

Eschatology in the first epistle of John: *koinwniā* in the *familia Dei*

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ABSTRACT

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*The schism that occurred in the Johannine community has been reinterpreted by the author of the first Epistle of John. In his opinion, the incident involving the schismatics could be interpreted as the coming of the antichrist(s), which marks the 'final hour' and describes an eschatological moment. This eschatological moment heightens the community's awareness of the fact that they live in an eschatological time, which will, at some time in the future, have an eschatological consummation, regardless of the form it takes. This present eschatological life is described by the author as continuous **koinwniā** within the family of God, the *familia Dei*, and as long as this family abides in the light, they will progressively experience divine life and fellowship. The consummation of this new existence will be experienced in the future, when the Son of God 'is revealed'. In this context one can label the eschatology of 1 John a progressively realizing eschato-logy that embraces a future eschatological consummation. A transitional eschatological event, which will end the present eschatological time and start a new one, is referred to by the author as 'when he (the Son of God) is revealed' (*ejan fanerwqh/* 2:28; 3:2), 'his parousia' (*parousiā/ aujtou*), 2:28), and 'the day of judgment' (*th/hmera/th" krisew"*, 4:17). Both present and future eschatology have to be interpreted and understood from the perspective of **koinwniā** in the *familia Dei*.*

1 INTRODUCTION

In the section of his treatise, *De Principiis* (On first principles, 1.6.1), that deals with the end of the world, Origen introduces the topic with the comment that discussion might be a better approach to the subject than definition¹. In the light of the confusion that surrounds the use of the word 'eschatology', it would be advisable to

1 <http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/text/origen122.html> 2006/05//07

follow a similar approach in this article, which investigates eschatology in 1 John. The theological problems posed by eschatology are numerous and complex (Allison 1992:209). In the theological reflection on eschatology, the 'semantics' became problematic and muddled. Theologians discussing eschatology were using the same word, but meant different things². Marshall (1978:264-9) summarizes nine different ways in which the term 'eschatology' has been used³; he concludes that the core definition must include the idea of an awareness that although some of God's promises are being fulfilled in the present, they have not been consummately fulfilled, therefore we can anticipate even greater fulfilment.

When one reads 1 John it becomes apparent that the eschatology of this epistle fits well into Marshall's proposal, as well as into the scheme developed by Dodd and named 'realized eschatology' (Dodd 1961:35). Dodd based the development of his eschatology on Jesus' proclamation. In his opinion, Jesus' proclamation has less to do with perfection, with fully achieved realization, than with the fact that divine reality actually has appeared. God confronts humanity. God steps out of a distant dwelling⁴, and humanity comes to feel God's powerful sovereignty:

Something has happened, which has not happened before, and which means that the sovereign power of God has come into effective operation. It is not a matter of having God for your King in the sense that you obey His commandments: it is a matter of being confronted with the power of God at work in the world. In other words, the 'eschatological' kingdom of God is proclaimed as a present fact, which men must recognize,

1 Brower (1997:119) states that 'Eschatology is a notoriously slippery word for which a bewildering variety of definitions confronts us'. See Rowland (1993:161-164) and Sauter (1999:3ff) for a thorough analysis and discussion of the problematic nature of the use and interpretation of the word 'eschatology'. Thomas (1997:55), for example, interprets eschatology as the study of ultimate things, ultimate realities.

3 According to this author all eschatological schemes are flawed; in the end they should be seen not as opposing one another, but rather as complementing one another.

4 Today we would be more inclined to refer to a 'different dimensional existence'.

whether by their actions they accept or reject it (Dodd 1961:29).

In Jesus' proclamation, these events have been realized (cf. Dodd 1961:29). Dodd named this event, in which eternity breaks into time without being absorbed into it, 'realized eschatology' (Dodd 1961:35). 'Realized eschatology' then means that the powers of the future world are gradually 'realized', made real in Jesus' actions. According to Sauter (1999:63), this is 'a symptom of the fact that the word "eschatology" already is hackneyed, so worn out, that it can be virtually synonymous with "salvation"'. What remains is the question – which Dodd answers affirmatively – whether salvation is 'here'. Behind this question lies the differentiation between the absolute and the historically relative, between eternity and time, between idea and appearance. Salvation cannot be diminished to a historical event; it exists 'here' and in what is 'to come'. What matters is that what happens 'now' has 'eternal' validity.

'Realized eschatology' is therefore a monstrous term (Sauter 1999:64). It hides the fact that eschatology no longer has to do with only the future⁵. Dodd does not have to argue whether realized eschatology involves a fully accomplished event or an event in the process of being accomplished, or whether it is an act or a process. It is evident that, in his opinion it is both.

'Realized eschatology' then points to the idea that eschatology is not dependent on familiar concepts of time, but bears witness to God's activity by irrevocably replacing the old with the new. However, in this article time indicators will be used for the structural

5 The Christian tradition generally teaches a future salvation fulfilment. Nevertheless, the declaration of the anticipation of that future realization is often founded in the present. The experience of the Holy Spirit is often understood in this way (cf. Rm 8:23). Those Christians involved in mysticism claim that already in this life the fullness of God's promised salvation can be experienced. Similarly, in Eastern religions, the promised goal is often unity with the god in the state of Brahman in Hinduism (Schoeps 1967:149) or Nirvana in Buddhism (Schoeps 1967:167). It comes to those, most faithful, upon their death and ends the cycle of endless life (especially in Hinduism). Yet, something of this final state can be experienced in this life through meditation. This proves that religions blend the ideas of the future and the present fulfilment of the promised salvation. Inherent is a basic struggle of religions to resolve the present experience and future hope of the believer (Kysar 1993:98).

arrangement and discussion of the various eschatological events distinguished in 1 John. This will now be determined and indicated in the discussion of the methodological approach.

2 METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

Probably the most explicit text on eschatology in 1 John is 2:18-3:3⁶. The easiest way out would be to investigate what 2:18-3:3 says about eschatology. For the purpose of this article the author has chosen to focus on the main features in this text on eschatology and related features elsewhere in the Epistle.

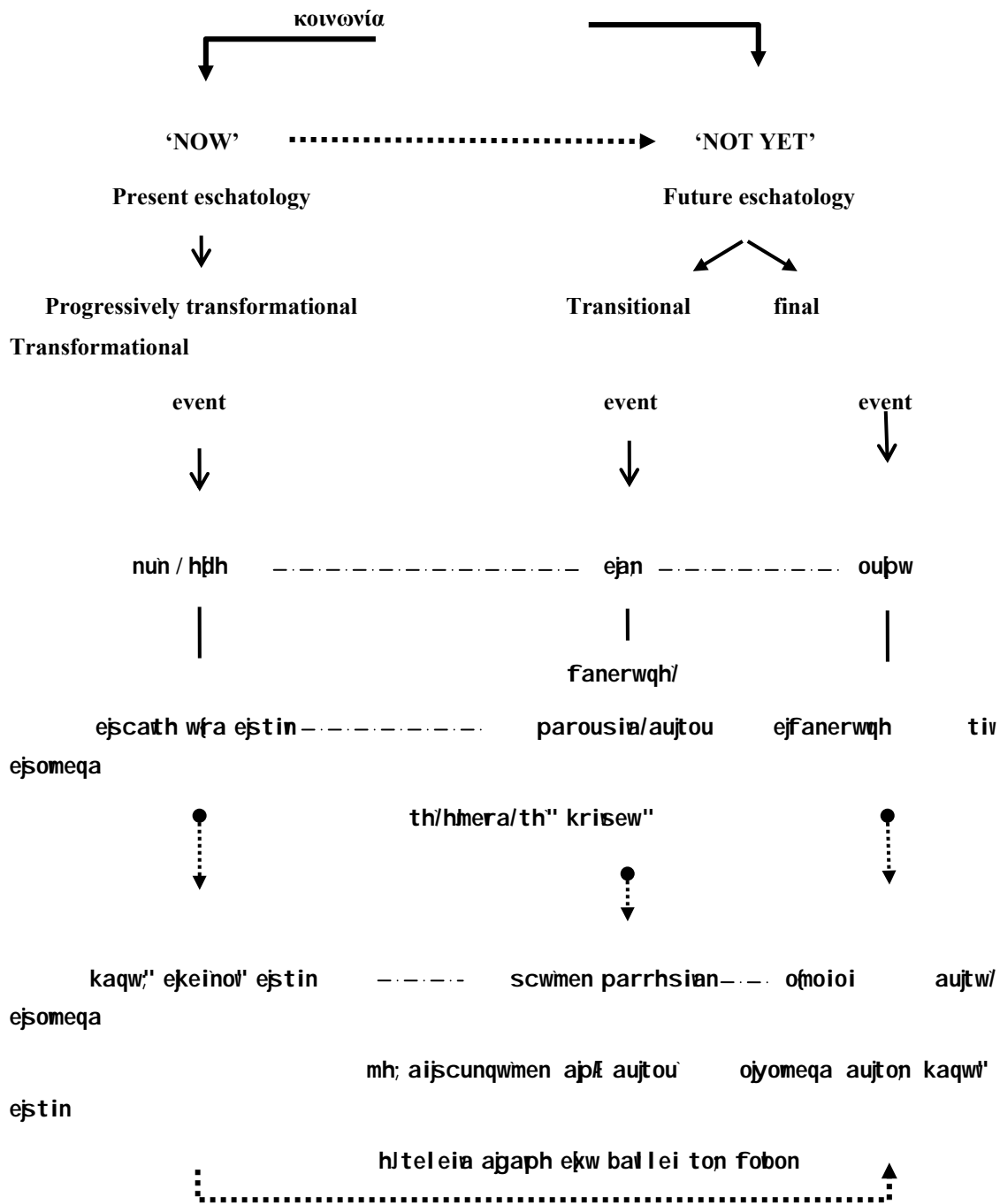
1 John 3:2 was selected as the key verse to offer help with the approach to, and the construction of a possible methodological time frame and structure for research, since it is the only text where three temporal indicators occur to distinguish between different eschatological events: the temporal particles are, **nun** and **oupw**; a particle used in a temporal sense is **ejan**. This verse can be analysed as follow:

^{3:2} #Agaphtoiy

.....nun tekna qeou ejmen,	NOW
kai;..... oupw ejfanerwqh tivejsomeqa.	NOT YET
oifamen ofti ejan .. fanerwqh/	WHEN
↳ ofnoioi aujt w/ejsomeqa,	
↳ ofti ojyomeqa aujton kaqw' ejstin.	

These time indicators help to construct the following possible Johannine eschatological framework from the following verses: 1 John 2: 6, 18, 28; 3:2, 3; 4:17.

6 Two other texts (4:1-6 and 16-18) complement this text and add some new perspectives.



The above analysis is a linear time indication. Since the Elder’s **time frame differed** from the current time frame, this is merely an analysis to distinguish between the different eschatological events. The most *obvious* order of research would be to follow a linear time approach starting with the ‘now’ and moving towards the ‘not yet’. However, in this article a more *sensible* approach will be followed. *Logically* the sequence of discussion will be: the arrival of the ‘last hour’; the revelation of Jesus: *parousia* and *day of judgment*;

realized eschatology (**kaqw," ekeinot' ejstin**) as **koinwnia** in the *familia Dei*; and, finally, future eschatology.

3 THE ARRIVAL OF THE 'LAST HOUR'

3.1 The socio-religious situation in the Johannine community

First John depicts a community torn apart by doctrinal and ethical differences. By the time 1 John was written, the differences had, according to Culpepper, precipitated a schism. A helpful starting point for identifying⁷ the opponents who caused the schism can be found in 1 John 2:18-19, which consists of an eschatological reference. These verses indicate that there had been a time when the opponents were not differentiated from the adherents of the Elder⁸. He defines them as **planwntwn** (deceivers, 2:26); **yeudoprofhtai** (false prophets, 4:1); **yeusth"** (liar, 2:22) and **ajnticristo"** (antichrist [**ajnticristoi**], 2:18, 22)⁹. These texts create the impression that the Elder is concerned about the possible deception of his adherents. The deception is already a reality; it has already caused a rift in the community (Kenney 2000b:101).

These deceivers claimed a special illumination by the Spirit (2:20, 27) that imparted to them the true knowledge of God. On account of this experience, they regarded themselves as *the* children of God. This explains the strong emphasis by the Elder on the knowledge of God and the way in which he and his adherents became children of God through having received salvation (5:1-5).

7 Many attempts have been made to identify the opponents of 1 John. Unfortunately none of these identifications are convincing. Therefore we can agree with Edwards (2000:161; see also Du Plessis 1978:101) that we cannot negate the existence of 'opponents' or 'deceivers,' but that the precise historical situation cannot be reliably reconstructed. However, from the text it is possible to make some deductions concerning how their beliefs influenced the polemic-pastoral message of the Elder.

8 In this article it has been accepted, in agreement with most scholars, that the three Johannine epistles were written by the same person, referred to in 2 John 1 and 3 John 1 as the **presbutero"** (Brown 1982:398; Culpepper 1998:251; Kenney 2000b:12; Duling 2003:439; Thomas 2004:4; Callahan 2005:2). Therefore, in this document, the author will be referred to as 'the Elder'.

9 See Van der Merwe (2005:550) for a thorough description of these antichrists according to 1 John.

He contrasts the deceivers' claim to knowledge with the knowledge that can come only from the Christian tradition (2:24).

Through spiritual illumination, these heretics claimed to have attained a state beyond ordinary Christian morality in which they had no more sin and had attained moral perfection (1:8-10). This group taught that all believers had been delivered from sin and had already crossed from death into life (1 John 1:8, 10; 3:14). This strong emphasis on realized eschatology led to a disregard for the need to continue to resist sin. Their chief ethical error appears to be a spiritual pride that led them to despise ordinary Christians who did not claim to have attained the same level of spiritual illumination.

This perception influenced their perception of Jesus and advocated a 'higher' Christology that emphasized the divinity of Christ and minimized the humanity of Jesus (1 John 2:19; 4:2) (Kenney 2000b:101; also Brown 1982:52; Lieu 1986:207). They denied the incarnation (2:22; 4:1). Because of their belief that since matter was *ipso facto* evil, God could not possibly have come into direct contact with the phenomenal world through Christ. Therefore, they denied the incarnation in general terms. There are several series of statements that indicate a serious disagreement about the person of Jesus Christ (1 John 2:22; 4:2, 3, 15; 5:1, 5, 6, 10, 13; 2 John 7). Together these statements yield a list of what the author urges his readers to believe and confess: Jesus is 'the Messiah'; he has 'come in the flesh'; he is 'the Son of God'; he came by 'water and blood.' In other words, they have to 'believe in' Jesus (3:23; 5:1, 5, 10, 13) and 'confess' (2:22, 23) him.

These statements clearly indicate that the controversy in the Johannine community was based on differences in the interpretation of a shared tradition (Kenney 2000b:102; Culpepper 1998:253). In response to this crisis, the Elder wrote 1 John to warn the community of the dangers of this false teaching, to correct this false teaching and to encourage those who remained faithful.

3.2 The socio-religious situation reinterpreted

In order to warn the community, to correct this false teaching and to encourage his adherents, the Elder reinterpreted this *Sitz im Leben* eschatologically. He makes two references to the arrival of these deceivers: as 'it is the last hour' (**eĵscath wŕa eĵstin**), which he determined more closely by using the temporal particle 'now' (**nun**). This phrase designates, according to him, the final and decisive

period in the history of humankind¹⁰. The ‘last hour’ is present, it is now, because the antichrists are present in the world (1 Jn 2:18; 4:3). The ‘last hour’ (**ejscath wra**) describes an eschatological moment¹¹. It states that it is the last hour in salvation history (Schnackenburg 1992:132; see Strecker [1996:62] for an opposite view), which has to be understood in a future eschatological sense. Therefore it comes as no surprise that this section ends with a reference to the future coming of Christ (2:28, **parousia/ aujtou**) which is imminent (Schnackenburg 1992:133)¹².

10 The reference **ejscath wra** occurs only here in the NT. Though no definite article occurs, the eschatological element is stressed by the reference to the coming of the Antichrist (Painter 2002:197; Haas et al 1972:62). Comparable expressions are found in the Fourth Gospel: ‘the hour’ (5:25, 28, also without the article), and ‘on the last day’ (6:39f, 44, 54; 11:24; 12:48; 7:37). The definite article is always used, and the reference is always to the day of resurrection which clearly differs from the last ‘hour’, which seems to refer to a period of time immediately leading up to the last day (Painter 2002:197). Other passages such as 2 Tm 3:1 and 2 Pt 3:3 speak of **ejscatwn twn hmerwn** and Jude 1:18 of **ejscatou »tou cronou**, all without the definite article. This use seems closer to **ejscath wra** in 1 John. In other passages (cf. 3:18; 4:23; 5:25) the Fourth Gospel views the final decision as being an accomplished fact.

11 Danker (2000:1103) confirms this when he defines **wra** in this context as ‘a point of time as an occasion for an event, *time*’. Therefore, Schnackenburg (1992:133) rightly states that the ‘last hour’ does not mean the entire period since the coming of Christ, or since his resurrection. Neither is it a phase or a particular period within time as it draws to its close. This reference also does not imply a precise chronological scheme for the Elder’s eschatological understanding. With the warning that the ‘antichrists have come’, the Elder wants only to say that his own time has an eschatological importance. Also see Van der Merwe (2002:253ff) for the Fourth Evangelist’s use of **wra**, *a possible theological setting for the understanding of Johannine eschatology*.

12 The imminence of the *parousia* by the Elder relates to the point of view expressed by other Christian theologians: 1 Cor 7:29ff; 16:22; Rm 13:11; Phlp 4:5; 1 Th 5:1ff; 2 Th 2:2f; Heb 10:25, 37; Ja 5:8; 2 Pt 3:9; 1 Clem 23.2; Did 10.6; Barn 4.1ff; 21.3, 6; cf. also Mk 13:6. In these texts no specific use of the noun ‘antichrist’ occurs (cf. Schnackenburg 1992:133fn 6).

It is evident that, for the Elder, the coming of the antichrist¹³ marks the arrival of this ‘last hour’ (Painter 2002:203). The term is used in both its singular and plural forms. In the singular form it probably refers to the principal leader of the schismatics. It is almost unthinkable that the schism did not involve a leadership struggle. While no leader is named or referred to, the fluidity of the one Antichrist and the many antichrists suggests a leader and his schismatic followers. The names Deceiver, Liar and Antichrist seem to focus on the leader of the opponents. His followers are characterized in similar terms (Painter 2002:203). The plural reference to the antichrists (**nun aṗticristoi polloi; gegonasin**, 2:18) reflects the impact of the schism and is due to the activity of those who were, according to the Elder, false teachers, false prophets, deceivers. That ‘they went out’ (**εἶηλθαν**) implies that they were once part of the community and that they left of their own accord (Painter 2002:204).

The noun **aṗticristo**" (antichrist) is not mentioned in Jewish inter-testamental literature, and neither in the Midrashim, nor in the Talmud, and apparently stems from the apocalyptic tradition. It appears to symbolize the rise of evil in the end times. Perhaps the title of ‘Antichrist’ arose over the schism that centred on the view of

13 The word ‘antichrist’ is used only in 1-2 John, where it occurs five times (1 Jn 2:18bis, 22; 4:3; 2 Jn 7). The preposition **aṗti** in this sense can mean: one who takes the place of Christ or one who opposes Christ. Both meanings were probably relevant in different contexts. The Elder does not refer to these deceivers as ‘false Christs’ (Mk 13:22, **yeudocristoi**), but as ‘Antichrist’ and ‘antichrists.’ The Elder sees them as opposed to Christ. This opposition seems to have taken the form of the rejection of the Christology referred to in 1-2 John. No reference is made to the oppressive ‘political’ Antichrist (Painter 2002:203f; cf. also Callahan 2005:28).

Callahan (2005:27) points out that the context ‘disavows typical apocalyptic expectations’ as informed by 2 Th 2:1-2 and the Apocalypse, where the noun ‘antichrist’ does not appear. Nowhere in the NT can the antichrist of the Johannine epistles be identified with any of the apocalyptic false prophets of ancient Jewish and Christian eschatology. The false prophets of the Markan apocalypse (Mk 13:6, 22), ‘the lawless one’ (2 Th 2:3-12), ‘the second beast of the Apocalypse’ (Rv 12:18-13:18), and the ‘deceiver of the world’ (**kosmopl anh**) in *Didache* 16.4 all perform miracles and are attended by supernal portents. Satan was the first to be identified with the antichrist in the *Sibylline Oracles* (3.63-74), not earlier than by the end of the first century (Strecker 1996:237). Consult Painter 2002:202) for an opposite view.

Christ. The Elder was familiar with it from the Johannine traditions, which would explain his repeated use of it here (Strecker 1996:62; Painter 2002:202). The community has been told, and therefore already knows, that the antichrist will come, as the phrase **kaqw;** **hjkousate** (as you have heard) indicates. He has probably reshaped this tradition due to the circumstances of the schism (Painter 2002:204; Schnackenburg 1992:134). From 2 John 7 it is clear that at this point this tradition has been demythologized through being applied to a specific historical situation.

Such a reinterpretation is not only a historicisation of a 'mythical figure', but also shapes people's understanding of history. The communities' own story is being played out in the immediate context of the apocalyptic events of the end time¹⁴. The appearance of the antichrists is a criterion by which the community may recognise that the 'end time' has arrived and that they must prepare themselves for the end (2:28; 3:2; 4:17) (Strecker 1996:63). This end of the 'end time' then is described by the Elder in terms of the revelation of Jesus: the *parousia*, which will be a day of judgment.

4 THE REVELATION OF JESUS: *PAROUSIA* AND DAY OF JUDGMENT

The event of the *parousia* and the day of judgment are referred to in this article as a 'transitional' event. The 'present eschatological' time will come to an end with the advent of a future eschatological event of the *parousia* and *day of judgment*, and will introduce a new 'future or final eschatological' time (cf. Dunn 2003:295). This understanding is reflected in the close relationship that exists between verses 2:28; 3:2f and 4:17, which help us to understand what the Elder tries to communicate concerning this eschatological event. These three verses are related, as indicated by cognate expressions, indicated by the following comparison. Only the applicable phrases were selected for this comparative analysis.

14 According to 4:1, **polloi; yeudoprofhtai** have come into the world. Since they are identified with the antichrist (see 4:1 and 3), they are the same opponents mentioned in 2:18. According to Strecker (1996:63) an apocalyptic aspect, interpreted in terms of the present, can be deduced from the statement that the 'antichrist' is already in the world (4:3).

...iħa eħan fanerwqh/ scwmen parrhsian kai; mh; aiġscunqwmn apł ajuťou eħ th/parousia/ ajuťou (2:28)

...oťi eħan fanerwqh/ ofnoioi ajuťw/eġsomeqa, oťi oġyomeqa ajuťon kaqw' eġtin (3:2)

...iħaparrhsian eċwmen eħ th/hmera/th" kriew"
(4:17)

According to this analysis, it is apparent that verses 2:28 and 4:17 form a parallelism, constituted by the phrases **scwmen parrhsian** and **parrhsian eċwmen**, and the two references concerning Jesus' future appearance, although differently formulated. The phrases **scwmen parrhsian** and **parrhsian eċwmen** form a chiasm to emphasize the 'confidence' believers can have at the *parousia*. The parallelism also helps to relate the coming of Christ (**th/parousia/ ajuťou**) with the day of judgment (**th/ hmera/ th" kriew"**). According to this comparison, the following can be deduced: the event described by the Elder as Jesus' 'revelation' (**fanerwqh/** 2:28; 3:2), is used as a compound word to depict this revelation as Jesus' *parousia* (**parousia/ ajuťou**, 2:28) and 'the day of judgment' (**th/ hmera/th" kriew"**, 4:17)¹⁵. Whereas *parousia* refers to the future eschatological 'event' as such, the *day of judgment* refers to the nature (purpose) of this event¹⁶.

If the last hour has brought the revelation of the Antichrist, it will soon end in the revelation of Christ (2:28b). The Elder gives his proclamation a special tone, for he has already spoken of another 'revelation' of Christ, namely his incarnation (1:2; cf. 3:5, 8). These two events converge through the use of the same verb **fanerwqh/**

15 Painter (2002:214) points out that both **fanerwqh/** and **parousia/** refer to the eschatological future coming, that is implied by the earlier declaration that the **eġscath wřa eġtin** (2:18). This description implies a scene of eschatological judgment.

16 These references to the 'revelation' of Christ show how close the Elder stands, despite his own theology, to the common ideas of the early church, and how harmoniously he has fitted both together. His announcement and explanation of the last hour vibrate with genuine theology, following the general line of early Christian teaching and interpretation (cf. Schnackenburg 1992:153; Strecker 1996:79). Therefore, since no further information is given concerning this event, the rest of the NT can be consulted for more detailed information.

For the elder, the tension-filled union of present and future eschatology is especially clear at this point; while **faneroun** is a *terminus technicus* for the incarnation of Jesus in the past (1:2; 3:5, 8; 4:9), it is used to unmask the deceivers in the present (2:19), and also to describe the Elder's expectation for the future (2:28; 3:2). The fact that the future revelation is in view here is confirmed by the fact that the revelation of Christ is equated with his *parousia*¹⁷ (Strecker 1996:79). Thus the Elder wants to depict these two events (incarnation and *parousia*) as a 'single, all-embracing manifestation or epiphany of God. In both these events God becomes visible on earth. At his first appearance the Son of God came to bring salvation (4:9, 10, 14) and to destroy the works of the devil (3:8). The first coming was an epiphany of God's love (4:9), of his redemptive involvement (3:5), whereas in the *parousia* Christ will appear as Judge¹⁸ (Schnackenburg 1992:152), as an epiphany of God's righteousness (1:9; 2:29; also 2:1 [Christ]).

Therefore, in the three texts about the future eschatological events, the Elder also exhorts his adherents to 'prepare' themselves for the *parousia* and the *day of judgment*, so that they may have confidence and not be put to shame before him at his coming, and also to become like him, for they will see him as he is. These three exhortations are: abide in Christ (**menete eñ aujtw**, 2:28), purify

17 This thought is in harmony with the early Christian doctrine where *parousia* became a technical term (Mt 24:3, 27, 37, 39; 1 Th 2:19; 3:13; 4:15; 5:23; 2 Th 2:1, 8; 1 Cor 15:23; Ja 5:7, 8; 2 Pt 1:16; 3:4). It occurs only here in the *corpus Johanneum*. It reflects the apocalyptic (future-eschatological) traditions presumed at the Johannine school, without giving any specific time for the coming of Christ (Strecker 1996:79). Schnackenburg (1992:152f; also Deismann 1965:372) points out that no other term would have been so suitable in a Hellenistic environment to announce the arrival of God as king.

18 The prospect of 'the day of judgment' (a concept taken from ancient Jewish and Synoptic eschatology) confirms that the Elder is faithful to the eschatology of the early church. See *1 Enoch* 10:4ff; 16:1; 18:11ff; 22:4, 11; *4 Ezra* 7:113; *Jub* 5:6ff; 24:28, 30; *Pss Sol* 15:13; etc.; Mt 10:15; 11:22, 24; 12:36. Schnackenburg (1992:223) points out that the theology of the early church adheres firmly to this (2 Pt 2:9; 3:7; Jude 6). The Day of Jahweh has often been regarded in the OT as the very heart of the prophetic eschatology (Is 2:12; 13:6, 9; 22:5; 34:8; 58:13; Jr 46:10; Ezk 7:10; 13:5; 30:3; Jl 1:15; 2:1, 11; 3:4; 4:14; Am 5:18-20; Ob 15; Zph 1:7, 8, 14-18; 2:2, 3; Zch 14:1; Ml 4:5) (Von Rad 1965:119).

yourselves just as Jesus is pure (**agnizei eauton, kaqw;" ekeino" abno' ejstin**, 3:3) and to live through love just as Jesus did (**ej toutw/ teteleiwtai hj agaph meqA hmwn ... kaqw;" ekeino' ejstin**, 4:17). All three exhortations are associated with Jesus, who is the Son of God and the personification of 'divine life' (1:2). On the day of judgment, faith in him as the Son of God through whom God became incarnate, and the example of his earthly life to which believers have to conform, will be the measuring stick (**kaqw;" ekeino' ejstin**) according to which people will be judged. Because he and God are both righteous (2:1; 1:9 and 2:29) his judgment will be fair. According to the Elder, in this present eschatological time, this *imitatio Christi* is possible only in terms of **koinwnia** among believers mutually and believers corporately with God within the family of God (*familia Dei*)¹⁹.

5 PROGRESSIVELY REALIZED ESCHATOLOGY AS KOINWNIA IN THE *FAMILIA DEI*

The new life and **koinwnia** in Christ, which believers experience corporately, are described by the Elder within the paradigm of the *familia Dei*. The motive for this is that in the ancient Mediterranean world, society consisted of groups. Being part of a group was important²⁰. The in-group of the Johannine community, and how the common life was lived within that group, were what mattered to the Elder, and this is the focus of his doctrine and ethics (cf. Botha 2005:395-6). By reminding his adherents of their fictive kinship, of their common identity (**ajdel foiv**[2:9, 10; 3:10, 12bis, 13, 15, 17; 4:20bis, 21; 5:16], **ajj I hl ou~** [1:7; 3:11, 14, 16, 23; 4:7, 11, 12; 2 John 5]) and the values, conduct and doctrine that set them apart from other groups (e.g. the deceivers) in their society, the Elder

19 See Van der Watt (1999:491-511) and Van der Merwe (2006) for a more thorough discussion on **koinwnia** in the *familia Dei*.

20 Malina (1982, 1986, 1993; 1996:64; also Esler 2000:147; Robbins 1996:101) points out how important group identity, real kinship and fictive kinship relations were in the first-century Mediterranean world – it fully determined the identities of individuals. Since they were group oriented, they were socially minded, attuned to the values, attitudes and beliefs of their in-groups. Because these people were strongly embedded in a group, their behaviour was controlled by strong social inhibitions along with a general lack of personal inhibition.

entrenches their identity as a group and continues to regulate behaviour in this group.

To this end, the Elder uses this most intimate social phenomenon in the ancient world, namely ‘the family’²¹ (Van der Watt 1999:494), to describe the existential reality of being and living as Christians in such a group. Within the boundaries of this family God’s children have to live as Jesus did, first and foremost to experience the presence of God, his life, and his salvation ‘now’ (1:3, 6, 7) and, secondly, to prepare themselves for the *parousia* of Christ (2:28; 3:3). According to the Elder, this can be achieved only through **koinwnia** in the family. Therefore, the Elder introduces the noun **koinwnia**²² as a significant theological term which occurs twice in the *proemium* (1:3bis) and twice in the rest of Chapter 1 (1:6, 7) to create a chiasmic pattern. The function of the chiasmic structure is to emphasize the interrelatedness and interdependency of the **koinwnia** among believers and their corporate fellowship with God²³. The one kind of **koinwnia** demands and constitutes the

21 In the *New Testament*, Jesus groups are described from a strongly ‘group-embedded, collectivistic perspective,’ perceiving themselves as forming ‘the house-hold of God’ (*familia Dei*). Sandnes (1997:156) points out ‘that in the family terms of the New Testament, old and new structures come together. There is a convergence of household and brotherhood structures. The New Testament bears evidence of the process by which new structures emerged from within the household structures. What we see in the New Testament is not an egalitarian community that is being replaced by patriarchal structures; the brotherhood-like nature of the Christian fellowship is in the making, embedded in household structures’.

22 Within scholarship two distinct and disparate views have developed concerning the message of 1 John. They have arisen as a consequence of two variant perceptions of the purpose of the epistle. The one comprises ‘salvation’ (5:13, **thn zwhn thn aiwnion**) and the other ‘fellowship’ (1:3, **koinwnian**) (see Derickson 1993:89-105; cf. also Smalley 1984; Kenney 2000a). In fact, they complement one another. Both these themes are mentioned in the prologue to 1 John, where the Elder gives, as we may expect, a synopsis of his principal motifs.

23 This is indicated by all the references to **ton adel fon autou**, **ajlhoulou-**, plural personal pronouns, and verbs in plural. Although the formulas of immanence refer primarily to fellowship with God, fellowship with one another is also implied.

other²⁴. Both these forms of **koinwnia**, which reflect, influence and constitute each other, occur throughout the epistle. It describes existence in the *familia Dei* during the **ejscaton**. Jesus used parables to describe the manifestation of the Kingdom of God. In the same way the Elder uses ‘family metaphoric’ to describe the manifestation of the **ejscaton** in 1 John. Hence, ‘family metaphoric’ constitutes the setting within which the eschatology of 1 John has to be understood, and **koinwnia** in the family denotes the nature of the eschatology.

5.1 KOINWNIA constituted through birth into the *Familia Dei*

1 John, like the Gospel (Jn 3:3), speaks of entry into the eschatological family of God as a new birth, being begotten by God, having the seed of God implanted in his child’s inner being (2:29; 3:9; 4:7; 5:1, 4, 18). Here the Elder uses language commonly used when speaking of family life to express the Christian’s new eschatological existence. Faith that Jesus is the Christ (5:1) and love for one another (4:7) provide proof of such a birth (5:1).

Used metaphorically, the verb **gennaw** (born) serves to indicate a relationship that is comparable to a family relationship, i.e. that between a father and his child. Through their rebirth people enter into a new relationship; they already become God’s children (3:1, 2, 10; 5:2). However, in the new birth and the implanting of the divine seed, the Elder clearly sees something more than a new

24 According to Danker (2000:552), the Greek word **koinwnia** lexicographically means ‘close association involving mutual interests and sharing, *association, communion, fellowship, close relationship*’. The semantic meaning, according to Louw and Nida (1988:446), relates to Danker’s definition: ‘an association involving close mutual relations and involvement – “close association, fellowship”’.

Founded on the above related definitions and based on the adjective meaning ‘common’ (**koinov**), the noun **koinwnia** then denotes the active participation or sharing in what one has in common with others: doing something together or sharing something (Haas, De Jonge & Swellengrebel 1972:27). The nature of what is mutually shared moulds the character of the group. In this context it refers to the ‘new life’ (cf. 1:1, 2; 2:25; 5:11-13) that believers share with Christ (and God) and with one another. This ‘new life’ in Christ creates and stimulates the desire for such fellowship and calls not for isolation, but for *active participation with other believers in this ‘new life’*.

relationship. It means, according to Ladd (1998:664), that a new dynamic, a new power, has entered the human personality, which is confirmed by a change of conduct (3:9; 4:7; cf. 5:18). A child of God has found a new orientation of his/her will – to ‘walk just as he walked’ (2:6) or to live just as Jesus lived.

5.2 KOINWNIA as *Imitatio Christi*: ‘Ought to walk just as he walked’ (2:6)

According to the Elder, Christ, the Son of God, is the template for the conduct of believers. This is probably what the Elder had in mind in his two ‘ought to’ (**ojfeilei**, 2:6; 3:16) references in relation to Christ. Through their active participation or sharing in the way Jesus lived they have a ‘common’ (**koinov**) ground which not only moulds the character of the children of God, but also constitutes the **koinwnia** in the family.

Because believers are now part of the *familia Dei*, they have to act according to their status and knowledge²⁵, which must relate to the social conduct (rules and values) of the family into which they were born. This conduct in the family has been determined by the character of the Father and was embodied in the conduct of Jesus, as described in the following four texts in which the phrase **kaqw**;²⁶ **ekeinov**²⁷ **ejstin** occurs. These four texts can be compared as follows:

25 See 1 Jn 1:6, 7; 2:3-5, 9-10; 3:16; 4:11; 2 Jn 6, 9; cf. also 2:29; 3:6, 9-10, 18; 4:7.

26 This **kaqw**- concept focuses, according to the Fourth Gospel, on the following basic aspects concerning the *imitatio Christi*: dependence ([5:19 – 15:5]; 6:57; 15:15; [12:49; 14:10 – 17:8]); mission (13:20; 17:18; 20:21); knowledge (10:14,15); love in obedience ([15:9; 15:10; 13:34f; cf. 15:12]; [5:20 – 14:12]; 17:23); unity (14:10f; 14:20; [14:10 – 15:4]; 10:30; 17:11,21-23); glory (15:8; 17:1-5; 22-24); obedience of Jesus’ commands (15:10) and life (6:57); also 1 Corinthians 11:1. See Van der Merwe (2001:131-148) on *Imitatio Christi in the Fourth Gospel*.

27 Commentators, almost without exception, refer the demonstrative pronoun (**ekeinov**) to Christ. This is suggested by the parallel passages (2:6; 3:3, 7), which use a similar comparative construction to refer to Christ as example. In these passages the use of the present tense of the verb **ejstin** is intended to show that the model existence of Christ transcends time and space and is meant to be pertinent for the community in all ages (Strecker 1996:166).

2:6 ol legwn ejn aujt w/menein o jfeilei kaqw;" ekeino" *periepathsen* kai; aujt o'
»out w''¼

peripatein.

3:3 ... aujt w/agnizei eauton, kaqw;" ekeino" *agnoi'* ejstin.

3:7 dikaioi' ejstin, kaqw;" ekeino" *dikaioi'* ejstin:

4:17 ... teteleiwtai hlagaph meqf hmwñ, ... , oti kaqw;" ekeinoi' ejstin kai; hmei"
ejsmen ejn /

tw/kosmw toutw/

This characterization of Jesus closely relates to the characterization of the Father in 1 John. It is to these qualities in Jesus' life that believers must conform²⁸ to experience the **koinwnia** in the *familia Dei* 'now', and in order to prepare them for the *parousia* and the day of judgment.

5.2.1 Imitatio Christi: to be pure as Jesus is pure (3:3). In 1:5 God is depicted as the light (ol qeo;- fw~ ejstin) in whom there is no darkness. In Jesus there is also no sin (3:5). Therefore, the same must be true of God's children. This implies that they must 'walk in the light' as Jesus 'walked in the *light*' and 'purify themselves, just as he is pure' (3:3)²⁹.

5.2.2 Imitatio Christi: to be righteous as Jesus is righteous (3:7). God (1:9; 2:29)³⁰ and Jesus (2:1; 3:7) are both depicted as being 'righteous' ([ol qeo;-] dikaioi' ejstin, 1:9; 2:29; **ihson Criston**

The community's task will be to present itself in the world in the same way as Jesus did.

28 In the future eschatological texts the encouragement to imitate Christ closely relates to probably the three most important forms of conduct expected from God's children: to abide in Christ (2:28); to purify themselves, just as he is pure (3:3, do not sin); to love one another (4:17, 18).

29 The verb **agnizei** and the noun **agnoi'** can be translated as 'pure' or 'holy' and is used in a cultic environment (Danker 2000:13; cf. also Painter 2002:222). The present tense (**agnizei**) seems to imply an ongoing process of purification (Painter 2002:222). Such an interpretation relates to abstention from sinful deeds, and to confession and forgiveness.

30 Scholars are divided regarding the question whether the verb **ejstin** refers to God or to Jesus. See Brown (1982:382) for a discussion on the different opinions. For the purpose of this article Painter's point of view (2002:214f) is accepted. His arguments that 'God' is implied are convincing.

dikaion, 2:1). Jesus has shown that righteousness is a quality of God (2:1). Therefore, the children of God are called righteous when they do what is right. People are known by their deeds³¹. Only through faith in Jesus (5:1), through birth from God (2:29; 5:1), will a person be able to follow the example of Jesus. Such behaviour is nurtured by the familial bond (Van der Watt 1999:506).

5.2.3 Imitatio Christi: to love as Jesus loved (3:17). In 4:8 and 16 God is depicted as love (**olqeo; agaph eġstin**). According to 3:16, Jesus shows what *love* is by laying down his life for humankind (3:16; cf. also 4:9, 10, 14). Therefore, believers ‘ought to’ lay down their lives for one another (3:17, **kai; hmei" oġfeilonen uġer twn aġel fwn ta;" yuca;" qeinai**). In this way the love of Christ (and God; cf. 4:9-14) will be continued through believers into the lives of other believers. Jesus acts in love (3:16). Believers are exhorted to love (3:16; 4:12). Thus the *familia Dei* is a family of love, the sphere where God’s love is communicated, shared and experienced.

5.2.4 Imitatio Christi: ‘ought to walk just as Jesus walked’ (2:6). The above three statements are actually an explanation of this statement. Reciprocally they converge in this statement. It is frequently attested in the New Testament tradition that the exemplar of Jesus must lead to *imitation*³². The indicative of the Jesus event **oġfeilein** (‘ought to’) effects the imperative of Christian life (cf. 1 John 4:11; 5:12-13)³³. In comparing Christian behaviour with that of

31 One is what one does. ‘Righteousness,’ metaphorically speaking, is to do what is right in God’s eyes (**ol poiwn thn dikaiosunhn dikaiot' eġstin, kaqw;" ekeino" dikaiot' eġstin**, 3:7); to live according to God’s will. When it is said that God is righteous, it serves to express that God is always doing what is in accordance to his own will, which is good and to be merciful towards humankind (Haas 1972:38). To live in righteousness is to do what God expects one to do.

32 Cf. 2 Cor 5:15; Phlp 2:5-11; 1 Tm 6:12-13; 1 Pt 2:21-24; Heb 13:13-14. Also see Schnackenburg (1992:182). The most important ancient rhetorical handbooks that discuss the use of examples (**paradeigmata**, *exempla*) as a rhetorical device are Aristotle’s *Rhetoric*, Quintilian’s *Institutio Oratoria*, and two anonymous treatises, *Rhetorica ad Alexandrum* and *Rhetorica ad Herennium*. A lengthy discussion of what each of these rhetoricians says regarding *exempla* has already been done by Cosby (1988:93ff).

33 The verb **oġfeilein** with an ethical obligation also occurs in 1 Jn 2:6; 4:11; 3 Jn 8; Jn 13:14.

Jesus, part of the Elder's rhetoric is to motivate God's children to live in the *familia Dei* 'now' as Jesus did.

5.3 KOINWNIA explained through formulae of immanence

As in 2:6, also in 2:27, 28, the Elder exhorts his adherents to 'abide in' Jesus (**menete ejn aujtw**). This is one of the formulae of immanence (*Immanenzformeln*, Schnackenburg 1992:63-69)³⁴ used by him to articulate the character of **koinwnia** from various perspectives³⁵. These formulae explain the qualitative lifestyle of the children of God in the *familia Dei*. It also makes known to the children of God what the consummate future holds. This will obviously strengthen their **koinwnia** with the other members in the family and progressively prepare them for the future consummation.

All these closely related formulae of immanence show the central significance of this concept (**koinwnia**) in 1 John, which has a connection with other leading concepts, especially that of 'children of God' (3:1-3), which has strong ethical implications (cf. Lieu 1991:42). By using these formulae the Elder encourages his adherents to set their relationship (**koinwnia**) with God right. The child of God can only make these claims of immanence when they are justifiably matched by a life of obedience and love (2:5f) (cf. Lieu 1991:41f). Therefore, they are exhorted by the Elder to live according to their immanency. Through the existential guidance of Jesus and the spiritual guidance of the Spirit³⁶, the believer, as a

34 Cf. also Lieu (1991:31-48); Strecker (1996:44).

35 The phrase 'being (**eihai ejn**, 2:5; cf. also 5:20) in God' semantically relates to 'abide (**menein ejn**) in God' (they are parallel in 2:5f; cf. also 2:24; 3:24; 4:13, 15, 16). The same applies in the case of 'having' (**epei**) the Father or the Son (2:23; 5:12; 2 Jn 9). In 1 John, abiding is a reciprocal experience and a uniquely Johannine expression of personal fellowship. When the children of God obey his commands or live in love, they abide in God as God abides in them (3:24; 4:12-16). Methodologically, within this purview, the formulae of immanence should also include 'abiding' in other entities which are closely connected with God, such as: 'truth' (1:8; 2:4; 2 Jn 2); 'his word' (1:19; 2:14; cf. 2:24; 5:10); his 'anointing' (2:27); 'his seed' (3:9); 'eternal life' (3:15); and 'love' (4:12; cf. 2:5; 3:17); the Spirit (3:24; 4:13); God Himself (3:24bis) abiding in the believer and reciprocally the abiding of the believer in the Son (2:6, 24, 28; 3:5, 24). Mutual abiding is referred to in 4:13, 15, 16 and 2 Jn 9.

36 On the role of the Spirit in this regard, see Jn 14:15-19; 15:26-27; 16:5-16; 1 Jn 2:20, 27; 3:24.

child of God, finds his/her own way to please Him (3:22) (cf. Van der Watt 1999:505).

5.4 KOINWNIA accomplished through the spirit of God

The eschatology in 1 John is surely the result of the Johannine community's convictions regarding the quality of Christian experience and fellowship. One of these convictions involves the presence of the Spirit of God in the *familia Dei*. Because the Elder also attached such great value to the presence of the Spirit in this community's fellowship and experience, they could declare that the future blessings are already present. This new eschatological existence of God's children can be experienced in a concrete way by the Holy Spirit, who carries out the redemptive work of the Father and the Son (2:20). The Spirit seems associated with the divine presence that results in the new life of the believer (4:13; 3:24). Through the Spirit the Father guides and educates his children (2:27) in the *familia Dei* to experience his divine life 'now', but also to prepare them for his future revelation³⁷. The Spirit becomes the guiding influence in the lives of God's children (2:20-7; 5:7), influencing their conduct and sustaining the family's **koinwnia**.

The role of the Spirit in 1 John appears to relate in one way or another to knowledge or knowing (Thomas 2004:13). In this way the Spirit is linked with the revelation of God. Eternity and history touched in the past at the incarnation of God in Jesus. They may touch again in the future as God brings history to its climactic conclusion. But, for the present, eternity and history are linked. It has been realised through the Spirit. Eternity is now (Kysar 1993:109-112). Through the Spirit it has been realized.

A question that arises is: How then, according to the Elder, should 'realized eschatology' be understood in relation to 'future eschatology'?

37 Other functions of the Spirit are those of teacher (2:27), empowerer (3:24 in the context of obedience; 4:13, in the context of love), confessor (4:2) and witness (5:7f) (cf. Kenney 2000a:47). The Spirit will give God's children knowledge (2:20). The Spirit witnesses to the truth (5:6a) and will guide God's children in the truth (5:6; see also Von Wahlde 1990:126ff).

6 FUTURE ESCHATOLOGY

The achievement of the actualization of ‘divine life’ and **koinwniā** in the *familia Dei* requires a future-eschatological goal. The inclusion of the certainty of having ‘boldness in the day of judgment’ (2:28; 4:17) as well as ‘the experience of the consummation of salvation’ (3:2) are two reasons given by the Elder in this regard. These two eschatological goals will now be discussed.

6.1 To have boldness and not be put to shame at the *Parousia*

According to the Elder, the children of God *can have* boldness (**scwmen parrhsian**) and *not be put* to shame at the *parousia* of Christ, which will be a ‘day of judgment’³⁸. ‘Boldness’ (**parrhsian**), as mentioned in 2:28³⁹ and in 4:17, refers to the emotional experience of believers as they approach the day of judgment, that is, the assurance of a good conscience, fearlessness and confidence, when standing before the judge (Schnackenburg 1992:223). This can only happen when the children of God ‘have lived as Jesus lived’ (2:6, 28; 3:3, 7; 4:17)⁴⁰.

In 4:18 the Elder adds a new perspective, namely fear (**fobo**), to his explanation of the boldness-concept. He introduces ‘fear’ as the opposite of ‘boldness’. He links these concepts when he states that ‘perfect love’ among God’s children not only constitutes boldness, but also casts out fear.

38 See Borg & Wright (2000:189ff) for a different understanding of *parousia*.

39 In 2:28 the phrase ‘and not be put to shame before him’ (**kai; mh; aijscunqwmēn apf autou**) is added in conjunction with 4:17. Scholars differ on the interpretation of the verb **aijscunqwmēn**. A passive reflects a legal situation where one is disgraced or rejected (Schnackenburg 192:153; Painter 2002:213). The implication is that to be shamed by Jesus is to be sent from his presence (Painter 2002:213). Brown (1982:381; Haas 1972:74; cf. Strecker 1996:81) favors the middle which carries more of the psychological aspect of the individual’s feeling of shame. According to the overall radical teaching of 1 John regarding living in the light, in righteousness and in love, the passive understanding of the verb is more acceptable.

40 The two statements **ejn autw/ menein** (2:6) and **menete ejn autw/** (2:28) form a reversed parallelism. This helps to conclude that the latter parts of these texts relate to one another; if God’s children imitate the life of Christ, then they will have boldness and not be put to shame at the *parousia*.

The Elder speaks of fear, without the article⁴¹, in general terms to relate ‘fear’⁴² to ‘love’. The phrase **teleia agaph** (perfect love) corresponds to the phrase **teteleiwtaï en th/agaph/** (perfection in love) and places the emphasis on this attribute. When God’s children attain this state of love, which results from unbroken fellowship with God, they will have overcome all fear and will have achieved perfect confidence (Schnackenburg 1992:224f).

Explaining this antithesis, the Elder tries to lead his adherents to a total commitment as befits the children of God. This commitment shows itself in ‘imitating Christ’ which results in perfect love⁴³ and abiding in Christ (2:28; cf. 4:16-18). The Elder never threatens them with the fear of punishment or eternal damnation. The only disastrous danger is that they may be cut off from Christ and God. That would be the most dreadful form of judgment because it would exclude them from the realm of God (cf. John 3:18, 36; 5:24; 8:24; 15:6; 1 John 3:14; also see footnote 38).

Hence, in the eschatology of 1 John, the teaching on love is central. Abiding in love is more than a condition for divine indwelling – by loving, the believer experiences God’s indwelling (4:16). Love reaches perfection in the act of abiding in each other, which brings about a mutual bond between God and his children (4:17a; also Strecker 1996:167), and when it abandons fear. What is

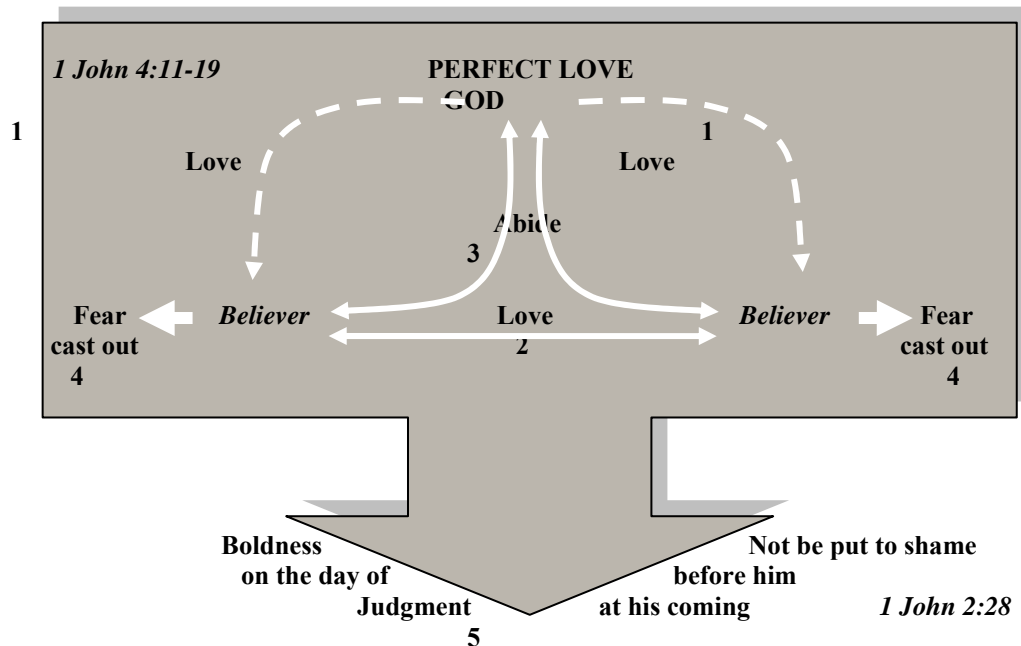
41 The noun **fobo**" is used with the definite article (**ton fobon, oti ol fobo**") in the rest of verse 18. Here it refers to the situation in the community.

42 The antithetical reality of love and fear is also evident in the sense that fear is associated with **kolasin** (punishment, 4:18). In Hellenism it takes on the meaning of ‘punishment’ and later becomes a technical term for ‘eternal punishment’, to be imposed at the final judgment. However, it can also be understood as a punishment already effective in the present (Strecker 1996:167f).

43 According to Strecker (1996:163) the ‘perfection of love’ is achieved when the exchange between the divine and human lovers takes place; when they interpenetrate. Johnson (1993:112) understands the perfection of love as ‘when it realizes its objective in the believing community, and that aim is the full assurance that does not doubt acceptance and communion with God’. Painter (2002:281) sees ‘perfect love’ when God’s love has been known / recognized and believed / accepted (4:16a). According to Brown (1982:527), this love emanating from God reaches perfection when it produces children in whom God dwells. These definitions are the same in content, though different in formulation.

at stake here is love, as a divine attribute, expressing itself to perfection in giving believers confidence in the future⁴⁴. It should be clear that, since love is able to maintain believers' present fellowship with God, it also has the capacity to keep alive their hope for the future (Schnackenburg 1992:222).

The following diagram helps us to understand what 1 John 4:11-19 says about how love can be perfected.



Perfect love is constituted when (1) God loves his children; (2) they love one another; (3) if they love one another then God will abide in them and they will abide in God; (4) this will cast out fear; (5) then they will have boldness on the day of judgment and will not be put to shame before him at his coming.

But the Elder also points out that at the *parousia*, (2:28; 3:2) the children of God, who lived as Jesus lived (3:3), 'will be like him, for we will see him as he is' (3:2, *ὁμοιοι αυτω/ εjsomeqa, οti οjyomeqa αυτον kaqw' ejstin*). This will now be explained.

6.2 We will be like Him, for we will see Him as He is

Future eschatology in 1 John is closely related to realized eschatology. In fact, they form a continuum. Future eschatology is described as a culmination of the present fellowship in the *familia*

44 See Schnackenburg (1992:222f) for a more detailed explanation of the meaning of love.

Dei – then the children of God, metaphorically speaking, will go into the house of their Father (John 14:1-3); they ‘will be like him, for we (they) will see him as he is’ (3:2b).

Through this phrase (3:2b) the Elder gives the reader a glimpse of the future life of God’s children. Windisch (1951:120) interprets it as an augmentation of 2:28, which corresponds to the apocalyptic notion of a future period of time, of existence after Christ’s *parousia*⁴⁵. The full revelation of the character of God’s children lies beyond history (3:2, ‘what we shall become has not yet been disclosed’). It is clear that the ‘already’ of the existence of God’s children is in need of enhancement by the ‘not yet’; it is reserved for the eschatological ‘then’ (**tote**; cf. 1 Cor 13:10-12; Rom 6:1-14). They are already separated from the world; they are living in a state of faith and **koinwnia**, and not of seeing (2 Cor 5:7). It is only at the *parousia* (**ejan fanerwqh**) that their future will become clear (Strecker 1996:88). This will lead to a greater crescendo, showing that salvation history is not just an external framework for his thought, but a temporal aspect (‘now’ – ‘not yet’). The prospect of future consummation opened up by the *parousia* (2:28) reveals a reality that has hitherto been invisible (**ejfanerwqh**) (Schnackenburg 1992:157)⁴⁶.

Although there is some uncertainty with regard to the nature of the future existence of believers as children of God, there are also aspects of the future of which they are certain. This certainty is stated in the verb ‘we know’ (**oidamen**) and underscores the knowledge the readers have as a result of the anointing they received (2:20) and their knowledge of the truth (2:21). Here their knowledge

45 Here Strecker (1996:88) distinguishes between the future point of the *parousia* and the time of salvation introduced by it. According to him, this is similar to 1 Cor 15:23-28, according to which the reign of Christ, when it comes, will occupy the time between the *parousia* and the ultimate **telo-**. Such a distinction in time is also recognizable in Col 3:4.

46 According to Schnackenburg (1992:157), the resurrection is presumed here, otherwise the verb **ejfanerwqh** would be hardly intelligible. The Elder probably has no interest in the resurrection of the body, or else he deliberately suppresses it. He avoids all the problems concerning the intermediate state which figured so prominently in Jewish apocalyptic. He is concerned only with the glory of the children of God, which at present is hidden but will be revealed later.

focuses on three specific points: ‘he will appear; we shall see him as he really is; we shall be like him’ (cf. Stott 1964:119)⁴⁷. First, the children of God know that Jesus will be manifested. Second, Jesus’ *parousia* will bring along with it a transformation of God’s children, resulting in their being like Christ/God⁴⁸. This infers that their future existence will be of a different order and on a different level than that currently known. Third, this transformation into his likeness is evoked in and by the radical transforming moment when ‘we shall see him just as he is’ (Thomas 2004:151).

The *second certainty* of which the Elder assures his adherents, is that, at the moment of Jesus’ final ‘appearing’, the children of God will be revealed as being ‘like him.’ Although the personal pronoun **aujtw/** does not clearly indicate to whom it refers (God or Christ), in this article, will regard it as referring to God⁴⁹. Then the eschatological escalation and full realization of the new status of God’s children and their **koinwnia** will consist in their being like God. Strecker (1996:89) points out that the ultimate hope of God’s children is to become ‘like God’ (**o(moioi aujtw/ ejsomeqa)**). Dodd

47 This interpretation depends on taking **ejan fanerwqh/** (when he appears) as a personal reference to the *parousia* of Jesus; and the context seems to demand this.

48 Scholars are divided as to whetherwhom the personal pronouns **aujtw/** and **aujton** refer to God or Jesus. Schnackenburg (1992:158), Strecker (1996:88), Grayston (1984:101), Painter (2002:221) see it as referring to God, while Johnson (1993:68) see it as referring to Jesus. Thomas (2004:151f) interprets it as referring to both God and Jesus.

49 Although the origin of the idea of ‘seeing God’ in all his fullness (**kaqw’ ejstin**, ‘as he really is’), and so becoming ‘like him’, has been located in Hellenistic mysticism of a gnostic variety (Dodd 1953:71), the Elder probably gleaned his knowledge from the traditional eschatology of the early church, as in 5:20 (cf. **oipate**, 3:5, 15; **oipamen**, 5:15) (Schnackenburg 1992:159; Strecker 1996:88). If so, John may be using this concept in a Christianized way to refute the unwarranted speculations of the heretics about the means (intellectual ‘knowledge’) by which a *visio Dei* (vision of God) may be attained. However, the possibility that the faithful will ‘see God’ is clearly present in the OT (cf. Ps 11:7; 17:15; cf. 42:1–5); and there is no reason why Judaism should not have provided the Elder with a primary background for his use of this motif (see Schnackenburg 1992:171–74). An even more immediate setting would have been the Fourth Gospel itself, and in particular the farewell discourse (Jn 17:24). For the vision of God and Christ elsewhere in the NT see 2 Cor 5:7; Heb 12:14; 1 Pt 1:8; Rv 1:7; also cf. Mt 5:8; Rv 22:4.

(1953:71) states that the Elder's 'serene certainty that we shall see our Lord and be like Him, is the model for all our thinking about the life to come'. But it would be better not to interpret **ομοιοι αυτω/εjsomeqa** (we will be like him) as 'equality' to God. The likeness to God (cf. John 5:18, 'making himself equal with God'; Philippians 2:7, 'equality with God') is never promised to believers in the New Testament. Yet, according to certain rabbinic phrases (see Volz 1934:395 for more information), it seems as if the eschatological restoration of life in paradise anticipates an even greater proximity to God, a closer assimilation of human nature to the divine, than was originally the case. The rabbis had no intention of placing human beings at the same level as God, not even in the future Garden of Eden. These Jewish sayings are nowhere near the type of deification taken so seriously by pagan syncretism, according to which human beings actually become God (Volz 1934:395)⁵⁰. Here, according to Reitzenstein (1966:235-243; also Bousset 1970:166, 431f) a pantheistic conception of the deity is presumed. This has always been denied in the Old Testament and Judaism, as well as in Christianity, which is rooted in the Old Testament (cf. Schnackenburg 1992:158).

This implies that, despite the bold *Immanenzformeln* (Schnackenburg 1992:63-69; cf. also Lieu 1991:31-48; Strecker 1996:44) or teaching on the Spirit or **koinwnia** about unity with God, Johannine theology nowhere teaches a mystical identity between God and humanity. After the *parousia* the children of God shall see Him. They will experience a fellowship that is different from what they are experiencing 'now'. Although the language in 1 John is similar to that of the Hellenistic mysteries or Gnosticism with their idea of deification, the meaning is radically different. The clause **ομοιοι αυτω/εjsomeqa** should not be translated as 'to be equal to God'. While it does express a certain quality of fellowship, the ultimate state of being of his children remains hidden in this world and will only become visible at the *parousia*, when all that is hidden now will be brought to light.

According to the Elder, *the third certainty*, which is the basis of this likeness to God and which will then be unveiled, lies in his

50 See Schnackenburg (1992:158) about references from 'pagan syncretism.'

being seen by his children (**ojomeqa aujton kaqw' ejstin**). The relationship between the **ofoioi** and **ofti** clauses is that of cause and effect: the future encounter with God in the *parousia* will include 'seeing God', and its consequence will be 'likeness to God.' Until 'now' nobody has seen God (4:12, 20; cf. 3:6; John 1:18). The children of God will only 'see Him as He is' when Jesus is revealed (**ojomeqa aujton kaqw' ejstin**). This idea of seeing God is found in both Judaism (Michaelis 1967:339; Volz 1934:358) and Christianity (Matt 5:8; 1 Cor 13:12; 2 Cor 5:7; Rev 22:4). According to 1 John 3:3 it is part of the eschatological hope (**el pida**)⁵¹. In agreement with Schnackenburg (1992:159) it can be said that the deeper reason for transformation, from seeing God (**ofti ojomeqa aujton kaqw' ejstin**) to being like Him (**ofoioi aujtw/ejsomeqa**), is not mentioned by the Elder.

The question is why the Elder thought that to see him would be to be like him. According to Painter (2002:221), there 'may be some thought that the object of vision has a transforming effect on the visionary.' What does seem clear here is that, although a transformation has already taken place (**nuh tekna qeou ejsmen**, 3:2), the *parousia* brings about more change. Hence, if God's children do not know what they will be, but they will be like him, there must be something about Him that they do not know. Nevertheless, the point the Elder tries to make is to affirm that, in addition to all the previous transformation, further transformation will take place at the *parousia* (Painter 2002:221).

If the *parousia* and the seeing of God are to be life-transforming, so is the interim before the coming. The Christian community defines itself on the basis of hope to distinguish it from the world. Hope is based on their knowledge of likeness to God (**ofoioi aujtw/ ejsomeqa**) and seeing God (**ojomeqa aujton kaqw' ejstin**), which together sum up the entire content of Christian hope (3:3). It is only here in the *corpus Johanneum* where hope is mentioned. Here hope is directed towards God ('in Him'), on

51 In the Johannine literature a polemic occurs against any direct seeing of God on earth (Jn 1:18; 5:37; 6:46; 14:8f; 1 Jn 4:12). On earth the children of God see the Father only in the Son (Jn 14:9; 12:45). The addition of 'as he is' (**kaqw' ejstin**) promises the unveiled sight of God ('face to face', 1 Cor 13:12) only at the eschatological consummation (see Schnackenburg 1992:160).

the basis of fellowship with Him, which urges believers to moral action; those who have this hope purify⁵² themselves even as (**kaqw'**) Jesus is pure (Painter 2002:222).

Thus the future perspective (3:2) implies a present obligation. Although the verb **agnizei** has a cultic background, it is to be understood ethically as elsewhere in the New Testament (Jas 4:8; 1 Pet 1:22). The demand that believers 'purify themselves' comprises that they are to 'keep themselves from sin'. 'Being incapable of sin' represents the eschatological reality (Strecker 1996:41, 42, 104; Schnackenburg 1992:98). The ethical and parenetic character is here understood through the phrase 'as he is' (**kaqw' eġtin**). The **kaqw'** clause has a comparative function. This phrase, like 2:6 (cf. also 2:29), sets Christ before God's children as the supreme example (Strecker 1996:92)⁵³.

7 CONCLUSION

The schism that occurred in the Johannine community has been reinterpreted by the Elder as the coming of the antichrist(s) which marks the arrival of this 'last hour', describing an eschatological moment. In order to warn the community of the dangers of this false teaching, to correct it and to encourage those who remained to continue in their faithfulness, he warned them that the *parousia* would be a day of judgment.

By using the concept, 'family,' as metaphor for the Christian life in relation with God, the Elder explains his eschatological notion. If the eschatology in 1 John were to be described in terms of life (1:2; 5:11-13) and **koinwnia** (1:3bis, 6, 7) within the *familia Dei*, it would be the same as labelling it as 'a situation which is constantly realising itself'. As the children of God move into new situations they must 'live' and continually experience **koinwnia** to realize their eschatological existence. That is why believers can have life now and experience an eschatological existence. While they are still in this world, and in combat with the antichrists (false prophets), the world and sin for this entire period (hour), they must live as

52 'Purification' is originally a cultic term, meaning to withdraw oneself from the profane, to become fit for worship (cf. Ex 19:10; Nm 8:21; 19:12; 1 Chr 15:12, 14; 2 Chr 29:5, 15, 18, 34; Jn 11:55; Ac 21:24, 26; 24:18).

53 Cf. 2:6, 29; 3:7, 16; 4:17.

people who received eternal life in this world, realizing their identity here and now (cf. Van der Watt 2000:435).

But eternal life does not infer that a person will already experience eschatological fullness. According to the Elder, the children of God do not yet receive everything when they are born into God's family (receive eternal life), just as children in physical life do not receive everything life has to offer simply because they live. What is received through this spiritual birth is the capacity to live (exist) in the *familia Dei* and progressively experience the change that this family life demands and brings about. It infers that the children of God have the capacity to be in the world as part of the spiritual family (*familia Dei*) and will in future experience the qualitative fullness of this new existence, whatever it comprise. Only at the *parousia* will they finally be transformed. The members of the family are on their way, metaphorically speaking, to the house of their Father (Jn 14:1-2), where they 'will be like Him, for they will see Him as He is'.

In this sense one can speak of a *progressively realizing situation*, of being part of the *familia Dei*. In the situation in which they find themselves now, they have life and experience progressively realizing **koinwnia** within the family. Their experience of fellowship increases. It would therefore make perfect sense to call the eschatology of 1 John a *progressively realizing eschatology* (cf. Van der Watt 2000:436) *that embraces a future eschatological consummation*.

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