

Understanding ‘sin’ in the Johannine epistles

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ABSTRACT

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The author of the Johannine Epistles has a good deal to say about sin. He abhors sin, seeing it as incompatible with God’s character (οἷος ἡμῶν ἐστίν, 1:5; [οἷος ἡμῶν] δίκαιος ἐστίν, 2:29; and οἷος ἡμῶν ἀγάπη ἐστίν, 4:8) and with the status of believers as God’s children. In this article attention is given to the following relevant aspects for understanding ‘hamartiology’ in the Johannine epistles from a ‘family perspective’: (1) the ‘family of God’ metaphor is used as the setting in which the author describes his symbolic narrative; (2) a differentiation is made between sin inside and sin outside the family; (3) sin outside the family is also described in terms of reciprocals to emphasize its condemnation; (4) finally, he focuses on the ‘forgiveness of sin’. This investigation is done against the socio-religious circumstances of the Johannine community in order to understand the Elder’s ethical and doctrinal definitions of sin.

1 INTRODUCTION

Sin is not a popular topic. Despite the Christian belief in redemption through confession and repentance, many people go through life crippled by feelings of guilt. Nevertheless, in many churches and denominations, sermons often focus on sin. This article is not an endeavour to continue in this preaching tradition, but rather to promote the academic understanding of the sin concept as dealt with in the Johannine Epistles.

The author (subsequently referred to as Elder)¹ has a good deal to say about sin, as is evident from the frequent occurrence of this concept throughout these epistles. Unfortunately only fragmentary publications on ‘sin’ in these epistles exist, and only certain aspects

1 In agreement with most scholars the author of this chapter believes 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 1997:398; Culpepper 1998:251; Kenney 2000:12). Therefore, in this document, the author will be referred to as ‘the Elder’.

were investigated². *This research endeavors to depict a concise but comprehensive and holistic understanding of the 'sin' concept as it is presented in the Johannine Epistles from a family perspective (which forms the setting in which the Elder describes his symbolic narrative).*

The methodology to be followed in this paper will be to determine the setting from which the 'sin' concept has to be approached, to select all information related to sin and place it in various relevant and related categories, and to consult all the relevant texts in order to construct a profile of a specific aspect of sin so as to determine what the Elder wished to communicate to his followers. Finally, the socio-religious circumstances of the Johannine community relating to matters of ethics and doctrine will be considered and respected, since they gave rise to the writing of these epistles. This will promote an understanding of the presentation and argumentation of certain aspects, and of the choice and meaning of specific expressions. Sometimes repetition will occur due to the interrelatedness of the concepts discussed in the epistles.

To introduce this research, another methodological remark is necessary. Since there are close connections between the three Johannine epistles, we shall look at 1 John as the main source for this discussion of 'sin'. 2 and 3 John will be incorporated where applicable and necessary. Any similarities or differences between these sources will be pointed out only to the extent that it contributes to the discussion.

2 THOUGHTS ABOUT THE SOCIO-RELIGIOUS CIRCUMSTANCES³ THAT INFLUENCED THE INTERPRE-

2 See Vitrano (1987); Ward (1995); Edanad (1987) has written a chapter on the forgiveness of sin; Edwards (1996) has also written a short chapter on sin, forgiveness, judgment and eschatology. Rusam (1993) wrote a few pages on 'Sünde im ersten Johannesbrief', 'Sünde zum Tode' and 'Sündlosigkeit und Mahnungen'.

3 When writing about the hamartiology of the Johannine Epistles, one has to consider epistemological questions relating to authorship, date, purpose, central theme, and the identity of the opponents and recipients. Unfortunately, scholars greatly disagree on these matters. For the purpose of this article, these questions will not be argued. I shall present the most popular and widely accepted points of view on these issues.

TATION, UNDERSTANDING AND DEFINING OF JOHAN- NINE HAMARTIOLOGY

In his study of *'First-century Mediterranean persons'*, Malina (1996:64) came to the conclusion that these people were strongly group-embedded and collectivistic. Since they were group-oriented, they were socially minded, familiar to the values, attitudes and beliefs of their ingroup. 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. Their prevailing social institution was kinship - familialism was foremost in people's minds. In such a group recognized principles and rules (norms), fixing rites and duties of the members in relation to one another and to their common interests, existed (Robbins 1996:101).

In *the New Testament*, Jesus groups are described from this 'group-embedded, collectivistic' perspective as conceiving themselves as forming 'the household of God'. Sandnes (1997:156) pointed 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'⁴. To have a proper understanding of the family metaphors involved, it is necessary to bring together questions about what the documents say and questions about the historical and social contexts of these documents (Sandnes 1997:156).

In the symbolic narrative of *1 John*, group orientation (*koinwnia*, 1:3, 6f) constitutes the socio-structural core (Van der Watt 1999:148ff)⁵. The language used for referring to the adherents

4 This point of view is supported by Verdoodt (2002:376).

5 The understanding of the characterization of the Johannine community relates closely to Robbins' (1996:101) definition of a Corporate Group: 'A corporate group is a body with a permanent existence: a collection of people recruited on recognized principles, with common interests and rules (norms) fixing rights and duties of the members in relation to one another and to these interests'.

of the Elder is strikingly familial. In his epistle the Elder portrays the Christian life as existence in a family (the family of God), with God, the Father, as the head. These believers are *tekna qeou* (3:1-2, 10; 5:2), *gegennhmeno" ek tou qeou* (2:29; 3:9; 4:7; 5:1, 4, 18). They confess that God is their *pathr* (1:2; 2:1, 14-15, 22-24; 3:1; 2 John 4). These adherents are *adelphon* (and sisters) to each other. The elder also repeatedly addresses his flock as *tekniā* (2:1, 12, 28; 3:7), and *agaphtoiv* (2:7; 3:2, 21; 4:1, 7, 11; cf. 3 John 1, 2, 5, 11).

The existence of obedient members is totally determined by their group adherence. Therefore the community (the Elder) sees the world⁶ as irredeemably evil and believes that salvation can be obtained only by withdrawing from it (Malina 1994:85). This community provides an excellent example of how a sect may distance itself from the outside world by myth, symbolism and ideology (Esler 1994:85). If such group adherence and its corollaries are negated, the respective group structures will collapse. Therefore, those who caused the schism in the community are described by the Elder in the harshest of terms. Hence, the way the deceivers and their evil deeds are depicted in the Johannine epistles have to be understood from the perspective of the dualism of group cohesiveness (familialism) in relation to the schism they caused. For this reason the Elder describes sin and salvation (in terms of this dualism) from the perspective of familialism. The opponents of the elder are depicted as existing outside this family. They are referred to as *ek tou kosmou eisin (tekna tou diabolou)*. The Johannine community, therefore, can be regarded as introversionist in its

6 Here *o kosmos* is seen as the domain of Satan, in control of the evil one (1 Jn 5:19), see Johnson (1993:52). It does not mean 'the created universe, nor the human race as such ... but the life of human society as organized under the power of evil' (Dodd 1946:39). Haas, De Jonge & Swellengrebel (1972:57) add a personal perspective, namely, that it refers to 'all who are, or for all that is, in enmity with God and the believers (see 2:15-17; 3:1, 13; 4:4f; 5:4f, 19). Taken thus it refers to the world and the persons in it as an evil system, as a way of life that is in the power of the evil one and, therefore, is friendly to the false teachers. Then the opposition between 'world' and 'God' is parallel to that between "darkness" and "light". Brooke's (1964:47) definition combines the above perspectives: *o kosmos* refers to 'the whole system, considered in itself, apart from its Maker'. This negative perspective about *o kosmos* pictures life outside the family of God. See Haas, De Jonge & Swellengrebel (1972:56f) for other meanings of *o kosmos* in the epistles.

preoccupation with its own holiness and in its belief that salvation can be achieved only through belonging to it and believing in Jesus Christ (Esler 1994:90).

When looking into the circumstances that caused the schism, First and Second John depict a community torn apart by doctrinal and ethical differences. According to Culpepper (1998:48), the differences had precipitated a schism by the time 1 John was written. The Elder identifies the opponents as ‘deceivers’ (*planwntwn*, 2:26), ‘false prophets’ (*yeudoprofhtai*, 4:1); ‘liars’ (*yeustai*, 2:22), and ‘antichrists’ (*anticrostoi*, 2:18, 22; 4:3). These references 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). The use of the present tense of the verb *planwntwn* is significant as it emphasises the ongoing or immediate nature of the deception (cf Danker 2000:821).

The deceivers claimed a special illumination by the Spirit (2:20, 27) that imparted to them the true knowledge of God. This caused them to regard themselves as *the* children of God. This explains the elder’s strong emphasis on the knowledge of God and the way in which he and his adherents became children of God (to receive salvation) (5:1-5). He contrasts the heretics’ claim to knowledge with the knowledge that can come only from the Christian tradition (2:24).

Through this 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 realised eschatology led to a disregard for the need to continue to resist the temptation to sin. Their chief ethical error appears to have been spiritual pride, leading them to despise ordinary Christians who did not claim to have attained the same level of spiritual illumination. The elder warns his readers against claiming to be without sin (1 John 1:8-22).

This perception influenced their perception of Jesus and advocated a ‘higher’ Christology that emphasised the divinity of Christ while minimising the humanity of Jesus (1 Jn 2:19; 4:2) (Kenney 2000a:101; also Brown 1982:52; Lieu 1986:207). They

went even further by denying the reality of Jesus' suffering. A host of statements in the epistles can be pieced together in an effort to characterise the teachings of the false prophets. There are several series of statements that indicate a serious disagreement about the person of Jesus Christ (1 Jn 2:22; 4:2, 3, 15; 5:1, 5, 6, 10, 13; 2 Jn 7); Together these statements yield a list of what the author urges his readers to believe and confess: Jesus is 'the Messiah' (1:3; 2:1; cf. 2:22, 23; 5:1); he has 'come in the flesh' (1:1, 2; 2:2, 64:9, 10, 14); he is 'the Son of God' (1:3, 7; 3:8, 23; 4:9, 15; 5:5; 20); he came by 'water and blood' (5:6). In other words, they have to 'believe in' Jesus (3:23; 5:1, 5, 10, 13) and 'confess' (2:22, 23) him.

Thus it seems clear that the controversy in the Johannine Community was based on differences in the interpretation of a shared tradition (Kenney 2000b:102; Culpepper 1998:253). For this reason the Elder writes to urge his readers as follows: 'do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God' (*mh; panti; pneumatī pisteuete ajlla; dokimazete (test) ta; pneumata eijek tou qeou ejstin*, 4:1), which implies that they are to measure the charismatic utterances of all so-called prophets by the norm of the sound Christian tradition, at the centre of which is the real incarnation of Christ (4:2-3). This Christian tradition characterises the family of God.

3 THE FAMILY OF GOD

To become a member of the 'family of God' a person has to be born into it, according to the Elder. This happens through faith⁷ in Jesus Christ, the (*monogenh*) Son of God (4:15; 5:5, Jesus as Christ (2:22; 5:1), as Son (2:23), and as God incarnate (4:2; 2 John 7)). This birth is necessary, for the child of God has to take on the same life as the Father which is evident in the conduct of the family. In 1 John three definite statements are made about God's character: '*o/qeo;" fw" ejstin*' (1:5), '*[o/qeo;"] dikaio" ejstin*' (2:29) and '*o/qeo;" agaph ejstin*' (4:8) (cf. Malatesta 1978:xvff; Culpepper 1998:269).

7 Another way of expressing the same truth is to speak of *pisteuwn eij' ton uibn tou qeou* (5:10), *oleqwn ton uibn* (5:12), even as the Gospel (1:12) speaks of *e! abon aujton* (Jesus).

‘Family life’ then implies specific ethical conduct relating to these three characteristics⁸. Therefore the Elder insists upon a correspondence between internal state and external behaviour. The ‘*aggel ia*’ correlates to ‘*eñtolh*’. Gospel and commandment are but two aspects of a single revelation given in Christ (Kenney 2000b:21). Through their rebirth, believers enter into a new relationship; they 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 relationship. It means, according to Ladd (1998:664), that a new dynamic, a new power, which is confirmed by a change of conduct, has entered the human personality. A child of God has found a new orientation of his will – to do the will of God, to love (*ol qeo;” agaph eñstin*) and obey Him, to break with sin (*ol qeo;” fw” eñstin*) and to follow the path of righteousness (*[ol qeo;”] dikaiol’ eñstin*)⁹.

8 Malina argues (1996:43) that ethical systems of Israelite Yahwism, Mediterranean Christianity and Rabbinic Jewish religion have codified social, anti-introspective and non-individualistic beliefs. The values and lines of behaviour that tend to strengthen group cohesion are considered positive values and virtues. On the other hand, those values and lines of behaviour which can in any way be detrimental to group cohesion are considered negative values, vices or sins. It must be noticed that all biblical ethical inventories - whether the traditional Ten Commandments (Ex 20:2-17), or the directives on the sermon on the mount (Mt 5-7), or Paul’s catalogue of the ‘works of the flesh’ (Gl 5:19-21; see also 1 Cor 6:9-10) – are essentially concerned with the maintenance and strengthening of group cohesion. These inventories highlight dysfunctional behaviours and directly lead to inner-group antagonisms and group dissolution. As such, according to Malina, they are directed to members of the group, whether it be Israel, or the Johannine community, or Paul’s Corinthian and Galatian Christians. That is true, but according to Malina it is unacceptable that these ethical lists are not universalizing and that they are not even remotely concerned with individual spiritual development. While, it is true that it was originally meant for a nation, community or congregation, the fact that it was incorporated into the canon gave it a timeless relevance and status and has made it necessary to distinguish between peripheral and scopic authority and appropriateness – those aspects that are cultural bound and those that are timeless.

9 The obligations of the children of God in the family are spelled out in all three Johannine epistles and in each case contribute to an understanding of the behaviour of these children, which is associated with walking. 1 John 1:6 speaks of the right conduct as walking in the light, whereas 2 John 6 specifies the

In 3:11-18 a deceitful brother's (Cain's) anti-group behaviour is explained and denounced. This behaviour shows that such a person does not belong to the family, since members of the family care for (3:16f) and will certainly not harm one another. Family cohesiveness and corresponding loyalty will be manifested through 'right' behaviour towards one another (3:10). In 1:6-2:2 the elder describes the problem of violating the conventions of such a family (group). If such a wrongdoer (*amartiā*) still claims to be a member of that particular family, confession is required (1:9), so that the family relationships can be restored. The Father deals with such matters in cooperation with the *paraklhto~*, who acts on behalf of the family (2:1-2).

Thus, two aspects are spelled out, namely 'faith in Jesus Christ as the Son of God' through whom one is born into the family of God, and 'conduct,' which relates to this new status. The Elder describes the concept of sin in relation to these two aspects. 'Sinners' are seen as those outside the family of God (outside the group) and are (1) labelled according to the sins they committed at the ethical level, on account of which they are called murderers (*ajqrwpoktono*", 3:15; see also 3:12, *efaxen*) and who do not love a brother (4:20; also cf. 2:11; 3:15). At the doctrinal level they are depicted as deceivers (*planoi*, 2 Jn 7; also 1 Jn 2:26; 3:7), antichrists (*ajticristoi* 2:18, 22; 4:3; 2 Jn 8), liars (*yeusth*", 2:22) and false prophets (*yeudoprofhtai*, 4:1). (2) These sinners are also described within specific relationships: concerning the devil they are seen 'as children of the devil' (3:8, 10); in relation to God they are depicted 'as not from God' (3:10; 4:3, 6), 'do not know Him' (God) (3:1), and 'do (not) have fellowship with Him (God) (1:6); and finally they are seen as 'to be in the world' (4:5). (3) Metaphorically, in a reciprocal sense, it is said that they 'walk in the darkness, and do not know the way to go, because the darkness has brought on blindness' (2:11). (4) In probably the harshest description it is said that such a person 'does not have life' (5:12; also 3:15) and 'abides in death' (3:14). In most of these references the harsh depiction of the sinners is contrasted with the characteristics of those inside the family (group); this will be dealt with later.

commandments as the sphere of walking, and 3 John 3 identifies truth as the sphere of behaviour (Kenney 2000a:117).

4 DISTINCTION BETWEEN SIN¹⁰ INSIDE AND OUTSIDE THE FAMILY

Sin and sinlessness

Up to 1 John 3:3 the author's basic definition of sin is fairly clear, though some details remain obscure, but from 3:4 - 5:12 it becomes more complicated. The main purpose seems to be to stress the seriousness of sin. Prior to 3:4 the Elder declares to those inside the family that if they say they have no sin, they deceive themselves and make God a liar, and that the truth and God's word is not in them (1:8, 10). Therefore he has written these things that they may not sin (2:1). This implies that even inside the 'family of God', not one of God's children is already perfect and will sin no more.

But then a paradox occurs: In the second section of the letter when the Elder also refers to the children of God (3:1f) in connection with sin, he states that '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' (3:9; also 5:18), and 'No one who abides in him sins' (3:6).

The frequent problem when reading these texts is that readers take 1 John too literally, consequently the rhetorical purpose of these texts is totally neglected (cf Edwards 1996:101). Therefore, assertions like 'Those who have been born of God do not sin' (*Pa*"

10 In Greek, as in Hebrew, various terms are used when referring to 'sin'. The most common Greek word for sin is *amartiā*. Here we will concentrate on the texts where the noun *amartiā* and the verb *amartanw* are explicitly used. The noun *amartiā* occurs seventeen times in the Gospel of John (the verb *amartanw* occurs three times) and seventeen times in the much shorter letter in 1 Jn (the verb *amartanw* occurs ten times). Among the seventeen occurrences of *amartiā* in 1 John, 11 are in the singular: among these are three with the article and in a particular context (3:4 twice, 8); 7 without the article signifying sin as such (1:8; 3:5, 9; 5:16 twice, 17 twice); and one with *pash*" (1:7). The term occurs six times in the plural and with the article signifying a personal act of sin (1:9 twice; 2:2, 12; 3:5; 4:10). In these cases the context is always purification and forgiveness of sins; its use in 1:7 also belongs to this group. Clearly the problem of sin vexed the Elder's community. Most of the references to sin are in the singular, calling attention to the principle or fact of sin in human life (e.g. 1:8), rather than to individual acts of sin. A study of the three Johannine epistles reveals that the noun *amartiā* and the verb *amartanw* occur only in 1 John, and mainly in three clusters of texts (1:5-2:2; 3:1-10 and 5:14-21 - the only two other texts in 1 John where *amartiā* occur are 2:12 and 4:10).

ol gegennhmeno" ek tou qeou amartian ouj poiei; 3:9; 5:18; cf 2:29; 5:4), though grammatically statements of fact in the indicative, serve the function of exhortation. In hyperbolic language the Elder seeks to promote right belief and right conduct. He definitely does not believe that those under instruction are actually perfect; but sinlessness is what is expected of God's children. Compare Deuteronomy 18:13 'You shall be perfect with the Lord your God'; Matthew 5:48, 'Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect'¹¹ (Edwards 1996:102).

The point the Elder wants to make is that a person who is born of God cannot continue to live in sin because a new principle of life has been implanted in that person (Strecker 1996:100). There must be an obvious change in the person's conduct. When a child of God follows Christ, (s)he will break with his / her sinful past (see 1 Jn 2:29; 3:3, 7, 10; Mt 7:18; Rm 6:7, 12)¹² (Ladd 1998:663; cf Von Wahlde 1990:167ff for a thorough discussion)¹³. According to the NT, being children of God certainly makes a difference in people's attitude towards acts of obedience *versus* acts of disobedience. It involves a reorientation – an orientation towards God and an orientation away from Satan, the world and selfishness. The actions that result from such an orientation must be interpreted and evaluated in the light of that (re)orientation¹⁴.

The question that arises is, 'What then causes those who have been born of God, in who's life God's seed abides, to sin?' The

11 The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version. 1996, c1989 (Mt 5:48). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

12 Malatesta (1978:246) points out that if the elder sees sin as a refusal to accept the revelation of love, which Jesus is, and therefore the refusal to love Jesus, the Father, who sent him, and the brothers for whom he came, then not sinning means loving devotion to the person of Jesus. Right relationships with the Father and with our brothers and sisters derive from a right relationship with Jesus.

13 Porter (1997:1098) states that in the argument of the letter the reality is stated before the ideal. The reality is stated in 1:8-10 and the ideal in 3:6 and 5:18.

14 The above point of view of a particular orientation to sin is not peculiar to 1 John. It is a basic Christian doctrine which occurs throughout the NT. See Rm 6 and 8 where Paul's doctrine of sin and salvation is underlined.

answer on this question relates to how the Elder understands the nature of sin, as spelled out in these epistles.

Nature of sin

The specific terms used by the Elder for sin are *amartiā*, *ajomiān* and *ajikiā*. But *ajomiān* and *ajikiā* are not as frequently employed as *amartiā*, and when they occur they are always used in association with *amartiā*. In the Epistle, three passages in particular (1:9; 3:4 and 5:16f) serve as the key to our understanding of the Elder's depiction of the nature of sin: sin as iniquity (*ajomiān* - 3:4) and sin as unrighteousness (*ajikiā* 5:16f; cf also 1:9)¹⁵.

In the context of 3:4-10 the elder refers to *amartiā* as *ajomiā* (*h/ amartiā ejstin h/ ajomiā*) and compares the 'children of God' with the 'children of the devil'. A series of antithetical propositions occur; one group (vv 3, 6, 7, 9) refers to *ta; tekna qeou*, and the other, (vv 4, 6, 8, 10) to *ta; tekna tou diabolou*¹⁶. In 3:8 the Elder writes that 'Everyone who commits sin is a child of the devil' (*ol poiwn thn amartiān ek tou diabolou ejstin*), and antithetically in 3:6 that 'No one who abides in him sins' (*pa" ol ejh aujtw/ menwn oujc amartanei*, cf also v 5) and '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' (*Pa" ol gegennhmeno" ek tou qeou amartiān ouj poiei, oti sperma aujtu ejh aujtw/ menei, kai; ouj dunatai amartanein, oti ek tou qeou gegennhtai*, 3:9). In this passage the Elder tries to depict those in the family as not sinning while those outside the family do sin. Therefore the reference to sin in this passage as *ajomiā* refers logically and particularly to the sin committed by those outside the family, who are depicted as the 'children of the devil' (*tekna tou diabolou*).

15 Furthermore, in the LXX the terms *amartiā* and *ajomiā* are used as if they are synonymous (cf Ps 31[32]:1-2, quoted in Rm 4:7-8; Ps 50:4 [51:2]; and see Heb 10:17).

16 A parallelism can be observed between the first and the third, and between the second and the fourth propositions in each group. The immediate context and the parallelism between vv 4 and 8 therefore show that, in the opinion of the Elder, 'to be involved in *ajomiā*' is the same as 'to be influenced by the devil'. This interpretation harmonizes with other writings of the same period.

Because the meaning of *ajnomia*¹⁷ is not explained, it can be taken for granted that they would have known the reference and meaning of it. Therefore, the meaning of *ajnomia* undoubtedly relates to the circumstances and conventions of the day; all those mentioned in 1 John. This sin ‘issues from alienation and estrangement from God in Jesus Christ’ (Vitranò 1987:128)¹⁸ and relates to the ‘walk in darkness’, the absence of love, and to commit unrighteousness¹⁹.

17 See Brown (1982:399f) and Hills (1998:286-299) for a thorough discussion on *ajnomia*. Lawlessness can be defined from the immediate context as *ta: efrga tou diabolou* (3:8). The people who commit this sin are referred to as *ta: tekna tou diabolou* (3:8, 10).

18 According to the Johannine epistles, sinful acts stem from three fundamental sources, namely: (1) the Devil referred to as *o/ diabolos* (3:8, 10) and *o/ ponhros* (2:13, 14; 3:12), (2) the world, represented by those ‘from the world’ who can be depicted as *twñ planwntwn* (2:26; 2 Jn 7), *ajticristoi* (2:18, 22; 4:3), *yeudoprofhtai* (4:1), *to: pneuma th" planh"* (4:6), *o/ yeusth"* (2:22), and (3) the self, which allows us ‘to deceive ourselves’ (*ebutou;" planwmen*, 1:8), ‘love for the world or the things in the world’ (*Mh; ajgapate ton kosmon mhde; ta: eñ tw/ kosmw)* ... ‘the desire of the flesh, the desire of the eyes, the pride in riches’ (*hl epiqumia th" sarko;" kai; hl epiqumia twñ ofqalmwn kai; hl ajlazoneia tou bidu*, 2:15-17).

19 In Jewish literature (Qumran), some non-canonical early Christian writings, and the NT *ajnomian* is used in an eschatological sense. In the Jewish literature of the period around the NT era the singular *ajnomia* is used in the context of the eschatological state of rebellion of the forces of evil under Satan against God and his kingdom (cf e.g., Test-Dan 6:6; comp. 5:4; 6:1-6). Edanad (1993:71) pointed out how in the manuscripts of Qumran there is much in common with 1 John. The Hebrew equivalents of *ajnomia* (‘wl and ‘wlh), are very frequently used in this eschatological sense. He gives a brief but convincing discussion how at Qumran ‘iniquity’ characterises the reign of the Evil one in the eschatological era, the people who are under his dominion, and the spirit – the power – which works in them; in short it refers to the eschatological opposition to ‘the truth’ and rebellion against God under Belial.

Even in the NT *ajnomia* is used in this eschatological sense (cf 2 Th 2:3, 7; Mt 23:28; 24:12). Also in some of the non-canonical early Christian writings *ajnomia* is used in this manner (cf Didache 16:4, Barn 4:1; 14:5; 15:7; 18:2). Edanad (1993:72) refers to De La Potterie who says that in the writings of the time around first century C.E. *ajnomiva* has entirely lost the meaning of violation of the law, and in most of its occurrences it signifies iniquity in a diabolical sense.

In the case of the noun, *apikia*, which occurs twice (1:9; 5:17) in 1 John and is used with the adjective *pa~* and linked with the noun *amartia* in both contexts, we see a different approach. In 1:5-10 God is referred to as ‘light’ and therefore the children of God have to walk in the light if they want to experience fellowship with God and with one another. In 1:8 and 9 the Elder uses the first person plural (*eipwmen*, v 8; *ep̄n omologwmen ta; amartia hmw̄n*, v 9) to include himself and his adherents, when he refers to the fact that those inside the family can also sin. Here *amartia* is used with reference to God’s children who sin.

In 5:17 *apikia* is again used in relation to *amartia*, which is qualified by the phrase ‘*amartia ouj pro; qanaton*’. Thus also in this context it is used with reference to the sin of those inside the family. As in the case of *ajomia*, *apikia* is also not defined by the Elder which implies that his adherents would have been aware of the meaning. Because *apikia* is used to refer to the sin committed by God’s children it ‘underlines the negative aspect of sin as a declension from “rightness” (*dikaio sunh*)’ (Smalley 1984:301). Therefore, it should more particularly refer to ‘the things in the world’ (*ta; ep̄n tw/ kosmw/* 2:15) against which those inside the family are warned²⁰. In 2:16 *ta; ep̄n tw/ kosmw/* is closer defined as

Therefore Schnackenburg (like Smalley; Hills; Edanad, Haas, De Jonge & Swellengrebel) proposes an explanation according to which *ajomia* in 3:4 does not refer to an individual act of sin, but rather to a general eschatological rebellion against the kingdom of God and the Messiah, under the influence of the devil, and is therefore to be translated as ‘iniquity’ rather than ‘lawlessness’.

Hills (1998:298) made an effort to define *hl amartia estin hl ajomia* from a social perspective in the Johannine Community. He convincingly points out that the meaning of *hl amartia estin hl ajomia* doubtlessly appeals to the conventions of the day. With varying degrees of interpretive usefulness it fits all three the proposed standard readings: ‘it speaks of the seriousness of sin; it reminds the community of the severe penalty already suffered by those who have left; and, for those with the education to spot it, it describes the metaphysical (or eschatological) dimensions of human wrongdoing’. According to Hills, each of these interpretations is socially localized – each one has a place where it must have ‘made sense’ – in the present life and conduct of the community. Therefore *ajomia* should be interpreted with appropriate reference to the entire first epistle.

20 In 2:15a the Elder commands his followers (the context attests that he addresses the way of live of his followers), *Mh; ajapate ton kosmon mhde; ta;*

‘the desire of the flesh, the desire of the eyes, the pride in riches’ (*h/ epiqumiā th" sarko;" kai; h/ epiqumiā twin ofqalmwn kai; h/ ajlazoneiā tou biou*). Therefore we can conclude that the nature of sin, in the case of those inside the family, is borne from selfish desires and pride. Their sins originate from within themselves and not from the devil, because in 5:18 the Elder states that the ‘evil one’ does not touch them.

Thus the Elder distinguishes clearly between sin conducted outside and inside the family (group), further rendered as ‘sin unto death’ and ‘sin not unto death’.

‘Sin unto death’ and ‘sin not unto death’

In 5:16, 17 a thorny problem arises when the author, in the context of a recommendation to pray for the sinning brother, distinguishes between ‘sin not unto death’ (*amartiān mh; pro;" qanaton*) and ‘sin unto death’ (*amartiā pro;" qanaton*)²¹. However, the absence of the article with *amartiān mh; pro;" qanaton* and *amartiā pro;" qanaton* in vv 16f indicates that the distinction the author has in mind is not between two well-known sins, nor between two definite classes of sin²². Rather, the language of v 16, namely the adverbial use of *mh; pro;" qanaton* in the phrase *toi" amartanousin mh; pro;" qanaton* and the equivalent use of *amartiān mh; pro;"*

ejn tw/ kosmw/ In 2:15b he motivates this command: *ejn ti" agapa/ ton kosmon, ouk estin h/ agaph tou patro;" ejn aujtw/* The causal conjunction *ofti*, at the beginning of v 16, indicates that v 16 gives a reason for the contradiction stated in v 15b, namely that it is impossible to love God and the world, because *ta; ejn tw/ kosmw/* has its origin not in the Father but in the world itself. God and the world are in absolute opposition as sources of value. The Elder defines *ta; ejn tw/ kosmw/* by way of three characteristic examples: (1) *h/ epiqumiā th" sarko;" kai*, (2) *h/ epiqumiā twin ofqalmwn*, (3) *kai; h/ ajlazoneiā tou biou*.

21 The expression and concept of *amartiā pro;" qanaton* have parallels in the Old Testament and in Judaism (Edwards 1996:103; Edanad 1987:75), where it means the sin which brings with it as its consequence physical death (Nm 18:22), or the sin deserving, or to be punished with death (Dt 22:26; TestIss 7:1; Jub 21:22; 26:34; 33:13, 18; compare Nm 15:30f; Is 22:14; Ps 19:13). See Haas, De Jonge & Swellengrebel (1972:126f) for another translation of these two phrases.

22 When a singular noun is used to signify a class it should be with the article (cf Blass-De Brunner 1961:252).

qanaton as the accusative of content of *amartanonta*²³, shows that the Elder perceives differences in the quality of sin as such - differences regarding the degree to which sin affects 'life' (*zwhn*) (Edanad 1987:76). This difference in the quality of sin must be determined both from the immediate context of the passage and from the general context of the Epistle as a whole, and will relate to the above description of 'the nature of sin'.

The reciprocal concept of (life) *zwhn* and (death) *qanaton*, as found in the Epistle, will be the key to understanding the concrete nature of *amartiā pro;* *qanaton*. Therefore in this passage *qanaton* has to be understood in light of the antithetical conception of *zwhn* and *qanaton* in 1 John²⁴ where *zwhn* always means divine life, which man is called to participate in, and is often specified as 'eternal life' (*zwh; aijwnio*", cf 1:2; 2:25; 3:15; 5:11, 13, 20). Consequently the references to *qanaton* in 3:14 and 5:16f, as opposed to the *zwhn*, can only mean the loss of this divine life²⁵. Thus *amartiā pro;* *qanaton* signifies sin which has as its natural result the loss of eternal life, and therefore implies exclusion from the communion with God – they are outside the 'family of God'.

With the exception of three occurrences, *zwhn*, as used in the epistle, is always associated with the Son (1:1, 2; 2:25; 5:11, 12, 13, 20). In the immediate context of 5:16f, eternal life is identified with the Son and its possession is the result of faith in Jesus the Son of God²⁶. Therefore it can be deduced that a total rejection of Christ will cause a total loss of eternal life. In short, *amartiā pro;* *qanaton*, viewed in the light of the Epistle itself, is the violation of

23 'Where the accusative of content is a cognate of the verb either in etymology or meaning, it serves a purpose only when a qualifying word or phrase in the form of an attribute ... is introduced' (Blass-DeBrunner 1961: 153).

24 *qanaton* occurs six times in the epistle (3:14; 5:16f), while *zwhn* occurs thirteen times.

25 Edwards (1996:104) refers to it as apostasy – a deliberate rejection of Christ, once a person has been converted. But this categorizing is also applicable to those who rejects Christ even after they heard about him as the only way of salvation according to the Elder.

26 In 5:11f it is explicitly stated that the eternal life granted to men by the Father is in the Son (5:11) and in 5:12 there is the emphatic tradition: *o/ efcwn ton uibn efcēi thn zwhn: o/ mh; efcwn ton uibn tou qeou thn zwhn ouk efcēi.*

the commandment of faith in Christ (and fraternal love), in other words, a formal or virtual rejection of Christ. Hence, according to the Elder, the *amartiā pro;" qanaton* is the same as the sin of the *ap̄ticristoi polloi*,²⁷ and of those who have joined them, excluding themselves from communion with God and with the true believers (Edanad 1987:77f).

The Elder refers to the sin committed by those ‘inside the family’ as *amartiā mh; pro;" qanaton*, and consequently does not cause the total loss of the divine life and complete exclusion from the divine communion (Edanad 1987:75). However, this *amartiā mh; pro;" qanaton* affects the divine life and weakens it. Vitrano (1987:129) purports that it can be assumed that here the mind of the Elder goes back to what was expressed in 2:1-2. From these two verses it seems apparent that because *ta; tekna tou qeou* have a *paraklhto~*, their sin is not *pro;" qanaton*. In the absence of such a *paraklhto~*, there is no hope. While Christ is the *ilasmol'* (2:2) for the sins of the whole world, he is the *paraklhto~* for those who believe (who are part of God’s family) that he is the Christ (5:1), the Son of God (5:5).

However, those outside the family (*ek tou kosmou*, 2:16; 4:5; also called *tekna tou diabolou*) are without a *paraklhto~*, consequently their sin is *amartiā pro;" qanaton*, which is further defined in terms of the reciprocals that occur throughout the epistles.

5 SIN ALSO DESCRIBED IN TERMS OF RECIPROCAL

By using reciprocals, the elder effectively and dynamically describes sin in relation to its counterpart, salvation. The following is a list of reciprocals that occur in all three the Johannine epistles:

27 Cf 2:22f; 3:23f; compare 2:9-11; 3:10; 4:8, 20.

Texts	swthria side	amartia side
a) 1:6f	a) <i>ejn tw/fwti; peripatwmen</i>	a) <i>ejn tw/skoitei peripatwmen</i>
b) 2:3, 4	b) <i>ta;" ejntola;" aujtou thrwmen</i>	b) <i>ta;" ejntola;" aujtou mh; thrwn</i>
c) 2:9f	c) <i>ol agapwn ton adel fon aujtou ejn tw/fwti; menei</i>	c) <i>ol legwn ejn tw/ fwti; eihai kai; ton adel fon aujtou miswn ejn th/skotia/ejstin elw" arti</i>
d) 2:21ff	d) <i>ajlhqeia" ... olomologwn ton uibn kai; ton patera ecei</i>	d) <i>yeudo" ... pa" ol ajrnoumeno" ton uibn oujde; ton patera ecei</i>
e) 4:2-5	e) <i>pan pneuma olomologei ... uinei" ek tou qeou ejste</i>	e) <i>pan pneuma ol mh; omologei ... aujtoi; ek tou kosμου eisin</i>
f) 4:6	f) <i>pneuma th" ajlhqeia"</i>	f) <i>pneuma th" planh"</i>
g) 4:12, 20	g) <i>ejan agapwmen ajlhliou"</i>	g) <i>ol mh; agapwn ton adel fon aujtou (mish)</i>
h) 5:12	h) <i>olecw ton uibn ecei thn zwhn</i>	h) <i>ol mh; e cw ton uibn tou qeou thn zwhn ouk ecei</i>
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i) 2 Jn 9	i) <i>ol menwn ejn th/didach/ oujto" kai; ton patera kai; ton uibn ecei</i>	i) <i>pa" ol proagwn kai; mh; menwn ejn th/ didach/ tou Cristou qeon ouk ecei</i>
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j) 3 Jn 11	j) <i>(mimou) to; ajaqon...</i>	j) <i>mh; mimou to; kakon ...</i>
k) 3 Jn 11	k) <i>ol ajaqopoiwn ek tou qeou ejstin</i>	k) <i>ol kakopoiwn ouc elwaken ton qeon</i>

These reciprocals help to explain the various perspectives on ‘sin’ that the Elder had in mind when he described the deeds of those outside the family. It echoes the character of apostasy. These varied perspectives relate to the doctrinal and ethical problems that the Johannine community experienced due to the *yeudoprofhtai*. These formulae are used in order to define sin at the doctrinal level as the denial of the Incarnation (1 Jn 2:23; 5:12; 2 Jn 7, 9), and at the ethical level to do evil (3 Jn 11), to hate brothers (and sisters) (2:11; 4:20) and not to obey God’s commandments. These formulae also point to the seriousness of committing these kinds of sin, because the consequence is to forfeit eternal life / fellowship with God and Christ (*ouk ecei ton patera kai; ton uibn*). This category of sin can be depicted as *amartia pro;" qanaton* and excludes people from kinship in God’s family.

6 THE FORGIVENESS OF SIN

In 1 John a double scheme is perceived in the elder's conception of the forgiveness of sins: the *Father* is the one who takes the initiative and forgives the sins – the *Son* is the mediator. Deletion and forgiveness of sins is already a reality for the believers – it is also a promise that is in the process of being fulfilled (Edanad 1987:81).

6.1 THE FATHER, THE FORGIVER OF SINS

The Father has taken the initiative

In three texts in 1 John (4:9, 10, 14) the Father is introduced as the one who has sent the Son into the world. A comparison of these three verses indicates that they are similar in their purport: The activity of God described in these contexts, by which his love is manifested²⁸, is regarded as salvific in purpose: the Son was sent into the world 'so that we might live through him' (*iħa zħswmen di j aujtou*, v 9), as an 'atoning sacrifice for our sins' (*iħasmon peri; twñ amartiwn ħmwñ*, v 10), and as 'the Savior of the world' (*swthra²⁹ tou kosmou*, v 14). In each verse it appears that God, the Father of Jesus Christ, is deeply involved in his world and has acted in history for the purpose of man's salvation (Dodd 1946:110f). This indicates that the Father has taken the initiative for the redemption of mankind.

The Father continues the forgiveness

In 1 John 4:10 the mission of the Son as *iħasmon peri; twñ amartiwn ħmwñ* is considered to be an event already accomplished and complete in itself, as the verb in the aorist indicates. In the other two texts (4:9, 14) the verbs in the perfect tense point to the fact that the mission of the Son, though already a past event, is still a present reality on account of its effects, and thus the Father's saving action, consequently purification, is being continued. This idea is brought

28 In these two verses the motive of the mission is emphasized by the repetition of the noun *agaph*: the mission of the Son is the result of the Father's unilateral love for men (v 10; compare Jn 3:16), and consequently it is also the revelation of this love (v 9) (Edanad 1987:83).

29 In the New Testament *swzein* and its derivatives signify mostly the messianic salvation (cf Mt 1:21; 10:22; 18:21, etc; Jn 3:17; 5:34; 10:9; 12:47; Acts 2:21, 40, 47, etc)

into clear relief in 1:9: ‘If we confess³⁰ our sins³¹, he who is faithful and just will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness’ (*ejan omologwimen ta," amartiā" hmwin, pistol' ejstin kai; dikaio", iha ajfh/hmin ta," amartiā" kai; kaqarish/hma" apo; pash" adikiā"*).

6.2 The Son, the mediator of forgiveness

The passages where the elder speaks about the mission of the Son (4:9, 10, 14), indicate that the purification from sin is effected by the Father through the Son. This theme is developed somewhat further elsewhere in the Epistle.

30 The context (1:5-10) in which 1:9 appears concerns the necessity of acknowledging one's sins as a consequence of *ejn tw/fwti; peripatwmen*. In v 9 the condition of confessing the sins is introduced as antithesis to the denial of a person's sin in vv 8-10, where the author directly attacks the position of those outside the family. Although vv 8 and 10 attack the refusal to acknowledge one's sin, in v 9 the positive request of acknowledgement of sins occurs. In v 9 the verb *omologeîn* is used for the confession of sins. This is the same as the one used for the confession of Jesus as Christ and the Son in the Johannine letters (1 Jn 2:23; 4:2, 3, 15; 2 Jn 7). Even the use of this verb in the Gospel of John (1:20; 9:22; 12:42) and elsewhere in the New Testament where the noun *exomologeîn* is connected with sin as its object, it always signifies public acknowledgement of sin (Mt 3:6; Mk 1:5; Jas 5:16; cf also Acts 19:18). It is possible that when the author speaks of a public confession of sins and the consequent forgiveness, the actual situation he has in mind is, in the light of the probable eucharistic context of v 7 (*koinwniā*) the confession of sins the primitive Christian communities used to make before the celebration of the Eucharist, which Didache 14:1 (comp 4:14) attests to. This is also found in a rudimentary form in 1 Cor 11:28, 31.

31 In this connection the two members of the antithetical statements in the Epistle are different in character and purpose. One member is normally negative in tone and makes a more or less direct reference to the opinion held by the heretics introducing it with a clause such as *ejan eipwmen* (every time at the beginning of vv 6, 8, 10), *ol legwn* (2:4, 6, 9), *ejan ti" eiph/*(4:20), and then attacks this opinion, demonstrating the contradiction in this position, and it is directed principally against these false teachers and those who have come or are in real danger of coming under their influence (Schnackenburg 1953:80). The other member is positive in character and in him/her the author expounds the Christian teaching he wants to communicate to the members of the community with a development of ideas that often goes beyond the mere requirements of countering the false opinion (cf 1:7, 9; 2:5, 10).

The purpose of the revelation of the Son was to remove sin

In 3:5 and 8 a twofold purpose is given for the revelation of the Son of God (*effanerwqh*):

⁵ *ekeino*"... *effanerwqh*, *iha ta," amartiā*" *afh/*

he was revealed to take away sins

⁸ *ei*" *touto effanerwqh oluib," tou qeou, iha lush/ta; efga tou diabolou*³²

The Son of God was revealed to destroy the works of the devil.

These two statements are found in the immediate context (3:4-10) of the incompatibility of sin with existence in the family, and the eschatological opposition of the sinful devil (v 8) and his followers to the sinless Son (3:5) and his followers. Here the Elder insists that in the Christ-event as a whole, the sins of people were forgiven and the power of the devil to work evil was effectively broken (cf John 12:31), even if the fulfilment of this action will not be achieved until the end (cf 3:8a, 10) (Smalley 1984:170).

Hence the Son appeared to remove both the sins already committed and the very possibility of sins being committed by the believers (comp. 3:9).

Jesus has removed sins through his expiatory death

The Father's saving act *culminated in Jesus' death*³³. The elder

32 The phrase *ta; efga tou diabolou* signifies human sin in its entirety (cf Brown 1982:407).

33 Christ is called *dikaio*" in 2:1. This predicate (being righteous) heightens the description of his ability to act as the sinner's intercessor. His own righteousness is manifested above all in the righteous act on the cross (cf 2:2). God (who is himself *dikaio*", 1:9a) can cleanse his children from all unrighteousness (1:9b; cf Rom 3:26) (Smalley 1984:37f). Salvation from sin then is based not only upon the reconciliatory work of Christ upon the cross, but also upon his exalted status in the presence of God.

One of the reasons why Jesus could abolish sin was because in him there was no sin. God's opposition to human sin was demonstrated in the appearance of Jesus not only as the revealer of God (4:5a), but also as the Redeemer of man (3:5). This is due to the fact that *amartiā eñ autw/ouk eřtin* (3:5; See also 2 Cor 5:21; Heb 4:15; 1 Pt 1:19; 2:21–22; cf Jn 8:46; Heb 7:26; 1 Pt 3:18). Only

argues repeatedly that sin is forgiven through the expiatory sacrifice of Jesus. For him the role of Jesus in the forgiveness of sin is essential, therefore, in 1:7 he states that: ‘the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin’ (*to; aiġma jġhsou tou uibu auġtou kaqarizei hma" apo; pash" amartiā*).³⁴ This statement relates to parallel statements in 2:2 and 4:10, where the elder explains what happened through Jesus’ death by insisting that ‘he is the atoning sacrifice for our sins’ (*auġto;" (Ihsou~) ilasmol' ejstin peri; twi amartiwn hmwn*). The event word *ilasmol'* has the same semantic meaning in these texts (cf Danker 2000:474), where it denotes the means of forgiveness. Jesus himself is the means by which sins are forgiven (Louw & Nida 1988:504; Klauck 1991:108). The same reality is also expressed in 2:12; 3:5 and 3:16. These passages are sufficient to indicate that the death of Jesus was the atonement for sin and the only way to constitute a relationship between God and man (cf Haas, De Jonge, Swellengrebel 1972:36).

Christ continues the purification of sins and the mediation of forgiveness

The purifying blood of Christ

In 1:5-7 the followers of the Elder are called upon to walk in the light, from which two consequences will follow: (1) ‘that we have fellowship with him’ (*koinwnian eġcomen met j aiġ Ihlwn kai*); (2) ‘and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin’ (*to; aiġma jġhsou tou uibu auġtou kaqarizei hma" apo; pash" amartiā*). In

as the perfect offering for sin (cf 2:2a) could Jesus be the effective Saviour of the world (2:2b; cf Jn 4:42). This description of Jesus as sinless (cf also 1 Pt 1:19, 22; 3:18; Heb 8:26) is matched by the elder’s positive assertions that Christ was *dikaio-* (2:1, 29; 3:7), *agio-* (2:20) and *agnol'* (3:3). This was the reason why he could free sinners and why those who remain in him will likewise be free from sin (Smalley 1984:157; Malatesta 1978:245).

34 The blood of Jesus occupies an important place in NT thought, and must be interpreted above all against the specific background of the cultic observances on the Day of Atonement (Lv 16; but cf also the Passover story and ritual, Ex 12). In his suffering and death, the NT writers claim, Jesus, in perfect obedience, made the true and lasting sacrifice for sin (cf Rm 3:25; Heb 9:12–14; 10:19–22; Rev 1:5; also 1 Cor 5:7). Therefore, to say here that the blood of Jesus *kaqarizei hma" apo; pash" amartiā*, means that in the cross of Christ our sin is effectively and repeatedly (*kaqarizei*, is a continuous present) removed (Smalley 1984:25). Schweizer (2000:194) adds that the blood of Christ is not only expiatory, but also guarantees God’s covenant.

this passage *kaqarizei hma" apo; pash" amartiø"* (1:7) forms a parallel with 'will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness' (*ifh aifh/ hmin ta;" amartiø" kai; kaqarish/ hma" apo; pash" apikiø"*, 1:9) and signifies the effect of *ejh tw/ fwti; peri peripatein* (v 7) and *omologein ta;" amartiø" hmwn* (v 9). In this context of the Epistle, written to believers who have already been part of God's family, these sins from which they were purified can only be sins committed after their conversion and incorporation into God's family (Edanad 1987:88).

In 1:7 the continuous purification from every sin is attributed to the agency of the blood of Jesus, the Son of God³⁵ (Edanad 1987:87). This cleansing is dependent on our resolve to 'walk in the light' (*ejh tw/ fwti; peri peripatein*), which means to lead our lives according to the self-revelation of God in Christ as love, which will result in the fraternal communion of the believers. Thus the purification from sin through the blood of Jesus Christ³⁶ takes place within the fellowship of the believers and is the consequence of *ejh tw/ fwti; peri peripatein*.

Christ, Paraclete and Expiation

The identification of Christ as 'atoning sacrifice for our sins' (*ilasmol' ... peri; twn amartiwn*) in the present (*ejstin*) in 2:2, seen in the light of 2:1, signifies not only that Christ's expiatory death, which the Elder refers to in 3:16 and 4:10, continues to bear fruit, but that Christ himself continues his role of the expiatory victim before the Father. Thus in him and through him the Father continues to forgive the sins (cf. 1:9) 'not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world' (*ouj peri; twn hmeterwn de; monon ajl la; kai; peri; o! ou tou kosmou*, 2:2).

35 Confer Heb 9:22; also Lv 16:15f, 19, etc. for the purifying power of blood. Purification through blood and through faith are not incompatible one with the other, but complementary (cf Rev 12:11); in 1 Jn 1:7 we find a synthesis of these two. In order to have the full benefit of the expiatory death of Christ one should have a living faith, should 'walk in the light' (*ejh tw/ fwti; peripatwmen* - 1:7)

36 *To; aijma jhsou'* refers to his sacrificial death on the cross. This is the Christian's agent of purification and cleansing and draws its meaning from the Jewish sacrificial system (Johnson 1993:31).

In 1 John 2:1-2 the intervention of Christ in favour of those who sin inside the family has two interrelated aspects. While in 2:2 the author specifies it as Christ's continuing role as the expiatory victim, his function as the intercessor for the sinner to the Father seems to come to the fore in the statement, *paraklhton ecomen pro; ton patera jhsouñ Criston dikaion*, in 2:1³⁷.

It is evident that the elder clearly distinguishes between sin inside and sin outside God's family: sin inside the family no longer leads to death for sinners because they have the only Son of God as their *paraclete*. Those still outside the family have no advocacy, therefore their sin is sin unto death.

In their need of divine forgiveness, says the Elder, the children of God have an effective intercessor to act on their behalf and to present their case to God the Father (cf Matt 10:32). As Son, he pleads for the sinner with (*proi'*) the Father. This means that Jesus intercedes in the *presence* of the Father. He does so *actively*: he pleads with (*proi'*) the Father for the forgiveness of the penitent.

CONCLUSION

The investigation of Johannine hamartiology has proven more difficulty than a simple summary might suggest. In the attempt to understand the Elder's teaching about the 'sin' concept in the three short Johannine Epistles, it became evident that the Elder has much to say about sin. 'It is clear that the author vastly abhors sin, seeing it as incompatible with God's character and with the status of believers as God's children' (Edwards 2000:193). Sin keeps those who are *ek tou kosmou* captured in darkness, from where they have to be freed, while it has a negative influence on the fellowship of the *tekna qeou*.

It became apparent that the socio-religious circumstances of the community, the depiction of believers as God's children and group coherence, played a decisive role in the Elder's categorical, understanding, interpretation and definition of sin. This research proved that Johannine hamartiology is explained from a family perspective to form the setting in which the Elder describes his

37 Gn 18:22-32, comp. v 19; Ps 34:16; 145:18f; Pr 15:29; 2 Macc 15:12, 14; PsSol 6:8; 2 Bar 85:1f; 4 Ezr 7:102ff, 111; also Jnh 9:31; Jas 5:16; 1 Pt 3:12. In 1 Jn *dikaio*~, as applied to God and to Christ, has a double significance: who one is – one who is just, righteous; what one does – one who justifies the sinner.

symbolic narrative. All the references to sin in these Johannine epistles relate to either the doctrinal expressions or the ethical conduct referred to. The Elder's hamartiology has to be understood and interpreted from the perspective of the Johannine dualism of light/darkness, love/hate, righteous/unrighteous, which runs throughout the epistles. Ultimately the above discussion is merely the depiction of the distinction between life inside and life outside the family of God.

Although the Johannine community can be regarded as a 'sect' and introversionist in its preoccupation with its own holiness and its belief that salvation can come only through belonging to it and believing in Jesus Christ, serious attention must be given to the teachings under discussion. Although life outside 'God's family' is described in harsh terms the teachings, particularly those about 'sin', do come to par with the teachings throughout the rest of the New Testament.

Even though most of these aspects (and vocabulary) regarding sin occur throughout the New Testament, it is addressed more coherently and more frequently in the Johannine epistles. Some aspects that are unique to this hamartiology are, for example, the distinction between *amartian mh; pro;" qanaton* and *amartia pro;" qanaton*, the high frequency with which sin is depicted in terms of reciprocals, and also the distinction between the 'sin of those inside the family' and that of 'those outside the family'.

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