

“Apostolic Witness of Jesus Christ in 1 John 1:1-4 and its Relevance to Combating Contemporary Heretical Teaching about the Person of Jesus Christ”

ABSTRACT

The teaching by some New Age Movement and Christian Cults members that denied the incarnation of Jesus Christ is against the teaching of the apostolic fathers. Apostle John being the last apostle that died, testified to the fact that Jesus Christ was actually incarnated and resurrected, and they are eyewitnesses. This is contrary to some religious teaching about the personhood of Jesus Christ. The aim of this paper is to defend the personhood of Jesus Christ as the incarnate word of God and to combat the contemporary heresy that denied Jesus as the Son of God incarnate. The methodology adopted for this study is historical – grammatical approach. The historical method is employed to unravel the history behind the emergence of the heretical teaching.

The findings revealed that there is an internal schism as a result of the denial of Jesus' incarnation by some members of the Johannine community; the secessionists taught that Jesus was a phantom and was not real human being. The heretical teaching of the false teachers stated that Christ is too holy to inhabit any matter (Gnosticism taught that matter is evil, but the spirit is good), Apostle John responded swiftly by refuting their false teaching declaring that he had been with Jesus in real life settings and was a first class eye witness to the life and times of Jesus. Further discoveries are: Apostle John insists that the heretics must not be admitted into the fellowship and there should be no form of relationship with the community. The paper thus recommended that though heretical teachings and doctrines mostly emanated from within and usually command a horde of followers, the believers in Christ must continually affirmed their faith, beliefs and practices in consonance with their historical heritage and faith, which is based on the incarnate Son of God. This would ensure that in the process, believers in Christ would know that they are not following a cunningly devise fables but Christ and that the unity of faith hangs on sound fellowship with other believers in harmony with our relationship with Jesus as the only begotten of God.

INTRODUCTION

Heretical teaching has a long history in Church history. Though this heretical movement may not be easily stamped out, but its effect can be reduced in the circle of Christians. The reason why it is difficult to stamp out heretical teaching completely is not far-fetched. It is because these teachings are appealing and suit the whims and caprices of the hearer. Apostle John refers to these heretics as people who have gone “out of us” as Apostle John succinctly puts it. They are not with us had it been they are with us they would have remained with us. The same situation is true today, where we have Christians who have gone out to establish their own churches because they would not listen to sound doctrines that are able to change their soul. The time we are in is perilous, all kinds of teaching are flying round the air and unfortunately, most Christians are not able to discern which one is the true doctrine and which one is not. False teaching and heresy serve as subtle weapon used by the enemy of the gospel to fight the work and the person of Christ. When the teaching about Jesus Christ is faulty then the whole process of redemption will be faulty. The more we should have sound doctrines about the person and work of Christ. Today, we have many conflicting views about the divinity and the humanity of Christ; which may be regarded as Christological debate. We have contemporary teachers who continuously deny the fact that Christ was crucified, and that Jesus was the only person that was on the cross. This was the heresy that was being spread within the Johannine community at that time. In our own time, there are heretical teachers who teach the people that Jesus and Christ were two separate entities. They say Jesus of Nazareth is not the same as the Christ of faith. In their argument they note that Jesus is the historical man who came to Israel but was not accepted. The other is Christ of faith the one who resurrected on the third day and seated in the heavenly places at the right hand of power.

Furthermore, this dangerous teaching is gaining grounds in our contemporary Christian community and must be tackled headlong. Although we do not have any early followers of Christ living on earth today, but we have their writings that had passed the integrity test of canonization and are relevant for combating contemporary heretics. The First epistle of John would be used as a platform in this research and the model would be presented as a tool to fight the heretics of our time.

In view of this, the study would find out exactly the heresies involved in John’s time and his method used in refuting them. The apostolic authority behind this

gospel would be investigated and firmly established. The writer of the epistle also established and proved to his audience that Jesus was not a phantom and that he was both human and divine. Therefore, the apostolic witness in the First epistle of John about the incarnation of Christ is a major weapon to silence the heretics.

This paper is divided into five sections. Section one is the introduction while section two discusses about what some author says about 1 John 1:1-4, section three is the exegetical section while section four discusses the relevance of this teaching to the contemporary believers and the last session provides the conclusions and recommendations

2. WHAT SOME SCHOLARS SAY ABOUT 1 JOHN 1:1-4 VIS HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF FALSE TEACHING AND HERESY

This section focuses on the historical background of false teaching and heresy in the church beginning from the first century into our contemporary time. Jason Barker has accurately observed that Christians had been warned against the spread of heresy in the first-century church through the apostolic writings. The warning that false teachers would continue to arise can easily be seen in the growth of cults and false-Christian religions in our time. Unfortunately, the heresies that are well acceptable today are basically variations of the same heresies that have arisen throughout the history of the Church.¹

2.1 Heretical Teachings during the Apostolic Period and the Early Church

According to J. G. Davies, he asserts that the apostolic period and the early church history began immediately after the death of Christ around 33 A. D. The apostolic and the early church period began in the first Century and lasted till around third century. The early church in her formative years began to struggle against various forms of heresies. During this period, the church was in danger of heretical teachers who as a result of their teachings created schism in the church.²

Church historians such as J. G. Davies, Howard Frederic asserts that one of the earliest heresies was Ebionism. Ebionism appears in fully developed form in the second century, which was in reality only a continuation and amplification

¹ Jason Barker, http://www.watchman.org/articles/other-religious-topics/heresies_then-and-now/ accessed on 01/10/15; 10:00am

² J. G. Davies, *the Early Christian Church: A History of Its First Five Centuries*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1976), 84.

of the Judaistic opposition to the apostle Paul. While in his letter to the Galatians, Paul sternly rebuked those who sought salvation through law keeping. However, the nature of human beings suggests that men and women have always been enamored with religious systems that promise salvation by means of good works; and Ebionism was such a system.³

Furthermore, the origin of this movement was attributed to be in Palestine and assumed various forms. While, some group seems to have been quite clear on the essentials of salvation but insistent on law keeping as a way of life; others most, however, appear to have denied the deity of Christ, the virgin birth (teaching that Jesus was the human son of Joseph and Mary), and the efficacy of His sufferings. These views were held in a bid to retain a true monotheism. The Ebionites assumed that Christ was unusual in His strict law observance, and He was rewarded with Messiahship for His legal piety.⁴

According to Frederic, generally speaking the Ebionites did not accept Paul's apostleship and his writings; rather they chose to venerate Peter as the apostle to the circumcision. They put much emphasis on the law in general and on circumcision and the keeping of Sabbath especially. One branch taught a kind of Jewish-Christian Gnosticism. Ebionism practically disappeared by the fifth century.⁵

According to Davies another heretical movement within the church at that time was Gnosticism. He asserts that the origin of Gnosticism has drawn scholars into two parallel lines of thought. The first one is that, it was a movement within Christianity which made use of non – Christian ideas. While the second line of thought suggests that it was an independent movement which incorporated Christian beliefs into its system.⁶

However, Frederick asserts that like Ebionism, Gnosticism seems to have existed in a nucleus form in the days of Paul and John. For instance, Colossians 2:8, 18–19 and much of 1 John might probably be aimed at this error. He believes that Gnosticism was a product of the spirit of religious fusion that characterized the first century, which borrows heavily from the elements of Judaism, Christianity, Greek philosophy, and Oriental mysticism and

³ Vos, Howard Frederic, *Exploring Church History*, (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1996), 80; Cf. Davies, *the Early Christian Church: A History of Its First Five Centuries*, 137.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ Davies, *the Early Christian Church: A History of Its First Five Centuries*, 70.

developed a system of thought that desired to combine revelation with the “wisdom of this world.” Spawned primarily in Egypt and Syria, it spread to Rome, Asia Minor, Mesopotamia, and Persia.⁷

Moreover, according to Davies the growing consensus of modern critical opinion suggests that Gnosticism was an eclectic phenomenon, being the characteristic of that age that arose out of a mixture of Hellenistic, Jewish, Oriental and Christian factors. While at the same time; employed philosophical language as a terminology but not as a basic structure.⁸

Further, Gnosticism derived some substance from Christianity upon which it was parasitical and it was empowered by the use or misuse of the apostolic writings, to develop its ideas and give them some compelling force. Davies opines that in the early form of Gnosticism they were divided into two major groups as a result of their differing teachings which pose a major threat to the church and her teachings and it was from these groups that others sprang up. The two major groups are Valentinianism, and Marcionism.⁹

Marcionism was a kind of heresy which gave the early the church a severe headache in which at the end of the day one may safely assumes that the headache was a positive one. Marcion was regarded as a second century heretic that formed an energetic conflicting church in Rome. He insisted that there are two gods – a creator and a redeemer. The initial was the god of the Old Testament, who was very wicked and unreliable. While, the latter was the god of love and redemption: whom Jesus Christ revealed.¹⁰

As a result of this view, Marcion established his own canon of Scripture in which he totally prohibited the Old Testament because of the way God was presented in it. Further, he repudiated major portions of the New Testament, and accepts a portion of Luke’s Gospel and only ten Epistles of Paul. Marcion reasoned that all the other books portrayed a Judaistic, Old Testament bias.¹¹

Marcion’s reasoning and ideas were very poisonous to the early church. He made use of his wealth and influence to establish a rival church in Rome which lasted for several centuries. The action of this heretic individual forced the

⁷ Frederic, 81

⁸ Davies, 70 – 71

⁹ Davies, *the Early Christian Church: A History of Its First Five Centuries*, 71 – 72

¹⁰ James P. Eckman, *Exploring Church History*, (Wheaton: Crossway, 2002), 22.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

church to think more carefully and systematically about the nature of the Godhead and this gave birth to the process that produces the canonization of the Scripture.¹²

Moreover, according to Jason Barker, Gnosticism becomes popular in the latter half of the 20th century as a result of the 1945 Egyptian discovery of the Nag Hammadi library, a collection of Gnostic writings. Elaine Pagel's book *The Gnostic Gospels* has been regarded as one of the most influential books in our contemporary time because it contains an analysis of the Nag Hammadi documents. Contemporary Gnosticism is usually seen in syncretistic groups, which propagates that Truth can be found by combining the beliefs and practices of numerous religions.¹³

Although there are others who exist at that time, but they were not regarded as a major threat to the Christian faith and beliefs; and these are the Nicolaitans, the Naasenes or Ophites, with whom the Sethians are associated with, and the Cainites.¹⁴ According to the Fathers of the church, Gnosticism began with Simon Magus, with whom Peter clashed with at Samaria; Simon asserted that he was a manifestation of the Supreme Being, who is God, a claim that was propagated on his behalf by his well-known successor Menander at that time.¹⁵

About the middle of the second century there arose in Phrygia (central Asia Minor) the Montanist heresy, which was formed by Montanus. Montanism was a response against the institutionalism or superficial and worldliness which was prevalent in the church at that time and strived to revert to the church's supposed early zeal and passion for spiritual emphasis. Frederick opines that response to unresponsiveness or formalism might take a charismatic approach, and response to worldliness could be legalism or the ascetic way.¹⁶

According to Frederick, the Montanists took both approaches. In North Africa the Montanist leaned towards strict asceticism (which involves fasting, celibacy, rigorous moral discipline, and so on), while those of Asia Minor were more charismatic.¹⁷ Davies asserts that Christian Gnosticisms was prevalent at that time which was as a result of the Montanist and Quartodeciman

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ http://www.watchman.org/articles/other-religious-topics/heresies_then-and-now/ accessed on 01/10/15; 10:00am

¹⁴ Davies, *the Early Christian Church: A History of Its First Five Centuries*, 72

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ Frederick, *Exploring Church History*, 81

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

controversies. The Montanist heresy was anchor on a claim to a fuller revelation of the divine will, in virtue of their inspiration by the Spirit, than that which was possessed by the universal church as at then.¹⁸

Furthermore, the Montanist claimed that Jesus' promise of sending the Paraclete had been fulfilled and that the Paraclete could only communicate to the church through Montanus and his followers. The Montanist took an advantage of the prophetic gifts that was manifesting in the church at that time and used it to propagate their teachings. They were condemned by the church because they claimed that their "fuller revelation" supersede the revelation that the gospel contains.¹⁹

Also, the Montanist's were generally orthodox in their approach and beliefs. They claimed that spiritual gift was a requirement to receive prophetic revelation. And that the only basic requirement of receiving revelation is to live an ascetic and austere lives, this would guarantee the veracity of any prophetic revelations that anyone would receive. The Montanist's were condemned by the church synods in Asia Minor and by the bishop of Rome. The church declared that biblical revelation had come to an end and that special spiritual gifts were no longer operative. One of the most famous Montanism's convert and adherent was Tertullian of Carthage.²⁰

Moreover, church historians posit that from the middle of the second century to the closing years of the second century through the opening of the third; the church was forced to struggle with another reality of heretical movements of thought. Davies asserts that Gnosticism was hardly Christian and Montanism was originally associated with orthodoxy. But in the third century, there was a large scale of heterodoxy which arises within the Christian community. These heresies were in connection with the status of the Father and the Son. Questions were raised about the Trinitarian beliefs of the church. The church rose up to defend her beliefs in the trinity.²¹

Frederic affirms that during the third century three movements arose to challenge the authority and doctrinal solidarity of the church and they are Novatianism, Monarchianism, and Manicheism. Novatianism was propagated by Noetus, who was a native of Smyrna and a Presbyter in Rome and was

¹⁸ Davies, *the Early Christian Church: A History of Its First Five Centuries*, 88.

¹⁹ *Ibid*, 90

²⁰ Frederick, *Exploring Church History*, 82

²¹ *Davies*, 136 – 137

interrogated by the council of presbyters on two occasions and was later excommunicated. Noetus was an able defender of the doctrine of the Trinity against the Monarchians. He refused the right of the church to restore back into the fold those people that lapsed during the persecution of Diocletian and proposed a purist concept of church membership that smacked of Montanistic legalism.²² It was around 303 A. D. when Diocletian who was favourably disposed to the cause of Christianity became enfeebled by age and under the influence of unscrupulous advisers that the assault was made upon the church. His younger colleague Galerius advocated stern repression.²³

Further, the dissenting party chose him as bishop, and the result was a schism that spread over most of the Empire which lasted until the sixth century.²⁴ He taught that Christ was the Father himself, and that the Father himself was born, suffered and died. Another name that was given to this kind of heretical teaching is called *Patripassianism*.²⁵

Monarchianism was another heresy which plagued the church in the third century. It arises out of a doctrinal error which was formed and propagated by a man named Theodotus a Byzantine leather worker who came to Rome and was teaching that God adopted Jesus as His own son, but he was a mere man. It was in the process of baptism that the divine power came upon him. The doctrine is known as Psilanthropism (a mere man), Adoptionism (Jesus being the adopted Son of God) and dynamic Monarchianism (Jesus having received the dynamic or power of God) according to Davies.²⁶

The challenge of this doctrine according to Frederick was that they were unable to comprehend the unity of the Godhead in the face of the Trinitarianism. In a bid to proffer solutions to this problem they erred by using something less than orthodox. Some of them, like the later Socinians and Unitarians, stressed that the Father alone possessed genuine personality; the Son and Holy Spirit were not related to the Godhead in any way and were just His features or

²² Frederic, *Exploring Church History*, 82, although, in the fourth century after the Diocletian persecution and crisis according to Frederick, the question of restoring those who drift away from the church arose again. In the process, another group known as the Donatists arose in North Africa and opposed the restoration process. Afterwards, the Novatian and the Donatists groups merged together to fight a common cause through their doctrine. cf. Davies, *the Early Christian Church: A History of Its First Five Centuries*, 137.

²³ Henry Thorne Sell, *Studies in Early Church History*, (Willow Grove: Woodlawn Electronic Publishing, 1998), 1906.

²⁴ *Ibid*.

²⁵ Davies, *the Early Christian Church: A History of Its First Five Centuries*, 138.

²⁶ *Ibid*, 137

characteristics of His person. They propounded further that the power of God came upon Jesus and gradually saturated and deified his humanity.²⁷

Some other groups of the Monarchians regarded the three persons of the Godhead as ordinary form of expression or means of describing God. They were not unique, divine persons. This Modalistic type of Monarchianism is also known as Sabellianism and Noetianism which was named after its two leading figures. The Monarchians called for an all – encompassing and efficient definition of the Trinitarian position. Even though the Polemicists dealt fatal body blows to Monarchianism, groups holding the Unitarian position have arisen repeatedly in Christendom.²⁸

However, the supporters of this view supposedly thinking that they are defending the oneness of God by denying the divinity of Jesus. Whereas, the Adoptionists were trying to resuscitate the Ebionites and the Jewish Christians belief: who had likewise denied the divinity of Jesus. Davies asserts this teaching could not gain more ground because of its denial about the divinity of Christ and died naturally. But, the second heresy which completely upheld the deity of Christ won many followers in the early church.²⁹

Manicheism is the third major heresy in which the church had to contend with in the third century. According to Frederick, Manicheism has been described Gnosticism which has its Christian elements reduced to a barest minimum and its Oriental elements raise to its peak.

The principle of Manicheism was developed by Mani who lived in southern Babylonia around 240 A. D. and later spread quickly through Persia, India, China, Egypt, North Africa, and Italy. It was very appealing and seductive to people. It somehow, lost its ground after an initial success probably due to the rigidity of the system.³⁰

Manicheism bought its dualistic tendency and system from Gnosticism. It was believed that the Kingdom of light was under attacked by the kingdom of darkness sometimes ago, in which the resultant effect was mixed creation of light and darkness (good and evil). As a result of this pollution, the kingdom of light started a program of gradual purification, in which Christ came into the

²⁷ Frederic, *Exploring Church History*, 82

²⁸ *Ibid*, 85

²⁹ Davies, *the Early Christian Church: A History of Its First Five Centuries*, 137

³⁰ Frederic, *Exploring Church History*, 86

world to enhance the good principle in human beings so that they will be able to overcome the thrusts of the kingdom of darkness.³¹

In the Manicheism system, there were two classes of people: the elect and the auditors. The elect were given an entrance into the secret rites of baptism and communion, which were celebrated with solemnity. The elect were very ascetic and engaged themselves with religious duties. The auditors engaged in the holiness of the elect by providing the elect with the necessities of life.³²

Manicheism assisted to nurture the ascetic or frugal spirit in the churches at that time and was largely responsible for the separation of church members into clergy and laity. Also, it encouraged the advance of the priestly function, or the idea that priests are mediators between God and humanity, and they possess amazing power with God.³³

Another heretical controversy which shaped the theology and the thinking of the church was Arian controversy in the fourth century. Arius was a North African Priest who was influenced by Greek rationalism. He argued for an absolute monotheism which denies the deity of Jesus and claimed that Jesus was a created being. This heresy was similar to the modern Jehovah's Witnesses. Arius argued that "there was a time when Jesus was not." Therefore, Jesus was of a different essence than the Father. As a result of Arius devotion to Greek thought, he demanded that God who is spirit and absolutely inseparable, could never truly identify with humanity, which is basically material. The two entities were forever irreconcilable.³⁴

Consequently, only a creature, which is created within time, could possibly connect that gap, and that creature was Jesus Christ. However, at the council of Nicea around 325 A. D., which was called by the Roman Emperor Constantine, Arius was condemned as a heretic and declared that "Jesus was of the same essence as the Father." Also, the council declared Jesus to be "true God from true God and that Jesus was begotten, not created."³⁵

There are other heretical teachings that deny the divinity of Jesus and attacked the doctrine of trinity apart from the Arius. The doctrine of trinity is one of the major pillars of Christian faith. This study would mention some other heretical

³¹ Ibid.

³² Frederic, *Exploring Church History*, 86

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Eckman, *Exploring Church History*, 22

³⁵ Ibid.

teachings which arise as a result of the misinterpretation of the doctrine of trinity. In the fourth century there was another group after the Arius controversy which taught that the Son and the Spirit are subordinate to the Father. This doctrine was called the Pneumatomachians.³⁶

Another heresy was that of the Apollinarius who was from the Alexandrian School of theology. He taught that Jesus was fully God but that His “rational soul” was unseated by the divine *Logos*. This teaching denies that Jesus was not completely human. Apollinarius was condemned as a heretic by the council of Constantinople around 381 A. D. because his teaching affected the doctrine of salvation. If Jesus was not totally a man, how would he be able to die for humanity? Therefore, the council concluded that Jesus had to be completely human and completely divine.³⁷

Nestorianism was another heresy which was formed out of the Aristotelian philosophical influence of the Antiochene School. They placed much emphasis on the unique distinction of Jesus’ two natures. Nestorius was uncomfortable with the Alexandrian thought about the personality of Jesus. He suggested that there should be an absolute distinction of the two natures to such an extent that the only connection between them was the will. Nestorius used the analogy of a Siamese twin to describe Jesus’ personality. This teaching was condemned as heretical at the council of Ephesus in 431.³⁸

2.2 Heretical Teachings during the Medieval Period

The medieval period begins from about 600 to 1517 in church history. In the fifth century the Western Roman Empire collapse and left an enormous vacuum in power in Western Europe. But at that time, the organized Roman Catholic Church filled that vacuum of power. And in the process, the papacy gained legitimacy, while monasticism was entrenched. The political, economic, social, moral, and intellectual structures of a vast civilization were no longer in existence at that time. The growth of the church brings along with it influence and power on one side and corruption and ineffectiveness on the other side.³⁹

Further, the two branches of the church at that time had disagreement in this period. The first argument was about when to celebrate Easter. Another conflict was based on the celibacy for clergy below the rank of a Bishop and on the

³⁶ Eckman, *Exploring Church History*, 33

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ Eckman, 33

³⁹ *Ibid.*

usage of statues and saintly pictures in the church. However, the most serious conflicts was in 867 when the Eastern Church Patriarch accused the Western church of heresy for teaching that the Holy Spirit proceeded from the Father and the Son rather than just from the Father.⁴⁰ This disagreement caused a major schism between the two Churches, as a result of that they were completely separated.

Furthermore, in this medieval period there was a community of belief that was developed by Polemicists which appealed to a body of true doctrine which was handed down by apostolic succession in an effort to defeat heretics. A vivid example of this was the Tertullian's method of fighting against the heretics.

2.3 Heretical Teachings during the Reformation Period

During the reformation era there were theological debates which have to do with the way the Catholic Church was selling indulgences. The church produced small pieces of parchment that guarantees forgiven which was been sold. This was the reason why Martin Luther became enrage and on October 31, 1517, he pasted Ninety-Five Theses for debate on the Castle door at Wittenberg. Luther believed that buying and selling indulgences would not remove any guilt, it is not applicable to purgatory, and it was just a false sense of security.⁴¹ Further, Luther's writings in this period reflected non – Catholic theology. He argued that the scripture provides for two ordinances baptism and Lord's Supper. Luther rejected the catholic dogma of transubstantiation and asserts that justification came by faith alone and works played no major role.⁴²

Another important personality during this period was Zwingli, who was at the middle of a major theological controversy concerning the Lord's Table. The debate was between the Lutherans and the Zwinglians. Both groups disregarded the Roman Catholic doctrine of transubstantiation - which says that the prayer of a priest transformed the elements into the literal, sacrificial body and blood of Christ.⁴³

⁴⁰ Eckman, 43; Cf. This doctrinal controversy according to Frederic was known as *Filioque* (meaning *and the son*) arguments. The Eastern Church taught that the Holy Spirit proceeded from the Father alone; while the West believes that such a view did not accord a proper recognition to the Son, they asserted that He proceeded from the Father and the Son. Frederic, *Exploring Church History*,81

⁴¹ Eckman, *Exploring Church History*, 50

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ Eckman, 51

Their point of disagreement was centered on the words of Jesus “This is my body.” The Lutherans claimed that Jesus was present “in, with, and under” the elements and that the believers are strengthened spiritually when they participated in the sacrament (consubstantiation). The Zwinglians considered this as an unnecessary concession with Catholicism. Rather, they concluded that the body of Christ was no longer available on earth; Jesus’ words must be taken symbolically. The element that is being used to represent the body of Christ was just a mere memorial.⁴⁴

2.4 Contemporary Heretical Teachings

In the eighteenth century, the new scientific breakthroughs and developments led to the view that the universe was a closed system of cause and effect controlled by universal and dependable laws. This view gave rise to deism during the eighteenth century. God created the universe and allow it to run on its own course without any interference from God, who is the creator. As a result of this, miracle, providence, prayer, and revelation were discarded. The natural religion of Deism took over the system.⁴⁵ As a result of God’s non – interference in the universe, there was nothing called revelation. The Bible was regarded as a book created by humans which contain some elevated ethical beliefs and spiritual lessons which had value for humanity.

Frederic asserts that according to the Deist, God’s self-revelation through His Son, and the miracle of incarnation were out rightly rejected. The Deist believes that Jesus was only a human with an amazing God-consciousness and a superior ethic which should be emulated. From this perspective and teachings rose another social philosophy which was championed by John Locke (1632 – 1704) and social philosophers. Locke propounded that as the universe was ruled by natural law, so men as part of nature were guaranteed certain natural rights and that the chief opponents of this right is the church. This is the beginning of open warfare between “Science” and theology in the West.⁴⁶

According to Frederic, Voltaire and other leaders of the Enlightenment were very loud in their opposition to the church and the orthodox view of the Bible. Voltaire (1694–1778) in his *Questions of Dr. Zapata* developed the foundation for rationalistic higher criticism of the Bible. What began in the eighteenth

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ Frederic, 84

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

century eventually developed into a formal system of biblical criticism in the late nineteenth century? David Hume (1711 - 1776) was regarded as one of the most influential writers of that century. He was a Scottish philosopher and historian. He was remembered for his skeptical attacks on miracles, which appeared through his famous “Essays on Miracles,” and was published, in his *Philosophical Essays Concerning Human Understanding*.⁴⁷

However, it was the publication of Darwin’s *Origin of Species* (c. 1856) and *The Descent of Man* (1871) that brings about a general acceptance of the concept of evolution in the natural sciences and was popularized by Thomas Huxley, Ernst Haeckel, and others. This means that man was no longer perceived as God’s creature, but as a product of an infinite process of necessitated development as a result of the environmental demands. The result was that creative intelligence which is God was banished from the universe; there was no need for God any longer.⁴⁸

Frederic posits that the reaction of people to the established religion as a result of Darwin’s publication was three fold; some people took that advantage and turned their backs on Christianity, while the claims of science was rejected by some people, and some others worked out a compromise between their faith and the new science. Darwin’s ideas of evolution invaded several fields such as natural sciences, cultural interpretation, social theory and the field of religion as well. Darwin postulated that man started out with no religion and finally advanced to the elevated perspective of monotheism that was commonly taught.⁴⁹

The field of religion was attacked as a result of new knowledge which says that the Bible was not a product of divine revelation, but a collection of tales, fables and a few historical facts which was developed over a period of time and was finally edited and put in the form we have now. This theory gave rise to various religious groups which attempts to flow with the Deist’s and Darwin’s theory of evolution. Meanwhile, other groups that differed to a greater or lesser degree from mainline positions appeared on the American religious scene. The Mormon movement came into being in 1830, the Seventh-Day Adventists, and the following year, Spiritualism in 1848, Russellism (or Jehovah’s Witnesses) in 1872, and Christian Science in 1876.⁵⁰ The study will now shift its attention

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ Frederic, *Exploring Church History*, 86

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

on two major contemporary heretical movements which have become widespread and are a major force against Christianity.

Jehovah Witnesses' Movement

An Historical Overview

Jehovah witnesses' movement was founded by Charles T. Russell around 1879 in Pennsylvania.⁵¹ Neil Shenvi asserts that the movement began in 1879 as a bible study class but became formalised in 1884 as a group. However, there are conflicting views about when it became formalised as a group. Russell was born in 1852 and died in 1916. He began to study the doctrine and the work of the second Adventist's such as George Storrs, Jonas Wendell, George Stetson and Nelson Barbour in 1870.⁵² It was from this people's writings that Russell formed the theology of the new group he has started.

While in 1931, the name "Jehovah's Witnesses" was adopted. Russell named his group the "Millennial Dawn Bible Study." He believes that one major way to advance his beliefs was through literature. As a result of this, he started writing a series of books which he titled "The Millennial Dawn." The series was at its sixth volume when he died, and it contained the Jehovah's Witnesses theology, beliefs and doctrines. Moreover, after his death in 1916 J. F. Rutherford, Russell's successor and friend wrote the seventh edition which was the final volume of the "Millennial Dawn series" titled the "The Finished Mystery," in 1917.⁵³

Further in 1886, the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society was established which serves as a vehicle through which the "Millennial Dawn" theology was been propagated. They were known as the "Russellites." However, in 1931 there was a split in the movement in which the cause was not known or revealed. Then, two groups emerged, the first group was known as the "Jehovah's Witnesses Movement," while the second group who is not as popular as the first group is known as the "Bible Students."⁵⁴

⁵¹ http://www.4jehovah.org/jehovahs-witness-beliefs-and-history/accessed_on_24/11/2015 although there are disagreements concerning the year Russell began this movement.

⁵² <http://www.shenvi.org/Notes/JWClassHandout.pdf>. Accessed on 24/11/2015 01:37pm

⁵³ <http://www.gotquestions.org/Jehovahs-Witnesses.html> Accessed on 24/11/2015 01:37pm

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

Jehovah Witnesses' Theological Perspectives

The name of their Bible is called New World Translation. Their translators did not have adequate skills of biblical manuscripts to do the translation. Further, the translators distorted verses such as John 1:1; 8:58; Hebrews 1:8 and other passages in the Bible to water down the deity of Christ so as to give room for the watchtower doctrine to be fully developed. Also, they inserted the word “Jehovah” into the New Testament without any manuscript to support and reflect their name as a witness to their own Christ in which they are proclaiming. Among their theological beliefs is a denial of Jesus as a person in the God head and presenting him as a created “Michael Archangel.” They also believed that Jehovah raised Jesus from the dead in an angelic “spirit body,” without flesh.⁵⁵

Furthermore, they believe that Jesus had existed in various states such as Michael the archangel; a perfect state in which the angel Michael gave up his God – like features and his “life force” became Jesus, the perfect man, the perfect second Adam. There is nothing like incarnation, Jesus did not become flesh. As a result of this, at the death on the cross Jesus was annihilated. The human part ceased to exist. While, in the third state they believe that Jesus was not in the grave for three days. Rather, Jehovah raised him from the dead as an immortal spirit, in the form of Michael the Archangel. Jesus’ resurrection was a fraud, and a recreation of him since there was nothing to be resurrected. Therefore, Jesus continues to be an angel forever.⁵⁶

They believe that salvation is obtainable by a combination of good works, faith, and obedience. This is in contradiction to the belief that the only way to obtain salvation is through faith in Jesus Christ. It is also in contrary to biblical passages such as John 3:16; Ephesians 2: 8 – 9; Titus 3:5 which asserts that salvation is obtainable by faith in Christ and no additional. Further, they rejected the doctrine of Trinity, and rejected Christ’s work of atonement on the cross, while claiming that Jesus’ death was a ransom payment for Adam’s sin.⁵⁷ The New Age movement is the next one to be considered.

⁵⁵ <http://www.4jehovah.org/jehovahs-witness-beliefs-and-history/> accessed on 24/11/2015 01:37pm

⁵⁶ <http://neirr.org/jwtheolo.htm> accessed on 24/11/2105 01:37pm

⁵⁷ <http://www.gotquestions.org/Jehovahs-Witnesses.html> accessed on 24/11/2015 01:37pm

The New Age movement

An historical overview

The New Age movement began in the 1960's and borrows heavily from the Eastern thought. Its rise becomes a major threat to orthodox Christianity. The movement took shape in 1971 with the writings of Baba Ram Das titled *Be Here Now*; it was the first national periodical of the East – West Journal, and it was also the first national network directories.⁵⁸

In our present day, New Age has become a common religious vocabulary. From its inception in the 70's, the movement has gained a public recognitions because hundreds of people that are looking for spiritual fulfilment which cuts across all strata of the society from oriental gurus, western philosophers, scientists, movie stars, writers, to the politicians are all in search of the New Age. These people are proclaiming the dawn of a new era in which humanity will ultimately reach its final phase of spiritual enlightenment as a result of a worldwide conversion to a syncretistic, mystical, and humanistic religion.⁵⁹

However, John P. Newport asserts that the New Age movement emerged in the second half of the 1970's, and came into full development in the 1980's, and still growing in the 1990's as the millennium is fast approaching.⁶⁰ From his own view, he believes that the New Age has its foundations in the United States and Western Europe. Newport opines that in the New Age subculture, there is much influence from various aspects of Buddhism, Hinduism, Sufism, Jewish mysticism, Gnosticism, and Native American religions, as well as comparative mythology and traditional folklore.⁶¹

According to Frederic, the movement focuses on a personal spiritual – psychological revolution, in which in some instances is a kind of crisis experience, while in most cases involves change over a period of time. Furthermore, in the process of transformation one is freed from devastating relations, dullness, life without purpose, lack of hope and much more and gains a new health, a new meaning to life and a new excitement.

⁵⁸ Frederic, *Exploring Church History*, 86

⁵⁹ Cezar Luchian, <https://www.ministrymagazine.org/archive/1998/06/the-gospel-and-the-new-age-movement> accessed on 24/11/2015 01:37pm

⁶⁰ John P. Newport, *The New Age Movement and the Biblical Worldview*, (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publ. Co., 1998), x.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

Some features of eastern religion and transpersonal psychology supply tools for spiritual evolution and include meditation, intensive seminars, healing at the hands of a New Age healer, who is a kind of guru. To an average New Ager, God tends to be a universal power, a unifying principle, and an essential reality of the universe, which is discovered by magical states of consciousness.⁶²

Further, New Agers believe that there would be one universal religion eventually. They believe that through universal religion society would be transformed and will usher in a New Age. Also, they taught spiritual and personal transformation is impossible to achieve in a lifetime, as a result of this some groups within them have subscribed to a belief in reincarnation.⁶³

In his own perspective, Cezar Luchian asserts that the roots of this movement can be traced to the resurgence of spiritualism in the second half of the nineteenth century as a result of the influence of Helena Petrovna Blavatsky, Annie Besant, George Steiner, and Alice Bailey, when they joined together the mystical philosophy of India and medieval occultism and was promoted as the only alternative to what was referred to as at that time a “defunct Christianity.”⁶⁴ As a result of this, the origin of the movement cannot be attached to any individual or group.

However Douglas Groothuis, from his own perspective believes that the New Age reached its peak in the 60s as a result of the resurgence of the counterculture when the customary moral values were abandoned, the materialistic society condemned. There was also a rethinking in many Western thoughts coupled with the explosion of psychedelic art contributed in no measure to the explosion of the “other gospel” according to Groothuis.⁶⁵

Luchian opines that this “other gospel” basically enchanted the world that the final and eternal happiness rests on the mystical enlargement of what is called an “inner sacred potential” which is buried in every human being. The development of this hidden potential in a proper way will lead the individual to self – discovery in the “divine” principle that governs the universe and by doing so, will cause an individual to be part of the initial cosmic order again.⁶⁶

⁶² Newport, *The New Age Movement and the Biblical Worldview*, x.

⁶³ Frederic, 86

⁶⁴ Cezar Luchian, <https://www.ministrymagazine.org/archive/1998/06/the-gospel-and-the-new-age-movement> accessed on 24/11/2015 01:37pm

⁶⁵ Douglas Groothuis, *Unmasking the New Age* (Downers Grove: Intervarsity, 1986), 37

⁶⁶ Cezar Luchian, <https://www.ministrymagazine.org/archive/1998/06/the-gospel-and-the-new-age-movement> accessed on 24/11/2015 01:37pm

Luchian further posits that before the advent of this “quasi gospel” Christians were busy engaging themselves in warfare against the constant secularization of postmodern western society, anti – Christian political and rational beliefs, and the rise of customary religious fundamentalism as at that time. But now, the New Age Movement has become the new widespread religion which surpasses all religious stratum, social, cultural, or political limits. This movement has no physical headquarters, no earthly leader, and no sourcebook. It is a form of disordered linkage of thousands of associations, groups and clubs which proclaims the coming of a New Age.⁶⁷

Moreover, according to Luchian, this enemy is more subtle and dangerous because many New Age philosophers feel free to include the Bible and the teachings of Jesus in which the uniqueness of the Christian faith is being tampered with. Luchian asserts that some Christian authors regarded the movement as “the spiritual version of AIDS.”⁶⁸

However, in response to the threat posed to the Christianity by the New Age Movement, anti – New age apologetics were evolved within the Christian community in which the evangelicals serves as cavalry in leading the battle. For instance Luchian asserts that it was Constance Cumbey who first coined the name of this new found enemy *New Age* in her book *The Hidden Dangers of the Rainbow*.⁶⁹

Beliefs and Practices

The new age movement is a representation of syncretism and amalgamation of many ideas in which its adherents attached their philosophy of life to. The following are some of the beliefs and practices of the new age movement.

1. The new age movement believes that all is one (monism); therefore, all is God (pantheism). The New Age believer sees God as the Divine Mind in which his oneness pervades all things. The god of the New Age according to them is an impersonal energy force or field.⁷⁰ Newport opines that this “Force” is pantheistic because the supreme reality, that is, the

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

⁶⁸ *Ibid.* cf. Philip H Lochhaas, *How to Respond to ... The New Age Movement* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1988), 5.

⁶⁹ [Cezar Luchian, https://www.ministrymagazine.org/archive/1998/06/the-gospel-and-the-new-age-movement](https://www.ministrymagazine.org/archive/1998/06/the-gospel-and-the-new-age-movement) accessed on 24/11/2015 01:37pm, cf. Constance Cumbey, *The Hidden Dangers of the Rainbow* (Shreveport: Huntington House, 1983).

⁷⁰ <http://www.lcms.org/Document.fdoc?src=lcm&id=38> accessed on 24/11/2015 01:37pm

two fundamental and conflicting theories of the cosmos is detectable with the forces and workings of nature. He asserts that what it means in essence is that the cosmos is equated with God, which is purely idolatry from biblical point of view.⁷¹

2. The New Age adherents deify Humanity. Because an individual is regarded as his or her own deity. As a result of this, each person possesses an ability or power to create his or her own world.
3. Humanity is infected with an error of ignorance of its deity and of its “Christ – consciousness.”
4. In order to raise the level of awareness of a person’s innate deity, consciousness – altering techniques must be constantly practiced.
5. For any global transformation to occur personal awareness should be increased and there should be a development of one’s own divinity.
6. They believe that all religions are one and that they all teach the oneness of all things.⁷²

The new age movement practices are multifaceted, and probably can be divided into two types of categories. However, these two forms are sometimes merged together into a befuddling mix. The first practice is occultisms which involve a channelling spirit that serves as guidance and make contact with extra – terrestrials. It is a process of consulting psychics by influencing the flow of “divine energy” through various alternative health care processes which includes therapeutic touch, some forms of yoga, some martial arts which focuses on the control of mind and universal energy manipulation such faddish practices in which quartz crystals are being used as a source of “healing energy,” and *Feng Shui* (it is a system of assembling furniture and other items in a room or office to enhance the spiritual “energy” balance).⁷³

The second practice is humanistic in nature. This means a new believer is agnostic or a freethinker. These practices imbibe an idea of human self – sufficiency which focuses on self-improvement and self-realization of one’s own divinity through the creation of one’s own reality.

⁷¹ Newport, *The New Age Movement and the Biblical Worldview*, 485.

⁷² <http://www.lcms.org/Document.fdoc?src=lcm&id=38> accessed on 24/11/2015 01:37pm

⁷³ <http://www.lcms.org/Document.fdoc?src=lcm&id=38> accessed on 24/11/2015 01:37pm

An example of such practices involves thought processes, mind control which may be taught at business seminars, receiving healing through right thinking, emotional learning and value clarification methodologies in public schools, and encouraging a one-world government in politics.⁷⁴

Furthermore, Newport suggests that contemporary Christians should be wary of many penetrating New Age movies series, television programmes and computer that are being produced to further strengthen the stronghold of New Age movement. Movies series such as the *Star Wars* and Cartoon Series such as *Avatar* are designed to influence people to think in a new age way. He opines that the New Age possesses a stronghold in the entertainment field. And there are many more popular movies with New Age subject ideas than there are with Christian themes.⁷⁵

In summary, the writer has been able to trace the history of how the church has fared against heresy and false teaching from the first century to the contemporary time. Most of the heresies discussed centers around the personality of Christ and his work of salvation. This means that the church has a long history with heresy and heretical teachers who have come to the scene to challenge the foundation of Christian faith. This study will now proceed to do the exegetical analyses of the pericope under study.

EXEGETICAL ANALYSIS OF 1 JOHN 1: 1 – 4

The Johannine Community and their Beliefs

Collin Kruse avows that there is a relationship between the fourth Gospel and the three letters of John. Though, the same person probably might not be the author of these letters, but they are somewhat interrelated in thought and language. He assumes that an early form of the Fourth Gospel had been in existence and probably completed before the writing of the letters, and that the Beloved Disciple, who was an eyewitness concerning most of the events explained in this Gospel, was responsible for producing the early form.⁷⁶

Also, this Beloved Disciple was probably the leader of a Christian community which adhere strictly to a certain tradition about the person of Christ, whom he claims to have had a first-hand experience with. This community had a

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

⁷⁵ Newport, *The New Age Movement and the Biblical Worldview*, 484.

⁷⁶ Colin G. Kruse, *The Letters of John*, (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publ. Co., 2000), 2.

considerably number of local assemblies located in and around Ephesus in the Roman province of Asia.⁷⁷

In our present time, it is imperative for biblical scholars to understand the Johannine community from contemporary perspectives. Thompson Marianne Meyer affirms that the Johannine community is like a network of smaller congregations or house fellowships which shares the same theological heritage and historical roots together. It is within the network of these smaller churches that theological conflicts (1 Jn 4:1–6; 5:5–8; 2 Jn 7–10) and social disputes (1 Jn 2:18–26; 4:1; 2 Jn 7) arose.⁷⁸

As a result of this, it behooves on The Elder (2 Jn 1; 3 Jn 1), to address the situation for the sake of the larger community. Thompson opines that the Elder was probably a member of one of these smaller congregations in which this schism has occurred is now writing both to interpret the split that has divided his church and to warn other assemblies about the problem.⁷⁹

However, after the writing of this early form, a dispute arose within this community because some members of this community had taken on board some certain beliefs about the person and work of Christ that were completely unacceptable to the leader of this community who was probably the Elder John, the author of the early form. These new beliefs rejected Jesus Christ, the Son of God, as the one who comes in the flesh (1 John 4:2 – 3), and that his death was not imperative for the forgiveness of sins (1 John 5: 6 – 7). This led to a sharp disagreement in the community and the consequence was a secession of those who embraced this new teaching (1 John 2:9).⁸⁰

Moreover, the secessionist began to propagate their new beliefs within the community and eventually gained momentum (1 John 2:26; 4:1-3; 2 John7). As a result of this, there was confusion among the believers who chose to remain loyal to the community's traditional teaching that had been proclaimed from the beginning according to the eyewitness report.⁸¹

Furthermore, this controversy led these believers to question their understanding about God and their relationship with him, whether they were

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

⁷⁸ Marianne Meyer Thompson, *The IVP New Testament Commentary Series: 1-3 John*, (Downers Grove, InterVarsity Press, 1992), 1.

⁷⁹ Thompson, *The IVP New Testament Commentary Series: 1-3 John*, 1.

⁸⁰ Kruse, *The Letters of John*, 2.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*

experiencing eternal, and whether they were really in truth. As a result of these, the author of the first John wrote to reinforce the assurance of such people by providing them with the benchmark that would be useful for them to evaluate their faith and the claims of the secessionist (1 John 1:5-2:2; 2:3-11; 3:7-10, 14-15; 4:4-6, 7-8, 13 -15; 5:13, 18 - 20). The letter was probably sent as a bulletin to the local assemblies that had been affected by the teachings of the secessionist.⁸²

However, the Elder decided to reinforce his first letter according to Kruse and decided to write two other letters. The first one was sent to the “elect lady and her children,” to warn the members about the itinerant teachers who represented the secessionists and were propagating new false and heretic teaching (2 John 7-8). The elder, who wrote 2 John, urged his readers not to aid and support these teachers through hospitality. Doing so, means they are participating in their “wicked work” (2 John 10 - 11).⁸³

There are also some good teachers who represented the community very well by keeping to the tradition of their beliefs and needed to be commended. These itinerant preachers also need to receive assistance through hospitality. Then, third John was written to an individual named Gaius who was commended for providing hospitality.⁸⁴

The Opponents of John and their and their Heretical Teaching

John’s first letters is written to correct an abnormal teaching that was going on in the church at that time. There were false teachers who separated themselves and their followers from the main body of believers (2:19) and so the church were divided. These group of people claimed that they possess a special “anointing” (*charisma*) of the Holy Spirit, by which they had been endowed with the true knowledge of God (2:20, 27). This knowledge (*gnosis*) became the focal point of their distinctive beliefs and lifestyle. Ultimately, these tendencies grew into a widespread and varied movement in which scholars have the generis name or title “Gnosticism.” One of the main concerns of John is to emphasize and define what a true knowledge of God contains.⁸⁵

David Jackman asserts that among many strands of gnostic belief, there are two major ones that are imperative and which is key to our understanding of John’s

⁸² Kruse, *The Letters of John*, 3.

⁸³ *Ibid*, 3.

⁸⁴ *Ibid*.

⁸⁵ David Jackman, *The message of John’s Letters*, (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1988), 13.

response. The first one is the exaltation of the mind, and therefore they embrace speculative knowledge above faith and behaviour. And the second one is the conviction that matter is essentially evil because the physical world is the product of an evil power.⁸⁶

Jackman posits that the resultant effect of these beliefs was that they deny the incarnation of Christ (2:22; 4:2 -3). They deduced logically that if the matter is evil, then how could the supreme deity condescend to be united with an impure physical body, such as man? In other to fault the convincing historicity of Christ, men like Cerinthus supposedly propounded a theory known as Docetism (from *dokein*, to seem).⁸⁷

In his own perspective, Jackman opines that this teaching denied the divine Word, the heavenly Christ, and teaches that Christ did not truly become a man, but he only seems to have a human form. Also, there were those people which maintain that the body of Christ in earthly life was a phantom. While others actually admitted that Jesus was human, but separated Jesus from the Christ.⁸⁸

The earthly Jesus was born and experience suffering, but the Christ did not unite himself with Jesus until baptism and withdrew again before the passion and the cross. Jackman asserts that there are many things about the person of Christ that were under attack and at stake. The incarnation of Christ was under attack, the reality of His suffering and its efficacy, not to mention His resurrection from the body.⁸⁹

Howard Marshall posits that a crisis had arisen in the Johannine community as a result of teachers who were advocating an understanding of Christianity which was different from that of the Johannine beliefs. It got to a point that these people had left the community probably to set up their own rival group and they still remain in contact with their former believers and were causing considerable damage and uncertainty among them concerning the true character of Christian belief and whether the members of the church could truly regard themselves as Christians.⁹⁰

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

⁸⁷ Jackman, *The message of John's Letters*, 14

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

⁹⁰ I. Howard Marshall, *The Epistles of John: The New International Commentary on the New Testament*, (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1990), 14.

Marshall asserts that these false teachers were probably the predecessors of the heretics who developed the Gnostic sects in the second century. He pointed to the fact that the seeds of Gnosticism were already to be found in the New Testament period. Furthermore, Marshall suggested that care must be taken when we are trying to analyse the nature of their teachings and its features.⁹¹

He then proceeds to suggest the likely claims of these secessionist. They were people who claimed to have communion with God and without sin (1:6, 8, 10). They claimed to know God (2:4). There is a probability that they believed that God was light and claiming that they live in that light (2:9). However, they held an unorthodox view about Jesus. They did not profess and believed that Jesus was the Christ or the Son of God (2:22; 5:1, 5); they denied that Jesus Christ had come in the flesh (4:2; cf. 2 Jn. 7).⁹²

As Marshall succinctly puts it; if they denied that Jesus was the Christ, they probably also denied that his death had any significance; if they claimed that they had no sin, it would follow that they were not in need of any atonement and cleansing by the blood of Jesus. Further, it seems that they refused to accept the validity of the Lord's command (2:4). Although, there is no clear evidence that they did not believe in the resurrection of Jesus and suffice to say that the first epistle did not made mention of resurrection, though there was a presupposition about it by the author.⁹³

Marshall posits that it is to the credit of these seceders that Apostle John did not accuse them of living immoral life, even though in 2:15 – 17 we have a side glance at their mode of life. John was able to rebuke them for their lack of brotherly love; nevertheless, there is no proof of open vice on their part.⁹⁴

According to Marshall, another probable “heresy” of these false teachers is that they were claiming to possess a deeper knowledge of God than ordinary Christians (2:20, 27); and having an “advanced” understanding of religion (2 Jn. 9), which was based on prophetic revelations which they claimed to be inspired by the Spirit (4:1).⁹⁵

Marshall was quoting Irenaeus (Against Heresies 3.11.1) says that John the disciple of the Lord was determined to eliminate the false belief or teaching

⁹¹ Marshall, *The Epistles of John: The New International Commentary on the New Testament*, 15.

⁹² *Ibid.*

⁹³ *Ibid.*

⁹⁴ Marshall, *The Epistles of John: The New International Commentary on the New Testament*, 15

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 17

that was been spread around concerning the person of Christ by Cerinthus and others. This view holds that the Son of God merely “seemed” to be incarnate in Jesus; upholders of this view came to be known as “Docetists” (from *dokeo*, “to seem”). Cerinthus was a first century heretic who holds this view and Basilides, in the second century.⁹⁶ This was the reason behind the prologue to the first epistle.

Kenneth Grayston observes that this erroneous teaching affirms that the creator and the father of the Lord were two different entities. That is; a difference of individuals between the son of the creator and the Christ who is from the higher Aeons and remained inaccessible. He was the person who descended on Jesus the son of the creator and returned back again to his own pleroma. Furthermore, the created system which we belong to, brought into being by some lowly power is cut off from communion in the things which are beyond sight and shame.⁹⁷

Grayston asserts that although, Irenaeus encountered great difficulty in putting Cerinthus’ teaching into the perspective of John’s prologue, he was able to set the prologue of John against the Cerinthus’ teachings as follows:

- a. The world was not made by the first God but by a power widely separated and remote from the supreme power which is above all;
- b. That subordinate power did not know the God who is over all things;
- c. Jesus was not born of a virgin but was the son of Joseph and Mary;

⁹⁶ *Ibid*; cf. (Irenaeus, A H 1:26:1; cited from W. Foerster, *Gnosis*, Oxford, 1972, I, 35f.). In Asia at that time, there was a man Cerinthus by name who taught that the world was not made by the first God, but by a power which was widely separated and remote from that supreme power which is above the all, and did not know the God who presides over all things. He taught that Jesus was not born of a virgin, according to him it is impossible, but he recognised Jesus as the son of Mary and Joseph, and believes that Jesus was just an ordinary man but far beyond men in justice and prudence and wisdom. After baptism Christ descended on him in the form of a dove, from the power that is over all things, and then he declared the unknown Father and accomplished miracles. But at the end Christ separated again from Jesus, and Jesus suffered and was raised again, but Christ remained impassible, since he was pneumatic. Irenaeus summarized the teachings of Basilides as follows: “the unoriginate and ineffable Father, seeing their disastrous plight, sent his first born Nous – he is the one who is called the Christ – to deliver those who believe in him from the power of those who made the world. To their (angels’)” nations he appeared on earth as a man performed miracles. For the same reason also he did not suffer, but a certain Simon of Cyrene was compelled to carry his cross for him; and this (Simon) was so transformed by him (Jesus) so that he was thought to be Jesus himself, and was crucified through ignorance and error. Jesus, however, took on the form of Simon, and stood by laughing at them” AH 1:24:4 W. Foerster, *op. cit.*, 60).

⁹⁷ Kenneth Grayston, *The New Century Bible Commentary: The Johannine Epistles*, (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publ. Co., 1984), 14 – 15.

- d. Jesus was far beyond the rest of men in justice and prudence and wisdom;
- e. After the baptism of Jesus, Christ descended upon him in the form of a dove, from the power that is over all things;
- f. He then proclaimed the unknown Father and accomplished miracles;
- g. At the end Christ separated again from Jesus who suffered and was raised again, but Christ remained impassable because he was spiritual. Grayston opines that items (i), (ii), (v), and (vii) are more or less the same as those views which the Epistles was intending to combat.⁹⁸

In his own view, Thompson suggests that the opponents are probably three kinds of group. According to him, the first group are the Cerinthians in which according to tradition Cerinthus was an archenemy of the apostle John in Ephesus, but little is known about him and his teaching except that which was recorded by Irenaeus in (Against All Heresies 1.26.1) Cerinthus' Christology made a distinction between Jesus and Christ. However, in his response, Apostle John asserts that Jesus came "not ... by water only, but by water and blood" (1 Jn. 5:6); which has to do with both the baptism of Jesus and his death on the cross. This is to affirm the permanent union of "Jesus" and "Christ" while he was on earth (cf. 1 Jn. 4:2; 2 Jn. 7).⁹⁹

⁹⁸ Grayston, *The New Century Bible Commentary: The Johannine Epistles*, 14 – 15.

⁹⁹ Thompson, *The IVP New Testament Commentary Series: 1-3 John*, 3. Cf.; I. Howard Marshall, *the Epistles of John: The New International Commentary on the New Testament*, (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1990), 17. Cf.; (Irenaeus, Against All Heresies 1:26:1; cited from W. Foerster, *Gnosis*, Oxford, 1972, I, 35f.). This view holds that the Son of God merely "seemed" to be incarnate in Jesus; upholders of this view came to be known as "Docetists" (from *dokeo*, "to seem"). Cerinthus was a first century heretic who holds this view and Basilides, in the second century follows suit. In Asia at that time, there was a man called Cerinthus who taught that the world was not made by the first God, but by a power which was widely separated and emote from that supreme power which is above the all, and did not know the God who presides over all things. He taught that Jesus was not born of a virgin, according to him it is impossible, but he recognised Jesus as the son of Mary and Joseph, and believes that Jesus was just an ordinary man but far beyond men in justice and prudence and wisdom. After baptism Christ descended on him in the form of a dove, from the power that is over all things, and then he declared the unknown Father and accomplished miracles. But at the end Christ separated again from Jesus, and Jesus suffered and was raised again, but Christ remained impassable, since he was pneumatic. Irenaeus summarized the teachings of Basilides as follows: "the unoriginate and ineffable Father, seeing their disastrous plight, sent his first born Nous – he is the one who is called the Christ – to deliver those who believe in him from the power of those who made the world. To their (angels') nations he appeared on earth as a man performed miracles. For the same reason also he did not suffer, but a certain Simon of Cyrene was compelled to carry his cross for him; and this (Simon) was so transformed by him (Jesus) so that he was thought to be Jesus himself, and was crucified through ignorance and error. Jesus, however, took on the form of Simon, and stood by laughing at them."

The second groups of opponents are the Docetists. According to Thompson, in the early Christian thought there was what came to be known as “Docetism” which is from the Greek word “*dokein*,” meaning to seem. This teaching denies the reality of Jesus’ incarnation and stressing that Jesus only “seemed” to be flesh. Thompson affirms that this type of teaching was acknowledged very early in church history. To strengthen his arguments further, Thompson asserts that there were documents from the archive of the early church which shows that Ignatius of Antioch in the early 2nd century wrote several epistles to churches in Asia Minor telling them to be wary of Docetizing tendencies. Ignatius, according to Thompson reminded his readers that Jesus did not merely suffer and died; but he did suffer and died.¹⁰⁰

The third groups are probably the Gnostics. Thompson opines that the view of Cerinthus was of Gnostic orientation and some of the Gnostics were also Docetists. He suggests that some of the characteristics of Gnosticism which is similar in the Johannine epistles are the dualism of light and darkness; truth and falsehood; claims of having a special alliance or knowledge of God; and that some selected human beings have a “spiritual seed” inserted in them (1Jn. 3:9); and claims to be without sin (1 Jn. 1:8, 10). While in some other Gnostics treatises, there was a claim that the heavenly man merely came upon an earthly body, but left that body before the crucifixion.¹⁰¹

Further, Thompson avows that although these separatists have various beliefs which possesses some forms of Gnosticism, but should not be regarded as Gnosticism. Because, if it is reconstructed as it is found in the First epistles they are not a fully developed Gnostics system and does not in entirety compatible with the developed gnostic systems in later writings.¹⁰²

However, in his concluding remark about the nature of opponents in the Johannine community, Thompson believes that there are striking similarities which may be seen between these early heresies and the epistles of John, but none of them perfectly reflects the false teaching in the epistle. He believes that they are just unsuspecting sincere Christians which were being led away as a result of their inability to comprehend fully the work and the person of Christ. This is what makes the problem of elder John and his community to be

¹⁰⁰ Thompson, *The IVP New Testament Commentary Series: 1-3 John*, 3.

¹⁰¹ Thompson, *The IVP New Testament Commentary Series: 1-3 John*, 3.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*

complicated by the subtlety of the heresy and the asserted sincerity of its proponents according to Thompson.¹⁰³

The First Epistle: Authorship, Dating and Recipients

Authorship

John Stott asserts that the natural location of any author of an ancient letter is in the letter itself. It is a customary practice for any ancient author to begin his correspondence by stating his identity and location. He opines that New Testament writers such as Paul, Peter, Jude and James followed this ancient tradition. According to him, the only exception to this rule are the authors of the book of Hebrews, while the writer of second and third John referred to himself as “the elder” and the author of the first epistle of John began without any introductory greetings.¹⁰⁴

Thompson asserts that the similarities between the Gospel of John and the Epistles suggest that it emanates from one person. The tone, language, thought and situation suggests that one can safely say that the author of these letters is John, the apostle. He affirms that there are two kinds of evidence which according to him is suffice enough to agree that indeed the elder John is the writer.¹⁰⁵

The first one is the internal evidence that he found in the letter itself. He opines that that are statements within the epistles which suggests that they were written by an eyewitness of Jesus’ ministry (1 John 1: 1 – 4). However, he said that this is not enough to allude the authorship to John, even though first-hand testimony fits with the theory of apostolic authorship. But, there were other eyewitnesses to Jesus’ ministry; because Paul speaks about five hundred people who were eyewitnesses to the resurrection of Jesus Christ.¹⁰⁶

According to Thompson, the other evidence is external and has to do with early church tradition which says that the epistles were written by John, the son of Zebedee, one of the twelve disciples of Jesus. He made references to early church fathers such as Eusebius, Papias and others who refer to an individual in the early church as John the Elder. Although, there are debates in modern

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁴ John R. W. Stott, *The letters of John*, (Leicester: Intervarsity Press, 2001), 17.

¹⁰⁵ Thompson, *The IVP New Testament Commentary Series: 1-3 John*, 1.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

scholarship as to whether the “Elder John” is the same person who was one of the twelve.¹⁰⁷

Thomas L. Constable opines that the epistle does not contain the name of its writer, but from its very early history the church believed the Apostle John wrote it. He asserts that several ancient writers believe that this book was written by John, although modern critics have challenged this view but they have not destroyed it.¹⁰⁸

Furthermore, there are some external evidences about the authorship of the First Epistle which gives credence to Apostle John as the writer according to Marshall. He asserts that the First Epistle of John was used by Papias (c. 140) according to Eusebius, and is quoted by Polycarp (c. 110 - 120), and very probably by Justin (c. 150 - 160). It was also recognised as the work of the fourth evangelist John the apostle by Irenaeus (c. 180), the Muratorian Canon (c. 180 – 200), and Clement of Alexandria (c. 200). According to Eusebius, there was never any questioning about its authenticity.¹⁰⁹

Furthermore, the external evidence about the authorship is consistent according to D. A. Carson. He asserts that from the first century to the second half of the second century there are possible allusions about the author which are found in documents around that time. The first one is Clement of Rome which describes God’s elect people as being “perfected in love.” (C. A. D. 96; 1 John 2:5; 4:12, 17 – 18). Secondly, the Didache (c. 90 – 120), which has something identical (10:5), a parallel made more impressive in this case by the mention in the next verse of the world passing away (10:6; cf. 1 John 2:17). Thirdly, we have the Epistle of Barnabas (c. 130) talks about Jesus as “the Son of God come in the flesh” (5:9 – 11; 12:10; cf. 1 John 4:2; 2 John 7).¹¹⁰

Lastly, it was recorded that Polycarp warns against deceiving false brothers with this statement “For everyone who does not confess Jesus Christ to have come in the flesh is Antichrist” (phil. 7:1, c. 135), surely dependent on 2 John 7 and 1 John 4:2-3; cf. 1 John 2:22. Also, the first writer which specifically refers

¹⁰⁷ Thompson, *The IVP New Testament Commentary Series: 1-3 John*, 1.

¹⁰⁸ Thomas L. Constable, www.soniclight.com, *Notes on 1 John* 2008 edition.pdf

¹⁰⁹ I. Howard Marshall, *the Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, “Heresy” Part Two: Goliath – Papyri, (InterVarsity Press, Tyndale House Publishers, Illinois 1997), 798.

¹¹⁰ D. A. Carson, Douglas J. Moo, and Leon Morris, *An Introduction to The New Testament*, (Leicester: InterVarsity Press, 1992), 446.

to a Johannine epistle as the work of John is Papias of Hierapolis in the middle of the second century.¹¹¹

Concerning the authorship, Olugbenga Olagunju opines that there are two basic positions about the person of the writer. The first position was traditional. He affirms that there was a tradition which was unanimous among the early church fathers that John, the Apostle was the author of 1 John. Some of the early church traditions that were allude to by Olagunju from various scholars have been listed above.¹¹²

Also, there was another early church tradition which Olagunju believes was another pointer to John as the author. This early tradition undisputedly testified that John survived all of the other Apostles in which after the death of Mary, Jesus' mother in Jerusalem he moved to Asia Minor and settled in Ephesus, which was the largest city at that time in that area. It was from this city that he was exiled to the island of Patmos and was later freed and returned back to Ephesus according the early church fathers.¹¹³

Further, the second position has to do with the modern scholarship. He suggests that majority of modern scholars acknowledge the similarities among the entire Johannine corpus, especially in phrasing, grammatical forms and vocabulary. The author uses various comparative styles such as light versus darkness, life versus death, truth versus falsehood. Olagunju strengthen his claim further by saying that this same irreconcilable differences in John' writings is also seen in other writings at that time; such as the Dead Sea Scrolls and developing gnostic writings. Therefore, Olagunju avows that John the aged Apostle penned the first epistles and the other four that were attributed to him towards the end of his ministry in Ephesus.¹¹⁴

Also, Kruse asserts that from various early church documents, reference was made to two Johns, the apostle and the elder. He asserts that Jerome (lives of illustrious men, 13) made mention of a widespread belief in his time that 2 and 3 John were written by the elder John, and not the apostle. Kruse further infers that to him he believes that Jerome attested to that fact that 1 John was written by the apostle John and not John the elder. The early Christian tradition is unanimous in ascribing 1 John to the apostle John, the disciple of the Lord,

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹¹² Olugbenga Olagunju, *A Concise Introduction to the New Testament*, (Ogbomosho: Ogunniyi Publishers, 2012), 218 – 219.

¹¹³ Olagunju, *A Concise Introduction to the New Testament*, 219.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 218 – 219.

which is in tandem with the internal evidence found in the book according to Kruse.¹¹⁵

Dating

Thompson opines that usually, the epistle is assigned to the tail end of the first century, probably in – between the years A. D. 90 to 100. He asserts that one of the chief reasons for dating the letters late in the first century is as a result of its relationship with the Gospel of John, which is usually dated between the years A. D. 70 to 100. He stresses the fact that most scholars assume that the Epistles were written after the Gospel and that is another probable reason why the Epistle was dated around that time also.¹¹⁶

While corroborating this idea, Olagunju affirms that dating the book at the close end of the century would have given more time for the development of the gnostic false theological or philosophical systems and would have also be appropriate for Elder John to address his audience as “little children,” which seems to suggest that an older man is addressing a group of young converts. Olagunju further avows that Jerome was quoted as saying that John lived for about another sixty-eight years after the crucifixion of Jesus, which was in tandem with this tradition.¹¹⁷

Constable asserts that the first epistle of John is one of the most difficult books to date of all the New Testament books. Although he submitted that there are few clues in the book that may help in dating the book is found in 1 John 2:9. He suggests that if John meant that the false teachers had departed from among the apostles, a date in the 60’s seems probable. Therefore, it might be around A.D. 60 – 65, before the Jewish revolts of A. D. 66 – 70 dispersed the Jews from Judea. If this is the case, then John probably might have written from Jerusalem according to Zane Hodges.¹¹⁸

However, according to Constable conservative scholars such as Westcott, Bruce, opines that John wrote this Epistle much later, between about A. D. 85 and 97, when he probably wrote the gospel of John (ca. A. D. 85 - 95) and the Book of Revelation (ca. A. D. 95 – 96). Further, Constable asserts that

¹¹⁵ Kruse, 14

¹¹⁶ Thompson, *The IVP New Testament Commentary Series: 1-3 John*, 1.

¹¹⁷ Olagunju, *A Concise Introduction to the New Testament*, 219 – 220.

¹¹⁸ Constable, *www.sonlight.com, Notes on 1 John* 2008 edition.pdf. cf. Zane C. Hodges, "1 John," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: New Testament*, (Wheaton: Scriptures Press Publications, 1983), 882.

following the dating of the book of revelation which is regarded as God's final word to humankind, the nature and its conclusion. He suggests that a date in the early 90's, ca. 90 – 95 seems most probable to him in agreement with Donald Guthrie.¹¹⁹

Recipients

Thomas L. Constable opines that the writer of the first epistle did not mention any specific recipients of the letter or where they live all that is known is that they were Christians (2: 12 – 14, 21; 5:13). He asserts that they may have been the leaders of churches (2:20, 27). According to the early church tradition, after John left Palestine, he ministered in Ephesus which happens to be the capital of the Roman province in Asia, for many years. Constable opines that there is a possibility that John knew the churches and Christians in that province very well according to revelation chapter two and three. And probably his readers lived in that province.¹²⁰

Scholars such as Everett Harrison according Morris Womack suggest that the first epistle was like a papal decree. This is partially due to the lack of addressee. Womack opines that if this is so, then 2 and 3 John was also encyclical letters which were to be passed around to various churches and individuals to be read. He believes that all the three letters of Apostle John were sent to Christians, but the question of who they were and where they live cannot be answered accurately since the writer did not mention them in his letter.¹²¹

Moreover, the most commonly proposed recipients are Area churches in Asia Minor (now present-day Turkey) according to Womack. He suggests that the reason behind this opinion is because at that apostle Paul also addressed striking similar heresies in his earlier writings. Further, there was a tradition that based on Jesus' instruction to John to care for Mary at the time of crucifixion, it is believed that Mary stayed with John and spent her life at Ephesus. Also, there is a traditional tomb of Mary in the ancient ruins of Ephesus today. Therefore, it is believed that John may have played an

¹¹⁹ Constable, *www.soniclight.com, Notes on 1 John* 2008 edition.pdf

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*

¹²¹ Morris M. Womack, *The College Press NIV Commentary: 1, 2 & 3 John*, (Joplin, MO: College Press, 1998). Cf. Everett F. Harrison, *Introduction to the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971), p. 447. He opines that there is a possibility that the recipients of 1 John could be Gentiles. He anchored his arguments on 1 John 5:21 and the writer's warnings about idols.

important role in the founding and fostering of the church there according to Womack.¹²²

However, Bob Utley asserts that Augustine in the fourth Century claims that the letter was written to the Parthians (Babylon). Augustine's claim was supported by Cassiodorus in early sixth century. Utley suggests that Augustine's claims probably came from the confusion of the phrase "the elect lady," and the phrase, "she who is in the Babylon," which are seen in 1 Peter 5:13 and II John 1. Further, in the Muratorian Fragment, an early canonical list of New Testament books written in the middle of A. D. 180 – 200 in Rome suggests that this epistle was written "after the exhortation of his fellow disciples and bishops" probably in the Asia Minor.¹²³

Exegesis of the Text

Exegesis of verse one

ἤν imperfect Indicative active of εἶμι to be. ἀρχῆς beginning, the beginning here could refer to the beginning of creation, or beginning in the abyss, or it was emphasising the pre-existence and divine character, beginning of Christian preaching, or the beginning of Jesus ministry. ἀκηκόαμεν perfect 1st person plural indicative active of ἀκούω which means I hear. The perfect expresses an act in the past with lasting results. It shows that a revelation has been made in a way that people can understand, and the results are permanent. The "we" may probably indicate the writer and his companions, but more probably means (we disciples of Christ). ἐώρακάμεν ὀφθαλμοῖς eye instrumental dative, meaning we have seen Jesus with our eyes.¹²⁴ Not only that we saw him, feel him, and touched him, but also ἐθεασάμεθα we look at, behold him. It has a special meaning of attentive regard.¹²⁵

Grayston asserts that the writer was making use of these senses of perception probably because he had seen and heard Jesus during his ministry and had touched Jesus with his hands after his resurrection. He posits further that the resurrection incidence recorded in Luke 24:39, where the same verb ψηλαφάω for "touch" or "handle" is also used in this verse. Jesus intentionally asked his

¹²² Womack, *The College Press NIV Commentary: 1, 2 & 3 John*.

¹²³ Bob Utley, *New American Standard Bible Commentary*, vol04.pdf, 199.

¹²⁴ Cleon L. Rogers Jr. and Cleon L. Rogers III, *The New Linguistic And Exegetical Key to the Greek New Testament: 1 John*, (Grand Rapids, Zondervan Publ. House, 1998), 591.

¹²⁵ Friberg, Timothy ; Friberg, Barbara ; Miller, Neva F.: *Analytical Lexicon of the Greek New Testament*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2000), 195.

disciples to touch him as a proof to show them that he was flesh and bones and not a mere phantom.¹²⁶

ὁ ἀκηκόαμεν ... ἐψηλάφησαν (“we have heard ... we felt [with our hands]”). In his own view, Smalley suggests that John stresses the reality of God’s self-disclosure in time and space for the benefit of some of his readers who were harbouring the docetic tendencies view about the person of Jesus. In order for John to prove his point beyond reasonable doubt, he moves beyond the idea of Jesus being the life-giving word to the level of proving that Jesus is the life-giver himself.¹²⁷

According to Tom Wright, the life and specifically the death of Jesus of Nazareth show that we have a true God which reveals himself to us through human face, or in a traditional Christian language, God incarnate. He asserts that God became human being without any violence and without doing any violence to his own inner character and essential nature.¹²⁸

Furthermore, Smalley opines that the use of four evocative verbs such as “we have heard, seen with our eyes, observed, and felt with our hands,” is highly pragmatic. The verb ἀκηκόαμεν and ἐώρακαμεν from Smalley’s perspective is very imperative because “hearing and seeing,” are concepts that are close to “faith” in the Gospel of John (cf. John 10:27; 20:29).¹²⁹ While corroborating this idea, Palmer asserts that the verb *theomai* meaning to behold, to gaze carries with it a very powerful dramatic sense. It connotes a sense of a spectacle which is seen in full power and wonder.¹³⁰

This occurrence was probably an appeal from that experience. The writer of the first epistle stresses on two occasions that he and others (probably the other followers of Jesus) experienced the “Word” not in an abstract manner but with a concrete experience. He emphasizes the fact that he and other disciples were taught by Jesus himself and that this cognate experience gives them the authority to declare the message about Christ.¹³¹

¹²⁶ Grayston, *the New Century Commentary Bible*, 38

¹²⁷ Stephen S. Smalley, *Word Biblical Commentary: 1, 2, 3 John*, (Dallas: Word Incorporated, 2002), 3.

¹²⁸ Tom Wright, *The Original Jesus*, (Oxford: Lion Publishing Plc., 1996), 82.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*

¹³⁰ Earl F. Palmer, Lloyd J. Ogilvie, *The Preacher's Commentary Series, Volume 35: 1, 2 & 3 John / Revelation*, (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Inc., 1982), 20.

¹³¹ Tokunboh Adeyemo (General Editor), *Africa Bible Commentary*, (Nairobi: Word Alive Publishers, 2006), 1529.

From the Lukan narrative mentioned above, it was not documented that Thomas touched Jesus, but there was a tradition according to Grayston in the early church in the *Adumbrations* quoting Clement of Alexandria on 1 John 1:1 that John “touched the outward body of Jesus and put his hand deep within and that the solidity of the flesh in no wise offered resistance but yielded to the disciple’s hand.”¹³²

Apostle John recalls his vivid experience and relationship with Jesus by using the word *horao* which is a very common word in the New Testament World which means plainly and directly “to see, to catch sight of.” The word *horao* according to Palmer offers an earthly companionship to the more dramatic sense of seeing in *theomai*. The encounter of John with Jesus was not only a mysterious perception of the living Christ, but also a very basic and down to the earth experience.¹³³

This experience gives John the confidence to asserts that Jesus was not a “phantom of the spiritual realm but He was Jesus of Nazareth.” The Greek word *phaneroo*, meaning to make plain, clear, to reveal, to become visible is used by John to describe his earthly encounter with Jesus. This word is emphasizing that the “word of life” has manifested and it is not hidden to people. Further, it is a known fact that could be attested to.¹³⁴

According to Womack, there are probably about five major themes that the writer was trying to develop to combat the false doctrines that was been propagated by the opponents. The first one is “That which was from the beginning.” Womack opines that John then explained that what was from the beginning is the word of life. Not only that it is eternal, but also had been with the father from the beginning and has appeared to us (cf. John 1:1 – 2; 17:5). He was not bearing witness about something he had heard from others, he himself had seen, heard and touched Jesus. Moreover, the role of a witness is not limited only to testimony that certain things really happened. A witness also proclaims the meaning and significance of those events. And for John, the significance of what happened in Jesus can be summarized by one word: *life*. Jesus himself is the life of God (1:1) and came to give eternal life to those who believe (1:2) according to Womack.¹³⁵

¹³² Grayston, 38. Cf. Thomas C. Oden (General Editor), *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture, James, 1-2 Peter, 1 – 3 John, Jude*, (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 166.

¹³³ Palmer et – al, *The Preacher's Commentary Series, Volume 35: 1, 2 & 3 John / Revelation*, 20.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*

¹³⁵ Womack, *The College Press NIV Commentary: 1, 2 & 3 John*.

ἡ ζωὴ ἐφανερώθη, the life appeared or “was made manifest,” is an aorist passive mode and this mode indicates that it is an action which is already completed. Hence, the Word has already been made manifest. Womack asserts that the second theme in this pericope is that the *Word became flesh* (cf. John 1:14).¹³⁶ This process is a completed one. The implication is that God himself in the mode of his Son Jesus actually lived among us; this is what John is actually laying claim to as a firsthand witness of this events.¹³⁷ The question to be asked is that if we do not have a real Christ according to Wiersbe, how can we have a real forgiveness of sin?¹³⁸

The reality of Jesus incarnation is one of the pillars or the foundation of Christian faith. Womack opines that the transgression of Adam has made all mankind to sinned against God and become alienated. There was a need for that relationship to be restored. Then, Jesus appeared in the form of flesh and blood to restore that relationship through his birth, suffering, death and resurrection.¹³⁹ However, the *Docetists*¹⁴⁰, from the Greek word δοκέω insisted

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*

¹³⁷ *Ibid.* According to Womack, Irenaeus recorded that Cerinthus was a man who was educated in the wisdom of Egyptians. He taught that the world was not made by the primary God, but by a certain power which is far separated from him, and a distance from that domain who is ultimate over the universe, and ignorant of him who is above all. Cerinthus claimed that Jesus was born by a Virgin Mary; rather he was born as a result of human coitus between Joseph and Mary. However, Jesus was more righteous, prudent, and wiser than any other men. Moreover, after his baptism, Christ descended on Jesus in the form of a dove from the Supreme Ruler, and that he declared the unknown Father, and performed miracles. And at last, Christ departed from Jesus, and that then Jesus suffered and rose again, while Christ remained impassible, because he was a spiritual being. (Irenaeus *Against Heresies* 1. 26.1.). the early church fathers passed on a tradition about a certain Cerinthus who lived in Ephesus at the same time with Apostle John. Irenaeus reports that Polycarp usually tells a story of an event in a public bathhouse. “There are also those who heard from him that John, the disciple of the Lord, going to bathe at Ephesus, and perceiving Cerinthus within, rushed out of the bathhouse without bathing, exclaiming, “Let us fly, lest even the bath-house fall down, because Cerinthus, the enemy of the truth, is within (Irenaeus *Against Heresies* 3. 3.4.)” After more than a century, Eusebius according to Womack when writing the history of the church included the account of what happened at the bathhouse two times virtually in the same words (Eusebius *Ecclesiastical History* 3. 28. 6; 4. 14.6.).

¹³⁸ Warren W. Wiersbe, *Wiersbe's Expository Outlines on the New Testament*, (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1997), 768.

¹³⁹ Womack, *The College Press NIV Commentary: 1, 2 & 3 John*.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.* The “Docetists” were those within the gnostic movement who did not believe in the incarnation of Jesus. I. Howard Marshall has the following comments that elucidated some of the concepts of Gnosticism: “Gnostic thinking was based on a sharp dualism between spirit and matter. The spiritual was regarded as divine and good, while the material was created and evil. It followed that the material world could not have been directly created by the supreme god, and different gnostic systems of thought devised various ways of explaining how the world had come into existence. One method was to postulate a series of beings or ‘aeons’ emanating from God and forming a long and complicated series, rather like a genealogical tree turned upside down, so that God is at the top and successive groups of aeons occupy different, lower levels, until at last one of the aeons farthest away from God creates the world. By this means God could be relieved of responsibility for creating the world. But if God could not create the world, neither could he, nor his immediate relations, be united with the evil, material world in any real or lasting sort of way.” (I. Howard Marshall, *The Epistles of John*, New International Commentary of the New Testament, Ned B. Stonehouse, F.F. Bruce and Gordon D. Fee, eds. [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978], p. 17.)

that Jesus only seemed to die. Their assumption was that all the events about Jesus right from his virgin birth to the ascension only seem to happen; but never happened.

If the assumptions that John was writing to Gentiles Christian is accepted, then Keeners assertion that the people had been accustomed to philosophers and Jewish teachers that have spoken about divine Word; but none of them had spoken of the Word's becoming flesh. And so, when John said that he touched Jesus and felt him which was an indication that Jesus had been fully human; he was not a divine apparition in Greek mythology of "manifestations" of gods in which the Greeks believed.¹⁴¹ John's new revelation and understanding about the "Word" becoming flesh and blood leads to a crisis of belief within the community and the *Docetists*,¹⁴² claim that it was not so, rather it was like a mirage and not real.

Furthermore, Scholars such as Stephen Smalley asserts that John was attempting to balance the "low" Christology of his ex-Jewish readers, while in the Gospel he was resisting the "high" Christology of his ex-pagan church members. He suggests that if John was making reference to the pre-existent Word of God in this verse it means that John begins his letter by introducing a Christology which is deliberately and consistently "high" to combat the idea of delineation or difference of personality between Jesus and Christ. According to Smalley, John views Jesus as one with God (cf. John 10:30; 13:3), and not someone with man (cf. John 14:28).¹⁴³

The historicity of Jesus' existence is further strengthened by Roger Dickson in his book *Biblical Research Library*. He asserts that there are various ancient historical documents which recorded or made reference to the life and events surrounding Jesus and his ministry. Dickson highlighted some of these historical documents which made references to either an events concerning the life of Christ or his death.¹⁴⁴

The first one was documented by Julius Africanus while quoting Thallus, who lives in Rome around A. D. 52. Africanus asserts that Thallus made reference

¹⁴¹ Craig S. Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary* (2nd Ed.), (Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2014), 708

¹⁴² Womack, *The College Press NIV Commentary: 1, 2 & 3 John*. Cerinthus promoted a doctrine that Jesus was "adopted" by God at his baptism when the Spirit descended on him, or at some other time, and then only pretended to die on the cross. It was claimed that Simon of Cyrene not only carried the cross for Jesus, but he also was crucified in the place of Jesus while Jesus was watching and laughing from nearby.

¹⁴³ Stephen S. Smalley, *Word Biblical Commentary: 1, 2, 3 John*, (Dallas: Word Incorporated, 2002), 3.

¹⁴⁴ Roger E. Dickson, *Biblical Research Library*, (Hutchinson: Africa International Missions, 2013), 1983.

to the darkness that came over the earth at the time Jesus was crucified (Mathew 27:45). Secondly, there was one Mara Bar – Serapion in a letter to his son made mention of an events in which the Jews Execute “their king,” which was in reference to the death of Jesus. Thirdly, Tacitus, who was born around A. D. 52 – 54, referred to one “Christus” (Christ) who was killed in the time of Tiberius. Lastly, according to Dickson was Josephus’ comment about Jesus being a wise man, and a doer of marvellous deeds.¹⁴⁵

Exegesis of verse 2

ἐφανερώθη third person singular first aorist passive indicative of φανερόω, to make clear, to manifest, to make known. It means to be revealed. This verb is used to describe the revelation of the Lord at His first coming, the incarnation. μαρτυροῦμεν present indicative active of μαρτυρέω, to be a witness, to testify. It suggests a continuous action. ἀπαγγέλλομεν first person plural present active indicative of ἀπαγγέλλω to report, to declare, to report with reference to the eyewitness source of a message.¹⁴⁶ According to Marshall and other scholars, verse two was like a form of parenthesis which was inserted by the writer to prove beyond reasonable doubt that the life to which John bears witness was revealed by God in the historical person of Jesus.¹⁴⁷

According to Womack, this verse is emphasizing that “Jesus is with us now and forever.” During the events of ascension, Jesus promised his disciples that he would be with them at all times (cf. Mathew 28:20). He opines that Jesus is the only living leader of any religion on earth today. The resurrection of Jesus is another pillar of Christian faith. The rest are dead. This is what John was actually saying. John regarded Jesus as the eternal life which appears and remained with the eternal Father.¹⁴⁸ John regarded Jesus as the “Word of Life” who had been with the father but now has been manifested among men. This word of life has the power to impart life or is a life giving spirit which is eternal. This phrase is just a proof to show the distinctiveness between the first and the second persons in the one Godhead.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁵ Dickson, *Biblical Research Library*, 1983.

¹⁴⁶ Cleon L. Rogers Jr. and Cleon L. Rogers III, *The New Linguistic And Exegetical Key to the Greek New Testament: 1 John*, 591.

¹⁴⁷ Cleon L. Rogers Jr. and Cleon L. Rogers III, *The New Linguistic And Exegetical Key to the Greek New Testament: 1 John*, 591.

¹⁴⁸ Womack, *The College Press NIV Commentary: 1, 2 & 3 John*.

¹⁴⁹ Robert Jamieson, A. R. Fausset, and Brown David, *A Commentary Critical and Explanatory on the Old and New Testaments*, (Oak Harbour: Logos Research Systems Inc., 1997), 1.

Kruse avows that the author states unequivocally his implied statement in verse one. *The life appeared or manifest*, if the life did not manifest physically it is impossible to have seen it or touching it. It is from this tangible experience that the author derives his authority as an eyewitness and to testify about the manifested life.¹⁵⁰

Kruse suggests that John's reference to eternal life is an allusion to the teaching which is located in the prologue of the Fourth Gospel, in which the *Logos* is described as the one "who was with God," invariably means that they have intimate relationship (cf. John 1:1,18). He asserts that the expression "eternal life" in this context connotes an impersonal quality of life which is from the Father, and refers to the "Word of life, the Son of God, who was with the Father prior to his incarnation, and in whom eternal life is found (cf. 1 John 5: 11 – 12)." The idea is this; from the beginning this eternal life was with God, the Father and at the appointed time was made to manifest through the incarnate Jesus. The writer making reference to God as the Father is consistent with Jesus' claim in the Fourth Gospel that he enjoys a special relationship with Father. According to Kruse, Jesus refers to God as The Father in the Fourth Gospel more than a hundred times.¹⁵¹

Exegesis of verse 3

ἀπαγγέλλομεν in this verse serves as the main verb of the sentence which began in verse one. κοινωνία fellowship. It suggests the putting aside of personal or private interest and desire and joining in with another or others for common good or purposes. ἔχητε present subjunctive active of ἔχω. To have in subjunctive with ἵνα which is to express purpose?¹⁵² ἔχητε second person plural present active subjunctive of ἔχω, meaning to have in subjunctive with ἵνα which is to express purpose. Hence, ἔχητε means might have.¹⁵³

We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard; this statement is an affirmation of what the writer has already stated in vv. 1 – 2. What follows is the reason for the proclamation of what has been seen and heard. The reason is not far-fetched: so that you (his readers) may have fellowship with us (the proclaimers). In his own view, Kruse asserts that the purpose of the writer is to

¹⁵⁰ Kruse, 50

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁵² Cleon L. Rogers Jr. and Cleon L. Rogers III, *The New Linguistic And Exegetical Key to the Greek New Testament: 1 John*, 591.

¹⁵³ Cleon L. Rogers Jr. and Cleon L. Rogers III, *The New Linguistic And Exegetical Key to the Greek New Testament: 1 John*, 591.

make sure or confirms his readers' persistence in the fellowship they have with him. Having fellowship with him means they would have nothing in common with the secessionists. This fellowship goes beyond having a personal relationship with the author; it includes partnering with him in his duty of proclamation. Furthermore, partnering with the secessionists would mean having fellowship with them in their evil work as it was indicated in 2 John 11.¹⁵⁴

Moreover, in order to encourage his readers to continue to have *koinonai* with him and his "good" work, John reminded them that "our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ." According to Kruse, Christian partnership; is first and foremost fellowship with God the Father through Jesus Christ his Son. It is common in Johannine thought that the Father is given the priority in all matters. According to Kruse, in the fourth Gospel eternal life is defined with priority been given to God (cf. 17:3).¹⁵⁵

Further, another worthy observation in this verse is the Greek word that is used to describe the relationship between God, the Father and Jesus. Kruse, suggests that the Greek word *huios*, is term used for Jesus alone in this epistle and is used about 22 times to describe the special relationship that exists between the Father and His Son, Jesus. Also, the author consistently used the Greek word *tekna* whenever he was referring to believer's as God's children like in the case of Paul (Rom 8:14, 19; 9:26; 2 Cor. 6:18; Gal 3:7, 26; 4:6, 7; 1 Thess. 5:5).¹⁵⁶

Moreover, the intention of the author is to probably mark a basic distinction between Jesus as the Son of God and believer's as God's children. Also, the word *kristos* was found in the letter for the first time and in 2:1; 3:23; 4:2; 5:6, 20 which serves as part of the "expression 'Jesus Christ', which functions as a full name for Jesus," according to Kruse. Secondly, it may probably be used as part of the "confessional formula of Jesus is the Christ," by the author to emphasize in a clear terms the fact that Jesus was the "Jewish" savior (cf. 2:22; 5:1). From Kruse's perspectives, the essence of these technicalities is to stress further that having fellowship with him is to have fellowship with God which includes his Son Jesus Christ and also involves sharing in the work of God. Even, though the secessionist is also claiming that they have fellowship with

¹⁵⁴ Kruse, 50.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁶ Kruse, 50.

God too (cf. vs. 6) in which the author vehemently rejected and refuted their claims.¹⁵⁷

Exegesis of verse 4

ταῦτα nominative plural of οὗτος. This, or “these things” the reference is to the entire contents of the letter or to the apostolic message. γράφομεν present indicative active of γράφω to write. The author used it with the emphatic personal pronoun ἡμεῖς. Therefore, it means that the writer is writing the letter in solidarity with all the representatives of orthodoxy in the church. πεπληρωμένη perfect passive participle of πληρω. The assurance of knowing that they possess eternal life would make their joy full. It conveys an idea that the message contains a conception of God men could not fathom without His help. It is a revelation and not a discovery.¹⁵⁸

καὶ ταῦτα γράφομεν ἡμεῖς, ἵνα ἡ χαρὰ ἡμῶν¹⁵⁹ ἢ πεπληρωμένη. It was suggested by Kruse that the writer is probably motivating his readers by saying that “we write¹⁶⁰ this to you to make our joy complete.”¹⁶¹ The Greek ἡμεῖς, ἵνα ἡ χαρὰ ἡμῶν, has two rendering in which to scholars such as Kruse, Womack¹⁶² and others is somehow confusing because it may be translated as “our joy or your joy.”

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁸ Cleon L. Rogers Jr. and Cleon L. Rogers III, *The New Linguistic And Exegetical Key to the Greek New Testament: 1 John*, 591.

¹⁵⁹ According to Kruse, some manuscripts read ‘we write these things to you (*hymen*) to make your (*hymōn*) joy complete’ instead of ‘we (*hēmeis*) write this to make our (*hēmōn*) joy complete’. However, *hēmeis* and *hēmōn* are the harder readings and have stronger external support, while still making good sense when the overall context of the letter is borne in mind: The author’s own joy can only be complete when he knows that his readers hold fast to the truth of the gospel as he proclaims it to them (cf. 2 John 4; 3 John 4).

¹⁶⁰ Kruse avows that a present tense form of the verb ‘to write’ is used here (as it is consistently in the earlier part of the letter [2:1, 7, 8, 12, 13]), indicating that at this point the author presents himself as in the process of writing what he hopes will complete his joy. (Later in the letter [2:14, 21, 26; 5:13] he consistently uses the aorist tense to speak about what he writes, indicating that at those points he is thinking of his writing as one complete act.)

¹⁶¹ Kruse, 50.

¹⁶² Womack’s perspective is that John uses the expression “I write unto you” at least eleven times in this epistle and twice in the negative, “I am not writing....” He is very careful to inform his readers that he has specific reasons for writing to them. This brief sentence is a little difficult to understand completely. Some translations read “to make *our* joy complete,” while other translations read “to make *your* joy complete.” If the correct translation is “our joy,” then John is either speaking of his own joy (with an editorial use of “we”) or a shared joy; if it is translated “your joy,” then John is speaking about the joy of the recipients of the letter. I am prone to agree with the rendering of the American Standard Version, Revised Standard Version and New International Version which use the pronoun “our.” Probably, in view of the discussion about the fellowship with God, Christ, and each other, the “complete” joy refers to how this great revelation of the Word to us affects all of us according to Womack.

However Spence – Jones opines that the variant of reading ἡμεῖς seems preferable to ὑμῖν, and that of ἡμῶν to ὑμῶν. But ἡμεῖς and ἡμῶν are not in harmony while ἡμεῖς is the apostolic “we;” ἡμῶν means “your joy as well as mine.”¹⁶³ Spence-Jones eventually settles for the ἡμῶν which suggests that both the sender and the reader shares in a complete fellowship which is full of joy. In any case, scholars agree that the best translation that fits into the pericope is “our joy.” This means that both the writer and the receiver have a joy to share in fellowship which makes their joy completed.

In this way, the recipients would probably be motivated and encouraged to carry out to the letter the instructions that John was probably passing across to them. It is worthy to note that the author have a good sense of responsibility and brotherly love when he discovers that his own joy would be incomplete if his readers whom they share the same brotherly affections with are in danger of departing from the truth as a result of being entangled by another or strange *koinonia*, which the author rejected that it does not have anything to do with God. Furthermore, in 2 John 4 and 3 John 4, this same sentiment is displayed wherein the elder’s joy comes from discovering that others walk in the truth.¹⁶⁴

Furthermore, Spence-Jones avows that this verse is an allusion from John 17:13 and believers are encouraged to be joyful at all times (1 Thessalonians 5:16; Philippians 4:4). According to him, we must be joyful to have seen the Eternal Life manifested and that we have fellowship with him and with the Father through him. The reason is because Gnosticism has cut off one serious aspect of our faith through the denial of atonement and the place of God in the salvation of mankind.¹⁶⁵

Abiding in God makes our union or partnership in faith with others to become possible. But the question is how do we abide in God? David Fiensy suggests that to abide in God one must practice proper lifestyle, which is adhering to God’s commandments which in summary means loving others. However, for someone to have a proper understanding of love, one must know and believe in the love of God that is been made manifest through Jesus Christ. According to Fiensy, knowing and having faith in this love means accepting Jesus as the Son

¹⁶³ H. D. M. Spence-Jones, *The Pulpit Commentary: 1 John*, (Bellingham: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 2004), 1.

¹⁶⁴ Womack, 50.

¹⁶⁵ Spence-Jones, *The Pulpit Commentary: 1 John*, 1.

and making a proper confession. To him, communion, love, doctrine, and faith cannot be separated.¹⁶⁶

In summary, Kruse has suggested in his own opinion that the purpose of this pericope and the letter is to serve as a reminder to the recipients about the foundations of the gospel and the message which centres on the Word of life. This gospel also comprises of being in fellowship with God the Father through Jesus and being in partnership with fellow believers of like-minded. However, another probable reason for writing this letter according to Brown is that the author is also conscientiously addressing the distortions caused by secessionists in the prologue of the Fourth Gospel as a result of the affinities the pericope has with it.¹⁶⁷

Theological Reflection of the Text

A major theological reflection in this passage has to do with Christology or the incarnation of Christ. The Christian faith is faith in the crucified, risen, exalted, Lord Jesus Christ, who is coming again. The collective opinion from the earliest period has been that Jesus Christ was divine, as well as human. According to Abogunrin, the New Testament writers regarded Jesus Christ as pre-existent, having a twofold characteristic of being; “according to the flesh” (*kata sarka*) and “according to the spirit” (*kata pneuma*).¹⁶⁸

Abogunrin opines that Christology is rooted in the experience of Jesus Christ, as He was known by the Apostle, the experience recorded in the Gospels and explained in the Epistles. Jesus of Nazareth according to Abogunrin serves as the historical connection between the religion of Judaism and Christianity.¹⁶⁹

The doctrine of incarnation and atonement is at the heart of Christology. These doctrines maintained that the events such as the life and death of Jesus of Nazareth, the attributes of God were normatively revealed and the salvation of mankind is established. According to Abogunrin, from the earliest period, speculations about the life and times of Jesus as abstract theories have been

¹⁶⁶ David A. Fiensy, *New Testament Introduction*, (Joplin: College Press Pub. Co., 1994), 351.

¹⁶⁷ Brown, *The Epistles of John*, 182.

¹⁶⁸ S. O. Abogunrin, “Christology and the Contemporary Church in Africa,” *Biblical Studies Series 2*: (2003), pp 1.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

debunked by Christian Theologians who believes firmly that all the stories actually happened.¹⁷⁰

Scholars such as Stephen Smalley asserts that John was attempting to balance the “low” Christology of his ex-Jewish readers, while in the Gospel he was resisting the “high” Christology of his ex-pagan church members. He suggests that if John was making reference to the pre-existent Word of God in this verse it means that John begins his letter by introducing a Christology which is deliberately and consistently “high” to combat the idea of delineation or difference of personality between Jesus and Christ. According to Smalley, John views Jesus as one with God (cf. John 10:30; 13:3), and not someone with man (cf. John 14:28).¹⁷¹

John believes that the Son of God who was incarnate in Jesus of Nazareth inhabited eternity with the Father. In the Johannine thought, the Son does not do anything without the consent of the father. In fact, the Son reproduces the actions of the Father and when you see the Son you have seen the Father (cf. John 5:18; 14:9).¹⁷² The imagery of Father to Son relationship is consistently high in the Johannine thought.

In his own view, Osadolor Imasogie opines that Christology is an existential response of the faith of the early church to the saving Presence of the God-man, Jesus Christ, in concrete historical situation. This saving presence was manifested through the life, ministry, death, resurrection and adoration of Jesus of Nazareth, the incarnate Word of God (cf. John 1:1 – 18). Christ was incarnated so that the people He created might be able to understand him in a clearer way. Through the incarnation of Christ and the atonement for sin, we have become participants in the divine nature of Christ.¹⁷³ The opponent of the Johannine community has assumed that they are sinless and as a result of that they are “a special breed,” which makes them superior to the other members of the community.

Lastly, John believes that “God can be comprehended at least in part because God has revealed the divine character in the person of Jesus.”¹⁷⁴ Jesus is

¹⁷⁰ Abogunrin, “Christology and the Contemporary Church in Africa,” *Biblical Studies Series* 2, pp. 2.

¹⁷¹ Stephen S. Smalley, *Word Biblical Commentary: 1, 2, 3 John*, (Dallas: Word Incorporated, 2002), 3.

¹⁷² D. C. A. Oguike, “Johannine Christology,” *Biblical Studies Series* No 2, (2003), pp. 192 – 205.

¹⁷³ Osadolor Imasogie, “Guidelines for Christian Theology in Africa, the Task Ahead,” *African Journal of Biblical Studies* Vol. 1, No 1 (1987), pp. 7 – 24.

¹⁷⁴ Ben Witherington III, *The Jesus Quest: The Third Search For the Jew of Nazareth* 2nd Ed., (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1997), 177.

regarded as the ultimate revelation of God and that any other revealed person or personality does not come from God. As a matter of fact, anyone who does not believe or accept this fact and teaches otherwise is regarded by John as Antichrist (cf. 1 John 2:18, 22; 4:3; 2 John 1:7)

John's Concept of μαρτυρέω in the text

The authority of John the writer rests upon the basic fact that he regarded himself as the witness to the life and events of Jesus Christ. Thompson suggests that the word translated "to bear witness" and "testify" originated from the legal terminology. Because, in a law court those who serves as witnesses are responsible for the integrity and truthfulness of their testimony. (Trites 1978: 1049 - 50) Therefore, witnesses do not only vouch for their personal experiential knowledge of the event, but also for the truthfulness of what is stated. As a result of this, the Johannine community revered those who were *witnesses* to Jesus.¹⁷⁵

According to Alison Trites, if we are going to have a grasp of the New Testament concept of a witness, there is a need to study the vocabulary of witness in secular Greek, and search other places where the concept might be found. In doing so, Trites posits that James Barr's justifiable criticism of the linguistic fallacies which is frequently practised by philologists and theologians must be constantly bore in mind.¹⁷⁶ While in the process of translation, one would be able to dress down and uncover any embellishments that philologist and theologians might have added to any words.

Alison asserts that in Homer, *martures* are not mentioned in an argument which involves adjudication. Although, the word *marturie* appears in the odyssey but it was not used in the technical sense of a witness in a legal battle. Occasionally, the word *marturos* is used for those who are familiar with some event or situation (Iliad, I. 338; II. 302), but they are not summon either as formal or general witnesses.¹⁷⁷

Alison while quoting Bonner Smith asserts that the first appearance of a witness was in Hesiod, which was already in used in Athens before the time of

¹⁷⁵ Thompson, *The IVP New Testament Commentary Series: 1-3 John*.

¹⁷⁶ Alison A. Trites, *The New Testament Concept of Witness*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 4. Cf. J. Barr, *The Semantics of Biblical Language*, (Oxford, 1961)

¹⁷⁷ Trites, *The New Testament Concept of Witness*, 4. W. Leaf, (ed.), *The Iliad* (London, 1907), pp. 311 – 14, who compares the Homeric trial scene with the ancient judicial proceeding known to Roman Law as the "*Legis Acton Sacramenti*"

Solon. In secular Greek, the litigant is usually represented as summoning his opponent with at least two witnesses.¹⁷⁸

Furthermore, there was discrimination concerning those who can testify or serve as witnesses in any Greek courts because only the adult males could do so. There are instances in ancient Greece in which a man might not be able to find a suitable witness; in such a case that man could go to court simply with his speech and could sometimes be acceptable to the courts. This is where the Greek legal procedure is somehow different from their Hebrew counterpart.¹⁷⁹ In Hebrew legal proceedings two or more witnesses are required for any statement to be valid and acceptable (cf. Deuteronomy 17: 6 – 15).

However, in Athenian courts, hearsay is not acceptable and was strictly forbidden. Exception to this rule is when the witness was either dead or ineligible to enter the court.¹⁸⁰ From this perspective, it is admissible that in the New Testament thought a person could testify about himself or any other event and yet become acceptable to the audience. Having this background understanding would assist us to accept John apostle as a credible witness to the life and times of Jesus. If the assumption is taken that the recipients are probably the Gentiles that were living in the Asiatic region at that time. Then, it would be easy for them to accept John because they would have probably had this understanding of how a witness could be credible.

Moreover, Thompson opines that in Johannine thought, Jesus was regarded as the person who bore witness to what he had seen and heard with the Father (Jn 1:18; 5:19, 36; 15:15; compare Rev 1:2, 5; 12:17; 22:20). And commissioned his disciples to be his witnesses John 15:27. It is evidently clear that the writer of the epistles continues to serve as a witness to the role Jesus played in securing the salvation of mankind. This is done not only by giving a credible testimony to the event, but also by carrying out the commission to interpret to others the fact of what they had experienced. It is not sufficient for witnesses to tell others what they had experienced; but they must educate them about the importance of their experienced and what it means.¹⁸¹

¹⁷⁸ Trites, *The New Testament Concept of Witness*, 5. Cf. R. J. Bonner and G E. Smith, *The Administration of Justice from Homer to Aristotle* (2 vol., Chicago, 1998.; C. D. Buck, *A Dictionary of Selected synonyms in the Principal Indo-European Languages* (London, 1949), pp. 1419 -61.

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 6. Cf. Bonner – Smith, *The Administration of Justice II*, 130ff.

¹⁸¹ Thompson, *The IVP New Testament Commentary Series: 1-3 John*.

Thompson posits that the “witness” in the Johannine churches gives us an impression that he had a specific role of being a “minister” or an “apostle” in a technical sense, although there is no specific allusion to it in the Gospels or epistles of John which refers to such a title. If this is the case, then the question, “who is a witness” is begging for an answer in the book of John.¹⁸²

However, Thompson suggests that a “witness” in the Johannine thought might not really be an “eyewitnesses” because according to him, the concept of “seeing” and “sight” could be metaphorical, which refers to “insight” and understanding, instead of being a literal sight. As a result of this, scholars suggest that the “Elder” probably might not have been an eyewitness, but rather a follower of one who was an eyewitness. Moreover, if the writer is not an eyewitness, then he is closely related to one who is, and he is zealous for the preservation of that person’s witness. However, his personal testimony is no less imperative or valid.¹⁸³ John was very sure that his testimony was not a tale bearing one, but an event that actually took place.

John’s meaning of *κοινωνία* in the Text

Grayston opines that the word *κοινωνία* is found only four times in 1 John only. There is no record of the word being found in all other Johannine epistles. All the four occurrences are found in verses 3, 6, and 7, where the writer is trying to bring his readers into fellowship with those who “truly” declare ‘the word of life.’¹⁸⁴ Kruse suggests that the term *κοινωνία* was employed by the opponents and that the writer used their term to explain what the true fellowship is all about. The author also chided his opponents by claiming to have fellowship with God and not with other believers; that is, the writers group. Fellowship with us means fellowship with God.¹⁸⁵

The word *κοινωνία* is used in classical Greek as a term to express the most intimate kinds of human relationship, for example, in marriage. Its basic root *koinos* literally means “common,” hence “communion.” It is this interpersonal and encouraging word that John now uses. Its meanings are warm and affirming. *κοινωνία* is another word which may be used for “generosity” as in Philippians 2:1. It can be translated with the word “participation” as in

¹⁸² *Ibid.*

¹⁸³ Thompson, *The IVP New Testament Commentary Series: 1-3 John*.

¹⁸⁴ Kruse, 59.

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

Philemon 6. While in its noun form, it can be translated by the word “partner” or “sharer,” as in Luke 5:10.¹⁸⁶

According to PHEME PERKINS, the writer uses the word *κοινωνία* in a technical sense in the early Christian mission, especially that of Pauline (cf. Gal. 2:9; Phil 1:5; 3:10; Philemon 6).¹⁸⁷ Grayston asserts that indeed the word *κοινωνία* and related words are almost limited to the Pauline corpus, in which they are mainly used in a pragmatic and commonplace manner.¹⁸⁸

According to Grayston, a *koinonos* is a partner in some business; while *κοινωνία* means a close relationship between partners who share something in common either through common or separate portions. He asserts that in different Pauline passages, Christian partners share the faith, the preaching task, financial arrangements, charity to the destitute, the sufferings of Christ, and the Holy Spirit.¹⁸⁹ The word translated *κοινωνίαν* has a sense of partnership and sharing.¹⁹⁰ Hearing the word and believing it grants them access to the community and not only that they eventually become partners in the proclamation of the word of life by providing support and hospitality to itinerant members of the community.

From Pauline perspectives, *κοινωνία* is a cluster of technical terms which is related with the Roman *societas*, a legally binding assembly of co-partners which is based on their communal assent to a common purpose. Perkins then put a further stress on *κοινωνία* by asserting that it is much more than a legally binding association for Paul and his companions. Further, she asserts that both in the Pauline letters and 1 John, there is a common idea behind the use of the term *κοινωνία* which is a joint agreement to pursue a common goal or purpose. However, the author of 1 John is writing to elicit his recipients' commitment to his own *κοινωνία* rather than that of the opponents.¹⁹¹

Furthermore, the writer of the first epistle warned them that since they (his opponents) do not share his own concept of *κοινωνία*, his readers should not assist and relate with his rival *κοινωνία* by providing hospitality to them. By

¹⁸⁶ Earl F. Palmer, and Lloyd J. Ogilvie, *The Preacher's Commentary Series, Volume 35 : 1, 2 & 3 John / Revelation*, (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1982), 20.

¹⁸⁷ PHEME PERKINS, 'Koinonia in 1 John 1: 3 – 7: The Social Context of Division in the Johannine Letters,' CBQ 45 (1983) 633 – 634

¹⁸⁸ Grayston, 43.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid*, 44.

¹⁹⁰ Tokunboh Adeyemo (General Editor), *Africa Bible Commentary*, 1529.

¹⁹¹ Perkins, 'Koinonia in 1 John 1:3-7,' 636 – 637.

doing so, they are not sharing *koinonei* in their wicked work.¹⁹² If Perkins is right in her assumption, then one may probably assume that John was actually saying that his opponents should no longer enjoy any form of fellowship within the Johannine community as long as they no longer intends to keep the tradition of faith that exists in the community.

In the NT corpus, Kruse asserts that places in which the *κοινωνία* occurred as a whole shows that there are places in which the concepts of commitments are expressed to a common task (Gal 2:9; Phil 1:5; 3:10; Phlm6; 1 John1:3). Also, there are places in which the expression indicates a personal relationship without any form of commitment to a common task being involved (cf. Acts 2:42; 1Corinthians 1:9; 2 Corinthians 6:14; 13:14; Philippians 2:1; 1 John 1:6,7), while in Romans 15:26; 2 Corinthians 8:4; 9:13; Hebrews 13:16, it denotes sharing financially with people in need and in 1 Corinthians 10:16, *κοινωνία* suggests fellowship with other believers and the Lord in Eucharist.¹⁹³

However, Kruse asserts that there are some parallels between the *κοινωνία* Paul shared with the Philippians and that which the author of 1 John wanted to share with his readers on the other hand. He opines that there is an indicator in verse 7, which shows that the fellowship the author wants to share goes beyond having a common goal or purpose, but something created as people walk in the light as God is in the light.¹⁹⁴

According to him, if this fellowship is established, then it would definitely find an expression through commitment to a common goal. An example of such an expression would be that his readers would provide support and partner with the author in the proclamation of the Word of life through the provision of hospitality for orthodox itinerants sent out with his recommendations according to Kruse. Therefore, Kruse opines that it is not totally correct that this fellowship would simply be on the basis of mutual assent to a common goal.¹⁹⁵

From the above study, it is evidently clear that John borrowed the term of his opponents to fight them and to let them know that the fellowship they had in mind is more than an ordinary meeting or a coalition of interest, it is a holistic one. Further, John addressed his community of believers that in other for them to prove that they were still bearers of his tradition; they must as a matter of

¹⁹² *Ibid.*

¹⁹³ Kruse, 60.

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁵ Kruse, 60.

urgency withdraw all the benefits and support that his opponents usually enjoyed before. Therefore, this fellowship is an all-inclusive one; it is both physical and spiritual intimacy. This fellowship involves pursuing a common agenda or goal and hospitality included.

Emiola Nihinlola posits that the paramount requirement for building a community is quality relationships which is characterised by mutual trust, listening, helping, sacrifice, selflessness, equality and personal freedom. He stressed further that without these ingredients which nurtures a community into full growth, there is a probability that such community would experience break down.¹⁹⁶

THE RELEVANCE OF 1 JOHN 1:1 – 4 FOR COMBATING CONTEMPORARY HERESY

Having reflected theologically from the exegetical analysis of 1 John 1:1 – 4; we come to discover that there are several important and relevant implications which could be useful in combating contemporary heresies and false teachings. The following are various implications derived from the exegetical findings which are applicable to the contemporary situations.

CHRISTOLOGICAL RELEVANCE

From his own perspective, Joseph Isah quoting Harrison pointed out three major Christological benefits for the incarnation of Christ in his defense. The writer would adopt these reasons for the Christological relevance of the study.

One, Christ came first of all to disclose God (cf. Luke 1:78- 79).¹⁹⁷ We should be aware of the fact that Jesus Christ is the only revelation of God in human form there is no other person either before him or after him. Equipping ourselves with this understanding would not allow us to be swayed by and smooth-talking fake Jesus.

Secondly, he came for the salvation of mankind. He opines that the incarnation of Christ took care of the barrier of finiteness by portraying God in human form and at the same time through the same gesture took away the barrier of sin by

¹⁹⁶ Emiola Nihinlola, *Theology Under The Mango Tree*, (Alausa – Ikeja: Fine Print & Man. Ltd., 2013), 161.

¹⁹⁷ Joseph Isah, “Christ’s Virgin Birth and Character: Implications for the Christian Faith and Life in Africa,” *Biblical Studies Series No 2*, (2003), pp 88 – 95.

presenting the saviour who could meet man's responsibility in way that is acceptable to God (cf. Luke 2:30; Mathew 1:21).¹⁹⁸

Thirdly, it is for dominion (Mathew 2:2; Luke 1:33). Jesus Christ is a king that is born with everlasting kingdom; He won the crown through the cross.¹⁹⁹

IT'S RELEVANCE FOR THE CHURCH IN AFRICA

The Church in Africa should present the incarnational Gospel of Jesus Christ in such a way that it would not reduce the person of Jesus to one of those spirits, because the stories of incarnation are not strange to Africans. There should be a distinction between various false beliefs about incarnation in Africa and the Gospel story.

The relevance of this study is that Jesus Christ is the manifestation of God's love to mankind through incarnation. God's love was displayed by the suffering of Jesus in his earthly ministry and is perfected through his crucifixion, death, and resurrection. The church in Africa should rekindle the hope of the people by identifying their suffering with the life of Jesus and believing that He is able to bring to an end all suffering and hardships.

The Church in Africa should continually be a living witness about the resurrection of Christ and should encourage people that Jesus is the only one who has conquered death. Therefore, death is just a passage way to the eternal bliss that Jesus promised.

The Church in Africa should speak with one voice in denouncing various churches and denominations that are denying the incarnation of Jesus. In doing so, it would discourage other groups or individuals who might want to do so in the nearest future. The Church in Africa should choose to be the keeper of the apostolic witness and traditions of the total gospel, especially when it comes to the person and work of Jesus Christ. Also, the Church in Africa should equip herself with adequate biblical understanding that is suitable for evangelising people that are being captured through these false teaching or heresy.

IT'S RELEVANCE FOR THE NIGERIAN BAPTIST CONVENTION

The Nigerian Baptist Convention should continue to do an adequate articulation of her beliefs in the incarnation of Jesus Christ in her statement of

¹⁹⁸ Isah, "Christ's Virgin Birth and Character: Implications for the Christian Faith and Life in Africa," *Biblical Studies Series* No 2, (2003), pp 88 – 95.

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

faith and practices and promote this teaching in her various programmes. This would create awareness among the Baptists family and protect them from contemporary heretical teachings that denies the incarnation of Jesus Christ.

The Nigerian Baptist Convention should continue to stand and hold fast her profession of faith about the person and the work of Christ. The convention should continue to emphasis her statement of faith when reaching out to any denominations or in the process of partnership. It is a great thing to partner with various mission groups in reaching out, but it must not be at the expense of our precious foundational faith in Jesus Christ.

The Convention should not in any way compromise her stand when it comes to the divine nature of Christ in the comity of ecumenism. Ecumenism should be promoted by the convention, but it should not be on the platform of our faith in Christ.

The Convention should be decisive and take a bold stand in denouncing publicly errant denominations in the country. In this regard, the Convention has been too quiet about press release which could serves as doctrinal scales. The Convention should promote unity of faith with like denominations, so that she would not be an island on doctrinal issues.

IT'S RELEVANCE FOR CONTEMPORARY BELIEVER

The problem of false teaching and deception would continue to challenge the faith of contemporary believers. The problem is surmountable for any serious minded Christians that do not want to be jinxed or hooked by false teachers. The present-day believer should develop a thirst after God's Word. This undiluted devotion to God's Word would preserve such a believer from becoming a prey to false teachers.

Contemporary believers should ensure that they have a genuine Christian conversion experience, because there is no substitute for divine encounter. There are so many professed Christians nowadays that do not know what it takes to be a true follower of Jesus.

Contemporary believers should be aware that they no longer live under the bondage of sin and fear, because Jesus' has taken care of it. Their sin has been atoned for by Jesus of Nazareth. Therefore, their lives should be for the glory of God.

IT'S RELEVANCE FOR CONTEMPORARY MINISTERS

Contemporary ministers should be able to ascertain their genuine encounter with Christ. This would embolden them to preach Christ in all situations with confidence. Apostle John was able to confront the false teachers and the secessionists as a result of his first-hand experience with Christ, thereby preserving the faith tradition that was handed over to him.

Contemporary ministers should be grounded in the Word of God; this would enable them to preach the undiluted message and be able to confront heretical teachers and their teachings. It should be noted that the ministers of the Gospel should not accommodate heretical teachers in any way because heresy is like a cancerous growth once it has develop a root, it would be difficult to cut off.

Contemporary Gospel ministers should have an adequate understanding of the theology of incarnation; that is Christology. Having a deep rooted understanding would help them to develop a theology about the incarnation of Christ for their congregation. Continuous discipleship should be encouraged in the church, because it would translate into a spiritual growth and a better understanding of Christ and his person.

Contemporary pastors should be informed about the challenges that are confronting their members as a result of their faith. The reason is because these false teachers are around us, and on daily basis they are interacting with our members. A proper understanding of their challenges on doctrinal issues would help their pastors to develop a theology that would inform, enhance and correct their understanding about God.

Heresy should not be allowed to fester in the church, it should be nip in the bud. Consequently, every minister of the Gospel should be decisive on matters of faith which could stir up doctrinal controversy in the church.

Furthermore, Pastors should encourage their members on the kind of so – called Christian literatures that they are being exposed to. It should be noted that if church members are exposed to wrong doctrine especially a diluted Christological exposition. It is only God who can restore such a person back into the fold. This study would present the summary, conclusions and recommendations in chapter five.

SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

It is noteworthy to find out that the First Epistle serves as an eye opener to present day believers on how to handle doctrinal schism either within the church or denomination. Through the centuries, false teaching and deception has been a consistent companion with the growth of the church.

The study of 1 John 1:1 – 4 reveals that John vehemently fights those who are polluting the community and wrote a theological treatise to address the situation with immediate alacrity. Today, those who denied the Christological relevance of Christ's death also claim to His followers and adherents to His teachings. The question is how do we handle them?

Summary

The purpose of this study is to use the book of First John 1: 1 – 4 as substratum to respond to the heretical teachings about the person of Jesus in our contemporary time. The study has been able to trace the historical background of the text and the heretic movement of the time, investigate the apostolic authority of the writer, and affirm both the divinity of Jesus Christ and the humanity of Jesus Christ.

It is discovered from the review of literature that heresy has a long history with Christianity, and it is an enemy within. The writer was able to trace the history of false doctrine from the early church through the mediaeval down to the contemporary church. In the pericope, John was able to inform his community that Jesus was truly heard and seen by many people. Also, he was an eyewitness to the life and times of Jesus and that he was not a phantom as some have been suggesting. John also warns his readers not to associate with anyone who does not share their belief because they are antichrist.

Finally, John asserts that the only thing he is proclaiming is what he has seen, heard, touched and believes that they had share fellowship with God through the revealed Jesus Christ. Therefore, those who believe the same thing are in the same fellowship. While those who believe something else or preach something else should no longer be welcome into the community.

Conclusion

From this study, it is visibly clear that John the Apostle was writing to defend the incarnation of Christ. Cerinthus was a man who spearheaded this teaching about Christ that he was a phantom and that Jesus was crucified and not Christ.

This teaching stirred up a controversy in the Johannine community and some members were confused to the point of questioning their faith. After the secessionist had left the community, they maintained their contact with them with the goal of convincing some of them to abandon their beliefs in the incarnation of Christ.

John decided to write the community assuring them that he had a personal encounter with Jesus. This encounter according to him is real, pragmatic and divine. As a result of this, he stands in the position of an eyewitness to challenge the teachings of the opponents declaring them as antichrist. Furthermore, he believes that writing that letter to the community would make their joy complete.

Also, the exegetical study of 1 John 1:1 – 4 is used as a model to combat these same contemporary heresies of the New Age movement and the Jehovah Witness who denies the incarnation of Jesus, but exalted his humanity. Therefore, the exegetical study would lead to some recommendations for consideration:

Recommendations

- ❖ The Church should not fold her arms when there is a need to publicly denounce heretical teachers and their teachings.
- ❖ Contemporary Christians should be a living witness of the Gospel by being an embodiment of Jesus Christ.
- ❖ The Church must promote, encourage, and embrace sound biblical doctrines and teachings of the scriptures.
- ❖ Apostle John gave a good account of himself when call to duty about the incarnation of Christ. Church leaders should be courageous enough to denounce heresies and false teaching at all times.
- ❖ Contemporary Christians should be careful about the subtlety of the New Age Movement which has permeated almost all aspects of life and should watch out for its influence.
- ❖ Believers should not entertain any literatures that is questionable and which cast doubts on the person and the work of Christ.

❖ We should be holistic in our doctrinal teachings because when people are confused they are liable to fall into error.

If the aforementioned recommendations are considered, Christians in this present time will be firm in their faith and would not be tossed by any winds of doctrinal teachings.

My Observations

1. Give your work to an editor for proper editing and let me have the editor's report as soon as possible
2. Re-write your chapter one to reflect your motivation in your background study, purpose, scope and research methodology.
3. Re write your abstract to reflect what I have highlighted in that section
4. Clearly have a section on exegetical deductions or inferences
5. Be consistence in your footnotes
6. You have a good grasp of the passage keep it up
7. please up-date this section of your bibliography divide the books into sections books, Bible Commentaries and Encyclopaedia, Journal Articles and Internet Sources. At these level of study your bibliography should be comprehensive

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(history, beliefs and practices)