancient family conventions, as was discussed earlier. Because the believer is part of the family, he or she should behave according to the requirements of the family³³⁵. Since God is righteous, behaving according to his will is also righteous. This is social convention in ancient times. No further motivation is needed. By using this imagery, the self-evaluation of the believers is determined at a socio-cultural level. This has a positive effect on the self-definition of the group members and consequently on the way in which they think of their ethical responsibilities. Since they are members of a particular group, they are polarized from the other group.

In sum, it can be said that in using the family metaphor, the author tried to strengthen "familial associations" to express and bring out "familial responsibilities and conduct" that formed the group identity. The author uses a network of metaphors to describe the character of this family life. These metaphors were familiar to the people of the first-century Mediterranean world. They were used in the Epistle in conjunction with various rhetorical devices to convince the group of their identity as part of the group and in belonging to God. It also influenced their conduct in this world. The most amazing thing about these rhetorical devices is that they are not used alongside one another but are closely interwoven and some are even embedded in each other³³⁶. The author masters this skilfully. This also shapes the spiral reading of the Johannine letter, as is discussed in more detail below.

335 Esler (2000:148) points out that neither in Greek nor in Latin was there even a word that corresponded to our word "family"; although *oiko* - in Greek and *domus* in Latin refer to the house and the household. This concept also occurs in Galatians and in 1 Thessalonians in the New Testament (Esler, 1997: 121ff; 2000: 145ff).

336 Metaphorical language forms an important part of any culture (Lassen, 1997: 103). Its main function is to "provide a partial understanding of one kind of experience in terms of another kind of experience." (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980: 154).

7.7.1. Patriarchal Father figure

The position and image of the Father is patriarchal and prescriptive. He is the head of the family. He prescribes the way of living in the family. Because he has been depicted as "light", "righteous" and "love," his "children" are expected to live according to his character³³⁷. The Father's character determines the identity and conduct of the family members.

7.7.2. Familial associations

The author repeatedly refers to his adherents as "children of God". The use of relational images entangles the author and his adherents in relationships that have a priori behavioural expectations built into them. There is emphasis on how a person can become part of this family. A new member has the obligation to take on the conduct of this group to show the renewal they have undergone.

7.7.3. Archetypal force

The family is a relational image that gathers its force from the time and traditions surrounding the cultural construct "family". The family is one of the oldest and most primary units of social cohesion. The network of metaphors creates associations of expectations, attitudes, emotions, and actions in this family structure. Other devices are embedded in this rhetorical device to complement and to strengthen the author's arguments on relationships.

7.7.4. Tightening of group adherence

By referring to the group as "children of God," the group becomes an imaginatively bonded-in-family, it exhibits a collective orientation. Relational imagery is conjured by the author to form group unity and fellowship.

7.7.5. Son of God imitation – deliberative rhetoric

The author, knowing which ethical conduct is recognized as superior to others, tries to persuade his adherents to follow a particular course of action. The call for the imitation of the Father is strengthened by the imperative to imitate Jesus. This is complemented by

337 According to Culpepper (1995: 142) a believers "fellowship with God" is constituted in the light, in truth, in righteousness and in love - which he calls metaphors for God's nature.

rhetorical formulas of immanence, which the author uses to command the children of God to perform.

7.7.6. Antithetical parallelisms

Family life is described in terms of antithetical parallelisms: love as opposed to hate; light as opposed to darkness; abide in as opposed to not abiding in; to confess that Jesus is the Christ as opposed to not confessing that Jesus is the Christ. The first “children” may refer to the whole Johannine group in *koinōnia* with the author. The second and third addresses, “fathers” and “young people”, may refer to distinct subdivisions of the group. So, it is first a general address to all as the author’s children, and then seniority in the subdivisions with the “fathers” addressed before the “young people”. Scholars like Brown, Braun, Bultmann, Schnackenburg and Weiss agree with these groupings. It is not unusual for the people of God to be divided into two groups based on dignity and age. It is perfectly plausible that there were two groups in the Johannine bigger group called *pater*, “fathers” and “young people”. Brown says that the author’s three forms of addressing reflect his position as a tradition bearer. After he addressed the whole body, he recognizes two existing groups. From his vantage point as someone close to the Beloved Disciple, all group members are “children”, but at the same time he tactfully recognizes that some have been Christian for long, and he counts on the support of these fathers (Brown, 1982:318). Brown also agrees that these two groups are not necessarily the only divisions. He points out that the life setting plays an important role in the choice of these two groups. Other scholars are of opinion that this group marker reminds them of the *Haustafeln* in the New Testament. An important view in dividing groups to consider for this study.

7.8. Looking closer to understand the opponents

The exact identity of the opponents denounced in the letter has been much disputed, and it is still a matter of controversy. Different suggestions have been advanced, ranging from Greek philosophy to specific names such as Judaizers to antinomians; from Christians to pagans. As noted above, one of the elements that makes the identification of the adversaries difficult is the failure to recognize which statements of the letter apply to them and which do not. Wayne Meeks said that identification with the Johannine group as a *social location* is key to the definition of Johannine “faith” (Meeks, 2002:74-79) and identity. A reading of 1 John shows that early Christianity was more diverse than the Johannine group desired, so

much so that they felt the need to urge homogeneity. They viewed their own group as holding the only truth through Jesus and the Paraclete. There is different means of differentiation between society and the strangers. It also shows the many ways in which “the other” affects the “us”. For the purpose in 1 John, we take up the most complex “other” with which Jewish thinkers of late antiquity had to contend, namely, the outsider who was not depraved, not barbarian, not pagan, not beyond the realm of the Torah – but who was also not inside. We wanted to find out in this study how the people of 1 John speak of “the outsider”. The group’s history shows that they saw the whole world as “pagan”, so the deep rhetorical structures of their language and mode of thought lay embedded in the distinction between “us” and “everybody else”. But there is something subtler, namely the difference between outsiders (who were initially part of the group) and the insiders in 1 John. The focus is on passages in which the discourse refrains from directness, but rather turns to language and images meant to say something in terms of something else.

7.8.1. Different views on the opponents

The view of 1 John the later product of a separate Johannine group, has not gone unchallenged. Bauckham (2008:120-139) makes a textual argument that the “we” of John 21:24 reveals the authorship of the apostle John, the “beloved disciple”, in that it is a “we” of authority, which stands for “I”. As part of his argument, he proposes that the “we” in 1 John 1:1-5 is traceable to its use in 3 John 9-10, 12. He argues that the “our” and “us” of 3 John 9-10 must be different from the “brothers” of v. 10, apparently travelling missionaries associated with the author, and that the “we” of v. 12 must be different from the “all” used there, referring apparently to all Christians in the author’s group. It is easiest, Bauckham (2008:373) concludes, to see the first-person plural in all three verses as a substitute for “I”. He then argues from this use in 3 John that the “we” in 1 John 1:1-5 is not associative (including John with his audience in the one group) but rather an authoritative “we” who is presenting eyewitness testimony, introduced in 1 John 1:6-10. The problem with this is that the change from an authoritative we and “our”, ἡμῶν, representing “I”, in 1 John 1:1, and in vv. 2-5, to an associative “we” in vv. 6-10 is harder to accommodate than the simpler proposition that an associative “we” is intended throughout vv. 1-10, meaning that the proclamation of what “we” must believe in vv. 6-10 comes directly from what “we” have heard from the beginning in vv. 1-5. It is only by interpreting “what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands” in v. 1 literally, as indicating eyewitness

testimony by John, the beloved disciple himself, that the “we” in vv. 1-5 becomes an authoritative “I”. However, this would greatly weaken the sense of the whole passage from vv. 1-10, the whole point of which is to tie the theology of vv. 6-10, which must be addressed to an associative “we”, including John himself, to what the same “we” have heard from the beginning in vv. 1-5. This suggests that the letter was the product of the beloved disciple and downplays to an unacceptable degree the extent to which the letter responds to the conflict the Johannine group is facing.

It is perhaps pertinent to consider at this point what the nature of the split between the author and his opponents was. What was the identity of the opponents and were they outside or in the group to whom the letter was addressed?

Westcott (1886) sees the object of 1 John as being to confront external, Cerinthean error. However, it was not long before scholars came to discern that it was written to confront Christian opponents, perhaps antinomian, or “docetic in doctrine and antinomian in practice”.

Brooke (2012) sees it as aimed at those holding a “mixture of Jewish and Gnostic ideas which must have formed the most pressing dangers to the moral and spiritual life of a Johannine group towards the end of the first century or the beginning of the second, or perhaps even later”.

Dodd (1946) views the opponents confronted in John’s first letter as “associated with that tendency in the religious life of the time which is known as ‘Hellenistic mysticism’ or ‘the higher paganism’, especially in its ‘near- Christian dress’, as ‘Gnosticism’”.

Bultmann (1973) sees 1 John as written in conflict with Gnostic opponents, although derived in part from a Gnostic source. However, commenting on 1 John 2:25, he contrasts the Gnostic position that “life” is “an assured possession” with John’s view that for the Christian, one is “on the way” to eternal life. Bultmann’s (1973:36-40) position is nuanced, but commenting on 1 John 2:19, he claims the opponents never stemmed from John’s group, and were not truly part of it.

Schnackenburg³³⁸ postulates that a group in an “advanced stage of development” lies behind 1 John, with the author “fighting on a single front” against “antichrists” (1 Jn 2:18) or

338 Schnackenburg, Johannine Epistles.

“false prophets” who are “united in their denial of the church’s Christological confession” (1 Jn 2:22; 4:2-3). He identifies heretical opponents who present both “Christological error and a false ethic” (1 Jn 1:5-2:11; to be inferred also from 1 Jn 3:4-24, 4:20-5:3) which come from the same source and form a united un-Christian stance.

Some earlier scholars, as noted above, acknowledge that John’s opponents may have been originally from his own group, if not a genuine component of it. Brown³³⁹ undertakes a detailed reconstruction of stages in the development of the Johannine group to demonstrate how it was that John’s opponents seceded from it, and thereafter threatened to subvert its Christological beliefs and ethical practice. Brown postulates four stages in the development of the life of the Johannine group from which John’s Gospel (and indeed 1 John) sprang, based on his reading of John’s Gospel itself. First is the pre-Gospel period in which the group originated, which involves its relationship to mid-first century Judaism.

Against this background, Brown³⁴⁰ postulates that John’s adversaries in his letters were distinct from his own group, yet still constituted a threat through their propagandists, who claimed to be teachers. He thinks there was most likely one adversary group rather than many, because the text of 1 John gives the impression that the Christological and ethical errors stigmatized in it were closely related. He cites 1 John 3:23 as yoking together both species of error: “now this is God’s commandment: we are to believe the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and we are to love one another just as he gave us the command”. Brown points to the same language of lying and deceit used to condemn both Christological and moral error. He infers that John was attacking those who held too high a Christology, which stressed Jesus’s pre-existence to the point of neglecting his flesh or humanity, and who therefore had difficulty with the belief that Jesus, the earthly man, was the Christ, the Son of God. As we have seen, Brown’s view is that this Johannine group consisted originally of Jews who held to a relatively low Christology, but that it later developed a higher Christology, which brought it into direct conflict with Jews.

Painter (1984: 460-474) sees Brown’s reconstruction as “generally convincing”, although he sees the Johannine group’s “higher Christology” as not necessarily developing later, it being more likely to be a contribution of the evangelist himself in dialogue with the synagogue. He

339 Brown, Community.

340 Brown, Community, 25-51.

adds the important point that the break from the synagogue “almost certainly opened the group to Gentiles,” who understood the Johannine group’s tradition differently. This may have contributed to its later division. He traces first the development of a group among Jewish converts, which he loosely describes at the “Johannine School”, then, after a break with the synagogue, the shaping of a group of Christian Jews, gathered around the evangelist himself, into the “Johannine group”. He postulates that at the break with the synagogue, reflected in John 9:22 and 12:42 (and, one might add, in John 16:2), some in the now-separate group of Jewish Christians “were wavering, undecided which way to turn”. One can readily see in this situation of wavering Jewish Christians facing the influx of Gentile converts, the seeds of future conflict in the new Johannine group.

Since Brown wrote in 1979, there seems to be broad scholarly consensus that John’s opponents were from within his group. Smalley speaks of a situation discernible first from 1 John 2:18-19 where John’s doctrinal and ethical opponents “withdrew”; after this, in 2 John 7, “many deceivers” defecting from John’s group are portrayed. Loader (2012) speaks of John writing in the letters to “a community which has experienced schism” and addressing the needs and concerns of those who remain. Johnson (1993:5-6) too writes of schism, with a “large and influential group” leaving the original fellowship, the issues between them and John being both doctrinal and ethical.

Obviously, the author’s goal in 1 John cannot be defined without identifying the position(s) of John’s opponents. As Brown observes, the only way to ascertain their beliefs is to reconstruct them from the opinions inveighed against by John himself, a mirror-reading which has its perils in that we cannot assume that every opinion John opposes was held by the secessionists³⁴¹. Similarly, we cannot assume that a single set of opponents had a “single tightly held logical position”, or that 1 John is “intelligible entirely in the light of the threat of the opponents”. Painter (2008:91) further writes (referring to 1 Jn 2:9-11) that “the claim to be in the light is falsified by hating the brother or the sister, behaviour that exposes a person who is in the darkness”, whereas “the person loving his or her brother or sister is in the light”. This too shows the crucial connection in 1 John between theological and moral error. As Von Wahlde (1990:202) aptly writes, the symbols of light, correct belief, love, and ethics structure the letter around the two elements of the tradition attacked by the

341 See Brown, *Epistles of John*, 116-130, Painter, 1, 2 and 3 John, 84-87.

secessionists. The picture of the opponents emerging here is of a group that denies both the ethical importance of love of the brother (or sister) and the true humanity of Jesus, denials which are essentially an illegitimate extension of the high Christology of the Gospel, especially in its prologue, in the direction of devaluing the Incarnation and Jesus's ethics teaching during his earthly life.

It is evident from these scholars' voices on the opponents that firstly, the opponents claimed an intimacy with God to the point of being perfect and sinless. Secondly, the opponents do not put much emphasis on keeping commandments (1 Jn 2:3-4; 3:22,24; 5:2-3) and thirdly, the opponents are vulnerable about brotherly love.

The opponents to this truth can be identified based on three different markers.

A new theology

Brown (1979) maintains that the opponents did not deny the incarnation of Jesus as such, but only devalued his humanity as the revealer of God. In other words, the crucifixion of Jesus and his incarnation was a problem for the opponents. In their Christological thinking the opponents were possibly docetically inclined because of the Greek-Hellenistic influences on the new members who entered the Johannine group. The opponents had a sort of dualism in their Christology. That is why the author stresses so strongly that Jesus is the Christ, anyone who denies it is the antichrist. The opponents thus did not just deny the manifestation of the Son of God, but that Jesus was the Son of God who came in the flesh. Such a view had the result that they also denied sin, the necessity for forgiveness and the purification by the blood of Jesus. That is why the author gives so much attention to the ethical behaviour of the opponents, their view on sin and the commandment to love your brother. According to the opponents, emulation of Jesus only meant belonging to God and knowing him but not to "live" like him. The author and the opponents differ in that the opponents claim that they do not need Jesus to teach them, they have the Spirit. But the author constantly anchors his conception of the Spirit in the ministry of Jesus. The split in the group was the way in which both sides believed the Johannine tradition should be interpreted. That both groups were very close to one another in their understanding of Jesus is evident from the above-mentioned remarks on Christology and pneumatology. Both groups (the "we" and the "they" group) claimed to know God, to possess the Spirit, to walk

in the light, to abide in him, and to be children of God. But the two groups differed in the way in which they understood these claims to be realized.

A new morality

The author of 1 John gives much attention to the opponents' ethical behaviour. This means that they did not live what they proclaimed. According to them, emulation of Jesus only meant belonging to God and knowing him but not to "live" like him. Their relationship with God was abstract because they did not allow the redemptive significance of Jesus Christ to bear fruit in a concrete way by their deeds. Brown is thus of the opinion that they only loved their own people. 1 John indicates that members of the group "went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us; but they went out, that it might be plain that they all are not of us" (1 Jn 2: 19). Later in Chapter 4, the impression is given that they were possibly the larger group, for they are identified with the world (1 Jn 4:5). The important thing to note with this remark on the group is that the schism occurred not through outside influences. Nowhere in his criticism of them does the presbyter allude to outside pressures. Rather, the cause of the split rests in the group itself and in the way it interpreted the pre-existent Christology as it was recorded and expressed in the Gospel of John (Gilmore, 1987).

A new spirituality

As mentioned before, in 1 John there is a collectivist culture, where the self is understood not as distinct, but interdependent and integrated with others. Therefore, who I am, what I think and how I act, is a function of my salient social identity and my role in the group. The identity of the group shapes the spirituality of the group. The identity is only discoverable in its expressions in words and deeds and in formulating values or principles. Through this process the spirituality of the outsiders is identified. Therefore, what a group member thinks and how they act is a function of their salient group identity, which forms the spirituality of the group. A member from the "us" group turns deviant with theological differences in the group. From the inside he/she behaves in a way that deviates from the prototype³⁴². The description of a deviant is an indirect description of the author's vision of the identity of a

³⁴² Prototypes emerges from the need of identity. It is a representation of the ideal or typical member of the category. The prototypical in-group member is like, needs to be asked in relation to out-groups meeting the group.

group and vice versa. This is shown in the letter through all the dualism used by the author.

These statements are the central affirmations that the author upholds regarding the person of Jesus Christ, and which influence the spirituality of the group:

- Jesus is the Christ (1 Jn 5:1; 2:22).
- He came in the flesh (1 Jn 4:2).
- He is the Son (1 Jn 2:23) or the Son of God (1 Jn 5:5).
- He came by water and blood (1 Jn 5:7).

On the other hand, the author rejects those who do not uphold the above basic tenets:

- He who denies that Jesus is the Christ is a liar (1 Jn 2:22).
- He who denies the Father and the Son is the antichrist (1 Jn 2:23).
- He who does not confess that Jesus has come in the flesh is not of God (1 Jn 4:3).

Simply stated then, the adversaries denied that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of God, who came by water and blood, who came in the flesh. The difference between the author and the opponents lies not in their emphasis of the pre-existence of Jesus. This is something they both uphold forcefully. It is rather in the significance of the death of Jesus as being salvific that the difference becomes evident. This is particularly evident in 1 John 5:6 where the author finds it necessary to emphasize that Jesus came not just “in water” as the secessionists maintain, but more particularly “in water and blood”. “This is He who came by water and blood, Jesus Christ, not with the water only, but with the water and the blood” (1 Jn 5:6). It seems best to see these adversaries as having gone out from the Johannine group itself. It seems most likely that they upheld the pre-existent Christology of the Gospel of John. In fact, they are criticized because, in their support of this Christology, they emphasized the pre-existence of Jesus to such an extent that they neglected to give due emphasis to his incarnation or humanity.

This shows that the Johannine group left an indelible mark on the universal church. In its understanding and presentation of the person of Jesus Christ, it gave a direction to the universal church, which was to be supported as a focal point of unity and a distinguishing mark of the Christian church. The Christology of the Johannine group became the Christology of the universal church.

7.8.2. Brown and Lieu's understanding of the opponents

Reading and trying to understand a New Testament letter is somewhat like eavesdropping on a conversation of which we can overhear only one side. We do not know what the addressees are saying or thinking, except for what we can infer from the letter we possess. As mentioned above, an important question for our group study is to ask to whom 1 John was written or directed, since the answer to this question will determine the perspective from which the letter should be interpreted. In the secondary literature the impression is frequently created that the letter has the opponents in mind, and that the statements in 1 John should be interpreted as if they are somehow directed at the opponents. This was discussed in the previous section, but the focus now turns to two important voices in the Johannine study field. This approach means that the conditional expressions (if ... then) are addressed at them (the opponents), with the express intention of convincing them that they are wrong. According to this approach the outside group would be directly or indirectly addressed and attacked.

Lieu (2008) however, showed convincingly that the letter was not written to the outside group, but rather that it was addressed to the remaining part of the Johannine group. Of course, if this is the case, it changes the rhetorical situation significantly. What is said is not intended to address the outsiders, but rather to admonish the in-group, to strengthen and build their identity considering what has happened between them and the secessionists. The exercise of power with language and rhetoric in 1 John must thus be judged from this perspective. The primary rhetorical mode of the text is thus not attack, but encouragement and strengthening of the in-group.

However, in 1 John the inner group problems are highlighted by direct remarks about the opponents, for instance in 1 John 2:18-27; 4:1-6. What were the conflict(s) about? Two types of material in the letters relate to the description of the opponents, namely direct and indirect observations.³⁴³ According to the direct passages (1 Jn 2:18-27; 4:1-6; 2 Jn 7-9) it would seem that the opponents broke with the church because of differences about the teachings of Jesus (Christology) relating to his messiahship, his humanity (1 Jn 2:22; 4:2; 2 Jn 7), and the atonement of Jesus (1 Jn 2:2; 4:10; see Van der Watt, 2011:1-7). Expressions like, "Who

³⁴³ They are considered indirect since it is not one hundred percent clear whether the statements were specifically formulated with a view to the opponents. They could have a rhetorical purpose.

is the liar but the one who denies that Jesus is the *Christ*?" (1 Jn 2:22) or "By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus *Christ* has come in the *flesh* is from God" (1 Jn 4:2) show that the dissident group most probably denied the humanity and messiahship of Jesus.³⁴⁴ They apparently acknowledged the divinity of Christ, but not his humanity. They argued that he only had the semblance of a human being.³⁴⁵ Therefore, the opponents are viewed as antichrist and false prophets who are being misled by false spirits (1 Jn 2:18-19, 22; 4:3-6). Their influence should not be underestimated since they managed to deceive members of the Johannine group (1 Jn 2:26). There is therefore a warning: one should not believe everyone who claims to speak through the Spirit. There are many false prophets (1 Jn 4:1-2).

Indirect observations are found primarily in the hypothetical and contrasting portions of 1 John that relate to the actions of the opponent (1 Jn 1:6, 8, 10; 2:4, 6, 9; 4:20). Such indirect suggestions include the possibility that the opponents claim to have fellowship with God and walk in the light, although they live in darkness (1 Jn 1:6; 2:9; Brown, 1986). According to them, they know that God abides in them, they claim to love God, but they do not obey God's commandments and they hate their brothers (1 Jn 2:4, 6, 9; 4:20). Yet they claim that they have no sin and so prove that they are liars and make God out as a liar (1 Jn 1:6, 8, 10). They apparently also denied the atoning value of the cross (1 Jn 2:2; 4:10), probably because they considered it to be unnecessary. As such, it does not appear as if this opposing group rejected Jesus, rather, they are simply professing to have a different view of Jesus in comparison to the view of the group to whom the letter is addressed. Both groups also made prophetic claims, claiming that the Spirit had led them. The conflict was thus within the Christian faith concerning the authentic interpretation of the nature and personhood of Jesus, leading to the natural consequences that accompany such an internal conflict.

The two groups have different answers to the question of who Jesus is and acted quite differently based on their respective understandings. It seems that the schism occurred

344 What is denied with the messianic denial of Jesus? Jews deny Jesus and return to Judaism. If the denial lies within pagan contours in the sense that Jesus is not acknowledged by the pagans, then the issue is one of Greek philosophy. Frey (2013) argues that the opponents could be a fictive construct aimed at building the ID of the groups itself. The aim is then explaining the message.

345 Dodd see Gnosticism as important background for 1J. The Palestinian-Jewish background should however not be overlooked. The Testament of the twelve Patriarchs has a similar ethics (See T.Benj. 3; T. Jud. 20).

because of Christological issues resulting in a part of the congregation leaving; contact is discouraged with the opponents (2 Jn 10-11). These opponents apparently also have more success in the world than the Johannine group (1 Jn 4:5), and they even mislead the Johannine group (1 Jn 2:26). The author therefore refutes their views in the strongest possible terms by calling them *inter alia* antichrists (people who have turned against Christ) and refuse them honour by not calling them by their real name.

The opponents' limited view of Christ also influenced the way people lived. It influenced their ethics. Since the spiritual dimensions were what counted, physical things, including the body, were not important at all. It did not seem to really matter what one did with one's body. Spiritual salvation was of more importance. That is why these people could walk past a brother or sister in physical need without even thinking of helping that person. There was no need for expressing love in physical terms, since only spiritual things count (1 Jn 3:11-18). The author rejects this view as false: such people claim to have fellowship with God, who is light, but walk in darkness (1 Jn 1:5-6).

In sum of Lieu's voice, it is preferable to view John as having written this letter to counter an early form of Gnosticism that had become influential among his group of believers. False teachers propounding this philosophy had been a part of the group and had left, leaving behind a group that needed assurance from its apostolic pastor. As their leader, the author saw the importance of combating the false teaching and of drawing proverbial "lines in the sand" that determined what was in-group truth and tradition and what was not; his opposition is rooted in his pastoral leadership and oversight of the group.

In 1 John, we hear the central themes of Christian theology and ethics. All these themes ring true today as they did then. For the Johannine group they have an enduring validity. They were likely written down by the author to confront and overcome a specific situation, specific problems, and a group of adversaries. Brown (1979) argues in *The Community of the Beloved Disciple* that these adversaries were at one time closely related to the author of 1 John and the groups he represented. Brown thinks they shared many of the same theological convictions and traditions. As far as we can infer from these letters, the beliefs and activities of these opponents can be seen as distortions.

What did the heretics in John's group teach? As mentioned previously, we have none of their writings, and the information about them that we do have is from reading John's rebuttal

of their teachings, the specifics of which are the subject of some debate. Yet by exploring John's affirmations and denials, we see that the opponents denied that Jesus was the Christ (1 Jn 2:22), the Son of God who came in the flesh as God's Son (1 Jn 2:23; 4:2, 15) by means of water and blood (1 Jn 5:6). They also apparently downplayed the magnitude of sin, did not keep the commandments themselves, and argued that they were not subject to sin (1 Jn 1:6-10). Their own conduct lacked love and was schismatic and was therefore a denial of the gospel they claimed to believe. Further, they alone claimed to have the right teaching, which led some in the group to doubt whether they themselves had the Spirit (1 Jn 2:26-27).

Just who were the opponents? We must be careful when trying to identify John's opponents precisely. After considering the essence of their teaching, we can compare this to what is known about the various heretical movements that arose in the late first century. Then we may ask if John's adversaries can be tied to any such movement. The question concerning the identification of John's opponents has warranted three main answers: (1) Docetism, (2) the teachings of Cerinthus, or (3) some early form of Gnosticism (proto-Gnosticism)³⁴⁶. Of these, the third is the most promising explanation of the current data. The third phase of the Johannine situation would have involved the development of a new Christian group, roughly from the mid-80s C.E. until the Gospel was finalized around 100 C.E. It was during this phase that the letter was written, say between 85 and 95 C.E. as a plausible estimation. 1 John 2:18-25 shows a split indicating that former group members had withdrawn and plausibly re-joined the synagogue (diminishing their commitment to Jesus as the Messiah/Christ) and Emperor worship with its associated implications was a growing problem. The acute threat now involved a fifth crisis in the Johannine situation: docetizing

346 For further suggestions, see Marshall, *Epistles*, 14-21. Others have suggested that what is being combated is an overreading, misreading, or "progressive reading" of parts of John's Gospel (James Leslie Houlden, *A Commentary on the Johannine Epistles* [2nd ed.; Black's New Testament Commentaries; London: A & C Black, 1994], 14-20; see also Brown, *Epistles*, 69-71). For doing so, Brown has been charged with "considerable speculation and uncontrolled inferences" (Carson, 1994). Still others ask whether the early church heresy of the Ebionites is in view. Ebionites essentially were Jews with low Christology. They could have some belief in Jesus as the expected Old Testament Messiah and Davidic king, but not Messiah in the sense of the Messiah—the incarnate divine Son of God who has come in the flesh (Brown, *Epistles*, 53). They rejected such notions as the divinity and pre-existence of Jesus, perhaps due to a fear of what might lead to "ditheism" (two Gods). However, the Ebionite suggestion is less likely given that John's opponents seemed to have Christology that was too high (overemphasizing the divinity of Christ to the detriment of his humanity) and not too low (overemphasizing the humanity of Christ to the detriment of his divinity). In either case, they did not accept the teaching concerning Jesus Christ passed on by the apostle John.

Gentile Christians who were teaching a doctrine of cultural assimilation and easy discipleship. The Johannine author, in his Christ-centred setting, levies the ultimate charge against both problems, calling their instigators “antichrists”. It is important to note here that the targets themselves would not have been comfortable with such titles. These were pejorative labels intended to disturb, and they were used as a disincentive to those who might be tempted to join their ranks.

While Brown does note differences between the antichrists of 1 John 2:18-25 and 1 John 4:1-3, he does not take full notice of how different the presentations of the two groups really are.

Docetism

First, docetism was an early church heresy that argued that the humanity and sufferings of the earthly Christ only seemed real yet were not real. According to the docetists, Christ did not have a true body during his earthly existence, but only a corporeal appearance. What we know about this heresy comes mainly from the writings of Ignatius of Antioch (A.D. 35-107), who was led to Rome and martyred for his Christian beliefs. He emphasized a higher knowledge and reasons for rejecting the incarnation of Christ (such as material-immaterial dualism). Docetism held that spirit is good, and matter is evil and that there could be no direct mingling of the “Supreme God,” who is spirit, and the material universe (including man), since matter is essentially evil. Therefore, how could the Christ (a spirit-being) become flesh, which is evil? The docetists seem to have been motivated by a “high” Christology, united with a contempt against the material. The realm of the material is the locus of sin and evil, and the divine Christ could, thus, never actually become a man. Therefore, Jesus only seemed to be a man, and only seemed to suffer and die (Schnackenburg, 1992). Some 1 John scholars have found the docetist argument quite plausible³⁴⁷. However, we realize that the author was not just concerned with the reality of the flesh of Jesus, but with the human Jesus and the divine Son or Christ. This study concludes that the docetist view on opponents did not precisely fit into the picture of 1 John, though similarities can be found³⁴⁸.

347 Schnackenburg (1992) argues that Docetism is more likely in view than the views of Cerinthus (esp. 21-23). Yet in the end, he concludes that no specific group should be identified (23), though he does see pre-gnostic tendencies in John’s adversaries (24).

348 See esp. Schnackenburg (1992), Johannine, 20-21; cf. Marshall, Epistles, 19; Kruse, Letters, 21-24.

Cerinthianism

Secondly, some have suggested that the teachings of Cerinthus are in view, and such a suggestion is plausible. What we know about him chiefly comes from the writings of Irenaeus and Eusebius³⁴⁹. Cerinthus was an early Christian heretic (ca. A.D. 100) who taught that the world was not created by the God of the Bible, but by a Demiurge or the angels who shaped it from formless matter. Jesus was a mere man, but at Jesus's baptism, the divine "Christ" (an eternal and divine power) came upon him. The "Christ" left Jesus the man at some point prior to the crucifixion since the divine Christ, being spirit and thus good, cannot suffer. Thus, Cerinthus separated the earthly Jesus (who is man/flesh) from the heavenly Christ (who is spirit). When we consider the explicit information, the author provides on the antichrists and false prophets, it is remarkable how the description fits Irenaeus's portrait of the teachings of Cerinthus. Both claimed to be Christian, and both denied Jesus as the Christ and Son of God. Besides this doctrinal correlation, there is also a historical link that Irenaeus made between the Johannine group and Cerinthianism. It is the well-known story attributed to Polycarp, of the encounter of John with Cerinthus in a bath at Ephesus. This study sees that there is no evidence to suggest that Cerinthus was ever part of the Johannine group, and there is a well-known error attributed to Cerinthus that finds no mention in 1 John. In addition, if the account of Polycarp about John and Cerinthus at the bathhouse scene in Ephesus is accurate, then the apostle knew Cerinthus. Therefore, why not mention Cerinthus by name if it is his specific teachings that are in view?

Whatever value this study may attribute to these traditions, the Johannine group was somewhat under the influence of Cerinthianism. The implicit and the explicit statements do, however, form a picture of the opponents that no longer conforms to the characteristics of Cerinthianism.

Proto-Gnosticism

Rather than the suggestions above, the preferable view is that John's opponents maintained some early form of Gnosticism ("proto-Gnosticism"). "Gnosticism" (from the word gnōsis,

349 Irenaeus was the second century bishop of Lyons, and Eusebius was a fourth century church historian. A well-known story handed down from Eusebius attributed to Polycarp says that the apostle John in fact knew Cerinthus. On one occasion John went to the bathhouse in Ephesus only to find that Cerinthus was inside. Upon learning that this "enemy of the truth" was inside, the apostle ran out terrified saying that at any moment God could lay waste to the entire bathhouse since "the heretic was inside."

meaning “knowledge”) itself is quite difficult to pin down since it was an amalgamation of Jewish, Christian, and pagan teachings, by far the most common identification of the opponents in 1 John. However, this term is used with lack of precision. Gnosticism is quite broad, and, to add to the confusion, both docetism and the teachings of Cerinthus were fundamentally gnostic (Yamauchi, 1973). Yet there are a few main points from which the various sub-groups develop their core teachings.

First (like docetism), Gnosticism was anchored in dualism that dichotomizes matter (which is evil), and spirit (which is good). It was thought that the Supreme God could not have created the world since it is matter and thus evil. Since matter is evil, there can be no biblical doctrine of creation, incarnation, or bodily resurrection, and thus the Divine Logos could never be united with human flesh.

Secondly, knowledge was essential, and its acquisition was of chief importance. Those who were enlightened had been granted special knowledge by revelation from God, and it was via this knowledge that one’s spirit could be saved. Therefore, there can be no bodily resurrection at all since salvation is freedom from the body. Knowledge is only possessed by the spiritually elite “elect,” within whom is the capacity for liberation from the matter of this world (Yamauchi, 1973).

Thirdly, in Gnosticism there is a supreme god, the ultimate father, from whom proceeds several lesser beings known as aeons. The Old Testament God is inferior to the supreme god, the father of Christ. This theology/philosophy did not fully mature until some 50 to 200 years after 1 John was written and was represented by a wide variety of gnostic groups.

Most scholars today agree that John is not countering full-orbed Gnosticism³⁵⁰. Yet most agree that John is not countering the other common suggestions either. What most affirm is that elements of each of these three suggestions are found in the teachings of John’s

350 Hengel is critical of scholars who would assert any gnostic influence in any part of the New Testament and hopes that such “gnostic fever” will completely disappear from NT studies (Martin Hengel, *The Son of God: The Origin of Christology and the History of Jewish-Hellenistic Religion* [trans. John Bowden; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1976], 33 n. 66). In contrast, earlier New Testament theologies such as the able work of Adolf Schlatter did assert full-blown Gnosticism (Schlatter, *Theology of the Apostles*, 120-21), but more recent theologies have concluded that Gnosticism did not ripen until the late second century A.D. The discovery of the Nag Hammadi texts in the 1940’s has aided this investigation. By way of contrast, George Eldon Ladd appears to propound an early form of Gnosticism while not using the nomenclature “proto-Gnosticism” (G. E. Ladd, *New Testament Theology* [rev. ed.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993], 657-59).

opponents. As such, “proto-Gnosticism” has been put forward in recent decades as a more careful and acceptable view considering more recent research (such as the Nag Hammadi texts). Proto-Gnosticism is Gnosticism in its early forms and was gestating at the time of the composition of 1 John. Proto-Gnosticism is applied when the essence of Gnosticism is already found in earlier systems.

Jewish opponents

The clear statement in 1 John that the opponents “went out from us” (1 Jn 2:19) rules out the possibility that we have here a controversy between the synagogue and the church (Brown, 1979:51-52). It does not eliminate the possibility that they were Jewish Christians who had gone back to Judaism. They would now be denying that Jesus was the Christ, and Son of God. The expression that Jesus Christ came “not with water only but with water and the blood” is not easy to explain either if we hold to a Jewish hypothesis. So, the reference to Jewish Christians who returned to Judaism does not fit the picture of the explicit statements in the letter.

These above descriptions where some characteristics fit, and others do not, has raised the possibility that the opponents in 1 John were characterized by a syncretistic mixture of Christian, Jewish, and Proto-Gnostic components.

It is not difficult to see how Hellenistic Jews, who adhered to a strict monotheism and at the same time were confronted with the phenomenon of Jesus, could have used Proto-Gnostic ideas to preserve their monotheism by denying either the reality of the incarnation (docetism) or the divinity of Jesus (Cerinthianism).

When we apply the explicit characteristics of the opponents to persons with a background in Hellenistic-Jewish-Christian syncretism, the following picture emerges: Such persons could have been described as ex group members if they abandoned the group based on their monotheism. They denied that Jesus was the Christ in the Johannine sense of divine Sonship. They also could have rejected the idea that Jesus Christ came by blood, based on Jewish and Hellenistic presuppositions alike.

Many attempts have been made to identify these opponents with known heretical groups. Although there are certain aspects where one can draw a parallel between the adversaries and these heretical groups, a direct identification is not possible. A methodological fallacy is

involved here, namely attempting to identify a group living at the end of the first century with what is conjectured about the views of heretical groups in the second century. Brown (1982:67) supports this conclusion by saying,

“While the Johannine opponents have some points in common with all the proposed candidates, differences militate against a precise identification with any of these groups. In any case to have so identified the opponents would not have been particularly enlightening; for granted the little we know about such groups. This identification of the opponents stays difficult.”

For this study, when the focus falls on the explicit statements, the evidence favours the identification of the opponents with a type of Jewish-Christian-Gnostic syncretism. However, this does not preclude their identification with Cerinthianism which had many syncretistic features and fits well with the explicit statements on the opponents.

7.8.3. Rhetorical technique of amplification of opponents

For some scholars, the rhetoric of the letters does not impede historical reconstruction of the opponents but facilitates historical analysis. Duane Watson (1993) has argued not only that the rhetorical style and shape of the letters of John rely on ancient rhetorical categories but also that categories were chosen to respond to specific problems in the Johannine orbit (1989a; 1989b; 1993). For instance, Watson (1993) shows that 1 John relies on the rhetorical technique of “amplification,” where an author repeatedly returns to and develops a particular set of ideas to “amplify” their importance. Du Rand (1979:2) describes the thought process in 1 John as

“a spiral, for the development of a theme often brings us back almost to the starting point, almost but not quite, for there is a slight shift which provides a transition to a fresh theme which has apparently been dismissed at an earlier point, and now comes up for consideration from a slightly different angle. This results in a recapitulation of certain themes.”

However, this is not merely a literary or rhetorical insight; it also has historical consequences. Watson argues that 1 John relies on “amplification” to win the greater adherence of its readers to the Johannine tradition in the face of the opponents who undermine that tradition. Rhetoric and historical reconstruction are tightly linked in 1 John. The rhetorical presentation

of the opponents not only shows us how to understand the rift in the group, but shows that the rift was not so great. The rhetoric can be viewed as minor squabble among people still living in communion. This way of reading is articulated clearly by PHEME PERKINS (1978;1979), who deserves to be quoted at length to make her position as clear as possible:

“Scholars who are not sensitive to the language of oral cultures often misinterpret statements about opponents in ancient writings. You would get the impression from reading some modern interpreters of the Johannine letters that the community was being violently ripped apart by the debates to which the author refers. In an oral culture, infused with rhetoric at every level, minor debates could produce major rhetorical responses that were often not indicative of the nature of the problem. . . . The point of rhetoric was to use every means possible to see that one’s own position, the true or good one, prevailed over its “bad” opposition. Even sciences and medicine were discussed in terms of conflicts between forces, of battles that had to be won”. (1978, xxi–xxii)

The heated rhetoric of the Johannine letters may not imply such an elaborate schism. Perkins writes:

When the author speaks of his opponents having broken fellowship with his community, we perhaps must think of the various types of feuds and breaking of association that occur in close-knit oral societies. . . . Such disputes do not destroy the whole fabric of a community. . . . Several hours after the direst exchange of insults and threats, the opponents may be going about their business as though they had never fought. (1979, xxii–xxiii)

According to Perkins, we should not imagine a grand schism behind these letters, but something more like a family quarrel that, once it blows over, is forgotten and a thing of the past. Fellowship continues. Two aspects of this approach are influential in what follows, with qualifications. First, the suggestion by Perkins that the quarrel in these letters is best compared to a family fight is helpful. The letters of John regularly rely on familial language³⁵¹

351 In this Letter, the picture of these children (adherents of the Elder) is clearly contrasted with a similarly developed picture of those opponents of the author. In the author’s comparison of the believers with the world, they become aware of the existential differences concerning status and behaviour between them and the world.

when they refer to the members of the church, as in the regular practice of addressing the readers as children (1 Jn 3:1, 2; 5:2; 2 Jn 1, 4, 13; 3 Jn 4) or “my little children” (1 Jn 2:12, 28; 3:7, 18; 4:4; 5:21). This may be an important sociological move on the part of the author. In antiquity, when people converted to a minority religion like Judaism or Christianity, they often strained or completely severed their ties to their natural families.

This familial character of Christian group plays a subtle role in the conflict behind these letters. For example, 1 John 2:9–10 refers to those who remain in the group as those who love their brothers, and to those who leave the group as those who hate their brothers. But the familial character of the conflict raises the issue of how complete and total the conflict was. While some interpreters follow Perkins in downplaying the polemical edge, viewing the struggle as either not very great, or at least not very central to the argument of the letters (Lieu, 1991:5–6, 13–16, 66), others argue against this view. Raymond Brown (1982:48–49) is prominent among them. He thinks that Perkins too quickly dismisses passages like 2 John 10–11: “If someone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not receive him into your house and do not say to him, ‘Greetings!’ For the one who says to him, ‘Greetings,’ has fellowship with his wicked deeds.” These verses imply a serious break of fellowship that is more extreme than Perkins’s approach allows. Brown’s position has broad support (Painter, 2002:88–90). One is left to ask: Is the heated rhetoric mere rhetoric, or does it reflect historical reality? And what effect does it have on group understanding in the Johannine group?

Perkins and Lieu may very well be correct that the division in the group is not so great, at least not yet. While certain people had left the fellowship (otherwise 1 Jn 2:19 could not have said, “They went out from us”), an ongoing relationship with these people seems to exist, since 1 John 3:7 tells the readers that they “are trying to deceive you.” A group of people had separated themselves from the Johannine group and seek to persuade others to follow them. And yet the readers of the letters might not yet realize just how dangerous the secessionists are. Following the argument of Perkins, the rift might not yet have seemed great to all members of the group. First John is written to make the danger plain. This shows that the forceful rhetoric of the letter may not imply that there was a crisis already. Perhaps instead it sought to produce a crisis. Understood this way, the rhetoric is not simply “mere rhetoric” but is to be taken seriously as reflecting a grave situation for the author of 1 John. The group, as tightly knit as a family, is nevertheless susceptible to pollution by false

teaching and was already experiencing some degree of division. All the group members might not yet have known the danger that lay before them, and the author wrote to oppose this teaching and to marginalize his opponents.

7.8.4. Polemical and non-polemical reading to better understand the opponents

The exegesis of 1 John is, in most cases, dominated by the question of the opponents. There is, however, significant dissent in the ongoing historical debate about the opponents. Looking at the hermeneutical basis of the current approaches, one can claim that, despite all their discord, most readings and commentaries of 1 John agree on four points:

- A basic assumption is that in a mirror-like reading, it is possible to reconstruct who the opponents were and what happened in the Johannine group. Therefore, reading 1 John non-polemically serves as a window on the world behind it, representing one stage of the history of the Johannine group.
- On the other hand, the opponents and the conflict between them and the orthodox Johannine group serve as a hermeneutical key to the text, which is nearly always interpreted in the light of the opponents.
- Therefore, not only are 1 John 2:18-27; 4:1-6 defined as opponent texts, but many other slogans and verses are also viewed in relation to the opponents. Among these verses are 1 John 1:6, 8, 10; 2:4, 6, 9; 4:20; 5:6–8, where contradictory statements about sin (1 Jn 1:8 versus 1 Jn 3:6, 9; 5:18) are seen as a reflection of the opponents' position. The sin unto death (1 Jn 5:16-17) is viewed as referring to the opponents, and the whole ethical parenesis is understood as a response to them guaranteeing the group's cohesion.
- Altogether, the polemical function of 1 John is stressed. It is considered as a text greatly determined by its original situation, even by authors who view the Gospel of John more generally. Though it is addressed to the Johannine group, 1 John is seen as a part of the struggle against the hostile influence of the opponents.

Most exegetes would agree that 1 John is a polemical text. Yet it must be asked, can a polemical text be read non-polemically?

The starting point for non-polemical readings is the question of whether the opponents have been overemphasized. This brings methodological alternatives that emphasize the literary character of 1 John, putting the opponents in a different light. Therefore, we can define a

reading that does not read 1 John as a polemical text, but as an entity, as non-polemical. In such a reading, even if polemical elements occur, their function is seen as internal.

The first scholar to take steps in this direction was Lieu (1991:210-228). She challenges the assumption that 1 John is “a fundamentally polemical writing”, which, according to Lieu, is an attribution of modern scholars and not of the text itself. She proposes a reading “without immediate and prior reference to the views of its opponents”. Her approach is not general but sets a different emphasis: “its [1 John’s] purpose is not first of all to engage in polemic with outsiders”. For Lieu, the ethics debate of 1 John is not primarily directed at opponents. Thus, the chief method of Lieu’s reading is to clearly separate the *ethics* debate from the *Christological* debate linked with the opponents.

Griffith (1998:253-276) was the first scholar to use the term “non-polemical” by proposing “a pastoral rather than a polemical outlook” on 1 John. He continues to develop Lieu’s thesis about the limited range of opponent texts in 1 John and proves the non-polemical character of the slogans in 1 John 1:6, 8, 10; 2:4, 6, 9; 4:20 with the help of analogies from secular Greek literature and philosophical debates.

The stance for this study is that 1 John is not a polemical text in its whole, but only in minor parts. A non-polemical reading demonstrates how the motif of the opponents is related to the main ethics theme of 1 John. This motif, which may be understood as polemical in a rhetorical sense, is thereby interpreted non-polemically as a special type of self-description.

Furthermore, I see the following advantages of the non-polemical model:

1 John is often regarded as secondary to John. A non-polemical reading offers a rehabilitation of 1 John. It is no longer described as a “situative” intervention in a past conflict, but as a general text of equal weight to John. Hence, contradictions in the text, which were traditionally explained by means of the opponents, can now be described as steps in a complex reading process. The question of the semantic of the Christological confessions remains relevant but is embedded in a pragmatic perspective on the function of denial and confession and is no longer the key issue in reading 1 John. Moreover, a non-polemical reading of 1 John is more open for relevance to the present so that today’s reader can participate in the reading. 1 John is no longer simply a story about a group more, but a story about oneself.

7.8.5. Two antichrist groups visible in the out-group

As in the seven letters of Ignatius³⁵², the Judaizing threat was followed by the docetizing threat, and the Johannine author, in his Christ-centred setting, levies the ultimate charge against both problems, calling their instigators “antichrists”.

While Brown does note differences between the antichrists of 1 John 2:18-25 and 4:1-3, he does not take full notice of how different the presentations of the two groups really are. First, there is a difference of timing: the first crisis had happened, and the next one is on the way but not fully realized. Second, there is a difference of action: the first crisis involved secession (they went out from us), but the next one involves an impending invasion (they have gone out into the world—not necessarily from us, but beware, lest they come to our or your group). Third, the content of their doctrinal beliefs is entirely different: the secessionists do not believe Jesus was the Christ (let alone divine), and the false teachers deny that Jesus came in the flesh (he was so divine that he was not even human). Therefore, the second antichristian threat involved traveling Gentile-Christian ministers in the area, who may have been soft on certain elements of Jewish faith and practice. It is against this backdrop that the assimilative teachings of the second antichristian threat should be understood. The antichrists of 1 John 4:1-3 and 2 John 1:7 were not secessionists but invasionists. The false teachings of Gentile-Christian traveling ministers probably revolved around discussions of what was allowable in terms of faith and practice, with an acute emphasis on the latter. If Gentile-Christian leaders disagreed with ethical and religious standards advocated by Jewish-Christian leaders regarding how “Jewish” followers of Jesus needed to be, they may have argued something parallel to the earlier Pauline debates on grace redemption over and against works-righteousness.

On this note, the author may be seen to be co-opting the propitiation theme (1 Jn 2:1) and pushing the implications of the costly sacrifice of Christ for costly discipleship among his followers. As Gentile-Christian preachers probably were more liberal in their teachings on cultural assimilation (i.e., less insistent on forsaking Hellenistic cultural and festive practices in exchange for Jewish religious standards), they probably resisted Jewish-Christian challenges with the appeal that abundant life through Christ was intended to make things

³⁵² Taken from "The Early Church Fathers and Other Works" originally published by Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co. in English in Edinburgh, Scotland beginning in 1867.

better, not to invite suffering. When reminded that Jesus suffered on the cross, the Hellenistic response was likely that he, if he was indeed divine, could not have suffered—thus, nor do his disciples need to in order to be faithful in the world. Therefore, docetizing Christology may not have been their lead thesis; it may have been the means to hold them accountable to emerging Christian orthodoxy around the turn of the first century, C.E. They were not Gnostics, and on such an assumption many an interpretive approach has floundered. Further, docetizing Christology might not even have been their primary interest; it became for the author a means of testing the teachers to see if their larger doctrine was rooted in a suffering Jesus, and the implications for Christian living are what was at stake. The identity of the group.

Again, in noting the correspondence between Pliny the younger and Emperor Trajan two decades or so after the writing of 1 and 2 John, several issues become apparent. First, the governor said that he was charging people for simply bearing the name “Christian,” and if found guilty, they were liable to be executed unless they recanted. If they reviled the name of Christ and/or worshipped the idol of Caesar, they were acquitted; even Pliny declared that a person could never be guilty of being a Christian if they were willing to perform such actions. Second, he noted that some who were brought in denied being Christians even though they met with believers before the dawn on a given day of the week, ate common food, and sang a hymn to Christ “as though he were god”. Such people were judged to be innocent of the crime as well. Third, there was pressure from the merchants whose living depended on the idol-worship trade because of the effect Christians were having on the pagan cultic enterprise. Pliny expressed some relief that some of the problem has begun to be corrected and that the adverse impact of the Christian movement is not as severe as it once had been.

Therefore, inferring two distinctive antichristian threats makes the best sense from the evidence in the first two Johannine letters, as informed by the backdrop availed by the letters of Ignatius and the Pliny-Trajan correspondence. The first antichristian crisis was a schism, where some Johannine group members of Jewish origin likely re-joined the synagogue, and the author surmises somewhat poignantly, “they never really were a part of us.” The Johannine letters reflect not the sectarian stance of an ingrown group, but a group attempting to straddle Jewish and Gentile understandings of faith and practice, having been separated from the synagogue while still seeking to maintain a basic set of Jewish values.

As distanced Jewish members of Johannine Christianity were then proselytized back into the Jewish group of faith, it is now the Johannine Christians who feel abandoned, expressing their disappointment with the conjecture that “they never really were a part of us” (1 Jn 2:19). Therefore, the first antichristian threat involved the appeal of religious certainty over and against faith in Jesus as the Messiah/Christ in a fledgling group of faith.

7.9. Distinguishing the in-group

By distinguishing “insiders” from “outsiders,” a distinct group ethos is formed. It was out of the crucible of conflict with various “others” that a Johannine self-identity was forged. In this process, the author of 1 John appealed to the core symbolic language of his group. A word that is telling of the in-group, it is *χρῖσμα*. The author describes the positive results of *χρῖσμα* and kerygma as knowledge (1 Jn 2:20, 27), eternal life (1 Jn 2:25), and relationship with the Father and Son (1 Jn 2:24, 27). *χρῖσμα* and kerygma, when embraced by the group, produce positive social identification, which give the Johannine group self-esteem. By alternating between the first- and second-person plural, the author can both project positivity onto and derive positivity from his own in-group evaluation. If the Johannine group embraces the idea that what categorizes the social identity produces positive results, then individuals in the group can draw the necessary self-esteem from the group itself. This type of positive distinctiveness is achieved through in-group favouritism and/or out-group discrimination. Though the author makes clear use of out-group discrimination (1 Jn 2:18-19, 22-23, 26; 4:3, 5; 2 Jn 7, 9a, 10-11), this appears to be of less importance in 1 John. Many have attempted to expand this list by reading instances of in-group encouragement as containing an implicit polemic against the antichrist group. Positive elements that highlight in-group favouritism, such as light, love, fellowship, truth, forgiveness, etc., are seen to be secondary products of the primary social categories of *χρῖσμα* and kerygma throughout the majority of 1 John.

The Johannine group’s method for maintaining positive distinctiveness is primarily to interpret the in-group’s social categories as yielding positive results, rather than discriminating against the out-group. Tapping into the in-group’s social memory, the author emphasizes that this out-group “ἐξ ἡμῶν ἐξῆλθον” (1 Jn 2:19), thereby representing a sort of out-group origin story. Along with this, the author outlines the antichrist’s narrative conclusion, specifically that they are bringing about the eschatological last hour (2:18). These elements of origin and conclusion act as narrative elements that guide the Johannine

group to begin the process of creating distinctiveness from an out-group. By highlighting how the in-group's beliefs differ from the out-group because of the *χρῖσμα* and *kerygma*, the author achieves intergroup distinctiveness while maintaining intragroup assimilation.

Social identity theory explains intragroup and intergroup processes (Tajfel, 1978:1982). The theory shows that individuals not only adopt a personal identity, but also form a social identity, which reflects their membership to various groups. Tajfel states (1978:63) that social identity is defined as that part of an individual's self-concept which derives from his knowledge of his membership of a group, together with the emotional significance attached to that membership. In the ancient Mediterranean world, people did not really form a self-concept. They understood their being through community and kinship. The comparison allows one to perceive the in-group as better than relevant out-groups.

The process of social identification is further elaborated in self-categorization theory (Turner, 1987) an extension of social identity theory (Hogg, 2001). The theory suggests that individuals categorize themselves. Being a group member signals that a person shares group belief. Group beliefs unify group members and differentiate them from out-groups. Group members are aware that they share the same beliefs, which define their "groupness". Group beliefs draw the line between the in-group and the out-group. The "we-experience" is setting the boundaries for the out-groups. Members of groups categorize themselves according to the norms and expectations of the group. Members are accepted to the extent that they conform to the norms of the group (Hogg, 2001:63-66; Marques et al., 2001:402), and fellow group members view tendencies to act against expected norms as deviancy. This can lead to marginalization and rejection (Hogg, 2001:63-68; Marques *et al.*, 2001).

A sort of collective intellect forms the social equilibrium of a society, based on the integration of the collective thinking and behaviour.³⁵³ Christ and their faith in him fundamentally define their common group identity. The new identity designation "in Christ" cuts across previous

353 Staples (2002:200). There are practical situations in which a person, belonging to a particular group, must act by deciding what to do. In cases it might be an impulsive action not reflecting a fixed pattern in the group. These actions are not considered. The actions referred to as creative (practicing) ethos refer to motivated behaviour in particular situations based on ethics. For instance, if a person must decide whether he should lie or not, his action will result from the way in which he understands and applies ethics and will be guided by the ethos he shares with his group. Actions that do not fit this ethos will be regarded as anti-social, or in religious terms, sin.

group designations and creates a new and wider group identity.

7.9.1. The social categorization process of the in-group in 1 John

Groups normally exist in relation to other groups; they derive their descriptive and evaluative properties, and thus their social meaning, in relation to these other groups. Intergroup relationships involve a process of competition for positive identity (Turner, 1984) in which groups and their members strive to protect or enhance positive distinctiveness and positive social identity. In other words, they accentuate intragroup similarities and intergroup differences (Tajfel, 1959). A coherent and distinct group. Well-structured, has clear boundaries, and its members share a common fate. Once categorized, people are viewed through the lens of the relevant group prototype and are represented in terms of how well they embody the prototype. Since group prototypes specify how people feel, perceive, think, and behave, social categorization generates stereotypical expectations and encourages stereotype-consistent interpretation of vague behaviours.

Self-categorization causes our thoughts, feelings, perceptions, and behaviour to conform to our prototype of the in-group. Group prototypes are grounded in consensual views that constitute a social reality that is reinforced repeatedly. The social identity theory-based distinction between group prototypes and group norms helps specify the generative processes underlying similar distinctions, such as those between perceived norms and collective norms. From a social identity perspective, out-group norms can have a significant effect on how we construct in-group norms, particularly in the absence of clear in-group normative information. Stories embedded in narrative and discourse create bonds between group members and construct representations of social categories (Edwards, 1997). Such representations of group norms influence what people talk about. Often a group can contain a minority subgroup or some other collective that represents a profound schism in the group's normative structure. Sani and Reicher (1998, 1999) describe how a sudden normative change brought about by the actions of a subgroup or a leader, can produce an acute sense of identity threat and self-conceptual uncertainty, impermanence, and instability. The group is no longer what it used to be—its normative attitudes, values, perceptions, and behaviours have irrevocably changed; thus, its identity has changed, and members are no longer sure whether they fit the new group.

Under these circumstances, members can try to re-establish the group's original identity through discussion, persuasion, and negotiation, or they can split into a separate subgroup that conflicts with the rest of the group. In 1 John, this internal conflict is visible given the new ideas on Christology and pneumatology that divide the in-group between a "we" and a "you". Georg Simmel in his classic work on sociology in 1908 stated that groups often derive unity and strength from facing internal opposition (Simmel, 1908: 97). When studying the conflict in 1 John, it is important to remember that the information is often fragmentary and incomplete, since our primary source was not intended for the purpose of historical reconstruction but to set down the stories and encourage the members of the 1 John group. The text from 1 John seldom gives us straight forward reports about social realities. Our cognitive and linguistic capacities are such that they enable us to both interpret and manipulate our surroundings. This is also true of the 1 John group. The author often aimed to interpret and manipulate their surroundings. In the practical work of analysing the text of 1 John, we have to imagine the text as a text in dialogue with the group, both drawing from it and constructing it. The group exists because people believe in it and identify themselves with it. The group has certain characteristics because people share a certain way of thinking about, feeling about, and evaluating their group. Once people have categorized themselves and identified with the group, they compare themselves with relevant out-groups and seek positive distinctiveness. The social identity theory helps with this process³⁵⁴.

Self-categorization theory adds to our exploration in that it elaborates on the cognitive process that causes group processes. Most importantly, self-categorization theory develops the idea that the group has a prototype and that the group members share perceptions about the ideal group member. These two theories (social identity theory and self-categorization theory) are similar and are often called the social identity perspective. This perspective was used throughout this study, although not always separately. Thus, in becoming part of a group, individuals do not lose all sense of self, rather they shift from personal to the social level of identification. In 1 John there is a collectivist culture, where the self is understood not as distinct, but interdependent and integrated with others. Therefore, who I am, what I think and how I act, is a function of my salient social identity together with my role with-in the group.

354 Tajfel 1981; Tajfel and Turner 1979.

7.10. Conclusion

According to Gilroy (1997:301-302), identity is always as much about differences as about shared belonging. The in-group in 1 John had internal differences³⁵⁵ the author warned against, but they also share their belonging to the group. Gilroy states that the formation of every “we” must leave out or exclude a “they”. So, identities depend on the marking of differences. It is important to keep in mind that although 1 John contains a fair amount of polemic against the opponents, it is not directed at the opponents themselves, but is intended for the members of the in-group. Thus, it is written *against* the opponents, but not *directly to* the opponents. Group identity refers to the shared identity of a group with the same worldview that characterized ancient group-orientated societies.³⁵⁶ In such group-orientated societies individuals received their identity from the group and were defined in terms of the group. The individual discovered his identity in relation to his fellow group members by sharing their worldview and receiving conformation from them that he indeed is who he thinks he is (Berger & Luckman: 1966). This provided stability and continuity to the group as well as to the individual members of the group.

Group members shared a common point of orientation that enabled them to assess each other in terms of a shared set of convictions and common goal. On this basis they could engage with one another in authoritative or paraenetic ways.³⁵⁷ This does not imply that the individual lost all independence. Individuals did have choices, were influenced by personal events and experiences, did have different biographies and stories to tell. This always left

355 False teachers were originally members of the Christian group to which the author is writing. They appear to have “gone out” from among this group “into the world” (4:1). Thus, the author is addressing a group, which has undergone a schism or split in which a substantial part of the group – maybe even a numerical majority – has withdrawn from fellowship. This is a key point, which affects the interpretation of almost every part of 1, 2, and 3 John. This group (which has split off and withdrawn from fellowship with the original group to which the author writes) is continuing to propagate its own beliefs. The secessionists are seeking to win converts for their own views, even from among the group to which they formerly belonged. Considering this threat, the author of 1 John is writing both to reassure and strengthen the faithful members of that group, and to warn them to continue to resist the efforts of the false teachers who have gone out from among them.

356 Early Christians defined themselves in terms of social identity, more than personal (individual) identity. Horrell (2005:92), quoting Esler, states: “The identity of a group, according to social identity theory, has cognitive, emotional, and evaluative dimensions, and is further defined by ‘norms’ that stipulate ‘a range of acceptable (and unacceptable) attitudes and behaviors’ for members of the group. Moreover, distinctions drawn between in-group, and out-group members serve to enhance a positive – and necessarily comparative – sense of group identity”.

357 Horrell (2005:94) remarks, “since social identity is constantly in process, as it were, reinforced or transformed over time, then there is certainly a clear logic in urging someone to be who they are, to act in ways congruent with their (current group) identity, particularly when there is perceived to be some threat to the viability of the group’s identity, or to its boundaries or integrity”.

open the possibility of deviant or conflicting behaviour.

A sort of collective intellect forms the social equilibrium of a society, based on the integration of the collective thinking and behaviour.³⁵⁸ Christ and their faith in him fundamentally defined their common group-identity. It's important to note that the new identity designation "in Christ" shared by the in-group, cuts across previous group designations and creates a new and wider group identity. In 1 John one can detect the existence of two groups of Johannine Christians, each drawing on the kind of Johannine theology known to us from the Gospel of John but interpreted differently. The author of 1 John still cannot silence his opponents by appealing to the authority of a tradition. True to Johannine tradition, the author appeals to a teaching Spirit abiding in the Christians through anointing by Christ, a principle that relativizes any human teachers (1 Jn 2:20, 27). A smaller group of Christians kept *koinōnia* with the Christians of the apostolic churches. I agree with scholars who argue that it was through these Johannine group members that the gospel found acceptance among second-century traditionalists such as Irenaeus.

By distinguishing "insiders" from "outsiders," a distinct group ethos was formed. It was out of the crucible of conflict with various "others" that a Johannine self-identity was forged. In this process, the author of 1 John appealed to the core symbolic language of his group.

As identity is never fixed or absolute, it is more reasonable to expect that the group continued to debate its place in the world and assess its own sense of self. As we have seen, the Johannine group has specific characteristics that differentiate it from the three major Johannine opponents. The language of social identity theory makes it evident that the Johannine group acts as an in-group, according to its own texts. As an in-group with an emphasis on true knowledge, loyalty to Christ, and lived experience of Jesus's teachings, out-groups could be seen as threatening due to their ability to persuade members of the failure of their Messiah, to change loyalties toward the Roman Empire, or to pull some out of an intimate relationship with God through the Paraclete. Opponents of this Johannine

358 Staples (2002:200). There are practical situations in which a person, belonging to a particular group, must act by deciding what to do. In cases it might be an impulsive action not reflecting a fixed pattern in the group. These actions are not considered. The actions referred to as creative (practicing) ethos refer to motivated behaviour in particular situations based on ethics. For instance, if a person must decide whether he should lie or not, his action will result from the way in which he understands and applies ethics and will be guided by the ethos he shares with his group. Actions that do not fit this ethos will be regarded as anti-social, or in religious terms, sin.

group are stereotyped as completely ignorant so that in-group members will not look upon them as having any religious truth or as knowing a non-Johannine path to positive distinctiveness, which would increase social competition between the groups. The Johannine worldview is not interested in encouraging more competition or diversity of belief, but instead stresses the orthopraxy and homogeneity of their Jesus tradition. The mainline Johannine belief is defended and defined by their stress on love, truth, commandments, and the direction of the Paraclete. This is done so that no out-group can be mistaken for such radical early Christians.

CHAPTER 8 A CONCLUSION OF THE SOCIAL ANALYSIS OF GROUPS IN 1 JOHN

A first reading of 1 John shows the spread of a new faith in the Johannine group. A closer reading reveals spiral story lines that are complex and puzzling. This study built an interpretive framework with the help of the social identity theory to the reader to understand the world in which the text was written.

The approaches used in this study can be organized under two headings:

- Identity understanding; and
- Engagement and social interaction.

It became evident that these two topics are inextricably interwoven in 1 John. They work together as a whole to shape and form the understanding of the Johannine group. Chapters 3 to 6 of this study show us how topics like family, ethos, love, belonging, language, ethics, customs, religion, names, and shared historical memories were the cultural markers of group identity. These markers were fiercely protected and hotly disputed in the words of the author in 1 John. Thus, they were often the cause of tension between group members.

The application of the social identity theory allowed a closer look at these markers and revealed the importance of understanding the social world of these people to get a grasp on the identity of the groups visible in 1 John. Honour was the social value; people derived their identities from their groups. Like-mindedness, co-dependence, and conformity were value attributed to the first readers of 1 John.

The previous chapters also showed the centrality of memory and identity recreation in the letter. The letter is an act of remembering and identity creation.

The essays by Halvor Moxnes (2010:90-106), *"Landscape and Spatiality: Placing Jesus"* and Alan Kirk (2018), *"Memory Theory: Cultural and Cognitive approaches to the Gospel Tradition"*, offer useful insights to conclude the study. Moxnes explores the connection between place, identity, and memory, while Kirk examines the active role memory plays in forging identities and realities. "Like memory, tradition is refracted through the contemporary social realities of the communities in which it is enacted, such that it comes in important respects to reflect, even to signify those realities" (Kirk, 2010:62). The author's creative way

of addressing the group contests his audience's memory of these events and claims legitimacy for himself and his group. It also shows how the author aims to create a group climate that increases cognitive certainty and thereby commitment to the group.

This just shows how interpretive models like the social identity theory can shed new light on the traditional questions of methodology and interpretation. This process showed that social identity theory is a tool for organizing and categorizing data on groups and making connections between data to interpret and understand the different groups. The social identity theory helped to estimate the norms of the in-group. The basic strategy is to make the identity in Christ salient and valuable by actualizing the narrative rationale of the group so that they feel motivated to become prototypical group members of the "us" group in 1 John. Throughout the letter, the author narrates the prototypical attitude for the in-group through explicit statements.

As William Paden (2000:182) puts it, there is no study of religion (or groups) without cross-cultural categories, analysis, and perspective. His words are true for this study also.

"Knowledge in any field advances by finding connections between the specific and the generic. Like it or not, we attend to the world not in terms of objects but in terms of categories. Wherever there is a theory, wherever there is a concept, there is a comparative program" (Paden, 2000:182).

8.1. Final remarks on the insights derived from the different markers in this study

As the cognitive linguistic scholars George Lakoff and Mark Johnson³⁵⁹ (1999) phrase it, we have "embodied minds". Therefore, we can find basic processes of emotions, knowledge formation and interpretation that are essentially the same across time and culture. The question in this study was not if such processes exist, but what the cause of these regularities are. These regularities are distinguished in this study by these four identity markers (tradition, identity, mission, and ethos), to gain new insights on the group. Stated differently: How is culturally specific knowledge produced out of universal predispositions?

This study shows that we share many cognitive features with the Johannine group, since they, just like us, are humans. If we use knowledge about these cognitive capacities to make

359 Important study of Lakoff and Johnson, for this understanding is: "Metaphors we live by."

better assumptions about how they probably organized their experience cognitively, we can to some extent bridge the divide of time and culture and better understand their culturally unique construction of identity and behaviour norms. Through this study I argued that there are basic innate cognitive patterns in the human mind, like categorization, that provide a good hermeneutical starting point for students who want to understand the cognitive constructs that governed the experience of past subjects in cross-culturally valid categories. A systematic application of the insights from cognitive psychology has helped us to better understand the imagination of the Johannine group through the words of the author. The result of the investigation is a systematic comprehension of the relationship between identity and behaviour norms in 1 John, described in categories common to us and to the Johannine group. These categories were taken up as four markers (tradition, identity, mission, and ethos) in Chapter 3 to 6 and are concluded in the table below:

Tradition in Chapter 3
The prologue of 1 John indicates that the letter is based on tradition (1 Jn 1:1-4). The author crafts a “sense of us” with the use of specific words in terms of loyalty to “our” traditions (1 Jn 2:24) seen in Paraenesis (a text in which a person of authority, addresses a party who shares basic convictions about the nature and reality of God) in this text. Through internalization individuals identify with social meanings, so that these meanings or traditions, becomes their consciousness, as is the case in 1 John. From this account the social structured world is an ordering of experiences. The authenticity and authority of tradition is increased by linking it to the Johannine concept of TRUTH, which refers to what is authentically divine. The traditions they were part of and the world they lived in had a constant effect on each other and formed their identity. Group-oriented people tend to be oriented to the past and hope to embody the traditions of their ancestors, in this case the author and the memories he recalls. These memories he recalls enables them to live in the group, and living in the group enables them to build memories. The role of the spirit in preserving tradition in the group also stood out. This shows why identity flows out of tradition in this study. Mimesis and reciprocity are the bedrock for understanding tradition in 1 John.

Identity in Chapter 4

Group identity is the dynamic process of involving and excluding. Group identity is also no longer seen as static, homogeneous, and normative. Rather, they are defined as “untidy”, fluid, and transient (Jones, 1997:131). Group identity is also an active maintenance of boundaries in the process of social interaction in 1 John (Jones, 1997:28). In this process, there is always a prototype, the ideal, typical member. In this letter this role is portrayed by the author. There is a strong tendency in our field to assume that all members of “communities of faith” were constantly preoccupied with issues pertaining to right doctrine and praxis. I am more inclined to the view that such issues were probably subject to debate first and foremost among religious experts who had sufficient knowledge and interest to wage battles of right interpretation. Such people were of pivotal importance to their respective groups as entrepreneurs of identity; they forged the “sense of us” for those groups. That is why the author plays such an important role when identity is studied in 1 John. In an honour culture, a person is brought up to seek the approval of important members of the group. This approval is through identity markers in 1 John: walk (1 Jn 2:6); light (1 Jn 2:9); truth (1 Jn 2:4); these markers represent a certain worldview actively explained, motivated, and defended it is the core value of the Johannine worldview: Love. To really understand this identity, I took a closer look at the 1 John text through the lens of “otherness” – those who no longer participate in group life (1 Jn 4:1-3), since all groups are defined in comparison with other groups. The letter functions as an attempt to forge and bring together the author and the addressees, the “us” and the “you”.

Mission in Chapter 5

The study showed that mission is the expansion of identity. As the identity of a person cannot be understood apart from his or her relationship with their worldview, likewise, identity determines the rest of the process on the continuum of action formation. Identity is abstract and cannot be seen empirically or physically – it is only discoverable in its expressions in words and deeds, i.e., in formulating values or principles. From this account, the social world is an ordering of experience. The mission is shaped by the lived experiences of the group. Founding principles and beliefs are needed to remind the in-group of their purpose, core values and function as guidelines for group life, the koinonia. The use of certain words in the text evokes experience and motivates the group to act in certain ways. The norms of the

group are thus visible in the words of the author. Values and norms become Christ-like identity through dialectic language, the role of family metaphors in the group and the Cain and Abel debate, together with mimesis (1 Jn 2:6) “*whoever says he abides in him ought to walk in the same way in which he walked*”. The mission of the Johannine group is a call or responsibility to share their view of God in the way they live. From norm to action in the group = Mission.

Ethos in Chapter 6

Ethos is understood as the language and behaviour that flowed forth from a missionary understanding of identity. Ethos is shaped by the knowledge and beliefs of the group, which in part shapes the behaviour to strengthen the “us” and “you” identity in the group. Dualism meant that a person is either on the side of the author or in the dark. It became clear to me that 1 John contains remarks on ethics, but not a developed system. Identifying these remarks are not as pivotal as understanding the rationale behind them for group identity understanding. In this collectivist culture the self is understood not as distinct, but interdependent and integrated with others. Therefore, who I am, what I think and how I act, is a function of my salient social identity and my role in the group. In a functional sense the aim of ethos is to express and illustrate the identity of the 1 John group, outlining inclusive and exclusive behaviour. Cognitive identity is therefore translated into ethical identity. Actions cannot be separated from identity. Traditions and ethics are interrelated. The Johannine tradition = revelation of God through Christ in the group through Imitation (1 Jn 4:13-15).

These concluding remarks show that the Johannine letter speaks to us from a particular social world, and this should be investigated using disciplines developed specifically to comprehend the social dimensions of human experience in the text of 1 John. This study used several cognitive perspectives. The most important of these are the social identity theory. Therefore, this study has been able to systematically work through the cognitive structure of the in-group prototype (Chapter 7) in a new way. This cognitive perspective of this study has also facilitated a discussion about the potential cognitive group and group dynamic effects of the in-group prototype and the narratives that are expressed in 1 John. The author’s rhetorical strategy to influence the cognition of the recipients has been analysed with the social identity theory.

What follows are the innovative results of the study:

The heart of this analysis of 1 John is the reconstruction of how the author presents the in-group prototype together with reflections about the social effects this prototype could have if it became the shared cognition of the group. A necessary reminder is that there were no newspapers, no television or radio in the first century. What does this imply for the 1 John group member? In the villages and small towns, when the day's work was over, what else was there to do but to sit and talk, to share the news of the day, to tell stories, to recall matters of importance for the group. Kenneth Bailey (1991:34-54) suggests that the traditional evening gathering of Middle Eastern villagers was to listen and recite the tradition of the group, the *haflat samar*, is the continuation of a practice that stretches back to the time of Jesus and beyond. For this study it is important to re-envision how identity of a group was transmitted in an orally structured society in gatherings and settings as named above. The identity forming process expanded through the study with the focus firstly on the **tradition** of the 1 John group, from which an **identity** for the group was formed. This identity shaped their **mission**, which can also be named the code of conduct of the group. This in turn led to a group **ethos**. The communal character in which this letter was received, shows that the author retains the tradition on behalf of the group. The group's awareness of these markers discussed above, shows that the letter is heard within the group's horizon of expectation, there is prior knowledge of the tradition on which the identity is based. In the words of Jan Vansina³⁶⁰, "a walking reference library", in Johannine terms this certainly accords with the role of the author in providing what can properly be called foundational tradition. There was a tale to be told, a teaching to be treasured. The group formed their being. Implicit in this study is the suggestion that groups developed their own symbols, their own language, and their own stories to reinforce their identity. In this way oral tradition is oral memory and the primary function is to preserve and recall what is of importance from the past, to form the identity of the group. It was living tradition; that is, lived-in-and-through traditions. It was not so much kept as used (mission), not so much preserved as performed (ethos), not so much read as heard.

360 Vansina, *Oral Tradition as History*, similarly Havelock speaks of an oral encyclopaedia of social habit and custom-law and convention (Muse, 57-8).

We will soon return to the results of the analysis of the in-group prototype as discussed above, but first we highlight several results that paved the way for the analysis of the group prototype or in-group member as named in this study.

Firstly, social identity theory together with the other approaches helped to estimate the norms of the Johannine group, which is the most prominent identity defining marker.

Secondly, social identity theory provided a new perspective on the rhetorical strategy of the letter. The basic strategy is to make the identity in Christ salient and valuable by actualizing the narrative rationale of the group so that they feel motivated to become prototypical group members. It became visible that the author narrates their relation to different social categories and the connection between prototypical attributes and behaviours. With the naming of Cain and Abel, the rhetorical strategy is to narrate the causes of different behaviours and evaluate these causes as either prototypical or out-group behaviour. The rhetoric about the relation between identity in Christ and norms can be fruitfully analysed in terms of cognitive patterns that are common to us and to the recipients.

Thirdly, the most valuable insight gained from self-categorization theory's is the important role the author plays in this group. He has the legitimacy to control the information flow in the group and thus to increase the cognitive certainty in the group.

Returning to the in-group prototype, what follows are the most central results of the reconstruction of the in-group.

Firstly, the recipient of the letter is motivated to continuously act in line with the behavioural expressions of prototypicality as in-group members.

Secondly, this study has scrutinized how the author aims to create a group climate that increases cognitive certainty and thereby commitment to the group. Group members have to listen to the author to gain the knowledge that leads to prototypicality. This showed the important role of tradition in the group.

Thirdly, the most surprising result of the analysis was that the virtue of love was more strongly associated with conventional speech than with practical care. Thus, brotherly love could be seen as an ethics marker for the in-group.

This study again highlights the importance of social information for the interpretive process, in other words the interrelationship between and the impact of the meaning systems and social structures of the Mediterranean world on the New Testament texts. For this reason, at the end when concluding, it is important to stand still for a moment at the role of embodiment in this 1 John group.

8.2. Embodiment as final binder in Johannine group understanding then and now

The cognitive sciences are the sciences of the mind. Through this multi-disciplinary network of sciences, questions are asked on how our minds process and structure inputs, memories, attitudes, and decisions. It helps to form the picture of how the mind relates to the body and to the material, social and cultural context. Embodiment focuses on our bodies as the empirical and spiritual locus of human experience and knowledge. There appears to be two ways of knowing, the one driven by scientific evidence, the other by practice and intuition. The concept of embodiment brings these two ways together. Practices and theories emerge in our bodily engagements with the world and one another. Identity information is the focus of learning processes that shape selves to create personal, social, and religious identities that enable us to engage our social and religious worlds. The cohesion and identity of a group is a matter of collective imagining (social memory). For the 1 John group, it is thus also a matter of becoming and being constructed through memory. Comprehending this process of social memory is central to this study. Belonging is basically the process of learning the proverbs and aphorisms that indicate social expectation and behaviour. An example of this in 1 John is sayings like “being in the Light” or “walking in the truth” as markers of the identity of the “us” group. A “model” is given in 1 John (in the words of the author) to be imitated, and this is the process of mimesis or reciprocity³⁶¹. A person is thus taken up in a new worldview within which he or she will be influenced to accept the values and traditions of that worldview.

Being human is essentially to be embodied in our presence in, and engagement with the world (Brown & Strawn 2012). It is only through our body and its senses that we know of a world “out there”; it is through our bodies that we handle and manipulate material objects; it is through our bodies that we engage in communication and communion with other human

³⁶¹ Reciprocity and mimesis are discussed in detail in Chapter 3.

beings. Lakoff and Johnson (1999) argue that our entire system of perception and knowledge is developed through this embodied engagement; even our most abstract language and identity is based on the metaphorical development of our physical, embodied participation in the world. This is not to deny that human beings are *more* than bodies, but to insist that the human body is the principal means of engagement with the world and with others; these engagements are the basis of human communication and human epistemological systems. This implies that such an idea as "theory" does not exist as universal truth "out there", but that it arises in personal and communal interaction with one's environment, as continual social interaction and negotiation develop perspectives and theories of what is the case.

We can only and ever observe reality through our bodily engagement with the world, with one another and, indeed, with God himself (Rorty, 2009; in Smith, 2014). This shows the importance of understanding the social world of the 1 John group member and the reader of 1 John.

This embodied engagement with the social and religious context is a growing focus in theology. For instance, Osmer (2008) proposes that the first task of theology is the descriptive-empirical task that requires a spirituality of faithful listening. When looking into embodiment, the role of the author in the 1 John group and his importance becomes visible. Leadership can be seen as the embodied performance of providing a safe holding environment amidst liminality to enable people to cope, to be transformed and to develop a new sense of social identity. Holzmer focuses on the leader's task to create "communicative space between people" so that the "transformative process" of dialogue can yield fruit (Holzmer, 2013:57–58). From this perspective, leadership is not simply a rational process that directs the vision and actions of followers through disembodied discourse, but it becomes a rational, emotional, and intuitive performance to create a safe holding environment for followers despite fears and insecurities. Holzmer thus illustrates how leadership is an essentially embodied process in which discernment and dialogue are vital social practices to enable groups to determine fruitful courses of action, which is the focus of 1 John.

Embodied realism is a particular variety of critical realism (Schilbrack, 2014). Its critical appraisal of realism rests on the realization that we can only know reality through our embodied engagement with it. Embodied realism has fascinating implications for how we

think about concrete experiences in all their diversity. For “pure reason,” diversity is simply the contingent part of our experience that needs to be “peeled away” to attain universal knowledge. For practical reasons, however, diversity is precisely the stuff from which we discover and attain knowledge. Such embodied forms of knowledge require relationships, interaction, and dialogue to share personal embodied knowledge, to make it explicit or public. This can be done informally through common manipulation of the material world, and through conversation and dialogue, or more formally through community negotiations and scientific research (Benner, 2000:8).

Our theories about this reality are always dependent on our embodied engagement with the world and our communication with one another. This is not to deny that reality exists independently of our observations and engagements with it, but to insist that even our best academic efforts can only be proximate descriptions of reality as it really is, since we are not able to rise completely above all human limitations of perception and knowledge.

We always search for others, for groups, with whom to share and to which to belong. We *can* and *do* step out of ourselves, so to speak, by communicating about our embodied handling of the world with others, checking our own experiences against those of others, and consequently adjusting our theories to incorporate a wider range of experiences. This is exactly what the 1 John group did, with the experiences portrayed by the author. This framework of embodied realism means that the human body is the locus where practice and theory meet, from which they both spring. This study supported the theoretical part in New Testament studies. In our embodied participation in the world and in its communities, there is yet no distinction between practice and theory.

At this point it is prudent to mention that groups and communities, as communities of practice, develop certain habits or practices as they interact with, and communicate about the world. Reflections – what one might call informal theories – are formed about these habits and practices, which might change those practices. Yet, these practices, in turn, might generate new insights, changing or correcting those reflections. My argument to this point is that both practices and theories emerge from our embodied participation in the world as well as from our embodied interaction with others, which was also the case in ancient Mediterranean times. This highlights the 1 John group as first readers of the author’s words, forming their identity and group ethos (Wenger, 1998).

Thus, groups transmit practices related to what to do and how to do it, particular views, reflections, theories, and beliefs about the importance of learning, maintaining, and developing this identity. Individual group members who adopt and embody these practices and reflections become, as it were, normative group members: they become in-group prototypes (Hogg, 2001). This study showed the author as the prototypical group member.

The emphasis on embodied realism and identity formation implies that hermeneutical competence is not simply directed at (ancient) texts, their wording, grammar and meaning, nor should it be simply refocused to include human beings as if they are also texts. Rather, hermeneutics should focus on understanding habits and practices, and on the ability to "read" practices and their discourses (texts) as forms of theological expression, constantly in dialogue, negotiating and competing with other forms of theological practice, discourse and normativity.

Theological scholarship often focuses on texts and the history of ideas. Moreover, there is a tendency to reiterate the mind-body dualism by focusing religious knowledge on that which is spiritual, in contrast to the body as a material dimension of faith. Christians typically picture themselves as incarnating Christ anew in their own lives and experiences. Thus, embodiment is an essential part of Christian thinking and practice, even if much of academic theology has been disembodied, perhaps even disincarnated. My hope is that this study brought together theory and practice with the focus on the text and with the help of social identity theory.

"Lived religion is constituted by the practices by which people remember, share, enact, adapt, and create the 'stories' out of which they live. And it is constituted through the practices by which people turn these 'stories' into everyday action. Ordinary material existence—especially the human body—is the very stuff of these meaningful practices. Religious and spiritual practices—even interior ones, such as contemplation—involve people's bodies and emotions, as well as their minds and spirits" (McGuire, 2008:197–198).

Embodied spirituality is essentially a relational phenomenon. Our embodied, metaphorical mode of thinking, and our embodied discernment in communities of practice assume a social and ecological system in which we live. Humans cannot function otherwise. It is only in relational fashion that our embodied intuitions and knowledge become shared. Knowing God

and knowing the world is to participate in the material, social and spiritual world by sharing with and relating to other participants.

8.3. Where I position my study in the New Testament field

With social location and processes becoming important in studies of early Christianity, scholars began to understand that identity formation was much more than a matter of maintaining ethnic boundaries and the negotiation of diverse beliefs. Identity formation is a complex process that is shaped by various social factors. The earliest sociological approaches to early Christianity focused on describing the social context in which Christianity developed and may be represented in the important works of E.A. Judge (2008) and H.C. Kee (1980), for example.

Although this scholarship has proven extremely helpful in gauging the context of the ancient world, social description did not produce a more complete understanding of the process of identity formation. Sensing a need to analyse social processes, some scholars began to employ various models and perspectives from cultural anthropology and social psychology. For example, Jack Sander's *Schismatics, Sectarians, Dissidents, Deviants* (1993) employs deviance theory in an examination of the relationships between Judeans and Christ-followers before 135 CE.

Another important scholar voice in this field was Minna Shkul (2008), who employs the social identity approach to demonstrate how Ephesians established early Christian identity. Shkul reviews literature on social remembering and reputation construction and applies these in an examination of how the text of Ephesians uses the reputations of Christ and Paul to legitimize the community, explaining non-Israelite inclusion into the people of God, reforms of Judean culture, and contours of the early Christian identity. These studies show that social-scientific models, particularly the social identity approach, have proven beneficial in examining the processes involved in early Christian identity formation. I position this study in this thought stream.

This study focused on social interactions in the first century Johannine group and the group processes and the distinctions made between in-group and out-group members. The study intended to provide readers with an introduction to social identity theory and its use as a heuristic device for biblical interpretation. It involves social differentiation based on group

membership and includes consideration of salient group norms, boundaries, and rituals. This approach is dependent on a thorough understanding of the text itself, so it builds on the results of lexicographical, grammatical, and discourse analysis. Moreover, the approach is dependent on understanding the text in its historical and cultural context, so it integrates results from historical and anthropological studies of ancient Middle Eastern culture, as was done in Chapters 3 to 6. The research tried to piece together the interaction between culture, group dynamics, narratives, spirituality, morality, and beliefs about what causes group members to act into a coherent account of how identity relates to behaviour norms. A social identity approach then built on these levels of understanding with an analysis of how the text functioned in the social interaction of the group and the leadership discourse of the author to shape the identity of the group.

The words of Judith Lieu (2004:62) shapes the concluding thoughts on this study, she notes that “without continuity there can be no identity”, thus stories “construct identity through their poetics”. Identity is shaped, therefore, as stories from the past are re-interpreted to meet the needs of the present and future. In this regard, texts “shape and are shaped by communities’ dynamic self-understanding” (Lieu, 2004:27). This analysis shows how this letter functioned as an identity group forming tool to shape the group’s socio-religious identity. In New Testament studies, this represents an innovative approach that is slowly gaining traction in the field.

8.4. Relevance of this study

The goal of this study was to examine the groups visible in 1 John. The cognitive research on how the human brain understands and evaluates was helpful in shaping this understanding on groups. The cognitive neurosciences have emerged as an exciting and rapidly developing interdisciplinary venture of our era. The results produced by the cognitive sciences are, however, not a ready-made dictionary that the humanities can lean on without caution. There are still many unresolved issues regarding the capacities and restraints of the human mind. This shows that anyone who wishes to use the insights of cognitive psychology must therefore first scrutinize the state of the debate in the group of cognitive scholars. With this being said, as new insights emerged from this study on 1 John that has the potential to open new understandings on the social world of 1 John. The research also shed new light on the traditional questions of methodology and interpretation. The social identity theory was a valuable tool for organizing and categorizing data and for making

connections between data – not for creating new data (Garrett, 1992:89-99). The insights helped me to better understand the imagination and behaviour of the Johannine group. The result was an investigation on the relation between identity and behaviour norms. The conclusion of Chapter 7 also facilitated a discussion about the potential cognitive dynamics, together with a broader understanding on the prototype. The author of 1 John aims to induce the belief that certain behaviours are caused by certain prototypical attributes, while other behaviours are caused by out-group attributes.

The cognitive approach will never become a hegemonic research paradigm since it is no universal solution to all historical problems. However, the specific framework that has been developed in this study has potential for use to analyse the relationship between identity and behaviour norms in other text of the early Christ movement to gain a deeper understanding on identity and belonging.

Lieu helps with four fundamental aspects of 1 John that remain central today (Lieu, 1991:115-117):

- 1) The way and the terms in which faith is understood do matter. The development of doctrine is essential. It may seem that 1 John errs on the side of cleaving to past traditions with the focus on what has been heard in the collective memory. However, the focus on Jesus together with mutual love stays central.
- 2) The testing of statements of faith in the light of tradition and experience is the task and responsibility of the whole community of faith. The experience of the whole community, grounded in what has been heard and proclaimed, stands in continuity with the first witness of those who physically saw and touched Jesus.
- 3) The central place 1 John gives to the confidence of the group as seen in the identity understanding of the in-group. 1 John affirms that believers are born of God, are children of God, do know God. The dualist passage in 1 John 3:4-10 declares that the coming of Jesus has brought about the destruction of the power of the evil and enables those who belief to live free from that power.

4) 1 John insists that in the group *belief* and *behaviour* are inseparable. Thus 1 John sidesteps that works might put us right with God. Behaviour is focused on the inner life of the group and the command to love one another³⁶².

8.5. Future studies

The study of the Johannine group through the lense of social identity theory to reveal how they defined the group and their opponents, may prove useful in studies of other religious polemical and apologetic texts. Those who continue to examine polemical texts as groups striving for positive distinctiveness and presupposing their identity as the most orthodox in-group, will be able to understand how ancient religious groups distinguished themselves from competing religious groups. From this 1 John study, it is known that early Christianity was more diverse than the Johannine group desired, so that they felt the need to urge homogeneity and view their own group as holding the only truth through Jesus and the Paraclete in the words of the author. Although the Johannine group believes that their opponents “did not belong to us” (1 Jn 2:19), their conceptions and claims concerning out-groups can inform our understanding of both the group’s priorities in social identification as well as their use of literary polemical strategies. However, it is clear from the study that more research can be done in this area. Further questions include: How does the Johannine in-group prototype, shared by the author, compare with other New Testament authors views on a prototype? How do the group dynamics of 1 John compare with the group dynamics of the Johannine Gospel? Further study can also be done on the relationship between ritual and religious knowledge.

It can also be interesting to do further studies on the Johannine group with the Kluckhohn-Strodtbeck model (1961). This model was developed to discover diverse values among different groups. The model enjoys wide currency today and has proved quite insightful and useful to a variety of people who wish to make comparisons across cultures. The purpose for introducing this value-preference model will be to supply an even broader canvas on which to depict the behavioural scenarios of the group-oriented Johannine group.

³⁶² This remark is explained in more detail in chapter 5 on mission and chapter 6 on ethos.

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