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## Commitment to avoid plagiarism

Student number: 3245-168-7

I hereby declare that this thesis, which is based on my research on *Exploring the Johannine Spirituality: The Experience of God in the Fourth Gospel perceived from the perspective of its Familia Dei* is my own work and all the sources that I have used or quoted are indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

I have committed myself to avoid plagiarism on every level of my research and have fully cited, according to the Harvard Method, every source that I used, including books, articles, internet sources and images.

Los Angeles, California  
United States of America  
25 August 2018

Pierre Youssef Albalaa

## Preface

After serving the Maronite Catholic Community in South Africa, mainly in Johannesburg and its vicinities, I moved to Los Angeles, California, in the United States of America. Once there, I had the privilege and the honor to serve both the Western Catholic Church within *The Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Los Angeles*, and the Eastern Catholic Church within *The Maronite Catholic Eparchy of Our Lady of Lebanon of Los Angeles*.

This service gave me the opportunity to experience the spirituality of these two churches rewardingly at a personal level, and pastorally at a communal level. It motivated me to academically learn more about spirituality through a scientific-analytical study. Another experience that nourished this motivation and kept its flame smoldering fervently was the Inter-Faith Gathering, which I organized with other ministers and pastors every year around Easter time. In this annual gathering, leaders and members from neighboring parishes and communities of the northern suburb of Los Angeles (Christians and non-Christians; Catholics and non-Catholics) gathered to share their spiritual experiences and to cherish their friendship. Both experiences occurred while I was finishing my Master's Degree in New Testament through UNISA. They strengthened my decision to pursue an academic knowledge about spirituality and directed my choice towards Christian Spirituality, specifically the Johannine Spirituality.

These two experiences, my admiration for the Fourth Gospel, the professional guidance of my supervisor, Prof. Dirk van der Merwe and the great service that I received from the University of South Africa, were the main factors that shaped my decision to choose the topic of this thesis.

## Summary

This thesis examines the Experience of God in the Fourth Gospel (in this research, it is also called the *Johannine Experience of God*) by perceiving it from the perspective of the metaphoric *Familia Dei*, found in this Gospel. This examination is done in a three-step process:

The first step consists of a literary review and a presentation of the methodology and approach employed in this research. It intends to set the thesis within the Johannine studies.

The second step involves the articulation of essential considerations on *Religious Experience*, the *Johannine Community*, and *the Fourth Gospel*. This articulation has two aims: First, to acquire a deeper understanding of the background of the Johannine Experience of God, and second, to point out the functionality of this Gospel's narrative in constituting this experience.

The third step comprises the following suggestion and the elaboration on its constituents:

- The Johannine Experience of God consists of two components: the first one is the initiative of God the Father conveyed by Jesus Christ, perpetuated by the Holy Spirit, and as it is recorded in the Fourth Gospel. And the second one is the response of the believers (John's readers) to this initiative by accepting the Son and journeying spiritually under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.
- The Johannine Experience of God can be perceived from the perspective of the *Familia Dei* metaphoric found in the Fourth Gospel.
- The narrative of the Fourth Gospel has the ability to constitute an experience of God and accordingly creates spirituality, once it is read or heard.

This thesis aims to generate a deeper understanding of the spirituality of the Fourth Gospel at one level, and to offer an acceptable general insight about the Johannine Spirituality at another, hoping that its findings become an inspiration for future studies.

## Key Concepts and Terms

- Biblical Hermeneutics
- Christian Spirituality
- Experience of God
- *Familia Dei*
- Family
- Family Metaphoric
- Father
- Fourth Gospel/The Gospel of John
- Johannine Community
- Johannine Spirituality
- Metaphor
- Paraclete/Holy Spirit
- Religious Experience
- Son
- Spirituality

## Versions of the Bible employed in the thesis

In this thesis, the following versions of the Bible are used, and the names of its books with their related abbreviations -listed in the table below- are employed.

**Wansbrough**, H (ed) 1985. *The New Jerusalem Bible*. London: Darton, Longman & Todd.

**Aland**, B, **Black**, M, **Martini**, C M, **Metzger**, B M & **Wikgren**, A (eds) [1966] 1994. *The Greek New Testament*. 4<sup>th</sup> edition. Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft.

Book	Abbreviation	Book	Abbreviation
Acts	Ac	Luke	Lk
Amos	Am	Lamentations	Lm
Baruch	Ba	Leviticus	Lv
1 Chronicles	1 Ch	1 Maccabees	1 M
2 Chronicles	2 Ch	2 Maccabees	2 M
1 Corinthians	1 Co	Micah	Mi
2 Corinthians	2 Co	Mark	Mk
Colossians	Col	Malachi	Ml
Daniel	Dn	Matthew	Mt
Deuteronomy	Dt	Nahum	Na
Ephesians	Ep	Numbers	Nb
Esther	Est	Nehemiah	Ne
Exodus	Ex	Obadiah	Ob
Ezekiel	Ezk	1 Peter	1 P
Ezra	Ezr	2 Peter	2 P
Galatians	Ga	Philippians	Ph
Genesis	Gn	Philemon	Phm
Habakkuk	Hab	Proverbs	Pr
Hebrews	Heb	Psalms	Ps
Haggai	Hg	Qohelet/Ecclesiastes	Qo
Hosea	Ho	Romans	Rm
Isaiah	Is	Ruth	Rt
Job	Jb	Revelation	Rv
Judith	Jdt	1 Samuel	1 S
Judges	Jg	2 Samuel	2 S
Joel	Jl	Song of Songs	Sg
James	Jm	Ecclesiastics/Ben Sira	Si
John	Jn	Tobit	Tb
1 John	1 Jn	1 Thessalonians	1 Th
2 John	2 Jn	2 Thessalonians	2 Th
3 John	3 Jn	1 Timothy	1 Tm
Jonah	Jon	2 Timothy	2 Tm
Joshua	Jos	Titus	Tt
Jeremiah	Jr	Wisdom	Ws
Jude	Jude	Zechariah	Zc
1 Kings	1 K	Zephaniah	Zp
2 Kings	2 K		



## Writing Conventions employed in the thesis

In writing the present thesis, the following writing conventions are adopted and abided by:

### ♦ Works Consulted

The publications being read or consulted during the composition of the thesis are enumerated in alphabetical order according the Harvard reference system suggested by Kilian (1993:34-53):

**Surname**, initials date. *Title*. Edition. Place of publication: Publisher.

The surnames of the authors are highlighted for better identification.

### ♦ Footnotes and References

Footnotes are utilized to provide the reader with different standpoints, to substantiate an argument, and to add extensive text references or enumerate extended references. Each footnote is indicated by placing an Arabic number slightly above the line directly after the punctuation marks. All the numbers follow a consecutive numeric sequence throughout the entire thesis. The related note is written at the bottom of the page where the corresponding footnote is used.

### ♦ Spelling and Terms Capitalized

The American spelling is employed throughout the thesis.

In the thesis, certain terms and expressions (i.e. disciplines, concepts, and titles) are capitalized and written in italics for the purpose of distinction and emphasis.

### ♦ Books of the Bible and References

In the text, references made to the books of the Bible are written in full, while abbreviations are used in notes and inside parentheses. The numbers indicating the chapters of the books are highlighted to distinguish them from the numbers indicating the verses. The abbreviations used follow the guidelines provided by *The New Jerusalem Bible*. The table, containing the full list of the books of the Bible classified in alphabetical order with their abbreviations, is presented in the previous page (page 9).

# Chapter 1

## Introducing the Thesis

### 1.1 The Title of the Thesis

The title of this thesis is: *Exploring the Johannine Spirituality: The Experience of God in the Fourth Gospel perceived from the perspective of its Familia Dei*. It is commonly acknowledged that titles are written expressions intentionally selected to label given texts and to persuade the readers to read them. Titles have the ability to create a wide spectrum of first impressions ranging from negative disparagement, to neutral response, and to genuine appreciation. Certainly, these first impressions have the power to affect the decision of the potential readers to read or not to read the texts arranged under a specific title. On a larger scale, texts also have the power to leave an authoritative impact on their readers, influence their mindsets while reading them, alter their attitudes, and consequently shape their convictions. With such power and ability comes great responsibility and eminent duty. At the level of the titles, the responsibility is to introduce the texts as accurately as possible to the readers and persuading them to read these texts. At the level of the texts, their responsibility is to convey faithfully the messages enshrined in them to the readers, and to encourage them to interact with these messages.

These opening lines intend to point out the fact that it is part of our human nature to interact with a given text when we read it in its written form, or hear it through spoken words. The biblical narratives, including that of the Fourth Gospel, are no strangers to this reality. This interaction is profoundly shaped by certain major factors such as:

- The character and the circumstances of the reader or the hearer;<sup>1</sup>
- The settings and the situations within which the act of reading or hearing occurs;<sup>2</sup>
- The spoken words or the written text and their ability to deeply influence their readers/hearers.<sup>3</sup>

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1. These circumstances can be classified under two main categories:

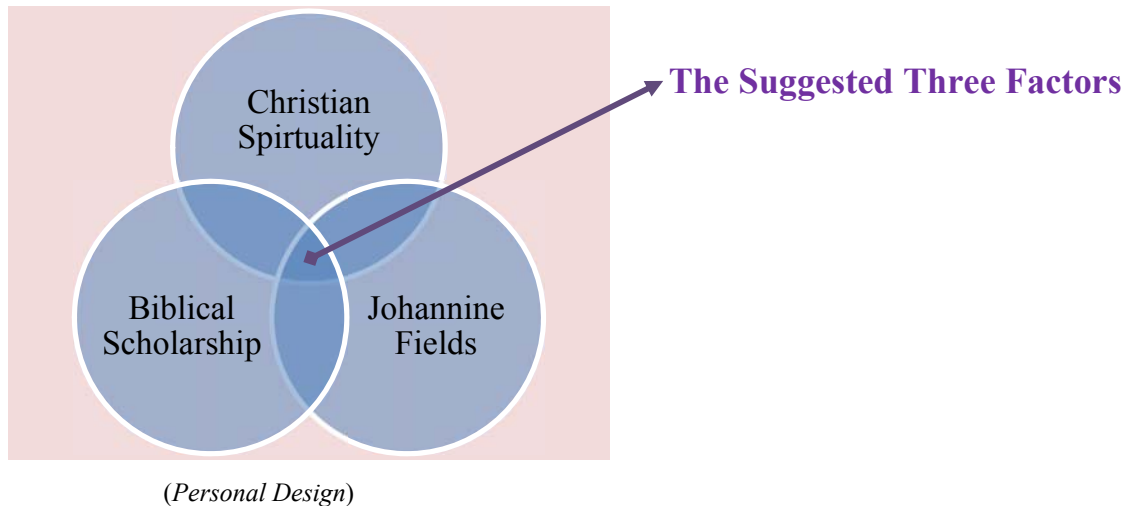
- Broader Circumstances such as the person's cultural-social-religious-background, education, and experiences.

- Immediate Circumstances such feelings, moods, conditions and emotions that the reader or the hearer is already having when the act of reading a given text or the act of hearing of the spoken words occurs.

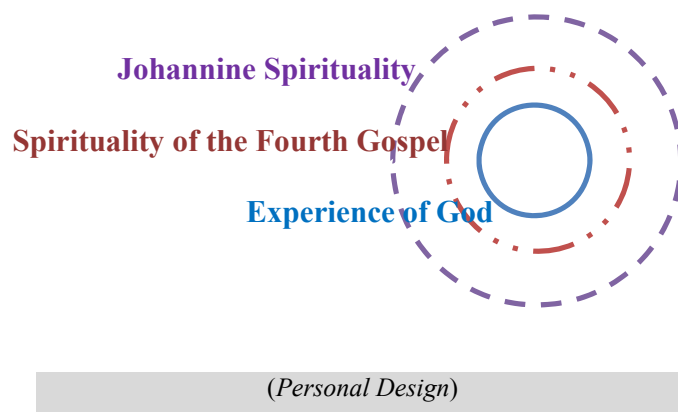
2. These settings and situations are a modifying and influencing factor of the acts of reading and hearing. They include but not limited to: time (good timing, bad timing); place (home, office, public place...); manner (harshly, gently, lovingly, hurtfully...); and purpose (educating, endearing, insulting, advising, humiliating, encouraging).

3. This factor includes the nature of the text/spoken words, literary style, message enshrined in them, etc.

These three factors can be found in the heart of biblical hermeneutics, the Johannine scholarship, and Christian spirituality. However, it is not the aim of this thesis to address these factors separately, but to borrow from what has been said about them in these fields as well as from selected data deemed relevant to establish a comprehensive framework to investigate the Experience of God in the Fourth Gospel from the perspective of the *Familia Dei*.



This investigation aims to shed some lights on the spirituality of the Fourth Gospel at a narrower level, and to articulate some observations about the Johannine Spirituality at a broader level. This aim is expressed by the title of the thesis, which consists of three main segments, each of them corresponding to and giving hints at a particular aspect of the topic that this research focuses on. The following illustration schematically depicts this aim:



The *first segment* of the title (*Exploring the Johannine Spirituality*) indicates the framework within which the research is conducted and corresponds to its broader aim articulated in the next pages. It is within the Johannine Spirituality that the Experience of God in the Fourth Gospel is examined. This segment finds its roots in the ever-growing appreciation of spirituality as a reality in general, and in the noticeable increasing interest in spirituality as discipline in the last few decades. The fervent search for personal meaning, specifically for life-integrating spirituality has led Christians over the centuries towards the Bible to explore the potential of its texts and to strengthen their spirituality. Accordingly, the books of the New Testament have increasingly maintained an evolving momentum in capturing the attention of both ordinary believers and seasoned scholars. The enormous number of monographs,<sup>4</sup> commentaries, books, and articles that have been published over the years on biblical hermeneutics, and Christian Spirituality during the last few decades, witnesses to that. Although the vast majority of these publications provide an excellent reserve of knowledge at the collective level and an abundant source of inspiration at the individual level, yet they still suggest two theses: The *first thesis* consists of a serious fragmentation in the existing studies. This fragmentation is generated partly by the fact that biblical hermeneutics includes a massive amount of topics, and that *spirituality* is a term resistant to a precise definition,<sup>5</sup> partly by the various angles these topics can be approached, by the variety of senses in which the term ‘spirituality’ is employed, and by the diversity of angles from which its concept is perceived. The *second thesis* points to a significant potential and much room for more research in both biblical hermeneutics and Christian Spirituality, especially in the Johannine field. As such, this study is no stranger to the second thesis.

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4. The following list gives an idea about the above-mentioned statement:

**Gutierrez** ([1984] 1988) approaches Christian Spirituality within the context of the ‘Liberation Theology’. He has reworked the classic symbols of Christianity to give voice to the experience of the poor in history.

**Dreyer** (1995) approaches Christian Spirituality from the perspective of the communal lived expression.

**Downey** (1997) presents different views of spirituality and highlights its multidimensional character.

**Sheldrake** (2007:2) affirms that Christian Spirituality is a useful expression to describe how, individually and collectively, believers appropriate the traditional Christian beliefs about God, humanity, and the world.

**Haynes** (2009) examines the interrelationship of nature, art, and spiritual life.

**Huguelet & Koenig** (2009) address the relation of religious issues to mental health. They affirm that spirituality and religiousness are very prevalent among the mentally ill.

Some other studies are referred to in their relevant places during the enfoldment of the present research.

5. **Howard** (2008:15) states: “Bernard McGinn, in his contribution to the first volume of the *Christian Spirituality Bulletin*, notes that he turned up some thirty-five different definitions of spirituality”.

The *second segment* of the title (*The Experience of God in the Fourth Gospel*),<sup>6</sup> calls to mind three important topics: *Religious Experience*, *God*, and the *Fourth Gospel*. Elaborating on these topics and their ramifications goes beyond the limits of this Chapter and surpasses its aim. The articulation of this segment was inspired by the following facts:

- ♦ Although scholars and authors have approached/are approaching the convoluted and massive topic of spirituality from different perspectives, their theories have at least one element in common: *Experience* as a constitutive component of spirituality. This element, sometimes known as *religious experience*, *spiritual experience*, *sacred experience*, or *mystical experience*,<sup>7</sup> is doubtlessly as ancient as the genesis of the human race itself.<sup>8</sup>
- ♦ In Christian tradition(s), the object of religious experiences is God, who reveals Himself through His Only Begotten Son. Some scholars -like Hurtado (2000:183-205)-<sup>9</sup> maintain that the revelatory experiences were the most powerful religious experiences for the earliest Christians and that the Fourth Gospel is saturated with indications correlated to these revelatory experiences. Additionally, when reading or studying this Gospel,<sup>10</sup> the reader/researcher realizes that Jesus plays the major role in these revelatory experiences and in making the Father known to His believers, as seen in verses like John 1:18 and John 17:3, 8, 23, 26. This knowledge has the power to create faith in their hearts and the ability to bring salvations to their souls.
- ♦ In this thesis, many features of religious experience are borrowed and evoked to recognize and to discuss the Experience of God in John.<sup>11</sup> This expression also refers to experiencing the first Person of the Holy Trinity: God the almighty Father, who is adored and worshiped in Christianity and depicted by John in his Gospel.

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**6.** The use of this expression in labeling the second segment of the title of this thesis is inspired by Kelly & Moloney (2003:55-60, 92-96, 136-140). However, what they compose under this expression is totally different from the work done in this thesis.

**7.** Cf. also: Bowker (1971:157-173); and Schäfer (1984:19-35).

**8.** Boyer (2001) investigates the evolutionary origins of religious thought.

**9.** Hurtado (2000:183) states that earliest Christianity was characterized by an assortment of religious experiences. Johnson (1998:67) claims that the religious experiences of earliest Christianity existed in a continuum with other experiences in complex combinations.

**10.** The history of Johannine scholarship in recent years has been chronicled by scholars, i.e.: Howard (1931) and Kysar ([1975] 1996).

**11.** In this thesis, the terms *Fourth Gospel*, *John*, *the Gospel of John*, *John's narrative*, *John's Gospel*, and *the Gospel* are employed equally, especially when it is needed to avoid any boring or unnecessary repetition. Also for the same reason and for a stylistic smoothness, the following expressions are employed: the *Fourth Evangelist*, *John*, *the Evangelist*, *the author of the Fourth Gospel*, *he*, *him*, and *his*. This does not indicate that the researcher adopts the theory of a single author behind the composition of John. For the position of the researcher with regard to this topic, see pages 103-109 of the present thesis.



The *third segment* of the title (*Perceived from the perspective of its Familia Dei*) refers to the family metaphoric, employed by John throughout his narrative, and its ability to constitute a lived experience once it is read or heard. The elements of this motif form the window from which the Johannine Experience of God<sup>12</sup> is gazed at. In Chapter 5, special attention is dedicated to elaborate first, on experiencing God through the Father's initiative towards His children/believers/*Familia Dei*, and second, on their responses to His initiative by accepting the Son (Jesus Christ) and following the guidance of the Holy Spirit (Paraclete).

This segment suggests that the richness of John's narrative and its abundant topics remain an inexhaustible source of inspiration and knowledge to be explored. To explore this richness and examine these topics according to the most acceptable hermeneutical principles and approaches, is extremely helpful and highly indispensable to considerate the social-historical setting of this Gospel, especially with reference to the Johannine Community within which it was composed, the exclusive characteristics and functionality of its text, and the theological-spiritual paradigm from which its narrative has emerged, developed, and took its final shape.

Inspired by the above-articulated explanation and motivated by an ever-increasing interest in John and the Johannine spirituality, the topic of this thesis was chosen. The attention of the reader is now directed towards the aspiration of this research, its limitations, and its endeavor to meet its objectives and reach its goals.

## **1.2 The Topic of the Thesis**

The Fourth Gospel comprises numerous themes skillfully knitted in beautiful embroidery. Each of them can be considered as an important topic able to inspire many studies. In this thesis, the *Familia Dei* motif is employed as a framework to examine the Experience of God in John's Gospel and to explore the Johannine spirituality. This decision is based on a twofold conviction: First, the family metaphoric, which runs through the entire narrative of the Gospel, offers appropriate and sufficient elements that facilitate this examination and exploration.

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**12.** In this thesis, the following expressions refer to the same subject: *The Experience of God in the Fourth Gospel*; *The Johannine Experience of God*; *The Experience of God in John*; and *Experiencing the Father*.





Second, the Experience of God is in the center of the Johannine spirituality. Thus, examining the first helps getting meaningful insight about the second. Certainly, the Experience of God can be perceived from different perspectives and be examined *via* various methodologies. However, the thesis investigates this experience holistically by focusing on two of its main components: the initiative of God towards His believers, and the response of His believers to this initiative. The approach and the methodology of the thesis are presented and explained in Chapter 3, while the elaboration on these two components is done in Chapter 5. The following diagram and the succeeding paragraphs give a deeper insight about the topic of the thesis.



At the opening of the *Prologue* (Jn 1:9), the identity of the Logos/Word of God and His creative power (creation) are, logically and metaphorically linked to the first words spoken by God at the beginning in Genesis: “Let there be light and there was light” (Gn 1:3). Here the Johannine account of the Logos/light is a metonymy for creation. Although this account is interrupted by the arrival of John the Baptist -a messenger sent by God to announce the coming of the Son-, it insists that the Logos was present at the creation (Jn 1:2). Additionally, the *Prologue* affirms that “no one has ever seen God” (Jn 1:18); and in the same verse, it hints at experiencing Him through the only Son, “who is close to the Father’s heart; and the one who has made Him known” (Jn 1:18). This account of creation gives sound indications to the *Experience of God* and *Familia Dei* in the Fourth Gospel.

According to the *Prologue*, the incarnation of the Logos promptly follows the creation. To present the latter, John employed terminology related to philosophical concepts (Logos, light, life, and darkness). To talk about the incarnation of the Logos, John changed the language of his presentation, borrowing biblical expressions from the Old Testament and using metaphoric vocabulary associated with *family*:

The Logos came into the world (Jn 1:9) to His own people (Jn 1:11); children of God (Jn 1:12) were born (Jn 1:13); and the “Word became flesh, He lived among us” (Jn 1:14). Added to that, John highlighted some merits of the incarnation of the Son; i.e.: The merit of becoming “children of God” (Jn 1:12) and members of His *Familia Dei*, which is given by the Son to those who accepted Him. Another merit is overcoming the gap between the Creator and His human creatures by enabling them to experience Him (Jn 1:14) and to receive, through the Incarnate Son, “grace upon grace” (Jn 1:16-17). Sadly, these merits were not appreciated by the world, as it did not recognize the Logos, and the Logos’ own people did not accept Him (Jn 1:10-11). This is John’s first use of family metaphoric in his Gospel. Both the creation through the Logos/Son and the incarnation of the Son/Logos are the source, the essence, and the purpose of making the Father known and revealing His initiative.

Once more, at the end of his *Prologue*, John affirms convincingly the full divinity of the Son on earth and His unique capacity as revealer (Schnackenburg [1968] 1980 I: 280). He is the revealer who has made the Father known. He is the Only-Begotten Son, who can speak about His Father with authority and knowledge (Jn 3:35), because He is close to His heart. The expression “close to the Father’s heart” (Jn 1:18),<sup>13</sup> is a family metaphoric that carries overtones of affection (Morris [1971] 1995:100), indicates the closest relationship between the Father and the Son (Köstenberger 2004:49) and reflects their unmatched love, intimacy and fellowship.<sup>14</sup> The *Beloved Disciple* experienced this intimacy while eating with his Master (Jn 13:25), and the disciples experienced this love during the Last Supper (Jn 13:1-17).

Moreover, for the Only Son, making the Father known (revealing Him) implies more than communicating a mere message; it suggests that the Incarnate Logos fully interprets God (Keener [2003] 2005 I:424). It also asserts the adequacy of the revelation achieved by the Son in “an unprecedented way” (Köstenberger 2004:49). It is the ultimate revelation when God reveals God (Schnackenburg [1968] 1980 I:278; and Whitacre 1999:61).

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<sup>13</sup>. About this affectionate image, see **Du Plessis** (1968:28).

<sup>14</sup>. **Keener** ([2003] 2005 I:425) asserts that the intimate connection between the Father and the Son is not only relational but should be understood in terms of their shared nature and similar role.

All of this finds its ultimate significance and completion in the gift of the Son, who is both “the Revealer and the Revelation” (Mullins 2003:78). This revelation of God the Father in the only Son includes “a revelation of the type of life offered to the believers as members of his family” (Whitacre 1999:56). Accordingly, these members and believers are urged to respond positively to God’s initiative by accepting the Son, and are encouraged to interact actively with it under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

Furthermore, in the Fourth Gospel the theme of the Experience of God is closely associated with another important theme, which conveys its core, enhances the effectiveness of its components, and facilitates its occurrence: *Communication*. Beside its innate importance and beneficial functionality in people’s daily life, communication plays a multidimensional role in this experience. John appreciates the efficiency and the productivity of communication functionally as he employs proficiently certain communicative features and technics in the *Prologue* of his Gospel as well as in the rest of its narrative to convey its message.

The above-articulated observations on the topic of this thesis and on the most accepted theories about the *Prologue*,<sup>15</sup> seen as a presupposition for the rest of the narrative of the Fourth Gospel (Robinson 1976:122; Brown [1966] 1979:19), and as a source (Culpepper 1983:168) to understand it (Bultmann [1966] 1978:13; Booth 1983:3-20; Rimmon-Kenan 1983:106-108), together with noticeable occurrence of family metaphoric support the conviction of the thesis: The Johannine Experience of God can be perceived from the perspective of this narrative, and examining this experience helps understanding both the Johannine Spirituality and the spirituality of John’s Gospel.

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**15. Braun** (1959:224-251) calls the *Prologue* a “début des thèmes généraux”  
See also: **Sloyan** (1988:20-22); **Reinhartz** (1992:18-25); and **Moloney** (1993:23).

### **1.3 The Sequence of Chapters**

**Chapter One** serves as an overture or a general introduction to the research. It explains the title of the thesis, introduces its topic, and demarcates correspondingly the sequence of its chapters itemizing methodically their contents.

**Chapter Two** sets the frameworks of the research and establishes its platform by reviewing a selection of publications pertinent to the topic of the thesis. The outcome of this literary review is used to formulate an indispensable Problem Statement that underlines the scholarly gap to be filled, and expresses the aspiration and the limitation of the thesis in filling this gap.

**Chapter Three** presents a concise panorama of *Biblical Hermeneutics*, expresses the limitations of the Study, and articulates the approach adopted by the thesis and depicts the methodology used to achieve its objectives (Page 10 outlines a selection of writing conventions and certain essential methodological remarks used during the composition of the thesis).

**Chapter Four** aims to prepare the investigation done in Chapter 5. It consists of articulating some essential considerations. These considerations help acquiring a deeper understanding about the Johannine Experience of God in the Fourth Gospel; and about the ability of this gospel's narrative to constitute such experience.

**Chapter Five** is the core of the thesis. It builds upon the contents and the outcomes of the previous chapters to perceive the Experience of God in the Fourth Gospel from the perspective of its *Familia Dei* theme. This chapter presents what is understood; in the thesis, by *Familia Dei*; its background, its members (Divine and Human); and its metaphoric aspects. Also, it contains the discussion about the two components of Johannine Experience of God, namely the initiative of God the Father and the response of the believer to this initiative.

**Chapter Six** concludes the thesis and summarizes its findings. It includes also some reflections on the Johannine Spirituality and certain suggested proposals for further studies in the future.

**Works Consulted** is the list of the resources consulted during the composition of the thesis. They are listed according to the *Harvard Reference System* as suggested by Kilian (1993:34-53).

## **1.4 Concluding Remarks**

This Chapter explains the title of the thesis, introduces its topic, and demarcates the contents of its Chapters. The title consists of three main segments: Each one of them corresponds to, and gives hint at a particular aspect of the topic that the research focuses on, to be exact the Experience of God in the Fourth Gospel, the spirituality of this Gospel, and the Johannine Spirituality. Additionally, the title evokes various topics and hints at numerous pertinent academic fields or disciplines, such as Religious Experience, Spirituality, Christian Spirituality, the Fourth Gospel, and Johannine Spirituality.

The number of books and articles published on these topics has grown immensely in recent years that it can barely be mastered by any single student or researcher whose focus is not sorting and evaluating these publications. A swift glimpse at the contents of these publications shows how spirituality has gone way beyond its traditional religious roots to involve other disciplines such as Education (Wright 2000; Ashton & Denton 2006), Sociology (Danesh 2000; Mathews 2009), Psychology (Paloutzian & Park 2005; Lines 2006; Snyder & López 2002; Starr 2007), Therapy (Kahle 2004; Wright 2005; Greenstreet 2006; Peeters 2008; Plante 2009), Art (Haynes 2009), and Media (Meissner 1984; Knight 2003; Austin 2007; Honiball 2008). Moreover, all the publications on the Fourth Gospel testify to the openness of its text to multivalent readings and to new studies (Howard 1931; Kysar [1975] 1996).

The increasing attention directed during the last few decades towards spirituality, the noticeable lack of studies on the Johannine Experience of God, and openness of John's Gospel to new research acted as motivation to choose the topic of the thesis and to select its title. The factors of this motivation are elaborated on in the next Chapter, which aims to set the topic of the thesis within the Johannine scholarship and Christian spirituality.

## Chapter 2

# Literary Review and Problem Statement

### 2.1 Introductory Notes

As already mentioned in Chapter 1, the title of this thesis contains four expressions: *Johannine Spirituality*, *Experience of God*, *Fourth Gospel*, and *Familia Dei*. Each one of these expressions has the characteristic to be labeled as a significant topic, and the exigency to involve various disciplines in its investigation. This title also evokes other important themes, such as *Religious Experience*, *Spirituality*, and *Christian Spirituality*. The *Works Consulted* listed after Chapter 6 hint at the potential of these themes to generate countless publications.

The following diagram shows the pattern of how the researcher consulted gradually and concentrically the aforementioned *Works Consulted* in attending the contents of the succeeding Chapters. It has the shape of an inverted pyramid that displays the proportional-interconnected relationships between the categories of the publications being read or consulted, with the broader component on the top and narrowing down. The segments of the pyramid represent these categories and exhibit their corresponding names. The bottom segment corresponds to the publications assessed and reviewed in the *Literary Review* presented in the following pages.



(Personal Design)

What has been published on the above-mentioned themes calls to mind a reasonable question: How can one encapsulate, in a short section, such immense volume of literature without reducing matters to names and dates, or without minimizing the abundant data to mere superficial generalizations? The only realistic answer is to select intentionally and wisely pertinent publications from Johannine scholarship and Christian spirituality to do a literary review.

The *Literary Review* presented in this Chapter is the outcome of an intensive and planned process. It was started by consulting attentively and reading seriously publications on *Religious Experience*, *Spirituality*, and *Christian Spirituality*. Thereafter, exclusive attention was given to available works published on the Fourth Gospel. The selection is limited to the publications that have addressed certain themes deemed associated with or considered relevant to the topic of this thesis. The following publications were consulted but not reviewed, because their correlation to the topic of the thesis is too remote: Alston ([1991]1993); Bradford (1984); Gellman (2001); Holt (1993); Karyakin (2001); Werner & Theobald (2001); Woods ([1989]2006); Wright (1996).

The works of Waaijman (1993; 2002a; 2002b), Van der Watt (2000), Kelly & Moloney (2003), and Kim (2017) are intentionally not included in the *Literary Review*; their findings are taken in consideration in the next Chapters.

The works reviewed in the succeeding pages can be classified in various ways, for example, thematically, chronologically -following their dates of publications- by disciplines to which they belong, or according to their approaches. However, here they are listed in alphabetical order.

## 2.2 Literary Review

**Augsburger** (2006) explores what spirituality looks like when it imitates Jesus Christ and is directed outward in service of the world, instead of inward on the self. He proposes eight practices: Radical attachment, stubborn loyalty, tenacious serenity, habitual humility, resolute nonviolence, concrete service, authentic witness, and subversive spirituality. He also presents ‘tripolar’ spirituality with three interdependent movements: Upward towards God, inward towards self, and outward towards neighbor, contrasted to ‘monopolar’ or ‘bipolar’ spiritualities. Although he emphasizes the place and the role of accepting Jesus in spirituality, he does not connect these motifs (*imitating Christ*, the *eight practices*, and the *three movements*) to the experience of God. In this thesis, imitating Christ is considered as one of the essential and constitutive elements of the Johannine Experience of God.

**Aumann, Hopko and Bloesch** (1968) focus on the practical dimension of spirituality rather than the theory and definitions. These scholars present their readers with an informative survey of the evolution and adaptation of Christian spirituality through the centuries. They research Christian spirituality specifically in the Catholic tradition from an experiential approach without addressing the experience of God, nor elaborating on the aspects or the genre of the spiritual experiences to which they invite their readers to live. Their book converges on some aspects with Cunningham and Egan (1996) who maintain that Christian spirituality is the lived encounter with Jesus Christ in the Holy Spirit. Cunningham and Egan explore salient themes like prayer and contemplation, tracing its evolution through the centuries. Although they provide the readers with a *taste* of the different ways Christians have experienced God or lived in His presence, they do not provide more insight on what constitutes the experience of God. Greater attention could be given to how the practices and themes of Christian spirituality are related to this experience, which is at the heart of this spirituality.

**Berger** (2003) approaches *Religious Experience* from a psychological perspective. He emphasizes that psychology should be understood in a strictly historical sense. The constant concern of historical psychology is precisely to dissolve the arbitrary dichotomy of *matter* and *spirit*.<sup>16</sup>

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16. About this dichotomy (*matter* and *spirit*) and its connection to Christian spirituality:



According to him, historical psychology is an important way of genuinely understanding the distinctive otherness to be found in the biblical text. He emphasizes the necessity of the distinction between the present and the past<sup>17</sup> when it comes to the experience of the people whose words form the basis of the biblical message. Furthermore, he argues that the relationship between incarnate wonder and subsequent discourse in John is a “key structural feature”. In the thesis, this idea is referred to when discussing the significance and distinctiveness of Jesus’ experience as reflected in John.

**Bowe** (2003) argues that spirituality is a lived reality, which does not exist in the abstract but within specific individuals and groups who respond to this ultimate reality in particular ways. Their concrete experiences and cultural contexts give them particular stories and act as symbols for boundaries of social awareness, different understandings of personal authority, as well as modes of knowing and feeling. According to her, Christian spirituality describes a particular way of responding to the Spirit of God mediated to the world and ultimately known through Jesus. She focuses on the progressive transformation in the Christian believers, which is the result of the cooperation of their life with the power and presence of Christ and the work of the Holy Spirit. She does not include any discussion about the experience of God in her argument.

**Coloe** ([1998] 2001) examines the Gospel of John as a unified whole against the background of the years following the destruction of Jerusalem and its temple. According to her, the “post-resurrection” community of John looked at the symbol of the temple as a basis for expressing its faith in Jesus. Coloe wrote two books. Although only her second book deals with the spirituality of John, both books are surveyed here.

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**Borg** (1987:33) argues that the non-religious and one-dimensional view of reality makes the other world and the notion of mediation between the two worlds unreal to us. It was, however, by no means unreal to the people in the first century and to the early Christians who wrote the New Testament. Early Christians lived in a dual world, a world of *matter* and *spirit*, a world of created things and their Creator. For them, the spiritual world, though unseen, was real and it exerted power and shaped influence on the seen material world.

**McGrath** (1999) offers a broad introduction to the diverse strands of practice and belief in the history of Christian spirituality in a thematic approach. Although he does not follow a strict historical development approach, he develops broad paradigms historically, psychologically, and culturally, particularly looking at the various ways in which Christianity has interacted *with* the world, *in* the world, *against* the world, and *above* the world.

**17. Borg** (1987:32) points out that there is a challenge generated by the difference between the modern way of looking at the world and that of the people of the first century.

This book of her is Christological in nature, where she suggests that John has presented the temple as the major symbol of Jesus who is the new dwelling place of God among his household. She explores the household scenes in John within their historic-literary milieu and provides a methodological reading of almost the whole of Gospel of John, following the order of its text. Her method is a traditional textual analysis.

In her second book, which is a sequel to her first book, Coloe (2006) investigates the theme of the community as a household. She takes John 14:2 as starting point to approach the spirituality and the ecclesiology<sup>18</sup> of the Fourth Gospel from the household metaphor perspective. She attempts to discover the experience of the post-resurrection community by selecting themes and scenes that occurred in the household of God, and by adopting a *Reader-Response Approach*. She combines *Narrative Criticism* with *Historical* and *Social Criticism*. Dissociating from a sociological meaning of the term *household*, she explores its symbolic and theological meaning.

Both books demonstrate that investigating the spirituality of John while working from a given text of its narrative, or from one of its major themes, can involve both a pastoral application of this text or theme, and the explication of the implied spirituality of the Johannine Community. It also confirms that approaching the narrative of John from a *Narrative-Critical Perspective* is a logical and suitable approach.

**Coolman** (2004) focuses, in his book, on the doctrine of the spiritual senses of the soul in the theology of William of Auxerre. It considers William's conception of human knowledge of God in relation to his fundamental claim that humans can know God in a way analogous to physical sensation. This book contains four parts: Part I considers William's doctrine of the spiritual senses in the context of beatitude. The remaining parts consider his teaching in relationship to the present life. Part II treats the objects of spiritual apprehension, while part III, the virtues of spiritual apprehension, and part IV, the forms of spiritual apprehension.

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**18.** Coloe approaches the spirituality and the ecclesiology of John. **Ferreira** (1998) examines John's ecclesiology on the basis of an exegetical and terminological study of John 17. He approaches John's Gospel from a historical perspective employing the methods of Historical-Literary Criticism. He also attempts to relate sociology, or the historical condition of the Johannine Community, to John's ecclesiology.

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He argues that the doctrine of the spiritual senses is central to William of Auxerre's conception of human knowledge of God, especially so in the next life, but in the present life too. He attempts to describe William's conception of human knowledge of God from the perspective of his teaching on the spiritual senses of the soul. As such, Coolman does not directly discuss this knowledge or the experience of God (not in general nor in John).

**Dodd** ([1953] 1970) restricts his book to the attempt of establishing some general principles and lines of direction for the interpretation of the Fourth Gospel. In the first part, he surveys the background of the Gospel's thought. In the second part, assuming this background, he defines the dominant concepts with which the Evangelist operates. In this part Dodd dedicates a chapter to examine the *knowledge of God* by elaborating on two points: First, a presentation of the usage of knowledge in Hebrew and Greek by paraphrasing Bultmann's theory, and second, an examination of the *knowledge of God* from the angles of two Johannine themes – *life* and *knowing Christ*.<sup>19</sup> In the third part, Dodd traces the course of John's argument through the whole Gospel. In his examination there are certain elements of the Johannine Experience of God, namely the *knowledge of God* and the role of Jesus Christ, but this does not mean that Dodd has intended to discuss this experience in his commentary.

**Downey** (1997) presents different views of spirituality with a tendency towards an anthropological definition. He argues that the various spiritualities are based upon a fundamental human capacity for the spiritual, known as the "human spirit". He also highlights the multidimensional character of spirituality in general and of Christian spirituality in particular.<sup>20</sup> According to him, spirituality is first of all that which pertains to the intrinsic dimension of the human being known as spirit and the quest for personal integration in the face of fragmentary and depersonalizing forces.

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<sup>19</sup> *Life*: Dodd connects *knowledge of God* to the motif of life in John -a life perfect and absolute, a life conceived here and now, but realized in its fullness beyond the grave- this life consists in the *knowledge of God* (Jn 17:3). *Knowing Christ*: Dodd argued that to know Christ is to Know of God: Jesus (as Logos) is the divine object of man's knowledge, and at the same time the Subject of God's knowledge of man. Additionally, Jesus (as man) is both the Object of God's knowledge and the Subject of man's knowledge of God.

<sup>20</sup> For example, **Gutierrez** ([1984] 1988) approaches Christian spirituality within the context of the *Liberation Theology*. He argues that the Spirit is the life-giving power that sets a person free and enables that person to say 'Abba-Father'. He takes the classic symbols of Christianity supported by biblical references, and radically reworks them to give voice to the experience of the poor in history, especially in Latin America, amid the experience of God's presence in them (cf. also **McCarthy** 1998:272-273; **Boff**, L 1987:162, 171).

He maintains that Christian spirituality is about the Spirit at work in people within a culture,<sup>21</sup> in relation to a tradition, in memory of Jesus Christ,<sup>22</sup> in the light of contemporary events, sufferings and promises, in efforts to combine elements of action and contemplation, with respect to charisma and community as expressed and authenticated in praxis.<sup>23</sup>

Although Downey does not specifically discuss the experience of God, his theory (about the interaction of the Holy Spirit with the human spirit, and about the implicit desire of the human spirit to have a relation with God, and the theories of Johnson, Duling, Perrin, and Ferm, and Dreyer (mentioned in the footnotes below) hint at certain aspects of this experience, which are investigated later on in the thesis. Accordingly, special attention is given in this investigation to the work of the Holy Spirit that reminds, teaches, guides, and transforms the human spirit within the realm of spirituality and during the experience of God.

**Dunn** ([1977] 2006) looks at spirituality from a broad-ranging perspective and discusses the religious experience of Jesus and the earliest Christian communities from an enthusiastic perspective. He examines the oral traditions of early Christianity and investigates the canon of the New Testament.<sup>24</sup>

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**21. Johnson** (1998:3, 67-68) argues that religion is about the “experience of transforming power”. He employs the technique of comparison, while focusing on the specific religious phenomena that include religious experiences. He approaches the analysis of these phenomena with the assumption that religious experiences in earliest Christianity existed in a continuum with other experiences in complex combinations and lived within a variety of perspectives. He asserts that these experiences were contextualized by the cultural settings and symbolic worlds within which the first Christians dwelt and which dwelt within them.

**22. Duling, Perrin, & Ferm** ([1994]:503-504) assert that Jesus was the most significant factor around which the lived experience of the early Christians revolved. Both His words and deeds were still fresh in their minds, and they lived in anticipation of His return. Christ was constantly set before them as an example to follow and as the ideal of sanctity. They experienced His presence in their devotion, especially in their liturgical celebrations and prayers.

**23. Dreyer** (1995) emphasizes the role of praxis in spirituality claiming that prayers, study of Scripture, corporate worship, and the like, open someone to a growing relationship with God. She argues that spirituality is a term used to refer to life in the Spirit and the experience of God. She also considers Christian spirituality as the daily, communal, lived expression of one’s ultimate beliefs, characterized by openness to the self-transcending love of God, self, neighbor, and world, through Jesus Christ and in the power of the Holy Spirit. Thus, one could say that these disciplines and concepts all have to do with knowing God, doing His will, and experiencing Him.

**24.** Few years later, **Sheldrake** (2007) summarizes the complex manner in which the term *spirituality* has taken on various meanings within the Christian tradition. His book charts the main figures, ideas, images and historical periods, showing how and why spirituality has changed and developed from its origins in the New Testament times to the present day. He suggests that Christian spirituality can only be understood in terms of a series of dialectical tensions: Experience and practice; interiority and external engagement; personal and collective.

According to him, what matters “for the proponents of experiential Christianity is direct experience with God...experiences of revelation” (Dunn [1977] 2006:174). Jesus experienced God as Father through prayers (Dunn [1977] 2006:189; cf. also Dunn 1975). He concludes that religious experience was an importance factor in the genesis of Christianity that many of the distinctive features of first century Christianity grew out of and were shaped by the religious experience of Jesus and the leading participants.

Dunn’s theory about the significance of prayer and the role of the Holy Spirit in Christian spirituality (Dunn [1977] 2006:199-200) finds some affinities in the work of Saliers (1992), who claims that Christian spirituality focuses on God’s self-giving in Christ, animated by the Holy Spirit. According to Saliers, spirituality refers to a lived experience and a disciplined life of prayer and action, but it cannot be conceived apart from the specific theological beliefs that are ingredients in the forms of life that manifest authentic Christian faith. Saliers maintains that the love of God and neighbor are at the heart of all Christian spirituality. Dunn’s conclusion seems to be a supportive element to the investigation in the following Chapters, namely Jesus’ experience of God, its significance and its impact on the spirituality of His believers, and their own experience of God.

**Gruenler** (1986) has written a brief thematic commentary on the Fourth Gospel. It contains five themes correlated to the Trinity: The Social Nature of God; The Divine Community in the Fourth Gospel; The Family of Father and Son; The Triune Community of Father, Son, Holy Spirit; and That They May Be One Even as We Are One. An appendix is added, called “The Historicity, Date, and Authorship of the Fourth Gospel’. Gruenler starts by discussing the social nature of God, arguing that one of the compelling characteristics of God, as He reveals Himself in the Scripture, is that He speaks, converses, and is eminently social. Gruenler then elaborates on specific passages in the Gospel of John to point out the mutual loving, generosity, glorification, equality, availability, disposability, and deference that characterize the divine family in the Gospel as a whole. He asserts that the interpersonal communion of the Father and the Son, and the alternation between Jesus’ affirmation of this communion and His *Ego Eimi* declarations, could be noticed clearly in the narrative of this Gospel, especially in John **8-12**.

Additionally, light and freedom are among the central metaphors by which Jesus describes His ministry to the world on behalf of the divine family. Gruenler (1986) has studied the discourses of Jesus in John and draws forth the disclosures of the social nature of God in the activity of the incarnate Son. He focuses on two specific features in the character of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit: “disposability” and “generosity”. Although one may find certain elements that could be considered belonging to the Johannine experience of God, such as the relationship between the Father and the Son and its impact on the believers, the *Ego Eimi* sayings that have the ability to constitute lived experiences/spiritualities, the central Johannine metaphors, and the family motif, he never mentions this experience or intends to connect these elements to it.

**Hurtado** (2000:183-205) starts by surveying the attitudes towards religious experience in the New Testament. He then reviews the studies of social scientists that help to appreciate the efficacy of a revelatory religious experience as a frequent factor in generating religious innovations. In his conclusion he underlines that the revelatory religious experiences were significant factors in generating perhaps the most distinctive religious innovation characteristic of early Christianity: The cultic veneration of Jesus.

**Hurtado** (2003) offers his own historical analysis of the beliefs and religious practices that constituted devotion to Jesus as a divine figure in earliest Christianity. He also draws on a body of ancient sources<sup>25</sup> to locate the presence and the place of Christ in the religious life, beliefs,<sup>26</sup> and worship in early Christianity. For him the only reasonable factor that accounts for the central place of Jesus in early Christianity is the impact of His ministry and its consequences, especially for His followers. Although Hurtado does not mention or discuss the experience of God, his works are of help in the discussion of the indications in John that the revelatory experiences are embedded in the family metaphoric, and that Jesus’ experience of God has animated the lives of His followers and constituted their own experience.

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**25. Woods** ([1989] 2006) appreciates the merit of such sources. He approaches *Christian spirituality* from a Catholic perspective, exploring how the sense of God’s abiding presence arose from its Jewish sources, developed and slowly spread from the time of Jesus through the major periods of Christian history down to the present time. He believes that one may appropriately draw on letters, diaries, prayers, and poems in which Christians express their religious and ethical experience.

**26.** Few years before Hurtado, **Ganss** (1991) claims that spirituality is a lived experience; it is an effort to apply relevant elements of Christian beliefs in the deposit of faith to the guidance of men and women towards the progressive development of their persons.





**Keener** ([2003] 2005), in the introduction of his two-volume commentary, surveys John's revelatory motifs and the broader setting in which they would have been most intelligible to a first century Mediterranean audience. Employing various Greek terms for knowledge, he consecutively discusses John's teaching about knowing the Father and Jesus, the Hellenistic concepts of knowledge, and the particularly Jewish understandings of the *knowledge of God*. His discussion includes correlated motifs to this concept (i.e. a relationship with God, moral sensibility of knowledge, seeing God, revelation, and the role of the Holy Spirit), which is a major theme in John and an integral part of Johannine polemic (Keener [2003] 2005 I:247). He does not include experiencing God in his discussion, but he hints at experience once: "Also relevant to the usage in the Fourth Gospel is experiential knowledge of a deity in Hellenistic interpretations of mystery initiations" (Keener [2003] 2005 I:238). His method could relate to Johnson (1998) who employs the technique of comparison to examine certain religious phenomena. Johnson assumes that religious experiences in earliest Christianity existed in continuum complex combinations with other experiences, and lived within a variety of perspectives. Johnson asserts that these experiences were contextualized by the cultural settings and symbolic worlds within which the first Christians dwelt and which dwelt within them. This aspect of Johnson's approach converges with this thesis' examination of the relationship between the Johannine experience of God and John's setting.

**Keener's** method could also relate to Thurston (2000) who examines the Jewish and Hellenistic religions that provided the setting for the religious experience of the early Christians and explained what they would have understood as spirituality. He suggests that Christianity revolved around the distinctive experience of the Person of Jesus Christ.<sup>27</sup> He successfully links this experience with their spirituality, and appropriately associates it with the Person of Jesus. In this thesis, the connection between the experience of God in the Fourth Gospel and the Johannine spirituality is included in the exploration of the latter.

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<sup>27</sup>. This point of view is also shared by **Johnson** (1998); and **Hurtado** (2003).

**Schneiders** (2003)<sup>28</sup> uses, in the introduction of her book, the traditional epithet of Eusebius, “the spiritual Gospel” in referring to the Fourth Gospel; this hints at the direction in which she wants to draw the attention of her readers. In *Part One*, she introduces the world of the Fourth Gospel by presenting three synthetic treatments of this Gospel as a whole from three different points of view. She does that with the intention of situating John as *literature* within the New Testament as a whole, and within its own historical and theological setting. Here, Schneiders investigates John’s theology and spirituality by focusing on a collection of closely intertwined themes such as revelation and the relationship between Jesus and His disciples, as well as the continuation of that relationship throughout history, after His return to God, following the crucifixion and resurrection. In *Part Two*,<sup>29</sup> Schneiders carefully explores the themes of discipleship, symbolism, commitment, and community. *Part Three* contains only one chapter that is built upon a feminist reexamination of the authorship of the Fourth Gospel. She proposed that the “Beloved Disciple is a kind of textual who concretely embodies in the text the corporate authority of the Johannine school” (Schneiders 2003:246). When reading the above-described parts, one notices the repetition of themes and motifs; this repetition has generated some criticism. Schneiders defends this repetition saying that she has willingly employed it, hoping to gradually habituate the readers to recognize the techniques and concerns of the Fourth Gospel.

It is clear that her feminist perspective dominates her approach: In one place, Schneiders calls it an “approach exegetically based on interpretation...an attempt to engage the spirituality of the biblical text through rigorously critical study undertaken in the context of living faith” (Schneiders 2003:1); few pages later, she calls it “feminist critical hermeneutical approach”. She invests a large part of chapter 8 of her book to explain this approach and to affirm its aim.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> The works of Schneiders include many articles, essays, book chapters, and monographs; in this section, the discussion will focus only on what is relevant to the present *Literary Review*.

<sup>29</sup> This part contains Schneiders’ interpretive reading of seven symbolic narratives of encounter between Jesus and His actual or potential disciples: Two from the public life of Jesus, one from the transition from public life to the passion, one from the passion itself, and three from the period of the resurrection.

<sup>30</sup> **Schneiders** (2003:126) expresses the aim of her approach by stating that it would “allow the world of Christian discipleship as it is projected by this text to emerge and invite the transformative participation of the reader”.

The following lines highlight the salient points of convergence and divergence between the approach of this thesis (presented and explained in Chapter 3) and the approach of Schneiders:

▪ **Convergence**

- Investigating the spirituality of the Fourth Gospel employing its narrative as a starting point.
- Engaging the Johannine spirituality through critical study.
- Admitting that *revelation* governs the theology and spirituality of the Fourth Gospel.
- Employing an interdisciplinary approach to tackle the spirituality of the Fourth Gospel.

▪ **Divergence**

- Schneiders investigates the theology and spirituality of John focusing on a collection of closely intertwined theological themes and the spirituality they express. The approach in this thesis consists of exploring the Johannine spirituality by investigating the *Experience of God in the Fourth Gospel* as it is perceived from the perspective of its metaphoric *Familia Dei* that runs through its entire narrative. This investigation is interwoven with intentionally selected Johannine themes<sup>31</sup> correlated with *God's Initiative*, which constitute an experience of Him in the life of His believers and their positive response/fruitful interaction with this initiative.
- Schneiders discusses the symbolic narratives of encounter(s) between Jesus and His actual/potential disciples from the public life of Jesus and His passion, and from the period after His resurrection. This thesis deals, within John's *Familia Dei* framework, with the significance of Jesus' place and His essential role in the *experience of God* in the *Fourth Gospel*.
- Schneiders uses a feminist critical hermeneutical approach to achieve her goal of weaving theology and spirituality into one horizon, and to engage her readers in search of personal meaning, purpose, hope, and life-integrating spirituality within the Johannine text. This thesis employs an integrated method, which includes insights from the *Socio-Rhetorical Method* and from other generally accepted methods to establish the essential lines that assist in an adequate examination of the Johannine spirituality.

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<sup>31</sup>. Examples are John's reference to the Old Testament, the Trinity motif, and imitating/following Christ. These and other pertinent themes are presented and discussed in Chapter 4.

**Thompson** (2001) has divided her book into five chapters, and labeled them as follow: *The Meaning of God; The Living Father; The Knowledge of God; The Spirit of God; and The Worship of God*. She argues that John presents Jesus with references to God, and at the same time emphasizes that God is truly revealed in Jesus.

Thompson does a theological investigation of John's Gospel that takes, as its central question, the convictions and the presentation of God. This investigation is done primarily through historical and exegetical means. She states that she intentionally did not include any attempt to reconstruct the history of John's text or the community that lies behind it. She argues that the Gospel of John, by virtue of its genre and its explicitly stated purposes, invites its readers to look for proper interpretation. According to her, the genre of this Gospel is a narrative of some aspects of Jesus' life, written to persuade the readers to take up its perspective of the significance of that life as their own. This intention is embodied in John's text and its primary author.

Her aim is to concentrate on the topic, *God in the Fourth Gospel*, in such a way that it contributes to the readers' understanding of the Gospel, of New Testament theology, of theology itself, and of God. To meet this aim, she treats issues and subjects that are essential to the understanding of this topic. The subjects for treatment in each chapter have arisen both from John's Gospel itself and from concerns related to the identity of God, which are embodied in literature from the era during which this Gospel was composed.

Thompson's study makes a threefold contribution: First, it brings more clarity to the subject of what it means to speak of God; second, it overturns the consensus maintaining that John's Gospel is focused on Jesus by locating Christology within theology; third, it undertakes a theological reading of a central New Testament book while taking seriously the historical and ecclesial location of John's narrative. Although all of the motifs discussed in her book have the ability to constitute the spirituality and experience of God, she does not include any discussion about the Johannine spirituality or the experience of God in the Fourth Gospel.

**Van der Merwe** (2007)<sup>32</sup> discusses, from a Christian perspective, the concept of having or experiencing the fellowship with God as depicted in the First Letter of John. He employs the four occurrences of the noun *fellowship* as starting point and uses the *Socio-Rhetorical Method* to investigate this topic. He expressed his aim stating: “It is to formulate briefly what it comprises and to concentrate especially how it can be accomplished through a change in socio-religious behavior according to 1 John 1:5-2:28...to investigate this fellowship with God and change in behavior from the perception of the *Familia Dei*” (Van der Merwe 2007:232).

Van der Merwe argues that fellowship with God encompasses the following elements: To experience the love of God (1 Jn 2:5); to experience the forgiveness of God (1 Jn 1:9); to know God (1 Jn 2:3, 20); to know the truth (1 Jn 2:21); and to experience the abidance of God, the Son, and the Holy Spirit (1 Jn 2:14, 24, 27-28) in the believer. According to him, this kind of fellowship demands a change in socio-religious behavior of the believer. It has four conditions: Renouncing sin; be obedient; doing God’s will; and mutual abidance. In this article, Van der Merwe has succeeded in dividing the inner-textually selected texts into sensible sub-sections, which he investigated individually.

On the same topic, Kim (2017) has investigated the profile of ἀκολουθέω (*follow*) in relation to correlated motifs in those texts of the Fourth Gospel where it is used with the connotation of discipleship. To carry out his investigation, he employed the methodology of *Literary-Theological Exegesis* under the discipline of biblical studies. Accordingly, by a noticeable maturity and an insightful engagement with the above-mentioned text, he reflects and elaborates on the spirituality of following Jesus as communicated in John’s Gospel.

**Van der Merwe** (2013) starts his article with a discourse analysis of 1 John 1:1-4 to investigate the religious experience in an early Christian community as it is articulated in the first chapter of the First Epistle of John. He states that the term *spirituality* used in his investigation denotes “a lived experience”.

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<sup>32</sup>. The works of **Van der Merwe** are invaluable for both the Johannine studies and Christian spirituality. Four of his articles are discussed here in a chronological order.

According to him, there are three different lived experiences that culminate in the last one: having fellowship with the divine. “The first two experiences (experience through physical senses, experience through spiritual senses) pave the way to establish fellowship with the divine. For the author of 1 John, the purpose of these lived experiences is to have complete joy, another form of experience...” (Van der Merwe 2013:1 of 9 pages). These three lived experiences express three different configurations of spirituality:

- The first one is a lived experience through the physical senses. The experience of seeing, hearing, and touching makes an impact on the Elder’s life.

- The second one is a lived experience through spiritual senses. At this level, Van der Merwe argues that it is only when people have encountered Jesus Christ physically or through the hearing of the Gospel and consequently perceive the otherness and identity of this Person to be the Son of God or the Word of life that a new and different lived experience emerges.

- The third one is a lived experience through family life. Elaborating on this experience, Van der Merwe discusses the family dynamics in the First Epistle of John, and the archetypal metaphor and spirituality. He employs this discussion to investigate the above-mentioned third lived experience. According to him, this experience “is defined by the Elder as fellowship...it is a fellowship with God that involves fellowship with his people...God is the Father, and the believers are brothers and sisters to one another. This lived experience of fellowship -within the family- is thus possible only between Father and children” (Van der Merwe 2013:7 of 9 pages).

**Van der Merwe** starts his 2014 essay by defining the meaning of the Torah. He then uses this definition to discuss how it was understood in Judaism in the first century AD and to examine its influence in second-temple Judaism. He agrees with Wuchterpfennig (2003:486) that the Torah is a balanced combination of story and law; and with Sanders (1975:372-381), that the Torah may simply refer to the Pentateuch and it could have the extended meaning of divine revelation.

In the second subsection, Van der Merwe argues that reading the Torah has evoked the spiritualities that left its impact on John's narrative. He demonstrates how John has borrowed imagery from the Old Testament and the Torah to create a correlated and new spirituality with a view to endorse a certain experience of the unseen God of the Old Testament through Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, and to give the Fourth Evangelist's "experiences a typical deep meaning hidden below the surface of the text" (Van der Merwe 2014:3 of 9 pages).

In an article written in 2015, Van der Merwe studies 1 John 2:28; 3:2-3; and 4:17 to indicate "some mechanisms that help in determining the effects used... by the Elder in his rhetoric to evoke some spiritualities" (Van der Merwe 2015a:2 of 9 pages). He starts his article by a concise analysis of the connection between these texts to establish a framework within which he investigates the spirituality of the eschatology embedded in 1 John.

In his investigation, Van der Merwe agrees with Waaijman (2002b:742) and Iser (1978:131) on the idea that the "readers shape the portrayal of texts in their imagination to participate effectively in the texts...*the readers* are pulled into the world of the texts and texts into readers" (Van der Merwe 2015a:2 of 9 pages). He asserts that the reading of biblical texts produces various kinds of spiritualities or lived experiences of the divine, depending on the contents that the text communicates about the divine and also who is reading the text. Van der Merwe's theory converges with that of Waaijman (2002b:244) and Iser (1978:131), maintaining that spiritualities embedded in texts are created through four effects: the dynamic interaction between text and readers; the composition of images; the dialectic of pretension and retention; and the fact of being entangled in a text. According to Van der Merwe (2015a:3 of 9 pages), these effects help to make sense of the text and also to determine some of the lived experiences evoked when the early Christians read the above-mentioned eschatological Johannine texts. After a successful analysis, Van der Merwe (2015a:9 of 9 pages) concludes his study by asserting that "the events described in the investigated aforementioned Johannine eschatological texts have implications for how people should live prior to these events...and how certain mechanisms in the rhetoric of the Elder, embedded in these texts constitute essential effects on the spirituality of their readers".

In his articles discussed above, Van der Merwe engages the readers in a search of personal life-integrating spirituality within the Johannine writings and in a dynamic interaction with their narratives. These articles are indeed a valuable treasure of knowledge and an insightful source of inspiration – this thesis could witness to that: It was inspired by these articles and enjoyed the privilege of their author’s supervision. At various levels of strength and similarity, the core of this research intersects with the hypotheses of Van der Merwe without falling in the realm of repetition and duplication. Additionally, the approach of the thesis converges with the method he employed to conceptualize these hypotheses. The following is a list of specific areas of intersection and points of convergence:

- Van der Merwe argues that some mechanisms are profoundly embedded in the Elder’s rhetoric, and that they have essential effects on the spirituality of the readers of 1 John. In this thesis, it is argued that the narrative of the Fourth Gospel holds certain characteristics and motifs (the metaphoric *Familia Dei* is one of them) that have the ability to constitute an experience of God once it is read or heard.
- Van der Merwe argues correctly that various Johannine figures of style, direct speeches, long discourses, dramatic characters, themes, and dialectic language draw the readers into the text so that they become part of its constructed dynamic.
- Van der Merwe also has the conviction that the Johannine family metaphors are able to create clear household images/family structures and reflect familial relationships, which the readers (of 1 John, in the case of Van der Merwe’s articles) and (of John’s Gospel in the case of this thesis) can associate with. These metaphors stimulate lived experiences of affection (according to Van der Merwe), and constitute an experience of God (according to this thesis) in the life of the members within the Johannine *Familia Dei*.
- The dialectic of pretension and retention, created by the cyclic reasoning and the frequent repetition of certain words, phrases, and concepts, helps the readers to become more motivated to get involved in the dynamic of the Johannine *Familia Dei* and more entangled in the Johannine texts. This entanglement can generate new spiritualities or experiences of God. It is also able to regenerate already existing experiences and spirituality.
- The Johannine *Familia Dei* could be considered as one of the leading perspectives to perceive the Johannine spirituality in general and the spirituality of the Fourth Gospel in particular.



## 2.3 Problem Statement

This section is divided into three subsections: The first subsection contains concise observations correlating with the topic of the thesis and supporting its *Problem Statement*. The second subsection identifies the scholarly gap as a result of the scarcity of publications on the Johannine experience of God as it is shown in the above-presented *Literary Review*. Building upon these two subsections, a few topics for future studies are suggested in the third subsection.

### 2.3.1 Concise Observations

The contents of this subsection are drawn from and inspired by the publications that were consulted in preparation for the above-presented *Literary Review*. This subsection has a twofold aim: to set the present problem statement in its boarder milieu; and to support and strengthen the statement in the following subsection.

The concepts of religious experience are vague and their types so diversified<sup>33</sup> that they cannot be easily categorized<sup>34</sup> as one thing or another: It may be individual or collective, conscious or subconscious, and also natural or supernatural. A religious experience, sometimes known as a spiritual, sacred, or mystical experience,<sup>35</sup> is doubtlessly as ancient as the genesis of the human race itself. It should be distinguished from religious feelings<sup>36</sup> in the same way that experience in general is to be distinguished from feelings in general.

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**33. James** ([1902] eBooks@Adelaide 2009) divides experiences into ‘healthy-minded’ and ‘sick-minded’ experiences, according to the personality of the subject, which colors the contents of the experience itself.

**Yandell** (1994:25-32) divides religious experiences into five categories: Monotheistic, nirvanic (enlightenment experiences associated with Buddhism), kevalic (enlightenment experiences associated with Jainism), moksha (experiences of release from karma, associated with Hinduism), and nature experiences.

**34. Johnson** (1998:46-52) did a profound assessment of experience. At the outset of his analysis, he acknowledges the difficulty of working on such topic.

**Leder** (1990:1-99) argues that the psychosomatic character of experience renders it both ineluctably individual and incredibly complex to analyze.

**35.** Religious experience is to be distinguished from mystical experience. Although there is obviously a close connection between the two, mystical experiences can all be classified as religious experiences, but not all religious experiences qualify as mystical. cf. also **James** ([1902] 2009) for the ‘authoritative grounds’ of mystical experiences. **Tabor** (1986) have focused on the ‘mystical experiences’ in the New Testament.

**36.** For discussions on religious experience in terms of feelings, cf. **Schleiermacher** (1998) feeling of the numinous; **Alston** ([1991] 1993) and **Gellman** (2001), affective states.

Part of this concept's vagueness comes from the term *religion*, which is difficult to define in any way that does not either rule out institutions that clearly are religions, or include terms that can only be understood in the light of a prior understanding of what religions are. Another contributing factor to this vagueness derives from the different ways in which differing religious traditions have described their religious experiences, such as nullification and absorption within the realm of God; complete detachment from the world; deep intrinsic connection to the world; innate knowledge; experience of one's true blissful nature; experience of a certain divinity; awareness of God's presence; a response to what is perceived as ultimate (Johnson 1998:61); and an encounter between the richness of God and His people (Howard 2008:78). One more contributor to the complexity of this topic is the broad spectrum within which the scholars are approaching and investigating religious experiences. This spectrum includes perspectives from both individual and communal levels. It also involves various disciplines such as psychology, medicine, theology, and education. This factor becomes more fundamental when one considers "the events and the human lives from which the religions have stemmed" (Smart 1969:10);<sup>37</sup> or the dynamic between *language* and religious experiences,<sup>38</sup> or the *epistemological issues* of religious experiences.<sup>39</sup> At this level, some scholars argue that religious experiences can epistemically necessitate belief, that is, anyone who has the experience and does not have the corresponding belief, is making an epistemic mistake, much like a person who, in normal conditions, refuses to believe his/her eyes (cf. Oakes 1976:311-318). Accounts of religious experiences show that the majority of these experiences are visual (visions) or auditory (auditions) presentations not through the physical eyes or ears<sup>40</sup> but through some spiritual analog of the eye or ear. Additionally, other kinds of religious experiences could be taken into considerations such as perceptions of certain supernatural providence, perceptions of *sacrum* and *numinosum*, perceptions of love and trust in a believing community, participation in faith-based healings, participation in religious culture, intuitions concerning afterlife, and the like.

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<sup>37</sup>. See also Johnson (1998:53-60) for a more elaborated discussion.

<sup>38</sup>. Many scholars (i.e. Flew & McIntyre 1955; Braithwaite [1955] 1970; and Martin 1990) have thought that there is some problem with religious language, as it cannot be meaningful in the same way that ordinary language is.

<sup>39</sup>. Alston ([1991] 1993) has developed a general theory of doxastic practices.

Hick ([1989] 1993) argues for a Kantian 'two worlds' epistemology.

D'Aquili & Newberg (1999) have studied the neurological basis of religious experience (cf. also Ellwood 1999).

<sup>40</sup>. Here, one should be very careful in identifying these experiences and wisely distinguishing them from hallucinations and imagination.

As such, religious experiences are in all relevant respects like sensory experiences. Sensory experiences are excellent grounds for beliefs about the physical world – likewise religious experiences are excellent grounds for religious beliefs.<sup>41</sup> In the case of John, its narrative is no stranger to these visual-auditory presentations or to these grounds for religious beliefs:

- The *Prologue* opens the Johannine narrative with an account of experiencing God by seeing His glory (visual presentation) within a family dynamic (Father and Son share this divine glory): “The Word became flesh, he lived among us, and we saw his glory, the glory that he has from the Father as only Son of the Father, full of grace and truth” (Jn 1:14).

- The *Epilogue* concludes the Johannine narrative with a hint at these grounds for religious beliefs: “There are many other signs that Jesus worked in the sight of the disciples, but they are not recorded in this book. These are recorded so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing this you may have life through his name” (Jn 20:30-31).

This account and hint are evoked and included in both establishing the platform of this thesis and the investigation of the experience of God in the Fourth Gospel.

Moreover, a (religious) experience is somewhat referred to as an essential element or as a constitutive component of *spirituality*<sup>42</sup> in the vast majority of theories and definitions generated during the long history of *spirituality*.<sup>43</sup> In the course of this history, *spirituality* remained bound up within the history of religion until the last few decades, when it became more and more detached from the religious traditions, specifically from its Christian roots, and has extended over Christianity and other religions to cover both the secular and the religious realms.

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41. cf. Swinburne (1979), Alston ([1991] 1993), and Plantinga (2000).

42. A few examples are given here: Ganss (1991:61) maintains that “Spirituality is a lived experience”; Conn (1993:237) argues that “Spirituality refers to the religious experience, which is rooted in particularity... This particularity refers to the human interaction with the transcendent... in the case of Christians it is with God”.

Deville (1994:153-154) asserts that it is true to say that “the schools of spiritualities are rooted in an intense twofold spiritual experience: the experience of the founder and the experience of spiritual formation of the first disciples”; Collins (2000:12-13) argues that the lived experience is the second referent of spirituality.

43. Only a few very important scholars are given here as examples to support the observations presented in this subsection: Downey (1997) presents different views of spirituality and highlights its multidimensional character; Heelas (1996) notes the development within New Age circles of what he calls ‘seminar spirituality’ or structured offerings complementing consumer choice with spiritual options; Haynes (2009) examines the interrelationship of nature, art, and spiritual life; and Huguelet & Koenig (2009) address the relation of religious issues to mental health. About the topic of spirituality and health, cf. also Paloutzian & Park (2005) and Plante (2009).

This detachment was caused partly by a steady fading attractiveness of institutionalized forms of religion, an increasing contempt concerning the value of material possessions, a growing body of evidence suggesting that personal spirituality has a positive therapeutic outcome on people, and pointing to an escalating recognition of the importance of spirituality to human fulfillment and well-being, to name but a few. This, together with many other factors, have directed the attention to the spiritual dimensions of life and increased the popular interest in spirituality. Consequently, a broader view of the term *spirituality* has emerged, generating various meanings to it, which make it, at the same time, difficult to be defined precisely, and the topic of many publications.<sup>44</sup> These bibliographic materials are evidence to both the richness of human's knowledge and the diversity in the field of spirituality. Nevertheless, in the midst of this diversity, there is a twofold common element that first, describes the depths and dimensions of human existence, and second, presents spirituality as a constitutive component of human nature and experience.<sup>45</sup>

In the same sphere but at another level, the fervent search for personal meaning specifically for life-integrating spirituality has led many Christians towards the Bible to explore the potential of its texts and to strengthen their spirituality.<sup>46</sup> Thus, in the last few decades, prominent scholars like Fredriksen (2000:18-64), Holmes (2002), Holt (1993), Hurtado (2003), Lapham (2003:20f), Perrin (2007), and Wiberg (1988:5-10) increasingly became interested in the disciplines of spirituality, Christian spirituality, and the New Testament, generating numerous publications.

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<sup>44</sup> **Sheldrake** (2007), as well as the entire issue of the *Christian Spirituality Bulletin* 1993 Vol 1 (Society for the Study of Christian Spirituality 1993) supply insightful data on this topic.

<sup>45</sup> **Macquarie** (1972:40, 47) states that spirituality is concerned with "becoming a person in the fullest sense"; **Kinerk** (1981:6) envisions spirituality as the expression of the dialectic by which one moves from the inauthentic to the authentic; for **Wakefield** ([1983] 1996:v), spirituality concerns "the constituent of human nature, which seeks relations with the ground or purpose of existence". **Cousins** (1985:xiii) asserts that spirituality refers to the inner dimension of the person where ultimate reality is experienced; **Saliers** (1992:460) argues that "*spirituality* refers to a lived experience and disciplined life of prayer and action"; **Burghardt** (1994:159) claims that spirituality is a living to the full of the Christian life.

<sup>46</sup> **Stringfellow** (1984:22) points out that biblical spirituality encompasses the whole person -body, mind, soul, place, and relationships- in connection with the whole of creation throughout the era of time.

**Schneiders** (2002:133-142) argues that Christian spirituality is biblical: It is rooted in and informed by the Bible; it is a transformative process of personal and communal engagement with the biblical text; On the topic, cf. (**Thurston** 2000:2-6; **Bowe** 2003:10ff; **Young** 2007; **Rohr** 2008).

At this point it is important to state that spirituality<sup>47</sup> and its ramifications are a significant theme ever-unfolding in the history of every human civilization. Nowadays, it is commonly recognized that spirituality goes beyond the limitations of culture and time. It can be either independent or a part of a particular religion. It can also be seen as the preferred way of referring to aspects of the interior individual experiences of believers or people who do not belong to a specific religion. Waaijman (2002a) has addressed the different forms of spirituality and charted its multiform phenomenon. In his 1993 article, he examines how spirituality was understood before theology was undertaken in a specific way. He argues that the human experience is the place where spirituality is to be found. According to Waaijman (1993), the Christian experience is a specific form of the experience of one's own being and the Absolute, who as such is common to all human beings. Although he presents a good argument about *experience* within the realm of spirituality by including important motifs in his argumentation, such as 'ongoing transformation' and 'relationality with the unconditional', he does not elaborate on this experience or examines it as an experience of God.

For the Christian believers, spirituality is a progressive realization of an ineffable but undeniable presence or awareness of being in the depths of experiencing God (McBrien 1994:1058) as a compassionate Father, source of His children's life (Jn 1:1-4) through His only Son, as a dependable companion guiding them through His Spirit (Jn 14:26; 16:13) in their journey towards His home as their final destination and eternal dwelling (Jn 14:1-4). This realization and experience are at the heart of Christian spirituality. This spirituality designates a pattern of life<sup>48</sup> encompassing a relationship with God,<sup>49</sup> and a mystic yearning for union with Him in Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit (Wiberg 1988:5-10).

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**47. Sheldrake** (2007:2) affirmed that "spirituality is a useful term to describe how, individually and collectively, we personally appropriate the traditional Christian beliefs about God, humanity and the world, and express them in terms of our basic attitudes, life-style and activity" (cf. also **Fredriksen** 2000:18-64; **Hurtado** 2003:283-400; **Lapham** 2003:20-42).

**48. Saliers** (1992:460) asserts that spirituality refers to a lived experience and disciplined life of prayer and action; while **Hurtado** (2003:xiii) refers to the pattern of early Christian life as "devotion to Jesus".

**49. Moltmann** (1992:83) argues that spirituality is a living relationship with the Spirit of God;

**Holt** (1993) asserts that spirituality integrates relationships to God and creation with those to the self;

**Sheldrake** (2000:40) maintains that Christian spirituality is "a conscious relationship with God, in Jesus Christ, through the indwelling of the Spirit and in the context of the community of believers".

Thus, the basic framework of Christian spirituality brings the realities of a human experience with God.<sup>50</sup> In other words, when Christian spirituality is discussed or examined, the attention should be directed to the lived experience of the Christian believers, and how this experience is articulated.<sup>51</sup> Jantzen (1987:277-291) has the opinion that if one believes in (a personal) God, then their religious experience would be understood in terms of an encounter with God. Therefore, one's assessment of religious experience is determined by one's antecedent theological beliefs and disbeliefs. Yet on the other hand, many have held that religious experience is itself a reason to believe in a personal God. To this could be added that the resurrection was a very powerful event, giving the full meaning of encountering God and believing in Him through the risen Christ. In other words, the experience of God lived by His disciples and their contemporary Christians found its true meaning and reached its fullness in the merits of the Resurrection (Mt **28**:16-20; Mk **16**:14-20; Lk **24**:50-53; Jn **20**:19-23; **21**:1-14), which was achieved by the Holy Spirit during the Pentecost (Ac **2**:1-13). These merits worked throughout the ages and they will be in place until the end of times in the essence of experiencing God; in other words, everything a believer says and does should be inspired and guided by the Holy Spirit to glorify the Father and accomplish His will as revealed and taught by His only Son: "Whatever you do, do all to the glory of God" (1 Co **10**:31). Knowing the Father, doing His will, cherishing His love, and sharing it with others, are the meaning and essence of Christian spirituality. Wainwright ([1982] 1987:452-460) maintains that Christian spirituality is an existence before God and amid the created world.<sup>52</sup> It is a praying and living in Jesus Christ; it is the human spirit being grasped, sustained, and transformed by the Holy Spirit; it is the search of believers for a communion that arrives as a gift; it is a present anticipation of the divine kingdom and human salvation awaited in an age to come. Wainwright believes that one may draw on letters and prayers, in which Christians express their religious experience.

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**50. Schneiders** (2002:133-142) discusses the three meanings of biblical spirituality. She notes that Christian spirituality is a self-transcending faith in which a union with God expresses itself in service of the neighbor and participation in the realization of the reign of God in this world.

**51. McGinn** (1985:xv-xvi) highlights the transformation for consciousness and the life of the believers as outcomes of that experience, while **Johnson** (1998:28) refers to "experiencing God as savior through Jesus".

**52. Sheldrake** (2007:2) affirmed that Christian Spirituality is a useful expression to describe how, individually and collectively, believers appropriate the traditional Christian beliefs about God, humanity and the world.

Yarnold (1986:9-17) takes the definition of Wainwright ([1982] 1987) on spirituality as the combination of praying and living, to discuss the theology of Christian spirituality. He centers his discussion around the following topics: God the creator; human nature; sin; the grace of Christ; mystical prayer; and the dark night. According to him, the history of spirituality depicts two principal forms of the spiritual life: First, it can be understood as a path to a union with God, and second, as the imitation or following of Jesus Christ.

Moreover, in Christian spirituality, the initiator and the object of religious experiences is God Himself, understood and worshiped as Father, eternal, omniscient, omnipotent, holy, and as a Person. Out of love for His believers/children (Jn 1:12), He revealed Himself, expressed His will and communicated His love to them through His only Son. He has sent His Holy Spirit to be with them. Some scholars maintain that *revelatory experiences* were the most powerful religious experiences of the earliest Christians.<sup>53</sup> In the Fourth Gospel, Jesus plays the major role in these revelatory experiences. He is represented as the only Son, who is close to the Father's heart, who made Him known (Jn 1:18). He was sent by the Father (Jn 7:16) to say to the world what the Father taught Him (Jn 8:16). In this thesis, these revelatory experiences are considered as components of the Johannine experience of God, and they are discussed adequately.

Christian spirituality, and the “lived experience”<sup>54</sup> of an individual or a group of people with God through Jesus Christ has therefore to do with experiencing God and with the transformation of consciousness<sup>55</sup> and the life of His believers as outcomes of that experience. It says something about God the Father revealing Himself in Jesus Christ. The revelation of the Father and His life-giving power are two main features of the narrative of the Fourth Gospel.

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**53. Hurtado** (2000:183) states that the earliest Christianity was characterized by an assortment of religious experiences; while **Johnson** (1998:67) claims that the religious experiences of earliest Christianity existed in a continuum with other experiences in complex combinations.

**54. Johnson** (1998:28) states that Christian spirituality is centered on the experience of God as Savior through Jesus Christ, and that the entire form of spirituality is His imitation. **Ganss** (1991:61) asserts that spirituality is a lived experience, an effort to apply elements in the Christian faith to the guidance of believers towards their spiritual growth and the development of their persons.

**McGinn** (1985) maintains that Christian spirituality is the lived experience of the Christian belief.

**55.** According to **Sheldrake** (2000:40), Christian spirituality is “a conscious relationship with God, in Jesus Christ, through the indwelling of the Spirit and in the context of the community of believers”;

**Burghardt** (1994:159) claims that spirituality is a living out of the Christian life inspired by the Holy Spirit.

**Waaijman** (1993:5-57) argues that the human experience is the place where spirituality is to be found.





The Fourth Gospel was fundamental to the emergence of Christian spirituality and theology, and still is important for its development. Eusebius depicted it as “The Spiritual Gospel”<sup>56</sup> and many scholars have praised it as the most profound of the four Gospels. Since the time of its composition and throughout the history of Christianity, it never stopped to be an object opened to both casual reading and academic scrutiny, and it has never ceased to command wide interest and to fascinate the minds and the hearts of scholars and non-specialist readers alike. Part of this fascination emanates from the intricacy of its socio-historical milieu, the complexity of its epistemological matters, and the richness of its narrative. The enormous number of publications on this Gospel testifies to the openness of its text to multivalent readings and understandings.

The last few decades of critical research are evidence to a myriad of opinions, suggestions, and theories. During these decades, Johannine scholars have focused on four areas of research: The historical value of the Fourth Gospel; the sources of the Johannine tradition and possible relationships between that tradition and the Synoptic trajectory; the compositional development of the text, particularly the relationship between the composition-history of the Fourth Gospel and the history of the Johannine community; and the potential inherent in reading the narrative of this Gospel as a whole self-contained unit. While each of these publications has provided unique and valuable insights, all of them have tended, somehow, to pay little (sometimes no) attention to the spirituality of the Fourth Gospel until recent years, which witnessed an increase in this attention. Yet the narrative of this Gospel is saturated with themes relevant to its spirituality. Thus, exploring the richness of its spirituality remains both a challenging task and a rewarding endeavor. Once exposed to this unique and unparalleled richness, one soon realizes that he/she is encountering a long and great tradition and entering a realm of endless and abundant potential topics to be explored. Another factor can be added to this reality: Christology and theology have enjoyed, for a long period of time and rightly so, the place of privilege in the Johannine studies. However, the emphasis on these two topics should not prevent one from appreciating other Johannine themes, especially its spirituality.

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**56.** This expression occurs in **Schnackenburg** ([1968] 1980 I:14) and **Schneiders** (2003:1). Both of them link its origin to Eusebius (*Historia Ecclesiastica* 6.14.7) who stated that Clement of Alexandria referred to the Gospel of John as the ‘The Spiritual Gospel’.

### **2.3.2 A Scholarly Gap to be filled**

Based on the publications being read and consulted while writing this thesis, presented in the *Literary Review* in the previous subsection, and the above-articulated observations, the following facts are emphasized in this subsection:

- In the fields of both biblical studies and Christian spirituality, there is a noticeable lack in the studies on the religious experience of the Christians of the first century.
- In the publications on Johannine spirituality and the Fourth Gospel, there has been no literature that has addressed, in a full-scale manner, its spirituality or the Johannine spirituality.
- None of the publications, reviewed in this Chapter and listed in Chapter 7, has investigated the experience of God in the Fourth Gospel or perceived it from the *Familia Dei*'s perspective.

These facts point to the following gap:

- There is a significant gap in the intersection of spirituality, Christian spirituality, Johannine spirituality, biblical studies and the Fourth Gospel scholarship.
- There is ample room for more research on the narrative of the Fourth Gospel, seeking to explore its spirituality as well as examining the experience of God in this Gospel.

This gap is huge and multidimensional; filling it is a challenging endeavor. This thesis aims to contribute modestly in this endeavor by investigating of the Johannine Experience of God in the Fourth Gospel, and by suggesting certain topics for future studies.

### **2.3.3 Suggested Topics for future studies**

The gap, mentioned above, has the capacity to encompass new topics and can evidently motivate new studies. The following topics are suggested:

- ♦ Taking the Johannine motifs, discussed in Chapters 4 and 5, as topics or as starting points for further studies.
- ♦ The experience of God and the Johannine pneumatology, ecclesiology, or soteriology.
- ♦ Investigating the Johannine experience of God by applying a psychological approach.
- ♦ The Johannine experience of God and its connotations to the ethical behavior of the believers.

## 2.4 Concluding Remarks

The topic of the thesis can be located within the intersection of the fields of spirituality, Christian spirituality, Johannine spirituality, biblical studies, and the Fourth Gospel scholarship. Choosing this topic was inspired by the significance of this Gospel's spirituality and motivated by the noticeable lack in publications on the Johannine experience of God. Based on the *Literary Review*, presented in this Chapter and supported by the contents of the list enumerated under *Works Consulted*, the following concluding remarks can be formulated:

Many books and articles on spirituality and Christian spirituality have been published, however, little on early Christian spirituality, even less on Johannine spirituality, and none on the experience of God in the Fourth Gospel. This gives importance to this research and the challenge of meeting the requirement of its goals.

For a long period of time, Christology and theology have enjoyed a place of privilege in the Johannine studies. Nevertheless, this should not prevent one from appreciating other Johannine themes, especially its spirituality. Therefore, any intent to explore the Johannine spirituality in general and the Johannine experience of God in particular, does not need much justification.

The *Literature Review* done in this Chapter is a logical selection from the above-mentioned publications. This review was structured and made to achieve a twofold goal: First, acquiring some knowledge-based elements by reviewing and assessing the works written on the topic chosen for this thesis: This is an important step to avoid any unnecessary repetition and to identify what is lacking in the concepts, definitions, and theories that they offer. Doing so, it helps expressing the benefits that might result from this thesis and conveying its proposal for action that might help satisfying this lack. Second, setting the platform and framework to formulate, in Chapter 4, some essential considerations based on the most common and accepted theories on religious experience, the *Johannine Community*, and the *Fourth Gospel*. Once fulfilled, this twofold aspiration will help to gain a comprehensible insight on the background of the Johannine Experience of God in the Fourth Gospel and facilitate the investigation of this experience done in Chapter 5.

## Chapter 3

### Approach and Methodology

#### 3.1 Introductory Notes

Biblical interpreters and exegetes are currently enjoying the privilege of being able to select, from a broad available assortment, a hermeneutical approach deemed to be in harmony with their traditions, beliefs, and theology, which they consider as authoritative criteria and as standard references to identify suitable and unsuitable, correct and incorrect readings. Thus, a rewarding and plausible hermeneutical endeavor should comprise, as a preparatory phase, two steps: First, an adequate comparison of approaches in order to ascertain their overall contribution to the meaning and understanding of the given biblical text; and second, a satisfactory choice of an approach capable to accomplish such an endeavor. Following this logic, this Chapter portrays the approach and the methodology adopted in this thesis. In addition to these *Introductory Notes*, this Chapter comprises three main sections and certain *Concluding Remarks*:

*Section One* presents a concise panorama of biblical hermeneutics aiming to locate the approach of the thesis within these approaches and to emphasize the significance of employing an integrated approach in the interpretation of a given biblical text.

*Section Two* indicates the limitations of the thesis.

*Section Three* depicts the approach and the methodology employed in this thesis. It is a holistic integrated approach/socio-historical and literary-theological approach.

It is the conviction of the researcher that exploring the Johannine spirituality and investigating the experience of God in the Fourth Gospel, require an integrated hermeneutical approach that harmonically combines specific elements from various approaches to reach its goals.

### 3.2 Biblical Hermeneutics: A Concise Panorama<sup>57</sup>

Biblical texts, including the Johannine writings, were composed to be read and/or heard. As such, they required an accurate and adequate reading/interpretation. Likewise, it is acceptable to assert that their narratives encompass, certainly among others, the religious experiences lived by their authors, and hint, somehow, at one aspect of their purpose of composition, namely motivating and enhancing the spirituality of their readers. The interpretations of these narratives are as ancient as their accounts and have various features in common, for example:

- ♦ The later biblical writings reinterpret their antecedents, for example: In the Old Testament, the Psalms and the prophetic writings reinterpret the contents of the Torah. Similarly, the books of the New Testament reinterpret the accounts of the Old Testament in line with the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ (cf. Longenecker 1999). It should be added that the merits of two of the references to the Old Testament in John should be appreciated, namely, linking the experience of God by John's readers to that of the people of the Old Testament, and creating/enhancing spirituality.
- ♦ The input brought by the readers or the interpreters' personal experience and perspective plays a significant role in the process of the biblical interpretation/reading. Köstenberger (2004:3) states that "no commentary is written without underlying hermeneutical presuppositions, whether conscious or unconscious, acknowledged or unacknowledged, explicit or implicit... Biblical Interpretation reflects the interpreter's ecclesiastical tradition, view of biblical authority and his or her preunderstanding" (cf. also Klein, Blomberg & Hubbard [1993] 2004:81-116). Concerning the Fourth Gospel and its readers, it can be stated that the ingenuity of John's literary style -including his *Familia Dei* motif- has a significant potential of generating new experience(s) and or enhancing its spirituality.
- ♦ The richness enshrined inside the biblical texts is abundant, and its openness to various methods of interpretation is noteworthy. The development of these methods has always enjoyed both a rich history and a noticeable complexity. Certainly, this is not the place to offer a complete chronicle of biblical hermeneutics – such an endeavor is offered in a number of works and in more details than the present research. Nevertheless, drawing a concise panorama about this history is indeed an insightful advantage to select the approach of this thesis.

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<sup>57</sup>. At the outset, I should assert that the aim of this panorama is not to get engaged in any debate whatsoever about *Biblical Hermeneutics* nor to pretend bringing a new input to it.

The history of biblical hermeneutics<sup>58</sup> is long and complex, as the hermeneutical fields never stopped getting an ever-growing attention. Over the years, they have developed in numerous areas of specialization and their necessity became more and more vital and undeniable. According to De Villiers (1991:146) and Smit (1988:441), no researcher can operate without employing hermeneutical methods and without observing their criteria.<sup>59</sup>

Porter & Stovell (2012:13-14) explain that the beginnings of historical exegesis go back to the ancient school of Antioch.<sup>60</sup> The approach of this school favored an historical and factual reading of the Scripture. It was considered as a response to the allegorical methods of the Alexandrian school.<sup>61</sup> Many scholars under the influences of Cartesian thinking, Pyrrhonian skepticism, English deism, radical German criticism, and the Enlightenment movement<sup>62</sup> started to question the historicity of miracles and the historical Jesus, by exploring different types of texts and sources.<sup>63</sup> Another important influence upon biblical criticism was the evolutionary philosophy. Failing to examine the latter's validity as a basis for historical and literary biblical studies, and the insufficient attention given to the uniqueness of the contents of biblical revelation, was a notable weakness of *Criticism* in the nineteenth century.

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**58.** Suggested references for further insight:

▪ For a comprehensive overview on the New Testament studies: **Baird** (1992); **Thiselton** (2009).

▪ For major histories of interpretation of the Old and New Testament:

**Robbins** (1996); **Oeming** (2006); **Hays** (2007); **Pokorny** (2010); **Reventlow** (2010); **Porter** (2010).

▪ For reviews of the history of theological hermeneutics:

**Mickelsen** (1970:20-53); **Virkler & Ayayao** (2007:43-78); **Deppe** (2011:194-227); **Thiselton** (1992:142ff).

▪ For a thorough analysis of the history of biblical hermeneutics: **Mickelsen** (1970); **Kümmel** ([1961] 1973);

**Bruce** (1979:21-59); **Lategan** (1984); **Grant** (1984); **Longman** (1987:13-46); **Tate** ([1991] 2011);

**Montague** ([1991] 2007); **Virkler & Ayayao** (2007); **Osborne** (2006); **Deppe** (2011); **Köstenberger** (2004).

**59.** **Tate** ([1991] 2011:xv) asserts that hermeneutics requires the formulation of some specific rules and instructions according to which exegesis is done. It also requires an adequate knowledge of its history.

**Thiselton** (1980:11) maintains that the exegetes are urged to recognize that the text they investigate is conditioned by a given historical context. Therefore, they should start by examining that text, its vocabulary, and style to understand the intention of the author. This process is called the *Theory of Scriptural Exposition*.

**60.** The school of Antioch was famous for its tendency to focus on concrete realities and on the factual/historical aspects of the human life of Christ. **Richardson** (2007:14-16) discusses the various problems related to this school.

**61.** The school of Alexandria had a tendency towards a Platonic metaphysical approach. It favored an allegorical reading of the Scripture, driven by a desire to get to the real meaning of given biblical passages. For more information about the schools of Antioch and Alexandria, cf. **Froehlich** (1984); **Manlino** (1994); **Gerald** (1996); **Hieromonk** (1999:187-198); **Breck** (2001:195-216).

**62.** **Thiselton** (1995:10-36) considers the Enlightenment movement as a turning point in biblical interpretation. For more details on this topic, cf. **Bruce** (1977:27-59); **Morgan & Barton** (1988:44-129).

**63.** For an agreeable discussion of the quests for the historical Jesus: **Wright** (1996:312-316); **Walter** (1999:xi-xii); **Porter** (2000:31-62). For further insight about the historicity of miracles: **Burns** (1981). For further information about the topic of text and sources: **Krentz** (1975:19); **Thiselton** (1995:12-14).



In view of the diversity of hermeneutical theories during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, together with the comparative paucity of satisfactory results, a shift of approach occurred in an effort to provide a more integrated method. Suitably, the foundations of the older criticism were neither destroyed nor undermined by the new approaches. They rather became the bases of modern hermeneutics to some extent. Many scholars like Porter and Robinson (2011:23-33) and Hustwit (2004:185) support the idea that considers Schleiermacher as the founder of modern hermeneutics, and the initiator of romantic hermeneutics as a response to the Enlightenment. Another scholar that influenced biblical hermeneutics is Bultmann. Since the days of Schleiermacher and Bultmann, hermeneutics has undergone a fundamental change in meaning and went beyond its traditional significance.<sup>64</sup> Consequently, biblical scholars have employed the three fundamental components of communication to tackle the epistemology of biblical hermeneutics, namely the phenomenology of its interpretation, communication, and language. They have published numerous publications on these topics, employing and presenting these components in different illustrations and various designations.<sup>65</sup>

The following diagram gives a schematic representation of these designations:



*(Personal Design)*

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<sup>64</sup>. cf. Ricoeur (1976:268ff); Roussouw (1980:17ff); Thiselton (1980:10); and Lategan (1984:2).

Ricoeur (1980:15ff) states that hermeneutics assumes the responsibility to move beyond the scientific explication of the text's language to the search for the ultimate truth that is incarnate in the language of the text: It is a move from 'in the language of the text' to 'through the language of the text'. He argues that the most important task of hermeneutics is to search for ultimate reality through the language of the text. Virkler & Ayayao (2007) define the meaning of hermeneutics as the science and art of biblical interpretation, while Ferguson ([1987] 2003:6) regards hermeneutics as the task of 'hearing what an ancient text has to say'.

<sup>65</sup>. cf. Van der Merwe (2015a:5 of 9 pages) for a few recent publications (new and updated) on the epistemology of biblical hermeneutics.



Oeming (2006:ix) argues that each of these components is connected to its own discourse and set of rules. Porter and Stovell (2012:10-12) suggest that most of the books published on biblical hermeneutics or biblical interpretation can broadly be classified into two major categories: The first category presents insightful instructions on how one should interpret the biblical text,<sup>66</sup> while the second category provides an introduction to the different methods of biblical interpretation.<sup>67</sup> According to them, both categories tend to overlook the larger hermeneutical issues involved in biblical interpretation and often do not do justice to the diverse range of opinions in biblical hermeneutics.<sup>68</sup>

Biblical hermeneutics,<sup>69</sup> also called biblical criticism, is a wide designation umbrella that covers various techniques or *critical* methods employed in studying the biblical texts. It can also refer to the discipline of studying, evaluating and critically assessing the Bible's accounts. During the development of its history,<sup>70</sup> biblical criticism was catalogued under two main categories: *Higher Criticism* and *Lower Criticism* (also called *Textual Criticism*). Whilst its history was gradually unfolding and its development progressed steadily, both categories never stopped producing new ramifications and evolving in an interweaving complexity. Consequently, their boundaries went beyond the realm of writing to embrace the sphere of orality.

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**66.** Scholars belonging to this category are **Kaiser & Kümmel** (1981); **Stenger** (1993); **Boyles** (2001); **Erickson** (2005); **Hayes & Holladay** ([1982] 2007); and **Blomberg & Markley** (2010).

**67.** Scholars belonging to this category are **Tuckett** (1987); **Black et al** (1994); **Maier** (1994); **Barton** (1997); **Klein et al** ([1993] 2004); **Osborne** (2006); and **Brown** (2007).

**68.** For an overview on the development of these New Testament studies: **Baird** (1992); **Thiselton** (2009).

For major histories of Old Testament and New Testament interpretation:

**Mueller-Vollmer** (1989); **Baird** (1992); **Robbins** (1996); **Oeming** (2006); **Hays** (2007); **Pokorny** (2010); **Reventlow** (2010); **Porter & Robinson** (2011).

For more reviews on the history of theological hermeneutics:

**Mickelsen** (1970:20-53); **Virkler & Ayayao** (2007:43-78); **Deppe** (2011:194-227); **Thiselton** (1992:142ff).

For a thorough analysis of the history of biblical hermeneutics: **Kümmel** ([1961] 1973); **Virkler & Ayayao** (2007); **Montague** ([1991] 2007); **Osborne** (2006); **Tate** ([1991] 2011); **Deppe** (2011); **Köstenberger** (2004).

**69.** **Braaten** (1966:131) defines hermeneutics as 'the science of reflecting on how a word or an event in the past time and culture may be understood and become existentially meaningful in present situation'. **Duncan** (1986:6) defines hermeneutics simply as 'the task of hearing what an ancient text has to say'. **Tate** ([1991] 2011:xvi) argues that the 'common ground shared by most definitions of hermeneutics is literary meaning'.

**70.** **Osborne** (2006), **Hays** (2007), **Tate** ([1991] 2011) and **Van der Merwe** (2015a) discuss, in different lengths and depths, the significant advances of the hermeneutical discipline that occurred during the last few decades.

Like any science, biblical hermeneutics has its own specific rules that its practitioners consider as best proficient and suitable to the process of exegesis and interpretation.<sup>71</sup> While its aim - apprehending and comprehending the meaning of a given biblical text- is singular, the pertinent data, or the retrieval and appropriation of this meaning, is many-sided and multidimensional.

At the level of the Johannine hermeneutics, Thatcher (2007:487-505) asserts that three major currents have dominated the Johannine studies: The first current concentrates on the discovery of the Fourth Gospel sources; the second current focuses on the course of developmental history of John; and the third one directs the attention towards the narrative of John and the style of the author that leaves this narrative open for multiple readings and various interpretations. These currents, together with their various ramifications and profuse insights into the complexities of John's narrative, have produced numerous hermeneutical approaches.

The valuable contribution of these currents to the Johannine hermeneutics is cherished and appreciated. However, at the level of biblical hermeneutics, the quest for what a given biblical text says or implies remains as active as ever, together with the search for a suitable method to realistically interpret this text and accurately continue to challenge the interpreter. This does not mean that there is something erroneous in the outcome of this contribution. To the contrary, one should see the above-mentioned diversity of approaches as a sound indication to the richness of the biblical narratives and as a vibrant reflection of the enormous stream of potential hermeneutic data enshrined in them, waiting for the existing interpretative methods (or methods that have not been initiated yet) to uncover it and make it accessible to experienced scholars and ordinary readers alike. Thus the necessity for new hermeneutical methods became more imperative and the effectiveness of the emerging integrated exegetic technics became more noticeable, acceptable, and employed.

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**71. Tate** ([1991] 2011:xv) defines exegesis and interpretation as follows: Exegesis is the process of examining a text to ascertain what its first readers would have understood it to mean. The varied set of activities which the exegete performs on a text in order to make meaningful inferences is called exegesis. Interpretation is the task of explaining the implications of that understanding to contemporary readers and hearers. Although the researcher is aware of the original meanings of the terms "hermeneutics" and "interpretation", in this thesis, these terms are used interchangeably, due to the fact that the term 'interpretation' has become, through usage, a comprehensive one – not only does it refer to the implication inferred from exegesis, but it also refers to the entire process of hermeneutics.

The outcomes of this necessity and the fruits of its effectiveness generated a new categorization of biblical hermeneutics that became broadly accepted and gradually started to replace the old twofold classification. This categorization consists of various groups of theories concerning the so-called *Pivot of Hermeneutical Attention* and the *Location of Meaning*.<sup>72</sup> In other words, the so-called *three worlds* of the biblical text are referred to as: ‘the World behind the Text’, ‘the World within the Text’, and the World in front of the Text’.<sup>73</sup> As such, this categorization could also be considered as a solid perspective from which one can effectively and satisfactorily perceive the shifts that occurred/are occurring within the realm of biblical hermeneutics.

It is the conviction of the researcher that the above-mentioned pivot of hermeneutical attention should be the product of a balanced conversation between the *world of the author*, the *world of the text*, and the *world of the reader* – in other words, between the three worlds of the text. In addition, the aim of this thesis and the limited scope of the present panorama do not allow even a concise elaboration on the history of biblical criticism, its numerous branches, their technics, strengths and weaknesses. However, to maintain a logical balance between the aim and limitation of this panorama on one hand, and the responsibility of keeping its contents enriched with accurate data and supportive references on the other, the researcher has found it practical to articulate some observations in the next paragraphs and to list some annotations.

The *world of the author* or the *world behind the text* is associated with *Historical Criticism*, which includes *Source Criticism*, *Form Criticism*, *Tradition Criticism*, and *Redaction Criticism*.

The common feature of these approaches is their commitment to read the New Testament texts in its socio-historical context.

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<sup>72</sup>. For discussions on this topic, cf. **Lategan** (1984:2ff); **Longman** (1987:19ff); **Tate** ([1991] 2011:xvi).

<sup>73</sup>. Ricoeur (*Interpretation...* 1976:87-94) suggested that one might conceive of textual studies as inquiries into three different worlds: ① the world behind the text, ② the world in the text, and ③ the world in front of the text. Subsequently many biblical scholars have used his model in their works.

**Tate** (1991:xvi) called these worlds “Approaches to Meaning”. According to him, there are three different groups of theories regarding the locus and actualization of meaning: Author-centered, Text-centered, and Reader-centered.

**Montague** (2007:127-238) discussed “The World of the Text”, “The World behind the Text”, “The World in front of the Text”, “The World around the Text” and The “Spiritual Sense of Scripture”.

**Van der Merwe**, in his essay (2015 *Reading the Bible...*), gave a brief history of Hermeneutics portraying skilfully the environments within which they were formulated. He also depicted proficiently the major shifts that occurred in the course of this history, and enumerated three different groups of approaches to the text:

① Author-centred; ② Text-centred; and ③ Reader-centred.



This kind of reading, sometimes called *window reading*, uses the text as a tool to reconstruct realities behind or beyond its contents. It attempts to understand the socio-historical milieu that produced the text by going beyond its narrative in order to interpret it.

*Historical Criticism*<sup>74</sup> (*window reading*) has contributed tremendously to the Johannine scholarships, as prominent scholars applied it to their works on the Fourth Gospel,<sup>75</sup> but it remains limited. At the first glance, the various branches of *Historical Criticism* seem as competing methods that have a serious potential of leading the exegete/scholar towards an “inevitable relativism” (Hartin & Petzer 1991:2). Although the risk is real, it is not definitive. Such diversity is praised by some enthusiastic practitioners as a clear sign of richness of biblical hermeneutics, because each method ‘has a particular function and purpose in illuminating the text’ (Smit 1988:442). Indeed, some approaches are more suitable to certain types of biblical texts than others. This optimistic view should neither undermine the weaknesses of *Historical Criticism* nor overpraise its achievements. Best is to rather appreciate objectively both sides as valuable contribution to the development of biblical hermeneutics.

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**74.** ♦ It is noteworthy to mention here that in the realm of scholarship, there is an ambiguity in using the expression *Historical Criticism*: At one level Historical Criticism is the whole work of *Lower and Higher Criticism*; while at another level it is one hermeneutical method alongside *Source Criticism*, *Form Criticism*, and *Redaction Criticism*. *Source Criticism* emerged in the midst of the seventeenth century and was popularized during the nineteenth century. Richard Simon (1638-1712) and Julius Wellhausen (1844-1918) played a major role in its development. For more information about Source Criticism:

**Hayes & Holladay** ([1982] 2007); **Morgan & Barton** (1988) and **Müller** (2009:21-36).

*Form Criticism* has its roots in the works of Jakob Grimm (1785-1863) and Wilhelm Grimm (1786-1859). It attempts to classify units of written and oral materials in their relation to a conjectured sociological setting out of which they could have arisen within the life of the community. For more info about Form Criticism, see:

**Krentz** (1975); **Stein** (1988); **Black & Dockery** (1991); **Marshall** (1992); and **Klein et al** ([1993] 2004).

*Tradition Criticism* is often seen as part of *Source Criticism* and as *founding factor of Redaction Criticism*. It accepts their results, but attempts to place emphasis upon the history of a given unit of literature. For more info about Tradition Criticism, see: **Popkin** (1996:383-407) and **Harrisville & Sundburg** (2002:30-45).

*Redaction Criticism* is called sometimes Editorial Criticism and considered often as another tool of Traditional. It usually depends on Source Criticism and Form Criticism to investigate the editorial works of the gospels authors and the context that caused the editing in order to see their emphases and purposes. For a more insightful material about Redaction Criticism, see: **Krentz** (1975); **Schaeffer** (1985); **Stein** (1988); **Black & Dockery** (1991); **Marshall** (1992); and **Klein et al** ([1993] 2004).

♦ To these, one can add the following approaches:

*Liberationist and Feminist Approaches*: **Schüssler Fiorenza** (1983); and **Gutierrez** (1988).

*Critical Communicative Methodology*: **Flecha** (2000); **Habermas** (2000); and **Claveria & Gómez** (2003).

*Canonical Criticism*, see: **Childs** (1978:3-16); **Barr** (1983); **Sanders** (1984); **Oswalt** (1987:317-325);

**Sailhamer** (1995); **Hahn & Bergsma** (2004:201-218); and **Lyons** ([1977] 2005:41-68).

**75.** Examples are **Brown** ([1966] 1979); **Bultmann** ([1966] 1978); **Schnackenburg** ([1968] 1980).

The opponents of *Historical Criticism*<sup>76</sup> reject its basic principle for the following reasons:

- ♦ It assumes the autonomy of the human scientist from the Bible as the word of God. At the level of this thesis, this is a real risk: Such autonomy may violate the role of revelation and inspiration, being vital components of the Experience of God in the Fourth Gospel.
- ♦ Its excessive, exclusive, and unbalanced attention given to the *world behind the text* to determine and explain the meaning enshrined in the text: This leaves the rest of the aspects or the other two worlds suffering from various degrees of neglect. Other scholars regard the reader as of no importance and the text as the only instrument (Lategan 1984:1ff). Such unbalanced attention is against two elements in this thesis: First, if the *world behind the text* is used as the only factor to determine the meaning of John's narrative, this factor could totally ignore the sacred factor and the spiritual dimension of this narrative. Consequently, it may prevent the readers from reading the text through their own experience and cherish their own spirituality. Second, this unbalanced attention may marginalize the effects of the Johannine text and its capability of constituting an experience of God, therefore creating spirituality.

In response to these and other weaknesses (that are not discussed here), many biblical scholars began using the scientific tools of anthropology, archeology, linguistics, and other disciplines. They started eagerly searching for/excitedly embracing new hermeneutical approaches that looked within the text itself.<sup>77</sup> Consequently, two major events happened: First, the occurrence of the first real paradigm shift – from diachronical to synchronical interests, or from *Historical Criticism* to *Literary Criticism* – and second, the naissance of *Structuralism*. Thus, the text became the center of attention and the meaning is to be found in its structure,<sup>78</sup> as only the text then legitimates an interpretation.<sup>79</sup> With this, the locus of meaning shifted from the *world behind the text* to the autonomous text or the *world within the text*. It must be noted here that even though a paradigm shift has occurred, the *Historic-Critical Approach* did not cease; however, the emphasis has shifted to the new literary-linguistic approach. The same also happened when the emphasis was transferred to the approach of the readers.<sup>80</sup>

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**76.** Wimsatt & Beardsley (1954) and Braaten (1966) argued against the purely historical approach and its locus of meaning. According to them, there is an inevitable gap between the originating moment in the author's mind and the cultural specificity of the author's language.

**77.** For an insightful history of this development, cf. Stanley & Tombs (1995:77-128).

**78.** cf. Louw (1976:99f); Combrink (1979:3); Mlakuzhyil (1987:17ff); Snyman (1991:89); cf. also: Van der Merwe (2015 *Reading the Bible...* part 1:2 of 9 pages).

**79.** See: Lategan (1984:1ff); Longman (1987:25ff); and Hartin & Petzer (1991: 47ff).

**80.** cf. Hartin & Petzer (1991:3) for a detailed discussion.

The *world within the text* refers to the text as a literary object that creates its own rhetorical reality (cf. Tate [1991] 2011:xviii).<sup>81</sup> It deals with the themes developed in the text, the plot of the narrative, structural patterns, literary devices, and stylistic idiosyncrasies. It also refers to the hermeneutical approaches that pay a close attention to how biblical texts functioned as works of literature, rather than reading them to gain insight about the historical milieus in which they were composed, or about *the world behind them*. The renewed interest in the text instead of the world behind it is credited to what scholars refer to as *Structuralism*<sup>82</sup> and *New Criticism*.<sup>83</sup>

With this shift, new hermeneutical theories and approaches developed.<sup>84</sup> Many interpreters started (unintentionally or intentionally) removing the authorial intent and the historical background from the equation, replacing it with an emphasis on poetics, narrative and textual unity (Porter & Stovell 2012:17). Other scholars started to emphasize the autonomy of the text, somehow disconnected from history, author, and readers. It became a ‘world’ in its own right and an object of investigation in all its aspects. For religious communities, this shift or ‘return to the text’ was fruitful: It allowed for a new way of understanding the connection between theology and the biblical text.<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>81</sup>. To this effect, **Abrams** (1981:83) states that the intention of the author “is irrelevant to the literary critic, because meaning and value reside within the text of the finished, freestanding, and public work of literature itself”.

<sup>82</sup>. According to **Tate** ([1991] 2011:186-190), *Structuralism* in general is based upon the assumption that all human social activities are nothing more than manifestations of underlying systems of abstract rules or conventions. *Structuralism*, as applied to literary discourse, is based upon three concepts: The distinction between *Langue* and *Parole*; the definition of *sign*; and the concept of binary opposition as it relates to the concept of *myth*.

<sup>83</sup>. *New Criticism* is a formalist movement that flourished during the middle decades of the last century. It describes a trend in the meaning theory, emphasizing a close reading of a given literary work to discover how it functioned as a self-contained, self-referential aesthetic object. Many scholars believe that this movement did not have a name until the appearance of *Ransom’s* book in 1941. **Longman** (1987:25) indicates two major schools of thought in the period of this shift: *New Criticism* and *Structuralism*.

For more information on *New Criticism*, cf. **Poythress** (1978:221); and **Searle** (2002).

<sup>84</sup>. Discussing all of the theories/approaches of the *world within the text* goes beyond the capacity of this footnote. Below is a list enumerating some theories:

*Literary Criticism*: One supporter of this theory is **Frye** (1982). Other scholars like **Meyer** (1989) have criticized it sharply. For a discussion on the limits of this theory, cf. **O’Day** (1985:341-389).

*Narrative Criticism* is generally associated to *Statistical Criticism*, and the claimed *ornamental glass reading*.

*Textual Criticism* aims to establish the original wording or form of the biblical text insofar as this is possible.

*Statistical Criticism* employs mathematical and statistical technics to scrutinize through variant readings. This kind of criticism has different branches (**Metzger** 1968; **Dearing** 1959).

For a thoroughgoing narrative analysis, cf. **Culpepper** (1983); and **Duke** (1985).

<sup>85</sup>. **Hays** (2007:5) argues that the ‘eyes of faith should be the epistemological precondition for reading the Bible as well as for the recovery of the theological exegesis of the Bible’; **Poirier** (2009:105-118) defends this theory with the intention to legitimize; **Green** (2004:159-174) finds himself in the same academic environment as Hays and Poirier, also intending to defend the legitimacy of this hermeneutical approach by relating it to an historical investigation.

This shift has resonated in the hermeneutical field of the Fourth Gospel, with the famous works of Martyn ([1968] 2003) and Brown ([1966] 1979). Consequently, this Gospel is no longer read as evidence to be dissected into traditions, strands, and sources, in search of the earliest and most authentic formulations, but to see how the text reflects the history and needs of the generative community (cf. Woll 1981; Renner 1982; Segovia 1982b; Evans 1993). What was gained from this shift is a view of the Fourth Gospel that takes the circumstances and the daily events of the Johannine Community (i.e. their needs, struggles, crises, joy, faith, etc.) as generative theological and spiritual categories. Moreover, the interest in the history and the needs of the generative community was also crucial for the Form-Critical analysis of the gospel, especially its *Sitz im Leben*. As such, this Gospel is no longer treated simply as an historical artifact but as a witness to the life and spirituality of this community. This perception is taken into consideration in the next Chapter, when discussing the functionality of the Johannine text and its role in creating and stimulating the spirituality of its readers. In the same discussion, special attention is also given to the ‘story-world’ (Wilder 1983:353-364) created by the text, and towards the power of its words to invoke and summon a specific spirituality, and to invite its readers to a new way of experiencing God while hearing/reading it. Thus, it is fairly acceptable to say that the spirituality of the Fourth Gospel, conveyed through its narrative, to both its first readers and the on-going generations of readers, is closely correlated to the world created by its text and the socio-historical world of the community within which it was composed. Moreover, the text created a world into which the Johannine Community was (and subsequent readers are) invited, and the world of this community also informed the shape of the invitation and the created world. Because they are held together in this narrative, these two worlds are also held together in the thesis.<sup>86</sup> They are discussed in the next Chapters by employing an integrated approach (*Socio-Historical-Literary-Theological Approach*) to explore the Johannine spirituality and examine the Experience of God in the Fourth Gospel.

Whereas the approaches of the *world within the text* would have the readers read the Johannine text as they have it, they must remember that this text is the product of a community.<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>86</sup>. Although **Gottwald** (1985) suggests that the social world and the literary world are to be held together, his work does not recognize the creative and creating power of the text.

<sup>87</sup>. For a discussion of the formation of the text, cf. **Brueggemann** (1988:127-165).



Whereas the approaches of the *world behind the text* would have the readers read the Johannine narrative to comprehend the social and historical dimensions of the community, one must remember that the text cannot simply be used as a source, because it helped determine the shape of this community. Despite the tension between these approaches, the components of the integrated approach of this thesis are complementary. The weakness of the *world within the text* approaches is generated by questions about the biblical text itself, such as: When a text is considered original? If there were multiple versions of ancient texts, how could one decide which version is better than another? What is an original context if there is no singular original text? These questions are a challenge to any scholar who wishes to ignore questions of the *world behind the text* and focus only on the text itself, because they indicate somehow that there is no *text itself*: At the dawn of Christianity there was no pristine text, but rather a general acceptance of various versions of a text. Thus, the *text itself* is not simply one version of a text; rather it is the sum of the various forms that a text has taken. This weakness urged scholars to search for new approaches that include the *world of the readers* or the *world in front the text*.

Towards the sunset of the last century, another shift has occurred in the field of hermeneutics: A move towards the reader/receptor (cf. Van der Merwe 2015a:4-5 of 9). This movement consists of a variety of methods aimed at diverse objectives and focuses on the relationship of the text-reader. This shift concerns the ‘reception and interpretation’ of the text or the *world in front of the text* (Lategan 1984:3). The latter encompasses the *reader-centered approaches*: As its name implies, this kind of criticism focuses on the responses a given biblical text evokes in different communities of readers at different times. At the extreme, it disregards the need for the historical background of a text or the recovery of the author’s intention. As such, the text presents its own world of meaning to the minds of a reading community, affecting its readers through the shape of the text-world in dynamic interaction with the readers’ own world. The meaning of the text is not bound to its first readers but is open to new responses in new communities.<sup>88</sup> Some scholars have focused on tracing the histories of interactions with a particular text across different communities and through time – this approach is mostly called *Reception History*.<sup>89</sup>

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**88. Fowler** (1985:5-23) argues that this multiplicity of meanings fills gaps left by rigid historical interpretations, and expands the limited paradigm of *Structuralism*. In this respect, reader-response theories are called ‘*Post-structuralist*’. About *Post-structuralism* cf. **Porter & Stovell** (2012:18); **Osborne** (2006:392-403).

**89.** About this topic, see: **Lategan** (1984:4ff), **Longman** (1987:38) and **Hartin & Petzer** (1991:145ff).



**McKnight** (1985:128) argues that different readers interpret a text differently.

[They] bring to the text a vast world of experience, pre-suppositions, methodologies, interests, and competencies...reader-oriented theories hold that a text means nothing until someone means something by it. More radical proponents of reader-response criticism go further to say that the reader creates the meaning of the text. Others hold that meaning is produced by the mutual interaction between the text and reader.

**Lategan** (1984:3ff) refers to the shift that has taken place in the field of hermeneutics, stating that “this shift consists of a variety of methods aimed at diverse objectives...This new trend is more interested in the effect of communication than in its mechanics. This stems from an attitude that the result of traditional exegesis has very little relevance to the needs of the day”.

Thus, in employing *reader-centered approaches*, the text engages the readers as the readers engage the text. *Meaning* becomes an invention by the readers in collaboration with the text, rather than the intention of the author. The readers are constrained by the text, but they are not divested of interests and presuppositions. The text is re-contextualized through the multicolored lenses of the readers, and, in certain cases, it becomes a mirror (cf. Culpepper 1983:3-5) for its readers and their experiences.

Traditionally, text-oriented critics often think of this methodology as an anarchic subjectivism, allowing readers to interpret a text any way they want. They accuse reader-response critics of saying that the text does not exist. Another objection to this reading is that it fails to account for the text being able to expand the readers’ understanding. While readers can and do put their own ideas and experiences into a text, they are at the same time gaining new understanding through it. All the *reader-centered approaches* share an interest in the particular positions of readers and users of texts, and the ways in which differences in context create different potential meanings and effects for the same text over time. A problematic assumption often undergirds all of these approaches: They posit a divide between the original context of the original text (which holds an original meaning or perhaps several original meanings) and later contexts, later readers, and later meanings. Another problem: Meaning can be seen as an invention of the reader, separate from the intention of the author or the historical situation at work in the original writing.

In spite of their weaknesses and fragmentation, the reading models of the above-presented three *worlds of the text* have contributed significantly to biblical studies, indicating the need for comprehensive reading methodologies, and calling attention to the opportunities for a holistic reading of biblical texts. In response, Robbins has developed a comprehensive model of interpretation which he calls *Socio-Rhetorical Criticism*.<sup>90</sup> He suggests and discusses the following categories.

### 3.2.1 Textures suggested by Robbins

#### 3.2.1.1 Inner Texture

The inner texture of a text deals with the flat surface of the text. It is the text-immanent dimension and the medium of communication that opens the socio-rhetorical reading. Here the reader or the interpreter is invited to explore the different inner textures,<sup>91</sup> which comprise plot, and setting, repetitive-progressive elements, opening-middle-closing texture (Botha 1998:55), narrational elements, the narrator, characters, grammar, and syntax (Robbins 1996a:7, 27). Once the process of reading or interpreting begins, the interpreter/reader realizes the existence of certain verbal signs, which should be investigated before moving on to other textures. Tuppurainen (2012:42) suggests that this realization leads to the perception of the rhetorical power of communication. According to prominent scholars like Goodwin (1993:177), and Gowler (2010:194) *discourse analysis* is more effective in the creation of semantic networks in the text and in the determination of the author's rhetoric. Thus, this texture focuses on studying the characteristics of the words, how they were made to function in the text, and how they were designed to communicate in the narrative. As such, calling upon this texture will help identifying the Johannine terminology pertinent to the examination of the experience of God in John.

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<sup>90</sup>. According to **Gowler** (2002:191-192), the term "socio-rhetorical" was first introduced into New Testament studies by **Robbins** in 1984. **Kloppenborg** (2003:64) explains that "it is not that Vernon Robbins created ex nihilo; of course, he drew on a variety of studies...Robbins had the clarity of mind to see how to integrate these diverse methods and approaches to the texts of antiquity into a multidimensional method, which identifies various registers or textures in an effort to understand how a text works on the intellect, emotions, and sensibilities of its readers and hearers and how the worlds of the readers or hearers variously affect the appropriation of the text".

**Oakley** (1999:110) argues for the critical importance of "scene construction" in discourse.

<sup>91</sup>. **Culpepper** (1998:73) widens the spectrum of inner textures to include the narrator, plot, characters, settings, and other aspects of the text.

### 3.2.1.2 Intertexture

Intertexture functions from the perspective of recognizing that the emergence of a given text is influenced by several factors outside of it (Voelz 1989:28). It is ‘the interaction of language in the text with outside material and physical objects, historical events, texts customs, values, roles, institutions, and systems’ (Robbins 1996b:32, 96). According to Tuppurainen (2012:42) it “was discovered when interpreters realized that other texts, verbal and non-verbal, play a part in forming the text and its meaning” (cf. also Brodie, MacDonald & Porter 2006:1-34). In this approach the interpreter compares the represented world evoked by the text with the represented world evoked by other texts. The emphasis is not (yet) on the readers; rather, the producer of the text is emphasized. It is the author who consciously or unconsciously was influenced by other texts and who made choices concerning the text. At the same time the author’s own cultural, theological, and historical package is brought into consideration. Thus, one can say that intertexture deals mainly with the historical dimension and the text-immanent dimension of the *Socio-Rhetorical Reading*.

### 3.2.1.3 Social and Cultural Texture

The social and cultural texture helps the interpreter/reader to discover and understand the social and cultural world evoked or created by the text. It is concerned with the historical and text-immanent dimensions of the text. The social and cultural texture is not to be confused with cultural and social intertexture, because they are not the same as they employ different methodologies (Robbins 1996b:143). The former utilizes anthropological and sociological theories to explore the social and cultural elements in the text, while the latter examines the socio-cultural phenomenon outside the text and its relation and influence to the text. According to Tuppurainen (2012:43), the purpose of social and cultural texture

is to grasp what kind of social and cultural world the text creates...The interpreter is called to listen to voices of the text to find out what kind of person would live in the kind of world described by the text...a reader is called upon to examine and be aware of social, cultural and theological phenomena.

For this thesis it would also include how John’s narrative, especially its *Familia Dei* metaphoric, creates spirituality and constitutes an experience of God.

### 3.2.1.4 Sacred Texture

The sacred texture systematically analyzes the function and nature of the relationship between human life and the divine (Robbins 1996b:120). It deals with the text-immanent, reading, and historical dimensions of the text. It tackles themes such as deity, holy people, spiritual beings, divine history, human redemption, human commitment, and ethics (Gowler 2010:195). This texture “relates not only to the inner texture or text-immanent and historical dimensions, but especially to metaphysical and supernatural elements in the text” (Tuppurainen 2012:45). The sacred texture provides this thesis with a suitable arena in which various dimensions of the Johannine experience of God can be explored.

After discussing the recent hermeneutical approaches and calling upon compelling arguments from the discussions of scholars that refer to the ‘application of biblical texts’ as the last phase in the hermeneutical process, Van der Merwe (2015b:2-5 of 9 pages) expresses his conviction that two more textures can be added: *The texture of spirituality* and the *texture of embodiment*.

## 3.2.2 Textures suggested by Van der Merwe

### 3.2.2.1 Texture of Spirituality

Van der Merwe (2015b:3ff of 9 pages) explains that “biblical interpretation must comply with the prescriptions of God and also the needs of its readers. One of the greatest needs that believers experience today is the need to nourish their own spiritualities”.<sup>92</sup> He has formulated a working definition of Christian spirituality and asserts that “societies for the study of spirituality have been established and academic journals in the field are on the increase”.<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>92</sup>. Quoting Collins (2000:9-10), Van der Merwe (2015b:3 of 9 pages) writes the following in a footnote: “The interest in biblical or Christian spiritualities is evident in the continuous decline of membership of the mainline, more conservative churches. Members leave these churches because of a desire for deeper spiritual meaning, and then join the Evangelical, Charismatic and Pentecostal churches. A large majority of these people believe the churches are no longer sufficiently concerned with spiritual matters”.

<sup>93</sup>. cf. Waaijman (2002a:1-4) for references about the growing interest in spirituality.

On the subject, Kourie (2006:20) writes: “Spirituality should receive more and constant attention and absolutely be incorporated in the hermeneutical process of reading Scripture”.

According to Van der Merwe (2015b:5 of 9 pages),

Texture of spirituality asks for a new reading of the Bible text. Studying the text is not to dissect the text into its constituent elements to account for its origin, but to appropriate the meaning of the text in its integrity...The objective of interpretation should be the dialectical illumination and correct discernment of the meaning of the text...Correct discernment of Scripture (text) is enabled by the Spirit to those who are spiritual...not only by way of inductive impressions, but also through the deductive activities of imaginative exegesis.<sup>94</sup>

In addition, Van der Merwe (2015b:3-5 of 9 pages) highlights the essential activity that the Holy Spirit undertakes in helping the reader/interpreter in both interpreting the Scriptures and perceiving the message, in assessing and evaluating the word, value, application, and significance of a biblical truth with the reader's need, personal condition, and cultural conventions (cf. Kaiser & Kümmel 1981:319).

In his discussion on the dynamics of the texture of spirituality, Van der Merwe (2015b:3-5) concludes that the spiritualities -or lived experiences, especially that of the divine- embedded in the effects of this texture, facilitate the embodiment of "the content of the text in the life of the readers. Spirituality then becomes the stepping stone for the embodiment of the text".

### **3.2.2.2 Texture of Embodiment**

Van der Merwe (2015b:5) asserts that the end of interpretation is embodiment. According to him

The response of an interpreter is finally not only a matter of reading the text but of being. The way of living of the interpreter displays his/her interpretation of the texts they have read. Thus the church is a living commentary of Scripture...there are two phases in the process of reading: the moment at which the meaning of the text is explained; and the moment at which the reader recaptures the meaning and gives shape to it in its own existence.

Ricoeur (1980:57) identifies this comprehension and application of meaning as 'the understanding of the significance'. Schneiders (1991:177) argues that "Transformative interpretation...is not blind submission to the text as answer but an in-depth engagement of the subject matter, of its truth claims".

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<sup>94</sup> **Lombaard** (2008:85-99) and **Schneiders** (2002:137ff) use the expression 'imaginative exegesis' in a descriptive way, in terms of what really happens or should happen in doing exegesis.





For Ricoeur (1980:57), the ‘the understanding of the significance’ is

the moment when the reader takes over the meaning, that is to say: activation of the meaning in the existence of the reader... [It] is the appropriation, which comprises the culmination of the interpretation of a text in the self-interpretation of a subject... Appropriation then coincides with identity formation... Interpretation is to appropriate *here and now* the intention of the text.

Boff, C (1987:137) and Waaijman (2002a:768) explain that the understanding of a text infers that the reader is transformed by the text; while appropriation is a process and certainly not a single event (cf. Henrichsen & Jackson 1990:271). The hermeneutical process is only complete when the embodiment of the text is investigated and realized in the life of the reader/hearer, and consequently becomes a new way of life. Tuppurainen (2012:53) points out that the “reader moves to and from the text, between its contexts and its reading momentum, seeking the meaning and the effects of the text’s meaning. This interplay generates a process whereby the text challenges and transforms the reader”. About the transformative power of the word of God, Schneiders (2002:136) writes: “The influence of the Word of God transforms the subjectivity of the reader. These influence and transformation are mediated by the words of the text and made effective by the interior work of the Spirit... This process culminates in the changing of the person”. Such a change results from *engaging* into *dwelling in* and experiencing oneself within the world of solemn Christian discipleship.<sup>95</sup>

### **3.2.3 Hermeneutical Triad of Köstenberger**

Another appreciated contribution to biblical hermeneutics that should be mentioned in this panorama, is the triad of Köstenberger (2004:3-12), consisting of ‘history, literature, and theology’. These are three realities that every interpreter of the Scripture has to deal with: The *history reality* emphasizes that the revelation of God to humanity took place in a real-life-time-space continuum; the *literature reality* refers to the texts that contain revelation and require interpretation; the *theology reality* denotes the reality of God and His revelation in Scripture. In the same line of thoughts, Köstenberger enumerates and discusses three phases closely associated with this triad:

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<sup>95</sup>. cf. Schneiders (2002:137-140) for a discussion on the “transforming reading of Scripture”.

- The first phase is a *preparation phase* or knowledge-oriented search. It includes all the reasons, the motivation, the hope to find answers, to gain knowledge, and the expectancy to attain or enhance spirituality that the reader/interpreter has when reading/interpreting a given biblical text. In the case of this thesis, it is an expectancy to experience God when reading John's Gospel.
  
- The second phase is an *interpretation phase* or a hermeneutical transforming process. It includes the entire dynamics of interaction between the biblical text and the reader/interpreter and its various ramifications, such as the reader response. This phase corresponds to the discussion in the next Chapters about the functionality of the text of the Fourth Gospel.
  
- The third phase is an *application and proclamation phase* or an embodiment journey. It includes the individual and personal journey of embodiment that the reader/interpreter begins while or after reading/interpreting the biblical text. It can be added that this phase has an undeniable and functional communal dimension.

Köstenberger's suggestion in the third phase converges with the above-discussed texture of embodiment suggested by Van der Merwe, as well as with the theory of 'following Jesus' suggested by Kim (2017:232):

The life of following Jesus is a pilgrimage that originates from the eternal compact and communion of love between the Father and the Son, which was before the foundation of the world (*from eternity*) and moves into the eternal communion with the Father and the Son in this life as the commencement and in the life to come as the consummation (*into eternity*) (*original emphasis*).

### 3.2.4 Conclusion to this Section

The long history of biblical hermeneutics, the shifts that occurred within it, the development of their approaches, and the naissance of new developments allude to a twofold reality: First, the richness of biblical texts is enormous and at the same time is opened to new studies; second, it becomes largely accepted that a single hermeneutical approach cannot encompass the full meaning of a given biblical text. Therefore, in order to interpret that text or examine its motifs (either individually or collectively), one should apply an integrated approach. In other words, the exegete is encouraged to employ a combination of different approaches and various criticisms, for example, the famous *Socio-Historical Criticism* proposed by Robbins, or an exegetical approach that is sensitive to the *hermeneutical triad* of Köstenberger, or to the *two textures* suggested by Van der Merwe, all referred to above.

*Socio-Historical Criticism* has indeed become more and more popular and employed in biblical hermeneutics.<sup>96</sup> It has established itself as one of the leading and promising new and dynamic methods of studying the Bible today (cf. Van der Merwe 2015a:4 of 9 pages),<sup>97</sup> which provides the reader/interpreter/exegete with a powerful analytical interpretation to explore dialogical interrelations among authors, texts, and readers, as well as to open “the way for new lived experiences and the embodiment of the text” (cf. Gowler 2010:203).

The approach adopted in this thesis and the methodology used to achieve its objectives are presented and depicted in the next section.

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**96. Robbins** (2004:1-2) describes *Socio-Historical Criticism* as a “multidimensional approach” to biblical texts, guided by a “multidimensional hermeneutic”. He (**Robbins** 1994:164-165; 1996:1-2) claims that one of the most notable contributions of *Socio-Rhetorical Criticism* is its ability to bring *Literary Criticism*, *Social-Scientific Criticism*, *Rhetorical Criticism*, and *Postmodern Criticism* together into an integral approach of interpretation.

**97. Kloppenburg** (2003:64) praises the contribution of Robbins to biblical hermeneutics;

See Page 67, Footnote 97 of the present thesis

**Gowler** (2010:191) maintains that *Socio-Historical Criticism* “provides a powerful and comprehensive interpretive analytic in exploring the dialogical interrelations between the author, text and reader/interpreter”.

**Aune** (2010:4) refers to this suggestion/approach as ‘a holistic combination of methods and approaches to reading and interpreting texts that Robbins describes as an “interpretive analytic”, namely “a multidimensional approach to texts guided by a multidimensional hermeneutic”.

### 3.3 Limitations of the Thesis

As stated in Chapter 1, the experience of God in the Fourth Gospel is a multidimensional topic with a wide spectrum, which goes beyond the limitations of this thesis. The aim of this thesis is therefore not to cover the entire scope of this spectrum, but rather to focus on two components of the above-mentioned experience: *God's initiative* and the *believer's response*. These two components, with correlated motifs in John's narrative, are therefore perceived from the perspective of the *Familia Dei* metaphoric.

The investigation done in the thesis does not include the Fourth Evangelist's experience of God or that of the following characters mentioned in his narrative: John the Baptist and his two disciples, Philip, Nathanael, Nicodemus, the Samaritan woman, the royal official, the sick man, the adulterous woman, the blind man, Martha and Mary, Peter, the twelve disciples, the beloved disciple, and the crowd. This could be considered as a topic for further studies.

Although the role of the Holy Spirit is fundamental in Christian spirituality (including the Johannine spirituality) in general, and in experiencing God in particular, the investigation done in Chapter 5 does not discuss His role. Only a few lines are dedicated to the discussion on the Johannine Paraclete as a member of the divine *Familia Dei*. In fact, investigating the experience of God in the Fourth Gospel from the perspective of its pneumatology could be considered as another inspiring topic for further studies.

Although the Johannine spirituality is linked to all of the Johannine writings and its study involves various disciplines like theology, Christology, pneumatology, and ecclesiology, the exploration of the Johannine spirituality, in the thesis, is limited to the scope of investigating the experience of God in the Fourth Gospel by employing the *Familia Dei* metaphoric as a platform and framework. Both the exploration and the investigation have these disciplines as foundation.

The associated devotional perspective, as well as the behavioral implication and the psychological perspective of the Johannine experience of God are not incorporated in the thesis. These motifs too can be considered as inspiring topics for further studies.

### 3.4 Approach and Methodology employed in the Thesis

At the outset of this section, it is noteworthy to highlight the fact that, whilst dealing with the complexity of biblical hermeneutics and the diversity of the approaches, one should be attentive to avoid the risk of confusing the meanings of terms like methodology, method, approach,<sup>98</sup> exegesis, interpretation, hermeneutics, and biblical hermeneutics.<sup>99</sup> In this thesis, the *Johannine spirituality* is explored, while the *experience of God* in the Fourth Gospel is examined by perceiving it from the perspective of the *Familia Dei* metaphoric. The following lines express how the three concepts, *Christian spirituality*, *Johannine spirituality*, and *experience of God* are understood and employed by this thesis:

♦ The exploration, done in the next Chapters, acknowledges the merits of the theories defining *Christian spirituality*, and appreciates the significance of the knowledge, with which they enriched the academic realm and inspired the Christians in their journey towards the Father's house (Jn 14:1). Accordingly, when *spirituality* is mentioned in this thesis, it refers to the logical and trustworthy elements of these definitions. It also refers to this existential journey that started by the loving act of creation initiated by the Father through His Son, redeemed by the Son through His incarnation, death and resurrection, and guided by the Holy Spirit through His caring love and compassionate wisdom. This journey encompasses the entire dimension of the believer including cherishing God's initiative and responding to it. This exploration does not discuss *spirituality*, as the researcher is not concerned with the non-religious and the non-Christian meanings of spirituality.

♦ In the thesis, *Johannine spirituality* is understood as one aspect of Christian spirituality. To be more specific, Johannine spirituality is the Christian spirituality perceived and lived by the authors of the Johannine writings and expressed in their narratives. Johannine spirituality consists of the spirituality of the Fourth Gospel, the spirituality of 1 John, 2 John, 3 John, and the spirituality of the Book of Revelation.

The research will focus solely on the spirituality of the Fourth Gospel.

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<sup>98</sup> Schneiders (1991:111-114) provides a helpful definition for 'approach'.

<sup>99</sup> Thiselton (2009:4) provides an insightful distinction between these terms.



♦ In this thesis, the spirituality of the Fourth Gospel is gazed at through the window of the experience of God. Certainly, there are many ways to study this experience, for example:

- Thematically: Select a theme from John's narrative as a starting point/framework for the study (i.e. emotional experience; intellectual experience; testimony-faith; and the like).

- Follow the sequence of chapters in John and find the verses/passages that contain elements referring to the experience of God in every chapter and investigate them successively.

- Follow the structure of John's Gospel (i.e. Prologue; Book of Signs; Book of Glory; Epilogue) and apply the same process as above, but at the level of this structure's parts not their chapters.

- Select one topic from each part, for example, the healing of the blind man, and his experience in John **9**, or the parable of the vine and its significance in John **15**, as starting point to investigate this experience.

- Select combinations of two (or more) topics that run through John's Gospel, like the *Ego Eimi* topic and the signs topic, and examine their account from the angle of experiencing God.

♦ The Experience of God may be quite passive, as is witnessed for example in Ezekiel 1, which describes no particular response on the part of the prophet (cf. also Dt 4:11-20). However, in the next Chapters, the Experience of God is considered as the interaction between *God's Initiative* towards His believers/the members of His *Familia Dei* and their response to this initiative. Additionally, these two components of the above-mentioned experience and their correlated motifs are investigated from the perspective of the *Familia Dei* theme within John's narrative. In this investigation, the researcher does not involve himself in the ramification of the redaction theories or the complexity of source critical concerns of this narrative, but rather accepts it in its present canonical form, treating it as *one whole unit*.

♦ Due to its multidimensional nature, the topic of this thesis requires the involvement of more than one hermeneutical approach in its investigation. To abide within the limitations of the present study, only some elements of the *socio-rhetorical approach* of Robbins and the above-discussed two textures suggested by Van der Merwe are employed. To summarize the matters at this point, it is important to point out that the overall structure of this thesis follows the common order of thesis writing. It consists of three progressing and interlinked steps:

*Step One* is covered by the first three Chapters. They are intended to introduce the topic of the research, situate it within the Johannine studies, and describe its approach and methodology. Their starting point is a threefold belief: The first fold is the belief that the Johannine spirituality can be explored through the Fourth Gospel; the second fold is the belief that a distinctive experience of God can be perceived from the perspective of its *Familia Dei* theme, which the Fourth Evangelist skillfully and proficiently employs in his narrative; and the third fold is the belief that this narrative is a meaningful configuration of language with an ability to constitute (once it is read or heard) such an experience *via* its employment of certain literary technics or significant motifs (like the *Familia Dei* metaphor; cyclic reasoning, pictorial, and coherence), and to enhance an existent experience of God – in the case of its original readers/hearers, by evoking certain motifs from the Old Testament. This belief is supported by the conviction that John’s Gospel is a “communicative narrative” (Malina 1993:169), which conveys to its readers a very unique message.<sup>100</sup> An invitation to believe in the Son and His Father who has sent Him; the distinctive reward of positively accepting this message and embodying it in one’s life, in seeing the glory of the Son, receiving grace upon grace from His Father; and becoming a child/member of His *Familia Dei*.

*Step Two* consists of articulating certain concise considerations on *religious experience*, the *Johannine community* and on the *Fourth Gospel*. This is done in Chapter 4, based on the most acceptable and trustworthy theories and on the pertinent data acquired from consulting or reading the works listed in Chapter 7. These considerations aim to gain a deeper insight about the socio-historical dimension of the experience of God, recorded in this Gospel. The last part of this step consists of discussing the effects of John’s narrative in constituting an experience of God once it is read or heard. This discussion focuses on specific features, which John has skillfully employed in his narrative, and that have these effects. It is hoped that this discussion will give an idea about the literary-textual dimension of the *Johannine experience of God*. The outcome of this step prepares for the investigation done in Chapter 5.

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**100. Garner** (2003:8) claims that the “Gospel of John provides a very clear communication: a message, and a response. The message is that we must believe and receive. If we respond in this way we will become a child of God...This is the essence of God’s grace, and the gift of salvation provided through Jesus”.



**Step Three** consists of investigating the *Johannine Experience of God* (as understood in the thesis) with salient correlated motifs. In John's narrative, these motifs are interwoven together and run throughout the entire Gospel. They are also multidimensional and could be examined from different angles. However, in the investigation done in Chapter 5, they are divided into two groups related to the two components of this experience. Instead of discussing them individually, which could lead to an *ad hoc* presentation, an integrated holistic approach that has an affinity with both biblical theology and biblical spirituality was rather chosen. It is an approach sensitive to metaphors and their significance in John, to an intertextual exegetical reading of John's references to the Old Testament, and to a kind of literary-theological engagement while examining pertaining verses or passages. The aim of this step is to investigate the theological-spiritual dimension of the Johannine experience of God, and to point out that its correlated motifs (investigated inside the thesis) could be considered as both a trustworthy record of a mature spirituality emanating from experiencing God in a profound way, and a factor that constitutes spirituality and/or an experience of God.

### Illustration

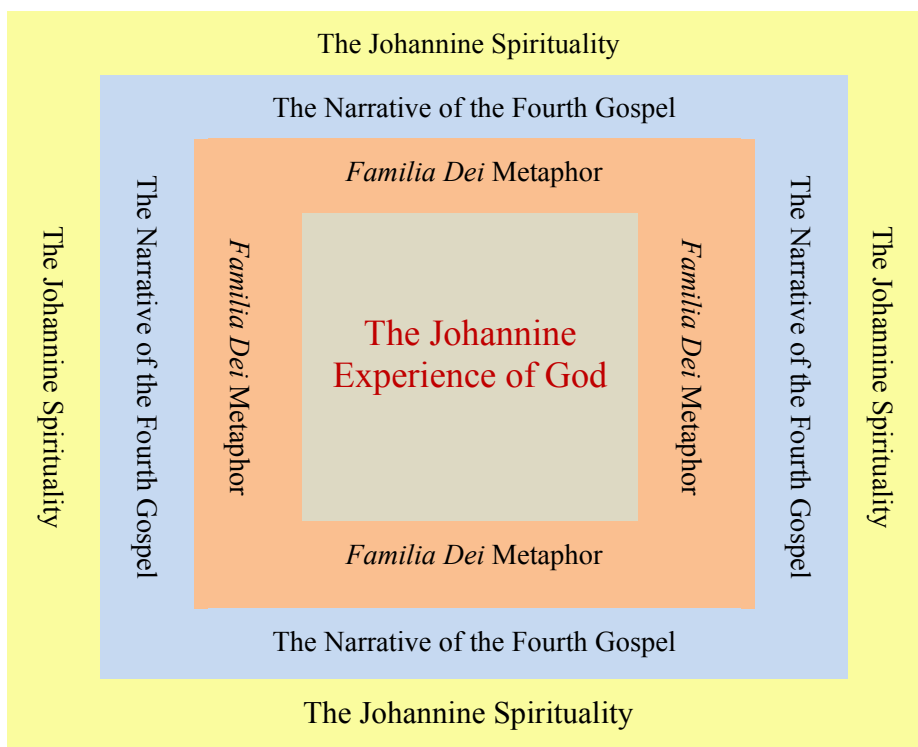


*(Personal Design)*

In the course of the three steps presented above, two components of the *Experience of God* in the Fourth Gospel are suggested: the initiative of God towards His *Familia Dei*/children/ believers, and the response of His believers/children/*Familia Dei* to this initiative. The three dimensions of this experience (the socio-historical dimension; the literary-textual dimension; and the theological-spiritual dimension) are holistically discussed by applying an integrated approach in investigating their correlated motifs from the perspective of the *Familia Dei* theme. Added to this, it is aspired to explore the same and/or similar findings related to these motifs and pointed out by previous studies, following a different road that gives a different slant to the researcher's own hypothetic proposals, and generate a deeper understanding of the Johannine spirituality. The outcome of these three steps and the findings of the research are evoked at the end of the thesis to formulate some concluding remarks about the Johannine spirituality.

The researcher believes that the contents of Chapter 6 will be a source of inspiration for subsequent studies and future researches.

### Illustrative Diagram



(Personal Design)

### 3.5 Concluding Remarks

The panorama and the presentation done in the previous pages point out that during its long, complex and prolific history, biblical hermeneutics have witnessed major shifts, and so did its labeling. It is commonly accepted that each of its various methods has brought ample richness and profuse knowledge to all of the pertaining fields or disciplines. Somehow, they have enriched the faith of Christian believers by providing them with more knowledge about the Bible's message/doctrine and have contributed significantly to the development of their spirituality by explaining this message/doctrine. Thus, one can say that biblical hermeneutics has provided Christian believers or Bible readers with an idyllic opportunity to experience God and consequently feel welcomed and included in His *Familia Dei*. However, as biblical hermeneutics keeps evolving and new questions emerge; the once renowned and celebrated approaches started fading, one after the other, and falling short of answering these questions. Therefore, interpreters and scholars have started moving away from employing one-dimensional approaches and began looking for new more-integrated ones that are capable to generate deeper, broader, and more comprehensive apprehension of the sacred Scriptures.

Furthermore, it has become evident that there is no objective way to properly divide the so-called *Three Worlds of the Text*. The same could be said about the approaches classified under the categories named *Author-Centered*, *Text-Centered*, and *Reader-Centered*. If the exegete takes any of these in isolation (thereby excluding the other two), the exegetic-hermeneutical approach becomes an unbalanced discipline (cf. Tate [1991] 2011:210; Longman 1987:61). The result of a one-mode approach will be an “overexposure”<sup>101</sup> or an “underexposure”<sup>102</sup> of biblical texts. It became evident too that *Socio-Rhetorical Criticism* is capable to maintain a satisfying balance between the segments of these categories. This was encouraging enough to employ this kind of criticism in the thesis.

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**101. Barr** (1983:13) maintains that the over-emphasizing of a certain mode can distort the communication process. According to **Rousseau** (1985:9), “historical overexposure” breaks up the New Testament text or degrades it to the status of a historical book, for example: In the case of the linguistic-literary aspect, the structure of the text is over-emphasized, sometimes at the expense of its message, to claim textual autonomy.

**102. Rousseau** (1985:93) argues that the underexposure of texts implies the ignoring of the “true nature, the message and the intention of the New Testament”. To underexpose the historical approach means to ignore the historical background of the text and its author. To underexpose the linguistic-literary mode means to ignore the literary and the stylistic features of the text.



When investigating the Johannine Experience of God, instead of employing systematically and individually all of the textures of the *Socio-Rhetorical Criticism* suggested by Robbins, the researcher opted to apply only some of these elements that are relevant to this investigation. Added to this, certain elements from the two textures suggested Van der Merwe will be applied. This decision was motivated by the fact that rhetoric is a powerful and useful method of communication that facilitates persuasion (it includes among other logic, argumentation, and author's intention), and by the advantageous employment of rhetoric by John in his narrative.

Another contributing factor to this decision is the twofold conviction held in this thesis: First, *Socio-Rhetorical Criticism*, especially with its interdisciplinary paradigm,<sup>103</sup> provides the exegete with an opportunity to better understand the biblical text, feel its persuasion and intention<sup>104</sup> to study the text's meaning and meaning effects,<sup>105</sup> as well as to apprehend the responses of its readers.<sup>106</sup> Second, the above-mentioned investigation requires a holistic model of interpretation like *Socio-Rhetorical Criticism*, which can lead to a successful and fruitful exploration of John's Gospel spirituality in particular, and the Johannine spirituality in general.

Employing this holistic model of interpretation, and to achieve such exploration, the next Chapter articulates some essential considerations on *Religious Experience*, *The Johannine Community*, and *The Fourth Gospel*. With these considerations, no claims are made to define any of these topics or getting involved in any debate about them. Relying on these considerations and on other sources, the researcher elaborates on the functionality of John's narrative and its ability to constitute an experience of God once it is read or heard.

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**103. Robbins** (2010:192-219) argues that *Socio-Rhetorical Criticism* is an exegetically-oriented approach that gathers current practices of interpretation together in an interdisciplinary paradigm.

**104.** Persuasion and its input into the Johannine experience of God are discussed in Chapter 4.

**105.** On the topic of 'the effective recovery and appropriation of meaning from Scripture', cf. **Tate** ([1991] 2011:210ff); and **Lyons** (2010:207-220).

**106.** One may argue that the contributions of this method to the Johannine scholarship could be generated by other kinds of criticism, and even overlap with their input. However, getting involved in such debate is not part of the objective neither of this Chapter, nor of this thesis.

## Chapter 4

# Understanding the Experience of God In the Fourth Gospel

### 4.1 Introductory Notes

This Chapter serves as preparation for the investigation done in Chapter 5. It consists of two main sections: *The first section* comprises essential considerations on *religious experience*, the *Johannine Community*, and the *Fourth Gospel*. The considerations on religious experience focus on underlining some of its features that help identifying the Johannine Experience of God in the Fourth Gospel. The decision of formulating them is based on the fact that these experiences share many common features. The considerations on the Johannine Community and the Fourth Gospel help in acquiring a deeper understanding of the socio-historical milieu that contributed to both the occurrence of the Experience of God in the Fourth Gospel and the development of its narrative. *The second main section* of this Chapter includes a presentation about the ability of the narrative of the Fourth Gospel to constitute such an experience. This aim has its roots in the conviction that this narrative enjoys two merits: Encompassing the experience of God recorded by its author and constituting such an experience when it is read or heard. The second merit is discussed in this section. The first merit is elaborated on in the next Chapter.

In order to understand these two merits, it is therefore vital to have a sufficient knowledge about the narrative to which they belong and about its background. The latter is nothing else but the milieu of the Fourth Gospel, which itself is significant<sup>107</sup> and complex.<sup>108</sup> This Chapter wants to shed some lights on two salient aspects of the Johannine Experience of God: The socio-historical aspect and the textual-literary aspect. The third aspect, which is the theological-spiritual aspect, is discussed in the next Chapter.

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**107. Barrett** ([1955] 1975:22) highlights this complexity, stating: “It is difficult to draw sharp lines. Men and ideas travelled fast and far in the first and second centuries after Christ, and cults and philosophies mingled together and influenced one another. It was an age of syncretism”.

**108. Schnackenburg** ([1968] 1980 I:119) underlines this significance, asserting: “The spiritual background, the world of thought in which it is situated, is of supreme importance for the whole understanding of John”.

## 4.2 Understanding the Johannine Experience of God

### 4.2.1 Considerations on Religious Experience

*Experience* is a term used in a variety of ways. It derives directly from the Latin *experientia* and the verb *experiri* that can be translated with ‘try’, ‘put to the test’, or ‘know by experience’. Moreover, experience as a general concept comprises knowledge of, or skill in, or observation of something, or some event gained through involvement in or exposure to that thing or event. It may also refer vaguely to both mentally unprocessed immediately-perceived events as well as to the supposed or procedural knowledge accumulated through involvement in, or exposure to, or interpretation of those events. As such, it could be said that the history of this concept aligns itself closely with the notion of experiment, and it is often used to indicate practical wisdom gained through long-term exposure to some aspects of life. Most wisdom-experience accumulates over a period of time, though one can also experience from a single specific momentary event.<sup>109</sup> Hurtado (2000:183-205) differentiates between *Physical Experience*,<sup>110</sup> *Mental Experience*,<sup>111</sup> *Emotional Experience*,<sup>112</sup> *Social Experience*,<sup>113</sup> and *Religious Experience*.

In a spiritual sense, experience sometimes correlates with *hope*: In his epistle to the Romans, Paul taught that “tribulation works patience, and patience, experience, and experience, hope” (Rm 5:3, 4). As believers live their life in accordance with their conscience, their hope for life becomes firm. It may also correlate with *faith* and bearing witness to what Jesus has said and done, which leads to “having life through his name” (Jn 20:30-31; 21:24-25) as it is stated in the *Epilogue* of John. This is a very important aspect of the experience of God in the Fourth Gospel. Furthermore, *experience* (including *religious experience*) in general consists of various contributing factors that are fundamental to its occurrence(s), instrumental in defining its nature, and essential to the process of examining and apprehending it. The Johannine Experience of God is no stranger to this reality. Though these factors have numerous common elements that could be found in any given experience, they comprise various aspects that make each experience unique and differentiate it from other experiences.

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<sup>109</sup>. These preliminary details about the term ‘Experience’ and its concept were mainly inspired and retrieved from <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/experience>. visited on 22 August 2016, from Dictionary.

<sup>110</sup>. cf. Popper & Eccles (1977: 425).

<sup>111</sup>. cf. Christensen & Turner (1993: xxi).

<sup>112</sup>. cf. Jungsik & Hatfield (2004: 173-182).

<sup>113</sup>. cf. Blumin (1989: 434).

An experience could happen just once (on a special occasion), or occur repetitively or continually (over a period of time), taking place in one or several locations within a given socio-geographical milieu (such as country, state, city, society, community, and group), being influenced or shaped by instrumental events,<sup>114</sup> lived by an individual or a group of people, and (sometimes) it is articulated, conveyed, and/or shared with other people *via* common communicative ways.<sup>115</sup> Although the length and the frequency of its occurrence are hard to define, the Experience of God in the Fourth Gospel is noticeable and apt to be identified and examined. Elaborating on these aspects, the immensity of their ramifications, and the complexity of their significances go beyond the capacity of this Chapter and are not part of its objectives. However, some of these aspects could be applied to *religious experience*, which is doubtlessly as ancient as the genesis of the human beings. Although it is often labeled under different designations,<sup>116</sup> it should be distinguished from paranormal events and religious feelings,<sup>117</sup> in the same way that experience in general is to be distinguished from feelings in general.

Part of this complexity emanates from the twofold ambiguity of employing the two terms, *experience*<sup>118</sup> and *religion*, to label *religious experience*: The first fold is the difficulty to define the term *religion* in any way that does not either rule out institutions that clearly are religious, or include expressions that can only be understood in the light of a prior understanding of what religions are. Add to that the different ways that religions have described their experiences. This factor becomes more fundamental when one considers “the events and the human lives from which the religions have stemmed” (Smart 1969:10).<sup>119</sup>

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**114.** No matter what the nature of these events is (past or current; individual or collective; ordinary or extraordinary; cheerful or depressing) they still play a major role in the occurrence and interpretation of the experience.

**115.** These ways could be drawing (painting), composition (music), oral (story), or written (text).

**116.** Examples are *spiritual experience*, *sacred experience*, and *mystical experience*.

See Page 14, Footnote 7 and Page 38, Footnote 35 of the present thesis

According to **James** ([1902] 2009) *mystical experience* are *transient*, *ineffable*, *noetic*, and *passive*.

**Bowker** (1971:157-173), **Schäfer** (1984:19-35), and **Tabor** (1986) have focused on and discussed the *mystical experiences* in the New Testament.

**117.** For discussions on *religious experience* in terms of *feelings*, cf. **Schleiermacher** (1998) – feeling of absolute dependence; **Alston** [1991] 1993, and **Gellman** (2001) – *affective states*.

**118.** cf. **Godin** (1985:66-67) on the ambiguity of the term ‘experience’.

**119.** For an elaborated discussion about the topic, cf. **Johnson** (1998:53-60).



Certain features of this fold may apply, by some means, to the *Johannine Experience of God*, due to the fact that each of its main terms is open to a spectrum of perspectives of understanding. In the case of John, the prior understanding that his readers and the members of his community had about the Old Testament's accounts, as well as their familiarity with certain then-popular literary technical aids (discourses; dualism; rhythm; repetition) and contemporary figurative language (metaphors; symbols) helped him to convey to them (through his Gospel's narrative) what Jesus said and did to make His Father known to His children. The second fold consists of the intricacy generated by the diversity of definitions given to *experience* (including *religious experience*) as well as the broad spectrum, within which the scholars are approaching or investigating it.<sup>120</sup> With the discovery of the Nag Hammadi Codices, this spectrum became even wider.<sup>121</sup>

Moreover, many scholars have employed various disciplines in their investigation of *religious experience*,<sup>122</sup> such as phenomenology,<sup>123</sup> psychology,<sup>124</sup> medicine, theology, philosophy,<sup>125</sup> history, education, and epistemology.<sup>126</sup>

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**120.** **Dunn** (1990:174-231) discusses religious experience from an enthusiastic perspective; **Johnson** (1998:53-60) enumerates and discusses the troubles with religious experience; **Hurtado** (2000:183-205) differentiates between physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual experiences; **Taves** (2009:49-72) discusses the fragmentation of consciousness and religious experience; **Bloechl** (2003) elaborates on religious experience and metaphysics.

**121.** **Kaler** (2013:2-7) discusses religious experiences in the Nag Hammadi texts. He defines them as 'Transcendent Religious Experiences' that are significant for the experiencer, perceived as being different from a normal experience; are linked to divine beings; and that they are more valid than the experiencer's normal consciousness.

**Tite** (2013:8-18) discusses the challenges of studying religious experience in Gnosticism. He also suggests directions that can be taken in future research on the study of the Nag Hammadi material.

**Bush** (2013:18-22) examines the philosophy experience and the Nag Hammadi Texts.

**122.** **Boyer** (2001) has investigated the evolutionary origins of religious thought; while **Gellman** (2001) discusses the psychoanalytic and socio-political explanations of religious experiences.

**123.** **Johnson** (1998:44-46) argues that the phenomenology of religion is first, good at dealing with the particular as opposed to the general; second, reasonably comfortable with the language that expresses experience; and third, is specifically attentive to the element of power as a key element in religion. **Bourgeois** (1990:34-55) states that the phenomenology of religious experience can be regarded as revealing ultimacy as a characteristic of the object of religious experience, taking both the subject and the object poles into account.

**124.** cf. **Murray, Cunningham & Price** (2012:410-426) on religious experience and psychiatry;

cf. **Devinsky & Schachter** (2009:417-424) on religious experience and neuroscience.

**Godin** (1985:70) argues that "Psychologically, four aspects of an experience can bestow on it a privileged and fascinating quality with regard to a fundamental aspiration: ① The Suddenness; ② The Intensity; ③ The Unifying Joy; and ④ The excitement of conflict".

**125.** cf. **Bourgeois** (1990:7-33) on the philosophical reflection on religion experience.

**126.** **Wynn** (2005:3) states that "the question of epistemic status of purported experience of God has been a central topic in recent philosophy of religion".

Over the years this has generated a wealth of insightful knowledge about this topic, which enriched the patrimonies of these disciplines and that of the Johannine field. Additionally, numerous researchers have successfully used these and other disciplines to study various topics of the latter. Berger (2003), for example, approaches religious experience from a psychological perspective. According to him, the constant concern of historical psychology is to dissolve the arbitrary dichotomies. This demands a rigorous distinction between now and then, between today and formerly, which is the nature of the experience of those people whose words form the basis of the biblical message. In the case of John, it is Jesus Himself who conveys to His believers what He experienced with His Father, for example, unity (Jn 10:30); love (Jn 14:31; 10:17); collaboration (Jn 5:36; 10:25); and trust (Jn 3:33-36).

Actually, it was this experience that has involved and engaged the entire psychological faculty of Jesus' contemporary disciples/followers, and then all of His believers throughout the centuries. Thurston (2000:3) describes it accurately: "At its origins, Christianity revolves around the distinctive *experience* of the Person of Jesus Christ; the text of the New Testament, itself, witnesses to this fact" (cf. also Dunn 1990; Johnson 1998; Hurtado 2003). In fact, in his narrative, John has successfully and skillfully connected Jesus with *experiencing God* within the metaphorical matrix of the *Familia Dei*. Also in the same field of psychology, Godin (1985:11) has examined the psychological dynamics of religious experience, stating: "If religious facts and psychological conditionings are already there and are inescapable, whereas God is not; there is room for misunderstanding or denial of God... between *Religion* and the rejection or the experience of God, the scientific workshop of history, sociology, and psychology finds its field".

To the above-mentioned misunderstanding, one may add another negative factor – that of the suspicious attitudes of many people (either at an individual or at a communal level) towards religious experiences, as well as their one-dimensional angle and non-religious perspective of looking at the world and its reality, which makes the other world and the notion of mediation between the two worlds unreal. This factor is a real challenge to the religious experience in general, and to the Johannine experience of God in particular, as well as to John's purpose of recording, in his Gospel, the signs that Jesus did.

The Fourth Evangelist recorded these signs with the purpose to generate faith in Jesus Christ, and consequently having ‘life through his name’ (Jn 20:31). Believing in Jesus and in His Father who sent Him is the heart of the Jesus redemptory mission and in the center of His Father’s salvific plan. This is a major theme that runs throughout the entire Fourth Gospel as well as a main aspect of the Johannine Experience of God. Some scholars, (i.e. Oakes 1976:311-318), argue that religious experiences can epistemically necessitate belief, meaning that anyone who has the experience and does not form the corresponding belief is making an epistemic mistake.

Speaking of attitudes, Hurtado (2000:183-205) has surveyed the attitudes towards the subject of religious experience in the New Testament. He has also discussed the indications in the New Testament, which hint at the revelatory religious experiences as significant factors in generating the cultic veneration of Jesus.<sup>127</sup> Dunn ([1977] 2006:174-201), who has investigated the religious experience of Jesus and the earliest Christian communities, suggests another motivating attitude. According to him, religious experience was an important factor in the genesis of Christianity that many of the distinctive features of first century Christianity grew out of and were shaped by the religious experience of Jesus and the leading participants.

In the same line of thought, Duling ([1994] 2003:503-504) asserts that Jesus Christ was the most significant factor around whom the lived experience of the early Christians has revolved. Thurston (2000:2-3) has examined the Jewish and Hellenistic religions that were salient components of the setting of this experience. According to her, early Christians lived in a dual world -a world of matter and spirit- a world of created things and their Creator. She argues that early Christianity revolved around the distinctive experience of the Person of Jesus. Moreover, Johnson (1998:67-68) maintains that the experiences of people in earliest Christianity existed in a continuum with other experiences in complex combinations, and they lived within a variety of perspectives. These experiences were contextualized by the cultural settings and symbolic worlds within which the first Christians dwelt and which dwelt within them.

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<sup>127</sup>. cf. Hurtado (2003:xiii; 2-3, 183-205) for more information on the devotion to Jesus in early Christianity.

The discussions -done above- do obviously not cover all of the characteristics of *religious experience* and its related topics.<sup>128</sup> However, it highlights three fundamental features of the religious experience lived by the early Christians. These features can also be considered as contributors to the Johannine Experience of God, because it was an essential part of these experiences and shared with them the same setting:

- The substantial influence of the revelatory events (revelation) on these experiences.
- Jesus was the most significant factor around whom these experiences revolved.
- The interaction between these experiences and their social-historical-spiritual setting.

Acknowledging the existence and the importance of other elements and factors that can provide one with a wealth of information about this setting, and abiding within this thesis' limitations, the researcher has chosen to focus only on the Johannine Community and the Fourth Gospel to get a glimpse on the background of the Johannine Experience of God.

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**128.** The following list of topics and their relevant references can provide more insight on the topic:

- The evolutionary origins of religious thought (**Boyer** 2001).
- The psychoanalytic and socio-political explanations of religious experience (**Gellman** 2001).
- The dynamic between language and religious experiences (**Braithwaite** [1955] 1970; **Martin** 1990).
- The belief-forming mechanisms (**Hick** [1989] 1993; **Alston** [1991] 1993).
- The neurological basis of religious experience (**D'Aquili & Newberg** 1999; **Ellwood** 1999).
- Epistemological issues and settings of religious experience (**Dunn** [1977] 2006; **Barton** 1992; **Johnson** 1998; **Hurtado** 2000; **Thurston** 2000:2-6; **Urban** 2002; **Berger** 2003; **Hurtado** 2003; **Mina** 2004; **Roseg** 2004:49-92; **Woods** [1989] 2006).

## 4.2.2 Considerations on the Johannine Community

### 4.2.2.1 Preliminary Considerations

Since the dawn of humanity, the significance of collectivities such as families, communities, groups, tribes, friendship circles, clans, and the like has been recognized and appreciated in every civilization. These collectivities have been considered as a fundamental feature of the human's social life. They can be of different sizes and several types, as well as having various goals, including beliefs and sentiments, which can be termed the "collective or common consciousness that have the ability to form a determinate system with a life of its own" (Allan 2005:108). This life can be, at different levels, highly rewarding to the members of a given collectivity, and a cradle of their multidimensional experiences, including religious experience, which, in certain cases and circumstances, can be developed around their experience of God. In line with the development of the maturity of this experience, is the development of the spiritual dimension of this life, and *vice versa*. This life can also be colored by the dynamics of the relationships existing between these members, as well as by the complexity of the network encompassing their interactions with their environments. The latter could sometimes be considered as a significant source of challenges, problems, and conflicts. The notable development of scientifically studying groups during the last few decades<sup>129</sup> has involved several disciplines, and produced numerous publications,<sup>130</sup> generating a wealth of knowledge about the complex history<sup>131</sup> of the above-mentioned collectivities, and shedding an insightful light on the related topics.

The considerations articulated in this section are selectively borrowing succinct data from this knowledge and from other pertinent consulted sources, in order to underline salient features and factors correlating to the Johannine Community<sup>132</sup> that are helping to understand the background and the development of the Johannine experience of God, and to perceive it in the Fourth Gospel.

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<sup>129</sup> Mills (1967:3) states: "it is really only in the last century or so that groups were studied scientifically".

<sup>130</sup> The following references act as an example on this study:

Tajfel (1982); Bales (1999); Benson (2000); Baron & Kerr (2003); Johnson & Johnson ([2003] 2009); Doel (2005); Forsyth (2006); Le Bon ([1896] 2006); Smith (2008).

<sup>131</sup> Within this history, one should mention the following prominent scholars: Émile Durkheim (1858-1917) who has dealt, in his sizeable works, with a number of subjects. He has contributed notably to the field studying the influence of the group membership on the "individual identity" Le Bon (1841-1931) has argued that people changed as they joined crowds; according to him an individual immersed for some length of time in a crowd soon finds himself...in consequence of magnetic influence given out by the crowd.

<sup>132</sup> The work done in this section does not aim to get involved in any kind of debate concerning the Johannine Community, or to pretend offering something new to the wealth of the already existent relevant theories.



Since the theory -considering the composition of the Fourth Gospel as a communal work, involving more than one person- was introduced to biblical studies, the challenging endeavor of identifying the collectivity to which these people belonged, and describing its involvement in this composition, became the focal point of an unsettled debate. Scholars have given it various names<sup>133</sup> and have described its involvement differently: Congregation; association; audience; Cluster of churches,<sup>134</sup> Conventicler,<sup>135</sup> sect,<sup>136</sup> Circle,<sup>137</sup> School,<sup>138</sup> Group,<sup>139</sup> and Community.

The present thesis uses the expression *Johannine Community*, because it is the most commonly used in the Johannine studies, and it is the most suitable to its topic as well as to its approach.

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**133.** **Fuglseth** (2005:1) states that this variety of names demonstrates the vast disparity of opinions. These names “are not arbitrary labels put on the social milieu behind the Gospel and its writer, but reflect different basic understanding of the Gospel”.

**Cirafesi** (2014:173-193) has surveyed and evaluated the most influential approaches to the Johannine Community debate, since Martyn’s 1968 study until now, dividing them into three main categories: ① Studies in the historical-critical stream (mostly from the late 1960s–1970s); ② Sociological studies; and ③ Studies that have departed from the Community hypothesis altogether.

**134.** cf. **Kruse** (2003:4-5); and **Kaczmarek** (2008:9); and **Culpepper** (1986:1-20).

**135.** cf. **Käsemann** (1978).

**136.** Many scholars have used this identification, for example: **Meeks** (1972:44-72); **Bogart** (1977:136-141); **Käsemann** (1978:56-73); **Shupe** (1981:180); and **Keener** (2003:149).

For a valuable definition of *Sect*, see **Rensberger** (1988:136) and **Culpepper** (1975:259), who gave a satisfactory bibliography on the sociology of *Sect*. **Scroggs** (1975:1-23) asserted that the whole early Christian movement was sectarian, for it met the following basic characteristics of a sect: ① It emerged out of an agrarian protest movement; ② It rejected many of the realities claimed by the establishment (claims of family, of religious institution, of wealth, of theological intellectuals); ③ It was egalitarian; ④ It offered special love and acceptance within; ⑤ It was a voluntary organization; ⑥ It demanded a total commitment of its members; ⑦ It was apocalyptic.

**Fuglseth** (2005:1-43) argues against naming this entity a sect.

**137.** cf. **Smith** ([1974] 1986:74-81); **Braun** (1979:56; 203-214); and **Painter** (2002:75-76).

**Cullmann** (1976:9-10) aimed to identify what he called a “Johannine Circle” within the early Christianity by examining the literary and theological characteristics of the Fourth Gospel. Consequently, he suggested the following process of literary composition of this gospel:

- The author made use of traditions coming from particular circles to which he belonged.
- He was responsible of the main lines of the work as we have it now.
- Redactor(s) belonging to the author’s circle completed (under his influence) the whole work after his death.

**Frey** (in Van Belle et al 2005: 47-82) uses the label ‘the Johannine Circle’ in the title of his chapter, than he alternated between using Johannine Community and Johannine School in reference to the same entity.

**138.** **Culpepper** (1975:1-38; 263-290) dealt with relevant literature chronologically and summarized the approaches and methodologies of the writers who discussed the Johannine School. He concluded that “many scholars are willing to call the community a school”.

cf. also **Hengel** (1989:109-135); **Smith** ([1974] 1986:74); **Schnelle** (1992:41-63); and **Strecker** (2000:419-433).

**Carson** (1991) suggests three flaws in Culpepper’s argument: ① The characteristics of “schools” identified in Johannine tradition could also fit a church. ② Parallels between the Beloved Disciple and the Paraclete do not make them equivalent. ③ Culpepper’s argument assumes what is to be proved.

**139.** cf. **Frey, J, Van der Watt, J G & Zimmermann, R** (2006:121).

However, when studying an entity like the Johannine Community, one might speak about a very complex and assorted *Paradigm* that encompasses numerous topics interwoven tightly such as its identity, Characteristics,<sup>140</sup> Ethics,<sup>141</sup> its members<sup>142</sup> and their interaction with its milieu;<sup>143</sup> its Theology, Christology,<sup>144</sup> Pneumatology,<sup>145</sup> and Eschatology.<sup>146</sup> In addition, one might speak about the involvement of this Community with the composition of John's Gospel and the list of topics can go on and on... Surely, the present section is not the fitting place to go into detailed discussion of this *Paradigm*'s ramifications.

No matter what scholars say about the Johannine community or how they describe the dynamic of its life, this thesis accepts that there was a community, which endured inner struggle, interacted with its setting, and has played a major role in the composition of the Fourth Gospel.

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**140.** Shupe (1981:180f) suggests a social profile of the Johannine community. Membership is voluntary, personal experience is rated very highly, there is an absence of emphasis on institutionalized features like liturgy or sacraments, and bureaucracy and hierarchy are abandoned in favor of an egalitarian structure. Strong primary group bonds among the members sustain the sect's orientation against persecution and the temptation to return to the 'world'. This could echo Rudolph's description of the Gnostic community "with an ideology advocating equality of sexes, the elimination of social differences...Perceiving themselves as an elite group possessing exclusive knowledge, they advocated community, equality and individualism as a means of escaping the clutches of a Roman dominated world" **Rudolph** (1977:35-44), cf. also (**Domeris** (1986).

Some scholars have examined other characteristics, for example:

*The Literary expressions*, cf. **La Grange** (1925: xcvi-cxix); **Black** (1967:149-151); and **Barrett** (1975:20-35).

*Doctrinal Language*, cf. **Braun** (1955:5-44); **Brown** (1968:138-173); and **Charlesworth** (1972).

*Interpretation of the Old Testament*, cf. **Cothenet** (1990: 43-69); **Hengel** (1994:380-395); and **Lieu** (1993:458-477).

**141.** The following some references about the Ethical Issues of the Johannine Community: **Culpepper** (1998:256); **Johnson** (1993: 29, 39, 117); **Painter** (2002:90); **Schnackenburg** (1982:77); and **Whitacre** (1982:122).

**142.** **Brown** (1966:I, lxi-lxiv), **De Jonge** (1977:149-175), and **Brown** (1979:27-58) address the topic of the Johannine Community and its members.

**143.** About this topics, see: **Cullmann** (1976:43); **Cook** (1979:105ff); **Sloyan** (1988:138); **Von Wahlde** (1989:49); **Schnelle** (1992:74ff); **Van Tilborg** (1996:25-47); **Culpepper** (1998:109ff); **Ferreira** (1998:80ff); **Strecker** (2000:455ff); **Marshall** (2004:491-529); and **Trebilco** (2004:357-402).

**144.** The Christological issues of the Johannine Community and the Gospel of John have generated a massive amount of publications; the following are just some examples:

**Aune** (1972: 99-101); **Martyn** ([1978] 2004: 18); **Schnackenburg** (1982:18-20); and **Whitacre** (1982:123).

- About the harmonic reinforcement between social experience of the Johannine Community and its Christology, see: **Meeks** (1972:44-72; 70-72) and **Martyn** ([1978] 2004:105).

**145.** cf. **Brown** (1982:52); **Hurtado** (2003: 415, 424); and **Kenney** (2000:101).

**146.** **Howard** (1952:443-444) states: "Even though present eschatology is much more central for John...*This Gospel* unambiguously expresses futuristic eschatology" (italics added). **Brown** ([1966] 1979:cxvi-cxxi) discusses the 'Realized Eschatology and Final Eschatology' in John. He argues that although the futuristic apocalyptic statements in John are of secondary origin, they still correspond to its spirit. **Bultmann** (1970) elaborates on the 'futuristic individualistic eschatology, which allows a final fulfillment for individuals at death'. For more insight on the topic, cf. **Van Belle et al** (2005:47-82).



Many scholars have deliberated about this issue and have generated a substantial assortment of publications of different genres, lengths and significances.<sup>147</sup> Some of these publications have employed what has been said about the Johannine community to understand the Fourth Gospel or to investigate one topic or a cluster of the correlated topics enshrined in its narrative; others have used the latter as a launching pad or a prolific source to acquire insights about this community.<sup>148</sup>

At this point it is appropriate to call upon the works of two prominent scholars -Martyn and Brown- who proposed two valuable reconstructions of the history of the Johannine community<sup>149</sup> that left a significant influence in and enriched the Johannine studies; the following considerations are inspired by their influence and are gratefully garnering from this enrichment. Over the years, the works of Martyn have influenced many Johannine scholars. He proposes that the Fourth Gospel should be read as a two-level drama that tells not only of Jesus' life, but also of the contemporary situation of the Johannine Christians. He has established this solution as a standard way to read this Gospel (cf. Smith 1990:275-294).

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<sup>147.</sup> The following are examples sorted in chronological order:

**Charlesworth** (1972:76-106) discusses the connection between John and the Qumran Scrolls.

**Meeks** (1972) uses sociological insights to depict the Johannine Community as a sectarian group, opposed both to the wider Jewish society and to other Christian groups.

**Kysar** (1977:355-366) employs metaphorically the concept of 'vector' to speak of the directions and movements within the field of Fourth Gospel criticism. According to him, these movements are 'moving in one general direction, namely, towards the elucidation of the Gospel in relation to the community which gave birth to the document and to which the document itself was addressed.

**Moody Smith** (1988:433-444) argues that all the Gospels are products of Christian communities and mirror their understanding of who Jesus was. They are all selective in their presentations, while theological interest as well as church usage governed their selectivity. John is not different from the others, although it is clear that this Gospel, more than the others, allows Jesus Himself to give expression to the church's distinctive faith.

**Schnelle** (1992:41-63) suggests the following criteria to recognize the 'Johannine school': First, the theological agreements among the three Johannine Letters and the Gospel of John; second, the common linguistic features; third, the plural *Communitis*; fourth, the ecclesiological terms; fifth, the ethical statements; sixth, the depiction of Jesus as teacher; and seventh, tracing its existence to a founder.

**McConnell** (1986:517-531) employs certain technics of literary criticism, redaction criticism, and textual criticism in investigating John 13, to understand the rites of the Johannine Community from the Fourth Gospel itself, and to shed light on worship in the first century – worship at its earliest extant Christian stratum.

**Lamb** (2011:157-160) has done research on the validity of the Johannine Community and examined the social context of the Johannine writings from the perspective of the sociolinguistic theory of register. He has challenged this paradigm, arguing that "the register of the Johannine writings does not indicate the context of situation of a close-knit community. While many commentators... have readily fitted the language of the Gospel...to a community *Geschichte*...., I believe that there is little or no linguistic evidence for this".

<sup>148.</sup> **Von Wahlde** (1995:379) states that 'we have richer sources of knowledge about the community that produced the Gospel of John than about any of the other communities responsible for the canonical Gospels. The reason is that our sources consist not only of John itself but of the three Johannine letters'.

<sup>149.</sup> cf. especially **Martyn** ([1968] 2003; [1978] 2004); **Brown** (1979; 1988).



This was not a new idea, as many elements in his reconstruction were already quite common among New Testament scholars – the outline of his solution dates back to the mid twentieth century;<sup>150</sup> yet Martyn was the first to connect this view to an analysis of the Fourth Gospel. He (Martyn [1978] 2004:90-121) argues that the literary history behind this Gospel reflects to a large degree the history of a single community, which maintained over a period of some duration its particular and rather peculiar identity. He discusses the social and theological configuration of the Johannine Community, and presents glimpses of three main periods of this community's history from its origin through the period of its existence in which the Fourth Gospel was composed.<sup>151</sup> He concludes his presentation by suggesting that by the time John was written, the Johannine Community found itself differentiated from the parent synagogue, alienated from a group of Christian Jews who remain within the synagogue, and aware of the existence of other Jewish and Christian communities who suffered excommunication and with whom there was the hope of unification. Although Martyn's proposal is finely nuanced, skillfully argued and presented, still some scholars have criticized his theory about the *Birkat ha-Minim* and disagreed with him.<sup>152</sup> Moreover, many theories proposed by prominent scholars have converged with, built upon, or had resonated Martyn's reconstruction of the history of the Johannine community. All of them share a threefold commonly accepted conviction:

First, reading John's Gospel offers a significant insight about the Johannine community within which it was composed.

Second, *vice-versa* from the first, investigating the history of the Johannine community generates a satisfying comprehension of John's Gospel.

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**150.** Ashton (1991:11) mentions the *Birkat ha-Minim*. Both Martyn and Brown have listed numerous publications referring to this topic.

**151.** The three main periods are:

- *The early period* (Martyn [1978] 2004:93-102) was marked by the conception of a messianic group of Christian Jews that stood in a relatively untroubled stream of social and theological continuity within the synagogue. During this period, the evangelistic preaching of this group seems to have met with considerable success and the Johannine evangelists have told the story of the Crucifixion.

- *The middle period* (Martyn [1978] 2004:102-107): In the course of this period, there were momentous developments and alterations, both in the group's setting and within the group itself. Beyond such developments lay two significant traumas: excommunication from the synagogue and martyrdom.

- *The late period* (Martyn [1978] 2004:107-107): During this period the Johannine Community developed its own theology and its own identity, not only *vis-à-vis* its parent synagogue, but also in relation to other Christian groups in its milieu. Some strata indicate a relationship with the emerging 'Great Church'.

**152.** Considerable doubt and obscurity clouding the date, purpose, and origin of the *Birkat ha-Minim*, motivated some scholars to criticize Martyn's theory about it. Examples are:

Kimelman (1981:226-244); Horbury (1982:19-61); and Katz (1984:43-76).



Third, the Johannine community has endured a two-level trauma, namely expulsion from the synagogue, and an inner conflict.<sup>153</sup>

The thesis embraces this threefold conviction and employs some of these theories in its endeavor of studying the experience of God, lived and interpreted by this community. The present discussion testifies to this.

In the same field of reconstructing the history of the Johannine community,<sup>154</sup> Brown (1979) elaborates on the suggestion claiming that the Gospel of John must be read on several levels narrating the story of both Jesus and the community that believed in Him.

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**153.** Many scholars like **Brown** (1982:69f), **Von Wahlde** (1995:379-389), and **Culpepper** (1998:256), believe that the controversy in the Johannine Community was based on differences in the interpretation of a shared tradition. **Kenney** (2000:102) has identified and examined the elements that caused a schism in the Johannine Community.

**154.** The following are examples of these theories:

- ♦ The social profile of the Johannine Community (cf. **Käsemann** 1978:56-73; **Shupe** 1981:180f).
- ♦ The separation of Christianity from Judaism (cf. **Frankfurter** 2000; **Cohen** 2014).

**Kysar** (1977:355-366) has examined samples of the Fourth Gospel criticism and suggested these vectors:

The *first vector* includes studies that describe the origin and nature of the Johannine Community.

The *second vector* involves the traditions of the Johannine Community.

The *third vector* deals with the theology of the Fourth Evangelist and his school.

The *fourth vector* is concerned with the situation of the Johannine Community.

The *fifth vector* consists of special concerns of the Fourth Evangelist and his community.

**Mattill** (1977:294-315) proposes four phases of theological development within the Johannine communities and the resultant three strata of Christological and eschatological deposits in John: Phase 1: The Johannine Jewish Christianity; phase 2: The new Johannine faith; phase 3: Johannine Docetism; phase 4: Johannine anti-Docetism. In view of these four stages of Christological-eschatological development and three strata of deposits in John, there can be no reflection of a unity within the Johannine Christianity, neither in belief (because the contents of the Christological-eschatological confessions of the four communities was so different) nor as a fellowship (because each group accused the other of heresy and of being from the devil). Common to these groups is only their origin from the Jewish Christianity of the foundation document and their rejection of Judaism.

**Ashton** (1994) follows Martyn's thesis regarding the formation of the Johannine Community, continuing the debate about how this community shaped its Jewish and Christian sources for its own theological and ideological ends.

**Hägerland** (2003:309-322) proposes three versions of the Fourth Gospel, each of them reflecting a stage of the Johannine Community:

*The earliest version of the Gospel* extended from the scene of the Baptist's meeting with Jesus to the resurrection of Jesus. The Johannine Community in its earliest days was certainly Jewish-Christian and was probably located in Palestine/Judea. It contained former members of John the Baptizer and Samaritans.

*The second version of the Gospel:* In this version, the Evangelist preserved much of the narrative framework of the first version. He added the materials that focused on the identity of Jesus and His ministry. Tension arose between the Johannine Community and the Jews, resulting in them being expelled from the synagogue.

*The third version of the Gospel:* The Gospel underwent another revision. Passages are giving hints of the relationship in which the community stood with the 'Great Church'. An internal dispute arose in the Johannine Community about the interpretation of its tradition.

In reconstructing the Johannine Community life, Brown posits four phases<sup>155</sup> in its development; additionally he admits that these phases themselves are not historically implausible.<sup>156</sup>

**Brown** (1997:24) opens his presentation by stating that there ‘are moments of tranquil contemplation and inspiring penetration in the Johannine writings, but they also reflect a deep involvement in Christian history’. He concludes by affirming that ‘over the centuries John’s Gospel has provided the seedbed for many forms of individualistic pietism and quietism as well as the inspiration of the profound mysticism...The greatest dignity is that of belonging to the community of the Beloved Disciple of Jesus Christ’ (Brown 1997:163). This statement evokes the topics of the functionality of John’s text and the significance of belonging to the Johannine Community dubbed to be correlated to the Johannine Experience of God. Both topics are discussed in the succeeding paragraphs.

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**155.** Below is a glimpse at Brown’s reconstruction:

*Phase one* (**Brown** 1979:25-58) consists of the so-called ‘pre-Gospel era’ and the Jewish Christians from whom the community originated. It involves the origins of the community and its relation to Judaism. It also includes the controversies between Johannine Christians and the synagogue leaders, which led up to it.

*Phase two* (**Brown** 1979:59-91) involves the life-situation of the community at the time the Gospel was written. The expulsion from the synagogue/s was now past but persecution continues. The insistence on a high Christology made it all the more intense. Attempts to proclaim the light of Jesus to Gentiles may also have encountered difficulty.

*Phase three* (**Brown** 1979:92-144) involves the life-situation in the now-divided Johannine Communities at the time the Epistles were written. Additionally, Brown elaborates on this phase, discussing what caused the division recorded in 1 John 2:19. He also works with the hypothesis that the struggle was between two groups of Johannine disciples who were interpreting the Gospel in opposite ways, in matters of Christology, ethics, and Pneumatology.

*Phase four* (**Brown** 1979:145-162) sees the dissolution of the two Johannine groups after the Epistles were written. During the second century, the secessionists, no longer in communion with the more conservative side of the community, probably moved rapidly towards Docetism, Gnosticism, and Montanism. The adherents of the author of 1 John have merged with what is called the ‘church catholic’.

**156.** Although not all of the scholars agree with Brown’s reconstruction, some of them would take its elements as orientation, especially the expulsion from the synagogue and its effects. Here are a few examples:

**Keener** (1993:153-169) believes that the detail of Brown’s reconstruction exceeds the historical verisimilitude at which even ancient historians (such as John) generally aim.

**Weiss** (1979) and **Lindars** ([1972] 1981) assert that it is clear that the Johannine Christians were suffering persecution at the hands of the members of the synagogue at the time John was composed.

**Böcher** (1981) and **Neyrey** ([1979] 1981) present some proposals for the life of the Johannine Community before their expulsion from the synagogue.

**Wengst** (1983) proposes that the community for which the Gospel was written lived in the southern parts of the realm of Agrippa II. After the council of Jamnia, Pharisaic Judaism came to power in that region and attempted to purge the synagogues of heretics, among who were the Johannine Christians.

**Segovia** (1982b) proposes that the history of the community includes the time of the writing of the Gospel, followed by the rise of a docetic-libertine group in the community, which occasions the writing of 1 John, and finally the additions to the Gospel. Somehow his argument invites one to consider two quite distinctive settings for John: First, the expulsion from the synagogue, and second, the intra-community crisis.

**Painter** (1981) and **Bassler** (1981) elaborate further on the consequences of the expulsion in John.

#### 4.2.2.2 Elaboration on Brown's statement

The aforementioned statement of Brown has two elements that correlate to the Johannine Experience of God: the First Element is the 'involvement in Christian History'; elaborating on this element enriches the discussion of the prolific contribution of John's narrative to the spirituality of its readers and to their experience of God. The second one is 'belonging to the Johannine Community'; elaborating on this element deepens the understanding of the significance of belonging to the *Familia Dei*.

##### ♦ Elaboration on the First Element -Involvement in Christian History-

A noteworthy twofold contribution can be distinguished in this involvement: *The first fold* includes an inward contribution from the Christian history into John's Gospel. It enfolds the substantial aspects of this history<sup>157</sup> from which the Fourth Evangelist drew his knowledge, experience, inspiration, and motivation to compose his Gospel. It also encloses the significant events that occurred throughout this history<sup>158</sup> and have shaped his theology, spirituality, thoughts, his writing style, and his experience of God. *The second fold* consists of an *outward contribution* from John's Gospel into the Christian history.<sup>159</sup> This element calls to mind a question that needs further investigation: To which degree have reading and interpreting this Gospel caused negative conflict and heated debates, even schisms between Christians? On a positive level, it is remarkable and undisputable, that the valuable, productive, and abundant input that John's narrative has brought into the life of his readers (original and subsequent) at both an individual and communal level, has created/enhanced their spirituality, biblical knowledge, liturgy, devotion, and especially their experience of God.

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**157. Bultmann** ([1966] 1978:35-54) suggests that the Gospels are primarily sources for the situations from which they arose and only secondarily sources for the historical situations they describe.

**158. Von Wahlde** (1995:379-389) has investigated the history and social context of the Johannine Community. According to him, there are three versions of John's Gospel that reflect three stages of the Johannine Community: *The earliest version of the Gospel* reflects the Johannine Community in its earliest stages: A community probably located in Palestine, and its members were Jewish Christians.

*The second version of the Gospel*: In this version, John preserved the previous one and added some materials that focused on Jesus' identity and ministry. The Christology of this version is the highest in the New Testament. During this stage, the situation of the Johannine Community was definitely one of persecution, estrangement, and alienation.

*The third version of the Gospel*: The contents of this version give hints of the relationship in which the Johannine Community stood with the Great Church, and of the dispute that arose within the Johannine Community. Two factors mark this stage: First, the community was convinced of its superior spiritual insight and closeness to Jesus, and second, it not only recognized that authority over 'the sheep' which were given to Peter, but it also accepted it.

**159. Schnackenburg** (1965:104) argues that the motive for John's composition may be discovered within the author's intention to provide the church of his time with a picture of Christ corresponding to its spiritual condition.





Additionally, throughout the history of Christianity, the Gospel of John has never ceased to command wide interest and to fascinate the mind and the heart of many experienced scholars and inexperienced readers alike. It was fundamental to the emergence of Christian spirituality and theology. Part of this fascination probably emanates from the intricacy of its socio-historical milieu, the complexity of its epistemological matters, and the richness of its narrative. The enormous publications about this Gospel testify to the openness of its text to multivalent readings and interpretations; in other words, it testifies to its *outward contribution* to the Christian history. Here it is logically acceptable to say that history generates traditions, and tradition creates experience. In the case of the Christians, this experience might include their experience of God.

#### ♦ **Elaboration on the Second Element -Belonging to the Johannine Community-**

Belongingness is a strong and inevitable feeling that exists in human nature.<sup>160</sup> People tend to have an intrinsic desire to belong to one another, to friends and families, to a community and culture, to a country and the world – in other words, to be an important part of something greater than themselves. Inside every person there is an innate longing to feel loved,<sup>161</sup> appreciated, and to be an accepted member of whatever collectivity they belong to. Thus, the awareness of being part of a culture, the sentiment of fitting into a community, and the feeling of belonging to a family, are considered among the greatest beauties of one's well-being and happiness. According to Walton et al (2012:513-532), belonging is a psychological lever that has broad consequences.<sup>162</sup> One's motivation, health, and happiness are inextricably tied to the feeling that they belong to a greater community that may share common interests and aspirations.

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**160. Baumeister & Leary** (1995:497-529) argue that belongingness is such a fundamental human motivation that one feels severe consequences of not belonging. This desire is so universal that the need to belong is found across all cultures and different types of people. This need to belong is only met if an individual has frequent, positive interactions with others and feels cared for by significant others. **Walton & Cohen** (2007:82-96) maintain that in all cultures, the need to belong is prevalent.

**161. Maslow** (1998) suggests that the need to belong is a major source of human motivation. He alleges that it is one of five human needs: *physiological needs, safety, self-esteem, self-actualization, and the need to belong*. According to him, if the first two needs are not met, then an individual cannot completely love someone else.

**162.** A sense of belonging to a social peer group can enhance students' academic achievement, cf.:

**Hymel et al** (1996:313-345); **Wentzel & Caldwell** (1997:198-1209); **Anderman & Freeman** (2004:27-63); **Pittman & Richmond** (2007:270-290); and **Faircloth & Hamm** (2011:48-72).

**De Cremer & Blader** (2006:211-228) believed that when people feel like they belong, they are more likely to examine procedural justice issues in a more thorough manner than if they do not feel like they belong. cf. also **Van Prooijen, Van den Bos & Wilke** (2004:66).

Moreover, isolation and loneliness can harm a person's subjective sense of well-being, as well as their intellectual achievement, immune function and health.<sup>163</sup> This brings to mind the two-level trauma endured by the Johannine Community: External persecution (expulsion from the synagogue) and internal conflicts (trouble between its members).<sup>164</sup> Much has been written about this trauma, its nature, and causes, but a lot can still be said. The succeeding paragraph focuses only on certain elements of these topics deemed pertinent to the discussion presented in it.

Rensberger (2006:278-291) asserts that with John, the actual conflicts are below the surface of the text, and it is only now becoming possible to hope that knowledge of them will bear fruit for the study of Johannine theology.<sup>165</sup> Aune (1972) thoroughly describes the relationship between the Fourth Gospel and its founding community. In his study, he moves from the theological experience of the Johannine Community to its Christology.<sup>166</sup> Assuming that religion is a projection of the consciousness of a community,<sup>167</sup> he argued that this Gospel is the primary means of expressing the religious needs, values and ideals of the Johannine Community. He also maintains that what the people experienced in their regular worship, especially the spiritual presence of Jesus, became the basis for a realized form of eschatology.<sup>168</sup>

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**163. Timmons, Selby, Lewinsohn & Joiner** (2011:807-817) maintain that the concept of low belonging suggested by the interpersonal theory of suicidal behavior is most relevant to parental displacement and adolescent suicidal behavior, because it is likely that parental displacement would affect perceived belonging of adolescents.

**Gunn, Lester, Haines & Williams** (2012:178-181) have examined the frequency in themes of thwarted belongingness and perceived burdensomeness in samples of suicide notes.

**164.** Here is an extract of scholars who have approached the topic of these conflicts from various perspectives:

**Elliot** (1998:273-313) points out to the evidence of an increase in social tension and ideological difference such as the Torah observance, temple allegiance, as well as harassment and punishment by Jewish authorities.

**Perkins** (1983:631-641) argues that each group has reflected a different attempt to consolidate authority around teachers or leaders in the Johannine communities. Such consolidation is rendered difficult by the strong tradition that no human teachers have authority over the community, cf. also **Brown** (1988:743-748). **Olsson** (1974:186-289) claims that the Johannine texts are deeply influenced by a Jewish environment, that they are rooted in the early Christian beginnings, and are subject to interpretation.

**165. Smith** (1995:75-160) has explored the Johannine theology and articulated certain inherited beliefs that were 'givens' for John. He also discusses Christological matters and the question of how one comes to faith, focusing especially on the role of the Spirit-Paraclete.

**166. Nicholson** (1983) has investigated the descending/ascending motif in the Fourth Gospel and concludes with the suggestion that John's Christology (which is linked to its soteriology) was a kind of apologetic explication of the cross in the midst of the Christian-Jewish dialogue following the expulsion from the synagogue.

**167. Gottwald** ([1979] 1985:622ff) describes the religion of pre-monarchic Israel as the product of the social egalitarian relations experienced by the early Israelites.

**168. Mattill** (1977:295-296) argues that 'most exegetes hold that John proclaims both the presence of the eschatological events and their completion on the Day of the Lord...John unambiguously expresses futuristic eschatology...The definitive eschatological event for John, in which the future becomes present, is the coming of Jesus as Revealer'. For more insight about the topic of Johannine eschatology, cf.:

**Howard** (1952:443-444); **Brown** ([1966] 1979: cxxi); and **Bultmann** (1970).

#### 4.2.2.3 Elaboration on Aune's theory

Two elements of Aune's theory attract the attention of this thesis: The *first element* is the theological experience of the Johannine Community (included in the discussion done in the next Chapter), while the *second element* is the expression of its religious needs. The latter looks like a vague concept that could be a rich topic for further studies. Inspired by its richness, the thesis proposes the following needs, dubbed to be correlated to the Johannine Experience of God:

♦ **The need to feel loved** by other members of the community/the *Familia Dei*, as well as by the head of this family – God Himself, through His Son: This need emerged and became crucial especially after these members endured the rejection from the synagogue and experienced hostility<sup>169</sup> (caused) by their fellow members.<sup>170</sup> Those who did not abandon the *Familia Dei* and were rejected by their own, felt the need for a transforming love (Jn 15:9-11) that has the ability to convert into an everlasting joy (Jn 16:22; 17:13), their sadness being triggered by the knowledge of the dramatic departure of their Master (Jn 14:19; 16:6-7, 18). It is a need for a sacrificial love that differentiates them from the others and unifies them. Käsemann (1978:56-73) asserts that the oneness motif and the emphasis on sacrificial love are the strongest indications that the inner composition of the community stood in stark contrast to the regular social systems of the day. Domeris (1986:50-56) maintains that the 'servo-mechanism' within the community is to be found in the ethics of John's Gospel, and the ethical teaching of Jesus common to other Christian groups is abandoned in favor of a new ethic. Jesus offers a new commandment. The disciples are to love one another even to the point of being prepared to die for each other. As the disciples of Jesus they are to strive after oneness with each other and to seek to emulate the unity between Jesus and God. This kind of love is shaped by a joyful promise embedded in the *Parousia* (Jn 14:3; 16:6-7, 18).

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<sup>169</sup>. cf. Van der Merwe (2007 b:1149-1169) for the schism in the Johannine Community.

<sup>170</sup>. Scholars refer to these members differently:

**Brown** (1982:69-70, 156) identifies them as "secessionists";

**Schnackenburg** (1982:18) refers to them as "heretical teachers";

**Painter** (2002:84) describes them as "opponents" or "schismatics";

**Hurtado** calls them "adversaries" (Hurtado 2003: 358f, 415, 429, 574, 618), "deceivers" and "propagandists".

♦ **The need to feel accepted:** This need was generated by the twofold trauma endured by the members of the Johannine Community/*Familia Dei* (Jn 15:19-20; 17:14-16), losing their place in the synagogue after being expelled from it, and after realizing that their membership in the community has been trembled and troubled by inner conflicts and frictions. This might have motivated these members to feel the need to be accepted. The satisfying answer to this feeling of being expelled and displaced could be found in the comforting eschatological promises of Jesus (Jn 16:22) and the consoling metaphorical encouragement of the *true vine* (Jn 15:1-8). These promises and encouragement provide these ‘placeless’ members with a pledge to have a special place (Jn 14:2-4) in the Father’s house, once they respond positively to Jesus’ invitation to believe in Him as they believed in the Father. Additionally, these promises and encouragement have the ability to transform these homeless members into a heavenly home or a divine dwelling for the Father and the Son, if they love Jesus (Jn 14:22).

♦ **The need to feel secured:** By their nature, people experience a range of both positive and negative emotions. The strongest emotions are linked to *attachment* and *belongingness*.<sup>171</sup> Thus, when individuals are accepted, welcomed, or included, it leads them to feel positive emotions and become more productive. However, when individuals are rejected or excluded, they feel strong negative emotions, such as anxiety and grief (cf. MacDonald & Leary 2005:202-223). Furthermore, Fiske (2004) argues that in the past, belonging to a group was essential for survival; it allowed a tribe’s members to share the workload and protect each other. In other words, the members of a given group depended on close social connections to fulfill survival and reproductive needs. This explains why people are happier and more productive when they experience social belonging. In contrast, lacking belonging and being excluded is perceived as painful and has a variety of negative effects, including feeling rejected, unsecured, not welcomed, not appreciated, insulted and not loved.

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<sup>171</sup>. These two topics are discussed on the next pages. A few helpful references on specific points are given here, depicting the connection between *Belongingness* and *Self-Presentation* (cf. Schlenker & Leary 1982:641-669; Fiske 2004); *Peer Networks* (cf. Newman, Lohman & Newman 2007:241-263). *Self-Regulation* (cf. Baumeister & Leary 1995; Wilkowski et al 2009). *Fairness* (cf. Van Prooijen et al 2004; Cornelis et al 2013). *Behavior/Social Problems* (cf. Cockshaw & Shochet 2010:283-289).

Prominent scholars like Stillman and Baumeister (2009:249-251), DeWall (2011:979ff), and Newman et al (2007:241-263) regard *belongingness* as a central component of human functioning and argue that social exclusion can deeply influence many cognitive aspects and emotional outcomes of behavior. Given the negative consequences of social exclusion and rejection, people develop traits that function to prevent rejection and encourage acceptance. DeWall et al (2011:979ff) maintain that even early civilizations considered both exile and death as equal punishments. Certainly, exile, death, and persecution can cause unbearable suffering to those subjected to these cruelties. The Christian perspectives on persecution<sup>172</sup> have inspired those who are facing persecution, to endure their suffering with hope, as they find in their persecution ‘resemblance to that of Jesus’ (Jn 15:20), and forgive their persecutors with love.

There are other scholars who maintain that humans have a profound need to connect with others and gain acceptance into social groups. When relationships deteriorate or when social bonds are broken, people are bound to suffer.<sup>173</sup> That is why *belongingness* is considered as among the most fundamental of all personality processes. Consequently, people develop traits that function to encourage acceptance and prevent rejection. Moreover, both interpersonal rejection and acceptance are psychologically powerful events: Feeling rejected, excluded, unappreciated,<sup>174</sup> or devalued can stir up negative emotions inside the individual, as well as the communal level. In contrast, feeling loved, included, appreciated, or valued, produces a high self-esteem, improve confidence, generate happiness, enhance well-being, and cause creativity. Culpepper (1986:1-20) affirms that two of the most creative moments in the life of any movement are the period when its constitutive elements coalesce, and the crisis in which rival factions divide the movement.

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**172.** The following are some Christians perspectives on suffering as part of persecution:

- There is blessing in persecution (Mt 5:10).
- God manifests His strength to those facing persecution (2 Co 12:10).
- God sees the purity of those who have given their lives for the sake of Christ (Rv 6:10-11).
- God will vindicate those who are persecuted (Rv 19:1-3).

**173.** About this matter, cf.:

**Pittman & Richmond** (2007:270-290); **Steger & Kashdan** (2009:289-300); and **Gotlib et al** (2004:386-398).

**174. Harland** (2003) highlights the fact that “outsiders” saw the early Christian movements, including the Johannine community, as “voluntary associations”. **Ascough** ([1998] 2003:43-44) points out that, during the Roman times, those outside a voluntary association did not view members of an association as all that honorable. The individuals often least impressed by the associations, were the civic leaders and imperial governors of Rome.

Tightly associated with belongingness is the need to form attachments: Individuals need to know that other people care about their well-being and love them. This need is universal among humans, as social bonds are easily formed in all cultures, without the need for favorable settings. Baumeister & Leary (1995:498ff) argue that the belongingness-hypothesis proposes two main features: First, people need constant, positive, personal interaction with other people, and second, people need to know that the bond is stable, and that this attachment will continue. In the same line, Hazan & Shaver (1994:1-22) assert that positive social bonds form just as easily under fearful circumstances. The presence of another person reduces distress and elicits positive responses. Positive emotions are associated with forming social attachments, such as the experience of falling in love, which leads to joy. Contrarily, breaking off an attachment causes pain that is deeply rooted in the need to belong. According to Walton et al (2012:513-532), social belonging factors are characterized as social feedback, validation, and shared experiences. Sharing common goals and interests with others strengthens positive social bonds and may enhance feelings of self-esteem.

Furthermore, staying in the same realm of deficiency and disturbed attachment of belongingness that generated negative feelings and inflicted them upon the members of the Johannine Community, Lindars ([1972] 1981:48-69) asserts that the major threat feared by the members of the Johannine Community appears not to be the Romans, but the Jews, as is evident from passages like John 7:13, 9:22, 12:42, and 16:2. Persecution and expulsion from the synagogue were the actions of the Jews against this community. Wach (1967:137) highlights another aspect of this painful ordeal, stating that the “most traumatic moment for a cult is the death of its founder”. John 21 suggests that in the Johannine Community a crisis was precipitated by the death of the *Beloved Disciple*. All of these negative feeling, as well as the death of Jesus,<sup>175</sup> created the need of the Johannine Community’s members to feel secured and reassured.

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**175. De Boer** (2015) has traced the developing understanding of the death of Jesus within the Johannine Community and correlates it with the social-historical circumstances that elicited interrelated theological perspectives. He sketches four stages in the life of this community and identifies the Christological view that marked each stage:

- John I was written by a Christian Jew with the aim of persuading other Jews that the Messiah was Jesus.
- John II was shaped by the setting of the debate with synagogue leaders, and the expulsion from the synagogue.
- John III: In this stage, history was provoked by the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus.
- John IV revises the interpretation of Jesus’ death (and Person) that had characterized the Johannine Christianity.

To this, it can be added that enduring the twofold detrimental trauma (harmful antagonism from outside and destructive schism from within), experiencing martyrdom,<sup>176</sup> having these needs, being aware of their existence, and witnessing their fulfillment by God's love,<sup>177</sup> and the reassuring promises of His Son, and by the caring intercession of His Holy Spirit, can reasonably be counted as aspects of the Johannine community's experience of God.

Noticeably, the narrative of the Fourth Gospel encloses numerous verses through which Jesus revealed<sup>178</sup> the following to the believers: His Father's abundant love (Jn 3:16; 5:20; 14:23); His Father's will to save the world (Jn 3:17); worshiping Him in spirit and truth (Jn 14:23-24); granting eternal life to those who believe in the Son (Jn 6:40); dwell in the believer (Jn 14:23); His Father's power to raise one from the dead (Jn 5:21); and His Father's generosity as a provider (Jn 6:32). Add to that the verses and passages through which Jesus promised those who believe in Him that He is going to prepare a place for them in His father's house (Jn 14:1-4); giving them his 'own peace' as a gift (Jn 14:27; 16:33) promising them that every request will be fulfilled (Jn 15:7; 16:24); reassuring them that He will never leave them orphans (Jn 14:18); and that He will send His Holy Spirit to be with them, and to guide them (Jn 16:7-8, 13).

All of these have the power to make the believers, especially the persecuted ones; feeling loved and belonged to the *Familia Dei*. It also had the ability to strengthen their spirituality, increase their faith, enhance their hope, rejuvenate their love, and reinstate their damaged self-esteem.

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**176. Weiss** (1979:298-325) states that, within the Johannine Community, the footwashing ceremony acquired a peculiar symbolic meaning in reference to the experience of martyrdom by members of the community. This kind of cleansing therefore had eschatological connotations.

**177. Rensberger** (2006:278-291) maintains that the Johannine writings have important insights to offer regarding the nature of God, the meaning of the incarnation, and the importance and the difficulty of a Christian community as a witness to and an expression of divine love.

**178.** According to **Stanton** (1989:115), Jesus also insisted, paradoxically, that His relationship with the Father is one of *dependence*. He referred to Himself repeatedly as the one sent by the Father, and, as if to rebut any suggestion that He is a "second god", he stated that "the Father is greater than I" (Jn 14:28). **Reinhartz** (2015:111-116) states that the Fourth Gospel may have been read regularly in the community, in addition to the reading from the Torah. Like the Torah, Jesus' words had their source in God, and for that reason they had the same status as the Revelation that the Torah had, as Jesus declared in John 7:16-17. Also, like the Torah, Jesus' words included the commandments that defined the covenant community, as Jesus declared in John 15:12-14.

In addition to that, John's narrative offers evidence that the Johannine community had observed and preserved the words of Jesus (Jn 8:51-52, 55; 14:23-24; 15:20; 17:6), and His commandments (Jn 14:15, 21; 15:10), because they were from God (Jn 3:34; 14:10), and because Jesus received them from His Father, and handed them on to the disciples (Jn 14:24; 17:8). To this can be added that another multidimensional revelation took place: A revelation conveying knowledge that led to faith and eternal life (Jn 3:15), handed on by the only begotten Son to His *Familia Dei* by making the unseen God a known Father to the members (Jn 1:18; 17:26). This was a revelation radiating fertile love and prolific unity, handed on by the *True Vine* to His *branches* (Jn 15:1-7). Hence, the whole process of cherishing and transmitting the faith within the Johannine community, interacting with these revelations, as well as the dynamics of the involvement of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit in the life of its members, should be considered no less than an experience of God. Schnelle (1992:44-45) converges with this suggestion, arguing that the Johannine community appeared as the place in which the Father's revelation through the Son was handed on and preserved. This community studied the Scriptures as a witness to Jesus and guaranteed by the Paraclete.

Drawing on the outcomes of the discussion above, the Johannine Community can be perceived as

- The cradle within which a multidimensional revelation has occurred and was interpreted;
- The bountiful field within which the spirituality of its members was shaped by this revelation;
- The prolific fount that nurtured its experience of God, which prospered within this spirituality;
- The fertile field within which the Johannine spirituality emerged and flourished.

#### **4.2.2.4 Closing Observations**

Consequently, the following observations are made:

First, for the purpose of this thesis, the Johannine community is intentionally considered as the *Familia Dei* within which the experience of God was lived by its members, as it was metaphorically portrayed and proficiently displayed by John in his narrative. The next Chapter elaborates on this decision.<sup>179</sup>

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<sup>179</sup>. This decision was inspired by the finding and suggestions of Van der Merwe (2007 a:231-262) with regards the *Familia Dei* as sphere where Christian fellowship is constituted and experienced.



Second, the matrix of the various traditions that the members of the Johannine Community brought with them when they became part of it, could be correctly considered as a significant component of their experience of God.<sup>180</sup> In other words, this matrix has provided them with a cognitive-psychological-theological-spiritual-ethical milieu within which they lived and expressed this experience. Klein (1976:155-186) claims that it is evident that the Johannine Community did nurture within itself a rich tradition, part of which came to literary expression in John. This finds certain resonance and support in Habel et al (1993), depicting religious experience as the structured way in which a believer enters into a relationship with, or gains an awareness of, the sacred within the context, through the mediation of a particular religious tradition. At another level, Turner et al (1987:1-2) highlight the influence of the membership of a group rooted in a given tradition. They state that a group is “significant for the members, to which they relate themselves subjectively...which influences their attitudes and behavior”. Durkheim adequately points out the fruitful input of a given group (community) into the experience of its members, stating: “Add to that which we can learn by our own personal experience all that wisdom and science which the group has accumulated in the course of centuries” (Durkheim [1897] 2002:427). To this, it can be added that the character and the knowledge of a given Christian group or community will certainly determine how the divine or God can be/is/will be experienced by its members.

Additionally, a community’s norms can provide codes of behavior that render the social life of its members more steadily and efficient; assist in reducing their uncertainty in difficult situations; and facilitate a way forward for interaction among these members. Baron and Kerr (2003:6) observe that “socially established and shared beliefs regarding what is normal, correct, true, moral...have powerful effects on the thoughts and actions of group members...Group norms develop in groups often because they are necessary for the group to survive and/or to achieve its ends” (cf. also Van der Merwe 2015a).

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**180. Culpepper** (1986:1-20) affirms that there were six groups related to the Johannine Community: The world, the Jews, the adherents of John the Baptist, the crypto-Christians (or secret believers), the Jewish-Christian churches of inadequate faith, and the Christians of apostolic churches. That these diverse groups brought differing theologies with them is probable, but the question is, which views should be assigned to each group when they entered the community? It seems safe to say that the Gospel of John reflects and represents a remarkable synthesis of literary materials, theological viewpoints, and ethnic groups.

Third, inspired by the common conviction of many scholars who perceive the Johannine Community as the natural *Sitz im Leben* of the Johannine writings,<sup>181</sup> the researcher believes that this community was the prolific cradle within which the experience of God of its members has occurred and developed. This consideration is justified by the fact that a given community, no matter what its type or identity is, has a significant impact on the life and experiences of its members at different levels, such as a feeling of belonging (Mills 1967:2; Turner et al 1987); becoming aware of being interdependent or mutually reliant on each other;<sup>182</sup> feeling inspired and motivated; sharing common fate (Benson 2000:5; Forsyth 2006:15); enjoying communication (Homans 1951:1); cherishing a social bond/relationships,<sup>183</sup> and striving to achieve the same goals.<sup>184</sup> Thus, one may say that communities can be considered as significant sites of socialization and education, enabling their members to develop a sense of identity and belonging, as an environment where these members are able to deepen their knowledge, skills,<sup>185</sup> values and faith, as a meaningful place where relationships are built and flourish, and as sources of strength, help, and support for its members.<sup>186</sup>

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**181. Schnackenburg** (1965:104) argues that John's intention was providing "the Church of his time with a picture of Christ corresponding to the Church's spiritual condition...and so the belief took shape that the teaching of John in some way mirrored the writer's own Church situation".

**Meeks** (1972) has studied the history of the Johannine Community to understand the theology of its members. He suggests a connection between the experience of this community and the Fourth Evangelist's narrative.

**Culpepper** (1975:217, 262) argues that the Johannine Community was the natural *Sitz im Leben* of the Johannine writings, and the latter reflects this community.

**Green** (1995:18-20, 261ff) discusses the *Sitz im Leben* and Gnosticism during this time.

**182. cf. Kurt** (1951:146); and **Cartwright & Zander** (1968:46); **Baron & Kerr** (2003:139) state that "it is a basic feature of groups that group members' outcomes often depend not only on their own actions, but also on the actions of others in the group".

**183. Forsyth** (2006:2-3) defines a group as some individuals who are connected to one another by social relationships, while **Johnson & Johnson** ([2003] 2009:73) believe that groups entail some sort of joint vision.

**184. Zander** (1985:1-13) asserts that the goals of a given group are the ends, the aims, or the outcomes sought by the group and its members, while the form which this group may take is often heavily dependent on these goals. **Benson** (2000:66) argues that without commitment to achieve common goals a given group will not be effective.

**185. Johnson & Johnson** ([2003] 2009:579, 581) maintains that "humans are not born with these skills; they must be developed. Those skills -and the attitudes, orientations and ideas associated with them- are learnt, predominantly, through experiencing group life".

**186. Forsyth** (2006:13) points out that "groups are not merely sets of aggregated, independent individuals; instead they are unified social entities...The notion of *group cohesion* -the forces or bonds that bind individuals to the collectivity- is fundamental to an appreciation of groups".

However, there is a downside to all of this: The socialization and interaction that members might experience within their community (group, etc.) or with their environment can be highly constraining, oppressive, hostile, and harmful. The community can also become an atmosphere that fosters interpersonal conflicts. Furthermore, the boundaries drawn around these communities are part of a process of excluding certain people, sometimes to their detriment. This and other detrimental attitudes and actions can also be initiated by the environment of this community, severely afflicting its members and their daily experiences in ways that warp their judgments, damage their ability to make the right decisions, making their life unbearable. Take for example the notable impact inflicted on the Johannine Community and on the composition of its Gospel (John's Gospel) by the experience lived by its members when they were expelled from the synagogues. Von Wahlde (1995:379) skillfully points to it, stating that each stage of John's composition 'is remarkably transparent to the historical and theological issues of the moment in the Johannine Community...[A] community engaged in continual turmoil as it struggles to define its faith within a variety of social contexts'. Kaczmarek (2008:9) correctly states that the 'extended family of communities did not stand still in time. Things were happening in and around their members'.

The researcher adopts the conviction of many scholars that John's narrative provides its readers with abundant references about the Johannine Community's tribulations caused by:

- The expulsion and the persecution inflicted by the synagogues on the Johannine believers;
- The rejection of some members to key theological understanding of the community;
- The depiction of the community by other Christian communities as heterodox in its belief.

The accounts of these tribulations are therefore reflected in John's Gospel in the telling of the story<sup>187</sup> of Jesus as the only Son, who is close to the Father's heart, who made Him known to those believing in Him (Jn 1:18) by telling them about the Father (Jn 16:25) and what He learned from Him (Jn 3:11; 7:5; 8:28), so that they 'may have life through his name' (Jn 21:31).

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**187.** The term *story* is used in this section and the following ones, not in the sense of a fictitious tale or a narration of a legend, but specifically to refer to the biblical account composed by the Fourth Evangelist about Jesus' life, death, and resurrection, which is based on both divine inspiration and real facts.

The fact that the Fourth Evangelist is telling this story<sup>188</sup> to his community<sup>189</sup> is no stranger to a universal phenomenon that could be found in every civilization, namely stories being told in communities to help creating and sustaining identity, to convey beliefs and to preserve tradition; and as the story of God's fidelity and love was told to His chosen people in the Old Testament<sup>190</sup> (Dt 4:9-10, 25), sustaining their life for centuries and encouraging them during traumatic times, so did the salvific story of Jesus (told in the New Testament, including John) to His believers in John's time and over the centuries.

Major events and radical change in circumstances give new life and new direction to old stories and create new stories. This has the ability to change the life of a given community and profoundly affects the experience of its members.

Applying this to the Johannine Community, one may argue that what this community has endured and experienced across its history and during the life span of its members, has significantly shaped their spirituality -including their experience of God- and profoundly influenced its involvement in the composition of the Fourth Gospel. To understand the significance of John's narrative in skillfully recording all of this and conveying it to his listeners/readers, the articulation of certain concise considerations on this Gospel is required and helpful at this point.

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**188. Weiss** (1979:298-325) has embarked on rereading the story of the footwashing in order to establish the Johannine setting, and to see the function of this story for the Johannine Community within which it was retold and put into practice – in other words, to understand the significance in the setting of this community that lived under persecution from the synagogue complemented by the trauma of conflicts from within.

**189. Schnelle** (2001:352ff) argues that John told his story of Jesus for his community. This means that there are two fundamental levels in the communication process sought by the Evangelist: First, the level internal to the text, which portrays the on-going periods of the narration from the pre-existence to the post-existence of Jesus Christ; and second, the level of the Johannine Community, external to the text, for which John conceived his story of Jesus in order to lead them to the knowledge and understanding of the saving work of God in Jesus Christ. The interpreter must always keep both levels in mind, since John intended his story of Jesus for the community but at the same time bound the community to the story of Jesus.

**190. cf. Maarten** (1996) and **Van der Merwe** (2014) on John's use of Old Testament citations.

### 4.2.3 Considerations on the Fourth Gospel

During the last few decades it became evident in the Johannine field that in order to understand the Fourth Gospel and the significance of its message, one needs to know as much as possible about the genesis of its narrative (including the date of composition, the authorship, and the like), and the milieu within which it has developed.<sup>191</sup> Many scholars have traced the background of the Fourth Gospel to three traditions: The Greco-Roman tradition, the Jewish tradition, and the Christian tradition.<sup>192</sup> It is not the aim of this section to discuss these traditions.

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**191.** *Mina* (2004:335-354) argues that John is difficult to be interpreted without referring to its background.

**192.** The Greco-Romano Tradition refers to:

- ♦ *Greek Philosophy*: **Barrett** ([1955] 1975:28-29); **Cullmann** (1976: 30-38); and **Keener** (2003:154-155).
- ♦ *Hellenism*: **Barrett** ([1955] 1975:28-30); **Lindars** (1981:39-40); **Du Rand** (1994:46-47).
- ♦ *Religions of Salvation*: **Barrett** ([1955] 1975:30-33).
- ♦ *Mandaism*: **Bultmann** ([1966] 1978: 225f); **Dodd** ([1953] 1970:15-18); **Schnackenburg** ([1968] 1980:138-143); **Beasley-Murray** (1987:lvii-lviii); **Du Rand** (1994:45-46); and **Keener** (2003:164-166).
- ♦ *Philo*: **Dodd** ([1953] 1970:54-73); **Barrett** ([1955] 1975:28-30); **Brown** (1966:lvii-lviii); **Lindars** (1981:39-40); **Du Rand** (1994:46-47); and **Anderson** (2000:110-111).
- ♦ *Gnosticism*: **Gordon** (1965:190); **Bultmann** ([1966] 1978:223); **Conzelmann** (1969:11) **Barrett** (1975:28-30); **Kysar** ([1976] 1993:49); **Du Rand** (1994:44-45); **Ashton** (1991:205-237); and **Keener** (2003:162f).
- ♦ *Hermetic Literature*: **Dodd** ([1953] 1970:10-53); **Gordon** (1965:190); **Schnackenburg** ([1968] 1980:136-138); **Kysar** ([1976] 1993:49, 79-82); **Brown** (1997:116, 127); **Beasley-Murray** (1987:lvi); **Keener** (2003:161-163).
- ♦ *Eastern Mediterranean*: **Keener** (2003:149-160).
- ♦ *Mysticism*: **Barrett** ([1955] 1975:71).

The Jewish Tradition refers to:

- ♦ *Traditional Judaism*: **Dodd** (1963:74-79); **Barrett** ([1955] 1975:25-28); **Cullman** (1976); **Lindars** (1981:36-38); **Kysar** ([1975] 1996:144-145); **Beasley-Murray** (1987:lviii); **Du Rand** (1994:48); and **Brown** (1997:132, 373).
- ♦ *Hellenistic Judaism*: **Barrett** ([1955] 1975:25-28); **Kysar** ([1976] 1993:87); and **Keener** (2003:171-194).
- ♦ *Pharisaic and Rabbinic Judaism*: **Dodd** (1963:74-79); **Barrett** ([1955] 1975:25-58); **Bowker** (1964:398-408); **Schnackenburg** ([1968] 1980:126); **Kimelman** (1981:226-244); **Lindars** (1981:36-38); **Horbury** (1982:19-61); **Katz** (1984:43-76); **Kysar** (1993:83); **Du Rand** (1994:48); and **Brown** (1997:132);
- ♦ *Heterodox Judaism*: **Schnackenburg** ([1968] 1980:128); and **Kysar** ([1976] 1993:88).
- ♦ *The Samaritan Religion*: **Meeks** (1967:176-215); **Bowman** (1975:310-314); **Beasley-Murray** (1987:lxiii-lxiv); **Du Rand** (1994:52); and **Keener** (2003:169-170).
- ♦ *The Old Testament*: **Barrett** ([1955] 1975:22-25); **Kysar** ([1976] 1993:83); **Schnackenburg** ([1968] 1980:121ff); **Du Rand** (1994:47); **Brown** (1997:338); and **Thompson** (1999).
- ♦ *The Qumran Literature*: **Kümmel** ([1961] 1973); **Schnackenburg** ([1968] 1980:128-135); **Lindars** (1981:36-39); **Beasley-Murray** (1987:lxii-lxiii); **Du Rand** (1994:48-49); **Keener** (2003:171-172); **Moody Smith** (1988:433-444).

The Christian Tradition refers to:

- ♦ *The Synoptics*: **Schnackenburg** ([1968] 1980:42-43); **Barrett** ([1955] 1975:33-44); **Kysar** ([1976] 193:3-14); **Beasley-Murray** (1987:xxxv-xxxviii); **Moody Smith** (1992:189); **Du Rand** (1994:125-137); **Brown** (1997:365); **Whitacre** (1999:21-24); **Köstenberger** (2004:17-18); and **Lincoln** (2005:26-38);
- ♦ *The Pauline Epistles*: **Barrett** ([1955] 1975:45-48); **Roseg** (2004:18); **Flannery et al** (2008:147); **Thomas** (2008).
- ♦ *The Johannine Literature*: **Barrett** ([1955] 1975:49-52); and **Johnson** (1998:67).
- ♦ *Christian Gnosticism*: **Schnackenburg** ([1968] 1980:143-149); and (**Olsson** 1974:36).

In this thesis it is proposed that John's Gospel and the experience of God recorded in its narrative have the same background. Furthermore, many prominent scholars have thoroughly studied this background and have significantly contributed to the pertinent fields, of whom a few are discussed below. Thus, the present considerations do not intend to repeat what they have done successfully, or plan to propose new theories, but rather to underline certain aspects that help in understanding this experience and facilitate the examination executed in Chapter 5.

In the Fourth Gospel, the readers find that the image of God as Father is indeed deeply entrenched in its theology and spirituality; and the use of the term Father to refer to God is attested in the fabric of its narrative, at different levels and depths, including the ever-recurring words,<sup>193</sup> the references to the Old Testament,<sup>194</sup> the distinctive "I am" sayings,<sup>195</sup> a net of interwoven concepts,<sup>196</sup> and an arrangement of interconnected themes.<sup>197</sup> In this narrative, the readers find also indications of this gospel's interaction, via the Johannine Community, with its socio-historical-religious setting. These and the remarkable maturity in recording the *Revelatory Experiences*<sup>198</sup> of this community give supporting evidences to the theory maintaining that the Fourth Gospel was composed over a period of time involving various factors. Its theology, Christology, and spirituality underwent a lengthy process of development. The connection between all of these factors and the Johannine Experience of God finds its meaning in the dynamic relationship existent between Time-Experience. Time makes Experience more mature and significant; in return, Experience makes Time more meaningful and productive.

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**193.** Such as: Light, Darkness, Truth, Life, Love, and the Father.

**194.** For example: (Ho 1:10); (Ex 4:22); (Is 63:16); (Dt 8:5); (Ps 103:13).

**195.** In the Gospel of John, Jesus refers to himself with "I am" seven times: (Jn 6:35); (Jn 8:12); (Jn 10:9); (Jn 10:11); (Jn 11:25); (Jn 14:6); and (Jn 15:1).

**196.** Such as: the Logos, believing, the passing from death to life, the truth and lies, the hour.

**197.** Many scholars have tackled the topic of the Johannine themes, cf.: **Sloyan** (1988); **Von Wahlde** (1989); **Bauckham** (1998); **Culpepper** (1998); **Ferreira** (1998); **Donahue** (2005); and **Winstanley** (2007).

**198.** In John's Gospel, Jesus plays the major role in these *Revelatory Experiences*. He is represented as the Only Son, who is close to the Father's heart, who made Him known (Jn 1:18). Also, Jesus was sent by the Father (Jn 7:16) to say to the believers what his Father taught him (Jn 8:16). In my thesis, these experiences will be considered as a major component of the *Johannine Experience of God* and will be discussed in the next Chapter.

Discussing the epistemological topics of the Fourth Gospel is both important and complex: It is *important* because this Gospel has occupied a central position in the early Christian theology, and it still plays a major role in Christian spirituality. It is *complex* due to the fact that investigating the setting of this Gospel and examining the interactions/connections between both of them is a complex endeavor.

Without any intention of simplifying the discussion of these topics or overdoing it, the rest of this section presents some annotations on John's date of composition and authorship.<sup>199</sup> Here it is noteworthy to underline the fact that the involvement of more than one person in this composition, and the length of time consumed to accomplish it, might have created a spiritual environment for the Johannine Experience of God, and contributed to its maturity.

The upcoming pages elaborate on other factors that play a major role in both recording and constituting the *Johannine experience of God*, namely the functionality of John's narrative (cf. Van der Merwe 2015a), the transformative power,<sup>200</sup> and narrative of the Fourth Gospel.<sup>201</sup>

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**199.** The majority of the contents of this part derives from the researcher's dissertation that discusses the four locations (Ephesus; Jerusalem; Alexandria; Antioch) suggested by many Johannine scholars as a place of composition of the Fourth Gospel (cf. **Albalaa** 2009:21-28). The suggestion -that the dissertation concludes with- is: "This Gospel could have originated in a tradition, which had its home in Jerusalem; then was taken to Antioch, where it was influenced by the Antiochene tradition that includes the literature connected with this city, the liturgical usage of the Antiochene church, the adoption of the *Prologue*, the teaching of missionaries who went out from it (Paul) and its later leaders (Ignatius). From Antioch, the Fourth Gospel was taken to Ephesus, where the final literary formulation was achieved in its content".

**200. Wainwright** (2012:284-304) has borrowed the *inner texture* and the *intertexture text* from Robbins' *socio-rhetorical approach*, and nuanced it in relation to an ecological reading of the biblical text that recognizes the centrality of *habitat*. She calls her new proposed texture *ecological texture* and names her ecological reading process an *eco-rhetorical approach*. She argued that images, words, stories can have transformative power. According to her **Wainwright** (2012:292), the text is "a place or site in/from which meaning is made, when initial attention is given to the marks on paper in the context of shared socio-cultural codes of grammar, of semantics, of language and of meaning-making narrative".

About the development of the biblical *ecological hermeneutic*, see: **Horrell, Hunt & Southgate** (2008:219-238). **Elvey** ([2004] 2011:64-79) has explored the transformative power of images, words, and stories. She notes that the text is a site of interconnectedness between plants, minerals, habitats, climates, bodies, breath, languages, oral and written traditions, and societies and their stories.

**201. Van Tilborg** (1996:3) states: "It is important to study how John's text was read or could have been read in first century Ephesus". He based his study in the equality of words, which evoke semantic similarities or dissimilarities. He called his study's kind, *Contextual Interference*.

### 4.2.3.1 Date of Composition

The Fourth Gospel has traditionally been viewed as the last one of the canonical Gospels to be written. The issue of dating its composition generates countless exegetical and historical details that cannot be canvassed in this paragraph.<sup>202</sup> Various theories have been given suggesting the date of its composition ranging from before the fall of Jerusalem in AD 70, to as late as the last quarter of the second century. It must be noted here that the more extreme theories have always been rejected due to a lack of convincing and satisfactory supporting evidences. On one hand, the scholars who maintain an early date of composition draw attention to a number of considerations to defend their suggestions (Morris [1969] 1985:330-359; Robinson 1985:67-93). On the other hand, the scholars, who suggest a late date of composition, support their theories with internal and external evidences. Although supported with strong arguments and reliable evidence, the most accepted suggestions do not provide a conclusive solution to the above-mentioned endeavor.

Thus, setting an exact date of composition still is, in many ways, a hypothetical matter. Accordingly, it must not be assumed that the date of writing and the date of publication are identical. Nor can it be accepted that the author, the publisher, and the editor are the same person, as the discussion below demonstrates. Nonetheless, numerous Johannine scholars have suggested that a date of composition located between AD 80 and 110 is most plausible, which is accepted in this thesis.<sup>203</sup>

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<sup>202</sup>. Since the debate concerning this matter is circular and involves numerous scholars with various theories, and since this matter is not part of the aim of this thesis, the enumeration of these theories and their references are neglected here, with all respect due to all of them.

<sup>203</sup>. Some of these scholars are:

**Barrett** ([1955] 1975:109) maintains that John was written between AD 90 and AD 140.

**Brown** (1966:lxviii) favours the earlier limit of AD 100 as date of composition.

**Lindars** ([1972] 1981:42-43) discusses AD 85 - AD 95 as the most probable date of composition.

**Kysar** ([1976] 1993:25) thinks that the Fourth Gospel may have been written between AD 75 and AD 85.

**Ellis** (1984:2) suggests AD 85 - AD 100 as time of writing.

**Carson, Moo, & Morris** (1992:166-167) advance AD 80 - AD 85 as date of publication.

**Duling & Perrin** (1994:409) argue that the FG is to be dated probably about AD 90.

**Du Rand** (1994:68) sets AD 90- AD 100 as a possible dating of the final 'edition' of the FG.

**Whitacre** (1999:26) argues that a date in the early nineties, with a final redaction a few years later is plausible.

**Keener** (2003:142) accepts a date in the nineties.

**Kruse** (2003:32) states that a date of writing in the eighties or nineties is reasonable.

**Köstenberger** (2004:8) believes that a date after AD 81 would appear most likely.

**Lincoln** (2005:18) accepts that the FG was completed and began to be circulated between AD 90 and AD 110.



### 4.2.3.2 Authorship

The narrative of the Fourth Gospel does not directly mention the name of its author. As early as the second century AD, Christian tradition has maintained that John, the son of Zebedee, one of the original twelve apostles wrote this Gospel. That is why it is called the *Gospel of John* or the *Gospel According to John*. This theory remained the traditional view for centuries and is extensively expressed in Christian art and literature. With the advent of biblical criticism, Johannine scholars have gradually witnessed a shift from this traditional view towards a new perspective: The Fourth Gospel is the product of a communal work composed in phases over a period of time. The defenders of the traditional view and the upholders of the new perspective offered numerous suggestions of varying weight and diverse characters. Their propositions can be categorized into two main categories: A single author, and a communal work.

#### 4.2.3.2.1 A Single Author

The statement found in John 21:24 inspired the defenders of the traditional view to argue that an eyewitness wrote the Fourth Gospel, and to associate this eyewitness with the *Beloved Disciple*.<sup>204</sup> They propose various theories to identify this disciple.<sup>205</sup> The wide spectrum of these theories shows that there is no consensus in Johannine scholarship concerning the identity of the *Beloved Disciple*. The main theories are:

♦ A Historical Person: John the son of Zebedee;<sup>206</sup> John Mark;<sup>207</sup> Lazarus;<sup>208</sup> John the Elder;<sup>209</sup> Thomas;<sup>210</sup> John of Jerusalem;<sup>211</sup> Owner of the house;<sup>212</sup> Mary Magdalene<sup>213</sup> and Nathanael.<sup>214</sup>

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<sup>204.</sup> For a deeper insight about of the *Beloved Disciple*, cf.:

**Brown** (1966:xcii-xcviii); **Schnackenburg** ([1968] 1980:97-100); **Du Rand** (1994:80-87); **Keener** (2003:84-89); and **Lincoln** (2005:20-26).

<sup>205.</sup> The footnotes of this paragraph enumerate only some of the suggestions made about the *Beloved Disciple* with their sources. The references cited below show where these suggestions can be found; this does not mean that they express the conviction of the scholars who discuss them. A scholar may have discussed several but may ultimately embrace a different conviction or perspective.

<sup>206.</sup> **Barrett** ([1955]1975:88-92), and **Du Rand** (1994:83-84).

<sup>207.</sup> **Brown** (1966:xcvi), **Du Rand** (1994:81), and in **Brown** (1997:333-382).

<sup>208.</sup> **Culpepper** (1998:32); **Stibbe** (1992:77-82); and **Lincoln** (2005:20).

<sup>209.</sup> **Schnackenburg** ([1968]1980:88-91), **Hengel** (1989:80-83), and **Smalley** (1978:80-81).

<sup>210.</sup> **Charlesworth** (1995:115-126; 225-287).

<sup>211.</sup> **Morris** ([1969] 1985:252).

<sup>212.</sup> **Morris** ([1969] 1985:252-253).

<sup>213.</sup> **Schneiders** (2003:110-114).

<sup>214.</sup> **Catchpole** (1977:162-172).



♦ A Symbolic Figure: Symbol of the Johannine Community;<sup>215</sup> Representative of Christianity;<sup>216</sup> a Functional literary example;<sup>217</sup> a symbol of the faithful followers of Jesus, with whom the reader can identify;<sup>218</sup> a character of an eyewitness<sup>219</sup> created by the redactor of John 21; a symbol of the prophecy, which is behind the Johannine writings;<sup>220</sup> or an idealised figure, whose role in the Johannine Community concurs remarkably with the Paraclete.<sup>221</sup>

#### 4.2.3.2.2 A Communal Work

In recent decades, it has become commonly accepted, within the Johannine field, that the Fourth Gospel was composed in a series of phases over a period of time. There is no absolute agreement among scholars about the number of phases, their composers, or about their lengths. For this reason and for the sake of brevity, only three approaches are indicated here:

The *first approach*: One original manuscript with multiple editorial layers;<sup>222</sup>

The *second approach*: Multiple sources have been used;<sup>223</sup>

The *third approach*: A process of development. This *approach* suggests that the composition of the Fourth Gospel was completed in a series of phases within the Johannine community. It was a product of a process of development, which included many people, several historical situations, and the changes affecting this community, together with revisions, corrections, and comments. This approach generates a variety of theories, leaving much room for differences concerning the details. In order to keep this paragraph concise, only the salient features of three of them are briefly listed with some correlated references:

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**215. Du Rand** (1994:84).

**216. Bultmann** ([1966] 1978:369-371).

**217. Mahoney** (1974:41-69).

**218. Du Rand** (1994:88).

**219. Thyen** (1977:290ff).

**220. Kragerud** (1959:67-83) holds that the *Beloved Disciple* was a symbol of the prophecy, which was behind the Johannine writings, and came to compete with the official authority in the community as represented by Peter.

**221. Du Rand** (1994:87), and **Culpepper** (1998:31).

**222. Robinson** (1985:17-18, 116-117); **Hengel** (1989:104-107); **Beasley-Murray** (1987:lxvii).

**Smalley** (1978) argues that the apostle John originated his Gospel verbally.

**223. cf. Bultmann** ([1966] 1978); **Morris** ([1971]1995:58); **Kysar** ([1975] 1996:33-37); **Barrett** (1975:113-114);

**Robinson** (1985:14-35); **Koester** (1989:173ff); **Carson** (1991:41-49); **Martyn** ([1968] 2003:46-47).

**Fortna** (1989) and **Von Wahlde** (1989) who did more work on the *Signs Source*.

- Three phases of composition.<sup>224</sup>
- Four phases of composition (Du Rand 1994:105-107).
- Five phases of composition.<sup>225</sup>

Built mostly on the Johannine literature and other external evidence, each theory/suggestion of the above-discussed *traditional views* and *new perspectives* has its own plausibility. Yet scrutinizing these theories closely might indicate some fragility of various weights in them. However, all of them have made a significant contribution to biblical hermeneutics and have tremendously enhanced the Johannine scholarship.

Before leaving this section, it is important to assert that in the case of John, it must not be assumed that the date of writing and the date of publication were identical, nor should it be said that its author and its editor were the same person. This thesis favors an integrated theory that encompasses a communal work of composition which involved more than one person, and a time of composition that might have started in the early nineties AD and was accomplished a few years later with the redaction of the final version of this Gospel, including the statement in the *Epilogue*: “There were many other signs that Jesus worked in the sight of the disciples, but they are not recorded in this book. These are recorded so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing this you may have life through his name” (Jn 20:30-31).

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<sup>224</sup>. The following scholars are proponents for this theory and its ramification:

**Schnackenburg** ([1968] 1980 I:72-74) asserts that the final Gospel cannot simply be treated as the work of an author in the modern sense. He therefore also suggests three stages of development cf. also (**Lewis** 2005:5-6).

**Kysar** ([1975] 1996:267-276) argues that at an early phase(s), the traditional materials first took an oral and later a written expression. Finally, an editor formulated them into the Gospel.

**Smalley** (1978) also distinguishes three phases.

**Painter** (1981) assumes that there were three crises in the Johannine community, which could explain the existence of three variations of the farewell discourses, John 13:31-14:31, 15:1-16:4a, and 16:4b-33.

**Culpepper** (1998) maintains that John utilized an early eyewitness testimony that was shaped by the Johannine Community. It was the result of a long process of composition, in which one may distinguish the tradition received from the beloved disciple, the work of the Evangelist, and the revisions of the redactor.

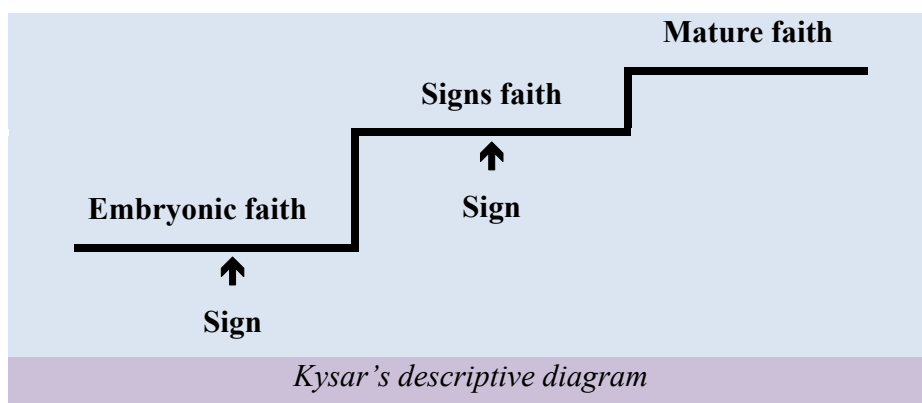
<sup>225</sup>. **Brown** ([1966] 1979:xxxivff; 1988:12; 1997:363) proposes five stages: Oral traditions; traditions that developed into Johannine patterns; the first edition of the Gospel; the second edition of the Gospel; and additions of a friendly redactor.

**Lindars** (1971:38-78) also suggests a five-stage process of composition: Traditions and sources; set of homilies; the first edition of the Gospel; the second edition of the Gospel; and post-Johannine additions. Negative assessments have been made about the theory of five stages by **Schnackenburg** ([1968] 1980 I:23-24) who considers it as ‘unverifiable’, and **Wengst** (1983:32) who argues that its “pre-Gospel” stage is an “ungraspable ghost”.

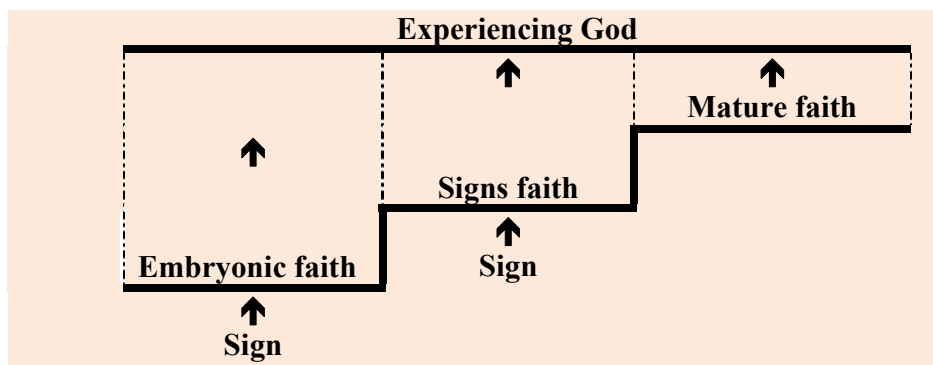
Thus, reading what the Fourth Evangelist wrote -in his narrative and in the *Epilogue*- believing in Jesus, and having life through His Name, are certainly a strong aspect of the Johannine experience of God and a good indication of the ability of John’s narrative of creating an atmosphere of spirituality that constitute this experience.

About the capability of a given text, Cunningham and Stanovich (1998:8-15) state: “Reading has cognitive consequences that extend beyond its immediate task of lifting meaning from a particular passage. Furthermore, these consequences are reciprocal and exponential in nature. Accumulated over time...they carry profound implications for the development of a wide range of cognitive capabilities”. Green (1995:3) argues that “the act of reading...is always, at least potentially, an encounter with the Evangelist as a partner in conversation. That conversation might be taking place in the text itself. Or it is happening behind the text if we attempt to get at the intention of the author or the author’s community”. In the case of John, the intention of the Evangelist is stated in the *Epilogue* of his narrative.

Kysar ([1976] 1993:80-92) links the Johannine faith to knowledge; this faith is provoked by the signs performed by Jesus, and it is shown by the Evangelist’s story in a three stage-process. According to him “the Johannine faith is not a detached intellectual confidence. It is a personal involvement and trust that links the believer to the object of belief together in a kind of unity. That relationship of faith was as such that our Evangelist could describe in the Hebraic sense of knowing” (Kysar [1976] 1993:92).



To Kysar's suggested stages, one more stage could be added: *experiencing God*. This added stage is discussed in Chapter 5, with the conviction that faith, being part of each of the above-mentioned stages, as shown by John in his narrative, is an essential element of the *Johannine Experience of God*. In the upcoming discussion of the believers' response to *God's Initiative*, certain motifs related to faith are underlined. The following diagram depicts this suggestion without oversimplifying the complexity of these topics or minimizing their significance or refuting the possibility of experiencing God during Kysar's suggested stages as well as through miracles and visions.



*Suggested Diagram (Personal Design)*

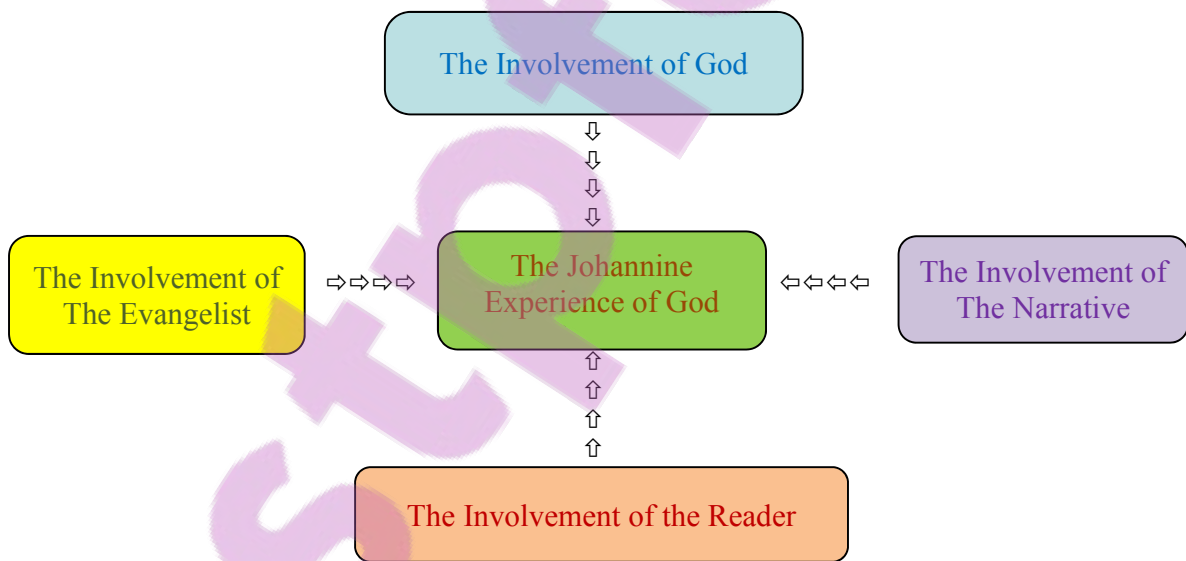
In the same realm of spirituality and experiencing God through the reading of biblical texts, one may find another example of process and stages of human experience presented proficiently from a different perspective by Howard (2008:87-92), who proposes six stages: Being aware; experiencing; understanding; judging; deciding/acting; and integrating.

The process of the *Johannine Faith* suggested by Kysar, and the process of the *Human Experience* proposed by Howard evoke, at this level, another kind of process portrayed by Waaijman (2002b): It is a process correlated to the realm of spirituality, from a different angle of learning and understanding of the biblical texts. It consists of 'entering' deeply into the text *via* these two acts, resulting in the gradual expansion of textual understanding. However, in the same realm of connecting biblical texts to the establishment of spiritualities, the remaining part of this Chapter discusses the involvement of the narrative of the Fourth Gospel in constituting an experience of God and the interrelated atmosphere, within which the functionality of this involvement becomes effective and productive.

### 4.3 An Attuned Interaction that establishes an Experience of God

To conclude this Chapter and before embarking on an investigation of the *Johannine Experience of God* in the next Chapter, it is necessary to discuss an essential factor that establishes this experience *via* creating a well-suited atmosphere and facilitates its occurrence. The researcher prefers to call this factor an *attuned interaction* between the involvements of four principal contributing participants in this experience, namely God the Father, the Fourth Evangelist, the narrative of the Fourth Gospel, and the Johannine readers/hears. This expression depicts the concordant consequence of the harmonious involvements of these participants converging concurrently and interacting synchronously forthwith, in the same event that is reading the narrative of the Fourth Gospel. Thus, this dynamic event becomes a congregating intersection, a fertile field, and a spiritual atmosphere within which the journey of experiencing God begins and flourishes. The following illustration depicts schematically the aforementioned *attuned interaction* of these involvements:

#### Descriptive Illustration 1

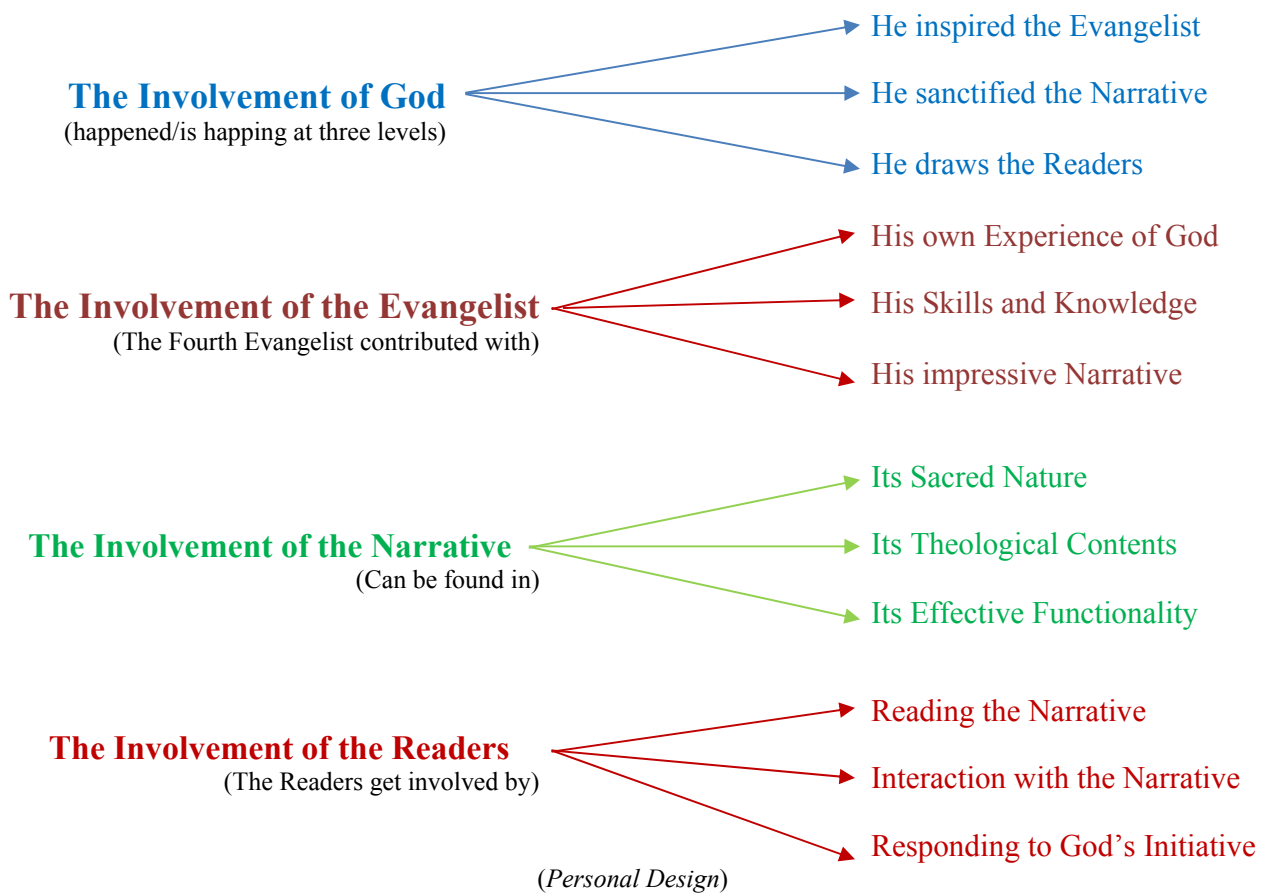


*(Personal Design)*

To this journey, each of the participants brings their own contribution. These contributions find the fullness of their meaning in the substantial and the greatest one of them all: God's contribution and involvement. They find the completeness of their purpose in the sincere effort of the readers to believe in Him and to accept and follow the one He has sent: His only Son.

Discussing the entire scope of each participant’s involvement in this interaction/this journey, goes beyond the capability of any literary work, and this section cannot afford to record it. For this reason, three essential elements of each involvement are listed below. The discussion of these elements is also narrowed down to a level that prepares for the investigation of the Johannine Experience of God, and accommodates its execution in the next Chapter. Instead of discussing each element separately and at length, they are dealt with holistically and concisely.

**Descriptive Illustration 2**



The reason behind listing these involvements in this order is to follow the chronological sequence of their occurrences: Initially, God inspired the Fourth Evangelist, consequently, the Fourth Evangelist composed the narrative of his Gospel, and ever since, the readers started getting involved in reading this narrative.



### 4.3.1 The Involvement of God<sup>226</sup>

The involvement of God in the journey of experiencing Him surpasses any human ability of fully apprehending it and entirely recording its scope. It is a journey voyaged by those who respond to His divine initiative since the dawn of creation. It started when He created humankind in the image of Himself (Gn 1:27; Jn 1:1-3) and will end by the second coming of His only begotten Son (Mt 13:36-43; Jn 5:25-29). It encompasses, in the course of its occurrence, the realms of incarnation, revelation, and salvation. At the level of the *Johannine Experience of God*, the three elements, listed in the descriptive illustration above, direct the attention to three stages of God's involvement in this journey. Each element corresponds to a specific dimension of the involvement of the other three participants:

- In the *first stage*, God's involvement consisted of Him inspiring and enabling the Fourth Evangelist to compose his Gospel under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. This is not new, as God did that with the rest of the biblical authors. The Evangelist responded positively to this grace putting at work, with great dispensability, the fullness of his knowledge, and the maximum functionality of his skills to record the contents of this inspiration. This stage witnessed the collaboration of two free agents: A divine being (God) and a human being (Fourth Evangelist). What happened in this stage is very unique and definitely unrepeatable. It could be rightly considered to be the culmination of the Fourth Evangelist's experience of God, as its resonances could be noticed in the core of his narrative.

- During the *second stage*, two vital events occurred simultaneously: On the one hand, the Fourth Evangelist wrote his Gospel in human terms and expressions, from his side, and on the other hand, God sanctified these human terms and expressions by transforming them into His own divine words. With this, He granted them the power to make those who observe them remaining in the love of His Son (Jn 15:10), and to complete their joy by giving them His joy (Jn 15:11). Whoever listens to these words will also never die (Jn 8:51) and will have "eternal life, without being brought to judgment" (Jn 5:24).

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<sup>226</sup>. In the present thesis, God's contribution/involvement is recognized as God's Initiative and is investigated in the next chapter under the title: *God's Initiative*. The discussion done in this section is just an introduction to that.

Similarly, whoever believes in the Word of God -the Son of God- who conveyed the divine words of his Father, will have life in His Name (Jn 20:31). In John's narrative, Jesus proclaimed many times that His words are those of the one who sent Him (Jn 3:11; 12:51). The reward of this sanctification is abundant: The contents of this narrative were transformed from an ordinary simple literary product into God's words, and in its turn, this inspired narrative became a living and active source of inspiration for its readers, with a powerful functionality capable to create spirituality and constitute an experience of God. Like the previous one, this stage has happened once, and it will never be repeated. However, its graces will endure forever.

- The *third stage* is still unfolding and evolving until it finds its fulfillment and completion in the second coming of the Son of Man (Mt 21:25-28). Throughout this stage, God has never stopped drawing the readers to read the inspired narratives, including that of John. Jesus continued this mission, during His earthly life, by always motivating His hearers (in this case, the subsequent readers of John) to respond positively to His Father's involvement (Jn 8:31; 14:21). This response is discussed in the next Chapter. Differently, from the other two, this stage continues to occur. The divine presence and activities, in all of these stages, are a significant seed of experiencing God. This section directs the attention only towards this element of God's involvement: Drawing the readers to experience Him through the reading of the biblical accounts in general, and in the case of the present discussion, through the reading of John's narrative.

It serves to mention that as it was the case with the other authors of the Bible, God has inspired the Fourth Evangelist to compose his Gospel. Certainly, this paragraph does not intend to prove the biblical inspiration or defend it or deny its validity; rather, its sole aspiration is to underline the role of inspiration in both God's involvement in every spiritual journey and in the inauguration of every experience of Him. Nevertheless, *biblical inspiration* is generally understood as the work of the Holy Spirit. Without marginalizing the human faculties, skills and knowledge, God the Father has guided the biblical authors and enabled them to record His revelation, to convey His words, to register His deeds, to communicate His covenant and promises, and to express His unconditional divine love towards the members of His *Familia Dei*.

Additionally, the apostle Paul, in his second Letter to his disciple Timothy affirmed: “All Scripture is inspired by God and useful for refuting error, for guiding people’s lives and teaching them to be upright” (2 Tm 3:16). About the value of the sacred Scriptures, the apostle Peter wrote in his second Letter: “You will be right to pay attention to it as to a lamp for lighting a way through the dark, until the dawn comes and the morning star rises in your mind...For no prophecy ever came from human initiative. When prophets spoke for God it was the Holy Spirit that moved them” (2 P 1:21-22). As the Father ‘has life in himself’ (Jn 5:25) and His only Son is the source of every life (Jn 1:3-4; 14:6), so ‘the word of God is alive and active’ (Hb 5:12). To these three elements/acts (inspiration, sanctification, and drawing), another factor can be added that made them happen: The unconditional divine love.

The entire Bible, including the Gospel of John, is the story of the unconditional divine love of the Father towards humankind in general, and His believers/His children in particular, and the sacrificial love of His Son towards them. It is a story that started at the dawn of Creation and will end in Eternity with them dwelling together forever in His house. It is a story of a spiritual journey lived by believers throughout the ages, aiming to know God, to experience Him, to believe in Him, and to love Him. In other words, the Father is the initiator, the companion during, and the ultimate destination of every spiritual journey and of every experience of Him. In this way, He becomes the *Vinedresser* (Jn 15:1) who prunes the branches of the True Vine to make them bear fruits. He becomes the Lord of the harvest, who send out laborers to His harvest (Mt 9:37), sowed by His only Son/the Son of Man (Mt 13:37). Out of love He created humankind through His divine Word (Jn 1:1-4, 13), and He sustains their existence through His caring providence (Mt 6:25-34; Lk 12:22-31). At the appointed time, He has sent His only Son to dwell among them (Jn 1:14), to grant them to be God’s children (Jn 1:12), and to enable them to know Him (Jn 1:18). Then, after the salvific death of His Beloved Son and His Glorious Resurrection, the Father sent His Holy Spirit to be with/in them, to teach them and to lead them to the complete truth (Jn 14:26; 16:7-13), which is nothing else but Jesus Himself (Jn 14:6) and His heavenly Father (Jn 3:33; 5:33). Furthermore, the loyalty of Jesus to glorify His Father and to accomplish His plan (Jn 7:13; 17:4) requires a proclamation of what Jesus learned from the Father (Jn 8:26). Jesus accompanied this proclamation by repeating the constant promise in a revelatory style: Whoever believes in the Son and keeps His words will have eternal life.

This promise is true and effective, because Jesus' words, like those of the Father, enter into the hearts of the believers and transform their life by its transformative love (Jn 15:3; 17:6, 14, 17). This could rightly be considered an aspect of the Johannine experience of God. At this point of the discussion, it is important to underline the fact that John did not treat *love* as an arid abstract concept or as a fictional theme of fairytales, but as an existential experience lived by both the giver and the receiver (Jn 3:16; 11:3, 5; 13:1, 34; 15:9-13; 16:27), and as a real divine-human feeling realized between the Father and His children through His only Son and His Holy Spirit. Thus, love can be considered as both a major topic that runs throughout John's narrative, and a main element that causes God's involvement in the spiritual journey of experiencing Him.

The ingenuity of the Fourth Evangelist to elaborate on this topic finds its roots in apprehending Jesus' mission of revealing the Father and His love to His children. The significance of this mission is that the only Son, who is close to the Father's heart has made Him known (Jn 1:18) and revealed His divine love. And the core of this revelation is articulated in John 3:16: "For God so loved the world he gave his only Son so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but have Eternal Life". Furthermore, the Father loves the believers because they believe in His Son (Jn 16:27). Jesus also loves His believers (Jn 11:3, 5), those who were His (Jn 13:1), and His disciples (Jn 13:23, 34); He loved them as His Father did (Jn 15:9), commanded them to love one another (Jn 13:34, 35) promising them that He and His Father will come and dwell in them (Jn 15:13), and He will send the Holy Spirit to be with them and to guide them (Jn 16:13). Becoming a *dwelling place* for God is one of the ultimate aspects of experiencing Him - the believers realize the magnitude of this divine love and how precious they are in the eyes of both the loving Father and His caring Son, because they belong to Jesus (Jn 17:10).

As such, no human experience of God could occur and no spiritual journey<sup>227</sup> can be completed without God's involvement. In other words, God's involvement in the spiritual journey of experiencing Him, gives meaning and fulfillment to the involvements of the other participants: the Fourth Evangelist, John's narrative, and its readers.

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**227. Kim** (2017:232) perceives this journey from the perspective of following Jesus. He states that it "began from eternity within the circle of the Father and the Son...and will be consummated in eternity".

### 4.3.2 The Involvement of the Fourth Evangelist<sup>228</sup>

Two leading sources provide numerous (direct and indirect) indications of the involvement of the Fourth Evangelist in the journey of experiencing God: The Gospel of John, and what has been published about it. The following paragraphs focus on certain features to point out the threefold core of this involvement: ①Inspired<sup>229</sup> by the Holy Spirit and motivated by his own experience of God, ②the Fourth Evangelist employed his skills and knowledge, ③ to compose a *spiritual Gospel* with an inspired *narrative*.<sup>230</sup> These three folds are discussed holistically and conjunctly.

The involvement of the Fourth Evangelist finds its origin in the inspiration granted to him by the Holy Spirit and attains the zenith of its significance in the realization of the Evangelist's aspiration expressed in the *Epilogue* of his Gospel: The readers "may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and accordingly have life through his name" (Jn 20:31). The inaugural component of this involvement is the Fourth Evangelist's own experience of God. It is an experience that was inaugurated by seeing the glory of God through the incarnation of the Logos (Jn 1:14), nourished by witnessing the first sign performed by Jesus at Cana (Jn 2:11), and culminating in the knowledge of the resurrected Lord (Jn 21:12). The ingenuity of the Evangelist in apprehending Jesus' message (revealing the Father and His love to His children) and in conveying it genuinely, to his readers *via* his Gospel, is a salient element of his involvement. Hence, following the prototype of writing a story and antecedent scriptural patterns,<sup>231</sup> he wrote a distinctive narrative<sup>232</sup> -many consider it as a *spiritual Gospel*- to effectively convey God's message of salvation and to persuade<sup>233</sup> his readers to accept it and believe in Jesus Christ.

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<sup>228</sup>. The expressions, 'the Evangelist', 'John', 'the author', or the individuals of the Johannine Community, who were involved in the composition of the Fourth Gospel, refer to the same subject. They are used alternatively in the thesis to avoid repetition.

<sup>229</sup>. Scholars like **Dodd** (1978:25) and **Wallace** (1996:313-314) quote verses from the Letter of Paul to Timothy to maintain that 'all Scripture is inspired by God and useful' (2 Tm 3:16-17).

<sup>230</sup>. In this discussion, the terms 'Fourth Gospel text', 'John's narrative', 'the narrative of the Fourth Gospel', 'the text', 'the Johannine narrative', and 'the Johannine text' hold the same meaning. They are used alternatively to avoid repetition and to preserve the smoothness of the sentences.

<sup>231</sup>. cf. **Alter** (1981:51-58); **Culpepper** (1983:137); and **Köstenberger** (2012:435-462).

<sup>232</sup>. About the distinctiveness of the Gospel of John, see **Brown** (1965:25-34).

<sup>233</sup>. **Ellis** (1999:269) directs the attention to the fact that John used his literary techniques, devices, and overall strategies to persuade his readers to accept the truths that he thinks they need to know; also that John knew the techniques used by the storytellers of the Old Testament and the Jewish rhetoricians of his own time.

Generally speaking, every story or narrative has a noteworthy impact on those who tell it, read it or hear it, due to the fact that telling/reading/hearing a story is a very complex human activity. It is an event during which numerous cognitive processes are involved,<sup>234</sup> multimodal situation models are constructed (cf. Zwaan & Van Oostendorp 1993:125-143), and the readers/listeners get immersed into the story.<sup>235</sup> Kuijpers (2014:28) describes this kind of immersion as “a state of absorption marked by deep concentration, losing awareness of one’s self, one’s surroundings and track of time”. In this way, *immersion* becomes a multidimensional experience involving various factors such as mental imagery, emotional engagement with the story’s characters, identification with these characters, and transportation into the story’s world.<sup>236</sup> *Immersion* is also associated with enjoyment, which means that the more the readers get engaged with a story, the more they enjoy it. It is important to note that the depth and the strength of the experience of being immersed in a narrative vary because of the characters of the readers and the circumstances of reading/hearing it (cf. Busselle & Bilandzic 2009:321-347; and Green 2004:247-266).

With regard to John’s narrative, one of the strongest factors that establishes such *immersion* is the ingenuity of the Evangelist in recording the words and deeds of Jesus and the language<sup>237</sup> (in the broader sense of the term) he used to convey what the Son has revealed about the Father. Another factor, which is even stronger and surpasses every enjoyment ever given by a story or narrative, is the words of Jesus, “I have loved you as the Father loved me...I have told you this so that my own joy may be in you and your joy be complete” (Jn 15:9, 11). This divine promise is accompanied by a request very dear to Jesus: “Remain in my love...keep my commandments”. Fulfilling this request is rewarding: “bearing fruit in plenty”, “glorifying the Father”, “becoming disciples of Jesus”, and “getting whatever one asks of God” (Jn 15:6-8).

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**234.** cf. **Gernsbacher** (1997:265-304), who explains that an elementary part of story comprehension is building a mental representation of the semantic contents of the text.

**235.** **Csikszentmihalyi** (1990) asserts that *immersion* is a state of absorption, which overlaps conceptually with flow and transportation. About the latter, cf. **Sestir & Green** (2010:272-288).

**236.** For more insight about this topic, see: **Green & Brock** (2000:701-721); **Green** (2004:247-266); **Zwaan** (2003:35-62); **Burke** (2013:199215); and **Jacobs** (2015:186).

**237.** **Kaczmarek** (2008:20) asserts that *language* is one of the strongest forces in any society: ‘It binds members of a given community together...the Johannine communities seem to have been developing just such a language. It was a theological language...that allowed them to express their belief in specific ways’, cf. also **Schnelle** (2005:82-83). **Lamb** (2011:160) believes that there is a consistent feature of the Johannine text showing the power which the author had in the relationship with his readers.

The disciples and contemporary believers needed to hear those words because their hearts were troubled, afraid, and filled with sadness (Jn 14:1, 27). Likewise, the subsequent hearers/readers throughout the ages need to hear these love-filled and reassuring words of the Lord, because what tremendously terrifies the heart of most humans is the fear of death, the insecurity caused by wondering what will happen after it, and the sadness generated by feeling rejected and not loved. Being loved by the Father and obeying Him out of love -and not fear- and glorifying Him by imitating the Son and keeping His commandments and doing the Father's will, is the *real joy* and the completeness of any experience of God. Jesus prayed for those who do so, asking the Father to protect them, and consecrate them in truth (Jn 17:11, 17). In other words, Jesus prayed for these believers to have everlasting joy, eternal life, and unity and be protected (Jn 17:1-26). They are a precious gift from the Father to His Son (Jn 17:6, 9-10), who consecrated Himself for their sake (Jn 17:19), and they are honored of being chosen to be in the Father and his Only Son (Jn 17:21), at the same time being privileged of becoming a divine *dwelling place* (Jn 14:20, 23).

Once the believers recognized how much they are loved and appreciated by Jesus, who gave them the glory that His Father gave Him (Jn 17:22), they would consequently feel immersed and embraced within this dynamical sphere of divine unity, glory, joy, salvation, and eternal life, to name just a few of God's graces and blessings emanating from His abundant love. They would feel included in the family of God as loved members of the *Familia Dei*. They would experience God by being loved by Him through His Begotten Son and guided to love Him by His Holy Spirit (Jn 14:26; 16:13). This is indeed a significant aspect of the Johannine Experience of God: John has lived it and skillfully recorded it in his narrative. The latter records a very clear communication:<sup>238</sup> An important message, an ensured promise, and a gratifying reward. If the readers believe in the incarnate Logos (the Son of God) and receive Him, He will give them 'the power to become children of God' (Jn 1:12-13). Mears (1980:41-42) explains that "aside from providing the way of salvation, the Fourth Gospel provides various methods of communicating in

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**238. Richards** ([1928] 1999:1994-1999) states that "communication takes place when one mind so acts upon its environment that another mind is influenced, and in that other mind an experience occurs which is like the experience in the first mind, and is caused in part by that experience". **Hooper & Janis** (1978:21) further refines the concept of communication, arguing that despite having numerous meanings depending on its context, communication is ultimately defined as "the process by which messages affect response".

order to reach others for Christ”. These methods include preaching (Jn 1:35-51), the direct call of Christ (Jn 1:43), and the witness of a friend (Jn 1:46).

It could be added that the persistent endeavor of John to proclaim who Jesus is -the Christ, the Son of God, and God- is clearly noticed in his narrative. It provides all the necessary authority to encourage his readers to believe in Him and motivate them to remain in Him in order to attain their salvation. Without this, the divine nature of Jesus cannot be comprehended, thereby disrupting the process of salvation and the meaning behind His death on the cross. To achieve this encouragement and empower this motivation, John started his *Prologue* by introducing to his readers the Logos, ‘who is God and was with God’, and who ‘became flesh and dwelt among us’ (Jn 1:14). Thus, the first merit of the incarnation of the Logos/the Son is that He made the Father known (Jn 1:18); with this, God became more accessible to human beings. The second merit of this incarnation is that the incarnate Son has granted to those who accepted Him and believed in His Name, the privilege of becoming the children of God (Jn 1:12). This privilege -the opportunity of experiencing Him- became for them more feasible and certain. Additionally, throughout the core of his narrative, John sought to encourage his readers to believe in Jesus and to experience the one who sent Him by providing them with a detailed account about the Son. It was through Jesus’ ministry, his death, resurrection, and the sending of the Paraclete that life was made available to the believers *via* faith. Furthermore, in the *Prologue* of his Gospel, John concluded this account with an affirmation about this life in which faith can lead the believers to God and channel His salvation to them.

Moreover, the Fourth Gospel comprises the biblical truths fundamental to the above-mentioned faith and salvation. The requisite of “being born from above”, and the requirements to “enter the Kingdom of God” are adequately explained (Jn 3:3-7). The promise of eternal life and its correlation with accepting and believing that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, is distinctly emphasized, while God’s love towards the world is clearly revealed (Jn 3:15-17). It provides the spiritual inspiration to understand the magnitude of God’s love towards His children/the members of His *Familia Dei*, which generates the ultimate joy granted to those who remain in His Son: It is a joy culminated with seeing/experiencing Him through His Son: In John 14:9, Jesus stated that “anyone who has seen me has seen the Father”. Erickson (2005:720) correctly comments on this



verse: “If we would know what the love of God, the holiness of God, the power of God are like, we need only look at Christ”.

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In addition to the topics of joy and love, John included in his narrative with a remarkable ingenuity, another two compelling topics -*witnessing* and *knowing*- to record God's initiative towards His children/believers/members of His *Familia Dei*. Such initiative is not easily understood by them, and at times is not even accepted by many people. Nevertheless, it seems that John intended to facilitate the comprehension of this initiative, and to awaken his readers to its merits and to the urgency of responding positively to it. He frequently used terms correlated to the *witnessing* motif, such as *witness*, *testimony*, *to bear witness*, and *to testify*. These occur forty-seven times in his narrative. Surely, not all of them express a specific theology, but their total shows the importance of this motif in generating faith/leading the readers to believe in Jesus through the testimonies of witnesses, and in God through the testimony of Jesus, given *via* what He did and said. These testimonies are important to encourage the readers in their journey of experiencing God and are part of the Evangelist's strategy to portray Jesus as the Son of God. He adorned his narrative with the testimonies of seven witnesses who testified to this:

- John the Baptist testified about Jesus: "There is the Chosen One of God" (Jn 1:34).
- Nathanael declared in front of Jesus: "You are the Son of God" (Jn 1:49).
- Peter professed by saying: "We believe and know that you are the Holy One of God" (Jn 6:69).
- Jesus revealed His identity, confirming: "I am the Son of God" (Jn 10:36).
- Martha proclaimed: "I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God" (Jn 11:27).
- Thomas said to the risen Christ: "My Lord and my God" (Jn 20:28).
- The Fourth Evangelist in his *Epilogue* stated: "Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God" (Jn 20:31).

It is noteworthy to mention here another group of testimonies that have similar significance in this journey, namely the testimonies of John the Baptizer (Jn 1:6-8, 15; 3:22-36; 5:33); of the prophets (Jn 1:45), Jesus Himself (Jn 3:11-15; 8:18); the Samaritan woman (Jn 4:39); God the Father (Jn 5:32, 37; 8:18); the works and signs of Jesus (Jn 5:36; 10:25); the Scriptures (Jn 5:39); the crowd who had been with Jesus when He raised Lazarus (Jn 12:17); the Holy Spirit -the Paraclete/the Spirit of Truth- (Jn 15:26); the disciples (Jn 15:27); Moses (Jn 1:45; 5:46); the disciple at the cross (Jn 19:35); and the writer of the Gospel (Jn 21:24). Above all, the supreme witness is Jesus Himself who witnesses to the Father (Jn 3:32-35).

John employed the *Inclusio* of eyewitness testimony in a noticeable way to emphasize the threefold salvific process: Witness to/give testimony about Jesus; believing in Him; and having life/eternal life through His Name. The largest inclusion of them comprises a spectrum stretching between the inaugural verbal testimony of the (first) witness (John the Baptizer), emphasized in the *Prologue* (Jn 1:6-8), and the concluding written testimony of the (last) witness (the disciple who vouches for these things), recorded in the *Epilogue* (Jn 20:30-31; 21:24-25). Each of these witnesses and testimonies has the power to reassure the readers or listeners that, by encountering Jesus and believing in Him, they will certainly have an experience of God.

The second motif, which John included in his narrative with a remarkable ingenuity to record God's initiative towards His children/the believers, is *Knowing God*.<sup>239</sup> In the Fourth Gospel, this motif is important as it is the purpose of the coming of the Son (Jn 17:3). Knowledge denotes relationship rather than factual knowledge or a perception of reality. This is equally true in the Old Testament, where knowledge of God involves acknowledgement, confession, and obedience (Jr 31:33-34). According to Lieu (1991:32), it belongs to the covenant relationship with God. Reading John, the readers will notice that *knowing* is tightly associated with *believing*. These two themes occur abundantly in John's narrative (about two hundred times) and diffusely (almost in every chapter). Moreover, their consequences are profuse and remunerating: Having eternal life (Jn 3:15, 16, 36; 4:14, 36; 5:24; 6:33, 40, 48; 8:12, 51-52; 10:28; 11:26-27; 12:25; 17:3; 20:31); becoming children of God (Jn 1:12); entering the Kingdom (3:4, 5); rising up on the last day (Jn 6:39, 40, 44, 54); being honored, loved by the Father (Jn 12:26; 14:21); becoming a dwelling place for Jesus and the Father (Jn 14:23); being loved by Jesus (Jn 14:21); sharing Jesus' prayer for unity (Jn 17:21); receiving the Spirit (Jn 7:39; 14:16); being saved (Jn 3:17; 10:9; 12:47); being set free (Jn 8:32); being exempt from judgment (Jn 3:18; 5:24); will never be thirsty again (Jn 4:13); will never go hungry again (Jn 6:35); will never stay in darkness (Jn 12:47); will do the same works as Jesus did (Jn 14:12); and bearing fruit – getting petitions granted (Jn 15:5-7).

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<sup>239</sup>. *Knowing God* is a multifaceted philosophical theme and a very complex topic. The researcher will not get involved in discussing it or any of its ramifications, because it is not part of the aim of this study; the discussion, in this section, is limited to certain pertinent verses and passages found in John. However, the valuable contributions of the numerous publications on this subject are appreciated, like Coolman (2004).

A closer look at this list shows that the consequences of remaining in Jesus, witnessing to Him, knowing the Father and doing His will, satisfies the most existential needs of every human being and reassures their hearts against the distress, anxiety, worries, concerns, and the uncertainty caused by death, illness, the fear of being not loved, of thirst, of hunger, and everything that might threaten their life, happiness, and wellbeing. Each of these consequences has the power to constitute, either by itself or conjunctly with the other ones, a special experience of God at different levels of the believer's life.

The Fourth Evangelist has put to use effective and remarkable techniques to guide his readers to knowing the Father (accordingly experiencing Him) and doing His will, as well as to motivate them to remain in Jesus and witness to Him: Employing figurative language, especially metaphors (Jn 10:1-18; 15:1-8); including short stories (Jn 2:1-11; 3:1-11; 4:4-42); introducing new characters; and featuring a sequence of events.

John introduced new characters during cleverly-placed scenes in well-planned lengths, to stimulate the curiosity of his readers and increase their interest in the message enshrined in his narrative, for example: John the Baptist (Jn 1:6, 15-40; 3:23-27; 4:1; 5:33, 36; 10:41); the two disciples (Jn 1:35-42); Nathanael (Jn 1:45-49); Nicodemus (Jn 3:1-9; 7:50-51; 19:39); the beloved disciple (Jn 13:23-26; 18:15-18; 19:25-35; 20:1-8); Malchus (Jn 18:10); Thomas (known as the twin) (Jn 11:16; 14:5; 20:24, 26, 28; 21:2); and Pilate (Jn 18:29-38; 19:1-38). Each of them has experienced God through Jesus, and is a source of inspiration to the readers to encounter Jesus and to experience God through Him, as these characters did. Each of these characters had a life-changing experience<sup>240</sup> with Jesus; so does every hearer/reader of John's Gospel -throughout the ages- because its message is timeless and its spirituality is a dynamic source of inspiration that cannot be restricted to a particular era or fixed in any historical context.

John also included a sequence of events in his narrative (Jn 2:12-13; 5-6; 7:9-10; 14:31-15:1) to emphasize essential events in the life of Jesus, for example: The cleansing of the temple (Jn 2:14-22); the plot to kill Jesus (Jn 11:46-54); the symbolic anointing at Bethany (Jn 12:1-8); and the majestic entry of Jesus into Jerusalem (Jn 12:12-19).

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**240.** Their experiences would be noteworthy topics for future studies.



These events like the aforementioned techniques draw the readers to John's narrative, motivating them to learn about Jesus and believe in Him. Doing so, they will experience God. The *Epilogue* asserted that 'the one, who vouches these things, has written them down'. This is a convincing assertion that confirms their validity and removes any doubt that might disturb this experience.

Another salient twofold element of the Fourth Evangelist's involvement in the journey of experiencing God is first, his awareness of his community's tradition,<sup>241</sup> which includes, but is not limited to, its members' knowledge of the Old Testament and their familiarity with certain contemporary concepts such as family and Logos; and second, his ability to evoke this tradition and to interpret it theologically<sup>242</sup> to his readers, based on both this knowledge and familiarity. Several times in his Gospel, he displayed accurate and detailed knowledge of this tradition in the period before the fall of Jerusalem (cf. Griffiths 1963);<sup>243</sup> he employed *citations*, *quotations*, and *allusions*<sup>244</sup> extensively, freely, and when it was needed, from the Old Testament or from the Targums;<sup>245</sup> he cited these references to achieve his theological purposes; and he pondered and employed them in his Christology,<sup>246</sup> but more particularly in their typological application.<sup>247</sup> The topic of the references to the Old Testament in John has generated numerous publications. The following paragraphs focus on how these references direct the attention towards one of the salient Johannine motifs, which is associated with experiencing God: The identity of Jesus.

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<sup>241</sup>. cf. **Schnackenburg** ([1968] 1980 I:115) and **Strecker** (2000:467).

**Klein** (1976:155-186) claims that it is evident that the Johannine Community did nurture within itself a rich tradition, part of which came to literary expression in the Fourth Gospel.

<sup>242</sup>. cf. **Keener** ([2003] 2005 I:17); **Morris** ([1971] 1995:35-42); **Martyn** ([1968] 2003); **Köstenberger** (2012:440). **Beasley-Murray** (1987:lxvi) argues that John's employment of the Logos concept to "introduce the story of Jesus was a master-stroke of communication...What he achieved in the *Prologue*...he did in the body of the Gospel...with a multitude of associations that helped to commend and interpret the good news he sought to convey".

**Culpepper & Black** (1996:33) assert that some of John's motifs are central, for example the address to God as Father, or Jesus' self-designation as Son of God.

<sup>243</sup>. About the bearing of Old Testament terminology on the Johannine chronology of the final Passover of Jesus, cf. **Story** (1989:316-324). On Isaiah 6:10 being used in John 12:37-41, cf. **Hartley** (2009:263-287).

<sup>244</sup>. **Tenney** (1965:300-308) maintains that the exact number of references to the Old Testament in John is debatable, for it is occasionally difficult to determine what is a reference and what is not. He suggests forty-seven references. According to **Tenney** (1965:301), *citations* are almost exact verbally and are definitely referred to a given author; *quotations* are sufficiently close to the original to leave no doubt concerning their derivation, but are not attributed explicitly to a definite source; and *allusions* are often so loosely constructed that only one or two words out of a sentence parallel the Biblical text.

<sup>245</sup>. Targums are the Aramaic translations of the Hebrew Bible cf. (**Du Rand** 1994:47).

<sup>246</sup>. cf. **Hunter** (1972), **Schnackenburg** ([1968] 1980:121-124; 135), **Brown** (1997:338), and **Thompson** (1989).

<sup>247</sup>. Examples of typological application can be found in John 1:14 (= Ex 25:8) and in representing Jesus as the Lamb of God (Jn 1:29), the one who is greater than Moses (Jn 1:17; 3:14; 12:31), the 'Manna' (Jn 6:30-59); and in the 'I am' sayings (= Is 41:4; 43:10-13; Dt 32:39).



This motif is alluded to in the *Prologue* where Jesus is introduced as the Logos who was “in the beginning” (Gn 1:1) “with God...He was God” (Jn 1:1-5). It runs throughout the entire Gospel and is concluded in the *Epilogue* with the prominent statement: “Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God” (Jn 20:31). After His incarnation, Jesus replaced the *Shekinah* and “lived among us” (Jn 1:14), as His Father (Yahweh) dwelt among His people (Ex 25:8-9; 40:34-35). Jesus is the *Revealer*, the truth, and the grace that surpassed Moses as the agent of revealing God’s Law, and the *Legislator* who fulfilled this Law by His new commandment (Jn 15:12). Jesus declared that the Scripture testifies to Him, and that Moses wrote about Him (Jn 5:39, 46); He is the “living water” (Jn 4:10-14) that satisfies every thirst and gives eternal life (versus the ritual water that is customary among the Jews (Jn 2:6; 13:4-5),<sup>248</sup> He is the *Bread Of Life* that is greater than the manna (Jn 6:35, 48); He is the *Savior* and the *Lamb of God* that takes away the sin of the world (cf. Jn 1:29, 36),<sup>249</sup> Anyone who sees Him, “has seen the Father” (Jn 14:9): This implies that, while the people of the Old Testament experienced God through His mighty deeds, after the incarnation of the Son, believers became able to experience God through Jesus.

Accordingly, seeing Jesus means seeing God could be understood as experiencing Jesus means experiencing God. Jesus Christ is the personification of God’s revelation, manifested in a personal relationship. The Father always initiates this experience by drawing people/believers to Jesus (Jn 6:44). This paragraph therefore points out that, in order to direct his original readers towards having such an experience, John referred to two motifs from the Old Testament, namely certain *prominent figures* and *Jewish feasts*.<sup>250</sup>

*Prominent figures*: Abraham (with whom God made the well-known covenant); Jacob (through whom God constituted a chosen people); Moses (whom God helped to deliver the Israelites from the slavery in Egypt); and Isaiah (whom God chose to restore the hope of His people).

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<sup>248</sup>. About Jacob’s Well, cf. **Neyrey** ([1979] 1981:419-437); and **Phan** (2010:160-175).

<sup>249</sup>. The next Chapter elaborates on the topic of the Johannine Son of God.

<sup>250</sup>. cf. **Menken** (1999); **Weiss** (1991); **Meagher** (1969); **Bryan** (2005); **Cory** (1997); **Köstenberger** (2005 b); **Coloe** (2009); **Harold** (2010).



*Jewish feasts*<sup>251</sup> commemorated historic events in the Israelites' history, and pointed their hope on the coming of the Messiah. It is remarkable how John has set his depiction of Jesus' identity, mission, and hour within a framework of these feasts: Jesus went up to Jerusalem at the Passover (Jn 2:13-22); and He promptly cleansed the temple, hinted at His death, declaring that the new temple of God is His body. His disciples believed in Him: This declaration means that Jesus is the new *temple* where God is to be worshiped. In recording this trip to Jerusalem and the days before it, the Fourth Evangelist made references to significant motifs correlated to the Passover (salvation): Lamb of God (Jn 1:36); the hour (Jn 2:36); the temple (Jn 2:13-22); and the bronze serpent (Jn 3:14-15). The highlight of John's references to the Jewish feasts, found in references to the Passover (Jn 2:13, 23; 6:4; 11:55; 12:1; 13:1; 18:28, 39; 19:14); tabernacles (Jn 7:2); and dedications (Jn 10:22), is that Jesus made the Father known by revealing the greatness of His fatherly love, and that He invited His listeners to believe in His Name so that they can receive eternal life. Making the Father known, revealing Him, revealing the identity of the Son, recognizing the great-generous love of the Father, appreciating the unconditional-salvific love of the Son, and believing in the Father through His Son are the essence of any experiencing of God.

The Fourth Evangelist freely employed references from the Old Testament to persuade his contemporary readers to believe in Jesus; the fruits of believing in Him are abundant the zenith of which is life (Jn 20:31). The Evangelist emphasized that Jesus is one of them, that they are His own (Jn 1:11), and He 'loved them to the end' (Jn 13:1). The understanding of the significance of this reference would come easier to these readers, because they knew the Old Testament well. However, for the subsequent readers, this comes with more difficulty; to overcome this and other difficulties of understanding the Scriptures and assist the believers in their journey of experiencing God, Jesus promised to send the Holy Spirit (Jn 14:26; 16:13).

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**251.** For an insightful reading about the Jewish feasts, cf. **Wheaton** (2009). About the *Hanukkah* and John 10:22-39, cf. **Dennert** (2013).

### 4.3.3 The Involvement of John's Narrative

#### 4.3.3.1 Suggested levels of involvement

The involvement of the Johannine Narrative in the *attuned interaction* -that establishes an experience of God- consists of its sacred nature, its theological contents, and its effective functionality in constituting this experience. It is hard to draw a sharp line between these three features and to examine one of them without considering or including the other two in the discussion. Therefore, in this paragraph these features are discussed holistically and conjointly. Like the rest of the biblical accounts, the narrative of the Fourth Gospel is considered to be inspired by the Holy Spirit and sacred because it contains the words of God the Father and His incarnate Son, and at the same time, it talks about both of them. Due to this, it has the power to sanctify its readers/believers (Jn 15:3; 17:17), lead them to eternal life if they keep these words (Jn 8:51), and bring complete joy to their hearts (Jn 15:11). Becoming holy and having eternal life mean that the believers are included to partake in God's realm full of joy, holiness, and life. Van der Merwe (2017a:1 of 9 pages; cf. also 2017b) argues: "In the Gospel of John, the holiness of the Trinity constitutes the theological environment for the code of holiness and forms the basis for the exhortation to holiness". This narrative contains evidence showing that its early readers (the members of the community, within which it was composed or at least some of them) observed Jesus' words (Jn 14:23-24; 15:20; 17:6) and His commandments (Jn 14:15, 21; 15:10), because these are from God (Jn 3:34; 14:10). Jesus heard these words from His Father and conveyed them to His disciples (Jn 6:68; 14:24; 17:8). The words of Jesus are true and whoever keeps them will never taste death (Jn 8:51-52, 55). This statement echoed a biblical language pertinent to obeying God's Law given through the prophets (Ps 88:49; Lk 2:26; Heb 11:5) and resonated in (Rv 3:8-10). This does not mean that the believers would not experience physical death; rather what they experience at that time -through believing in Jesus- would not be interrupted by their death, because they have passed through death into life. This statement indicates that John's narrative has a capability to inspire its readers,<sup>252</sup> and the readers found in it what they were searching for: Knowledge about God that lead to know Him and experience Him.

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**252. O'Day** (1986:345) points to another aspect of the ability and power of the Johannine narrative, stating that "the power of the Fourth Gospel's rhetoric depends in large measure upon its ability to create a linguistic, textual, imagistic world that addresses the needs and yearnings of a concrete religious community".

**Phelan** (1988:138) depicts the narrative of this Gospel as a "rhetorical transaction with ideological and theological effects and consequences for a given reading experience".

Moreover, the ability of the Johannine narrative to constitute an experience of God and to create spirituality, finds its roots in the merits of its sacred nature, the richness of its theological contents,<sup>253</sup> and the effectiveness of its literary devices. The elements of this trio are threading throughout the entire Gospel, as they interconnect, reinforce, and complete one another throughout to convey *God's initiative* through a “spiritual Gospel”, saturated by spirituality and expressed by themes revolving around the incarnate Word of God and His plan to make His Father known, and at the same time drawing the readers to experience Him through this knowledge. To grasp the dynamic and the effectiveness of this ability, one must distinguish and follow these themes through the entirety of this narrative. These themes, like the other accounts of the New Testament, create a certain spiritual atmosphere overflowing with a significant opportunity for its readers to have their own experience of God. In other words, these accounts introduce their readers to what the first Christians and the apostles have experienced while following Jesus, witnessing His deeds and listening to His teaching. The authors of these accounts employed the maximum of their ability and the breadth of their knowledge to record, in inspired words, the elements of the *Father's initiative (Creation, Incarnation, Revelation, and Salvation)* accomplished by His incarnate Word, and explained by His Holy Spirit.

In order to convey this initiative and assist his readers to promptly embrace its significance, respond positively to it, and consequently benefit from its merits during their spiritual journey of experiencing God, John fashioned distinctive theological themes by employing various literary devices. These have been the center of attention throughout the history of biblical hermeneutics, and certainly will be for years to come. As this is not the place to discuss all these themes and devices, it is helpful to evoke some of them just to point out the involvement of John's narrative in the above-mentioned journey. During this journey, one can compare these themes to a detailed map that leads to the final destination: Knowing God and experiencing Him. Likewise, the literary devices can be compared to useful tools that help to decode this map, and to a proficient instigator that keeps the readers motivated and entangled in the narrative while reading it.

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**253.** This expression may bring to mind the Johannine Theology, Christology, Pneumatology, and Ecclesiology. These are not discussed specifically and individually in this thesis but are rather evoked generally and deliberately in the discussion conducted in this paragraph and in the next Chapter, and in adequate places, when it is needed.

In this journey, Jesus is the light that guides (Jn 1:4, 9; 8:12), and the way that leads to the Father (Jn 3:13; 14:6). While decoding this map -reading John's narrative- the readers notice that the journey begins with Jesus, transforming the previous meanings of the following Jewish symbols into new ones with much deeper significance: The jars for ritual purification at Cana in Galilee (Jn 2:1-12); the temple in Jerusalem (Jn 2:13-25); a rabbi (Jn 3:1-21); and a revered well in Samaria (Jn 4:1-42). In doing so, Jesus revealed His glory, making His disciples believe in Him (Jn 2:11): He hinted at His salvific death, declaring that He is the new *temple* where the Father dwells (Jn 2:21), and He revealed the generous love of God the Father and the sacrificial love of the Son (Jn 3:1-12) promising to grant eternal life (Jn 3:16). Each of these events raises an emotional response within the readers. Though the rise of emotions is not consistent, and emotional impact can be variable, still witnessing such positive transformation in the meaning of symbols -that have been esteemed for centuries- creates in the readers' hearts admiration towards Jesus. Likewise, learning about how He transformed the water from an ordinary cleansing liquid into a good wine (preventing the embarrassment of the 'president of the feast' and the 'bridegroom' in front of their guests, while at the same time bringing joy to everyone), and from a natural element that satisfies a basic need into a powerful living water that grants eternal life, all of this creates, in the readers, an excitement that draws them to Jesus. These two scenes are part of a larger theme: Water.<sup>254</sup> Reading the different passages, the readers will notice that water, as one of the most essential elements in sustaining existence, is linked to life and eternal life, and that Jesus has power over it as well as the power of giving the living water. Note the following associated motifs: Jesus heals the invalid man at the Pool of Bethesda (Jn 5:1-18); He walks on water of the lake (Jn 6:16-21); He offers living water during the Feast of the Tabernacles (Jn 7:37-39); He heals the man born blind at the Pool of Siloam (Jn 9); and He washes the feet of His Disciples (Jn 13:1-17). Thus, reading this section of the above-mentioned map, the readers feel loved, included in something bigger than them, and reassured that Jesus will be there for them in both the moments of joy and at the times of difficulties. Additionally, the convincing observations recorded by the Evangelist stating that many people believed in Jesus after/in the course of every scene, reassure the readers that they too can experience God through Jesus as these people did.

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<sup>254</sup> **Brown** (2015:289-298) maintains: "Water imagery permeates John's Gospel...Between the introduction and culmination of his earthly ministry, Jesus interacts with water continually... Likewise, his teaching often identified his mission with water, especially when he spoke with the Pharisee and leader of the Jews" cf. also (**Jones** 1997).

A second section of this map consists of another panorama showing Jesus at Jewish feasts: The Passover (Jn 2:13-4:54; 6:1-71; 11:1-12:36); Sabbath (Jn 5:1-47); the Feast of the Tabernacles (Jn 7:1-10:21); and Dedication (Jn 10:22-42). This brings to the readers' mind some biblical images: Jesus compared the Kingdom of God to a great banquet (Lk 14:15-24); a father held a feast when his prodigal son returned (Lk 15:11-24); and other happy images: Abundance of food and drink to satisfy hunger (Jn 6:1-14); and celebrating and rejoicing with friends and loved ones (Jn 2:1-12). This panorama also focuses on showing how Jesus is the fulfillment of what these feasts commemorate and symbolize.

A third section of this map encloses the records of *seven signs*<sup>255</sup> and *seven discourses*:<sup>256</sup>

- 1<sup>st</sup> Sign: Jesus transformed the water to wine at Cana of Galilee (Jn 2:1-11)  
1<sup>st</sup> Discourse: about heavenly things versus earthly things (Jn 3:1-21)
- 2<sup>nd</sup> Sign: The cure of a royal official's son (Jn 4:46-54)  
2<sup>nd</sup> Discourse: about the Living Water that brings eternal life (Jn 4:1-42)
- 3<sup>rd</sup> Sign: The healing of a sick man at the pool of Bethesda (Jn 5:1-18)  
3<sup>rd</sup> Discourse: about the Father and the Son (Jn 5:19-47)
- 4<sup>th</sup> Sign: The Miracle of the Loaves (Jn 6:1-15)  
4<sup>th</sup> Discourse: about the Bread of Life (Jn 6:22-66)
- 5<sup>th</sup> Sign: Jesus comes to his Disciples walking on the waters (Jn 6:12-21)  
5<sup>th</sup> Discourse: Jesus foretells his departure and offers living water to all (Jn 7:14-39)
- 6<sup>th</sup> Sign: The cure of a man born blind (Jn 9)  
6<sup>th</sup> Discourse: Jesus is the Light of the World (Jn 8:12-59)
- 7<sup>th</sup> Sign: The resurrection of Lazarus (Jn 11:1-54)  
7<sup>th</sup> Discourse: about the Good Shepherd (Jn 10:1-18)

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**255.** Suggested references on the *Signs* topic:

**Guthrie**, D 1967. The Importance of Signs in the Fourth Gospel. *Vox Evangelica* 5:72-83.

**Tenney**, M C 1975. Topics from the Gospel of John. Part II: The Meaning of the Signs.

*Bibliotheca Sacra* 132:145-60.

**Rusch**, F A 1978. The Signs and the Discourse - The Rich Theology of John 6.

*Currents in Theology and Mission* 5:386-390.

**Ciholas**, P 1982. The Socratic and Johannine Σημειον as Divine Manifestation.

*Perspectives in Religious Studies* 9:251-265.

**Voelz**, J W 1995. Multiple Signs, Levels of Meaning and Self as Text: Elements of Intertextuality.

*Semeia* 69:149-164.

**Belle**, G 1998. The meaning of signs in Jn 20:30-31. *Ephemerides Theologicae Lovanienses* 74(4):300-325.

**Culpepper**, R A 2008. Cognition in John: The Johannine Signs as Recognition Scenes.

*Perspectives in Religious Studies* 35:251-260.

**Lee**, D A 2015. Signs and Works: The Miracles in the Gospels of Mark and John. *Colloquium* 47(1):89-101.

**256.** Suggested reference on the *Discourses* topic:

**Leung**, M 2014. The Discourse Function of "He Answered and Said" in the Gospel of John.

*Bibliotheca Sacra* 171(July-September):307-327.

It is generally accepted that John's account of the signs performed by Jesus, is intentionally selective. They were designed to generate a twofold faith – that Jesus is the Christ, and that He is the Son of God. These signs and discourses are tightly interrelated and support each other. Both of them further illuminate the functionality of John's narrative: The discourses reveal various aspects of Jesus' power given to Him by His Father; it is a power that Jesus exercised to make the Father known and to assist His Children/the members of His *Familia Dei* who believed in Him. Referring to the signs or miracles acted as a confirmation that Jesus has this power. Additionally, many of those who heard these discourses and witnessed these signs encountered Jesus and believed in Him, as they learned more about the Father and His plan, and accordingly experienced Him through Jesus. However, those (the subsequent readers) who did not have the privilege to hear these discourses directly from Jesus, or did not have the unique opportunity of witnessing these signs, are not disadvantaged, because they still have the words of Jesus (recorded in John's narrative), which are as effective as these signs in stimulating faith.<sup>257</sup> The same effectiveness can also be found in the fourth section of the aforementioned map.

The fourth section of this map comprises the famous ἐγώ εἰμι sayings.<sup>258</sup> Throughout the narrative of his Gospel, John recorded significant declarations made by Jesus using the divine declaration, 'I am' (Ex 3:14). Simmons (1988:94) states that "the *Ego Eimi* sayings in the Fourth Gospel fall into two broad categories. The expression is found on the lips of Jesus twenty-four times in the Fourth Gospel. Fifteen times it is used with a predicate and nine times it is absolute or without a predicate". In the same line of thought, Ball (1996:174-175) makes a helpful distinction between the two categories by suggesting that the "*I am* sayings [are implemented] with an image to be seen as emphasizing Jesus' identity in relation to his role (for others), while the other *I am* sayings should be seen as emphasizing Jesus' identity in itself".

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**257.** Suggested references about this topic:

**Thompson, M** 1991. Signs and Faith in the Fourth Gospel. *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 1:89-108.

**Johns, L & Miller, D** 1994. The Signs as Witnesses in the Fourth Gospel: Reexamining the Evidence *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 56:519-535.

**Köstenberger, A J** 1995. The Seventh Johannine Sign: A Study in John's Christology. *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 5:87-103.

**258.** Suggested references about this topic:

**Freed, E D** 1979. *Ego Eimi* in John 1:20 and 4:25. *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 41:288-291

**Simmons, B E** 1988. A Christology of the "I Am" Sayings in the Gospel of John. *The Theological Educator* 38 (Fall):94-103.



According to Vereş (2008:110-111), John does not only “winnow the wonders, but he also enriches substantially their purports, calling them *signs*. They are not simply wonders but signs; therefore, they have a special meaning...through these, Jesus Christ is proclaimed as the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies”. Hutchison (2011:64) echoes this theory arguing that in these sayings “particular Old Testament metaphors were chosen by Christ to describe His messianic identity in the New Covenant and in the process to contrast Israel’s failures under the Old Covenant”. Bultmann ([1951] 2007:33) states: “He who formerly had been the bearer of the message was drawn into it and became its essential contents. The proclaimer became the proclaimed”. Barclay ([1975] 2001:xxiv) asserts that “the wonderful works of Jesus were not simply wonderful; they were windows opening on to the reality, which is God”. Nevertheless, many scholars have focused on seven of these sayings;<sup>259</sup> they agree that John selected them intentionally with a clear purpose in mind, as it is mentioned in John **20:31**.

These seven sayings, which appear in the majority of pertinent publications, are used here to point out that their role was an important part of John’s narrative involvement in the above-discussed attuned interaction that establishes an experience of God. These sayings emphasize *who* Jesus is and illustrate some of His functions: To sustain, to illuminate, to admit, to care for, to give life, to guide, and to make productive. Reading/hearing these words, the believers feel safe and reassured that through the bread of life, the hunger (which threatens their life) will be overcome; and the anxiety (about what to eat or what to drink) will be conquered. This means that their nature will be restored into its original status as it was before the verdict was passed in Eden (Gn **3:17**). They will receive knowledge that leads them to faith, love, and salvation. Their hearts will enjoy tranquility and happiness, because Jesus, as the door, the good shepherd, and the way, will lead them to His Father’s house (Jn **14:1-3**), into the realm of divinity where they will get close to Him. This is indeed a powerful way to experience Him through reading John’s narrative, and it is the culmination of their journey. At this point, a few words about the functionality of this narrative and its role in this experience are added to the discussion.

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**259.** These sayings are:

- “I am the bread of life” (Jn **6:35**, 41, 48, 51)
- “I am the light of the world” (Jn **8:12**)
- “I am the door of the sheep” (Jn **10:7**, 9)
- “I am the good shepherd” (Jn **10:11**, 14)

- “I am the Resurrection, and the Life” (Jn **11:25**)
- “I am the way, the truth, and the life” (Jn **14:6**)
- “I am the vine” (Jn **15:1**, 5)





#### 4.3.3.2 Effects in John's Narrative that constitute an Experience of God

Investigating the effects of texts, including biblical texts, on their readers, is not a new topic. Many scholars have researched it from various angles with different strengths, generating prolific findings and a noteworthy wealth of knowledge. The discussion presented in this section relies on this heritage and elaborates on what has been discussed, to underline the role of the effects of John's narrative in constituting an experience of God/creating spirituality. In an article, Van der Merwe<sup>260</sup> discusses the eschatological events described in 1 John 2:28-3:10, and the implications of this text on how 'people should live prior to these events'. He refers to the linguistic strategies used in this text that have the ability to awaken certain spiritualities in the readers in order to motivate them to act according to the recommendations given in the text, and proposes four effects that constitute "lived experiences in the contemplative reading of texts":

*The first effect:* Reading a text creates a dynamic interaction between the text and the reader.

*The second effect:* Reading a text composes images.

*The third effect:* The dialectic of pretension and retention.

*The fourth effect:* Entanglement in the text – the way new experiences are formed.

Based on the significant affinity between the Fourth Gospel and 1 John, the four effects proposed by Van der Merwe are taken as a starting point to discuss the effects in John's narrative that constitute an experience of God, and to further underline the involvement of this narrative in the above-mentioned *Attuned Interaction* that establishes an experience of God, creates new spiritualities, and enhances existent ones consequently.<sup>261</sup> Waaijman (2002b:242, 244) argues that spiritualities embedded in texts are created through a dynamic interaction between text and reader, the composition of images, and the dialectic of pretension and retention. Iser (1978:131) calls this interaction "to be entangled in a text". According to Mina (2004:337-340), texts are primordial testimonies and pristine teachings on the life in the Spirit, the sacred books and traditions. They play an elemental role in establishing the religious tradition, as a religious community within which various schools of spirituality arise.

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<sup>260</sup> Van der Merwe, D, 2015a. 1 John: Effects in biblical texts that constitute lived experiences in the contemplative reading of those texts, *in die Skriflig* 49(2). <http://dx.doi.org/10.4102/ids.v49i2.1930>.

<sup>261</sup> The narrative of the Fourth Gospel also has the ability to reflect its author's experience of God – a topic that suggests future studies.

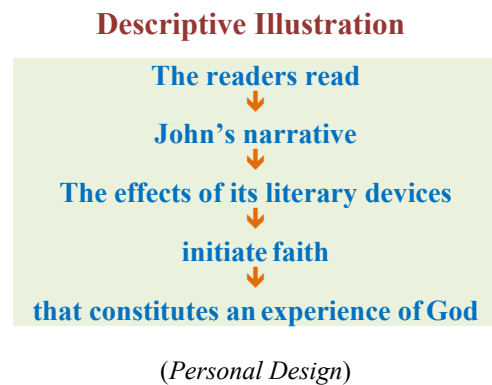
#### 4.3.3.2.1 First Effect

Van der Merwe (2015a:3, 5 of 9 pages) argues that reading a text creates a dynamic interaction between the text and the reader; it creates “lived experiences” inside the reader: “Reading comprises a continuous dialogical negotiation for meaning between text and reader that evokes varied spiritualities”. Investigating 1 John 2:28-3:10, he discerns two kinds of “strategies” which are used in the text to generate spiritualities and conduct within an eschatological environment, namely *formal* (participation; detachment; transformation) and *informal* (semantic networks; linguistic features; dialectic language; prominent themes; intimate forms of address). In his argument, he builds upon the suggestion of Iser (1978:107) that considers a text as a “structured prefiguration”, stating that “the way in which texts are received depends on both the readers and the texts. Reading is certainly not a one-way process, but a dynamic interaction between text and reader”. He also utilizes the proposal of Waaijman (2002b:248), who maintains that “readers become actively involved when they understand and imagine the meaning of the text and when they reflect on the entire text”. Van der Merwe concludes his argument by stating: “The rhetoric of the Elder, as embedded in the text, will then influence the lived experiences of the readers and persuade them to act in particular ways”.

Elaborating on his argument, the thesis suggests that reading the Fourth Gospel creates a similar ‘dynamic interaction’ between its narrative and its readers. This interaction has the potential to create spirituality and constitute an experience of God. This potential finds its roots in the above-discussed involvement of John’s narrative and the involvement of its readers (discussed in the next section). This narrative (with the sacredness of its nature, the charisma of its style, and the richness of its contents) has the ability to satisfy (if not all of them, at least the majority of) the needs of its readers. Furthermore, when the readers decide to read John (or the Bible in general), they approach it with a certain knowledge of being in front of a sacred text. They also come with their expectations (which vary from one reader to another), hoping to find satisfaction for whatever they are looking for. Their decision (including the circumstances and the reasons behind it) to read this Gospel initiates this “dynamic interaction”, and at the same time, the process of experiencing God. Though the timing, the length, and the pace of this experience are hard to define or delineate, because it belongs to the mysterious relationship between God and believers, between the divine realm and the human domain, still its occurrence is guaranteed.

Most likely, before they came to read John’s narrative, the readers knew that they were going to read the words of God and words about Him. This knowledge sets a suitable atmosphere for such occurrence. And when they started reading it, this narrative captivated their attention and kept them engaged (in the aforementioned *dynamic interaction*/act of reading) through the effect of the *literary devices* employed by its author in composing it. Nowadays, it is generally accepted that John used a variety of these devices to present Jesus to his readers as the Christ and the Son of God, at the same time encouraging them to believe in Him (Jn 20:31).<sup>262</sup> Thus, it is logical to say that these devices were meant to have an effect on the readers. Likewise, it is reasonable to say that such effect would initiate faith, which creates an experience of God.

A careful investigation shows that a certain pattern can be found while examining the effects of each of the Johannine literary devices. The illustration on the right shows schematically the connection between these devices and the establishment of an experience of God.



The Johannine literary devices introduce Jesus as an exemplar to follow and provide the readers with a meaning of His teaching to be applied to their own *status quo*. They seem to embody both John’s theology and the legacy of the Old Testament; that what gives them a persuasive character. They carry with them the undeniable credence of past experiences of God, the guaranteed seeds of a new spirituality, and the certitude of occurrences of similar experiences.

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**262.** cf. **Culpepper** (1983:6-7); **Duke** (1985:1); **O’Day** (1986:47); **Roth** (1987:6-29); and **Gavrilov** (1997:56-73). Moreover, many scholars have studied, from different angles, the *literary devices* employed by John in his narrative, but not from the perspective of their role in constituting an experience of God. Examples are:

- ♦ *Chiasm*: **Man** (1984:146-157).
- ♦ *Circular Reasoning*: **Rips** (2002:767-795).
- ♦ *Dialectic*: **Atkins** (1968:3-23); and **Lamm** (2003:1-25).
- ♦ *Discourses and Dialogues*: **Brown** (1965:25-34).
- ♦ *Double Meaning*: **Richard** (1985:96-112); and **Wead** (1970b:106-120).
- ♦ *Inclusion*: **Ellis** (1999:269-338).
- ♦ *Irony*: **Wead** (1974); and **Hisayasu** (2000:373-387).
- ♦ *Repetitive Resumption*: **Von Wahlde** (1976:520-533).
- ♦ *Symbolism*: **Schneiders** (1977); and **Painter** (1979:26-41).
- ♦ *Understanding & Misunderstanding*: **Jonge** (1971:337-359); and **Carson** (1982:59-91).

Although not all the *literary devices* are discussed in this section, one of them catches the eye: *Misunderstanding*. This device was usually instigated by dialogues established between Jesus and other Johannine characters, and revolved around terms and expressions that have multiple meanings. It was triggered because these characters interpreted what Jesus said on an ordinary or physical level, whereas He was actually speaking on a more profound or spiritual level. Analyzing the topics, the sequence, and the consequences of this device, one notices that John used them in a pattern connecting fundamental elements of the human existence (birth; body; nourishments; death) to Jesus (life; death; resurrection):

- John 2:19-22: “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up”.
  - ★ Jesus’ intended meaning: His own body (the new *temple*).
  - Related element of human existence: The body.
  - ❖ Consequence: “His disciples believed the scripture and what He had said” (Jn 2:22).
- John 3:3-10: “No one can see the Kingdom of God without being born from above”.
  - ★ Jesus’ intended meaning: Having eternal life (from God/being with Him).
  - Related element of human existence: Earthly birth.
  - ❖ Consequence: A faith matured over time and shown by deeds of love (Jn 19:38-42).
- John 4:10-15: ‘Living water’; ‘spring of water’.
  - ★ Jesus’ intended meaning: Gushing up to eternal life.
  - Related elements of human existence: Water, a vital element to live/survive.
  - ❖ Consequence: “Many Samaritans of that town believed in Him” (Jn 4:39).
- John 6:41-51: “I am the Bread of Life”.
  - ★ Jesus’ intended meaning: Live forever – having eternal life.
  - Related elements of human existence: Bread, another vital element to live/survive.
  - ❖ Consequence: Peter (the twelve: *We*) professed his/their faith in Jesus (Jn 6:68-69).
- John 11:11-15: “Our friend Lazarus is at rest, I am going to wake him”.
  - ★ Jesus’ intended meaning: Jesus is the life; He gives life/eternal life/conquers death.
  - Related elements of human existence: Death (the biggest threat of human’s existence).
  - ❖ Consequence: “Many of the Jews...believed in Him” (Jn 11:45).

The pattern noticed in these -and in the other components of this device- is the same: Jesus said something; one person or a number of people misunderstood Him; Jesus slowly brought them to a deeper understanding; they -and other people- ended up believing in Him, with the implication that they simultaneously had a special experience of God through encountering Jesus. This reassures the readers that when they encounter the word of God through reading the words about Him (in this case, John’s narrative) they might experience God despite their lack of knowledge about Him, His will or plans, and their circumstances.

#### 4.3.3.2.2 Second Effect

Van der Merwe (2015a:6-7 of 9) maintains that

When biblical texts are read, the readers' imagination composes images of what the text presents to them. The reader subjectively and selectively composes...the images out of the multifarious aspects of the text as well as the metaphors embedded in the text...When family metaphoric is applied to a particular group of people in a specific situation, bonding power, images and lived experiences are created, and the reader is drawn imaginatively into the sphere of the household of God.

Building upon this, it can be suggested that John's narrative is capable of producing a similar effect on the readers through its figurative language, especially the *Familia Dei* metaphoric (this motif is discussed in the next Chapter). The functionality of this effect is better understood in connection with the two driven forces behind it: First, the impact/functionality of the semantic tension created between the tenor and the vehicle of metaphor, or the generated dynamic between the literal meaning and the figurative meaning of the metaphor; and second, the concept of family within both its Greco-Roman context and its Old and New Testament background.<sup>263</sup>

Lee (2010:115) states: "The Gospel of John uses a number of images to express its understanding of what it means to believe in Jesus and to belong to the community of faith. These images, drawn from the material world, are used as...vehicles of the divine world".<sup>264</sup> Brown (2014:14) argues: "Human beings learn the use of words in application to the sensible world. So clearly, if the jump to the divine is to be made, language will need to be stretched in analogies, images, and metaphors, what are in effect the common tools of the imagination". The following aspects of the above-mentioned functionality are highlighted to point out the ingenuity of John in using metaphors to motivate his readers to believe in Jesus, and how these (Johannine) metaphors create and/or enhance their experience of God:

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<sup>263</sup>. For an insightful info about the Greco-Roman context and the New Testament, see: **Botha** (1992:195-215).

<sup>264</sup>. On the *imagery in John*, cf. **Zimmermann** (2006:1-43).  
On texts and the mystagogical world, cf. **Mina** (2004:335-354).  
On metaphor and biblical thought, cf. **Macky** (1990:31-56).

- In John, metaphors express abstract theological beliefs in concrete concepts in order for the readers to understand them easier. Take for example the first metaphor in John, namely the Word/Logos: Just like words convey the thoughts, the intentions, and the identity of their authors, so the Word/Logos makes the Father known (Jn 1:18).
- In John, metaphors create familiarity.<sup>265</sup> By nature, people love to recognize things, and whenever they cannot do so, the brain embarks on a process of employing certain mental patterns that help the brain perceiving and understanding a given unfamiliar thing. For example, when Jesus identifies Himself as the door (Jn 10:9), this does not mean that He is a real door, but a metaphorical door, implying that the readers/listeners must fill this identification with meaning by transferring certain aspects of the door onto Jesus' identity. Beale (2014:265) correctly states: "Human assertions have both explicit and implicit meaning". Therefore, when Jesus is depicted as the 'door', the readers would notice new, previously hidden, aspects of Jesus.
- In John, metaphors stimulate emotions<sup>266</sup> and trigger feelings which make its narrative appealing to the readers and more effective in creating spiritual experiences: At the shore of the lake, when Jesus referred to Himself as the bread of life (Jn 6:1-67), this statement/metaphor generated both negative emotions (Jn 6:60) and positive emotions (Jn 6:68-69).
- Each one of the Johannine metaphors has the ability to draw the reader's attention to very specific elements of John's message, which leads to a deeper understanding of its theology, to interact with it, and consequently believe in Jesus. As such, this message does not leave the readers with a simple image of the Jesus who was/the Logos who became flesh, and a mere record of His mission, while waiting for the Son of God who will come again at the end of time. Noticeably, it (the aspect of John's message conveyed via metaphors) creates, in the minds of the readers, familiar images of a loving Christ, who quenches every thirst (Jn 4:14), and satisfies every hunger (Jn 6:35). Images that readers recognize draw their attention, just like when one recognizes a familiar face in the midst of a large crowd of unfamiliar people. Furthermore, if at the time of John, all of his readers/listeners were familiar with the objects employed, in the narrative of his gospel, as metaphors like shepherd (Jn 10:1-184) and vine (Jn 15:1-17); still not all of his subsequent readers/listeners are. However, both kinds of readers are familiar (even from different perspectives) with the concept of Family.

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<sup>265</sup>. On Johannine metaphors and their meanings and functions, cf. **Kysar** (1991:81-111).

<sup>266</sup>. On emotions in Early Christianity, cf. **Barton** (2011:571-591).

In John's era,<sup>267</sup> family surpassed the spectrum of the conventional familial unit consisting of husband, wife, and children, to include also grandparents, unmarried uncles or unmarried aunts, and even slaves.<sup>268</sup> It was depicted as a household within which members had different roles and undertook various responsibilities. The head of the household fulfilled the main role, being very powerful, managing the entire household, exercising authority over all of its members, and implementing the traditional family values.<sup>269</sup> These families were patriarchal, as the father had the highest authority, while parents were respected and honored (Ex 20:12). Punt (2009:1) asserts that "marriage and family...were perceived to provide continuity and stability in the social order... [Bible] texts provide normative and regulating principles or guidelines for determining the contents and structure of traditional...family values".

The use of family metaphors and terminology (including references to brother/s; brothers and sisters; father; mother, son/s; daughter/s; child/ren; inheritance terminology; God's house, etc.), as well as the references regarding the reinforcement of these values, are abundant in the New Testament.<sup>270</sup> According to Sanders (2002:117-128), references to the family and related concepts in the Bible are more useful for theologizing than moralizing, and for understanding the involvement of God in human lives than for human relationships. Barclay (1997:66-80) argues that family was the bearer of religion in both Judaism and early Christianity. Punt (2009:13-14) asserts that Roman social relations always had a sacred character ... both living and the ancestors were considered sacred. He agrees with Hollingshead (1998:106-107), who asserts that "the *paterfamilias* was able to sire children and perpetuate family; he was able to found new life, but always in the context of a founding that has gone on before". Thus, perceiving John's use of the family metaphoric within the above-mentioned context, the metaphorical connection that the Johannine readers made between the dynamic of the family and the relationship between God and those who believe in Him through His Son Jesus (His children) becomes clear. This makes it easier to understand the effect of John's narrative on its readers.

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<sup>267</sup>. As it is was the case in the eras of both the Old and the New Testament, cf. Colijn (2004), and Wright (1983).

<sup>268</sup>. On *Family*, cf. Moxnes (1997 b); Cahill (2000); and Thatcher (2007).

<sup>269</sup>. On the topic of *traditional family values*, cf. Frilingos (2000); and Tsang (2005) On *household management*, cf. Balch (1981:65-121); and Schüssler Fiorenza (1983).

<sup>270</sup>. For example: (Col 3:18-4:1); (Ep 5:21-6:8); (1 Tm 2:8-15; 5:11-16; 6:1-2); (Tt 2:2-10); and (1 P 2:18-3:7).

On family and related motifs in the New Testament, cf. Barton (1996:451-462); Sanders (2002:117-128); Köstenberger (2004); and Osiek (2005:216-217).





#### 4.3.3.2.3 Third Effect

Van der Merwe (2015a:8-9 of 9 pages) has the conviction that

Repeated (contemplative) reading or studying of the same (biblical) text will create various lived experiences. This will also happen when this text as a text becomes more familiar to the reader and as the reader develops more insight into it.

Elaborating on this argument and applying it on the Fourth Gospel, the involvement of John's repetition in creating an experience of God when it is read/heard is underlined here. Many scholars have approached the *repetition* and its functionality in John's narrative from various angles.<sup>271</sup> Discussing the style of John, Schnackenburg ([1968] 1980 I:112-113) mentions *repetition* as one of the technical aids employed by what he calls 'oral tradition' in its efforts to help the memory of the listeners and readers of John. Comparing a functional reading of John to listen to a balanced musical symphony, Du Rand (1996:59-70) discusses this Gospel's repetitions in connection with 'true discipleship' and 'a tree of relationships' (between the Father, the Son, the Paraclete, the cosmos, and the disciples/believers). He considers these repetitions as one of the forces that leads to experiencing the power of the Fourth Gospel as a particular sense of causality through which John's readers experience the effective meaning in a comprehensible, emotional sequence, and as a narratological focus conceived to convince the readers to orientate to true discipleship in a life-giving relationship with the 'committed God' through His Son. In the Johannine model of relationships affective meaning flows from the Father, through the Son and the Paraclete, to come to its fulfillment in the relationships to be built by the disciples/believers. Keener ([2003] 2005 I:48) states that "one obvious feature of Johannine style is repetition on a number of levels...it does offer rhetorical emphasis and amplification to the central themes".<sup>272</sup> Van der Watt (2008:75-99) asserts that repetition is a stylistic tool that could be productively utilized in interpreting a given text of John's Gospel. It is an *inter alia* functionally employed by the Evangelist to develop a particular concept, assuming that the readers will supply the necessary contents to this concept.

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<sup>271</sup>. For example: **Thielman** (1991:172), who cites John's redundant use of pronouns and sayings.

<sup>272</sup>. **Burridge** (1997:527) argues that the Fourth Evangelist repeats favorite theological themes, even though he often varies them with favorite synonyms.

On this subject, Van Belle (2009:84-85) writes: “The Secret of the Fourth Evangelist is to be found precisely in his use of various forms of repetition (variation and amplification), whereby he endeavors to keep the attention of his readers time and again”. Mardaga (2012:117) asserts: “By using repetition, variation, and amplification John enhances the concentration of the audience”. To this, it can be added that John has successfully mastered the art of guiding the readers in the reading of his Gospel, enabling them to understand the significance of its literary and theological message. In the *Prologue*, John introduced Jesus as “the only Son, who is close to the Father’s heart, who has made Him known” (Jn 1:18), while in the *Epilogue*, he invited the readers to “believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life through his name” (Jn 20:31). Additionally, in order to provide the readers with a degree of orientation within the narrative, the Evangelist employed various repetitions (variation and amplification) to support these two significant themes. He depicted Jesus in a dramatic way with the intention to involve the readers therein and to lead them to faith. The following motifs are used as examples: World (78 times); love (45 times); Word/Logos (45 times); know (131 times); life (47 times); witness/witnessing (47 times); abide (13 times); glory/glorify (40 times); Father (118 times); and believe (98 times). A closer look at these and the other salient repeated motifs in the Fourth Gospel shows that all of them support one another while elucidating the two aforementioned themes (making the Father known and believing in Jesus). They are skillfully intertwined throughout John’s narrative to convey its theological message to the readers and assist them to comprehend its meaning. Repetitions (variation and amplification) urge the readers to become affectively involved while reading/hearing this narrative. This makes them familiar with its message as expressed in these two themes. Additionally, repetition provides the readers with valuable knowledge to understand its significance.

To conclude, one may say that in the case of the Fourth Gospel, familiarity enhances knowledge, knowledge generates love, love originates faith, and faith leads the believer to abide in the *True Vine* (Jesus Christ), to glorify the *Vinedresser* (His heavenly Father), and to “bear fruits in plenty” (love) (Jn 15:1-17) through the Paraclete (Jn 14:26). Thus, the readers become included in the divine loving realm of the Father, His only begotten Son, and the Holy Spirit. Going through this process is indeed a genuine experience of God initiated by reading John’s narrative.

#### 4.3.3.2.4 Fourth Effect

Discussing the last one of his four suggested effects, Van der Merwe (2015a:8 of 9 pages) approaches the entanglement of the readers with a text from the angle of the interaction between the ‘present text’ and the readers’ ‘past experience’. Borrowing this topic of entanglement with a biblical text, the thesis suggests that the entanglement of the readers with John’s narrative could happen at various levels, such as a cognitive level, emotional level, spiritual level, and behavioral level, all of which, collectively or individually, might constitute an experience of God.

At the *cognitive level*, John’s main message, which revolves around Jesus making His Father known through His teaching and deeds, is grasped *via* the actualization of the readers’ entire capacities to experience, imagine, understand, reflect, and to interact. In the Fourth Gospel, the teachings of Jesus<sup>273</sup> were conveyed through conversations held either with individuals or with group of people,<sup>274</sup> parables,<sup>275</sup> discourses and metaphors – these are also noticeable in His prayers. Jesus taught in various settings,<sup>276</sup> and made it clear that His teaching comes from the Father who sent Him (Jn 7:16-18; 8:26, 28, 38; 12:49-50).

Additionally, this message enters the readers’ experience and cognitive faculties as objective data provoking questions about/initiating response to God’s initiative conveyed to them through the teaching of Jesus as recorded in John’s narrative. Thus, the readers would start, as the disciples did, recognizing factors that were previously unknown (Jn 16:29), and realizing the need for further illumination (Jn 16:12-14). The contents of Jesus’ teaching, the literary style through which it is expressed, and the significance of the places in which it was conveyed, could be considered as power elements that entangled the Johannine readers at the cognitive level when they heard John’s narrative. This level is tightly connected to the emotional and spiritual levels of entanglement of the readers with this narrative.

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<sup>273</sup>. Listing and elaborating on all of Jesus’ teaching in John are beyond the scope of this thesis.

<sup>274</sup>. i.e. the first two disciples in Jn 1:35-51; Nicodemus in Jn 3:1-21; the Samaritan woman in Jn 4:1-42; the Pharisees in Jn 10:1-19; and the crowd in Jn 6:22-71; 8:12-59.

<sup>275</sup>. The Fourth Evangelist does not record Jesus, telling narrative parables like those found in the Synoptic Gospels. Six examples of the so-called ‘abridged parables’ can be listed here: John 3:29; 10:1-5; 8:35; 11:9-10; 16:21; 12:24.

<sup>276</sup>. For example in the synagogue (Jn 6:59); the temple (Jn 7:14, 28; 8:2, 20; 18:20); the hillside (Jn 6:2); and the lake’s shore (Jn 6:22).

The emotional level of entanglement of the readers with John's narrative cannot be separated from the cognitive one. They support and complete each other in constituting an experience of God during or after the event of reading or hearing this narrative. As the latter leads its readers further into the depth of its theology and the breadth of its Christology, their threefold entanglement (cognitive, emotional, and spiritual) or their journey of experiencing God moves along lines shaped by Jesus' teaching as it is recorded by the Fourth Evangelist. These lines are also shaped by the Father's love towards His Son and that of the Son towards His Father. Both of them are at work (Jn 5:19-20) to include, in this realm of divine love, all of the believers -the living (Jn 5:24) and the dead (Jn 5:25)- by giving them eternal life. In order to help His believers to understand this and to lead them to the 'complete truth', Jesus promised them to send his Holy Spirit/the Paraclete/the Spirit of truth (Jn 16:5-15).

Although the emotional level of entanglement of the readers with John's narrative encompasses a cluster of emotions that the believers have when they read or hear it, it is sufficient at this point to mention that the aforementioned lines "institute" believers in an awareness of being included in the *Familia Dei* and becoming "the children of God". They feel loved and are recipients of the gifts of life and truth. In this dimension, Jesus is both making His Father known and granting the believers a "new identity" (becoming members of the *Familia Dei*/children of God), which enables them to know the Father and to experience God.

The spiritual level of entanglement of the readers with John's narrative finds its roots in the two above-discussed levels and reaches its completeness in the decision to accept Jesus and follow Him, as well as in believing in Jesus, and in His Father who sent Him. Reading this narrative, the attentive readers soon notice the fragility and incompetence of the human nature without the divine intervention (Jn 15:5). Simultaneously, they realize its great potential and its ability to reach the fullness of this potential, becoming "children of God" (Jn 1:12), having their "joy completed" (Jn 15:11), performing "the same works" as Jesus did (Jn 14:12), and passing 'from death to life' (Jn 5:25). All of these culminate and reach their fullness in the most significant aspect of this potentiality: Becoming a divine *dwelling place* (Jn 14:23).

Although the emotional level of entanglement varies from one reader to another, it leads to a spiritual journey whatever the circumstances might be – a journey to follow the One who is “the Way” that leads to the Father (Jn 14:6, 9). The essence of this journey is experiencing the Father’s divine initiative towards His children through His only begotten Son, who is the heart of this experience: Without Him no one can experience the Father. In fact, the above-discussed levels of entanglement lead the readers to encounter Jesus as He is depicted in the *Prologue*: Jesus as the Eternal ‘Logos’ (Jn 1:1), the only begotten Son, “who is close to the Father’s heart” (Jn 1:18), through whom “all things came into being” (Jn 1:3-4). He ‘became flesh’ and ‘lived among us’ (Jn 1:14), with a mission to make His Father known (Jn 1:18). And as the Johannine narrative unfolds, the identity of Jesus is revealed/introduced to the readers by recording His deeds (cf. Jn 9:13-39; 13:1-11), or by using metaphors (Jn 6:35; 8:12; 10:11; 15:1). Additionally, His mission is expressed in various ways: In a question (Jn 1:38), a conversation (Jn 1:47-51), a command (Jn 13:34), a judgment (Jn 5:27), and a prayer (Jn 17). Here, it is noteworthy to mention that the prayer of Jesus recorded in John 17 can also evoke spirituality, and consequently leads the reader to experience God.

These three levels of entanglement are very essential to the Johannine experience of God, as they are interwoven and interconnected in a tight manner within the dynamic of experiencing the divine life and love. To ignore these levels of entanglement would result in not grasping the entire significance of it dynamic.<sup>277</sup> A careful consideration of these three levels can be regarded as a valuable perspective to perceive the experience of God in John’s Gospel. This observation concludes the discussion on the involvement of John’s narrative in the *attuned interaction* that establishes an experience of God. It simultaneously prepares the platform to discuss the involvement of the readers in this interaction.

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<sup>277</sup>. For more insight about the topic, see:

Kelly A J [1993] 2003. *An Expanding Theology. Faith in a World of Connections*. Sydney: E. J. Dwyer.

Web version: <http://dlibrary.acu.edu.au/staffhome/ankelly/>

Loneragan B J F 1971. *Method in Theology*. London: Darton, Longman and Todd.

Kelly A & Moloney F J 2003. *Experiencing God in the Gospel of John*. Mahwah: Paulist Press.

#### 4.3.4 The Involvement of the Readers

The discussion, conducted in this section, about the *involvement of the readers*<sup>278</sup> in the *attuned interaction* that establishes an experience of God, and the elaboration (on it in the upcoming pages) on their response to *God's initiative* during the journey of experiencing Him, do not aim to get involved in any debate whatsoever, on the epistemological topics concerning John's readership or the hermeneutical approaches dealing with *reader response* or the *world in front of the text* and their ramifications. Rather, both the discussion and the elaboration are done to underline the significance of the place and the role of the Johannine readers in this journey.

Here, three groups of readers are distinguished: The *first group* consists of those readers who met Jesus or knew Him when He was alive, and who, after His Death and Resurrection, read what John wrote about Him. The *second group* comprises the early Christians who did not have the privilege to meet/know Jesus in person, but they have shared with the members of the first group the same social-historical-religious milieu. The members of the *third group* are the subsequent Johannine readers throughout the years and centuries. Each group has offered/offers/will offer its members a different spiritual environment within which their journey of experiencing God was/is lived. Each of these groups has a different type or level of involvement in the above-discussed *attuned interaction*. Additionally, the members of these groups can be classified in two categories: The *first category* consists of those who read the Bible by themselves, for themselves, for whatever the purpose or the motivation of that reading might be; the *second category* comprises those who perform the act of reading for others, for example, a religious leader, a lector, or a celebrant in a given liturgical celebration.<sup>279</sup> Investigating the experience of God by these groups and categories can be a compelling topic for further studies.<sup>280</sup>

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**278.** The discussion in this section generally refers to the early Johannine readers. It could also be applied to the Johannine readers of any era thereafter, taking into considerations both the circumstances of these readers and the state of affairs of their era.

**279.** Gavrilov (1997:56) maintains that "throughout antiquity books were written to be read aloud, and that even private reading often took on some of the characteristics of a modulated declamation. It might be said without undue exaggeration that a book of poetry or artistic prose was not simply a text in the modern sense but something like a score for public or private performance".

**280.** On reading and hearing in ancient contexts, cf. Rodriguez (2009:151-178); and Knox (1968:421-435).

Nevertheless, no matter to which group they belong, or the nature (strength; length; depth; maturity; etc.) of their journey in experiencing God, the readers remain the center of attention of both God through His initiative, and John through his narrative: Since the dawn of creation, God wanted, and still wants, His human creatures and beloved children to be with Him in His kingdom and to enjoy the eternal life He grants them if they believe in His Word/Only Begotten Son and observe the words/the sacred Scriptures written about Him. Thus, God was/is/will always be the initiator and the benefactor of every spiritual journey of experiencing Him.

Additionally, these words -the sacred Scriptures- were written to record God's divine initiative, to establish and facilitate this journey, and to accompany the readers of these words (in this case, John's readers) in this journey. God the Father sent His Son to reveal and explain this initiative to His believers and members of His *Familia Dei*. He sent His Holy Spirit to inspire the authors of the New Testament (as He did to their ancestors who composed the Old Testament) to record this initiative in their writings and to convey it to their readers.

Furthermore, one can say that the involvement of the readers in the above-mentioned *attuned interaction* finds its roots in the cooperation of the inspired biblical authors with the divine inspiration that helped them while composing their writings, as well as in the remarkable relationship between these authors and their writings during the time of composition. It also finds its roots in the valuable contribution of the lectors at the dawn of Christianity. During this era, many of the early hearers or believers were illiterate and did not have access to these written texts in the same manner as the readers of later stages did/do. For them, the only available access to these texts was *via* performances done by a proficient reader or a skilled performer – this fact reduced the lack of literacy. Although there is no complete agreement among scholars on considering John's narrative as a drama, some of them have made a good observation in pointing out certain features of John's employment of dramatic techniques.<sup>281</sup>

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**281.** According to **Connick** (1948:159-169), the purpose of the Fourth Evangelist was consistent with that of a dramatist. And throughout the narrative of his Gospel, there are many evidences of the use of techniques employed normally by dramatists, i.e. Artistic form; Concentrated action; Contrast; Symmetry; Variety; Irony; Time and place indications; and Dialogue pattern.

**Domeris** (1983:31-32) asserts: "In the Johannine drama, Jesus takes the leading role...the central spotlight is focused on Jesus. His presence pervades every scene; his authority dominates all interactions with others, even at his trial; his words govern every conversion in which he engages".





During these performances, the biblical texts were highly visible since they were often read from directly (Lk 4:16-20) or held in the lector's left hand when recited from memory. The likelihood exists that through exposure to repeated performances of a text, an illiterate person could have become familiar enough with a text to have memorized it. Within the intimate context of a Christian house church, the lector may have been immediately accessible to the audience to explain issues arising from the text's contents (cf. Le Donne & Thatcher 2011:16). One should give credit to the role of memorization in preserving and enhancing the effectiveness of this contribution.<sup>282</sup> Therefore, hearers apprehended and reacted to biblical texts as these were read aloud. From their side, the readers came to the spiritual journey of experiencing God with their needs, struggles, joy, dreams, disappointments, sufferings, excitement for a brighter future, and the like. Above all, they came with their hope to encounter Jesus and experience God, with their longing to deepen their knowledge of Him, and with their inspiration to have that experience. Needless to prove here, that throughout its history, the Fourth Gospel has channeled/is still channeling the graces of God the Father to countless readers and to those who believe in Him and in His Only Son through reading/hearing its narrative, graces that satisfied their needs and fulfill their aspirations, in other words, changed their life.

Encountering Jesus is a central theme in the Gospel of John, running throughout its narrative; it is a life-changing event. This is the essence of spirituality and the starting point of the journey of experiencing God. For those who met Jesus and accepted Him, He "gave power to become children of God" (Jn 1:12). This means that their identity has changed from being ordinary human creatures to becoming members of the *Familia Dei*, eligible to all the privileges that comes with this honor, e.g. receiving one gift replacing another (Jn 1:16); eating the heavenly bread and living for ever (Jn 6:50); and dwelling with Jesus in His Father's house (Jn 14:1-4). This means that the believers, at their own level, are able -through the merit of this new gift- to experience God as His children, drawing from the Son's experience of God the Father.

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<sup>282</sup>. The following are some quotes and references that give an insight into this topic:

**Hezser** (2001:496) maintains that "the texts of the New Testament emerged from a society that was... keenly invested in the memorization and rehearsal of significant textual traditions".

**Horsley** ([1987] 2006:x) notes that "in an environment in which communication was mainly oral, oral forms, techniques, and style carried over in the production of manuscripts".

**Thomas** (1991:10) discusses certain universal gestures and their general meanings.

Therefore, when reading this Gospel and meditating on these verses, the readers feel motivated to embark on the timeless and rewarding journey of experiencing God. Another factor that motivates the Johannine readers can be found in the panorama of individual and personal encounters with which John illustrated his narrative. These are the encounters of Jesus and ordinary people coming from different backgrounds carrying on their shoulders the impact of their daily life circumstances. These encounters led to an exceptional spark of faith, which Jesus both affirmed and amplified into a blazing flame that changed the life of these individuals and initiated their experience of God through His Son. Consequently, they went and told other people about Jesus; in their turn, these people ended up believing in Him. Among these individuals are John the Baptizer (Jn 1:29-33); the first two disciples (Jn 1:35-42); Nathanael (Jn 1:47-51); Nicodemus (Jn 3:1-8); the sick man (Jn 5:1-16); the royal official (Jn 4:43-54); the adulterous woman (Jn 8:1-11); the man born blind (Jn 9:1-17); Mary and Martha, the sisters of Lazarus (Jn 9:1-16); and all the noteworthy encounters of the Disciples with Jesus during His ministry, especially during the Last Supper and after His resurrection. To all of these, one can add the experience of the Samaritan woman (Jn 4:1-43), even though one can notice some hesitation in her experience: “Come, see a man who told me everything I ever did. Could this be the Messiah?” [Μήτι οὗτός ἐστιν ὁ Χριστός?] (Jn 4:29). Each of these people had a unique encounter with Jesus that changed their life on a physical level (healing; restoring of health; rising from the dead), on a spiritual level (forgiveness of sins; believing), or on a social level (leaving everything and following Jesus). These individuals were ordinary people before encountering Jesus. After meeting Him, they became His faithful followers (they followed Him through His death and resurrection) and fearless witnesses, proclaiming His good news to their families, circles of friends, and societies.

Although the subsequent readers do not have the same privilege that these people had, namely encountering the historical Jesus/the incarnate Word of God, they would certainly encounter Him through His words recorded in John’s Gospel and consequently have their own experience of Him and of His heavenly Father. In this way the readers become members of the *Familia Dei* through the Son, and witnesses to the Father under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. They become branches of the True Vine (Jn 15:1-17) bearing fruits of unity, complete joy, faith, and salvation. Therefore, they are doing what Jesus has commanded them to do.

Jesus -who was with the Father before creation (Jn 1:1-2)- has experienced His Father in a very special and unique way, because He is close to the Father's heart (Jn 1:18). He learned from the Father and passed it on to His Disciples and believers. Jesus' experience of God can be described with four elements:<sup>283</sup> Knowing the Father, remaining in Him, glorifying Him by doing His will, and making the Father known to others. Moreover, the above-listed Johannine characters had these elements in their own experience of God. In other words, as Jesus was the first to experience God, He did not keep this experience to Himself, but shared its merits and graces with them, as well as with His disciples. In their turn, they encountered Jesus, and experienced God through Him. Consequently, they told the others about this experience, and somehow, like Jesus, they made God known to them.

The *involvement of the readers* in the above-discussed *attuned interaction* has, therefore, among others, an inward aspect towards oneself: The readers read John's narrative for themselves, and experience God, after which some of them share this experience with others, which generates new experiences. It also has an outward aspect: Lectors read this narrative to others, and accordingly these hearers interact with the heard narrative and will have their own experience.

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<sup>283</sup>. In order to keep the follow of the discussion in this paragraph smooth and not burden it with many references, the references from John's narrative, which are related to these elements, are not listed here. However, reading this narrative attentively, leads certainly to all of the relevant verses and passages.

## 4.4 Concluding Remarks

The present Chapter aims at gaining a deeper insight into the Johannine Experience of God. It consists of two main parts. The first part contains considerations on *Religious Experience*, the *Johannine Community*, and the *Fourth Gospel*. The second part suggests and discusses, what it called, an *Attuned Interaction* that establishes an experience of God and constitutes spirituality when the narrative of John is read or heard.

The considerations on *Religious Experience* underlines the fact that the Johannine Experience of God, as any experience in general or a given *religious experience*, consists of various contributing factors that are fundamental to its occurrence(s), instrumental in defining its nature, and essential to the process of examining it and apprehending it. In addition, the Johannine Experience of God correlates with believing in Jesus, who is in the heart of this *experience* and conveys to His believers what He experiences with His Father, who sent Him. Three fundamental features of the religious experiences lived by the early Christians -including the Johannine Community- could be considered as major contributors to their experience of God: First, the influence of the *revelatory events* on these experiences; second, the significance of Jesus' presence in the heart of these experiences; and third, the impact of the interaction between these Christians and their historical-social-spiritual milieu, on their experience of God.

The considerations on *Johannine Community* underline three common elements of the most generally accepted theories on this community: First, John's Gospel offers a significant insight on the Johannine Community within which it was composed; second, *vice versa*, investigating the history of the Johannine Community generates a satisfying comprehension of John's Gospel; and third, the Johannine Community has endured a two-level trauma: Expulsion from the synagogue, and an inner conflict. Moreover, to accommodate the purpose of the thesis, the following annotations about the Johannine Community are intentionally articulated:

- The present thesis considers the Johannine Community as part of the *Familia Dei* according to which the Johannine Experience of God is investigated in the next Chapter.
- The Johannine Community was the prolific cradle within which the experience of God of its members has occurred and developed.
- The Johannine Community had a rich tradition; part of which is reflected in John's narrative.

The considerations on the *Fourth Gospel* direct the attention to a twofold valuable contribution:

- ♦ The first fold consists of an *inward contribution* from the early Christian history into the Fourth Gospel. This contribution enfolds the substantial aspects of this history from which the Fourth Evangelist has drawn his knowledge, experience, inspiration, and motivation to compose his Gospel. It also encloses the significant events that occurred throughout this history and have shaped his theology, spirituality, thoughts, writing style, and experience of God.
- ♦ The second fold is an *outward contribution* from the Fourth Gospel into the Christian history. It consists of the valuable, productive, and abundant input, which this Gospel has brought into the life of its readers (original and subsequent) at both an individual and a communal level (enhancing their spirituality, enriching their devotion, constituting an experience of God). It seems logical to accept that history generates traditions, and tradition creates experience: In the case of the Christians this experience includes their experience of God.

Furthermore, the considerations on the *Fourth Gospel* express the decision of the thesis to adopt the theories -suggested by prominent scholars as discussed above- maintaining that the Gospel of John was composed over a period of time involving various factors, and that its theology, Christology, and spirituality underwent a lengthy process of development. Building upon this decision and elaborating on the interrelated discussion, it is suggested that the connection between all of these factors and the *Johannine Experience of God* finds its meaning in the dynamic relationship existent between time and experience: Time makes experience more mature and significant; while, in return, experience makes time more meaningful and productive.

The outcomes of the above-articulated considerations led to propose/identify certain noteworthy *religious needs* of the Johannine Community, dubbed to be correlated to the Johannine Experience of God: First, the need to feel loved by other members of the community/*Familia Dei*; second, the need to feel accepted, which was generated by the two-fold trauma endured by the members of the community; and third, the need to feel secured, which is closely associated with *belongingness* and forming attachments, that finds its roots in the most traumatic moments in the life of this community. A genuine experience of God has the ability to satisfy these needs. Living such experience has abundant merits, part of which is that the Johannine reader feels loved by the Father and His Son, as well as included and welcomed in the *Familia Dei*.

The second part of this Chapter is a discussion of the suggested *Attuned Interaction* that establishes an experience of God. It is an *interaction* between the involvements of four principal contributing participants in this experience, namely, God the Father, the Fourth Evangelist, the narrative of John, and the readers of this Gospel. The following involvements apply:

- The involvement of God happened/is happening at three levels: He inspired the Fourth Evangelist; He sanctified the narrative; and He is constantly drawing its readers to Him.
- The contribution of the Fourth Evangelist to this *attuned interaction* consists of skillfully recording his own experience of God, and employing his skills and knowledge in doing so, accordingly providing the readers with an impressive narrative.
- The involvement of the narrative of the Fourth Gospel can be found in its sacred nature, the richness of its theological contents, and its effective functionality.
- The involvement of the Johannine readers consists of them reading John's narrative, interacting with it, and responding to God's Initiative.

The reason behind listing these involvements in this order is to follow the chronological sequence of their occurrences: Initially, God inspired the Fourth Evangelist, who consequently composed his Gospel, and ever since, the readers started getting involved in reading it. The attuned interaction of these involvements in establishing an experience of God can be understood in the light of the functionality of John's narrative during the event of reading it or hearing it. The suggestion of Van der Merwe (2015a:3-9 of 9 pages) is taken as a starting point to investigate this functionality and accordingly appreciate its contribution in constituting such experience. The following remarks on the effects of John's narrative on its readers summarize the outcome of this investigation.

- The first element of this functionality/effect of John's narrative consists of the ability of John's narrative to create a *dynamic interaction* between its contents and its readers. This interaction has the potential to generate spirituality and constitute an experience of God. This dynamic is initiated by the decision of the readers to read this narrative, and is nurtured by the sacredness of its nature, the charisma of its style, and the richness of its contents.

- The second element/effect is composing images in the mind of the readers. In other words, by reading John the readers' imagination is stimulated to compose images of what its narrative presents to them *via* its figurative language, especially focusing on the *Familia Dei* metaphoric. The functionality of this effect is better understood in connection with the two driven forces behind it, which are first, the impact/functionality of the semantic tension created between the tenor and the vehicle of the metaphor, or the generated dynamic between the literal meaning and the figurative meaning of the metaphor; and second, the concept of family within both its Greco-Roman context and its Old Testament /New Testament background.

- The third element/effect is the ability of John's repetition to establish an experience of God. This repetition (variation and amplification) urge its readers to become affectively involved while reading or hearing John's narrative. This makes them familiar with the essence of its message expressed in/revolving around major themes, i.e. making the Father known and believing in Jesus. It also provides them with valuable knowledge to understand its significance. This familiarity enhances knowledge; the knowledge generates love; love originates faith; and faith leads the believer to accept Jesus and to believe in His Father who sent Him. Going through this process is indeed a genuine experience of God.

- The fourth element/effect is the entanglement of John's readers with its narrative. This could happen at various levels, especially at the cognitive, emotional, and spiritual levels – all of which, collectively or individually, might constitute an experience of God. These three levels of entanglement are essential to the *Johannine Experience of God*; they are interwoven and interconnected in a very tight manner within the dynamic of experiencing the divine life and love; these levels are also valuable to grasp another significant dynamic: The involvement of the readers in the above-mentioned *Attuned Interaction* that establishes an experience of God.

In this Chapter, three groups of readers are distinguished: The *first group* consists of those who met Jesus during His earthly life; the *second group* comprises the early Christians who did not have the privilege to know Jesus personally, but who have shared the same social-historical-religious milieu with the members of the first group; the *third group* consists of the subsequent Johannine readers throughout the ages.



Added to this, the members of these three groups can be classified under two major categories: The *first category* consists of those who read the Bible by themselves for themselves, while the *second category* comprises those who perform the act of reading for others i.e. religious leaders, lecturers, liturgical celebrants, and the like. However, no matter to which group they belong, or the nature of their journey in experiencing God, the readers remain the center of attention of both God through His initiative and the Fourth Evangelist *via* his narrative. In John, encountering Jesus is a central theme that runs throughout its narrative. It is a life-changing event, the essence of spirituality and the starting point of the journey of experiencing God. When reading this Gospel and meditating on its message, the readers feel motivated to embark on this spiritual journey and become members of the *Familia Dei*.

In this journey, Jesus is the 'Light' that guides the readers to know the Father, and the 'Way' that leads to Him. The essence of this journey is the dwelling of the Father and the Son, through the Holy Spirit, in (the life of) the believer (Jn 14:20, 22), and its completion is the believer's dwelling in the Father's House through the Son. It is motivated by the believer's faith in Jesus and in His Father who sent Him. This journey is not merely a temporary trip to go vacationing during a pre-set time in a predetermined place; it is a life-long journey that engages all the dimensions of the believer's life (cognitive, emotional, spiritual, ethical, communicative, etc.) and introduces them to fresh horizons of experiencing God. Thus, their life reaches new spiritual zeniths, their minds are satisfied by a profuse knowledge of God, and their hearts are filled by an abundant love to Him. This divine-human existential and fundamental interaction finds its roots in God's initiative and reaches its fulfillment in the believer's positive response to this initiative.

## **Chapter 5**

### **The Experience of God in the Fourth Gospel Perceived from the perspective of its *Familia Dei***

#### **5.1 Introductory Notes**

The first main section of this Chapter expresses and explains how the Johannine *Familia Dei* motif is perceived and employed in the investigation done below. This is done by briefly discussing the following associated topics: *Familia Dei* and group; *Familia Dei* and family in the Greco-Roman world; *Familia Dei* and family in the Fourth Gospel; and *Familia Dei* as a metaphor in the Fourth Gospel.

The second section of this Chapter focuses on *God's Initiative* and His involvement in the believer's journey of experiencing Him. In John, God the Father is the one who makes the first move: He created everything through His Son (Jn 1:3); He gives life (Jn 1:13; 3:3; 5:26); He grants eternal life (Jn 3:36; 17:2-3); and He saves the world (Jn 3:17; 12:47). The initiative of the Father is a two-ways initiative: An outward direction/movement (reaching out to His human creatures) through the existential and fundamental events accomplished by His only begotten Son (*Creation, Incarnation, Revelation, and Salvation*), and an inward direction or movement, drawing (through His Son) all people to be with Him in His house (Jn 12:32; 14:1-4). This is an initiative rooted in the Father's divine love (1 Jn 4:19) to His Son (Jn 5:20; 15:9) and to the world (Jn 3:16). It is also rooted in the Father's awareness and knowledge of the limitations of the human nature/beings (Jn 3:31; 8:23); its fragility and mortality caused by sin and generated by walking in the darkness (Jn 3:19; 8:14); its incapability to function without remaining attached to the true vine (Jn 15:5); and the inability of the human beings to see Him (God the Father) and to go to Him by themselves (Jn 1:18; 5:37; 6:46; 7:34; 8:21; 14:6). This abundant love and knowledge generated God's loving and redeeming initiative. In His words and deeds, Jesus expressed it clearly, and the Fourth Evangelist recorded it skillfully in his Gospel's narrative, employing a family metaphoric framework.

In John's narrative, the readers easily notice that Jesus is always intervening whenever and wherever He is needed: He prevented the embarrassment of His host (Jn 2:3); He helped a distressed father (Jn 4:47); He assisted people in desperate need (Jn 5:5-7; 9:1; 11:39); and He fed a hungry crowd (Jn 6:4-7). In these and everything that He has said and done, Jesus made the Father known (Jn 1:18) and accessible to be experienced.

As the heading (The divine members of the *Familia Dei* and God's initiative) of the second section indicates, it deals with the first component of the Johannine Experience of God, which is God's initiative. In this section selected attributes given to the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are discussed, as well as the involvement of each member in this experience.

- The Father as the *initiator* and the *aspiration* of the believers' experience of God.
- The Son as the *implementer* of God's Initiative and the *mediator* of the believers' response.
- The Paraclete as the *teacher* and the *companion* of the believers during their spiritual journey.

The third main section of the Chapter discusses the response of the believers to God's initiative. Introduced to this initiative while reading or hearing John's Gospel, the readers would feel motivated and urged to interact with it and respond positively to it. They would feel oriented to approach it retrospectively and prospectively: retrospectively by looking back to its roots in the Old Testament, and prospectively by looking ahead to its eschatological fulfillment in the Father's house (Jn 14:1-4). During the above-mentioned act of reading/hearing, this kind of feelings is constantly nourished and its flame is kept smoldering fervently by the richness of John's narrative, and the distinctiveness of its message. Therefore, every passage in the Fourth Gospel could be perceived in the light of its correlation with the development of the history of this initiative, during which the old pledges (of God's initiative) are fulfilled, new promises are established through Jesus, and eschatological merits are guaranteed by Him. Consider for example the renowned Christological 'I am' sayings: While revealing different aspects of Jesus' identity, this expression retrospectively evokes the theological-biblical 'I am' of the Old Testament (Ex 3:14), while it prospectively invokes the eschatological 'I am' of the book of Revelation (Rv 1:8, 17). During this development, the Old Testament with all its theology, rituals, symbols, and promises was fulfilled by the incarnation, life, and death of Jesus, and a new covenant with all its ramifications was established by the same Christ and directed by the Holy Spirit towards the world to come, or the final destiny eternal life.

Thus, as soon as the readers' spiritual journey of experiencing God starts, there is no going back to their old ways of life, nor staying immersed in the present; it rather is a constant move forward towards knowing God, glorifying Him, believing in His Son and imitating Him, and living under the guidance of His Holy Spirit. This is the essence and the realization of the believer's response to God's initiative. In this manner, God's initiative establishes the journey of experiencing Him, while the believer's response reaches its completion, by becoming a member of His *Familia Dei*, fulfilling the duties that come with such an honor, and enjoying all its merits. The zenith of this is having (eternal) life (Jn 1:4; 5:24; 14:6) in and through Jesus Christ (Jn 6:68; 10:28; 17:2). This (eternal) life is not interrupted at/by death (Jn 11:25-26), becoming complete at the resurrection (Jn 6:40; 11:25-26), and endures forever.

This section therefore focuses on the second component of the Johannine experience of God, which is the response of the believer/s to God's initiative. This response is discussed as follows:

- Accepting the Son and believing in Him.
- Imitating the Son and following Him.
- Remaining in the Son and bearing fruits.

## **5.2 The *Familia Dei* in the Fourth Gospel**

The importance of the Fourth Gospel's rhetoric depends largely upon its ability to generate a linguistic-textual world that addresses the concerns and the aspirations of its community, as well as its capability to compose images in its readers' mind when its narrative is read or heard. It was through the encounter of ability and capability that John's message was expressed. Nowadays, it is commonly accepted among biblical scholars that the meaning of this message cannot be fully expounded by employing a one-sided hermeneutical methodology. Therefore, in order to prepare for the investigation done in the succeeding pages and to shed some lights on its usage of the *Familia Dei* motif, certain useful and correlated considerations are given here. Certainly, there are valid reasons and convincing explications behind the decision of the Johannine scholars to employ the so-called *Familia Dei* expression in their arguments and studies. Some of these reasons and explications can be traced to the similarities between this metaphoric entity with the group (in general) and family (in particular), as well as to the importance of the family in the society and religious communities at the time of John.

## 5.2.1 *Familia Dei* and Group

It is important to note that the following considerations on the *group* do not aim to suggest a new theory on the subject, nor to get involved in the debate around it, but only to underline certain elements deemed indispensable to facilitate the investigation of the *experience of God* in the Fourth Gospel from the perspective of the *Familia Dei* metaphoric. However, by nature, human beings have always been gathered in groups like families, tribes, communities, and the like. They derive a sense of identity from this kind of belonging. The omnipresence of groups and the inevitability of being in them make these groups important factors and a fundamental component of the life of their members and its social, political, and spiritual dimensions.<sup>284</sup> Groups can be of various sizes,<sup>285</sup> and structures.<sup>286</sup> They may also exist in different genres,<sup>287</sup> in one specific place or in several locations (neighborhoods, villages, or cities). In certain cases they can even grow beyond the boundaries of their own country and become international existing in numerous nations (i.e. political parties, civil organizations, and religious groups). They can offer their members the opportunity to work together on joint projects and to develop larger-scale activities.<sup>288</sup> As an interest in groups, their genres, dynamics, and impact on their members developed,<sup>289</sup> numerous definitions emerged and several theories have been articulated.<sup>290</sup>

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**284.** Turner et al (1987:1-2) define a group as an entity that is psychologically significant for the members.

**285.** Homans (1951:1); Mills (1967:2); Cartwright & Zander (1968:46); and Brown (1988:2-3) perceived *Groups* as units composed of two or more persons, who come into contact for a purpose.

**286.** Forsyth (2006:11) defines the structure of a group as the “norms, roles and stable patterns of relationship among the members of the group”.

**287.** cf. Cartwright & Zander (1968); Arrow et al (2000); Suriwiecki (2004); and Forsyth (2006).

The following are examples of related theories and references:

\* *Primary groups* such as families, tribes, and close friendship circles are usually the locus of a close and intimate interaction. These are also the places where attitudes, values, and orientations are developed and sustained.

\* *Secondary groups* such as trade unions and national trusts are often large and usually formally organized. Their members are rarely, if ever, in direct contact with each other.

\* *Planned groups* are specifically formed for some purpose, either by their members or by an external individual, group or organization. Forsyth (2006:6) states: “People *found* planned groups, but they often *find* emergent groups”.

\* *Emergent groups* relatively spontaneously come into being where people find themselves together in the same place, or gradually come to know each other through conversation and interaction over a period of time.

Tajfel (1982:2) argues that a group “can be defined as such on the basis of criteria which are either external or internal... The two components are: a cognitive one, in the sense of awareness of membership; and an evaluative one, in the sense that this awareness is related to some value connotations. The third component consists of an emotional investment in the awareness and evaluations”.

**288.** cf. Esler (2000:151); and Robbins (1996:101).

**289.** Mills (1967:3) states that “it was during the last few decades that groups were studied scientifically”.

**290.** cf. Turner et al (1987); Hersey & Blanchard (1977); Brown (1988:19); and Bales (1999).

The application of pertinent elements of these theories, especially the theory of Tajfel (1982:2) to the Fourth Gospel, are positively helping in the process of understanding how John, in his narrative, thought to maintain the distinctive identity of the *Familia Dei* in the cognitive, evaluative, and emotional dimensions:

♦ The *cognitive dimension* directs the attention to the basic recognition of belonging.<sup>291</sup> It also assists in understanding the feeling of belonging to the Johannine *Familia Dei* and its metaphors, which find its ultimate legitimation and meaning in the abundant references to the Fatherhood of God in the narrative of the Fourth Gospel.<sup>292</sup> The outcome of this understanding helps to elaborate on one of the fundamental elements of the Johannine experience of God as it is expressed in John 1:18: “No one has ever seen God, it is the only Son, who is close to the Father’s heart, who has made him known”.

♦ The *evaluative dimension* refers to the positive and negative connotations of belonging.<sup>293</sup> Applied to the Johannine *Familia Dei*, it leads to discussing the dynamic of ‘being born’ to this family, ‘becoming members’ of it, ‘abiding’ in it or ‘abandoning/forsaking’ it. An additional deeper insight can be attained about this dimension when it is approached in connection with the *Social Identity Theory*,<sup>294</sup> and its successor *Self Categorization Theory*.<sup>295</sup>

♦ - The *emotional dimension* refers to the ethics (i.e. in Jn 15; 17: 20-23); and attitudes such as: love, fellowship, and relationship,<sup>296</sup> which the members of the *Familia Dei* hold towards insiders<sup>297</sup> and outsiders.<sup>298</sup> They are bounded<sup>299</sup> together by the obligations<sup>300</sup> of mutual love mandated by Jesus (Jn 13:34; Jn 15:12), which is rooted in the love between the Father and his Only Son, and in the love that the Son has to his believers.

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<sup>291</sup>. cf. Austin (1979:41); and Esler (2000:167, 170).

<sup>292</sup>. The following are some examples of references: Those who are ‘begotten of God’ are ‘children of God’, and ‘are chosen by him’ (Jn 1:12; 11:52); they are born into the family/*Familia Dei* (Jn 3:3); they make decisions to join the family/*Familia Dei* (Jn 9); and they follow Jesus to join the family/*Familia Dei* (Jn 1:35-51; 9).

<sup>293</sup>. cf. Austin (1979:41); and Esler (2000:159).

<sup>294</sup>. About *Social Identity Theory*, cf. Austin (1979:41); Tajfel (1982:255); and Esler (2000:158).

<sup>295</sup>. About *Self Categorization Theory*, cf. Commins & Lockwood (1979:281-282); and Turner et al (1987).

<sup>296</sup>. For further info about the topic, see also: Turner et al (1987); and Benson (2000:5); and Forsyth (2006:2-3).

<sup>297</sup>. On intergroup conflict, cf. Sherif (1967: 12ff).

<sup>298</sup>. On *Ethnocentrism* (‘ingroup’ and ‘outgroup’), cf. Tajfel (1982:7, 1-41).

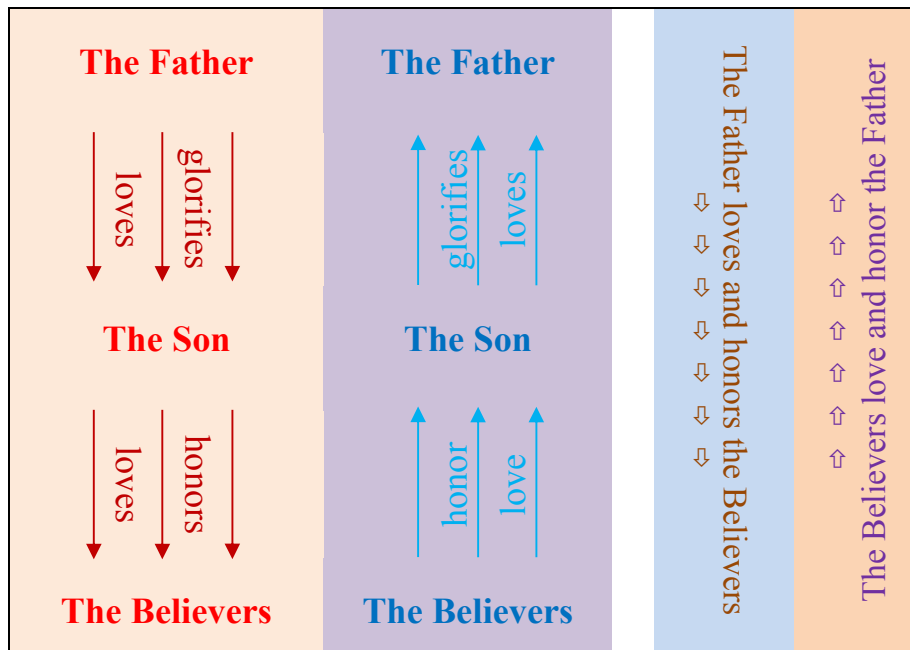
<sup>299</sup>. On *Group Cohesion and bonds*, cf. Tajfel (1982:15-16); and Forsyth (2006:15).

<sup>300</sup>. On *Group Goals*, cf. Zander (1985:1-13); Benson (2000:66-67); and Johnson & Johnson ([2003] 2009:73).



Accordingly, the Johannine *Familia Dei* is considered as the sphere in which this kind of love and fellowship is constituted and experienced at the individual level and communal level in a hierarchy of love,<sup>301</sup> glory and honor.<sup>302</sup>

*Illustration of the Hierarchy of Love and Honor*



*Personal Design*

The aim of the above- articulated observations on the *Familia Dei* and *group* is to highlight the fact that the common elements between group and family as well as the significance of the latter at the time of John might have worked in his favor when he employed family metaphors or the *Familia Dei* motif in his narrative to depict the mission of Jesus in making the Father known. At this point, it is important to enunciate certain perspectives on family in the Greco-Roman world.

**301.** According to **Harland** (2005:491-513), the Greco-Roman family ideals of solidarity, affection, friendship, protection, glory, and honor are the kinds of values that would come to the minds of those who drew on the similarity of family relationships within group settings. Additionally, honor has been assigned -after gods- to parents by nature and law. This hierarchy of honor was the basis of familial and other relations in the Greco-Roman world.

**302.** References in John that inspire and support this statement:

- The Father loves and glorifies the Son (Jn 3:35; 5:20; 8:54; 10:17; 13:3, 31; 15:9; 17:5, 23).
- The Son loves and glorifies the Father (Jn 12:28; 13:31; 14:13, 31; 17:1).
- The Father loves and honors the Believers (Jn 3:16; 6:40; 12:26; 13:1; 14:21; 16:27).
- The Son loves and honors the Believers (Jn 5:21; 10:15; 15:9; 17:24).
- The Believers love and honor the Father (Jn 4:23; 15:8).
- The Believers love and honor the Son (Jn 5:23; 14:23; 15:15; 16:27).



## 5.2.2 *Familia Dei* and family in the Greco-Roman World<sup>303</sup>

In this section certain concise observations are listed that are deemed indispensable to consider the *Familia Dei* metaphors in the Fourth Gospel as a suitable perspective from which the Johannine experience of God is perceived in the succeeding pages. Rawson (2011:3) states:

There is no simple definition of *Family* for Greek or Roman culture. Neither *Oikos* nor *Familia* conveys exactly what common English usage of *Family* conveys. There are concepts of property in the Greek and Latin terms, especially for Roman society where large numbers of slaves belonged to the *Familia*. There is no term for what we understand as the nuclear family. And yet the nuclear family -father, mother, and children- is an important element of both *Oikos* and *Familia*.

Osiek and Balch (1997) discuss the social environment of the Greco-Roman household, early Christian families, and house churches. One of their suggestions maintain that the New Testament's authors were not interested in describing the nature and meaning of the family, as they were using the family and the household as a model for understanding the meaning of the church and discipleship.<sup>304</sup> According to them, the biblical view of the family does not refer to what real families may have looked like in biblical times, but exclusively to God's directives for how the family should be ordered. Van der Merwe (2015b:207-226),<sup>305</sup> however, correctly argues that the people of the first century Mediterranean were group-oriented, and

[The] major group or the dominant institution tends to be the family... Among a person's kin (insiders) there were strong bonds of affection, cooperation... Towards non-kin (outsiders) an attitude of suspicion and competition prevailed... In the New Testament, Jesus groups are also described from a strongly group-embedded... considering themselves as forming, metaphorically speaking: the household of God's *Familia Dei*.

The family has always been the right and proper environment for the upbringing of children, observing traditions, and transmitting human values and religious beliefs. The Christian family in very early Christianity (and to certain extend throughout the ages) is no stranger to this reality: Within it, members were instructed about the Christian faith and ethics.

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**303.** Perdue (1997); Anderson, et al (1998); Brynolf & Smith (1998); Meeks (1983); and Cahill (2000) discuss thoroughly the Greco-Roman household/family.

**304.** Osiek & Balch (1997) pull these directives from biblical passages like:

Genesis 1-3, 1 Corinthians 11:2-16, 14:33-36, Ephesians 5:21-23, and 1 Timothy 2:11-15.

**305.** His argument converges with that of: Esler (2000:147, 151); Malina (1996:64); and Guijarro (1997:43).

Christian faith and ethics are two aspects that would lead/create undeniably to experiencing God. The effectiveness of their ability to create such an experience might find its roots and meanings in the so-called *domestic church* (cf. Rm 16:5; 1 Cor 16:19; Col 4:15). Widok (2013:167-175)<sup>306</sup> suggests that these two are factors, which are part of everyday Christian life, are dependent on each, and that

[in] family as domestic church, with the practice of reading the Holy Scriptures and praying... the father of the family is responsible for the systematic upbringing of his children leading to the practice of the principles of Christian religion...such position of father of the family was not a new discovery, since in the ages before Christ there existed an institution of father known as *Pater Familias*.

Widok's suggestion gives an additional useful insight on John's employment of the *Familia Dei* metaphoric to record Jesus' mission of making the Father known.

The above-mentioned place and role of the father in the family were not an isolated reality. In fact, the first century people in the Greco-Roman world were not individualistic but group oriented,<sup>307</sup> while the family of that era was a highly important social institution, organized to favor the prerogatives of male elders and the elite classes, and to favor access to material and social goods for their inferior dependents. Belonging to a family and holding a prescribed place within a household was a central part of individual identity and a precondition for most people to enjoy the goods and benefits of their local community. Families also mediated the interests of surrounding religious and political hierarchies.

Moxnes (1997b:14-15) relates families and households of that time "were multifunctional, in the sense that it was more than simply a domestic residence but also had specific political, economic and religious functions as well, not to mention its broader socio-cultural impact". Moreover, early Christian families/households were integral components of that world. Although they interacted with their contemporary societies at various levels, such as social identity and agency, including economy, religion, and politics, they preserved their own Christian household codes.

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**306.** Widok (2013:167-175) discusses the Christian family in the writings of Saint John Chrysostom.

**307.** cf. Malina-Neyrey (1993:72-73); Kloppenburg (2003:16-17); Wilson (1995:2); and Esler (2000:151).

Biblical scholar such as Balch (1992:318-320) and Dunn (1996:43-63) have provided valuable theories about these codes. According to them, these codes were related to standard Greek provisions for 'household management'. They were essentially an accommodating or realist attempt to give Christian values a practical meaning within the limits of hegemonic social expectations about family, class, and gender. In other words, these codes modeled a process of interpretation, wherein the family was constantly challenged and redefined by its Christian identity, even as they responded to other historical and cultural influences, in an ongoing dynamic of formation and transformation. The Christian household codes therefore manifested a productive dynamic between the familial duties of the believers, the creative values of their faith, and their social context. They illustrated the Christian commitment to engage faith and the new life in Christ with the world.<sup>308</sup> Simons (1956:947, 949-951) asserts that the early Christians committed themselves to a new community of believers in Christ in which loyalty to the family hierarchy was superseded by solidarity with other believers in a mix of family and class standings. The new family of Christ subverted customary ways of allocating power and resources within the larger society. Although status distinctions were never entirely abolished, Christians formed a new metaphorical family, less tied to biological kinship and more class-inclusive than the cultural norm. Converts did not only continue to live as members of their own families and households, but those groups of kin and co-residents provided the first foundations of Christian affiliation and assembly. It can therefore be stated that the household codes could be considered as guidelines for churches whose physical space, worship, and morality were in fact never separate from the complex net of domestic, social, and economic relationships in which believers defined themselves, and with which they interacted. This evokes the so-called *house church* phenomenon that was generally parallel to households in early Christianity, and a center for worship, hospitality, religious education, and social services.<sup>309</sup> Additionally, it can be stated that in John's time, Christians (including his contemporary readers) were most likely familiar with the contemporary language of *family, family values, and accordingly understood the meaning of family metaphoric*. Thus, all of this might have made it easy for both John (recording Jesus' mission in his narrative, employing family metaphors/*Familia Dei* metaphors) and for his readers (to grasp the message of this mission and consequently understand its meaning).

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**308.** On the topic of *Christian Household Codes*, cf. **D'Angelo** (1994:321-323).

**309.** For further reading about *house churches*, cf. **Osiek** (1998); **Punt** (2009); **Billings** (2011); and **Trebilco** (2013).

### **5.2.3 *Familia Dei* and Family in the Fourth Gospel**

Building upon the outcomes of the previous section and selected related references from the Synoptics, the following observations can be made:

John's realization of family's significance and his appreciation to its merits find their roots in a long tradition that encompasses that of both the Old Testament and the New Testament. Indeed, since the dawn of humanity, the *family* was the strongest source of identity and inclusion for the individual; and the ancient world, it was considered as the basic unit of social structure, in such a way that the identity of the individuals was corporate before it was personal. For the people of the Old Testament, family had a long history of collective identity, pride and cohesiveness. According to Wright (1992:761-769), the family played an essential role in 'preserving the covenant relationship with Yahweh', keeping the nation's tradition (i.e. faith, history, laws, rituals, customs), and passing them from generation to generation. Rogerson (1996:36) maintains that "in the Galilean towns and villages where Jesus carried out his ministry, family authority and family loyalty were keys to identity and survival".

In his narrative, John featured certain interactions between Jesus and members of physical families in various contexts and occasions: Andrew the brother of Peter (Jn 1:40); Mary the mother of Jesus (Jn 2:1-2, 5, 12; 19:25); the royal official's son (Jn 4:46); the family of the man born blind (Jn 9); and the family of Lazarus (Jn 11:1-44). Additionally, he depicted Jesus as the compassionate Son of God, who revealed the love and compassion of the Father in words and deeds. John's depiction converges with what has been recorded in the Synoptics and the other books of the New Testament about the topic of family. In fact, Jesus was very sympathetic to people who suffered or pled with Him on behalf of their family members. Examples are the military official (Jn 4:46-53); the synagogue official (Mt 9:18-26; Mk 5:21-43; Lk 8:40-56); the father of a child who was possessed by a demon (Mt 17:14-20; Mk 9:14-28; Lk 9:37-42); the Canaanite woman whose daughter was tormented by a devil (Mt 15:21-28; Mk 7:24-30); the hemorrhaging woman (Mt 9:20-22, Mk 5:25-34, Lk 8:43-48); the friends and sisters of Lazarus (Jn 11:1-45); and a paralyzed man (Mk 2:1-11; Lk 5:17-26). Most of these accounts reveal parents in apparent states of concern for children for their own sakes.

However, in another happier occasion, parents brought their children to Jesus, “for him to lay his hands on them and pray” (Mt 19:13-15; Mk 10:13-16). Jesus took these occasions as an opportunity to express His love for these youngest members of the family by embracing them lovingly. He employed the *childlikeness* symbolism to talk about accepting the Son and the Father who sent Him as well as about becoming “like a child” in order to enter the kingdom of heaven (Mt 18:2-5; Mk 9:33-37; Lk 9:46-48).

These qualities are required of those who want to follow Jesus and be His disciples. His disciples were not to pursue earthly prestige and worldly privileges or seek power to control others and to enhance their own position. Like children, they had to accept weakness and social disrespect, be obedient to the Father’s will, and comply with the demands placed on them by the community formed around the Gospel. Instead of seeking recognition for their own greatness, those who want to enter the kingdom have to become like children. The disciple finds and serves Jesus in “the least of these” to which He refers as ‘brethren of mine’ (Mt 25:40, 45) by recognizing them as Christ’s true family. Correspondingly, a disciple or a member of Jesus’ family welcomes those who are suffering, with compassion and takes care of their basic needs with the love that reflects and continues Jesus’s greater love (Jn 15:13). This love emanates from the eternal and divine love that the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit have for each other and for the *Familia Dei*.

Jesus used family parables and terminologies to express the unconditional love of God the Father towards His children, and to depict His loving initiative to always welcome them in His heavenly house despite any opposing conditions (Lk 15:11-24), as well as to define the requirements for a family to be truly Christian. The so-called ‘parables of judgment’ found in Matthew 25 offer a clear idea about this definition: In resounding verses, Matthew 25:31-46 declared that ‘when the Son of Man comes in his glory’, He will proclaim ‘to those on his right hand’ saying, ‘Come, you whom my Father has blessed, take as your heritage the kingdom prepared for you since the foundation of the world’. In addition to those who imitate Jesus by doing acts of mercy and deeds of charity, Jesus’ *Familia Dei* also includes ‘whoever does the will of God’ as Jesus’ brother, sister, and mother (Mk 3:28-30), and those who are like Peter, who make a supreme sacrifice leaving everything to follow Jesus (Mk 10:28-30; Lk 14:25-26).

These acts of mercy, deeds of charity, and supreme sacrifices could be considered as salient, fundamental, and tangible aspects of the *Familia Dei*. They find their origins in the ultimate love of the only begotten Son, who has “emptied Himself” (Ph 2:7), “became flesh” (a member of a human family in Nazareth) and “lived among us” (Jn 1:14). They reach their fullness by accepting Him, following Him, imitating Him, and glorifying the Father in Him and with Him.

With reference to John’s Gospel, it is clear that the *Familia Dei* is not a merely isolated Johannine element (as becomes clear from the previous paragraphs) or a simple metaphorical stylistic device. Rather, this is both an essential constituent of the figurative language of John, and a powerful motif to express his theology. It is a salient topic that opens John’s narrative, employing family terminology to introduce the eternal Logos, “Who was with God and was God in the beginning” (Jn 1:1), and to portray the mystery of His incarnation (Jn 1:14). The first fruits of this mystery are found in Jesus, giving to those who believe in Him/accept Him “the power to become children of God” (Jn 1:12), and making “the Father known” (Jn 1:18) to all. These fruits are fundamental components of the Johannine experience of God. Although the Old Testament has progressively revealed God as loving Father who approached His people, His presence was never so intimate as when He sent His Only Begotten Son into the world that it might live through Him (1 Jn 4:9). Thus, the incarnation of the Word of God marked a new phase in the development of the Father’s plan for humankind. Accordingly, Jesus Christ is considered the center of the *Familia Dei*. Through Him, the Father is therefore not only present to/known by the believers, but is dwelling in them (Jn 14:23), granting them life: “For the Father, who is the source of life, has made the Son the source of life” (Jn 5:26). In other words, the life that the Son shares with the Father and the Holy Spirit is granted to the members of the *Familia Dei*. Consequently, it regenerates them and elevates them to the divine realm of this family.<sup>310</sup> The Fourth Evangelist recorded accurately and skillfully all of this and conveyed it competently to his readers employing figurative devices. These devices are interwoven together, at the same time intertwined with the form, style, and mode of the revelatory language of the Fourth Gospel. Jointly, they form a literary context for the *Familia Dei* metaphoric in its narrative, which creates images in the readers’ mind, with transformative power that constitute an experience of God.

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**310.** cf. Arintero (1978) on the topic of how the Father adopts the believers.



### 5.2.4 *Familia Dei* as metaphor in the Fourth Gospel

In the last few decades, the narrative of the Fourth Gospel has noticeably attracted the attention of many biblical scholars<sup>311</sup> to its figurative language.<sup>312</sup> They generated therefore a wealth of valuable findings and perspectives, from which this section draws to formulate some observations on the metaphorical aspect of the Johannine *Familia Dei* deemed necessary to perceive the experience of God in this Gospel.

Perhaps, the two most famous devices of John's figurative language are *symbols* and *metaphors*.<sup>313</sup> Brown (2015:289-298) states that "symbolism lies at the core of the theology of the Gospel of John".<sup>314</sup> Leon-Dufour (1980:439-456) emphasizes the importance of symbolism and sees it as an outcome of "a consciously established relationship" between Jesus of Nazareth and the Son of God. Here, it could be added that this relationship was evoked to depict the relationship between Jesus and His twelve disciples at one level; and the relationship between Him (as the firstborn of the *Familia Dei*) and His believers (the members of this family) everywhere in the world and throughout the ages: Metaphorically speaking this is a reference to the *True Vine* (Jn 15:1-17) and its branches, and to the *Good Shepherd* and the sheep of His flock (Jn 10:1-18). Painter (1979:35) correctly maintains that "the symbols, derived from the world of sense experience, are used to communicate that which transcends the world in order that the transcendent might be experienced". Symbols in John's narrative have the same effects as the metaphors: Both of them lead the readers to 'higher meaning' (cf. Shedd 1975:256-257), supplemented by the meaning that the Fourth Evangelist wished to convey (Wead 1974:38). To this effect, Duke (1985:1) maintains that "the thought of this Gospel reaches dizzying heights, its majestic language spirals and soars, presenting a Christ, lifted up, to a glory more elevated than we might otherwise have seen".

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**311.** cf. MacCormac (1985:140); Kittay (1987:10-11, 39); Indurkha (1991:2-6); and Lakoff (1993).

**312.** The limitations of this section do not allow a detailed discussion of this language. However, one example will suffice, and that is the *Dualism* motif in John, i.e. darkness/light (Jn 1:5; 8:12; 9:5; 11:9; 12:35, 46); and flesh/Spirit (Jn 1:13; 3:6, 12; 6:63), cf. Bianchi (1987); Davies (2007); and Hahne (2012). Other motifs are:

*Chiasm*, cf. Bailey & Van der Broek (1992); Schüssler Fiorenza (1998:176); and Ellis (1999:270);

*Irony* (e.g. Jn 6:42; 11:49, 50), cf. Duke (1985); and Wead (1974);

*Misunderstanding* (e.g. Jn. 2:19; 3:3, 4; 4:10, 11), cf. Carson (1982); and Culpepper (1983:164-165).

*Double Meaning*, cf. Richard (1985); and *Polyonymy*, cf. Croy (2014).

**313.** On *metaphor* in religious language, cf. Van den Heever (1992:90-91); and Lemmer (1998b:110).

On the types of metaphor and how they function, cf. Dawes (1998:29); and Van der Watt (2000:16-17).

**314.** On Symbolism in the Gospel of John, cf. Leon-Dufour (X 1980:439-456); and Koester ([1995] 2003).



Actually, in the Johannine mode of perception, there is a special relation between reality symbols and metaphors. The use of these two literary devices makes it possible for the unseen Father (or at least certain aspects of His divine identity) to be revealed and conveyed to the believers and the Johannine readers. Johannine symbols and metaphors<sup>315</sup> are therefore a figurative way of speaking/meaning through which a reality (i.e. the Father's initiative, aspects of His identity, Jesus' identity, or a theological concept) is depicted in terms that are more commonly associated with another reality (*family/Familia Dei*) which is correlated to it through analogy. Johannine metaphors are loaded with biblical-theological contents. As Jesus used them, these metaphors revealed the divine character of His Person, the eschatological dimension of His deeds, and subsequently made His Father known. Therefore, it is suitable to say that, in addition to the structure and style of its narrative, John's literary devices, especially metaphors, provide plausible and useful data to perceive the experience of God from the perspective of His *Familia Dei*.<sup>316</sup> Shibles (1972:28) defines metaphor as "the instinctive and necessary act of the mind exploring reality and ordering experience by which the unknown is assimilated to the known". As metaphor, in general, suggests experience beyond the ordinary literal sense of everyday life" (cf. MacCormac 1976:83), likewise the Johannine metaphoric designation involves an ethical perceptible (cf. Bruce 1970:41; and Haas, De Jonge, & Swellengrebel, 1972).

Surely, John utilized the effectiveness of figurative language,<sup>317</sup> especially metaphors, and applied it purposefully in his narrative (cf. Von Wahlde 1976). He employed the most intimate social phenomenon in the ancient world (cf. Esler 2000:167; and Lassen 1997:114), namely the *family metaphor* to talk about Jesus' mission of making His Father known. This would certainly empower the so-called *transformative power* of this metaphor, enhance its effectiveness in portraying this mission, and accordingly help the readers comprehending it.

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**315.** Van der Watt (2000:22) states that metaphors "in the Fourth Gospel both describe and create". According to Jordan (1974:235-236), "metaphor does not create a reality, but aims to describe this reality". Lemmer (1998a:3) maintains that: "Metaphor involves the relating of two or more clusters of associations"; while Avis (1999:102) argues that: "Metaphors participate in the reality that they seek to convey". It is the conviction of the thesis that Johannine family metaphoric has the ability to create a reality, namely an experience of God.

**316.** cf. Bultmann (1973:16); Johnson (1993:28); Strecker (1996:25) on the metaphorical statement of God's nature in relation to His children.

**317.** Dewey (1980:81) argues that "the gospel of John labels much of its own contents as *Paroimiai*, a term which seems to embrace a variety of literary forms and devices in that gospel...Their functions range from creating literary discord to providing a basis for some fundamental Johannine themes".



Van den Heever (1992:90) affirms that “the Johannine narrative is thoroughly metaphorical and its metaphorical nature forces one to consider the role played by metaphors in this communicative process”.<sup>318</sup> Shibles (1972:31) suggests that “metaphors motivate the imagination of the readers and excite in them a heightened awareness of qualities called spiritual”. MacCormac (1976:x, xviii) echoes Shibles’ suggestion, saying that “metaphors have an emotional and spiritual effect upon the readers”. Here, one will notice that the aforementioned topic of the transformative power<sup>319</sup> of the images<sup>320</sup> created by the Johannine family metaphor is tightly connected to another important topic namely *Rhetography*.<sup>321</sup> Lee (2010:115) states that “the Gospel of John uses a number of images to express its understanding of what it means to believe in Jesus and to belong to the community of faith. These images, drawn from the material world, are used as... vehicles of the divine world”.

In keeping with this, it can be stated that, at the three commonly distinguished levels of reading (reading aloud; so-called sub-vocalization [movement of the lips, tongue, and throat without the production of audible sounds]; and silent reading in the proper meaning of the phrase), *Rhetography* has the power and the ability to get the reader engaged in the accounts of its components (cf. Gavrilov 1997:58; Cullinan 2004:90; Dinkler 2011:288;), and consequently immersed in the realm of the *Familia Dei*. In this realm, both the divine and human dimensions congregate and interact, creating a distinctive experience. Through such an experience, the absence of relationship between God and the human being is being overcome (cf. Berger 2003). *Rhetography* also refers to the graphic images people create in their mind as a result of the visual texture of a text.<sup>322</sup> It communicates a context of meaning to a hearer/reader.

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**318.** Added to Van den Heever, **Botha** (1992:209) writes that “the written word itself exercised religious power... [They] have special and profound quality that caused or allowed people to bring about extraordinary results”. And **Joy** (1990:74) states: “the importance of metaphor is its impact on the reader’s world view, or life-orientation”.

**319.** From the power of meaning potentially derives *Polysemy*, which is an essential manifestation of the flexibility, adaptability, and richness in meaning that lie at the very heart of what a language is and what it is for (cf. **Fauconnier & Turner** 2003:79-94; **Robbins** 2008:1-3).

**320.** cf. **Adams** (1983); **Pilotti, Gallo & Roediger** (2000); **Yates** (2013); and **Beale** (2014).

**321.** *Rhetography* emerged from combining both the linguistic and pictorial turns that occurred at the dawn of the twenty first century; cf. **Robbins** (2008) for *Rhetography*; cf. **Thiselton** (1980:117-139) for the ‘linguistic turn’; and cf. **Mitchell** (1994:11-34) for the pictorial turn in the study of literature and art.

**322.** According to **Robbins** (1996 a:29-36) *visual texture* is an aspect of sensory-aesthetic texture, which exhibits the range of senses (thought, emotion, sight, sound, touch, smell) the text evokes or embodies. **Jeal** (2006:12) describes these senses as visual, oral, aural, olfactory, tactile, gustatory, textual, prosaic, poetic, and intellectual.

Applying this to the Fourth Gospel's narrative, by employing family terminology as a context (or as archetypal metaphor), John articulated a web of communication through statements, signs, characters, and discourses that conjure visual images in the readers' mind, which, in their turn, evoke familiar contexts that provide meaning for their hearers/readers.

Furthermore, as expressions composed of two levels of meaning that complement one another, Johannine metaphors are saturated with biblical-theological contents. As Jesus used them, these metaphors revealed the eschatological character of His Person and mission. Perceived from a redemptive-historical perspective, they could be considered retrospective (reaching back to the Old Testament) and prospective (reaching forward to the Father's house). From his side, employing family metaphors, John kept returning, in one way or another, themes such as Jesus revealing His identity, expressing God's initiative, and making the Father known. By means of this repetition, John implied that these themes are essential, which the hearer/reader needs to grasp in order to comprehend the central message of his Gospel.

Van der Merwe (2009) has discussed family metaphors and the use of familial images in rhetoric. He emphasizes the importance of *metaphorical language* as an important part of any culture. According to him,

[a] metaphor can help create new meanings and new perspectives...At an individual level, metaphors are used to describe the unknown in terms of the known. This implies that metaphor is used to construct meaning. At a communal level, metaphors are used for a wide variety of social purposes...*Familia Dei* then is the sphere in which fellowship is constituted and experienced (Van der Merwe 2009:89-90).

Van der Merwe (2009: 108) concludes his article stating that: "the network of metaphors used sets up associations of expectations, attitudes, emotions and actions regarding family relationships and responsibilities". Also, in another article, Van der Merwe (2010:207-226) has also investigated the character, identity, and the life of the hypothetical Johannine Community towards the end of its existence. He approaches it as a 'fictive family'.<sup>323</sup>

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<sup>323</sup>. The approach of **Van der Merwe** is in the same line as **Neyrey** (1995:156-157), who directs the attention to the lack of studies on fictive kinship, stating that the latter is "the ways in which the first Christians regarded and treated each other as family". **Moxnes** (1997a:1) confirms that saying, "Although family is such an important topic in Christianity, there have been few comprehensive studies of family in early Christianity".

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According to him, the author of 1 John used family metaphors to describe the identity of this community in order to identify the *Pater Familias* whom they have never seen, but whom they worship. Both works of Van der Merwe are part of a wealth of publications<sup>324</sup> written on *Family; Johannine Community; John's Figurative Language; and Archetypal Metaphors* in rhetoric. Osborn (1967:115-126) argues that *archetypal metaphors* are popular in rhetorical discourse. This popularity appears immune to changes wrought by time. They are grounded in prominent features of experience, in objects, actions, or conditions that are inevitably noticeable in human consciousness. When a rhetorical subject is related to an archetypal metaphor, an association occurs between this subject and a prominent feature of experience, which has already become associated with basic human motivations. Osborn underlines the 'persuasive potency of archetypal metaphors', stating that because of it, 'the speaker can expect such metaphors to touch the greater part of his audience'. Kysar (1991:81-111) describes the Johannine metaphors as true metaphors with poetic power to initiate a new kind of experience. With them, the Fourth Evangelist creates a new reality, and a reader experience of a world where the Christ figure stands at the center. At this level, it is up to the readers to grasp this new reality, enter the aforementioned world, and to embrace Christ. Culpepper (1997:199) maintains that John's story of Jesus "unfolds in a series of recognition scenes, until at the end the question is whether or not the reader has recognized in Jesus the Eternal Word".

Concluding from what has been discussed in this section, it becomes clear that John has employed the family archetypal metaphor to depict the Father (whom no one has ever seen), to describe the mission of the Son (who made the Father known), and to consider the believers (those who accept the Son, follow Him, imitate Him, and believe in His Father who sent Him) as 'children of God' in his narrative. Therefore, the Johannine family archetypal metaphor could be considered to be a significant motif through which John has presented the *Familia Dei* and portrayed its realm within which the mission of Jesus was accomplished and through which the readers/believers have the opportunity to experience God.

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**324.** The following are some examples of publications listed in chronological order of their dates of publication: Adams (1983); Rosenblatt (1994); Esler (1995); Barton (1996); Malina (1996); Osiek (1996); Guijarro (1997); Moxnes (1997a); Osiek & Balch (1997); Van Henten & Brenner (2000); Balch (2003); Koester (2008).

In fact, the introduction of his Gospel hinted at Jesus' identity and introduced His mission: Jesus is 'the Only Son', who makes the Father known (Jn 1:18); He is the "Lamb of God", who takes away the sin of the world (Jn 1:36); and the 'Incarnate Word', who empowers His believers to become "Children of God" (Jn 1:12) and members of His *Familia Dei*. The following section expresses how this thesis perceives the Johannine *Familia Dei*.

### 5.2.5 *Familia Dei* as perceived by the present investigation

In this section the focus is on articulating a few remarks to express how the investigation, conducted below, considers the *Familia Dei* (found in John), its distinctive members, and its distinguished character:

- ♦ *Familia Dei* depicts a divine-human realm within which God's initiative is revealed, conveyed, and accomplished by the Son; also where the believers' response to this initiative is achieved by accepting the Son, believing in Him and imitating Him under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.
- ♦ The *Familia Dei* is a real entity that includes divine members (the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit), human members (those who believe in the Son; the twelve disciples; and some of the Johannine characters); as well as metaphoric members, like the sheep of the good shepherd (Jn 10:1-18) and the branches of the true vine (Jn 15:1-17).
- ♦ Acknowledging the existence of many other members, this section only focuses on three features of the *Familia Dei*'s character, namely holiness, unity, and love.

At this point, it is important to clarify that, referring to the *Familia Dei* as a divine-human realm or as a real-metaphoric entity does not mean that this investigation perceives it as one of the Johannine dualism motifs.<sup>325</sup> The metaphorical dimension of the *Familia Dei* is rather considered as an element of the Fourth Gospel's rhetoric that has the ability to create a literary and imagistic sphere to convey theological concepts and God's initiative. As far as this investigation is concerned, the focus is on the *Familia Dei* sphere that is created linguistically and metaphorically between two statements: "No one has ever seen God" (Jn 1:18), and "The only Son...who has made Him known" (Jn 1:18; 17:3, 8, 23, 26).

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<sup>325</sup>. On *Dualism*, cf. Cressy (1962); Charles (1969); Bianchi (1987:506); Lieu (1999:18-28); and Volf (2005).





It is within this spectrum that God's initiative originates spirituality and constitutes an experience of God, correlated divine-human relationships, and simultaneous interactions between the members (divine and human) of the *Familia Dei*. Waaijman (2002a:225f)<sup>326</sup> maintains that by including the term 'God' in the definition of spirituality, one confines himself/herself to the domain of religions. He considers the divine-human relational process as 'a relational whole in which the divine and human realities shape each other reciprocally'. In this relational process, he distinguishes three perspectives, namely 'the divine reality, the human reality, and the relational moment'. Expanding the meaning of this statement, it seems clear that by reading John's narrative and responding to this initiative, the human reality of the readers (believers) change: They become 'children of God' (τέκνα τοῦ θεοῦ)/members of His family, and the so-called 'relational moment' will encompass their experience of Him. This means that the usage of household or family language was probably one of the main characteristics of the emerging Christianity of the first century.<sup>327</sup> Household<sup>328</sup> was the basic unit of the Greco-Roman world; it played a major role in the process of recruiting converts. Families formed the core of house churches in earliest Christianity and therefore must have contributed strongly to the formation of Christian life as a separate way of living (cf. Gehring 2009; Peerbolte & Groenendijk 2016). In fact, many scholars have perceived or portrayed the Christian life as existence in a family/*Familia Dei*.<sup>329</sup> To illustrate the discussion at this level, two valuable works are referred to here: First, Van der Watt (2000) argues that almost all of the metaphors in John relate to ancient family imagery. This imagery, which is interwoven throughout the Gospel in a complex network, provides a key to the understanding of the message of the Fourth Gospel.

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**326.** Although **Waaijman** (2002a) does not discuss the experience of God or the Johannine experience of God, reading his book reveals many paragraphs labeled with certain expressions (i.e. *Image of God, knowledge of God, idea of God, and experience of faith*) that sound related to experiencing God.

**327.** The utilizing of family language in the Fourth Gospel is not an isolated phenomenon. The last few decades have witnessed the publication of various studies that pursue the meaning of this figurative language *within* Christianity, like **Meeks** (1983); **Banks** (1994); **Sandnes** (1994); **Burke** (2003). Actually, this kind of language is found in other early Christian texts, like the *Pauline Corpus*: In his Letters, Paul employed this language by using the term ἀδελφός (brother) 113 times in 108 verses, as a metaphor in referring to the members of his Christian communities. Also, in the epistles of John, the *Elder* emphasized the fact that the believers in Christ are 'children of God' and the core value for these children is love (ἀγάπη).

**328.** **Coloe** ([1998] 2001) looks at the Gospel of John from the post-resurrection perspective from which the Johannine Community experienced itself as God's household.

**329.** The following are some examples: **De Vaux** (1973:20); **Lieu** (1991:31-48); **Rusam** (1993:105); **Tollefson** (1999:88); **Esler** (1995:121-125); **Esler** (2000:145-148); and **Van der Merwe** (2005:543).

Van der Watt (2000:25-160, 411) develops a customized metaphor theory based on two of the best-known metaphors in the Fourth Gospel, 'I am the good shepherd', and 'I am the true vine'. According to him, this theory can be applied to the analysis of the Gospel as a whole. He states that 'the family imagery combines and integrates different central theological themes in the Gospel by means of a network. It serves as the dominating form in which the Gospel is formulated'. Second is Van der Merwe (2015b) who argues that the author of the first Epistle of John employed family metaphors to make the invisible (Father) visible in the Johannine community. Van der Merwe utilizes the *Social Identity Theory* of Tajfel to characterize the identity of the Johannine Community.<sup>330</sup> Their suggestions and findings call to mind another important topic that Thompson (1993:177-205) fittingly referred to as "the characterization of God in the Gospel of John". According to her, the actions and comments of Jesus and the narrator are of great importance in characterizing God in the Gospel. The readers know God through the characterization of Jesus and the telling of the story. Much about God is assumed or implied in the text in order to draw the readers into the narrative so that they will understand God from the point of view of the narrator and Jesus, who is the principal character. Thus, God is characterized as *the God who is known through Jesus*.

Although these theories and findings converge with this study at the level of terminology and shared with it certain elements at the level of motifs, they do not have the same direction and intention, namely perceiving the experience of God in the Fourth Gospel from the perspective of its *Familia Dei*. With that being said, and in order to achieve the aim of the thesis, the two components of this experience are now discussed:

- *The divine members* of the *Familia Dei* and God's initiative.
- *The human members* of the *Familia Dei* and their response(s) to God's initiative.

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**330.** Waaijman (2002a) can also be added as a good source in this concern (already referred to).

### 5.3 The First Component of the Johannine Experience of God: The Divine Members of the *Familia Dei* and God's Initiative

The divine members of the *Familia Dei* are the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit-Paraclete. They are eternal and exist before this family came to be. Out of infinite goodness and unconditional love they have created the *Familia Dei* in order for the human members to enjoy all of its privileges. The zenith of these privileges is glorifying the Father (Jn 17:1-5) with the Son (Jn 12:26; 17:24) and guided/accompanied by the Paraclete (Jn 16:5-15). The Father loves the human members abundantly (Jn 3:16), especially those who accept Jesus and believe in Him (Jn 6:44). He gathers them,<sup>331</sup> and gives them to the Son (Jn 6:37, 39, 66; 17:6, 7); hence, by becoming members of His *Familia Dei*, they experience Him in a particular way. In His turn, the Son loves them unconditionally (Jn 13:1; 14:21) and gives them power to become 'children of God' (Jn 1:12). He also grants them to be with Him (Jn 14:3). Doing so, the Son transforms both the *Familia Dei* into a sphere of divine fellowship, and the course of joining it into a spiritual journey that constitutes an experience of God. During this journey, the Holy Spirit succeeds Jesus as 'another advocate' (Jn 14:16) and defends the members of the *Familia Dei*; this implies that Jesus was the first advocate (Paraclete). The Paraclete is also personal, as Christ Himself is personal. He accomplishes many of the same things that Jesus said and did. The Father and the Son send Him (Jn 14, 15, 16). He makes both of them present in the family; He "works side by side with the exalted Lord Christ who is in heaven" (cf. Betz 1963:149, and Johnston 1970:124). It is necessary to point out that during the process of this collaboration, the Paraclete accompanies and leads (Jn 16:5-15) the 'children of God' to 'the complete truth' (Jn 3:33) – their search for this truth is spirituality, while the omnipotent truth is God Himself. His love is eternal, meaning that it does not change in the time of past, present or future.

When the human members of the *Familia Dei* therefore move forward on the path of spirituality and embark on the journey of searching for the 'complete truth', which was revealed by the Son, the Holy Spirit becomes their guide. Those members, who accept the Son and imitate Him, will experience a sense of belonging<sup>332</sup> to this family and will simultaneously learn more about the Father (head of the family) through the directive of the Holy Spirit.

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<sup>331</sup>. cf. Coloe ([1998] 2001:39-58) on the topic of "Gathering the house of God".

<sup>332</sup>. On emotions in Early Christianity, cf. Barton (2011:571-591).



Thompson (1993:177) states that, “although many of the textual indicators of (human) character are present for God in the Gospel, others are missing. Both the presence and absence of various indicators contributes to the characterization of God”. She argues that the most common designation of God is ‘Father’: He is identified in the words of Jesus (i.e. discourses; debates with the Jews, self-revelation, and instruction of His disciples), and by John, as the Father of the Son (Jn 1:14, 18; 3:35; 5:18). Ten years earlier, Culpepper (1983:113) has expressed the difficulty of describing the characterization of God in John, because “God never appears and the only words He speaks are ‘I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again’ (Jn 12:28)”.<sup>333</sup>

Despite the multiplicity of their approaches and the diversity of their findings, the publications pertinent on the topic under investigation here, agree almost unanimously on one thing: The designation of God as ‘Father’ in the Fourth Gospel. With that being said, selected attributes pertinent to the Godly nature of each divine member of the *Familia Dei* based on John’s narrative, are now presented, as well as certain aspects of their role in the Johannine experience of God, especially in its first components, which is God’s initiative. The presentation and discussion done in the following pages, therefore make no pretense of breaking new ground or suggesting new theological, Christological, or pneumatological hypotheses about the divine members of the Holy Trinity (individually or collectively) or about the characterization of God in the Fourth Gospel.<sup>334</sup> Their aim is to perceive God’s initiative from the perspective of Creation, Incarnation, Revelation, and Salvation as they are presented in John’s narrative.

The following motifs are discussed in this section:

- The Johannine Father as the initiator and the aspiration of the believers’ experience of God.
- The Johannine Son as the implementer and the mediator of the believers’ experience of God.
- The Johannine Paraclete as the teacher and the Companion of the believers during their journey of experiencing God.

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**333.** Culpepper’s observation converges with the findings of Sternberg (1985:322-341), who discusses the three challenges posed by the task of the characterization of God: First, the limited ability of the readers to step behind the story to know a character other than the way the narrative presents them; Second, the absence of those things that generally combine in producing a character; Third, the development of the characters portrayed in the Bible’s accounts. Berlin (1983:43) expresses some reservations about this theory of ‘stepping behind the story’.

**334.** Over the centuries these topics have generated numerous publications, with scholars and researchers who have approached the motif of God with its ramifications from different angles in the Fourth Gospel, like ‘image of God’ and presence of God. Examples are: Neusner (1970); Torrance (1992); Thompson (1993); Meyer (1996); Thompson (1997); Tolmie (1998); Lee (1999); Bennema (2009).

• For further reading on the Trinity in John, cf. Keener (1999); Kangas (2008); Köstenberger & Swain (2007).



### 5.3.1 The Johannine Father

#### The Initiator and the Aspiration of the Believers' Experience of God

John's depiction of God as father is deeply rooted in both the Old Testament<sup>335</sup> and the New Testament.<sup>336</sup> In his gospel, the Fourth Evangelist employed profusely the term 'Father' in referring to God (118 times); but it is John 1:18; John 10:30; and John 17:11, 22 that contain the most significance occurrences of this term. These verses express the close filial relationship between the two divine members of the *Familia Dei*, who are two Persons of the Holy Trinity: The Son is close to the Father's heart, and God is addressed by Jesus as 'Father'. This relationship is based on love, unity, and holiness – these are considered by Christian theology as fundamental aspects of God's nature. In the same theological realm, this investigation considers these as the core of the *Familia Dei*, the foundations of the spirituality of its human members, and what they might experience once they join this family. It also considers them as the origins of all the attributes given to God as well as the source of His divine initiative towards His children, and His involvement in their spiritual journey.

#### 5.3.1.1 The Father is Spirit

The Johannine Father is Spirit (Jn 4:24) and “no one has ever seen Him” (Jn 1:18). Jesus and His followers worship Him (the one whom they know) in spirit and truth (Jn 4:24), they know Him, because Jesus made Him known to them (Jn 1:18; 17:6). This statement is one of the most glorious elements of the Johannine doctrine of God, as it delineates His divine nature and describes a profound aspect of being part of His family, namely worshipping Him. Situated at the heart of spirituality, this kind of worship is adorned by prayer that emanates from the special relationship that the believers have with the Father (Jn 16:23-27), the Son (Jn 16:16), and the Holy Spirit-Paraclete (Jn 14:17). It is motivated by faith that grants them both life and eternal life (Jn 20:23) and provides them with a place in the Father's house (Jn: 14:1-4).

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<sup>335</sup>. For example: (Ex 4:22); (Dt 8:5); (Ps 103:13); (Is 63:16); and (Hos 1:10).  
For further reading: **Reinhartz** (1999:1-10).

<sup>336</sup>. For example: (Mt 5:16, 45) “Your Father in heaven”; (Mt 5:48; 6:14, 32; Mk 11:25) “Your heavenly Father”; (Mt 5:16, 45) “Your Father”; (Mt 5:45; 6:9; 7:11) “Our Father in heaven”; (Mt 10:20) “The Spirit of your Father”; The remaining references in the rest of the New Testament are numerous that they cannot be enumerated here.





### **5.3.1.2 The Father is Light**

The Johannine Father is Light (Jn 1:4, 9; 3:19-21; 8:12; 9:5) and in Him and His house there is no darkness. Therefore, as the essential property of light is to shine, so God by His very nature of holiness, righteousness and love is to reveal Himself as being what He is, in order to become the ‘complete truth’. Doing so, He becomes the object of spiritual experience and the source of spirituality for His children. This self-revelation of God the Father is conveyed to them via His Son the incarnate Word, who is the light of men (Jn 1:4), the light of the world (Jn 8:12; 9:5), and the true light (Jn 1:9). It is in their illumination by this divine light that those who do the truth/His children “come out into the light” (Jn 3:19-21).

### **5.3.1.3 The Father is Love; He also loves**

The Johannine Father is Love. This is not a mere moral characteristic given to Him, it is one of the fundamental attributes that reveal His true nature (i.e. eternal, holy); it is the fountain from which the other attributes emanate, and in which they all merge, finding the essence of their meanings; it is the ultimate force that shapes His will with regard to humanity and especially His children, and the mighty power that defines His work and initiative. God therefore is not only love, but He also loves, and His love is creative, abundant and unconditional. He “loves the Son and entrusted everything to his hands” (Jn 3:35). God also loves the entire world and gave his only Son to them (Jn 3:16), especially to those who are spiritually His children – He will ‘make his home’ with them/dwells in them (Jn 14:23). Bartling (1952:872) put it beautifully saying “if one could paint a picture or carve a representation of love, true love, it would have to be a representation not of man and his working, nor even of angels and heaven, but a representation of God Himself. Behold, thus John depicts God that he makes of God and love one thing”. Moreover, in the Johannine theology, this eternal giving and receiving of divine love (between the Father and the Son, as well as between the Father and His children through the Son) is an essential element of the divine nature. In Johannine soteriology, this love is manifested and realized by the sacrificial-redemptive love of Jesus (Jn 10:11, 15; 13:1; 15:13). In the Johannine spirituality, this love leads to a unique fellowship (between the members of the *Familia Dei*), which is adorned by the indwelling of the Father and the Son in their believers. This constitutes a profound experience of God, which can be considered as a significant component of the believer’s spiritual journey of deification.

Arintero (1978:349-351) correctly states that “all three and each of the sacrosanct Trinity, in his own way, contribute to the work of our deification...It is the Father who adopts us; the Son who makes us his...co-heirs; the Holy Ghost who consecrates and sanctifies us and makes us living temples of God”. It could be added that this distinctive divine love was/is behind God’s initiative, that it has motivated Jesus during His salvific passion, and was/is His new commandment to His disciples and to the subsequent believers in their relationships to one another (Jn 13:34-35; 15:12-13).<sup>337</sup> Schwöbel (1998:307) argues that “the notion of love in its manifold variations is indeed so significant that it seems to appear in all dimensions of Christianity: in its doctrinal dimension, in its worship-dimension, in its social dimension, its ethical dimension and in its experiential dimension...Loving is in this way presented as a necessary and sufficient condition for knowing the God who is love”. Story (2010:99) connects God’s love with His purpose and glory, stating that “God’s purpose embraces various...aspects that are to be subsumed under God’s ultimate purpose for the glory of God that is dynamic, relational and loving. God’s glory, Jesus’ glory and the glory of the disciples are intertwined”.

To the findings of Schwöbel and Story can be added that God, who is love (1 Jn 4:8), has created the world out of love through His eternal Word (Jn 1:1-3). He is the loving Father and the God of love, who saw the world He had made and found it “very good” (Gn 1:31). He created the human being “in the image of Himself” (Gn 1:27) and loved the world so immensely that He gave His Son, so that everyone who believes in Him “has eternal life” (Jn 3:16). Those who have accepted the Son, are given “the power to become children of God” (Jn 1:12). The filial relationship of the believers to the Father -established by the Father’s love and accomplished by the Son’s love- and the privilege of being created in the image of God, become therefore an ultimate prospect for the believers to experience God. Thus, God’s love becomes a fundamental foundation of His initiative towards His children, and a motivating factor for them to response to it. The implication is that out of love, the Father created His believers, giving them life and eternal life through His Son. The Son enabled them to become children of God and a *dwelling place* for Him, at the same time experiencing Him. These evoke another attribute of God: God is Life and the Giver of life (Creation) and Eternal Life (Salvation) through his Son (Incarnation).

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<sup>337</sup>. cf. also Bartling (1952:873-874); Zorrilla (1995:74-85); and Shepherd (2010:777-792).



### 5.3.1.4 The Father is Life and the Giver of Life/Eternal Life

The Johannine Father is Life and the immanent source of life. He is the giver of both life and eternal life (Jn 1:3-4). He was “in the beginning” (Gn 1:1; Jn 1:1) and “has life in himself” (Jn 5:26). For the believers, this life is maintained only through a persistent invigorating remaining in the ‘True Vine’/the Son (Jn 5:1-6). He grants eternal life to His believers through His Son and *via* an act of a divine begetting (Jn 1:13; 3:5) by which they become “children of God” (Jn 1:12). This is clearly implied in all the passages which speak of God’s abiding in His believers and their abiding in Him. Eternal life is the element common to the personality of God the Father, of the Son -the incarnate Logos- and of those who become/are the “children of God”. These Johannine statements about life, however, are not the conclusion of a metaphysical speculation, nor do they emanate from an unambiguous reading of God’s nature in His created works or in His providence; they are rather based on a twofold unique act of God in the realm of the human history: He created them through His Son (Creation), and He sent His Son to save them (Salvation). In His turn, the Son became flesh (Incarnation), consequently making the Father known (Revelation) to His children. Thompson (1997:221-246 & 2001:70) puts it correctly: “The primary understanding of God as Father in John comes to expression in Jn 5:26”; “Jesus is the unique Son...who receives life from the Father and in turn gives it to others”.<sup>338</sup> Reflecting on the same concept of life, Minear (1993:488) writes that

this life is, of course, explicitly identified with the life of God who has life in himself; like his Father, the Son has life in himself (5:26). One cannot know this Father without knowing this Son; Father and Son share in the same work of giving life to those whom they choose, those whom they send (5:19-21). Each gift of life is a work of creation that responds to God’s command (12:50).

It can be added that, by reading the Gospel of John, one clearly notices the powerful declaration of Jesus, “I am the life” (Jn 14:6), His convincing promise, “whoever lives and believes in me will never die” (Jn 11:26), and their variations, e.g.: those who drink the water that Jesus gives (Jn 4:14; 7:37); those whom He chooses (Jn 5:21), or come to Him (Jn 5:40); those who hear, accept, keep, obey His word (Jn 5:24; 8:51); those who follow Jesus wherever He goes (Jn 8:12); and those who eat His Body and drink His Blood (Jn 6:54).

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<sup>338</sup>. cf. also Fennema (1979); and Meyer (1996).



These variations describe, in various ways, the qualifications of those to whom Jesus disclosed this declaration and extended this promise. While helping to circumscribe the significance of Jesus' declaration and promise within John's narrative, these variants aid its readers in comprehending the essential concurrence between Jesus' deeds and the believers' response, between the Father's gifts and the deeds of the Son in which both Father and Son are glorified. Consequently the believers/children of God are embraced and included. It is only at this concurrence and at the conjunction of selecting and deciding (accept the Son or not) that life is created and eternal life is inherited. Hence, God is experienced through both life and eternal life.

Thompson (1999:20) argues:

In the Gospel of John, Jesus is the Son who receives life from the Father and in turn gives it to others. [This] kinship of God and Jesus as Father and Son becomes the basis for a number of claims made for Jesus. These claims include his authority to judge, to give life, to mediate knowledge of the Father and to reveal him, to do the works and will of the Father.

According to both Genesis 1 and John 1, the first act of God being mentioned is His creation (accomplished by His Word). In the *Prologue*, the Logos/Word existed alongside God the Father and shared fully in the divine being. He worked alongside the Father to accomplish what only God can do: "All things came to be through Him" (Jn 1:3). The second act of the Logos being mentioned is His incarnation: He "became flesh and lived among us, and we saw his glory, the glory of the one and only Son" (Jn 1:14). The concluding statement of the *Prologue*, "No one has ever seen God; it is the only Son, who is close to the Father's heart, who has made him known" (Jn 1:18), introduced the mission of the incarnate Logos, that is revealing the Father (Revelation) and saving His children (Salvation).

Moreover, as John 1 depicts Jesus as the agent of the original creation, John 3 presents Him as the agent for the new creation that begins with a spiritual regeneration of those who believe in Him. Time after time, therefore, John's narrative portrays Jesus as the creator, who has a creative power and an authority that belongs only to the Father. John also portrays Jesus' mission in the incarnation in terms of inaugurating a new creation through His death and resurrection, while those who believe in Him will receive eternal life and will 'perform the same works' as He does (Jn 14:12) – His works are the works of His Father (Jn 8:28-29; 10:37).

In his narrative, John recorded a powerful statement made by Jesus: “My Father still goes on working, and I am at work too...the Son can do only what he sees the Father doing: and whatever the Father does the Son does too. For the Father loves the Son and shows him everything he himself does” (Jn 5:17-20). Although it is unfeasible to name and discuss all the attributes and the deeds of the Father (recorded in John) in this subsection, only some of the deeds attributed (in the Fourth Gospel) to the Johannine Father are enumerated here (depending only on its narrative). These deeds were presented to its readers in two manners, either through the annotations of the Evangelist himself (i.e. Jn 1:6, 12-13, 17), or through the words (dialogues; discourses; teachings; arguments- i.e. Jn 3:35; 4:23; 5:17) of Jesus recorded by John.

Additionally, one can list the succeeding deeds of the Johannine Father: The Father seeks true worshippers (Jn 4:23); He loves the Son (Jn 5:20; 10:17; 15:9; 17:23); He works (Jn 5:17-20); He shows the Son what He is doing (Jn 5:20); He raises the dead and gives life (Jn 5:21); He gives authority to the Son to have life (Jn 5:26) and implement judgment (Jn 5:27); He gives the Son His deeds to perform (Jn 5:36); He sent the Son (Jn 5:37, 38; 6:29, 39; 8:18, 26; 11:42) and has set His seal on Him/the Son of man (Jn 6:27); the Father testifies to Jesus (Jn 5:37; 8:18); He hands over everyone and everything to Jesus/the Son (Jn 6:37; 13:3; 17:2, 7); He gives bread from heaven (Jn 6:32); He judges (Jn 8:16). The Father instructs Jesus, sends, and stays with Him (Jn 8:28, 29); He knows the Son and consecrated Him (Jn 10:15, 36). He hears the Son/Jesus (Jn 11:41); He glorifies Jesus (Jn 8:50, 54; 13:31-32; 17:1, 5, 22, 24); He honors those who serve Jesus (Jn 12:26); the Father glorifies his own Name (Jn 12:28); He will love, come, and dwell in believers (Jn 14:23); He will send the Holy Spirit (Jn 14:26); He prunes the branches of the true vine (Jn 15:2); He loves the disciples (Jn 16:27; 17:23); He protects those that He has given to the Son (Jn 17:15); and He sanctifies believers in the truth (Jn 17:17). As the head of His *Familia Dei*, the Johannine Father loves His Son (Jn 3:35; 5:20; 10:17; 15:9). He also loves his children (Jn 3:16; 6:40; 12:26; 13:1; 14:21; 16:27), and sustains their life by providing them abundantly with *bread of God* (Jn 6:32-33), *living water* through Jesus (Jn 4:10), and rooms in His heavenly house (Jn 4:2). He protects them (Jn 17:11, 15), and consecrates and unifies them at the request of His Son (Jn 17:17, 23). He abides in them (Jn 14:23); He draws them to Jesus (Jn 6:44). He sends them the Paraclete to be with them (Jn 14:26).

These attributes and deeds of the Father, recorded in the Fourth Gospel, are only a few components of His divine *initiative* motivated by His creative love, accomplished by the sacrificial love of His Son, and accompanied by the caring love of His Holy Spirit. His deeds, rooted in His attributes, have the power to constitute the spirituality of His children while enabling them to experience Him through His Only Son. The above-mentioned attributes of the Johannine Father are but a modest sample of the numerous attributes articulated, over the centuries, to describe His divine nature: The essence of this nature is holiness; its communication is life; its revelation is light; and its work is love. It was through His Only Begotten Son that the Father was made known, His nature was revealed, His love was expressed, and His life was granted to His children. That is the essence of His work and the constituents of His *initiative*.

### **5.3.2 The Johannine Son**

#### **He is the Implementer and the Mediator of the Believers' Experience of God**

This heading suggests that the presentation of Jesus in John is an essential contributor to the believers' experience of God.<sup>339</sup> Noticeably, each title or deed attributed to Jesus in John appeals to a different kind of readers. Due to the facts that the occurrences of these titles and deeds are abundant, only a selected portion of them are discussed from the perspective of their connections with the Johannine experience of God. Additionally, these titles are closely connected and interwoven, implying that the titles of the Son reveal and convey the principles of His deeds, and in their turn, His deeds validate and explain His titles. As such, they are not discussed separately or individually, but deliberately selectively and thematically. Furthermore, the present paragraph rather draws from the wealth of the pertinent publications as well as from John's narrative to look closely and concisely at the involvement of Jesus/the Son in the Johannine experience of God at both of its levels: God's initiative on the one hand, and the response(s) of the members of His Familia Dei/believers to this initiative on the other.

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<sup>339</sup>. Even a casual glance at the heading's expressions might bring to mind the considerable number of topics and related disciplines that have, and still are, producing numerous publications and a significant fountain of knowledge. Examples are: Christology with its branches, such as the *Kenosis Christology*, *Skenosis Christology*, *Gnosis Christology*, *Functional Christology*, *Ontological Christology*; soteriology; theology; sacraments; devotion to Jesus; the historical Jesus; the Christ of faith; and the 'I am' sayings, to name but a few. Mentioning the attributes given to Jesus would evoke the entire spectrum of the *Ontological Christology*. In the same way, talking about His deeds would evoke the whole continuum of *Functional Christology*, and all of the correlated motifs.



### 5.3.2.1 The Son is God

Already in the *Prologue* of his Gospel, John promulgated the second Person of the Holy Trinity and introduced His salvific mission within a family context. He portrayed the second Person as God and a member of a family: the Word of God or the Logos, who existed ‘with God and was God’ (Jn 1:1-2). At the fullness of time, He emptied Himself, entered the cosmos that He created (Jn 1:2-3); He became flesh/a member of both Jesus’ earthly in Nazareth and the divine-human *Familia Dei*, and dwelt among His own (Jn 1:14). Also in the *Prologue*, the Fourth Evangelist hinted at two essential elements of this mission: The incarnate Logos enabled those who accepted Him to “become children of God” (Jn 1:13); and the only Son made “the Father known” (Jn 1:18). The development of both elements is recorded in the narrative of the Fourth Gospel within a family context: In the beginning, John depicted the Son as “the Only Son, Who is close to the Father’s heart” (Jn 1:18). Before His death, when His hour came, the Son announced that His mission of making the Father known is accomplished (Jn 17:1-26).

And when a new charge, “He spoke of God as his own Father and so made himself God’s equal” (Jn 5:18) was brought against Him, Jesus delivered a strong apology (Jn 5:19-47) referring to God as ‘the Father’ or ‘My Father’. Clearly noticeable is this text’s powerful theological and Christological contents, which provide a profound insight on the Father and the Son, and their relationship. Furthermore, after His resurrection, the risen Christ said to Mary of Magdala: “Go and find my brothers, and tell them: I am going to my Father and your Father” (Jn 20:18), and when Thomas met the risen Christ, he cried out proclaiming his faith in Him as ‘Lord’ and ‘God!’ (Jn 20:27).<sup>340</sup> The terminology of family and the indications to Jesus/the Son as God are clearly noticed in the aforementioned references. Also, the development of His mission is recorded heftily in the Fourth Gospel, and the Son is distinctly introduced to the readers, either by the Evangelist or by Jesus Himself as truly and fully equal to God the Father.<sup>341</sup>

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**340.** Whitacre (1999:485) suggests that Thomas’ proclamation got the ‘punch line’ of the entire Fourth Gospel. D’Angelo (1994:624) regards this confession against John’s imperial background and as a slight against Zeus.

**341.** Stanton (1989:115) states that the “Word is dependent on God, and is not simply to be equated with God”.

Anderson (1999:33-57) asserts that the Father-Son relationship is the backbone of the Johannine presentation of Jesus’ words and works. It also contributes to Johannine theological, sociological, and literary issues.

Newheart (1999:155-175) has examined the Father-Son language in John employing a psychological approach.

Kysar (2001:370-376) takes the mission of Jesus as starting point to offer a brief summary of what is implied about the identity and mission of the church, and to examine Jesus’ commission to His disciples.

Cowan (2006:115-135) examines the relationship of the Son to His Father from the angle of subordination.



For example: the Logos/Son was with God and He is God (Jn 1:1-2); He is close to the Father's heart (Jn 1:18); He sits on God's throne (Jn 1:51); and He is one with the Father (Jn 10:30, 38). All of these are validated by Jesus' use of the well-renowned expression or self-revelatory claim, 'I am', which are unique within the New Testament (cf. especially Jn 8:24, 28, 58), and belongs only to God in the Old Testament (Ex 3:4, 14; Dt 32:39; Is 42:8). Many scholars have approached these claims from different perspectives, such as theological, Christological, and subordination perspectives. These perspectives are not discussed here, although certain concise observations are highlighted just to support the line of this investigation and to direct the attention to their connection to the topic of *the Johannine Experience of God*.

By using the 'I am' claim, Jesus asserts His own divinity and affirms His identity as the revealer of the Father and the Savior of the world. This includes His pre-existence, ability to give life, uniqueness of being, and all the aspects of His identity and mission. When Jesus identifies Himself twice as 'I am He' (Jn 8:24, 28), the Pharisees and the Jews refused to believe Him, although His disciples believed His disclosure (Jn 13:19). Furthermore, on different occasions (Jn 4:14, 26; 6:35) He revealed Himself as the *living water* and the *true bread* that supply or communicate life and grant eternal life, resulting in perfect satisfaction and spiritual fullness. Moody Smith (1977:367-368) argues that the Johannine presentation of Jesus "comes alive in the narrative itself. He is the Jesus of the past, who lived and worked in first century Palestine... His miraculous deeds are... deeds of love and mercy [and] signs of Jesus' messiahship and sonship". To this can be added that Jesus' references to Himself as 'the door of the sheep' or 'the gate and its keeper' (Jn 10:7, 9), call to mind the thought and phraseology found in Genesis 28:17 and Numbers 27:15-21. These also imply that Jesus opens the door for His believers to have access to the Father's house. He is the only door through which the children of God can come to the Father (Jn 14:6) and experience Him. His devotion and sacrificial love are also seen as metaphor of the good shepherd who, in order to rescue the sheep, lays down His life for them. The Son is not only the *good shepherd*, but he is also the "Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world" (Jn 1:29, 36). By implication, this statement refers to Jesus' death as the way in which the Father would save the world. Thus, after the Father has given life to the world through the Son, He would save it through His death.

Accordingly, the salvation of the world through the Son can rightly be considered as a major aspect of God's initiative. Reflecting upon another one of Jesus' famous claims, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life" (Jn 14:6), one might find it fitting to say that Jesus is the way that leads the believers/children of God to the place, which He has prepared for them in the Father's house (Jn 14:1-4); He is the way that gives them access to the Father and leads them to all real knowledge of God; He is the truth in which there is the genuine and complete knowledge of the Father; the road to the Father is knowledge of the truth and the possession of life. Truth and life are therefore in the Incarnate Son: He gives the life; He reveals the truth; He offers the light; and He shows the way, all of which He is. Therefore, no one can experience the Father except by perceiving the truth, participating in the life, and following in the way revealed by Jesus to the human member of His *Familia Dei*.

To say that the Son is God and equal to the Father does not mean that He replaces the Father, but that He has His fundamental and complete faculties, will, unity, purpose, and power.<sup>342</sup> All of these and what has been discussed in the previous paragraphs, point to the lofty position of Jesus as He is presented in the Fourth Gospel. In contrast to this, however, there are verses and passages that reflect certain aspects of the humanity of Jesus, the Son of God (Jn 1:14) and the Son of man (Jn 1:51): He gets tired (Jn 4:6) and thirsty (Jn 4:7); He was often exposed to physical harm and violence (Jn 7:1; 8:59; 11:8), especially to the physical agony and suffering on the cross (Jn 19:12-27), and His death (Jn 19:28-30). Furthermore, it is correct to say that the narrative of this Gospel presents, to its reader, both the divine and the human presence of Jesus by recording His attributes and deeds with the purpose that they will meet Him Jesus, believe in Him, and receive eternal life through Him (cf. Van der Watt 2002:89-90). It can be added that the contact of the present readers with the words and deeds of Jesus through John's narrative may not generate in them the same feelings and impact as His first followers could have experience when they physically heard His words or saw Him in action, but certainly, they will have a similar spiritual experience. This implies that the written words and recorded deeds of Jesus (found in John's narrative) have undoubtedly the same ability as His physical words and actual deeds to establish an experience of God and create spirituality.

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<sup>342</sup>. For examples: As the Father raises the dead and gives them life, so does the Son (Jn 10:28; 11:38-44); Also, the Father has given *all judgment* to the Son (Jn 8:21-30; 10:26), and the authority to execute it (Jn 8:31-59).



### **5.3.2.2 The Son is both the Word of God and the Son of Man**

The title *Son of man* is less frequent in the Gospel of John than in the Synoptics, although where it does occur it is significant (Jn 1:51; 3:13-14). The title ‘Son of God’ or simply the designation ‘Son’ is more often employed. There is much emphasis on the filial relationship of Jesus to the Father and its significance for His relationship to believers. For example, more on the divinity of Jesus is revealed when He prays in John 17. The special use of these two titles is deeply impressive and makes the reader realize that the Person of Jesus is beyond comprehension.

One of the most characteristic features in John’s Gospel regarding the identity of Jesus is the Logos doctrine, which serves as an introduction to its account. Right from the opening of the *Prologue*, it is evident that Jesus, as presented in the rest of the narrative, is portrayed as both pre-existent and possessing the divine nature of God Himself. “Logos” is a very fitting title for Jesus’ identity and a significant designation to His mission. He is indeed the ‘Word’ that came from the Father and the means of communication between Him and the believers. Whatever the Father wanted to say to His children, He said through the Son. At the same time, the Son is the Word of God that reveals the will, thought, feeling, intention, plan, and even the character of the Father and His initiative. When the readers encounter these two titles (Word of God and Son of Man) in John’s Gospel, they start with their spiritual journey in the realms of the Incarnation and Revelation portrayed in its narrative.

### **5.3.2.3 The Incarnate Word and the origin of the Father’s Initiative He created the World and showed the Father’s Glory**

The very first sentence of the *Prologue* claims that both the Word and God (the Father) were distinct (although in close proximity and related), as well as that from before creation the Word had the same identity as God. This Word “became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father” (Jn 1:14) – the Son of God became Son of Man. The *Prologue* explains that although ‘no one has ever seen God’, still John’s witnesses have seen the glory of the incarnate Word, and as such He (God) became visible to human sight.

In the rest of the Gospel, the readers are presented with a series of signs that steadily and increasingly uncovers the glory that the Word had with the Father before the creation of the world (Jn 12:41; 15:5); the glory that started to shine out in Jesus from the time when ‘the Word became flesh’ (Jn 1:14); the glory that was first revealed to the disciples at a wedding in Cana of Galilee (Jn 2:11); the same glory that shined ever brighter throughout the entire mission of Jesus, especially by means of His various signs (i.e. Jn 11:40); and culminated in His glorious death (Jn 12:23, 27-33; 17:1-5). It is the same glory that shall overshadow the members of the *Familia Dei* (those whom the Father took from the world and gave to the Son – Jn 17:6), and shall make them one, as the Father and the Son are one (Jn 17:1, 5, 22). It is the same glory that the disciples/these members will fully and continuously see when they are reunited with the risen Savior in the Father’s house (Jn 17:24).

It is therefore fitting to say that the glory of God the Father is an aspect of His divine identity, and that the incarnate Word, who is the Only Son and shares this glory with the Father, has also included the other members of His *Familia Dei* in it (Jn 1:14).<sup>343</sup> He gives them the honor of becoming ‘children of God’ (Jn 1:12), the privilege of calling Him ‘Abba, Father’ (Rm 8:15), and the pleasure of experiencing Him through this glory. Therefore, being included in this glory means receiving another grace from the fullness of the incarnate Word (Jn 1:16). This grace is a significant enrichment to the gift of life and eternal life granted (to these members/His believers) by the Son of God (Jn 1:4, 12-14; 5:24) that enables them to enjoy the Father’s love (Jn 3:16).

The following observations act as conclusion to this subsection: Although the term ‘Word’ (Logos) does not recur after the opening verses of the *Prologue*, its creative, revelatory, and salvific significance is clearly noticeable throughout the rest of the Fourth Gospel;<sup>344</sup>

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**343. MacLeod** (2004:72-88) argues that John 1:14 is one of the most memorable sentences ever penned down. It is a central New Testament text on the doctrine of the incarnation, the doctrine that the second Person of the Trinity assumed human nature. The message of the text is that the Logos assumed human nature and lived a life of moral splendor on this earth. Because He has done so, He can meet the needs of His people and reveal God fully to them.

**344. Quan** (2011:49-68) has sketched the contours of the multileveled understanding of the Word of God in John. According to him, on one level, Jesus is the eternal, incarnate Word sent from the Father, who accomplishes the work given to Him, while on another level, the Fourth Gospel is both distinct from the incarnate Word, a witness to Him, and the continuing speech of the glorified Word through which He continues to dwell with His own.

For example, the reality of the ‘eternal-divine-life giver-Word becoming flesh’ being emphasized in (Jn 4:6; 11:35; 19:1-3, 17, 28, 34, 38-40; 20:20, 27) reveals the divine glory enshrined in it.<sup>345</sup> On earth, Jesus is still ‘the Son of man, who is in heaven’ (Jn 3:13); the perfect revelation of the Father (Jn 14:9); the Light of the world (Jn 8:12); the Way, the Truth and the Life (Jn 14:6); the Resurrection (Jn 11:26); the Final Judge (Jn 5:22) and Savior of the world (Jn 4:42; 6:40); the giver of the Holy Spirit (Jn 7:38, 39; 16:7; 20:22); the hearer of prayers (Jn 14:13, 14); and endowed with all the prerogatives of God the Father (Jn 5:23; 10:30, 36-38).

The narrative of the Fourth Gospel contains the most highly developed description of the Son in the entire New Testament. By the end of the first chapter, the readers already knows that Jesus is “the Word” (Jn 1:1, 14); preexistent (Jn 1:1); God (Jn 1:1); the Creator of life (Jn 1:4); “the True Light” (Jn 1:9); the Only Begotten Son (Jn 1:18); “the Lamb of God” (Jn 1:29, 36); the One who baptizes with the Holy Spirit” (Jn 1:33); Rabbi (Jn 1:38); the “Son of God” (Jn 1:34, 49); the Messiah (Jn 1:41, 45); “the King of Israel” (Jn 1:49); the greater [in rank] that comes after the Baptist (Jn 1:15, 27, 30); He who exists before the Baptist (Jn 1:15, 30); He who baptizes with Holy Spirit (Jn 1:33); and “the Son of Man” (Jn 1:51).<sup>346</sup>

Then John provides his readers with a significant account and a substantial elaboration on these titles and their fundamental connection to both the initiative of God the Father towards His children/the members of His *Familia Dei* (i.e. creating them through His Word; revealing Himself by showing them His glory; loving them and expressing this love by sending His Son to save them) and to the mission of the Son (i.e. making the Father known; empowering the believers to become children of God; laying His life down to save them; taking them to be with Him in His Father’s house).

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**345. Barrett** ([1955] 1975:58-59) argued that “Jesus is (in his words) Son of man, and Messiah (in the words of others)... The fact is that in the Fourth Gospel the Messiahship of Jesus is both hidden and revealed to the believer whom God has called... The Son of man is a mediator in an ontological sense, since he is related both to God and to people... The Fourth Evangelist conceives the relations between the Logos and the human race soteriologically”.

**Schnackenburg** ([1968] 1980:155) states that the Johannine Christology is essentially ordained to Soteriology. Everything that the Johannine Jesus says and does, all that He reveals and all that He accomplishes as ‘signs’, takes place in view of man’s attaining salvation, in view of his gaining divine life.

**Moody Smith** (1981: 421-426) pointed out that some scholars explain the unity of the divine and the human in the same Jesus in three ways: the *Gnosis*, the *Kenosis*, and the *Skenosis*.

**346.** For further reading on the identity of the Johannine Son, cf. **Frederickson** (2000); **Fortna & Thatcher** (1991).





Furthermore, the narrative of the Fourth Gospel contains numerous titles and attributes given to Jesus (the Incarnate Word, the Son of God, and the Son of Man), which are rooted in the theology of the Old Testament, for example: He is the new wine (Jn 2:1-11); the Lord of the temple (Jn 2:12-25); the source of the new birth ( Jn 3:1-36); the giver of the living water superior to that given by Jacob (Jn 4:1-54); the Lord of the Sabbath (Jn 5:1-47); the bread of life superior to that given by Moses (Jn 6:1-71); the teacher of Israel (Jn 7:1-8:59); the good shepherd (Jn 9:1-10:42); the Lord of life (Jn 11:1-46); and the one who glorifies, loves, and obeys the Father (Jn 17:1-5, 14, 15). In the Old Testament, one may find passages that employ the expression ‘the word of God’ to refer to God’s communication with His people, especially through the prophets. In these passages, the word of God is depicted as effective, full of life, and powerful (cf. Ps 107:20; Is 55:11). Like the rest of the Johannine titles, attributed to Jesus, the above-mentioned titles are deeply connected with both the Father’s initiative and the Son’s mission to carry out this initiative.

#### **5.3.2.4 The Son conveyed the Father’s Initiative**

##### **His words and works, recorded in John’s narrative, continue his mission**

Under this heading, two suggestions are presented and explained in a conjunct and concise way:

- Whatever Jesus (the Logos, the incarnate Word of God, the Son, the Son of God) said or did was a progressive process of conveying and accomplishing the Father’s initiative. Accordingly, those who have heard and seen Jesus physically -and believed in Him- have experienced God in a distinctive way. Undoubtedly, the Fourth Evangelist was one of them, as the narrative of his Gospel testifies to that.
- The words and works of Jesus, recorded in the Fourth Gospel, continue the second part of His mission, namely conveying the Father’s initiative. The first part is unique and unrepeatable (among its main components are, creating the world, revealing the Father, and saving the world); it was fulfilled by Jesus Himself.

Due to the merit of their nature and the capability of their substance, the words and works of Jesus recorded in John, have the same ability of creating an experience of God when they are read or heard, and when the readers/hearers believe in Jesus, who said and did them. It is noticeable that John has recorded these words and deeds, employing family terminology.

Indeed, the Father's initiative, conveyed and accomplished by the Son through His words and deeds, is featuring strongly throughout John's Gospel. This is evident from the powerful statements made either by Jesus or the Evangelist, and found in its narrative. Examples are:

- "No one has ever seen God, it is the Only Son, who is close to the Father's heart, who has made Him known" (Jn 1:18).
- "For this is how God loved the world: He gave his Only Son, so that everyone who believes in Him may not perish but may have eternal life" (Jn 3:16).
- "Father...glorify your Son, so that He may give eternal life to all those you have given him. And eternal life is this: to know you...Father, I have revealed your name to those whom you gave me...and they have kept your word" (Jn 17:1-6).

It is also evident in the motifs of glory, love, eternal life, faith, obedience, and abiding, as well as in John's distinct use of the family metaphor to record Jesus' mission and present it to his readers. Actually, the Fourth Evangelist has skillfully developed the love motif as the nature of God and as one of His qualities. The heart of the Son's mission was to reveal this love.<sup>347</sup> It is out of this divine love that the Father has sent the Son to save the world. The Son has made Him known to the world, which means He revealed Him, His love towards His children, and His salvific plan. The culmination of this plan is reached when the human members of the *Familia Dei* accept the Son, cherish this divine love, and respond positively to the Father's initiative. This is the core of the Johannine experience of God.

The object of the Johannine experience of God is the Father Himself, understood as eternal, omniscient, omnipotent, free, loving, holy, and Spirit. The Father loves the only Son (Jn 5:20) and the world (Jn 3:16; cf. also Raabe 1995:132-147), even those who did not believe the Son and resisted Him (Jn 8:19). He revealed Himself to the human members of His *Familia Dei*/disciples/believers (Jn 14:6-11). They do not have any knowledge of the Father except through revelation, freely given by the Father Himself.

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<sup>347</sup>. The terminologies related to this topic occur mainly in the second part of John's narrative.

**Barrett** ([1955] 1975:215) states that, "since God loves the world (Jn 3:16) his love only becomes effective among those who believe in Christ. For the rest, the love of God turns to judgment".

**Van der Merwe** (1996) extends his discussion about Jesus' mission to include the *unity* and the *equality* between the Father and the Son. He maintains that, in John, Jesus' mission revolves around "The Father who sent me".



As recorded in John's Gospel, this Revelation was conveyed and interpreted, on various occasions, through Jesus Christ the Only Begotten Son (Jn 1:18), at different levels and in many ways, such as: signs; discourses; prayers; His Passion; His Death; and His Resurrection. During the development of this Revelation,<sup>348</sup> the Son did the father's will.<sup>349</sup> He performed what He saw His Father doing (Jn 5:19), the zenith of which is giving life and restoring life.<sup>350</sup> He taught what learned from his Father (Jn 7:17-18): his words are "spirit", "life" (Jn 6:63); also, they are the word of the Father (Jn 17:14). In the Fourth Gospel, *to speak* often signifies revelation as in in John 8:40 and 17:17. The Son also declared that He and the Father are one (Jn 10:30);<sup>351</sup> and that He is the *Way*, the *Truth*, and the *Life*; implying that nobody comes to the Father, except through Him (Jn 14:6). Thus, who has seen the Son, has seen the Father (Jn 14:9). This is clearly noticeable in the narrative of the Fourth Gospel, where the words and the deeds of Jesus are recorded to 'bear witness' (Jn 1:8; 21:24) to the Son who revealed the Father to the world. They also bear witness to the Son's sacrificial love and divine power on which human beings and creation depend as the source of everything that the Father is revealing, doing, or declaring. In this way, the Evangelist's favorite terminologies, like way, truth, life, light, bread, and water, demonstrate the most fundamental and overarching aspects of existence for all created beings –especially believers– in finding purpose and meaning in life.

Kanagaraj (1998:250) states correctly that "John presents Jesus as the one who had seen the Father and his works and He is sent to reveal precisely the same God by doing the same works". Köstenberger (2005a:15) argues that John's Gospel is pervaded by a divine mission: "God, the Father, in his love sending Jesus, his Son, to save all those who believe in him, for eternal life".

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**348.** The Prologue links 'revelation' to 'truth'. This is a relationship, which receives further thematization throughout the rest of the Gospel (Jn 8:31-51; 14:6).

**Dodd** ([1953]1970:177) describes *Truth* as the eternal reality as revealed to humankind.

**Bultmann** (1964:239) said *Alētheia* is (truth) thus the reality of God, which is opposed and inaccessible to human existence as it has constituted itself through the fall from God (i.e. through sin), while revelation is a miraculous occurrence beyond the reach of the being which is alien to God.

**Küng** (1977:410) maintains that this is a "truth, which aims at practice, which calls to the way, which bestows and makes possible a new life".

**349.** cf. (Jn 4:34; 5:30; 6:38-40; 8:29; 12:27-28; 18:11).

**350.** cf. (Jn 1:14; 3:15, 16, 36; 4:14; 5:1-18, 21, 24; 6:33, 40, 47; 9:1-41; 11:144).

**351.** cf. (Jn 10:38; 14:10-11, 20; 17:11, 21-22).

Beside revealing the Father and saving the world, the Johannine readers find in John's Gospel another significant element of the Son's mission – that is doing the will of the Father.<sup>352</sup> The implication is that the entire life of Jesus, the only Son, is based on and revolves around His endeavor to do the will of the Father who sent Him. As the revealer, Jesus did what He saw His Father was doing (Jn 5:19, 30), and He spoke what God the Father has told Him to say (Jn 8:28).

The words, which Jesus spoke and the deeds that He performed surpassed their historical circumstances and went beyond their ordinary meanings to lead those who heard/witnessed them physically (through Him) to the Father/experiencing the Father. They are also the words, the works, and the *image* of the Father who sent His Son. This validates Jesus' statement: "Whoever sees me sees the One who sent me/the Father" (Jn 12:45; 14:9). It also validates the suggestions proposed/discussed in this thesis, that whoever experiences Jesus (through His words and works) will experience God through Him; similarly, the Johannine readers will have a similar experience when they read John's narrative that records them. To put it differently, John -throughout the entire scope of his narrative- highlighted the union between the Father and His Son: Every action of the Son is an action of the Father (Jn 5:17-20), and every word of the Son is a divine word given by the Father (Jn 8:28; 12:49-50). Therefore, whoever experiences the Son, would experience the Father. The Evangelist presented the relationship between the Father and the Son within a missiological perspective: The Father is portrayed as 'the one who sent', while the Son is described as 'the one who is sent' with a mission.<sup>353</sup>

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**352.** Various verses (cf. Jn 3:34; 7:16; 8:26, 42; 12:49; 14:24) hint at the fact that Jesus the Son of God is the agent, who has to perform a specific mission. About the Johannine concept of sending, cf. **Ferreira** (1998).

**Flemming** (2016:133-144) asserts that the Gospel of John offers a rich resource for exploring the relationship between holiness and mission, and that mission in John is anchored in the sending love of the triune God. He also explores how the connection between holiness and mission in Jesus' own ministry shapes the mission of the church. **Baker** (2013:38-45) argues that in the Johannine discipleship, the relationship between mission and spirituality for the disciples of Jesus involves various dimensions, i.e. biblical, theological, historical, spiritual, and practical.

**Van der Merwe** (1996:266, 290) states that "for the reader the obedience of Jesus to the will, words and deeds of the Father sets an example to whom believers must comply. This meta-narrative of Jesus constitutes spiritualities of obedience, trust and trustworthiness... the task Jesus has to perform is twofold. As the Son he has to reveal the Father so that people can be saved".

**353.** Except for John 8:42, the concept of Jesus' mission is associated somehow with the act of speaking the words of God, like in John 7:16; 8: 26, 34, 42; 12:49; and John 14:24. The other missions mentioned in the Fourth Gospel are also associated with Jesus' mission (Jn 3:17): The mission of John the Baptist (Jn 1:6; 3:28); the mission of the priests and Levites (Jn 1:19); the mission of the Pharisees (Jn 1:24); the mission of Jesus' disciples (Jn 4:38); the mission of the messengers (Jn 5:33); the mission of the temple guards (Jn 7:32); the mission of an envoy (Jn 11:3).

The origin and the motivation of Jesus' mission is love: The abundant love of God towards the world (Jn 3:16); the mutual love between the Father and His only Son (Jn 3:35; 5:20; 17:24); the love of Jesus towards His own (Jn 13:1); and the believers' love towards Jesus, which is crowned by the coming of the Father and the Son, and their dwelling in these believers (Jn 14:23). Schnackenburg ([1968] 1980 I:153) wrote: "This love of the Father for the Son is seen in the revelatory power of the Son and his participation in the works of the Father".

Bultmann (1953:405) (also cf. Mealand 1978:455; and Loader 1984:198) argues that

Salvation was accomplished only when Jesus completed the cycle of his descent-ascent. The entire salvation drama initiated by the Father (incarnation, crucifixion, resurrection, Pentecost, and the Parousia) is concentrated into one single event: the Revelation of God's reality (ἀλήθεια) in the earthly activity of his Son in the Person of Jesus which enables people to come to this new life through faith in Jesus.

This calls to mind an important topic: The well-known *revelatory experiences*. Scholars like Hurtado (2000:183-205) maintain that these experiences were the most powerful religious experiences lived by the earliest Christian generations.<sup>354</sup> Johnson (1998:61) describes them as a response to what is perceived as an ultimate experience of God, or as an encounter between Him and human beings (cf. Howard 2008:78). In the case of the Fourth Gospel, this kind of experiences originated from, and was facilitated by Jesus the Son of God/the revealer, and recorded by John in his narrative. Quan (2011:49-68) has investigated the contours of the multileveled understanding of the Word of God in the Fourth Gospel, and the relationship of the incarnate Word to the Fourth Gospel. According to him, the Fourth Gospel is a 'witness to the Word', and the 'continuing speech' of the glorified Word; through this gospel, by the Spirit, the Word continues to dwell with his own. Kurz (2001:67-84) relates how the Johannine Word reveals the Father, especially in the Fourth Gospel, and how Christian communities and readers can continue to actualize this insight.<sup>355</sup>

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<sup>354</sup>. Hurtado (2000:183) states that earliest Christianity was characterized by an assortment of religious experiences. Johnson (1998:67) claimed that the religious experiences of earliest Christianity existed in a continuum with other experiences in complex combinations.

<sup>355</sup>. According to Kurz (2001:67-84), the *Prologue* presents several ways on how the Word/Son reveals the Father: As Word 'with God in the beginning', and 'creating all things' as God; and as light and life coming into the world. Van der Merwe (2003:253-285) maintains that John 17:17-19 does not refer to the historical sending of the disciples by Jesus, but to the appointment of the disciples as the agents of Jesus to continue His mission in the world.





To conclude: Although the only reference to Jesus as the Word/Logos, who alone has revealed the Father, occurs only once in the *Prologue* of the Fourth Gospel, the theme of Jesus as the Son and the revealer, revealing the Father, runs throughout the remaining part of its narrative.<sup>356</sup> In other words, through his words and deeds, Jesus has revealed the Father to those who physically have heard and saw Him. Recorded competently in this narrative, these words and deeds continue to convey this revelation to its readers throughout the history of Christianity, and at the same time, introducing them to the one who carried out and explained this revelation: Jesus Christ. The merit of this is to be found in the ability of these recorded words and deeds to initiate spirituality and create an experience of God.

### 5.3.3 The Johannine Holy Spirit

#### He continues the Son's Mission; He accompanies the believers in their spiritual journey

In the Fourth Gospel, the readers find significant teaching about the Holy Spirit. In this Gospel, three titles are employed when referring to Him:<sup>357</sup> παράκλητος (*Paraclete*, 4 times),<sup>358</sup> πνεῦμα τῆς ἀληθείας (*Spirit of truth*, 3 times: Jn 14:17; 15:26; 16:13), and πνεῦμα ἅγιον (*Holy Spirit*, 3 times). Only the title 'Holy Spirit' is taken from the Old Testament (Ps 51:11; Is 63:10-11), with the other two titles being totally new with reference to the Old Testament. He is not portrayed as 'wonder-working' (Isaac 1983:399), and the term πνεῦμα was used in John in reference to various things,<sup>359</sup> such as Spirit/spirit, breath, the animating force of human life (Jn 3:6), the perturbed human spirit of Jesus (Jn 11:33; 13:21), Jesus' own life (Jn 19:30), a 'gift' from God (Jn 1:32-33; 3:5-8; 15:26), and that which Jesus gives to His disciples (Jn 20:22).

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**356.** Cf. Harris (1994); Tanner (2005); Phillips (2006); and Ward (2009) on the topic of Christology, on ἐγώ εἰμι and related motifs.

**357.** Referring to the Holy Spirit/Paraclete/Pneuma in a masculine form has generated a major debate. The issue of gender and its linguistic ramifications are not discussed here. However, the traditional identification commonly employed in referring to the Holy Spirit/Paraclete/the Spirit as He, Him, Himself, and His are adopted in this thesis. These names are used alternatively to avoid any unnecessary and boring repetition.

**358.** The way in which the term *Paraclete* can be translated, is debatable. It could be translated with 'one called to the side of another', 'advocate', 'comforter', 'intercessor', 'revealer', 'helper', 'mediator', 'teacher', 'strengthened', or 'vindicator', depending on the context in which it is used.

**359.** On the topic, cf. Barrett ([1955] 1975:8, 12-13); Brown ([1966] 1979:124); Wallace (1996:331-332); and Beasley-Murray (1987:261).

In other passages in John, it is used in an ordinary sense of the term (cf. Jn 4:23, 24; 6:63; 19:30). John also pointed out certain characteristics of the Holy Spirit, employing two metaphors, *dove*<sup>360</sup> and *wind*,<sup>361</sup> together with their associated variations and metaphoric terminologies.

This shows the importance of the Johannine pneumatology for biblical theology (both of which are not discussed in this Chapter). The names (titles) attributed to the Holy Spirit reveal His character, and the attributes given to Him express His multidimensional role. This is validated by the multilevel and frequent references related to the Holy Spirit found in the Gospel of John.<sup>362</sup> In each of these references, the unfolding glorification of Jesus Christ by the Spirit can be seen, as the Spirit makes Him known as Son, being the continuation to His mission.

Although, the *Holy Spirit-Paraclete* is not mentioned in the *Prologue*, the role of the *Logos* in John 1:1-5 has many similarities to that of the *Spirit* in the creation's accounts of Genesis 1-2. This implies that the Paraclete does many of the same things that Jesus said and did. Doing so, He continues Jesus' revelation and completes it. This is validated by the significant references to the Holy Spirit-Paraclete<sup>363</sup> that are spread throughout the rest of the Fourth Gospel:

First, in the opening of the Gospel (Jn 1:32-33), the Fourth Evangelist introduced to his readers the Holy Spirit as a *dove* coming down from heaven on Jesus during His baptism and as the one who identified Jesus – the chosen one of God (Jn 1:29-34). Accordingly, John the Baptist declared that Jesus will baptize people with the Holy Spirit (Jn 1:34). In John 3:5-8 the Spirit is mentioned in connection with new birth and spiritual life, and in John 3:34 as an abundant gift from God that would enable the believers to worship the Father in Spirit and in truth (Jn 4:23). The Spirit and the idea of life-giving are mentioned again in John 6:63 and 7:39.

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**360.** With the metaphoric *dove*, the Johannine narrative highlights the following characteristics of the Holy Spirit: Gentleness, pureness, innocence, graciousness, tenderness, peace and tranquility; cf. **Barrett** ([1955] 1975:178); **Brown** (1982:57); and **Carson** (1991:151).

**361.** The study of the Johannine metaphors is valuable in understanding the message and theology of the Fourth Gospel. The metaphor *wind* is no stranger to that, due to its functional and theological implications in this Gospel, (cf. **Martyn** [1978] 2004:143-151; **Ashton** 1991:550-552; **Barrett** [1955] 1975:210-211); for further reading on the topic: **Keener** ([2003] 2005 I:556-558); and **Köstenberger** (2004:124-125).

**362.** The references about the Holy Spirit are abundant in the Fourth Gospel, cf. e.g.: (Jn 1:32-34); (Jn 3:5-8, 31-34); (Jn 4:21-24; 6:61-63; 7:37-39; 11:33; 13:21; 14:14-17, 25-26; 15:26-27; 16:7, 12-15; 19:30; 20:21-23).

**363.** In the Fourth Gospel, the term Paraclete is used only in the farewell discourse.

**Kysar** ([1975] 1996:239) states that the Fourth Evangelist drew two distinct thoughts together -one old and one new- to produce an unforgettable combination and a single theological construct: The Spirit/Paraclete.



Second, close to the middle of the Gospel, within the Last Supper discourse, Jesus has promised His disciples that the Father will send the Paraclete to teach them everything and remind them of all that Jesus has said to them (Jn 14:26). Another main function of the Holy Spirit-Paraclete is witnessing to Jesus (Jn 15:26; 16:14). In John 16:7-13, there is a shift in the depiction of the Paraclete's role – from teaching and reminding to judging and guiding.

Third, in the conclusion of John's narrative, the risen Christ gave His disciples the Holy Spirit and sent them to continue His mission (Jn 20:22).

The promise of baptism by the Holy Spirit in John's first chapter (Jn 1:33) is hereby fulfilled in its conclusion (Jn 20:22). Evidently in his narrative, the Fourth Evangelist included the account of the Holy Spirit-Paraclete in connection with Jesus' mission, employing the above-mentioned titles and using the dove, water and wind metaphors. He did that to enable the original and subsequent readers to come to a better understanding of the Holy Spirit-Paraclete and His involvement in Jesus' mission, making His Father known, and saving the world. The titles and metaphors pertaining to the Holy Spirit-Paraclete certainly have functional and theological implications for the Johannine pneumatology and theology. The Fourth Evangelist used these titles and metaphors to express the pneumatological and theological message of his Gospel.

It suffices to look at John 3, 4 and 6 to realize that the Holy Spirit-Paraclete is essential for salvation: The 'birth of the Spirit' is the way to enter the kingdom of God (Jn 3:3-8); it 'is the Spirit that gives life', according to the revelatory discourse of Jesus (Jn 6:63); the 'living water' (Jn 4:10-14; 7:37-39) points to, among others, what the Spirit-Paraclete will become in the believers, that is a profuse spring flowing towards eternal life, and worshipping the Father in 'the Spirit and in truth' (Jn 4:23-24). During the development of Jesus' mission, people (including the disciples) have already experienced the Father through both the work of His only Son and the involvement of His Holy Spirit in continuing this work. The contents of John 7:39 and 16:7 suggest that the disciples (believers) still had to wait for the coming of the Paraclete till after the glorification of Jesus during and after His crucifixion and resurrection, and the gift of the Holy Spirit (Jn 20:22). By receiving the Holy Spirit, their experience of God is adorned and their spiritual journey is enriched. Thus, in John, the involvement of the Holy Spirit in the believers' journey could be understood as the sign of spiritual life that generates an experience of God.

### 5.3.3.1 The Holy Spirit identifies the Son and makes Him known

#### The Holy Spirit leads the people to know the Son and to believe in Him

The first reference to the Holy Spirit in the Fourth Gospel is meaningful,<sup>364</sup> where He identified Jesus by coming “down on Him like a dove from heaven and rest on Him” (Jn 1:32-33). Although He did that silently, He enabled John the Baptist to make a public twofold testimony about Jesus, declaring that He is both the ‘Lamb of God’ (Jn 1:29) and the ‘chosen one of God’ (Jn 1:34). The first part of this testimony hints at the forthcoming ultimate and salvific sacrifice of Jesus, through which both the Father and the Son would be glorified (Jn 17:1, 4; 21:19). The second part evokes and validates the declaration of John 1:18 that describes Jesus as the ‘only Son of God’, who revealed the unseen Father and made Him known. This is a principal Johannine theme, which is developed progressively in John’s narrative: As the Son makes the Father known, likewise the Holy Spirit makes the Son known. The Spirit revealed the divinity of Jesus to John the Baptist (Jn 1:32), directing the attention to two aspects of Jesus’ divine identity: Creator and Savior. The metaphoric Father-Son in John 1:18, 49, with its variations and correlated motifs, inaugurates the *Familia Dei* theme within which John is going to convey its theological, Christological, and pneumatological message. The *dove*<sup>365</sup> imagery could be seen as a symbol of the new creation (Gn 8:8) and as a reminder of the Israelites’ salvation (Ho 11:11).

The verb ‘remain’ is one the favorite terms in the Fourth Gospel: Its first employment here emphasizes the permanency of the relationship between the Father and the Son; it implies that Jesus is the greater prophet and the permanent bearer of the Holy Spirit – the Spirit of truth. Schnackenburg ([1968] 1980 I: 303-304) asserts that “the Baptist put his testimony to Jesus... then he declared his own identity (Jn 1:21, 23), and announced his own task (Jn 1:29-35)... full and permanent possession of the Spirit is the distinctive characteristics of the Messiah... in John, Jesus also wins his first disciples... who form the beginning of the community (Jn 3:27, 29)”. This community could be considered as the human side of the *Familia Dei*.

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**364.** On the relation of the Holy Spirit-Paraclete to the different levels of meaning in John’s narrative: cf. **Martyn** ([1978] 2004:143-151); and **Ashton** (1991:550-552).

**365.** **Barrett** ([1955] 1975:178) claims that the *dove* has no independent meaning in John, and is to be seen only as a piece of traditional imagery. **Brown** (1982:57), however, sees it as a symbol for the Holy Spirit. **Carson** (1991:151) notices that the choice of a dove to symbolize the Spirit’s descent is not obvious, though there is some evidence in Jewish sources for a connection between the *dove* and the *Holy Spirit*.



Whitacre (1999:68) and Barrett ([1955] 1975:178) maintain that the act of ‘remaining’ implies that all of Jesus’ ministry must be understood as accomplished in communion with the Spirit of God. Carson (1991:151) asserts that when Christians read their Bibles, they would see in Jesus “the fulfillment of God’s promises to pour out his Spirit on the coming King (Is 11:11ff)”. Keener ([2003] 2005 I:461) states that the particular title ‘Holy Spirit’, used in John, emphasizes “the continuity between Jesus’ revelation and that of the Spirit”. Brown ([1966] 1979:66) affirms that the theme of the dispensation of the Spirit recurs throughout the Gospel.

At this level, it can be added that this theme has many dimensions that are connected to the identity and the work of the Holy Spirit, for example:

- John 1:19-34 recorded that the Holy Spirit came down from heaven and rested on Jesus. Among other meanings, this signifies the beginning of a new Messianic age. Ever since, the Holy Spirit remained with Jesus during His entire mission on earth. The promise of sending the Holy Spirit, which Jesus made to His disciples, was fulfilled after His resurrection and before His ascension to the Father (Jn 20:22-23). From that moment on, the Holy Spirit-Paraclete became the constant presence of the Father and the Son with the disciples to inspire the subsequent believers or the human members of the *Familia Dei*. The Holy Spirit, therefore, became the unseen and permanent companion or ‘another Paraclete’, who will accompany them/‘be with them forever’ (Jn 14:16). As such, the Holy Spirit-Paraclete will continue the presence (somehow replace) of the first ‘advocate’ (1 Jn 2:1) or the visible and ‘impermanent’ Jesus/the Incarnate Son (referring here to His short life on earth).
- In John 3, *regeneration*<sup>366</sup> or *new birth* are presented as one aspect of the Holy Spirit’s work. In the course of His conversation with Nicodemus, Jesus compared this aspect to that of the wind, which one cannot see but can sense its effects. Jesus also took Nicodemus’ misunderstanding as an opportunity to deliver more teachings about the Father, the Son, and the divine salvific plan of God for the world, about the necessity of a new birth ‘from above’ or being ‘born through water and the Spirit’. These, and believing in the Son, can be considered as a condition for salvation. This could be understood through the Holy Spirit.

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**366.** The work of the Holy Spirit-Paraclete in *regeneration* is declared in John 3:5-8. This topic has been approached by scholars from different angles, like **Dodd** ([1953]1970:297-317); **Barrett** ([1955] 1975:226); cf. also: **Brown** ([1966] 1979:137-144); **Carson** (1982:59-91); **Pamment** (1983:12-16); and **Richard** (1985:96-112).

Water is indeed a salient topic in John and its ramifications are important,<sup>367</sup> and within this context, being ‘born through water and the Spirit’ can be validly linked to a new spiritual birth and joining the *Familia Dei*.

With the above-articulated observations in mind, and agreeing with the largely accepted conviction that figurative language is an essential element of the Johannine style, it is evident that imageries, metaphors, and titles -attributed to the Son and the Holy Spirit in John 1 and 2- are an integral part of John’s effort to enable the readers’ understanding of his Gospel’s message. These are powerful instruments, which the Evangelist used to record the mission of the Son and that of the Holy Spirit. They are associated with a twofold chain of revealing and witnessing, which generates knowledge, faith, and salvation, that is an experience of God. The Son made the Father known and the people saw His glory. The Holy Spirit identified the Son, and John the Baptist recognized Him. John saw Jesus and told the first two disciples about Him. They followed Him and spent time with Him; then after that they shared their experience with other family members and people. This chain started in the *Prologue*, is developed throughout the narrative, and is concluded in the *Epilogue* with the final statement of the disciple ‘who vouches for these things and has written them’ (Jn 21:24).

Therefore, as the live testimonies of the Son and the Holy Spirit (that include the revelations carried out by both of them, their works, and in the case of Jesus, His words too) have created the experience(s) of God lived by the first generation of believers. Likewise, the account of these testimonies recorded in John’s narrative has the same ability to create (by the power of the Holy Spirit, enshrined in the words of God) similar experiences once it is read or heard. Revealing the Son and leading people to know Him/believe in Him, therefore establish the first stage of the involvement of the Holy Spirit in the believers’ spiritual journey of experiencing God. The second phase is about the Holy Spirit continuing the mission of the Son by reminding/teaching the believers and leading them to the complete truth.

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**367.** Examples are: water and ceremonial washings (Jn 2:6; Jn 4:7, 10-15, 28, 46; 5:7; 7:38; 13:5; 19:34); water and baptism (Jn 1:26, 31, 33). **Bennema** (2003:40) states that “Jesus’ Spirit-baptism refers to some sort of cleansing and is also linked with the revelation of God to people, and Jesus accomplishes this by means of the Spirit. People who accept Jesus’ revelation and cleansing find life/salvation”.



### 5.3.3.2 The Holy Spirit continues the Mission of the Son

#### The Holy Spirit accompanies the believers in their spiritual journey

The outcome of the previous paragraphs points out that the first segment of the involvement of the Holy Spirit in the believers' experience of God, consists of Him identifying the Son and making Him known, as well as leading the people to know the Son and to believe in Him. The second segment of this involvement finds its roots in the Farewell Discourse in John **14-16**,<sup>368</sup> and encompasses the role of the Holy Spirit-Paraclete in continuing the mission of the Son, glorifying Him (Jn 16:15), and accompanying the believers/the human members of the *Familia Dei* (henceforth members of the *Familia Dei* or simply *Familia Dei*) in their spiritual journey of experiencing God. Many verses and passages testify to this statement, for example:

- The Paraclete is the *Holy One* (Jn 14:26) as Jesus is (Jn 6:69);
- The Paraclete is a *Revealer*, who continues Jesus' revelation of the Father (Jn 1:18; 14:6; 17:6-7);
- The Paraclete is a *Leader*, who guides the disciples to the 'truth' (Jn 16:13-15);
- The Paraclete is a *Companion*, who will be with the disciples forever (Jn 14:16-18) to perpetuate the presence of Jesus among the disciples and the believers (Jn 14:23; 15:5);
- The Paraclete is a *Divine Teacher*, who teaches the disciples and the succeeding believers and explains to them/reminds them (Jn 14:26) of what Jesus, the greater teacher (Jn 1:38) has taught and preached (Jn 15:11, 15; 17:8, 13; cf. also Jn 1:39; 3:2, 11-13; 11:28; 13:13-14; 16:13);
- The Paraclete is a *Judge* sent by the Son (Jn 16:7) and by the Father in Jesus' Name (Jn 14:26) to bring the world to judgment (Jn 9:39; 16:8); He continues the work of the Son (Jn 8:49-50), who received everything and all judgment from the Father (Jn 3:35; 5:22), exposed sin (Jn 9:39) and the world's lack of righteousness (Jn 7:7); likewise, the Paraclete exposes sin (Jn 16:8-11) and the world's lack of righteousness (Jn 16:8);
- Paraclete is the *Spirit of Truth* (Jn 14:17; 15:26), who helps Jesus' disciples, and God's children (Jn 14:15-21), and reminds them of/interprets to them the Father's initiative (Jn 14:25-31). He will testify to God's truth (Jn 15:26-16:4), and lead them to the final destination of their spiritual journey, that is the Complete Truth (Jn 16:12-16) – Jesus Himself (Jn 14:6), and God the Father (Jn 3:33). This truth will set them free (Jn 8:32) and sanctify them (Jn 17:17) If they live by this truth, they will come into the light and will realize that what they have done has been done in the sight of God (Jn 3:21). They will worship the Father in the Spirit and in truth (Jn 4:23-24).

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<sup>368</sup>. On the topic of the Spirit-Paraclete in the *Farewell Discourse*, cf. **Shillington** (2012:31-39).

This could also imply that the Paraclete keeps the mind of the *Familia Dei* focused on the Son by revealing ‘the things to come’<sup>369</sup> to its members. He leads them to a saving knowledge of the Father and the Son, and at the same time, fills their hearts with ‘full joy’ (Jn 16:14, 22). He also brings the new revelation, which is the continuation of the initial revelation brought by the first Paraclete (Jesus the Son of God; cf. Jn 14:26; 16:13). Bennema (2003:35-60) maintains that the Spirit has a salvific role in John’s Gospel – John 3, 4 and 6 is evident to that. Therefore, the Paraclete makes both the Father and Jesus present in the *Familia Dei*. He also witnesses to Jesus (Jn 15:26),<sup>370</sup> as Jesus witnesses to the Father (Jn 14:6-11), and both of them (the Holy Spirit and the Son) operate together so that people may know the Father, and in knowing Him, may become His children. As the Father testified to Jesus, so did John the Baptist, the Fourth Gospel and the entire Bible. Just like Jesus (Jn 5:19, 30; 8:26, 28, 40; 14:10), the Paraclete does not speak from Himself or on His own, but whatever He hears (Jn 16:13). The role of the Holy Spirit, which started physically through His descent, like a dove, onto Jesus at the dawn of His public ministry, has continued during the development of Jesus’ mission on earth, and will endure spiritually with the believers/*Familia Dei* (Jn 14:17) by accompanying them perpetually. As the power of the Paraclete was visible in what Jesus said and did, so it will be in what they are doing and saying.

In this subsection it has been pointed out that the attributes and functions of the Holy Spirit-Paraclete<sup>371</sup> are parallel to those ascribed to Jesus in the Fourth Gospel, and that the Holy Spirit-Paraclete was sent by the Father and the Son to continue the mission of the Son, which entails revealing and achieving the Father’s initiative (which is the first component of the experience of God). He was sent to remind the believers/*Familia Dei* of its essence and explain it to them, at the same time, to enlighten and guide them to respond positively to it. Thus, it is up to them to decide: Their positive response is the second component that completes their experience of God.

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**369.** The topic of prophecy in the Johannine Community or any of its ramifications is not discussed here. Ample information is available from **Betz** (1963:149); **Jeremias** (1971:22); **Johnston** (1970:127-148); **Burge** (1987:3-42); **Käsemann** (1978:39); **Moody Smith** (1995:97); and **Stefan** (2005:273-296).

**370.** **Estrada** (2013:77-94) has different opinion and urges the readers to rethink the Paraclete’s witness not in relation to the world, but in relation to the disciples and the context of the Johannine Community.

**371.** On the topic Holy Spirit, cf. **Brown** ([1966]1979: xiii-xxi); **Malatesta** (1973:539-550); **Carson** (1979:547ff); **Painter** (1980/1:525-543); **Segovia** (1982 c:115-128); **Hoeck** (2012:23-37); and **Smit** (2016:447-462).

## **5.4 The Second Component of the Johannine Experience of God:**

### **The Human Members of the *Familia Dei* and their response(s) to God's Initiative**

Like the other Johannine themes, the heading of this section has the potential to evoke numerous topics and involve various disciplines. In the previous pages, *God's Initiative* as the first component of the *Johannine Experience of God* was discussed. This discussion points out the role of the Son in manifesting and accomplishing this initiative. It also highlights the involvement of the Holy Spirit in continuing the mission of Jesus and accompanying the believers in their spiritual journey/experiencing God. This section deals with the second component of this experience that is the human members of the *Familia Dei* and their positive response(s) to God's Initiative. Like the first one, this component is perceived from the perspective of the narrative of the Fourth Gospel and its *Familia Dei* metaphoric.

#### **5.4.1 Being members of the *Familia Dei***

In the light of the presentation of the *Familia Dei* concept in this thesis, being members of this family is an important topic with many salient aspects. Two aspects are discussed here:

- ♦ Joining the *Familia Dei* - becoming children of God.
- ♦ Being children of God - becoming a divine dwelling.

##### **5.4.1.1 Joining the *Familia Dei* - Becoming Children of God**

The privilege of joining the *Familia Dei* and the honor of becoming Children of God are not two separate events that one can list them chronologically (one event before the other). In fact, they are two indications attributed to the same event. They are the reward of accepting (believing in) the Incarnate Son of God (Jn 1:12). Although the name and certain characteristics of the *Familia Dei* are metaphoric, its members (divine and human) are real living beings, and the relationships connecting them are actual facts. Their interactions with each other and their involvements in the journey of experiencing God are also factual. These relationships and interactions are better understood in the light of two metaphors that Jesus employed to reveal His identity, to explain His mission, and to identify those who believe/accept Him: The *True Vine* (Jn 15:1-17) and the *Good Shepherd* (Jn 10:1-21).

Metaphorical language forms an important part of any culture as well as of the biblical thoughts and literary styles (including that of the Fourth Gospel) (cf. Esler 2000:167; Lassen 1997:114). And the predominant biblical themes of covenant, communities, fellowship, and the like, are the foundation of the theology of family. The early Christians committed themselves to a new lifestyle within a community of believers, which they considered to be *new family* (*Familia Dei*; Osiek 1996:20, 23 calls it a *surrogate family*) that glorified the Father by believing in the Son, and living under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Prominent scholars like Käsemann (1978:56f), Schüssler Fiorenza (1983:290-291), and Robbins (1996:101) claim that in the New Testament, the followers of Jesus were described from a group-oriented and collective perspective, and that the first century Mediterranean people were not individualistic.<sup>372</sup> Van der Merwe (2005:543f) argues that this kind of spiritual family transcends, existentially and ethically, the physical family to whom someone belongs. It means that though this person exists in a ‘different way’ on earth, he/she already possesses eternal life. Schnackenburg ([1968] 1980 I:203-204) explains that

Natural birth does not make one a child of God, nor any other natural process. It is a supernatural event, wrought by God alone...the evangelist presents the birth from God as the incomprehensible work of the divine Spirit...he stresses the supernatural origin of the children of God, to show...their kinship with the Logos.

Punt (2009) affirms that “the tension in the New Testament between the household parenesis and the appeals to discipleship is sometimes addressed by the claim that, in the case of the latter, family is not abolished but extended”. Keener ([2003] 2005 I:405) argues that

This birth makes one a participant in the whole new creation inaugurated by the messianic woes undertaken by Jesus and his followers...the narrative’s logic implies a transferal: the Word that had been forever ‘with God’ (Jn 1:1-2) ‘became flesh’ (Jn 1:14) so others could be ‘born not from flesh but from God’ (Jn 1:13; 3:6).

According to Osiek (1996:10), family values convey an aura of tranquility, respectability, and moral rectitude; therefore “believers know where they belong and what God wants them to do”.

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<sup>372</sup>. On the topic of Early Christian communities in the Greco-Roman world, cf. **Malina & Neyrey** (1991:72-73); **Wilson** (1995:2); **Esler** (2000:151); **Trebilco** (2013:25-48). **Billings** (2011:542-569) suggests a ‘three stage theory’: *First stage* (*Oikos Ecclesiae*) 50-150 AD: Christian communities met in private homes of members; *Second stage* (*Domus Ecclesiae*) 150-250 AD: Private homes were renovated for dedicated Christian usage; *Third stage* (*Aula Ecclesiae*) 250-313 AD: Larger buildings and public halls were renovated for Christian usage.

Building on the above-presented statements of the scholars and on the discussion in the previous page, it could be added that the transferal (suggested by Keener [2003] 2005) creates a new identity for the believers: They become children of God. It also generates a set of family values suitable for this identity. The latter and its related values are two of the essential characteristics that make the *Familia Dei* unique and unrepeatable. Another valuable feature that can be added is that the divine members (the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit) were/are involved in creating the human members of this family (believers, children of God), sustaining their existence, and including them in the Father's kingdom and eternal life.

The narrative of the Fourth Gospel points out how people (believers) can become member of the *Familia Dei*/children of God; for example: by accepting the Incarnate Logos (Jn 1:12); by being born from above through the Spirit (Jn 3:3); as a result of being drawn by the Father (Jn 6:44); or by making a decision to join the family (Jn 1:35-39; Jn 9:35-38). The privilege of joining the *Familia Dei* and the honor of becoming Children of God are bestowed upon the believers by the power of the Only Begotten Son (Jn 1:12; 11:52). Accordingly, they are honored by the status of their heavenly Father, and bounded by the practice of mutual love (Jn 13:34; 15:12). Reading these passages and the special terminologies used to convey the message, the readers feel encouraged to identify themselves with the members of the *Familia Dei* and endeavor to join it.

Becoming children of God connotes the direct communication of the Father's own nature and identity; it also contains the promise of a future glorious development: Eternal life and being with the Son in His Father's house (Jn 14:1-3). It creates an ambiance of family love and friendship, being at once human and divine. O'Day (1986:157) states that "Jesus is the ultimate friend. Friendship in John is the enactment of the love of God that is incarnate in Jesus and that Jesus boldly makes available to the world".<sup>373</sup> Crook (2011:7 of 7 pages) asserts that a fictive friendship in the Fourth Gospel is to be understood as a fictive kinship, as love and friendship are tightly connected in John's Gospel. Jesus called His disciples friends and treated them like friends. By doing so, He enabled them to experience God and to have fellowship with Him.

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**373. Johnson** (2004:158-171) proposes three kinds of connections: The *first connection* is between the explicit and the implicit, between denotation and connotation; the *second connection* is between what is said and what is done, between discourse and practice; and the *third connection* is the one that the first Christians formed among themselves on the basis of the material expression of friendship, cf. also **Konstan** (1996); and **Fitzgerald** (1997).



In the Bible, the theme of household<sup>374</sup> and its associated family metaphors find the fullness of their meaning in the teachings of Jesus/the Son about the kingdom of God (cf. Osiek 1996:10).<sup>375</sup> Van der Merwe (2010:207-226) maintains that a coherent network of metaphors, related to the social reality of the first century family life was used to explain fundamental Christian concepts, identity, and ethical matters (cf. also Lassen 1997:103; Lakoff & Johnson 1980:154).<sup>376</sup> As belonging to a human family gives the person a sense of identity, privileges, and rights; so does belonging to the *Familia Dei*: It gives the believer all of this and more, but at a deeper multidimensional spiritual, and eschatological level. To the statement of Van der Merwe can be added that, just as being members of a human family comes with various responsibilities, so is the case with becoming a child of God. Among other obligations, the children of God must participate in the life of the *Familia Dei*; protect its traditions and heritage; practice its family values<sup>377</sup> preserve its beliefs and legacy, and pass them on to future generations.

Becoming *children of God* means that believers get to know the Father, and consequently they commence to share His divine life without ceasing to be human beings. By believing in His Son, they will have life (Jn 20:31) and eternal life (Jn 6:40) through His Name. Given the significance of the name in biblical literature, traditions, and theology,<sup>378</sup> when people (in the thesis at hand: the johannine readers) join the *Familia Dei*/ become *children of God*, they will have the privilege to share in God's divine life, and the honor to carry His Name. Therefore, Jesus' mission of making the Father known includes the honor of becoming members of His family, and a revelation of the type of life granted with such honor: This life is an ambiance of unity, holiness, fellowship, love, and everlasting joy lived among and with the other members.

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**374.** Scholars like **Schüssler Fiorenza** (1984) claim that, in the time of the Old Testament and in Early Christianity, the household was the place of spiritual continuity by preserving the faith and the traditions, and passing them on from generation to generation. For a feminist perspective of the topic, cf. **Wright** (1992:761-769).

**375.** For example: (Mt 5:3-11, 38-48); (Mk 3:28-30); (Lk 2:41-51; 6:20-26; 15:11-24)].

**376.** **Jordan** (1974:235-236) and **Van der Watt** (2000:22) state that metaphors and metaphors in the Fourth Gospel do not create a reality, but aim to describe this reality.

**377.** The following are some references related to *Family Values* in the New Testament:

(Col 3:18-4:1); (Eph 5:21-6:8); (1 Tm 2:8-15; 5:11-16; 6:1-2); (Tt 2:2-10); and (1 P 2:18-3:7).

**378.** **Carson** (1991:125-126) explains that "the name is more than a label; it is the character of the person, or even the person himself...Another way of describing those who receive the Word is suggested by the children of God".

In this ambiance, love and friendship (within the Johannine corpus)<sup>379</sup> could be considered as two graces that come with the privilege of joining the *Familia Dei*/the honor of becoming *children of God*, and as a venue to experiencing God. In John, God is depicted as the loving Father, whose will is to grant eternal life to His children (Jn 6:40); Jesus as the sublime friend, who consistently sustains this life (Jn 6:33; 11:25; 14:6); and the Holy Spirit as the caring companion in the spiritual journey, who communicates this life (Jn 3:5-8). O’Day (2004:157) states that “Jesus is a true friend...friendship in John is the enactment of the love of God that is incarnate in Jesus and that Jesus boldly makes available to the world”. According to John 3:16, love is the source of eternal life. This is the love of the inner circle of the believers and the three Persons of the Holy Trinity<sup>380</sup> – as such it is the creative love of the Father, the sacrificial love of the Son, and the caring love of the Holy Spirit; it is their love that brings the *children of God* close to the Father’s heart where the only begotten Son is (Jn 1:18).

It can therefore be stated that the friendship with Jesus reveals God’s love, while, at the same time, God’s love initiates the friendship with Jesus. John excelled in presenting these two motifs in his Gospel, employing *family* metaphors and metaphors. His presentation contains principal constituents of an entire array of beliefs, morals, and practices, lived by the Christians throughout the ages, and passed on from generation to generation.<sup>381</sup> Receiving this array and interacting positively with its contents, can be regarded as another aspect of the honor of becoming children of God/the privilege of joining the *Familia Dei*. In this ambiance of love and friendship, the begotten life of the believers is established, while their experience of God is nourished and sustained. One of the most convenient and plausible ways to understand this, is to see it from the angle of the Johannine motif *Abiding*.

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**379. Crook** (2011:6 of 7 pages) argues that there are two places in John (Jn 15:12-17; 19:10-13), where the term φίλος is used in a way that illustrates the challenge of understanding ancient uses of friendship language.

**380. Kitzberger** (1994:190-206) links this kind love to the footwashing account in John 13:1-20, by focusing on reader response and employing an intertextually reading. **Moloney** (1991:237-256) approaches John 13:1-38 employing a *sacramental reading*. For other viewpoints, cf. **Segovia** (1982a:31-51); and **Coloe** (2004:400-415).

**381.** This presentation is a valued segment of a bigger spectrum found in the rest of the New Testament, and conformed by numerous verses and passages:

Although **Paul** employed extensively the family metaphor in his letters, this use was not restricted to him. Perhaps, the most in depth use of this metaphor can be found in (Rm 4:1-18; 8:12-29), (Ga 3:26-4:7), and (1 Th 2:7-12).

**1 John** used the sibling language (14 times), Father (12 times), child (17 times), son (22 times); **James** (12 times); and **Hebrews** used family language (8 times), son (12 times), child (3 times). The following references are some example to illustrate this observation: (Mt 12:49-50); (2 Co 6:18); (Ga 6:10); (Ep 2:19-22); (1 Tm 5:1); (Tm 3:14); (Hb 3:6); and (1 P 4:17). on *Families in the New Testament World*, cf. **Osiek & Balch** (1997).





### 5.4.1.2 Being Children of God - Becoming Divine Dwelling

The honor of becoming *children of God*/the privilege of joining the *Familia Dei* reach their completeness and find the fullness of their meaning in the act of mutual *Abiding*: the Father and the Son abide with the believers during their earthly life (Jn 14:23), and the Holy Spirit will be/abide with them (Jn 14:16-18); and at the end of this life, the believers will be/abide with the Son in the Father's house (Jn 14:1-3). According to The Merriam-Webster Dictionary (1987:44), *Abide* can be translated with 'to wait for'; 'to endure without yielding', 'to bear patiently', 'to stay', 'to reside', 'to withstand'; 'to remain stable' or 'to remain in a fixed state'. In his Gospel, John used μένω frequently,<sup>382</sup> loading it most of the time with overtones of love, faith, discipleship, and fellowship. Although scholars like Schnackenburg ([1968] 1980 I:161-62), Bultmann ([1966] 1978 I:535; 544-547), Bruce (1970:380), Beasley-Murray (1987:95, 254), Pryor (1992:145, 161), and Keener ([2003] 2005 II:999-1003) approach the Johannine theme 'Abiding' from various angles at different levels, they agree that μένω denotes the intimate, personal, committed, continuous, and reciprocal relationship between Jesus, the Incarnate Word, and His believers. Most of these scholars prefer to translate it with *remain/remaining* instead of *abide/abiding* (i.e. Brown ([1966] 1979 I:510-512). In this thesis, their findings are adopted, although both possible translations are used to avoid repetition. As the thesis approaches this theme from the perspective of its connection with the Johannine Experience of God, *abiding* is perceived as initiator and indispensable factor of this experience. In certain passages, the expression 'in me' succeeds this term:<sup>383</sup> In each of these occurrences, it refers to fellowship with Christ, or 'to designate a close personal relation' (cf. Arndt & Gingrich 1957:259). In John, when Jesus used 'in Me' (e.g. Jn 6:56), He referred to a sphere within which a certain action happens, or to a life of fellowship rather than biological connection... Keener ([2003] 2005 II:518) states that "in 2:2, Jesus' disciples remain with him in a family setting...their continuance with Jesus here indicates the intimate, familial relationship Jesus has with his followers who persevere...they become members of his extended household".

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**382.** The verb μένω occurs 118 times in the New Testament; the majority of these occurrences are found in John, for example: (Jn 1:32, 38-39; 2:12; 3:36; 6:56).

**383.** 'In Me' occurs 16 times in John: (Jn 6:56; 10:38; 14:10, 11, 20, 30; 15:2, 4, 5-7; 16:33; 17:21, 23).

**Dodd** ([1953] 1970:197) argues that "our indwelling of God...is a personal relation with a living God, mediated through a concrete, historical personality, in whom that relation is original and perfect".

With this in mind, the following observations can be made: *Abiding/remaining* (μένω) is a major theme within John's narrative. It is a segment of a larger Johannine tapestry decorated by various motifs linked to each other and connected to the *Familia Dei* metaphoric. In this narrative *abiding* is linked to creation, incarnation, revelation, and salvation, for example, in the *Prologue*, the Evangelist introduced his readers to a sequence of unique events, all of which point to *abiding*, and are recorded in family terminology: "The Logos was with God...through Him all things came into being...to those who did accept Him, He gave the power to become children of God...He became flesh...and lived among us...the only Son, who is close to the Father's heart, whom has made Him known" (Jn 1:1-18). The following can be deduced:

- The creative power of the eternal Logos is tightly connected to His eternal *abiding* with God: He created everything, including His own people.
- The incarnation of the eternal Logos altered His *abiding* status. The new status – He came to His own...He became flesh...He lived among us (Jn 1:14) – did not eliminate His previous status stipulating that He was with God (Jn 1:1). Accordingly, the creative power of the eternal Logos became a transformative power belonging to the incarnate Logos. In its turn, this new power transformed the identity of those who accepted Him: They became children of God.
- Towards the end of the *Prologue*, the Logos and God are given new titles: The 'only Son' and 'the Father' (Jn 1:18). Correspondingly, this transformative power of the Logos became a revelatory power: He made the Father known.

It is important to state here that what has been said above does not mean that there are three different beings with variable personalities (the Eternal Logos, the Incarnate Logos, and the Only Son) and changeable powers (creative power, transformative power, and revelatory power). It is in fact one divine being and His unique power. John gave Him different titles and highlighted certain aspects of His power, just to record the aforementioned sequence of events, and convey its message to his readers. In the *Prologue*, the readers will notice two aspects of *abiding*:

- The *abiding* of the Logos with God: The Son with the Father.
- The *abiding* of the Incarnate Logos in the world: Among His own people (children of God).

The fruits and merits of the Son's abiding with the Father since eternity, and among His own people, the *children of God*, since their creation and His incarnation, are significant:

- ♦ The realm of the divine members (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) of the *Familia Dei* was extended through the event of creation (Jn 1:1-4) to include new members (human beings).
- ♦ The status of those who accepted the Incarnate Logos was transformed: They “were born from God” and became *children of God* (Jn 1:12-14), and joined the *Familia Dei* through their faith.
- ♦ The firstborn of the *Familia Dei* -the Only Son- made the head of this family (the Father) known to the other members of this family.
- ♦ The abiding of the Son, recorded in the *Prologue*, can be considered as a source of life, faith, and knowledge, as well as a domain to reveal the Father, and to express His divine love. It can also be considered as an initiator and guarantor of any experience of God lived by the children of God, either at a communal level or at an individual level.
- ♦ The fruits and the merits of the Son's abiding were not restricted to the original believers; they are available to every believer in the Son (here focusing on the Johannine readers), anytime and everywhere, through the Holy Spirit and *via* the Sacred Scriptures/recorded Words of God.
- ♦ Although μένω does not occur in the *Prologue*, its contents still point to the essence of *abiding*, including the presence of the Logos with God; the dwelling of the incarnate Logos among His own people; and the closeness of the only Son with the Father. The Fourth Evangelist developed this essence in the rest of his Gospel to include various types of *abiding*. He characterized *abiding* as an intimate, enduring, personal, and reciprocal relationship between the members of the *Familia Dei*, consisting of the Father, the Son, the Holy Spirit-Paraclete, and the believers/disciples/children of God. On the one hand, the divine dimension of *abiding* or the dwelling of the divine members of the *Familia Dei* (the Logos/only Son/Jesus in the Father, and the Father in Jesus; the Holy Spirit-Paraclete in Jesus) in/with each other, can be considered as a feature of their eternal unity and as an aspect of their divine nature. Additionally, their abiding with the human members of this family can be considered as a source of life and love as well as an initiator of their experience of God. On the other hand, the *abiding* of the disciples/believers/children of God provides them with the time, the constancy, and the opportunity to cherish this life, enjoy this love, and to experiencing God.

The vine metaphor, recorded in John 15, also focuses on the essence of *abiding*. The vine imagery was well recognized at the time of Jesus, because it was rooted in the tradition and theology of the Old Testament. When John used it, the vast majority of his listeners were most likely agricultural peasants and the descendants of these people. They were therefore familiar<sup>384</sup> with the vine, its produce, and its metaphorical symbols. All of this probably has rekindled in their hearts the memories of the experiences that their ancestors had of Yahweh. Consequently, they had no difficulty apprehending Jesus' teachings. The sequence of events (Jesus speaking; the disciples/people listening; rekindling memories; pondering on his words) was culminated by an act of faith in Jesus, His divine identity, and His supreme knowledge (Jn 16:30). This can be considered as the beginning of their own journey of experiencing God. It might encourage the subsequent Johannine readers to also embark on this journey of remaining in Jesus.

The absence of *abiding* (Jn 15:6) extinguishes the life of fellowship and diminishes the relationship (of *abiding*) between Jesus and the believers (Jn 15:1-11). Consequently, all of the relationships mentioned in John 15 would be gravely and negatively affected, that is to say, the relationship of love (Jn 15:12-17) between the disciples; the challenging relationship with the unbelieving world (Jn 15:18-25); and the special relationship as co-witnesses between the believers and the Holy Spirit (Jn 15:26-27). On the contrary, remaining in Jesus, as the branches remain in the *True Vine* (Jn 6:56-57; 15:1-7), facilitates the forwarding of life and the conveying of the Father's love to His children through the Son, so that they may bear fruits.

Abiding in Jesus can also be compared to listening to the voice of the *Good Shepherd* and following Him (Jn 10:1-18) like his sheep do. The voice of the *Good Shepherd* is the same as that of the Word of God who made the Father known and expressed the Son's sacrificial love, His devoted commitment, and His promise to grant eternal life. As the voice of John the Baptist revealed the identity and the mission of the Son, so does the voice of the sacred Scriptures (including the Fourth Gospel). *Abiding*, therefore, provides effective means through which the Father reveals His initiative through the Son, the Son to carry out this initiative, the Holy Spirit to accompany the believers, and the children of God to respond positively to this initiative.

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**384.** The listeners of Jesus were familiar with the Old Testament tradition and theology as well as with the meanings of its metaphoric motifs, i.e. fruitlessness, bearing fruits, prosperity, wickedness, covenant, removal of branches, burning, destruction, the distinctive relation between Yahweh and His people. cf. Psalm 80:8-16; Isaiah 5:1-7; Jeremiah 2:21; 5:10; 12:10; Ezekiel 15:1-8; 17:1-24; and Hosea 10:1.

### 5.4.2 Responding to God's Initiative

Responding to *God's initiative* varies from one person to another. It is shaped by the person's tradition, their socio-religious background, geo-demographic milieu, education, experiences in life, and the like. In his Gospel, John hinted at Jesus' knowledge of the vulnerability and need of the human beings and noted it skillfully by recording the words of Jesus: "No one has ever seen God" (Jn 1:18); "no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above" (Jn 3:3); "no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born through water and spirit" (Jn 3:5); and "apart from me you can do nothing" (Jn 15:5). It is clear how the divine members of the *Familia Dei* intervened/are still intervening to strengthen this vulnerability and satisfied/still satisfy this need: The Father loved them abundantly and unconditionally, as He 'gave his only Son so...they may have eternal life' (Jn 3:16). He also sent the Holy Spirit at the request of the Son to be with them. The Son revealed this love by expressing His own love and compassion in words and deeds. He assisted those in need (Jn 2:3), and restored life (Jn 4:47; 5:5-7; 9:1; 11:39). The ultimate communication of this love was laying down His own life (Jn 10:11) to save them. The Holy Spirit is perpetuating this love by leading, teaching, reminding, defending, and accompanying them in their journey towards the Father's house.

From their side, since the dawn of creation, human beings have constantly realized (are realizing/will always realize) their vulnerability and needs at various levels and in different depths. The believers, however, turn to the Sacred Scriptures looking for answers, knowledge, and inspiration. Undoubtedly, they will find certain inspiring passages or verses that would help them take the first step in the journey of experiencing God, for example: "Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you" (Jos 1:8-9); "Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom" (Lk 12:32). "As God's dear children, then, take Him as your pattern, and follow Christ by loving as He loved you" (Ep 5:1); and "If you remain in me and my words remain in you, you may ask for whatever you please, and you will get it" (Jn 15:7). Certainly, readers can be inspired by other passages or verses. These verses were mentioned just to point out that by reading John (as well as the entire Bible), the readers are able to notice God's initiative, and feel encouraged to respond positively to it.

The following paragraphs discuss the response of the human members of the *Familia Dei* (children of God/believers) to the Father's initiative, from the perspective of the Fourth Gospel. The focus is directed only on three segments of this response: Accepting the Son of God; journeying with the Holy Spirit; and glorifying the Father.

#### **5.4.2.1 Accepting the Son of God**

In the Gospel of John, God's initiative is portrayed as a mission, undertaken by the incarnate Son to reveal the Father to His human creatures. The believers' response to this initiative looks like a spiritual journey during which they live an experience of God. It starts by accepting the Son/believing in Him, reaches its fullness by knowing the Father, and culminates by being with both of them in the Father's house (Jn 14:1-3). Two powerful statements testify to this: the first one opens John's narrative, "To those who did accept Him, He gave the power to become children of God" (Jn 1:12); and the second statement concludes it, "These are recorded so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing this you may have life through his name" (Jn 20:31). Noticeably, the two acts required from the believers (accepting the Son and believing in Him) are abundantly rewarded by two valuable heavenly graces that surpass all of the earthly honors and privileges: Becoming a child of God means that the believers are now included in the inner and intimate circle of the Father; it means receiving all of the graces that come with this privilege, the first of which is enjoying the Father's presence and carrying His holy Name, 'child of God', as the incarnate Logos (Son of God) does. 'Having life through his name' means participating in the Father's life as the only Son did/does (Jn 5:26); it means 'passing from death to life' (Jn 5:24). In between these two statements, and as John's narrative develops, other statements stand as pillars of light, reflecting and transmitting the light of the world to guide the readers in the process of reading/hearing, which is part of their journey of experiencing God. The positive decision of the Johannine readers to accept the Son and to remain in Him could be based on the examples of the Johannine characters that made similar decision: It could be *motivated* by the proclamation of Mary Magdalena (Jn 20:11-18); it could be *inspired* by the enquiry of the first disciples, "Rabbi, where do you live?", and by the answer of Jesus, "come and see" (Jn 1:35-42); also, it could be *stimulated* by Peter's question, "Lord, to whom we shall go? You have the message of eternal life" (Jn 6:68).

In this case, accepting the Son of God becomes a sphere of spirituality and a web of divine-human relationships that encompass believing in the Son, following Him, remaining in Him, having fellowship with Him, and imitating Him. As it was during the time of His dwelling among His own on earth, it will be so throughout the ages: Some people did/do/will not accept the Incarnate Logos (the Son of God), while others did/do/will accept Him. It is always a matter of a vital decision that the Johannine readers/potential believers have to make. This leads to the following observations: In John's Gospel, accepting Jesus can be initiated and motivated by:

- The Father who draws the believers to Jesus and entrusts them to Him (Jn 6:44; 10:29; 17:6-9);
- Jesus who chooses the disciples (Jn 6:70; 13:18; 15:19);
- The Spirit-Paraclete who leads the believers to "the complete truth" (Jn 16:13);
- A personal decision (i.e. Jn 1:35-51; 2:11; 4:41).

At another level, accepting Jesus through the Gospel of John starts by meeting Him as He is depicted by its narrative. Both events (meeting and accepting) are neither sudden nor temporary incidents. They are rather two constant aspects of a lifelong journey towards the Father's house,<sup>385</sup> while glorifying Him on earth by continuing Jesus' mission. In the process, the readers will learn that He is the only Son, who reveals the Father (Jn 1:18; 17:6). He is the way that leads the believers in their journey towards the Father's house (Jn 14:1-4, 6) and the light that illuminates their journey (Jn 14:6), so that they never walk in darkness (Jn 8:12). During this journey, Jesus provides them with the 'bread of life' (Jn 6:34-35, 48, 51) and the 'living water' (Jn 4:10). He is their strength when they have hardships during this journey (Jn 16:33), and at its completion, He is the resurrection (Jn 5:25-28; 11:25-26). These and other attributes and deeds of Jesus, recorded in the Fourth Gospel, make the readers feel secure, loved, and encouraged to embark on this journey, not as slaves or servants, but as friends, loved ones, siblings and (like the Son, and by His merit) children of God (Jn 1:12; 15:15; 16:27; 17:23; 20:17).

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**385.** According to **Kim** (2017:240-241), the ultimate destination of this journey is "the union with the Father... with Jesus, where the followers of Jesus may participate in the intimate loving communion with the Father and the Son...Towards this end, to invite the readers into this incomparably glorious lived experience (Spirituality) of following Jesus, the Fourth Evangelist communicates the unique aspects of following Jesus in the Johannine text".



Comparing the Johannine experience of God to a journey is not something new. One of the most powerful images of the Christian's spiritual life is that of a journey. Both the Old Testament and the New Testament recorded many journeys, while the early Christians were referred to as "the followers of the Way" (Ac 9:2; 24:14). At various places in Paul's writings, one finds certain variations of this image: Paul compares the Christian life to a long and arduous journey assumed under hardship, in which the winners will receive a crown (Ga 2:2; 2 Tm 4:7), while the Letter to the Hebrews encourages its readers to persevere in this journey by keeping their eyes focused on Jesus (Hb 12:1-2). The aim of the Christian life and associated journey is to arrive safely in the heavenly home. John is no stranger to this line of thoughts: In his Gospel, he depicted Jesus' mission as a journey towards His *Hour* (Jn 2:4; 7:30; 8:20; 12:23, 27; 13:1; 17:1). This depiction is affluent and illustrated with characters, signs, discourses, and encounters; the following insights can be noted:

- Preparing for a journey, one usually tries to get hold of a map that indicates how to get to the desired destination. In Christian spirituality, this map consists of the shared experiences of those who undertook this journey and passed down their wisdom and knowledge. In the case of the Johannine readers, their map is the narrative of the Fourth Gospel.
- One of the rewarding ways of gaining encouragement on a long journey is to anticipate one's arrival. This means visualizing one's final destination, anticipating the delight of arrival, and picturing those who will be there welcoming them.
- The spiritual journey of experiencing God is better understood in the light of the Father's presence in the believers' life and their participation in His life through the Son. It is an intimate participation (Jn 14:15-23) that opens the horizon of the believers' existence towards a new life granted by the Savior (Jn 4:42; 5:34), the Lamb of God (Jn 1:29) who is capable to free those who accept Him from the slavery of sin (Jn 8:31-36; 12:31), and the devil's dominion (Jn 8:44).

Applying it to this discussion: The Johannine readers are the travelers/pilgrims; the map is Jesus' words and deeds recorded in John's narrative; the companion is Jesus Himself; the guide is the Holy Spirit; the anticipated delight is to be where Jesus is, and the eternal life; the destination is the Father's house, and the welcoming party are the divine members of the *Familia Dei* – the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit-Paraclete.

Having all of this in mind while journeying with Jesus, through John's narrative and in daily life, the readers feel honored to have Jesus as their knowledgeable companion,<sup>386</sup> who knows where and to Whom He is going (Jn 13:3): He knows the Father and reveals Him (Jn 1:18; 16:29) by sharing with them/teaching them what He heard, has seen, learned from the Father and what the Father's will is all about (Jn 7:16; 8:28; 12:50; 15:15; 17:14). Jesus also knows himself, his origin, his destination, and his mission.<sup>387</sup> He knows all people and "could tell what someone had in him" (Jn 2:25),<sup>388</sup> and what they must do if they are "to carry out God's work" (Jn 6:28). The zenith of Jesus' knowledge is that He knows the Father and the Father knows Him (Jn 10:15); He is one with the Father (Jn 10:30), and who sees Him sees the Father (Jn 14:9-10). If the readers realize this and respond positively, the implication is that they accept Jesus and are ready to proclaim with his Disciples "now we see that you know everything... because of this, we believe that you came from God (Jn 16:29). In different occasions, Jesus declared why He was passing his knowledge to the believers and the bountiful reward, which they would receive, once they have accepted it: Complete joy (Jn 15:11; 17:13); perfect peace (16:33); ad eternal life (Jn 17:3).

Thus, listening to Jesus and keeping His words, which are the Father's words (Jn 17:6-8), are two aspects of accepting Him and consequently remaining in His love (Jn 15:10). By remaining in Jesus and in His love, the believers become able to experience the Father through His words conveyed to them by the incarnate Word. Listening to Jesus, keeping His words, and remaining in His love evoke another event, namely following Him. Following Jesus is rooted in the event of accepting Him.<sup>389</sup> It is achieved through a free decision by the believer, made willingly and out of love. The decision of the believers to follow Jesus is shaped by a conviction that He came "from God as a teacher" (Jn 3:2) to make the Father known (Jn 1:18); He alone has "the message of eternal life" (Jn 6:68); He is the way (Jn 14:10) that leads to the Father, and the light (Jn 8:12) that illuminates the darkness. Accordingly, no darkness, difficulties, persecutions, and rejection (Jn 6:60-67; 16:33) can stop the believers/those who accept Jesus from following Him, because they believe that "He is" (Jn 6:20).

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**386.** The verses hinting at Jesus' Knowledge are abundant, i.e.: (Jn 2:24-26; 6:64; 7:29; 8:14, 37, 55; 13:1, 18).

**387.** i.e.: (Jn 3:11-18; 5:19-30; 6:35-40; 7:27-29; 8:12-19, 23-29; 10:24-38; 11:25-26; 12:44-50; 13:13; 14:1-4).

**388.** Jesus knew his chosen ones (Jn 13:18); his hour and the one who is going to betray Him (Jn 13:1, 21).

**389.** In the above paragraph, what has been mentioned on the topic *Following Jesus* is meant to illustrate the discussion of *accepting Jesus* and its connection to *experiencing God*.



It is noticeable and significant that the first words of Jesus (the Incarnate Logos/the Only Son), - recorded in the first chapter of the Fourth Gospel- were an invitation to follow Him (come with Him). Likewise, the last words of Jesus (the Risen Christ) -chronicled in the final chapter of this gospel- were also an invitation to follow Him. Both of these conversations started by a question and ended by an invitation: In the first passage, Jesus “turned round” saw the two disciples of John the Baptist, following Him; He asked them “what do you want”, then He invited them saying “Come and see” (Jn 1:38-39). In the second passage, Jesus asked Peter three times “do you love me?” after which He added “follow me” (Jn 21:15-19). Concluding the conversation with Peter, Jesus asked him anew to follow Him “You are to follow me” (Jn 21:21).

When Jesus turned around and saw John’s disciples, He was assuming His role as the *Good Shepherd*, who always walks in front of his sheep to lead them to bountiful pasture, and from time to time looks back at them to make sure that they are safe and still following Him. Furthermore, with regards to the above-cited invitations, the questions that Jesus asked before He conveyed His invitation to follow Him can be understood as an act of love through which Jesus is attuning the will (at the same time the entire inner being) of the disciples (the believers) to be in harmony with His mission. The heart of this mission is to do the Father’s will (Jn 6:39-40). Thus, as He willingly submitted His own will to that of His Father, so whoever wants to follow Him must do the same (Jn 14:12). In the event of following Him, Jesus assumes the active role, as He is leading, teaching, protecting, and providing, because He knows that without Him, His sheep will be/feel alone, abandoned, confused, and exposed to the distress of darkness like someone who is lost, at night, in a dark forest. The disciples are also active: They are following, learning, and trusting Him. Their decision to follow Him is based on believing in Him. *Accepting Jesus* evokes two other aspects – that of *believing* and *abiding*. These two motifs become increasingly evident to the seasoned readers or the experienced researchers when they read John.

In the Fourth Gospel, *believing* is not an abstract concept or a theoretical theme; it is a willing act to respond positively and actively to the Father’s initiative, to love Him, believe in Him, and to glorify Him through His incarnate Word. It is an act that flourishes, matures, and becomes bountiful through a personal and intimate interaction with His ‘inspired words’ (the Bible, more specifically here, the narrative of this Gospel) that continues conveying the mission of Jesus.

The creative, active, and effective words of God chronicled in the Old Testament resolve themselves in this Gospel, into the one Word – the Incarnate Logos/Jesus Christ. For the Fourth Evangelist, this Word is the focal point of his narrative, for the readers to look at the initiator, the sustainer, and the purpose of their experience of God from the vantage point of the Incarnate Logos (who made the Father known), to whom their senses are now attuned. In recounting His words and works, the Fourth Evangelist reminds his readers that there is no other *Bread of Life*, no other *Good Shepherd*, no other *Way* or *Truth* that leads to the Father than the only Son. Indeed, this is sated accurately and profoundly in the *Prologue*: “In Him was life” (Jn 1:4), and in the *Epilogue*: “Believing this you may have life through his name” (Jn 20:31). Reading the Fourth Gospel, it becomes clear that the response -which Jesus wanted/wants- is *believing*. During His conversation with Thomas, Jesus praised such response, saying, “Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe” (Jn 20:31). The believer that Jesus referred to here, does not only have to be Thomas, but actually includes every Johannine reader. The significant reward of a positive response (like that of Thomas) is (eternal) life.<sup>390</sup> Jesus Christ Himself is ‘the life’ (Jn 14:6); He is the only giver and unfailing source of life (Jn 14:19); He came that we might have life in abundance (Jn 10:10).

In John, the act of *believing* in Jesus is not a mere action of trusting, be certain of, or having confidence in Him, it is a fundamental act that engages the believer’s emotions, senses, behavior, and entire inner-being (cf. Koester 1989:327-348; Lee 2010:115-127). Lee (2010:126-127), maintains that John employed the five senses as “images pertaining to faith: They represent that material comprehension by which the reader makes a connection to the divine source of life”. Azari and Birnbacher (2004:903) assert that ‘all emotions are cognitive in structure’.

Zimmermann (2006:40-43) maintains that the individual images of Christ can be transferred to the believers: The *Good Shepherd* commissions His disciples to be shepherds; and through his relationship to God, described in images as Son, Jesus opens up to the believers a similarly relationship to the Father and through this ‘creates a community based on love and equality’.

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<sup>390</sup>. In the Fourth Gospel, the designation most frequently employed is “the life” (17 times). It is described qualitatively as ‘eternal’, although the adjective only brings out what is already implicit in the noun.

Alston (1991:49-50) asserts that “a great deal of religious experience is indeed affectively toned”. Currently, most theorists maintain that the specificity of an emotion involves some kind of evaluation, appraisal, or judgment concerning the context in which the experience occurs (cf. Marshall 2004; Scherer, Schorr, and Johnstone 2001). About the significance of emotions, Wynn (2005:3) writes that a ‘reconceived account’ of the nature of emotions makes a significant difference to one’s understanding of what is involved in the so-called ‘affectively toned experience of God’. It can be added that, in John’s narrative, the five senses (including the feelings and emotions generated by them) generate knowledge about God, His plan, and His will. This kind of knowledge leads to faith, as it finds its origin, strength, veracity, and dynamic in faith. This energetic duo, *knowledge-faith* and its vibrant relation affect the behavior of the believers -as they start *obeying* (Jn 8:29), *remaining*, and *loving* (Jn 15:9-10)- and all the dimensions of their life. Thompson (1991:107-108) states that “faith is faithfulness in trusting God as made known in Jesus... Faith entails a commitment to life in the midst of death, to love in the midst of hate, to God in the midst of the world”.

In the Fourth Gospel, faith and love are closely connected: If faith denotes the believers’ response to the Father’s initiative, then love expresses their response by accepting Jesus, loving Him, abiding in Him,<sup>391</sup> and glorifying the Father by bearing fruits, as well as loving each other (Jn 15:9-12). Faith and love are also closely connected to commitment: They have the ability to initiate it, to give it its true meaning, and to strengthen it in every aspect of the believers’ spiritual journey. That is to say, the decision of the believers to accept Jesus (to believe in Him, follow Him, imitate Him,<sup>392</sup> and abide in Him) is based on the understanding that He reveals the Father and carries out His life-giving and loving initiative. A Johannine *abiding* includes the fact that those who imitate Jesus, reflect the relationship between the Father and the Son (Jn 14:10), keep His commands, see their prayers answered, bear fruit, glorify the Father through Jesus’ work in their life, and experience the fullness of Christ’s joy in their life (Jn 15:7-16).

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**391. Bass** (2007:305-325) argues that John’s purpose for his *abiding* motif was to incite his readers to persevere in their faith. In addition, John also saw his readers as living in the new covenant and therefore believing that they have a new and divine enabling that will empower them to abide.

**392.** According to **Van der Merwe** (2001:131-148), this concept focusses on the following basic aspects concerning the *Imitatio Christi*: dependence (Jn 5:19-15:5; 6:57; 15:15; 12:49; 14:10-17:8); mission (Jn 13:20; 17:18; 20:21); knowledge (Jn 10:14-15); glory (Jn 15:8; 17:1-5, 22-24); love in obedience (Jn 13:34f; 15:9-12; 5:20-14:12; 17:23); unity (Jn 14:10-15:4; 10:30; 17:11, 21-23); obedience of Jesus’ commands (Jn 15:10), and life (Jn 6:57).



In John's Gospel, *abiding* is an event and a decision that believers make by living a life of obedience and love. It can be a source of assurance (Jn 15:5, 7) and joy (Jn 15:11), of birth from above or being of God/have life (Jn 6:54-57). The exhortation to abide is not an exhortation to endurance and perseverance; it is a continuation of a relationship, which does not envisage changes or deterioration. The Johannine *abiding* is both a commitment to accept Jesus, and a decision to imitate Him by continuing what He did and what He said.

Bennema (2014:261, 274) argues that

the Johannine concept of mimesis is a hermeneutical process that involves both the understanding of the original act and a resulting mimetic act that creatively but faithfully articulates this understanding...There are two essential components in mimesis: (i) the implied idea, attitude and purpose of the original act (which must be replicated exactly); and (ii) a tangible/bodily act that expresses this idea, attitude and purpose (this act can be a replicate or a faithful, creative expression).

Van der Merwe (2001:147) asserts that

The concept *Imitatio Christi* does occur explicitly in the Fourth Gospel. This relates to the important theme of Agency, which implies that Jesus' disciples must continue his mission. The disciples must represent the one (Jesus) who sent them – they must speak the words and perform the deeds of their sender.

To this can be added that Jesus did not send His disciples to continue His mission on their own, but He sent them the Paraclete – the Spirit of truth (Jn 16:15) to defend, teach, guide, and accompany them during their journey of accepting Jesus, continuing His mission, and experiencing the Father who sent Him.



### 5.4.2.2 Journeying with the Holy Spirit

The spiritual journey of the believers can only reach its aim, and their experience of God can only fulfill its purpose with the involvement of the Holy Spirit-Paraclete in it. Jesus knew the vulnerability of those who accepted and believed in Him, and their inability to continue His mission by themselves (Jn 15:4). He loved (still does) them to the end (Jn 13:1), and He did not want to leave them as orphans (Jn 14:18) after He went back to the Father (Jn 16:18). He therefore promised them to send another Paraclete – the Spirit of truth (Jn 16:8, 13) to be with them and to accompany them on their spiritual journey. Accordingly, the Father sent the Paraclete at the request of the Son and in His Name (Jn 14:16, 26). As the Holy Spirit was with Jesus and accompanied Him since His first public appearance (Jn 1:32-34) until His final hour (Jn 19:30) and after His resurrection, the risen Christ breathed on His disciples and said, ‘receive the Holy Spirit’ (Jn 20:22). The Holy Spirit is therefore with the believers since the dawn of their journey that started by becoming ‘children of God’ (Jn 1:12) and being spiritually born from above (Jn 3:5), until they reach the ‘complete truth’ (Jn 16:13) and the ‘perfect unity’ with the Father and the Son (Jn 17:23) – in other words, until they arrive safely at the house of the Father (Jn 14:1-3) – to know Him and enjoy eternal life (Jn 17:3). All of this provides the readers with a valuable insight into the promise that Jesus has made to His disciples/believers, that He is going to give them ‘another Paraclete’ to be with them forever (Jn 14:17-17).

John’s Gospel does not employ the term ‘person’ in reference to the Holy Spirit, or gives any reference that He spoke. There are valuable references depicting His actions, like ‘come down and rest’ (Jn 1:32-33); He grant spiritual birth (Jn 3:5-8); He gives life (Jn 6:63); He is with the disciples (Jn 14:16-17); teaching and reminding them (Jn 14:26); and testifying (Jn 15:26).<sup>393</sup>

With this in mind and applying the merits of this promise to the believers’ response to *God’s initiative* and inspired by the Johannine title given to the Holy Spirit, the following folds of the involvement of the Holy Spirit-Paraclete in the spiritual journey of the believers of experiencing God by responding positively to His initiative, are now discussed.

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<sup>393</sup>. Other verses in the Fourth Gospel referring to the Spirit/Paraclete/Advocate are: (Jn 3:31-34); (Jn 4:21-24); (Jn 7:37-39); (Jn 11:33); (Jn 13:21); (Jn 14:16); (Jn 15:26); (Jn 16:7, 12-15, 26); (Jn 19:30); and (Jn 20:21-23).

#### 5.4.2.2.1 The Holy Spirit and the Spiritual Birth – the beginning of the journey

Noticeably, the Fourth Evangelist mentioned the presence of the Holy Spirit at the inauguration of Jesus' public ministry (Jn 1:32-33). A few verses earlier in the *Prologue*, he pointed to the spiritual birth of those who accepted the incarnate Logos: They were born from God (Jn 1:13). Keener ([2003] 2005 I: 405, 552-553) links the interpretation of this verse to that of John 3:6. According to him, the logic of John's narrative implies a transferal: the Logos that had been from the beginning with God (Jn 1:12) became flesh (Jn 1:14) so others could be born not from flesh - natural descent, nor of human decision but from God (Jn 1:13).

As the Incarnate Son gives those who accept Him the power to become *children of God*, likewise the Spirit enables them to have life in the Name of the Son (Jn 20:31). Given the significance of the *Name*, in every culture, especially in biblical tradition, it is clear that *live in His Name* is another manner of referring to being a child of God, because it means sharing in the divine life (Jn 6:40; 17:21-23; cf. also 1 Jn 1:3), and reflecting the Father's character. Thus, the revelation of the Father in Jesus includes a revelation of the kind of life the believers are offered as members of His *Familia Dei*. It is a life guided by the Spirit of the truth towards the 'complete truth' (Jn 16:13), and 'the kingdom of God' (Jn 3:3). Remarkably, the author of 1 John described this kind of life as walking in the light (1 Jn 1:5-7), breaking with sin (1 Jn 2:1-2), and keeping Jesus' commandments (1 Jn 2:3-7). According to Hawkin (1987:13), the end of this life "is not the relief of man's estate but communion with God".

Both 'born from God' (Jn 1:13) and 'born of the Spirit' (Jn 3:6) refer to a new birth and to a new spiritual life, adorned with worshiping the Father in spirit and truth (Jn 4:24).<sup>394</sup> That is the kind of worship the Father seeks. The highlight of the involvement of the Holy Spirit during this inaugural segment of the believers' journey consists of giving life, assisting the believers to comprehend the revelation of the Father conveyed by Jesus, and consequently helping them to establish a familial relationship based on love, faith, and worship. This fold of the aforementioned involvement can be rightly considered as a profound dimension of their experience of God facilitated by His Holy Spirit.

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<sup>394</sup>. On the topic *truth* in John, cf. **Boring** (2002:17-26); and **Lindsay** (1993:129-145). **Köstenberger** (2005c:62) maintains that Jesus embodies the hope of the ultimate triumph of truth in the reign of his kingdom.

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#### **5.4.2.2.2 The Paraclete: the loyal companion, the honorable guest, and the beloved dweller during the journey**

In many countries, it is a custom that, in the absence of the parents (caused either by death, or by any other reason), the firstborn brother assumes the parents' responsibilities, taking care of his orphan younger siblings, and managing the family and its assets. Knowing that "his hour had come to pass from this world, having loved those who were his own" (Jn 13:1), Jesus also took care of His 'younger siblings' by promising that He will never leave them orphaned. He reassured them with these words: "And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Paraclete to help you and be with you forever, the Spirit of truth...you know him, for he lives with you, and he will be in you" (Jn 14:16-18). The contents of this promise suffice to dissipate the fear and anxiety in the heart of the disciples. For the original Johannine readers/hearers, it might have brought to their minds the promise of Yahweh to the prophet Haggai: "To work, I am with you...and my spirit is present among you. Do not be afraid" (Hg 2:4-5). Add to that their knowledge of the power that the meaning of the term *Parakletos* had in that era and area, and the significance of the work of the advocate in their daily life: To be there for others in need to assist them, defend them, and to alleviate their distress. For the succeeding readers, it will have the same effect of encouragement to embark on their spiritual journey, knowing that the Paraclete will be with them. Because the journey of following Jesus to the Father's house passes through Golgotha and the crucifixion, it means that the believers might encounter difficulties and tribulations during this journey. They therefore have to be courageous and persevere. Jesus knew that (Jn 16:33) and He knew that they need another Paraclete to be with them; 1 Jn 2:1 insinuates that Jesus is the *First Paraclete* "καὶ ἐάν τις ἀμάρτη, Παράκλητον ἔχομεν πρὸς τὸν Πατέρα Ἰησοῦν Χριστὸν δίκαιον". He taught His own, protected them, defended them, prayed for them, provided for them, and He loved them to the end, to the point that He laid down His life for them; and after His death and resurrection, He gave them the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit then continues the works of the Father and of the Son in the midst of the *Familia Dei*, by revealing, teaching, glorifying, and leading the believers (Jn 14:26; 15:26; 16:13). He is the Spirit of truth and the precious gift from the Father to His children; He is the mighty and powerful Paraclete who, like a loyal companion is 'with' the believers; as an honorable guest He 'lives with' them; and like a beloved dweller He will 'be in' them (Jn 14:16-17).

The logic with which Jesus described the presence and the role of the Paraclete during the spiritual journey of the believers is remarkable. John respected this order and recorded it accordingly in his narrative. The sequence of these three actions of the Paraclete represents a well-planned order that reflects the gradual and increasing process of intimacy and familiarity of the relationship between the Paraclete and the believers: From a loyal companion, to an honorable guest, to a beloved dweller in the life and the inner being of the believers. It is noteworthy to mention that both folds of Jesus' promise to send the Paraclete started by emphasizing the importance of love (Jn 14:15, 23-24). The zenith of this love is the love that the Father and the Son have for the believers, which Jesus expressed by promising to send the Paraclete to be with (in)/to live with the believers, and by declaring His intention to come with His Father and dwell in the believers. This intention could be considered as another ultimate aim of sending the Paraclete, to be added to what has already been discussed in this concern. Seemingly the other important constituent of the Paraclete's role, besides accompanying the believers in their spiritual journey, is to prepare and regenerate them, to enable them to be a dwelling place for the Father, the Son (Jn 14:23), and the Paraclete (Jn 14:17). It is important to take note of the significance and the depth of this dimension of the believers' experience of God – made possible by the Paraclete – and the reward of their positive response to the Father's initiative: Becoming a divine *dwelling place* for the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

#### **5.4.2.2.3. The Spirit of Truth teaches, reminds, leads, and reveals during the journey**

Jesus supplemented His promise to send the Holy Spirit by an encouraging declaration of what the Spirit of truth will do while accompanying the believers on their spiritual journey. It is a multifold educational role that culminates with a revelatory action; examples are:

♦ ***The first fold:*** Teaching the believers everything that Jesus told them (Jn 14:26)

During His entire mission on earth, Jesus was the teacher (Jn 3:2) who taught in the temple and the synagogue (Jn 18:20). He spoke openly to His disciples (Jn 17:8), employing both veiled and regular language (Jn 2:19; 10:1-18; 15:1-17), to make the Father known and reveal His initiative (Jn 1:18). This segment of Jesus' mission is perpetuated, after His death and resurrection, by the presence and the works of the Holy Spirit – the Spirit of truth.

♦ ***The second fold:*** Reminding the disciples/believers of all what Jesus has said (Jn 14:26)

The second fold of the educational role of the Holy Spirit is a continuation of the first one. It consists of reminding the disciples about what they have learned from Jesus and what He has done while He was with them. It also deepens their understanding of what they could not comprehend sufficiently (Jn 16:16-18; cf. also Lk 9:45; 18:34), and matures it in their heart, mind, and life – in the light of the Scripture and Jesus’ resurrection (Jn 2:22; 12:16). This also applies to the subsequent believers, who did not have the opportunity to personally hear Jesus teaching or to see His works, although they have learned about it from reading John’s Gospel. This fold somehow fulfills what the Lord had spoken through the prophets: All of them will become His ‘disciples’, and His law and commandments ‘will be written in their heart and mind’ (Is 54:13; Jr 31:33; Jn 6:45). They will therefore consequently know Him (Jr 31:34; Hb 8:10-11). Thus, the words of the Father conveyed to the believers by Jesus and perpetuated by the work of the Holy Spirit will remain alive in the heart and mind of the believers, as a source of spiritual life and a realm of experiencing God.

♦ ***The third fold:*** Leading the disciples/believers to the complete truth (Jn 16:13)

The third fold of the educational role of the Holy Spirit consists of leading the believers to the ‘*complete truth*’. This finds connection with Psalm 25:4-5: “Yahweh, teach me your paths. Guide me in your truth and teach me, for you are God my Savior”. This Psalm points out that the law of Yahweh is the truth. In line with this, Jesus portrayed Himself as ‘the way, the truth, and the life’; (Jn 14:6) as He is the ‘Word of the Father’ that consecrates the disciples and the believers (Jn 17:17). With this in mind, one of the various possibilities to look at the essence of this fold consists of perceiving it by evoking the topic on the *dynamic of consecration*, as well as focusing on the three dimensions of Jesus’ salvific plan: past, present, and future.

- Jesus’ salvific plan has its origin and roots in the Old Testament. The Spirit of truth will help the disciples and the original readers to read and understand the accounts of the Old Testament in the light of the Incarnation of the Eternal Logos and His mission. For the subsequent readers/believers this dimension will also include what used to be the present for the original readers/believers and the accounts of the New Testament.

- For the original believers, the dimension of the present included the events of Jesus' passion, crucifixion, death, and resurrection. The Spirit of truth will assist the believers to comprehend these events within their biblical and theological contexts.

- The dimension of the future encompasses all of the eschatological elements of God's initiative and Jesus' salvific plan: This includes but is not limited to the eternal life, the *Parousia*, and entering the kingdom of God. These can, *inter alia*, be considered as part of the 'things to come' (Jn 16:13) and as part of the complete truth, which the Holy Spirit is revealing and explaining to the believers of every era. He is the only one who can perfectly accomplish this multifold educational role, because He is the Spirit of truth. In order to do so, He will receive from Jesus what He must make known to His believers (Jn 16:15). The Spirit of truth will therefore succeed in leading the believers to the complete truth, at the same time glorifying Jesus (Jn 16:14).

The achievement of the above-discussed multifold educational role goes side by side with a revelatory action: The Spirit of truth is Jesus' witness (Jn 15:26). In the Fourth Gospel, Jesus has witnesses in John the Baptist, the Scripture, Moses, and His own works; the most perfect ones though, are the Father and Jesus Himself, and in the case at hand, the Spirit of truth. According to 1 John 5:6-11, testifying to Jesus is an essential part of the Spirit's role: He is both truth and witness. Moreover, His testimony is done, so that the faith of the believers will be strengthened, and their knowledge of God and His initiative will be deeper. It is also done in order for the believers to know Jesus more and more: The Spirit of truth will take what belongs to Jesus and reveals it to the believers. What belongs to Jesus is part of His identity and an aspect of His mission; revealing this part and aspect therefore means revealing Jesus Himself. Another merit of this testimony is that it enables and empowers the believers to become witnesses to Jesus.

While recording the accounts of the Father and the Son, John did not forget to give significant attention to the Holy Spirit, to His titles, and role. The latter is both educational and revelatory. In his narrative, John located certain salient aspects of this role: Some of them are around important events of Jesus' life (i.e. Jn 1:32), while others are directed towards the believers: He will accompany them in their journey of experiencing God; He will also enable them to respond positively to God's initiative. From their side, the believers are encouraged to read the Fourth Gospel with awe and wonder and with prayerful dependence upon 'the Spirit of truth'.

### 5.4.3 Glorifying the Father

The terms *glorifying* and *glory* cover a large assortment of meanings.<sup>395</sup> In this section, this motif is approached from the angle of its connection with the Johannine Experience of God. In the Gospel of John, God is characterized as the Father who is known through Jesus,<sup>396</sup> because Jesus did ‘the work of the Father’ (Jn 5:36; 10:32, 37) and revealed the ‘glory of the Father’; He is in the Father and the Father is in Him (Jn 14:11); He and the Father are ‘one’ (Jn 10:30). At this point, two suggestions can be made: First, the believers, assisted by the Spirit of truth, are able to glorify the Father through Jesus and with Jesus, because they are in Jesus and Jesus is in them (Jn 14:20); and second, reading or hearing the story of Jesus is not a passive activity, as it has the power to transform its readers and stimulate their spirituality, it engages their heart and mind, and provides them with information through which they feel motivated to glorify the Father – “it is to the glory of my Father that you should bear much fruit and be my disciples” (Jn 15:8). Thus, by loving one another and remaining in Jesus, the believers will glorify the Father.

Another way to glorify the Father is that the believers must work towards establishing and maintaining a unity rooted in/similar to that which unites the Father and the Son. In the final prayer of Jesus (Jn 17:1-26), the unity of the believers is closely linked to both Jesus’ glory and the Father’s glory, and to their knowledge about the Father conveyed to them by Jesus.<sup>397</sup>

The search for unity between the believers must focus on the Person of Jesus, since it was He who showed them the value and the merit of the unity through His teaching and example. He revealed to them the unity that He has with the Father and the Holy Spirit, and its connections to their own unity. The unity that exists between the believers is therefore not a unity built on common ethnic origins, social ties, or ideological beliefs, but rather a continuation of the unity between the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. As such, it becomes a valued way to glorify the Father. Keener (1999:51) correctly states that “if the Son’s unity with the Father teaches us nothing else, may we learn from it how our unity with one another is essential to honoring him”.

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<sup>395</sup>. On topic, cf. **Van der Merwe** (2002 a:226-249).

<sup>396</sup>. **Thompson** (1993:200-201) asserts that the reader knows God through the characterization of Jesus and the telling of the story. The story functions by drawing the readers into the narrative so that they will understand God.

<sup>397</sup>. On the topic, cf. **Robertson** (1988); **Gruenler** (1989); **Van der Merwe** (2002a; 2002b); **Ensor** (2007); and **Peterson** (2013).





Van der Merwe (2002b:224-254) adds that the Fourth Evangelist has successfully proved how the unity between the Father and Jesus has been used as an example according to which the unity between Jesus' disciples is to be constructed. Moreover, Jesus prayed to the Father to keep the believers in firm fidelity to this knowledge: "Holy Father, keep them in your Name...that they may be one even as we are. While I was with them, I was keeping them in your Name which you have given me" (Jn 17:11-26). Based on the theology of the New Testament, the Christian doctrine declares that God is eternal and triune: Three divine Persons in one God. Although the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are three distinct divine Persons, the Name is one: God (Holy Trinity). Matthew 3:17 states: "And a voice from heaven said: this is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased". This declaration indicates one aspect of Jesus' Name that He received from the Father. According to Matthew 28:19, Jesus commanded His disciples to "go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit". In the Old Testament, the Name of God (Yahweh) is holy, powerful, and revered (cf. Ps 20:1; 54:1; Pr 18:10). In the context of the above-mentioned prayer of Jesus, the Name of the Father may stand for both the manifestation of His character and for His might. Additionally, according to the Johannine *Prologue*, "to those who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, He gave the right to become children of God" (Jn 1:12).

Becoming children of God means that the believers carry the Name of their Father. They must therefore honor it, respect it, and cherish it. Doing so and maintaining the unity among themselves, and remaining in Jesus (the true vine) they will definitely glorify the Father. The gratitude that the children of God/the believers must show to the Father, and the honor and respect that they should give to His Name, are an essential element of glorifying Him, and an indispensable element of worshiping Him. John 17:1-26 shows that glorifying the Father, revealing His Name, imploring Him to protect the believers by the power of this holy Name, and praying for the unity among the believers, were at the heart and the intention of His prayer. It also indicates the strong bond between glorifying the Father, and worshiping Him.

In the same context, these three elements are fundamentally connected to both events: First, revealing the divine members of the *Familia Dei* to its human members while motivating these members to abide in this family (remain united to its divine members and to each other).<sup>398</sup> Second, experiencing God through this revelation: Jesus made the Father and His Name known (Jn 1:18; 17:6); He revealed Himself through the *Ego Eimi* sayings, His teachings, and the signs He performed; and He revealed the Holy Spirit by talking about His titles and roles.

Seeing it from the perspective of the Johannine spirituality, worship includes among others:<sup>399</sup>

- ♦ Knowledge: Jesus and the ‘true worshippers’ worship the Father ‘in spirit and truth’, in the Spirit of Truth, who teaches them and leads them to the complete truth (Jn 16:12-13); they worship the one they know (Jn 4:22), the one whom Jesus made known to them (Jn 1:18; 17:6).
- ♦ Faith that grants eternal life to those who believe in the Father and in Jesus (Jn 20:23), and provides them with a place in the Father’s house (Jn: 14:1-4).
- ♦ Devotion in its internal and external dimensions: The salient component of devotion in the Fourth Gospel is prayer, which emanates from the relationship that the believer has with the Father (Jn 16:23-27), the Son (Jn 16:16), and the Spirit-Paraclete (Jn 14:17).
- ♦ Perseverance during hardship, tribulations, and persecutions: This kind of perseverance is empowered by the example of Jesus who endured sufferings, crucifixion, death in obedience to His Father, and faithfulness to the mission that the Father entrusted to Him. This perseverance is empowered by the prayer of Jesus in John 17:1-26, and it is strengthened by His encouragement (Jn 16:23), cf. also Hurtado (2005:330-331).

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**398.** Among other things, abiding in the *Familia Dei* embraces three elements that are not discussed inside the thesis, namely fellowship, discipleship, and holiness:

Fellowship: It includes service and love between the members of the *Familia Dei*. The disciples of Jesus are to respect others, and to demonstrate their mutual love (Jn 13). This service and love found its origin in the example of Jesus who came from God (Jn 13:3; 17:5) and who promised the sending of the Spirit (Jn 14:16; 16:7; 17:11) to His disciples to empower this service and this love, and to perpetuate the fellowship that they had with Jesus.

Discipleship: Those who became Jesus’ disciples/members of *Familia Dei*, and had fellowship with Him and with each other, are sent out by Him to continue His mission in the world (Jn 17:18; 20:21). This specific factor of discipleship, like that of Jesus, therefore becomes salvific (Jn 6:39-40; 20:31).

Holiness: The foundation of holiness is the divine and holy nature of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit; on the topic code of holiness cf. **Van der Merwe** (2017a).

**399.** On *Worship* motif, cf. **Keener**, (2003, 1:608-628); **Barrett** ([1955] 1975:190-204); **Brown**, (1966:166-186); and **Schnackenburg** ([1968] 1980:419-460).

It therefore seems justifiable to say that, as Jesus glorified the Father through His suffering, crucifixion, and death, so in a similar way, the believers can glorify the Father by embracing all kinds of difficulties with Christian hope, and by remaining in Jesus with all faithfulness. Kanagaraj (1998:35) correctly involves the love motif in *worship*, stating that “worship entails a deep communion with God that is possible by entering into a communion with Christ who alone reveals to human beings the character of God; his love and salvation”.

Biblical scholars have approached the topic of love in general, including love in Johannine writings from numerous angles. The following suggestions are suitable to illustrate the present discussion: “*Agape* in the New Testament designates love in its fullest conceivable form as the distinguishing attribute of Divinity, and that, when referring to human activity, it holds the central position as the distinctive peculiarity of the Christian life” Sikes (1955:139-150); Schwöbel (1998:326-327) adds: ‘God has freely chosen to be in a relationship of love with human beings whose destiny it is to be in communion with God, because God is love’. Love, as it is found in John, is the love of the inner circle of believers, the love that connects the members of the *Familia Dei*, the source of life (Jn 3:16) and a creative power in whatever form it appears; it is the sacrificial love that Jesus expressed on the cross to reveal and fulfill the Father’s will and love. By loving the Son, the believers love the Father and accept His Fatherhood. Love enables the believers to participate in the divine life of the Father and the Son through the Spirit of truth. Accordingly, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit (the divine members of the *Familia Dei*) dwell in the believers (the human members of the *Familia Dei*). Thus, love enables the latter to experience God in a unique and profound way.

## 5.5 Concluding Remarks

The outcomes of the previous Chapters have set the platform for the investigation done in this one. These Chapters point out that John has skillfully recorded the *Father's Initiative* towards His children, the members of His *Familia Dei*, as it was accomplished by His Son and explained by His Holy Spirit. Rooted in His divine love, the Father's initiative and His involvement in the believers' journey of experiencing Him are a two-way movement: First, an outward movement reaching out to His *children*, through the fundamental events accomplished by His Only Begotten Son (Creation, Incarnation, Revelation, and Salvation); and second, an inward movement drawing, through His Son, all people to experiencing Him and to be with Him and. By embracing the significance of this initiative and responding positively to it, the Johannine readers are embarking on the spiritual journey of experiencing God. The essence of this journey is the indwelling of the Father and the Son through the Holy Spirit, in (the life of) the believers (Jn 14:20, 22), while its completion is the believers' dwelling in the Father's house through the Son (Jn 14:1-4). In his narrative, John employed family metaphors with its correlated motifs and terminology to portray and record this interaction. The significance of *group* and *family* during the era of the Fourth Evangelist has worked in his favor when he employed the *Familia Dei* motif to depict the mission of Jesus in carrying out the Father's initiative. Moreover, the familiarity and the appreciation of the Johannine readers (original and subsequent) to this significance made/make it also easy for them to embrace John's depiction and motivate them to respond to this initiative.

In the thesis, the *Familia Dei* is understood not as a simple metaphorical stylistic device, or as one of the Johannine dualism motifs, but it is considered as

- A real entity that includes divine members (the Father; the Son; the Holy Spirit) and human members (Christian believers; the Twelve Disciples, some of the Johannine characters, and the Johannine readers who believed in the Son, and those who are in the process of believing).
- A divine-human realm within which God's initiative is revealed, conveyed, and accomplished by the Son, and where the believers' response to this initiative is achieved by accepting the Son, believing in Him and imitating Him under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. It is within this realm that God's initiative establishes divine-human relationships and interactions between the members of the *Familia Dei*, originates spirituality, and constitutes an experience of God.

In the thesis, the Johannine Experience of God consists of two major components: God's initiative towards the believers/his *Familia Dei*; and their response to this initiative.

The first component consists of the divine members of the *Familia Dei* – the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, and their involvement in revealing *God's initiative*, and in accomplishing it:

- The Johannine Father is the *initiator* and the *aspiration* of the believers' experience of God.
- The Johannine Son is the *implementer* and the *mediator* of the believers' experience of God.
- The Johannine Paraclete is the *companion* of the believers in the journey of experiencing God.

The Johannine God is *love* and a loving Father. He loves immeasurably the Son (Jn 3:35), and unconditionally the world (Jn 3:16). His divine love is a fundamental foundation of His initiative towards His *children*, and a great motivating factor for them to respond positively while striving to become His *dwelling place* during their earthly life and aspiring to enjoy the eternal life/be with Him in His Kingdom. Out of this fatherly love and by the merits of the Son, the Father grants life and *eternal life* to the members of the *Familia Dei*. Loving abundantly and granting life/eternal life can be two elements common to the identity of the Father and the Son as well as a powerful factor that enables those who become children of God/the believers to have life/eternal life and to be embraced by the abundant love/included in the divine life of the Father and the Son. This factor forms an important part of what initiates the believer's spiritual journey of experiencing God. Therefore, the Johannine Father can be perceived as the *initiator* and the *aspiration* of the believers' experience of God.

The Johannine Son revealed and achieved God's initiative; He generates and mediates the positive response of the believers to this initiative. The titles and deeds attributed to Him in the Fourth Gospel are closely connected and interwoven: His titles reveal and convey the principles of His deeds; and in their turn, His deeds validate and explain His titles. He is the *way* that leads the believers to the Father's house (Jn 14:1-4); He is the *way* (Jn 14:6) that gives them access to the Father and enables them to know Him, love Him and glorify Him. He is the *truth* (Jn 14:6) in which they found the genuine and complete knowledge of the Father; the Johannine Son is the *life* and the *giver of life* and *eternal life* (Jn 1:4; 3:15; 5:21), both of which enable the believers to always be with Him. That means that they can be with the Father and experience Him.

Furthermore, the narrative of the Fourth Gospel is considered to be the inspired words of God that continue the mission of Jesus, the Word of God. In this narrative, the Word of God is depicted as alive and active with a creative and transformative power. Likewise, the words used in this narrative to depict the Word of God have -by His merits- similar power to create spirituality and constitute an experience of God when they are read or heard under the guidance of the Holy Spirit-Paraclete, the Spirit of Truth.

The Johannine Holy Spirit-Paraclete identifies the Son and reveals His divinity (Jn 1:32-33) to the believers/*Familia Dei*; He announces the beginning of a new Messianic age. The titles and roles attributed to Him, in John's narrative, affirm that He continues the mission of the Son and accompanies the believers on their spiritual journey of experiencing God. In John 3, regeneration or *new birth* are presented as one aspect of the Holy Spirit's work. After the resurrection of Jesus, the Holy Spirit-Paraclete became the constant presence of the Father and Son with the disciples/the subsequent believers/the members of the *Familia Dei*. Revealing the Son and leading people to know Him/believe in Him, establish the inaugural aspect of the involvement of the Holy Spirit in the believers' journey of experiencing God.

Introduced to the Father's initiative while reading or hearing John's Gospel, the Johannine readers would feel motivated and urged to interact with it and respond to it positively.

The second component of the Johannine Experience of God is the positive response of the believers (*Familia Dei*) to God's initiative.

The significance of joining the *Familia Dei* -becoming children of God means that the believers commit themselves to a new lifestyle within a new family that glorifies the Father by believing in the Son and living under the guidance of His Spirit. They become therefore a divine dwelling. This commitment reflects their response to God's initiative, which includes, but is not limited to Accepting the Son of God; journeying with the Holy Spirit; and glorifying the Father.

*Accepting the Son of God* is the inaugural event in the believers' response to God's initiative and the essential element in their spiritual journey of experiencing God. This means that this journey starts by accepting the Son; it unfolds in the active presence of/under the guidance of the Holy Spirit-Paraclete; and culminates by knowing the Father, loving Him and glorifying Him. In John's narrative, two powerful statements testify to importance, the significance, the merit(s), and to the rewards of accepting Jesus the Son of God: "To those who did accept Him, He gave the power to become children of God" (Jn 1:12), and, "These are recorded so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing this you may have life through his name" (Jn 20:31). The implication here is that the believers are included in the inner and intimate circle of the Father, which enables them to experience Him in a very special way. In this case, accepting the Son of God becomes a sphere of spirituality and a web of divine-human relationships that encompass the notions of believing in the Son, following Him, remaining in Him, having fellowship with Him, and imitating Him Journeying with the Holy Spirit.

Journeying with the Holy Spirit is in the heart of the believers' positive response to God's initiative and in the core of their experience of God by means of reading or hearing the narrative of the Fourth Gospel. As the Holy Spirit has accompanied Jesus since His first public appearance (Jn 1:32-34) until His final hour (Jn 19:30); and after His Resurrection, He remains with the disciples (Jn 20:22). Likewise the Holy Spirit will be with the believers- *Familia Dei* during their journey. In this way, the believers are encouraged to read the Fourth Gospel with awe and wonder and with prayerful dependence on 'the Spirit of Truth', who enable them to glorify the Father by loving Him and doing His will.

Applying the image of a journey to the Johannine experience of God, it can be said that the believers (including the Johannine readers) are the travelers, John's narrative is the map. Jesus is the *way*, and the Holy Spirit is the guide. The anticipated delight is being where Jesus is, and with Him glorifying the Father; the destination is the Father's house, and the welcoming party is the divine members of the *Familia Dei*. It is a journey that starts by becoming 'children of God'-being 'born from above' (Jn 1:12; 3:5); it reaches its zenith by embracing the 'complete truth' (Jn 16:13), and attaining the 'perfect unity' with the Father and the Son (Jn 17:23); and it culminates by arriving at the Father's house and enjoy eternal life with Him (Jn 14:1-3; 17:3).



## Chapter 6

### General Conclusion

This thesis examines the experience of God in the Fourth Gospel by perceiving it from the perspective of metaphoric *Familia Dei* found in its narrative. This examination is done by following a three-step process, organized in six Chapters: The first step consists of conducting a *literary review*, presenting the *methodology* and *approach* employed during this examination, and focusing the thesis on the Johannine studies, especially John. The second step involves the articulation of essential considerations on *religious experience* and the *Johannine community*, connected to this Gospel. This articulation aims at acquiring a deeper understanding of the background of the Johannine experience of God and at pointing out the functionality of this Gospel's narrative in constituting this experience. The third step suggests and discusses two components of the Johannine experience of God: *God's initiative*, and the *believers' response* to it. With these, the thesis aspires to generate a deeper understanding of both the spirituality of the Fourth Gospel and of the Johannine spirituality, thereby enriching future studies on this topic.

#### 6.1 Summary of the key Chapters

**Chapter 1** serves as an overture to the research. It introduces the topic of the thesis and explains its title. The latter has three segments: the first segment (*Exploring the Johannine Spirituality*) indicates the framework within which the research is conducted and corresponds to its broader aim. The second segment (*the Experience of God in the Fourth Gospel*) points to the theme being investigated in this research. The third segment (*Perceived from the perspective of its Familia Dei*) refers to the family metaphoric, employed by John throughout his narrative, as a window from which will be gazed holistically at two suggested components of the Johannine experience of God: God's initiative towards His believers, and the response of His believers to this initiative. The decision to select this window is based on a twofold conviction:

- The family metaphoric in John offers suitable elements that facilitate both the exploration of the Johannine spirituality, and the examination of the Johannine experience of God.
- John's narrative provides the researcher with abundant data about this experience.

**Chapter 2** sets the framework of this research and establishes its platform by reviewing a selection of publications relevant to the topic of this thesis. It also expresses the limitations of the thesis and its aspiration to contribute in filling a specific research gap. The outcome of the literary review helped identifying this gap, pointing out the scarcity of publications on the Johannine experience of God. This outcome therefore underlines the fact that there is a multidimensional gap existing in the intersection of *Spirituality*, *Christian Spirituality*, *Johannine Spirituality*, *Biblical Studies* and the Fourth Gospel scholarship. It also underlines the fact that there is ample room for a new study that approaches John's narrative, seeking to explore its spirituality and the Johannine spirituality through examining the experience of God. Although this thesis cannot and does not intend to fill this big gap, the aim is to contribute in filling it.

**Chapter 3** articulates the *approach* adopted by this thesis and depicts the *methodology* used to achieve its objectives: It is a *socio-historical* and *literary-theological* approach, which is a holistic integrated approach that suggests and discusses a panoramic view of how the components of the experience of God are recorded in John's Gospel, and how God can be experienced through reading or hearing its narrative. The overall structure of the thesis is based on a the conviction that the *Johannine spirituality* can be explored through the Fourth Gospel, and that a distinctive experience of God can be perceived from the perspective of the *Familia Dei* theme found in this Gospel; it is also motivated by the certitude that its narrative has the ability to constitute an experience of God and to create spirituality once it is read or heard.

**Chapter 4** is a preparation for the investigation done in Chapter 5. It comprises essential considerations on *Religious Experience*, the *Johannine Community*, and the *Fourth Gospel* that help understanding the Johannine experience of God.

♦ The considerations on *Religious Experience* aim to highlight some of its fundamental features that help understanding the religious experiences lived by the early Christians. These experiences are considered as contributors to the Johannine experience of God (recorded in John), at the same time this experience is considered as an essential part of these experiences; and both of them share the same socio-historical milieu and circumstances.

♦ Through the articulation of the considerations on the Johannine Community, the thesis embraces the following threefold commonly accepted conviction: first, reading the Fourth Gospel offers a significant insight on the Johannine Community within which it was composed. Second, investigating the history of this community generates a satisfying comprehension of this Gospel. And third, the Johannine community has endured an expulsion from the synagogue, and an inner conflict. Building on this conviction and elaborating on salient correlated motifs (i.e. the need to feel loved; the need to feel accepted; and the need to feel secured) it is suggested that the Johannine Community could be perceived first, as:

- The cradle within which Jesus' words and deeds were recorded (in John), and interpreted;
- The fertile field within which the spirituality of its members was shaped by this interpretation;
- The prolific fount that nurtured its experience of God, which prospered within this spirituality;
- The bountiful meadow within which the Johannine spirituality emerged and flourished.

♦ Articulating some considerations on the Fourth Gospel, the focus here is on two fundamental contributions that are tightly connected to its involvement in constituting an experience of God. The first one is an *inward contribution* from the Christian history into John's Gospel. It enfolds the substantial aspects of this history from which the Fourth Evangelist drew his knowledge, experience, inspiration, and motivation to compose his Gospel. It also encloses the significant events that occurred throughout this history and have shaped his theology, spirituality, thoughts, writing style, and experience of God. The *second contribution* consists of an *outward contribution* from John's Gospel into the Christian history: The input of this Gospel in the life and spirituality of its readers/hearers (original and subsequent at both the individual level and the communal level), throughout the ages, is remarkable and valuable.

The last part of Chapter 4 suggests and discusses a crucial factor that has the ability to establish a Johannine experience of God and the aptitude to create a well-suited atmosphere that facilitates its occurrence. This is called an *attuned interaction* between the involvements of four contributing participants: God the Father, the Fourth Evangelist, the narrative of the Fourth Gospel, and the Johannine readers. This interaction is the concordant consequence of the harmonious involvements of these participants, converging concurrently and interacting synchronously forthwith in the same event, which is reading/hearing this narrative.

This dynamic event therefore becomes a congregating intersection of the aforementioned four involvements, a fertile field that facilitates the occurrence of the Johannine experience of God, and a spiritual atmosphere within which the journey of living it develops and flourishes:

- The involvement of God the Father happened at three levels: He inspired the Evangelist; He sanctified the Narrative; and it still happening: He draws the Readers to Him through Jesus.
- The contribution of the Fourth Evangelist into this *attuned interaction* consists of recording skillfully his own Experience of God (and that of his community); employing his Skills and Knowledge in doing so; accordingly providing the readers with an impressive Narrative.
- The involvement of the Narrative of the Fourth Gospel can be found in its sacred nature; in the richness of its theological contents; and in its effective functionality.
- The involvement of the Johannine readers/hearers consists of them reading/reading John's narrative; interacting with its contents accordingly; and responding positively to God's initiative.

**Chapter 5** is the core of the thesis. Building upon the contents and the outcomes of the previous Chapters, it starts by elaborating on how *Familia Dei* is perceived and employed by the thesis, and culminates by suggesting and discussing two components of the Johannine experience of God: God's initiative towards humans; and the response of the believers to this initiative.

- In the thesis, the *Familia Dei* is understood not an isolated Johannine theme or a simple metaphorical stylistic device, but both as an essential constituent of the figurative language of John, and as a powerful factor to express his theology. It is a salient topic that opens John's narrative, employing family terminology, to introduce the eternal Logos (Jn 1:1) to its readers as the Only Son who made 'the Father known' (Jn 1:18) to everybody; and as the Incarnate Word that gave to those who believe in/accept Him "the power to become children of God" (Jn 1:12). Making the Father known and granting the power to become children of God are fundamental components of the Johannine experience of God. Additionally, the *Familia Dei* is considered as a real entity that includes divine members (the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit), human members (those who believe in the Son, the twelve Disciples, and some of the Johannine characters that may be included in this category), and metaphoric members (the sheep of the good shepherd in John 10:1-18 and the branches of the true vine in John 15:1-17).

*Familia Dei* is therefore a divine-human realm within which God's initiative is revealed, conveyed, and accomplished by the Son, and the response of the believers to this initiative is achieved by accepting the Son, believing in Him-expressed by imitating Him under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. The significance of the *family* and the noticeable use of metaphors in literature at the time of the Fourth Evangelist, might have worked in his favor when he employed family metaphors and the *Familia Dei* motif, in his narrative, to depict the Father whom no one has ever seen, and to describe the mission of the Son who made the Father known/revealed-achieved his initiative, while referring to those who accept the Son and believe in his Father (the believers) as *Children of God*. Most likely at the time of John, his readers/hearers were familiar and had sufficient knowledge about the contemporary language of *family*, *family values*, and *family metaphoric*. This made it easy for both John in recording this mission, employing *Familia Dei* metaphors, and for them to grasp the meaning of this initiative and to respond positively to it. Likewise, the knowledge that John's subsequent readers/hearers have on family's significance and their familiarity with its value in Christian life, enable them to do as their predecessors did.

- As suggested and discussed in Chapter 5, the first component of the Johannine experience of God consists of God's initiative towards humans or the involvement of the divine members of the *Familia Dei* (the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit-Paraclete) in initiating, revealing, achieving, and perpetuating this initiative:

The Johannine Father is the *initiator* and the *aspiration* of the Johannine experience of God. He is understood as eternal, light, almighty, holy, spirit, love, Life/giver of life, and as head of His *Familia Dei*. He is a loving and caring Father, who loves His *children* abundantly: through the Son, He sustains their life by providing them with *true bread/bread of God*, *living water*, and places in His heavenly house; also at the request of the Son, He protects them from the evil one, consecrates and unifies them. He comes and abides in them while drawing them to the Son who will resurrect them in the last day; He has sent them the Paraclete to be with them until that day. All of the titles and deeds attributed to the Father in the Fourth Gospel are salient constituents of His *initiative* and an essential part of His involvement in His children's spiritual journey of experiencing Him. In other words, the Johannine Father is the one who made/makes the first move: He created everything through His Son (Jn 1:3); He gives life (Jn 1:13; 3:3; 5:26), grants eternal life (Jn 3:36; 17:2-3), and saves the world (Jn 3:17; 12:47).

The Father's initiative is therefore a two-way initiative: An *outward direction/movement*, reaching out to His human creatures through the existential and fundamental events accomplished by His only begotten Son (*Creation, Incarnation, Revelation, and Salvation*), and an *inward direction/movement* drawing through His Son all His children to be with Him in His house (Jn 12:32; 14:1-4). As recorded by John in his narrative, it is a loving initiative rooted in the Father's abundant love to His Son and to the world (Jn 3:16; 5:20; 15:9), and in His knowledge of the limitations of the humans (Jn 3:31; 8:23). It is also a redeeming initiative that was revealed-accomplished by the Only Son.

The Johannine Son is God and the Logos. He is both the Word of God and the Son of Man. He is the *revealer*, who conveyed-accomplished the Father's initiative; and the *mediator* of the believers' response to this initiative, who facilitates their experience of God. In Johan's Gospel, the entire life of the Son (Jesus) is based on and revolves around His mission to make the Father known and do his will. As the *revealer*, Jesus did what He saw His Father was doing, and spoke what the Father has told Him to say (Jn 5:19, 30; 8:28). The words that Jesus spoke and the deeds that He performed (which are the words and the works of the Father) surpassed their historical circumstances and went beyond their ordinary meanings to lead those who heard/witnessed them physically (through Jesus) and those who read/hear them (in John) to the Father and accordingly experiencing Him. This validates Jesus' statement: "Whoever sees me sees the One who sent me/the Father" (Jn 12:45; 14:9). It also validates the suggestions proposed in this thesis that whoever experiences Jesus by accepting Him will experience God through Him; likewise, the Johannine readers will have similar experience when they read the words and deeds of Jesus (recorded in the narrative of the Fourth Gospel) and believe in Him through them.

The Johannine Holy Spirit comes from the Father at the request of the Son. He is the *Paraclete* who accompanies the disciples/the believers forever (Jn 14:16-18), and the *Spirit of Truth* who reminds them of what Jesus has said, teaches them about the things to come, and leads them to the 'complete truth' (Jn 16:13). These and the other titles, metaphors, and deeds attributed to the Holy Spirit-Paraclete the Fourth Gospel have functional and theological implications for its pneumatology and theology.

Thus, it is relevant to say that His involvement in the Johannine experience of God consists (among others) of first, identifying the Son, making Him known, and leading the people to know *Him*/believe in Him; second, continuing the Son's mission by perpetuating the Father's initiative and explaining it to the believers/children of God/human members of the *Familia Dei*; and third, accompanying the members in their spiritual journey of experiencing God. Therefore, as the live testimonies of the Son (that include His works and words) have constituted significant experiences of God lived by the first generation of believers, likewise the presence and the involvement of the Holy Spirit-Paraclete in the believers' life has the ability to create similar experiences and constitutes prolific spirituality.

- Furthermore, the second component of the Johannine experience of God consists of the believers' response to the *Father's initiative*. Actually, responding to this initiative varies from one person to another. It is shaped by the person's tradition, their socio-religious background, geo-demographic milieu, education, experiences in life, and the like. In Chapter 5, three segments of this response were suggested and discussed: Accepting/believing in the Only Son (Jesus), journeying with the Holy Spirit-Paraclete, and glorifying God the Father.

Accepting the Only Son (in the Gospel of John) is the heart of the believer's response. It is a sphere of spirituality and a web of divine-human relationships that encompass believing in the Son, following Him, remaining in Him, having fellowship with Him, and imitating Him. It is a significant event that can be initiated and motivated either by the Father who draws the believers to Jesus and entrusts them to Him (Jn 6:44, 65; 10:29; 17:6, 9), or by Jesus who chooses the disciples (Jn 6:70; 13:18; 15:19), or by the Spirit-Paraclete who leads the believers to 'the complete truth' (Jn 16:13), or by a personal decision (i.e. Jn 1:35-51; 2:11; 4:41); to be exact, by the four of them combined because they are intrinsically and profoundly connected. This event is crowned by the privilege of becoming *children of God*/members of the *Familia Dei*/ a divine *dwelling place* granted by the Son to those who accept Him. It is also an event that reaches its completeness and finds the fullness of its meaning in the act of mutual *abiding*: The abiding of the Father and the Son in the believers, and the abiding (remaining) of the believers in Jesus. Thus accepting the Son becomes effective means through which the Son reveals the Father's initiative, and an inaugural event that establishes the believers' journey of experiencing God.

Journeying with the Holy Spirit (in the Fourth Gospel) reflects and expresses the believer's decision to accept the Son and their willingness to live and fulfill the requirements of this decision in a way that glorifies the Father. The Johannine Holy Spirit-Paraclete is the loyal companion, the honorable guest, and the beloved dweller during the journey. He is the Spirit of truth, who teaches, reveals, reminds, and leads the believers during their journey.

Glorifying God the Father is the beginning, the zenith and the aspiration of the believers' spiritual journey. Comparing the Johannine experience of God to a journey is not something new. It is one of the most powerful images that describe the Christian life and spirituality. Preparing for a journey, one usually tries to acquire a map that indicates how to get to the desired destination. One of the rewarding ways of gaining encouragement on a long journey is to anticipate one's arrival; this means visualizing one's final destination, anticipating the delight of arrival, and picturing those who will be there welcoming them. Thus the spiritual journey of experiencing God is better understood in the light of the Father's presence in the believers' life through the Son and the Holy Spirit; and in the believers' realization and appreciation of the magnitude and significance of this presence that bestows life and eternal life.

## **6.2 Suggested Features of the Johannine Spirituality**

The following are some suggested features of the Johannine spirituality inspired by and based on the findings of this thesis:

- ♦ The spirituality of the Fourth Gospel and the Johannine spirituality are closely related, each dependent on the other, enriching and completing one another. Both spiritualities spring from the experience of God, lived by the authors of the Johannine writings and their community/ies, while a special interest for experiencing God is intrinsic to these writings and an essential element of their message, and an aspect of their theology. Both spiritualities are about what the readers draw from the accounts of these writings, and about recording devotedly and conveying accurately God's Initiative as well as about the positive response(s) of their readers (Believers/Familia Dei/Children of God) to this initiative, or their spiritual journey of experiencing God.



- ♦ In this spiritual journey, the Johannine readers are the travelers, their road-map is Jesus' words and deeds recorded in the narratives of the Johannine writings. The way in this journey is Jesus Himself, while the guide is the Holy Spirit.
  
- ♦ Johannine Spirituality revolves around responding positively to God's initiative by accepting the Son who carried it out and conveyed it, as well as around journeying with the Holy Spirit who perpetuates it and constantly explains it.
  
- ♦ Johannine Spirituality can be compared to a precious diamond, well cut and adorned; each of its various *façades* reveals the preciousness and the beauty of the entire stone. This spirituality could be considered as *Theocentric*, *Christocentric* and *Pneumacentric*.
  
- ♦ The Johannine spirituality is rooted in a matrix of human-divine love: The unconditional love of the Father to the world, to His children, and to His Only Begotten Son; the glorifying love of the Son to the Father, and the sacrificial love of the Son to God's children; and the love of the believers to the Father who loves them abundantly, to the Son who made the Father known to them and redeemed them, and to the Holy Spirit who guides them in their spiritual journey.
  
- ♦ The Johannine spirituality is rooted in a mutual abiding: The Father abides in the Son; the Son abides in the Father; both the Father and the Son abide in the believers; and the believers abide in the Son, in His love and His commandments.
  
- ♦ The Johannine spirituality is part of Christian spirituality, and therefore it adapts itself to every era and area, and each believer (or group of believers) responds to its imperatives in accordance with the needs and capabilities proper to themselves. Thus, it is a dynamic participation in the Father's life and love through His only begotten Son and the Holy Spirit. As there are certainly many other features of Johannine spirituality that are not listed here, the hope is that further studies conducted in the future will generate more understanding about this spirituality.

### 6.3 Suggested Topics for future studies

Inspired by the outcome of this study, the following topics are suggested for further studies:

- ♦ Studying other dimensions of the Johannine experience of God (i.e. practical, devotional, and ecumenical) at an individual level and/or a collective level.
- ♦ The place and the role of *modern technology* and *the social media* in experiencing God or in conveying this experience: The challenges, functionality, and feasibility of such an endeavor.
- ♦ Identifying and investigating other aspects of God's initiative (i.e. mercy; forgiveness of sins).
- ♦ Identifying and investigating other aspects of the believer's response to God's initiative (i.e. their devotion, their involvement in activities that address poverty, sickness, violence, etc.).
- ♦ Perceiving the experience of God from the perspective of the Johannine pneumatology, ecclesiology, soteriology, or from the perspectives of other Johannine themes (i.e. the Hour of Jesus, the life motif, the glory motif, the references to the Old Testament).
- ♦ Investigating the Johannine experience of God by applying a psychological approach.
- ♦ The Johannine experience of God and its connotations to the ethical behavior of the believer(s).
- ♦ The Johannine experience of God and its connotations to the holiness of the believer(s).
- ♦ Elaborate on the above-articulated observations on the believers' spirituality journey.

## Chapter 7

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