

DOMESTIC ARCHITECTURE: CULTURE, FICTIVE KINSHIP AND IDENTITY IN THE FIRST EPISTLE OF JOHN

Abstract

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The aim of this research is to investigate the domestic architecture of the First Epistle of John. It seems that the author has used family metaphors to make the invisible (Father) visible in the community and also to characterise this early Christian community. Group orientation, also spelled out in terms of kinship, which seems to be the *main social construction* in the first-century Mediterranean world, was the driving force behind this research. This orientation together with the social identity theory, pioneered by Henri Tajfel, has been applied to the situation depicted in this Epistle to characterise the identity of this Johannine group.

1 INTRODUCTION

Just more than a decade ago Jerome Neyrey (1995:156–7) expressed the need for further studies of fictive kinship. He defines this as “the ways in which the first Christians regarded and treated each other as ‘family’”. Two years later Halvor Moxnes (1997:1) made a nuanced related statement that “... although ‘family’ is such an important topic in Christianity, there have been few comprehensive studies of family in early Christianity”. Since these statements a number of publications¹ have followed on “the family in early Christianity”. This research also aims at making a contribution to this subject, albeit from a metaphorical discourse perspective.

This study is a critical enquiry (using socio-cultural, literary and theological perspectives) into the character and identity of the hypothetical Johannine community towards the end of its existence. We will examine how the author of the First Epistle of John (hereafter referred to as the Elder) used family metaphors² to describe the identity of this community in order to identify the *pater familias* whom they have never seen, but whom they worship.

This research will start with an investigation into the most important socio-cultural feature of the first-century Mediterranean world, namely group orientation. This feature will be applied to the Johannine community. Subsequently, the identity of the Johannine community and life in the community as a fictive family will be explored. Henri Tajfel’s social identity theory will be used to show how the Elder describes the identity of the community.

2 MODELLING MEDITERRANEAN CULTURE

This first section examines what is *probably the most important social aspect* relating to how the people of the first-century Mediterranean world lived. This provides a setting for the rest of the research.

2.1 Group-oriented people

2.1.1 Groups and familism

¹ See Moxnes (1997); Osiek (1996); Osiek & Balch (1997); Guijarro (1997); Van der Watt (2000); De Silva (2000); Van Henten & Brenner (2000) as a result of the colloquium at Leuven. There were also a few other publications prior to 1995: Cosby (1988); Carter (1994); Barton (1994); cf. also Malina et al (1995).

² The description of family metaphors in the first part of this article relates closely to my 2009 publication: Family metaphors: a rhetorical tool in the Epistle of John. *Acta Patristica et Byzantina*, 20.

In his study of first-century Mediterranean people, Malina (1996:64) concluded that these people were strongly group-embedded, collectivistic persons.³ Malina (1982, 1986, 1993), Esler (2000:147), Harland (2003) and others have pointed out what prevailing group identity, real kinship and fictive kinship relations were like in this world – such relations fully determined the identities of individuals. These people were socially minded, and attuned to the values, attitudes and beliefs of their in-group. Individual behaviour was constituted and regulated by the community or the group to which such a person belongs.

For these societies which are group-oriented, the major group or the dominant institution tends to be the family (cf. Esler 2000:151; Guijarro 1997:43). Although many other kinds of groups existed, including trade associations, army units, and so on, the basic social distinction in the society was the one between kin and non-kin. Among a person's kin (insiders) there were strong bonds of affection, co-operation and sharing of available resources. Towards non-kins (outsiders) an attitude of suspicion and competition prevailed.⁴

In the New Testament, Jesus groups are also described from a strongly “group-embedded, dyadic, collectivistic perspective”,⁵ conceiving of themselves as forming, metaphorically speaking, “the household of God” (*familia Dei*).⁶ Being now aware that the family metaphor is involved here, it is necessary to bring together questions about metaphoric language and the dynamics of family life. Let us first explore the use of metaphoric language.

2.1.2 Metaphorical language – the metaphor of family

Metaphorical language forms an important part of any culture (Lassen 1997:103). Lakoff and Johnson (1980:3) state that “[m]etaphor is pervasive in everyday life, not just in language but in thought and action”. According to Rosenblatt (1994:1) a metaphor is “a figure of speech in which words that literally denote one kind of object or idea are used in place of another,

³ A member of a particular kinship or fictive kinship group could not show any allegiance to any other group (Ἐὰν εἴπωμεν ..., 1:6, 8, 10; ὁ λέγων ..., 2:4, 6, 9; ἕάν τις εἴπη ..., 4:20). See also Van der Watt (2000:161–394).

⁴ Kinship was one of the primary ways of structuring social life. The social order was dominated by group/kinship allegiances; membership or alliance with another group was not permitted. A member of a particular kinship or fictive kinship group could not show any allegiance to any other group (Ἐὰν εἴπωμεν ..., 1 John 1:6, 8, 10; ὁ λέγων ..., 2:4, 6, 9; ἕάν τις εἴπη ..., 1 John 4:20). Much has been written on kinship language: Moxnes, H. 1997. *Constructing early Christian families: family as social reality and metaphor*. London: Routledge. Barton, S C. 1994. *Discipleship and family ties in Mark and Matthew*. Cambridge: University Press. Cosby, M H. 1988. *House of disciples*. Maryknoll: Orbis Books. Van Henten, J W & Brenner, A. 2000. *Families and family relations as represented in early Judaism and early Christianities: text and fictions*. Leiden: Leo Publishing. Rusam, D. 1993. *Die Gemeinschaft der Kinder Gottes: Das Motiv der Gotteskindschaft und die Gemeinden der Johanneischen Briefe*. Stuttgart: Verlag W. Kohlhammer. Hodge, C J. 2007. *If sons, then heirs. A study of kinship and ethnicity in the Letters of Paul*. Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press. Malherbe, A J. 1995. God's New Family in Thessalonica, pages 116–25 in *The social world of the first Christians*. Essays in Honor of Wayne Meeks, edited by L M White and O L Yarbrough. Minneapolis: Fortress. Osiek, C & Balch, D. 1997. *Families in the New Testament world: households and house churches*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox. Balch, D L. 2003. Paul, families and households, pages 258–92 in *Paul in the Graeco-Roman world. A handbook*, edited J P Sampley. Harrisburg: Trinity Press International. Barton, S C. 1997. The relativisation of family ties in the Jewish and Graeco-Roman traditions, pages 81–100 in *Constructing early Christian families. Family as social reality and metaphor*, edited by H Moxnes. London, New York: Routledge. Cahill, L S. 2000. *Family: A Christian social perspective*. Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress.

⁵ When looking at Robbins' (1996:101) definition of a corporate group, the Johannine community relates closely to it: “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.”

⁶ See Van der Watt (2000:31, 38, 81, 161–394, especially 209, 406–411) on cohesion and integration in the Johannine community. Cf. also Käsemann (1978:56ff) on expressions of family unity that are typically of the Fourth Gospel.

suggesting a resemblance or analogue”. As Lakoff and Johnson (1980:5) noted, “[t]he essence of metaphor is understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another”. Its main function is “to provide a partial understanding of one kind of experience in terms of another kind of experience” (Lakoff & Johnson 1980:154). As a result of this truth, much of human understanding of the world is constructed by metaphors (Schroots, Birren & Kenyon 1991:2) because metaphors can help to create new meanings and new perspectives. It is a way of taking what we know and applying it to an area that is less understood. Mooij (1975:257ff) argues that metaphors function not only dualistically but also monistically. In the case of the latter, the metaphor may consist of only one lexical item. Geeraerts (1986:50) strengthens this point in saying that the monistic theories do contain an element of comparison, which implies dualistic elements (see Van der Watt 2000:6–7). This is exactly what is apparent when the family concept is used monistically as metaphor.

2.2 Archetypal metaphor of the family

Osborn (1967:115), in his research on archetypal metaphor in rhetoric, opens up important new lines of rhetorical analysis. His view of archetypal metaphor “carries the idea of basic, unchanging patterns of experience”. Osborn (1967:116) claims that archetypal metaphors exhibit a persuasive potency because of their attachment to basic motives.

In his study Osborn focuses mostly on “naturalistic” archetypes and the metaphoric force they generate. The metaphoric images that Osborn worked on all derive their persuasive power from the power of the natural physical forces they invoke by comparison to significant social situations (see also Adams 1983:56).⁷

In this research the focus falls on the “family image” as archetype.⁸ The family is a relational image which gathers its archetypal “force” from the time and traditions surrounding the cultural construct “family”. The family seems to be one of the oldest and most primary entities of social cohesion. It reaches back to the beginning of civilisation. Human beings have been united in the family experience for as long as human existence.

Thus, just as naturalistic metaphors have an impact upon people, so do relational images have an impact and act to unify people. Family bonds are made explicit by the Elder in his use of selected words, analogies or comparisons that denote or connote familial states among his readers. The use of relational images entangles the Elder and his adherents in relationships that have *a priori* behavioural expectations built into them. This suggests that familial images in written communications can be effective in evoking primary “actions, attitudes, and emotions”. By using familial terms, the Elder involves personal cognitive, emotional and ethical (evaluative) and social attachments that exist in early life within the extended family and should apply within the *κοινωνία* of believers. These expectations are stored in the archetypal relational pattern as it has been played out through centuries of human situations (cf. Adams 1983:56).

Relational images have a “bonding power” that differs from other references of categorisation. The category “brothers and sisters”, for example, is a much more powerful reference for unification than “people” because “people” lacks the familial connotation and

⁷ Osborn (1967:117) indicates that “light relates to the fundamental struggle for survival and development because of its relationship to warmth, sight, growth, etc”. The antithesis of light is darkness. If a rhetor can metaphorically relate “light” associations to certain people or propositions, and in turn relate “dark” associations to opponents or opposing arguments, then the rhetor can effectively arouse feelings that are generally related to the “image” of the fundamental struggle between life and death symbolised by light and darkness. In such a way, according to Osborn, the rhetor can deepen the urgency of the situation and magnify the importance of a conflict. The symbolic triumph of life (light) over death (darkness) deepens the sense of satisfaction and commitment towards the decision. The same applies to the connotation and denotation of light to “what is good” and darkness to “what is evil”, two metaphors also used in 1 John by the Elder.

⁸ For this archetype of “family” I rely strongly on the work done by Adams.

potency (Adams 1983:56f). The category “father” is also a more powerful reference for authority than “captain” because “captain” also lacks the familial connotation. Even the concept “son” entails certain generalisable rights, duties, privileges, attitudes, pitfalls, problems, etc, which are associated with it.

At an *individual level*, metaphors are used to describe the unknown in terms of the known. This implies that the metaphor is used to construct meaning. At a *communal level*, metaphors are used for a wide variety of social purposes. In theological writings, these two functions of metaphor frequently converge. On the one hand, the metaphor is used to describe that which is by definition unknowable, the divine. On the other hand, it describes how members, associated with one another, have to behave towards one another (cf. Brettler 1987).

2.3 Family metaphors in early Christianity

The early Christians also made ample use of metaphorical language in order to better explain Christian concepts. To describe this existential reality of being and living as a Christian in such a group,⁹ the authors use the most intimate social phenomenon in the ancient world, namely “the family” (Van der Watt 1999:494).¹⁰ The authors employ the language of kinship from their surrounding cultures in relation to them and their readers and in relation to the God they worship.¹¹ This concerns both the distinctive features of Mediterranean family life and also the various ways in which they utilise such features in seeking to develop and maintain a positive group identity. In so doing they want to distinguish their readers from the negatively valued out-groups (Esler 2000:167).

They define and describe the kind of fellowship that should be constituted, and should exist in this Christian community, by applying the best of what they know about earthly families to the relationship between true believers communally and between these believers corporately with their God (cf. Tollefson 1999:85). The *familia Dei* then is the sphere in which this fellowship is constituted and experienced. Sandnes (1997:156) points out that:

[I]n 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.

⁹ The understanding of the characterisation 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.”

¹⁰ According to Berger and Luckmann (1966:120), part of the function of paraenetic utterances is social formation, where admonitions are made to strengthen the induction “of an individual into the objective world of a society or sector of it”. This is exactly what the Elder is doing; he is reminding his adherents of the shared common values of their particular group that set them apart from the group of deceivers.

¹¹ Lassen (1997:114f) stated in his comparison between the Roman family and the family used as metaphor in Christianity that: “Roman family metaphors were in many respects dissimilar to the metaphorical family introduced by the first Christians. Whereas the Roman family signalled, first and foremost, hierarchical power relationships, the family metaphors as used by the first Christians did not primarily support a hierarchical order on earth. When in the Gospels, to take the most prominent Christian texts, family metaphors were used to describe inter-human relationships, their function was primarily to create equality and a new sense of belonging. From the point of view of pagan Romans, then, there was a contrast between the Roman use of family metaphors, most often conveying authority, and the family metaphors used by the first Christians, expressing equality.” In his introduction to his book *Constructing early Christian families* Moxnes (1997:1–2) briefly points out the fundamental distinction between kinship and fictive kinship, between reality and metaphor in this area.

By reminding the Johannine community of their fictive kinship, of their common identity,¹² and the values, conduct and doctrine that set them apart from other groups (the deceivers) in their society, the Elder entrenches their identity as a group, and serves to continue to regulate social (ethical) behaviour in this group. This injunction by the Elder and his paraenesis serves to strengthen their identity and unity in a world which seems somewhat hostile towards them.

When reading 1 Jn it becomes apparent how the Elder uses a coherent network of metaphors,¹³ related to the social reality of first-century family life (cf. Van der Watt 1999:491; Lassen 1997:103; Moxnes 1997), to explain fundamental Christian concepts, identity¹⁴ and ethical matters. *The Elder incorporated widely accepted conventions from everyday family life and applied them to what happens in the community. He used generally accepted ideas on family life to explain what the Christian life in the community comprises.*¹⁵ Through doing this he rhetorically tries to activate the social dynamic of the interrelatedness between a father and his child in the mind of the first-century reader (cf. Van der Watt 1992:272–9). Fortunately the images referring to certain social aspects are developed in the text itself. Only where external social information is helpful to supply reference material will it be consulted to help describe some of the social conventions of ancient times.

2.4 The household metaphor in the First Epistle of John

From the Gospel of John we learn that it is during Jesus' crucifixion that the familial aspect of Christian community is reflected and this new family constituted. When Jesus sees his mother and the disciple whom he loves, "he said to his mother, 'Woman, here is your son.' Then he said to the disciple, 'Here is your mother.' And from that hour the disciple took her into his own home" (19:26–27). For the Fourth Evangelist, all those who acknowledge God as their Father, and Jesus as their brother, have a place in the family.

The Beloved Disciple was entrusted to take care of Jesus' mother. This scene portrays the beginning of a faith community that would extend into the future. This community will include "those who have not seen, yet believe" (20:29). This deduces that the Beloved Disciple became the brother of Jesus. Earlier in the Gospel this term was used to indicate the "brothers" of Jesus, those who related to him by blood, but not by faith (2:12; 7:3, 5). After his resurrection this term was used to refer to those who were connected to Jesus by faith. When Jesus spoke to Mary Magdalene at the tomb, he told her to "go to my brothers", referring to his disciples. She had to tell them from Jesus that, "I am ascending to my Father and your Father." This indicated that they were now part of the same family (20:17). This term "brother" consequently became quite common among all who accepted the testimony of the Beloved Disciple (Koester 2003:243; also 2008:197ff; Achtemeier et al 2001:200).

¹² See ἀδελφοί [2:9, 10; 3:10, 12(bis), 13, 15, 17; 4:20(bis), 21; 5:16], ἀλλήλους [1:7; 3:11, 14, 16, 23; 4:7, 11, 12; 2 John 5].

¹³ Metaphorical language forms an important part of any culture (Lassen 1997:103). Its main function is to "provide a partial understanding of one kind of experience in terms of another kind of experience" (Lakoff & Johnson 1980:154).

¹⁴ It is at this point that Esler put me on the track of Henri Tajfel's social identity theory from a social psychological perspective. This is just one aspect of the way in which an in-group (in this context the family) maintains a positive identity for itself by generating a negative picture of outsiders and stereotyping them as untrustworthy.

¹⁵ Achtemeier, Green and Thompson (2001:547) assert that the family imagery may provide useful evidence regarding the internal structure and organisation of the Johannine community. This implies that the Johannine community would have understood exactly what the Elder was trying to communicate.

The Elder extends this motif when he portrays the Christian life of fellowship¹⁶ in the Johannine community as existence in a family¹⁷ (cf. Rusam 1993:105ff; Van der Watt 1999:494ff; Van der Merwe 2005:443f),¹⁸ the *familia Dei*,¹⁹ where God is the Father (1:2, 3)²⁰ and the head. Jesus is the only Son of the Father (4:9)²¹ and the believers are “children of God” (τέκνα θεοῦ, 3:1–2, 10; 5:2)²², “born from God” (ἐκ θεοῦ ἐγεννήθησαν, 2:29; 3:9; 4:7; 5:1, 4, 18)²³. In 1 Jn the followers of the Elder are also repeatedly addressed as “little children” (τεκνία, 2:1, 12, 28; 3:7), and “beloved” (ἀγαπητοί, 2:7; 3:2, 21; 4:1, 7, 11; cf. 3 John 1, 2, 5, 11). They confess that God is “Father” (πατήρ, 1:2; 2:1, 14–15, 22–24; 3:1; cf. also 2 John 4) and are referred to by the Elder as “brothers” (ἀδελφοί and sisters, 3:13) to each other.²⁴ The Father gives the believers “eternal life” enabling them to partake in this new family (1:13; 6:4).²⁵ Jesus is the only (μονογενῆ, 4:9,) “Son” of the Father (Ἰησοῦς ἐστὶν ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ θεοῦ, 4:15), to whom the newborn children of the Father must adapt their lives (see the *καθὼς* expression in 2:6). Although there is no direct reference to the “Spirit of God” as in 1 Jn (τὸ πνεῦμα τοῦ θεοῦ, 4:2f.) it is clear from the texts of reference that it is the Spirit of God (Holy Spirit, 14:26)²⁶ which constitutes the presence of the Father (1 Jn 4:13; 3:24) and guides and educates His children (1 Jn 2:27) in the *familia Dei*. By doing this the Elder brings the Father, Jesus, the Holy Spirit and believers into fellowship like that of an extended earthly family (cf. Tollefson 1999:88). To become a member of this family, one has to be born²⁷ into this family.

2.5 Conclusion

This investigation sincerely confirms that the first-century Mediterranean Christians were strongly group-embedded, collectivistic people. Therefore, the Elder used family metaphors to elaborate on what happened at the crucifixion of Jesus – that a new family was constituted. In 1 John he explains the relationships and conduct in this new corpus of Christian believers. The rest of this paper will revolve around how he depicted the identity of this corpus.

¹⁶ Alongside “to have fellowship with God”, which is only found in 1:3 and 6, one of the most common phrases is “to be in God” (ὄτι ἐν αὐτῷ ἐσμεν, 2:5; 5:20) or “to abide” (μένειν, 2:6, 24; 3:24; 4:13, 15, 16). This combination with the typical word μένειν is usually expanded (except in 2:6, 24) into a twofold or reciprocal formula (“we in God and God in us”) or vice versa. Another expression of fellowship with God found only in 1 and 2 John is “to have the Father” (τὸν πατέρα ἔχει) or “the Son” (ὁ ἔχων τὸν υἱὸν, 1 John 2:23; 5:12; 2 John 9). “To know the Father” (ἐγνώκατε τὸν πατέρα) comes down to the same thing (2:3 [cf. 2:5]; 2:13, 14 [cf. 1:3]). Believers are also indicated to be “of God” (ἐστὶν ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ, 3:10; 4:4, 6; 5:18f). God also abides in believers through His Spirit that He has given them (μένει ἐν ἡμῖν, ἐκ τοῦ πνεύματος οὗ ἡμῖν ἔδωκεν, 2:3; 3:24). See also Lieu 1991:31–48; Schnackenburg 1992:190f.

¹⁷ Van der Watt (2000:157, 161–394)

¹⁸ Esler (2000:148) points out that neither in Greek nor in Latin was there even a word that corresponded to our word “family”, although οἶκος in Greek and *domus* in Latin refer to the house and the household. This concept is also found in Galatians and 1 Thessalonians in the New Testament (Esler 1997:121ff; 2000:145ff).

¹⁹ In the Old Testament the term “*bêth*” or “house”, like the word “family” in modern languages, is flexible and may even include the entire nation (“house of Jacob” or the “house of Israel”), or a considerable section of the people (the “house of Joseph” or the “house of Judah”). It may denote kinship in the wide sense (De Vaux 1973:20).

²⁰ τὸν πατέρα, 1 Jn 3:1

²¹ See also Jn 1:14, 18; 3:16, 18 where it refers to the “only” (μονογενῆ) “Son” of the Father (**Error! Main Document Only.** Ἰησοῦς ἐστὶν ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ θεοῦ, 4:15).

²² τέκνα θεοῦ, Jn 1:12; 11:52

²³ γεγεννημένος ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ, Jn 1:12

²⁴ Believers are also referred to by Jesus as “sons of light” (υἱοὶ φωτός, Jn 12:36).

²⁵ Also 1 Jn 2:25; 3:14–15; 5:11–13; 5:26.

²⁶ The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of God (3:34; 14:26).

²⁷ See Jn 3:3–7 and Van der Watt (2000:162, 165–200, 398–400).

3 KINSHIP AND CHRISTIAN IDENTITY IN THE JOHANNINE COMMUNITY

The social identity theory of Henri Tajfel will be utilised to determine the identity of this group.

3.1 Social identity theory of Henri Tajfel

The socio-cultural aspects just considered (group orientation) relate to the primary level of socialisation of people across the Mediterranean and ancient world. Yet in 1 John the Elder is addressing the same audience of a particular type within this larger context, namely *the Johannine community*, a community of Christ-followers who were in various ways in a state of tension with other people and groups in the surrounding environment. The particular identity and status of these Christ-followers as members of the Johannine community and as members of the *familia Dei* suggest that the social-scientific theory of Henry Tajfel, who can be regarded as one of the pioneers of this theory, might be useful to explicate the identity of this group in the Gospel of John.²⁸

The crucial question regarding a social psychological approach to the subject relates to how, and through what psychological processes, a community or a particular group manages to install itself in the minds and hearts of individuals in order to affect their behaviour. An important point conceived by Tajfel is that a group needs to establish a positively valued distinctiveness from other groups. The rationale behind this is to provide the members of the in-group with a positive social identity. The members of these in-groups will then learn who they are. They will develop an appreciation for this, and be perceptive of the ways in which they were differentiated from out-groups. The empirical stimulus for this view lies in research that indicated that the categorising of people to belong to a specific group led to social comparison with other groups. Such a comparison will then result in significant forms of group behaviour. The members in the group will favour one another while they will discriminate against members of out-groups (cf. Esler 2000:158f).

Tajfel interpreted this process as a concern to establish a “social identity”, which refers to that part of a person’s self-understanding which derives from the belonging to groups. He (1978:63, 67) defines social identity as “that *part* of an individual’s self-concept which derives from his knowledge of his membership of a social group (or groups) together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership” (1978:63).

The basic hypothesis, then, is to evaluate a group positively through in-group/out-group comparisons. This leads groups to attempt to differentiate themselves from each other (see Tajfel 1978:61–76; Turner 1978:235f; Austen 1979:41). Hence, according to Tajfel’s definition there are at least three classes (dimensions) of variables that should influence intergroup differentiation or identity in concrete social situations:

1. the cognitive dimension: refers to the simple recognition of belonging²⁹
2. the evaluative dimension: refers to the positive or negative connotations of belonging³⁰
3. the emotional dimension: refers to the attitudes, such as love and hate, which members hold towards insiders and outsiders³¹ (see Esler 2000:159)

²⁸ Esler in 1994 and later in 2000 introduced this theory of Tajfel in his work on Matthew, Thessalonians and Galatians. “Social identity theory adopts a distinctive position in relation to the continuing issue of the relationship of the individual and the group” (Esler 2000:158).

²⁹ “... individuals must have internalized their group membership as an aspect of their self-concept: they must be subjectively identified with the relevant in-group” (Austen 1979:41)

³⁰ “... the social situation must be such as to allow for intergroup comparisons that enable the selection and evaluation of the relevant relational attributes” (Austen 1979:41).

The application of this theory of Tajfel to the FG necessitates examining what the Elder must have thought to maintain the distinctive identity of this community family in each of the cognitive, evaluative and emotional dimensions in this congregation.

This theory will now be applied to discover the type of identity the Elder may have recommended to the Johannine community.

3.2 Kinship imagery and identity in the Johannine community

Central to the theory of Tajfel is the extent to which humans derive a sense of identity from belonging to a group. In the particular group they then develop ways of differentiating their in-group from negatively regarded out-groups. He clearly explains the extent to which the oppression of a group contributes to strengthen the sense of belonging to the group. In 1 John the Elder utilises such ill-treatment of Christ-followers as a prototypical experience for the in-group in Ephesus. The oppression implied throughout the document will force members to act according to their membership and implied character.

We will now apply the different elements of “social identity theory” to how the authors depict the Johannine community as a fictive family, as the *familia Dei*, in order to distinguish them from out-groups. In this effort of identification it will become evident how the character of the Father became illustrious.

3.2.1 The cognitive dimension

According to Tajfel the “cognitive dimension” refers to the simple recognition of belonging. “Individuals must have internalized their group membership as an aspect of their self-concept: they must be subjectively identified with the relevant in-group” (Austen 1979:41). The Elder articulates to his readers this cognitive dimension, the sense of belonging to the Johannine community.

The Elder employs the language of kinship from his surrounding culture in relation to himself and his readers. In order to understand his point of using this language, from a literary perspective or metaphorically, various sorts of kinship language need to be borne in mind. This concerns both the distinctive features of Mediterranean family life and also the various ways in which he utilises such features in seeking to develop and maintain a positive group identity. In doing so he wishes to distinguish his readers from the negatively valued out-groups (Esler 2000:167). He orientates them in terms of differentiating their in-group from a negatively regarded out-group. The concern of the Elder with a particular in-group versus an out-group in the surroundings emerges as early as chapter 2: ¹⁸ “Children, it is the last hour; and as you have heard that antichrist is coming, so now many antichrists have come; therefore we know that it is the last hour.”¹⁹ They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us; but they went out, that it might be plain that they all are not of us.”³² Here we find – closely integrated – a strong rationale for the existence of an in-group of a particular kind. In this cognitive dimension the research will focus on the identity of the constituents of this family.

3.2.1.1 Knowing the Father³³

³¹ “... in-groups do not compare themselves with every cognitively available out-group: the out-group must be perceived as a relevant comparison group. Similarity, proximity and situational salience are among the variables that determine out-group comparability ...” (Austen 1979:41).

³² At various places in the Gospel (which has been extended to the first epistle) the FE underlines this fundamental division between in-group and out-group (see Fn42 in Families & family relationships), between those who believe in Jesus and those who do not. He uses a variety of expressions to distinguish his readers from the out-group(s). They are those who did not “know Jesus” (Jn 1:10) and “did not accept Jesus” (Jn 1:11) or did not confess Jesus as the Christ (1 Jn).

³³ See the excellent work done by Thompson (2001:60–100).

Kinship language begins already in the prologue in verses 2 and 3 with the references to the Father and his Son Jesus Christ (μετὰ τοῦ πατρὸς καὶ μετὰ τοῦ υἱοῦ αὐτοῦ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ).³⁴ “Father” is the most common designation of God in 1 John. The readers know the Father through the description of His character and the lifestyle in which they should partake.

3.2.1.1.1 Characteristics

In 1 John God is depicted as the Father (1:2, 3; 2:14, 15, 22–25; 3:1), as the *pater familias*. From a patriarchal perspective He is depicted as the head of the family. The nature of the Father determines the new status and rules of conduct to which His newborn children have to conform. The Elder characterises Him to be light (ὁ θεὸς φῶς ἐστίν, 1:5), righteousness ([ὁ θεὸς] δίκαιός ἐστίν, 2:29) and love (ὁ θεὸς ἀγάπη ἐστίν, 4:8, 16).³⁵ As the one who cannot be seen (4:12, 20), He is the One who is in command. He knows everything (3:20). He creates κοινωσία, enabling them to be part of this new family (2:25; 3:14–15; 5:11–13). He gives eternal life through his Son (1:2, 4:9; cf. also 4:11, 14) and to his children. He forgives His children when they confess their sins (1:9). The Father lives with and in His children by way of the Spirit (3:24). The Father takes care of His family through His Spirit. Also in the First Epistle of John the primary focus is on God the Father. Jesus, His Son, and the community, His children, must live according to how His identity has been depicted by the Elder. Therefore, His children have to take on His character.

3.2.1.1.2 Immanenzformeln³⁶

The Elder uses various formulas of immanence through which the children of God come to know Him better and have fellowship with Him. These rhetorical formulas of immanence (*Immanenzformeln*)³⁷ describe the qualitative lifestyle of believers. All these formulas of immanence show the central significance of this concept in 1 John, which has a strong connection with other leading concepts, especially that of a “child of God” (3:1–3) with its strong ethical implications (cf. Lieu 1991:42). It points out that the Elder expresses the fellowship (κοινωσία) of believers with God in various ways as “knowing” 2:3–5; 3:1–2, 16; cf. also 2:29; , “having” 5:10, 12, “to be in” (2:5; 5:20) and “abiding in” (2:6, 24; 3:24; 4:13, 15, 16) God.

Seen from the perspective of family imagery these formulas of immanence point essentially to a “qualitative and functional union on the basis of shared status, conviction and custom as members of the same family” (Van der Watt 1999:503); they influence one another to think and act alike.

3.2.1.2 Knowing the Son (of God)

³⁴ The rest of the prologue (1:14–18) characterises this group by its relationship to God the Father (1:18) and to Jesus Christ who is, according to the FE, the only Son of the Father (1:18). With these connections and the description of Jesus’ function in establishing such a group in the latter part of chapter one, the FE creates a desire to belong to this particular group. This statement (1:11–13) confirms both the “agonistic” nature of an out-group and also the relevance of the theory of Tajfel which shows how the social identity of members of the Johannine group is developed in the FG.

³⁵ According to Culpepper (1995:142) believers’ “fellowship with God” is constituted in the light, in truth, in righteousness, and in love – which he calls metaphors for God’s nature. He adds the noun ἡ ἀλήθεια (5:6) where the Elder refers to “the Spirit is the truth” (πνεῦμά ἐστιν ἡ ἀλήθεια).

³⁶ See Van der Merwe (2006:542f).

³⁷ Schnackenburg 1992:63f; Van der Watt 2000:353; cf. also 2000:323ff and Scholtissek 2004:431.

In 1 John familial terminology refers to Jesus as the Son of God,³⁸ and those who follow him are his brothers and sisters (4:13; 20:17; 21:23). If Jesus and his followers have the same Father, then it infers that they are members of the same family. If the role of God as Father is shaped by his bond with Jesus His Son, then the features are extended to those who follow Jesus (Koester 2008:51).

In 4:9 Jesus is referred to as the *only*³⁹ Son of the Father and in 1:1–2 Jesus is eternal life personified (1:1–2). He is without sin (3:5). He is also referred to in functional terms (Van der Watt 1999:502) in relation to God’s children: therefore through him (his blood) people are cleansed from all sin (1:7). He is the believer’s atoning sacrifice (ἰλασμός, 2:2) and advocate (παράκλητος, 2:1) by the Father. He is righteous (Ἰησοῦν Χριστὸν δίκαιον, 2:1). He is pure (ἐκεῖνος ἄγνος ἐστίν, 3:3). As the truth (5:20), he reveals (1:1) in order to give understanding (5:20). He restores broken κοινωμία.⁴⁰ He gives God’s children understanding to know Him who is true (5:20). Therefore, the children of God have to believe in the Son and follow him. They are commanded by the Elder, in his usage of the emphatic subordinating comparative particle καθὼς, juxtaposed to the adverb οὕτως, to live as Jesus lived: καθὼς ἐκεῖνος περιεπάτησεν καὶ αὐτὸς [οὕτως] περιπατεῖν.

3.2.1.3 Knowing themselves (the children of God)

3.2.1.3.1 Depicting the children of God

The family metaphor is further strengthened by the Elder when he refers to his adherents as “(little) children or children of God”⁴¹ and also in terms of “brothers”⁴² (also the frequent occurrence of the preposition with the pronoun μετ’ ἀλλήλων⁴³ – with one another).

The description of the Johannine community as children of God has been extensively elaborated on in the Epistle. The adherents of the Elder were depicted as “the children of God” (3:1, 2, 10). They are born of God (2:29; 3:9; 4:7; 5:1, 18) and in 3:9 it is said that “God’s seed” abides in them. Thus they are attached to God by birth, to the Son by faith and confession and to the Spirit by truth. The community of mutual love is none other than an expression of a mutual abiding (μένειν)⁴⁴ with God the Father. God’s children abide in Him and He in them (3:24; 4:13, 16).

Another main area of (fictive) kinship language in 1 John consists of the frequent use of “brothers” (ἀδελφοί). On a number of occasions⁴⁵ he directly addresses his readers as

³⁸ See 3:8; 4:15; 5:5, 10, 13, 20; cf. 1:3, 7; 3:23; 4:9.

³⁹ Μονογενής is used as a term for the relationship of the Son with the Father only in the Johannine writings. In the Gospel of Luke (7:12; 8:42) it is used of the only child of a parent, but also as an indication of the *value* of a certain child with no indication of how many children the parent has (cf. Heb 11:17). In the Gospel of John, the reference is clearly to oneness and not in number but in being; the utter uniqueness of the Sonship of Christ (cf. Ridderbos 1997:53).

⁴⁰ See Kok (2009:112–147) for an explicit reference to the restoration and reconciliation dimension in the Johannine literature.

⁴¹ 2:1, 12, 14, 18, 28; 3:1, 2, 7, 10, 18; 4:4; 5:2, 19, 21

⁴² 2:9, 10; 3:10, 12, 13, 15, 17; 4:20, 21; 5:16

⁴³ 1:7; 3:11, 14, 16, 23; 4:7, 11, 12

⁴⁴ The verb μένειν is used 117 times in the New Testament. Over half the uses occur in the Johannine writings in connection with God’s word (2:14, 24bis), seed (σπέρμα, 3:9), anointing (χρίσμα, 2:27), the Spirit (3:24; 4:13), God’s love (3:17), God (3:24bis) abiding in the believer and reciprocally the abiding of the believer in the Son (2:6, 24, 28; 3:5, 24), and I the truth (2 John 2). Mutual abidance is referred to in 4:13, 15, 16; 2 John 9.

⁴⁵ 1 John 2:9, 10; 3:10, 12 (bis), 13, 15, 17; 4:20 (bis), 21; 5:16

ἀδελφοί⁴⁶. The extent of such fictive sibling language in such a short letter is very impressive. He seeks that the members treat one another as brothers should. Thus the Elder is endorsing a fictive kinship within the community which is imbued with the ideal characteristics of actual kinship in Mediterranean culture. The Elder is both advocating a particular identity for his Johannine Christ-followers as well as bringing out some specific features which consist of certain behavioural norms. His repeated address to them as brothers is matched by a number of other indications which verify that he has family relationships in mind as the appropriate model.

3.2.1.3.2 The behaviour of the children of God

The behaviour of God's children has to relate to the social behaviour (rules and values) of **the family** into which they are born. "Family life" implies specific ethical conduct. Therefore, the Elder insists upon a correspondence between internal state and external behaviour. The Elder is playing particularly on the Greco-Roman image that children are extensions of their father's character. Children are of the same essence as their father, and children will exhibit a character that is indicative of their origins.⁴⁷

They know the Father and do what pleases Him (3:22).⁴⁸ When they became part of the *familia Dei*, major fundamental changes took place in their lives. The picture of these changes is derived from an analysis of their status and the change in their social behaviour, as depicted by the Elder, and has both individual and corporative implications. They should act according to their status and knowledge.⁴⁹ The new status and rules of conduct to which the children of God *have to conform* are determined by the head of this family, the Father of the family.⁵⁰ According to the Elder, these attributes of God the Father must be recognised and imitated (2:6) by God's children.

3.2.1.4 Knowing the Spirit of God

According to the Elder, this new existence of the believer as an existence in the *familia Dei* can be experienced in a concrete way by the Holy Spirit who applies to God's children the redemptive work of the Father and the Son (2:20). The chief functions of the Spirit are those of illuminator (2:20), teacher (2:27), empowerer (3:24 in the context of obedience; 4:13 in the context of love),⁵¹ confessor (4:2) and witness (5:7f) (cf. Kenney 2000:47). The Spirit becomes the guiding influence in the lives of God's children (2:20–7; 5:7), influencing their conduct. It is the Spirit that influences and leads these children to act right (δίκαιός – 2:29; 3:7, 12; cf. also 3:10), to walk just as Jesus walked (2:6). The Spirit will give God's children knowledge (οἶδατε – 2:20). The Spirit witnesses to this truth (5:6a) and will guide these children in the truth (5:6) (see also Von Wahlde 1990:126ff). The purpose of the multiple references to the work of the Spirit by the Elder is to convince the readers that they, as

⁴⁶ See footnote 4.

⁴⁷ Look at how this imagery is used in the following passage to draw the distinction between "children of the light", those "born of God" and children of the devil. Then notice how sibling language is used to signify appropriate relationships toward other believers.

⁴⁸ In *Maccabees* sons fulfil the conditions of their father and their success proves that they obeyed their father, which implies that they stayed loyal to the covenant of the forefathers, kept the law and its ordinances (Macc 2:19–22, 67, 68).

⁴⁹ See 1 John 1:6, 7; 2:3–5, 9–10; 6; 3:16; 4:11; 2 John 6, 9; cf. also 2:29; 3:6, 9–10, 18; 4:7

⁵⁰ As theology dominates the Fourth Gospel (see Thompson 2001, 1ff), 1 John is also theocentric (cf. Lieu 1986:198; cf. also Malatesta 1978:96): it explores the nature of God's character.

⁵¹ Kenney (2000:47) points out that 1 John awards equal importance to the three themes of obedience (1:5–2:6; 2:29–3:10; 5:13–21), love (2:7–11; 3:11–18; 4:7–21), and belief (2:18–28; 4:1–3; 5:5–12).

children of God, have no excuse not to become Father-like. They are anointed by the Spirit (2:27).

3.2.1.5 Conclusion

In conclusion it can be said that in using the family metaphor the Elder tried to strengthen “familial associations” to rhetorically express and bring about “familial responsibilities and conduct”. Such familial responsibilities and conduct are expressed by the Elder in terms of “life as existence in the family”.

3.2.2 The evaluative dimension: the significance of the family

According to Tajfel the “evaluative dimension” refers to the positive or negative connotations of belonging. “The social situation must be such as to allow for intergroup comparisons that enable the selection and evaluation of the relevant relational attributes” (Austen 1979:41).

Central to this are group norms (cf. Brown 1988:42–8). Such norms are a scale of values which defines a range of acceptable and unacceptable definitive principles (doctrines), attitudes and behaviour of the group’s members, in our case the family members. It coordinates and regulates behaviour and covers issues such as ideologies and traditions. It also assists the members of the particular group/family to act appropriately in new and ambiguous situations. Hence, such norms maintain and enhance the identity of the group/family (Brown 1988:251).

Berger and Luckmann (1966:120) contribute another perspective to this statement by Tajfel. According to them, part of the function of paraenetic utterances is social formation, where admonitions are made to strengthen the induction “of an individual into the objective world of a society or sector of it”. This is exactly what the Elder is doing; he is reminding members of the community of the shared common values and norms of their particular group that set them apart from their opponents.

The norms of the *familia Dei* will now briefly be investigated as depicted in 1 Jn. For the Elder to distinguish this community from other groups the text includes (1) *dualistic concepts* (in 1 Jn these concepts are spelled out in terms of dialectic discourse); (2) *confession about Jesus*: the confession in the Epistle that Christ is the Son of God incarnated; (3) *harsh terminology*: the character of the opponents of this *familia Dei* are depicted in terms of harsh expressions through which the opposite of this family has been inferred.

3.2.2.1 Dialectic discourse

Throughout the Epistle the Elder makes use of dialectic discourse. *Dialectic discourse* is defined as one kind of rhetorical technique that makes extensive use of antithetical and binary language to persuade or convince others of the element of truth or correctness of one’s position that would otherwise be difficult to obtain.⁵²

Dialectical discourse makes special use of metaphors referring to transformation or “becoming”, to persuade the reader that change is not only possible, but inevitable (Murphy 1971:116). In the case of 1 John, each new dialectical choice becomes an opportunity to guide the reader in the selection of these decisions in life which give a measure of right conduct regarding the ethics of the *familia Dei*.⁵³ This way of life, according to the Elder, comprises to

⁵² Cf. also Benjamin 1983:65; Cosigny 1989:281–87; Gadamer 1980:3; Holmberg 1977:233; Lake 1986:206f; Murray 1988:286.

⁵³ Du Rand (1981:2) describes the thought process in 1 John as “a spiral, for the development of a theme often brings us back almost to the starting point, almost but not quite, for there is a slight shift which provides a transition to a fresh theme which has apparently been dismissed at an earlier point; and now comes up for consideration from a slightly different angle ... This results in a recapitulation of certain themes.”

love against to hate, to live a life of righteousness against a life of unrighteousness, and to live in the light against to live in darkness.⁵⁴ *These three characteristics that have been attached to the Father and his Son are now applied to the children of God. This was raised because these three ethical problems occurred in the community, under those who broke away and those who remained loyal to the Elder. Thus under the evaluative dimension of familia Dei the Elder explains how they should live as children of God. This will distinguish them.*

Walking in the light – walking in darkness⁵⁵ (1:5–2:27): In the first major dialectical division of 1 John the Elder uses the metaphor of light to represent God and darkness to represent the world and evil. He continues by suggesting (1:5–2:2) that an individual is confronted with the choice of whether to live in the light and have fellowship with God (the Father) or to live in darkness and have fellowship with the *world*.⁵⁶ The choice realises with the dialectical choice of either walking in obedience to the truth or in disobedience to the truth. The Elder intensifies this dialectic when he contrasts the community of God the Father with the community of *evil* (2:12–17). He pauses in the presentation of the struggle between fellowship with light or darkness by commending the victorious community of believers (youths, adults and elders) for walking in obedience with the Father because they defeated the efforts of the evil one to subvert their loyalties (2:12–14).

Works of righteousness – works of unrighteousness (2:28–4:6): The second major dialectical division depicts the struggle between the works of righteousness and the works of unrighteousness. It presents a vivid contrast between the beliefs of the children of God and the beliefs of the children of the world. Here, the Elder delineates between the believers' knowledge about the Father in juxtaposition to the unbelievers' lack of knowledge about the Father. He contrasts membership in two families: those who belong to God and those who belong to the devil (3:4–10). The membership boundary in the family of God is clearly drawn by noting that Christ is sinless and that he came to take away sin from those who believe, while those who continue to commit sin habitually are guilty of lawlessness and are excluded from the *family* (community of faith) (3:4–5). The stated reason for this change of lifestyle is that the Father (and the Son) is righteous; and so His children should live righteous lives. One practises righteousness because of his/her righteous character. The individual's conduct is evidence of his/her nature.⁵⁷ *The one who practises righteousness does so because he/she has been granted the righteousness of the Father and so again God the Father becomes sensible in this world.*

⁵⁴ This part of the paper links closely with the tripartite division of this epistle by Tollefson (1999:81–84; cf. also Bruce 1970:29): Prologue 1:1–4; (I) Walking in the light – walking in the darkness (1:5–2:27); (II) Works of righteousness – works of unrighteousness (2:28–4:6); (III) Love brings life – hate brings death (4:7–5:13); and Conclusion (5:14–21).

⁵⁵ Van der Watt (2000:187, 237f, 245–260).

⁵⁶ According to this context it implies that sin in the *familia Dei* did not cease. Consequently it does not only hamper fellowship with God, but also with fellow family members. From this perspective, the responsibility for morality and deviance is not on the individual alone, but on the social body in which the individual is embedded (Malina & Neyrey 1993:76).

According to the Malina model (1993:31ff), the primary good in the Mediterranean world is honour, meaning the value of a person in his/her own eyes together with the acceptance of such an assessment by a relevant group. Honour resides in proper behaviour, and is attached to positions of reputation in a family (village, city or nation). One of the means to acquire such honour is to be born into an aristocratic or illustrious family. Malina (1993:38) points out that honour is always presumed to exist within a person's own family of blood, which he defines as such a person's blood relatives.

⁵⁷ In this sense John's regeneration language parallels the New Testament concept of justification. The believer does right because he possesses the imputed righteousness of Christ. Instead, Christ is the standard, the means, the motivation for the Christian's righteousness. As a child of God the believer seeks to live a life of Christlike righteousness. He seeks to be like Jesus.

Love brings life – hate brings death (4:7–5:12): The third major dialectical division depicts the antithesis between love and hate. Love that produces life is contrasted with hate that results in death. The Elder compares the Father’s love with the lack of love of mankind. The Father’s children love Him while those outside the family (unbelievers) do not love Him. These children are reminded that if they love an invisible Father, they should also express love for visible human beings (4:11–12). Such confession and acceptance mean God (the Father) lives in His children and they live in Him. Denial brings rejection of that life (4:15f).

3.2.2.2 Confession that Jesus is the Son of God or that the Son of God is Jesus

But this evaluative dimension of Tajfel which refers to the positive or negative connotations of belonging is also sensible in the confession of the *familia Dei*. The Elder and his opponents differed on the question of whether the man Jesus could be the same person as the divine Christ. For those that left the family, this proposition was unacceptable, since it was radically in conflict with their belief. But for the Elder it was a matter of epistemology, it concerned the main and crucial point of the Christian faith – for the existence of this family as well as the existence in the family: “No one who denies the Son has the Father; everyone who confesses the Son has the Father also” (1 Jn 2:23).

“To have the Father” expresses a close and intimate communion with the Father, not the possessing of the Father, of course. Some renderings are, “to be with the Father”, or “to be a child of the Father”. John counters this by stating who cannot “have the Father” and who can. Only by accepting Jesus Christ who, as man, has been part of this material world, can one “have the Father”: that is have fellowship with God, the Father of Jesus Christ. This infers that in this *familia Dei*, intimate communion between a child of God and the Father can only take place through the Son, when he is acknowledged to be part of the family.

Those who left the *familia Dei* did not confess that Jesus was the Christ. What is denied here is not a statement, but a person, implying that Jesus is not the Son of God, and consequently not part of the *familia Dei*. With a personal object the verb has the meaning of “not to acknowledge/accept a person for what he is”. Some of the renderings used here are “to reject” or, more descriptively, “to declare one does not believe in”. In this sense the denying of the Son is the cause, and the denying of the Father the result. It accentuates that the child’s relationship with the Father himself is at stake.

3.2.2.3 Harsh depiction of the opponents of this community (family)

Harsh terminology has been used to depict those outside of this family. Within the framework of this investigation, these opponents can perhaps best be identified through a study of the three key passages: 1 John 2:18–27; 4:1–6 and 2 John 7–11.⁵⁸ These passages delineate some aspects regarding the background of these opponents of the Elder:

2:18 ἀντίχριστοι πολλοὶ γεγόνασιν, ὅθεν γινώσκομεν ὅτι ἐσχάτη ὥρα ἐστίν.

4:1 Πολλοὶ ψευδοπροφήται . ἐξεληλύθασιν εἰς τὸν κόσμον.

2 John 7 πολλοὶ πλάνοι ἐξῆλθον εἰς τὸν κόσμον

In these texts the Elder refers to the fact that in the schism apparently *many* (πολλοὶ) had separated from him and his network of house churches.⁵⁹ It can be deduced that *many* people left the community. Since there is no inference that they left their environment, they could still have influenced the adherents of the Elder.

⁵⁸ Although 2 John has not been selected in this research, these verses have been incorporated here due to their relevance.

⁵⁹ See Culpepper, R A. 1976. *The Johannine School*. Missoula: Scholars; Cullmann, O. 1976. *The Johannine Circle* (trans. J. Bowden). London: SCM; and Brown, R E. 1979. *The community of the Beloved Disciple: The life, loves and hates of an individual church in New Testament times*. London: Geoffrey Chapman.

By labelling his opponents as ἀντίχριστοι, ψευδοπροφήται and πλάνοι, the Elder refers to unnamed people who had once been members of the Johannine group, but had subsequently abandoned their association with this group (2:19). Other references in this passage are to ‘lies’ (2:21), ‘liars’ (2:22), and ‘those who would deceive you’ (τῶ πλανώντῳ ὑμα, 2:26; cf. also 4:6), probably also referring to those who had left the Johannine community. They promoted a religious viewpoint that differed so much from ‘what they ha[d] heard from the beginning’ (cf. 1:1; 2:7, 13, 14, 24) that the Elder regarded it as an unacceptable innovation (Hurtado 2003:408f). The names “deceiver”, “liar” and “antichrist” seem to focus on the leader(s) of the opponents. His followers are characterised in similar terms (Painter 2002:203). The reference in the plural form, made to the ἀντίχριστοι (2:18), ψευδοπροφήται (4:1) and πλάνοι (2 John 7), should be understood in the light of the impact of the schism and the activities of those who were, according to the Elder, false teachers, false prophets and deceivers.

That ‘they went out’ (ἐξῆλθαν) implies that they were once part of the community and left of their own accord (Painter 2002:204). The phrase εἰς τὸν κόσμον (4:1; cf. 2 John 7)⁶⁰ is merely another way of stating emphatically that they have left the community and characterises them as opposing those in the community. They are of the world, while those in the community are of God (see 4:1–6).

Throughout 1 John the opponents are vehemently depicted and treated as existing outside the Johannine community⁶¹ and are (1) labelled according to the deeds they committed at the ethical level, on account of which they are called murderers (ὁ ἀνθρωποκτόνος, 3:15; see also 3:12, ἔσφαξεν) who do not love a brother (4:20; also cf. 2:11; 3:15), and at the doctrinal level, on account of which they are depicted as deceivers (2 John 7; also 1 John 2:26; 3:7), antichrists (2:18, 22; 4:3; 2 John 8), liars (2:22) and false prophets (4:1). (2) These deceivers 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’ (1:6). Finally they are seen as ‘to be in the world’ (4:5). (3) Metaphorically speaking, 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 they ‘do not have life’ (5:12; also 3:15) and ‘abide in death’ (3:14). In most of these references the harsh depiction of these opponents is contrasted with the characteristics of the adherents of the Elder (see Van der Merwe 2005:430ff).

3.2.2.4 Conclusion

In conclusion it can be said that the Elder characterised the opponents of this group/family very negatively while those who are part of the family are portrayed in clear terms. Social formation took place through the paraenetic utterances. The admonitions towards the

⁶⁰ Of the 23 occurrences of κόσμον in 1 & 2 John, only two (4:9, 17) refer to locality. In 4:1–6 κόσμον occurs six times. In all these cases it is used antithetically to God. The phrase ‘they have gone out into the world’ (also 2 John 7) alludes to 2:19, where it is stated: ‘They went out from us’, which infers that they were formerly part of the community but had severed all ties. See Schnakenburg (1992:199) for a different interpretation. ‘They went out from us...’ characterises their appearance in public all over the world. The adherents of the Elder may come upon them anywhere.

⁶¹ Scholars refer to them differently. Painter (2002:84) refers to them as ‘opponents’. According to him, they could also be called ‘schismatics’ or ‘heretics’. An alternative nomenclature used by Brown (1982:69, 70, 70 n. 156; also Hurtado 2003:409ff) is ‘secessionists’ (1982:69); he also refers to ‘adversaries’ (1982:415, 574, 618), ‘opponents’ and ‘deceivers’ (1982:358f), and ‘propagandists’ (1982:429). Schnackenburg (1992:18) calls them ‘heretical teachers’. Each of these terms can be justified as representative of the Elder’s point of view. See Hurtado (2003:418) for a brief discussion of why references to these secessionists as ‘docetists’ or ‘gnostics’ are unacceptable.

opponents strengthened the induction of this family. In 1 Jn a scale of values was presented to define a range of acceptable and unacceptable attitudes and behaviour of the family members. This was to assist the members of the Johannine family to act appropriately in new and ambiguous situations. These norms enhanced the identity of the family.

3.2.3 The emotional dimension: life in the family

According to Tajfel, the “emotional dimension” refers to the attitudes, such as love and hate, which members hold towards insiders and outsiders.⁶² One extreme feature of social comparison, common in all groups, is the tendency of the in-group to stereotype out-groups. Within the paradigm of social identity theory, stereotypes are described by Hogg (1988:65) as “... beliefs that all members of a particular group have the same qualities, which circumscribe the group and differentiate it from other groups”. Stereotypes seem to often be associated with the evaluation of groups. There is this tendency to attach positive stereotypes to the describer’s in-group and negative stereotypes to out-groups (Esler 2000:162).⁶³ This would infer that in the in-group members will love and honour one another.

3.2.3.1 Love in the family

Quite a number of times the children of God’s family are called to love one another. The phrase “let us love *one another*” occurs throughout the epistle (1 Jn 2:10; 3:10, 11, 14, [18], 23; 4:7, 11, 12, 21; 5:1–3; 2 Jn 5).⁶⁴ Here love seems to be the *sine qua non*⁶⁵ for the ethics of the Johannine community (cf. Schnackenburg 1992:217). In 1 John the believer’s subject of love is indicated as ἀλλήλους⁶⁶ (one another). More important than the number of uses of ἀλλήλους is the concentration of the command to ἀγαπῶμεν ἀλλήλους (*love one another*).⁶⁷ Thus the formulation, ἀγαπῶμεν ἀλλήλους, is exclusive to the epistles (and the Gospel) of John. The subject of love is closer defined by the Elder as τὸν ἀδελφὸν αὐτοῦ.⁶⁸ The community is called upon to love one another as brothers and sisters belonging to the same family, the *familia Dei*. Thus, the consistent use of the reciprocal pronoun ἀλλήλους seems to be a conscious delimiting of the scope of love.⁶⁹

⁶² “... in-groups do not compare themselves with every cognitively available out-group: the out-group must be perceived as a relevant comparison group. Similarity, proximity and situational salience are among the variables that determine out-group comparability ...” (Austen 1979:41).

⁶³ For a detailed discussion of stereotypes, see part II (from perceptual judgement to social stereotypes) in Tajfel, H G. 1981. *Human groups and social categories: studies in social psychology*, Cambridge.

⁶⁴ Love terminology is characteristic of the Johannine Gospel and Epistles. The two verbs ἀγαπᾶν and φιλεῖν are used without distinction in the Gospel. Only ἀγαπᾶν appears in the Epistles 31 times (28 in 1 John) and the noun ἀγάπη is used 21 times (18 in 1 John) and ἀγαπητοί 10 times. This high frequency of occurrence marks out the Johannine writings from the rest of the NT and other Greek literature of this period. These Johannine writings, especially 1 John, make love a theological category derived from the character and action of God. On this basis it becomes an ethical category, placing God’s children under the obligation to love (cf. Painter 2002:170).

⁶⁵ “an essential requirement” or “an essential element or condition” from *The Free Dictionary*. Available online at: <http://www.thefreedictionary.com/sine+qua+non> (accessed 11/06/2009)

⁶⁶ This reciprocal pronoun is used 100 times in the New Testament. Of these occurrences a great concentration is found in the Fourth Gospel (15x). 1 John uses the term 6 times (1 Jn 1:7; 3:11, 23; 4:7, 11, 12) and 2 John once (v 5).

⁶⁷ 1 John 3:11, 23; 4:7, 11, 12; 2 John 5 (cf. also John 13:34bis, 35; 15:12, 17)

⁶⁸ Van der Watt 2000:304–323, 355f

⁶⁹ Other references, ἀδελφοί (2:9, 10; 3:12, 13, 15, 17; 4:20, 21; 5:16) and ἀγαπητοί (2:7; 4:1, 7; ἀγαπητῶ, 1 John 3:2; 3 John 1; also τεκνία, 2:1, 12, 28; 3:7, 18; 4:4; 5:21; ἐκλεκτῆ, 2 John 1; φίλοι, 3 John 14) that occur are forms of address when the Elder speaks to his adherents, but they also spell out some characteristics of being τέκνα θεοῦ. Ἀδελφοί in the NT denotes “fellow-Christians” or “Christian brothers”. In John 20:17 Jesus calls his disciples his brethren, and he also uses the same term to describe the relations of the disciples to one another (Mt 23:8; Lk 22:32). Ἀδελφοί refers to their relationship with other believers belonging to the same family,

In 1 John the Elder exhorts love for one another because “love is from God” (4:7) and “God loved us so much” (4:11). The fundamental action of the Father is in sending his Son as the expiation of sins (4:10; cf. also 4:9, 14). The obligation is grounded in the loving action of the Father in the Son and is expressed in the love command (ἐντολή).⁷⁰ Therefore, according to Painter (2002:101), “those who bear the message of that love assert that acceptance of the message is the means by which the love of the Father becomes effective, creating community (κοινωνία): 1 John 1:3, 6, 7. Community with the Father does not bypass community with the children of God, and that community is expressed in love for one another.”⁷¹

3.2.3.2 Honour and shame: pivotal values of family life

Honour seemed to be the main social value in the first-century Mediterranean world. It refers to the worth that people have of themselves and the social acknowledgement of that worth. Honour can be held by an individual or a group, especially a family (Esler 2000:152; Malina 1993:31).⁷² According to Malina (1993:38), “Honour is always presumed to exist within one’s own family of blood, that is, among all those one has as blood relatives.”

According to Malina and Neyrey (1993:26) honour, then, “... serves as a register of social rating which entitles a person to interact in specific ways with equals, superiors and subordinates, according to the prescribed cultural cues of the society”. This value of honour will now be applied to the fictive kinship in 1 John.

The Father’s honour is defined in terms of *gender* (male, father) and *position* (head of the household). The head of the fictive Christian family is characterised as a father. In 1 John the Father is honourably portrayed with positive characteristics: He is Love (4:8, 16; cf. 4:7–21), He is righteous (2:29) and He is Light (1:5). From His position as Father He sends His Son to give life (3:9; also in 4). He forgives His children when they confess their wrongdoings (1 Jn 1:9), because of His position, when He is approached and requested to do so. When His children obey His commands, His *power* is evident.

The First Epistle of John also emphasises how Jesus was endowed with maximum honour. 1 John refers to him as the Παράκλητος (2:1) to intercede on behalf of the children of God for the forgiveness of sin (1:7). He was with and is with God the Father (Jn 1:1–5, 18; 1 Jn 2:1).

The children of God are honoured by the status of their Father. They are loved by God and Jesus (Jn 14:23), they are born of God (1 Jn 2:29; 3:9; 4:7; 5:1, 4, 18), called children of God (Jn 1:12; 1 Jn 3:1, 10; 5:2, 19). The children honour the family when they keep the commandments (1 Jn 2:3; 3:22–24; 5:2, 3), live according to the character of the Father and when they help a brother or sister in need (3:17).

Obviously, the opposite of honour seems to be shame. But according to Malina and Neyrey (1991:45) this word can also be a positive symbol, meaning to have sensitivity for one’s own reputation and sensitivity for the opinion of others. To “have shame” in such a way reflects a positive value. Thus any person belonging to the *familia Dei* needs to “have shame”, that is to be emotionally sensitive to its honour rating and to be perceptive to the opinion of the other members in this family. A sense of shame makes the contest of living possible and dignified. This implies acceptance of and respect for the commands of brotherly and Fatherly

while ἀγαπητοί refers to the believers’ relationship of love with God and fellow believers (cf. 2:5, 10; 3:1, 11, 14, 16, 23, etc). Consequently, it can be deduced that the meaning and assessment of ἀδελφοί and ἀγαπητοί (also ἀλλήλους and τὸν ἀδελφὸν αὐτοῦ) are determined more closely by τέκνα θεοῦ. This contains a qualitative indication of the believer’s new identity and status as part of God’s family (*familia dei*), which is, in principle, a *communio sanctorum* (holy community).

⁷⁰ Note the importance of commandments in 1 John 2:3, 4, 7ter, 8; 3:22, 23bis, 24; 4:21; 5:2, 3; 2 John 4, 5, 6bis.

⁷¹ Two texts in 1 John cast some light in determining what is meant in reference to love God the Father and fellow members within the *familia Dei* (cf. Schulz 1987, 524–527; also Van der Watt 1999, 508–510).

⁷² See also Van der Watt (2000:299f, 331ff, 342, 358).

interaction in the family. This in turn implies that when members in this family have broken these commands (sinned) they will confess and ask for forgiveness to restore this interaction. Then the Father “will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 Jn 1:9).

On the other hand, when a member of the family does not recognise the commands of brotherly and father-child interaction, such a person is reckoned to be shameless. This shameless member, who has a dishonourable reputation beyond all doubt, is reckoned to be outside the boundaries of acceptable moral and spiritual life. Members get shamed (not have shame) when they aspire to a certain status which is denied them by public opinion. When these members then realise that they are being denied the status, they are or get shamed; they are then humiliated and stripped of honour (Malina & Neyrey 1991:45). This implies that where one family member is shamed, the whole family is shamed.

When those who live in darkness (1 Jn 1:6) hate one another (1 Jn 2:9), and do not confess their sin, they also bring shame on the family. Even those who love the world (1 Jn 2:15–17) as well as those who deny the Son (1 Jn 2, 4) put the family in shame. An example of shame is given by the Elder in terms of Cain who did not love his brother and consequently murdered him.

3.2.3.3 Conclusion

The emotional dimension has been expanded with the incorporation of the emotional social value of “honour and shame” in a family/group. From this it became evident that the emotional dimension contributes to the cohesiveness of the group/family.

The three dimensions suggested by Tajfel are essential in order to identify the character of a group. But due to the content of 1 Jn this researcher feels it necessary to add briefly a fourth dimension in which the three dimensions of Tajfel converge: “life in this particular family”.

3.2.4 Life in the family: following Jesus⁷³

The Elder uses the verb περιπατεῖν⁷⁴ (translated as “walk” or “live”) rhetorically to describe the conduct in the *familia Dei*. The five times he has used it in 1 John were in connection with “having fellowship” with the Father (God) (1:6, 7; 2:11) and “imitating” the Son (Christ) (2:6) who is imitating the Father (see Jn 14–17). A comparison of Christian behaviour with the life of Jesus is part of the rhetoric of the Elder to motivate God’s children to live in the *familia Dei* as Jesus did.⁷⁵ In 2:6 he states that the lifestyle of the children of God should correspond with that of Jesus, the Son of God:

καθὼς ἐκεῖνος περιεπάτησεν καὶ αὐτὸς [οὕτως] περιπατεῖν. Such an approach is

⁷³ Family rules spelled out as commandments (2:3,4, 7, 8; 3:22, 23; 5:2, 3). The must live according to what they have heard from the beginning (1:1; 2:7, 13, 14, 24; 3:8, 11), what they have learned from the Elder (I am writing to you, 1:1, 4; 2:1, 7, 8, 12–14; proclaim, 1:5) and what they have learned from the Spirit (anoint, 2:27; cf. 2 Jn 9–10).

⁷⁴ It has been stated that norms are also important to create and maintain a particular identity. The Elder announces his interest in this area by the use of the verb περιπατεῖν in connection with how the Johannine community are to please God. The verb περιπατεῖν occurs five times in 1 John (1:6, 7; 2:6bis and 2:11). In 1:6, 7 ἐν τῷ φωτὶ (σκότει) περιπατῶμεν is directly linked with κοινωνία. This implies that when the τέκνα θεοῦ walk in the light, they have fellowship with God and one another. When they walk as Jesus walked, they also walk in the light which implies that Jesus walked in the light. In 2 John περιπατεῖν occurs thrice to characterise this life in the *familia Dei* as περιπατοῦντας ἐν ἀληθείᾳ (v 4) and περιπατῶμεν κατὰ τὰς ἐντολὰς αὐτοῦ (v 6).

⁷⁵ The most important ancient rhetorical handbooks that discuss the use of examples (παραδείγματα, *exempla*) 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 in regard to *exempla* has already been presented by Cosby (1988:93ff). The question concerning the use of ‘examples’ as rhetorical devices was whether παραδείγματα (*exempla*) had a probative or an illustrative function.

prompted by the way in which the Elder delineates in-group from out-group in the passage (cf. Esler 2000:171). According to the Elder Jesus is the template for the conduct of believers, because Jesus' way of life was analogous with the character of the Father. All this is a matter of doing the will of the Father (2:17). Ethics in the *familia Dei* is determined by what the Father of the family requires. Therefore, the conduct of all the members of the family should reflect the character of the family as it is personified in the head of the family (cf. Van der Watt 1999:506).

Therefore, the Elder has pointed out that ethics in 1 John is not a matter of a set of rules; it is an existential way of living that is established by the attitude and behaviour of Jesus, the Son of God. This "way of living" can only actualise in believers (the children of God) through the Spirit.⁷⁶ Through the existential guidance of Christ and the spiritual guidance of the Spirit the believer finds his/her way as a child of God to please the Father (3:22).

Hence, the abundant kinship language in 1 Jn finds its ultimate legitimating in the account of the fatherhood of God. The Elder's insistence upon the fatherhood of God, possibly aided by his own protective attitude, serves as one form of legitimation for kinship language. Therefore, in the epistle he couldn't avoid advocating that they treat one another like kin. In the group-oriented culture of Ephesus (see Van Tilborg 1996) this meant sharing and protecting one another's goods. In the language of Tajfel's theory the Elder was seeking to develop a group identity (Esler 2000:170).

4 FAMILY METAPHORICS USED TO TALK ABOUT GOD

4.1 No one has ever seen God

Nowhere in the NT are there any references such as "nobody has ever seen God". This phrase and related nuanced references occur only in the Johannine writings as many as nine times. Of all the NT books, the family metaphor has been developed mostly in the Johannine literature. This is certainly not coincidentally. Earlier in this paper it was stated that "At an individual level, metaphors are used to describe the unknown in terms of the known. This implies that the metaphor is used to construct meaning." Therefore, the Elder has purposefully made use of the family metaphor to talk about the deity "whom nobody has ever seen", but in whom they believe and whom they worship. Even the heartbeat of the first Epistle of John is a matter of theology and not ethics or Christology. Everything said about the Son, the children of God, and even the opponents in 1 John revolves around the identity of God, the Father, who is depicted by the Elder as "God is Light; God is Righteous; God is Love".

The denial that anyone had seen God is inserted in the following texts:⁷⁷

"θεὸν οὐδεὶς πώποτε τεθέαται ..." (No one has ever seen God, 1 Jn 4:12);

"...τὸν θεὸν ὃν οὐξ ἑώρακεν (God whom they have not seen, 1 Jn 4:20)⁷⁸.

See also the texts from the Gospel of John:

"θεὸν οὐδεὶς ἑώρακεν πώποτε....(No one has ever seen God, 1:18);

οὐχ ὅτι τὸν πατέρα ἑώρακέν τις εἰ μὴ ὁ ὢν παρὰ τοῦ θεοῦ. (Not that any one has seen the Father except him who is from God, 6:46);

⁷⁶ On the role of the Spirit regarding this cf. John 14:15–19; 15:26–27; 16:5–16; 1 John 2:20, 27; 3:24.

⁷⁷ The texts from the Gospel of John that reflect the same idea have been included here. The First Epistle of John was probably written very close after the Gospel and therefore could they have been written in the same situation.

⁷⁸ Also cf. related texts 3:2, 6; 3 John 11; John 1:18; 5:37; 6:46; 14:9.

οὔτε φωνὴν αὐτοῦ πώποτε ἀκηκόατε οὔτε εἶδος αὐτοῦ ἐωράκατε
(His voice you have never heard, his form you have never seen, 5:37);

Δεῖξον ἡμῖν τὸν πατέρα
(Show us the Father? 14:9).

In the tradition of John 1:18, the Elder also denies that anyone has seen God: “No one has ever seen God (4:12)”.⁷⁹ The Elder confirms this further in 4:20, “God whom they have not seen”. There are no exceptions to who has seen God (“no one”), and there are no exceptions to the time frame (“has ever”).

It is more likely that the denial is made to make clear that the only means of seeing God, according to the FG, was in the revelation in the Son.⁸⁰ This revelation brought honour to the Father (17:1–4). This is also the point in John 14:8–11. It is also fundamental in 1 John 4:7–12 that the love of the Father (God) is made known in the Son. The alternative to seeing God, now according to the Elder (and the FE), is “if we love one another”. The point I want to make is that both cases call “the family” image to the fore (see also 4:20). He, the Father, can be seen, however, within the *familia Dei*, in the lives of those who live as Jesus lived (1 Jn 2:6), for example to demonstrate the love of the Father to others.⁸¹

The question that arises is: “if God reveals Himself through His Son and His children, what does such a relationship between God and those who claim to have a relationship with Him look like and comprise?” This, the Elder tried to explain in terms of a family set-up.

4.2 Conclusion

It seems as if the Elder used the family metaphor to converse about the God whom they have not seen. To talk about this deity obviously has revelatory and ethical implications. Therefore, this community who believes in Him and wants to honour Him must have a certain identity which has been explained and described in family dynamics. For the Elder, the identity of the *familia Dei* is a description of who this deity is and what it means to stand in a relationship with Him.

5 CONCLUSION

In this paper I tried to indicate how the family concept has been used metaphorically as a strategy by the early Christians in order to make the invisible visible for them and to identify the Johannine community as a *familia Dei*. On the one hand, metaphor was used to describe that which is by definition unknowable, the divine. On the other hand, it was used to describe how members, associated with one another, have to behave towards one another. In 1 Jn (and the FG) these two functions of metaphor frequently converge. The authors used the conventional constituents of family life but innovatively adapted and developed it, according to their theological convictions, to fit their dynamics of the *familia Dei* and their conception

⁷⁹ In 3:2 the expectation of seeing him (Jesus) as he is was the ground of the hope that “we will be like him”. This is the Johannine version of the vision of God. When he is revealed, at his coming (2:28), we will be like him because we will see him as he is (Painter 2002:271).

⁸⁰ The Son came to do the will of the Father. He spoke what the Father told him to say and he performed the deeds shown to him by the Father. When the Son, according to the FE, revealed the Father “by finishing the work that you gave me” (17:4) and through his crucifixion (17:1), he also glorified the Father.

⁸¹ Jesus claimed that the one who had seen him had also seen the Father (John 14:9), but this is not the kind of seeing referred to here. As Hiebert explains, “What Moses saw on Sinai (Exod 33:22–23) or Isaiah in the temple (Isa 6:1), were theophanies, revelations by which God made Himself visible to the eye.” See also Akin, D L. 2001. *1, 2, 3 John* (The New American Commentary, vol. 38; electronic Logos Library System). Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 181; and Van der Horst, P W. 1972. “A Wordplay in 1 John 4:12.” *ZNW* 63: 280–82 for studies relating to 1 John 4:12.

whom God is. This newly defined identity also helped to distinguish them from other groups and to honour their God as their Father.

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