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The concept of sinlessness and sinfulness in the first letter of John:

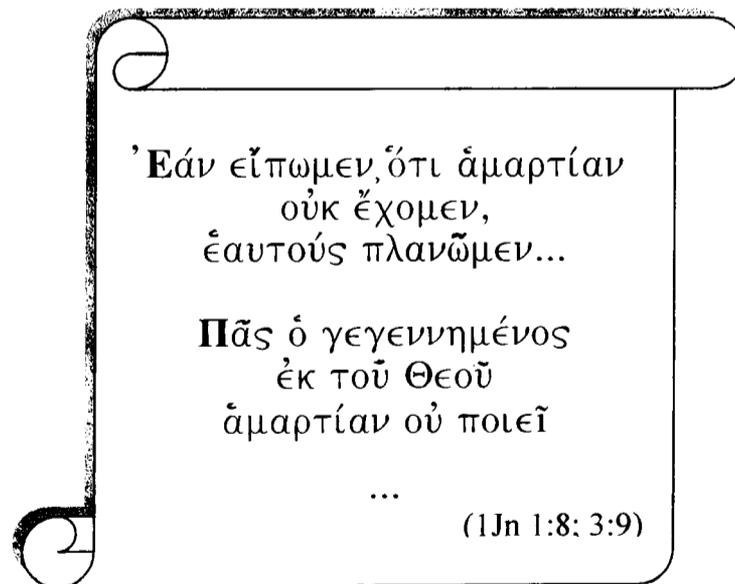
With reference to  
the paradox encountered in 1:6-10/3:6-10

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A dissertation submitted to  
the department of theology and religious studies  
University of Glasgow

In candidacy for the degree of doctor of Philosophy

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## **THESIS ABSTRACT**

The purpose of this thesis is to investigate the meaning and function of an apparently paradoxical statement encountered in the first letter of John. The method chosen for this investigation is an exegetical study of two passages namely 1Jn 1:6-10 and 3:6-10, which are supposed to be in juxtaposition.

The argument, reduced to its bare minimum, will move as follows.

Firstly, the first chapter sets the context for this study by addressing the issue of sin and its parameters in contemporary Jewish literature. Jewish writers of the time were much occupied with such themes as sin, sinfulness and sinlessness, need of cleansing, forgiveness, the reward of the righteous and punishment of the wicked. The Jewish world of thought of the time provides us with the ideological framework in which John is to be better understood. We are to witness the coexistence of apparently contradictory modes of thought concerning eschatology and by extension anthropology; for instance, statements supporting the exercise of free will on man's part and God's predestination or references to the idea of demonic powers being accountable for sin and man's own responsibility for sin, 'like those of a railway, run side by side, crisscross, or overlap in various ways', even in the same piece of work.

Bearing in mind the result of the study of this background, chapter two undertakes an examination of the history of the community whose products the Fourth Gospel and the Epistles were. According to our findings, the Johannine community never became a sect alienated from the rest of Christianity, in spite of the presence of sectarian traits such as perfectionist ideas and ethical rigorism, the exaggeration of which led finally to an inner schism. Next, chapter three investigates the identity of those in combat in 1John, the so-called opponents of John, concluding that having being former members of the Johannine community, they misinterpreted the Johannine tradition conveyed by the Fourth Gospel, drawing radical conclusions about their sinlessness/perfection from its realised eschatology.

The following two chapters concentrate on the exegetical approach of the two passages referred above. Referring to scholars' opinions from Westcott to today's scholars, I express my opinion on the issues brought up by the epistolary author. In the exegesis it becomes obvious, to an extent at least, where the inconsistency lies and how the author conceives it.

Lastly, in the light of my research in the preceding chapters, I draw conclusions on the meaning and function of this paradox in the first letter of John; a paradox which finally is of vital importance to our understanding of Christian life and experience. Briefly, the

two passages represent two sides of the same coin. Both are essential to our perception of the sinfulness and sinlessness of the believer; for it is in the believer's life that present and future meet and cooperate.

Moreover, John does not seem willing to give up either point. On the contrary, scandalous though it sounds, in 1:6-10 the epistolary author stresses the continual presence of sin in the believer's life. That the believer is sinful is what every day experience demonstrates but the claim is supported also and above all, by God's provision of means of cleansing from sin. Still, in 3:6-10 the author stresses the fact that having fellowship with God, the believer, being God's child, is sinless. This gift however, is going to be fully experienced only in the age to come. Thus, despite his sinfulness, the believer has to bear in mind that he is a child of God *already*, but what he is going to be has not been revealed *yet*: 'Beloved, we are God's children now; what we will be has not yet been revealed' (1Jn 3:2).

This tension between the *already* (realised eschatology) achieved but *not yet* (future eschatology) realised, is, in my opinion, the framework in which the paradox under consideration is to be better understood.

Let us explain it, in detail, in the chapters to follow.

## **TABLE OF ABBREVIATIONS**

ABD	Anchor Bible Dictionary
Adv. Haer.	Irenaeus, <i>Adversus haereses</i> [ <i>Against Heresies</i> ]
The Apostolic Fathers:	
IClem.	I Clement
Ign. Eph.	Ignatius, to the Ephesians
Ign. Trall.	Trallians
Ign. Smyrn.	Smyrnaeans
Ign. Phld.	Philadelphians
Pol.Phil	Polycarp, to the Philippians
Did.	Didache (The teaching of the twelve Apostles)
BJRL	Bulletin of the John Rylands Library
Corp. Herm.	Corpus Hermeticum
DSS	Dead Sea Scrolls
	CD            The Damascus Document
	IQS            The Community Rule
	IQH            The Thanksgiving Hymns
	IQM            The War Scroll
	IQ27            The Triumph of Righteousness or Mysteries
	IQ14            Commentary on Micah
	IQpHab        Commentary on Habakkuk
Expos	The Expositor
GJohn	The Gospel of John
HeyJ	Heythrop Journal
Hist. Eccl.	Eusebius' Ecclesiastical History
ICC	International Critical Commentary
1Jn	The first letter of John
2Jn	The second letter of John
JSNT	Journal for the Study of the New Testament
JBL	Journal of Biblical Literature
JTS	The Journal of Theological Studies
NHL	Nag Hammadi Library
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version (1989)
NT	New Testament
NTA	New Testament Apocrypha

NTS	New Testament Studies
NovT	Novum Testamentum
OT	Old Testament
OTP	Old Testament Pseudepigrapha
	T12P           Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs
	TReu           Testament of Reuben
	TSim           Simeon
	TLevi          Levi
	TJud           Judah
	TIss           Issachar
	TZeb           Zebulon
	TDan           Dan
	TNaph          Nephtali
	TGad           Gad
	TAsh           Asher
	TJos           Joseph
	TBenj          Benjamin
	2Bar           2(Syriac Apocalypse of) Baruch
	1En            1(Ethiopic Apocalypse of) Enoch
	4Ezra          4Ezra
	Jub            Jubilees
	Odes Sol       Odes of Solomon
	Pss Sol        Psalms of Solomon
PG	Patrologia Graeca
PL	Patrologia Latina
SC	Sources Chretiennes
TDNT	Theological Dictionary of the New Testament

Abbreviations from the Scripture follow those of NRSV (pp.xxvii-xxviii).

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## **PREFACE**

In the first year of my studies in the faculty of theology in Thessaloniki, I was taught that the Fourth Gospel is the θεολογικώτερον of the Gospels. With the passage of time however, I realized that what was simply said in the first centuries was repeatedly challenged by modern scholarship to a great extent. So, when time came I decided to do my masters degree on the Gospel of John. This was the outset of my adventure in the corridors of Johannine scholarship. Exploring the Johannine world has been a challenge for me since then. It seems that I really enjoyed it, as I also decided to write a thesis related to the Johannine field.

It struck me that many scholars talked of the Johannine ‘riddle’, ‘problem’, ‘question’, ‘enigma’, marvellous though, (*‘das wundervollste Räthsel’*) and ‘puzzle’. It was a challenge for me to try to comprehend the way this ‘puzzle’ works; I did not think that I could complete it but at least I could try to put even just a piece in its place; for I believe that there are some ‘puzzles’, the solution of which lies elsewhere than in scientific approach.

So, I embarked on the exploration of sinfulness and sinlessness as 1John conceives them. At the end of my Odyssey, I just hope that I have added a tiny stone to the building of Johannine scholarship. Not that I have something to give but I certainly have taken much walking through my way to my *Ithaca*.

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Secondly, I would like to thank members of the faculty of Divinity at the University of Glasgow and my colleagues for supporting me and providing a friendly environment to work in, over the last three years. I honestly thank them for making me feel not a foreigner but a friend from another country.

Most of all, however, I wish to give my profound thanks to my supervisor, Prof. John Riches for his knowledgeable guidance, precious judgements on my work, his encouragement and even the correction of my English-admittedly influenced by Greek-since I embarked on my research. I truly thank him for his being tolerant, encouraging and even 'blunt' occasionally, as he used to say when for instance he had to ask me to rewrite a chapter.

Also, I would like to thank my parents, Μιχαήλ καί Γεωργία to whom, I actually dedicate this work, for their endless love and various support under all circumstances. I also want to express my gratitude to my spiritual family, here in Glasgow, at St. Luke's orthodox cathedral for their own contribution to the completion of this work. Particularly, I am grateful to my spiritual father, Rev. Archimandrite John H. Maitland Moir in Edinburgh, for his precious guidance and love ἐν Κυρίῳ, during my staying in Glasgow.

Last but not least, as apart from emotional support material support is not negligible, I have to mention that for financial assistance in bringing the present work to fruition I am indebted to the State Scholarships Foundation (S.S.F./I.K.Y.) for the award of a research grant, as well as a grant to cover thesis preparation costs. I hope that I have used the money I have been offered in the best possible way.

Finally, I just hope that I should be able to return but a portion of the loving support and contributions of any kind, I have received so abundantly from others; at least this work is a token of my being willing to do so.

## **GENERAL INTRODUCTION**

In this thesis I will attempt to explore the character and the function of the apparently paradoxical statements encountered in the first letter of John. Specifically, while John in 1:6-10 stresses the fact that the believer is sinful and for this reason God has provided means of cleansing from sin, in 3:6-10 he points out the fact that being God's child, the believer does not sin and actually *cannot* sin. This paradox undoubtedly poses a serious question regarding the extent to which perfection is to be enjoyed by Christians. Moreover, this question becomes, I think, more acute in form in 1John than in any other NT document and represents a problem which actually led to an inner schism.

In the Fourth Gospel, Jesus is the life Himself (14:6). The believers already enjoy eternal life (6:47; cf. 3:15-16, 36; 6:51). Briefly, the fact that elements of realised eschatology dominate the thought of GJohn cultivates a sense of perfectionism. The greater the claim that they already possess eternal life, the greater the expectation their lives will be perfect.

Yet, in the Epistle, John rather highlights another aspect of the coin called the believer and sin, namely the fact that believers are sinful. He shifts the emphasis from realised to future eschatology for an inner schism in his own community functions as a reminder, I would say, of the existence of sin even among those who thought of themselves to already possess eternal life.

Further, attempting to comprehend this situation, we have to answer a number of questions that are raised.

Firstly, does this situation reflect tensions found elsewhere in the religious world of the time? In our attempt to answer this question, we will set the background of this study, exploring the use of sin and its parameters (namely, the nature and the origin of sin/evil, repentance and forgiveness, reward and punishment, man's responsibility/God's election and finally sinlessness and its achievement), in contemporary Jewish literature. As will be shown, sin was a favourite theme for the writers of that time and there are ideas and concepts, which Johannine and Jewish thought have in common.

Secondly, we will examine to what extent the problem of perfectionism emerges from the community's history itself. In our opinion, the Johannine community in its distinctiveness may have offered grounds for the perfectionist assertions of sinlessness. These assertions moreover, it seems to me, may have been voiced by some schismatics who misinterpreted the message of the Fourth Gospel and with whom the epistolary author seems to be in combat.

Finally, bearing all the above in mind, we will turn to the exegesis section of this study in order for us to explore what the text itself says about this problem, the so-called,

Johannine paradox. To be more specific, in the first passage under discussion, 1:6-10, the author by those 'if' clauses stresses what the preconditions are in order for the believer to 'have κοινωνία' with God. So, the believer has κοινωνία with God provided that he 'walks in the light', as God 'is the light'. 'Walking in darkness' and at the same time asserting his having fellowship with God, the believer lies and he is not doing the truth.

Further, does the fact that sin is an obstacle to the maintenance of this relationship between God and the believer suggest that the one who is in κοινωνία with God, is sinless? The author answers in the negative. Sin and God are certainly two incompatible realities as are darkness and light. However, God has provided for the believers means of cleansing themselves from sin. They just have to 'confess' their sins, ask for forgiveness and the 'blood of Jesus' cleanses them from all sin. The assertion of sinlessness however, proves God a liar and the salvific work of His Son, Jesus Christ, empty.

Despite all the above, as the Epistle unfolds, in the third chapter and especially in our second passage, 3:6-10, we hear the author saying 'no one who abides in him sins' (3:6); actually, 'those who have been born of God do not sin...they cannot sin...' (3:9). At this point a Johannine, a Christian I would rather say, paradox emerges. So, is John contradicting himself in such a short piece of writing?

A lot of ink and energy has been devoted to clarifying this *inconsistency*. I will argue that in this paradox lies actually the point John wishes to make. The author cannot deny either the fact that the believer is sinful or that, being a child of God, he is sinless. In a way, reading the first passage we should overhear the 'but' which follows in chapter three, in order for us to comprehend his argument in its wholeness.

As will be shown in the following chapters, both statements represent the truth. In the relevant passages the issue of sin and the believer is examined from different perspectives: present reality and future expectation. The children of God *are* sinless as they are God's offspring, *but* this reality is not to be fully realised till the eschaton. For the Johannine community and the early church as a whole I suppose, the emergence of heretical tendencies verifies that the devil, who 'has been sinning from the beginning' (1Jn 3:8), is still around. In 1John, as I see it, the very experience of an inner schism has necessitated for the community a shift of emphasis from present/realised eschatology-represented by and large by the Fourth Gospel-to the future eschatology highlighted by the Epistle.

Moreover, I think that this shift in eschatology correlates with a shift in Christology. Jesus in GJohn is the realisation and the embodiment of every godly attribute. Having communion with Him, the believer shares these attributes. Undoubtedly, the Fourth

Gospel led itself to be read in a rather perfectionist way. The Epistle however, highlights another aspect of Jesus' mission, the atoning effect of His death. Furthermore, this shift in eschatology and Christology reflects also on anthropology. 1John emphasizes the voluntaristic aspect of salvation though in GJohn the deterministic colouring is dominant.

It is significant however, that though occasionally, one aspect of eschatology, Christology and anthropology dominates, both sides of them present and future, already but not yet, human will and God's election, are present in GJohn and 1John, betraying their paradoxical collaboration in Christian experience.

## ***CHAPTER ONE: Sin and its parameters in Contemporary Jewish Literature***

### ***Introduction***

Setting the background of our research, we now turn to the examination of the term sin and its parameters in contemporary Jewish literature. Undoubtedly, the wider environment of that time has contributed, to an extent at least, to the emergence of ideas expressed in our text. Johannine literature was born in a specific religious context under specific ideological circumstances, the exploration of which might help us to explain certain paradoxes met in 1John.

As will be seen, other people have as well attempted to explain the existence and the function of antithetical realities such as sinfulness and sinlessness in human nature. The most important element is, I esteem, the fact that we even witness two different religious frameworks or modes of thought, seemingly contradictory, in the same text. This last observation is of special interest to our approach to John, as what we are going to deal with is the presence of a similar paradox in 1John according to which sinfulness and sinlessness are thought to be simultaneously present in the believer's life.

Is such a paradox as odd as we think it is? We will see that actually it is not. Rather, it is an idea of frequent occurrence in contemporary religious documents. Sinfulness and sinlessness lie alongside one another as, struggling for sinlessness, the sinful believer has a foretaste of the fruit of sinlessness that belongs to the age to come.

Qumran literature and the other Jewish writings of the time we are going to deal with below, constitute a part of the general religious milieu in which Johannine works were born. Before getting into the matter of our primary interest namely, sin and sinlessness, granted that these notions are a part of dualistic schemas widely employed by the documents under consideration, I assume that we have to refer briefly to the dualistic patterns traced in them.

A dualistic frame of thought is characteristic of sectarian communities. As Collins observes, 'dualism is obviously highly compatible with a sectarian ideology', as 'it provides a way of explaining why the truth, as the sect sees it, is utterly rejected by others, even those who profess to worship the same God'.<sup>1</sup> For instance, as the same scholar observes, 'it is reasonable to suppose that the sharp separation between light and darkness posited in the Instruction on the Two Spirits, reflects the alienation of the Dead

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<sup>1</sup> Collins, 1997, p.44

Sea sect from the world around it and its decision to separate itself from the majority of the people'.<sup>2</sup>

First and foremost, I suppose, we have to define the kinds of dualism that can be found, as it is really important to our approach to dualistic writings. Quoting the Oxford English Dictionary definition of dualism, according to which dualism is 'the doctrine that there are two independent principles one good and the other evil', Barrett observes that 'if the word *independent* is to be taken seriously, there are not many really dualistic systems, systems that have not only a truly independent God but also a truly independent devil, eternal and unchanging as God himself'.<sup>3</sup> Thus, in Barrett's words, 'there are narrow limits to the area in which true dualism is to be found'.<sup>4</sup>

Moreover, exploring the origin of evil and by implication sin in the Jewish documents of the time, we are going to follow mainly, de Boer's two 'tracks of Jewish apocalyptic eschatology'.<sup>5</sup> According to the first track, which he labels 'cosmological apocalyptic eschatology', 'this age is characterized by the fact that evil angelic powers have, in some primeval time (namely, the time of Noah), come to rule over the world'. The story of the fallen angels, de Boer proceeds, 'is found or alluded to, in much of the literature (*1Enoch* 6-19; 64.1-2; 69.4-5; 86.1-6; 106.13-17; *Jub.* 4.15,22; 5.1-8; 10.4-5; *T.Reub.* 5.6-7; *T.Naph.* 3.5; *CD* 2.17-3.1; *2Bar.* 56.12-15; *Wis.* 2.23-24; cf. *Jude* 6; *2Pet.* 2.4)'. The basic story, one that also lies behind *Gen* 6:1-6, is that 'some of God's angels descended to the earth and married beautiful women, thereby begetting giants. Though there was a preliminary judgment of the angels themselves in the time of the Flood, the giants they begot left behind a host of demonic spirits who continue to pervert the earth, primarily by leading human beings, even God's own people, astray into idolatry. Furthermore, it is evident that Satan (Mastema, Belial, the devil) and his angels continue to wreak havoc on the earth'.<sup>6</sup>

Moreover, according to the second track labeled 'forensic apocalyptic eschatology', 'this age is characterized by the fact that human beings willfully reject or deny the Creator, who is the God of Israel, thereby bringing about death and the perversion and

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<sup>2</sup> Collins, 1997, pp.44-45

<sup>3</sup> Barrett, 1982, pp.100-101 However, he adds, gnosis, 'comes nearer to absolute dualism; it is significant that it always finds its chief problem not in the doctrine of salvation but in the doctrine of creation'. He also refers to Philo noting that Philo does share 'some of the features of Gnosticism, trembles on the brink of dualism and sometimes seems to go over the edge'. Houlden, 1973, pp.15-16, as well observes that though gnosticism held an ontological dualism, Johannine writers hold an ethical one. See also Rensberger, 1997, pp.40-41

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p.102

<sup>5</sup> See de Boer, 1989, pp.174-180 To clarify the term 'apocalyptic', de Boer, 1989, pp.173-174 quotes Martyn's definition according to which, apocalyptic involves 'the conviction that *God* has now given to the elect true perception *both* of present developments (the real world) and of a wondrous transformation in the near future'. Martyn L., *Apocalyptic Antinomies*, p.424 n.28

<sup>6</sup> De Boer, 1989, p.174

corruption of the world. Adam and/or Eve are the primal ancestors who set the pattern for all subsequent human beings'.<sup>7</sup> Furthermore, 'the fall of Adam and/or Eve is mentioned in a number of works (see *1Enoch* 69.6; *Jub* 3.17-25; 4.29-30; *Sir.* 25.24; *Wis.* 10.1; cf. *2Cor.* 11.3; *1Tim.* 2.13-14; *1Cor.* 15.21-22; *Rom.* 5.12-21)'. More specifically, the fall of Adam and Eve is mentioned, de Boer notes, in two apocalypses, *4Ezra* and *2Baruch*.<sup>8</sup>

Accordingly, distinguishing between two accounts of the origin of evil, we are going to refer to ethical dualism and cosmological dualism. We are talking about ethical or forensic dualism in the sense that men, being responsible for their acting sinfully, are divided into two groups according to their virtues or vices. While observing God's Law, the righteous are to achieve salvation, the wicked by disobeying it are to be damned. Moreover, the assumption that evil angelic powers are to be held responsible for human sinning, leads to what we call cosmological dualism, meaning the division of the cosmos into two camps namely, God's dominion and evil reign. Further, the latter ceases after a cosmic battle that takes place at the eschaton. Finally, regarding to the eschaton, we can also refer to eschatological dualism in the sense that the present age is to be replaced by the new one, while reward and punishment are prepared for the righteous and the wicked respectively when this new aeon is to be established.

Furthermore, what de Boer stresses, and I would positively agree with him, is of great significance. He says actually, that by these 'tracks' he does not suggest that 'the various Jewish documents that to one degree or another bear witness to the eschatological dualism of the two ages can be assigned simply to one of the two tracks'. Rather, the tracks presented are '*heuristic models* that may be used as interpretive tools to understand the dynamics of the various texts'<sup>9</sup>, as will be seen below.

Specifically, with regard to the character of the dualism traced in Qumran writings, it is commonly accepted that Qumran dualism is at least partly, rooted in Zoroastrianism.<sup>10</sup> It is always distinguishable at an essential point namely, it is a *modified*<sup>11</sup> dualism, in the sense that 'the spirits of Light and Darkness', have been created by God and He 'founded every action upon them and established every deed [upon] their [ways]' (IQS

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<sup>7</sup> De Boer, 1989, p.175

<sup>8</sup> In *4Ezra* 3:5-7, 20-21; 4:30-31; 7:118-119; *2Bar* 17:2-3; 23:4; 48:42-43; 54:14,19; 56:6. *Evil angelic powers are absent from both works.* Ibid., p.175

<sup>9</sup> De Boer, 1989, p.176

<sup>10</sup> Boismard, 1972, p.157 Brown, 1968, p.142 as well notes: 'while much of their (referring to DSS) ideology is phrased in a quasi-biblical language, the guiding inspiration of the dualism is clearly extrabiblical. In a series of brilliant articles, K.G. Kuhn seems to have successfully identified this source as Iranian Zoroastrianism'. So Knibb, 1987, p.96; Painter, 1991, p.30; Lieu, 1991, p.80

<sup>11</sup> This term is employed by Brown, 1968, p.141; Charlesworth, 1972, p.88; Price, 1972, p.15; Painter, 1991, p.30; Barrett, 1995, p.107

III, 25).<sup>12</sup> Moreover, these spirits are dependent on God, as is everything that exists, for, ‘from the God of Knowledge comes all that is and shall be’ (IQS III, 15). In fact, the monotheistic core of Jewish religion rules out any possibility of absolute dualism in the sense that there are two different opposing to each other principles in the world, one good and the other evil. As Brown adds, ‘modified dualism adds the corrective that these principles are not uncreated, but are both dependent on God the Creator’.<sup>13</sup>

Furthermore, commenting on the dualism found particularly in IQS III, 13-IV, 26, Charlesworth stresses that ‘we find a modified dualism both because the “Spirit of Truth” and the “Spirit of Perversity” are subjugated to one God, and because the dualism is limited by the finite existence of the “Spirit of Perversity”-he appeared after God and will disappear at the final judgment (4:18)’.<sup>14</sup>

We come across a number of dualistic schemas in Qumran for as Boismard notes, in Qumran literature ‘dualism expresses itself by means of two pairs of opposites, light and darkness, truth and iniquity’.<sup>15</sup> In the present work, we are going to deal with those of them, which have a bearing on our subject matter. To set the stage for the action, we have to stress the existence of two different and opposed to each other worlds, the world of light where God dominates, and the world of darkness where sin reigns.

Initially, it has been asserted that Johannine expressions and concepts were rooted in Hellenistic ground or in the Greek world of the early second century A.D.. However, the discovery of Qumran manuscripts reveals another world of thought, through which John could probably be better understood. The abstract language of GJohn and 1John ultimately was not alien to Judaism and Jewish categories. As Brown notes, ‘what Jesus says in John would have been quite intelligible in the sectarian background of first-century Palestine’.<sup>16</sup>

With regard to the other works of contemporary Jewish literature, we are as well going to see how sin and its parameters were dealt with by their writers. I have to note at this point that though placing the documents under discussion, in time and their environment, we are not going to deal with introductory issues in detail.

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<sup>12</sup> Quotations are taken from Vermes’ translation (1998).

<sup>13</sup> Brown, 1968, p.141 Moreover, in Price’s, 1972, p.15 view, ‘the dualism of Qumran was certainly not an absolute dualism, either in the sense of affirming a limitless coexistence and coequality of good and evil beings or forces, or of spirit and matter. Belief in “the God of Israel” as Creator led the sectarians to espouse a “modified dualism”, or perhaps one should say, a qualified or relative system’.

<sup>14</sup> Charlesworth, A critical 1972, pp.88-89 Moreover, as Collins, 1997, p.47 notes, ‘it is apparent that the dualism of the two spirits played a central role in a cluster of texts from Qumran. The question remains whether it was central to the ideology of the sect as a whole, or a view of the world that was held by some members of the sect and rejected by others’.

<sup>15</sup> Boismard, 1972, p.156

<sup>16</sup> Brown, 1972, p.8

Moreover, I have also to point out that the relationship between Qumran and Pseudepigrapha is not our primary concern in this study. Suffice it to note that in the Qumran library fragments of Pseudepigrapha have been found; a fact that indicates the use of the latter by the sectarians. In broad lines, the existence of similarities between these two corpora should not surprise us, as both are dealing by and large with the same religious subject matter.<sup>17</sup>

Organizing our research, we are firstly going to present how sin is conceived in the writings involved and what is meant by it. Though sin is commonly conceived as the infringement of God's will, in every document certain aspects of sin arise which we will try to point out. Secondly, relevant issues such as the possibility of repentance if it is offered, followed by God's forgiveness, the reward of the righteous and the punishment of the wicked, are themes, which are dealt with by the writers of the time. Further, we are going to deal with the issue of predestination, exploring what man's role is in his being saved or damned and how this relates to God's election. Do humans play a significant role or they are just passive victims in this process of salvation? And finally, we are to talk about the eschaton, what are its characteristics and what initiates this new era. Further we are going to see that sinlessness is regarded as a fruit of this era, when evil, either external to men or being embodied in men, ceases to exist and God becomes the only spiritual power in the world.

But, let us now examine every document in itself and see whether and to what extent, the tracks de Boer refers to, are illustrated in the documents of that era. Before getting into detail, I have to note that we are going to refer to the relevant notions as they are conceived in the contemporary Jewish literature as a whole. It is true that, being written under special circumstances and having a particular purpose, genre and function, every single document has its own peculiarities, which we are not to deal with in great detail in the present work.

## ***Qumran Literature***

(200 B.C. - 70 A.D.)

Qumran literature is dated between 200 B.C. and 70 A.D.<sup>18</sup> Briefly, it constitutes a complete 'novelty'<sup>19</sup> of great historical and theological importance. As Qumran covers I think or even is very close to, the chronological period during which 1John was written,

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<sup>17</sup> See Best, 1965, p.48; Brown, 1968, p.141

<sup>18</sup> See Vermes, 1998, pp. 12-14

<sup>19</sup> 'With one exception', as Vermes, 1998, p.11 n.29 notes. 'The exception is the Damascus Document...previously known from two incomplete medieval manuscripts'. See also 'Qumran's greatest novelty', *ibid.*, pp.23-25

ideas expressed in DSS have a say in the general spiritual background against which 1John was composed. For our own purposes we will focus on the notion of sin and its parameters as they are conceived in these manuscripts, as a whole.<sup>20</sup>

### *Light-Darkness*

Being members of a sectarian community, Qumraners thought of themselves as God's chosen people. As will be seen, their sectarian outlook on the world is sufficiently reflected in their theology. To start with the doctrine of creation, they also held the biblical one according to which God is the author of every creature. In IQS it is said that 'from the God of Knowledge comes all that is and shall be' (III, 16), and that 'all things come to pass by His knowledge' (XI, 11). Everything depends on Him as 'the laws of all things are in His hand and He provides them with all their needs' (III, 17).<sup>21</sup>

Moreover, the world according to Qumran is divided into two dominions, the one of the Light where the sectarians belong which is ruled by the Spirit of Light and the one of Darkness, which represents the dominion of Belial. What is interesting is that in Qumran both Spirits which govern the world, the forces of good and evil, are said to be created by God: 'For it is He who created the spirits of Light and Darkness and founded every action upon them and established every deed [upon] their [ways]' (III, 25). At this point Brown observes that 'if the Zoroastrian background of Qumran dualism is correct, the specific statement of the creation of the two spirits may have been intended as a corrective'.<sup>22</sup> Parenthetically, we note that the doctrine of the two Spirits ruling the world is found only in IQS, a fact that as Best observes, implies that 'it may not then be normative'.<sup>23</sup>

Evidently, while the Spirit of Light is the source of every good, the Spirit of Darkness is the one which leads people astray, or teaches them to sin. The former is also called 'the spirit of truth, the Prince of Light, His Angel of Truth' (IQS III, 18, 20, 25; respectively). As for the latter, it is also called 'the spirit of injustice, the Angel of Darkness, the spirit of falsehood, the Angel of Destruction and the Angel of Persecution' (IQS III, 19, 21; IV, 9; CD II, 4; CD, XVI, 5 respectively). 'Quite often, the Spirit of Darkness is designated by the name of 'Belial' (IQM XIII, 2, 11).<sup>24</sup>

<sup>20</sup> I have to mention at this point that I am indebted to Sanders', 1977, pp.239-328 and 329-418 guidance, on DSS and Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha (namely Jub, 1En, Pss Sol and 4Ezra) respectively.

<sup>21</sup> The quotations are taken from Vermes' translation 1998.

<sup>22</sup> Brown, 1968, p.146

<sup>23</sup> Best, 1965, p.51 see also Collins, 1997, p.47

<sup>24</sup> As Best, 1965, p.48 notes, 'the Devil is normally called Belial; the names Satan and Mastema occur respectively three and four times; the favourite Rabbinic designation, Sammael, does not occur at all. Even where Satan and Mastema are used it is not always clear if these denote the Devil. This is true also of

Moreover, these Spirits are there to help or hinder man, as on the one hand, ‘the God of Israel and His Angel of Truth will succour all the sons of light’ (IQS III, 25), while on the other, ‘the Angel of Darkness leads all the children of righteousness astray’ (IQS III, 21). Thus, up to this point, sin is placed in the dominion of the Spirit of Darkness, which is the one who causes it. In IQS IV, 9-11 we have a list of sins caused by the evil spirit. We have then, Best notes, ‘a clear picture of an outside power attacking man in order to lead him to sin, that is, tempting him’.<sup>25</sup> As we are going to see however, this does not exhaust the notion of sin as it is conceived in the Scrolls.

### ***Sons of the Light-Sons of the Darkness***

Furthermore, in a like manner, according to Qumran’s outlook, all men are aligned in two opposing classes according to which dominion they belong to. Undeniably, one ‘turning through the pages of a text or translation’, as Sanders notes<sup>26</sup>, is going to find a variety of designations attributed to both of them. With regard to those who belong to the dominion of light, the so-called ‘sons of light’ (IQS III, 13,24,25), they are also called ‘sons of truth’ (IQS IV, 6,8), the ‘elect’ (IQS VIII, 6; IQH II, 13), the ‘perfect of way’ (IQH IX, 37).

Concerning the ones who belong to the realm of darkness, the ‘sons of darkness’ (IQS I, 10), they are also called ‘children of injustice’ (IQS III, 21) and frequently those who ‘walk in the stubbornness of their own hearts’ (eight times in IQS, five times in CD, and in IQH XII, 14).<sup>27</sup> Moreover, other ‘more descriptive titles’ are also used such as ‘the sons of perversity, the congregation of the men of perversity, the men of deceit, the men of the pit, the congregation of nought, the congregation of Belial, lying interpreters, and the famous “seekers of smooth things”’.<sup>28</sup>

### ***Man’s role***

Yet, in the light of the above, what is man’s role in this story? Are men predestined to be either saved or destroyed? Does their future depend on their choice?

Qumran texts support actually two different frames of thought. While, on the one hand God is said to determine human’s destiny, on the other, the sectarian theology allows for the exercise of men’s free will as well. There is a group of passages which suggest that God is the one who decides who is going to be in the covenant. It is a fundamental belief

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Belial; on each occasion of its use we have to look carefully to see if it is a proper name or a noun’. For more details about these designations see *ibid.*, pp.48-50

<sup>25</sup> Best, 1965, p.51

<sup>26</sup> Sanders, 1977, p.243

<sup>27</sup> About those dualistic pairs see also Charlesworth, A critical, 1972, p.89 and Painter, 1991, pp.32-35

that one owes his entering the sect to God's grace. For, firstly God himself has assigned each man to his 'lot' or 'way'. According to the very well known IQS III, 18-25 God 'has appointed for him (man) two spirits in which to walk until the time of His visitation: the spirits of truth and injustice'; as for men, 'those born of truth spring from a fountain of light, but those born of injustice spring from a source of darkness'. Moreover, 'all the children of righteousness are ruled by the Prince of Light and walk in the ways of light, but all the children of injustice are ruled by the Angel of Darkness and walk in the ways of darkness'.

In a like manner, in IQH VII, 13-18 the psalmist admits that 'righteousness is not in a hand of flesh, [that] man [is not master of] his way'; God 'alone didst [create] the just and establish him from the womb'. As for the wicked, He 'didst create for [the time] of Thy [wrath], Thou didst vow them from the womb'. Though the phrasing in the above mentioned pericopes is not the same, the gist of both these passages is that God is the one who determines the dominion in which men are to live; actually, He does so 'from the womb'.

This idea is strengthened by those passages that stress God's responsibility for everything as 'nothing is done without Thy will'. Thus, 'to the God of Israel belongs all that is and shall be; [He knows] all the happenings of eternity' (IQM XVII, 4; see also IQS III, 15; XI, 11, 17; I, 7, 19f., IQH XVIII, 19).

Furthermore, according to the Qumran writings, while God 'made known His Holy Spirit to them (the chosen ones) by the hand of His anointed ones, and He proclaimed the truth (to them)', 'those whom He hated He led astray' (CD II, 13-14). Likewise, the hymn in IQS XI, 7 says that God 'caused' the chosen ones 'to inherit the lot of the Holy Ones'. Therefore, the sectarians owe not only their being in the community to God's providence, but also their being guarded from sinning. The 'Angel of Persecution' deserts him who enters the covenant (CD XVI, 5) and in the future, God does not permit the 'insults of the mighty to dismay' Him (IQH X, 35; XV, 7-10); He actually prevents the psalmist from being led astray (XII, 24; XVI, 15-16).

However, this is only the one side of the coin. Despite all the above, man's free will still plays a significant role. Obviously, for the sectarians, God's providence does not exclude the exercise of free will on man's part.

Thus, we observe in the Scrolls deterministic statements and statements suggesting man's freedom of choice, lying alongside one another; an observation which is also

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<sup>28</sup> Sanders, 1977, p.243 See *ibid.*, pp.243. 250-251 for the different use of these designations in different Qumran documents.

going to be exemplified by other documents of contemporary Jewish literature.<sup>29</sup> According to the passage already quoted above (IQH VII, 12-18), while God is said to have created 'the wicked' for the time of His 'wrath', it is also stated that this is so, because 'they walk in the way which is not good' (see also IQpHab I, 11 the wicked 'shall not believe in the laws of [God]'; CD III, 17; VIII, 19). Put another way, their behaviour determined their belonging to the 'lot of Belial'. Moreover, the psalmist goes on to say that they 'have despised' His covenant, 'loathed' His truth and they 'have *chosen* that which Thou hatest' (IQH VII, 18). Additionally, we observe a shift between God's choice and human choice when the psalmist says 'I know that Thou hast marked the spirit of the just, and therefore I have chosen to keep my hands clean' (IQH VIII, 9-10 see also IQH XIV, 5-7).

Moreover, in IQS the sons of light are also called the 'elect' (IX, 15) and 'those who have chosen the Way' (IX, 18). The co-existence of God's election and man's free will is met even in the same phrase: 'all who freely pledged themselves to join the elect of [God to keep the Law] in the Council of the Community, who shall be saved on the Day [of Judgment]' (IQ14 frag 10 7f.).

It is noteworthy that those who walk 'in the way of wickedness' shall be cleansed provided that they 'turn from their wickedness' (IQS V, 14). Besides, the righteous are said to be those who 'turn from transgression', while the wicked are those who 'depart from the way' (X, 21-22). Additionally, as will be seen in the next subsection, God pardons all those who repent; He is actually, 'visiting the iniquity of the wicked' (IQH VI, 24). Apparently, there are not concrete boundaries between the two camps of *light* and *darkness*; there is always a way to bring down the separating wall.

Moreover, the designation of the sons of darkness as those who 'walk in the stubbornness of their own hearts' which is frequently used in the Scrolls, indicates as Sanders observes 'like the terms "turn", "choose" and "despise", how far the sectarians were from denying man's freedom of choice'.<sup>30</sup> The practice of entering the congregation requires actions of free will (see IQS I, 7 those who enter the community are 'all those who have freely devoted themselves to the observance of God's precepts'; III, 9; II, 26; VI, 19). Having been expelled from the community, in order to reenter it, one has to prove his good will, in terms of behaviour and attitude (cf. IQS VII, 19-22).

It is clear that man's freedom of choice has a say in one's being in the community, as in order for the sectarian to maintain his membership, he has to obey the sect's

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<sup>29</sup> See De Boer, 1989, p.177 referring to two tracks of thought.

<sup>30</sup> Sanders, 1977, p.263

regulations and God's commandments; a fact which, apparently, is subject to his own will.

Finally, how is such a conflict of ideas to be explained? It seems certain that 'the Qumran sectarians, like other Palestinian Jews of the period' (like John I would add), 'were not systematic theologians. Various answers to various questions would be regarded as true, without examining whether or not the various answers cohered with one another', Sanders notes; 'here we seem to have a striking instance of this situation'.<sup>31</sup>

Moreover, Sanders attempts to account for the 'very strong insistence on both these points', in the Qumran literature.<sup>32</sup> He asserts that while for the Rabbis all the explanations given were to the question why God chose Israel, the sectarians were confronted with a much more serious problem: being already a part of the specially elect, how could they account for their status? Needless to say election must be by God's will but why has God now chosen some Israelites and not others?

In IQS appear both of the answers: God chose some because he wished to do so and God chose those who keep His commandments. 'The electing grace of God', Sanders observes, 'which chooses some and omits others would be emphasized when the author was thinking primarily of himself or of his colleagues within the sect, especially *vis à vis* God'.<sup>33</sup> *Vis à vis* God admittedly, no one can be worthy; one's being chosen by God, may be by His grace. This idea dominates when insiders are involved. However, when it comes to the outsiders-wicked, the sectarian authors would naturally write as if all depends on man's choice.

Another explanation according to Sanders could be that in prayer material one is thinking more of God's grace, while in halakah one's own ability is presupposed. Nevertheless, 'the character of the literature is not the entire answer to the problem of why, on the basic problem of the election, there is such a stark division between expressions of divine choice and statements of human choice'.<sup>34</sup>

Furthermore, having separated themselves from Israel, the sectarians have taken a very essential step, placing themselves over against the rest of Israelites. Having done this they have to explain God's choice of them and also why the other Israelites rejected it. It

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<sup>31</sup> Sanders, 1977, p.265

<sup>32</sup> See *ibid.*, pp.266-270 He also refers (*ibid.*, p.265) to other explanations proposed: one of them suggests that 'the incongruence has to do with two different sources which have not been harmonized: traditional Judaism accounts for the emphasis on one's own choice, while Iranian dualism, somewhat altered, accounts for the emphasis on divine predestination' (e.g. Brown, 1968, pp.151-155). Another explanation is that 'the two different emphases reveal the presence of different "philosophies" within the Qumran community'.

<sup>33</sup> Sanders, 1977, p.266

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, p.267

is clear that they did not take it to its extreme, as there is always an opportunity for those outside to join the community. This fact however, ‘does not eliminate the seriousness of the theological position that the election and the distinction of the elect from the non-elect is by the grace of God’. ‘The “doctrine of predestination” in the Scrolls is best seen as *answering the question of why the covenanters are elect*, rather than whether or not there is free will’.<sup>35</sup>

It seems that for the sectarians, neither the pious explanation that God has chosen some Israelites and not others because the former remained faithful (though there are traces of such an explanation in the Scrolls CD III, 10-14; IV, 1; IQH XII, 19), nor the thought that the rest of Israel just strayed from God’s way, was an adequate explanation. They rather take it further, referring to a new covenant whose previously hidden secrets, were revealed to them (CD III, 13f.; IQH XII, 19).

What differentiates the sect’s conception of the election from other Jewish groups’ ideas is their assurance that ‘it is an election of individuals rather than of the nation of Israel’.<sup>36</sup> Those outside are destined to be destroyed. Moreover, given the fact that this membership is not a birthright, the entrance requires a free act of will. This act is twofold: repentance and commitment to the covenant, as will be seen just below.

Hence, I would agree with Sanders who states that the doctrine of predestination in the Scrolls, does not constitute an answer to the question of whether or not man is free but to the question of why the sectarians among all Israelites are elect. Evidently, the covenanters’ ‘assertion of God’s governing providence did not exclude their certainty that a man could determine his own destiny’.<sup>37</sup>

### ***The nature of sin-Fulfilment-Transgression***

Having set the world-stage on which Spirits and men are actually divided into two opposing camps, Qumran asserts both that the Spirit of Darkness is partly responsible for the existence of sin and that human nature is a vehicle of sin. We now proceed to see how sin is conceived in Qumran.

Being members of a sect, Qumraners consider the fulfilment of the commandments of the sect’s covenant to be of vital importance. Consequently, first and foremost, the transgression of these commandments constitutes a sin.

The fulfilment of the will of God is what a member of the covenant is undoubtedly supposed to do. When someone enters the covenant, in doing so he ‘swears to return to the Law of Moses’ and the Spirit of evil, ‘the Angel of Persecution’, has no power over

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<sup>35</sup> Sanders, 1977, pp.267-268

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., p.270 see also ibid., p.320

him 'provided that he fulfils his word'. And the author of CD strengthens his statement referring to Abraham who 'circumcised himself on the day that he knew' (CD XVI, 5-7). So, the fulfilment of the covenant shields the sectarians from the very cause of sin, the Angel of Persecution.

Moreover, in the same document, obeying the commandments seems to be more important than the very life of the covenanters. For, 'let no man, even at the price of death, annul any binding oath by which he has sworn to keep a commandment of the Law'. Additionally, if one takes an oath not to keep the Law, he should 'even at the price of death', not keep this oath (CD XVI, 8-10). Those who enter the covenant, in doing so, are expected to obey all of God's commandments (IQS I, 5-10, 16; V, 20f.); they actually 'shall stray neither to the right nor to the left of any of His true precepts' (IQS I, 15).

Apparently, sin is basically conceived as the transgression of God's commandments. This statement is supported by the fact that though the 'sons of darkness' are said to have been destined for destruction, even 'from the womb', their punishment is still the result of their own deeds. For, 'they walk in the way which is not good', they 'loathed' God's truth and 'they have taken no delight in all Thy commandments and have chosen that which Thou hatest' (IQH VII, 17-19). Therefore, as Sanders observes, 'despite the statements indicating that man is consigned to one "lot" or another, sin is still concretely *transgression of commandments*'.<sup>38</sup>

Further, sin is also regarded as the disobedience of God's words even in the passages with predestinarian colour. In IQS III, 22 ('the children of injustice... walk in the ways of darkness') and IQH VI, 14 ('the workers of iniquity') for example, the 'sons of darkness' are those who do not follow the will of God. For, the one who walks 'in the stubbornness of his heart', is the one who 'detests the wise teaching of just laws' (IQS II, 26-III, 1). Briefly, we would say that the transgression of God's commandments is what characterizes mainly the 'sons of darkness' (IQS II, 26; V, 16; IQH VI, 14-22; VII, 18f.). The same idea is found in CD very frequently. The 'sons of darkness' are those who 'depart from the way and abhor the Precept' (CD II, 6). Moreover, the fall of the 'Heavenly Watchers' was occasioned by their walking 'in the stubbornness of their heart', and they 'were caught because they did not keep the commandments of God' (CD II, 16-18).

With regard to this conception of sin as primarily the transgression of the will of God, Sanders notes, two objections would probably be raised. Firstly, what about those

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<sup>37</sup> Sanders, 1977, p.264

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., p.273

passages which attribute sin to man's human nature? Specifically, in IQH IX, 21f. the psalmist calls himself 'a shape of clay kneaded in water', 'a source of pollution, a melting-pot of wickedness'. In other hymns as well, he confesses that 'for I have stood in the realm of wickedness and my lot was with the damned' (IQH XI, 24). Moreover, in IQS XI, 9f., as well, the author characteristically writes, 'as for me, I belong to wicked mankind, to the company of unjust flesh. My iniquities, rebellions, and sins, together with the perversity of my heart, belong to the company of worms and to those who walk in darkness'. However, the one who belongs to the community used to belong to 'the lot of the damned'. So, the saved are not held in sin's bondage but their sin constitutes wrongdoings that are to be forgiven and from which they will be cleansed, as it will shortly be seen (see IQS XI, 14f. 'He will pardon all my sins. Through His righteousness he will cleanse me of the uncleanness of man and of the sins of the children of men...'). Finally, I would agree with Sanders who asserts that both aspects of sin namely transgression of commandments and sinful acts, 'are not actually two separate things', but they both 'are opposed to obeying the Torah'.<sup>39</sup>

Secondly, is such an idea namely, the conception of sin as being the transgression of commandments, supported by the 'two spirits'-passages and their function in the world (IQS III, 14-IV, 26; and also IQH VI, 11-14; VII, 13-19)? For, it seems that according to them, men transgress the commandments being under the influence of evil spirits. Thus, in IQS III, 23 is said that 'the Angel of Darkness leads all the children of righteousness astray, and until his end, all their sin, iniquities, wickedness, and all their unlawful deeds are caused by his dominion in accordance with the mysteries of God'. What is said here, is that men do not sin because they 'walk in the stubbornness of their heart', but men also sin being under the influence of evil powers. That is why sin exists even in the ranks of the community where the sectarians are not supposed to walk 'in the stubbornness of their heart'. As Sanders correctly observes, these two aspects of sin are not standing in opposition to each other, in the sense that in saying that men sin under the influence of evil powers, one does not deny that sins are the result of man's will. Rather, what is stated in IQS III, 21-23, namely that 'the Angel of Darkness leads all the children of righteousness astray...', 'is an attempt to explain why one in the community continues to sin'.<sup>40</sup> Thus, asserting that the Angel of Darkness also causes men to sin, Qumraners do not deny the fact that men's will is as well involved. The phrase 'in accordance with the mysteries of God', may suggest that even for Qumran theologians this was not an adequate explanation. In a way, they say, as Sanders notes that 'sin is transgression, but

<sup>39</sup> Sanders, 1977, p.277 Sanders observes so agreeing with H.Braun's view.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., p.282

that transgression is not altogether avoidable'.<sup>41</sup> Yet, this view is not explained either. It seems that there is no solution to that unavoidable sin. For, on the one hand, man 'is in iniquity from the womb and in guilty unfaithfulness until his old age' (IQH XII, 29) and on the other, the sinning of the elect will be explained by the will of God that is a mystery (IQS III, 23).

Furthermore, another explanation of the existence of the two statements being stated together is proposed by Best who asserts that 'the co-existence of the two ideas is not impossible in so far as one (the temptation comes from outside) may be seen to be the original conception of the Old Testament and the other (the temptation begins within man) as entering through Iranian influence'.<sup>42</sup>

As will be seen, two different tensions in such matters do not constitute necessarily a contradiction or inconsistency. They rather answer to different theological questions or the same question differently, without these answers necessarily being mutually exclusive. Moreover, there is always room for God's *mysterious* ways.

### ***Repenting-Cleansing***

As Sanders observes, in Qumran, 'God's cleansing is the other side of the coin from man's repenting'.<sup>43</sup> Sin does exist in the community itself. The psalmist admits that he 'is in iniquity from the womb and in guilty unfaithfulness until his old age' (IQH XII, 29). However, he continues, 'I said in my sinfulness, "I am forsaken by Thy Covenant"' (XII, 35). So, he 'leans' on God's 'grace', hoping to be pardoned and purified from sin (XII, 37-38).

Therefore, cleansing is necessary for the sectarians. They became members of the sect having been cleansed, for 'Thou hast cleansed a perverse spirit of great sin that it may stand with the host of the Holy Ones' (IQH XI, 22). But they need this cleansing, even during their life in the community as well. Sinning does not exclude them from the congregation of the saved ones, as 'there is hope for those who turn from transgression and for those who abandon sin...and to walk without wickedness in the way of Thy heart' (IQH XIV, 6-7). In a like manner in IQS I, 11-14 is said that 'those who freely devote themselves to His truth shall bring all their knowledge, powers and possessions into the Community of God, that they may purify their knowledge'. Moreover, it is

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<sup>41</sup> Sanders, 1977, p.283

<sup>42</sup> Best, 1965, p.52 Likewise Brown, 1968, p.151 notes 'from the Old Testament there came to Qumran the basically simple Hebrew notions of morality, involving the obviously free behavior of man and his consequent reward or punishment. From outside, presumably from Zoroastrianism, came the idea of two spirits dominating the human race, so that man acts according to one or the other'. However, for Sanders, 1977, p.269 notes that 'there seems no justification for regarding the sect's theology as an unharmonized marriage of Judaism and Zoroastrianism'.

<sup>43</sup> Sanders, 1977, p.276

‘through the spirit of true counsel concerning the ways of man that all his sins shall be expiated’, that one ‘may contemplate the light of life. He shall be cleansed from all his sins by the spirit of holiness uniting him to His truth’ (III, 6-7).

Moreover, God forgives those who repent, as He is said to be ‘a merciful God and rich in favours, pardoning those who repent of their sin’ (IQH VI, 24). In another hymn (XV, 30-31) there is a reference to God’s pardoning and His ‘multitude of mercies’, without any reference to man’s repentance. The thing is that repentance and cleansing are frequently found side by side in the Scrolls in general. As Sanders observes, ‘God’s initiative is emphasized more in the hymns, man’s more in IQS and CD. Yet both appear together sufficiently frequently to permit us to call the combination general’.<sup>44</sup>

### ***Punishment***

In broad lines, in the Scrolls, the punishment of the wicked is destruction. Those who disobey the rules of the sect are to be punished in order for them to restore their fellowship with the community. It is repeatedly said that God punishes those who sin. In IQM VI, 6 the ‘foot-soldiers’, by the power of God ‘pay the reward of their wickedness to all the nations of vanity’. It is also said that there is a ‘Day of Vengeance’ (VII, 6 see also IQM XI, 14; XVII, 1; IQS VIII, 8-9; CD VII, 9-10).

Moreover, with regard to the Wicked Priest, he will receive his reward, which in IQpHab V, 4 is called ‘judgement’. In IQpHab XII, 2 the sectarians are called ‘the Poor’ and of the Wicked Priest it is said that ‘he shall be paid the reward which he himself tendered to the Poor’.

What is more, the Levites are said to curse ‘all the men of the lot of Belial’ in IQS II, 5f., saying: ‘be cursed because of all your guilty wickedness! May He deliver you up for the torture at the hands of the vengeful Avengers! May He visit you with destruction by the hand of all the Wreakers of Revenge!...’. Additionally, other means of destruction are ‘fire’ (IQpHab X, 5-fire of brimstone-13; IQS IV, 13), a ‘destroying scourge’ (IQpHab IX, 11), or sword (IQM IX, 5-9).

Furthermore, particularly IQM as Brown observes, ‘gives a detailed plan for the organization of the forces, for standards, signals and weapons of battle’. The wicked will be strictly punished after their defeat. Their sufferings ‘are graphically described in apocalyptic language: a multitude of plagues, eternal ruin, everlasting terror, destruction in the fire of the dark regions, calamities of darkness’ (CD 9:2, IQS iv, 12; IQH iii, 28ff.).<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Sanders, 1977, p.276

<sup>45</sup> Brown, 1968, p.149

It is noteworthy, I suppose, that 'the elect' are said to help God in destroying the wicked. So, in IQpHab V, 4 'God will execute the judgement of the nations by the hand of His elect' and in IQS V, 6f. the sectarians seem to participate in the judgement of 'all those who transgress the precepts'. Despite the fact that destruction seems to be the only punishment for sin, as Sanders observes, 'the idea that sin brings affliction is not altogether absent'.<sup>46</sup> Thus, in IQS X, 21 those 'who depart from the way' are 'smitten' but not destroyed.

What is more, if this is the case for the wicked, what happened with the 'sons of light' who as well sin? As it is mentioned above, punishment is there, whether a sinner belongs to the sect or not. For the sectarians however, the punishment is not destruction. In IQS and in CD we encounter numerous references to the punishment of the transgressors within the community. In IQS VI, 25 for instance, the one who 'has lied deliberately in matters of property', is going to be excluded from 'the pure Meal of the Congregation for one year' and apart from this he 'shall do penance with respect to one quarter of his food'. Moreover, in CD XII, 4-5, the one who 'strays so as to profane the Sabbath and the feasts', is not put to death, instead 'it shall fall to men to keep him in custody'. Such a man, will approach the 'Assembly', after having been kept 'in custody for seven years' and 'healed of his error'.

Though the proposed punishments do not agree in the two documents mentioned above, 'the general character of temporary exclusion is the same'.<sup>47</sup> In IQS, reduction of food is frequently a kind of punishment. For those in authority punishment is more rigid (see IQS VIII, 20f.). Especially, the one who 'deliberately or through negligence transgresses one word of the Law of Moses', he 'shall be expelled from the Council of the Community', and 'shall return no more'. Additionally, the one who has been 'in the Council of the Community for ten years', and betrays the community, 'he shall return no more to the Council of the Community'. And even if one 'has shared with him food or property', he will as well be 'expelled' (IQS VII, 24-26). However, someone who has 'betrayed the truth' is to be expelled from the community for two years and be readmitted afterwards (IQS VII, 19-22).

Yet, there are sins which require the punishment of permanent exclusion such as 'uttering the Venerable Name...while reading the Book or blessing' (IQS VII, 1)<sup>48</sup>, 'slandering the Congregation' (VII, 17) and 'murmuring against the authority of the community' (VII, 18). Apparently, expulsion, either permanent or temporary, was the

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<sup>46</sup> Sanders, 1977, p.272

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., p.285

<sup>48</sup> As Sanders, 1977, p.286 notes, 'blasphemy is one of the few crimes covered by biblical law which is mentioned in the Scrolls'.

strictest of the community's punishments, while reduction in the food allowance is occasionally imposed. It is also noteworthy that two of the instances, which necessitate permanent expulsion of the congregation, involve sins that are relevant to the community.

In IQH moreover, the psalmist refers to his sins and sufferings regarding them as God's chastisement for his transgressions (see IQH XVII, 24 'Thy rebuke shall become my joy' and IV, 22 where is said for the chosen one that 'his humility [may bear fruit] through Thy chastisement'). This is not always the case in IQH, however, where it seems that the afflictions may also come from the enemies of the psalmist and God is the one who 'strengthens' him 'in the face of the scourge' (as in IX, 32-33; XVII, 10-13).

To sum up, in enabling the sinner to restore his fellowship with the community, punishment functions as the remedy for transgression and sin. Whether the punishment comes from the community or God (as in the hymns), in both cases, it is considered just and efficacious, given the fact that the one who willingly accepts it, is to be readmitted in the ranks of the sect.

### ***Eschaton-sinlessness***

As mentioned above the punishment of the wicked is their destruction, which is going to take place at the eschaton when sin ceases to exist. In other words, in Qumran sinlessness is thought to be a fruit of the end times. Obviously, Qumraners have a sense of the 'not yet' reality which describes the future time when evil is defeated by the good, once for all.

Specifically, what is stressed in Qumran is, on the one hand, the fact that perfection is only God's attribute (IQH XII, 30-31; IQS XI, 11) and on the other that man is 'in iniquity from the womb and in guilty unfaithfulness until his old age'; for 'righteousness is not of man' nor 'is perfection of way of the son of man' because to God 'belong all righteous deeds' (IQH XII, 29-31; IQH XV, 17). The hymnist writes therefore, 'as for me, my justification is with God. In His hand are the perfection of my way and the uprightness of my heart. He will wipe out my transgression through His righteousness' (IQS XI, 2). Through God, human nature can participate in righteousness and perfection.

Likewise in IQS XI, 11, man is said to be 'unable to establish his steps' for 'justification is with God and perfection of his way and the uprightness of his heart'. However, the hymnist confesses that if he 'staggers' because 'of the sin of flesh', his 'justification shall be by the righteousness of God which endures for ever'. The point here is that man on his own is a sinner and only God can establish his way (IQS XI, 13; IQH XII, 31). In a way, for the sectarian, this is a description of his life till the end. Only  
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 to walk in ways of righteousness. Given the fact that the

covenanter being in the community sins and still receives God's purification, provided that he repents, it seems to me that the sectarians thought of a kind of sinfulness which does not exclude anyone from the covenant.

Unlike the wicked that insist on walking in 'the stubbornness of their heart', the sectarians though they also sin, resort to God's mercies. As we have already seen, through asking for forgiveness and cleansing one is saved from the sin of transgressing the covenant but not actually from the sin he *carries* in his human nature. Consequently, the one who has been cleansed is still human and 'in iniquity' *vis à vis* God, for all righteous deeds belong to God.

However, there are passages in which the overcoming of this fleshly nature is implied. These passages point not to this earthly life but to the eschaton. Thus, sinlessness is to be traced at the end time. In IQS IV, 19-22, 'God has ordained an end for injustice and at the time of the visitation He will destroy it for ever'. At this time of His 'visitation', 'truth...shall arise in the world for ever'. The end time is also characterized by God's purification regarding man's 'deed'. God actually will 'root out all spirit of injustice from the bounds of his flesh' (IQS IV, 20). The elect are still sinful, as they are flesh, and inadequate *vis à vis* God. In few words, 'all the works of injustice shall be put to shame' (IQS IV, 24) at the end time; fleshly weakness as a vehicle of injustice is going to be overcome. The hymnist says that God will cleanse him 'of the uncleanness of man and for the sins of the children of men' (IQS XI, 14f.) which I think may refer to the future time as well.

The reward of the righteous (IQH VII, 16f.) as well as the punishment of the wicked (IQH VII, 15f.) are thought to take place in the future. Thus, a significant point for understanding the sect's conception of sin is that even in the ranks of the sect, sin does exist. A sectarian is actually expected to confess his sinfulness, which is going to be overcome. This is another observation to be borne in mind as we proceed to the exegesis section where we trace similar ideas namely, the existence of sinfulness in the dominion of 'light'.

Consequently, one who is a member of the sect still participates in the sinfulness of humanity, though he is among the saved. The sin that excludes one from the covenant is primarily the transgression of the Law. Evidently, for a sectarian, the first step towards salvation is taken once one joins the community of the 'sons of light'. The second is going to be taken at the eschaton when, on the one hand, the 'end' of the Angel of Darkness comes (IQS III, 23) -as the Spirits of Light and Darkness are to be active 'until the final age' (IV, 16 or the time of 'His visitation' III, 18)- and on the other, the weakness of humanity is overcome and the unavoidable sin ceases to exist. Even being

in the community the sectarian hoped that he would be further purified at the end (see IQS III, 21-23; IV, 13-22).

Furthermore, I suppose that a question lingers at this point. Being placed in the future, was perfection required from the sectarians in the present?

Generally speaking, Qumran documents, as a whole answer in the affirmative. Actually, both ideas are witnessed in the Scrolls: while the sectarian admits that he is not in a position to walk perfectly and stresses God's grace (as we have seen above), at the same time, he acknowledges that the sect is a community of those who walk in a perfect way.

To be precise, in IQS IV, 22, the designation of the sons of light as 'upright' is paralleled with another one namely, 'the perfect of way' (see also IQH IX, 36 'O all you perfect of way'). Similarly, in CD B II, 2, 5, 6 those who are members of the congregation are called 'the congregation of men of perfect holiness'. Especially, the 'twelve men and three Priests' who constitute the Council of the Community are said to be 'perfectly versed in all that is revealed' (IQS VIII, 1). Yet they were not the only ones from whom perfection was required. All of them who 'have chosen the Way', have to walk 'perfectly together in all that has been revealed to them' (IQS IX, 18-19 see also CD II, 15). 'Perfection of way' is a presupposition for those who wish to enter (VIII, 12) or reenter (VIII, 18; X, 21) the community.

Moreover, though in IQS III, 9-11 the one who 'order[s] his steps (to walk) perfectly in all the ways commanded by God', is the one who actually strays 'neither to the right nor to the left' and transgresses 'none of His words', as we have seen, the sectarians did sin. According to CD VII, 5-6 the reward of those who 'walk in perfect holiness' is a long life of 'thousands of generations'. Additionally, there is a reward for those who walk in perfection as 'each man may be advanced in accordance with his understanding and perfection of way, or moved down in accordance with his distortions' (IQS V, 24). Apparently, perfection of deeds is regarded achievable, to an extent at least, in the community.

Moreover, the fact that 'no man can be just in Thy judgment or [righteous in] Thy trial', does not exclude the possibility of men being righteous *vis à vis* each other, for 'one man [can] be more just than another, one person [more] wise [than another]'. And this is so, 'though' the psalmist adds, there is 'no power to compare with Thy might' (IQH XVII, 15-17). This last citation makes clear as I see it that though man is imperfect compared to God, he has to struggle for perfection and be more perfect than somebody else. It is also obvious that every righteous deed that men may do comes from God. He is the only source of perfection. The grace of God enables the sectarians to consider

themselves to be ‘the congregation of the perfect’. However, *vis à vis* God, *face to face* with God, ‘righteousness is not of man, nor is perfection of way of the son of man’ (IQH XII, 30).

What is said in IQ27 I, 5-8, summarizes I suppose what characterizes the eschaton, the end time: ‘when the breed of iniquity is shut up, wickedness shall then be banished by righteousness as darkness is banished by the light. As smoke clears and is no more, so shall wickedness perish forever and righteousness be revealed like a sun governing the world. All who cleave to the mysteries of sin shall be no more; knowledge<sup>49</sup> shall fill the world and folly shall exist no longer’.

### ***The book of Jubilees***

(Second century B.C.)

As Wintermute points out, the writer of the book of Jubilees ‘belonged to the Hasidic or Essene branch of Judaism’ and ‘it is generally maintained that the text was written in Hebrew’.<sup>50</sup> Concerning its dating Wintermute underlines that ‘the discoveries at Qumran have also helped narrow the limits for dating Jubilees’, by determining the latest possible date. So, Jubilees ‘must have been written ‘before: 1) the date of the earliest fragment of the text discovered at Qumran; 2) the date of Qumran documents which depend on Jubilees; 3) the date of the split between the Maccabean establishment and the sect which settled at Qumran’.<sup>51</sup> In general, as Vanderkam notes, ‘one may say that the book was probably written at some point between 170 and 140’.<sup>52</sup>

Moreover, with regard to its content, ‘Jubilees presents itself as the account of a revelation which was disclosed to Moses on Mt. Sinai... The revelation proves to be a heavily edited rehearsal of the material from Genesis 1 to Exodus 20, all of which is encased in a chronology which divides time into units of 49 years (=jubilees), each of which consists of seven “weeks of years”’.<sup>53</sup>

In rewriting incidents recounted in Genesis and Exodus, ‘the author takes considerable liberty with the text: supplying names for persons and places, explaining problems

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<sup>49</sup> For the concept of knowledge in relation to the one of election see Sanders, 1977, pp.259-261; 317-318

<sup>50</sup> Wintermute, 1983, p.45.43 So Charlesworth, 1981, p.143

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., p.43 Wintermute quotes Vanderkam’s opinion on the matter. Having recently studied carefully all the apparent allusions to Maccabean history, Vanderkam concludes that ‘the latest events to which I can find reference in Jubilees are Judas Maccabeus’ wars in 161 B.C.’ If that is correct Wintermute notes then ‘the date of Jubilees must be set between 161-140 B.C. (ibid., p.44 Wintermute refers to Vanderkam’s monograph *Textual and Historical Studies in the Book of Jubilees* 1977). See also Charlesworth, 1981, p.143 See Charles, 1902, pp.lviii-lxvi for the date of Jubilees.

<sup>52</sup> Vanderkam, 1992, p.1030 III

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

within the text, and whitewashing some acts'.<sup>54</sup> Moreover, as Vanderkam observes the author of Jubilees does distinguish his narrative from the Biblical ones, 'by referring to them as "the first law" (2.24; 6.22) or "the law" (30.12)'. Presumably, then, the same scholar notes, '*Jubilees* is the second law. It uses the storyline of Genesis-Exodus as the foundation of its narrative, but it brings the message of that sacred history home to the needs of its readers through various kinds of interaction with the text'.<sup>55</sup>

### ***Angels-Demons***

As Wintermute notes, between God and man, 'Jubilees introduces us to a host of angels and demons'.<sup>56</sup> God has created 'all of the spirits which minister before him' (2:2 see for their ranks), as He is the creator of 'everything which is in the heavens and the earth and the seas and the depths and in the light and in the darkness and in every place' (2:15-16).<sup>57</sup> At the beginning all angels were good. However, later, a class of angels called Watchers,<sup>58</sup> who were sent 'to teach the sons of man, and perform judgment and uprightness upon the earth' (4:15), began 'to mingle themselves with the daughters of men so that they might be polluted' (4:20). The prince of those evil spirits is called 'Mastema' (10:8)<sup>59</sup>. He is the one to whom 'a tenth' of the spirits of evil has been allotted, while nine tenths of them went 'into the place of judgment' (10:9).<sup>60</sup>

Furthermore, the good and evil spirits have their work to accomplish on earth. Thus, the former are to 'teach' men skills (3:15), report their sins to God (4:6), punish evil spirits (10:9f.), make God's will known to men (12:22), test them (19:3), prophesy (16:1-4,16), guard men (35:17) and assist those attacked by evil spirits (48:4, 13). The latter however, having sinned 'with the daughters of men', were responsible for the increasing of 'injustice' upon the earth and for the 'corruption' of the ways of 'all flesh' (4:2). For, in Jubilees (as in Qumran), God is said to have 'caused spirits to rule so that they might lead them (men) astray from following him' (Jub 15:31; see also IQS III, 18).

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<sup>54</sup> Charlesworth, 1981, p.143 see for examples *ibid.*, pp.143-144

<sup>55</sup> Vanderkam, 1993, p.117

<sup>56</sup> Wintermute, 1983, p.47

<sup>57</sup> Concerning the Pseudepigrapha, the quotations are taken from Charlesworth, 1983 and most of the times are representative of the issue involved.

<sup>58</sup> See Collins, 1997, pp.30-32 for the 'myth of the Watchers'.

<sup>59</sup> As Best, 1965, p.53 notes, in the different apocalyptic writings the Devil 'appears under various names, for example Beliar, Mastema, Satan, Sammael; though in some writings he features rarely if at all (in each of *Ass. Moses* and *Sib. Or.* one reference only and none in II Baruch)'.  
<sup>60</sup> As Charles, 1902, p.lviii notes, Mastema's 'subjects comprise both satans and demons. The demons are the spirits which went forth from the bodies of the slain children of the Watchers and the daughters of men (x. 5; Eth. En. xvi).

### *The origin of evil*

With regard to the origin of evil, in Jubilees as well as in Qumran we can trace elements of both the idea according to which evil angelic powers lead men astray (4:15,22; 5:1-8; 10:4-5; 15:31), and the one asserting that human beings are responsible for evil (3:17-25; 4:29-30). Jubilees, as de Boer observes, along with the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs has ‘numerous similarities to the Dead Sea Scrolls with respect to the ways in which “cosmological” and “forensic” (or “anthropological”) elements run side by side or overlap, though it might be argued they do not keep the same balance between the two tracks as do the Dead Sea Scrolls’.<sup>61</sup>

It seems that the origin of evil, while placed outside of God’s sphere is partly located in the demonic powers. Briefly, as Wintermute notes, the author of Jubilees ‘would teach us three things about evil: 1) It is superhuman; 2) but it is not caused by God; 3) therefore it comes from the angelic world, which has suffered a breach from God’s good order’.<sup>62</sup>

Moreover, according to Jubilees, apart from evil spirits who lead men astray, or cause them to sin (1:20; 10:1; 11:4-5), evil is attributed to men and women as well. For instance, women cause men to sin (39:5) and men may also corrupt themselves (5:10, 19; 36:8). Additionally, men may plan evil in their hearts (37:24) and therefore sin may also be attributed to man’s imagination and desire (5:2; 7:24). It is noteworthy that even in a small section two different approaches are adopted. For instance, while in 7:24 it is said that ‘all the thoughts and desires of men were always contemplating vanity and evil’, three verses below it is held that ‘the demons have begun to mislead you and your children’. This is an interesting observation to be made, as it exemplifies the truth that even two totally different frames of thought could be traced in the writings of this era, without the author’s being conscious of contradicting himself.

Moreover, in 23:14, where the evil is in a way described, it is not actually attributed to either demonic powers or men’s initiative. We may conclude however, as Best does, that the author has in mind the traditional view of the Old Testament which attributed ‘temptation either to the man himself or to other men’.<sup>63</sup>

### *The nature of sin*

But, what is meant by sin in the book of Jubilees? As expected, sin primarily means the infringement of God’s commandments. God’s Law occupies a prominent position in the book of Jubilees. Having been given the law, Israel is supposed to keep the

<sup>61</sup> De Boer, 1989, p.177 See Knibb, 1987, p.8 for similarities between CD and Jubilees.

<sup>62</sup> Wintermute, 1983, 47

<sup>63</sup> Best, 1965, p.54

commandments, a fact that differentiates Israelites as a nation from Gentiles, those who are condemned to destruction (22:20). Therefore, 'Israel's role in the covenant relation is to keep the commandments'<sup>64</sup>, in order for them to escape destruction.

Apparently, the dualism of the angelic world was reflected in the world of men as well. Though 'many people and many nations', 'all belong to him (God)'(15:31), as it was expected,<sup>65</sup> Israel was identified with the righteous (2:21), and Gentiles with 'the sinners' (23:23). In a way, the latter personify unrighteousness. Consequently, the hostility between Israel and neighbouring nations may be seen as a conflict between good and evil (29:11; 48:12; 24:28-33).

Furthermore, circumcision marks those who belong to the covenant (15:11) and makes them 'sons of the covenant' over against the 'children of destruction' (15:26). The members of the covenant naturally are not to act like Gentiles who lead a sinful life. Thus, the former are expected to avoid 'uncleanness' which is linked not only to idolatry, which is warned against (1:9; 11:4, 16; 12:2; 20:7; 22:22; 36:5) but also to sexual sins (16:4-6; 20:3-5; 25:7; 50:5). Apart from these, Israel had to keep the Sabbath (2:18), cover their nakedness (3:31), observe a period of uncleanness after birth child (3:8-11), refrain from eating meat with the blood in it (6:10; 21:18) and observe the Feast of Tabernacles (16:29) and the Passover (49:8). Consequently, the breach of these commandments, whether it is the result of human initiative or the result of demonic agency, would constitute sin, as it implies forsaking the covenant.

### ***Repentance-Forgiveness***

As even Israel sins, God provides for 'the children of Israel' an antidote for sin. For, 'he will pardon all of their transgressions' and 'have mercy on all who return from all their error, once each year' (5:17-18). God promises that he will 'cut off the foreskin of their heart and the foreskin of the heart of their descendants...purify them so that they will not turn away from following me from that day and forever', provided that Israelites 'acknowledge their sins' (1:22-23). God shows mercy to those 'who love him' (23:31). To this merciful God Israelites appeal (10:3; 31:25; 45:3) and ask Him to prevent them from sinning (1:20; 12:20; 22:10; 22:19; 22:23). Naturally, repentance is as well emphasized, being defined as 'turning aside' from all sinful deeds to 'keep' the commandments of God (21:23).

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<sup>64</sup> Sanders, 1977, p.364

<sup>65</sup> As Ashton, 1991, p.211 observes, 'in view of Israel's profound and pervasive sense of divine election, we might expect the wicked to be identified with the Gentiles'. As he also observes, 'this happens quite frequently, the Qumran War Scroll being a particularly clear example (cf. also *Pss Sol.* 3:3-8; 15:4-13; *I Enoch* 90:18)'.

However, it seems that there are some transgressions, which are incurable (cf. IQS VII, 1, 17-18). They appear to be equal to forsaking the covenant (not circumcising, not keeping the Sabbath, intermarrying or permitting intermarriage with Gentiles, not keeping the Passover, devising evil against fellow Israelites)<sup>66</sup> or by inference mean a denial of the God who gave the commandment (eating blood, having intercourse with one's father's wife or mother-in-law). These transgressions result in one's being expelled from Israel and of course from salvation.

### ***Reward- Punishment***

For the author of Jubilees there is punishment and reward for those who either transgress or obey respectively. Both, punishment (2:27; 6:12f.;) and reward (2:27; 7:34, 37) are fulfilled in the present as well as in the future, 'eternally'. The image of book-keeping in heaven (5:13; 28:6; 30:19; 30:22; 36:10; 39:6) may imply that one is going to be judged according to his deeds that are recorded in heaven. In fact, there seem to be two kinds of 'heavenly tablets': the 'book of life' (30:22; 36:10), and the 'book of those who will be destroyed' (30:22). One's own deeds judge his future.

### ***Man's role***

Israel is actually the nation, which God exclusively has chosen among the other nations in the world and He 'alone is their ruler and he will protect them...and they might be his and he might be theirs henceforth and forever' (15:32). Additionally, while God 'caused spirits to rule so that they might lead them (the nations) astray from following him', for Israel God 'alone, is their ruler and he will protect them' (15:31-32). Nevertheless, it is possible for even the children of Israel to be subjected to attack by the spiritual powers of evil (48:2f.). In such a case the good angels of God will save them (48:4), and God himself will 'guard and bless' the children of Israel (15:32).

Moreover, though the theme that God chose Israel is of vital importance in Jubilees (2:19, 21, 31; 19:18, 33:20), the author can also assert that Abraham chose God and his 'kingdom' (12:19). Apparently, the divine choice does not eliminate freedom of will on man's part. The presence of sin even among Israel, 'the elect' (1:29), in my opinion fortifies this point. Yet, Abraham in 12:20 prays to God in order for him to be saved 'from the hands of evil spirits which rule over the thought of the heart of man'; a fact which indicates that evil comes also from external-to-man powers which also determine his life. That is why, as we are going to see below, sinlessness is going to be achieved only after those evil powers are destroyed.

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<sup>66</sup> Jub. 15:26; 2:27; 30:7-16; 49:8f.; 36:8-11 and 6:12; 33:13 respectively.

Furthermore, it is obvious that the basis of salvation is one's participation in the covenant and loyalty to it (15:26-28). Salvation is meant eternally ('with his holy angels') and earthly ('they will not be uprooted from the land'). Whatever salvation is, for Jubilees, it belongs to Israel (1:27; 23:23, 24). Nevertheless, some Israelites who have 'broken' or 'left' His covenant, are going to be damned (see 15:26, 34). As we have seen above, in Qumran the membership of the covenant is not sufficient for one's salvation. In a like manner, in Jubilees, despite the importance given to one's physical descent from Jacob, this physical descent is not the only condition of salvation. One's keeping of the commandments is also required, a fact which depends on one's own freedom of will.

### *Eschaton-sinlessness*

As God is 'holy and faithful, and He is more righteous than all (others)' (21:4; 5:16), Israel is expected to be so. It is noteworthy that the notion of imitating God is implied in Jubilees (16:26). One is righteous provided that he keeps God's will (22:10; cf. 20:2f.). Among the elect nation there were people who were called 'righteous'. In 5:19 Noah is said to have a 'righteous heart in all of his ways', and 10:17 speaks 'of his righteousness in which he (Noah) was perfected'. Abraham is said to be 'perfect in all his actions with the Lord and was pleasing through righteousness all of the days of his life' (23:10). Even God himself calls him 'perfect' (15:3). In 17:15 Abraham is also called 'faithful' (cf. 17:16; 19:18). Moreover, Jacob is said to be 'upright in his way' and 'a perfect man' (27:17; 35:12 similarly Leah in 36:23). Finally, Joseph 'walked uprightly' (40:8).

However, those attributes are going to apply to Israel as a whole when God will purify Israel 'from all sin and error'. Then the righteous 'will dwell in confidence in all the land'. As for Satan, during that time, there will be no 'Satan or any evil (one). And the land will be purified from that time and forever' (50:5 cf. 1:27f.). Despite Israel's transgressions, God promises to restore his people as long as they repent. There will be a time when 'they will all be called "sons of the living God"' (1:25). Therefore, we can talk of two views of sinlessness in Jubilees. On the one hand, faithfulness constitutes a step towards perfection that is to be realised in the present and on the other, this perfection will be completed at the end time when demonic powers are going to cease to have power over men. Once more, sinlessness and perfection is placed at the end time, at the time when the 'new creation' is going to take place.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> Referring to Jub 1:29, Charles, 1902, p.9 notes that 'we should observe carefully the nature of the "renewal" as it appears in Jubilees. This renewal of the creation is not to be instantaneous and catastrophic, but gradual, and its progress to be conditioned ethically by the conduct of Israel. This will be seen most clearly in iv. 26 and xxiii. 26-28'.

Thus, the time will come when God will make 'for all his works a new and righteous nature so that they might not sin in all their nature forever, and so that they might all be righteous, each in his kind always' (5:12). Additionally, there will be a time when 'the earth will be sanctified from all sin and from pollution throughout eternal generations' (4:26). There is a sense, Sanders notes 'in which being righteous is an eschatological hope which will come with the new creation at the hand of God'.<sup>68</sup> Apparently, election as the first stage of salvation and final purification as the accomplishment of it, are both dependent on God's initiative. The latter however, depends on obedience and repentance of men. It is at this point I suppose, where man's role lies in the process of his salvation.

### **1(Ethiopic Apocalypse of) Enoch**

(Second century B.C.-First century A.D.)

Though it has evoked divergent opinions, 'today' (1981), Charlesworth notes, 'there is a consensus that the book is a composite'.<sup>69</sup> For Nickelsburg this document consists of 'a collection of traditions and writings composed between the 4<sup>th</sup> century B.C.E.<sup>70</sup> and the turn of the era, mainly in the name of Enoch, the son of Jared (Gen 5:21-24)'. Moreover, the Enochic corpus represents a series of revelations received by Enoch and transmitted to his son Methuselah for the righteous who would live in the end times, to benefit from. Its chief subject matter is twofold: the nature and implications of the created structure of the κόσμος and the origin, nature, consequences, and final judgement of sin and evil.<sup>71</sup>

We certainly have to point out the multiplicity that characterizes the Enochic corpus as it influences its frame of thought in each part of it. More specifically, according to Isaac's division, the first part of the book consists of an introduction (chs. 1-5), which presents the end time when the final judgement of the men, righteous and wicked is to take place, and an account regarding (chs. 6-36) the fallen angels, their sinning with women (Gen 6:1-4), their corruption of humankind, Enoch's vain intervention on their behalf, a prophecy of their disaster, and a variety of visions of Enoch during his tour of the earth, the world of the dead and the heavenly world. Moreover, the second part-the 'Similitudes, or the so-called parables' (chs. 37-71), deals with the imminent judgement of the righteous and the wicked, the figure of the Messiah, the Son of Man, the Righteous One, and the Elect One. Further, Similitudes concern the revelation of

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<sup>68</sup> Sanders, 1977, pp.381-382

<sup>69</sup> Charlesworth, 1981, p.98 As Collins, 1984, p.33 observes, '*1Enoch* is not just one work, but is a major collection of apocalyptic writings'.

<sup>70</sup> For the date of the book see Charles, 1893, pp.24-33; Charlesworth, 1981, p.98; Vanderkam, 1993, pp.96-97

<sup>71</sup> See Nickelsburg. 1992. p.508 II

heavenly secrets, the Paradise, the resurrection of the righteous ones and the punishment of the fallen angels. The third part, 'an astrological treatise' (chs. 72-82), concerns the calculation of time by the sun, the nature of the solar year of 364 days, and the cosmic anomalies of the final days. The fourth part, 'the Dream Visions' (chs. 83-90), contains two visions regarding the future history of Israel and the world, and the fifth part (chs. 91-104), 'Enoch's testament', refers to the issue of 'the spiritual blessedness of the righteous and the sorrowful end of the sinners'.<sup>72</sup>

Summing up, in Nickelsburg's words, 'Enoch attests the confluence of many social, cultural, and religious currents in postexilic Judaism', as will be seen below.<sup>73</sup> The Mosaic Torah is interpreted in a specific way while at the same time it is supplemented by the Enochic Torah, which shows a particular interest in cosmology and calendar. The Enochic authors appear to be indebted to aspects of Israelite prophecy, with regard to their claim to be mediating revelations about the great final judgment which is going to take place at the eschaton and which will reward the righteous and punish the sinners for their responses to God's will; a fact which is evident from the use of 'prophetic forms and genres and dependence on specific prophetic traditions'. So, as Nickelsburg observes, 'through the intersection of these currents a new phenomenon appears in *1 Enoch*. The content of Torah is broadened, and its true interpretation is specified. The revelation of God's will and of the eschatological future is supplemented by revealed knowledge of a hidden world, and together these are identified as heavenly wisdom of broad and inclusive dimensions, mediated by a primordial seer and sage'.<sup>74</sup>

In the final analysis, as Isaac accurately observes, the Enochic corpus helps clarify 'the rich complexities of both intertestamental Jewish thought and early Christian theology'.<sup>75</sup>

### ***The origin of evil***

As will be seen, the 'dualistic understanding of historical and cosmic reality' pervades the Enochic corpus and 'is essential to its exposition'. In a like manner, as Nickelsburg observes, 'important aspects of the Enochic authors' understanding of the nature of evil were governed by a dualistic worldview'. While human beings are responsible for their bad actions, the Enochic authors attributed a significant part of them 'to a hidden demonic world, and the corpus devotes considerable space to myths that trace the origins

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<sup>72</sup> Isaac, 1983, p.5 See also Vanderkam, 1993, pp.98-99; Charlesworth, 1981, pp.98-99

<sup>73</sup> Nickelsburg, 1992, p.515 II

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

<sup>75</sup> Isaac, 1983, p.9

of that world to an angelic rebellion that took place in the heavenly realm and the hidden primordial past'.<sup>76</sup>

Thus, concerning the Enochic understanding of the character of evil, particularly in the Book of Watchers (chs 1-36), all sin and evil are seen to be attributed to the fallen angelic powers<sup>77</sup> (the Watchers) and their demonic descendants (cf. 9:1, 6-9; 10:7-9; 15:8-16:2; 19:1-2).<sup>78</sup> Moreover, while the idea of the Watchers' being the source of sin on earth is prominent, there are passages which refer to sinners, but are not explicit as to where this sin comes from (see 1:9; 22:7,13; 27:2). In my opinion, these passages may constitute implicit elements of forensic eschatology.

According to the Epistle of Enoch (chs 91-105) however, all responsibility for evil lies on man's part. Cosmological eschatology, which dominates in the Book of the Watchers, in the Epistle of Enoch is replaced by ethical eschatology.<sup>79</sup> In 98:4 for instance the author affirms that human beings are to be responsible for their own sins, noting that sin has not been 'exported into the world. It is the people who have themselves invented it. And those who commit it shall come under a great curse'. Additionally, in 98:12 the author refers to those 'who love unrighteousness'. Moreover, 'there is one strange passage'<sup>80</sup> where women are said to tempt angels in 1Enoch. Thus, in 6:2 'the children of heaven' saw the daughters of man and 'desired them' (see also 69:4).

### *The nature of sin*

Though 1Enoch says less about the observance of God's Law than Jubilees, sin consists in the transgression of the will of God. Angels first transgressed committing fornication (6:1ff. the offspring are bastards 10:9). Apart from that, the fallen angels 'revealed eternal secrets which are performed in heaven' to men (9:6; 65:6). Added to this, in 19:1 the angels who 'have defiled the people', will 'lead them into error so that they will offer sacrifices to the demons as unto gods'. This action constitutes the primordial sin in the first part (according to Isaac's division above) of the Enochic corpus and in Jubilees as well.

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<sup>76</sup> Nickelsburg, 1992, p.514 II

<sup>77</sup> As Isaac, 1983, p.9 also notes 'allusions to the legend of the fallen angels occur elsewhere in Jewish writings (viz. Jub; Sir 16:7; CD 2.14-3.13; 4Q 180f.; and rabbinic Midrashim)'. For the 'Book of the Watchers' see also Collins, 1984, pp.36-46

<sup>78</sup> See De Boer, 1989, p.174 As Collins, 1997, p.30 observes, 'the fullest articulation' of the mythic account of the origin of evil on earth, 'is found in one of the oldest books of Enoch, the Book of the Watchers (1Enoch 1-36)'.  
<sup>79</sup> See De Boer, 1989, p.178 As Collins, 1997, p.23 observes, 'the Epistle evidently knows the tradition of the Watchers, but disputes it. If we view the various components of 1Enoch as a tradition, it is evident that this tradition allowed for dispute and argumentation'.

<sup>80</sup> Best, 1965, p.53

Moreover, in 10:20 God orders Michael to 'remove from the earth', all 'injustice', 'defilement', 'oppression', 'sin', 'iniquity', 'which is being done on earth'; these terms apparently signify sinful actions. Also, in 1Enoch 95:5, 6 the rewarding of 'evil to one's neighbors' and witnessing 'falsehood' is counted as sin. In 99:1-2 sin appears to be synonymous with causing 'wickedness', glorifying and honouring 'false words', altering 'words of truth'.

### ***Righteous-Wicked***

Ethical dualism is also witnessed in the book of 1Enoch. Generally, men are divided into the 'elect', and 'righteous' and the 'ungodly ones' (1:1-9) or the 'righteous' and 'sinners' (22:9-13). In 25:5 the righteous seem to be identified with the elect.

In the Dream Visions, (chs. 83-90) the wicked are said to be mainly the unfaithful Israelites rather than Israel's enemies. Though God took care of all of them (89:28), some as if they were blind ('their eyes became dim-sighted' 89:41), 'went astray, going in diverse ways and abandoning that house of his' (89:51). Put another way, a part of Israel out of disloyalty to Judaism, 'forsake the Temple' (89:56, 58).

Moreover, in the fifth part (chs.91-104)<sup>81</sup> we are told a lot about the unrighteous (see 91:6-10; 96:4; 96:7f.; 97:8f.; 102:6-8). The sinners seem to have faith in their riches (94:8; 100:6; 104:6) and confidence in their own security and the assumption that there is no reward or punishment after death (97:8; 102:6-8). In brief, they 'fear him (God) not' (101:7). However, at the day of judgement their 'wealth shall not be able to save them at the place where their sins shall collapse' (100:6). Here as well the wicked appear to be, in part at least, apostate Israelites (99:2 they are said to 'pervert the eternal law'; 91:7 the wicked blaspheme).

The righteous<sup>82</sup> on the other hand, are 'afraid of do[ing] evil in his presence' (101:1); they obey the law and follow 'the path of the Most High' (99:10). Though they suffer 'hardships and have experienced every trouble' (103:9-15), they are assured that 'in heaven the angels will remember them for good before the glory of the Great One' and they 'shall shine like the lights of heaven' (104:1-2).

### ***Reward-Punishment***

1Enoch as well espouses the idea of the righteous being rewarded and the wicked being punished, on the day of the final judgement (10:11-22; 22:13; 27:3; 84:6; 90:25).

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<sup>81</sup> As Ashton, 1991, 211 observes, 'the division of mankind into good and bad becomes more noticeable and more extreme in the writings of the Second Temple era that emanate from circles outside the establishment'.

<sup>82</sup> For the righteous in the Similitudes see Collins, 1984, pp.145-147

That disobedience is met by punishment and obedience by reward is a constant theme in the Enochic corpus. Thus, the wicked are expected to be paid according to their 'deeds' (95:5), while the righteous are said to be rewarded for their 'labors' (103:3). The author characteristically thinks that though for the wicked there is no mercy (94:10; 95:4; 98:9f.), the righteous will be blessed according to God's mercy and not their good works (92:4f.).

### ***Election-Man's role***

First of all, the election in 1Enoch is conceived as a gift of God. In 27:3f. it is said that 'in the days of the judgment of (the accursed), the (merciful) shall bless him for the mercy which he had bestowed upon them'. However, the phenomenon of apostasy indicates that it depends on one's freedom of will if this gift is to be obtained or not. Paradoxically, in 94:4 one is exhorted to 'seek' for himself 'and choose righteousness and the elect life'. So, election appears to be a matter of choice on man's part (cf. IQH VII, 12-18; VIII, 9-10 *et.al.*).

Moreover, while the righteous are constantly urged not to 'walk in the evil way' but to 'walk in the way of peace' (94:3-4), the wicked are exhorted not to 'become wicked' in their 'hearts', or 'give praise' to their 'idols (104:9); it thus appears as Sanders notes and I would agree with him, that it is 'possible for the sinners to turn and repent'. Yet, Sanders observes, 'in keeping with the general apocalyptic view, we are not told how an individual might *transfer* from the group of the unrighteous to the righteous'.<sup>83</sup>

It is noteworthy, I think, that it is not the transgression of the commandments, which makes the wicked, wicked. Rather, it is the stance the wicked or the righteous take over against sin. Though the righteous also transgress-only after the judgement they sin no more (5:8)-they repent and actually seek God's mercy. However, the Watchers, as representatives of the wicked, transgress and speak 'slanderosly grave and harsh words' with their impure mouths 'against his (God's) greatness' (5:4). Put in another way, they refuse to repent (they 'walk in the stubbornness of their own hearts'). Thus, being 'hard-hearted' and excluding themselves from the sphere of God's mercy, the wicked find no mercy. They, rather, choose for themselves 'eternal execration' (5:5).

### ***Eschaton***

Reward and punishment are always placed in the end times though, as we have already seen, there are instances when one is getting what he deserves, during his earthly life as well. In broad lines, in 1Enoch we encounter the familiar motive of the triumph of the

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<sup>83</sup> Sanders, 1977, pp.356-357

righteous over the wicked at the eschaton. According to 1:1 there will be a day when 'all the ungodly ones' will be removed. As for the authors of evil, namely the Watchers, they 'shall quiver' (see also 10:15; 'they shall be judged till they are finished' (19:1)).<sup>84</sup> 1 Enoch is actually instructed to predict the disappearance of the fallen angels at the end-time (12:6).

Moreover, sinlessness is to be realized at the end times. Thus, after the judgement 'wisdom shall be given to the elect' and 'they shall all live and not return again to sin either by being wicked or through pride; but those who have wisdom shall be humble and not return again to sin' (5:8).<sup>85</sup> The giving of wisdom is a characteristic of the messianic times (see also Pss Sol 17:23; 2Bar 44:14; 4Ezra 8:52; 49:3 cf. IQ27 I,8 where it is said that at the eschaton 'knowledge shall fill the world and folly shall exist no longer') when 'wisdom flows like water and glory is measureless before him (the Messiah)' (49:1). The 'thirsty ones' are invited to drink of the water 'and become filled with wisdom' in order for them to dwell 'with the holy, righteous and elect ones' (48:1).

Further, on the day of judgement, when Michael cleanses the earth 'from all sin' by actually destroying the demonic angelic forces (cf. chs 16, 19), 'all the children of the people will become righteous... and the earth shall be cleansed from all pollution... and it shall not happen again that I shall send (these) upon the earth from generation to generation and forever' (10:12-22).<sup>86</sup>

Finally, we encounter an interesting concept in 107:1, which reads: 'one generation shall be more wicked than the other', till 'a generation of righteous ones arise', and the 'wickedness shall perish', 'sin shall disappear from upon the earth'. The permanent triumph of righteousness will be preceded by the contemporary flourishing of wickedness on earth (cf. TIss 6:1 where it is said that 'in the last times (men)... abandoning the commands of the Lord, they ally themselves with Beliar').

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<sup>84</sup> As Ashton, 1991, p.222 observes, 'it is often very difficult to tell from any particular description of the events of the last days just how soon the writer expects them to occur'. And he asserts that the opening of 1 Enoch 1:3-9 'furnishes us with a good example of this unclarity'.

<sup>85</sup> See Charles, 1893, p.123 (commenting on 42:1-2) for the theme of wisdom.

<sup>86</sup> According to Charles, 1893, p.77, 10:21 refers to 'the conversion of the Gentiles cf. xc. 30' (ibid., p.257).

## ***Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs***

(Second century A.D.)<sup>87</sup>

As Collins observes ‘another literary genre that is closely related to the apocalypses and appears in the Hellenistic age is the testament. A testament is a discourse delivered in anticipation of imminent death’. According to this genre, ‘the speaker is typically a father addressing his sons or a leader addressing his people or his successor’.<sup>88</sup> Specifically, the piece of work we are dealing with represents ‘the most extensive corpus of testamentary literature from the ancient world’.<sup>89</sup>

Moreover, underlining that the history of composition is one of the most controversial issues in the current study of the pseudepigrapha, Collins states that though there is no doubt that this work incorporates Jewish material, it is ‘certainly Christian in its present form’.<sup>90</sup> De Jonge espouses Collins’s thesis, noting that ‘there is no doubt that *T.12 P.* are Christian in their present form and must have received that form sometime in the second half of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century A.D.’.<sup>91</sup> First of all, De Jonge notes ‘one has to establish the meaning of the present *T.12 P.* for a Christian audience around A.D. 200’.<sup>92</sup>

In short, de Jonge states that ‘it is very difficult, if not impossible, to establish the exact contents of this “original” (pre-Christian) Jewish document, let alone to detect different stages in the redaction of that document’. In fact, he stresses, it is ‘uncertain whether one should speak of a Christian redaction of an existing Jewish *T.12 P.* or of a Christian composition’.<sup>93</sup>

Be that as it may, concerning the pattern followed by the Testaments, as Collins notes, it involves ‘three basic elements: 1) historical retrospective, in the form of a narrative about the patriarch’s life (*T.Asher* is the only exception); 2) ethical exhortation; and 3)

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<sup>87</sup> As Kee, 1983, p.777 observes this date refers to the *T12P* as we now know them with ‘the Christian interpolations, which seem to have a special affinity with Johannine thought’. The ‘basic writing’ however, ‘gives no evidence of having been composed by anyone other than a hellenized Jew. Its use of the Septuagint suggests that it was written after 250 B.C.’.

<sup>88</sup> Collins, 1984, p.102

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, p.106

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.* As he (*ibid.*, p.107) also notes, ‘the use of Jewish traditions in the *Testaments* is shown by the existence of parallel materials... So, while it is clear that the *Testaments* incorporate pre-Christian Jewish material, it is also apparent that the Jewish elements can only be identified tentatively and with caution’.

<sup>91</sup> De Jonge, 1992, p.183 V

<sup>92</sup> ‘Allowing’, de Jonge, 1992, p.183 V, adds, ‘for possible alterations in the period between their origin and the origin of the archetype of our manuscript tradition’. O’Neill, 1966, pp.4-5, however, noting de Jonge’s thesis opposed to the older editors ‘who maintained that the Testaments have suffered only marginal Christian additions’, asserts that ‘the affinities between the Twelve Testaments and the Qumran writings, together with the fact that closely related Testaments have already been found in the caves, make it probable that the older position should be maintained’. See also Charlesworth, 1981, p.212

<sup>93</sup> De Jonge, 1992, p.183 V

prediction of the future (these predictions often display the so-called sin-exile-return pattern, which is typical of Deuteronomic theology)'.<sup>94</sup>

### *Two spirits*

As de Jonge observes, the Testaments 'have no systematic angelology and demonology'.<sup>95</sup> In broad lines, dualism is traced in the Testaments concerning the spirits, which are abroad in the world. Thus, Judah warns his children that 'two spirits await an opportunity with humanity: the spirit of truth and the spirits of error' (TJud 20:1f.). This has been so since the beginning of time when the Watchers 'departed from the nature's order' (TNaph 3:5; see also TReu 5:6) and brought a curse on the earth.

Moreover, this dualism manifests itself in the choice between two ways, which are 'granted' by God' to the sons of men, 'two mind-sets, two lines of action, two models, and two goals' (TAsh 1:3). As for men, either, rejecting wickedness, their soul 'overcomes evil and uproots sin', or driving out the good on their own account, their mind 'is overmastered by Beliar' (TAsh 1:7-8). Obviously, the good angels are those who instruct the righteous (TReu 5:3; TIss 2:1; TJud 15:5) and punish the wicked (TLev 3:2-3).

### *The origin of evil*

Generally, in the Testaments we encounter both modes of thought, the one which holds evil powers responsible for men's sins and the one which attests that men themselves are to blame for their own sinful choices.

Hence, on the one hand Beliar is said to be the one who entices men into sinning (TDan 1:7; 3:6, where he is called Satan 5:6; TJos 7:4; TBen 6:1; 7:1-2; TReu 4:8-10), and on the other, men themselves tempt their fellows into sinning (TReu 5:3) or, as evil is placed in man (TReu 5:3 'the spirit of promiscuity'), they follow their own bad inclinations regarded as evil (TIss 6:2 'they pursue their own evil schemes'). Sin is also instigated by the power of the spirit of falsehood and anger (TDan 1:6; 2:1-5:2 where is said that 'if you do not guard yourselves against the spirit of falsehood and anger, and love the truth and forbearance, you will perish'), of jealousy and envy (TDan 1:5; TGad 7:1-7 where is said 'do not be envious, but remember that all humanity dies'; TSim4: 5,7,9; 6:2), and of greed (TJud 17:1; 19:1 where it is said that 'love of money leads to idolatry'). Falsehood and anger are characteristically said to be 'a doubled edged evil, and work together to perturb the reason' (TDan 4:7). Moreover, men in their youth are

<sup>94</sup> Collins, 1984, p.108

<sup>95</sup> De Jonge, 1992, p.184 V

more vulnerable to evil (TJud 6:1; 13:6; cf. 14:1ff.). In the TSim 5:3 it is said that it is actually sin (fornication) that ‘separates from God and leads men to Beliar’, rather than that Beliar leads them to commit fornication.

What is really interesting for our own purposes is the fact that yet again we meet both ideas concerning the origin of evil, side by side. Thus, in TAsh 1:3-9 men are said to sin because they choose to do so (‘if the soul wants to follow the good way’) but also because they are made to sin by Beliar who ‘even when good is undertaken, presses the struggle so as to make the aim of his action into evil’.

Moreover, in the TDan 1:3,7 and the TReu 3: 1-11 we encounter both, on the one hand that men are responsible for their sinning and that evil spirits are to be blamed for human sinning. Additionally, while in the TReu 5:6 and TNaph 3:5 angelic evil powers are responsible for human sins, the TLev 19:1-2 attests that humans are responsible for their sinful actions.

### *The nature of sin*

Throughout the Testaments there is a stress on obedience to the Law (TLev 13:1; 14:4; TJud 26:1; TIss 5:1; TZeb 5:1; TDan 5:1; TNaph 8:9; TGad 3:1; TAsh 6:1,3; TJos 11:1 according to which God loves those who keep His commandments; 18:1; TBen 3:1; 10:3). In the TLev 19:1-2 for example, the obedience of the Law is an attribute of those who belong to the ‘light’ and are opposed to ‘the works of Beliar’. In the TLev 14:4 moreover, God’s Law is ‘light’ which was granted to Israel ‘for the enlightenment of every man’. Evidently, actions that are opposed to God’s Law constitute sin. It is characteristic however, that there is no mention of the observance of the Sabbath or of circumcision or any of the dietary Jewish laws.<sup>96</sup>

Moreover, Testaments seem to be concerned with ethical matters as opposed to ritual and ceremonial ones. Thus, we encounter a great deal of virtues and vices, which the sons of the Patriarchs are exhorted to adopt and avoid respectively. Accordingly, the Patriarchs exhort their children to struggle for: integrity (TSim 4:5; TLev 13:1; TIss 3:2; TJud 23:5; TIss 4:1), piety (TReu 6:4; TIss 7:5; TLev 16:2), honesty (TDan 1:3), generosity (TIss 3:8; 4:2; 7:3), uprightness (TIss 13:1; TGad 7:7; TSim 5:2), self-control (TJos 4:1-2; 6:7; 9:2-3) and compassion (TIss 7:5; TJud 18:3; TZeb 2:4; 5:1-3). In the TIss 4:1-6 Issachar enumerates the attributes of the ‘genuine man’ who does ‘everything that is well-pleasing to the Lord’.

On the contrary, the Patriarchs’ sons are advised to avoid sexual sins (TReu 1:6; 1:9; TLev 9:9; TSim 5:3; TJud 11:1-5; 17:1-3), which are caused by Beliar (TReu 4:10), and

marriage with gentile women (TLev 9:10; cf. TJud 8:10-12). Additionally, the sons of Patriarchs are repeatedly warned against jealousy, falsehood and anger, greed (see above), hatred and lies (TDan 4:1-7).

Moreover, once there is a reference to 'sin unto death', which is reminiscent of 1John, when Issachar claims that he is not aware of 'having committed a sin unto death' (7:1). Also, there is sin committed 'in mind' (TZeb 1:4) just like love can be expressed 'in deed and word and inward thoughts' (TGad 6:1).

### ***Repentance-Forgiveness***

Sin is not absent from the life of those who are God's people either. Archangels offer 'propitiatory sacrifices to the Lord on behalf of all the sins of ignorance of the righteous ones' (TLev 3:5 see TZeb 1:5). Yet, 'every sin is immediately repented' (TAsh 1:6). Their repentance is met by God's forgiveness (TGad 7:5) as God 'is compassionate and merciful', and pardons those who act 'in ignorance' (TJud 19:3). Repentance is also expressed by fasting (TReu 1:9-10; TSim 3:4), and weeping (TSim 2:13).

In the TGad there is a *definition* of repentance; 5:6-7 reads 'according to God's truth, repentance destroys disobedience, puts darkness to flight, illumines the vision, furnishes knowledge for the soul, and guides the deliberative powers to salvation'.

Moreover, while Israel's insistence on sinning is met by God's punishment, their return to the right way is always met by God's mercy and their deliverance from evil and enemies (TJud 23:4-5; TIss 6:3-4; TZeb 9:7; TDan 5:9). Evil has no power over those who repent, for 'if anyone flees to the Lord for refuge, the evil spirit will quickly depart from him, and his mind will be eased' (TSim 3:5).

### ***Reward-Punishment***

As usual in the writings examined so far, there is a reward for those who repent and ask for forgiveness. At the end times, the righteous will enjoy 'eternal peace' (TLev 13:5) and deliverance of any evil spirit and enemies (see the eschaton subsection below). God's response to Israel's sin is 'famine and plague, death and punishment', until they return to the Lord.

As for those who persist in sinning, they will be punished eternally (TReu 5:5; TLev 4:1; TGad 7:5); God 'shall bring down fire on the impious and will destroy them to all generations' (TZeb 10:3). In the TGad it is characteristically said that the punishment of wickedness is God's own work. For, if one 'is devoid of shame and persists in his wickedness', the believer has to forgive him from the heart 'and leave the vengeance to

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<sup>96</sup> The food laws are mentioned only as a metaphor of moral purity (TAsh 2:9; 4:5).

God' (6:7). As will be seen, in 2Baruch the same motif is encountered according to which punishment of the wicked is entirely God's business (19:3).

### ***Man's role***

In TJud 20:1 it is said that though there are two spirits, one of error and another of truth, 'between is the conscience of the mind which inclines as it will'. I suppose that at this point man's role is of major importance. In TAsh 1:5 as well, it is stressed that there are two ways good and evil, 'concerning them are two dispositions within our breasts that choose between them'. In TAsh 1:3 it is explicitly stated that 'God has granted' these two ways. It is not said however that God has as well granted the evil disposition rooted in the human soul. It will be seen that the authors of the documents under discussion avoid such a radical explanation.

Levi characteristically exhorts his sons to 'do righteousness on earth' in order for them 'to find it in heaven' (TLev 13:5). Further, in 19:1-2 the patriarch advises his children to *choose* for themselves 'light or darkness, the Law of the Lord or the works of Beliar'.

### ***Eschaton***

We again come across the same motif, according to which the righteous are the ones who win eschatologically. Referring to the book of 1Enoch (TSim 5:4; TLev 14:1; TJud 18,1; TDan 5:6; TNaph 4:1; TBen 9:1 and in the TZeb 9:5 to 'the writings of the fathers')<sup>97</sup>, the Patriarchs prophesy that in the last days, Israel will desert the Lord (TIss 6:1; TZeb 8:2; TDan 5:4; TGad 8:2; TAsh 7:6). They will repent however and so they will be saved. Moreover, we encounter references to a saviour figure who will come at the end of the time to rescue Israel from his enemies and his sins (TSim 7:1-3; TJud 23:5; 24:1-6; TGad 8:1; TAsh 7:3 'the Most High will visit the earth'; TBen 11:2-5).

The present age will end in the consummation of God's purpose (TReu 6:8). In the end-time, God will dwell in the midst of Israel (TLev 5:2; TJud 22:2; TZeb 9:8; TNaph 8:3). Another characteristic of the age to come is the fact that Beliar will lead many astray (TIss 6:1 cf. 1En 107:1), but will be defeated by God's agents of salvation (TDan 6:3; TJos 20:2). At the eschaton there will be 'no Beliar's spirit of error, because he will be thrown into eternal fire' (TJud 25:3). In the last days, Zebulon says to his sons, 'every spirit of error will be trampled down' (TZeb 9:8). Thus, sin is nullified at the end times when God triumphs and Beliar is disarmed.

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<sup>97</sup> As Knibb, 1987, p.191 observes, 'it would be misleading to try to tie any of these passages to the actual books of Enoch that we possess'.

## ***Psalms of Solomon***

(First century B.C.)

The so-called Psalms of Solomon consist of 18 non-canonical psalms from the first century B.C.<sup>98</sup>, which are preserved, in Syriac and Greek. The title of the collection, as Trafton notes, 'is a curious one, since there is nothing in any of the psalms to link them to Solomon'.<sup>99</sup>

According to Wright, 'the eighteen Psalms of Solomon incorporate the response of a group of devout Jews to the capture of Jerusalem by the Romans in the first century B.C. Psalms 1,2,8, and 17 are the account of how a native cadre seizes power illegally and misuses its prerogatives'.<sup>100</sup>

Moreover, in Trafton's estimation, the Psalms of Solomon are a significant witness to 'the rich diversity' within first century B.C. Judaism. The collection bears witness both to 'the political perspective and to the personal piety of a particular group of Jews'. Apart from that, the same scholar states, the Psalms provide 'one of the outstanding examples of pre-Christian Jewish messianic hope'.<sup>101</sup> It is also a key document for ascertaining developments in postbiblical Jewish poetry'.<sup>102</sup>

### ***The origin of evil-Nature of sin***

First and foremost, we have to point out that the psalmist, unlike Jubilees and 1Enoch, does not mention evil cosmological powers in opposition to God.

Sin is of course what is opposed to God's commandments. In the Psalms however, it seems to be self-evident; for God is not often pictured as giving His commandments to His people, apart from 14:2 where it is said that the Lord is faithful 'to those who endure his discipline, to those who live in the righteousness of his commandments'. In this respect, Sanders observes, 'the Psalms of Solomon differ widely from Jubilees and Rabbinic literature but are closer to the various sections of 1Enoch'.<sup>103</sup>

Undoubtedly, keeping the commandments is implied and their transgression constitutes sin (2:3; 8; 8:9-13). For Israel has signed a covenant with God (9:16-19;

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<sup>98</sup> See Charlesworth, 1981, p.195; Trafton, 1992, p.115 VI

<sup>99</sup> Trafton, 1992, p.115 VI

<sup>100</sup> Wright, 1983, p.639

<sup>101</sup> As Collins, 1984, p.113 observes concerning the messianism of the book involved, 'apart from the complex evidence of the *Testaments* and the Qumran scrolls, the only passage from this period that deals with the Davidic messiah is found in the *Psalms of Solomon* 17-18'. Additionally, Collins (*ibid.*, p.114) notes that 'the portrait of the messiah echoes the language of the canonical Psalms (especially Psalm 2) and Isaiah'.

<sup>102</sup> Trafton, 1992, p.116 VI

<sup>103</sup> Sanders, 1977, p.390

10:5; 17:7). Being unfaithful to this covenant, one is excluded from the benefit of eternal life, which the righteous are going to enjoy (3:11-12).

### ***Righteous-Wicked***

To start with, in 2:1f. the psalmist identifies the Roman soldiers with the sinners who 'broke down the wall' and 'went up to your (God's) place of sacrifice; arrogantly trampled with their sandals'. For, 'the sons of Jerusalem defiled the sanctuary of the Lord' first. Though here the wicked are identified with the Roman soldiers, I would agree with Sanders<sup>104</sup> that the wicked are primarily fellow Jews. Their sin is described with clarity in psalm 8 where they are said to sin 'in secret places', breaking the law, provoking God. They even 'walked on the place of sacrifice of the Lord, (coming) from all kinds of uncleanness'. On the top of all, the psalmist writes, 'there was no sin they left undone in which they did not surpass the gentiles' (9-13). Thus, God answered to Israel's sinning with their deliverance to the Romans.

Moreover, on the one hand, the righteous are said to be 'those who fear God' (2:33; 3:12; 5:18; 13:12), the 'devout' (2:36; 8:34; 9:3; 13:12). They are also called, the 'poor' (5:2; 15:1), the 'humble' (5:12) and the 'innocent' (12:4). Further, they are those who 'love God' (14:1), obey the Law (14:2); they may stumble but they do not pile sin on sin (3:5-6); declaring God's righteousness (3:3-5; 2:15), they accept God's discipline (3:4; 10:1f.; 14:1).

The wicked on the other hand, apart from 'sinners' (4:8; 14:6), are also called 'godless' (13:5), 'criminals' (12:1-4; 14:6), 'deceitful' (4:23) and 'hypocrites' (4:20). Having committed sexual transgressions and sins against the sanctity of the Temple, they are considered by the righteous to have sinned worse than gentiles (8:9-13). Further, their attitude is depicted in Psalms 3 and 4.

### ***Repentance-Forgiveness***

The righteous are not perfect, they do sin but God does not 'accuse them for what they sinned'; He rather blesses them. For, God's 'goodness is upon those that sin, when they repent' (9:7, 10). The psalmist asks God's protection to keep sins 'far from' him; however, he is sure that if he sins God's discipline will make him to 'return' (16:11 see also 10:3 where God's discipline atones; likewise 18:4).

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<sup>104</sup> See Sanders, 1977, pp.400-401 So Trafton, 1992, p.116 VI As the latter also observes, there exists a 'perceived dichotomy within Israel itself', which suggests that the Psalms are the work of 'a Jewish party or sect'. However, as Sanders, 1977, p.408 and Charlesworth, 1981, p.195, state there is no indication that a sect is behind the Psalms.

Moreover, while the righteous 'atones for (sins of) ignorance by fasting and humbling his soul' and as a result, 'the Lord will cleanse every devout person and his house', the sinner 'stumbles' and instead of asking for forgiveness he 'curses his life, the day of his birth, and his mother's pains' (3:8-9). However, there is a hope for salvation even for those who 'sank into sleep, far from God' and whose 'soul was drawn away from the Lord', thanks to God and His 'everlasting mercy' (16:2-3 cf. 1En 104:9 where the wicked are exhorted not to 'become wicked' in their 'heart', or 'give praise' to their 'idols'; 4Ezra 9:11-12).

### ***Reward-Punishment***

According to the general outlook of the Psalms, those who 'live in the righteousness of his commandments, in the Law' (14:2) shall by God's mercy receive the reward of eternal life (15:13; 3:12) at the last judgment, while sinners shall be eternally punished (15:4; 6, 12).

Moreover, in the Psalms the fact that though the wicked prosper (1:4), the righteous are chastened by God (13:7; 9) is characteristically stressed. Yet, 'the discipline of the righteous (for things done) in ignorance is not the same as the destruction of the sinners' (7), for while the righteous are not to be destroyed, as God is going to 'wipe away their mistakes' (10), the 'destruction of the sinner is terrible' (13:6), and 'no memory of them will ever be found (11). As Sanders notes, 'the view seems to have developed that it is the special characteristic of the pious to be chastened. This combines the old view with the new situation'. That is, 'the sign of righteousness is to be chastened for one's sins rather than to be prosperous, for the wicked may be prosperous; but to be destroyed, for the wicked will ultimately be destroyed'.<sup>105</sup>

Further, the salvation of the righteous and the destruction of the wicked are to be determined by their actions 'for the Lord's righteous judgements are according to the individual and the household' (9:5). Additionally, we encounter once more the motif of the righteous being dealt with by God, with mercy (2:33, 35, 36; 4:25; 13:9, 12) and the sinners with strict justice (2:34; 4:24).

### ***Election***

The concept of Israel's being chosen by God is explicitly stated in 9:9 reading (see also 9:8-10; 7:8) 'for you chose the descendants of Abraham above all nations, and you put your name upon us, Lord, and it will not cease forever'. However, the chosen people

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<sup>105</sup> Sanders, 1977, pp.390-391

‘neglected the Lord’ and as a result they were ‘taken into exile to a foreign country’ (9:1); a fact which suggests that election does not nullify men’s own freedom of will.

### ***Man’s role***

As has already been pointed out, in the Psalms a considerable emphasis is put on personal accountability and choice. Thus, ‘our works (are) in the choosing and power of our souls, to do right and wrong in the works of our hands, and in your righteousness you oversee human beings’ (9:4). Apparently, God judges one according to his actions. One, by choosing to do the right thing, ‘saves up life for himself with the Lord’, while the one who chooses to do what is wrong, ‘causes his own life to be destroyed’ (9:5).<sup>106</sup>

Additionally, the fact that on the one hand even the righteous sin and they have to repent in order for them to be forgiven, and on the other, the fact that those who were ‘near the gates of Hades with the sinner’ (16:2), are not excluded from salvation thanks to God’s ‘everlasting mercy’, both indicate the significant role man’s will plays.

### ***Eschaton***

The end time seems to be at hand for the psalmist. God’s intervention is necessary and Israel is waiting for that time which is called ‘the day of the Lord’s judgement’ (15:12), the day of His ‘supervision’ (10:4; 11:6) or the ‘day of mercy’ (14:9). At that day, sinners who will not share in the resurrection (3:9-12; 14:9f.), will be eternally destroyed ‘in dishonor’ (2:31,34; 15:12) and the righteous raised ‘to life’ (3:12), ‘to glory’ (2:31).

Moreover, the psalmist looks forward to the time when Israel will be cleansed ‘for the appointed day when his Messiah will reign’ (18:5; 17:32). The Psalms contain nothing of the ‘apocalyptic manner of revelation and show no interest in the angelic or heavenly world’; they ‘attest a belief in afterlife (3:12; 13:11; 14:3; 14:13; 16:1-3), but the primary focus of the eschatology is on the restoration of Jerusalem, which will be brought about by the Davidic messiah’.<sup>107</sup>

When the Messiah appears, he is going to ‘destroy the unrighteous rulers’, ‘purge Jerusalem from gentiles’ and ‘drive out the sinners from the inheritance; to smash the arrogance of sinners like a potter’s jar’ (17:22-23). Finally the Messiah will ‘gather a holy people whom he will lead in righteousness’ (17:26); there will be ‘no unrighteousness among them in his (Messiah’s) days, for all shall be holy, and their king shall be the Lord Messiah’ (17:32).

<sup>106</sup> As Wright, 1983, p.645 observes it is clear that one’s fate is not unalterably fixed and that God may adjust it on the basis of one’s actions’.

<sup>107</sup> Collins, 1984, p.114

## ***The fourth book of Ezra***

(Late first century A.D.)

This pseudepigraphon is a 'Jewish apocalypse'<sup>108</sup> written in the last decade of the first century A.D.. Written a generation after the destruction of the temple, the thought of 4Ezra 'is dominated by this catastrophe'. Being an apocalypse, the relevant book 'is divided into seven parts, conventionally called visions.'<sup>109</sup>

In broad lines, in these visions, Charlesworth notes, 'the writer confronts the problem of theodicy, and speculates about the coming of the Messiah and the end of this age'. As for the prefixed chapters (1-2), probably added in the second century, they 'delineate God's faithfulness and Israel's apostasy with subsequent exhortations'. The suffixed chapters (15-16), probably added in the third century, 'contain prophecies of woe, followed by exhortations and promises of deliverance for the elect'.<sup>110</sup>

Let us now see what 4Ezra has to say about our subject, sin and its parameters. As will be seen, generally, as Collins observes, this pseudepigraphon 'falls within the spectrum of Jewish opinion at the end of the first century C.E.'.<sup>111</sup> Briefly, 'the problem addressed by the book-of divine justice and the fate of Israel-were clearly very much on people's minds after the destruction of the temple in 70 C.E.'.<sup>112</sup>

### ***The origin of evil***

What is peculiar to 4Ezra concerning the relevant issue is the fact that he assumes Adam's transgression to be the root of sin.<sup>113</sup> As soon as Adam transgressed God's 'statutes', 'the entrances of this world were made narrow and sorrowful and toilsome; they are few and evil, full of dangers and involved in great hardships' (7:10-11). Thus, death entered the world as a result of Adam's sin and also, life became toilsome and hard to bear.

Moreover, as 4Ezra sees it, Adam did transgress as 'a grain of evil seed was sown in Adam's heart from the beginning' (4:30). As Stone observes, the use of the image of sowing seed in the heart 'implies that Adam was not responsible for the formation of this

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<sup>108</sup> Stone, 1992, p.611 II see also Charlesworth, 1981, p.112; Metzger, 1983, pp.517-518 There are some chief critical issues concerning this work such as date, its literary unity, the source theory that are not our primary concern in this thesis. For the issue of literary unity see also Collins, 1984, pp.156-159 For an extensive analysis see Stone, 1990, 11-21

<sup>109</sup> See Stone, 1992, p.612 II; Charlesworth, 1981, p.112 Moreover, as Stone, 1992, p.614 II also notes, 4Ezra shares this seven-vision structure with 2Baruch, as 'many elements of terminology and language' as well.

<sup>110</sup> Charlesworth, 1981, p.112

<sup>111</sup> Collins, 1984, p. 169

<sup>112</sup> Stone, 1992, 613 II-614 II

<sup>113</sup> For a brief survey of the Adamic fall theory see Thompson, 1977, pp.28-49

seed but that it was set in him by some outside agency'.<sup>114</sup> Further, 3:21 reads 'the first Adam' being 'burdened with an evil heart, transgressed and was overcome, as were also all who were descended from him'. Thus, 'the disease became permanent'. For, though it was him who sinned, 'the fall was not his alone', Ezra claims, 'but ours also who are your descendants' (7:118). Adam's descendants act in the same sinful way as they 'have also had the evil heart' (3:26). Though 'the law was in the people's heart along with the evil root', 'what was good departed, and the evil remained' (3:22).

As Collins observes, 'the potency of the evil inclination (or "evil heart") plays a prominent part in the apocalypse of 4Ezra'<sup>115</sup>, it is noteworthy however, that neither in chapter 3 nor in 7:92 where 'evil heart' is also called 'the evil thought which was formed with' men, does the writer make the origin of the evil heart or thought clear. Evidently, as Stone notes the author 'carefully avoids directly attributing the creation of this evil inclination to God'.<sup>116</sup>

Yet, as will be seen below, there are passages in which mankind is described as struggling to overcome the evil inclination and achieve righteousness (7:92). The author of 4Ezra moreover, avoids putting the blame on God for the evil inclination sown in humans; 'perhaps', Stone points out, 'this is because of the large role that free will plays in his thought'.<sup>117</sup> Besides, it seems to me that the author's silence may aim at stressing the fact that the origin of sin is a matter beyond human competence to comprehend. The riddles in 4:1-12, which Ezra is unable to solve, indicate, as I see it, his inability to conceive the origin of evil; an issue which is described as knowledge of 'the way of the Most High' (4:2,11). God's ways remain a mystery (cf. IQS III, 23; CD 3:18 God's 'wonderful mysteries').

### ***Righteous-Wicked***

God has 'made this world for the sake of many, but the world to come for the sake of few' (8:1); for 'many have been created, but few will be saved' (8:3). Those few are the righteous (7:17,93 Ezra is one of them 7:77; 8:52), 'the wise' and 'worthy' to whom secret things have revealed (14:13,26,46) or 'the faithful children' (15:25). God takes special care for them for He is said to have perfected them 'with much labor' (9:22).

The righteous though they are said that 'they might keep the Law of the lawgiver perfectly' (7:89), and they actually 'kept the Law which was given them in trust' (7:95),

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<sup>114</sup> Stone, 1990, p.95

<sup>115</sup> Collins, 1997, p.34 See Thompson, 1977, pp.334-336

<sup>116</sup> Stone, 1990, p.63 see excursus on Adam's Sin *ibid.*, pp.63-67 So Thompson, 1977, p.336 'In contrast', Stone (*ibid.*, p.64) notes, 'the rabbinic sources are quite specific about the origin of the evil heart. God created the evil inclination, but, the Sages add, he gave humans the ability to overcome it'.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*, p.64

do sin. Evil thought is formed even in the righteous ones but they strive ‘to overcome’ it (7:92).

As for the wicked, they are those who ‘have despised his (God’s) Law, and who have hated those who fear God’ (7:79). Being ‘unworthy’ (14:46) and ‘ungodly’ (7:93; 8:51), they ‘walk in great pride’ (8:51); though they have also ‘received freedom’, they ‘despised the Most High, and were contemptuous of his Law, and forsook his ways’; they even ‘trampled upon his righteous ones, and said in their hearts that there is no God-though knowing full well that they must die’ (8:56-58).

### ***The nature of sin***

As usual, in 4Ezra what primarily constitutes a sin is the transgression of the Law. In 15:24 in particular, sinning is parallel to not keeping the commandments: ‘woe to those who sin and do not observe my commandments’. Though God ‘strictly commanded those who came into the world’, what they should do in order for them to avoid punishment, they sinned and they ‘spoke against him’. They ‘devised for themselves vain thoughts, and proposed to themselves wicked frauds; they even declared that the Most High does not exist, and they ignored his ways!’. Besides, ‘they scorned his Law, and denied his covenants’ (7:21-24). Thus, despising God (7:79) or His commandments’ (7:37), one commits sin.

Moreover, sinning is peculiar to ‘human race’ for, ‘in truth there is no one among those who have been born who has not acted wickedly, and among those who have existed there is no one who has not transgressed’ (8:35-36). Thus, in the pessimistic outlook of Ezra, as there is no good in men, there is no hope of Israel’s participating in the ‘eternal age has been praised’ to them, given that they ‘have done deeds that bring death’ (7:119).

Therefore, ‘let no sinner say that he has not sinned; for God will burn coals of fire on the head of him who says, “I have not sinned before God and his glory”’ (16:53). This verse reminds us of 1John where also asserting sinlessness is condemned. The aetiology however, as will be seen, is different. While for 4Ezra asserting sinlessness is proved a lie by God’s being omniscient, for 1John asserting sinlessness, one ‘deceives’ himself and makes God a liar (1John 1:8,10). And 4Ezra goes on writing ‘woe to those who sin and want to hide their sins’ (16:63) as God ‘knows all the works of men, their imaginations and their thoughts and their hearts’ (16:54).

### ***Repentance-Forgiveness***

Generally, God is ‘gracious to those who turn in repentance to his law’ (7:133). He actually pardons the sinners for, ‘if he did not pardon those who were created by his

word and blot out the multitude of their sin, there would probably be left only very few of the innumerable multitude' (7:139-140).

Moreover, God is called 'merciful', because 'of us sinners' (8:31). In this, 4Ezra stresses, God's 'righteousness and goodness will be declared' when He is 'merciful to those who have no store of good works' (8:36). Bearing in mind that all humans are sinful and no one can escape sin, 4Ezra exhorts those who recognize their sinfulness not to 'hide' their sins (16:63), but 'cease' from them and 'never commit them again', so as God will lead them 'forth and deliver you from all tribulation' (16:67). So, those who keep God's 'commandments and precepts', even if they sin, should not let their sins 'pull them down', or their iniquities 'prevail over them' (16:77).

Furthermore, there is a judgement after death. One's own behaviour determines what he is going to confront after his death. The wicked spirits of the dead are to be tormented in seven ways; one of them is that 'they cannot make now (after death) a good repentance that they may live' (7:82). On the contrary, referring to the righteous, 4Ezra notes that 'if you will rule over your minds and discipline your hearts, you shall be kept alive, and after death you shall obtain mercy' (14:34).

### ***Reward-Punishment***

For the author of the pseudepigraphon under discussion, 'the day of judgment is decisive and displays to all the seal of truth' (7:104). According to the Lord's Law, the righteous to whom the fruit of the age to come belongs, 'can endure difficult circumstances while hoping for easier ones; but those who have done wickedly have suffered the difficult circumstances and will not see the easier ones' (7:17-18).

Moreover, it is for the righteous that 'the Paradise is opened' and the 'tree of life is planted'; every evil is 'sealed up' and there is no illness, death or sorrow. Thus, the righteous are going to enjoy 'immortality' (8:52-54 7:13), 'incorruptibility', (7:97) 'spacious liberty' and their faces are 'to shine like the sun' (7:96-97). Death and corruptibility do not affect them. Hence, Ezra is exhorted to 'renounce the life that is corruptible and put away from him mortal thoughts' (14:14).

The wicked on the other hand, having sinned 'before' God, are to be judged in the last times' (7:87).

Further, sin brings about punishment but the latter could be avoided, as those who 'came into the world' were commanded by God what they should do 'to live' and avoid retribution (7:22 see also 7:72). It is also said that God's Son-The Man From The Sea-, will reproach 'the assembled nations', 'to their face with their evil thoughts and with the torments with which they are to be tortured' (13:38). Moreover, God brings evils (sword,

famine and death) on the world because of the 'iniquity' the 'ungodly deeds' and the 'wicked practices' of those away from Him (15:5-8; also 5:26-27; 16:8,19).

### ***Election of Israel-The Law***

From Adam 'we have all come' 4Ezra says, 'the people from whom you have chosen' (6:54); among many cities and nations, God has chosen 'Zion' and Israel (5:24-30). Israel is repeatedly called the 'chosen people' (15:53; 16:73; 15:21). For Israel God has created the whole world, the other nations are actually 'nothing', and 'you (God) have compared their abundance to a drop from a bucket' (6:56). In 15:21 it is said characteristically that those who have harmed God's chosen people, 'will repay into their bosom'.

This special and unique relationship between the Lord and his people, was reflected in the Law that He has given to Moses. However, though God sowed his Law in his people (9:31) instructing them (8:12), they have forsaken His commandments. Therefore, those 'who have received the Law and sinned will perish'; the Law however, 'does not perish but remains in its glory' (9:36-37,33). God's commandments are said to be the 'light' of the world, for 'the world lies in darkness and its inhabitants are without light' because God's 'Law has been burned and so no one knows the things which have been done or will be done by you' (14:20-21). Therefore, 4Ezra asks for God's permission to write down His commandments so as 'men may be able to find the path', and live (14:22).

### ***Man's role***

It seems that 4Ezra strongly argues for free will. However, man's struggle to obey, is essentially qualified by the doctrine of the evil heart that he possess (see 7:92,127).<sup>118</sup> Still, his own freedom of will is what basically determines his destiny. God's mercy of course plays a significant role as well, offering the possibility of repentance to those who sin and ask for forgiveness. Obviously, people are going to be judged according to their deeds (8:33) for, on the day of judgment, 'everyone shall bear his own righteousness or unrighteousness' (7:104-105). The righteous are saved as they managed to 'rule over' their minds and 'discipline' their hearts (14:34), which required their own efforts. Those who observe the 'commandments and precepts' of God are exhorted not to be overwhelmed by their sins but deal with them effectively (16:66-77).

Though an 'opportunity of repentance was still open' to those who 'did not acknowledge God during their lives', and 'scorned God's Law' (9:11-12 cf. 1En 104:9), they did not make use of it. After death there is no hope for them to repent or seek mercy

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<sup>118</sup> See Stone, 1990, p.64 n. 23

(7:82). Moreover, God brings calamities to the disobedient ones in order for them to return. However, they ‘will not turn from their iniquities, nor be always mindful of the scourges’ (16:19-20). This very effort ‘for the correction of men’, I suppose, indicates that their fate is not fixed, they may return if they wish. Thus, it follows that indeed, ‘every unbeliever shall die in his unbelief’ (15:4).

Additionally, 4Ezra refers to Moses who spoke to the people saying ‘choose for yourself life, that you may live!’ (7:129). Yet, they did not believe either in him or in the prophets, or even in God. Therefore, ‘there shall not be grief at their damnation, so much as joy over those to whom salvation is assured’ (7:130-131).

### ***Eschaton***

The end is at hand for 4Ezra, as ‘the age has lost its youth, and the times begin to grow old (14:10); the older the age the worse evils are to take place (14:16 cf. TIss 6:1; 1En 107:1). The beginning of the ‘immortal age to come’ will be the day of judgment. It is then that ‘corruption’ ceases to exist, ‘sinful indulgence’ comes to an end, ‘unbelief’ is cut off, ‘righteousness’ increases and ‘truth’ appears’ (7:114-115). As everything has been done through Lord, the end shall come through Him as well; as for evil, it ‘shall be blotted out’ (6:6; 7:114; 8:53) and ‘that which is corruptible shall perish’ (7:31).

Sinlessness, for 4Ezra as well, is placed at the eschaton when the righteous are to be ‘incorruptible from then on’ (7:97). ‘The root of evil is sealed up’ from those who are going to inherit the Paradise (8:53). As for the human evil heart, it ‘shall be changed and converted to a different spirit’ (6:26). God’s ‘servant’ prays to God to give him ‘seed’ for his heart ... ‘by which every mortal who bears the likeness of a human being may be able to live’. (8:6).

Besides, the age to come ‘belongs’ to the righteous and for their sake this age ‘was made’ (9:13). Thus, they are exhorted to be patient for, ‘just a little while, and iniquity will be removed from the earth, and righteousness will reign’ over them (16:52).

## ***2(Syriac Apocalypse of) Baruch***

(Early second century A.D.)

About 30 to 50 years after the catastrophe of the temple by the Romans in 70 A.D.<sup>119</sup> a talented Jew, using old traditional material, many of which antedate 70, Charlesworth notes, ‘struggled to assert that Judaism is a religion based on Torah-Law-and that the loss of the temple was due to the failure of the chosen nation to be obedient to God and

his Law'.<sup>120</sup> Being a 'full-blown apocalypse', the same scholar observes, 2Baruch was composed in Palestine. As for the language in which it was written, there is a disagreement among the scholars, on whether it was composed in Greek, Hebrew or Aramaic.<sup>121</sup>

Moreover, it is possible to divide the apocalypse into seven sections: 'the destruction of Jerusalem (1-12); the impending judgement (13-20); retribution and the messianic era (21-34); Baruch's lament and an allegory of the vine and the cedar (35-46); the endtime, the resurrected body, paradise (47-52); Baruch's vision of a cloud (53-76); and the epistle of Baruch (77-87)'.<sup>122</sup>

Concerning its relationship with 4Ezra, Charlesworth asserts that 'no literary dependence' proves the priority of 4Ezra over 2Baruch.<sup>123</sup> Yet, there are 'numerous and striking parallels' between them (viz. cf. *4Ezra* 7:118 with *2Bar.* 48:42 and 54:19).<sup>124</sup> It seems to me that Collins is probably right in asserting that 2Baruch 'is generally the more optimistic' of the two.<sup>125</sup> Yet, there are pessimistic traces in 2Baruch as well (11:7 where because of the calamities fallen on Zion, the dead seem to be 'more happy' than the living ones; 85:10; see also 48:18).

Finally, in broad lines, the central message of 2Baruch is the observance of the Law<sup>126</sup>, which becomes more significant in the light of the new aeon's coming.<sup>127</sup>

### *The origin of evil*

This pseudepigraphon is important for numerous theological concepts one of which is the preoccupation with the origin of sin. 2Baruch, unlike IQS and 1Enoch, does not refer to the story of the fallen angels or evil spirits who led people astray. The author of 2Baruch puts the blame on humankind, allowing for free will (54:15,17). Yet, 2Baruch is aware of the myth of the fallen angels, asserting though that they were punished in the past (56:11-15). Moreover, even for their sin Adam is to blame, for 'he who was a danger to himself was also a danger to the angels' (56:10). Thus, for 2Baruch 'it is

<sup>119</sup> See Klijn, 1983, pp.616-617, where he refers to several passages that help us to determine the probable date of 2Baruch. He goes on quoting 32:2-4; 67:1; 28:2.

<sup>120</sup> Charlesworth, 1992, p.620 I

<sup>121</sup> Ibid. p.621 I See also, Charlesworth, 1981, pp.83-84; Klijn, 1983, pp.616

<sup>122</sup> Ibid. See also Charlesworth, 1981, p.84; Collins, 1984, p.170 There is a disagreement on the borderline verses of these sections, however.

<sup>123</sup> For Klijn, 1983, p.617 '2Baruch is probably later than 4Ezra, since it appears to show an advanced stage of theological development'. See also Collins, 1984, pp.178-180 for the 'most striking affinities' and 'the most significant differences' between 4Ezra and 2Baruch.

<sup>124</sup> Charlesworth, 1992, p.621 I See also Klijn, 1983, p.620 where he accepts that there are parallels between the two relevant Pseudepigrapha asserting that 'since the theological ideas of the two writings differ widely, a common source is also more likely here'.

<sup>125</sup> Collins, 1984, p.179 see also Thompson, 1977, p.26

<sup>126</sup> Ibid., p.177

<sup>127</sup> See Zerbe, 1993, p.85

human transgression, not angelic rebellion, that has brought about and continues to bring about cosmic disorder'.<sup>128</sup>

First and foremost, when Adam sinned transgressing the commandment' (4:3; 17:2-3), death (23:4; 54:15; 56:6) and 'corruption' (48:43; see also 56:6) enter the world. However, the author of 2Baruch stresses that 'Adam is not the cause, except only for himself, but each of us has become our own Adam' (54:19).

### ***Righteous-Wicked***

The righteous (11:4; 14:12; 15:2; 21:9,11; 48:48; 51:1; 64:2; 70:3), also called the 'wise' (66:2), are opposed, as usual in the apocalyptic writings, to the wicked ones (15:2; 48:48; 70:3). Being those who 'act wickedly' (51:2), the latter are also called the 'impious' (66:3) and 'unrighteous' (54:17). Moreover, while being 'incorruptible', the former are 'those who have proved themselves to be righteous' (21:9; 51:2), the latter are those 'who sin' and are 'corruptible' (28:4-5). Additionally, the righteous are 'those who proved to be righteous on account of my (God's) law, those who possessed intelligence in their life, and those who planted the root of wisdom in their heart' (51:3); their heart is actually 'pure from sins' (9:1).

Having subjected themselves to God and His Law 'in faith', the righteous are those to whom secrets are to be revealed, as they are also 'spotless' (54:3).

### ***The nature of sin***

First and foremost, given that the Law occupies a prominent position in Baruch's theology (17:4; 32:1; 38:2), sin is tantamount to the transgression of God's commandments (19:3; 41:3; 79:2). The 'lamp of the eternal law' (59:2; 17:4; 77:16), is life, wisdom, and light. Israel is repeatedly exhorted 'not to withdraw from the way of the Law' (44:2-3). Keeping the Law, one is guarded against falling (48:22). Baruch, in his letter, exhorts Israel to remember 'Zion and the Law' and not 'to forget the festivals and the sabbaths' (84:8).

### ***Reward-Punishment***

Sin brings about punishment (13:9; 55:2; 77:4; 82:2), on the righteous and on the wicked as well. Thus, on the one hand, Israelites are punished 'for a time' because of their sins (4:1; 6:9; 13:9; 78:3; 79:2). The Temple will be destroyed and Israel will be scattered among the nations (1:4). Yet, 'the world will not be forgotten' (4:1); God who as it is characteristically said, 'chastens' His people (4:1; 78:3; 79:2), did not reject

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<sup>128</sup> De Boer, 1989, p.178

them. All these calamities eventually will resolve their sins that 'they might be forgiven' (13:9-10). Therefore, the righteous are exhorted to 'enjoy' themselves in the suffering, and 'prepare their souls for that which is kept for them, and make ready their souls for the reward which is preserved for them' (52:6-7). As for 'the enemies' who cause so much pain to Israel, they are characteristically said that in doing so, they actually 'serve the Judge for a time' (5:3).

In 2Baruch we also encounter the notion of the righteous being punished because of the unrighteous. The pious Israelites are said to have been punished, due to the sins of the wicked ones. For, even those who 'did not sin' because of those who sinned were 'destroyed', and 'the one who has not gone astray has been delivered up to the enemies' along with those who 'acted unrighteously' (77:10). Concerning however those of Israel who having forsaken the Law, joined the nations (41:3; 42:4), they will be rejected by God.

Moreover, at the endtime, 'everything will come to judgment'; a fact which shows 'the great power of our Ruler' (83:7). It will be then that, while God 'will glorify the faithful ones in accordance with their faith', 'a retribution will be demanded with regard to those who have done wickedly in accordance with their wickedness' (54:21). As it is said elsewhere, 'the corruption will take away those who belong to it, and life those who belong to it' (42:7).

Furthermore, on the one hand, the righteous 'have good hope for the end...because they possess with you (God) a store of good works' (14:12). Being faithful, they will receive reward as 'the one who believes will receive reward' (54:16). Besides, the age to come is 'on their account' just like 'the world has come on their account' as well (15:7). The very future world is preserved as a reward for those who 'have proved themselves to be righteous'; for, 'if only this life exists which everyone possesses here, nothing could be more bitter than this' (21:13). As Collins observes, 'as in all apocalypses, salvation is salvation *out of* this world'.<sup>129</sup> Further, the righteous' 'splendor will be glorified by transformations and the shape of their face will be changed into the light of their beauty so that they may acquire and receive the undying world which is promised to them' (51:3). Their 'excellence' actually, 'will then be greater than that of the angels' (51:12).

Moreover, we have to note the author's stress on God's being merciful, (77:7; 48:18) 'for if he judges us not according to the multitude of his grace, woe to all us who are born' (84:11). As Collins stresses, given that even here (84:11), 'there is no forgiveness for unreformed sinners' in 2Baruch, it seems that 2Baruch 'envisages a greater role for

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<sup>129</sup> Collins, 1984, pp.177-178

mercy than does 4Ezra'.<sup>130</sup> Additionally, there is no opportunity of repentance after death (85:12 cf. 4Ezra 14:34).

With regard to the wicked ones, on the other hand, 'their shape ... will be made more evil than it is (now) so that they shall suffer torment' (51:2). As for the nations at the end they 'will be thoroughly punished' (13:6). They 'as a smoke will pass away' (82:6), and 'as a passing cloud they will vanish' (82:9). Further, to the question of Baruch 'who will judge over these things', God ultimately answers that He is the one who is going to 'judge everything that exists' (19:3). Thus, the punishment of the wicked is entirely 'God's business'.<sup>131</sup>

### *Man's role*

Though Israel is the 'beloved people' (21:21; 5:1; 78:3) they went astray and trespassed certain of the commandments (1:2; 77:8-10). They were given the 'lamp' of Law (17:4) to walk in the light, yet they chose the darkness. Apparently, election is not the only factor of salvation. Everyone is free to choose between light and darkness (54:15,19; 85:7). For, as we have seen, Adam may have sinned first, but 'each of us has become our own Adam' (54:19). Adam is not the one to blame for one's choosing light or darkness.

Yet the tragedy and fluidity, which is peculiar to human nature, is also recognised. In 14:11 Baruch likens human nature to 'breath', which 'ascends without human control and vanishes'. So it is, he says, 'with the nature of men, who do not go away according to their own will, and who do not know what will happen to them in the end' (14:11).

Yet, the righteous are confident that they 'possess with you (God) a store of good works which is preserved in treasuries' (14:12; also 24:1). Thus, while the righteous are to be saved 'because of their works' (51:7), the wicked ones, having 'rejected the understanding of the Most High' (54:17), opt for destruction. In addition, in 24:1 we encounter the image of the heavenly books (cf. Jub 30:22; 36:10) where 'the sins of all those who have sinned' are written, and 'the treasuries in which are brought together the righteousness of all those who have proven themselves to be righteous'. Also, the Law is said that 'will repay' those who transgress it on God's day (48:47), which I suppose implies that the wicked works are going to decide the destiny of the wicked on that day. Briefly, human behaviour determines their destiny.

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<sup>130</sup> Collins, 1984, p.177

<sup>131</sup> For Zerbe, 1993, pp.81-84 'the notion that the righteous should be preoccupied with the rewards and punishments of the age to come and the punishment is God's business appears explicitly in three passages', in the sections: chs.10-20, 48-52 and 77:18-87-1.

## ***Eschaton***

According to 2Baruch, the period 'which will remain forever' is coming (44:12; also 82:2). Yet, the end will not come until the number of those to be born is fulfilled (23:4-7). The important thing is that this 'world of corruption will come to an end' (4:3), and another world will be established. While this world is called the one 'of affliction' (51:13), 'the passing' (48:50) and 'the world of corruption' (4:3), the age to come is called 'invisible' (51:8), 'with no end (48:50), 'undying world' (51:3) and 'the new world' (44:12). Comparing to the age to come, this world 'which is now, is nothing' (44:8).

Moreover, this 'undying world' will not be 'polluted by evils' (44:9) as the 'passing world' of the present time. For, this 'new world' 'is the end of that which is corruptible and the beginning of that which is incorruptible'; it is actually 'far away from the evil things and near to those which do not die' (74:3 see also 73:1-5). All those bad things that enter the world as a result of Adam's sin (56:5-6) are going to perish at the end (73:3-4). Therefore, there is no place for sin at the age to come. Sinlessness is a not-yet gift which God is to present to those who believe in Him. For, God after the end of 'all those who exist', on the one hand 'will purge from sins' and 'make alive' 'those whom he has found', and on the other, 'will destroy those who are polluted with sins' (85:15).

## ***Odes of Solomon***

(Late first to early second century A.D.)

In Charlesworth's opinion the 42 Odes were composed around 100 A.D. by a 'Christian', who was 'influenced by Jewish thought, especially similar to that found in the Jewish apocalypses and within some of the Dead Sea Scrolls'.<sup>132</sup> For the same scholar the Odes are 'certainly Christian'. This conviction determines in a way their date. 'If they are heavily influenced by Jewish apocalyptic thought and especially the ideas in the Dead Sea Scrolls, a date long after 100 is unlikely'.<sup>133</sup>

Moreover, assuming that the Odes are of Christian origin, we may explain and better understand the proximity of thought of the Odes and the Johannine world of thought.

<sup>132</sup> Charlesworth, 1992, p.114 VI See also Charlesworth, 1981, p.189

<sup>133</sup> Ibid. However, being placed in the later half of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century. Odes have also considered being of gnostic origins. For more details see Charlesworth, 1992, p.114 VI See also Charlesworth, 1981, p.189 and Charlesworth, 1977, p.vii.

### *The world from above-The world from below*

Firstly, we have to point out that the exact character of the Odes' dualism<sup>134</sup> is determined by the Odist's monotheistic belief. There is one Creator (4:15; 16:18 'there is nothing of the Lord, because he was before anything came to be'), upon whom all creatures are dependent (6:3-5) and He is 'sufficient for all our needs' (14:14).<sup>135</sup> Moreover, God is perfect for 'even from the peak of the summits and unto their end is his perfection' (28:7 see also 7:11-13; 8:22; 9:4; 35:6; 36:2); 'only perfection' is his will (18:8).

Moreover, the universe is separated into two worlds (34:4-5, the world from above and the world from below; see also 23:5; 21:6; 36:1). In Ode 38, we find a dualism between Truth and Error, both of which are personified (38:1,7,5,11,13). However, they do not compete with each other as they do in the DSS, in the War Scroll. In the Odes, as in John and Qumran, the categories of light and darkness are also used (cf. 5:4-6; 6:17; 7:14; 12:3; 25:7). The paradigm of light and darkness denotes as well the reign of God and Evil (11:19). The light of God 'has dismissed all darkness' from the Odist's face (15:2), for 'darkness was destroyed by his appearance' (31:1). Opposed to God is the 'Corruptor' (33:1,7; 38:9), the 'Evil One' (33:4), the 'Deceiver' (38:10) or the 'Error' (31:2; 38:10). The Corruptor and Error 'caused the world to err and corrupted it' (38:11).

This dualism of the cosmos is reflected in the Odist's anthropology. The righteous are called 'the faithful ones' (15:10), 'the wise' (18:13), 'the holy ones' (23:1), 'the elect' (23:1,2), and 'the blessed ones' (32:1). In 39:13, the righteous are 'those who adhere to the path of his faith; and who adore his name'.

Moreover, abandoning 'the way of error' (15:6; 18:14) the righteous walk 'in the Way in his peace, in the Way of truth' (11:3) or 'in the knowledge of the Lord' (23:4).

### *Man's role*

Though in the Odes there is no discussion on the matter of predestination, there are a few passages that opt for the idea that man acts according to his own choice.

Thus, those away from God are invited to 'return' and 'approach' Him (33:6-7). In doing so, He will 'enter into' them and bring them 'forth from destruction, and make' them 'wise in the ways of truth'. Obviously, it depends on man's own decision whether he chooses salvation or destruction. The righteous are those who have 'stripped off darkness, and put on light' (21:3), who 'abandoned the way of error, and went toward him and received salvation from his generously' (15:6).

<sup>134</sup> See Charlesworth, *Odes*, 1972, pp.117-122 for the characteristics of the 'dualism' in the Odes.

<sup>135</sup> It is really interesting the fact that 'in several verses the Creator is called the 'Word' (12:10; cf. 7:7f.; 16:8-12,19)'.

Moreover, in 23:2,3 where the faithful are called 'the elect ones', it is said that 'grace' and 'love' are for them and they are to be received by those who 'trusted' in grace and 'possessed' love, 'from the beginning'. One has to 'walk in the knowledge of the Lord' in order for him to 'know the grace of the Lord generously' (23:4). Additionally, in 33:13 the 'elect ones' are those who 'walk with' Him and 'seek' Him.

Furthermore, on the one hand God's grace and mercies (see 4:6; 7:5; 14:9; 16:7; 29:3) are particularly stressed as the holy ones 'put on incorruption through his name' and strip off 'corruption by his grace' (15:8). The 'multitude of his mercies' enables the faithful to 'put on incorruption' provided that they 'return' and 'approach' Him. The elect ones are aware of the fact that they 'live in the Lord by his grace' (41:3). On the other hand, it seems to me that the believer's desire and love for the Lord is actually met by the abundance of His mercies. For the Odist's 'joy' is the Lord (7:2) and his 'breasts and his pleasure are with' Him (14:2). The Odist likens the believer's members to the strings of a harp through which 'the wind moves...and the strings speak'; 'the Spirit of the Lord speaks through' the believer's members and in turn, the believer speaks 'through his love' (6:1-2).

### *Eschaton*

As Charlesworth notes, like John the Odes, 'portray a realizing eschatology'<sup>136</sup>. Though the 'war' between good and evil still continues (8:7; 9:6; 29:9 where the believer is said to make war by His 'word'), the crucial battle has been fought so that 'the persecutors became extinct and were blotted out' (23:20 see also 42:5); for the Messiah 'inherited and possessed everything' (23:19). 'Darkness was destroyed by his appearance' (31:1f.) and even Sheol 'saw' Him 'and was shattered and Death ejected' Him (42:11). Actually, 'Error fled from him (the Truth), and never met him' (38:6).

Moreover, the Odist, as has already been seen, experiences from the present his salvation and he has put on the garment of 'incorruption' (15:8) or 'light' (21:3). As His possession is 'immortal life', those 'who receive it are incorruptible' (40:6). For the Odist, incorruptibility is a fruit of immortality. Further, he sees himself as a 'blooming and fruit-bearing' tree, which has a place in His Paradise (11:16a-18). He is set by 'the Truth', 'on the place of immortal life' (38:3 see also 31:7; 40:6). However, there are passages in the Odes (like in GJohn 5:28f.), which reflect a futuristic eschatology. For instance, ode 33:12 reads 'and they who have put me on will not be rejected, but they will possess incorruption in the new world'. Nevertheless, as Charlesworth accurately

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<sup>136</sup> Charlesworth, *Odes*, 1972, p.120 See also Charlesworth, 1998, pp.232-257 for 26 parallel concepts met in the Gospel of John and in the Odes of Solomon.

notes, 'throughout the Odes the concept of time is not that of the present versus the distant or even imminent future, but of the breaking in of the future into the present'.<sup>137</sup>

Furthermore, as the Odist himself 'obeyed him', he asserts that, he 'did not err in anything' (38:5). Besides, 'the thought of truth led' the Odist and he 'went after it and did not err' (17:5). As 'Error fled from him (the Truth) and never met him' (38:6), those who obey in him are not met by error either. The Odist is assured that 'those who walk faultlessly shall not be shaken' (39:6). However, he prays for his deliverance from the Evil One saying 'let me be saved from the Evil One' (14:5).

It is noteworthy, I suppose, the way the Odist feels about his experiencing immortality and incorruptibility from this moment without hoping for a future time when these gifts are to be enjoyed. He rather celebrates the possession of these eternal gifts that will last forever. The Odist is convinced that those who 'are loved in the Beloved', 'shall be found incorrupted in all ages' (8:22) and at the same time he looks forward to the future 'incorruption in the new world' (33:12). Undoubtedly, in the Odes, we encounter concepts and ideas similar to those found in Johannine world. However, for purposes of this study, it is worth remarking that specifically the concept of 'being born of God' is missing from the present document while it plays a significant role in John as will be seen in due time.

## **Conclusions**

Evidently, the origin of evil and by implication sin and its parameters was the subject of much speculation and debate in Judaism from the second century B.C. to the second century A.D., as the writings examined above amply exemplify.

First and foremost, it is important to point out that the documents under discussion do not consist of theological pieces of work, from which we could possibly extract an articulate doctrine of sin and its parameters. Moreover, the above composition is far from being exhausted, nevertheless I hope that it partly illustrates the general pattern of the tendencies of contemporary Jewish religious thought, a pattern that represents to some extent, John's religious background. I have the impression that we have already *touched* issues, which we are going to deal with in detail in 1John (nature of sin: avoidable and unavoidable transgressions; predestination and free will; sinlessness).

Moreover, generally, as Best observes, with regard to the apocalyptic writings, 'by the very nature of the case the Apocalyptic writings were not greatly taken up with actual descriptions of the way in which evil actions were conceived and performed but rather

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<sup>137</sup> Charlesworth, *Odes*, 1972, p.120

with supernatural forces as they appeared at the beginning and end of the world and with their effect on the course of history, individual and national'. Yet, he proceeds, 'we do find many statements that suggest that the authors had not abandoned the dominant trend of Old Testament thinking which saw evil as originating within man himself'.<sup>138</sup>

Systematizing our findings we now proceed to summarize them.

Firstly, the subject of the origin of evil and by implication sin was obviously extensively pondered by the writers of the time. It goes without saying that sin is basically conceived as the infringement of God's commandments. At the period we discuss, sin is attributed to external factors, evil angelic powers, to the weakness of human nature or to an evil inclination planted in human heart. In all cases, sin is to find its cure in divine intervention. Besides, God is the only one who, on the one hand has the power to defeat the angelic powers and on the other, to cure human weakness and root out any evil inclination planted in humans.

Thus, to start with Qumran, according to the sect's belief, the observance of the Law, shielding against evil, is considered to be more precious than one's life. Sin can be avoidable or unavoidable. The latter refers to sins committed by the very members of the sect. In Jubilees as well God's Law occupies a prominent position. However, in the Psalms of Solomon there is no particular stress on the importance of the observance of the Law; it seems to be rather self-evident.

Moreover, with regard to the origin of evil, Qumran, Jubilees, Enochic corpus and the Testaments of the twelve Patriarchs support both tracks, namely the one according to which evil is attributed to angelic powers that lead people astray, and the one according to which evil is rooted in the weakness of human nature. Cosmological and forensic elements lie side by side and even overlap in these documents, as has already been demonstrated.<sup>139</sup> However, while in the Psalms of Solomon there is no reference to evil cosmological powers in opposition to God, in the Odes of Solomon there is a reference to the Corruptor or Error, but it does not play a significant role in the context. Moreover, in 4Ezra and 2Baruch evil angelic powers are not mentioned at all.

Finally, though earlier in the documents discussed above there is an awareness of the Adamic Fall theory (see 1En 32: 6; 69:6; Jub 3:17-25; 4:29-30; TLev 18:10-11)<sup>140</sup>, it is not until the first century A.D. that 'the sin of Adam acquires central importance, in the letters of St Paul and in the apocalypses of 4Ezra and 2Baruch'.<sup>141</sup> In the latter, 'a grain of evil seed sown in Adam's heart' and in every human being ever after, is the source of

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<sup>138</sup> Best, 1965, p.53

<sup>139</sup> See Collins, 1984, p.111

<sup>140</sup> See Thompson, 1977, pp.30-31

<sup>141</sup> Collins, 1984, p.32

evil. Yet, avoiding holding God responsible for this, the author of 4Ezra does not explain where that evil seed comes from.

Evidently, as de Boer stresses, ‘track 2 (ethical eschatology) overtook and displaced track 1 (cosmological eschatology) completely after the disaster of 70 CE (cf. *4Ezra*, *2Baruch*’.<sup>142</sup>

Furthermore, in the documents examined above, on the one hand repentance is met by God’s forgiveness. Cleansing and repenting are the two sides of the same coin. Yet, in Qumran as well as in Jubilees there are sins which are incurable and lead to permanent expulsion from the sect or Israel respectively.

On the other hand, those who do not repent are to be punished at the end. Sin brings about punishment for both the righteous and the wicked. In Qumran, while for the former punishment, being a sort of remedy is not equal to destruction, for the latter destruction is their punishment. Moreover, reward of the righteous and punishment of the wicked are commonly placed in the future. Yet, in Jubilees punishment and reward are fulfilled in the present as well as in the future.

Moreover, in the Psalms of Solomon we encounter the notion of the righteous’ being chastened during their earthly life but not destroyed at the end, while the wicked being prosperous during their earthly life are ultimately destroyed. Further, it is noteworthy for our purposes of this present study, I suppose, that the assertion of sinlessness is condemned in 4Ezra.

Furthermore, with regard to the issue of predestination, the relevant documents vary concerning the stress they put on either God’s predestined will or man’s free will. It seems however, that the two statements are not thought to be mutually exclusive. Some documents indicate, de Boer writes, that the two tracks can, ‘like those of a railway, run side by side, crisscross, or overlap in various ways, even in the same work’.<sup>143</sup>

To be specific, in Qumran literature both ideas God’s determinism and man’s freedom to choose are witnessed. It is said that though the sectarians enter the community thanks to God’s grace, entering or reentering the community requires one’s free will. Still, sectarians’ freedom of will plays a significant role as it is up to them to keep or transgress the covenant, to repent and ask for forgiveness or to ‘walk in the stubbornness of their heart’. Likewise, in Jubilees and 1Enoch, though the basis of salvation is one’s participation in the covenant, it does not guarantee one’s being saved. The presence of sin even among Israelites (as among the Qumraners) indicates that one’s participation in Israel is just the first step towards salvation. Loyalty to God’s Law is the next step; one’s

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<sup>142</sup> De Boer, 1989, p.182

<sup>143</sup> *Ibid.*, p.177

sinning followed by repentance brings about God's forgiveness. At this point, I presume lies the importance of man's free will.

Moreover, in the Psalms of Solomon and in the Odes as well considerable emphasis is put on personal accountability and choice. Likewise, 4Ezra and 2Baruch stress the idea that the individual is accountable for his actions, which ultimately determine his destiny.

Furthermore, the end time is commonly characterized by the end of the dominion of evil powers and the permanent triumph of righteousness-God over against wickedness-Evil. As we have seen so far, evil powers are to be active 'until the final age' (DSS); the fallen angels will disappear or be destroyed (1En). For the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs Beliar will be thrown into 'eternal fire' and every spirit of error will be 'trampled down'. Further, at the eschaton evil shall be 'blotted out' and whatever is corruptible 'shall perish' in order for the righteous to be 'incorruptible from then on' (4Ezra). Likewise, sinners will be 'marked out for destruction' (Pss Sol); the 'ungodly ones' will be removed' (1En) or as 2Baruch says 'those who are polluted with sins' will be destroyed by God.

What is more, weakness of the flesh, which too is a source of injustice, has also to be overcome (DSS). As for evil heart planted in human nature, it 'shall be changed and converted to a different spirit' (4Ezra). At the eschaton, Israel and the land will be purified; it is noteworthy that the purified Israel will be called 'sons of the living God'. The book of Jubilees refers to a new creation, which is to take place. God will make 'for all his works a new and righteous nature so that they might not sin in all their nature forever'. For 2Baruch, God after the end of 'all those who exist', 'will purge from sins' and 'make alive' 'those whom he has found'. In the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs and in the Psalms of Solomon, the Saviour figure-the Messiah plays an important role. He is the one who will sanctify Israel, restore Jerusalem (Pss Sol) and save Israel from his enemies and sins (T12P).

Consequently, sinlessness belongs to the age to come and it is going to be achieved by the intervention of God. The absence-destruction of evil, however it is represented, enables men to be sinless. Thus, I would say that *evilnessness*, the absence of evil, is what at the final analysis paves the way for sinlessness; a fact that indicates that human nature is unable to overcome it on its own and necessitates God's intervention.

Thus, when this age is perceived as the time when demonic powers lead people astray and spread evil on the earth, it follows that the age to come is going to involve a cosmic battle between God and evil powers. Moreover, when this age is characterized by human disobedience and voluntary rejection of God and His Law, the age to come is to be realized as soon as God purifies human nature of every evil spot. Thus, what actually

brings about the eschaton is the disappearance of evil either internal or external to man, through God's intervention. Sinlessness is a gift of God's. One's earthly life is a continuous struggle towards perfection. It is interesting I think, that the notion of imitating God, which we are going to encounter in 1John, is implied in Jubilees (16:26).

Moreover, it is worth remarking the fact that in all of the documents examined above, sin is present even in the life of the righteous. What makes them righteous is the fact that they deal with sin effectively and do not reject God. Yet, for the Qumraners perfection of deeds is regarded to be achievable at least to an extent. Likewise, in Jubilees faithful people like Abraham and Noah are said to be perfect. Still, Abraham prays to God to be saved 'from the hands of the evil spirits'. Principally, it is only through God that human nature can participate in righteousness and perfection.

Yet, what if the eschaton is already realized? By making this question we approach even more the Johannine world of thought. If perfection is to be exclusively in the future, then perfectionist claims have no place among Christians. Nevertheless, what if the eschaton moves in the present in a radical way? In the Odes, the Odist is assured that he already possess eternal life. Yet, he prays for his deliverance from the Evil One. Assuming that the Odes is a Christian document, we could say that we encounter a situation similar to John here according to which though the Evil has been defeated through Christ, the seal of this victory has not been put yet. It is going to be put in the age to come.

Undoubtedly, in the literature we have examined so far, we encounter paradoxical statements and theological inconsistencies, at least to our modern minds. The coexistence of two modes of thought concerning the origin of evil, the fact that even the righteous sin, the amalgamation of free will and God's election, represent religious paradoxes of that era. Evidently, those so-called paradoxes were neither contradictory nor problematic in the minds of those who wrote them and read them; they were rather *mysterious* (CD III, 18; IQS III, 23). Apparently, 1John was not a pioneer of the kind. However, John's are paradoxes *in Christ*, while the above mentioned ones, I would say are the result of the human mind attempting to explain the inexplicable.

Summing up, I think that what has to be borne in mind is that 1John is a Christian document. Christology correlates with eschatology. The advent of Christ marked the fulfillment of many promises that Judaism was looking forward to; this is why Jesus confessed to be the Christ. Moreover, this very fact I suppose, accounts partly at least, for the emphasis put on realized eschatology by the early church. For whatever reason however, the advent of the messiah did not fully fulfil the expectations for the permanent

annihilation of evil and the triumph of God over against evil whatever its vehicle was thought to be.

For John,<sup>144</sup> the fullness of God has been revealed ἐν Χριστῷ, the Messiah. The believers have fellowship with Him and are exhorted to imitate Him. In this context the emphasis put on realised eschatology, not found in any of the texts examined above apart from the Odes of Solomon, though expected, is rather problematic. For this emphasis on present eschatology is what at the very end exacerbates the problem of perfectionism. Those who are in communion with the sinless One are to be sinless. The continuous existence of sin within the Christian community, among those who already possess eternal life, should be a source of scandal. Evidently, Christology reflects on eschatology and anthropology as well, as we are going to see in the exegesis section of this study.

So, examining 1John's contemporary writings we aim to illustrate where certain ideas may derive from but not what these notions refer to. The latter is what we are going to deal with thoroughly in the exegesis section of this study.

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<sup>144</sup> By John, in this thesis, I mean the writer of GJohn and 1John as I would rather vote for their common authorship. This is not the place for an extended discussion of the issue of authorship. Parenthetically I note that among the scholars there are those who are in favour of common authorship (see Westcott, 1886, p. xxx; Law, 1909, p. 40; Brooke, 1912, p. xvi; Howard, 1947, pp. 24-25; Wilson, 1948, p. 156; Salom, 1955, p. 102), and those who are not (see Dodd, 1937, p. 156; Dodd, 1946, p. lvi; Bultmann, 1967, p. 1; Filson, 1969, p. 261; Houlden, 1973, p. 38; Cullmann, 1976, pp. 53-54; Brown, 1982, p. 30; Barrett, 1995, p. 52). As Smith, 1987, p. 18 notes, if the evidence in the scholarly discussion 'does not preclude the traditional view of common authorship, it has certainly deprived it of the status of a foregone conclusion which it once enjoyed'. Be that as it may, given the confusion and uncertainty which occurs in modern scholarship I would agree with the 'general consensus of the church' according to which as Lieu, 1986, p. 5 notes quoting Bede, 'John the Apostle also wrote these letters'; besides, I suppose that this position is no more neutral than any other.

## **CHAPTER TWO: The Johannine Community**

### **Introduction**

Having examined the wider ideological environment of John, we now get closer to the Epistles' world, attempting an approach to the character of the community which produced them, the so-called Johannine community.

Before getting into detail, we should refer to the assumptions on which we are going to proceed in our approach to the Johannine world of thought. More specifically, in order for us to set the question of perfectionism within the Johannine community in its historical context, we need to give an explanation of the similarities of thought between the Fourth Gospel and the Epistles and also to give an account of their temporal relationship.

That there exists a very close relationship between the Gospel and the Johannine Epistles concerning ideas, vocabulary, style, is not disputed. As Ashton notes characteristically, 'by general consent', 1John is 'a horse out of the same stable as the Gospel, whether or not it had a common sire'.<sup>145</sup> As I have already noted, in this thesis I assume their having a 'common sire', their common authorship. I would also opt for the priority of the Gospel over the Johannine Epistles,<sup>146</sup> an assumption which is of vital importance to our approach to the heresy in combat in 1John, as we are going to see in the next chapter.

As I see it, the most persuasive argument for the priority of the Gospel over the Epistles is the fact that the former is rather an 'evangelistic tool',<sup>147</sup> while the latter are pastoral letters. 1John seems to be 'a pastoral application of Johannine teaching'.<sup>148</sup> So, in the Epistle the author seems to have been more mixed up with the life of the church and so he addresses his community in a pastoral way. As I am going to argue, the fact that the notion of sin is more prominent in 1John in its ethical sense, than in the Gospel

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<sup>145</sup> Ashton, 1991, p.73

<sup>146</sup> In favour of the priority of GJohn over the 1John are: Law, 1909, p.360; Brooke, 1912, p.xxvi-xxvii; Robinson, 1960-61, p.57; Goguel, 1964, p.468; Filson, 1969, p.261; Houlden, 1973, p.30; Rensberger, 1997, pp.20-21; See Brown, 1982, p.35; see also Brown, 1979, p.97 For a detailed study on the relevant issue see Brooke, 1912, pp.xix-xxvii and Brown, 1982, pp.30-35 However, O'Neil, 1966, p.66-67 votes for the priority of the Epistle over the Gospel. Additionally, for Schnackenburg, 1992, p.39 'the question of the priority of the two writings is unanswerable'. Moreover, for Lieu, 1991, p.19 there is no decisive issue in the question of the sequence of GJohn and 1John...stating that in her study 'no particular sequence between Gospel and Epistles is being assumed', she stresses that 'this position is no more neutral than any other!'

<sup>147</sup> So Robinson, 1960-61, p.57

<sup>148</sup> So Houlden, 1973, p.30

supports the same conclusion.<sup>149</sup> Moreover, the prologue of the Epistle presupposes a lapse of time since John's audience heard about the 'word of life' (1Jn 1:1). John reminds them of a basic lesson they have learnt which is reminiscent of the teaching of the Gospel. At this point, I would involve the issue of authorship as well, as I believe that the prologues of the two documents speak volumes for their common authorship. Only the mind, which has written the Gospel, would produce the prologue of the Epistle in such a natural way.

Furthermore, though certain theological ideas such as eschatology and atonement represent a rather 'simpler'<sup>150</sup> theology or a more 'primitive'<sup>151</sup> form of Christian belief, as I am going to argue, the two documents put emphasis on different aspects of the same doctrine in responding to the circumstances they confront.<sup>152</sup>

However, as I am going to point out later, assuming the priority of the Gospel over the Epistle, I do not imply that the latter was dependent on the former to the extent assumed by Brown.<sup>153</sup> The fact that no passage in any of the Epistles is a direct or certain quotation from GJohn has to borne in mind. The Epistle can actually stand on its own feet. Undoubtedly, the meaning of some passages in 1John will be illuminated by the interpretation of corresponding ones in the Gospel. This is to be attributed to their being the products of the same community. Yet, the Epistle keeps its own *personality*. Therefore, we may trace theological elements-absent or not explicitly stated in GJohn-a fact, which ultimately suggests a theological development that took place with the passage of time. So, these two writings are certainly not there to *compete* with each other. It would be wrong to place 1John entirely under the shadow of the Gospel and interpret it as such. Their closeness is unique but their uniqueness must be valued as well.

Thus, having as a basis the evidence present in GJohn and 1John, in this chapter we will try to follow the historical development of the Johannine community. Firstly, we will endeavour to trace where the origins of the Johannine community might lie. Then,

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<sup>149</sup> For Houlden, 1973, p.30 while the fact that 1John seems to be a pastoral piece of writing involving 'institutional and disciplinary problems' which were 'much more pressing than at the time when the Gospel was written', the former 'simpler' nature of theology 'is by no means an argument for an earlier date'.

<sup>150</sup> Houlden, 1973, p.30

<sup>151</sup> Rensberger, 1997, p.21 However, Rensberger notes, 'both the ideas and the specific terminology in question (meaning ideas about eschatology and atonement) also appear in works as diverse in date as 1Thessalonians and 2Peter, Romans and Hebrews'. In fact, he concludes, 'this is simply part of another major pattern in 1John, the use of terms and concepts not found in the Fourth Gospel but common elsewhere in early Christian literature'.

<sup>152</sup> See Howard, 1947, pp.24-25; Schnackenburg, 1992, p.38 As Barrett, 1995, p.107 accurately notes, 'the Gospel writer wrote for his contemporaries, but the writer of the letters wrote to his contemporaries, and what he wrote had to relate to the conditions under which they lived if it was to be of any value to them'.

<sup>153</sup> See Brown, 1979, p.97

we will see how is it possible for certain incidents in the history of the community to influence its self-understanding and its outlook on the world.

Moreover, we will also examine whether there are ecclesiological elements in the Johannine literature. This issue will lead us to explore whether and in what sense the Johannine community was sectarian. Finally, we will see if all the above factors have an impact on the community's conceiving of sin and its parameters and whether such an understanding may have gradually resulted in the formation of perfectionist patterns of thought and ideas.

In the previous chapter we have examined the wider environment of John and how ideas of sin and sinlessness were conceived by contemporary Jewish thought. In my opinion this prehistory of these terms has certainly influenced the thought of John. Yet, it is not the only factor that led to the birth of these ideas. In this chapter, we are going to trace other elements that seem to me to have had an impact on the development of ideas of perfectionism encountered in John.

One could assert that the historical development of the community would influence the self-understanding of its members and by extension their ecclesiology. Moreover, the absence of any kind of ecclesiology in the proper sense, would suggest the community's being an alien group to the early Church. Consequently, despite the subsections we have arranged for practical reasons, these issues are closely linked to each other.

### ***The history of the Johannine Community***

To start with, we have to acknowledge that all we know about the Johannine community is what can be inferred from its writings. Such external guides as we have, are 'at best unreliable, at worst misleading'.<sup>154</sup> Nevertheless, being a product of a particular people under particular historical circumstances, undeniably the Johannine writings offer us evidence, though limited, of the community which produced them. Evidently, in this process of piecing together the evidence buried in the Gospel and the Epistles, conjectures are inevitable.

Von Wahlde seems to be more confident about the data which is contained in the Johannine writings. First of all, he points out that compared to the other communities responsible for our canonical Gospels, 'we have richer sources of knowledge about the community that produced the Gospel of John'. The reason for this is the fact that apart from the Gospel we have the Epistles as well, picturing the same community. Nevertheless, despite the richness of resources 'to unlock the history and social situation

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<sup>154</sup> Ashton, 1991, p.160

behind the Johannine community is more difficult than in the case of other gospel-communities'. Why is this? 'Because', von Wahlde answers, 'the Gospel of John is a heterogeneous document, consisting of three stages of composition'. Fortunately, according to the same scholar, 'each of these stages is remarkably transparent to the historical and theological issues of the moment in the Johannine community'. As a result, 'when we speak of the Johannine community, we are able to provide not only a *description* of the community, but a *history* of it'.<sup>155</sup>

Be that as it may, as will be seen below and seems more plausible to me, the 'lack of clear internal information has led to considerable debate as to the origins of the distinctive Johannine Christianity'.<sup>156</sup>

### *Its origins*

Parallels between the writings of Qumran and the Johannine literature (common patterns of phraseology, dualistic patterns and concepts) have led modern scholarship to trace the origins of the Johannine community in Jewish sectarian groups.<sup>157</sup> However, we have to be cautious of our conclusions. As Barrett observes referring to the relationship between Johannine Christianity and the Qumran sect, our inadequate knowledge of 'the variety, the subdivisions, and the crosscurrents in the Judaism of the first century', makes us unable 'to affirm that no contacts ever existed between the traditions that eventually found their way respectively into the Fourth Gospel and into the Qumran sect and its writings'.<sup>158</sup> Thus, this lack of evidence 'should make us hesitate before locating the beginnings of Johannine thought too precisely'.<sup>159</sup>

Besides the absence of any reference to Jesus and his life in the DSS, is not to be ignored. Also, the insistence on the keeping and observing the Law that is of great significance for Qumran, is absent from Johannine literature.<sup>160</sup> As we have concluded from our findings in the previous chapter, the Qumraners and Johannine community

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<sup>155</sup> Von Wahlde, 1995, p.379 nor is this all, he (ibid.) adds. 'Once these pictures lie before us, we are able, by looking to cultural anthropology for assistance, to gain some insight into the deeper interaction between the theology and social situation of the Johannine community'. And the result is 'a portrait remarkable of its richness of detail, of a community engaged in continual turmoil as it struggles to define its faith within a variety of social contexts during the last quarter of the first Christian century'.

<sup>156</sup> Lieu, 1991, p.17

<sup>157</sup> O'Neill, 1966, p.6 notes that the author of 1John was a member of 'a Jewish sectarian movement, the bulk of whose members had become Christians by confessing that Jesus was the Messiah'. Moreover, for Kysar, 1977, p.366 'the Fourth Gospel took its origin within a "Christian school" which was related to a marginal and nonnormative form of Judaism'. Additionally, this 'Christian school' preserved a 'distinctive tradition all its own (in either oral or written form) which was at the same time related in some way to the Synoptic tradition'.

<sup>158</sup> Barrett, 1995, p.107

<sup>159</sup> Lieu, 1991, p.18

<sup>160</sup> See Brown, 1968, pp.138-173

shared certain patterns of thought and expression, as both stemmed from Judaism, but I think, it cannot be stated that Johannine world was actually rooted in Qumran.

In a few words, it has been asserted both that the origins of the group that produced the Fourth Gospel and the Epistles are to be sought in Jewish (namely in Judaism itself or Jewish-Christian world)<sup>161</sup> and, on the other hand, that its origins are in the non-Jewish (meaning in gnosticism or Hellenistic circles)<sup>162</sup> environment.

Being convinced that the Johannine community, despite its distinctiveness, is not rooted in Hellenistic or gnostic ground<sup>163</sup>, I now turn to examine the, to me, most plausible solution that the Johannine community was rooted in Judaism. Johannine Christians were Jews who declared the Messiahship of Jesus and thus were separated from the rest of the Jews.

I would like to start with the two most important attempts at reconstructing the historical development of the Johannine community namely, Martyn's and Brown's. Both assume that the Johannine community had its origins among Jews who confessed that Jesus was indeed the Messiah (Martyn finds his key to this in John 1:35-51).

As Ashton points out, the use of the term 'Johannine community'<sup>164</sup> 'conceals a major shift of emphasis, a radical change of direction in Johannine research'. 'Much of the credit for this must go to J.Louis Martyn'.<sup>165</sup> Martyn (in his *History and Theology in the Fourth Gospel*) himself outlines his project as such: 'our first task is to say something as specific as possible about the actual circumstances in which John wrote his Gospel. How are we to picture daily life in John's church? Have elements of its peculiar daily experiences left their stamp on the Gospel penned by one of its members? May one

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<sup>161</sup> In Smith's, 1987, p.35 opinion, though the origin of Johannine Christianity is likely to have been centred in 'Judaism and Jewish Christianity', it nevertheless 'does not seem possible to explain the entire history of the Johannine tradition against such a background'. For, Von Wahlde, 1995, p.380 'the community was certainly Jewish Christian, as is evident from the use of numerous Hebrew and Aramaic terms, Moses typology, and traditional Jewish christological categories'. 'Apparently', he adds, 'the Johannine community either contained former members of John's Baptist movement or at least faced pressures from John's later followers'. Ferreira, 1998, p.28 also believes that the Gospel is the product of 'the birth, history, conflicts, struggles and experiences of a small Christian-Jewish group'.

<sup>162</sup> For Käsemann, 1968, pp.70, 73, 39 John's theology reflects its origin in a 'conventicle with gnosticizing tendencies', which existed on or was 'being pushed to, the Church's periphery'. Barrett, 1995, p.226, gives us the definition of the term 'conventicle'. First, comparing this with the term 'school' which is also used to characterize the 'Johannine community', he points out that the former has no such interesting ancient history. The word is Latin. *Convenio* means to *come together*; *conventus* is a *coming together*, a *meeting* or *assembly*, and is used in a variety of senses'. ...Thus a *conventicle* becomes 'a meeting (esp. a religious meeting), of a private, clandestine, or illegal kind, as of Nonconformists or Dissenters in England...'. For Cullmann, 1976, p.53 the 'Johannine circle' is closely associated with the group of 'Jerusalem Hellenists'...The thing is that theologically, Cullmann states, the Johannine circle 'is distinct from both Jewish Christianity and Gentile Christianity'.

<sup>163</sup> However. see Ashton, 1997, pp.9-10 for those who espouse the idea of GJohn's being of gnostic origin.

<sup>164</sup> As Ashton, 1997, p.12 notes, Bühner uses the expression 'Johannine community', formulating his own version of the Johannine problem'.

sense even in its exalted cadences the voice of a Christian theologian who writes *in response to contemporary events and issues*, which concern, or should concern, all members of the Christian community in which he lives?'<sup>166</sup>

It is clear where this shift of emphasis in Martyn's statement lies.<sup>167</sup> He is interested in the situation of the evangelist and the people he was addressing. Comparing the three miracles of healing [namely the army officer's son in Capernaum (4:46-54), the lame man at Bethesda in Jerusalem (5:1-9), and the blind beggar near the Temple (9:1-7)<sup>168</sup>] which John and the Synoptics have in common, Martyn observes that 'it is just possible that careful attention to *style* and to accents characteristic of the discourses will enable us to distinguish—at least in the stories of the lame man and the blind beggar—between (a) traditional materials and (b) passages in which elements of John's own interests and experiences are more or less clearly reflected'.<sup>169</sup> He goes on exploring them on two levels. In a few words, he examines three miracle-stories, which he assumes are presented as 'a formal drama' 'on a two-level stage'.<sup>170</sup> On the first level, which Martyn calls *einmalig*, the story level, we can read about Jesus' deeds and life. However, for Martyn the main concern of the evangelist was to address the issues of his own day. He does this, Ashton notes, 'primarily by projecting back into the life and times of Jesus a description of the conflict of the Christian group with the authorities of the synagogue'.<sup>171</sup> In other words, for Martyn, the Fourth Gospel was a product of a community which was in conflict with the synagogue, and this conflict was actually recounted in its book.<sup>172</sup>

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<sup>165</sup> Ashton, 1997, p.12 Also, Ashton, 1991, p.107, notes 'for all its brevity', this work of Martyn's 'is probably the most important single work on the Gospel since Bultmann's commentary'. Obviously, Bauckham, 1998, p.19 rightly calls this work of Martyn's a 'vastly influential' one.

<sup>166</sup> Martyn, 1979, p.18 According to Allen, 1955, p.88, 'one might indeed hope to reconstruct from the Gospel not a little of Jewish-Christian polemics at that period'.

<sup>167</sup> This question Ashton, 1997, p.12 observes, of the situation of the evangelist and the audience he was addressing, was a question 'which Bultmann, for all his acumen and assiduity, had left untouched. Why? Because he was convinced that the Gospel was designed to give a Christian answer to the timeless questions of the purpose and nature of human existence; for him the situation of those to whom the message was first proclaimed was of no particular significance'.

<sup>168</sup> Martyn, 1979, p.21 Additionally, Allen, 1955, p.91, observes that 'the man in the story represents the small group of Jews who accepted Jesus as prophet and Messiah and who clung to their faith in spite of the cross-questioning to which they were subjected and the sentence of expulsion that was eventually passed upon them'.

<sup>169</sup> Martyn, 1979, p.21

<sup>170</sup> *Ibid.*, p.37

<sup>171</sup> Ashton, 1997, p.12

<sup>172</sup> Also, as Allen, 1955, pp.91-92 notes, 'the Gospel of John bears on every page marks of the contemporary situation. The controversies in which Jesus engages with the Jews reproduce the theological debates, often bitter and prejudiced in the extreme, between Church and Synagogue at the close of the first century A.D.'. Likewise, Rensberger, 1989, p.25 stresses the significance of Martyn's approach to the Gospel and agrees with him that 'the determinative factor in the milieu of the Johannine Christian community was its conflict with the synagogue' which resulted in the expulsion from it.

Accordingly, for Martyn the Gospel presents a 'drama' staged by the evangelist. Though I would agree with him that the split with the synagogue played a significant role<sup>173</sup> in the community's further historical development, in my opinion his 'drama'-hypothesis, interesting though it seems to be, undermines the historicity of the Gospel. Besides, as Meeks notes, 'it is precisely the specificity of the scenario, which makes it (Martyn's theory) vulnerable to various objections, that also makes it a prolific working hypothesis'.<sup>174</sup>

Being in agreement with Martyn that the Johannine community was rooted in Judaism, Brown notes 'moving beyond Martyn's reconstruction but not contrary to it, I would judge it likely that an important component in the Johannine memory of the Jews who first came to believe in Jesus consisted of followers of John the Baptist'.<sup>175</sup>

Moreover, according to Brown's reconstruction of the Johannine community, there are four phases<sup>176</sup> in the development of the community. To the originating group, in Brown's view, belong 'Jews of relatively standard expectations, including followers of John the Baptist. Another group consisting of 'Jews of an anti-Temple bias' is also accepted during the first phase. The expulsion from the synagogue takes place in this phase, a fact that resulted in the alienation of the Johannine Christians from Judaism, while Gentiles are as well accepted in the community.<sup>177</sup> During the second phase, Brown suggests, 'when the Gospel was written, the Johannine community was engaged in a dispute with followers of JBap who rejected Jesus and claimed that their master was the Messiah or at least *the* envoy of God'.<sup>178</sup> Debates over Christology lead to a split within the community. Phase three represents the situation envisaged in the Epistles. At this point, Brown discusses three aspects of Johannine community life and history

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<sup>173</sup> For Kysar, 1977, p.366, 'the community developed a unique theological perspective amid a struggle with the synagogue'.

<sup>174</sup> Meeks, 1975, p.184 'The weakest point (of it) however, is just the starting point: the attempt to reconstruct a single, unitary *narrative* source independently of form and redaction-critical study of the *discourse* material. Thus neither the extraordinary scope nor its supposed theological and missionary implications are convincing'. See also Bauckham, 1998, p.19 for his critique of Martyn's reconstruction.

<sup>175</sup> Brown, 1977, pp.385-386

<sup>176</sup> For Von Wahlde, 1995, pp.380-385 however, the Johannine community underwent three stages of development, each of which is represented in the analogous version of the Gospel. So, the earliest version of the Johannine community's written tradition was 'almost certainly a complete Gospel rather than simply a collection of miracles, as was once maintained'. There are indications, von Wahlde states that this version of the Gospel 'extended from the scene of the Baptist's meeting with Jesus to the scene of Jesus' resurrection'. In the second version, having preserved 'much of the narrative framework of the first', the author 'changed the character of the first version by adding discourse and dialogue material that focused in a new way on the identity of Jesus and the purpose of his ministry'. At this stage, though the community remains primarily Jewish, tensions with the parent Jewish group results in separation-expulsion from the synagogue. Moreover, the third version of the Gospel emphasizes the value of Jesus' words and ethical behaviour. This time tensions lead to a breaking within the community. At the same time during this stage, the Johannine community moved in the direction of unity with the Great Church.

<sup>177</sup> See Brown, 1979, p.166-167 for a summary of his reconstruction.

<sup>178</sup> Brown, 1979, p.29

presupposed by the Epistles, namely, 'its geographical spread into different churches, the teaching role played by the Johannine school and the nature of the division that had taken place between the author and the secessionists'.<sup>179</sup> Finally in phase four after the writing of the Epistles, the 'last hour' has come for the Johannine community and the 'peculiar identity of the Johannine Christianity known to us from the Fourth Gospel and the Epistles' ceased to exist.<sup>180</sup>

Generally speaking, I think that Painter is right observing that 'this chronological development raises questions about the detailed credibility of the reconstruction'.<sup>181</sup> Given the lack of social evidence we cannot be so precise about our conclusions. The 'specificity of the scenario'<sup>182</sup> casts doubts, in my opinion, on such approaches.

Moreover, both of the reconstructions mentioned above presuppose the idea that the Gospel is telling the story of Jesus through the prism of the community's own life. At this point, I should refer to Lieu's reservations, which I share, with regard to the use of the Gospel as 'an archaeological site',<sup>183</sup> for the purpose of reconstructing the community's history. However, 'this is not to deny that John does reflect the community's own circumstances; it is to question whether those circumstances or past history can be "read off" directly from distinctively Johannine passages'.<sup>184</sup>

Undeniably, the Gospel does reflect recent experiences of the community in which it was composed. Certainly, it was not written 'in the abstract'. To the contrary, Johannine literature was composed in particular historical contexts and situations.<sup>185</sup> It is doubtful however, whether its theology could be seen as a response to a historical situation. As Barrett observes, 'theology may be drawn directly from the text but social history only by means of hints and inferences'.<sup>186</sup> I am just wondering if and to what extent we are justified to infer them or use the former to define the latter and then the latter to clarify the former. It seems to me that, at the very least, the whole matter rests on our decision of what we think was the primary interest of the author of GJohn; in other words, what is in the background and what in the foreground of the Johannine works.

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<sup>179</sup> Brown, 1979, p.97 for details see *ibid.*, pp.97-109

<sup>180</sup> *Ibid.*, p.146

<sup>181</sup> Painter, 1991, p.46

<sup>182</sup> Meeks, 1975, p.184 referring to Martyn's reconstruction.

<sup>183</sup> Lieu, 1991, p.18 n.23 See also Lieu, 1986, p.168, 214

<sup>184</sup> Lieu, 1986, p.214

<sup>185</sup> 'This observation', Lieu, 1986, p.168 notes 'is often used to account for the differences between them (the Gospel and the Epistles)'

<sup>186</sup> Barrett, 1995, p.95 According to Scroggs, 1979-80, p.179, what researchers whether historians, sociologists or Marxists have in common is the aim to show 'how the New Testament message is related to the everyday life and societal needs and contexts of real human beings, how the texts cannot be separated from social dynamic without truncating the reality of both speaker and reader (including the reader today)'

In Painter's opinion, it has become clear that the history of the Johannine community is a 'second factor' influencing the formation of the Gospel, in addition to the 'thought world' of the evangelist. Consequently, he points out 'the task of reconstructing the history of the Johannine community is not only of interest for its own sake, it promises to throw light on our interpretation of Jn'.<sup>187</sup>

At this point, I would like to refer to Barrett's thesis on this issue, for it seems to me that it sheds light on this attempt of discovering the social frame in which John was writing. In a few words, Barrett first underlines the fact that 'social history is a modern invention, and little of it can be observed in antiquity'.<sup>188</sup> Referring to Paul's Epistles, he notes that although the letters are certainly theological, 'they provide the reader who is willing and able to read between the lines a great deal of information about social matters'. Yet, one does not find that much. Obviously, social history, which is of great importance to the twentieth century, was of no interest to the first century<sup>189</sup>, and 'perhaps least of all was it of interest to the Christians of the first century'. Even in Acts 'the author was much more concerned to proclaim the gospel in his own way and to impress upon his readers the gospel's goals and consequences than to describe the past, especially in its individual and social details'.<sup>190</sup> If we turn to the writings of John, Barrett proceeds, the observations made with regard to the New Testament, 'become even clearer for two reasons'. The first one 'arises out of John's theological purpose'. John did intend to give his work 'universal appeal'. On the one hand, he uses traditional material, which however, adapts to yet another setting. Using a 'multitude of concepts and expressions', John 'liberated his material from particular settings to give it universal applicability'. It was not his intention 'to make his Gospel conform to a particular form of society'. The second reason why John is of little help to the social historian is that 'his theology prompts him to speak in a special way of the "cosmos", which is portrayed as almost completely evil'.<sup>191</sup> Consequently, the Christian community can have only negative dealings with the world and its life-style. Thus, Barrett concludes, 'the Johannine literature is hardly a promising field for an examination of "Christianity and society"'. However, this is not as unfavourable as it may first appear.<sup>192</sup> There is no reason to assume that 'John alone lived in an ivory tower and remained untouched by his

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<sup>187</sup> Painter, 1991, p.46

<sup>188</sup> Barrett, 1995, p.93

<sup>189</sup> Moreover, as Barrett, 1995, p.228 observes elsewhere, 'the fact is that the early Christian writers were not sociologists and took little thought for the sociologists of the twentieth century'.

<sup>190</sup> Barrett, 1995, pp.93-94

<sup>191</sup> Ibid., pp.94-95

<sup>192</sup> As Barrett, 1995, p.95 observes, 'few great theological works have been written in complete isolation from the things of this world'.

environment'. Still, it is his 'greatness that he viewed contemporary events under theological rather than sociological aspects'.<sup>193</sup>

Be that as it may, with regard to the reconstructions of John's social frame, I would agree with Painter who notes that 'it is essential to recognize the hypothetical nature of all reconstructions'. Of course, this is not an excuse for avoiding reconstruction. Neither the Gospel as a story floats free from history, nor the Gospel simply tells the story as it happened; 'neither position is simply a "given"'.<sup>194</sup>

Obviously, I esteem that have no other choice than read between the lines for some inferences to current events and situations. However, it is utterly different thing to read 'the lines' as such. To be more specific, it is one thing to say that from John 9 we infer that Christians were expelled from the synagogues and it is entirely different thing to assert that the evangelist has made the whole story up in order for him to show the painful experiences his community went through. I esteem that John set out to write theology and not the history of his community; social details constitute the background in John's presentation of theology.

What, then, can we infer from GJohn concerning the sociological setting of his community? Undeniably, there is evidence of a painful rift with Judaism. There seems to have been a fierce controversy between the Johannine community and synagogue; a controversy which resulted even in persecution and excommunication. The term ἀποσυνάγωγος is an idiom of GJohn (9:22; 12:43; 16:2). Apparently, the Johannine community comes from a fairly large break with the synagogue, which may have had an impact on the self-understanding of the community. The dualistic mentality, which is characteristic of Johannine writings, may have its origins in this break with what represents Judaism at that time, the synagogue, and influences its attitude towards an inner split later in its history (1John 2:19).

However, though it is obvious that the Johannine community experienced such a painful experience, it was not the only one. In the Gospel of Luke verse 6:22 seems to presuppose excommunication. Moreover, in Matthew, I think that the hostility towards the Pharisees runs throughout the Gospel and I also think that it is more intense than in any other Gospel. The readers of the evangelist seem to have separated themselves from the Pharisees (21:43). They even perceive themselves to be under threat of persecution (5:10-12; 10:17f.; 21:41-45; 22:6f.; 23:31-35). As Stanton accurately observes, 'whereas Mark refers to the Pharisees as hypocrites only once (7.6) and Luke not at all, Matthew

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<sup>193</sup> Barrett, 1995, p.95

<sup>194</sup> Painter, 1991, p.46 n.52

has twelve such references, six of which are in ch. 23'.<sup>195</sup> Besides, Matthew's careful distinction between ἐκκλησία and συναγωγή, as Stanton observes, 'is striking' (see 4:23; 9:35; 10:17; 12:9; 13:54; 23:34).<sup>196</sup> Apparently, when GJohn was written, the divorce between Judaism and Christianity was official and a new term was coined to make it clearer, the term ἀποσυνάγωγος.

Thus, though undoubtedly the split with synagogue-Judaism, played an essential role in the historical development of the Johannine community, we should not I suppose overemphasize it as such a division was necessitated by the members of the community being Christians and not just Johannine Christians.<sup>197</sup> Besides, the same situation is envisaged, as we have stated above, in Matthew and Luke as well. So, I suppose, the origins of the Johannine community are not as distinctive as they are assumed to be.

### *The concept of the church in Johannine literature*

Having made the above observations concerning the historical route of the Johannine community we will now explore if the concept of the church is present in the community's theology in order for us to decide to what extent the Johannine Christians were a distinctive group of the time.

It is commonly noticed<sup>198</sup> that John (like Mark and Luke) does not use the word ἐκκλησία as it is used by Matthew (16:18; 18:17). Based on this observation there has been expressed a variety of opinions on the matter whether John develops any ecclesiology and to what extent.<sup>199</sup>

Barrett, despite the absence of the term ἐκκλησία from GJohn, notes that 'John does show, more clearly than any other evangelist, an awareness of the existence of the Church'.<sup>200</sup> 'At times', he proceeds, 'this awareness becomes quite explicit' (e.g. John

<sup>195</sup> Stanton, 1992, p.127

<sup>196</sup> Ibid., p.97

<sup>197</sup> Besides, as Smith, 1987, p.35 observes there are 'motifs in the Johannine literature that go beyond the controversy with Judaism'. For example, the farewell discourses of the Gospel 'appear to represent principally an inner Christian development, and to raise christological, eschatological, and ecclesiological issues arising apart from or subsequent to the break with the synagogue'. We cannot assume that 'inner Christian developments were always subsequent to a break with the synagogue. Naturally, it cannot be assumed that inner Christian developments were always subsequent to any controversy with Judaism'.

<sup>198</sup> Dodd, 1946, p.xxxvi; Barrett, 1955, p.78; Schweizer, 1959, p.236; Goguel, 1964, p.74; Filson, 1969, pp.271-272; Bultmann, 1952-55, II, p.91; Brown, 1979, p.13; Dahl, 1997, p.148; Bornkamm, 1997, p.101; Ferreira, 1998, p.14 Moreover, as Dahl, 1997, p.148 adds 'the usual ecclesiological terminology of the New Testament is not found in the Fourth Gospel; words like ἡ ἐκκλησία, οἱ ἅγιοι, ὁ λαὸς τοῦ θεοῦ are lacking, and so is the opposite term τὰ ἔθνη'. Dahl's article first published in *Current issues in New Testament Interpretation*, ed. W. Klassen and G. F. Snyder, (1962) 124-42

<sup>199</sup> As Meeks, 1997, p.192 observes, 'the Johannine literature gives little description of the community and hardly any statements that are directly "ecclesiological"'. Moreover, Bornkamm, 1997, pp.100-101 notes that 'there is no question in John of any ecclesiology in the proper sense'. Lieu, 1986, p.191 states that though 'the language of ecclesiology such as we are familiar with elsewhere in the New Testament is lacking in IJohn, yet the community is always presupposed'.

<sup>200</sup> Barrett, 1955, p.78

17:20; 20:29). The 'two-fold theme', of the 'old Church of Israel' being rejected and the 'new Church' being brought into existence, 'constantly recurs throughout the gospel and is one that helps to bind together the Prologue and the rest of the book'.<sup>201</sup>

What is more, two discourses, the one of the shepherd, the one of the vine and the prayer for unity (ch.17), are thought to have ecclesiastical undertones.<sup>202</sup> Specifically for Barrett, John's 'doctrine of the Church is summed up in two great symbolic discourses, that of the Shepherd (10:1-16) and that of the Vine (15:1-6)'.<sup>203</sup> These great discourses 'bring out clearly and vigorously the facts which have been collected from the gospel as a whole'. Everything rests upon Christ: the good shepherd lays down his own life for his fold (10:11); he came that they might live (10:10). The life Christians enjoy exists only in Him (15:5). The sheep are brought by the shepherd into the fold as Christ gathers the Christians to Himself; here the Gentile mission is represented (10:16). Being closely united to Christ, Christians must be united in love with each other. Obeying Christ, they follow, love, and trust Him.<sup>204</sup> As for the vine symbolism<sup>205</sup>, Barrett proceeds, it 'has at least a eucharistic background, so that once more we are compelled to see the crystallization of the Church's unity in God through Christ in its act of worship'.<sup>206</sup>

However, for Schweizer, both of the above mentioned discourses-parables point up the individualistic character of the 'call' of Jesus to follow Him. Thus, John does not compare 'the Church to a "Body" which incorporates all the members from the beginning and grows as a whole'. He rather compares the Church 'to the vine which keeps sending out fresh branches' (15:1 ff.). The same applies to the parable of the shepherd according to which 'some of the sheep hear his voice and follow him, while

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<sup>201</sup> Ibid., p.78

<sup>202</sup> Ibid., p.82; Brown, 1967, p.389; Smith, 1987, p.2

<sup>203</sup> Ibid. As Dahl, 1997, p.148, notes 'Schweizer himself points to the Old Testament background of the imagery of the true vine (15:1ff., cf. esp. Ps. 80:14-16) and of the good shepherd and his flock (10, cf. Ezek.34). But such images are no longer employed in order to depict the way of God's dealing with his people in the course of history; they represent the actual relation between Christ and those who belong to him'.

<sup>204</sup> For Brown, 1967, p.389 'the primary emphasis of the symbolism is on the relation of the shepherd (Jesus) to his sheep whom he knows by name and for whom he is willing to lay down his life'.

<sup>205</sup> For Brown, 1967, p.389, 'the *mashal* (partly parabolic, partly allegorical) of the vine and branches in 15:1-6, with its expanded application in 15:7-17, is often characterized as the Johannine equivalent of the Pauline image of the body of Christ, which Ephesians identifies with the church. Yet, while there is a stress on loving one another in 15:12, the real emphasis of the Johannine imagery is on the union of the Christian with Jesus—the branches must remain on the vine which is Jesus. There is no echo of the Pauline reference to different functions of the members of the body'.

<sup>206</sup> Barrett, 1955, p.82 As Goguel, 1964, p.75-76 notes, 1John 'provides evidence concerning an important development in the conception of the Church. A distinction is drawn between the empirical Church and the ideal Church'. ... John 'finds no clear parallel between the ideal Church, i.e. the community of those destined for salvation, and the concrete and empirical Church, which might be defined as the community of those who desire salvation, without any distinction drawn between those in fact destined for it and those who will be excluded for professing heresy and making themselves anti-Christ, i.e. enemies of Christ. Probably he judges those whose sanctification is insufficient in the same way'.

others do not know him. Some sheep will even come to him from other folds (John 10:4,14ff., 27; cf. 11:52)'.<sup>207</sup>

Moreover, in John, Schweizer notes, 'there is no church order at all...this church has really no further to go, no battle to win, no goal to reach. It has only to "abide" in Jesus'.<sup>208</sup> Regarding the Johannine Epistles, they 'reveal a good deal of the same peculiarities in the conception of the Church as the Gospel of John'. In fact, even more clearly, Schweizer points out; 'here again the idea is expressed that anyone who has perceived Jesus to be the true God therewith has everything (1John 5:20), and that he then no longer needs any brother to teach him (2:20,27)'. Further, in the Epistles as well, 'the sending of the Son is the revelation of God's love (4:9ff.). The same Son sent by the Father is perceived by eyewitnesses and witnesses of later generations (4:14 and 1:1ff.). Here again, Christians are urged only to love one another and to keep themselves from the world (2:9ff.)'.<sup>209</sup>

However, concerning the parables, I would say that a parable illustrates usually a situation but we cannot expect this imagery, namely the one of the vine, to cover every aspect of it. For instance, the parable of the vine is supposed to stress the unity between Jesus and the believer as an individual. Nevertheless, this does not mean that deductions like Schweizer's should be valid. In my opinion, he reads a lot into this symbolic figure. Incorrectly to me, he puts the parable of the vine in contrast with the Pauline ecclesial imagery of the body. These two parables simply have a different function and stress different aspects of the concept of the church. Besides, in applying the argument from silence we may reach invalid deductions.

Moreover, as for the conception of the church in the Epistles of John, it seems to me *pace* Schweizer, that the church illustrated by the Epistles has 'further to go'. 'Abiding in Jesus' constitutes the 'battle' and the 'goal', which the members of the community are called to win and reach. 'Walking in light', as we are going to see in the exegesis section, one meets all those who also walk in the light and thus all have *κοινωνία* with

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<sup>207</sup> Schweizer, 1959, p.235 Additionally, according to Käsemann, 1968, p.73, one of the 'outstanding marks of Johannine eschatology' is 'the ecclesiology of the community which consists of individuals who are reborn through the divine call, which lives from the Word, and which represents the heavenly unification on earth'. Nevertheless, Brown argues against this individualistic aspect of John's ecclesiology (see Brown, 1966, p.cviii; comments on chapter xv.). Commenting on Schweizer's and Brown's opinions on this issue, Smith, 1987, p.3 asserts that 'Brown's criticism of Schweizer's approach should no more be dismissed as a product of his Catholicism than should Schweizer's interpretation be credited to his Protestantism'. Moreover, (ibid.) the divergent views of these scholars may suggest that 'the clarification of this concept (the one of 'Christian community or of the church') may not be possible on the basis of exegesis alone'.

<sup>208</sup> Ibid., p.237

<sup>209</sup> Ibid., p.238

God and with each other (1Jn 1:6-7). The word *κοινωνία* implies the existence of *ἐκκλησία* congregation and requires more than one member to make sense.<sup>210</sup>

Additionally, another approach to the relevant issue has been made by Bultmann<sup>211</sup> and it is determined, I think, by his thesis that the Fourth Gospel is of gnostic origin. Thus, he notes that John ‘himself never takes the concept “Church” for a theme as Paul does. The Church is only indirectly dealt with’. However, it occurs in 3John ‘where it does not mean “Church” but “a church”’.<sup>212</sup> Moreover, when John does touch on themes of ecclesiological interest, Bultmann believes that ‘the Johannine terminology pertaining to the Church comes, instead (of the Old Testament, Judaism, and the early Church terminology), from the area of Gnostic thought’.<sup>213</sup> In a certain sense however, ‘the church is conceived in John’, Bultmann proceeds, ‘as the “invisible Church”<sup>214</sup> insofar as they who are “of the truth” belong to it, even though they have not yet heard his voice but are yet to hear it (18:37; cf. 10:3)’.<sup>215</sup>

First of all, Brown points out that before ‘we broach the problem, we must raise some methodological considerations’. To begin with, ‘the argument from silence plays an important role in the minimal views of Johannine ecclesiology’. A principle usually followed is: what John does not mention, he is opposed to, or, at least, considers of minimal importance. However, Brown notes such a presupposition ‘is not without its danger’.<sup>216</sup> Specifically, regarding the claim that ‘many ecclesial terms are not found in John’, Brown notes that the terms usually cited such as ‘church’, ‘people of God’, or

<sup>210</sup> Concerning 1John in particular, Dodd, 1946, p.xxxvi states that despite the absence of the term ‘church’, ‘the author is acutely conscious of the Church as a community called into being by the act of God in Christ and sustained by fellowship with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ (1.3)’.

<sup>211</sup> As Ferreira, 1998, p.36 notes, the ‘earliest studies on the church in John were done by Gaugler (1924) and Faulhaber (1938), but these studies were very general with no exegetical foundation (Miller 1976: 16). Bultmann again was the one who determined the genesis and direction for the debate on this aspect of Johannine theology’.

<sup>212</sup> Bultmann, 1952-55, II, p.91 However, as Ferreira, 1998, p.14 observes, the fact that the term in 3John ‘shows that the Johannine community would not necessarily have objected to its usage’. As for Bultmann, Ferreira, 1998, p.36 notes that the former ‘denied the existence of any real ecclesiology in John and devoted only three pages to the Johannine concept of the church in his *Theology of the New Testament* (1951-55: II, 8-9, 91-92). Additionally, as Brown, 1966, p.cv, observes ‘for Bultmann, the evangelist was a converted Gnostic and one of the basic sources of the Gospel was Gnostic; therefore the Fourth Gospel cannot be expected to show a real sense of tradition, Church order, salvation history, or the sacraments’.

<sup>213</sup> Bultmann, 1952-55, II, p.91

<sup>214</sup> I quote here a passage from *The Tripartite Tractate* referring to the concept of the church: ‘not only does the Son exist from the beginning, but the Church, too, exists from the beginning. Now he who thinks that the discovery that the Son is an only son opposes the word (about the church)...Such is the Church consisting of many men which exists before the aeons, and which is called, in the proper sense, “the aeons of the aeons”’ (I 57:34-39 58, 31-34; NHL, p.59). Commenting on this passage Klauck, 2000, p.484 writes ‘even as the earthly image of the heavenly <sup>ἐκκλησία</sup> the *ἐκκλησία* of the pneumatics remains a theoretical or, better, a mythological construct. It need not appear actively as a visible organisation. Gnosis knows of the Church in this general sense only as an entity belonging purely to the sphere of consciousness and knowledge’.

<sup>215</sup> Bultmann, 1952-55, II, p.92 As Brown, 1966, p.cv observes, though Schweizer does not share Bultmann’s opinion, the former’s ‘conclusions about Johannine ecclesiology are not very different’.

<sup>216</sup> Brown, 1966, p.cv

'body of Christ' etc., with the exception of 'kingdom of God', are not 'really *Gospel* terms'. And he is wondering 'how would the Synoptic Gospels fare if this criterion of ecclesiology were applied to them?'. In these three Gospels, the term 'church' in the strict sense occurs only in Matt 16:18 (see Matt 18:17). Obviously, 'the real difficulty here' seems to be 'that John's ecclesial terminology is being compared with that of works which are not Gospels, for example, the Pauline Epistles'. 'We cannot expect', Brown points out, 'to find the evangelist placing flagrant anachronisms on the lips of Jesus-for example, to find the Johannine Jesus talking about his body which is the Church'.<sup>217</sup>

Furthermore, the second 'methodological consideration' to which we have to pay attention, according to Brown, concerns the 'comparisons made between John and the other Gospels'. It is noted that John fails to refer to 'ecclesial expressions and scenes' mentioned by the other evangelists.<sup>218</sup> Moreover, John as well has been regarded as 'antisacramentalist', as 'the Fourth Gospel omits the scenes pertaining to the Eucharist and Baptism which are found in the Synoptics'. Yet, Brown points out, 'the selection of Gospel scenes was very much determined by the purpose of the evangelist, and it is not to be expected that all the Gospels would express their ecclesiology in the same way'.<sup>219</sup>

Thus, firstly, we are not justified in expecting the Gospel of John to contain the phraseology of the Epistles of Paul and secondly, we have to bear in mind that every Gospel has its own characteristics, emphasizes different issues according to its purpose and the evangelist's idiosyncrasy and thought world.

Additionally, as Brown also observes and I agree with him, 'it may be that certain things are not mentioned in John, not because the evangelist disagrees with them but because he presupposes them'.<sup>220</sup> To me, this principle can be applied to many occasions thereby things really are kept simpler and unambiguous. Unfortunately, the majority of the scholars do not even mention it as at least another possible answer.<sup>221</sup> Besides, Brown points out that 'just as Acts is used along with the Gospel of Luke in a study of Lucan theology, so also must the other works of the Johannine school, Epistles and Revelation, be consulted before generalizing about the Johannine view of the Church'.<sup>222</sup>

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<sup>217</sup> Brown, 1966, pp.cv-cvi

<sup>218</sup> Schweizer, 1959, p.237 for example, notes that John 'does not mention either the election (Mark 3:13ff.) or the sending forth of the disciples (Mark 6:7ff.)'.

<sup>219</sup> Brown, 1966, p.cvi

<sup>220</sup> Ibid. p.cvii

<sup>221</sup> It would not fit with their general aspect of and approach to, Johannine literature, whatsoever.

<sup>222</sup> Brown, 1966, p.cvii 'Feuillet and Schnackenburg', Brown (ibid.) adds, 'have done this in their studies: and their interpretation of Johannine ecclesiology is, in our opinion, far more satisfactory than that of scholars who seem to posit a necessary opposition among these works, even though "the Johannine writings" have so much in common by way of style, ideology, and terminology'.

What is more, for Brown ‘the strongest support for the idea of community in John is found in the prayer of Chapter 17 where Jesus prays, “that they may be brought to completion as one” (17:23)’. Unity, Brown proceeds ‘is salvific because, like life itself, it comes from the Father to Jesus and from Jesus to Christians. Unless Jesus and the Father are with them, Christians can not be salvifically one among themselves: “That they all may be one, just as you, Father, in me and I in you, that they may also be [one] in us”. Thus, the ideal of community may well exist in John, but it is subordinate to and dependent on the ideal of the union of the Christian with Jesus’.<sup>223</sup>

Additionally, while Ferreira also believes that ‘John 17 is the Gospel’s most significant statement on ecclesiology’, he states that he will argue that ‘the prominence of the place of the community in John 17 underscores the importance of ecclesiology in the construct of Johannine theology’. He adds as well that ‘John 17 presents Jesus’ last words to his disciples and serves as a kind of overview of the entire Gospel’.<sup>224</sup>

Thus, first of all it has to be borne in mind that the fact that certain ecclesial terms are not found in John, does not mean that he opposes to them; rather, he may presuppose them. Secondly, we are not supposed to find in the Johannine literature ecclesiastical terms used in the Epistles of Paul. The Gospels talk about the church in their own way according to the purpose they serve. Concerning John, I suppose that what is said about the community in the Gospel is not irrelevant to what we call *ecclesiology*. For, I esteem, for John, at that early stage of the history of the church, community represents the ἐκκλησία in its infancy.

Moreover, the two parables of the shepherd and the vine and chapter 17 have ecclesiological colouring. Despite the fact that John does not use the term ἐκκλησία in his Gospel, he actually talks about it. Besides, the term ἀδελφοί<sup>225</sup> used seventeen times to refer to other Christians in the Johannine Epistles, is another way of referring to the family of God, the church. Accordingly, Rensberger notes, ‘the metaphor of Christians as a family of God’s children is thus their (Epistles’) primary way of speaking about the church’.<sup>226</sup>

Additionally, having accepted that John shows awareness of the importance of the ecclesial community, we have to deal with the, to me, apparent indifference of John

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<sup>223</sup> Brown, 1967, pp.389-390

<sup>224</sup> Ferreira, 1998, pp.14-15

<sup>225</sup> Moreover, as Pancaro, 1969-70, p.129 in an attempt to show that John does use ecclesial terms argues that in the Gospel ‘the word λαός is used in a pregnant sense which tends to identify the Christian community with the “People of God”. The “children of God”, mentioned in John xi.52, are neither the Gentiles nor the Jews of the dispersion as such, but rather: all those (whether Jew or Gentile) who would be united into this new People by the death of Christ’.

<sup>226</sup> Rensberger, 1997, p.42

concerning structural and institutional characteristics of the church as he conceives it. Before getting into detail, we should, I think, refer briefly to the Qumran community concerning the relevant issue. Evidently, the Qumran community was more institutionalised than the Johannine. It is not difficult for the reader of the Qumran library to reach such a conclusion. As Vermes observes, ‘Qumran was strict and formal, from the highest level to the lowest. Every sectary was inscribed in “the order of his rank” (IQS VI, 22)-the term “order” recurs constantly-and was obliged to keep to it in all the Community meetings and at table, an order that was subject to an annual review on the Feast of the Renewal of the Covenant’.<sup>227</sup>

Moreover, matters of discipline are stressed in Qumran literature. The sect is committed to its ethos, which also functions as a means of making even stronger its separatism from the rest of the world. As we have seen in the previous chapter, there are specific means of punishment for a range of sins. Some sins are not forgiven and result in permanent expulsion from the sect (IQS VII, 1, 17-18, 24-26). Others require a procedure of cleansing and are followed by the member’s re-entering the community (IQS VII, 19-22; VIII, 20f.). It is noteworthy how the insistence on ethical matters reinforces the community’s belief that they, and only they, possess the truth and so they have to live it out.<sup>228</sup>

However, concerning the Johannine community, as Bornkamm notes, ‘it is obvious straightaway that there is no trace in the Fourth Gospel of the elements that constitute the life of a community-worship, sacraments, church officers, charisms, etc.’.<sup>229</sup> For Rensberger as well ‘the Johannine tradition was an egalitarian one, without hierarchy or offices, instead emphasizing unity, mutual love, and access to the Spirit (John 13:34-35; 14:26; 15:12-13,17; 16:12-15; 17:11, 20-26; 20:21-23)’. As for the Epistles, ‘they display something of both the positive and negative potential of such an approach’,<sup>230</sup> a fact which suggests, I suppose that John was not opposed to hierarchical or institutional matters.

Moreover, on the one hand, Ferreira argues that John’s interest lies elsewhere, and on the other Brown, -whose attempt Ferreira disapproves<sup>231</sup>-, argues that there is evidence

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<sup>227</sup> Vermes, 1998, p.28

<sup>228</sup> See relevant section in chapter 2 for further details.

<sup>229</sup> Bornkamm, 1997, p.101 This article was first published in *EvT* 28 (1968) 8-25. So Schweizer, 1959, p.237 Moreover, Käsemann, 1968, p.27 as well observes that obviously John does not share the synoptic tradition, picturing the circle of disciples from the perspective of the later church organization. On the contrary, ‘even the basic elements of congregational life, worship, the sacraments and ministry, play such insignificant roles that time and again John’s interest in them has been doubted’. He (*ibid.*, pp.32,40 respectively) also states that ‘worship and sacraments do not play a dominant role in our (fourth) Gospel’, and John’s ‘ecclesiology is not designed on the basis of the forms of church organizations’.

<sup>230</sup> Rensberger, 1997, pp.42-43

<sup>231</sup> Ferreira, 1998, p.15 n.11

of John's being interested in issues concerning church order and sacraments. In fact, John's interest 'lies elsewhere' but this does not exclude any possibility of his implicitly referring to such matters.

Firstly, Ferreira notes that though the 'Pauline or "orthodox" characteristics of the church' such as 'church order, government and the sacraments', are not the major concern of the Johannine ecclesiology, this does not mean that John is not interested in church order or the sacraments; nevertheless, Ferreira proceeds 'its concern lies elsewhere'. Obviously, 'John is more concerned about the origin, nature, and especially the function of the believing community than about matters of liturgy or church order'. Thus, Ferreira argues that John 'develops a "christological ecclesiology" in the sense that the Johannine community is *Christus prolongatus*', and that this ecclesiology 'has its origins in the unique *Sitz im Leben* of the Johannine community'.<sup>232</sup>

Secondly, once more, Brown notes, the argument from silence may lead us to invalid deductions. In fact, he observes, there are traces of church order 'in the Johannine treatment of the disciples'. Often 'they are the model for all Christians'. However, in some passages where Jesus speaks of the future, 'the disciples take on the aspects of Church leaders'. In Jn 21:15-17, Peter is entrusted with pastoral care over the flock; in 4:35-38 and 13:20, it is implied that the disciples have a role in the Christian mission, and in 20:23, they are given an authoritative power to absolve or not men's sins. As for the rest of the Johannine literature, Brown proceeds, 1Jn 2:24 'implies an authoritative teaching'. Moreover, in Revelation passages such as 21:14 and ch.4 may also reflect the existence of church order in John.<sup>233</sup>

To conclude, two tensions are to be observed concerning the ecclesiology of John. On the one hand, the absence of any ecclesiological element in John has been asserted (Bultmann, Käsemann, Schweizer). Such an assertion is primarily based on the lack of the term ἐκκλησία in John. Moreover, this conviction contributes to the idea of John's audience being a distinctive one with sectarian orientation. As Brown observes, 'the likelihood that the Johannine community was a sect sharply different from most other Christians would be increased if the Fourth Gospel is anti-sacramental or decidedly non-sacramental...or anti-institutional...or if its christology is a naïve docetism'.<sup>234</sup>

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<sup>232</sup> Ferreira, 1998, p.15 n.11 See also *ibid.*, p.16

<sup>233</sup> Brown, 1966, pp.cix-cx

<sup>234</sup> Brown, 1979, p.16 He (*ibid.*) also adds that 'while there is always some basis in the Johannine writings for such radical interpretations, there is enough evidence on the other side of the issue to make them unconvincing and to point toward a more nuanced interpretation of Johannine christology and ecclesiology'.

On the other hand, some scholars have recognized ecclesiological material in John (Barrett, Brown, Rensberger, Pancaro, Bogart), and stated the existence of Johannine ecclesiology.

In general, it has to be borne in mind that the argument from silence is not always safe. Gospels were written under particular circumstances and occasioned by certain reasons. Being examined in its context, every Gospel acquires its value.

In my opinion, the Johannine community constituted a 'church' in the broadest sense, 'an organized group who celebrated the sacraments and instructed the faithful'.<sup>235</sup> The distinctiveness of Johannine thought does not exclude those people who represented it, from the church. Rather, it suggests another way of conceiving Jesus Christ and His salvific action. What is certain, moreover, is the fact that there is no indication in the Johannine literature of the Johannine community's being in opposition to the Great Church; this is verified by the fact that on the one hand, the members of the distinctive Johannine community were finally, partially at least, incorporated in the body of the main stream of the Church, as will be seen below and on the other, the Johannine literature was included in the canon of the New Testament to be read by all Christians.<sup>236</sup>

### *Was the Johannine community sectarian?*

Having examined the historical development of the community of John and also having concluded that ecclesiology is not totally absent from the Johannine literature, we now turn to decide whether the Johannine community was a sect in the light of what has already been said.

First and foremost, I suppose that we have to note what we mean by the term *sect*. According to White, sect is 'a deviant or separatist movement within a cohesive and religiously defined dominant culture. Thus, despite expressed hostilities and exclusivism, the sect shares the same basic constellation of beliefs or "worldview" of the dominant cultural idiom'.<sup>237</sup> Moreover, I would agree with Stanton<sup>238</sup> that Blenkinsopp's notes on this issue are of particular interest. Thus, the latter, noting that this is not to be taken as a definition of a sect, observes that 'a sect is not only a minority, and not only

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<sup>235</sup> Bogart, 1977, p.10

<sup>236</sup> This is not the place to go into details of the history of the canon concerning the Johannine Epistles. See Brooke, 1912, pp.lii-lxii for a detailed analysis on the issue; see also Dodd, 1946, pp.xi-xvi; Brown, 1982, pp.6-9 and Lieu, 1986, pp.5-36

<sup>237</sup> White, 1988, p.14 See also Wilson, 1990, pp.1-22 'Sectarian Studies: Assumptions, Sources, Scope and Methods'; Wilson, 1967, pp.1-45 for an introduction and 'An analysis of sect development'. As White, 1988, p.14 notes, Bryan Wilson's influential studies of sects are based 'almost entirely on pluralistic tendencies within the cultural framework of contemporary Christianity; his 'complex typology' does not 'fit so neatly to all the types of splinter groups one sees in first-century Judaism, much less to the complexities of religious life in the larger Roman Empire'.

<sup>238</sup> Stanton, 1992, p.90

characterized by opposition to norms accepted by the parent-body, but also claims in a more or less exclusive way to be what the parent-body claims to be. Whether such a group formally severs itself, or is excommunicated, will depend largely on the degree of self-definition attained by the parent-body and the level of tolerance obtaining within it'.<sup>239</sup>

Generally speaking, as Ashton observes 'we are sure of the names of only three sects in contemporary Palestine: Pharisees, Sadducees, and Essenes'. Of these, only the Essenes, who included in their ranks the members of the Qumran community as most of the scholars believe, fulfilled all the characteristics of what modern sociologists would call a sect, 'in their isolationism and their uncompromising rejection of all other claims to be the rightful heirs of the promises of Israel'.<sup>240</sup>

Assuming the sectarian character of the Johannine community, Meeks underlines the fact that 'despite the absence of "ecclesiology" from the Fourth Gospel, this book could be called an etiology of the Johannine group'. Telling the story of the Son of Man who descended from heaven and then re-ascended after choosing his disciples out of the world, the Gospel of John 'defines and vindicates the existence of the community that evidently sees itself as unique, alien from its world, under attack, misunderstood, but living in unity with Christ and through him with God'.<sup>241</sup> This book is a book 'for insiders' and it can hardly be considered as a 'missionary tract'. So, as Meeks presents it, the Gospel's primary function is 'to provide a reinforcement for the community's social identity, which appears to have been largely negative'. It also provides 'a symbolic universe which gave religious legitimacy, a theodicy, to the group's actual isolation from the larger society'.<sup>242</sup> The Fourth Gospel not only describes the birth of the community in 'etiological fashion', but also 'provides reinforcement of the community's isolation'.<sup>243</sup>

Cullmann, unlike Käsemann who, as the former notes, detaches the whole Johannine circle more or less entirely from the rest of earliest Christianity and 'assigns it to a "corner"',<sup>244</sup> asserts that though Johannine circle was theologically distinct from 'both Jewish Christianity and Gentile Christianity', the group with which we are concerned 'is not isolated within earliest Christianity'. Consequently, 'the designation "Johannine" is probably too narrow'.<sup>245</sup> However, Cullmann does not deny the circle's being different

<sup>239</sup> Blenkinsopp, 1981, pp.1-2

<sup>240</sup> Ashton, 1991, p.168

<sup>241</sup> Meeks, 1997, p.193 This article was first published in *JBL* 91 (1972) 44-72

<sup>242</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.193-194

<sup>243</sup> *Ibid.*, p.194

<sup>244</sup> Cullmann, 1976, p.55

<sup>245</sup> *Ibid.*, p.53

from the rest of early Christianity. Its members were probably aware 'of the difference which separated them from the church going back to the Twelve and also saw that their particular characteristics laid upon them the obligation of a special mission, namely to preserve, defend and hand on the distinctive tradition which they were sure had come down from Jesus himself'. This does not mean, nevertheless, that this awareness 'led to direct polemic against the other Christians'. However, 'as a minority the group always found itself on the defensive and had to fight for its independence without in any way attacking the church founded on the Twelve'. So, according to Cullmann, maintaining its independence, the Johannine circle still feels the need for 'mutual supplementation in the common interest'.<sup>246</sup>

Moreover, Bogart, having referred, on the one hand, to Käsemann who often speaks of the 'naïve docetism'<sup>247</sup> of the Fourth evangelist, and on the other, to Dodd's belief according to which John's soteriology is 'unique to the New Testament', points out that John's peculiar soteriology and christology alone 'do not make a community "sectarian" in the sense of being *at odds* with the rest of Christianity and with the world around it'. However, if the Johannine community was sectarian when the Gospel was written because of the reasons just mentioned, it follows that it ceased to be when the Epistles were written.<sup>248</sup>

As he goes on, Bogart refers to Meeks's thesis—the one already mentioned above at the beginning of this section—saying that 'here we come to the nub of the issue'. So, what 'made and *kept* the Johannine community sectarian—in the sense of its being both peculiar in doctrine *vis à vis* the rest of the church, and defensive and alienated *vis à vis* the world around it—was *its perfectionist self-understanding*, not merely its doctrine'. This conclusion, Bogart notes 'corroborates both Käsemann's and Meeks' views of the Johannine community'. Briefly, 'their perfectionist self-understanding, born of their peculiar eschatological perspective, contributed greatly to their sectarian self-understanding, to which Käsemann and Meeks refer'.<sup>249</sup> Additionally, their 'prophetism', 'points toward their being sociologically an in-group'. The evangelist, Bogart explains, throughout his book appears 'as a Christian prophet who continues to speak *viva voce* the words of the Living Jesus, the One From Above who continues to abide in his believers'. Thus, Bogart concludes, 'we would argue that the perfectionist self-understanding in the Johannine community was a major contributor, if not the chief

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<sup>246</sup> Cullmann, 1976, p.55

<sup>247</sup> See Käsemann, 1968, p.70

<sup>248</sup> Bogart, 1977, p.137

<sup>249</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.138-139

contributor, to its sectarianism'.<sup>250</sup> I would say however at this point that the marginalization of a group cultivates perfectionism and in turn, this perfectionistic outlook enforces this marginalization.

In my opinion, distinctive doctrinal elements of Johannine Christology, soteriology and eschatology, are indicative of the Johannine manner of conceiving Christ and His work. The distinctiveness of the Johannine perception of Jesus and His teaching, allowing for perfectionist ideas, was also vulnerable to misunderstandings as we are going to see in the next chapter. Besides, peculiar and highly distinctive though they are thought to be, GJohn and the Epistles were eventually included in the canon of the church to be read by all Christians.

Moreover, for Brown, despite all the characteristics of sectarianism traced in the Johannine community (the Johannine Jesus is understood best only by his own people, who are not from this world as Jesus is not of this world. They are represented by the beloved disciple who never abandons Jesus<sup>251</sup>), 'the Johannine attitude toward the Apostolic Christians proves that the Johannine community, as reflected in the Fourth Gospel, had not really become a sect'. Despite their 'exclusivistic tendencies', apparently, Johannine Christians never broke communion with other Christian groups referred to in the New Testament. We actually reach this conclusion if we can judge, Brown proceeds, from the presence of Simon Peter and other disciples at the Last Supper, from verse 10:16 where their expectations for the future are expressed and finally from 17:20-21, where Jesus prays 'for the oneness of the Apostolic and the Johannine Christians. Here the Johannine attitude is just the opposite of the outlook of a sect'.<sup>252</sup>

I would agree with Brown that the Johannine community 'had not really become a sect'. It seems to me however, that Brown, though he takes pains to find traces of the assumed peculiarity of the Johannine Christians-even the literary structure of the Gospel points this way<sup>253</sup>-, finally decides in favour of the opposite direction. I am just wondering how such a distinctiveness and alienation ceased to exist in such a rapid passage of time.

At this point, I think, we should briefly refer to the sectarian character of the Qumranic community. Qumran was indeed a sect over against the main stream of Judaism that eventually sees Judaism as an enemy. Its strict dualistic, marginalized mentality, as we

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<sup>250</sup> Bogart, 1977, p.139

<sup>251</sup> Brown, 1979, p.89

<sup>252</sup> *Ibid.*, p.90

have seen in the previous chapter, its insistence on ethical matters and the living out of this ethos, are means of maintaining the community's distinctive identity and it also betrays its sectarian character over against Judaism. The boundaries are unambiguously drawn; the ones 'who have freely devoted themselves to the observance of God's precepts', while they are to 'love all the sons of light', are to 'hate all the sons of darkness' (IQS I, 8-10). Moreover, from the very beginning of the Damascus Document the basic lines are drawn, accounting 'of the origins of the Qumran community'<sup>254</sup>: those 'who know righteousness', are opposed to those 'who despise Him' (CD I, 1-2). The separation between the elect group and the parent body, the body from which it came from, is pictured with the most vivid colours in the following verses. Thus, those who 'sought Him with a whole heart' are opposed to 'the congregation of traitors' and 'those who departed from the way'. God raised for His people 'a Teacher of Righteousness to guide them in the way of His heart', whereas, 'the Scoffer arose who shed over Israel the waters of lies'. Those outside of the sect 'wander in a pathless wilderness, laying low the everlasting heights, abolishing the ways of righteousness and removing the boundary with which the forefathers had marked out their inheritance' (CD I, 10-17).

Evidently, as Stanton observes commenting on the Damascus Document, 'polemic is part of the sect's self-understanding as a distinct entity over against the parent body'.<sup>255</sup> Moreover, Qumraners claim 'in a more or less exclusive way to be what the parent-body claims to be',<sup>256</sup> the heirs of what 'the forefathers had marked out their inheritance' (CD I, 16).

Additionally, for Rensberger, the Johannine community's sectarianism may be seen primarily in 'its relations with Judaism and in its attitude toward the outside world as a whole'.<sup>257</sup> Moreover, Rensberger is of the opinion that 'the Johannine community may reasonably be regarded as a sectarian group with introversionist characteristics'.<sup>258</sup> The very character of the community's book, the Gospel and 'precisely its sectarian sharpness and the "in group" nature of its language', tell against its being a mission

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<sup>253</sup> To some extent, Brown, 1979, pp.89-90 notes, 'even the literary style of the Fourth Gospel reflects Johannine peculiarity, with its abstract symbolism (life, light truth) and its technique of misunderstanding'.

<sup>254</sup> Stanton, 1992, p.94

<sup>255</sup> Ibid., pp.96-97

<sup>256</sup> Blenkinsopp, 1981, p.1

<sup>257</sup> Rensberger, 1989, p.138 Rensberger (see *ibid.*, pp.138-144) as well analyses the 'positive values' (the confession of Jesus that brought the community into conflict with the synagogue) and the 'negative' ones (xenophobia, injustice and violence towards outsiders) of that sectarianism.

<sup>258</sup> As Wilson, 1967, p.28 notes 'the introversionist-or pietist-sect directs the attention of its followers away from the world and to the community and more particularly to the members' possession of the Spirit; ...such a sect is typified by reliance on inner illumination, whether this be regarded as the voice of conscience or the action of the Holy Ghost'. See *ibid.*, pp.26-29 for the subtypes of sects namely, *Conversionist, Adventist, Introversionist* and *Gnostic*; see also *ibid.*, pp.16-17

book. However, it appears that there was a mission for the Johannine community and that 'it had not become so introverted as to have turned its back definitely on the world'; the community's mission is 'like that of Jesus, to "take away the sin of the world" to draw, people from darkness into light (1:29; 12:46). Thus, for Rensberger, 'the Johannine Christianity is not a pure example of introversionism'.<sup>259</sup>

Summing up, personally, I would positively agree with Brown saying that first and foremost, the question whether Johannine Christianity has become a sect, is a matter of definition.<sup>260</sup> And I would also agree that the relevant issue is a 'burning' one, due to the fact that it influences our understanding of the Fourth Gospel and Christian origins. Nevertheless, I would call Johannine Community 'a sect' only as a part of the larger Christian sectarian movement.<sup>261</sup> It is obvious enough that recent scholars' tendency to present John as an alien grouping opposed to the rest of Christianity necessitates the community's being 'a sect'. Undoubtedly, the origins of the Johannine community were sectarian in the sense of being separated from the rest of Judaism. It was a marginalized group over against the parent body-Judaism. It is important to note that there is no evidence of the community's being at odds with the rest of the Christians. Even the κόσμος, while it is said to be ruled by the devil (Jn 14:30), is loved by God (3:16) and Jesus came to save it (3:17; 4:42).<sup>262</sup> John's community is not like Qumran, which 'hates' those outside of its ranks. So, the term *separatism*-in the sense of being separated from the parent body of Judaism-may be more accurate in the case of the Johannine community than the one of *sectarianism*.

Thus, in my opinion, the Johannine community was perhaps a sect over against Judaism but not over against the rest of the Christian communities. This may also explain why this assumed distinct Johannine community utterly disappeared after the writing of the Epistles and the Johannine Christians were embodied partly at least, in the main body of the Church, as we are going to see below.

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<sup>259</sup> Rensberger, 1989, pp.144-145

<sup>260</sup> Brown, 1979, p.14

<sup>261</sup> Scroggs, 1975, p.2, reaches the same conclusion noting that 'the community called into existence by Jesus fulfils the essential characteristics of the religious sect, as defined by recent sociological analyses'. The basic characteristics of a sect which he thinks are met by the early Christian movement are the following: (1) It emerged out of an agrarian protest movement; (2) It rejected many of the realities claimed by the establishment (claims of family, of religious institution, of wealth, of theological intellectuals); (3) It was egalitarian; (4) It offered special love and acceptance within; (5) It was a voluntary organization; (6) It demanded a total commitment of its members; (7) It was apocalyptic' (see *ibid.*, pp.3-7). See also, Scroggs, 1979-80, p.171 "Sociological analyses of the early church"; Culpepper, 1975, p.259, n.10, gives a bibliography on the sociology of a 'sect'.

<sup>262</sup> For Smith, 1987, p.3 however, 'on any reading of the Gospel and the Epistles there appears a sectarian consciousness, a sense of exclusiveness, a sharp delineation of the community from the world. Although this sensibility is sharper in IJohn (e.g. 2:15-17) than in the Gospel (cf. 3:16-17; 12:47; 17:21, 23), it is present there as well (e.g. 17:9-14)'. Moreover, as Smith (*ibid.*, pp.3-4) states 'comparisons with

### *The Johannine school hypothesis*

At this point I suppose I should refer briefly to the Johannine school hypothesis as it represents another approach to the nature and character of the Johannine community.

The concept of a 'school'<sup>263</sup> is thoroughly explored in relation to other groupings in the ancient world by Culpepper. Culpepper has attempted to give a closer definition to the concept of 'school' by comparing the 'Johannine community' with the great centres of learning like the Stoa or the Academy that were founded in Greece some centuries earlier.<sup>264</sup>

First, Culpepper starts by surveying the history of the Johannine-school hypothesis.<sup>265</sup> According to his findings 'many scholars are willing to call the community a school, but they describe it in a variety of ways'. Besides, he notes, his study shows that 'the variety of descriptions and definitions is endless'.<sup>266</sup> After having examined the history and the characteristics of other ancient schools,<sup>267</sup> Culpepper concludes that 'the Johannine community shared the essential characteristics<sup>268</sup> of the ancient schools', therefore, 'the Johannine community was a school'.<sup>269</sup>

community consciousness in Qumran which is likewise related to a fundamental dualism, are entirely apposite and to the point'.

<sup>263</sup> 'School', Barrett, 1995, p.225, notes, 'is a word with a long history a history that has in it a curious twist.... With few exceptions their (Greek words beginning with the root syllable σχολ-) primary meaning is related to leisure; σχολάζειν means to have nothing to do... Similarly σχολή originally *leisure, rest, ease*, moves on to mean that on which one's leisure is employed, and eventually not only, or often, to a *school* (as a place where one studies, which is σχολεῖον) but to a group of disciples who learn a way of life from a common master'.

<sup>264</sup> Ashton, 1997, p.7, notes that 'Wilhelm Bousset expressed the more cautious opinion that the Gospel was the product of a single school, a view that may be said to have prevailed until the present day'.

<sup>265</sup> Culpepper, 1975, pp.1-34 He (ibid., p.4) also notes that the first occurrence known to him of the phrase 'school of John' appears in E.Renan's *Vie de Jésus* (1863) See also Loveday, 1994, pp.76-81 for 'the schools and the New Testament'.

<sup>266</sup> Ibid., p.37

<sup>267</sup> See Culpepper, 1975, pp.39-246 where he examines the Pythagorean, the Academy, the Lyceum, the Garden, the Stoa, the school of Qumran, the House of Hillel, Philo's school and Jesus' school'.

<sup>268</sup> Culpepper, 1975, pp.258-259, 287-289 As Strecker, 1996, p.xxxvi n.53, observes these characteristics are the following: 1) emphasis on φιλία and κοινωνία; 2) gathering around a founder, who is honoured as an example of wisdom or goodness; 3) obedience to the teachings of the founder; 4) members of the school are pupils of the founder; 5) teaching and learning are community activities; 6) common meals are often celebrated as a memorial of the founder; 7) rules and practices determine the life of the members; 8) distance from human society; 9) development of organizational forms that ensure the continuation of the school'.

<sup>269</sup> Culpepper, 1975, p.290 So, Strecker, 1989, p.xxxv notes 'the differences and agreements among the Johannine writings point to school traditions and presume teacher-pupil relationships that are also determinative for the definition of the concept of a "school" '. Moreover, for Rensberger, 1997, p.18 'whether or not there was a Johannine "school", it is at least possible that more than one person within the community wrote in the style typical of the Johannine tradition'. This style may have originated with the author of the Fourth Gospel and then 'become the common property of teachers, preachers, and writers within the Johannine community'. See also Ferreira, 1998, pp.30-31; What is more, Lieu, 1993, p.466 states that though 1John and GJohn both reflect exegesis of the same Old Testament passages, they do so in different ways, using none of the same 'vocabulary or fundamental concerns'. This, Lieu asserts, 'should not surprise us; it seems increasingly evident that the Johannine writings, while not denying the creative individuality behind them, were the result of a long period of what we might call school activity'. Moreover, Culpepper, 1975, p.261 as well thinks that John's usage of Old Testament suggests 'that the Gospel was composed in a school (similar to the school of Matthew)'. However, in Ashton's, 1991,

As I see it, though Culpepper's is an interesting approach to the actual character of the Johannine Community, this model is not enlightening concerning the uniqueness of the Johannine community. I would agree with Ashton who states that being 'unhelpful', the whole argument for a 'Johannine school' does not completely cover all aspects of the community's self-understanding that deserve consideration. Besides, this term 'does nothing to help us to understand the particular modalities which make *this* community unique'.<sup>270</sup>

### *The aftermath*

To the question 'is it possible to trace the development of the Johannine circle further into the second century?', Cullmann answers in the affirmative. However, it is a difficult question given the fact that from a certain point in time onwards 'the group increasingly loses its special position and both ecclesiastically and theologically is taken up into the rest of Christianity'.<sup>271</sup> We can probably, the same scholar asserts, 'count Ignatius of Antioch as one of the successors to the circle, even if a historical link cannot be established'. Still further, Irenaeus may be one of them who were influenced by the circle. However, the further we move from the beginnings, the more the 'Johannine type is mixed with synoptic and Pauline Christianity, especially as the rise of the New Testament canon has a cumulative effect'.<sup>272</sup>

Moreover, the special characteristics of the original group were preserved 'in certain *gnostic* circles, albeit in a heretical form which ran contrary to the intention of their advocates'. Given the attraction that the Gospel of John exercised on gnostic circles, some groups removed themselves further by joining up with the gnostics, while 'the general tendency was towards assimilation to the rest of Christianity'. Thus, Cullmann concludes, there appeared 'an area common both to the heterodox Judaism from which the Johannine circle derived and to gnosticism'.<sup>273</sup>

Likewise, Brown states that after the split referred to in the Johannine Epistles, the 'last hour' for the community has come. Though the Johannine writings and some

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<sup>270</sup> Ashton, 1991, pp.195-196 Moreover, as the same scholar observes (ibid., pp.195-196) Culpepper's theory, first 'obscures the differences between the two institutions' (the Johannine group and the ancient schools). Secondly, given the fact that the beloved disciple used to be Jesus' listener, Culpepper is mistaken in regarding him as 'the head' in much the same way 'as ancient schools regarded their founder'. And finally, the fact that the community shared some features with those schools (those of Plato and Epicurus), it is true but 'unenlightening'.

<sup>271</sup> Cullmann, 1976, p.61

<sup>272</sup> Ibid., pp.61-62

<sup>273</sup> Ibid., p.62 For Bogart, 1977, p.140 as well, the heretics illustrated in 1John 'disappeared into the myriad, syncretistic groups of gnosticism', while the orthodox 'remained in the community and became more like their fellow Christians'.

elements of Johannine thought are attested in the second century<sup>274</sup>, after the Epistles there is no further trace of ‘a distinct and separate Johannine community’. It is possible however, Brown notes that the two groups (the author’s adherents and the secessionists) did survive but they left no trace in history. Yet, it is ‘far more likely that the two groups were swallowed up respectively by the “Great Church” and by the gnostic movement’.<sup>275</sup> Both of them made their contribution to the group they finally joined. But in each case, ‘the Johannine community would have so adapted its own heritage in favor of the larger group that the peculiar identity of the Johannine Christianity known to us from the Fourth Gospel and the Epistles would have ceased to exist’.<sup>276</sup>

Furthermore, von Wahlde states that the two factors namely the conflict with dissidents and the movement toward the Great Church, at this stage ‘function as correlatives’. ‘The community’s affirmation of its tradition vis-à-vis opponents was perhaps part of its move toward clearer unity with other communities under the leadership of Peter’.<sup>277</sup> Additionally, according to the same scholar in 3John we have the first indication of the ‘emergence of authoritative figures’ within the Johannine community. Also, in 3John the community is termed an ἐκκλησία which ‘elsewhere and most notably in Paul and Acts, is most commonly used to denote the Christian “assembly”’. Although this evidence is slight, von Wahlde points out, it ‘nonetheless forms a consistent pattern’. ‘This pattern suggests that the Johannine community, once a maverick among early Christian communities, was moving in the direction not of sectarianism but of increased harmony and unity with the Great Church’.<sup>278</sup>

I suppose that our findings concerning the aftermath of the Johannine community enforce our assumption that the Johannine community never became a sect in the sense of being alienated from the rest of Christianity. It was a distinctive community in terms of theology; a theology which became a part of the theology of the wider church.

## **Conclusions**

To conclude, we can gather a range of assumptions from what has been stated concerning the social setting of the Johannine community.

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<sup>274</sup> Brown, 1979, pp.147-150 refers to the citation of Polycarp’s which is the closest to John: ‘everyone who does not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is an antichrist’ (*Phil.* 7:1); he also mentions that Justin the Martyr ‘certainly knew a *Logos* christology’; Moreover, he notes that the ‘earliest indisputable orthodox use of the Fourth Gospel is by Theophilus of Antioch in his *Apology to Autolycus* (ca. A.D. 180)’.

<sup>275</sup> Brown, 1979, p.145 See also Brown, 1982, p.70; and for a detailed discussion see Brown, 1982, pp.103-115

<sup>276</sup> Brown, 1979, pp.145-146. Brown goes on examining in detail the route of those groups, pp.151-164

<sup>277</sup> Von Wahlde, 1995, p.384

<sup>278</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.384-385

First and foremost, it has to be borne in mind that our only tools in reconstructing the history of the community are the writings of John, namely the Gospel and the Epistles. For such a task, admittedly, the Gospel is not as productive as the Epistles are, due to its genre. Generally speaking, we are not to expect from the Gospel the quantity of information provided by say, the Pauline Epistles. Besides, for Barrett concerning the sociological details provided, even in the Pauline Epistles and Acts ‘one does not find much’.<sup>279</sup> ‘It is surprising’, the same scholar stresses, that ‘we even have Acts as a “history of the Church”’. Apparently, ‘the author was much more concerned to proclaim the gospel in his own way and to impress upon his readers the gospel’s goals and consequences than to describe the past, especially in its individual and social details’.<sup>280</sup> Furthermore, as Scroggs notes, ‘sociological data for New Testament times is sparse’.<sup>281</sup>

Obviously, things are not as simple as von Wahlde suggests saying that concerning the Johannine community, the stages of the composition of the Gospel are ‘remarkably transparent’ a fact that enables us to provide not only ‘a *description*’ but also ‘a *history* of it’.<sup>282</sup> Brown however, asserts that regarding the sources used for the composition of the Gospels, ‘if the recoverable pre-Gospel sources or traditions were formed at an earlier stage in the life of the same community that received the final Gospel, they help us to detect that community’s history; but if they were composed outside the community and imported to supplement (or even to correct) the community’s thought, they may supply very little ecclesiastical information about the community itself’.<sup>283</sup>

So, concerning the above mentioned attempts to reconstruct John’s social setting, with respect to Martyn’s approach, though I agree with him that in fact, we can extract information about the life of Johannine Christians, I would not share his method to reach such a conclusion. His reconstruction seems to me an unwarranted one based on evidence that allows a simpler explanation. It sounds rational to me to say that from chapter 9 we conclude that there must have been a phase in the history of early Christianity when Christians were excluded from the synagogue. However, it is entirely different thing to be stated that the evangelist has invented chapter 9 in order to furnish us with such information.

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<sup>279</sup> Barrett, 1995, p.93

<sup>280</sup> Ibid., pp.93-94 Moreover, as Scroggs, 1975, p.8, notes ‘the book of Acts, which purports to tell the history of the church, is of little use for our purpose’.

<sup>281</sup> Scroggs, 1975, p.8 He also adds ‘neither Jewish nor Christian writings are *directly* interested in offering such data. Information even about the Roman legal processes and taxes in Palestine is inadequate’.

<sup>282</sup> Von Wahlde, 1995, p.379

<sup>283</sup> Brown, 1979, pp.17-18 Moreover, as Brown (ibid) notes, as for the Fourth Gospel, ‘scholars have sometimes assumed that the evangelist used and corrected sources taken from outside the community, indeed even from non-Christian sources’.

Moreover, I would agree with Brown that one has to be cautious of making deductions from John's silence. Yet, though his reconstruction is 'generally convincing'<sup>284</sup>, I am also cautious of Brown's detailed exposition of the history of the Johannine community, and especially with the chronological precision that is applied to his reconstruction. Granted the inadequacy of our sources, as Brown himself has stressed, we cannot be so precise with regard to our conclusions on the relevant issue.

Consequently, on the one hand the lack of social historical evidence provided by the Johannine literature and on the other the fact that it is possible that the sources used for the composition of the Gospel were not representative of the Johannine community, I suspect that any effort of reconstructing the social setting of the Johannine community must be made cautiously and I would also say that it cannot be characterized by such a precision and detailed chronological development as the ones examined. Besides, being influenced by our modern social views, we are not allowed, I think, to read our expectations in the text.

Furthermore, in my opinion, GJohn primarily tells us how John conceived and presented Jesus' teaching and mission, to a Christian community at the end of the first century; a presentation that indirectly allows a glimpse into that community's life at the time when the Fourth Gospel was written.<sup>285</sup> The assertion however, that the Gospel is primarily a mirror of the community's life and that the evangelist's main purpose was to picture his own community, implies the rejection of the Gospel's historicity in the sense that the evangelist is assumed to have invented stories in order for him to express a particular situation his community was in. Were the social setting of his community's the writer's first priority, this setting would be more unambiguously stated and consequently there would not be such a diversity of opinions on the relevant issue.

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<sup>284</sup> Painter, 1980-81, p.525 There are, however, Painter (ibid., pp.525-526) goes on, some points which need to be raised: *firstly*, 'there seems to be no good reason for delaying the development of the "higher" christology. This might well have been a contribution of the evangelist in the context of the dialogue with the synagogue. *Secondly*, there is reason to think that the farewell discourses do not all belong to the same late stage in the pre-Gospel history. *Thirdly*, the break from the synagogue almost certainly opened the Johannine community to Gentiles. It is not improbable that the Gentile believers understood the tradition in a different light and that this contributed to the division of the community reflected in the Johannine Epistles. *Fourthly*, the redactor, whose hand is clearly responsible for 21.24, probably added the whole of chapter 21 including the references to the "Beloved Disciple", 21.7, 23-24.... Recognition that this material is redactional is significant for the historical reconstruction. It is not suggested that the redactional stratum is contrary to the purpose of the Gospel as it probably was the work of the *Johannine school*. But it is the latest stratum'.

<sup>285</sup> So Brown, 1979, p.17 Brown notes that 'Wellhausen and Bultmann were pioneers in insisting that the Gospels tell us primarily about the church situation in which they were written, and only secondarily about the situation of Jesus which *prima facie* they describe'. Painter, 1980-81, p.526, is in agreement with Brown, stating that 'while the Gospels were written to proclaim Jesus, indirectly they give us insight into the life of the communities for which they were written'. Painter also notes that 'this indirect insight can be referred to as a *reflection*, a mirror image. From the reflections an attempt can be made to reconstruct the history of the communities that shaped the tradition'.

Nevertheless, such a conclusion does not deny entirely the presence of elements of social history in the Johannine literature and specifically in GJohn. Undoubtedly, Jesus lived in a particular historical setting; the Gospel certainly was not written 'in the abstract'. Thus, what we can infer from the Gospel is the fact that the Samaritans have joined Christianity (from John 4); obviously Christians were excluded from the synagogue in a particular time which means they used to be a part of it (John 9:22; 12:42; 16:2); also in every probability from John 12:20 we can infer that Gentiles were also accepted in the Christianity. This is what I understand as 'reading between the lines'. Undermining the historicity of the Gospel to expand those inferences and to extract more, one is building on conjectures and 'ifs'. The text itself is our guide to such a task and we can go as far as it allows us to go. That is why our possibilities are really limited.

Undoubtedly, Jesus' earthly life and the writing of the Gospel do not coincide chronologically. Writing the Gospel at the end of the first century, John had the opportunity to judge things and interpret them clearly as they had become more explicit due to the passage of time. The hostility of Jewish authorities towards Jesus has resulted in the expulsion of His disciples from the synagogue (cf. Jn 15:20). The expulsion from the synagogue may not have been applied to the same extent when Jesus was still alive, as it was after His departure. Also, the fact that Greeks were looking for Jesus was certainly an omen of their being accepted in the ranks of the church, a fact that happened later on. The evangelist was in a position to know the development of such events, which were in process during Jesus' earthly life.

Moreover, when the Gospel was written, Judaism was an ex-parent of Christianity.<sup>286</sup> Barriers had already been erected. John does not hesitate to write about the hostility of Jews (cf. Mat ch.23; Mk 7:6), even about its last resort, namely the expulsion of the Christians from the synagogue (*ἄποσυνάγωγος* see Jn 9:22; 12:42; 16:2). That hostility towards the Jews is not an alien theme to the rest of the evangelists, however (Mat 23:34; 10:23; Lk 6:22). The gap between Christians and Jews could be felt in the rest of the Gospels as well. Especially for Matthew, as Stanton notes, 'nearly every pericope of the gospel reflects rivalry between "church" and "synagogue"'.<sup>287</sup>

Thus, I assume that the threat of excommunication was not exclusively directed to the members of the Johannine community for, the Jews were opposed to those who had recognised the Messiahship of Jesus; in other words, the Christian communities. The

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<sup>286</sup> Meeks, 1975, p.182, notes that 'it seems clear that at the time of composition of the Gospel the Johannine community is separate from "the Jews" and no longer expects "Jews" to convert'. Westcott, 1886, p.xxxiv as well concerning 1John believes that 'the Jewish controversy is closed'.

Johannine community however, may have more painful experiences of the excommunication from the synagogue.

Furthermore, concerning the Epistles, as Meeks notes they 'show no sign of any further direct involvement with Judaism'.<sup>288</sup> Johannine Christians however, in a way seem to reexperience that painful phase of their history namely, the split with the synagogue, by confronting an inner division this time (1Jn 2:19). The dualistic mentality, which was cultivated after the divorce with Judaism in order for the members of the Johannine community to stress their separation from it, obtains new, more specific dimensions after the inner split of the community itself. I would argue that the Epistles actually redefine that sense of sectarianism which is left from the Gospel.

To be more specific, the dualistic mentality traced in GJohn seems to re-emerge, in order for the remaining members of the community to assert their preserving the truth proclaimed by the Gospel. In doing so the author of 1John particularly needs to take some steps further. He emphasizes that Christ actually is the one who defines 'light' and 'darkness' by His presence and absence respectively, and the one who claims that he belongs to His dominion has to exemplify it in terms of living. Thus, as I see it, redefinition of the community's boundaries is necessitated. The issue is not any more Christian against Jews, synagogue against Christian community. This issue is over though it left scars. In the Epistles, it seems as if Christ is the boundary who separates those who 'walk in the light' and those who 'walk in the darkness'. Thus, being in the light, Johannine Christians have κοινωνία with those who also walk in the light, whoever they might be, Jews or Greeks. This *walking* however, has to be interpreted in practical terms.

The practical dimensions of such περιπατεῖν in the light is what the opponents of John failed to grasp. As we are going to see in the next chapter, the Gospel could be read in a way that supports perfectionism. In their effort to assert their possession of the truth and the beholding of the glory over against the parent body, Judaism, the Johannine Christians got to some form of perfectionism. Consequently, the greater the contrast between the Johannine community and Judaism, the closer the community holds to perfectionist ideas. Johannine Christians viewed their relationship to God in the light of their relationship to Jesus. Such a view however, bears on the problem of sinlessness. The greater the claims that they behold the glory and that He dwells among them, the greater the paradox of the continuous existence of sin in the believers' life.

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<sup>287</sup> Stanton, 1992, p.124

<sup>288</sup> Meeks, 1975, p.182

Further, in the Epistles, in the light of an inner division, an insistence on dogmatic and ethical matters is observed, as a means of reasserting that they do possess the truth despite the inner split. This time however, this possession of truth has to be translated into praxis. The paradox is that the community's perfectionism functioned as a boomerang; its distinctive way of comprehending Jesus and the believer's relationship to Him-the believer like his master is sinless-, giving birth to misunderstandings-denial of sinfulness-, necessitates the clarification of certain distinctive Johannine concepts and dualism.

Summing up, I would argue that the Johannine community did not eventually become a sect in its strict sense; rather, it was a sect in a rhetorical sense. After the split with the synagogue, the community separated from the main stream of Judaism. It is noteworthy however, that there is no indication of any kind of conflict between the Johannine community and the Great Church. It took them some time however, to be incorporated with the Great Church and actually they did so after another painful experience, an inner schism. This takes us to the next chapter where we are going to give some thought to who the authors of such a schism might have been.

## **CHAPTER THREE: The opponents in the Johannine Epistles**

### **Introduction**

Though all commentators agree that John is writing to refute certain elements of heretical teaching, they differ from each other in their estimation concerning the extent to which they think the author is doing so.<sup>289</sup>

In my opinion, though the opponents are there and the polemical context is occasionally clear, the author's primary objective is to exhort his *τεκνία* to walk in the light. In his words, he is writing these things so that their 'joy may be complete' (1Jn 1:4) and they may 'know that they have eternal life' (5:13). In doing so however, he refutes elements of heretical teaching that have a bearing on the way his children are to live out the 'word of life' and to achieve the 'joy' and the 'eternal life' in Christ.

Unfortunately, the identification of the heresy, due to the fact that its refutation was not the author's primary aim in writing the Epistle, is a matter of mirror-reading. As Lieu accurately observes, 'the author's failure to spell out his opponents' views and to refute them must be taken seriously'.<sup>290</sup> Accordingly, we also resort to conjectures regarding the identity of those in combat, as will be demonstrated in this chapter. Were 1John exclusively written to refute heresy, there would be an indication of the heretics' exact identity. In my estimation, heresy is not fully addressed and refuted due to the fact that it was not the writer's main concern and also because it has not been fully developed yet.

So, in this chapter, we will attempt to reveal the character of the heresy combatted by the epistolary author as far as our text allows us to go. Firstly, we are going to explore if in the Johannine Epistles one or many groups are combatted. Secondly, we will attempt to disclose the identity of the heretical group(s) following their beliefs reconstructed entirely from the text; a task that, as I am going to explain, has to be done cautiously. Also, we are going to underline elements of teaching, which the opponents of John<sup>291</sup> and other heretical movements of the time have in common. Finally, we are to discuss the relationship they may have had with the Gospel of John. We are actually going to

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<sup>289</sup> That 1John is not primarily a polemical piece of work say: Westcott, 1886, p.xxxix; Brooke, 1912, p.xxvii; Nunn, 1945, pp.300-301; Dodd, 1946, pp.xxvii-xlii; Robinson, 1960-61, p.130; Filson, 1969, p.276; Lieu, 1991, pp.15-16; Rensberger, 1997, p.25. However, for Law, 1909, p.25 'there is no New Testament writing which is more vigorously polemical in its whole tone and aim'. Additionally, for Brown, 1979, p.94 the polemical aspect is the centre around which the logic of the entire letter revolves.

<sup>290</sup> Lieu, 1991, p.16

<sup>291</sup> Saying 'the opponents of John' in this chapter, I am referring to the opponents combatted by the Johannine Epistles.

focus on the proposal of modern scholars that, representing a distortion of GJohn, the opponents' views derive from the very Johannine tradition.

Moreover, as we have seen in the previous chapter, Johannine Christians held a rather idealised view of their community; a view which is likely to cultivate a sense of perfectionism. In their attempt to stress their being the ones who possess the truth, personified by Christ (Jn 14:6), over against those who reject Him and His salvific mission, they seemingly asserted that they are sinless as Jesus is sinless. As we are going to see, the Gospel, the community's book, could be read in a way that supports such perfectionist ideas.

Before going into detail, I think that the fact that, in order for us to talk about John's opponents, we have to base ourselves on reconstructed material, has to be borne in mind. Thus, I esteem that our findings are far from being certain or exhaustive. For 'it is hardly possible to provide an exhaustive account of the heresy that is being opposed' given the fact that 'the meager hints and the formulas used in the letter are all we have to go on'.<sup>292</sup> Or as Brooke earlier stated 'we have to remember how few of the necessary bricks are supplied to us, and how large a proportion of the building material we have to fashion for ourselves'.<sup>293</sup>

Thus, at this point we have to be careful of 'mirror-reading' as, it is both 'essential and extremely problematic'.<sup>294</sup> Nevertheless, it is out of the question that such a task is of great importance to our approach to the letter.<sup>295</sup> Evidently, our better understanding of the 'schism' that took place leads to our better understanding of the Epistle itself.<sup>296</sup> As Schnackenburg correctly notes 'if we are to understand 1John we must try to form a picture of its contemporary background. In particular we must discover the motives of the opponents with which the epistle is in combat'.<sup>297</sup> The heresy may not control entirely the thought of the Epistle but it made our author, partly at least, to take up his pen. So, I would say that we are somehow indebted to those heretics for our having the Johannine Epistles in the form we have them today.

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<sup>292</sup> Schnackenburg, 1992, p.17

<sup>293</sup> Brooke, 1912, p.xl

<sup>294</sup> Barclay, 1987, p.74 Barclay in this article, using Galatians as 'a test case', examines the problems and pitfalls mirror-reading a polemical letter might involve. Moreover, he proceeds referring to 'seven most appropriate criteria' for such an exercise. Klauck, 1991, p.35 implies as well the danger of 'mirror reading' (spiegelbildlichen Lesens) if we assume the issue of the opponents of John as the interpretative key to the exegesis of the Epistle.

<sup>295</sup> Painter, 1986, p.48, he adds also, 'the great commentaries by Theodor Häring, R.Law, and Rudolf Schnackenburg make the conflict with the "schismatics" the key to their interpretations'.

<sup>296</sup> Ibid., p.50

<sup>297</sup> Schnackenburg, 1992, p.17

## ***Theological profile of the opponents of John-One or many groups?***

Undoubtedly, the idea that the opponents belong to more than one group remains a minority opinion among scholars. However, the view that there was more than one group in combat is also held.

Before exploring this question, I suppose that we should refer to the theological profile of the opponents as far as our text-‘mirror’ allows us to do so. Seemingly, we can partly reconstruct them, by looking at the affirmations the author makes assuming that he refutes their heretical claims. However, I do not think that every single statement he makes is intended as a polemical statement. It is not unlikely, it occurs to me, for the author refuting a false assertion, to refer to other orthodox positions to enforce his point. I suppose that given the insufficiency of the information given by the text, we are not in a position to be certain with regard to our conclusions. Evidently, ‘mirror-reading’ is inevitable to an extent; nevertheless, it has to be done cautiously, for as Lieu observes the danger of a circularity of argument is obvious.<sup>298</sup> The opponents are there; their identity however is not explicitly outlined; consequently, conjectures are unavoidable.

Thus, from what we gather from the text<sup>299</sup>, refuting his opponents, the author stresses that: Jesus is the Christ (5:1), the Son (2:23; 3:23; 5:11-12) or the Son of God (1:3,7; 3:8,23; 4:9,10,15; 5:5,9,10,11,12,13,20), who has come or is coming in the flesh (4:2; 2John 7). It is particularly stressed that Jesus Christ is the one who came by water and blood (5:6); an affirmation, which sounds to me rather polemical. Consequently, everyone who denies the Son or the Christ (Χριστός 2:22-23) and who does not confess Jesus’ coming in the flesh (2John 7) is negatively criticized.

Regarding ethical matters, as we are going to see in the exegesis section, the author warns against walking in darkness (1:6), not keeping the commandments (2:4), not imitating Christ (2:6; 3:3-6; 3:7-8) and committing sin or not acknowledging sin (1:8-10). Further, the author’s insistence on love of brethren (3:9-10; 2:9) is, I imagine, better understood if we assume that the adversaries were former Johannine Christians not loving the brethren who left the community (2:18-19; 2John 7; 4:1-3). It is noteworthy that for John dogma is interwoven with ethos. The issue of loving the brethren or not is related to the belief or disbelief in Jesus’ coming in the flesh. It seems that the underestimation of Jesus’ earthly life results in an underestimation of the way one leads his life. I would agree with Brown who explains that, ‘a theory that one’s moral behavior has no great salvific importance could flow from a christology in which the earthly

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<sup>298</sup> See Lieu, 1991, pp.15-16

career of Jesus, the way he lived and died, had no great importance'.<sup>300</sup> The fact that the author does not mention any 'specific vices'<sup>301</sup> of his opponents, suggests, as Brown sees it, that they were 'moral indifferentists rather than libertines'. Ultimately, 'theory is likely to be translated into practice, and that danger may be why the author rails so strongly against the theory'.<sup>302</sup> The insistence throughout the Epistle that the imitation of God has to be understood in practical terms may also point to the same direction (2:6; 3:7), supposing that imitation of God was understood in abstract and theoretical terms and by extension, had no moral or practical consequences, e.g. to claim to be in the light as He is in the light, without keeping His commandments.

In a few words, the decisive factor in order for us to answer the question of the existence of one or more groups combatted in the Epistles is whether we assume the unity of christological and ethical error.

Specifically, to start with Brooke, he asserts that we are obliged to consider whether the author of 1John refers to one adversary group... 'whether he is combating different enemies in different passages'.<sup>303</sup> In Brooke's opinion on the one hand 'the expressions which he (the author) uses certainly suggest variety' (2:18 where the author refers to the many antichrists<sup>304</sup> who have come while in 2:23 he refers to those who lead astray).

Moreover, Brooke proceeds, the same variety of error may be traced in the fourth chapter. In this chapter the readers are warned against the 'false prophets' and are advised to test 'spirits', especially those who deny that Jesus is 'not of God'. This denial is the 'mark of the Antichrist', who works in the world through his 'many subordinates'.<sup>305</sup> Nevertheless, for Brooke it is only in the fifth chapter that the writer

<sup>299</sup> I refer to 1John unless otherwise indicated.

<sup>300</sup> Brown, 1982, p.55

<sup>301</sup> As Brown, 1982, pp.54-55 notes, despite the author's disagreement with the opponents' ethical behaviour, he 'never mentions any specific vices of his adversaries-and this at a time when catalogues of vices are well attested in Christian writings' (See Gal 5:19-21; I Cor 6:9-11; II Cor 12:20; Rom 13:13; I Pet 4:3).

<sup>302</sup> Ibid. Additionally, Klauck, 1991, p.94 notes that the opponents of 1John 1:8 are not to be sought among the libertines.

<sup>303</sup> Brooke, 1912, p.xxxix, he observes however, that 'the unity of the false teaching is assumed by Wurm and by Clemen, and is accepted by perhaps the majority of writers on the subject'. Moreover, Brown, 1982, pp.49-50, mentions the names of 'a number of older commentators (Bisping, Braune, Lücke, Luthardt, Mayer, Rothe) who have assumed that there is no relationship between the christological and ethical errors combatted in the Epistle. Moreover, Brown notes that scholars like Michl, Weiss, Painter, Richter, Smalley distinguish two groups, and concludes that 'today, the positing of more than one adversary group remains a minority opinion among scholars'.

<sup>304</sup> However, for Schnackenburg, 1992, p.17 even though there may be many groups of antichrists (2:18) or false prophets, their denial of the church's christological confession unites them (2:22; 4:2-3).

<sup>305</sup> Brooke, 1912, p.xl However, for Schnackenburg, 1992, pp.17-18, concerning the different names used as 'antichrists' and 'false prophets' they are only 'different terms arising from particular perspectives, depending on whether it is eschatological (last hour, antichrist) or pneumatic (distinguishing of spirits)'. As for the repetition and separate treatment of these terms are due to 'the author's loose literary style'. In fact, the same scholar points out, there are instances when as well the author refers to the christological differences (4:15; 5:15-16)

seems to refer entirely to one particular form of false teaching, namely ‘the denial that Jesus who is the Son of God came by blood as well as by water’. Rephrasing this, Brooke writes that, they deny that ‘both His sufferings and His death were essential parts of His Messianic work of salvation’.<sup>306</sup> Thus, he concludes, the message of the author throughout is: ‘truth is one, error is manifold’; consequently, error that appears to be manifold threatens ‘in more forms than one’.<sup>307</sup>

However, referring to ‘one well-defined group’, Brown wonders whether it is possible that the author was facing several groups of opponents in 1 and 2 John, ‘granted the seemingly organised opposition’.<sup>308</sup> Referring to other scholars’ opinions Brown states that ‘the text itself gives the impression that the christological and the moral (ethical) errors were closely related’. For instance, 1John 3:23 ‘brings the two areas under the rubric of the one commandment...love one another just as he gave us the command’. Also, in 2John 5-6, ‘the author insists on the need to love one another and, immediately afterward (7-8), attacks those who do not confess Jesus Christ coming in the flesh and warns against receiving those who come bringing an overly progressive teaching about Christ (9-10)’. Obviously, christological and ethical error spring from the same source. Besides, ‘the same language of lying and deceit is used of the christological error (2:22-23; 2John 7), as well as of the moral error (1:8; 2:4; 4:20). The propagators of the former belong to a Spirit of Deceit or to a Spirit that is not of God (4:6; 4:1-3), while the propagators of the latter are children of the devil rather than of God (3:7-8; 3:11-12)’.<sup>309</sup>

Consequently, though ‘none of this is firm proof’ Brown concludes, ‘one can state that I and II John give little reason to think of a variety of adversaries and can quite logically be explained if one well-defined group was being attacked’.<sup>310</sup>

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<sup>306</sup> Brooke, 1912, p.xl Scholars commonly propose this interpretation of the particular phrase.

<sup>307</sup> Ibid. Likewise, Goguel, 1953, pp. 407-409 as well argues for the existence of more than one group of adversaries. Specifically he states that actually there were three groups of opponents implied in 1John namely, ‘Ebionites’ (2:18-27) [*pace* Westcott, 1886, p.xxxiv, who states that ‘the Epistle gives no evidence that St. John had to contend with Ebionistic error’.] ‘Docetes’ (ch.4), and a third group ‘made up of antinomians’ (3:7f.). None of these groups envisaged, Goguel observes, seem to refer to the kind of gnostics who are attacked in the Epistles to the Colossians and the Ephesians or in the pastoral Epistles. Moreover, while two of them ‘professed a christological heresy, the third was antinomian’. See also Ibid., pp. 366-369. Moreover, Goguel, 1964, p.75-76 notes as well that ‘the Ebionites, had on their own initiative separated themselves from the Church’, while ‘nothing similar is said of the two other heretical groups mentioned in the Epistle, the antinomians (iii, 4) and the docetes (iv, 1f.). They remained in the Church’.

<sup>308</sup> Brown, 1982, p.49

<sup>309</sup> Ibid., p.50 As Barrett, 1995, p.102, observes, ‘in the first reference to antichrists the word cosmos is not used (1John 2:19). There is no doubt, however, that we are dealing here with the same group that is referred to in 4:1, 5-6: “Many false prophets have gone out into the world...They are from the world; therefore what they say is from the world, and the world listens to them. We are from God. Whoever knows God listens to us, and whoever is not from God does not listen to us”’.

<sup>310</sup> Brown, 1982, p.50 See Painter, 1986, p.50 who is also in favour of one group stating that ‘the treatment of the schism (1Jn 2.19) predisposes the answer in terms of a specific group’. Likewise, Klauck, 1991, p.35; Schnackenburg, 1992, p.17, and Rensberger, 1997, p.22

Obviously, as I have already stressed above, what determines scholars' opinions on the present issue is their position concerning the relationship between christological and ethical errors. Given the fact that our assumptions are to be built on reconstructed material furnished only by the Epistles, I suppose that we have to be cautious about our conclusions. In fact, 'none of this is firm proof'. There seems to be an element of truth in both sides. Generally, I espouse Brown's statement according to which, 'one can state that I and II John give little reason to think of a variety of adversaries and can quite logically be explained if one well-defined group was being attacked'. However, I am just wondering, under these circumstances, to what extent does the evidence given allow us to refer to 'one well-defined group'.

It seems to me, that throughout 1John, the author sets out to refute dogmatic errors and ethical ones in a way which suggests that they are closely interrelated. As we are going to see in detail in the exegesis section, dogma and ethos are the two sides of the same coin. But how do christological and ethical errors cohere? It seems to me that first of all the author draws a theological connection between christology and love for the brethren rooted in the incarnation (4:8-11). The reality of the incarnation of the Son of God manifests God's love for the believers. Imitating God, believers love each other for God has loved them first (4:10). For the author, the issue of loving one another is related to christology (3:23; 4:7-5:5). This ethical issue of love, moreover, is also connected with the Son's atoning sacrifice that has sprung from His coming (4:10 also 1:7; 2:2). Apparently, Jesus' coming in the flesh determines His relationship to humans.

Moreover, the different designations of the opponents the author uses (such as 'liars' 2:22, 'antichrists' 2:18, 22, 'deceivers' 2John 7), depend on the kind of error he occasionally refutes. Our insufficient evidence and our weakness to identify the opponents imply either that the refutation of the opponents' views was not the primary purpose of the author, or that this group of the opponents at this stage of its history sought its own identity, given the fluidity which characterizes orthodox and heretical teaching at this stage of the history of the church. It is likely that the adherents of this one group found shelter in more than one of the heretical systems of the time. So, though it seems to me that it is plausible to refer to one group, we have not sufficient ground for assuming that 'a well-defined' group is involved, in the sense that we are in a position to describe it with certainty, for its source as well as its aftermath is a matter of speculation.

### ***Affinities with other Known heresies of the time***

As has been noted, the identity of the opponents is to be determined by their beliefs, which obviously are to be reconstructed from what the author says to refute them.

Evidently, the issue in its entirety seems to be rather complicated and apparently, conjectures are inevitable.<sup>311</sup> According to scholars' opinions, more than one religious system can be traced behind the author's refutations. Thus, gnostic elements, particularly Cerinthian, docetic overtones, Hellenistic influences, even anti-Jewish statements, all these are encountered in passages behind which false teaching is thought to be traced.

Brown uses a variety of names referring to the heretics such as 'secessionists', 'adversaries', 'opponents', 'deceivers', and 'propagandists'. Painter adds, 'they could be also called "schismatics" or "heretics"'<sup>312</sup>. It is notable that none of these terms are employed by the author of the Johannine Epistles. This is rather unfortunate, because had they been used they would reveal the author's actual opinion of his opponents.

Moreover, we are going to attempt to reveal their identity based on the even inadequate evidence traced in the relevant text. First of all, the presence of those who we call 'opponents' is manifested by 1John 2:18-19 which reads 'now many antichrists have come from us but they did not belong to us; for if they had belonged to us, they would have remained with us'. In 2John 7 as well there is a reference to 'many deceivers' who 'have gone out into the world'. As I have noted in the introduction of this study, the opponents whether we can identify them, are there. They may not entirely control the thought of 1John, but it seems to me that refutation and exhortation are perfectly combined by the author in order for him to teach the Truth. The refutation of the heresy is an implied exhortation to follow the orthodox way and an exhortation to the right kerygma is the best refutation of false teaching.

Moreover, following the evidence given by 1John scholars have been concerned to trace the possible origin of the views held by the opponents combatted by the Letter. In broad lines, in the first decades of the last century, scholars tended to look outside the ranks of the church (Gnosticism, Cerinthianism, Docetism) in order for them to

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<sup>311</sup> See Painter, 1986, p.50 and Brown, 1982, p.72 The latter also points out that 'we are dealing with secessionist views reconstructed from a polemic against them (the opponents); and such a reconstructive process imposes severe limitations on the surety and quality of our conclusions'. Moreover, Painter, 1986, pp.49-50 examines also the possibility of the opponents' being 'merely a literary creation'. '1John, is a stylised book', he observes, 'in which the author addresses his reader variously as αγαπητοί, τέκνία, παιδιά, πατέρες, νεανίσκοι, suggesting that the opponents could be a literary sounding board against which the author could express his own views'. Nonetheless, against such a possibility is the evidence 'that those who broke away from the community were identified as "liars", "Antichrists" and "false prophets", 1John 2.18-19 cf. 4.1-6'. Besides, 'the finding of a coherent position would also count against the notion that the opponents were simply a literary fiction to provide a sounding board for our author's views'.

<sup>312</sup> Painter, 1986, p.48 He (ibid.) also notes that, having broken away from the author's own group, the opponents were 'schismatics or secessionists'. Their schism sprang from false practices, but more important, false confession, as the former gave rise to the latter. In that respect, the adversaries could be called 'heretics' as well. However, Brown, 1982, p.70 n.156, notes that 'the terminology secession/secessionists is preferable in every way to heresy/heretics...during this period the schismatic, rather than the heretical, aspect of error was primary in the mind of those who wrote about inner-Christian disputes'.

determine the identity of those been attacked by the author of the Epistle.<sup>313</sup> However, later on, they assumed the situation envisaged in the Johannine Epistles as an inner-Church dispute. At this point the Fourth Gospel seems to play a significant role, as it is alleged that the opponents of John were former members of the Johannine Community who misunderstood and misinterpreted the tradition conveyed by the Gospel of John.

Specifically, scholars<sup>314</sup> have pointed out similarities between the Johannine Epistles and gnostic teaching. Before getting into detail, I think that the following observations have to be borne in mind. First and foremost, gnosticism whose definition is still unspecified,<sup>315</sup> appeared fully developed in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century A.D.. Thus, we actually cannot presuppose that there was a sort of gnosticism in the background of 1John. We are not justified in reading later developments found in the gnostic writings we have at our disposal into 1John and then in interpreting the Epistle on the basis of this reconstruction.<sup>316</sup> What we can safely do, in my judgement, is using the gnostic sources available to us today, namely the Nag Hammadi documents<sup>317</sup> on the one hand and the patristic treatises<sup>318</sup> that were directed against the heretics on the other, to trace any possible similarities between gnostic teaching and John's theology and evaluate them.

So, let us first examine on what grounds scholars have assumed a possible influence of gnostic ideas on John's thinking.<sup>319</sup> To begin with, the dualism between light and darkness, truth and falsehood, which is characteristic of John's theology (see 1John 4:6; 2:9), is also met in *The Paraphrase of Shem* (VII 1-49; NHL 308-28) that as a whole

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<sup>313</sup> Evidently Lieu, 1991, p.14 is right stating that 'the imprecision of the letter has inevitably led to an imprecise and varied depiction of the schismatics'.

<sup>314</sup> According to Law, 1909, p.26 the Epistle was intended to arm the Church against the influence of gnosticism, and specifically, 'a form of Gnosticism that was Docetic in doctrine and Antinomian in practice'. Law goes on giving 'a very brief sketch of the essential features of Gnosticism', (see Ibid., pp.26-28) noting that it will 'suffice to show not only that these are clearly reflected in the more explicitly controversial utterances of the Epistle, but that the influence of an anti-Gnostic polemic is traceable in almost every sentence'. See also Brooke, 1912, p.xliii-xliv Moreover, Robinson, 1960-61, p.61 talks of 'incipient Gnosticism-incipient, if only because there is no trace of the idea of the Gnostic redeemer'. See also Wilson, 1968, pp.40-42, 44,46,59; Filson, 1969, p.268 and Scholer, 1975, p.242 both talk of an early form of gnosticism combatted by the Epistle. Likewise Bauer, 1971, p.78 states that 'John's letters find him in opposition to a false teaching of an unmistakably gnostic brand-a heresy which pursues its path within the churches themselves, and not alongside them'.

<sup>315</sup> As J. Munck, CINTI, p.224 observes gnosticism is 'a scientific term that has no generally accepted scientific definition'. (Quoted by Brown, 1966-70, p.LIII)

<sup>316</sup> Scholars however, have also talked of a pre-Christian gnosticism or even Jewish gnosticism. See Brown, 1966-70, p.LIII

<sup>317</sup> The discovery of the thirteen Coptic gnostic books called the Nag Hammadi codices in 1945 in upper Egypt, was a decisive event with regard to our knowledge of gnosticism. They are dated from no earlier than the middle of the 4<sup>th</sup> century A.D. (see ABD II 1034). 'In terms of their contents', Klauck, 2000, p.445 notes, 'the Nag Hammadi writings are religious treatises which to a considerable extent (though not exclusively) proclaim gnostic ideas'.

<sup>318</sup> As Klauck, 2000, p.438 observes, 'the problem involved in working with the Church fathers is obvious: their intention is not to deliver a neutral observation of facts, but to fight polemically against heretics. and this is why they blacken their opponents completely, not even shying away from personal insinuations'.

<sup>319</sup> At this point I have to note that I have used Brown's guidance on this issue. However, I occasionally have added elements that I think are relevant to our subject matter.

refers to the opposition between 'Light' which was a 'mind full of attentiveness and reason' and 'Darkness' which was 'wind in [...] waters' which also 'possessed the mind wrapped in a chaotic fire' (VII 1: 33-35). As for the opposition between truth and error, it is traced in the *Gospel of Truth* (I 26:19-35; NHL 42), where it is said that 'everyone loves the truth because the truth is the mouth of the Father', while 'error is empty, having nothing inside'. Moreover, in *Corp.Herm.* (Libellus XIII, 9) we read 'flee away Deceit; for Truth has come'. In the *Acts of Thomas* 34 (2.462) also we are informed about 'him whose works are light and his deeds truth' and enable others to do good. In *Corpus Hermeticum*<sup>320</sup> (Libellus I 21) it is said that 'the Father of all consists of Light and Life, and from him Man has sprung'. 'If then, being made of Life and Light, you learn to know that you are made of them, you will go back into Life and Light'.

Moreover, in 1John 2:27 the Christian is taught by the unction (χρῖσμα) about everything. The *Hypostasis of the Archons* (II 96:35-97:10; NHL 159) talks of the 'True Man, within a modelled form', who is to reveal the existence of '[the Spirit of] Truth, which the Father has sent. Then he will teach them about everything: And he will anoint them with the unction of Life eternal'... and they will ascend into the limitless Light, where this Sown Element belongs'. According to *Pistis Sophia* (ch. 86 or II, 195) 'those of the Midst', the 'perfect souls will baptize them and give unto them the spiritual unction and seal them with the seals of their mysteries'. Also, 'the Virgin of Light seals that soul and the receivers of the Light baptize that soul and give it the spiritual chrism' (ch. 112 or III, 292). Further, in 1John 3:9 it is said that the seed of God remains in the one begotten by God. Likewise, the Valentinians believed that a spiritual seed was infused in humans, 'and that through an ineffable Providence'; a fact, which the Demiurge (the God of the Old Testament, the creator of the material world) who created the animal nature, ignored (Irenaeus, *Adv. Haer.* 1.5.6). Also, in the *Gospel of Truth* (I 43:9-16; NHL 49) there is a reference to those 'who appear in truth since they exist in true and eternal life and speak of the light which is perfect and filled with the seed of the Father'. Moreover, from what we gather from Irenaeus (Irenaeus, *Adv. Haer.* 1.6.4), calling themselves the 'Spiritual' and the 'Perfect', the Valentinian gnostics, taught that 'it is not any conduct which brings men into the Pleroma, but that seed which is sent out from thence in an infant state, and is here brought to perfection'.

Furthermore, the idea of the believers being begotten by God (1Jn 2:29; 3:9; 4:7; 5:1,4,18) is apparently encountered in the teaching of the Valentinians. From what we

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<sup>320</sup> A group of writings from the second or more probably the third century A.D. As Klauck, 2000, p.440 notes, these writings 'represent a particular type of pagan revelation literature with a basis in vulgar Platonism, which promises to communicate a knowledge surrounded by mysteries'.

gather from Tertullian such an idea was not alien to gnostic teaching. Commenting on John 1:13, Tertullian notes that ‘the Valentinians say that the text reads, “were born” as though it referred to the above-mentioned believers in his name (1:12)’. From it, Valentinians try to prove that there exists ‘that mystic seed of the elect and spiritual which they baptize for themselves’. Thus, for Tertullian, ‘the singular is correct, as referring to the Lord *was born...of God*. Rightly so, because the Word is God’s and with the Word is God’s Spirit and in the Spirit is God’s power, and God is everything that Christ is’ (see *De carne Christi* 19:1; CC 2:907). Also, in the *Discourse on the Eighth and Ninth* (IV 62:33-63:3; NHL 297) there seems to be a reference to divine begetting when it mentions one ‘who will not be begotten at the start by God’.

Additionally, concerning sinlessness, in the *Gospel of Mary* (BG 8502 7:13; NHL 471) ‘the Savior said there is no sin’, for sin is peculiar to a different form of nature in which once one participated. Moreover, Irenaeus, (Irenaeus, *Adv. Haer.* 1.6.4) referring to gnostics, writes that the latter loathed those who keep themselves ‘through the fear of God, from sinning so much as in thought or word for being unlearned and knowing nothing’, while ‘themselves they magnify above measure under the names of Perfect, and Seeds of Election’. In the *Second Treatise of the Great Seth* (VII 60:8-12, 19-32; NHL 334), being ‘the sons of light’ and the ‘perfect assembly’, gnostics are called ‘innocent, pure (and) good’, since they ‘have a mind of the Father in an ineffable mystery’, in opposition to others who are ‘small and ignorant since they do not contain the nobility of truth’ thinking that Jesus really died. Besides, according to the *Apocalypse of Peter* (VII 83:16-24; NHL 344-45) the things he saw should be presented to ‘those of another race who are not of this age’. For, ‘there will be no honor in any man who is not immortal, but only (in) those who were chosen from an immortal substance’. Moreover, in the *Gospel of truth* (I 43:20-23; NHL 49) gnostics, God’s children, are said to be ‘perfect and worthy of his name, for he is the Father: it is children of this kind that he loves’.

The above elements of gnostic teaching, which seem to be similar to John, being far from exhaustive indicate that there are actually similarities between these writings. However, one has to bear in mind that the instances of gnostic teaching referred to above are later (from half to two centuries) than 1 and 2John. Besides, certain elements supposed to be of the fundamental ones of gnosticism are missing.<sup>321</sup> In my judgement,

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<sup>321</sup> Such as the bad God-Demiurge with his aeons, the myth concerning the fall and salvation of Sofia, the complicated outlook of the world divided into ten heavenly spheres et al. So Klauck, 1991, p.39 observes.

what we can safely<sup>322</sup> conclude from such a comparison, is that John's teaching could be used or understood in a gnostic way. As Brown concludes, 'the most one can argue from gnostic similarities is that many of the positions of the adversaries would have been at home in the gnostic circles which composed the Nag Hammadi documents and which were attacked by the church fathers'. However, it may well be that 'the position of the epistolary adversaries had not yet jelled into a distinctively gnostic system of thought'.<sup>323</sup> Besides, such ideas are also amply attested by contemporary Jewish literature, as has been already demonstrated in a previous chapter.

It has been also asserted that the opponents of John may have been identified with the docetists attacked by Ignatius.<sup>324</sup> Not getting into detail regarding the exact identity of the opponents of Ignatius, we will make some general observations which to me show that it will be rather oversimplified to identify the heresy combatted by John and Ignatius.<sup>325</sup> Firstly, while the docetists attacked by Ignatius seem to have denied the actuality of Jesus' coming in the flesh (*Smyrn.* 4, 5 see also *Smyrn.* 1-3 and *Trall.* 9-10 where Ignatius insists on the actuality of events of the earthly life of Jesus, calling 'atheists' those who doubt it), the adversaries of 1 and 2 John do not seem to espouse such a radical idea. As will be seen, John is rather concerned about the salvific dimensions of Jesus' coming in the flesh and the moral implications of such a coming. Secondly, in Ignatius' letters there is a special emphasis on the significance of ecclesiastical structure (*Trall.* 3; *Eph.* 6), whereas in the Epistles of John such an idea is actually absent (with the exception may be of 3Jn

Added to the above, it has also been stated that the teaching of the opponents of John had affinities with Cerinthianism. It is true that Cerinthus is 'linked in various ways to the Johannine writings'.<sup>326</sup> Eusebius refers to an anecdote (*Hist. Eccl.* 3.28; 4.14 attested by Irenaeus *Adv. Haer.* 3.3.4 as well), according to which once, when John met

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<sup>322</sup> As Brown, 1982, p.64 notes, 'we face a charge of circular reasoning if, when the modality of the adversaries' claims is not specified in I and II John, we determine that modality on the basis of later gnostic views and then triumphantly use this to prove that they were gnostics'.

<sup>323</sup> Ibid.

<sup>324</sup> See Brooke, 1912, pp.xliv-xlv Moreover, Rensberger, 1997, pp.22-23, notes that 'some of the first known Docetists, whom Ignatius of Antioch criticizes for their denial of the flesh of Jesus, were probably not far removed in time or location from the opponents of 1 and 2 John (Ign. *Trall.* 9-10; Ign. *Smyrn.* 1-7)'. So Meeks, 1997, p.195

<sup>325</sup> See Brooke, 1912, p.xlv Being in agreement with Brooke, Rensberger, 1997, p.22, notes that, 'the hints in 1 and 2 John are not enough to identify the opponents as full-fledged Docetists, and it may be best to avoid that label. Still, they may represent an early move toward Docetism'. Moreover, as Bauer, 1971, p.92, notes, 'how this particular form of gnosticism is related to that of Ignatius' opponents is open to question'. See also Brown, 1982, pp.57-59 for docetic opponents of Ignatius of Antioch. Moreover, as Lieu, 1991, p.14 observes, Ignatius' 'letters imply a far more precise articulation than we could draw from 1John'.

<sup>326</sup> See Klauck, 2000, p.450 As Klauck, (Ibid., p.451) adds, 'particular affinities or antagonisms between gnosis and the Johannine writings were certainly noticed even in antiquity'. Also Klauck, 1991, pp.36-37

Cerinthus in the baths of Ephesus, he fled from the house without bathing, crying that the whole building is going to collapse because of Cerinthus' being in it, 'the enemy of the truth'. Cerinthus<sup>327</sup> an early *gnostic*, whose teaching is not adequately attested, is probably the most 'favored identification'<sup>328</sup> for the secessionists combatted by the Johannine Epistles.<sup>329</sup> Is there any evidence in the Johannine Epistles suggesting a kind of familiarity with Cerinthian views? Firstly, I think that we have to bear in mind the fluidity and uncertainty, which characterises our knowledge of the views, attributed to Cerinthus by the ecclesiastical writers.<sup>330</sup> According to the church fathers Cerinthus taught that 'after Jesus' Baptism there descended on him from that Royalty which is above all, Christ in the figure of a Dove, and that he then declared the unknown Father and did mighty works'. In the end however, 'Christ again soared back from Jesus' and Jesus 'suffered and rose again, but Christ remained impassible, as being spiritual' (Irenaeus, *Adv. Haer.* 1.26.1). This idea is thought to be under attack in 1John 5:6 where John points out that 'this is the one who came by water and blood, Jesus Christ, not with the water only, but with the water and the blood', with 'water' meaning baptism and 'blood' meaning death.<sup>331</sup> But if this is correct, would it not imply that the author partially agreed with Cerinthus that Christ did indeed come on Jesus 'with the water'? It seems that, what the author was attacking in 1John 5:6 was a kind of dualism, which asserted a partial union between the divine and the human in Jesus Christ. However, we do not encounter in the Johannine Epistles the articulated heretical system we do in Cerinthianism. For instance, as Schnackenburg observes<sup>332</sup>, there is no reference to the idea of the existence of two deities characteristic of Cerinthus' teaching (Irenaeus, *Adv. Haer.* 1.21), in John. Moreover, Cerinthus and the adversaries seem to agree on the denial of incarnation, they do so however, on different grounds. While the former deny the incarnation because the virginal conception 'seemed to him impossible' (Irenaeus, *Adv. Haer.* 1.26.1), there is no indication that the latter hold such a belief. Thus, I

<sup>327</sup> See ABD I 885; Brown, 1982, pp.767-771

<sup>328</sup> Brown, 1982, p.65 See *ibid.*, pp.65-67 for 'Cerinthians'.

<sup>329</sup> So Westcott, 1886, p.xxxiv-xxxv; Brooke, 1912, p.xlix; Wilson, 1968, p.40; Filson, 1969, p.269 However, Lieu, 1991, pp.14-15 and Schnackenburg, 1992, p.20-21 state that certain elements of Cerinthianism are missing from the Epistles. Rensberger, 1997, pp.23-24 thinks that though the opponents of John 'may at least be related to Cerinthianism', many features of Cerinthus' thought, as it has come down to us, are missing in 1 and 2John'.

<sup>330</sup> See Brown, 1982, p.66 for a list, which contains the principal views that the church fathers attributed to Cerinthus.

<sup>331</sup> As Nunn, 1945, p.297 notes 'there can be little doubt that the stress which is laid on the doctrine that Christ came in the flesh and that He came not by water only, but by water and blood, is intended to refute an incipient form of Docetism and may even be aimed at the beginnings of the heresy of Marcion'. Additionally, Filson, 1969, p.273, referring to 1Jn 1:7, 2:2 and 4:10 observes, 'here First John clashes with gnostic tendencies, especially those which claimed that the divine Son, the Christ, separated from the human Jesus before the crucifixion'. See also Lieu, 1991, pp.14-15

<sup>332</sup> See Schnackenburg, 1992, p.21

suppose that though Cerinthian heresy would be a plausible candidate we would rather be cautious of calling John's opponents Cerinthianists, granted on the one hand our inadequate knowledge of Cerinthian views, and on the other our limited evidence of the beliefs of the opponents the Epistle deals with. Besides certain elements of Cerinthianism are missing from the Epistle as Lieu and Schnackenburg have observed.

Thus, we can not with any degree of certainty, attribute either the articulate doctrine of docetism attacked by Ignatius or the gnostic ideas known to us from the Nag Hammadi literature and the polemic works of the fathers of the church, to the opponents of John. Moreover, though certain ideas in the Epistles may be assumed to be linked to contemporary heretical systems, the main elements of teaching of these systems are missing.

Proceeding with our research, we now turn to the possibility of the opponents' being Jews. There is evidence in support of such a hypothesis. For instance, as Robinson observes, the categories with which the heresy combatted is condemned are all Jewish (idolatry 1John 5:21, false prophecy 4:1 and above all, of antichrist<sup>333</sup> 2:18; 4:3; 2John 7).<sup>334</sup> Moreover, the author's insistence on the confession that Jesus is the Messiah<sup>335</sup> (2:22; 5:1), and on the fact that one has to have the Son in order for him to have the Father<sup>336</sup> (2:22; 2John 9), may also suggest that the opponents of John were Jews who denied the Messiahship of Jesus and His being the Son of God-the Father. Furthermore, Houlden makes an interesting observation on this issue. He correctly I think states that the emphasis on passages like 5:1 and 4:15, 'is not that Jesus is *the Messiah* or *the Son of God*, but that *Jesus* (yes, Jesus) is the Messiah or the Son of God'. The belief that the Messiah has come is what the heretics have in common with those from whom they have

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<sup>333</sup> However, de Jonge, 1970, p.70 examining the use of the terms *χρῖσμα* and antichrist in 1John, notes that 'it is evident that the author's refutation of his opponents and exhortation of his children remain within the circle of Christian faith and practice'. That is why these terms needed no explanation in the communities to which the Epistles were addressed, although they both are one of the *ἄπαξ λεγόμενα* in the New Testament... Besides, 'the term "antichrist" is neither a Jewish term nor a clear equivalent of a Jewish expression'.

<sup>334</sup> Robinson, 1960-61, p.60 Furthermore, in morals, too, Robinson (ibid.) adds, 'the strictures passed presuppose that the readers acknowledge Jewish standards'. Though it is 'often said rather freely', that the opponents were antinomians, in that case the writer should write that *ἀνομία* is sin. Yet, the writer says that 'sin is *ἀνομία*'. This implies, that the author's opponents 'admitted that contravention of the Law was wrong, but refused to see that what they were doing did contravene it'. For Schnackenburg, 1992, p.24, as well, 'the letter contains no suggestion that the heretics were antinomians'; *pace* Goguel, 1964, pp.468-469 who votes for the opponents' being antinomians.

<sup>335</sup> See Brooke, 1912, p.xli-xlii Likewise Robinson, 1960-61, p.60; O'Neill, 1966, p.65; Houlden, 1973, p.34 However, for Westcott, 1886, p.xxxiv, there is no trace of a Jewish-Christian debate in 1John. The controversies traced in Acts and in the Epistles of Paul, are absent from our Epistle. In 1John, there is no trace of any conflict 'between advocates of the Law and of the Gospel, between champions of works and faith'. Moreover, 'the difference of Jew and Gentile and the question of circumcision, have no place in the composition'.

now separated. However, what the heretics cannot accept is 'that the Messiah, whose visitation has had such spectacular results (such as the gifts of eternal life and sinlessness for his followers), is at all points identical with the human Jesus who had suffered death'.<sup>337</sup> Apparently, what they failed to comprehend is that the coming of the Messiah and His departure afterwards, has an impact on the way one has to lead his life; in other words, that the christology determines ethos.

However, the theory of the opponents of John being Jews does face 'enormous difficulties',<sup>338</sup> as another set of evidence seems to argue in the opposite direction. The presence of Jewish elements alone is inevitable for, undeniably, the Johannine community was rooted in the synagogue. Though, unlike GJohn, there are no direct citations in 1John (apart from the reference to Cain 3:12)<sup>339</sup>, the Jewishness of the Letter is obvious especially after the discovery of the DSS which amply support such a conclusion, as it has been already demonstrated in the first chapter of the present study.<sup>340</sup>

Thus, I suppose, the use of Jewish categories is not surprising and it cannot be used as an argument in favour of the opponents of John being Jews. Besides, the text itself testifies that the opponents were former Johannine Christians who had left the community (1John 2:18-19). Moreover, there is no controversy regarding the Jewish law, keeping the commandments and acting accordingly. Nor is there any trace of disagreement on the subject of Jew-Gentile relationships. In such a case, the author would at least, have used directly the Old Testament, in order to refute the secessionists' beliefs. I am saying *directly* as, I do share Lieu's opinion that in 1John Scripture is used in an 'allusive' and 'anthological' way.<sup>341</sup>

Rather, the debate is gathered around the person and work of Jesus. The issue is whether Jesus himself, the one who died on the cross, was the Messiah. The problem is no longer if the Messiah has come; it rather lies in the question whether he has come in the man called Jesus. The way of his coming and not his coming as a fact is in dispute in 1John.

<sup>336</sup> See Robinson, 1960-61, p.60

<sup>337</sup> Houlden, 1973, pp.34-35

<sup>338</sup> Brown, 1982, p.51

<sup>339</sup> For Houlden, 1973, p.98, Brown, 1982, p.28, Painter, 1986, p.53 and Carson, 1988, pp.256-257, it is the Epistle's polemical setting which accounts for its failure to use TO quotations.

<sup>340</sup> Though Dodd, 1946, p.lii stated that 'there is no other New Testament writing in which the Jewish colouring is so little significant as in the Johannine Epistles', he did so before the discovery of DSS which point in the opposite direction. That is why Robinson, 1960-61, p.65, writing after the discovery of the DSS, notes that 'in some respects the Epistles should seem even more Jewish than the Gospel'.

<sup>341</sup> Lieu, 1993, p.461 See Lieu, 1993, pp.458-477 where in order to confirm her thesis on the matter, she explores three key themes and passages of 1John which betray an implied biblical thought (namely 1:9-2:2; 3:7ff.; 2:11), clarifying that 'the letter is not just "Jewish" but reflects a tradition of Biblical interpretation and application' (ibid., p.461). So Westcott, 1886, p.xl; Meeks, 1975, pp.175-176

In conclusion, there is no reason to see the origins of the opponents of John outside Judaism, as the vocabulary, expressions and the thought patterns of contemporary Judaism illustrated in the literature examined in detail in a previous chapter, to a satisfactory extent, fill in the background of Johannine theology.<sup>342</sup> Thus, I esteem that it is unnecessary to give preference to uncertain heretical elements of teaching concerning the origin of the heretics.

Regarding the perfectionist claims or claims of sinlessness which the opponents seem to have made, as we have already seen, sinlessness as an idea is not alien to Jewish literature. What I actually believe is that what 1John asserts about sinlessness is ultimately in accord with the works of Jewish literature we have so far examined. Briefly, sinlessness is to be achieved; still, not yet. The presence of sin even among the believers or the sectarians as we have seen, does not exclude the possibility of their pursuing sinlessness. In Qumran and Jubilees perfection is achievable at least to an extent. In Jubilees as well faithful people like Abraham and Noah are called perfect. Still, they are in need of God's help in order for them to be delivered from the evil powers. The sectarians though they sin, are called 'the perfect of the way'. Also, Israelites despite their sinning are still 'sons of the living God' (Jubilees).

Evidently, perfectionism as a concept is not unknown to the contemporary Jewish literature. Moreover, we even find elements of realized eschatology in this corpus. For instance, in the Odes of Solomon (Jewish-Christian), as I have already pointed out, it seems that the future breaks into the present and the believers enjoy future gifts in the present age (see 15:8; 21:3; 40:6 *et al*); a fact which is reminiscent of GJohn. Likewise, the sinful believer has a foretaste of the fruit of sinlessness that belongs to the age to come. Still, futuristic eschatology (e.g. Odes 33:12; GJohn 5:28f.) in these writings goes hand in hand with realised eschatology. Present and future seem to be interwoven.

Apparently, such an assertion could be rooted in Jewish soil and as we are going to see below could actually stem from the teaching of GJohn.

### ***The relationship of the opponents of the Johannine Epistles to the Gospel of John***

Having made the above observations, we now turn to examine a more plausible candidate in my estimation, for occasioning the secession the Epistles imply, namely the Fourth Gospel.

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<sup>342</sup> As Brown, 1972, p.8 notes referring to GJohn in comparison to the DSS, 'what Jesus says in John would have been quite intelligible in the sectarian background of first-century Palestine'.

Being two different ‘faces’ of the same tradition, the Fourth Gospel and the Johannine Epistles, admittedly have a lot in common as we have already pointed out. Do the opponents belong to the common ground these two documents share? Some scholars have answered this question in the affirmative. In general terms, they assert that the opponents’ views are closely related to the teaching of GJohn and particularly that they represent a misconception of its ideas.

As I have noted above, in the first decades of the last century scholars tended to think that the heresy combatted in the Johannine Epistles was connected to known heresies of the time. However, later on they started regarding the secession illustrated by the Epistles as a dispute in the very ranks of the church. After what has been written above, I think that the latter approach is more likely to be the one closer to the truth.

It is worth remarking that concerning in particular the verses we are interested in (1John 1:6-10; 3:6-10), the response of 1John to the opponent’s assertions of sinlessness is not altogether negative. The claims are rather placed on another plane. Sinlessness is a matter of interest for the believer. It is certainly not to be rejected. Thus, it seems that the heresy combatted by the Epistles was occasioned by a misinterpretation of certain elements of orthodox teaching present in the Johannine tradition.

Let us examine now how could the heretical ideas implied in the Epistle result from the misapprehension of the teaching of GJohn.

Brown is the one who shows in the most elaborate way, how reconstructed secessionist views may have been derived from the tradition of GJohn.<sup>343</sup> In a few words, Brown asserts that the opponents’ views could have resulted from a particular reading of the Gospel of John. More specifically, according to his opinion, ‘in the decade after the main body of GJohn was written (*ca.* 90), the Johannine community became increasingly divided over the implications and applications of Johannine thought’. The schism had taken place before the writing of the Epistle. The resultant groups, both accepted the teaching of Christ as we know it through GJohn, but they interpreted it in a different way. Brown does not seem to allow for external influences, asserting that almost certainly the two groups thought of their own interpretation as the one based on the Johannine tradition itself. One must be cautious, Brown proceeds, of arguing that the Gospel inevitably led to either position of the opponents or of the author; nor is it clear

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<sup>343</sup> See Brown. 1982, pp.73-86 Earlier on, Robinson, 1960-61, p.65 stressing the Jewishness of the Epistles concludes that ‘all these emphases, so characteristic of the Epistles, can best, be understood if they are seen as necessary correctives to deductions drawn from the teaching of the fourth Gospel’, but ‘by a gnosticizing movement within Greek-speaking Diaspora Judaism’. Moreover, for Filson, 1969, p.267 the opponents’ beliefs were ‘radically at variance with the gospel, which the author had held and taught “from the beginning”’. Painter, 1991, p.55 states that the conflict witnessed in the Epistle has been originated in the Fourth Gospel... ‘it is in 1John that we find the most detailed evidence of this conflict’.

that either position is an entire misrepresentation of GJohn. Rather, ‘the Johannine tradition enshrined in GJohn, as it came to both the author and to his adversaries, was relatively “neutral” on some points that had now come into dispute. Either it did not contain direct answers for the divisive questions, or it contained texts that each side could draw upon for support’.<sup>344</sup> Accordingly, for the epistolary author, his opponents were ‘innovators or “progressives” who were distorting the tradition as it had come down from the beginning’.<sup>345</sup>

Moreover, Brown proceeds to show that ‘*every idea of the secessionists (as reconstructed from the polemic of I and II John) can be plausibly explained as derivative from the Johannine tradition as preserved for us in GJohn*’.<sup>346</sup>

Specifically, for Brown both the Christological and ethical faults of the opponents can be related to passages of GJohn. The matter is not whether the views of the secessionists represented a correct understanding of GJohn, or even derived from it, but only whether they constituted a possible reading of GJohn or, at least, not a contradiction of it.<sup>347</sup> To be fair to Brown we have to underline what he points out that given the fact that one cannot verify beyond any shadow of doubt that either group reflected on GJohn, as we know it, ‘it is safer to speak of their knowing the proclamation of Christianity known to us through GJohn’. This is what he means speaking of either side drawing upon GJohn or the Johannine tradition.<sup>348</sup>

As I said, in Brown’s view, christological errors<sup>349</sup> and ethical faults<sup>350</sup> could both be derived from the teaching represented by GJohn. Particularly, the recognition of the incarnational christology based on pre-existence bears within itself the possibility of relativizing the importance of Jesus’ earthly life (1Jn 4:3). The way in which, Brown observes, the author discusses the christology of the secessionists helps to confirm their relationship to GJohn. Particularly, though the author denies some positions they hold, he never attacks the basic incarnational or preexistence christology (1Jn 1:2; 3:8; 4:9, 14; 5:6-20). Thus, ‘not the fact but only the manner of the coming is the subject of debate between the epistolary author and the secessionists’.<sup>351</sup> As for Jesus Christ’s coming in the flesh and in blood, Brown recognises that there are passages in GJohn, which imply lack of interest in Jesus’ death. The Johannine Jesus seems to have power over his death

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<sup>344</sup> Brown, 1982, p.69

<sup>345</sup> Ibid., p.70

<sup>346</sup> Ibid., p.72

<sup>347</sup> Ibid.

<sup>348</sup> Ibid., p.73

<sup>349</sup> See *ibid.*, pp.73-79, which are the negation of the importance of Jesus, and the non-acknowledgment of Christ’ coming in the flesh and in blood.

<sup>350</sup> See *ibid.*, pp.79-86 which are, lack of emphasis on moral behaviour, perfectionist freedom from sin and lack of love of the brethren.

(Jn 10:17-18; 19:11; 19:30). Consequently, 'there are elements in the tradition of GJohn that might have led the secessionists to deemphasize the crucifixion as a salvific "coming" and to regard it simply as a continuation of that revelation of the glory of the preexistent which began through the Baptist's baptizing with water (1:14,31)'.<sup>352</sup>

Secondly, concerning the ethical errors, Brown observes that the author does not contradict their claims altogether saying for example, no one knows God or that no one abides in God or in light, due to the fact that they (the opponents) were themselves 'clearly defensible from the Johannine theology (respectively in John 17:22,23,26; 14:7; 3:21; 8:12)'. So, the author and his opponents disagree not on the claims but on the opponents' failure 'to draw behavioral implications from the claimed relationship to God' e.g. the claim to know God without one's having to keep the commandments or the assertion to be in the light without his loving the brethren.<sup>353</sup> Moreover, the secessionists were not 'libertines' infamous of scandalous behaviour but were 'indifferentists' who attributed no salvific significance to moral behaviour by believers. Is such an attitude supported by the Gospel of John? Brown answers in the affirmative in terms both of affirmations made in GJohn and of its strange silence on ethical matters. For instance, some statements in John 15:19; 17:16 seem to relativize the earthly existence of Jesus. Furthermore, though in the Synoptics discipleship is marked by *doing* the will of God (Mark 3:35; Matt 12:50; Luke 8:21), for John (8:31), "if you *abide* in my word, you are truly my disciples". The appeal to repentance or reform (μετάνοια/μετανοεῖν) is not found in GJohn either. Rather, what has cleansing power is the word spoken by Jesus (15:3).<sup>354</sup>

Additionally, no particular sins of behaviour are referred to in GJohn but only the great sin which is to refuse to believe in Jesus (Jn 8:24; 9:41). Apparently, 'it is quite possible', Brown asserts, 'that a secessionist lack of interest in moral behavior, in keeping the commandments, and in the dangers of sin may have been shaped by the dominance of christology in the Johannine tradition and by the lack of specific moral directives'.<sup>355</sup>

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<sup>351</sup> Brown, 1982, p.76

<sup>352</sup> Ibid., p.79

<sup>353</sup> Ibid., p.80

<sup>354</sup> See *ibid.*, pp.80-81 An appeal which is 'so much a part of the Synoptic proclamation of the kingdom (Mark 1:4,15; 6:12) and of the early Christian preaching in Acts (2:38; 3:19; 5:31; 8:22; etc.)' However, Brown (*ibid.*, p.81 n.184) adds, 'the need for some change of life seems presupposed in John 5:14 ("Sin no more") and 8:34 ("Everyone who acts sinfully is a slave of sin"). Moreover, at this point, I suppose that we could also refer to John 3 where the concept of rebirth certainly suggests a kind of reformation and change of life.

<sup>355</sup> Brown, 1982, p.81

Regarding the opponents' claim of their being sinless (1Jn 1:8,10), Brown notes that the author answers making 'his own claims of sinlessness (3:6.9; 5:18)', a fact which signifies that the Johannine tradition justifies such a claim. The claim that they are free from sin (1Jn 1:8) is 'easily related to GJohn when we remember that the terminology "guilty of sin" and "slaves of sin" is used there for nonbelievers' (Jn 8:31-34; 9:34,41). However, could the secessionists justify their second claim that they have not sinned (1Jn 1:10), from GJohn? If the secessionists, Brown claims, meant by this claim that they had never sinned in their lives 'because they had come into this world as God's children, then the secessionists probably should be classified as gnostics; but it is very dubious that the secessionists did claim that they were God's children by nature, instead of by baptism'. Undoubtedly, such a view could not be derived from GJohn (Jn 1:12-13; 3:3-6).<sup>356</sup>

However, in GJohn, there are passages that point to 'an *orientation* or *predisposition* toward becoming a child of God' (e.g. 6:65; 10:3). If the secessionists were in the Johannine tradition, 'they thought of their status as children of God and the perfection it brought as something acquired through becoming Christians rather than as something with which they came into the world'. Granted that the opponents claimed their inability to sin after their being baptized, one could argue that, since baptized the children of God, are like the Son of God who asked, 'which of you convicts me of sin?' (Jn 8:46). Other passages as well point in the same direction (see 20:22-23; 3:18; 5:24; 13:10). That the Johannine tradition 'lends itself to a thesis of the sinlessness of the believer in imitation of the sinlessness of God's Son is illustrated by the epistolary author's own affirmation in 3:5-6...he then goes on to associate the challenge to sinlessness with being begotten by God (3:9)'.<sup>357</sup>

Finally, concerning the opponents' failure to love one another, Brown observes that 'the author puts such love on the same level of importance as correct belief in Jesus Christ (1John 3:23)'. Apparently, if they failed on the one score they did on the other as well. If this is so, how could the secessionists derive or justify their attitude from the tradition known to us in GJohn? In line with his theory, Brown states that the secessionists did assert that they loved their brethren according to Jesus' command (John 13:35), meaning that they fulfil the commandment by loving their fellow secessionists, but not the author's group.<sup>358</sup>

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<sup>356</sup> Ibid., p.82

<sup>357</sup> See *ibid.*, pp.82-83

<sup>358</sup> See Brown, 1982, pp.84-85

Furthermore, Rensberger, agreeing with Brown, states that so far ‘the most persuasive explanation of the dispute behind 1John is that it was about the interpretation of Johannine tradition’. He also adds however, that ‘not every detail of what 1John ascribes to the opponents can be easily derived from the Gospel of John’. Besides, Rensberger states, if the opponents claimed that their ideas were inspired by the Spirit, ‘they would not hesitate to offer *new* concepts built up from their basic interpretation of the tradition’. This is why, the same scholar explains, ‘1John calls for the testing of spirits and emphasizes continuity with “the beginning”, and why 2John 9 warns against those who “go forward”’.<sup>359</sup>

In conclusion, I also think that the most persuasive explanation of the secession mirrored in the Epistles, is the one proposed by modern scholars that the heresy combatted by the Johannine Epistles is nothing but a distortion of the tradition conveyed by the Fourth Gospel. Moreover, though I agree with Brown’s approach to the whole problem, I would rather agree with Rensberger on the fact that ‘not every detail of what 1John ascribes to the opponents can be easily derived from the Gospel of John’; and it is not necessary to. For, I do accept Lieu’s opinion that the Epistles can stand on their own feet. However, I also think that we cannot deny that there is a special relationship between the Fourth Gospel and the Johannine Epistles. Moreover, I suppose that we do not underestimate the theological profile of the Epistles if we assume them to be related to the Gospel of John. We just place them in a historical place where they actually acquire their value. Thus, drawing linking lines between GJohn and the Epistles, a fact which presupposes that the former precedes the latter is a step towards the better understanding of their content.

Besides, we have to bear in mind that what we assume as the claims of the heretics, is a product of reconstruction. Thus, I suppose that we are not justified in being so categorically sure concerning our conclusions. Neither could we assert that it is possible to simply read the opponents out of the Gospel, nor should we utterly ignore GJohn. The Fourth Gospel as well represents a sound evidence of Johannine tradition, which has produced both the Gospel and the Epistles. I would obviously disagree with Lieu who asserts that ‘if we cannot reconstruct the heretics from the Epistle, neither can we then relate them to the Gospel’.<sup>360</sup>

Specifically, my assumption is that there is a shift of emphasis between these two works, which determines their meaning. While the Gospel focuses on the understanding of Jesus’ teaching presupposing His physical presence among the members of the

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<sup>359</sup> Rensberger, 1997, p.24

<sup>360</sup> Lieu, 1986, p.209

church, (though in the farewell discourses Jesus reflects on what is going to happen after His departure), the Epistles focus on the interpretation of the Gospel after His departure. This shift is what, in my opinion, the opponents fail to comprehend, as I will attempt to make clear in the exegesis section.

## **Conclusions**

First and foremost I think that there is only one group being combatted in 1John. It seems to me that ethical errors spring from the christological errors. Dogma and ethos are intertwined for John, as will be seen. Thus, Christological and ethical errors may refer to one group of opponents. Besides as Painter observes, the very treatment of the schism (1Jn 2:19), points to the existence of one group.<sup>361</sup>

The opponents' views, and particularly their failure regarding their christology and its moral implications, invite attempts to identify them with known christological conflicts within the early church. As we have seen above, there could be traced elements peculiar to more than one heretical systems of the time. Thus, the language of 'knowledge of God' and the dualistic patterns of 'light and darkness', 'truth and falsehood', echo later gnostic ideas and concepts. Yet, it has to be borne in mind that these concepts are amply encountered in the contemporary Jewish literature as has been illustrated in a previous chapter.

Moreover, the negation of the 'Jesus' coming in the flesh' does remind us of docetic errors, especially of ones of Cerinthian orientation. However, the reconstructed beliefs of the adversaries do not form a complete system; not all of the fundamental elements of the heretical systems examined above, are encountered in the Epistles.

Evidently, these heretical views encountered in the Johannine Letters 'cannot be parallel with any other manifestation of heresy known from that era'.<sup>362</sup> The evidence provided by the Epistles is far from being enough for the opponents' positions to be identified with these more articulated systems. Besides, as Lieu observes, 'it is probable that they did not represent a "system" as such'.<sup>363</sup> Or even as Rensberger notes 'they may represent a form of belief that has left no other trace in history'.<sup>364</sup>

Be that as it may, in the light of what has been said in this section, I believe that the secessionists combatted in the Johannine Epistles were heretics 'on the way', or it is reasonable, I think to assume that they were at least forerunners of such groups

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<sup>361</sup> Painter, 1986, p.50

<sup>362</sup> Schnackenburg, 1992, p.23 Likewise, Scholer, 1975, p.242 n.60 points out that 'a precise identification of the opponents is not possible'.

<sup>363</sup> Lieu, 1991, p.15

mentioned above, more probably gnostic.<sup>365</sup> Moreover, in my opinion, not only were they not ‘a well-defined group’ as Brown states, but they were group(s) who were seeking self-definition a process which was to be found in other heretical systems of the time. This is why on the one hand, the author fails to spell out specifically their errors and on the other, in their teaching they apparently combine elements of more than one heretical system.

As for the opponents’ relationship to the Fourth Gospel, I do accept that the most persuasive explanation of the dispute behind 1John is that it was about the interpretation of Johannine tradition. GJohn, the book of those who held a rather idealised view of their community, supports ideas of perfectionism-sinlessness. GJohn’s high Christology makes a perfectionist view of life harder to avoid. So, resorting to a docetising form of Christology, (hence the insistence of 1John on the importance of Jesus’ ‘coming in the flesh’, 1Jn 4:2), the opponents find a way of coping with such a situation, namely the scandalous existence of sin even among those who behold the glory and have eternal life. Asserting spiritual perfection, they played down the significance of sinning ‘in the flesh’. Having failed to comprehend the Gospel’s high christology, they underestimated the importance of the flesh of Jesus assuming that there is no link between the humanity of Jesus and the manifestation of His glorious coming.

However, I esteem that Rensberger is also right in stating that ‘not every detail of what 1John ascribes to the opponents can be easily derived from the gospel of John’. ‘If the opponents claimed that their ideas were inspired by the Spirit’, Rensberger explains, ‘however, they would not hesitate to offer *new* concepts built up from their basic interpretation of the tradition’. This is why 1John ‘calls for the testing of spirits and emphasizes continuity with “the beginning” and why 2John 9 warns against those who “go forward”’.<sup>366</sup>

Moreover, the Spirit could even lead the writer of the Epistle to different ways in order to enable him to refute the adversaries. Besides, there is always room for development concerning theological ideas, especially when we refer to pieces of writing written under different circumstances. For, as Rensberger observes, ‘ultimately our focus must be on the text itself and not on a hypothetical reconstruction’.<sup>367</sup>

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<sup>364</sup> Rensberger, 1997, p.24

<sup>365</sup> As Dodd, 1946, p.xix observes, ‘the false prophets were certainly on the track which led to later Gnostic heresies’. ‘The vagueness of detail in 1John’, Lieu, 1991, p.14 notes, ‘the absence of any reference to the other aspects of a gnostic position has led most scholars to speak of the opponents of 1John as proto-gnostic or “on the way”’.

<sup>366</sup> Rensberger, 1997, p.24

<sup>367</sup> Ibid., p.25

## CHAPTER FOUR: Exegesis of 1John 1:6-10

### *Introduction to the Exegesis*

Having discussed, so far, the ideological background of the Johannine Epistles, we concluded that John has written in a language that has undoubtedly many affinities with contemporary Jewish phraseology, concepts and notions. Exploring John's Jewish background we have *touch*ed issues which we are going to deal with in this section.

Following de Boer's 'tracks' of eschatology namely cosmological eschatology (evil angelic powers lead people astray) and forensic eschatology (humans willingly reject the Creator), we have shown that these two tracks are not mutually exclusive. Specifically, in Qumran literature, Jubilees, the Enochic corpus and the Testaments, cosmological and forensic eschatology lie side by side and even overlap. Yet, in the Psalms of Solomon, 4Ezra and 2Baruch there is no reference to evil angelic powers who lead people astray. In the Odes of Solomon, though there is a reference to the Error or the Corruptor as an evil power, it does not play significant role in the document. As we have said, it seems that ethical/forensic eschatology largely overtook and displaced cosmological eschatology after the disaster of 70 A.D..

Moreover, eschatology reflects on anthropology regarding the role the human will plays in the process of salvation. Thus, while in Qumran, Jubilees and the Enochic corpus, God's determinism and man's freedom to choose are both witnessed, in the Psalms of Solomon, the Odes of Solomon and 4Ezra and 2Baruch considerable emphasis is put on personal accountability and choice. Thus, briefly the coexistence of two modes of thought concerning the origin of evil/sin, the fact that even the righteous sin, the amalgamation of free will/voluntaristic language and God's election/deterministic language, represent religious paradoxes of that era.

Moving towards the Johannine world of thought we referred to the Odes of Solomon where the present seems to be *broken into* by the future. In the Odes of Solomon which, I tend to believe is of Christian origin, the odist is assured that he already possesses eternal life (see 38:3; 40:6), though he still prays for the deliverance from the Evil One (14:5). As Charlesworth accurately observes, 'throughout the Odes, the concept of time is not that of the present versus the distant or even imminent future, but of the breaking in of the future into the present'.<sup>368</sup>

Against this ideological background we now turn to the Johannine world of thought where we again witness this collaboration of present and future. First and foremost, it

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<sup>368</sup> Charlesworth, Odes, 1972, p.120

has to be borne in mind that, unlike the Jewish literature examined above, both the Gospel and the Epistle are Christian documents. In broad lines, for John Christology correlates with eschatology and by extension reflects on anthropology.

Specifically, on the one hand, in the Gospel of John elements of realised eschatology are rather prominent. Jesus is the life (14:6) and the believers are called to share it, having communion with Him. They actually already possess eternal life (6:47; cf. 3:15-16,36; 6:51,58; 8:51; 10:28). In this context where realised eschatology is dominant, perfectionist ideas are to be expected. In this sense GJohn underpins the claim that Christians do not sin.

On the other hand, in 1John future eschatology dominates. The Epistle introduces atoning theology highlighting the expiatory power of the blood of Christ (1:7,9; 2:2). The atoning function of the death of Christ in its continual sense is played up. The reference to the cleansing power of the blood of Christ is a modification of the bread of life teaching (Jn 6), signifying a step towards the kerygma of the Great church.

Concerning anthropology, John, like contemporary Jewish documents, combines elements of cosmological and forensic eschatology. In 1John we have deterministic language (the believers are 'born of God') that is modified and qualified by voluntaristic language (confession of sins, cleansing from sins, effort to imitate God). However, there is a stress on voluntaristic language, as will be shown in detail below. Though in GJohn the devil is said to be cast out (3:12) (though he is still there in Judas?), in 1John he is still around (5:19) and might be seen to be behind the antichrist (2:18,22; 4:3; 2Jn 7).

Moreover, we have also referred to the specific circumstances that gave birth to the Johannine Community, its distinctive thought over against the rest of Christian communities, its sectarian colouring and perfectionist leanings. In the Gospel of John Jesus *is* the divine life and the believers share this life being in communion with Him. My assumption is that the distinctiveness of the Johannine thought consists in its unique way of conceiving Jesus and His mission; a uniqueness which is reflected in the Johannine literature. Furthermore, the Johannine community, just like Christianity as a whole, was a sect over against the Jews and the writing of the Epistles prepared the road towards the union with the Great Church.

Further, we have explored the profile of those in combat in the Epistles and our basic assumption is that they certainly were former members of the Johannine community who possibly have misinterpreted concepts and ideas of the Fourth Gospel. Being the heirs of the high Christology GJohn represents, they failed to comprehend it in its fullness. They seem to have asserted sinlessness, failing to draw practical-ethical implications of one's being in communion with Jesus, the sinless One, denying also any relationship between

Jesus' humanity and His salvific mission. In a way, it seems to me that the unique idiosyncrasy of the Johannine thought contributed to such misunderstanding of the tradition conveyed by the Gospel.

Thus, having set the background of our study, we now turn to the foreground, to the Epistles themselves, dealing particularly with the notion of sin and sinlessness in 1John. In doing so, we are going to explore how far our assumptions concerning the background of the Epistles are borne out by the text.

Dealing especially with the issue of sin and sinlessness, we will attempt an approach to John's thought, using as a valuable tool the scholars' comments on the issues involved. Our main subject is sin as John conceives it in vss.1:6-10 and 3:6-10, where, in my opinion, lies the gist of the relevant theme. More specifically, these verses represent the two sides of the paradox we are going to deal with, namely sinfulness and sinlessness as two seemingly contradictory realities, in the believer's life.

Though the core of what is meant by sin in both GJohn<sup>369</sup> and 1John, is the same, namely the rejection of Christ, I presume that there is a difference in their conception of sin; a difference in the sense of their having, for certain reasons, different perspectives. Such an assumption however, does not entail the existence of any kind of contradiction between these two pieces of writing. They rather seem to shed light on different aspects of the notion of sin.

Generally speaking, in my opinion, the concept of sin in 1John and in GJohn is fundamentally the same.<sup>370</sup> The Epistle builds on the same ideas encountered in the Gospel, though the former emphasizes certain aspects of sin expanding the meaning of

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<sup>369</sup> As Law, 1909, p.350 observes, the word 'sin' (ἁμαρτία), 'occurs sixteen times in the Gospel'. In six of them, according to Law, 'the idea of guilt' is definitely attached to it (9:41; 15:22,24; 16:8,9; 19:11). Commenting on Jn 5:24, Bultmann, 1971, p.551 states that 'sin is not primarily immoral behaviour; it does not consist in any particular action, but is unbelief, and it will be defined as such explicitly in 16.8'. Moreover, commenting on 16:9 he (Ibid.,p.563), states that 'sin is not moral failure as such, but unbelief and the bearing that springs from it, i.e. the world's conduct determined by unbelief and taken as a whole'.

<sup>370</sup> Bogart, 1977, pp.51-54 and 55-61 respectively, divides the passages in which 'sin' is used into two categories: those, which represent the pre-Johannine usage of the term (1:29b; 5:14b; 20:23) and those, which exemplify the peculiar to John theological outlook (8:21,24; 8:34; 8:46; 9:2-3; 9:16,24,25,31; 9:34,41; 16:8-9; 19:11). Comparing the meaning, of the term under discussion, in GJohn and 1John, Goguel, 1953, p. 366 observes that though the 'epistle has the same conception of sin as the gospel', the former 'is much more concerned about it'. The reason for this is the fact that the epistolary author 'seems to have been mixed up with the life of the church more directly than the evangelist who seems to have lived in a select group of Christians'. Additionally, the Epistle is 'much more directly polemical in purpose' than the Gospel and 'corrects and adds clarity to certain phrases from the gospel, from which not without some show of logic conclusions seem to have been drawn which were contrary to the thought of the evangelist'. As I see it, the fact that the pre-Johannine usage of the term is present in the Gospel suggests that John was not opposed to it, though it seems that the sectarian character of Johannine community influenced its understanding of sin. The more explicit reference to sin in the Epistles may have been occasioned by the mixing up of the Johannine community with the life of the church, foreboding its route towards the Great Church. For Schnackenburg, 1992, p.254-255, 'the topic of Christians and sin comes to the fore at three places in the epistle: 1:6-2:2; 3:4-10; 5:16-18'. He also states that 'while in the

rejecting Christ and emphasizing its ethical dimensions. Thus, I esteem that the new aspects of sin encountered in 1John, are due to the particular message and idiosyncrasy of the Epistle. Moreover, the two documents seem to illuminate different aspects of it. As Lieu observes, 'the vocabulary related to sin looms larger in 1John than in the Gospel as the author combats this divorce between Christian experience and the realities of daily living (1.7-2.2; 2.4,9-11)'.<sup>371</sup>

So, in GJohn the term is primarily examined in relation to Jesus and the believer's attitude towards Him, meaning mainly unbelief-rejection of Christ (see Jn 8:31-34; 9:41; 15:22, 24)<sup>372</sup>. As we have seen in a previous chapter, holding a rather idealised view of their community and being ethically confident, the Johannine Christians thought themselves to be the ones who beheld the glory. Their belief in Jesus being the Messiah, was what initially caused their separation from the synagogue and ultimately, what differentiated them from Judaism. Their faith in Jesus led even to their persecution. Thus, it is natural for them to assume the rejection of Christ to be the crown of sin. Sin had no place among those who believed in Jesus' being the Messiah. Holding a deeply christocentric vision of things, they regarded Jesus as the actual embodiment of every godly attribute. So, rejection of Jesus was the epitome of sin, though other shades of this meaning are not missing (see Jn 1:29; 5:14; 20:23).

I also think that we are not justified in generalizing the meaning of sin or of any other term. For, what determines the meaning of every notion, I esteem, is the context in which it is used. Being a multisided notion, sin cannot be expected to bear precisely the same denotation in its every occurrence, even in the same piece of work. The occurrence of the meaning of the rejection of Christ, for instance, in GJohn, does not dictate the absence of any other shade of meaning.

On the other hand, in the Epistle the Johannine community is torn apart because of a sin. The strange thing is that both sides assert that they accept Jesus as their Lord; nobody rejects Him. One of the parties however, is wrong. Thus, inevitably, sin needs redefining. Under the new circumstances sin is examined through the prism of a heretical schism that has occurred and threatens the orthodox teaching. Moving on a more practical plane, the meaning of 'sin' is expanded and obtains moral dimensions. The rejection of Jesus is viewed in rather practical terms; a fact that was probably

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first passages the author 'is combating the gnostic heresy', in the other two 'this explicit debate with the opponents is lacking'.

<sup>371</sup> Lieu, 1986, p.193

<sup>372</sup> See Lieu, 1986, p.197 where she notes that 'sin in the Gospel refers to unbelief and as such finds its meaning in relation to Jesus (9.41; 15.22,24), but is not an issue for the believer'. I think that this is a rather bold statement. How are we to account for the rest of the occurrences of the term 'sin' in the

necessitated by the experience of the community with the passage of time.<sup>373</sup> The fact that the word by which 1John defines the essential principle of sin is ‘lawlessness’, Law rightly notes, ‘corresponds to the strong emphasis which the Epistle lays upon the commandments of God and their careful observance’ (2:3,4; 3:22,24; 5:2,3).<sup>374</sup> Stressing voluntaristic language, the author of 1John brings in elements of forensic eschatology, in the light of the existence of sin in the ranks of his community. Thus, I presume that 1John, in a way, brings the Johannine Christians ‘down to earth’, reminding them of their being sinful. Evidently, some Christians were not prepared to comprehend high theological concepts of GJohn; so the Epistle intervenes to translate it in *earthly* terms in order for them not to misinterpret the message of the Gospel.

The acceptance of Jesus in 1John is supposed to be manifested in terms of life rather than in words. For the Gospel, accepting Jesus and being in His company, was equated with walking in the light, while in the Epistle walking in the light means keeping His commandments<sup>375</sup> and it has to be witnessed by somebody’s way of living (1:6). In the Gospel, the fact that the believer has to deal with sin, even having accepted Jesus, seems to be ignored, not without a reason though. A rather enthusiastic, charismatic, I would say, tension was maintained. Presumably, according to the evangelist, Christ was the embodiment of any of God’s attributes in which the believer was invited to participate. In the Epistle however, granted Jesus’ departure from this world, belief in Him has to be concretised in acts. Accordingly, in my opinion, there seems to exist a shift from theory to practice, from the ideal, which usually underlines theoretical ideas, to every day experience, and life. Such a shift, I esteem, was necessitated by the very experience of the church life and of course by the threat of heretical tensions in the body of the church.

What the author of the Epistle stresses is that sin, despite its presence in the believers’ life,<sup>376</sup> is out of place in God’s realm. He only encounters sin in His way towards

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Gospel? I would rather agree with Lieu, 1991, p.53 where she notes that in the Gospel sin is ‘primarily unbelief or the refusal to believe but this does not fit 1John so well’. (See also *ibid.*, pp.60-61).

<sup>373</sup> At this point parenthetically I note that this last element could be possibly thought of as an indicative of the priority of the Gospel over the Epistle.

<sup>374</sup> Law, 1909, p.133 Moreover, referring to sin in 1John, Law (*ibid.*, p.129) notes that of the two principal passages that have a direct bearing upon sin, the first, 1:7-2:2 ‘contemplates sin as guilt’, while in the second, 3:4-9 ‘sin is contemplated in its ethical antagonism to the nature of God and of the children of God’.

<sup>375</sup> This does not mean that in the Gospel the believer is not exhorted to keep the commandments; it is characteristic that in GJohn the ἐντολή (see Bultmann, 1971, p.541) the disciples are urged to keep is ‘to love each other’ (Jn 13:34; 15:12 cf. 14:15; 15:10). It seems to me that the notion in 1John is broadened under the influence of the secessionist teaching which fail to draw practical implications from belief.

<sup>376</sup> As Goguel, 1964, p.468 notes that the author of 1John ‘attaches more importance to the idea of sin and does not attribute to it a merely negative significance. He recognizes that ‘even the man who is in communion with Christ is not entirely denuded of sin and become inaccessible to temptation’. Furthermore, as Lieu, 1991, p.52 observes, ‘sin is a problem for the letter, apparently both (doing sin and doing righteousness) ‘possible for “a brother” (5:16; cf. 1:9f.) and yet incompatible with “abiding in him” (3:6)’.

humanity and He is the only one who can effectively deal with it (1Jn 1:9). As for the believers, they are exhorted to confess their sins and the blood of Jesus will cleanse them from every single sin. Denying one's being sinful, he proves God a liar and he is not doing the truth.

Evidently, John does not hesitate to spell out this reality of the presence of sin in those who walk in the light. In the following chapter, we will attempt to conceive the way John understands the fact of sin's being present in the believer's life, which does not seem to be an inconsistency for him whatsoever.

### ***Exegesis of 1John 1:6-10***

In these verses we have the three presuppositions that according to 1John have to be fulfilled in order for men to be in fellowship with God.

'Saying' is not enough; 'walking' determines the validity of what one says. In other words, the way the Christian lives has to exemplify his beliefs. His relationship with God is supposed to be mirrored in his very life. So, abiding in Him, the Christian is expected to keep His commandments. Thus, expressing the relation of the believer to God, positive qualities like light, life, truth and love cease to be abstract ideas but they acquire a rather practical content.

As we are going to see below, John employs a number of 'if' clauses-'tests of life' as Law calls them-<sup>377</sup> in order for the believers to see where they stand concerning their relationship with God.<sup>378</sup>

Moreover, as we have noted in the previous chapter, we may possibly trace the false elements of teaching the opponents of John asserted by using his affirmations as 'a mirror' of them. Thus, we assume that behind these tests there may be hidden the assertions of those being combatted by 1John.<sup>379</sup>

At this point, it suffices to note-as we are going to deal with it in detail below-that what the author seems to assume as the secessionists' critical mistake is the fact that they

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<sup>377</sup> This is the title given a study of 1John by Law (see bibliography). As Filson, 1969, p.263 observes, the word 'test' recurs 'in more than one outline' of 1John.

<sup>378</sup> See Filson, 1969, p.263-264 Furthermore, Filson distinguishes between two types of sentences expressing that testing of Christian life, the 'by this form' and the 'if clauses' (e.g. 1:6f.; 1:8ff.; 2:3; 2:15,19,24,29; 3:17,21; 4:12,20; 5:15). The former ones are 'by no means the author's only way of stating tests'. The latter 'vary in setting and type of test but they show how often and how earnestly the author is concerned to set up tests and conditions by which the Christian can be guided in thinking and action. Some such clauses warn against damaging and deadly attitudes which the loyal believer must avoid'. See also Lieu, 1991, pp.51-54 for 'The tests of life'.

<sup>379</sup> For Brown, 1982, p.225 those claims (1:6,8,10) 'probably represent secessionist thought'. Being of the same opinion Painter, 1986, p.51 observes, that 'the "boasts" provide particularly valuable information concerning the position of the opponents'.

assert the absence of sin from the believers' life and by extension underestimate the salvific work of Jesus Christ.

Moreover, examining the following verses, we are in a position to say that surely the author does not exclude any thought of perfection in Christians' life. 'Walking in the light' and 'having communion with Him', are realities, which the author does not rule out completely; he rather places conditions on their realisation. Further, he points out that sin is a real fact in the believers' everyday life which ultimately, if not cured by the means God offers, will tar the fellowship between God and His devotees. So, that fellowship once achieved, needs to be safeguarded against sin that undermines it.

### **6. If we say that we have fellowship with him while we are walking in darkness, we lie and we do not do the truth;**

By this verse the author draws the basic lines of what follows. God is light Himself and truth, opposed to lie, is a category, which is peculiar to His dominion of light. God is the One who defines the character of the environment in which He exists.

Having said that 'God is light and in him there is no darkness at all' (1:5),<sup>380</sup> the author of 1John goes on placing men as well in God's dominion of light, stressing that to be 'in communion with Him' presupposes one's not walking in the darkness. The one who asserts otherwise is a liar and he does not 'do the truth'. This statement paves the way for the issue of the imitation of God, which is going to be put forward later. Simply, 'those who have fellowship with the God who is light cannot be other than as God is'<sup>381</sup>

What the author says in broad terms is that moral conduct goes hand in hand with spiritual communion. If we assert that we have communion with God, while walking in the darkness, we prove ourselves liars and we are not *doing* the truth. Accordingly, truth, as a positive attribute is placed in the realm of God, while falsehood is attributed to the realm of darkness.<sup>382</sup> It is obvious, as Dodd rightly observes, that pointing to the imitation of God, the author is not interested in any 'metaphysical implications of the idea that God is light, but in its ethical implications'.<sup>383</sup> So, the author seems to warn

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<sup>380</sup> As Bultmann, 1967, p.17, notes, 'the consequences of v.5b are developed in what follows, primarily in 1:6-2:17. In this section the author evidently employs a Source which is stylistically related to the Revelatory Discourse Source used in John'. Nevertheless, in my opinion, there is no need to resort to any kind of source to interpret 1John; besides the existence of such a source is merely hypothetical.

<sup>381</sup> Rensberger, 1997, p.52

<sup>382</sup> As we have seen in previous chapters these antithetical pairs are amply used by the contemporary Jewish literature as well as by later gnostic writers.

<sup>383</sup> Dodd, 1946, p.19 Likewise Houlden, 1973, p.57 notes 'accepting the doctrine (of God's being light) entails appropriate conduct'. We will find, Houlden adds, this idea to be 'a constant feature of 1J'.

against 'the indifference of moral conduct to spiritual communion'.<sup>384</sup> The one who walks in the light has to share its attributes. Accordingly, 'those who continue to practise the works of darkness cannot be in fellowship with the light'. What John points out however, is that walking in darkness and having fellowship with God are two incompatible realities. It seems that the assertion 'we have fellowship with him' is not what the author is combatting here; for, the believer's aim is both to achieve-accepting God's invitation by faith-and maintain this fellowship with God.<sup>385</sup> What he is opposed to, is the assertion that one has communion with God while his life does not support such a claim.

***6a. If we say that we have fellowship with him,***

As it has been asserted,<sup>386</sup> the author in this verse refutes his opponents, explaining what it really means to be have fellowship with God. However, this does not imply that such an assertion is false altogether.

Apparently, the author includes himself in those Christians who could make such an assertion; a fact which may be an indication, on the one hand, of the influence his opponents had exercised 'in thought and practice'<sup>387</sup> among the faithful and on the other, of the fact that the heresy was real and not merely hypothetical.<sup>388</sup> Or as Strecker notes, the author engages with the congregation due to the fact that 'the group itself, and not simply a false docetic teaching, is in danger of failing to draw the necessary ethical consequences of being joined to God'.<sup>389</sup> Or, the 'we' 'represents the Johannine Community that remains after the secessionists have left (2:19)'.<sup>390</sup> Naturally, as I said in the previous chapter, I suppose that in attacking a heretical claim the author is targeting it first and foremost to safeguard his audience against such a false teaching, while at the same time he discloses their false claims.

'Him' apparently refers to God the Father, as He is the subject in v.5 as well.<sup>391</sup> But what does 'to have fellowship with Him' mean? It is true that the word *κοινωνία* is missing from GJohn. Both Brown and Painter have made this observation. The former

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<sup>384</sup> Brooke, 1912, p.13 Such an attitude has been adopted, Westcott, 1886, p.19 notes, 'by enthusiasts in all times of religious excitement'.

<sup>385</sup> Klauck, 1991, p.88 refers to the fellowship with God as 'ein erstrebenswertes Ziel' implying that this fellowship (Gemeinschaft) is not yet achieved. Moreover, for Strecker, 1996, p.29, this 'if' clause (v.6) functions as a parenthesis to the believers who 'are continually in a state of becoming'. However, I think that the author of 1John is rather concerned about the maintenance of such fellowship, presupposing that those to whom he refers are in *κοινωνία* with God.

<sup>386</sup> Brown, 1982, p.197; Schnackenburg, 1992, p.77

<sup>387</sup> Brooke, 1912, p.13 So Westcott, 1886, p.19

<sup>388</sup> Ibid.

<sup>389</sup> Strecker, 1996, p.29

<sup>390</sup> Brown, 1982, p.197

thinks that the term *κοινωνία* was an ecclesiastical term by means of which the author affirms the importance of the relation to the tradition. Moreover, it is used by the author of the Epistle instead of the terms *μένειν ἐν* and *εἶναι ἐν* used by the evangelist.<sup>392</sup> However, the latter states that it is not reasonable to see it ‘as some kind of equivalent to *μένειν ἐν* or *εἶναι ἐν*, neither of which is used of the believers’ relation to one another’. Additionally, if *κοινωνία* were the evangelist’s interpretation of the opponents’ claim to ‘abide in God’, Painter wonders, ‘why did our author also present the boast in the opponents’ own terms in 2.6 where they boast that they abide in (<sup>ΜΕΝΕΙΝ</sup> ~~ΕΙΝΑΙ~~ ἐν) him?’. Consequently, Painter concludes, ‘the evidence suggests that our author took up and used the term because his opponents were using it’, with a modification however, as we are going to see in v.7.<sup>393</sup>

Firstly, I think that, granted its use in the rest of the New Testament (e.g. Acts 1:42; 1Co 1:9; 10:16), it is not unlikely that the relevant term was an ‘ecclesiastical term’ as Brown observes. In this case however, I would say, that it may be connected with Eucharist, for on the one hand it is thus referred to in the New Testament, and on the other, the author of 1John focuses on the issue of the blood of Christ in the following verse right afterwards.<sup>394</sup>

Moreover, the term *κοινωνία* echoes the unity which the remaining members have to safeguard, especially in the light of the secession that had taken place.<sup>395</sup> Thus, the absence of this term from the Fourth Gospel is not to be exaggerated. Its use was necessitated by the very historical situation the Letter confronted. Besides, my assumption is that the Epistle does not move strictly in the Gospel’s theological territory. There are ideas or aspects of them that emerge out of the particular situation 1John deals with. Besides, *κοινωνία* may now be established as an equivalent to *μένειν ἐν* or *εἶναι ἐν*.

I suppose that the word *κοινωνία* is a very rich term, which basically means to share things with whom one is in *κοινωνία*. Accordingly, having communion with God means

<sup>391</sup> So Westcott, 1886, p.19 and Brown, 1982, p.197 The latter (ibid.) also notes that ‘in this whole unit God is mentioned by name only in 1:5d but is referred to pronominally (*autos*) in vv.6a, 7b, 10bc’.

<sup>392</sup> Brown, 1982, p.186, 232;

<sup>393</sup> Painter, 1986, p.54

<sup>394</sup> However, for Lieu, 1991, p.63 the reference to the blood of Christ, is ‘probably a general reference to the continual efficacy of the death of Jesus rather than a specific reference to eucharist or baptism’.

<sup>395</sup> In Strecker’s, 1996, p.28 opinion, the use of the word *κοινωνία* clarifies the fact that to say that God is light ‘is not simply a description of the divine nature but has instead, despite the ontological character of the expression, an urgent meaning that affects the community’. This term presumes, Strecker goes on, ‘the unity of Father and Son (1John 1:3; cf. John 17:21), and its intention is that the community should also be united with the Father and the Son, thus forming a comprehensive, eschatological communion’. Strecker’s thesis again indicates that the believers’ *κοινωνία* is not yet fully achieved. However, as I have already said above, v.6a does not represent the disputed part of the boast.

to share his attributes, to imitate him, to want what he wants and to reject what he despises. It is obvious that one who does the works of darkness cannot have communion with God, as God has nothing in common with darkness; a fact that apparently, the secessionists fail to comprehend.

***6b. while we are walking in darkness, we lie***

While having communion with God is what the believer has to maintain, at this point it becomes obvious under what circumstances such an assertion constitutes a lie. I suppose that the fact that fellowship with God, for the epistolary author, is not a given and requires maintenance (1:7,9), implies an effort on the believer's part to keep it. For the author, words are to be translated into acts and statements into conduct; walking in the darkness, meaning doing works of the darkness with which God has no dealings, is incompatible with having communion with God.

The image of περιπατεῖν stems from the biblical language (e.g. Isa 2:5; Prov 8:20 cf. IQS III, 17-19).<sup>396</sup> It follows that walking in the darkness is the opposite of walking in the light. This walking in darkness, Westcott notes, is not a matter of 'the specific character of special acts, but of the whole region of life outward and inward'.<sup>397</sup>

As an expression, walking in the darkness is not unknown to GJohn.<sup>398</sup> Apparently such an assertion, 'we have communion with Him' could be derived from the Gospel. In the Gospel, while people prefer the darkness than the light, there are those who 'act in truth' and 'come into the light' (Jn 3:19-21). The secessionists may have assumed that once they opt for the light, darkness-and sin as a parameter of it-is not an issue any more. According to the Gospel, darkness represents the realm in which people who have rejected Christ live (1:5; 12:34-35; 12:38-40). For the believers however, things are different; walking in the light, as long as they accept Christ, they will possess the light of life (8:12).

The Gospel focuses on the understanding of sin *vis à vis* Jesus. Every sin springs from *the* sin, the rejection of Christ or unbelief in Him. The Epistle however, addresses people who have accepted Jesus and believe in Him. The very circumstances that occasioned

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<sup>396</sup> Westcott, 1886, p.19; Moreover, Westcott (ibid.) adds, this image of walking is not found 'applied to conduct in classical writers, but is common in St John and St Paul. So Brooke, 1912, pp.13-14. see also Brown, 1982, pp.197-198; Klauck, 1991, p.88; Rensberger, 1997, p.51

<sup>397</sup> Ibid.

<sup>398</sup> Brooke, 1912, p.13 Referring to John 8:12 (cf. Jn.11: 9,10), Brooke (ibid.) notes that 'the metaphor (walking in the darkness) used by the Lord in the Gospel has already become part of the natural religious language of Christian'. Moreover, with regard to the Gospel, Dodd, 1963, 375 notes that the expression, 'walking in the light', does not occur in the Gospel. It is used here in antithesis to walking in the darkness. In these characteristically Johannine passages, *light* and *darkness* 'are unmistakably symbolic, and περιπατεῖν has its derived sense, "to conduct oneself", as in Paul *passim* and once only in the Synoptic Gospels (Mark vii. 5)'. See also Klauck, 1991, p.88

the writing of the Epistles necessitated the rephrasing of the notion of sin in ethical and christological terms.<sup>399</sup>

Presumably, for the secessionists 'walking in the light' represents a privilege given to the believers once for all; they do not seem to draw practical implications from it. The epistolary author without denying the protasis-6a-stresses that such an assertion is true only if 'we walk in the light'. God is light and is in the light; darkness is foreign to Him. Thus, everyone who asserts that he is in communion with God while walking in darkness is a liar; for darkness and light are two irreconcilable realities, though the one may threaten the other (cf. IQS III-IV).<sup>400</sup>

Lying is another feature of those who walk in the darkness. As the devil whose reign is the darkness, is himself a liar (Jn 8:44)<sup>401</sup>, those who walk in the darkness are liars. In this case, lying for Law, does not mean just ψεύδεσθαι which merely signifies to 'say what is untrue'; rather 'we have here the widest statement of the case, covering culpable self-deception as well as conscious hypocrisy'.<sup>402</sup> For Brown, the Johannine writers regard the position of their opponents not as 'ignorance'<sup>403</sup> but as 'a lie'; and not 'a lie of self-deception but a lie involving active hostility to the truth'.<sup>404</sup> I think that the fact that lying in this context does not simply mean not to say the truth becomes obvious in what follows in v.6d.; it denotes an opposition to the truth.

Thus, lying which actually combines 'self-deception', 'hypocrisy' and above all 'hostility to the truth', is another aspect of walking in the darkness, while doing the truth characterizes one's walking in the light.

### ***6c. and we do not do the truth***<sup>405</sup>;

What the author has previously stressed in positive terms-'we lie'-he enhances now by repeating it in negative terms-'and we do not do the truth'.<sup>406</sup> Here another feature of

<sup>399</sup> As Schnackenburg, 1992, p.79 observes, 'the moral heresy is closely connected with Christology (cf. 3:23)'.  
<sup>400</sup> As Brown, 1982, p.233 rightly observes, 'the secessionists would have regarded that message as a promise dispensing them from worrying about darkness, while the epistolary author would have understood it as a command not to walk in darkness'.

<sup>401</sup> As Schnackenburg, 1992, p.77 notes, 'to lie' means 'leading others astray in a wicked and malicious way'; in this sense, Jesus calls the devil a liar.  
<sup>402</sup> Law, 1909, p.372

<sup>403</sup> As Westcott, 1886, p.19 notes, 'men who profess to combine fellowship with God with the choice of darkness as their sphere of life, actively affirm what they know to be false'.

<sup>404</sup> Brown, 1982, p.199, see also, *ibid.*, pp.198-199 for the Pauline conception of 'truth', and the notion of 'truth' in Hellenistic and Hebrew thought.

<sup>405</sup> My translation; though generally I follow the NRSV translation from the Greek, I think that the translation we 'do not do what is true' is not the appropriate one here and deprives the text of its meaning.

<sup>406</sup> For the expression 'to do the truth' see also IQS I, 5 according to which the members of the sect 'may practise truth, righteousness and justice upon earth'. The 'sons of light' are also called 'sons of truth' (IV, 6,7 cf. 'the Angel of Truth' III, 24). Furthermore, in TBen 10:3 the Patriarch instructs his children to 'do

those who walk in the light emerges namely, they 'do the truth'. We would expect our author to write they 'say the truth'. However, truth in God's realm is an act, a way of living. Truth is one of those multidimensional notions that infuses believers' lives. It has a wider meaning and at the same time a more specific one, than that with which its modern connotation familiarizes us.<sup>407</sup> It characterises the dominion of God, and God is truth Himself. It is like light that is God but God is in the light as well. As Houlden accurately notes, the meaning of 'truth' overlaps with that of 'light' in describing 'the sphere of God's rule into which the believer is brought and in which he dwells'.<sup>408</sup>

Moreover, in the Old Testament<sup>409</sup> the expression to 'do the truth' is synonymous with 'to keep the commandments'. For John however, Christ has replaced the Law,<sup>410</sup> and truth acquires a more personal meaning. In the Gospel Jesus calls himself 'the truth'. As Brown notes, the term ἀλήθεια is a Johannine term, which in Johannine thought tends to be identified with 'the revelation in and by Jesus, and in the author's judgment that revelation is now under attack by the secessionists'.<sup>411</sup> There are various synonymous expressions in the Johannine Epistles such as the 'being' of the truth, 'in us' (1:8; 2:4), of 'being of the truth' (2:21), of our 'being of the truth' (3:19), of 'walking in the truth' (2Jn 4), of 'knowing' and 'being on familiar terms with' truth (2:21; 2Jn 1; cf. Jn 8:32).

Particularly, in 1John 'to do the truth' is synonymous with 'being in the light', with 'having communion with God'. 'Doing the truth' is to be understood not only as something that is 'in thought and word but also in action'.<sup>412</sup> As to be in the light has to be proved in terms of conduct, likewise to do the truth has to be realised in actions.<sup>413</sup>

It is obvious that 'light', 'life', and 'truth' are categories which signify attributes that flourish in God's sphere. I would say that they find their perfect meaning in God. In the

the truth each of you to his neighbor and to keep the Law of the Lord and His commandments' (see also TRou 6:9 where 'to do the truth' is connected with 'love').

<sup>407</sup> For Law, 1909, p.372 the 'objective Divine Truth' is to be distinguished from the 'subjective, moral truth (sincerity)'. See also Brooke, 1912, p.14 Moreover, as Bultmann, 1967, pp.18-19 notes, while 'ψευδόμεθα has initially the simple meaning: 'we speak falsehood'; what follows, 'and we do not live according to the truth', 'shows that ψεύδεσθαι connotes an even deeper meaning. "Lying" 'is not simply accidental, but is rather a characteristic of "walking in the darkness"'. However, truth and falsehood in John, I suppose, acquire a wider meaning that saying the truth or speak falsehood given that Christ Himself is said to be 'the truth' (Jn 14:6).

<sup>408</sup> Houlden, 1973, p.66

<sup>409</sup> Westcott, 1886, p.20 notes that in the Old Testament the phrase 'to do mercy and truth' (LXX) occurs not unfrequently: Gen. xlvii.29; Josh. ii.14; 2Sam. ii.6; xv.20'. See also Brooke, 1912, p.14; Hoskyns, 1947, p.219; Brown, 1982, p.200; Strecker, 1996, p.29 n.19; Klauck, 1991, p.89; Rensberger, 1997, p.52

<sup>410</sup> So, Brown, 1982, p.200 and Klauck, 1991, p.90 observe.

<sup>411</sup> Brown, 1982, p.199 The term occurs 109 times in the NT, with 25 in GJohn and 20 in the Epistles. See also Klauck, 1991, p.89

<sup>412</sup> Westcott, 1886, p.20; Also Brooke, 1912, p.14 notes, 'to "do the truth" is to give expression to the highest of which he (man) is capable in every sphere of his being. It relates to action, and conduct and feeling, as well as to word and thought'. See Bultmann, 1967, p.19

<sup>413</sup> As Houlden, 1973, p.66 notes, the expression 'doing the truth' meaning something like 'behaving with integrity', 'shows clearly the word's (truth) practical and ethical bearing'.

Gospel in the *I am* sayings, Jesus is said to be the personified light of the world (8:12), truth and life (14:6). I think that John's thought is governed by the identification of Jesus with the light of the world as light includes any positive quality that exists. In the Epistle, the believer is exhorted to imitate Him and participate in his realm. Truth is a mere lie when it is conceived outside of God's realm, and darkness, where lie belongs by definition is the very antithesis of God.<sup>414</sup>

As we have seen in the relevant section, dualistic patterns such as light versus darkness and truth versus falsehood are encountered in contemporary literature.<sup>415</sup> Presumably, the opponents of our author would have no problem in accepting this maxim that God is light and whatever opposes to Him belongs to the darkness. What the author, however, hastens to point out is the ethical implications that spring from such a doctrine. The battle between light and darkness takes place in the believer's inner world. It is not only a matter of decision being made once for all, but also a matter of concretising this decision in conduct. It seems to me that, in a way, the schism leads to a kind of introspection as the nature of a believer's faith now becomes ethical. This introspection however is not a matter of mere speculation; it rather must have its observable counterpart in correct behaviour.

***7. but if we walk in the light as he himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin.***

One's having fellowship with God presupposes his walking in the light, for light is the realm of God. What the present clause adds however, is that God Himself 'is in the light'. Moreover, while in v.6 the author explains under what circumstances being in communion with Him is a lie, in v.7 he clarifies what being in fellowship with God results in. Thus, the one who 'walks in the light', on the one hand realizes the communion with his fellow Christians and on the other, being aware of his sinfulness, he continues to be in the light as he knows that the blood of Jesus 'cleanses' him 'from all sin'. The maintenance of one's fellowship with God is possible given the fact that the blood of Jesus Christ cleanses His believers from what threatens this fellowship, namely sin.

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<sup>414</sup> Cf. Corp.Herm. (Livellus XIII, 9), where it is written that 'truth has come to us, and on it has followed the Good, with Life and Light. No longer has there come upon us any of the torments of darkness: they have flown away with rushing wings'.

**7a. *but if we walk in the light as he himself is in the light,***

The author does not write ‘if we say...’ but ‘if we walk’, as if he says, let us leave words aside, let us talk about deeds. Indeed, as Westcott underlines, ‘there is a sharp contrast between the vain profession of fellowship and godlike action’.<sup>416</sup>

God, being light, is in the light, as ‘the realm of perfect truth and purity in which He is completely corresponds to His own nature’.<sup>417</sup> I would say that God’s presence is what makes light be light; and thus, darkness is characterized by the absence of God. God is light and it follows that He is in light. As Rensberger notes the statement ‘God is in light’, does not imply that ‘light is somehow prior to God’. Rather, having introduced the theme of imitation of God, the author writes that ‘God is in light’, as ‘there must be a parallel between our condition and God’s’.<sup>418</sup>

Moreover, Brown notes that the image of God’s being in light represents a change from ‘God is light’ and that the new image has better biblical parallels (Ps 104:2; Isa 2:5; Dan 2:22; 1Tim 6:15-16). He also observes that the two formulas, ‘God is light’ and ‘God is in light’, ‘have slightly different functions: One portrays God’s being as the basis for Christian experience; the other portrays Him as the model for Christian behavior’. The choice of the image, ‘God is in light’, here ‘may have been determined by the idiom “walk in light”’.<sup>419</sup>

I would say that the two expressions are almost synonymous. ‘God is in light’ flows from ‘God is light’. Besides, John tends to repeat statements while changing the wording of them, depending on which particular aspect *of* an idea he wishes to put emphasis on. The context or the theme of imitation to which the author repeatedly points, may have dictated this change of phrasing.

**7b. *we have fellowship with one another,***

Walking in the light, the believer meets his fellow Christians who also walk in the light. What unites them is their union with God. As Brooke notes, following his usual custom, the author seems to carry ‘the thought a step further’;<sup>420</sup> fellowship with one another stems from one’s fellowship with God.

<sup>415</sup> Cf. IQS III, 13-25 where as Houlden, 1973, p.57 notes s ‘we read words strongly reminiscent of our present passage....it would be hard to think of a closer parallel’. See Klauck, 1991, p.89 in his subsection: *Wahrheit*

<sup>416</sup> Westcott, 1886, p.20

<sup>417</sup> Ibid. As Barrett, 1955, p.132 notes, ‘the contrast of light and darkness seems inevitably to arise whenever theological use is made of “light”’. For passages where the metaphor of light is present in earlier Christian writings and in the Old Testament see Hoskyns, 1947, p.330

<sup>418</sup> Rensberger, 1997, p.52

<sup>419</sup> Brown, 1982, pp.200-201

<sup>420</sup> Brooke, 1912, p.15 So, Brown, 1982, p.201 However, with regard to this turn of thought, O’Neill, 1966, p.10, notes that ‘we may surmise that an early scribe enriched the text; it is harder to imagine a scribe deliberately impoverishing the verse by changing the *with each other* to *with Him*’. However, for

Accordingly, though I agree with Westcott that one's fellowship with his brethren 'is the visible sign of fellowship with God',<sup>421</sup> I would rather maintain that fellowship with the brethren is rooted in fellowship with God and not *vice versa*.<sup>422</sup> God's atmosphere is where believers meet each other while they walk in the light. Having communion with God results in having communion with each other, as what unifies the believers is their common belief in God or what makes them brothers is their common father-God.<sup>423</sup>

According to Brown, what happens here is that the author 'is going back to the idea he proposed in the Prologue by insisting that the secessionist boast, "We are in communion with Him", must be wrong precisely because they do not have communion with the other Johannine Christians who are adherents of the author and the tradition-bearers'.<sup>424</sup> Moreover, the communion meant here is not among all Christians but among members of the Johannine community.<sup>425</sup> As Brown sees it, the author is simply not thinking of the rest of the Christians and he is not pastorally concerned about them in this piece of writing.<sup>426</sup>

However, in my opinion, though in every probability, the opponents are implicitly meant in this verse, there is no indication that the text itself excludes the possibility of the author's being concerned about the Christians as a whole. As I have already said, refutation and exhortation lie alongside each other in the Epistle. However serious the secession was, I think that the author's pastoral interest would never abandon him. Besides, the Epistle was written at the end of the first century and at this time the danger of heresy was more than visible.

Bultmann, 1967, p.19 'in all likelihood, that is (fellowship with him) what stood in the conjectured Source, but the author of the Epistle probably changed it to "with one another" with the thought that the reader needs to know in what walking in the light, as opposed to walking "in the darkness", (v.6) consists'. For Strecker, 1996, pp.29-30 the reading 'with him' instead of 'with each other' must be regarded as a secondary smoothing of the language that does not preserve the connection between communion with God and human community in the Christian congregation that is characteristic of Johannine theology'.

<sup>421</sup> Westcott, 1886, p.20

<sup>422</sup> Ibid., p.21 notes that 'true fellowship with God comes through men'. Just like love of the brethren is the proof of the love of God: fellowship with the brethren is the proof of fellowship with God. Accordingly, Westcott (ibid.) proceeds, 'St John does not repeat the phrase which he has quoted from the vain professors of Christianity (*we have fellowship with Him v.6*), but gives that which is its true equivalent according to the conditions of our being. Comp.v.3'.

<sup>423</sup> So, Law, 1909, p.372-373; Brooke, 1912, p.15; Strecker, 1996, p.30; As for Vouga, 1990, p.28, he espouses the idea that there is no difference for the author between 'having fellowship with Him' and 'having fellowship with one another'. For Klauck, 1991, p.90 the difference is not as big as it seems to be. Bultmann, 1971, p.536 commenting on chapter 15:4 talks of a 'reciprocal' relationship between the Revealer and the believers.

<sup>424</sup> Brown, 1982, p.201 Painter, 1986, p.55 as well notes that the opponents 'seem to be claiming some kind of mystical union with God which had no relation to the lives of other believers'. Moreover, in Painter's opinion, the use of *each other* suggests some relation to the love command in the GJ tradition (13:34). Indeed, *to have communion with each other is to love each other*. In this way, Painter proceeds, 'our author has reoriented the theme from a direct relation with God to the believers' relation with each other'.

<sup>425</sup> Unlike Bultmann, 1967, p.20 who asserts that 'the formulations of the antithetical attitude in 2:11, 4:20, make it probable that "with one another" is to be referred to human fellowship in general'.

If we were to assume that the opponents of John used the term *κοινωνία*, I would agree with Painter who states that while the 'first boast' appears to have been presented in the terms of the opponents, in the present verse, 'our author reinterpreted *κοινωνία* and developed criteria which would demonstrate that the opponents did not have *κοινωνία* with God'.<sup>427</sup>

Rensberger combining the ideas of fellowship and love with God and one another, states that 'fellowship with one another may be another way of speaking about love, so that imitating God in light and love brings fellowship both with God and with one another'. Therefore, he goes on, 'fellowship with God is not a private relationship but involves joining with others in shared tradition (1:3) and in love. We can walk in the light only when we walk with others whom we can love and with whom we can learn of God'.<sup>428</sup>

While for Strecker to be in communion with God is the foundation of one's walking in the light, Rensberger says that imitating God or being in the light as He is in the light, brings fellowship both with God and one another. As I see it, being in communion with God is achieved in the realm of light but one cannot be in the light without being in communion with God; for God is the light apart from being in the light. Thus, these two expressions may convey the same meaning.

Obviously, what is underlined here is the fact that 'fellowship with God is not a private relationship'; it brings about fellowship with one another. Neither of them can stand independently and both of them are fully realized in the church.<sup>429</sup>

### ***7c. and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin.***

Though this verse seems to have no relationship with what preceded,<sup>430</sup> it actually explains how what has been said in 7a. and 7b. is possible to be concretised, granted that sinful human beings are involved.

What the author stresses is that it is not humans being sinless<sup>431</sup> which enables them to be in communion with God who is sinless. It is rather the possibility they are offered to

<sup>426</sup> Brown, 1982, p.201

<sup>427</sup> Painter, 1986, p.55

<sup>428</sup> Rensberger, 1997, pp.52-53

<sup>429</sup> Evaluating the concept of the community, Schnackenburg, 1992, p.78, points out that the author, unlike the heretics, who assert their personal experience and possession of God, 'is entirely rooted in the Christian fellowship and knows that the only way to God is in community, the community that preserves the message of Christ (cf. 1:3; 2:19)'.

<sup>430</sup> Though for Westcott, 1886, p.21 and Brooke, 1912, p.15-16 this part of verse 7 is coordinate with that which precedes it, for Bultmann, 1967, p.20, v.7c 'corresponds indeed, to the ecclesiastical theology, but not to Johannine thought'. Accordingly, it represents 'an addition of the ecclesiastical redactor'. See O'Neill, 1966, pp.10-11 and Strecker, 1996, p.31 for their objections to Bultmann's theory. Though I respect Bultmann's thesis, I suppose that the lack of any textual evidence in favour of his theory has to be taken seriously into consideration.

deal with sin effectively. Obviously, sin constitutes an obstacle to men's living in the light. So, God has provided His believers with the means of curing 'this universal human disease'<sup>432</sup>, the blood of His Son, Jesus Christ.<sup>433</sup> The theme of imitation of God is implicitly present once more. To have *κοινωνία* with God necessitates one's being sinless, as He is sinless. This is going to be achieved by the acceptance of and appeal to the redemptive action of the blood of Christ-offered to those being in communion with God as a means of maintaining communion with God-and not by rejecting sin as a reality in human life, as the opponents seem to have done (1:8).

Thus, I think that the author implicitly refutes his opponents' claim, which he will spell out in the next verse<sup>434</sup>, putting his finger on the critical issue of the presence of sin in the believer's life. The author refuting the secessionists, Schnackenburg notes, is in danger of contradicting what he has just said. On the one hand, he seems to insist that fellowship with God means walking in the light in the sense of doing the works of the light, while he also says that no Christian can be without sin/works of darkness. The solution to this dilemma lies, for the author, 'in the fact that the Christian is not immune from sin, but that the blood of Jesus Christ cleanses from all sin'.<sup>435</sup>

Cleansing practices are known to us from the Old Testament<sup>436</sup> and are also present in the contemporary Jewish literature, as they represent a feature of every religious system, for approaching God always requires cleansing. In the New Testament<sup>437</sup> God approaches human beings to offer them the means of cleansing themselves, in order for

<sup>431</sup> As Schnackenburg, 1992, p.79 notes, the author does not base the ability of Christians to walk in the light on their being sinless but indirectly admits that sin may occur 'even in the life of Christians' (cf. 5:17).

<sup>432</sup> Filson, 1969, p.273 As Brooke, 1912, p.16 notes Jesus, 'as man gained the power to help men' and 'as Son of God His help is effective'.

<sup>433</sup> For Bogart, 1977, p.39 the author of 1John 'by a firm affirmation of the primitive doctrine of expiation, hitherto unused in the Johannine community' refutes the gnostic concept of inherent sinlessness (1:8).

<sup>434</sup> See Brown, 1982, p.202 Also, Schnackenburg, 1992, p.79 refers to the 'novel slogans' of the opponents, which the author refutes.

<sup>435</sup> Schnackenburg, 1992, p.79

<sup>436</sup> Here, Westcott, 1886, pp.21-22 notes, 'the thought is not of the forgiveness of sin only, but of the removal of sin'. As we know from the Old Covenant, 'ritual "cleanness" was the condition for the participation in the privileges of approach to God'. So Brooke, 1912, pp.15-16; Brown, 1982, p.203 Westcott, 1886, p.22 also adds that by saying 'sin' and not 'sins', the author is referred to 'the spring, the principle' of sin, and not to its 'separate manifestations'. Likewise, Law, 1909, p.373 and Brooke, 1912, p.16 As Lieu, 1991, pp.59-60, notes 'the plural is used of sins forgiven (1:9; 2:12; 3:5) or propitiated (2:2: 4:10; at 1:7 "every sin" has a plural sense), but also to be confessed (1:9), which implies their present reality'.

<sup>437</sup> As Barrett, 1954-55, p.217 observes, 'the connection in the New Testament between the death of Jesus and sin and guilt is too evident to need emphasis; see for example Rom. iii.25, 1Cor. xv.3, 1John ii.2. iii.5'. Moreover, in this article Barrett is making a few observations on some of the New Testament references and allusions to Christ as God's Lamb, and he ventures 'to suggest what may have been the traditional processes to which they bear witness' (ibid., p.212). He suggests that the background of the phrase is eucharistic *pace* Dodd (1953, pp.235-238) who asserts that it is rather apocalyptic (ibid. p.238). However, concerning this context in Bogart's, 1977, p.52, opinion 'certainly it must be said that the combination of the title *Lamb of God* with the function of taking away the world's sin is a Christian invention'.

them to approach God and be in communion with Him. In John in particular, the emphasis is put on one's being born 'from above' (Jn 3:3), or being 'born of God' (1Jn 3:9).

Moreover, the reference to the cleansing power of the blood of Christ, I would agree with Strecker, is intended to remind Christians of the fact that 'the union between God and the community of Christians is not perfected once and for all, it requires continual renewal'. The author, Strecker proceeds, rightly I think, 'is neither utopian nor enthusiast, and does not soar beyond empirical reality'. Sin is present in the believer's life and perfection is not going to be achieved by the children of God on earth.<sup>438</sup> At this point we should note that exactly the same stand towards the issue of the presence of sin in the believer's life is taken by contemporary Jewish thought, as we have seen in the first chapter. At this point, it suffices to say that the 'perfect' (Qumran), the 'sons of the living God' (Jubilees), do sin but they have to struggle for sinlessness, purifying themselves with means that the community provides for them. Yet, perfection is to be achieved in the age to come, not in the present time.

The cleansing of the believers' sinfulness appears to be a presupposition and at the same time a result of their having fellowship with God. To partake in His realm of light one has to be cleansed. At the same time, being in this realm, the believer can continually be purified by the cleansing power of the blood of Christ. The thing is, Dodd notes that 'such purity belongs to believers, not through their own moral achievement, but by virtue of the death of Christ'.<sup>439</sup>

Apparently, the need for cleansing underlines the fact that sin does exist in the believers' life. So, the believer has to be continually cleansed in order for him to maintain his fellowship with God.<sup>440</sup> The cleansing power of the blood of Jesus is what enables Christians to continue to walk in the light, despite their sinfulness. Undoubtedly, we cannot assert that such an idea was totally absent from GJohn. An assertion like that would mean that according to the Gospel sin is not an important element in the believer's life. Nevertheless, I would say that the seeds of such an idea though implicitly, were present in GJohn. For example, in the reference to the Lamb of God, 'who takes away the sin of the world' (Jn 1:29)<sup>441</sup>, as Barrett notes, John probably refers primarily to 'the Paschal lamb'. However, given the fact that in Judaism the lamb

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<sup>438</sup> Strecker, 1996, p.30

<sup>439</sup> Dodd, 1946, p.21

<sup>440</sup> As accurately Reumann, 1982, p.145 observes, 'since sin is a continuing fact even for the believer, forgiveness and cleansing must continue for those who "walk in the light" of God'.

<sup>441</sup> In Jn 1:29 sin has the meaning of wrongdoing, an action done against God's will (cf. Jn 3:14; 20:23). These passages represent, as Bogart, 1977, pp.51-52 observes, the 'pre-Johannine usage atypical of the

sacrificed at Passover is not thought to take away sins, 'the probable source of John's thought and language is the Paschal interpretation of the last supper and the eucharist'. Moreover, Barrett goes on, 'the eucharist is a Paschal meal and in it the death of Christ for the remission of sins is portrayed'. In the present context, the same scholar concludes and I would agree with him, it seems that the two propositions namely, that 'Christ was the Passover lamb' and that He 'bore, or took away, sins', though 'originally unconnected, are combined'.<sup>442</sup> Special circumstances as we have already pointed out called for the more explicit stressing of the ideas of sin and the doctrine of atonement in 1John.

Given the fact that, as I see it, according to 1John the blood of Christ is what cleanses the believer of sin while he walks in the light, it appears to me that these ideas of sinfulness and sinlessness are directly related to the redemptive mission of Christ as the former seems to be its cause and the latter its result.

I suppose that from this verse the so-called contradiction becomes obvious. Christians are said to be walking in the light and to have communion with Him, despite their being sinful. Talking about sins, the author appeals to the cleansing power of the blood of Jesus to make clear how these two things can coexist. So, he clarifies that God, and actually the work of His son Jesus, enables the believers to keep walking in the light, despite their sinful nature. For this reason, it seems to me that the reference to the cleansing power of the blood of Christ at this point is harmonious with the whole section and flows naturally from what has been said previously.

### ***8. If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.***

The idea of the cleansing power of the blood of Jesus leads to another thought. Asserting sinlessness, one proves God's offer of the blood of His Son useless; a fact which is nothing but self-deception and of course, alien to the truth. Those who assert sinlessness, being liars, deceive themselves. As I noted, in the present verse the author writes explicitly what was said implicitly in the previous verse. Moreover, v.8 seems to have the same wording as v.6.<sup>443</sup> Still, while the hypothesis part of the sentence (if we

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central theological thrust of the Gospel'. However, the fact of John continuing this usage suggests that he was not opposed to this meaning of sin.

<sup>442</sup> Barrett, 1955, p.147

<sup>443</sup> As Bultmann, 1967, pp.20-21 states, the sentence with which verse 8 begins, 'comes initially as a surprise, because the protasis "if we say we have no sin" corresponds to the "if we say..." in v.6, and accordingly "have no sin" becomes parallel with "walking in the darkness"'. However, Bultmann concludes, this sentence is explicable in that vss.5-10 concern the false teachers who assert their sinlessness. In other words, this assertion for the author is synonymous with 'walking in darkness'.

say that we have fellowship with him) in the latter was not rejected altogether by the author but it was conditioned in the apodosis (not walk in the darkness), the hypothesis in the former (if we say that we have no sin), is not true under any circumstances.<sup>444</sup>

**8a. *If we say that we have no sin,***

'Picking up the key word "sin"<sup>445</sup>, the author by this *if* clause introduces us to the second false claim of the opponents.<sup>446</sup> It seems that the word 'sin' has a rather general meaning and it is not referred to a particular kind of sins, as the meaning of the verse requires.<sup>447</sup> The false assertion appears to deny the sin as a fact in the believers' life. What the author points out to his audience<sup>448</sup> is that such an assertion has 'fatal consequences'<sup>449</sup>; not only self-deception but also proving God a liar.

The opponents' assertion of sinlessness reminds us of later gnostic elements of teaching according to which gnostics appealed to a mystical communion with God which makes them sinless.<sup>450</sup> Talking about 'two distinct types of perfectionism', Bogart states that in the relevant verse we have the heretical perfectionism while in 3:6 and 9 we have its orthodox expression.<sup>451</sup>

For Law, in the phrase 'to have sin' (1Jn 1:8; Jn 9:41; 15:22,24; 19:11), the idea of sin is more abstract. The phrase connotes 'not so much the act of sin as the culpability of the doer'.<sup>452</sup> Specifically, in 1:8 ('if we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves') 'the judicial sense is unmistakable'. Being peculiar to John, the phrase ἁμαρτιαν ἔχειν 'has a quite definite sense'. Thus, in John 15:22 'if I had not come and spoken to them, they would not have sin; but now they have no excuse for their sin', Law notes, undoubtedly,

<sup>444</sup> See Brown, 1982, p.205

<sup>445</sup> Schnackenburg, 1992, p.79

<sup>446</sup> Westcott, 1886, p.22; Brooke, 1912, p.17; Dodd, 1946, p.21; Bultmann, 1967, p.21; Bogart, 1977, p.34; Brown, 1982, p.82; Painter, 1986, p.55; Schnackenburg, 1992, p.79-80;

<sup>447</sup> As Westcott, 1886, p.22 notes, the word 'sin' is to be taken quite generally and 'not confined to original sin, or to sin of any particular type'. So Brown, 1982, p.205 notes that 'there is no indication that we should confine this "sin", to original sin, or to sexual sin, or to minor sin, or to forgiven past sin'.

<sup>448</sup> The 'we', in Brown's, 1982, p.205 opinion represents 'Johannine Christians who might make this boast under the influence of secessionist theology'. However, for Lieu, 1991, p.50 the 'we' is not aimed at others who did so claim but at the community.

<sup>449</sup> Brooke, 1912, p.18

<sup>450</sup> Dodd, 1946, p.21-22 refers to the belief that 'Christians have been given a new nature superior to that of other men'. Accordingly, there is no need for moral striving and their 'mystical communion with God in itself removes them from the category of sinful men'. So Bogart, 1977, pp.33-34 Moreover, for Schnackenburg, 1992, p.80 the false teachers are in line with 'the gnostic conviction that pneumatics cannot be defiled by the material world and its impurities'. 'This dispute' Brown, 1982, 205 asserts, 'is but the tip of the iceberg, for the implications of this statement have been the subject of theological discussion for centuries'.

<sup>451</sup> Bogart, 1977, p.34 As Brown, 1982, p.205 observes, some have understood this verse as a 'perfectionist claim' meaning 'we are not guilty, for we have never sinned', and others in a 'libertine sense' meaning 'we are not guilty, although we have sinned'.

<sup>452</sup> Law, 1909, p.129 n.1 Moreover, with the article, ἁμαρτία 'is a pure abstract, signifying sin in its constitutive principle' (ἁμαρτία, 3:4.8, in direct antithesis to δικαιοσύνη, 2:29; 3:7).

‘to have sin’ specifically denotes ‘the guiltiness of the agent’. Moreover, regarding Jn 9:41; 15:24 and 19:11 the sense is equally clear. In Law’s opinion, these parallels are decisive for the meaning of 1Jn 1:8. Accordingly, the meaning of the relevant verse is in Law’s estimation, ‘if we say that we have no guilt, no responsibility for the actions, wrong in themselves, which we have committed, we but deceive ourselves’.<sup>453</sup>

For Brown, the key to what the author means by saying ‘if we say that we have no sin’ depends on the ‘exact connotation of the peculiar Johannine expression, “have sin”’, which he translates as ‘being guilty of sin’.<sup>454</sup>

First of all, I would agree with Brown that such an assertion would be derived from GJohn. This secessionist slogan is easily related to the Fourth Gospel, given the fact that the terminology ‘guilty of sin’ (Jn 9:41; 15:22,24; 19:11), and ‘slaves of sin’ is used there ‘for nonbelievers’. In Jn 8:31-34, Jesus addresses ‘Jews who had (inadequately) believed in him thus: “Everyone who acts sinfully is a slave of sin”, whereas “If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples; and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free”’. Since, Brown proceeds, unlike the nonbeliever, the believer is freed from sin, the secessionists ‘would really be rephrasing only slightly if they claimed to be free from the guilt of sin’.<sup>455</sup>

The phrase ‘to have sin’, as scholars have observed, is peculiar to John in the New Testament<sup>456</sup>. Its meaning is thought to have a different connotation from ‘to sin’.<sup>457</sup> I suppose that ‘to have sin’ refers generally to the idea of sin as a principle, while ‘to have sinned’ where the verb is used, refers to sinful actions. The denial of having sins makes unattainable the possibility of having sinned. ‘Having sin’ necessitates one’s ‘having sinned’; ‘having sinned’, one certainly ‘has sin’. The difference as I see it, is slight. Simply, ‘to have sin’ refers to the principle of sin and ‘to have sinned’ refers to its several manifestations.

Moreover, for Brown the relevant phrase ‘to have sin’ is used in the same way in the Gospel and the Epistles bearing exactly the same meaning namely ‘to be guilty of sin’.

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<sup>453</sup> Ibid., p.130

<sup>454</sup> Brown, 1982, p.205

<sup>455</sup> Ibid., p.82

<sup>456</sup> See Law, 1909, p.130; Brooke, 1912, p.17; Barrett, 1955, p. 452; Dodd, 1963, p.327; Brown, 1982, p.205; Klauck, 1991, p.93; Schnackenburg, 1992, p.80 n.36; Rensberger, 1997, p.53

Specifically for Westcott, 1886, p.22 like ‘corresponding phrases πίστιν ἔχειν (Matt.xvii.20; xxi.21), ζῶην ἔχειν (John v.26, 40), λύπην ἔχειν (John xvi.21f.)’, ‘it marks the presence of something which is not isolated but a continuous source of influence’.

<sup>457</sup> For Westcott, 1886, p.22 ‘to have sin’ is distinguished from ‘to sin’, ‘as the sinful principle is distinguished from the sinful act in itself. “To have sin” includes the idea of personal guilt: it describes a state both as a consequence and as a cause’. Additionally, for Brooke, 1912, p.17 to ‘have sin’ is not merely a synonym for to commit sins. This is necessitated, Brooke adds by the contrast demanded by verse 10 between *we have no sin* and *we have not sinned*. Accordingly, ‘sin is the principle of which sinful acts are the several manifestations’

Firstly, Brown notes, and I would agree with him, the analogy, which exists between other similar Johannine expressions<sup>458</sup> in which 'have' governs an abstract noun, suggests that 'the expression refers to a state'.<sup>459</sup> The relevant expression occurs four times in GJohn (9:41; 15:22,24; 19:11), always, the same scholar writes, 'in a situation in which a wrong action has already been committed or there is a wrong attitude already existing, and in which something further has occurred to underline the evil of that action'. Accordingly, in John 9:41, the Pharisees 'have not been able to "see" Jesus with the eyes of faith: if they were physically blind, they might not *have sin*; but because they claim to see, their sin remains'.<sup>460</sup> For Brown, 'the evangelist wished the reader to identify himself with the blind man, and the secessionists have done just that in regarding themselves as those who have been enlightened and thus not guilty of sin'.<sup>461</sup>

Furthermore, as Brown sees it, in Jn 15:22,24 Jesus says, 'If I had not come and spoken to them, they would not *have sin*; but as it is, they have no excuse for their sin'. And in 19:11, 'the one who handed Jesus over to Pilate *has* a greater sin than Pilate who will sentence Jesus'. In 1Jn 1:8, Brown proceeds, 'the meaning seems to be the same'. The author 'is warning people who have sinned that they cannot claim, "We are free from the guilt of sin". Theirs need not have been an extreme libertinism that said there were no wrong actions for the enlightened and urged wicked deeds with impunity as a way of showing one's freedom from the powers that rule the world'.<sup>462</sup> Rather, Brown concludes their claim may have suggested that 'actions committed by the believer were not important enough to be sins that could challenge the intimacy with God acquired through belief'.<sup>463</sup>

Nevertheless, Brooke states that while 'it is probably true that as compared with the simple verb the phrase accentuates the ideas of guilt and responsibility', these ideas do not exhaust the meaning of the phrase. So, in particular, in Jn 15:22 'where the antithesis, "Now they have no excuse for their sin", must be noticed', though the idea of guilt is prominent, 'it does not exhaust the meaning of the phrase as used there'. Moreover, in 9:41 and in chapter 15 as well, 'the rejection of Christ's words by His

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<sup>458</sup> See Brown, 1982, p.205, notes, 'to have communion (κοινωνία: 1John 1:3,6,7), confidence (2:28; 3:21; 4:17), hope (3:3), life (3:15; 5:12-13), love (John 5:42; 13:35; 15:13; 1John 4:16), joy (John 17:13; III John 4), and peace (John 16:33)'. See also Schnackenburg, 1992, p.80, n.36

<sup>459</sup> Brown, 1982, p.205

<sup>460</sup> Ibid., pp.205-206 Referring to the corresponding verses in GJohn, Schnackenburg, 1992, p.80 n.36 notes that 'this phrase always conveys the idea of being actually tainted with sin, not merely being accused of it'.

<sup>461</sup> Ibid., p.82 For details see Brown, 1966-1970 at the relevant passages.

<sup>462</sup> See Irenaeus's, *Adv. Haer. 1.25.4*, and Eusebius's, *Eccl. Hist. 4.7*) where these views are attributed to Carpocrates, a gnostic leader.

<sup>463</sup> Brown, 1982, p.206

opponents had given sin a power over them, which it could never have had but for their missing the opportunity of better things'.<sup>464</sup>

Furthermore, Brooke suggests, even if the phrase 'to have sin' in the Gospel of John denotes 'the guiltiness of the agent', it would not inevitably bear precisely the same connotation in the Epistle. The writer, Brooke explains, 'likes to put new meaning into the phrases he repeats'. Nevertheless, 'though the exact *nuance* may be different in the two writings, the fundamental idea expressed is the same'.<sup>465</sup>

I would rather agree with Brooke, that 'the guiltiness of the agent' represents partly the meaning of the relevant phrase. It seems to me that in the Johannine verses mentioned by Brown 'be guilty of sin' does not exhaust the meaning of the phrase. First of all, it is clear that the phrase refers to a state just like the similar Johannine phrases already mentioned; a state that primarily has relational dimensions illustrating the nature of our relationship to God. Undoubtedly, the idea of guiltiness and responsibility is included. Nonetheless, to me the idea of the rejection of Jesus is prominent followed by the one of guiltiness and responsibility.

Moreover, the explanation Brown offers of the expression 'to have sin' ('in a situation in which a wrong action has already been committed or there is a wrong attitude already existing, and in which something further has occurred to underline the evil of that action') is, I think wider than the definition 'be guilty of sin'. It is noteworthy that the above explanation consists of three parts as many as the verses involved are; a fact, which means that the proposed explanation is actually inadequate.

What is more, nonbelievers were guilty of sin but from Jesus' standpoint. Their sin consists in the rejection of Christ. Not recognizing this, Pharisees as representatives of those who opposed Christ went on sinning refusing to see the light. In the Epistle, the believer is exhorted to recognize his being sinful, though he walks in the light, and ask for forgiveness. So, 'to have sin', concerning GJohn, means to close one's eyes so as not to see the Light-Christ and thus reject Him. In the Epistle, the circumstances have been changed. Though the core of the term sin remains the rejection of Christ, the meaning of this rejection, in the face of heresy, is extended. The author of the Epistle addresses people who have already accepted Christ and believed in Him. The problem is not one of rejection/acceptance of Christ any more; the author is concerned about the way one is to demonstrate his belief in Christ. Verbal acceptance is not enough and the rejection or

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<sup>464</sup> Brooke, 1912, pp.17-18 Moreover, for Barrett, 1955, p.452 the phrase to 'have sin' in Jn 19:11, 'plainly means "guilt"'. However, with regard to Jn.9:41 he (ibid., p.304) notes that 'the blindness of such men is incurable since they have deliberately rejected the only cure that exists'. Also, referring to Jn.15:22, the same scholar, (ibid., p.401) observes that, 'by sin John means conscious and deliberate rejection of the light'. Furthermore, Cooper, 1972, p.244 notes that for John unbelief 'is the sin par excellence'.

acceptance of Christ now that He is not among them in the flesh, has to be demonstrated in ethical and christological terms.

Thus, sin, in the light of the experience of the schism, needs redefining. Christians are alerted not to *deceive* themselves asserting that 'we believe in Him so we do not have sin as Pharisees did' (Jn 9:41). 1John redefines the meaning of *believing in Him*, equating it with the *abiding in him*—being followed by all the necessary supplementary meanings; and in doing so, *to have sin* as opposed to *to abide in him*, acquires another content, namely *to walk in darkness*, the heart of which is once more the rejection of Christ. There is a shift from strongly deterministic language, namely to 'have life' as opposed to 'have sin', to the more voluntaristic expressions namely 'confess sins', be cleansed by sin in order to have life and be in communion with the Life. This shift between GJohn and 1John, I think, has to be borne in mind even when expressions used in both writings are to be interpreted.

What is more, as I have repeatedly pointed out, in my opinion, the Gospel functions as a valuable tool for the Epistles to be comprehended but it should not be used as a theological fence marking the borders in which the theological views of the Epistles should be restricted.

### **8b. we deceive ourselves,**

Asserting sinlessness seems to be a 'fatal mistake' with two faces. On the one hand, the one who asserts such a thing deceives himself, and on the other, truth does not dwell in him. V.8b. corresponds to v.6bc.<sup>466</sup>; while in the former the one who says that he is 'in communion with Him' and walks in the darkness is a liar, in the latter, the one who says that he has no sin, deceives himself. Saying that he has no sin, one makes clear that he walks in darkness. In doing so he is a liar and more than this, he deceives himself.<sup>467</sup>

<sup>465</sup> Brooke, 1912, p.18

<sup>466</sup> As Bultmann, 1967, p.21 notes, 'we deceive ourselves' corresponds to the 'we lie' of v.6. 'For self-deception does not mean a simple mistake, but rather that misdirected self-understanding which is not aware of its nothingness'. However, in Strecker's, 1996, p.31 opinion, being in the truth is the opposite of being in falsehood, 'which in turn means not only an existence in error, a "misdirected self-understanding", as Bultmann states, but also a deliberate self-deception that refuses to acknowledge what it already knows'.

<sup>467</sup> As Westcott, 1886, pp.22-23 states, if we assert that we have no sin, our fatal mistake is, not only 'a fact but it is a fact of which we are the responsible authors'. Though we know that such an assertion is false, 'more than this, we persuade ourselves that it is true'. This phrase, the same scholar observes (ibid., p.23) does not occur in NT. 'For the use of *ourselves* with the first person see Acts xxiii.14; Rom. viii.23; xv.1; ICor. xi. 31; 2Cor. i.9. St. John uses it with the second person c. v. 21; 2John 8; John v.42; vi. 53; xii. 8'.

Concerning the idea of *πλάνη*, Westcott notes that, it ‘is in all cases that of straying from the one way (James v.19f.): not of misconception in itself, but of misconduct. Such going astray is essentially ruinous’.<sup>468</sup>

Moreover, Brooke notes that the phrase *we deceive ourselves* as contrasted with the simple *πλανώμεθα* ‘emphasizes the agent’s responsibility for the mistake...there is no excuse for the sin which we “have”, in spite of our denial of the fact’.<sup>469</sup> The plea expressed in verse 8 ‘rests on self-deception’. Such an assertion can be made by those ‘who shut their eyes to the teaching of experience, in themselves or in others. And they lead themselves astray’.<sup>470</sup>

Observing that apart from the present usage of ‘we deceive ourselves’ that could refer simply to self-deception arising from confusion, Brown notes that all the other usages of the verb and nouns in the Johannine Epistles refer to ‘the secession that is affecting the Johannine community’. Moreover, the constant association of deceit with the Antichrist (2:26; 2Jn 7; 1Jn 3:7; 4:1-6) and secession, Brown adds, ‘makes it likely that there too the author is thinking of self-deception under the influence of secessionist propaganda’. The terms for ‘lie’ and ‘deceit’ belong to the Johannine language of dualism where they are used in opposition to truth.<sup>471</sup>

### ***8c. and the truth is not in us***

It seems that v.8c corresponds to 6d.<sup>472</sup> When one does not do the truth, it follows that the truth is not in him. The first results in lying to others, the second emphasizes the lying to oneself. As we have seen in v.6 self-deception is a shade of lying, which is the opposite of the truth. It follows that the one who deceives himself cannot be indwelt by the truth. The truth has nothing to do with any kind of deception, especially with self-deception<sup>473</sup> that, I think, includes a sense of deliberate violation of the truth.

We have already referred to the concept of the truth as John conceives it. Referring particularly to this verse, Westcott concludes that ‘the Truth may therefore in this most

<sup>468</sup> ‘The cognate terms’, Westcott, 1886, p.23 notes ‘are used of the false christs and prophets (Matt. xxiv. 4ff.; Apoc. ii. 20; xiii. 14; xix. 20; comp.c. iv. 6; 2 Ep. 7); of Satan (Apoc. xii. 9; xx. 3ff.), of Babylon (Apoc. xviii. 23), of Balaam (Jude 11)’.

<sup>469</sup> Brooke, 1912, p.18 As Brooke (*ibid.*) adds, ‘*πλανῶν* always suggests the idea of leading astray from the right path (cf. ii.26, iii.7; Jn.vii.12; Apoc. ii.20, xii.9, etc.). The mistake must have fatal consequences until we lead ourselves back into the way of truth’.

<sup>470</sup> *Ibid.*, p.17

<sup>471</sup> Brown, 1982, p.206

<sup>472</sup> For Bultmann, 1967, p.21, ‘the truth is not in us’ corresponds to ‘we do not do the truth’ of v.6 and ‘designates the futility of such a mode of being’.

<sup>473</sup> As Schnackenburg, 1992, p.80 observes, the active voice with a reflexive, ‘gives a stronger image stressing the note of personal responsibility’. Here the claim to possess truth is more emphatically pointed than in v.6. Truth is ‘understood as a divine reality which does not dwell in that type of person’.

comprehensive sense be regarded without us or within us: as something outwardly realized (v.6 *do the truth*), or as something inwardly efficacious (*the truth is in us*).<sup>474</sup>

The expression 'the truth is not in us', is an equivalent to 'walking in the light', to 'be of God', and it belongs to this group of Johannine idioms which point in one and the same direction, the realm of God. According to John, the truth is the one who recognizes his sinfulness and asks for forgiveness, as the next verse reads.

**9. If we confess our sins, he who is faithful and just will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.**

If 'we confess our sins', on the basis of the preceding verse, we are not deceiving ourselves and the truth is in us.<sup>475</sup> Acknowledging his sinful being, the believer is in the light where the blood of Christ cleanses him from every sin. Moreover, in the present verse the author, according to his habit, takes his thought a step further.<sup>476</sup> The acknowledgment of the sin is not enough. The believers have to confess their sins and God, being reliable and just, will forgive them and cleanse them from all wrongdoing.

As Westcott notes, 'the same attributes of God which lead to the punishment of the unrepentant lead to the forgiveness and cleansing of the penitent'. Frank confession is met by free blessing. And 'the divine blessing connected with the confession of sins is twofold. It includes: 1) the remission of sins, the remission of the consequences which they entail, and 2) the cleansing of the sinner from the moral imperfection which separates him from God'.<sup>477</sup> Moreover, in Brooke's opinion though the existence of sin 'is a patent fact', it does not make it impossible for us to be in fellowship with God, as 'in those who acknowledge the fact, God has provided for its forgiveness and removal'.<sup>478</sup>

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<sup>474</sup> Westcott, 1886, p.23 In John Westcott (ibid.) notes, 'the Truth' is the whole Gospel 'as that which meets the requirements of man's nature'. 'The same conception is found in the other apostolic writings; 2Thess. ii. 12; Rom. ii. 8; 2Cor. xiii. 8; (Gal. v. 7); 1Tim. iii. 15; iv. 3; vi. 5; 2Tim. ii. 15, 18; (Tit. i.1); Heb. x. 26; 1 Pet. i. 22; James iii. 14; v.19'. For Law, 1909, p.372 the ἀλήθεια 'denotes the reality of things *sub specie aeternitatis*-the realities of the spiritual and eternal world, the revelation of which is the Light'. So, Brooke, 1912, p.19

<sup>475</sup> Law, 1909, p.373 notes that though the expected antithesis would have been: 'If we confess our sins, we do not deceive ourselves' the thought (as in 1:7), 'leaps immediately to the Divine action which is immediately consequent upon our action'.

<sup>476</sup> As Westcott, 1886, p.23 observes 'there is no sharp opposition in form between this verse and v.8, as there is between 7 and 6'. 'Open confession and open assertion are acts of the same order'. However, according to Bultmann's. 1967, p.21 theory, 'verse 9 is inserted between these verses and comments on v.8, insofar as the warning about considering oneself sinless includes the admonition to confess one's sins'. Moreover, this explanation was in every probability inserted in the Source by the author, but it is entirely in accordance with the Source.

<sup>477</sup> Westcott, 1886, p.23

<sup>478</sup> Brooke, 1912, p.19

### 9a. *If we confess our sins,*

The exact phrase is not found elsewhere in the New Testament.<sup>479</sup> However, the related expression, ἐξομολογεῖσθαι ἁμαρτίας occurs in Mat 3:6, Mk 1:5, Jas 5:16. As commentators observe the phrase, ‘confess our sins’<sup>480</sup> means not only acknowledge them but acknowledge them ‘openly in the face of men’.<sup>481</sup> For Law what is meant here is ‘not recognition only, but open acknowledgment-this, as is evident, being made primarily to God, but confession to man, when it is due, not being excluded’.<sup>482</sup> Additionally, the same scholar stresses the element of responsibility for our sins, saying that to confess our sins ‘is not only to acknowledge the presence in our life of wrong action, but is to confess this as needing *forgiveness*—to lay at our own door the full responsibility for it’.<sup>483</sup>

Furthermore, Brown as well opts for public confession pointing out that ‘all the parallels<sup>484</sup> and background... suggest that the Johannine expression refers to a public confession rather than a private confession by the individual to God’.<sup>485</sup> The idea of public confession is also supported by the uses of ὁμολογεῖν in GJohn (1:20; 9:22; 12:42) that, Brown adds, ‘involve public professions in relation to Jesus’. What is more, the four christological uses of ὁμολογεῖν in 1John 2:23; 4:2,15 and 2John 7 are also most likely public.<sup>486</sup>

However, as for the exact mode in which this is to be done, nothing is said in our text; it seems that this issue ‘must remain an open question at this point’.<sup>487</sup> ‘That is’ Westcott explains, and I would agree with him, ‘to be determined by experience’. Yet, what is important here is the essential character of confessing sins as an act. Westcott characteristically notes that what ‘corresponds to saying “we have no sin” is not saying,

<sup>479</sup> So, Law, 1909, p.373; Brown, 1982, p.208; Schnackenburg, 1992, p.81 n.41

<sup>480</sup> The verb ὁμολογεῖν occurs 4 times in GJohn, 5 times in IJohn and once in IIJohn 7. Cf. IQS I, 24-II, 2; X, 11; XI, 15; Did. 14:1; 4:14

<sup>481</sup> Westcott, 1886, p.23 Also Houlden, 1973, pp.64-65, notes that ‘they confess their sins-formally, we may suppose, before the congregation (i.9)’. Moreover, Strecker, 1996, pp.31-32, states that ‘knowledge of one’s own sinfulness cannot remain a simple act of recognition; it must lead to ὁμολογεῖν “confession”’. Rensberger, 1997, p.54 as well as Brown, 1982, p.208, opt for public confession. So, Lieu, 1991, p.62 and Klauck, 1991, p.94

<sup>482</sup> Law, 1909, p.373

<sup>483</sup> Ibid., p.131

<sup>484</sup> ‘Consult’, Brown, 1982, p.208 suggests, ‘Mark 1:5 and Matt. 3:6 for the confessing of sins as or after people were baptized by John the Baptist; Acts 19:18 for believers confessing past evil practices; Jas 5:16 for believers confessing sins to one another in the Christian community’.

<sup>485</sup> Though, Brown, 1982, p.208 notes, Augustine, Oecumenius, Bede, and Theophylact are of the opinion that here ‘private confession by the individual to God’ is implied.

<sup>486</sup> Brown, 1982, 208

<sup>487</sup> Strecker, 1996, p.32

“we have sin”, but “confessing sins”.<sup>488</sup> The denial is made in an abstract form: the confession is concrete and personal’.<sup>489</sup>

Thus, though there is no indication in the text of what exactly is meant by ‘confessing sins’, I would agree with Schnackenburg who notes that ‘we can be assured, however that this passage represents one of the earliest pieces of evidence for the church’s practice of confession’.<sup>490</sup>

Moreover, as the verb καθαρίση in v.7, the verb ὁμολογεῖν is in the present tense implying, I suppose, the continuous character of being cleansed and forgiven; a fact which highlights on the one hand the stubborn presence of sin in the believer’s life, and on the other the necessity of continual effort on the believers’ part to maintain κοινωνία with God.<sup>491</sup>

According to Bultmann, ‘walking in the light’ in v.7 must correspond to ‘confessing sins’. This paradox that the confession of sin, as well as ‘having fellowship with one another’ belongs together with walking in the light, ‘characterizes Christian existence in contrast to the false teaching of the Gnostics’. ‘If the being of a Gnostic is static’, Bultmann accurately writes, ‘then the being of a Christian is dynamic’. The Christian, unlike the Gnostic, ‘has never acquired the light as permanent possession through his faith’; rather he ‘must authenticate his faith in περιπατεῖν; he is always under way and never stands before God as a finished product, but is rather dependent on forgiveness’.<sup>492</sup>

### ***9b. he who is faithful and just***

Evidently, the author bases forgiveness on God’s being πιστός and δίκαιος.<sup>493</sup> The principle of forgiveness ‘is built into the structure of a moral order created and determined by the character of a just and faithful God’.<sup>494</sup> Throughout the Bible the idea of God’s being faithful to His covenant despite man’s unfaithfulness ‘is the primary

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<sup>488</sup> The same observation is made by Painter, 1986, p.55 and Rensberger, 1997, p.54 The latter (ibid.) also notes, ‘the contrast to self-deceptive denial of sin is confession (1:9), meaning the acknowledgment of what really is’.

<sup>489</sup> Westcott, 1886, p.24

<sup>490</sup> Schnackenburg, 1992, p.82

<sup>491</sup> Painter, 1986, p.55 notes, the result of such confession, ‘is forgiveness and cleansing. Such a situation might be described in terms of being free from sin, but not as a state of being’. Rather, Painter goes on, ‘it was understood in dynamic terms on the basis of the confession of sins and consequent forgiveness and cleansing’.

<sup>492</sup> Bultmann, 1967, p.21 Moreover, Bultmann thinks that v.9 is an insertion. However, Strecker, 1996, p.32 points out that ‘this assertion follows so logically in v.9 that it does not call for any distinction between a model document and an author who secondarily composed this verse and inserted it in a “source”’.

<sup>493</sup> What is noteworthy Dodd, 1946, pp.22-23 notes, is the fact that ‘our author should base divine forgiveness directly upon the faithfulness and justice of God’. For John as for Paul, Dodd points out, ‘the mercy or forgiveness of God is a function of His righteousness: and so far from forgiveness being a kind of breach in His self-consistency, it is both possible and actual only because God is completely “faithful”, completely to be relied upon in all circumstances’.

signification of δικαιοσύνη of God'.<sup>495</sup> 'Righteousness is completely fulfilled in God both in respect of what He does and of what He is'.<sup>496</sup> Here, Westcott proceeds, 'action and character absolutely coincide'. And yet further, 'the "righteousness" of God answers to His revealed purpose of love; so that the idea of righteousness in this case draws near not unfrequently to the idea of "mercy"'.<sup>497</sup>

In the New Testament God is repeatedly called δίκαιος<sup>498</sup> (e.g. Jn 17:25; Rom 3:26; 1Pet 3:18). In the NT Epistles God is the One who will fulfill His promises (Heb. 10:23; 11:11), and accomplish what He starts (1Thess 5:24; 1Cor 10:9); He protects those who trust Him (1Cor 10:13), because He cannot deny His nature (2Tim 2:13).

Houlden, commenting on 1Jn 2:2, gives another meaning to the adjective δίκαιος, namely sinless. Here, he notes, 'the link is made with the reference to sacrifice in i.7 and ii.2'. 'An effective offering', Houlden goes on, 'must be spotless without blemish. So too Jesus as the leader of God's people must be blameless'.<sup>499</sup>

Moreover, for Brown the adjective πιστός<sup>500</sup> 'covers the quality of God to which human beings correspond by faith, a characteristic summed up as His fidelity (see Deut 7:9; 1Cor 1:9; 2Tim 2:13). In 1John God is also δίκαιος and being so, He forgives sins. A study of the three passages in 1John (2:1,29; 3:7) shows that, as in GJohn, 'the approach to justice or righteousness is not merely juridical. The author is putting the demand to act justly in the OT sense of doing what is right; only now it is in imitation of Christ who is just (2:29; 3:7), and this broadens the concept'.<sup>501</sup>

The idea of God's being 'faithful', or trustworthy, Dodd notes, is 'a fundamental postulate of biblical religion in Old and New Testaments'.<sup>502</sup> Specifically, the description of God as πιστός and δίκαιος is OT language (Deut 32:4; Jer 42 49:5) and 'reflects a covenant attitude toward God'.<sup>503</sup>

<sup>494</sup> Dodd, 1946, p.23

<sup>495</sup> Brooke, 1912, p.19

<sup>496</sup> For Dodd, 1946, p.23 God forgives, 'not because He chooses on this occasion to be indulgent, or considerate, or tolerant, but because no other course would be consistent with the perfectly good will by which the whole universe is created and sustained'.

<sup>497</sup> Westcott, 1886, p.24 See also Law, 1909, p.67-70 'The doctrine of God as righteous and love'.

<sup>498</sup> It occurs three times in the Fourth Gospel (5:30; 7:24; 17:25) and four in 1John (apart from the present one in 2:1,29; and 3:7). See also Hays, 1989, p.201-202

<sup>499</sup> Houlden, 1973, p.64

<sup>500</sup> There are two other Johannine instances of πιστός Jn 20:27 and 3John 5

<sup>501</sup> Brown, 1982, p.210 Hays, 1989, p.201 observes that 'although the tradition of describing Jesus as "Righteous One" receives a distinctive Johannine interpretation, it is noteworthy that the eschatological horizon of this language is not entirely lost'. For Vouga, 1990, p. 29 the word πιστός is only here used christologically (unlike Jn 20:27; 3Jn 5). In the Gospel of John the word δίκαιος is referred to the father (17:25) and to the eschatological judgment (5:30; 7:24). In 1John the term acquires a christological meaning as the revealer (2:29) has the characteristics of the savior (1:9:2:1) and thus, of the one who is the prototype for the ones who have been saved and their works (3:7,12 cf. 3:3; 2:6; 3:16; 4:17).

<sup>502</sup> Dodd, 1946, p.22

<sup>503</sup> Brown, 1982, p.210 Cf. Ps 18:8f.; 32:4f.; 84:12; 88:15; 95:13; 118:160; cf. 1Clem. 27:1; 60:1 See also Strecker, 1996, p.32 n.30; Reumann, 1982, p.145; Schnackenburg, 1992, p.83

Moreover, referring to the two epithets, πιστός and δίκαιος, Brooke asserts that they are ‘co-ordinate’. Specifically, God’s faithfulness is shown ‘in the fulfillment of His promises’ and he is just, in that, ‘in spite of men’s failures to fulfill their obligations, He remains true to the covenant which He made with them; and this includes the forgiveness on certain conditions’.<sup>504</sup>

Furthermore, for Strecker, the combination of the adjectives πιστός and δίκαιος is drawn from ‘liturgical tradition’ as suggested by the identical formula in *IClem.* 27.1 and 60.1, where πιστός refers to God’s promise and δίκαιος to God’s judgement’. However, our passage interprets in ‘christological and soteriological terms: that God is trustworthy and just is evident from God’s action of forgiving sins in Christ’.<sup>505</sup>

In my opinion the concept of a faithful and just God present in the OT is broadened in the NT and particularly in 1John. Both adjectives represent an attribute of God’s nature. I suppose that scholars’ opinions have an element of truth and each interpretation supplements the other. The wide range of meanings, which the πιστός and δίκαιος can have, makes difficult the exact translation of them. The only secure way of approaching their meaning, I assume, is to study other occurrences of them and of course place them in the context. Thus, in 1John 1:9 God is called πιστός and δίκαιος in relation to His power to forgive sins; an idea which is not absent from the Old Testament either.<sup>506</sup> For those who ask for forgiveness, God will always be the forgiving God, the one who by nature forgives sins.

The fact that this verse is reminiscent of covenant language is beyond question, as scholars have pointed out. The reference to God’s attributes of righteousness and justice, which many times in Jewish history have proved themselves true, gives I think, to the subject of forgiveness a special value. As nobody doubts the fact that God is righteous and just, likewise one has to be sure that the forgiving God is going to forgive the believer’s sins. The new covenant attains personal dimensions; it is like a new covenant (καινή διαθήκη) signed and sealed between God and every believer personally; one that ascertains the fact that whenever the latter sins, the former is to grant forgiveness, just because He is consistent with His own nature.

### ***9c. will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.***

Confessing one’s sins results in forgiveness of sins and cleansing from all wrongdoing. First of all, I would agree with Brown who asserts that in 1Jn 5:17, the only other epistolary use of ἁδικία, ‘sin’ and ‘wrongdoing’ are identified. This makes it clear that

<sup>504</sup> Brooke, 1912, p.19

<sup>505</sup> Strecker, 1996, p.32 n.30

v.9c, 'will forgive us our sins' and 9b, 'cleanses us from all unrighteousness', are in parallelism and there is no progression...in both these ways of saying the same thing, more than the removing of a legal barrier is involved-the human being is cleansed'.<sup>507</sup>

However, for Brooke, in ἀφιέναι, the *metaphor* is borrowed from the canceling of debt, but the thought, which the metaphor is used to demonstrate, is ethical. Therefore, Brooke notes, there is no need to equate the meaning of καθαρίζειν<sup>508</sup> to that of ἀφιέναι.<sup>509</sup>

The forgiveness of sins results in the cleansing from all wrongdoings. Slight differences in meaning of verbs and nouns, give an extra flavor to the text. While God is the one who forgives our sins, the blood of Jesus cleanses us from all wrongdoings. Both notions point to the same direction, the believers' pursuit of perfection.

Thus, 'the two parts of the divine action are here spoken of in their completeness'; they 'answer to the two aspects of righteousness already noticed'. Thus, 'judging righteously God forgives those who stand in a just relation to Himself; as being righteous He communicates His nature to those who are united with Him in His Son'.<sup>510</sup>

Concerning the first 'part of the divine action', the verb ἀφιέναι occurs in this connection in 1John 2:12; Jn.20:23.<sup>511</sup> It is also used in the New Testament in the sense of 'remission'.<sup>512</sup> However, the phrase ἄφεσις ἁμαρτιῶν is not found in the Johannine writings. 'The image of "remission", "forgiveness", presents sin as a "debt"',<sup>513</sup> Westcott notes, 'something external to the man himself in its consequences, just as the image of "cleansing" marks the personal stain'.<sup>514</sup>

Moreover, though the metaphor of the remission or canceling of debts is clear, it must be remembered, Brooke rightly notes, that 'as in the case of most metaphorical

<sup>506</sup> See Ex 34:6ff; Deut 32:4

<sup>507</sup> Brown, 1982, p.211 However, for Bultmann, 1967, pp.21-22 the continuation 'and cleanse us from all unrighteousness' is probably 'an addition of the ecclesiastical redactor'. The reason for this is the fact that 'it is formulated in the ecclesiastical-cultic terminology that', Bultmann asserts, 'is otherwise foreign to the writing'. Since it is a matter of forgiveness, 'unrighteousness' 'has the sense of a wrong that has been committed (cf. 2Pet 1:9) and not of doing unrighteous acts (cf., perhaps, 2Cor 7:1; Jas 4:8)'. As for the word ἀδικία, Law, 1909, p.134 notes, it 'naturally suggests the negative aspect of sin-sin as declension from the standard of rightness (δικαιοσύνη)'. This meaning, Law asserts, 'satisfactorily meets the requirements of the three passages in which alone it occurs in St John' (Jn 7:18; 1John 1:9; 5:17).

<sup>508</sup> O'Neill, 1966, p.11 notes that 'the present tense of καθαρίζειν ... is normal in an apodosis when a general rule is being laid down (as in Acts 15.1 and John 8.54)'.  
<sup>509</sup> Brooke, 1912, p.21

<sup>510</sup> Westcott, 1886, p.25

<sup>511</sup> As Brown, 1982, p.211 observes, 'the verb *aphienai* literally means "to let go, release" and reflects a legal background, being used of debt and trespass as well. In the LXX it appears in a cultic setting as well' (see Lev 4:20; 19:22).

<sup>512</sup> See Brooke, 1912, p.21 where he quotes a list of passages where the word is used as such. See also Hoskyns, 1947, p.176

<sup>513</sup> So Brooke, 1912, p.20 notes 'the application of the word to "sin" is almost certainly suggested by the metaphor of the remission or cancelling of debts'.

<sup>514</sup> Westcott, 1886, p.25

expressions which are used to emphasize some particular point of similarity, in respect of which comparison is possible, it is confusing to transfer all the associations of the metaphor to the new subject which it is used to illustrate'. Thus, as applied to 'sins' this metaphor suggests, 'the canceling of the outstanding debt, the removal of that barrier to intercourse between man and God which is set up by sin'.<sup>515</sup>

**10. If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.**

In v.10 the author seems to repeat what he has written in v.8. Having talked of sin as a principle and tendency in human beings, he now makes his statement more clear in case it be misunderstood. Instead of 'if we say that we have no sin', he now asserts 'if we say that we have not sinned', stressing that sin, as a principle, works in men and results in sinful actions.<sup>516</sup> For, as Westcott accurately observes, 'he who recognizes the true character of sin, and the natural permanence of sin as a power within, may yet deny that he personally has sinned'.<sup>517</sup>

I suppose that this verse may represent the opponents' third plea,<sup>518</sup> or I would say, an explanatory extension of their second false plea namely, 'if we say that we have no sin'.<sup>519</sup> Thus, the one who denies that has never acted sinfully, not only deceives himself and lies to his fellow Christians (v.8) but on the top of everything, he proves God a liar and of course His 'word', His revelation, is not in him.

In Westcott's words, verse 10 stresses that asserting sinlessness, on the one hand 'we affirm (positively) that God deals falsely with men', and on the other, '(negatively) we are without the voice of God within us which converts His revelation for each one into a living Word'. Thus, Westcott proceeds, 'divine revelation is regarded first from without and then from within'.<sup>520</sup>

Briefly, in the present verse, John, I think strengthens his previous argument by almost repeating it. On the one hand, he states in negative terms what he said in v.8 but expanding it, and on the other, he expresses negatively what he said in positive terms in v.9 explaining that the confession of sins implies that sinful acts have been done. The nub of the issue here is that one has to accept his sins by confessing them, so that God

<sup>515</sup> Brooke, 1912, p.20

<sup>516</sup> 'Taking up their (opponents') slogan for the third time', Schnackenburg, 1992, p.84 argues, 'the author recapitulates his second reference to it in different terms'.

<sup>517</sup> Westcott, 1886, p.25; So Brooke, 1912, p.21 As Law, 1909, p.131 notes 'in 1:10 the emphasis is directly on the fact of wrongdoing, the culpability of which has been asserted in the preceding verses'.

<sup>518</sup> So, Westcott, 1886, p.25; Brooke, 1912, p.21; See Painter, 1986, pp.55-57

<sup>519</sup> As Bultmann, 1967, p.22 observes up to this point v.10 corresponds completely to v.8a, but 'the continuation is different'. So instead of 'we deceive ourselves', it now reads: 'we make him a liar'.

will forgive them. Denying his sinful nature, however, one is deceiving himself and even worse, he proves God a liar.

### ***10a. If we say that we have not sinned,***

By the use of present perfect tense in this statement, the author refers to past sinful actions. The question is however, whether making such a claim, the secessionists referred to themselves as being sinless after their becoming Christians or they believed that sin has never had any influence on them. While in the first instance we spot a kind of heretical Christian perfectionism, the second reminds us of elements of gnostic teaching.<sup>521</sup> It seems that as we have said in the previous chapter the ideas espoused by the opponents would be at home and may be enriched, in later gnostic movements.<sup>522</sup>

However, in my opinion, it is more plausible to opt for the former, for the whole context refers to presuppositions and implications of a Christian walking in the light. So, the opponents probably asserted their not having committed sin after their being baptized.<sup>523</sup>

### ***10b. we make him a liar,***

The assertion of one's not having committed sins proves God, who has provided for the remission and cleansing of sin, a liar. Moreover, His very nature of His being πιστός is in doubt. For, He has promised to forgive sins but it is unnecessary as long as the believers have no sin to be forgiven by the forgiving God. For, as Dodd notes, the very proclamation of God's being a faithful, just and forgiving God, 'declares man to be a sinful creature needing forgiveness'.<sup>524</sup> Moreover, in the light of what has been said in vss.7 and 9, one's assertion of sinlessness proves that 'God deals falsely with men'.<sup>525</sup>

<sup>520</sup> Westcott, 1886, p.26

<sup>521</sup> According to Bogart's, 1977, p.34 theory, v. 10 along with v.8 expresses the heretical perfectionist claims which the author refutes. In 1:10 we have not sinned, 'is cast in the perfect, which often indicates the continuance of completed action'. This assertion, Bogart notes serve to strengthen the one made in v.8 'they never have sinned at all'. No Christian perfectionist 'would ever make such a claim. Accordingly, Bogart concludes, 'only a gnostic view of man, a view which saw man as intrinsically part of the Divine Essence, or a spark from the Divine Fire, a part of the Father who is above all, could claim that man had never sinned'.

<sup>522</sup> Comparing this third boast to the second one, Painter, 1986, pp.55-56 points out that 'while the second boast asserted a state of sinlessness from the time of κοινωνία with God, the third boast assumes the absolute sinlessness of those who affirmed it'. Perhaps, Painter proceeds, 'this allowed that there were those who were sinless by nature while others only became sinless through union with God, presumably at their (χρῖσμα) initiation'.

<sup>523</sup> So Brown, 1982, p.211-212 Moreover, Brown adds, neither in Jewish tradition nor in the GJohn could the secessionists find elements to support such a conviction, unless the assertion 'we have not sinned' 'refers to sins committed after becoming a Christian'.

<sup>524</sup> Dodd, 1946, p.23 So, Bultmann, 1967, p.22 writes the assertion of sinlessness 'does not recognize him as the one who, as πιστός and δίκαιος in v.9, is the forgiving God'. Also, Law, 1909, p.374

<sup>525</sup> Westcott, 1886, p.26

Moreover, as Brown notes, 'there is Johannine logic to the charge that the denial of sins makes God a liar because God claimed to have sent Jesus as the Lamb who takes away the world's sin'.<sup>526</sup>

Generally speaking, 1John is thought to be distinct from GJohn in the theme of propitiation.<sup>527</sup> Undoubtedly, sacrificial and atoning ideas are not as explicit in GJohn as they are in 1John. As Brown observes, 'the sacrificial and atoning character of the death of Jesus is much clearer in 1John (1:7; 2:2; 3:16; 4:10) than in GJohn, where the death of Jesus is seen as his triumph and glorification (12:27-32; 13:1; 14:30-31; 16:10-11,33; 17:1)'.<sup>528</sup> However, as some commentators have pointed out, passages such as John 1:29, 36 where John the Baptist calls Christ 'the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world', the narrative of footwashing (Jn 13:1-20), the prophesy of Caiaphas (Jn 11:51), are implicit references to the atoning character of Christ's death. The author of 1John is explaining let us say, what implicitly is said in GJohn. Besides, I would agree with Brooke who underlines that 'it is a question of proportion rather than of fundamental difference' between the Gospel and the Epistles.<sup>529</sup> As I have already pointed out, both documents are revolving around Jesus and His salvific action though they shed light on different aspects of His mission. So, while the Gospel says that Jesus has come to take away sins, the Epistle clarifies how this is to take place.

More specifically, the phrase 'we make him a liar' is characteristic of John<sup>530</sup> and it is also met in 1Jn 5:10 where it is said that the one who does not believe in God's μαρτυρία for His Son, 'makes him a liar'. Also in 2:4,22; 4:20 'a liar' is called the one who asserts that he knows Him but who does not keep the commandments, the one who denies that Jesus is the Christ, and the one who claims that he loves God but hates his brother, respectively. So, 'liar' when it refers to God has to do with His faithfulness (πιστότης), while being referred to humans, a lie, meaning more than just not saying the truth (cf. Jn 8:55), may be referred to christological and ethical errors. It is characteristic, I think, that for John words have their translation into acts, whether they are positive or negative.

Moreover, in the Gospel of John the devil is called 'a liar' and 'the father of lies' (Jn 8:44). So, in a way the one who asserts sinlessness puts God on the same level with the devil.<sup>531</sup> As I said, the author though almost repeating verse 8, in the present verse

<sup>526</sup> Brown, 1982, p.212

<sup>527</sup> See Dodd, 1937, pp.144-146; Dodd, 1946, pp.xxxii-xxxiii

<sup>528</sup> Brown, 1982, p.26 Moreover, the same scholar (ibid.) calls John 1:29, 36 'an enigmatic reference', various interpretations of which are to be found in his commentary on the GJohn, 1966-70 29, pp.58-63.

<sup>529</sup> Brooke, 1912, p.xxi

<sup>530</sup> So Law, 1909, p.373; Westcott, 1886, p.26

<sup>531</sup> So Brown, 1982, p.212; Schnackenburg, 1992, p.84

reaches the zenith of his arguments, for as Law accurately observes, the author in this verse, ‘culminates the series of falsehoods: “we lie”; “we lead ourselves astray”; “we make Him a liar”’.<sup>532</sup> Furthermore, as Brown states ‘the charge that a secessionist-inspired claim would make God a liar is not surprising granted the fact that in 1John 2:4,22 and 4:20 those who hold secessionist theology are branded as liars’<sup>533</sup>, as I have already pointed out.

### ***10c. and his word is not in us.***

V.10c corresponds to ‘we do not do the truth’ and ‘the truth is not in us’, as His word is the truth in its ultimate sense. Lying, deception and falsehood are peculiar to the darkness and their author, the devil. According to scholars the λόγος of God, here means the Gospel message as ‘the crown of all revelation’<sup>534</sup> and it has nothing to do with the Λόγος of the prologue of GJohn.<sup>535</sup>

Distinguishing between ‘word’ and ‘truth’, Westcott states that, the term ‘word’ here differs from the ‘truth’ in v.8 ‘as the process differs from the result’.<sup>536</sup> For Westcott, the word makes gradually the truth real to him who receives it (Jn 8:31,32). Additionally, the word is personal as well: ‘it calls up the thought of the speaker: it is “the word of God”’. The truth however, is ‘abstract, though it is embodied in a Person’. Also, Westcott proceeds, ‘the word, like the truth, can be regarded both as the moving principle which stirs the man and as the sphere in which the man moves (Jn v.38; viii.31,37)’. And Westcott concludes: ‘by claiming sinlessness we first deny generally the truth of the revelation of God’<sup>537</sup>; and, as a consequence of this denial, we lose the privilege of “converse” with Him: *His word is not in us*’.<sup>538</sup>

Undoubtedly, God’s truth has been revealed to us through His word. In the Fourth Gospel, God’s word is indeed the truth (17:17). People are said to be given the divine word by Jesus (17:14) and to believe in Jesus by God’s word (17:20). Further, people hear and believe the word (5:24; 4:50), they keep it (8:51-52; 14:23; 15:20; 17:6) and

<sup>532</sup> Law, 1909, pp.373-374

<sup>533</sup> Brown, 1982, p.212

<sup>534</sup> Westcott, 1886, p.26 For Dodd, 1946, p.23 ‘his word is not in us’ means ‘we have heard the Gospel, and thought we believed it; but we have not inwardly digested it’. Likewise Brown, 1982, p.212 notes that word ‘is the divine revelation spoken by Jesus’.

<sup>535</sup> So Brooke, 1912, p.22; Brown, 1982, p.xvi, 22; Lieu, 1991, p.31; Schnackenburg, 1992, p.84

<sup>536</sup> Westcott, 1886, p.26 For Law, 1909, p.374 however, the word here corresponds ‘closely’ to the truth in v.8. Moreover, the λόγος ‘regards the truth not only as true in itself, but as the message which God has addressed to men in Christ’. Making the above assertion, we make God a liar as ‘we contradict what He has expressly revealed and declared’.

<sup>537</sup> So Brooke, 1912, p.21 ‘the whole plan of God’s dealings with men is based on the assumption that all have sinned’. So, making this assertion equals the denial of ‘the truth of God’s revelation’.

<sup>538</sup> Westcott, 1886, p.26

thus they remain in the word (15:3). The word also remains in those who keep it (5:38; 1Jn 2:14) and they are cleansed by the word (15:3).

It is obvious that *λόγος* of God is a multidimensional term. In its condensed form I think it is used in our text as well. We however, may stress its meaning as God's cleansing power, given the fact that sin is the issue under discussion.

### **Conclusions**

As we have seen, John is writing in a widely diffused language; both contemporary Jewish literature and Qumran manuscripts had broadly used the dualistic patterns, concepts and ideas employed by John. However, in my opinion, while John used those linguistic 'vessels', he redefined them, putting in them an entirely different content. For him ideas such as light, darkness in either of which one walks, truth and falsehood acquire a meaning determined by Christ, who Himself is the light of the world and the truth (Jn 8:12; 14:6). Whether they were used by later gnostic or other religious circles, I think is an important issue as far as our knowledge concerning the background of these terms is enriched.

Moreover, these patterns were used first by the Fourth Gospel. Representing the same Johannine tradition, the Fourth Gospel, I would say, is the first *redefiner* of those dualistic frames. Accordingly, using GJohn in our approach to 1John's messages is, up to a point, necessary and quite illuminating as it sheds light on many notions and concepts employed by the Epistle. However, I assume that we do not have to stick slavishly to it, in a way that deprives the Epistle of its own 'personality' and uniqueness. To be more specific, neither do I espouse Brown's approach according to which the Epistle is to be interpreted entirely under the shadow of the Gospel, nor do I adopt Lieu's opposite assumption that 2 and 3John can indeed be interpreted independently from 1John.<sup>539</sup> For, it would be wrong I esteem to examine independently writings whose content speaks volumes about their common tradition.

Furthermore, in my opinion, the closeness of 1John to the Gospel is an undeniable fact. The Epistle expands some ideas already present in the Gospel, responding to a secessionist movement that took place in the ranks of the Johannine community. Brown's thesis that both the secessionists and the author of 1John were drawing on the

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<sup>539</sup> To the question why treat 2 and 3John independently, Lieu, 1986, p.166 answers that though they usually are examined in the light of 1John, 'it is in these two Epistles, despite their brevity, that we have a clear contact with known issues and controversies in the early church and hence it is they which can provide a proper starting point for analysing the nature and causes of the Johannine response'. However, what Brown, 1989, p.192 underlines at this point is that 'these letters are so short that they are far from "clear"'. Moreover, as Brown, 1989, pp.191-193 points out in his review of Lieu's work, the latter 'does appeal constantly' (*ibid.*, p.192) to 1John in order to illuminate some ideas used in the smaller Epistles.

same tradition expressed in the Fourth Gospel, seems plausible to me. However, it would be an exaggeration to assert that the secessionists' claims were exclusively a misrepresentation of GJohn. Apparently, there were elements in the Gospel, which could be interpreted in a rather unorthodox way. At this point, the author of 1John intervenes in order to fix the damage, clarifying what was rather implicitly said in the Gospel. Thus, having been written under particular circumstances, occasionally, the Epistle modifies ideas encountered in the Gospel, stressing aspects that are rather implicit in it, and rephrases theoretical statements colouring them with practical shades. This does not imply any kind of contradiction between them. I would rather say that it is like observing an object from different optical angles; in the main, their common string of thought is visible betraying a special relationship between these two pieces of writing.

My basic assumption in this study is that on the one hand, the author's theology functions as a rectification of misunderstandings rooted in GJohn, and on the other, that the author in his exposition was responding to particular circumstances, which had a say in the formation of his theology. Apparently, terms such as God's σπέρμα, χρῖσμα, and ideas such as the appeal to sinlessness, the neglecting of Christian morality and the denial of Jesus' coming in the flesh may have gnostic or Hellenistic background.<sup>540</sup> However, this does not imply that our author was influenced by these notions. Rather, I presume that the fact that he used them is indicative of their constituting a part of a widely diffused language of that time as I mentioned above.

What is more, I also think that it has to be borne in mind what was the purpose of the Epistle and its function generally, a fact which influences its idiosyncrasy. As I have already noted, I esteem that the Epistle is not exclusively a polemical piece of writing. The author's pastoral concern emerges often and has never abandoned him. He repeatedly exhorts his τέκνιά to walk in the light as He is in the light. Nevertheless, to deny the presence of secession is to *deceive ourselves*; the opponents are there; hidden probably, behind what the author declines as unorthodox assumptions. Thus, as I have said in the previous chapter, mirror-reading is inevitable but it has to be done cautiously.

Accordingly, in the light of the above, I think that the fact that concepts and ideas encountered in the Epistle are missing from the Gospel (e.g. the use of the term κοινωμία) is to be attributed to the new situation confronted by the author of 1John and does not entail any fundamental contrast between the Gospel and the Epistle. I also assume the priority of the Gospel over the Epistle, which I suppose allows for a

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<sup>540</sup> I would agree with Houlden, 1973, pp.17-20 who allows for external influences in the formation of the heresy in combat. Likewise Dodd, 1946, pp.xix-xxi See also Dodd, 1953, pp.3-130 for the ideological background of GJohn

development in terms of the church life. For, I think that a development in thought and theology is to be expected as well with the passage of time.<sup>541</sup> As for those notions and ideas that the two documents have in common, I presume that we first have to point out the meaning they bear in the Gospel and then in the Epistle in order to trace any development in them. My basic assumption in my thesis is that there is a shift between the Gospel and the Epistle; a shift which was occasioned by the very circumstances under which the two relevant writings were produced.

Moreover, what I believe was the primary factor resulting in such a shift is the presence and absence of Christ in the Gospel and in the Epistle respectively. To be more specific, I believe that there is a change of focus between the relevant pieces of work. GJohn focuses on Jesus Christ and His personal relationship to the believers, whereas the Epistle focuses on how this relationship is to be realised now that Jesus is not physically present among the members of the church. GJohn is centred on the understanding of Jesus' teaching while He is present among His believers. Nevertheless, in the Epistle this teaching is supposed to be lived out by His believers while He is away. It is a shift between pre-resurrection and post-resurrection period. In other words, it is about the difference that existed between theoretical statements and their practical implications or what is ideally pursued and what is practically achieved. The presence of Christ among His disciples idealised aspects of life and behaviour. Christ was the embodiment of every godly attribute the believers longed for; He actually was the embodiment of sinlessness. Nevertheless, when the Epistle was written, problems that emerged in the very ranks of the church necessitated the redefining of the believers' relationship to Christ in earthly, practical terms.

Had this shift been borne in mind, I esteem that the Epistle would have been safely interpreted not exclusively under the shadow of the Gospel but several steps ahead, keeping its own special meaning and function. Even the paradox of the coexistence of sinfulness and sinlessness in the believer's life is illuminated by the acceptance of such a shift.

That particular relationship between the Gospel and the Epistle reminds me of a passage found in the writings of the rest of the evangelists, (Mat 9:15; Mk 2:19-20; Lk 5:34-35) where when the Pharisees asked Jesus why His disciples do not fast, He replied thus: 'the wedding guests cannot mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them, can they? The days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast' (Mat 9:15). That 'when the bridegroom is taken away from them' it seems to

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<sup>541</sup> There are instances when, Brown states, that theological elements in the Epistles do not represent the 'main thrust of the gospel'. E.g. Brown, 1982, p.407 where he refers to 3:8a

me that suggests the existence of a shift that inevitably took place in Church's life. It signifies the expected difference between what it means to be with Him and what it entails to live while He is physically absent.

In fact, there are reflections on Jesus' departure in GJohn as well (13:33; 14:19; 16:16). Jesus himself refers to that period of His absence and to the fact that there are some things, which have to be borne in mind during that time. In 16:4 for instance, referring to the advent of the Holy Spirit, Jesus says to His disciples 'I did not say these things to you from the beginning, because I was with you'; but now He has to mention all these to them as he is 'going to him who sent' Him. The situation will be changed. The relationship between Jesus and His disciples is going to be put in another spiritual framework. *Hearing, seeing, knowing, believing*, are categories which are to be understood in this new framework, in order for them to be experienced in the believer's life in the post-resurrection period. In 16:16 Jesus says 'a little while, and you will no longer see me, and again a little while, and you will see me'. Commenting on this verse Abbott notes 'the world shall cease to behold my visible and material body, but ye shall still behold me with the faith of affection'.<sup>542</sup> Physical vision is inevitably substituted by spiritual vision in the post-resurrection period. Of course physical vision is not underestimated. To the contrary, the author of 1John appeals to experience of physical vision and to the roots of his community in the historical Jesus (1Jn 1:1f.; 3:11). As Abbott observes, 'in the post-resurrection narrative, there appears a remarkable and systematic distinction between "verbs of seeing", intended apparently to lead up to the words of Jesus that even *any kind of mere "seeing"* is inferior to believing (xx.29 "Blessed are they that have *not seen* and had believed")-although "believing" itself is only a preparation for "abiding" in the Son'.<sup>543</sup> Even this spiritual vision, the author of 1John seems to stress, is to be tested in praxis, in terms of ethical behaviour.

Expressions such as 'to have fellowship with him' and 'to abide in him', obtain a new content in the post-resurrection period. While to have communion with Him could be comprehended as meaning just to stay in His company and follow Him and in doing so to share His attributes, in the Epistle this phrase is expanded and explained in terms of ethical behaviour in the face of heresy. The secessionists apparently missed this change in life setting and assumed that for instance, sin has nothing to do with the believers, as it has no dealings with the Christ whom they follow. I am not implying that this deeper meaning was absent from the Gospel. Rather, Jesus was always talking in *heavenly* terms; the thing is that He was not understood accordingly.

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<sup>542</sup> Abbott, 1905, p.106

<sup>543</sup> *Ibid.*, p.107

In the light of the above, we now turn to the exegesis where I think my assumption of the existence of a shift is exemplified. In a few words, John, in a way, seems to hammer into Christians' minds what he wishes to say, strengthening it sentence by sentence. Although, occasionally, the impression given is that he repeats himself, he actually adds a word may be, or an idea that gives stronger flavor to what has been preceded, paving the way for what follows.

So, implying the opponents' first false plea, (1Jn 1:6) the author of 1John writes:

6.If we say, that we have fellowship with him,  
while we are walking in darkness, we lie and we do not do the truth.

What strikes me first in this assertion is the contrast between *say* and *walk*. Though the first sentence seems to express a claim held in every probability by the secessionists, the author does not refute it altogether. The apodosis is true when the presupposition in the hypothesis is true as well. So, those who assert that they are in communion with Him, while they *walk* in the darkness, are liars and *do* not the truth. The juxtaposition between theory-*say* and praxis-*walk* is apparent.

First, the term *κοινωνία* encountered in this verse, is absent from GJohn. As I see it 'to be in communion with God' is synonymous with 'to abide in God'. Why 1John opts for the former is a matter of speculation only. I do accept that the term under discussion may have been adopted by the opponents. It probably signified their special relationship with God, because of which they are immune from sin. It is also likely that the relevant term was an ecclesiastical term, which was abused by the opponents. Moreover, the use of it betrays the theological development, which is in my opinion evident in the Epistle's teaching.

What the author aims to point out is that the relationship between God and His believers suggests a mutual situation. God invites people to join Him. One's *coming*, *seeing*, *knowing* Him, are notions, which represent the steps taken by those who answered to His invitation. The believers' response to such an encounter is faith. Believing in Him, the believers enter a new spiritual phase and establish a new relationship with the One they believe in. This mutual relationship between God and His children envisages what John calls *κοινωνία*. However, this *κοινωνία* is mirrored in the fellowship that the believers have with each other and with God.

What one has to bear in mind is the fact that the believers' relationship with God is not something inherent or unbreakable. To believe in His name means to live according to His commandments. Meditating on the theme of sin that is already present in the Gospel,

the author of 1John draws some practical conclusions in order to protect his audience from the danger of being led astray.<sup>544</sup>

However, if one walks in the darkness, which is the devil's dominion, one becomes a liar due to the fact that the father of lies is the devil (Jn 8:44). So, to have communion with God, in other words to share His attributes, while one is doing the works of darkness-falsehood, is but a lie. What would this walking in darkness mean for the secessionists? Though the claim to have communion with Him is one that the author and his opponents share, they understood differently what it entails. What the adversaries failed to understand is that orthodoxy goes hand in hand with orthopraxy.

The notion of 'following' Jesus in the Gospel, apart from bearing the literal meaning of walking in the same direction with Jesus (1:37,38,40; 6:2; 21:20), it is also 'the term par excellence for the dedication of discipleship'.<sup>545</sup> So, the very act of following Jesus is a movement of faith towards Him and whatever this faith entails for him to be or to do.<sup>546</sup> In Abbott's opinion, 'John brings out the true meaning of "following" in a dialogue between our Lord and Peter, who does not indeed (like the "scribe") proclaim that he *will* "follow", but asks "Why cannot I follow thee now? I will lay down my life for thee"' (Jn 13:37). Having told the Jews at an earlier stage that they cannot follow Him, Jesus says now that this truth applies for the disciples as well (Jn 18:33). Yet, the washing of feet, Abbott asserts, 'taken with its sequel constitutes an indirect answer, namely, that "following" the Son means serving the Son, and serving the Son means serving the brethren with the love with which He loved and served them' (Jn 13:34; 15:12).<sup>547</sup>

Moreover, in GJohn<sup>548</sup>, on the one hand the following of Jesus 'has already in some sense become a fact in the literal following of Jesus (i.37,40 cf. xxi.20)', and on the other is boldly redefined 'in the light of the approaching Death of Jesus (cf. Mark

<sup>544</sup> As Filson, 1969, p.275 observes, 'the truth and the believer's privileged relationship with God and God's people are not transient realities. The things that count are to be basic and steadily operative in the individual and in the fellowship of believers...The point is not static existence but loyal, enriching life because of the constant vital link with God and with God's people'.

<sup>545</sup> Brown, 1966-70, p.78 'The imperative "Follow me"', Brown adds, 'appears in the Synoptic accounts of the call of disciples (Mark ii.14; Matt viii.22; Matt. xix.21)'.

<sup>546</sup> As Schnackenburg, 1968-82, v.I, p.566 notes that *following* as a notion associated with faith, includes as well the sense of 'making the full act of faith'. He also adds ' "Discipleship" of Christ in this sense is an active faith which is exercised in deeds as well as in words and which perseveres in fraternal charity (13:34f.; 15:8)'. As Brown, 1966-70, p.475, observes, 'in both traditions (synoptic and Johannine) the saying about following Jesus is a call for a willingness to imitate Jesus in suffering and death'.

<sup>547</sup> Abbott, 1905, p.330 Moreover, 'the Synoptics, it is true', Abbott (*ibid.*, p.329) notes, 'emphasize Christ's saying that "*following*" must go with "*taking up the cross*": but, even there, Luke thinks it desirable to warn his readers that they must "*take up the cross daily*"' (Mk 8:34; Mt 16:24; Lk 9:23).

<sup>548</sup> As Hoskyns, 1947, p.179 notes 'in the perspective of the gospel the verbs *to follow* and *to abide* define the nature of true discipleship (viii.12, x.27, xii.26, xiii.36, 37, xxi.19-22; cf. Mark i.17, 18; Matt. iv.20; Luke v.10, 11; John vi.56, x.4-10, xiv.2,10,23)'.

viii.34)'.<sup>549</sup> Following Jesus meant that being a devoted disciple of His, one is walking in the light and has communion with Him. To accept Him meant to participate in His realm, where there was no place for sin and works of darkness. Nevertheless, now that they are not in a position to follow Jesus in the literal sense, they have to show their following Him by keeping His commandments or becoming like Him. Following Jesus in the post resurrection period means not any more to walk with Him but *walk* as He *walked* while He was living among them; in other words to imitate Him. However, an encounter with Jesus still remains possible not only by direct sight of Christ whose coming is a matter of history, but by hearing the apostolic testimony (cf. 17:20). As Schnackenburg points out, 'the exalted Lord still continues to address his community, and it is still possible to follow him in faith (8:12) and, as we may legitimately presume, personal encounter and fellowship are likewise possible'.<sup>550</sup>

The believers' fellowship and acceptance of Him has to be manifested in terms of every day experience. This is what the author aims to make clear. To *say* is not enough; to *walk* is what makes it real. This does not of course mean that what was said in the Gospel was just theory. On the contrary, the teaching in the Gospel was the basis of such a morality, which in turn is real provided that someone has communion with Him. In the Gospel, Jesus, being sinless, was the living example of every goal believers are later invited to achieve. Accordingly, we are talking about two sides of the same coin; both of them give its value to it.

Provided that in v.6 a false plea of the opponents of John is hidden, we may assume that the secessionists seem to have failed to draw practical-ethical implications of one's being in communion with Him. The believer's being in *κοινωνία* with Christ is proved by the former's walking in light; and the author goes on (1:7) explaining what happens if one walks in the light; does it actually prove that he is sinless? And if not, how can he-a sinful one-have communion with the sinless One?

7. But if we walk in the light as he himself is in light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son cleanses us from all sin.

With *but* an opposite statement is imported. To walk in the light, in other words to have communion with Him, results on the one hand in the believers' having communion with each other and on the other, their being cleansed from sin.

The realm of God-light is actually the place where Christians meet each other. Having fellowship with God results in having fellowship with each other, and the latter ensures

<sup>549</sup> Hoskyns, 1947, p.452

<sup>550</sup> Schnackenburg, 1968-82, v.I, p.570

the reality of the former. Behind this statement, there may be an implication against those who have left the community, while they assert that they have fellowship with God. However, the secessionists may regard as their brothers only those who have also abandoned the community sharing their heresy. Yet, even if this is the case, given that both the opponents and the Johannine Community have fellowship with Jesus should not they meet each other in His fellowship? As long as the secessionists have left the community, they have not fellowship with God either. For, in the community-church is where one experiences the paradox of the sense of the presence of Christ while He is bodily absent.

Moreover, Jesus being sinless has dealt effectively with sin, which hinders the way towards fellowship with God. Jesus offers the means by which sins are taken away namely the cleansing power of His blood. One has to be in communion with Him in order for him to have his sins cleansed and to maintain this communion. Nevertheless, the rejection of reality of sin working in us not only does endanger our fellowship with God but also ultimately, proves God a liar.

8. If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.
9. If we confess our sins, he who is faithful and just will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.
10. If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.

In these verses the idea of deceiving ourselves if we say that we have no sin, is followed by the one, we make God a liar, which is even worse. This schema is a distinctive feature of John's spontaneous way of writing, as we have noted earlier.

What is clear in these verses is that the opponents of 1John probably asserted sinlessness. The author is stressing the fact that Christians do sin despite their having fellowship with God. How would such a thing be possible? Is sin compatible with God's realm? Both the secessionists and the author would answer in the negative; the thing is that while the former assert sinlessness to avoid this σκάνδαλον, the latter introduces the means God offers to cure sin.

The truth is that in the Gospel there are grounds supporting such an assertion. In the Gospel the Lord with whom the adversaries are in communion, said that whoever believed in him should not be judged (Jn 3:18; 5:24). Why should they not say with their Lord, 'which of you convicts me of sin?' (8:46). Moreover, according to the evangelist only those who reject Jesus are sinful and the rejection of Him is sin.

However, for the epistolary author, asserting sinlessness is not the only way out of this dilemma. As we have already pointed out in the relevant chapter of this study, Jewish thought as well recognizes the fact that sin is present even among the believers. Jewish

writers attempted to account for it more systematically than John, saying that it is because of the weakness of the flesh (forensic eschatology) or the spirits of evil which are at work in the world leading people astray (cosmological eschatology). As we have seen in the relevant chapter, elements of forensic and cosmological eschatology are not mutually exclusive; they actually may coexist (see DSS, 1En, Jub, T12P). In the Epistle of John on the one hand there is an implication of cosmological eschatology (5:19) and on the other there is an emphasis on voluntaristic language-forensic eschatology (1:9 cf. 2:16) in the light of the continuous existence of sin in the believer's life.

Moreover, the author of 1John stresses that sin is a stubborn fact in the believer's life, which can occasionally interrupt one's relationship with God. However, God is capable and he has promised to cope with sin provided that the believer, confessing his sins, asks for forgiveness and accepts that cleansing power of the blood of Christ. Accordingly, asserting sinlessness, one doubts God's being a forgiving God. Further, I suppose that to an extent, the author's insistence on this subject was driven by the need to fight those who say that they are sinless.

Furthermore, claiming sinlessness, one proves God a liar and *his word*-the whole divine plan of God's revelation, is not in him. The writer of the Epistle even appeals to the μαρτυρία of the Old Testament in an attempt to point out that God by nature is a forgiving God. God's πιστότης and δικαιοσύνη have been proved true in His covenant with Israel. Now, in the new covenant provided that one confesses his sins and asks for forgiveness, God remains πιστός και δίκαιος due to the fact that He can not refuse Himself (2Tim.2:13). Asserting sinlessness, the opponents on the one hand challenge the validity of the Old Testament where God is declared to be the one who forgives sins and humans the ones who do sin, and on the other, prove Jesus' mission empty.

The stress on the salvific power of Jesus' blood has another aspect as well. It means that the believer's relationship with God is a breakable one which calls for a continuous attempt to be maintained. The acceptance of Jesus is not enough, as it used to be in GJohn. Accepting Jesus has to be verified in terms of ethical behaviour. One's accepting Jesus suggests an inward movement of faith that has to be exemplified by the very life of the believer. It constitutes just the first step towards Him. According to the epistolary author, to have communion with Him entails one's having trust in God's promises for forgiveness while accepting his sinfulness.

Summing up, it seems to me that, vss. 1:6-10 represent the practical aspect of the sin in a believer's life what really happens regardless of our wishes. However, the next section, vss.3:6-10 envisage the theory of it, what should happen in the life of the children of God. Moreover, I would say that the former is more compatible with what the Epistle

has to say whereas the latter reminds us of the Gospel's spirit according to which perfection has already been achieved and sin is an entirely foreign reality for the believer. All this lies, as we are going to see, in the emphasis put on realized and futuristic eschatology in the Gospel and in the Epistles respectively.

However, it is noteworthy that both elements of realized and future eschatology are present in both pieces of writing; for, for the believer, present has to point to the future and future has to be anticipated by the present.

## **CHAPTER FIVE: Exegesis of 1John 3:6-10**

### ***The eschatological context of 3:6-10***

Before passing on to a detailed analysis of our second group of passages where as I have said future eschatology comes to the forth, let me say a few things about the context to which this pericope belongs.

Having heard what the author had to say from the standpoint of the present concerning the believer and sin in section 1:6-10, we have to be in a position to, so to speak, *overhear* a 'but' in order for us to conceive John's message in its wholeness and have a complete idea about this dialogue which takes place between future and present in the believer's life.

So, having referred to the present reality of sinfulness, and the expiation offered by God through His Son Jesus Christ (1:6-2:2), the author goes on stressing the ἐντολή of love towards the brethren (2:9-11). Further, verses 2:12-14 have a taste, I would say, of present eschatology. The believers, τεκνία, πατέρες, νεανίσκοι are said to have their 'sins forgiven', to 'know him who is from the beginning' and to 'have conquered the evil one', respectively. This triumphant statements are sealed by the author's assurance that the κόσμος which they are exhorted not to love (2:15), παράγεται, while those 'who do the will of God live forever' (2:17).

At this point we should briefly refer to the concept of the κόσμος in 1John and the believers' relationship to it. In 1John the κόσμος is presented as an antigodly territory where the devil reigns (5:19 cf. Jn 14:30). The Johannine Christians are assured however that 'the one who is in you is greater that the one who is in the world' (4:4).

Further, the κόσμος does not 'know' the Johannine Christians-it actually, 'hates' them (3:13)-for it does not know God (3:1). Apparently, the fact of their being of God alienates them from the world. Moreover, as being of God represents Christian identity, those who 'are from the world' say things that are 'from the world' and in turn 'the world listens' to them (4:5). Thus, Johannine Christians being of God and been begotten by God have no dealings with the κόσμος. They are assured that 'whatever is born of God conquers the world. And this is the victory that conquers the world', their 'faith'; the one who believes that 'Jesus is the Son of God' is the one who conquers the world (5:4-5). In other words, the members of the Johannine community who believe in Him, conquer the κόσμος.

However, God has sent His Son 'τόν σωτήρα τοῦ κόσμου' (4:14; 4:9 cf. Jn 3:16-17; 12:47) to save the world and as He is the 'atoning sacrifice' for the believers' sins. He is

so 'for the sins of the whole world' (2:2). It seems that though the believers are exhorted not to love the world and whatever this might entail (2:15, 16), God is concerned with the salvation of the world.

Speaking of the κόσμος the author refers to the antichrist or to the many antichrists who 'have come' as an omen of the coming of 'the last hour' (2:18). The believers are warned against the coming of the antichrists, their christological errors (2:22-23) and their intension to lead the faithful astray (2:26).

Furthermore, if the last hour occasioned the coming of the antichrist then it marks the coming of the Christ as well. 'Καί νῦν' (2:28), as scholars observe marks the beginning of a new section (2:28-3:10).<sup>551</sup> John exhorts his τέκνία 'abide in him', in order for them 'to have confidence and not be put to shame before him at his coming' (2:28). 'There is a particular reason', Houlden notes, 'for sticking to Christ: that one may stand firm on the great day of his return'.<sup>552</sup> It is noteworthy at this point that the abiding in Christ is connected to the concept of παρουσία. So, what enables Johannine Christians to stand with 'confidence' at the revelation of Christ, is that they have abided in Him.

Generally speaking, in my opinion both parts of verse 28 mean the same thing: abide in Him, so that 'when he is revealed' / 'at his coming', 'we may have confidence' / 'and not be put to shame before him'.<sup>553</sup> It is obvious that 'abide in him' is an imperative in the present context. The pronoun αὐτός refers to Christ, since, as Brown notes, 'the next two lines mention the parousia'.<sup>554</sup> The word παρουσία is used only here in the Johannine literature and it refers to the second coming of Jesus Christ.<sup>555</sup>

In the next verse, v.29 the author refers again to the idea of God's/Christ's<sup>556</sup> being δίκαιος. I would agree with Brown that Christ is the subject of *is* in the present verse. Christ is δίκαιος by His very nature being the Son of God. The believers are exhorted to imitate Christ and 'do justice' and in doing so they demonstrate their being children of God. The expression to 'do justice' (cf. to do the truth) is used thrice by the author of 1John and as Brown notes, 'though contrasted with doing sin (3:7-8; cf. 3:4), it means more than not sinning; for justice involves holiness'.<sup>557</sup> Moreover, as Westcott rightly asserts δικαιοσύνη 'is not the condition but the consequence of Sonship'.<sup>558</sup> In 1:9 we

<sup>551</sup> So, Brown, 1982, p.379; Rensberger, 1997, p.85 As Houlden, 1973, p.85 notes the now 'is deliberate: "at this crucial time"'.  
<sup>552</sup> Houlden, 1973, p.86

<sup>553</sup> See also Houlden, 1973, p.86; Brown, 1982, p.381

<sup>554</sup> Brown, 1982, p.379 So, Westcott, 1886, p.83; Houlden, 1973, p.86

<sup>555</sup> So Rensberger, 1997, p.84 See also Brown, 1982, p.381-382 for the term 'παρουσία'.

<sup>556</sup> See Brown, 1982, p.382 for the arguments in favour of God's or Christ being the subject here.

<sup>557</sup> Ibid., p.383

<sup>558</sup> Westcott, 1886, p.83

are informed that God is righteous and in 2:1 that Jesus is also righteous. In the present verse the believer is involved. As we have repeatedly stated, the notion of imitation of God runs through 1John. Thus, 'what is true of the Father is true also of the Son, and becomes true of the believer'.<sup>559</sup>

So, the one who ποιεῖ τὴν δικαιοσύνην, John asserts, 'has been born of him' (2:29). It is impossible on grammatical grounds to say whether *him* refers to God or to Christ. It is amazing how the writer 'slides easily from the one to the other'.<sup>560</sup> Scholars have opted for the former as God is the One who is said to beget His children (see Jn 1:13; 1Jn 3:9; 4:7; 5:1,4,18).<sup>561</sup> In this verse the idea that Christians are God's offspring appears for the first time and it occupies a prominent place in the rest of 1John.<sup>562</sup>

With verse 3:1 the author interrupts his chain of thought being amazed by the love of God towards his children: 'Beloved, we are God's children now' (present eschatology); yet, 'what we will be has not yet been revealed. What we do know is this: when he is revealed, we will be like him, for we will see him as he is'. This last part of the verse constitutes, I would say, the crown of 1John's futuristic eschatology. However, it is modified by the 'we do know'; the author does not say we will know; by saying 'we know', as Brown observes, John 'is assuming that what he states about future revelation is part of the knowledge his adherents already possess'.<sup>563</sup> It is noteworthy how John combines in the same verse elements of present and future eschatology. The *dialogue* between present and future is in progress.

Specifically, in 3:2 two promises are prominent: that the believers 'will be like him' and they 'will see him as he is'. The author seems to summarize the anticipation of them in a word, namely the word ἐλπίδα (3:3). The exhortation to imitate God is not a chimera but a reality, which is going to be perfected in the future (1Jn 3:2). For the time being however, it is an ἐλπίδα anticipated by the believers.

This expectation is a matter of hope in which faith is involved. One's standing fast to this hope of being like Him results in one's purifying himself 'just as he is pure' (ἄγνός 1Jn 3:3). As Brooke notes, 'the possession of such a hope is the strongest incentive to absolute purity'.<sup>564</sup> The hope of seeing Him on the one hand and one's being like Him on the other, excludes any hint of sin's existence in the believer's life when both seeing

<sup>559</sup> Houlden, 1973, p.87

<sup>560</sup> Houlden, 1973, p.88

<sup>561</sup> For Westcott, 1886, p.83 this argument 'is not conclusive'. Moreover, he states that 'there is nothing against the tenour of Scripture in saying that Christians are "born of Christ" who is "God only-begotten" (John i.18)'. So Houlden, 1973, pp.87-88

<sup>562</sup> We are going to deal with it thoroughly in 3:9 below

<sup>563</sup> Brown, 1982, p.424

<sup>564</sup> Brooke, 1912, p.83

Him and being like Him are to be realised, eschatologically. It would be blasphemous for somebody to assert that the one who is like Him commits sins. Thus, sin is again under discussion (3:4-6); this time however, what is focused on is the believer's incapability of sinning. With 3:4 John returns to his main theme of this section which is not the revelation of what 'we shall be' but our preparation for the revelation of Christ.

Themes such as the children of God, imitation or likeness of God by the believer, righteousness, sin and revelation are actually interrelated and placed in a particular eschatological context.

Summing up, as we have seen in the first part of the exegesis, namely 1:6-10, future eschatology is emphasized by the author's putting stress on the imperfection of the present reality/sinfulness of the believers. In 2:12-14 a beam of realised eschatology appears giving a triumphant tone to the writing. The believers are said to have defeated the devil; however, John right afterwards refers to those who being the devil's vehicles are there to lead the faithful astray.

Moreover, in 3:1-3 the imperfection of the present reality is even more stressed by the anticipation of 'what we will be' at the eschaton, 'when he is revealed'. Even at this statement however, we are in a position to *overhear* the future's voice for at least 'we know' from now that 'we will be like him'.

Further, in the verses we are to deal with in detail, namely 3:6-10, realised eschatology raises its voice and the future breaks into the present. Sinlessness is presented to be already possessed by 'those who have been born of God' and being so they 'do not sin'; and actually they *cannot* sin' (3:9). In the following verses, having referred to the issue of love, John returns to the issue of sin making a distinction this time between 'sins *πρὸς θάνατον*' and sins *μὴ πρὸς θάνατον*' (5:16; NRSV 'mortal' and 'not mortal').<sup>565</sup> Yet again, (cf. 3:4-10) the reference to the issue of sin brings about the mention of the notion of 'being born of God'. Sin is incompatible with God; thus, the one who is born of God has no dealings with sin. What is more, the devil is incapable of harming him (5:19) for, on the one hand 'the one who is born of God protects' him and on the other, John reminds the believer that the 'whole world lies under the power of the evil one' (5:19) and the evil one has no power over those who are not of this world.

Thus, first and foremost, I would say that the collaboration of elements of present and future eschatology in 1John is worth noting. However, while in GJohn present eschatology is rather dominant, in 1John future eschatology is emphasised over against present eschatology; occasionally, (1Jn 2:12-14; 3:6-10; 5:18) nevertheless, John

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<sup>565</sup> I am going to refer briefly to 5:16-20 at the end of this chapter, for I think that it is undeniably relevant to our issue.

reminds the believers of future realities which determine their way of living in the present and actually constitute their real being in Christ.

### ***Exegesis of 1John 3:6-10***

We now proceed to the next group of verses where sin is also dealt with. This section represents the other side of the coin as I have already pointed out. To be more specific, while in 1:6-10 the believer is reminded of the fact that sin does exist in a Christian's life, here the author stresses the fact that sin is alien to Christians as they are children of God. He actually goes even further, asserting that the children of God *cannot* sin. How are these two to be reconciled?

Having examined the pericope in its context, I think that it has become obvious that the assertion of Christians' being sinless is to be based on eschatological foundations. The notion of sin is going to be examined from another point of view namely, the eschaton. The two passages under discussion are not in contradiction; they are actually 'in dialogue'. We just have to detect this *change of voice* that takes place between them in order for us to interpret rightly the dialectical character of John's theology concerning sin. Having referred to the present aspect of sin in relationship to the believer, he now changes his voice talking of its eschatological aspect. This shift of emphasis explains in my opinion, the apparent contradiction between 1:6-10 and 3:6-10, as I will attempt to explain below.

#### ***6. No one who abides in him sins; no one who sins has either seen him or known him.***

In the preceding verses, we have read that the last hour has come and the Antichrist is at hand (2:19). The author seems to historicize the coming of the Antichrist by pointing to the secessionists, assuming them to be the fulfilment of his expectation. Having presented Jesus as the model of perfect holiness and purity (2:29; 3:3), the author now turns to a moral issue concerning the believer's life. He refers again to a subject which has already been raised, namely that of sin.

Having in mind what we read in 1:6-10, there seems to be a contradiction between v.8f. and the present verse. This contradiction however is only an apparent one.<sup>566</sup> At this stage of exegesis it suffices, I suppose, to make the following comments. First and foremost, the context in chapter 1 is different from the one in chapter 3. In the former,

the writer intends to stress the importance of the cleansing power of the blood of Christ and the believer's asking for forgiveness, while in the latter his ultimate purpose is to point out that sin is out of place in the realm of God who is sinless, so the believers abiding in him do not commit sin. In verses 1:8ff., what is underlined is the Christian's experience in terms of everyday life, whereas in 3:6ff., the principle that sinning and abiding in God are incompatible is the important thing which is primarily under discussion. The two sections shedding light on two different aspects of sin are both essential for one's understanding of sin and its role in the believer's life.

As Westcott observes, verse 6 'flows directly from the last clause of v.5'.<sup>567</sup> Admittedly, having fellowship with someone who has no sin, one has to be sinless as well, in order for their fellowship to be maintained. Accordingly, everyone who abides in him does not commit sin. Or, "Abiding in him" Bultmann writes, 'is the condition of "not sinning"'.<sup>568</sup> It also becomes clear that 'the antithetical form of 3:6', as Rensberger notes, 'establishes two mutually exclusive categories, those who abide in Jesus and those who sin, an unlikeness in contrast to the theme of likeness in 2:28-3:3'. For the same scholar this categorisation 'begins the difficult discussion of sinlessness that 3:7-10 will take up'.<sup>569</sup>

Apparently, the situation the community found itself in, necessitated this change of setting. Realities, which through the prism of realised eschatology, were thought to be already shared by the believers-e.g. sinlessness-having been misunderstood, are now placed in the age to come. The painful schism which took place in the very ranks of the Johannine community contributed, as I see it, to the change of emphasis from realised to futuristic eschatology.

### **6a. No one who abides in him sins;**

Sin and abiding in Him are two inconsistent realities. Abiding in Him rules out every sinful action. What is meant by abiding in Him? The expression is another Johannine idiom 'full of theological profundity: it signifies that stable and assured relationship with God which the Christian has received, and it echoes with the permanence of eternity'.<sup>570</sup> Abiding in God<sup>571</sup> entails total submission to His world. I suppose that the relevant

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<sup>566</sup> For Bultmann, 1967, p.51, 'this sentence (3:6) appears at first to stand in contradiction to 1:8ff, where the readers are warned against the conceit that they are sinless, in contrast to the false teachers, who assert their sinlessness. There is, nevertheless, no real contradiction'.

<sup>567</sup> Westcott, 1886, p.104 So Brown, 1982, p.403 notes that 'the logic of this statement flows from the preceding verse: there is no sin in Christ, and so those who abide in him should have no sin in them'.

<sup>568</sup> Bultmann, 1967, p.51

<sup>569</sup> Rensberger, 1997, p.90

<sup>570</sup> Houlden, 1973, p.87

<sup>571</sup> In the present verse I suppose *him* refers to God. See n.559 of the present study.

phrase due to its ‘theological profundity’ embodies, I would say, the notions ‘to be in communion with Him’, ‘to be in Christ’ or His abiding in the believer, ‘to walk in the light’ and in a way, includes the idea of ‘being of the truth’ or ‘to do the truth’.

Moreover, the Gospel uses of the expression μένειν ἐν are indicative of its theological importance and its broad meaning. In Johannine thought, the word of God can abide in somebody (Jn 5:38; 15:7 so 1Jn 2:14,24), Jesus abides in the believer and the believer in Him (6:56; 15:5 so the χρῖσμα in 1Jn 2:27; 3:24; 4:13,14,16). Moreover, chapter 15 illustrates its meaning in more explicit terms. The believer brings fruit only if he abides in Christ; otherwise he dies (15:4-6). One can abide in His love and His love and joy abides in him (15:9-11; so the love abides or not in the believer 1Jn 3:17; in 1Jn 4:16 the one who abides in love, abides in God as God is love). Additionally, in the Epistle eternal life abides in the believer (3:15), whereas the one who does not love (the brethren) abides in death (3:14). I would say that all these occurrences of the relevant expression in the Gospel and in the Epistle betray the multidimensional character of this expression and at the same time its deep theological core.

I would agree with Lieu however, that the use of the term *abiding* (μένειν) in the Gospel ‘is not identical with that of 1John’. As she asserts in 1John ‘abiding is a fully reciprocal experience-believers, or those who obey God’s commands and live in love, abide in God as God does in them (3:24; 4:12-16); in the same way abiding in death is identical with not having life abiding in one (3:14-15). In contrast to the Gospel (John 6:56; 15:1-7), abiding is predominantly theocentric-in and by God’.<sup>572</sup> I would assert though that this difference is not a matter of contrast. It is rather to be attributed to the shift of emphasis, which exists, between GJohn and 1John. As I see it, while the former focus on the personal relationship of the believers to Jesus Christ, who is the Messiah, the latter refers to the relationship of the members of the church directly to God. I do not think that we can draw strict lines, between these two meanings however, for, as Lieu mentions, ‘the frequent and characteristic “in him” does allow for some ambiguity as to whether God or Jesus is intended (2:6,28; 3:6,24; 4:13), and in 2:24 abiding is “in the Son and in the Father”’.<sup>573</sup>

As I said above the expression μένειν ἐν embodies the idea of ‘being in’ God; it adds however the conception of personal effort (voluntaristic shade of meaning) to maintain the *being in* God. As Westcott notes the author ‘speaks of “abiding” in Christ and not simply of “being” in Christ, because his argument rests on the efficacy of continuous

<sup>572</sup> Lieu, 1991, p.41

<sup>573</sup> Ibid. See *Abiding and having* ibid., pp.41-45

human effort'.<sup>574</sup> Besides, this is I think the message of 1John; or at least one of the Epistle's implicit messages is that the believer is to be struggling to remain abiding in Him. This idea was what the secessionists fail to grasp. Fellowship with God is not a static relationship achieved once and lasting forever. The imperative form *μείνате*<sup>575</sup> in GJohn (8:31 'if you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples', 15:4 'abide in me as I abide in you', 'abide in my love' 15:10) suggests the breakability of this abiding.<sup>576</sup> The relationship between God and believer is really delicate and fragile and the Christian has to keep it alive. This however does not imply that human efforts are sufficient on their own to maintain such a relationship. As John says 'the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine' (Jn 15:4). Moreover, in 1John it becomes clear that God's *σπέρμα* plays a determinative role in order for the believer to maintain sinlessness.

What undermines this relationship, as we have seen in the previous section, is sin which constitutes a continual threat. That is why the one who abides in Him is expected not to commit sin. For in doing so he rejects his citizenship in the realm of God. This is the principle that must be followed, the canon, which applies to this kind of relationship.

### ***6b. no one who sins has either seen him or known him.***

Though, we would expect here to read 'no one who sins abides in him', we read 'has either seen him or known him' instead.<sup>577</sup> To me this interchangeability of the terms shows the proximity in meaning of the terms involved. I agree with Brooke that 'the

<sup>574</sup> Westcott, 1886, p.104; See also *ibid.*, p.50 where Westcott notes that 'for the phrase "being in God" St. John more commonly...uses the phrase "abiding in God", which adds the conception of personal determination and effort: vv.24,27,28; iii.6,24; iv.12f.; 15f. John vi.56'. Brooke, 1912, p.86 as well correctly, in my opinion, notes that 'as contrasted with *εἶναι*, *μένειν* perhaps suggests in this context the necessity of human effort'.

<sup>575</sup> It can also be taken implying an indicative. In this case it approaches the GJohn world of realised eschatology. For Barrett, 1955, p.397 for example, the imperative (in Jn 15:4) 'is a summons to the disciples to enter into and so to abide in the love of Jesus'. Strecker, 1996, p.45 as well referring to 1John notes that 1Jn 3:6 suggests an 'indicative assertion that the community, if it "remains in [God]" does not sin'...however, this passage among others, 'occur[s] in parenetical contexts, so that even here one can see a clear connection to the imperative'.

<sup>576</sup> As Strecker, 1996, p.96 sees it, the author does not intend to establish 'a theology of sinlessness in contrast to 1:8-10'. The connection between 'not sinning' and 'abiding in him' is of fundamental importance. As for the 'abiding in him', it is to be understood 'in the framework of the parenthesis...as the prelude to the admonition not to sin (cf. 2:6)'. Accordingly, abiding in him is not a *habitus* for the believer, 'it must continually renew its awareness of its origins and thus of its own identity'. See also Strecker, 1996, pp.44-46 Excursus: *Μένειν*.

<sup>577</sup> For Hoskyns, 1947, p.499 'knowledge and faith are closely interwoven, since knowledge is appropriated by faith, and also supports it (Jn vi.69)'. As Schnackenburg, 1968-82, p.565 observes the verbs 'to know' and 'to see' are verbs which 'are associated with faith'. ' "To see" Jesus in faith points to the peculiar character of Christian revelation, namely that men "see" the Father in him, and only in him (14:9). The verb *γινώσκειν* is used particularly often, and its close relationship to *πιστεύειν* has often been noted and studied. It occurs 56 times in John, sometimes parallel to "believe" (cf. 14:7 with 10: 17:8b with c; 17:21d with 23c; also 6:69?) sometimes as a "higher" degree of faith or a stage of its development (cf. 8:28 with 24; especially 10:38; also 12:16; 13:7; 14:20)'.

vision and the knowledge have their abiding results'.<sup>578</sup> I would like to add though that they become perfect in abiding with Him. We have to point out that seeing and knowing Him have nothing to do with physical categories, as μένειν ἐν was not meant to be understood only in physical terms. What the author is referring to here is spiritual sight and knowledge.<sup>579</sup> The time when these senses were meant to be taken physically has gone.

Moreover, in the Gospel Jesus said, 'whoever has seen me has seen the Father' (Jn 14:9). However, in John 16:3 'the Jews' are the ones who know neither Jesus nor his Father. Apparently, physical vision is not enough for someone to assert that he has seen and known Christ. It is clear as in other instances I have pointed out, that some physical categories (such as abide, believe, behold) in GJohn have a spiritual substratum that emerges more explicitly in their use in 1John.<sup>580</sup>

In our verses, the author seems on the one hand to deprive the secessionists of the privilege of sharing the community's experience of having seen Him (1Jn 1:1; 2:14) and on the other he accuses them of ignorance of Christ just like Jesus has accused Jews. In the Epistle however, my basic assumption is that all these concepts acquire another meaning after the departure of Christ. As I have repeatedly stated, the relationship with God is to be placed on another plane in the post-resurrection period.

We again witness that shift between the Gospel and the Epistle. In GJohn, the one who sees (physical vision) Jesus has already seen the Father. However, parenthetically I note that in my opinion even in this saying of Jesus spiritual vision is what is ultimately meant (cf. Jn 9:40-41). In the Epistle, those physical categories are replaced by spiritual ones, due to the fact that the fellowship with Christ is concretised in spiritual terms. Jesus is no longer with them. Does it mean that they cannot *see* the Father? Of course not. They can see Him with the eyes of their faith, '*not from sight but from inward conviction*'.<sup>581</sup>

<sup>578</sup> Brooke, 1912, p.86 As Schnackenburg, 1968-82, p.565 notes 'we must always remember that "to know" in biblical thought is always an act which institutes or reinforces fellowship'.

<sup>579</sup> For the concept of knowledge see *Corp. Herm.* Livellus XIII, 8 where knowledge is in contrast to ignorance. See also in the *Gospel of Truth* I. 26: 24-25 NHL 42 where knowledge is in contrast to error. Moreover, in *The second treatise of the great Seth* it is noted that the knowledge of the Greatness is to be 'from above and (from) a fountain of truth...' (VII 61: 1-3 NHL 334).

<sup>580</sup> As Abbott, 1905, p.105 observes, there also occurs the thought 'that our "seeing" Christ depends on Christ's "seeing" us, just as man's "knowing" God is sometimes identified both in N.T. and in O.T. with God's "knowing" man'.

<sup>581</sup> *Ibid.*, p.109 Moreover, as Lieu, 1986, p.116, observes the assertion here that he who does evil has not 'seen God' is 'unusual in that the general Johannine and biblical emphasis is that no-one can see God anyway' (Jn 1:18; 6:46; 1Jn 4:12,20 etc.). So Abbott, 1905, p.111

Moreover, as Westcott notes there exists a climax in meaning: the 'knowing' 'is less direct and immediate and therefore forms the climax here'.<sup>582</sup> Additionally, as Brown sees it, 'since knowledge implies intimacy, this denial may be even more biting than the denial of sight in the previous line'.<sup>583</sup> According to both Houlden<sup>584</sup> and Schnackenburg<sup>585</sup> however, there exists no important difference between the two verbs *see* and *know*. Besides, we have witnessed the writer's habit of using interchangeable terms, trying to reinforce what he intends to say.

What is certain here is the fact that John is not keen on developing philosophical ideas. For him seeing and knowing God are qualities which lead to one's having fellowship with God, but at the same time, they attain their full essence in fellowship with God. Only if one shares God's realm can he assert that he sees and knows him. Moreover, for the secessionists who claimed that they *knew* him the author is pointing out that knowledge of God is to be based on their refraining from sin; a fact which requires a continual effort on the believer's part as sin is a stubborn fact in his life. Otherwise, their knowledge is empty.

Furthermore, some commentators<sup>586</sup> discern a hint here that the secessionists may have appealed to their having seen Christ in his earthly life as a sign of their superiority. I do not find it impossible as I am of the opinion that John is seeking first and foremost to point out the difference between those times when Jesus' adherents used to see him with their own eyes and to which times the secessionists seem to appeal, and the present when spiritual vision overshadows the physical one. As Westcott notes, the use of the word, *see* 'in connection with Christ seems to point to some teachers who appealed to their personal sight of the Lord as giving authority to their false doctrine'. However, 'past sight and past knowledge cease to be unless they go forward'.<sup>587</sup>

For Brown, 'neither the author nor his secessionist opponents had physically seen Jesus of Nazareth, but that is not the point of his attack. The secessionists, by their indifference to the malice of sin, are not heirs to the Beloved Disciple, "the one who

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<sup>582</sup> Westcott, 1886, p.104 He (ibid.) also notes that 'seeing expresses briefly the fullest exertion of our utmost faculties of gaining new elements of truth from without: 'knowing', the apprehension and coordination of the truth within'. See also Brooke, 1912, p.87. Moreover, for Houlden, 1973, p.94, to 'see' him is the same as to 'know' him, 'almost certainly'. 'To try to draw a distinction between two classes of Christians –eyewitness and the rest- is surely unreal'.

<sup>583</sup> Brown, 1982, p.403

<sup>584</sup> Houlden, 1973, p.94 observes that 'almost certainly' there is no difference between *to see* and *to know* Christ.

<sup>585</sup> As Schnackenburg, 1992, p.173 notes 'has known' is 'simply used for variation'.

<sup>586</sup> Westcott, 1886, p.104; Brooke, 1912, p.86 notes that 'it cannot be restricted here (as by Weiss) to those who had actually seen the Lord in the flesh, ἐγνώκε being added to meet the case of later disciples'. So Strecker, 1996, p.97

<sup>587</sup> Ibid., p.104

saw" these things (John 19:35)'. 'His objection is', Brown proceeds, 'to a continued life-style and outlook on sin that is incompatible with being a Johannine Christian'.<sup>588</sup>

Metaphorically speaking, I esteem that what is meant here is that sin is a kind of veil that hinders the believer from seeing and knowing Christ. So, principally, being in true fellowship with God, the believer does not commit sin, in the sense that he removes that veil, longing for his fellowship with God, whenever sin keeps him from the sight and knowledge of God. The way of doing so has been explained in 1:8-10 where confession-request for forgiveness and the power of blood of Christ are proposed to be the means of renewing the believer's fellowship with God. Apparently, for the secessionists, those means and the death of Jesus in particular, were insignificant (5:6-8) whereas the author of 1John regards them as essential (1:7; 2:2; 4:10).

***7. Little children, let no one deceive you. Everyone who does what is right is righteous, just as he is righteous.***

I think that the theme of imitation of Christ reappears again, implicitly though in this verse. In vss. 5-6, the reader is reminded that Christ is sinlessness and that 'no one who abides in him sins'. So, the believers are invited to share His characteristics. In the present verse, His righteousness is proposed as the model, which Christians are to copy.<sup>589</sup> Having referred to sin, the author points out that the principle that the Christian is invited to follow is that Christians do not sin in order to imitate Christ who is sinless. Now he goes on to highlight another of His attributes which again the believers who have fellowship with Him are exhorted to share, namely righteousness. Again, Christ is the one, whom His believers have to have as a model, leading their lives.

We have encountered again this epithet δίκαιος attributed to God in the previous section where God's being πιστός and δίκαιος is the reason for His being a forgiving God. Here the author again underlines the fact that one's behaviour determines one's character. The one who says that he is just has to act in this way, and thus he resembles Christ who is the perfect expression of δικαιοσύνη. For, 'there are no heights of knowledge, or superior kinds of nature, for which action is a matter of indifference'.<sup>590</sup>

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<sup>588</sup> Brown, 1982, p.403

<sup>589</sup> According to Rensberger, 1997, p.86, 'the theme of likeness or imitation appears throughout this section. In 2:28-3:3, it is related to doing what is right, being unknown to the world, seeing and being like God, and purification. In 3:5-6, 7, it is related to sin and righteousness; it is also implicit in the elaboration of this theme in 3:8-10'.

<sup>590</sup> Brooke, 1912, p.87

### **7a. Little children, let no one deceive you.**

Once more, the danger of the faithful being led astray becomes obvious interrupting the thought of the writer. His agony for his church overflows in a rather tender way. The designation *τεκνία*<sup>591</sup> exemplifies on the one hand his conviction that Christ is what makes them a family and they have to stay together to face the heresy, and on the other betrays the force of the imminent danger that awaits for the believers.<sup>592</sup>

I think that the author has in mind a certain heresy and particular opponents.<sup>593</sup> Exhorting his *τεκνία*<sup>594</sup> throughout the Epistle, apart from the danger of self-deception (1:8), he reminds them explicitly of a danger which is still among them threatening their fellowship with God (2:27; 3:7). Accordingly, the believers are advised that ‘they must yield to the seductions of no one, however prominent his position or plausible his arguments’.<sup>595</sup> Obviously, while the opponents asserted that they were righteous, they could not prove it by their actions, the way they led their lives. Such an attitude stems from their general indifference concerning morality.

### **7b. Everyone who does what is right is righteous, just as he is righteous.**

I would agree with Westcott that ‘“to do righteousness” is more than “to do righteous acts”’.<sup>596</sup> I suppose that ‘to do righteousness’ means that the whole human nature has been informed by righteousness and consequently one’s acts are just. In 2:29, the one who *does righteousness* is a son of God, as righteousness is one of God’s attributes and in Him it finds its wholeness. Christ<sup>597</sup> is the prototype of acting righteously and being righteous. He is the one ‘who set the Christian standard’.<sup>598</sup> Moreover, the core of His righteousness is love, as Westcott writes ‘in Him righteousness was and is the expression

<sup>591</sup> ‘The tenderness of the address’, Westcott, 1886, p.105 observes, ‘is called out by the peril of the situation’. Moreover, Brooke, 1912, p.87 notes, ‘if this is the true reading, the appeal is again made to their common (spiritual) nature’.

<sup>592</sup> Moreover, for Strecker, 1996, p.97, ‘the beginning of the verse with “little children” should not lead one to suppose that the author intends to begin a new topic. On the contrary, this will be a continuation of the community parenthesis, now effectively underscored by addressing the readers again’. However, for Schnackenburg, 1992, 173, ‘here the author makes a fresh start by addressing his readers as “little children” as in 2:1, 12, 18, 28’.

<sup>593</sup> Brooke, 1912, p.87 is of the opinion that ‘it is possible that the writer is thinking of some particular opponent’.

<sup>594</sup> As Lieu, 1986, pp.67-68 notes, ‘the Greek word used in both Epistles (2 and 3John) is “τέκνον”, in common with the New Testament and other parallels; in contrast, the Gospel and First Epistle use the rare diminutive forms “τεκνία”, “παδιά” in address to the disciples or members of the community, reserving “τέκνον” for describing spiritual origin, “children of God”, “Abraham” or “the devil”’.

<sup>595</sup> Brooke, 1912, p.87

<sup>596</sup> Westcott, 1886, p.105

<sup>597</sup> O’Neill, 1966, p.32 notes that ‘there is no ambiguity of reference except in verse 7, where *ἐκεῖνος* presumably refers to Christ, after the usage in verse 5’. So Lieu, 1991, p.56 notes that *ἐκεῖνος* ‘probably refers to Jesus’. Brown, 1982, p.404 notes that ‘Christ dominates the thought from 3:3 to 3:8’.

<sup>598</sup> Brooke, 1912, p.87 He (ibid.) also notes that ‘no lower ideal would prove a sufficient incentive to holiness, *i.e.* the highest self-realization of which the nature of man is capable, who was created in order to

of love'.<sup>599</sup> Besides, the fact that His being a forgiving God is based on His being righteous, I think exemplifies the truth (1:9).

What 'doing righteousness' means in Reumann's opinion, is clarified in 3:7 and 10. "Righteousness", he explains, is something one does, like "truth" (1:6). It does involve the ethical above all practice of the love-command'. Moreover, for the same scholar 'this dynamic Johannine idiom' has moral connotations. It actually combats 'a gnostic perversion that ignored deeds in the world'. The question is how, since God is righteous (1:9) and Christ is righteous (2:1), the believer who does righteousness comes to be righteous (3:7), "just as That One [Jesus] is"? The answer, Reumann goes on, 'of the epistle lies not only in the role of Jesus Christ as expiation (2:2) and intercessor (2:1) and our participation in and through him with the Father (1:3,6) but also in the Johannine idea of being begotten of God (2:29; 3:9)'.<sup>600</sup> But how do these biological (begotten by God) and social (κοινωνία) metaphors relate to each other? As I see it, the former describes the dimensions of the latter. For the believer, it is not just a participation in God's reality; it is the sharing of God's attributes which exemplifies the exact relationship that exists between God and the believer. The believer is not only invited to be with God but to be like God. So, the nature of the believer's reply to the invitation of God has to be ethical and devotional; the former makes possible the believer's being with God for he is sharing His attributes, and the latter assures the maintenance of their fellowship.

For Lieu, 'the use of the present tense and of the emphatic pronoun "that one" (ἐκεῖνος) when speaking of Jesus may suggest that it is his present role within the tradition or teaching of the community as an example which is more certain for the author than his historical significance (2:6; 3:3,5,7,16; 4:17)'.<sup>601</sup>

In the present verse, apart from the author's pastoral interest, that is evident, the danger of the πλάνη is also obvious. The author offers to the faithful a criterion according to which they can prove the secessionists deceivers. The secessionists were probably, as Brown notes, 'equating "being just" with knowing God'<sup>602</sup> or at least with an abstract category drawing no practical consequences concerning their way of living. The person who *does* righteousness *is* righteous. This reminds us of what is said in the previous

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grow into the likeness of God'. For Hoskyns, 1947, p.485 'as sin is grounded upon unbelief, so faith is productive of righteousness and virtue'.

<sup>599</sup> Westcott, 1886, p.105

<sup>600</sup> Reumann, 1982, p.146 As O'Neill, 1966, p.36 observes, 'the idea that the righteous will be "like God" at his coming is equally poorly attested, but in this case any special hellenistic influence is unlikely; the concept is eschatological, referring to the renewal of the Adamic image in men' (see IQS IV. 23; 1En 38.4; TBen 6.6f).

<sup>601</sup> Lieu, 1986, p.200

<sup>602</sup> Brown, 1982, p.404

section where the author insists on the importance of *walking* and not on what somebody *says*. Theory goes along with practice. 'He, and he only, who shows the fruits of righteousness in what he does, is righteous', Brooke points out.<sup>603</sup>

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<sup>603</sup> Brooke, 1912, p.87

**8. Everyone who commits sin is a child of the devil; for the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The Son of God was revealed for this purpose, to destroy the works of the devil.**

In the relevant verse, on the one hand, the distinction between those who act sinfully and those who do righteousness is sharpened, and on the other, the incompatibility of Christ with sin and sinful behaviour is stressed even more. As doing righteousness is peculiar to those who belong to God, acting sinfully signifies that someone belongs to the devil. Acts are always the main criterion for one's being categorised one way or the other.

Yet, as we have seen in 1:6-10 sin is a stubborn reality even in the believer's life. What differentiates him from those who belong to the devil however, is his attitude towards sin. While the believer renounces sin and resorts to God's means of cleansing from sin in order for him to maintain his fellowship with God, the children of the devil we should imagine keep on sinning just like the devil, the author of sin who acts sinfully *from the beginning*. Yet, what v.8 points out is that it is possible for the believer to rebel against sin thanks to the revelation of the Son of God who came to terminate this catalytic power of the devil. Therefore, for the believer it is not a matter of wish but one of reality that he can fight against the reign of sin in his life.

Obviously, for John when it comes to the believers' relationship to God, everything is presented plainly, in black-and-white. 'It had to be made so,' Dodd observes, 'if the readers were to be sufficiently warned against the dangers of sophistication. Sophistry can as easily prove that evil is an aspect of good as that error is an aspect of truth. But truth and falsehood, good and evil, right and wrong, God and the devil, are irreconcilable opposites'.<sup>604</sup>

Indeed, as I have already pointed out, John is not interested in the development of any philosophical term and concept. Even when philosophical terms are used, they are transformed by their reference to God and his realm. There is no place for compromise and one's own way of life speaks of his spiritual identity. The author of 1John sharpens gradually his teaching in order to unveil the deceit of the secessionists and of course to shield his community against heterodoxy, offering them a criterion for their own spiritual life.

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<sup>604</sup> Dodd, 1946, p.73

**8a. Everyone who commits sin is a child of the devil;**

The person, who acts sinfully<sup>605</sup>, does not know/see God and belongs to the devil as opposed to the one who does righteousness and abides in Him. As usual, John expresses in negative terms<sup>606</sup> what was previously said in positive terms, making it even explicit and at the same time not allowing for any misunderstandings. This becomes obvious if we compare in parallel verses 7 and 8. The one who *does righteousness* is opposed to the one who *acts sinfully*. While the former is *righteous* sharing God's attributes, the latter *belongs to the devil* imitating him who sins from the beginning.

Accordingly, the one who *does sin* accepting sin as the guiding principle in his life, belongs to the devil. As Westcott notes, the one who acts sinfully, 'draws from him (the devil) the ruling principles of his life, as his child'.<sup>607</sup>

Moreover, the expression 'to be of the devil' occurs 3 times in Johannine literature, whereas the expression 'to be of God' occurs 15 times. While the latter characterizes someone's being in His realm and under His dominion, the former refers to those who live in the devil's realm and do sin.<sup>608</sup>

Concerning GJohn, Jesus referring to the Jews said that they were 'from the devil their father', (8:44) for they were unable to hear His word.<sup>609</sup> It is characteristic the fact that as God has children and is called their father, in a like manner, the devil has children (1Jn 3:10) and is considered as their father (Jn 8:44). However, although the form εἶναι ἐκ (to be from) is used in both cases, God's children are said to be begotten by God, as we are going to see in the next verse, but nowhere are the children of devil regarded as devil's offspring.<sup>610</sup>

<sup>605</sup> According to Law, 1909, p.129 n.1, with the article, *the sin* 'is a pure abstract, signifying sin in its constitutive principle' (3:4,8, 'in direct antithesis' to *the righteousness* 2:29; 3:7). So in 3:8 '*the one who does sin* = he who expresses in actual deed the essential principle of sin'. Moreover, as Barrett, 1955, p.286 observes commenting on Jn 8:34, 'he who actually commits sin demonstrates thereby that he is already the slave of sin; also, by the very sin he commits he makes himself still further a slave'.

<sup>606</sup> So, Westcott, 1886, p.105 notes 'the opposite to v.7 is expressed with characteristic variations'. However, for Bultmann, 1967, p.52, 'formally, v.8a belongs together with v.9a in antithetical parallelism'. So Strecker, 1996, p.99

<sup>607</sup> Westcott, 1886, p.106

<sup>608</sup> As Lieu, 1991, p.39 observes, 'there are spirits which are of God and those which are not; the latter are "of error" or even of "the antichrist" (4:2-3,6). The parallelism suggests a real symmetry between being of God or of the devil, although never are those "of the devil" said to have been "born of the devil"'.  
<sup>609</sup> The other two occurrences of the word διάβολος in GJohn are the ones where Judas was a devil or devil-inspired (6:70; 13:2). In the Epistles, the term διάβολος occurs 4 times all of which are found in vss. 3:8-10.

<sup>610</sup> As Strecker, 1996, p.100 notes, 'the distinction between children of the devil and children of God has a Jewish background that is especially evident in apocalyptic literature (*Jub.* 15.26-32; *T. Dan* 4.7; *Apoc. Abr.* 13-14). The author does not, however, intend to describe a future eschatological situation, especially since he makes a clear distinction between the devil and the antichrist'. For Bultmann, 1955, I, p.174, 'in fully Gnostic fashion those who are "of the devil" (Jn 8:44; 1Jn 3:8) or are "of the evil one" (1Jn 3:12), "from below" (Jn 8:23), "of this world" (Jn 8:23 and elsewhere), or "of the earth" (Jn 3:31)-are contrasted with those who are "from God" (Jn 7:17; 8:47), "of the truth" (Jn 18:37), "from above" (Jn 8:23), or are "begotten of God" (1Jn 2:29; 3:9; 4:7; 5:1)'. See Lieu, 1993, p.470-471 who notes '...although 1 John talks

To me, this very fact signifies the absence of absolute predestinarian elements in John's theology. On the one hand, John does not say that the devil actually begets some to be his children, meaning that nobody is predestined to be of the evil one, and on the other, while saying that there are some who are begotten by God, his insistence on exhorting them to abide in Him means that they certainly could act otherwise. Accordingly, it is a matter of choice for everyone which of the two dominions he is going to serve. What has to be kept in mind for our author is that this choice has to be expressed by acts and not by words. One's spiritual identity is recognised in one's way of living. Or in Westcott's words, 'character reveals the choice'.<sup>611</sup> This idea, I suppose is in the main, the one that the secessionists fail to grasp. However, in the next verse we will see that human decision is not on its own sufficient and so the divine factor-God's σπέρμα intervenes in order for the believer to fight for sinlessness.

Moreover, as Brown observes, the devil is incapable of any creative task. In his words, it 'takes a positive, life-giving, creative action by God to make children out of those who believe in Him, but the devil is not creative. He does not give life but takes it away'.<sup>612</sup>

Referring to John 8:44 where Jews are said to be the children of the devil and to the fact that apparently the heretics are spoken of in the same way, Houlden points out that this fact may show that 'in the writing of the Gospel, "the Jews" were, partly at least, symbolic figures, standing for all opponents of Christ, including those of the writer's own day'.<sup>613</sup>

At this point Brown is wondering 'what did the secessionists think of the devil?' He proceeds asserting that 'in forms of the gnostic myth the creator, who is the lawgiver of Israel and therefore the God of the OT, becomes a demonic figure. The GJohn statement that the father of the Jews is the devil (8:44) could easily have moved Johannine Christians in that direction, but there is no way to tell how far along that road the secessionists were'. The fact however that the author 'never challenges them on their view of OT salvation history', Brown states, shows that presumably 'it was not a matter of active dispute between him and them'.<sup>614</sup>

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only of those who are born of God and never of some as *born* of the devil nor of their nature or being separately from their behaviour'.

<sup>611</sup> Westcott, 1886, p.106

<sup>612</sup> Brown, 1982, p.405 'The issue' Brown (ibid.) also notes, 'has importance because a division of human beings into those begotten of God and those begotten of the devil would be a giant step toward a gnostic myth in which human beings have a preexistent status'.

<sup>613</sup> Houlden, 1973, p.95

<sup>614</sup> Brown, 1982, p.405 However, Strecker, 1996, p.99, states that 'when in the present passage it is not truth and falsehood but righteousness and sin that characterize the children of God and of the devil and separate them from one another, it is not because there is a secondary application here of the anti-Jewish polemic in the Fourth Gospel'.

Though I think that Houlden's thesis might be a plausible assumption, I suppose that Brown's theory sounds rather exaggerated. On the one hand, I do not think that such an issue would ever be a matter of inactive dispute. Never would the author be occupied with issues such as sin and love when the very identity of God is challenged. On the other, once more I think that the text itself proves what is my view concerning the role of GJohn in the interpretation of the Epistle. New ideas do exist in the Epistle related possibly to GJohn but not always interpreted through its channels. The two writings are relatives but they are not twins.

Moreover, while nobody can deny the presence of heresy combated in the Epistle, it does not mean that the polemical character of the document forms its theology altogether. Undoubtedly, there are theological elements whose development was occasioned by the heresy. Yet, there are ideas, which were solely rooted in the author's pastoral concern.

### ***8b. for the devil has been sinning from the beginning.***

What the person who acts sinfully and the devil have in common is sin, as the devil is the one who sins from the beginning. In a previous verse the author admonishes Christians to be righteous as Christ is righteous in order to prove their origin. In a like manner, the one who persists on sinning proves his being of the devil.

First and foremost, I think that by saying 'from the beginning'<sup>615</sup> the author wishes to put stress on the fact that sin is an external principle to human nature. The devil was the one who sinned first; he is the father of sin and in general, of everything anti-godly, which flows from it. Accordingly, as Brooke notes, sin 'is not self-originated or part of man's nature'.<sup>616</sup> The present tense used signifies that he still abides in sin; he still has the power to lead people astray. If we were to locate this first sinful act in history, I suppose it is plausible to be placed in the narration of Genesis of the fall of the angels and their rebellion against God.

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<sup>615</sup> For Westcott, 1886, p.106, 'from the beginning' refers to 'the first dawn of human history'. Moreover, for Brooke, 1912, p.88 'the attempt to assign a definite date, so to speak, is a mistake. "The earliest times spoken of in Genesis", would perhaps be the nearest popular paraphrase'. For Hoskyns, 1947, p.336 'it means the Creation'. Bultmann, 1967, p.52 n.35 says that it 'can refer neither to the origin of the historical event of the proclamation as it does in 1:1, 2:13, nor to the Garden of Eden story in Genesis but rather intends the primordial beginning since the nature of the devil is being characterised'. In Brown's, 1982, p.406 opinion, 'the author is thinking of sin inspired by the devil in the whole complex of Gen 1-4, a section which starts with "In the beginning"'. As Lieu, 1986, p.75 notes the phrase "from the beginning" represents a recurring theme in 1John (1.1; 2.7,13f. 24; 3.8,11)'. As she (ibid., p.75, n.72) also notes, 'an absolute beginning may be intended in 2.13f.; 3.8 but even here the beginning of Christian experience is possible'. Moreover, for Strecker, 1996, p.100 'the reference is more probably to the story of paradise or the opposition between Cain and Abel'. Likewise Schnackenburg, 1992, p.174 In any case it is different from the 'In the beginning was the Word' (Jn 1:1).

<sup>616</sup> Brooke, 1912, p.88

Obviously, the author of the Epistle was not keen on explaining in detail when and how the devil became what he now is. The only thing he says is that the devil sins from the beginning (3:8), and that 'the whole world' is his domain (5:19). However, nothing excludes the possibility of his referring to the ordinary assumption that the devil is a fallen angel. In Genesis it is clear that the devil is the arch-opponent of God. The issue of devil's origin and his role in the history is a huge one. At this point, I would agree with Houlden who notes that '*the beginning* refers to the moment of that mysterious, primeval disaster' (when 'his fall from angelic status' happened and he began 'his career as the arch-opponent of God's good purposes'). However, according to the same scholar, 'it would be quite wrong to press questions, which exercised later minds: was the devil coeternal with God? Or was there something (what?) before "the beginning"? and if so was this not a contradiction in terms, or could "the beginning" be an event "before" which there was God?'.<sup>617</sup>

### ***8c. The Son of God was revealed for this purpose, to destroy the works of the devil.***

However, the devil has no power over the Son of God who not only has power over him but is revealed<sup>618</sup> to destroy the devil's works. Referring to the title 'Son of God', Westcott observes that here, for the first time in the Epistle, 'the title of dignity' is used 'to bring out the nature of the conflict'. This title is used henceforward being 'His most common name (iv.15; v.5, 9 ff., 20)'.<sup>619</sup>

Saying in 3:5 that Christ is *revealed* to take away sins, the author now clarifies his previous statement exposing the source of sin, the devil. So, the author writes that He came as well to destroy the works of devil namely, sins. That the works of devil cannot be but sins, is obvious due to the fact that sin is what makes him be what he is, the devil.<sup>620</sup>

As John writes, the Son of God 'was revealed for this purpose, to destroy the works of the devil'. Indeed, 'when the "works" are destroyed, not only the effects of satanic

<sup>617</sup> Houlden, 1973, p.95

<sup>618</sup> As O'Neill, 1966, p.33 asserting that the themes encountered in 1John are rooted in Jewish soil, notes 'we are so accustomed to seeing in every reference to the Parousia a reference to Christ's second coming that at first sight it seems incredible that the isolated verses belonged originally to a Jewish community'.

<sup>619</sup> Westcott, 1886, p.106

<sup>620</sup> As Westcott, 1886, p.107 notes ' "the works of the devil" are gathered up in "sin" which is their spring'. Brooke, 1912, p.89 notes that the works are the sins 'which he (the Devil) has introduced into the lives of men'. So Vouga, 1990, p.55. In Strecker, 1996, p.101 opinion that the works of the devil 'are the equivalent of his sinful activity, that is, that the doers are identical with their deeds. is the conclusion to be drawn from what has proceeded (cf. also 3:12; Jn 8:41,44)'.

power but the power itself are overthrown'.<sup>621</sup> Though the former is already realized in the believer's life, the latter is going to be accomplished eschatologically, when the believers are to be sinless. For the time being the believers are said to be given the power to conquer the devil (2:13f.; 4:4; 5:4f.). Moreover, they have been offered an antidote for their sins, as we have seen in the previous section. Partly, the works of the devil have been destroyed till their final annihilation eschatologically. There is a tension, I think, between the destruction of the works of the devil in the present-*already* (Jn 12:31 cf. 14:30; 16:11) and in the future-*not yet* (1Jn 3:8; 5:19)<sup>622</sup>. Like the tension which exists in the believer's life between the victory over the world already achieved (1Jn 2:13) and a victory to be accomplished in the time to come (1Jn 5:4-5). On the cross the initiation of a process of destroying the devil's works took place, which is going to end up in his final dethronement eschatologically. Yet again the significant difference in emphasis between realised and futuristic eschatology in the Gospel and in the Epistle respectively is witnessed.

I suppose that we are now prepared to listen to the author's saying that the children of God *cannot sin* in the sense that whenever they sin they 'give a hand' to the devil in performing his *works* and in doing so they hinder at the same time the mission of the Son of God who came to destroy them. The author knows though the weakness of human nature. His thought is just moving on a different plane where reality is replaced by expectation.

I esteem that the revelation of the Son of God mentioned here refers to His incarnate life as in 3:5, and the zenith of His earthly career namely, His death on the cross.<sup>623</sup> Concerning GJohn, in 12:31, Houlden notes 'we see the Passion of Jesus as the moment when the devil ('the prince of this world') is cast out and when the climax of his "works", the assault on the Son of God (GJ xiii.2), is brought to nothing'. Accordingly, 'it is likely that the death of Jesus is in mind in our present passage', Houlden adds 'though it is not explicitly mentioned'.<sup>624</sup>

<sup>621</sup> Strecker, 1996, p.101 Brown, 1966-70, p.468 notes that 'the modified dualism implied in John's portrait of a struggle between the Prince of this world and Jesus is very close to the Qumran picture of a struggle between the angel of darkness and the prince of lights'.

<sup>622</sup> As for the DSS as we have seen the destruction of the angel of darkness is to take place at the eschaton (see IQS III, 13-IV, 26; IQM I, 1 et.al).

<sup>623</sup> According to Lieu, 1991, p.75 'the same verb "to be manifested", can be used of his incarnate life (3:5,8; cf. 1:2; 4:9) as well as of his, presumably very different, future coming (2:28; 3:2)'. Moreover, Sevenster, 1970, p.189 referring to 1Jn 3:5 and 3:8 notes, 'in both these texts the incarnation is suggested through the aorist 'was revealed' and in both, this incarnation possesses a soteriological aspect; the taking away of sins and deliverance from the power of Satan'. In Brown's, 1982, p.406 opinion, 'a reference to the incarnation would be less awkward than it was in 3:5; for the "Son of God" would be an appropriate name for the pre-existent Word, whereas in the author's view "Christ" would not'.

<sup>624</sup> Houlden, 1973, p.96 Referring to the same passage Brown, 1966-70, p.477 notes that 'the hour that brings glory to Jesus brings expulsion to his great enemy. ... Perhaps we can say that the victorious hour

However, Brown observes that ‘while one can understand, “The Son of God was revealed to destroy the works of the devil”, by combining scattered passages in GJohn, that statement is not representative of the main thrust of GJohn; for the public ministry of the Johannine Jesus is singularly free of confrontation with the demonic’.<sup>625</sup> The thing nevertheless is that John does explicitly refer to the demolition of devil’s works presenting the main message of those narratives, which are missing from GJohn.

According to Schnackenburg, the context shows that ‘this verse looks beyond the redeeming death of Christ on the cross, beyond his victory in principle over the devil, toward the continuing battle against the works of the devil, a battle in which the believers are also involved. At the same time it forms an *inclusio* which rounds off the argument’.<sup>626</sup> However, though I agree with Schnackenburg that this verse points beyond ‘toward the continuing battle against the works of the devil’, in the sense that the believers are going to denounce sin as a principle throughout their life abiding in the One who ‘was revealed to destroy the works of the devil’, I have the impression that it does not function as an *inclusio*; it rather prepares the ground for what follows.

At this point, given that the Son of God came in fact to destroy the works of devil, one may wonder: ‘does this mean that for the believers who accept and believe in the mission of Son of God, the road to sinlessness is wide open?’

I think that the answer is given in the next verse, which has been a riddle for commentators, as it seems that it consists in a part of a contradiction.

**9. Those who have been born of God do not sin, because God’s seed abides in them; they cannot sin, because they have been born of God.**

Having referred to the children of the devil, the author now turns to the offspring of God. The whole verse refers to children of God, underlining more characteristics of their existence. Up to now in this section, we have learnt that God’s children, *abide in Him* and in doing so, they *know* and *see* Him; they also *do righteousness* in imitation of their God, whereas, devil’s children are doing the works of their father namely, sin.<sup>627</sup>

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of Jesus constitutes a victory over Satan in principle; yet the working out of this victory in time and place is the gradual work of believing Christians’.

<sup>625</sup> Brown, 1982, p.407 He (ibid.) also refers to other New Testament references to demonic confrontations of Jesus, and to other Christian literature as well.

<sup>626</sup> Schnackenburg, 1992, p.174

<sup>627</sup> As Bultmann, 1967, p.52 notes this verse is taken from the source, and 9a is ‘a variation of what was said in v.6a but in such a way that “whoever is begotten of God” replaces “whoever abides in him”’. So, Houlden, 1973, p.96 observes that ‘in v.9 we have a variant on the formulation in v.6, but this time in terms of parenthood’.

However, the Son of God came to destroy the devil's fatal *works* and put an end to his catastrophic action in the world. As we have seen in the previous section, the author insisted on Christians' being sinful and equated the denial of sin with proving God a liar. Additionally, he pointed out that there are means of cleansing themselves from sin namely, confession and the blood of Christ. However, in the present verse the author, points out that the children of God not only do not sin but they actually *cannot sin*.

As Lieu observes, 'the startling, almost gnostic, affirmation (3:9) has provoked a wealth of different interpretations'.<sup>628</sup> Moreover, much has been said by commentators in order to stress that there exists no contradiction between 3:9 and 1:8-10. They seem to be keen on making excuses on behalf of John who does not really seem cautious of asserting sinfulness (1:8-10) and sinlessness (3:9), in a rather short piece of writing.

The meaning of the verse is in Brooke's words, 'he who is begotten of God must be in character like God who begat him. Sin, which is of the Devil, finds no place in him'.<sup>629</sup>

### ***9a. Those who have been born of God do not sin,***

In v.6, the author said 'No one who abides in him sins'; in v.8, he writes 'Everyone who commits sin is a child of the devil'. What follows is what is said in 9a: 'those who have been born of God (abide in Him), do not sin (as do those who belong to the devil)'.<sup>630</sup>

Moreover, for the first time in the sections we are dealing with, we encounter this notion of God's *begetting* his children.<sup>630</sup> The significance of such a concept for Christian teaching is exemplified by an observation made by O'Neill, who asserts that, though every idea in 1John being rooted in Jewish soil has its parallels in Jewish literature, 'the only idea that proved difficult to parallel was that of God "begetting" his children'.<sup>631</sup> To me this fact indicates the centrality of such an idea in the teaching of the New Testament. The relationship between God and his believers is placed on another plane. In GJohn 20:17, the risen Christ calls his disciples 'his brothers', and God 'my father and their father, my God and their God' (cf. Mk 3:35). So, Jesus' resurrection marks the opening of a new era when there exists a special relationship between God

<sup>628</sup> Lieu, 1993, p.471

<sup>629</sup> Brooke, 1912, p.89

<sup>630</sup> As Hoskyns, 1947, p.164 notes, 'the use of the analogy of birth to describe the new status of the Christians is, moreover, characteristically Johannine (1John ii.29, iii.9, iv.7, v.1.4,18)'. For Westcott, 1886, p.107, 'the phrase (everyone who has been begotten by God) occurs here first in the epistle in its full form. Comp. iv. 7, v.1 (4). 18...The exact form is important. The perfect (γεγεννημένος) marks not only the single act but the continuous presence of its efficacy. "He that hath been born and still remains a child of God.' So, Brooke, 1912, p.89

<sup>631</sup> O'Neill, 1966, p.37 He elsewhere (Ibid.,p.33) adds that 'that God has "begotten" his children is not said very clearly, although Deut. 32.18; Ps. 2.7 (?); Isa. 1.2; and James 1.18 may be cited, and the idea is common in Philo (especially *de Confusione Linguarum*, 145)'.<sup>631</sup>

and His believers, He actually begets them.<sup>632</sup> Chapter 3 of GJohn is the best commentary on this idea.

Brown makes an interesting observation on the notion of divine begetting, underlining the fact that divine begetting is not an action which takes place once forever. It is like the idea of *having fellowship with God* that as we have pointed out, requires continuous vigilance to be kept alive. So, Brown writes 'for 1John "having been begotten" means more than a terminated divine creative activity of the past. Whether the seed is the word of God or His Holy Spirit, it remains active after it has brought the child of God into being. In Jn 6:44 Jesus says, "No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him"; the drawing toward Jesus', rightly Brown observes, 'continues after one has first come to him'.<sup>633</sup> This idea in the long run, excludes every hint of predestinarian elements in John's teaching. Even this seed, which protects somebody from sinful actions, is not given once for all. It depends on men's free will whether they keep it active in them or not. It seems to me that the author's insistence on the sinfulness of human nature and on the need of cleansing points also in the same direction.

Moreover, we have to point out that the phrase 'be born of God' is a metaphor, which has to be taken as such. As Barker notes, and I would agree with him, 'in dealing with truth presented in metaphor we are faced with the difficulty of steering between Scylla and Charybdis'.<sup>634</sup> Thus, on the one hand, we are not to stretch its meaning and give the word more burden than it can carry, and on the other, we are to take it seriously and not evacuate it of any significant element it may bear.

As I see it, the metaphor is meant to stress the closeness of the relationship that exists between God and His children.<sup>635</sup> The 'full force of the metaphor is that man's sonship to God does consist in a [sic] oneness of nature', as Barker notes.<sup>636</sup> We would also force the metaphor I think, if we were to argue that as birth is an involuntary event, the children of God are destined to be such. However, as I have said, having fellowship with God constitutes a breakable situation. Being a child of God is a possibility offered by God to the human being. Though it predisposes the one who accepts it, it depends on the latter whether he responds to this offer; it certainly allows for free choice. Being a child

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<sup>632</sup> According to Barrett, 1955, p.172 'the notion of supernatural begetting...occurs in the Prologue (1:12f.), and perhaps also in (John) 11:52. It is not found in Paul who prefers the metaphor of death and resurrection, but is used in 1Peter 1:3,23) and in the Pastorals (Titus 3.5). It recurs frequently in 1John (2.29; 3.9; 4.7; 5.1,4,18). It seems not to be present in the Apostolic Fathers, but in Justin it is firmly established in Christian usage, in unmistakable connection with baptism (I.Apol 61f.).

<sup>633</sup> Brown, 1982, p.431

<sup>634</sup> Barker, 1957, p.46

<sup>635</sup> As Barker, 1957, p.48 concludes 'the doctrine of the New Birth implies the creation of a kinship between God and man: for like produces like.

<sup>636</sup> Barker, 1957, p.48

of God is a gift given but Him by His giving requires one's accepting it in order for him to become a child of God.

Moreover, Christ's coming on the earth precedes the possibility given to the believer to be called God's τέκνον. The believer is not God's child by his physical birth, he becomes such however, provided that he wishes to be responding to God's invitation-drawing to Him (Jn 12:32). God begets those who accept Him (Jn 1:12) and have communion with Him. Their own initiative plays an important role in their being called God's offspring (Jn 1:12). What is pointed out in the Epistle is that it requires one's acceptance of being God's child. Such an identity, the author of the Epistle stresses, is exemplified by one's very way of living, in acts.

Furthermore, the criterion according to which one can verify his belonging to the divine generation is once more expressed in ethical terms. One is actually God's child if he resembles his father, who is sinless. However, 'if by being born of God you mean "enlightenment", or initiation into a superior grade of "knowledge"', Dodd points out, 'then this is mere delusion unless the ethical test is satisfied'.<sup>637</sup>

Moreover, while I would agree with Strecker who states that in this verse by *pas* 'the community is being addressed as a whole', I would disagree with him concerning the second part of his statement reading that 'consequently, an argument against opponents is not intended here'.<sup>638</sup> I would rather say that there might be an implication of the opponents' assertion that they are indeed 'children of God'. Their fatal mistake again is that they fail to recognise that there are some practical implications flowing from such an assertion. So, the author reminds his adherents of what God's generation involves. Those who assert their being God's children have to show it by striving to lead a sinless life, rather than denying their being sinful.

I suppose that in this verse both pastoral interest and polemic are present. The author admonishes, refuting false teaching and refutes exhorting his children. To what extent each of them is present here, we are not, I think, in a position to know.

### ***9b. because God's seed abides in them;***

In 9b we are told what it is which actually prevents the believer from sinning namely, God's σπέρμα. I think that the use of this metaphor springs from the previous one of birth enhancing its meaning and its symbolism. A father's sperm abides in his child. Moreover, it is intended to point out the nature of the relationship that exists between God and His children. Needless to say, this metaphor is not to be taken literally no more

<sup>637</sup> Dodd, 1946, p.74

<sup>638</sup> Strecker, 1996, p.101 See also Strecker, 1996, pp. 83-85 'Excursus: Being Born of God'.

than in 1Peter 1:23 where Peter writes 'you have been born, not of perishable but of imperishable seed, through the living and enduring word of God'.<sup>639</sup>

As O'Neill points out, the words in 3:9 because God's seed abides in him 'are often supposed to show the close relationship between 1John and Hellenistic mysticism and gnosticism' (see *Corp. Herm. Libellus XIII*, 1-2; *Gospel of Truth*).<sup>640</sup> That may be so, but, O'Neill goes on, 'the actual term "seed" is found in this sense in at least one late Jewish document, and it is related to a common theme of the Qumran writings'.<sup>641</sup> So, such a concept is not foreign to Jewish thought. E.g. 1En 84:6 reads, 'do now destroy, my Lord, the flesh that has angered you from upon the earth, but sustain the flesh of righteousness and uprightness as a plant of eternal seed'. The elect are said to be God's plantation: 'the congregation of the holy ones shall be planted, and all the elect ones shall stand before him' (62:8). The plantation theme occurs also in 1QH VI, 15 and VIII, 4-20.

That the author of 1John may have been influenced by Hellenistic ideas sounds to me probable. However, as I have pointed out elsewhere, John expressed divine truths in a widespread language in order to be understood by his audience. Moreover, these terms and notions function as 'pots' in which he has put entirely different meaning determined by Christ. Which is the meaning that the term bears *in Christ*?

In general, commentators<sup>642</sup> opt for either the *seed of God* stands for the word of God, or for the Holy Spirit. To start with, Westcott calling the seed of God 'the principle of life' and 'the germ of the new life', states that 'the instrument by which this vital element is conveyed is the "word"(James i.18; IPet. i.23; Luke viii. 12,15)'.<sup>643</sup> Moreover, in Dodd's opinion, in the 'authentic Christian tradition', 'regeneration is closely associated with the Word of God' (see Jas. i.18; 1Pet. i.23-25; John i.12). Dodd adds as well that this association of the ideas 'seed' and 'word' encountered in

<sup>639</sup> As Bultmann, 1967, p.52 points out 'the expression is to be understood figuratively, as is the case with "begotten of God"'. However, for Schnackenburg, 1992, p.175 'the analogy to human begetting is not strictly carried out (in 1John) as it is in 1Pet. 1:23'.

<sup>640</sup> See Dodd, 1946, pp.74-77 where Dodd points out that 'the expression "seed of God" in this sense (meaning in the sense of 'offspring') is not found in the New Testament, but it could find support in parallels elsewhere'. As for the word 'seed' meaning generation, Dodd points out that 'this may be aptly illustrated from the Hermetic tractate *On Regeneration* (see *Corp. Herm.*, XIII. 1-2)'. Moreover, he adds (ibid., p.75), 'in order to decide the question, we must have regard to the wider context of thought'. He goes on saying that 'in "Hellenistic mysticism" and in the Christian or near-Christian "Gnosticism" affiliated to it, the doctrine of a divine principle implanted in human nature is one of the most constant elements (*Corp.Herm.*, I. 12-15, 24-26; Also, *Leg. All.*, I. 31-32; *Vit. Mos.*, I. 279; Hippolytus. *Philosophumena*, V. 26-28 etc)'. See also Houlden, 1973, p.96, n. 1 For a fuller discussions see Brown, 1982, pp.408-11; See also Strecker, 1996, pp.102-103; Schnackenburg, 1992, p. 175. n. 179; Rensberger, 1997, p. 91

<sup>641</sup> O'Neill, 1966, p.37 See also Brown, 1982, p.411

<sup>642</sup> For a full discussion see Brown, 1982, pp.408-411

<sup>643</sup> Westcott, 1886, p.107-108 So Law, 1909, p.389 notes that 'unquestionably the σπέρμα is here the new life-principle implanted by the Divine Begetting'.

'Hellenistic Christian circles' is helped by 'the Stoic doctrine of the "spermatic" or seminal λόγος, even though the Stoic λόγος, is not a "word"'. In the light of all the above, Dodd concludes that 'it would seem natural to suppose that when our author speaks of divine "seed" he is thinking of the Word of God, or the Gospel'. For Dodd, 'the Gospel, as the Word of God, is the immanent divine principle producing in men the regenerate nature which does not sin'.<sup>644</sup>

However, I would rather agree with Brooke who concerning this idea of the seed of God being His word asserts that it 'is hardly in accordance with the Johannine teaching, in which the Spirit is the author of the new birth (cf. Jn. iii)'.<sup>645</sup> Though in GJohn the word of God cleanses the disciples (15:3) and abides in them (15:7; as in 1Jn 2:14,24), I think that chapter 3 of the Gospel constitutes sound evidence of the seed of God being the Holy Spirit.

Equally, for Brown, 'the Spirit is clearly a factor in begetting in John 3:5-the kind of passage the epistolary author may be presuming when, without explanation, he relates divine begetting with God's abiding seed' in 1Jn 3:9. Concerning the element of abiding, the Spirit was given by Jesus 'to be with you forever' (14:16); in 1Jn 2:27; in 3:24 and 4:13 divine abiding is associated with the Spirit. In Jn 16:8-9 Brown adds, 'the Spirit is presented as the great opponent of sin'. Moreover, with regard to the rest of the New Testament 'one may combine references to baptism with the Holy Spirit' (see Mk 1:8; Acts 1:5; 19:5-6; 1Cor 12:13) with references to baptism 'as rebirth or regeneration'. Additionally, 'there is an association of the Spirit with sonship (Rom 8:14; cf. Gal 4:6). 'None of this constitutes proof', Brown notes. However, he concludes, 'overall the evidence favors identifying God's seed with the Spirit rather than with His word'.<sup>646</sup>

Additionally, Schnackenburg and Rensberger are also of the opinion that metaphor of the seed of God is to be referred to the Holy Spirit, rather than to the word of God. As Schnackenburg characteristically states "'God's seed" can hardly mean anything other than the Holy Spirit (cf. 3:24; 4:13)'. Pointing out that 'this is similar to John 3:6', the same scholar adds that "'seed" is therefore a metaphor, similar to "anointing" in 2:20, 27'. Though the image of seed is preferred for the word of God, here the context requires it to mean the 'divine Spirit'. Accordingly, 'the Christians' inability to sin is regarded as a necessary consequence of this divine principle of light which they have had within themselves since they were baptized and were born of God'. So, 'it presupposes an

<sup>644</sup> Dodd, 1946, pp.77-78

<sup>645</sup> Brooke, 1912, p.89 So, Brown, 1982, p.410

<sup>646</sup> Brown, 1982, pp.410-411

ontological likeness, an idea already adumbrated in the Old Testament, with its promise of a new heart and a new spirit forming part of the messianic hope'.<sup>647</sup>

Furthermore, for Rensberger 'the obvious sense (of 'his σπέρμα abides in him') is that those who have been born of God possess in themselves a divine element or principle that shields them against any possibility of committing sin'. Pointing out that 'the abiding σπέρμα could be the λόγος, most likely however, the σπέρμα, like the anointing in 2:20, 27, is the Spirit, which is the agent of divine birth (John 3:5-8) and is connected with divine abiding (John 14:16-17; 1John 3:24; 4:13)'.<sup>648</sup>

I would agree with Schnackenburg that the context<sup>649</sup> is what actually requires the seed of God to mean the Holy Spirit. The word of God is of course abiding in the believer, but what gives him strength to confront the works of devil is the Holy Spirit, the One who takes over after Jesus' departure (Jn 14:16). The Holy Spirit is sent to *teach* the believers the word of God (Jn 14:26; 1Jn 2:20, 27). Once Jesus himself safeguarded them against sin, and the ones who believed in Him were safe but now the Paraclete is the one who will shield them against sin, in the sense that He will help the believers to maintain their fellowship with God. The cleansing power of the blood of Christ, the confession of sins and the presence of the seed of God in the believers enable them to fight for sinlessness till the eschaton when sinlessness is fully realised.

In conclusion, I would like to point out that though the language of divine begetting and the term σπέρμα are reminiscent of gnostic<sup>650</sup> terminology, 'it is only a linguistic echo'<sup>651</sup>; the ideas themselves are essentially different. Their gnostic background<sup>652</sup> enriches our knowledge regarding their previous usage and the meaning they bore, but it cannot be a decisive factor in our hermeneutical approach to them with regard to 1John.

Supposing that the references to the concept of divine begetting and to the seed of God which abides in the believers were occasioned by certain false elements of teaching which the secessionists asserted, we could possibly suspect that they asserted a divine

<sup>647</sup> Schnackenburg, 1992, p.175 see also *ibid.*, p.163

<sup>648</sup> Rensberger, 1997, p.91

<sup>649</sup> However, Lieu, 1991, p.34 suggests that as in 2:20, 27 'nothing in the context suggests a reference to the spirit unless we should suppose that in both cases the author prefers to use appropriate images for the spirit without naming it as such'. She also notes elsewhere (*Ibid.*, p.48), 'even if the spirit were represented by "the anointing" (2:20,27) or the "seed" (3:7), the very ambiguity of these images does little to suggest any richer understanding, although the emphasis on teaching rather than on any more "prophetic" activity might be confirmed'.

<sup>650</sup> Lieu, 1991, p.16 n.21, arguing that 1John is not an 'anti-gnostic' piece of writing, notes that 'it is often argued that images possibly stemming from the letter's opponents such as "anointing" (2:20,27) or "seed" (3:9), have gnostic overtones; while this may make 1John "anti-gnostic", some of the letter's own images, such as being born from God, have also been labelled "gnostic". These labels are used so loosely, without relation to a total structure of thought that might justify them, that they serve little purpose'.

<sup>651</sup> Schnackenburg, 1992, p.175

<sup>652</sup> See *Corp. Herm.* Livellus XIII, 10 where Hermes explains 'what the Rebirth is'. Expressions like 'divine birth' and 'is born again' are also used.

begetting by the time of their conversion when they accept Jesus as their saviour, not however, drawing any further ethical implications.<sup>653</sup> As Brown observes, 'probably they would not have thought that the seed needed to remain an active force changing the earthly life of the Christian so that by fidelity to the commandments it mirrored divine life'.<sup>654</sup> Obviously, there is no evidence in the text to draw more specific conclusions concerning the role the secessionists played, in the formation of such teaching.

***9c. they cannot sin, because they have been born of God.***

In plain, simple and straightforward words, the author points out that 'the ideas of divine sonship and sin are mutually exclusive'.<sup>655</sup> That walking in the light/having fellowship with God is incompatible with sinful behaviour has already been pointed out. In 9c, both of these ideas are even more enhanced. On the one hand the believer not only walks in the light, where God is, not only has fellowship with Him sharing his attributes, but also he has been begotten by Him. On the other hand, not only sin has nothing to do with the believer's life, but also the believer *cannot* sin! God's child has to look like his father and be, among others, sinless. 'Every τέκνον must reproduce the works of his father', in Brooke's words, 'in so far as any man is a τέκνον of God he "cannot" do the works of the Devil'.<sup>656</sup>

How then is this statement to be reconciled with vss 1:8-10 where the faithful are warned against holding themselves to be sinless? What about the remedy John reminds them of, namely the blood of Christ? First and foremost, I would not expect to find contradictions between passages of Scripture. Secondly, it has to be borne in mind that no author would ever be so clumsy to contradict himself in such a short span of writing as 1John is.

Let us now turn to the commentators' opinions on this apparent contradiction. Brooke, to start with, states that the fact that one has been begotten of God 'excludes the possibility of his committing sin as an expression of his true character, though actual sins may, and do, occur, in so far as he fails from weakness to realise his true character'.<sup>657</sup> Rightly, I think, Brooke has pointed out the reality of both statements in the life of the believer as the experience shows.

<sup>653</sup> As Lieu, 1991, pp.34-35 notes, as in 2:20, 27, 'it has been suggested that the image (of σπέρμα) is one adopted from the author's (more gnostic?) opponents who claimed a special portion of the divine, but this explanation is not necessary'.

<sup>654</sup> Brown, 1982, p.411

<sup>655</sup> Westcott, 1886, p.108

<sup>656</sup> Brooke, 1912, p.90

<sup>657</sup> Ibid., p.89

Based on a distinction of tenses in Greek, Dodd suggests that the difficulty encountered here may be overcome. In 2:1 the author uses the aorist, which indicates that 'single or occasional acts of sin' are meant. In 3:4-10 however, present or imperfect tense is used referring 'not to single or occasional acts of sin, but to habitual sin, or a continuous sinful state'. Accordingly, we understand the author to be saying that 'it is impossible to conceive of a child of God being habitually sinful, while it remains possible (ii.1) for him to fall, once and again, into a single act of sin (though he ought not to do so)'.<sup>658</sup>

However, I suspect that it is rather weird to suppose that the author of the Epistle left such a theological teaching hung on a distinction of tenses. The same observation is made by Dodd, who also adds that 'it is not clear that this distinction of tenses is carried right through with the precision which would be necessary if the whole weight of the argument rested upon it'. Moreover, as the same scholar points out 'there did exist in early days a quite serious expectation that Christians should be actually sinless'.<sup>659</sup> In support of his thesis he quotes 1En 5:8 where we read 'then wisdom shall be given to the elect. And they shall all live and not return again to sin, either by being wicked or through pride';<sup>660</sup> similarly, Jub 5:12 reads: 'and he made for all his works a new righteous nature so that they might not sin in all their nature forever, and so that they might all be righteous, each in his kind always'.<sup>661</sup> So, Dodd adds that since this idea was widespread, the readers of the Epistle would probably grasp it, 'without observing too narrowly his use of tenses'.

Concluding his point, Dodd states that 'the apparent contradiction is probably not to be eliminated (though it may be qualified) by grammatical subtlety. In i.8-ii.2 on the one hand, and in iii.4-10 on the other, the author is writing from different points of view, and concerning himself with different problems'.<sup>662</sup> Thus, the author in 1:8-10 combated those who believed that 'being "enlightened", they were already perfect in virtue', while in 3:9 the assertion that 'it did not matter whether they were virtuous or not, provided they were "enlightened"' is combated. Moreover, Dodd points out when the author is facing the facts 'of personal experience, he is well aware that the pattern of life is not such a perfect chess-board, with its black and white separated by rigid lines. The actual

<sup>658</sup> Dodd, 1946, pp.78-79

<sup>659</sup> Brooke, 1912, pp.79-80

<sup>660</sup> It is interesting, I think what follows as well: 'they shall not be judged all the days of their lives' (1 Enoch 5:9 cf. Jn 5:24). See also IQS III, 16

<sup>661</sup> O'Neill, 1966, p.15 also notes parallels in late Jewish writings concerning sinlessness: 'the sinlessness of the elect is described in 1 Enoch 5.8f; Jubilees 5.12, is demanded in Test. Reuben 4.4ff, and forms the ideal and even the achievement of the Qumran sectaries (for example, 1QH XI. 3-14, especially 10ff, cf. Wisd. 15.2). In Test. Dan 5.1 the faithful are encouraged to keep the commandment of the Lord in order that "the Lord may dwell in you"'. See also Brown, 1982, p.415; Strecker, 1996, p.104, n. 73

and the ideal do not coincide. Nevertheless, it may be by contemplating the ideal that we best understand the final truth of things (which I suppose is going to be realized in the future) which underlies the actual'.<sup>663</sup>

I would rather agree with the last statement of Dodd's, as I believe that both of the apparently contradictory elements are real and exemplified in the believer's life. However, I do not think that John refutes different groups in each of them. Besides, these two are interrelated. The need for sinlessness is realised through the experiencing of sinfulness. Unfortunately, in fact Christian life is not 'a perfect chess-board, with its black and white separated by rigid lines', for the players are always human beings. However, they have to know that for God, who is the one who has set up this 'board', everything is in black and white and towards that reality they should walk.

For Bultmann, the author here is talking about a possibility to be realized. In his opinion, the resolution of the contradiction 'lies in the fact that the μένειν of the σπορά is understood as the gift of God's ἀγάπη, which remains for the believer a possibility not to be lost, so that he can always call upon that gift, even though he in fact sins'. Therefore, for Bultmann, 'he is not able to sin' is to be understood as 'the possibility of not sinning, which the believer has received as the unforfeitable gift of God's love, a possibility that is always to be realized, as v 10 immediately indicates'.<sup>664</sup>

Having discussed other commentators' opinions<sup>665</sup>, Brown asserts first that 'none of them is really satisfactory'. However, 'a partial explanation is that here the author is speaking in the eschatological context of the last hour when in Jewish apocalyptic it was believed that God would prepare a sinless generation in the great struggle with evil'. Moreover, in Brown's view as we have already pointed out, 'both the secessionists and the author held a perfectionism based upon GJohn statements which seemed to confine sin to disbelief by outsiders, so that Johannine believers could model themselves on Jesus who was without sin'. Apparently, both sides would have held that Christians do not commit sin. The secessionists may be more in accordance with the teaching in GJohn that Christians have nothing to do with sin.<sup>666</sup> Here however, 'the author is

<sup>662</sup> Dodd, 1946, p.80

<sup>663</sup> Ibid., pp.80-81

<sup>664</sup> Bultmann, 1967, p.53 Moreover, for Bultmann the clause 'because he is begotten of God', derives from the author, while the one 'for his seed abides in him', is to be attributed to the Source.

<sup>665</sup> See Brown, 1982, pp.413-415

<sup>666</sup> Concerning the contradiction under discussion, Schweizer, 1959, p.240, points out that 'I rather incline to think that the contradictory statements in 1:8 and 3:9 may be explained by pointing to the false teachers against whom the author has to contend. These false teachers declare (again as a wrong and dangerous consequence of Johannine statements) that those who have received the Spirit have a divine character which they cannot lose; it is no longer possible for them to sin. They can therefore be as immoral as they like, in order to demonstrate their complete freedom from the law. In face of such assertions, the Epistle is bound to deny that man is divine and without sin; but it also opposes any frivolous immorality by stressing

dealing with pastoral reality. Even if this is the last hour, there is a “not yet” (2:18; 3:2),<sup>667</sup> given the fact that divine begetting and consequently the abiding of the seed of God in the believer, as Brown notes, are not to be understood as ‘terminated divine creative’ activities of the past.<sup>668</sup> On the contrary, believers have to make continuous effort to maintain their abiding with God and in so doing to keep alive in them the Holy Spirit who teaches and leads them ‘into all the truth’ (Jn 16:13).

Accordingly, Brown proceeds, 1Jn 3:6,9 is to be understood in light of the statements in 3:1,2. Believers are already children of God; a fact which means that ‘there is a freedom from sin attached to that state’. Jesus said ‘If you were Abraham’s children, you would be doing what Abraham did’ (Jn 8:39). Our author has his own way to express this: ‘You really are God’s children, and so you must do works worthy of God, and not sin which is the work of the devil’. Yet, Brown notes, the author recognises that the believers are ‘not yet all that they shall be, and so there is a growth in God’s children’. In conclusion, Brown states that ‘the author is attacking a static understanding of divine begetting that is held by the secessionists, for whom divine childhood is a once-for-all gift and not a life that has to express itself in the behavior of the Christian’. ‘A further corollary for the author’ Brown adds, ‘is that this life not only expresses itself in action but also grows, and increasing sinlessness is a mark of that growth’.<sup>669</sup>

I would agree with Brown in large measure as I am going to state that perfection, through the prism of the present, is the believers’ very struggle towards it. Our earthly life is but a stage of a process that ends in our being like Him. Nunn has already pointed it out saying that in 3:9 the perfect participle is used which ‘denotes a final and complete condition...this seems to refer to the completion of a process which is now only in its initial stages’.<sup>670</sup>

For Painter, though the author outrightly rejects the boasts expressed in 1:8,10, there is no attempt to reinterpret them. For this reason, he asserts, ‘3.9 and 5.18 should not be understood in terms of the boasts denied in 1.8,10’. Perhaps, Painter concludes, ‘having used the opponents’ terms, our author was arguing that those born of God are not able *to live in sin*. This could be the subtle point of the present tenses rather than aorist, which

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that sin is lawlessness and nothing else. Both points show wrong and dangerous consequences resulting from John’s approach’.

<sup>667</sup> Brown, 1982, p.430

<sup>668</sup> Ibid., p.431

<sup>669</sup> Ibid.

<sup>670</sup> Nunn, 1945, p.298

would indicate a specific act of sin'. So, 'the person born of God *does not commit sin* because God's *σπέρμα* is in him and *cannot sin* because he is born of God 3.9'.<sup>671</sup>

In Strecker's opinion, this *non posse peccare* (3:6,9c) is an intensification of *non peccare* (9a) and 'it is determined by a parenetic framework, and that it is an especially powerful form of expression aimed at warning the community not to sin'.<sup>672</sup> The community is exhorted to return to its beginning point, which is actually represented by this idea of incapability of sinning. Being incapable of sin represents the 'eschatological reality out of which the community has lived from its beginning'. Yet, Strecker points out, this eschatological reality 'does not eliminate the earthly reality within which sin remains a threatening force that must be repeatedly overcome, until the end of the world'.<sup>673</sup> To me sinlessness, as an eschatological reality, does not refer to the community's origins but to a future expectation of the Church (cf. 1Jn 3:2-3). As the community even from its beginning has been living as well in 'the earthly reality' where sin is present. The believers are reminded that being children of God, they cannot sin. The existence of sin in their lives however, suggests that sinlessness is to be fully realised only in the future. 'We are God's children now'; yet, 'what we will be has not yet been realised' (1Jn 3:2). It seems to me that the author talks of the present from a future perspective.

For Schnackenburg, on the one hand we should not minimize the importance of such a statement (9c) and on the other, we should figure out what it actually presupposes. The divine begetting, which enables us to achieve sinlessness, 'is not an isolated supernatural act of God'. Believers have to lead a moral life according to God's will. This is what the author understands 'as our being the children of God in all its fullness'. And Schnackenburg goes on drawing a line between the ideal and the real, expectation and experience. 'This is certainly an idealistic view', Schnackenburg states, and 'it needs to be constantly corrected by seeing how Christians really behave in this world (cf. 2:1; 3:20; 5:17)-which may explain the forceful expression in v.9'. The author may 'appear at first sight to be contradicting himself; yet, 'there is a unity here in tension'. For in John... 'sacrament and ethics are inextricably intertwined and conditioned by the state of salvation which Christians enjoy in this world'.<sup>674</sup>

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<sup>671</sup> Painter, 1986, p.57 Moreover, as Painter (*ibid.*) also states, adopting his opponents' language here the author seems to be in contradiction with what he said in 1:8,10. Reconciliation is possible, Painter notes. 'by seeing that the overall argument of the passage 2.28-3.24, especially 3.4-10, is about how to recognize the children of God. The *claim* to have the *σπέρμα* is not enough. Nor is the *claim* to have the Spirit. 4.1-6'.

<sup>672</sup> Strecker, 1996, pp.102-103

<sup>673</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.103-104

<sup>674</sup> Schnackenburg, 1992, pp.175-176

As for Rensberger, taking into consideration on the one hand that 'the basis for the claim of sinlessness is the continuing and indwelling effect of divine birth', and on the other that 'this claim derives ultimately from the opponents, since it so strongly resembles the position rejected in 1:8,10', he asserts that the author would also hold that Christians are 'transformed people', but unlike his opponents he would draw 'a different implication from this truth'. 'Note', Rensberger asserts, 'that the author does not claim that children of the devil *must* sin. It is the opponents for whom origins determine character or conduct'. The author's point 'is not to derive conduct from origins, but *to demonstrate origins from conduct*'. So, the thought here is not that 'God's children are not merely free of sin in principle, irrespective of their actions' rather, 'they must be so in practice'.<sup>675</sup> It has become obvious so far that for 1John, unlike gnostic teaching (cf. *Adv. Haer.* 1.6.2-4), theory goes hand in hand with praxis. What the opponents of John failed to grasp is that the children of God are sinless but what they 'will be has not yet been revealed' (3:2). The assertion of sinlessness in the present would prove the blood of Christ useless and God unfaithful (1:8-10).

As Dammers correctly has pointed out, 'both sides of the paradox are true to Christian experience'.<sup>676</sup> I would totally agree with Filson who states that 'the author evidently cannot give up either point of an apparently insoluble dilemma. Sin is a stubborn fact of our lives-but it is completely out of place in the believer'.<sup>677</sup> So, there exists a contradiction here but it rather concerns present reality and future expectation, experience and ideal.

**10. The children of God and the children of the devil are revealed in this way: all who do not do what is right are not from God, nor are those who do not love their brothers and sisters.**

For the author up to now the ones who *abide in Him / have fellowship with Him* (v.6), have also *seen / known* Him. Additionally, they *do righteousness* (v.7), they not only *do not sin* (v.6) but also they *cannot sin* (v.9). In the present verse, the author underlines two of the basic criteria according to which one is to be recognised as God's child. So, one is really begotten by God if he does righteousness and loves his brother. The former has already been mentioned, while the mention of the latter, as commentators have

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<sup>675</sup> Rensberger, 1997, p.93

<sup>676</sup> Dammers, 1963, p.371

<sup>677</sup> Filson, 1969, p.273

pointed out,<sup>678</sup> functions as a transition to the new subject he is going to deal with namely, the love of the brethren.

***10a. The children of God and the children of the devil are revealed in this way***

‘In this way’, I suppose refers to what has preceded, the doing or not doing of sin.<sup>679</sup> One’s attitude towards sin classifies him either in the family of God or in the family of the devil. For the writer of the Epistle the world is straightforwardly divided into two classes, those who belong to the devil and those begotten by God. There is no midway.<sup>680</sup> Concerning the background of the notion of the believers’ being children of God, as O’Neill observes, the idea of Jews being God’s children ‘is particularly common in late Judaism’.<sup>681</sup> Moreover, in Qumran writings the members of the community are called God’s “sons of truth”.<sup>682</sup> As for the division between the children of God and the children of the devil ‘is closely paralleled in the Qumran division between the sons of light and the sons of darkness or the dominion of Belial’.<sup>683</sup>

Moreover, in this verse we witness the only instance in the New Testament of people called ‘children of the devil’.<sup>684</sup> I repeat here what has already been pointed out that though 1John often speaks of Christians being born of God (2:29; 3:9; 4:7; 5:1,4,18), it never refers to people being ‘born of the devil’.<sup>685</sup> At this point it is important to note that to be ‘child of God’ is, I think synonymous with to be ‘born of God’. Verses 3:9 and 10 exemplifies the truth; both phrases are used interchangeably. According to our author, moral behaviour is what proves somebody a child of God (2:29; 3:9f.; 4:7; 5:1f.). Moreover, the seed of God (the Holy Spirit, in my opinion) is what abides in them and

<sup>678</sup> O’Neill, 1966, p.38; Dodd, 1946, p.81; Brown, 1982, 417; Strecker, 1996, p.105; Schnackenburg, 1992, p.177

<sup>679</sup> So Brooke, 1912, p.90; Dodd, 1946, p.81; for Bultmann, 1967, p.53 n.40 however, ‘the opening phrase of v.10 refers to what precedes or what follows. The view that it points in both directions at once is highly unlikely (however Schnackenburg, 1992, p.176 n.181). Rather, it more plausibly refers to what follows. in which case it is explicated by the clause “he who does not do righteousness”’. Brown, 1982, p.416 referring to other commentators’ opinions he states that ‘structurally it seems to make better sense if the ἐν τούτῳ refers to what precedes, while what follows (3:10) is seen as transitional to the next unit’. Strecker, 1996, p.104 nevertheless states that ἐν τούτῳ refers to what follows’.

<sup>680</sup> As Lieu, 1993, p.470 writes, ‘this is a chapter (meaning ch.3) which is, at least in the first half, markedly dualistic; it moves from the initial assurance “that we are children of God” (v.1) to an absolute contrast (found in this chapter alone) between those who are the children of God and those who are the children of the devil (v.10)’.

<sup>681</sup> O’Neill, 1966, p.33 e.g. Sirach 23.1; 51,10; Ps. of Sol. 17.17,30; Wisd. 2.13-18; Jubilees 1.24-6. where they are called the children of God who loves them and will descend to dwell with them’.

<sup>682</sup> See 1QH VI. 29; VII.29f; IX.35; X.27; XI.11, and cf. IV.32f. As Schnackenburg, 1992, p.177 states, ‘the author of 1John seems to have been not uninfluenced by these Jewish ideas. The example adduced from the Old Testament which soon follows (Cain, v.12), also supports this possibility’.

<sup>683</sup> O’Neill, 1966, p.36 See 1QS I,9-11,18,23f; III.13-IV.26, cf. TZeb 9.8 TNaph 2:6; TBen 6:1,7; 7.1f.. See also our relevant section in this study.

<sup>684</sup> In Acts Elymas is called ‘son of the devil’ (13:10), and Matthew speaks of ‘the children of the evil one’ referring to the weeds among the wheat (13:38).

apart from their initiative, it is the Spirit that enables them to maintain their identity as God's children.

By contrast, the children of the devil are revealed so by their sinful behaviour (3:8,10; and in Jn 8:44). Nothing is said about the seed of the devil. Thus, there is no antithetical statement in 3:9-10 about it. Besides, no creative action can come from the devil. As Strecker rightly observes, 'differently from the case of being a child of God, adherence to the devil is not the result of an (un)saving event or a sacramental action, but depends instead on human acts'.<sup>686</sup> Plausible though it sounds Strecker's thesis constitutes an argument from silence.

This division of people does not imply that John espouses the idea of there being two groups whose different origins inescapably decide their destinies. One's identity is revealed by his very actions. In turn, according to actions one is classified either in God's realm being begotten by Him, or in the devil's dominion belonging to him. On the one hand, the opponents' moral indifference and lack of love prove them children of the devil. On the other hand, one's insistence on the imitation of Jesus suggests that he belongs to God's sphere. Moreover, in order for this relationship to be maintained, human efforts are not sufficient; the abiding of the Holy Spirit is required. So, though this relationship between God and the believers is nourished by sacramental means (confession met by forgiveness, the cleansing power of the blood of Christ, the abiding of the Spirit), to do the works of the devil is peculiar to those who are children of the devil.

### ***10b. all who do not do what is right are not from God,***

What was expressed in 7b in positive form is now phrased in negative form. Though repetition is peculiar to the Johannine pen, the fact that the author repeats this statement betrays the significance which it bears. Yet again, (apart from 3:7 note also 2:29 where 'everyone who does right has been born of him') doing justice is an attribute that distinguishes those who belong to God from those who belong to the devil. Having communion with God, the believers share God's characteristics, proving themselves real children of His.

Yet, as Brooke notes, 'the doing of righteousness might be too vague and general a test'. Therefore the writer 'narrows it down to one special form of righteousness,<sup>687</sup> which is in fact the basis of the whole, and in the exercise of which the false teachers

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<sup>685</sup> So, Schnackenburg, 1992, p.162; Lieu, 1993, pp.470-471

<sup>686</sup> Strecker, 1996, p.105

had apparently shown themselves particularly lacking'.<sup>688</sup> So, love is another attribute of God's (1Jn 4:8,16), which the believers are expected to share unless they are not walking in the light.

***10c. nor are those who do not love their brothers and sisters.***

The theme of loving the brethren introduced in this verse indicates that there existed a relative problem in the ranks of the community. It is possible that the secessionists are primarily in mind here. They were the ones who have left the community and asserted that despite their apostasy, they do have communion with Him. However, in the previous section the author has pointed out that having communion with God results in having communion with each other. The former is manifested in the latter and the truth of the latter is ensured when the former is real.

Moreover, though the issue of righteousness is not new, as Dodd observes, here the author 'makes it clear that the specifically Christian form of righteousness is love, or charity, and the lack or denial of charity is, more than anything else, what Christianity means by sin'.<sup>689</sup> So, 'the two families', Houlden notes, 'God's and the devil's, are to be distinguished by a clear test-that of conduct, in particular love of the brothers'.<sup>690</sup>

I suppose that in this context, the love of the brethren was primarily referred to the love the members of the Johannine community were supposed to practice in their own community. However, this does not mean that love to other Christians was not also implied.<sup>691</sup> Apparently, from what the author says, we may surmise that the opponents, those who left the community-family of God, showed signs of hatred rather than of love, which characterizes the children of God. By doing so, the opponents even disregard their own tradition envisaged in GJohn. The command of love is rooted to the Jesus' logion (Jn 13:34). Moreover, Jesus Himself has pointed out love for each other as a criterion for someone who is His disciple (Jn 13:35).

However, the opponents may still assert that they do love each other, meaning those who belong to their schism. I think that the author deliberately referred to the issue of love after referring to the one of sin and moral behaviour so that the faithful already have

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<sup>687</sup> As Strecker, 1996, p.105 notes that this phrase (10c) 'is significant not only as a transition to what follows (vv.11-12) but also as an interpretation of the concept of δικαιοσύνη...the righteousness demanded of Christians is evident in their love for one another'.

<sup>688</sup> Brooke, 1912, p.90 As Lieu, 1991, p.53 notes "'not doing righteousness" is expanded as "not loving one's brother" and in the following verses this is developed with reference to the story of Cain's hatred and murder of his brother Abel (3:12,15)'.  
<sup>689</sup> Dodd, 1946, p.81

<sup>690</sup> Houlden, 1973, p.97

<sup>691</sup> Strecker, 1996, p.106 states '*brother* is to be understood primarily as referring to fellow Christians, even though the ethic of 1John does not exclude a universal application; in fact, its fundamental

realized who is the real child of God and who is not. If the opponents have already proved deceivers, asserting that they have communion with God while they walk in the darkness, it becomes clear that they cannot have communion with the brethren while failing in their duty of love towards their fellow members of the Johannine community (1:7).

### **Note on 5:16-20**

As we have seen examining the eschatological context of 3:6-10, in 2:28 the notion of the believers' *παρρησία* was connected with the revelation of Christ and was a result of one's being abiding in Him (cf. 4:17). In 5:14-15 *παρρησία* is what guarantees the fulfilment of the believers' petitions to God (cf. 3:21-22 where *παρρησία* is the result of one's obeying His commandments). Moreover, in 5:16 a specific *αἴτημα* is referred to; it reads: 'if you see your brother or sister committing what is not a mortal sin, you will ask, and God will give life to such a one'.

Generally speaking, there have been expressed a number of proposals regarding the distinction between sins '*πρὸς θάνατον*' and sins '*μὴ πρὸς θάνατον*'. This is not the place for an extended discussion of the scholarly approach to this issue.<sup>692</sup> It suffices I suppose to refer to the relevance of the pericope under consideration to the issue of sin and sinlessness as presented in our central passages, namely 1:6-10 and 3:6-10.

Thus, in the light of what has already been concluded above, I would say that what the author calls sin *πρὸς θάνατον* is the rejection of Jesus Christ. Let me explain myself in what follows.

In our first section 1:6-10 the believer is exhorted to acknowledge his sins, confess them, ask for forgiveness and the blood of Christ will cleanse him from every sin. There is nothing said about any particular kind of sin that the blood of Christ is not capable of cleansing. So, it follows that the sin *πρὸς θάνατον* is the sin of not asking for forgiveness, denying the salvific efficacy of the blood of Christ or, in a few words, rejecting Jesus Christ; which as we have pointed out is the epitome of sin according to the Johannine world of thought.

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orientation points beyond the community circle'. For Brown, 1982, p.417 however, 'brother' refers to 'fellow Johannine Community member'.

<sup>692</sup> See Brown, 1982, pp.613-618 where he has grouped the various proposals under four headings: 1) Different types of petitions, 2) Different types of penalties, 3) Different types of sins and 4) Different types of people.

Therefore, the *πρὸς θάνατον*<sup>693</sup> sin is peculiar to nonbelievers, who in 1John are the secessionists. As we have seen, asserting sinlessness, the schismatics proved God a liar and the mission of Christ empty (1:8-10). Thus, the ‘brother’ in 5:16 cannot concern a fellow Johannine Christian, for acknowledging their being sinful, they ‘walk in the light’. Further, what enables them to keep walking in the light and to be in *κοινωνία* with God, despite their being sinful is the fact that they deal with sin effectively; in other words they resort to God’s means of cleansing.

Further, hard though it sounds, John advises his children not even to pray for those who commit a sin *πρὸς θάνατον*. This is so because by stepping out of the community, the secessionists joined the world (1Jn 4:5) with whom the Johannine community has no dealings. Besides, Jesus himself did not pray for the world (Jn 17:9). We should also refer to 2Jn 10-11 which reads ‘do not receive or welcome anyone who comes to you and does not bring this teaching’ (e.g. refusing to believe in Jesus as the Christ come in the flesh and as the Son of God 1Jn 2:22; 3:23; 4:2-3; 5:1,5,10). So, it seems that what John says in 5:17, though it is a hard saying, is in harmony with Johannine teaching.

In 5:18-20 we have three instances of *οἶδαμεν* which refer to issues that the readers have already been taught about; as Brown rightly observes, everything John says in this passage ‘has already been said earlier in 1John’.<sup>694</sup>

So, in the first instance of *οἶδαμεν* sinlessness is related to divine begetting. I think that the first part of this verse is only slightly different from 3:9. The second part of it however, ‘the one who was born of God protects (*τηρεῖ*) him (*αὐτόν*) and the evil one does not touch him (*αὐτοῦ*)’ [my translation], is rather ambiguous. Firstly, the crucial point here is to decide who is ‘*ὁ γεννηθείς ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ*’; does it refer to Christians or to Jesus? Moreover, who protects (*τηρεῖ*) whom from the evil one?

There have been proposed five ways of understanding this part of the verse. Firstly, John says that ‘the begetting by God guards him [the Christian who has been begotten]’ or secondly that what actually is said is that ‘the one begotten by God [Jesus] guards him [the Christian who has been begotten]’.<sup>695</sup> Moreover, it could also be taken to mean either ‘the one begotten by God [the Christian] guards himself’ or ‘the one begotten by

<sup>693</sup> Cf. TIss 7:1 where there is a reference to ‘sin unto death’. See also in the DSS for sins that are not forgiven and result in permanent expulsion from the sect (IQS VII, 1, 17-18, 24-26). Moreover, incurable sins are also referred to in Jub. 15:26; 2:27; 30:7-16; 49:8f.; 36:8-11. Moreover, from the synoptics we have an idea about sin which was thought to be outside even of divine forgiveness, namely the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit (see Mt 12:32; Mk 3:29; Lk 12:10 where works of divine power are attributed to the devil).

<sup>694</sup> Brown, 1982, p.637

<sup>695</sup> So Westcott, 1886, p.194, Brooke, 1912, pp.148-149 and Dodd, 1946, p.138

God [the Christian] holds on to Him [God]'. Lastly,<sup>696</sup> it could also be understood as 'the one begotten by God [the Christian], God guards him [the Christian]'.<sup>697</sup>

Be that as it may, I would opt for the 'ὁ γεννηθείς ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ', the Christian who repeatedly is said to be begotten by God, is protected<sup>698</sup> and 'the evil one does not touch' him. In GJohn Jesus himself prayed to the Father to keep His followers safe from the evil one (17:15). In 1John, as we have already pointed out, the devil is the ruler of the world but the Johannine Christians do not belong to the world and so, they are not ruled by the evil one. Besides, in 2:13-14 the νεανίσκοι are said to have conquered the devil.

Furthermore, the second instance of οἶδαμεν makes even more explicit the distinction between the children of God and the children of the devil (3:8-10), as the former are said to be 'ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ' and the latter to be in the world which 'lies under the power of the evil one'.<sup>699</sup> It also explains why the πονηρός has no power over the Johannine Christians. Abiding in God and being of God, the Johannine Christians are safe from the devil.

Thus, placing sinlessness in the present, vss 5:18-19 represent realised eschatology and enforcing this idea, these verses would be grouped with our second pericope, namely 3:6-10.

Finally, the last οἶδαμεν refers to the assurance that 'we know that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding (διάνοιαν) so that we may know him who is true (γινώσκωμεν τὸν ἀληθινόν); and we are in him who is true, in his Son Jesus Christ. He (οὗτος) is the true God and eternal life' (5:20). As Schnackenburg notes, here with the third 'we know', 'the joyous certainty of the Christians reaches a crescendo'.<sup>700</sup> For the believers 'it is upon the historical fact of the coming of Christ', the Son of God, that their faith is founded.<sup>701</sup>

Yet again, we witness the ambiguity which every so often characterises John's writing. There is a disagreement among the scholars with regard to the pronoun οὗτος in the last part of verse 20 reading 'οὗτος is the true God and eternal life'. It is been asserted

<sup>696</sup> So Schnackenburg, 1992, pp.522-523

<sup>697</sup> See Brown, 1982, pp.620-622 for representatives of all five views.

<sup>698</sup> Or perhaps better, 'τηρεῖ ἑαυτὸν (ἑαυτον as equivalent to αὐτόν)'. See Brown, 1982, p.622 uses the passive avoiding assigning a subject to the verb τηρεῖ. Finally, it seems to me that this is the only way out concerning this ambiguity.

<sup>699</sup> As Brown, 1982, p.639 rightly observes, verse 5:19 'is reminiscent of 1QS 3:17-21, which places all human beings under the influence of the spirits of truth and iniquity'. See the relevant section in the present work (Chapter one: Sons of light-Sons of darkness).

<sup>700</sup> Schnackenburg, 1992, p.261

<sup>701</sup> Dodd, 1946, p.139

that it refers either to God or to Jesus Christ.<sup>702</sup> Both proposals seem to me that would be possible. I would opt for the latter however, for I think that it makes a better sense and I would not share the uneasiness sometimes expressed among scholars about Jesus being called *God* in the NT texts. Besides, such an idea is actually encountered elsewhere in Johannine thought (Jn 1:1 cf. 1:18; 20:28).<sup>703</sup>

Further, οὗτος is identified by two predicates. The first one is ἀληθινός which is a title of the Father in Jn 17:3. The second predicate is ζῶν ἀίωvιος and fits Jesus better than it fits God (see Jn 11:25; 14:6).

So, it has become clear I suppose how this passage, 5:16-20, relates to the issues of sin and sinlessness already discussed in this thesis. The reference to the topic of sin in 16-17 stresses the imperfect state in which Christians are. As we said the sin πρὸς θάvατον does not concern Johannine Christians but the author also notes that there is also a sin μὴ πρὸς θάvατον (5:17). Verses 18-19 however, are dominated by realised eschatology and remind us of our second passage (3:6-10) where the believers already possess sinlessness.

So, by those assurances of vs 18-20 the author summarizes what has already been said and what the Johannine Christians know 'from the beginning'. In the section just examined the topic of sin and the reference to the notion of the believers' being born of God reappear, a fact which suggests the centrality they occupy in Johannine thought in which present and future are actually *in dialogue*; and as we have seen, 1John exemplifies this truth and any particular pericope is best understood within this complex eschatological context.

## **Conclusions**

As I mentioned above, when I say that there exists a shift between the Gospel and the Epistle, I do not imply the existence of any sort of contradiction between them. Rather, what I am saying is that it is as if the two documents are observing an object from different optical angles. In the first section, we have seen how the author sees the concept of sin in the believer's life, assuming it as a 'stubborn' factor in his life. In the present section however, the author takes another position and examines the same object/sin from a different optical angle, namely its eschatological dimensions.

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<sup>702</sup> So, Westcott, 1886, p.196; Brooke, 1912, p.152. However, for Brown, 1982, p.626 and Schnackenburg, 1992, p.262 it refers to Christ. Also, for Dodd, 1946, p.140 the οὗτος 'has a wider vaguer reference'.

<sup>703</sup> So, Brown, 1982, p.626 and Schnackenburg, 1992, p.263

Moreover, the believers are to be begotten by God and those who sin are said to belong to the devil. Consequently, sin despite its persistent existence in the believer's life (1:8-10) is irreconcilable with God's realm (3:6-10).

6. No one who abides in him sins; no one who sins has either seen him or known him.

It was made clear in the previous section that abiding in Christ is opposed to walking in the darkness (v.6). Moreover, walking in the light one has communion with other Christians who walk in the light as well (v.7). Walking in the light does not exclude the possibility of one's being sinful. In other words, being in communion with God does not imply that a Christian *has no sin*. On the contrary, asserting sinlessness, one not only deceives himself but also proves God a liar (vv.8, 10), as He has provided the means for the believers to cleanse themselves from any wrongdoings (v.7, 9).

This contradiction consisted in the presence of sin in God's realm through man's presence in it. It constitutes a part of the paradox encountered in our text. Sin is a given in the believer's life. God's own nature as being πιστός καί δίκαιος (1:9), ready to forgive, and the sacrifice of His Son (2:2; 4:10), exemplifies the truth. So, the remedy proposed is confession of one's sins followed by God's forgiveness and the cleansing power of Jesus' blood (v.9).

Nevertheless, in 3:6 the epistolary author seems to contradict himself asserting that 'no one who abides in him sins'. He makes it even stronger saying that 'no one who sins has either seen him or known him'.

The theme of imitation of God runs 'throughout this section'<sup>704</sup> of the Epistle. In the previous verses, the believer is exhorted to be δίκαιος and άγνός as God is such (2:29; 3:3). Moreover, in 3:5 Jesus is said to be sinless. So, in what follows I think, the exhortation to the believer to be sinless as He is sinless is expected. For, sinlessness constitutes another attribute of God, which the believers are invited to share. However, what is pointed out is that sinlessness is to be achieved in the future, when what the believers 'will be' is to be revealed; and they will be 'like him' (3:2-3).

So, what we call contradiction does not come out of the blue. It is to be expected when imitation of God is presented as the believer's ultimate purpose.

In the relevant verse, John in positive and negative terms points out that sin is incompatible with God's realm. Those who abide in Him do not commit sin. This is the rule, which regulates and applies to the relationship between God and the believer. Moreover, sin prevents the believer from seeing and knowing God. In a way, by insisting on sinning, one refuses to share the vision and knowledge of God. The vision

that is meant here is not a physical one as, as Brown observes ‘neither the author nor his secessionist opponents had physically seen Jesus of Nazareth’.<sup>705</sup> Besides, the vision of God is impossible in both Johannine (Jn 1:18; 6:46; 1Jn 4:12,20) and Biblical thought (Ex 19:21; 33:20,23; Deut 4:12).<sup>706</sup>

As for the knowledge of God, John defines it in 2:3: ‘now by this we may be sure that we know him, if we obey his commandments’. So, seeing and knowing God obtain a spiritual meaning already present in the Gospel’s use of these terms (‘to know’ and ‘to see’ God). Moreover, John again draws the ethical implications they also necessitate in order for them to be understood in their entirety.

Being in fellowship with God, the believer does not commit sin in as much as he longs for the sight and knowledge of Him, despite his being sinful. He knows the rule and he struggles to follow it. It is worth remarking that while in verses 1:8-10 the author of the Epistle proposes the means of cleansing from sin for the believers, he goes on in 2:2 saying ‘I am writing this to you that you may not sin’. For this is the ultimate purpose of the believer. However, if he sins then God has provided for him the remedy. What is said in 2:2 as an exhortation here is put as a regulation that applies to God’s sphere. It is Jesus’ sinlessness that defines the identity of his realm and not the believer’s sinfulness. Accordingly, it has to be borne in mind that sin is alien to God’s world and the one who has fellowship with him is not expected to commit sin.

7. Little children, let no one deceive you. Everyone who does what is right is righteous, just as he is righteous.

The author refers again to the deceivers who claim to be God’s children, without demonstrating it by actions. The moral indifference of the opponents of John may be implied here. Their false teaching and immorality actually embody a danger for the members of the Johannine community. For this reason our author sets another criterion for the faithful, not only to test themselves, but also and primarily under those circumstances, to prove liars those who endeavour to lead them astray.

The theme of imitation of Christ reoccurs here in terms of righteousness. Yet again Christ is the model according to which one has to lead his life. Sharing God’s attributes for John constitutes a sound proof for one’s being in fellowship with God. For, in the main, actions and not what one says determine one’s character. As Brooke points out ‘he, and he only, who shows the fruits of righteousness in what he does, is righteous’.<sup>707</sup>

<sup>704</sup> So Rensberger, 1997, p.86

<sup>705</sup> Brown, 1982, p.403

<sup>706</sup> See Lieu, 1986, p.116

<sup>707</sup> Brooke, 1912, p.87

8. Everyone who commits sin is a child of the devil; for the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The Son of God was revealed for this purpose, to destroy the works of the devil.

In this verse, the author makes the chasm that exists between God's dominion and the devil's world even wider. Sins are called the *works of the devil*, which Christ came to destroy. His salvific mission represents the preliminary phase of the destruction of the works of the devil, which initiates the final one when the devil himself will be disarmed and his works will be destroyed. Now it becomes more obvious that sin has no place in the believer's life; 'truth and falsehood, good and evil, right and wrong, God and the devil, are irreconcilable opposites'.<sup>708</sup> It is for God's righteousness and faithfulness that sin is tolerated in His realm in order to be transformed into holiness.

While the one who does righteousness is righteous in imitation of God, the one who acts sinfully belongs to the devil. Actions determine one's belonging to either God or the devil. Having been the devil's innovation, sin constitutes the distinctive characteristic of his dominion. Those who sin belong to the devil. However, as we have seen in 1:6-10, sin is an issue for the believer as well. Thus, ultimately, what differentiates the believers from those who belong to the devil is not sin but it is the stance they take over against sin. While the former confess their sins and resort to the cleansing power of the blood of Christ, the latter insist on sinning.

Obviously, what a sinfully acting man and the devil have in common is sin itself. The devil was the first one who sinned and sins ever after. It is implied here that sin is an external principle to human nature. Accordingly, sin 'is not self-originated or part of man's nature'.<sup>709</sup> Rather, it originates in the devil's rebellion against God as is illustrated in the narration of Genesis.<sup>710</sup>

While 'the whole world lies under the power of the evil one' (1Jn 5:19), this is not going to last for ever as the Son of God 'was revealed to destroy' his works. It is then that the believers will obtain sinlessness in its fullness. For the time being, God has provided other means, which enable the believers *to touch* sinlessness or at least to fight for it. In every probability, Jesus' death on the cross is implied here. The revelation of the Son of God mentioned refers primarily to His incarnate life and the summit of his salvific mission namely, His death on the cross. Eschatologically however, at the eschaton, when the devil and his works are to be destroyed once for all, the believers will share sinlessness with God.

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<sup>708</sup> Dodd, 1946, p.73

<sup>709</sup> Brooke, 1912, p.88

<sup>710</sup> As we have seen in contemporary Jewish literature, sin/evil is attributed to the weakness of the human nature and to the evil powers that lead people astray. In Genesis it is clear that the devil represents the archopponent of God.

At this point we should refer to GJohn, where the devil, 'the ruler of this world', is thought to have already been 'driven out' (Jn 12:31). In the Epistle however, the devil is said to be still the ruler of this world (5:19). Evidently, the Gospel put an emphasis on realised eschatology, while the Epistle under the influence, I believe, of an inner schism rather emphasizes futuristic eschatology. Also, it seems that in 1John there is a greater emphasis on forensic eschatology (hence the voluntaristic language 1:9) without cosmological eschatology being wholly absent (the πονηρός rules the world 5:19). 1John places the destruction of the devil's works in the eschaton, as the community's very experience speaks volumes of the fact that the devil is still working in the world.

In my opinion, v.8c functions as an introduction to the statement which follows, in the sense that they both are in part concretised in the present but they are to be wholly fulfilled in the future. Moreover, the believers' inability to sin, which the author asserts in the next verse, is to be understood as the result of the fact that 'the Son of God was revealed to destroy the works of the devil'. The salvific mission of the Son of God makes sinlessness possible to be achieved by the faithful.

9. Those who have been born of God do not sin, because God's seed abides in them; they cannot sin, because they have been born of God.

Having portrayed the children of the devil in the preceding verse, the author refers now to the children of God who abide in Him, adding some characteristics in order to complete their image or to make the contrast with the children of the devil more expressive. Accordingly, the children of God have God's σπέρμα abiding in them. Moreover, they *cannot* sin, as they are *begotten* by God.

We have already discussed what σπέρμα may stand for here. We have also mentioned that many commentators suggest that the term σπέρμα may have been borrowed from gnostic language or Hellenistic notions; a fact which is probable. John however, has put in it an entirely different content. Moreover, in my opinion, the reference to the begetting theme makes the use of the relevant term quite plausible. Be that as it may, I personally think that the context necessitates its meaning to be equated with the Holy Spirit rather than with the word of God. For, the Spirit is what enables God's children to maintain their fellowship with God as their fellowship is always threatened by the works of the devil. Fellowship with God is not to be taken for granted. Not even having been begotten by God is one safe from sin once for all. The abiding of the Holy Spirit is what safeguards the believers against the attacks of the devil. As Brown observes 'for 1John "having been begotten" means more than a terminated divine creative activity of the

past. Whether the seed is the word of God or His Holy Spirit, it remains active after it has brought the child of God into being'.<sup>711</sup>

At this point, I have to point out that the metaphor of begetting used here is 'only a parable'. Moreover, as Hoskyns observes, when GJohn refers to the birth of the children of God 'in order to avoid confusion between the two (meaning natural birth and divine generation), the divine generation must be expressed in a series of strong negatives' namely, *not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor to the will of man, but of God*.<sup>712</sup> Consequently, that begetting is not to be taken literally. It is neither a matter of absolute dualism nor does it only depend on human decision. Divine sonship is a gift from God offered to those who respond by faith to God's invitation. It however requires maintenance. For this reason God offered means of maintaining such an identity. It depends on humans whether they resort to them. The cooperation of the divine and human factor plays a considerable role in this process.

We turn now to the apparent inconsistency that exists between the two sections we are dealing with. As Brown notes, 'much scholarly energy has been devoted to proving that no contradiction exists'.<sup>713</sup> I think that there is an element of truth in every opinion expressed so far.

In my view, in 1:6-10 the author examines the theme of sin through the prism of human experience and every day life, whereas in 3:9 he passes it through the filter of God's realm. In the former, he aims to clarify that sin is a stubborn fact in human life that is not to be ignored. In the latter, the incompatibility of sin with God's reign is pointed out. Moreover, despite the persistent character of sin, God has sent his Son to put an end to the works of the devil. The Son of God having power over the evil One, is revealed to destroy his works and as this destruction is not completed yet, He came to provide the Church with the remedy for sin as well. Ultimately however, sin is going to be destroyed permanently. Both facts have to be borne in mind by the Christians in order for them on the one hand, not to underestimate the devil's catalytic work in their lives and on the other, not to be filled with despair because of their being sinful.

Admittedly, being a child of God, one already possesses partly sinlessness, for a child has to look like his father. However, as long as the devil is still the ruler of this world (1Jn 5:19), the children of God have to deal with him and his works. Sin, as Strecker notes, is a 'threatening force that must be repeatedly overcome, until the end of the world'.<sup>714</sup> At this point we have again to mention the change of emphasis on realised and

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<sup>711</sup> Brown, 1982, p.431

<sup>712</sup> Hoskyns, 1947, pp.146-147

<sup>713</sup> Brown, 1982, p.413

<sup>714</sup> Strecker, 1996, p.104

futuristic eschatology between GJohn and 1John respectively. Apparently, this sinlessness is to be obtained provided that abiding in Christ is maintained. There is a growth in God's children; increasing sinlessness that I believe it is implied here, is a mark of that growth. Perfection for the believer, as it is limited by the earthy reality, is the tendency towards it. The more the believer grows spiritually, the closer to this perfection he stands. It is neither an already achieved aim, nor a chimera for the Christian. Rather, it constitutes the ultimate intention of his life.

It seems to me that the notion of imitation of God which runs throughout this section consisting in the believers' ultimate purpose, implies a sense of growth which in turn constitutes a criterion of their achieving their aim or not. As I see it, the imitation of God does not imply a procedure fulfilled at once. However, there may be inferred as well that God's children may already be perfect but their identity remains hidden and obscured till the day when it is going to be revealed. Nevertheless, I would rather opt for the former suggestion, as I have the impression that here John's ideas are rather compressed. Growing into the likeness of God is an idea that underlies the life of the believer. The stress on the believer's sinfulness in 1:6-10 emphasizes the fact that perfection is not achieved yet. Moreover, if a growing is not meant here and rather an accomplished but hidden perfection is what is stressed, what then is the function of the sacramental means God offers for the achievement of sinlessness?

In a few words, the epistolary author points towards the aim-sinlessness (3:9), without ignoring the reality-sinfulness (1:8-10). However, both have to be borne in mind as bearing salvific importance. Verse 3:1-2 exemplifies the truth. 'What we are to be is not apparent yet', as we are still sinful and in need of what God offers to us to be cured of sin. Yet, 'when he appears we are to be like him-for we are to see him as he is'. Sinlessness is one attribute we are going to share with him in order to be like him. Accordingly, sinlessness is placed in the future when 'he is revealed' (1Jn 3:2). Perfection is a fruit of the age to come and it is going to be achieved in its fullness eschatologically.

In this sense, believers are potentially (*δυνάμει*) sinless but actually (*θέσει*) sinful. The actuality of their being sinful is a matter of every day experience. So, what the author says, as I see it, is this: to deny our being sinful does not constitute a cure of our sins. The remedy has been provided by our faithful and just God namely, confession met by forgiveness and the blood of His Son. This does not mean however that we are going to persist in sinning because we have the antidote available. To the contrary, we always have to keep in mind what our ultimate purpose is. As God has nothing to do with the works of the devil, the believer who asserts that he is God's child is incapable of sinning

Sinning means cooperating with the devil. So, sins are a sort of an obstacle, which we are supposed to overcome on our way to sinlessness. The seed of God that abides in us enables us to remain abiding in Him till we become like Him, sinless. The reality-sinfulness of the believer is not to encourage him to insist on sinning but to make him long for sinlessness.

Obviously, Filson is absolutely right saying that 'the author evidently cannot give up either point of an apparently insoluble dilemma. Sin is a stubborn fact of our lives but it is completely out of place in the believer'.<sup>715</sup> That is the pragmatic way of comprehending divine realities.

In conclusion, I would say that there is a perfectionist statement in 1John but it is not 'a memory of an ephemeral past'<sup>716</sup> but an omen of a dynamic future. It is not the Johannine community that is supposed to reach this perfectionism but the church as a whole when it 'will be like him' (1Jhn 3:2). This perfectionist statement functions as a mirror in which our going-to-be nature is reflected.

10. The children of God and the children of the devil are revealed in this way: all who do not do what is right are not from God, nor are those who do not love their brothers and sisters.

It has been pointed out that sin is the distinctive characteristic of those who belong to the devil. In v.10 however, the author refers to two characteristics of those who belong to God namely, righteousness and the practice of love to each other. Moreover, while the former has actually been mentioned the latter functions as an introduction to the next section where love of the brethren will be the main subject.

It has become clear so far that for our author men are either God's children or belong to the devil. There is no midway. Their moral behaviour speaks for their classification in one way or the other. Moreover, as we have seen in the previous verse, decision is not enough. God's σπέρμα/Holy Spirit, who abides in the believer, is the one who enables him to concretise his decision.

Moreover, while the believers are offered the means of cleansing themselves from all wrongdoing (1:8,10), and they have in them the abiding power of the seed of God which enables them to defeat sin, nothing is said either about the seed of the devil or about any sacramental means offered to those who belong to the devil. The devil is the author of sin and everything negative that stems from it. He cannot be the creator of anything. One's insistence on sinning and ignoring the salvific mission of Jesus classifies him among the children of the devil (3:8,10 and Jn 8:44).

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<sup>715</sup> Filson, 1969, p.273

<sup>716</sup> Bogart, 1977, p.144

The author's insistence on the theme of God's being righteous signifies the importance of it. Yet, the author narrows its meaning down 'to one special form of righteousness' namely, love of the brethren. Apparently, the Johannine community has faced a relevant problem. So, for this reason the author of the Epistle refers to the practice of love among the Christians.

Love finds its perfect expression in God's realm, as God is love (4:16). As we have seen, having communion with God results in having communion with each other (1:7). So, I think that the practice of love among those who assert that they are in fellowship with God, tests the validity and reality of their relationship with God. As 1John says elsewhere, 'he who will not love his brother whom he has seen cannot possibly love the God whom he has never seen' (4:20).

## CHAPTER SIX: General conclusions

At the outset of this study I said that I would attempt a wandering in the corridors of the *labyrinth* called Johannine scholarship concerning my subject matter. At the end of this wandering, having being largely helped by the scholars' opinions on Johannine issues, I am in a position to summarize my conclusions.

Firstly, having discussed the concept of sin and its parameters in contemporary Jewish literature we gathered that the origin of evil and by implication sin and its parameters was the subject of much speculation and debate in Judaism from the second century B.C. to the second century A.D.. In these writings sin is basically conceived as the infringement of God's commandments and it is attributed to external factors, evil angelic powers, to the weakness of human nature or to an evil inclination planted in human heart. In all cases, whether human beings help God's work by being obedient to His law or by fighting against evil powers, sin is to find its cure in divine intervention. God is the only one who, on the one hand has the power to defeat the angelic powers and on the other, to cure human weakness and root out any evil inclination planted in humans. It is noteworthy that even in the same document, elements of what we have called *cosmological eschatology* (evil attributed to angelic powers) overlap with elements of *forensic eschatology* (evil is rooted in the weakness of the human nature). It seems however that eventually, forensic eschatology overtook and displaced cosmological eschatology largely after the catastrophe of 70 A.D..

Both belief in God's determinism and men's freedom to choose are witnessed to in contemporary Jewish literature. To be a member of the Qumran community or of Israel, though it is thanks to God's grace, also requires one's free will for, to maintain this membership depends on every member's will. And this is so because sin exists even in the sectarian's/Israelite's life. Sin is an issue for the sectarian/Israelite as well. Moreover, repentance is always met by God's forgiveness and means of cleansing are offered to those who repent and ask for forgiveness. In the final analysis, what differentiates the righteous from the wicked is the stance they take regarding sin. Though both sin, the former deals effectively with sin and does not reject God, while the latter, insisting on sinning, 'walks in the stubbornness of his heart'.

Eschatologically, however, at the end time, righteousness/God triumphs over against wickedness/Evil. Thus, sinlessness is placed at the age to come when the sources of sin, whether human weakness or evil angelic powers, cease to exist forever. In a way *evilessness*, so to speak, which is going to be achieved by God's intervention, is the precondition of sinlessness.

As we are going to talk about the paradoxical statements in 1John, it is worth remarking that in contemporary Jewish literature paradoxes such as the two modes of thought concerning the origin of evil, the presence of sin even in the devotees' life, the amalgamation of free will and God's election, are not missing. They rather seem to underline the religious thought of that time. As I have already mentioned however, those so-called paradoxes were neither contradictory nor problematic in the minds of those who composed the relevant writings. There is a point that the human mind is unable to go beyond and then the writers speak of the 'mysterious ways' of God.

Yet, what if, as in the Odes of Solomon, the eschaton is already thought of as realised? Undoubtedly, by raising this question we approach even more the Johannine world of thought. We have, I suppose to point out at this stage that in the Odes as well as in GJohn elements of realised eschatology and of futuristic eschatology coexist. Undeniably, if perfection is entirely placed in the future then perfectionist claims have no place among Christians, who are going to be sinless only at the eschaton. However, what if the eschaton moves into the present in a radical way? It follows that the fruits of the age to come-e.g. sinlessness-are offered in the present as well. In this case the assertion of sinlessness seems to be justified. As we have already seen in the detailed exegesis of a comparison of 1John 1:6-10 and 3:6-10, eschatology plays a significant role in our better understanding of the text.

Against such a background, we attempted an approach to John's conception of sin and sinlessness, having in mind principally the passages 1Jn 1:6-10 and 3:6-10, which to me contain the gist of John's conception of these notions.

Before getting into hermeneutical details in the third chapter of this thesis, we tried to picture the character of the community which gave birth to the Johannine literature, shedding light on its assumed distinctive character. Having accepted Jesus as the Messiah, the members of the Johannine community were excommunicated and even persecuted for their faith in Jesus. Having been born out of a conflict with the synagogue, the Johannine community cultivated a dualistic understanding of the world. They were the ones who possessed the truth, over against the parent body, the synagogue as a representative of Judaism. Being ethically confident, the Johannine Christians held a rather idealised view of their community. As we have concluded, the book of the community in question, the Fourth Gospel, offers grounds for such perfectionist beliefs more specifically for belief in the actual achievement of sinlessness of the members of the community. Presumably, the Fourth Gospel led itself to be read in a rather perfectionist way which influenced radically the self-understanding of the Johannine

community. Such a self-understanding led to the marginalization of the community and in turn, their being marginalized enforced their perfectionism.

However, it is worth mentioning that there is no indication that the community was in conflict with the rest of Christians or other Christian communities. Thus, I esteem, that the Johannine community never became a sect in the proper sense. It was a sect in a rather rhetorical sense. The distinctiveness of the Johannine community lies in its conception of Jesus Christ and His salvific mission. Christianity as a movement, occupied a marginal position in the wider society and Johannine community was a part of this movement; a fact which is verified by the fact that after the schism those of its members who remained faithful became members of the Great Church. As I have argued, 1John actually redefines that sense of sectarianism which is left from the Gospel of John. After the experience of an inner schism, redefinition of the community's boundaries seems to be necessitated, for it becomes clear that the acceptance of Jesus is not enough as it used to be, to separate those who belong to the dominion of God from those who do not. Christ is the boundary between those who walk in the light and those who walk in the darkness, no matter where they come from. This walking however, has to be demonstrated in praxis.

Afterwards, we proceeded attempting to unveil the identity of those combatted by 1John. Though both the secessionists and the epistolary author claimed that they were the heirs of what 'was from the beginning', it seems that the former have misunderstood certain elements of this tradition. As the text itself informs us, the opponents of John were former members of the Johannine community who I esteem, having misconceived the message of GJohn and probably be influenced by contemporary gnostic ideas, asserted sinlessness.

Thus, a schism occurs in the very ranks of that charismatic community; a division that functions as a blow to the idealised image of the community its members held. The definition of sin as primarily meaning the rejection of Christ, now proves itself inadequate. It becomes clear that there are many ways of rejecting Him, such as not walking in the light, doing the works of darkness while walking in the light, not doing the truth. This is occasioned by the shift that takes place between the Gospel and the Epistle. While the former focuses on Jesus and His personal relationship with the believer, the latter is written after the experience of church life and also after the emergence of heretical tendencies among those who have accepted Jesus.

In the first passage 1:6-10, John points out what 'having fellowship with God' entails. One is in *κοινωνία* with God when he walks in the light where God is. Thus, he has

κοινωνία with the rest of the believers. Moreover, what enables him to maintain this fellowship, despite his sinful nature, is the cleansing power of the blood of Christ.

Undeniably, sin is incompatible with God's realm. Both the secessionists and John agree on this. However, while the former assert sinlessness to avoid this antinomy of the presence of sin in God's world, the latter introduces the means God offers to cure sin. The epistolary author also stresses that in asserting sinlessness, the heretics, on the one hand challenge the very nature of God who is πιστός καί δίκαιος forgiving sins, and on the other, they prove Jesus' mission empty.

However, though the believers in 1:6-10 are exhorted not to assert sinlessness, in 3:6-10 the author claims that the children of God *cannot* sin. The author seems not to give up either thesis. Both are valid in the believer's life. How is this antinomy to be understood? If we say that there is no antinomy here, we *deceive ourselves*; we even miss the point, I would say, the author wishes to make. John expresses this theme of sin and sinlessness in dialectical fashion, looking at it from different optical angles. While in the first instance the author examines the issue of sin and sinlessness through the prism of the present reality and every day experience, in the second he sees it through the prism of the eschaton, the age to come. As I understand this antinomy, the author states that under the earthly circumstances of life, being sinless is equated with striving for sinlessness using God's means of cleansing; for, on the one hand sin is a stubborn fact in the believer's life and on the other the only way to achieve sinlessness is to remain in God's realm.

It seems to me that the emphasis in the Epistle is on futuristic rather than realised eschatology. In doing so, it also places sinlessness in the future, when it is to be fully realised by the believers. This does not mean that the believers in the present are not children of God who cannot sin. On the contrary, they are children of God and that is why they are offered the blood of His Son to be cleansed by their sins. The believers are potentially (δυνάμει) sinless but actually (θέσει) sinful. The very existence of sin in the believer's life necessitates such a distinction. Besides, salvation is not an act of magic, it is an act of decision to follow Christ, a decision which has to be concretised in life and this life itself speaks of the stubborn presence of sin.

Further, I think that the emphasis that 1John puts on futuristic eschatology is to be attributed to the very experience of an inner schism. In a sense the Epistle invites the community to take some steps back, abandoning the enthusiastic and rather charismatic view of Christian life and adopting a more down to earth view of itself. The assertion of sinlessness is a part of that enthusiastic view they used to hold of themselves. Yet now sin has occurred in the form of a schism making itself more than real. Sin is a real fact in

the believer's life. But, at the same time the believer has to know that the children of God *cannot* sin.

So, there is indeed a paradox here in 1John. But this antinomy is, I would say, a part of Christianity and its message. For, is not Christianity itself a paradox? Is it not a paradox the encounter of the Divine with humanity, the Infinite with the finite, the Perfect with the imperfect? Is it not paradox the encounter of the Sinless with the sinful? In John however, the sinless One wishes to draw to Himself humanity not by using magic and making them automatically sinless, but by their own consent. What John says, it seems to me, is that Christians are given the opportunity to become sinless as long as they are striving for sinlessness; for such a gift is offered to those who maintain their fellowship with God who is the only one who will grant sinlessness to them at the eschaton, when evil ceases to exist. As I see it, perfection for John is the striving of the imperfect for perfection.

This dialectic between present and future, *already* and *not yet* is the framework in which Christian experience is to be understood, and this is true especially of John's theology. For the Christian, the tension between these two realities constitutes the dialectic character of his existence. The present is not to be ignored as it is the arena where the battle to win the future is held. Futuristic eschatology goes hand in hand with present eschatology. Occasionally, one of them may be emphasized by the writings of the New Testament but this, I think, is to be attributed to where the interest of the writer lies. Jesus Himself grants eternal life to those who believe in Him (Jn 5:24); yet, He offers His blood as atonement for their sins (1Jn 1:7). The believers have the σπέρμα of God abiding in them (3:9) but their own effort is also required to shield themselves from sin.

It is a fact that christology, and particularly the atoning significance of Christ's death, eschatology and pneumatology (which has an impact on anthropology) have been pointed out by scholars as three ways of differentiation between GJohn and 1John<sup>717</sup>. At the end of my work however, I have been persuaded that in the final analysis, the way according to which aspects of the issues mentioned above are presented in Fourth Gospel and in 1John suggests their being mutually complementary. As Westcott notes affirming GJohn's and 1John's common authorship, 'no imitator of the Gospel could have combined elements of likeness and unlikeness in such a manner'.<sup>718</sup> I do realize that this is a wide and contested field in Johannine scholarship. I would like though to refer to it as I suppose it may represent my small contribution to the understanding of the

<sup>717</sup> See Dodd, 1946, p.xlix-liii

<sup>718</sup> Westcott, 1886, p.xlvi for the whole argument see *ibid.*, pp.xliii-xlvi

Johannine world of thought, or the piece of the *puzzle* I promised that I will put in its place at the outset of this thesis.

Summing up, the Johannine '*the hour is coming and is now here*' (Jn 4:23; cf. Jn 5:25; 16:32), may have been experienced by the early Church in a greater extent but underlines Christian life till the eschaton. I suppose that this cooperation of present and future may constitute another paradox; for the time being however, let us confine our research to one paradox: the coexistence of sinfulness and sinlessness in the Christian's life.

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