

**LIVING TOGETHER IN THE COMMUNITY: THE  
CONTEMPORARY SIGNIFICANCE OF FIRST JOHN TO  
KOM BAPTIST CHURCH**

By

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## **DECLARATION**

I hereby declare that the work contained in this dissertation is my own original work and has not previously in its entirety or in part been submitted to any institution for a degree.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Kimbi Paul Kawuldim', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Kimbi Paul Kawuldim

Bamenda, Cameroon

July 2014

## **DEDICATION**

For the saints in Kom who have not deviated from the apostolic faith but are modelling the gospel of reconciliation; for Crescens Kimbi and Samuel Fadhili Kimbi gone ahead as saints

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

I owe a tremendous debt of gratitude to my supervisor, Dr Annang Asumang who has not only shaped my mind but has equally touched my heart and thus has taught me what it means to be called to be a saint and a scholar. He read through every word of this dissertation several times, painstakingly tickling my mind to come out of its cage of limitations. At the same time, he shared with me his sermon presentations in Wellowgate Chapel in Grimsby most of which touched my heart and shaped my perception of life.

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## **ABSTRACT**

A church community engenders people from various backgrounds who are expected to be nurtured to bond together with other believers in the community. Regrettably, many church communities have stayed on for too long as aggregates of people than as communities galvanized by love as exhorted in 1 John, as has been the case of Kom Baptist Church.

This study made use of discourse analysis and relevance theory as exegetical approaches to decipher the meaning of 1 John to address the schism that has been witnessed in Kom Baptist Church. Most scholarly approaches to contextual hermeneutics have tended to talk of Africa as a united whole without much delineation to specific contextual situations of the different socio-cultural groupings in the continent. This study posited the contextual background of 1 John adjacent that of a particular socio-cultural context of Kom and intimated that Christology and the lack of love have been the key issues behind the breakdown of fellowship experienced in Kom Baptist Church as was the case with the Johanine community. The study found out that pastoral ministry in Kom Baptist Church has been over-professionalized, a situation that has created a dissonance between knowledge and praxis. Evidence of breakdown of fellowship was demonstrated by the lack of love, confession and forgiveness that reigns within this church community.

John teaches an ethics of family resemblance or emulation whereby members of the believing community are called upon to resemble God, their Father. Anyone who affirms that God is light invariably sees himself as falling short of the standard requirement of God's righteousness and consequently needs to confess his or her sins, receive forgiveness and love one another just like God

their Father is light (1 John 1:5) and love (1 John 4:8). The study also demonstrated that African Traditional Religion (ATR) is rife in the Kom area and engenders syncretism in the church thus impeding a proper Christological understanding and appropriation of the Christian values.

Church administration in Kom Baptist Church was found to practice a model of leadership different from that which 1 John teaches. The way John has crafted his letter through repetition; his diction and tone are ostensibly done so with a performative intent that seeks to effect unity among his recipients. Thus, his use of the particle *καὶ* and his use of the inclusive pronoun 'we' in his exhortations are pastoral strategies to effect unity among members of his community. This should serve as lessons to the leadership of Kom Baptist Church that appealed more to litigation than Scriptures to address the schism.



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# **CHAPTER ONE**

## **INTRODUCTION**

### **1.1 Background and motivation**

The church beckons people from diverse backgrounds to become its members. Nonetheless, it is taken almost for granted that accepting Christ as Lord and Saviour qualifies one for membership within the church community wherein each member is expected to express love for one another, thus living harmoniously in the Christian community. Harnessing people with different backgrounds to form a community of believers has appeared more difficult than it seems at face value. First John is addressed to a Christian community that faced the challenge of living in togetherness. The exact causes of the schism and its subsequent history are debated by interpreters nevertheless; there is little doubt that this schism influenced the chief pastoral concerns, language, and theological ideas that dominate 1 John. This study intends to examine how the contextual situation addressed by 1 John informs the situation of the Kom Baptist Church facing a challenge of living in togetherness because of discordant tendencies experienced in its community.

#### ***1.1.1 A brief background of scholarly approaches to 1 John***

Understanding the message of 1 John requires of us to understand the socio-cultural environment of the community to which it was addressed. Different scholars have tried to reconstruct the audience to this letter. Many like Ladd (1993:219) believe that it is 'clearly addressed to a church or churches in which false prophets have appeared who have initiated a schismatic

movement in the church'. Marshall (1978:14) summarizes for us the situation in 1 John as follows:

A crisis had arisen in church due to the rise of teachers who were advocating an understanding of Christianity different from that upheld by John and his colleagues. The point had been reached where they actually left the church...but although they had left the church, they were still in contact with its members and were causing considerable uncertainty among them regarding the true character of Christian belief and whether the members truly regard themselves as Christians.

There is consensus that the audience of 1 John falls within the academic construct that has been called 'the Johannine Community', an inclusive term that refers to the audience of the Johannine writings. The Johannine community is seen by scholars as 'a third major stream within early Christianity after the Jerusalem/Judean churches and the Pauline mission' (Kruse 2000:4). Bauckham (2007:13) argues that although the quest of the historical Johannine community has produced a wide variety of results, scholars are yet to come to terms on 'a criteria of authenticity and critical methodological reflection' that explain these results.

Varied approaches have been used in the study of 1 John and this partly owes to the categorization of the letter as a general epistle. Painter (2010:365) argues that although scholars have used varied approaches to access the context of 1 John, there is a 'dependence of the epistles [of John] on the traditions embodied in the gospel [of John]'. The study of any of the epistles therefore obliges scholars to look at the common audience given that 'a common vocabulary, idiom, point of view and world view connect the gospel and the epistles (Painter 2010:344). Raymond Brown's works (1966, 1970, and 1979) feature conspicuously here as he engages in historical criticism to determine the origins and history of this community. Over the

years, different lenses have been used by different scholars to read the letter. So for example, Lieu (2008) applies a rhetorical reading, while Conway (2002) applies the 'new historical perspective' where she explores dramatization of the Johannine community as a way to read Johannine literature. Witherington (1995:5) agrees with Conway's idea of dramatization and consequently argues that what the editor of the fourth gospel did was 'to choose to present the story of Jesus in a dramatic mode'. In this way, 'the Fourth Evangelist has drawn on the conventions of the Greco-Roman drama to reveal the character of someone who he believed truly is the divine Son of God...' Witherington's comments are ostensibly in reference to the Fourth Gospel. Nonetheless, the scholarly debates for the dependency of Johannine literature notably the epistles on the Fourth Gospel are rife among scholars (Jackman 1992; Jones 2010; Painter 2010; Rensberger 2006; Wahlde 1995; Yarid 2003).

Despite arguments for the dependency of the epistles of John on the Gospel of John (Lieu 2008), there are enough grounds to suggest that the audience of the Fourth Gospel had a shared context and worldview with other Johannine literature. Taking this as a given, it can be argued that the conventions of Greco-Roman drama that Witherington alludes to can be applied in reading the letters of John. In other words, contextual information needed to understand the Gospel of John would serve a useful purpose to provide at least in part elements of understanding the epistles of John. Judith Lieu (2008) agrees with a shared worldview between the gospel and the epistles of John but resists the tendency to treat the Johannine letters as footnotes to the Gospel. She argues in favour of understanding the letters in their own terms and right and not as a shadow of the Fourth Gospel. For her, the similarities between the letters and the gospel are classified as 'Johannine' but the term should be seen as a term of convenience than one of inter-dependency. Von Wahlde (1995), on his part, seeks to understand the epistle by looking at the history and social context of the community. After analyzing the stages of the development of the Johannine community, Von Wahlde asserts that the author seeks to inculcate the virtue of love in this community in order to strengthen its identity and bonds as a community and

sees the exhortation to love as an intra-community exhortation and not universal (von Wahlde 1995).

Kruse (2000) seeks to apply what he calls 'responsible mirror reading of 1John' in identifying the audience of the letter. He argues that the audience is a group of members of the community who are being improperly influenced by former members of that community to agree to their heresy. Streett (2011) corroborates Kruse's idea of 'responsible mirror reading' against 'an aggressive mirror reading' where each assertion of the author is assumed to be a reflection of what the opponents practiced and taught. There has been in the case of 'aggressive mirror reading', an over-reading of 1 John, characterizing the whole epistle as polemic even though not every passage of the epistle is controversial. To try to describe the whole letter as polemic is to fail to recognize the pastoral themes clearly evident in the letter. There are specific and perhaps isolated cases of reprimand in the letter that can be seen as polemical but it will be improper to consider the whole letter to be polemical. An aggressive mirror reading tends to ignore the probability of multi-causality wherein an author can be motivated by several circumstances, sometimes unrelated in nature that he wants to address. In other words, different themes of a piece of writing may be owed to different challenges an audience faces and the writer might undertake to address the different issues in the same book. Nonetheless, the challenge lies in delineating the best approaches and criteria for identifying which sections of the epistle address which particular problems.

None of the approaches used in reading 1 John is without its own limitations. Talking about historical criticism for example, Marshall (1977:127) says 'it will be clear that many factors enter into the historian's reconstruction of the past and that he cannot always arrive at certainty'. He further adds that the historian is often 'reduced to reasoned conjectures and assessments of comparative probabilities'. Deciphering the meaning of a biblical text requires of us to understand the communication situation whereby we may want to fill out any implicit communication necessary for understanding the writing. This is the situation in 1 John and some approaches may yield greater dividends



than others but none of the approaches can encompass a full gaze of all that is involved in the communication by itself exclusively. A multi-faceted approach to reading a letter like 1 John, described both as pastoral and polemical will yield greater dividends than any single approach would give.

A key bone of contention in reading 1 John therefore is defining the suitable methodological procedure for constructing the history and situational context behind the writing of this epistle. The traditional approach has been to employ the mirror reading in which several of the statements of the epistle are thought to be polemically addressing the specific situation. Streett (2011:121,122) argues against a mirror-reading because for him, there are some unjustified assumptions that stem from mirror reading the text. Some unwanted inferences are bound to creep in when the text is mirror-read. Streett's contention is against the tendency to try to see each exhortation in 1 John as a reaction and/or reproach against the secessionists. Evidently, there is a schismatic situation that 1 John addresses but the letter also seeks to encourage the community than devote its full attention to address the secessionist. Not all the passages in 1 John are polemical and to reap the benefits of the letter, we must presume that each passage is 'innocent of polemical intent unless proven guilty' (Streett 2011:131). I have pointed out above to the fact that there can be several motivations to writing a letter like 1 John and it will be limiting to use a single gaze to try to understand the book. Mirror-reading therefore has to be applied in conjunction with other methodological procedures in order to maximize the dividends latent in the letter for its readership. Reading any exhortation as a mirror reflection of reprimand against schismatic tendencies will deprive the reader of the letter's pastoral intents.

Marshall (1978:15) concurs with this reluctance to view 1 John as wholly polemic when he says 'it is hard to tell exactly what the false teachers opposed by John positively believed and taught; it is easier to say what features of the orthodox faith they denied since John directs his attention mainly to these'. He explains that these features of the orthodox faith which they denied include amongst others the claim that they have fellowship with

God and that they are sinless. They held unorthodox views about Jesus and did not believe that Jesus was the Christ or Son of God and denied that he had come in the flesh.

In spite of the limitations that each approach in reading the letter may bring with it to the text, there are also enough dividends that each bring for a proper understanding of the letter. Thus, Marshall rebuts his own argument about the limitations of historical criticism and argues that in some sense we are obliged to follow it. 'In fact anybody who tries to understand the New Testament or to defend its historicity against skeptics by any kind of reasonable argument is already practicing the historical method' (1977:131). The same defence can be made for the grammatico-historical method given that the word of God comes to us in human language and we are bound to try to understand its linguistic strata in order to appropriate the message. I have argued that a multi-approach to reading the letter can yield greater dividends and perhaps it is necessary to state here that no approach strictly disaffects itself completely from the others. There are slight and major overlaps between whatever approaches we may choose to use in reading the Bible. This helps to reduce the weaknesses that a single approach may bring to the text.

Though different scholars have used different approaches to study the epistle, they inadvertently agree on their main proposals. They agree that there was a historical development of the community that became an inclusive but heterogeneous community whose unity was threatened by theological and ethical issues. Brown (1966; 1979) initially identifies five stages of its development and later coalesces them into three stages and shows the different groups involved in the community. These groups included Jews of different Christological persuasions namely, the Jews of the Synagogue who did not believe in Jesus and the followers of John the Baptist who rejected Jesus as the messiah in favour of John. The Crypto-Christians believed in Jesus but they remained in the synagogue because they were afraid of the Jews. The community also included gentile Christians and Samaritan believers.

Such a heterogeneous community tottered and suffered disintegration principally because of erroneous teachings. 'The letter thus represents a sustained effort to prevent further apostasy among Johannine Christians by strengthening their identity and cohesion' (Griffith 2002:2). Griffith adds that this cohesion and identity is achieved by the call to maintain 'the foundational confession of Johannine Christianity, namely that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God (John 20:31, NIV); an appeal to strengthen fellowship with one another by obedience to the command to love one another...' (2002:2). In other words, one of the key concerns of 1 John is to reinforce the cohesion and identity of the Johannine Christianity following a previous upheaval and to forestall further cracks in the community. It is from this outlook that the present project seeks to explore how the dynamics of cohesion and unity to obviate future splits addressed in this letter may inform a similar contemporary situation of Kom Baptist Church.

Studies in 1 John have become even more relevant for a contemporary society faced by globalization and proliferation of theologies that leave the ordinary Christian at the crossroads wondering what form of Christian life will be relevant to him in the midst of a plethora of discordant doctrines and discordant socio-cultural challenges. Heresy appears to be rife in different parts of the world and so in the Kom area and different doctrinal persuasions sprout up here and there. Coming to terms with the apostolic understanding of Christianity is of vital importance today in a world where numerous dissenting voices in Christianity echo in many places. The foundational aspects of Christian belief should be understood by all and sundry within the church community in order to resist and combat heretical teachings. The message of 1 John is relevant as much today as it was in the early days of the heretics and Gnostics (although scholars agree that in 1 John, the situation had not yet fully grown into Gnosticism).

First John highlights theological and ethical issues that lurk within church communities thus posing a threat to the unity of the church. The letter re-enacts the foundational issues of Christianity notably the Christological issue and goes on to propose a procedural way of dealing with the ethical issues

when they come up within the church community. An approach to stay away from sin or alleviate its consequences is defined in the letter and this is fundamental for maintaining the integrity of Christian communities in the world, particularly in the African context where infringements against each other in the community is a daily occurrence orchestrated by acute political, economic and social misfortunes. It is perhaps, these infringements against each other and the failure of an ethical interplay of love, faith and obedience in the community of believers in Kom Baptist Church that has orchestrated a rupture in the church which is the focus of the present investigation. Studies in 1 John therefore need to be revisited today in the midst of divisions facing church communities. The exhortations of 1 John are a necessary prescription in addressing crisis in church like the situation of the Kom Baptist Church. Streett (2011:121) summarizes the relevance of this epistle to the audience: 'The author writes not to correct his audience or to combat the secessionists or false teachers, but rather to encourage his audience to maintain their faithfulness to the message'. This affirmation reflects the character of this dissertation also captured succinctly in the words of Guthrie (1970:872, 873) viz.

'Quite apart from the false teachers, therefore, the author [of 1 John] has an edificatory purpose. Christians need to be challenged about the distinctive features of their faith, especially the necessity for the exercise of love. Nowhere else in the New Testament is the combination of faith and love so clearly brought out, and it seems probable that this is emphasized because the behaviour of the readers leaves much to be desired.

### ***1.1.2 A Brief background of the situation in Kom Baptist Church***

This study will posit the contextual background of 1 John adjacent a similar experience of rupture in the Kom Baptist Church community for the latter to learn from the teachings of the former. It will therefore be necessary up front to briefly state the background to the situation in the Kom Baptist Church.

The Baptist church was planted in Kom in 1928 and by 1998 it had more than sixty seven congregations (Jam 1998). These congregations came together as a ministry area of the Cameroon Baptist Convention (CBC) and were collectively called Belo Field Council of Baptist Churches (abridged as Belo Field). From the mid 1990s, the church witnessed a crisis that led to a major split. Two factions of the church came into existence: one made up of congregations that were faithful to the umbrella body, the Cameroon Baptist Convention and the other that advocated for secession from the main body and for the formation of another convention designated as Cameroon National Baptist Convention (CNBC). The decision to secede from the umbrella convention was arrived at during a Bible conference in 1997 by a decision that later came to be known as the 'Anyajua declaration'. The declaration stated that:

We the undersigned fully mandated delegates of the following churches of the Belo Field Council of Baptist Church, sitting in a massively attended session at the 1997 Bible conference at Anyajua Baptist Church, today 26th November, 1997, at the hour of 3:00p.m. prayerfully declare as follows: to withdraw our membership from the CBC and assume full autonomy in order to henceforth function and worship God without hitches or suppression of any sort as it is presently the case and to work harder to evangelize the unbelieving world far and near (CODERU 1999:25).

Belo Field Christians advocating for secession uphold that they have been marginalized by the CBC hierarchy and claim that their move to secede is to enable them be more efficient in their mission of evangelization as a church. They then adopted their slogan as, '*the battle is the Lord's*'. The CBC Christians on the other hand see themselves as faithful adherents to the teachings of the Bible and assert that the behaviour of the other party is in opposition to biblical teaching. For them, such behaviour is a manifestation of the end times taught in the Bible. They adopted as watchword the term '*watchmen of the true faith*'. The adoption of this name created a poignant distinction between both parties given that before now, there was an ambiguity because those members of the Field who were calling for secession and those who advocated for loyalty to the CBC all hung on to the appellation 'Belo Field'.

The crisis within the Baptist church in Kom appears thus to brandish both theological and ethical reasons as was the case of the Johannine community addressed by the epistle of 1 John. Apparently, there is lack of love among members of the Christian community in Kom. Belo Field claims that its members who work with the social institutions of the CBC have been dismissed or reassigned and posted to remote and obscure areas. Defamatory language is used by some members of the church across the divide. There are numerous court cases based on varied issues such as ownership of the existing church property and character defamation (CATID 1999:95-98). Victimization and outright hatred characterized by avoidance to come together in social occasions is conspicuous. The edificatory purpose of the message of 1 John does not seem to have taken roots in this community calling into question both the content and quality of teaching, understanding and Christian values within the community.

There are many facets that a study like this one can take. However, the particular inclination of this dissertation is to provide an adequate understanding of 1 John to the Baptist Church of Kom so that the latter can correctly appropriate the message of the epistle for itself and thus live in togetherness within the Christian community. Tolerance and correction of one

another borne out of Christian love is reflected in the so many exhortations on community or collective values taught in 1 John for the church to stay relevant as a witness to the outer community. The practice of these values will bring cohesion to the church, restrain the degeneration of the crisis and provide preliminary solutions to the crisis. Okure (2009:4) echoes this when she says: 'The challenge here is for each religious to re-examine her/his values, her/his attitudes towards fellow religious and all God's people. Do they rejoice at the talents and gifts of others and see them as assets for building the body of Christ or as threats to their own ego and false self-worth?'

## **1.2 The statement of the problem and key questions**

Living and growing together within a church community engenders people from different backgrounds with different ambitions, motivations, world views and levels of commitment to the Christian faith. Nonetheless, these people are expected to be nurtured to bond together as a believing community through biblical exhortations. First John addresses a schismatic situation in a community of believers and forms the main object of study in this dissertation. The desire here is to use its teachings to impact a parallel situation observed amongst the Baptist Church in the Kom area in Cameroon. Given this background, the main research question in this paper can thus be stated as follows:

What are the community values taught in 1 John and how can they help in addressing the contemporary schismatic situation of Kom Baptist Church?

The following subsidiary questions ensue from the main question:

1. What is the contextual background of 1 John?
2. What circumstances orchestrated the schism in 1 John
3. What is the contextual situation of the church in Kom
4. What specific values for building a community of believers, both in theoretical and practical terms did 1 John aim to encourage?

5. What is the contemporary significance of the message of 1 John regarding a post-schism situation to Kom Baptist Church?

### **1.3 Objectives and rationale of the study**

A crisis in church can bring with it a defective interpretation of Scriptures. For a community that depends on a few church leaders and church intelligentsia to read and interpret the Bible for them, a defective interpretation can deprive most of its members of the intended meaning of Scriptures. The epistle of 1 John presents a response to a community of believers in tension. The ethical exhortations in the letter are geared towards consolidating and sustaining cohesion in the community of believers. Such an ethical teaching according to the letter should ensue from the right knowledge and belief about Christ. For example, 1 John asserts that 'anyone who claims to be in the light but hates his brother is still in darkness' (2:9, NIV). The metaphor of darkness here is ethical, signifying the absence of love within the community of faith and, light metaphorically stands for love and knowledge of God. Members of the Kom Baptist Church, currently facing some tensions will be challenged with these values to appreciate each other in their community of faith. Given the prevailing circumstances of division within the Kom Baptist Church, these values in 1 John can be distorted or wrongly appreciated by different readers in the church across the divide. This study therefore focuses on the need for an appropriate exposition of the values of 1 John for the gain of the Christian community of the Baptist churches in Kom.

In recent years there has been much scholarship effort to prescribe various hermeneutical approaches to reading the Bible in Africa, prominent amongst which is contextualization (Hesselgrave 1999; Hiebert 1999; Kraft 1999; Light 2012; West 2005) and what has been called 'inculturation hermeneutics' (Upkong 2001). Most of these scholarly writings and approaches to contextual hermeneutics have tended to speak of Africa as a united whole, without much delineation to specific contextual situations of the different socio-cultural groupings across the continent like the Kom community. This study seeks to



ask the question, what are the practical ways in which the community values indicated by 1 John may be endorsed in the church community in Kom Baptist Church? This concurs with Ela's assertion (2001: 60) that:

Christian communities in Africa have no future unless they can trust their own internal dynamics, their own ability to respond to challenges, and their own ongoing capacity to face their entire crisis and to make full use of community resources and potential.

Ela further strengthens his argument when he adds that:

Today as we grow more aware of the need to live our faith in the encounter with other cultures, we must go beyond a ministry of institutions and meet the Africans within their daily existence. The church must face up to the challenge posed by converts who still feel the need to consult diviners or marabouts<sup>1</sup>. What form of Christian life is appropriate in villages and slums (2001:141)?

The daily challenge the church is facing might be owed to the deficient and superficial manner in which Christians have understood and live their faith. This study adds to the many voices calling for an adequate understanding and application of Scripture.

Attempts to reconcile the factions of the Baptist church in Kom have appeared elusive. Belo Field loyalists claim that they have made several attempts for the resolution of the conflict through dialogue but say these attempts were mocked at and it was 'dialogue abused' (CODERU 1999:20; CATID 1999:38-

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<sup>1</sup> The word is a French word that has been borrowed into English in Cameroon and perhaps elsewhere and signifies someone who combines soothsaying and traditional healing practices.

39). These attempts thus far, to my understanding have not appealed significantly to the authority of Scriptures but to some form of church law and administration and to non-church authorities like the civil administration of the state. Several cabinet ministers, local administrators of the Cameroon Government and some key personalities of Kom descent have taken turns to appeal for reconciliation but the two factions in the crisis have found at each given time an excuse to shy away from re-uniting. The closest Christian attempt to solve the crisis came on about three years into the crisis when the two parties were successfully brought to the negotiating table. This attempt for reconciliation was masterminded by a concerned CBC Christian outside of the Kom area. Although for the first time he succeeded in bringing both parties to the negotiating table, Belo Field delegation left when they learnt that the CBC authorities had secretly invited Government security forces to be part of the discussion. Evidently, there is mutual distrust and suspicion reigning over both parties. How can this tendency of suspicion and distrust be abated? Okure (2009:2) asserts that 'reconciliation, the restoring of persons or parties to a warm relationship of friendship and love previously rent asunder, is essentially God's work... Human beings accept and live this reconciliation in hope for themselves'. The attempts at reconciliation failed to formulate a biblical model of reconciliation thus an indication that they did not see reconciliation as 'essentially God's work'. The inclination of this dissertation seeks to nurture a good climate for both parties to peacefully co-exist by practicing the virtues taught in 1 John. It is on a platform of peaceful co-existence that a congenial environment for reconciliation could be initiated. This dissertation does not necessarily focus on the issue of reconciliation but is an attempt to make Scriptures to be at the basis of seeking solutions to the present crisis. The message of 1 John spells out such values. In this dissertation, I am concerned about the practice of these virtues in the awareness and hope that it will abate the present stalemate and kindle hope for an eventual reconciliation. Ukpong (2001:191) succinctly helps me to summarize in an overall fashion the goals of this study:

The task is reading the Bible to appropriate its message for a contemporary context. This involves engaging a biblical text in dialogue with a contemporary contextual experience so as to appropriate its message in today's context. The biblical text is read against a background of social-historical situation reflected in it. In both tasks it is the canonical form of the text that is the object of the study.

The task here therefore is reading 1 John to appropriate its message for a contemporary audience of the Kom Baptist church against a background of tension and division in Kom that is reflected in 1 John.

#### **1.4 Design and methodology**

The main thrust of this study is a literary study that falls within the area of biblical exegesis, seeking to do an exegetical study of 1 John and a study of its significance to the contemporary Kom Baptist Church. Exegesis is understood as deciphering what the biblical message meant to the original hearers. Exegesis provides the basis for the hermeneutical process for the targeted audience of this dissertation. In other words, an understanding of the contextual situation of an audience is necessary for a relevant application of the message from Scriptures (Klein; Craig and Robert LH. 2003; Flemming 2005; Hiebert 2008; Malina 1993; Witherington 2007).

Though the study in its core is a literary study, it significantly overlaps with practical theology in an attempt to address the prevailing situation in Kom Baptist Church and relating the significance of 1 John to Kom Baptist Church. Practical theology is the domain of theology that aims at solving a problem in the real world. It identifies a real situation in the world, an anomaly and seeks to address the situation by indicating what the preferred situation should be, using a teaching from Scriptures. Practical theology looks at the present situation and prescribes the desired future in response to the present

situation. This study thus, engages in the area of practical theology to the extent in which it observes the prevailing situation of Kom Baptist Church and use the exegetical analysis to draw a hermeneutical prescription to the present crisis observed in the church. In the process of observing the Kom Baptist Church, interviews were conducted to determine how the people perceive the present community values adumbrated in 1 John can be practically applied in the Kom situation. The interviews sought to understand the platform of the cultural background on which Christianity is practiced in Kom so as to establish whether there are any conflicting values of the Kom culture that impede or distort an appropriate understanding of the values taught in the Christian community. I shall now briefly explain the main components of the methodology.

#### ***1.4.1 The commentary approach***

The commentary approach is one of the approaches to research in exegetical studies. Smith (2008:178) explains this approach in the following words:

This approach moves through the passage verse by verse, presenting relevant exegetical insights as they occur in the pericope. It needs an introduction section and a section discussing the overarching background issues, but it presents most of the exegetical details in the verse-by-verse discussion. The commentary integrates the historical, cultural, redactional, grammatical, lexical and other types of observations.

This study seeks to use this approach as explained by Smith and to focus particularly on the cultural and grammatical analysis to decipher the meaning of the text. In its historical and cultural inclination, the study will look at the communicative context of 1 John by looking at the 'overarching background

issues' necessary for understanding the text. In the grammatical analysis, there is a special focus on discourse analysis.

Discourse is the sum total of utterances (written or spoken) that constitutes a text. All of the literary devices a writer or speaker may employ to communicate a message forms part of the text. Discourse analysis is the branch of linguistics that scrutinizes these linguistic regularities employed to understand the message of the text (Bailey JL 2010; Dooley RA and Levihnson SH 2000; Green JB 2010; Reed 1996). It should be noted that discourse analysis unavoidably engenders semantics and pragmatics. In this study, I shall use discourse features to determine the foreground/frontline exhortations and background information in the text of 1 John. In other words, there are linguistic signals to suggest the main exhortations of 1 John and mitigated exhortations. Passages that shall be analyzed are passages that focus on community values such as love, truthfulness, forgiveness and a proper knowledge of God based on an adequate understanding of Christology.

#### ***1.4.2 Relevance theory***

The debate on how far inferences can be drawn in an inferential communicative model is rife among scholars. Kruse (2000:15) has written about 'judicious mirror reading' or 'responsible mirror reading' but there is need to establish guiding principles on what would make a mirror reading responsible. The extent to which mirror-reading a text can go is not clear and in some cases, there is an over reading and perhaps over reaction to the situation behind the text of 1 John. Relevance theory (Sperber and Wilson 1995) provides a useful guide to checking the limits of how much a text can be extrapolated. I will use some of its basic principles to explain the inferences that would be drawn in forming conclusions on the blend between the linguistic analysis of the text of 1 John, its socio-cultural environment and its application to the Kom community. Nevertheless, attempting to introduce a fairly recent theory on communications like relevance theory as a methodological guide can be very weighty. Only the key areas of direct

implication to the hypothesis will be explained and employed in this dissertation.

### **1.4.3 Field study**

Field study is an empirical method or step in research that has been classified under what has been called 'LIM model' of research (Smith 2008: 205). Smith explains that this aims at a systematic investigation of a situation in the real world. 'What is the real situation...? How did the present situation develop? Why is the situation the way it is? (Smith 2008:206). This empirical component of the investigation observes the circumstances that surround the crisis in the Kom Baptist Church and how different stakeholders perceive it. It also seeks to examine the socio-cultural context of the Kom area in which the church sways. Mouton (2001: 98-110) explains that this can take the form of participant observation, 'personal and group face to face interview' amongst others.

As a Baptist Christian of Kom origin, I carried out a participant observation in which I took turns to observe four key congregations across the divide to ascertain the prevailing situation in these congregations. Coarse jokes, lampooning and defamatory language, mudslinging amongst others directed at opposing Christians have been reported across the divide. How do these congregations nurture the values of love, fellowship, honesty, truthfulness and forgiveness that are encouraged by 1 John? How do they perceive the other 'brothers' 'who left' or who have stayed back in the fellowship? Interviews and focus group discussions were conducted in Joseph Merrick Baptist Churches (JMBC) <sup>2</sup>Fundong, First Baptist Church Wombong and Triumphant Baptist Church Wombong. I interviewed eight members from each of these four congregations. The members interviewed were selected by purposive

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<sup>2</sup> There are two congregations in Fundong with the same name. These congregations and those from Wombong have been chosen because prior to the division they worshipped together but witnessed a split leading to the establishment of analogous but rival congregations in separate localities of the same town.

sampling from across the different layers of the congregation viz., women, men, youths and leaders. One of these leaders was the pastor of the church and the other leader was a deacon in the congregation. This was to tap opinions from a representative sample of the whole church. Interviews took the form of unstructured face to face conversations with the designated individuals and thereafter, another set of eight members (men, women, youth and leaders) were brought together in a focus group discussion. The focus group focused on a study of key portions of 1 John relevant to community values. They did a mini Bible study on how these passages inform the dynamics of the division in Kom. The two focus groups from each parallel congregations in the same locality were brought together for the same exercise to see how the study of the epistle can help shed light on the problem they have faced prior to and after the separation. The key foci of these focus group discussions were to establish how the participants perceive the practical application of 1 John to the situation in Kom, especially regarding how to practically live together in harmony.

Morgan argues that the size of the group should range from four to eight participants as small groups 'make it easier for the moderators to manage the active discussions that often accompany high levels of involvement and emotional topics...' (1996:146). He also suggests the number of focus groups in a project and says 'the most common rule of the thumb is that most projects consist of four to six focus groups. The typical justification for this range is that the data becomes saturated and little new information emerges after the first few groups, so moderators can predict what participants will say even before they say it (1996:144). This was the orientation of this study viz., interview at most eight members of the congregation in a focus group so as to remain effective and able to manage the group well. The results of the focus group discussions were compared with those of the separate interviews. 'One reason for comparing focus groups to more familiar methods has been to determine whether the two methods produce equivalent data' (Morgan 1996:136).

Given that focus groups and interviews are aspects of gathering data in qualitative research, analysis of the data will be 'primarily, a matter of scrutinizing the data, looking for themes or patterns in people's views, observations, or experiences' (Smith 2010:35). The study determined what the views of the people were vis-a-vis the message of 1 John. Opinions of the focus group that concurred with those of separate interviews were harnessed and proposed as the main tenets of the crisis. Strategies for living in togetherness were drawn from these tenets gathered from the research.

As a native of Kom, most of the cultural values of Kom that I brought to the study were based on my intuitive understanding of the culture. However, the interviews also ascertained how different Baptist Christians understand and apply values of the Kom culture in their daily live. This facilitated a relevant application of the message of 1 John drawn within the context of the Kom culture.

Klein, Blomberg and Hubbard (1993: 406-424) suggest methodological steps for a legitimate contextual application. This includes determining the original application(s), evaluating the level of specificity of the original application(s) and identifying the cross-cultural principles. It is this orientation that this dissertation took to draw the application of 1 John within the context of Kom socio-cultural order.

## **1.5 Hypothesis**

The hypothesis that this study proves is that:

Both the ethical and theological values necessary for a Christian community to live in harmony such as love and forgiveness and an adequately honed Christology as expounded in 1 John lucidly address the schismatic situation of Kom Baptist Church today.



## **1.6 Presuppositions**

As an evangelical Christian, I bring to this study presuppositions of evangelical theology such as Smith (2008:169-170) outlines and I particularly like to highlight the following beliefs about Scriptures and the interpreter.

I believe that the Bible or the Holy Scriptures is composed of sixty-six books and originally inspired by the Holy Spirit through human authors. It is entirely trustworthy and is relevant to all people at all times though its application may vary. I subscribe fully to Klein, Bloomberg and Hubbard's thesis (1993:82-86) that the interpreter needs to have faith, a relationship with God and a willingness to work within the Bible's framework as God's revelation. He needs to have the willingness to put himself or herself under the text, respond to it and participate with God's people in a fellowship otherwise called the church.

## **1.7 Definition of terms**

### ***1.7.1 Community***

I adopt the definition of Grenz (2003: 21-22) in the way I use the term community here. He talks of community in the following way:

In contemporary religious thought, the term also designates a group bound together by a strong commitment to shared spiritual values and a common sense of being a people who embody a telos, or purpose connected to God's intentions for humankind and creation'.

My use of the term therefore focuses on this 'telos' or goal that tie the Christians of Kom Baptist Church together as they seek to practice the Christian values. The pursuit of these shared values binds and propels them together as a people group or community.

### ***1.7.2 Living together***

This refers to interaction that ensues from the consciousness of being in a community where individual members of the community are concerned about the wellbeing of others and create an allowance for tolerance of the mistakes of one another as a sign of Christian love. Their common desire to be together supersedes and makes them to overlook, correct in love and forgive the faults of one another.

### ***1.7.3 Contemporary***

I use the term in this dissertation to refer to the period of the 1990s up to today when the crisis started and is continuing in the Kom Baptist Church. Nonetheless, the term can also apply in its loose sense to mean all the present audience that have or will witness the crisis and who constitute the church in Kom today. This may include the preceding decade leading to the crisis and the decade that will follow the crisis.

### ***1.7.4 Kom Baptist Church***

Kom is an ethnic group of about two hundred thousand people living in the highlands of the North West Region of Cameroon. The Baptist church is well implanted here and I use the term to refer to all the congregations of the Baptist church found within this tribe. It also applies to Baptist Christians of Kom origin in the Diasporas who have stakes in the crisis in the church in Kom.

## **1.8 Delimitation**

This study seeks to do an exegetical study of 1 John to apply it to the situation among the Baptist churches in Kom. It cuts across biblical studies and practical theology. As such, it presents itself as an enormous project. No work

of this nature can be exhaustive in scope enough to address all ramifications of what is relevant to the people. In order to stay relevant and effective, the inclination of this paper is to study and address particularly how the Christians of the Baptist church in Kom have lived together as Christians given the crisis in the church. Although this dissertation seeks to understand 1 John as a whole, the exegesis will be limited to passages that deal with community values necessary to inform and reform the situation of Kom Baptist Church, particularly those dealing with love and fellowship. On the other hand, although I will observe the situation of Kom Baptist Church generally, interviews shall be conducted only in four of these congregations in two major villages in Kom. These congregations have been chosen because of the severe tensions they experienced and the analogous congregations that these tensions gave birth to.

## **1.9 Overview of chapters**

Chapter two deals with the contextual situation of 1 John necessary for understanding the letter given that there are some communicative assumptions of 1 John that can only be known through a background study of the letter. Here I studied and determined the authorship of the letter, its date and audience. I also studied its historical context and what occasioned the writing of the letter, its purpose and setting. I probed at the literary context, its literary argument and structure and its theological themes. I observed that unlike other biblical books labelled as letters, 1 John is unique in its genre. It is perceived by many as polemical and by others as a pastoral letter. To those who see it as polemical, they associate it with the attempt to refute a heretical teaching spreading around the author's community and for those who see it as a pastoral letter, they think the author is out to encourage members of his community to stay close to one another through love. This dissertation took the inclination that the letter is more pastoral than polemical and I intimated that 1 John solicits an approach to studying it that departs from the default way of studying letters.

In chapter three, I explained the theoretical framework of the methodologies used in the study. Thus, I explained discourse analysis, relevance theory and other methodological options that are used in this dissertation.

Chapter four investigated the meaning of some passages of 1 John using discourse analysis and relevance theory as exegetical tools. The study revealed that 1 John has very few direct or strong exhortations. One of these key exhortations in the letter found in 2:1 is: "my dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin". It shows that even when John wants to exhort strongly, he brings a pastoral tone through the use of a vocative such as 'my dear children' to avoid being considered offensive. John exhorts believers to exercise love in the Christian community and demonstrated that the Johanne community suffered because of both ethical and theological concerns, namely hatred and or the absence of love.

Chapter five presents the Kom Baptist Church within the Kom culture. This chapter investigates the socio-cultural context of the church in Kom to examine the cultural values that might have a bearing into Christian values taught in 1 John. One key issue of the Kom culture is its matrilineal family system. The question was thus raised on how Christians in this area will understand the family imagery used in 1 John.

Chapter six focused on the contemporary significance of 1 John to Kom Baptist church. An examination of the contextual situation of Kom Baptist Church was shown through an analysis of the empirical findings of field research. The state of lack of forgiveness, over-intellectualizing the faith, Africa Traditional Religion and an apparent lack of proper understanding of the Scriptures were found to be some of the issues that prevail in Kom Baptist Church. The relevance of 1 John to Kom Baptist church was shown to be in the area of the need for a proper understanding of Christology and the need to address the ethical issues plaguing the church just like John did in his letter.

In Chapter seven, I summarized the whole work, drew some conclusions and gave relevant recommendations ensuing from the study.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **THE SOCIO-HISTORICAL AND LITERARY- THEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND OF 1 JOHN**

#### **2.1 Introduction**

In communicating the word of God, the biblical authors did so within a particular context. This context was shared between them and their direct addressees otherwise referred to as the primary audience of the Bible. As a result, there are some elements of the communication that are not *prima facie* apparent to a secondary audience. Therefore, understanding the associated background of the communication is a prerequisite *sine quo non* for an adequate understanding of the message of the biblical writers by a secondary or contemporary audience such as the Kom Baptist Church.

The present chapter seeks to situate the contextual background necessary for understanding 1 John. The need for understanding the contextual background of Scriptures is even more exigent on 1 John given that it defies epistolary conventions of the Greco-Roman world and has been characterized as polemical. It is assumed that the letter seeks to rebut heretical speculations taught by a splinter group from the author's addressees. What the splinter group taught is debated and is derived to the most part through mirror-reading the text. Furthermore, the identity of the author and that of his addressees is veiled. These issues have led to a multiplicity of observations about the letter. For example, Painter (2008) and Reno (1997) see the epistle as polemical and strange while for Griffith (2002) and Streett (2011), the letter should be seen more as a pastoral letter than a polemical one. This dichotomy of

opinions concerning the letter makes it difficult to state unequivocally what the central message of the letter is. Rather, strata of themes thrust themselves to the reader and nurture fields of varied opinions. This scholarly diversity necessitates a cautious approach for any learner undertaking studies in 1 John. This is so because the different opinions have well substantiated evidence from the text warranting a scrupulous scrutiny before adopting one opinion over another. All of these make 1 John an interesting and unique book to study as an epistle.

The present chapter seeks to determine the author of the letter, the date and place of writing, the situation that orchestrated the writing of the letter and the authorial intentions for writing. It will also delve into the structure and genre type of the letter and some of the theological themes resonating in the letter. These aspects constitute what is referred to in this dissertation as the contextual background of 1 John.

## **2.2 Authorship of 1 John**

### ***2.2.1 Background***

First John is one of the few books of the New Testament that does not identify its author and has no clear identification of its addressees and their location. Given these circumstances, and given its close similarity with the Gospel of John, scholars have tended to treat the letter as ‘a kind of a guide to the interpretation of the Gospel of John’ (Rensberger 2001:11), or as ‘a handbook for understanding and dealing with the [Johannine] community crisis’ (von Wahlde 2010:5). Irenaeus associated the entire Johannine corpus (1, 2, 3 John, the gospel of John and Revelations) with the same author (Painter 2010:344). In this corpus, 1 John is strictly anonymous, 2, 3 John written by an unidentified elder, the Gospel of John associated to the Beloved disciple and Revelations written by a certain John. The challenge for scholarship has been to identify who the Beloved disciple is and whether the Beloved disciple and John designate the same referent? Are they different referents and is the Elder of 2 and 3 John the same person as the author of 1 John and the

Beloved disciple of the Gospel? Is there another John whose surname is Elder hence John the Elder? These questions have presented themselves almost as conundrums in the quest for authorship of 1 John. The leeway of interpretation has been to lean on the Gospel for clues to understand the epistle.

Lieu argues against this tendency in scholarship to treat the Johannine epistles 'as footnotes to the Gospel' (2008: ix). Lieu sees a mismatch between the audience of the Gospel which is Jewish and the audience of 1 John which ostensibly is non-Jewish. This is good indication for her to doubt a common authorship of the Gospel of John and 1 John. Rather, she recommends that 'in interpreting the letters [of John] it will be important to take this anonymity seriously and to examine how it contributes to the way in which the letters seek to achieve their purpose' (2008:2).

Despite Lieu's contention, it is necessary for the contemporary reader of 1 John to seek to know who wrote the letter. The author of the letter never identified himself perhaps for good reasons known to his primary audience and we find ourselves at a loss to understand who he was. We can deduce that his identity was well known and respected by his readers and it would have been redundant to state who he was. In other words, he was a 'very important personality' (VIP) and his personality and authority would be self evident to the primary audience. If this be the case, it would be incumbent on a secondary audience to seek to unveil the writer and see why he wielded such authority on his addressees. In other words, the weight of the exhortations in the letter is invariably connected to the author's *locus standi* in addressing his audience. For a letter that decries heresy, the place of the author within apostolic faith needs to be situated particularly for a contemporary context where emergent theologies are sporadic.

Many scholars attribute the author of 1 John to John the son of Zebedee, the apostle of the Lord (Westcott 1966; Guthrie 1970; Marshall 1978; Keener 1993; Ladd 1993; Kruse 2000; Rensberger 2001; Mac Arthur 2007, Painter 2010). Yet others like Lieu question why the same author will allude to such a

diverse audience given that the audience of the Gospel is Jewish and the audience of the letter is non-Jewish. Von Wahlde (2010:5) presents arguments from scholars on whether the author of 1 John is an eyewitness of Jesus Christ or not. This inquiry is based on the declarations of the author in 1:1-3 when he says:

That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched—this we proclaim concerning the Word of life. The life appeared; we have seen it and testify to it, and we proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and has appeared to us. We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ (NIV).

One of the arguments von Wahlde brings up is that the author appears too far away in time to have been an eyewitness to Jesus' ministry. Implicitly, the argument is saying that the author of the letter cannot be John the apostle because as a contemporary of Jesus, it is not possible for John the apostle to have lived up to the time when this letter was written. Whereas the claims of the author of the epistle to have seen and heard and touched [Jesus] provide good premises to the school of thought that argues for a common authorship of the epistle and the Gospel, for von Wahlde, it is unlikely that these utterances in 1 John were from the apostle.

Von Wahlde's argument that the author appeared too far off in time to have been an eyewitness of Jesus is limited. We do not know for sure when the letter was written. We do not also know for sure how long John the son of Zebedee lived. There is no hypothesis to assert that he could not have lived long enough to the time that the letter was written. So, dismissing his



authorship of the letter on account of age limitation can only be a matter of conjecture that is difficult to verify.

One major area evoked by arguments against John the apostle's authorship of the letter is the diverse vocabulary in the letter and the gospel. The Gospel is said to reflect the language, thoughts and customs of Palestinian Judaism whereas the epistle reflects a Hellenistic vocabulary. Stott (1964) brings out some of the most important terms of the epistle and points out that they do not appear in the Gospel. Words such as *κοινωνίαν* (fellowship 1:3), *ἱλασμός* (propitiation 2:2), *χρῖσμα* (anointing 2:20), etc are some of the key words on which the argument of the epistle is constructed but these words are not found in the Gospel. Furthermore, some of the key words that are found in both the epistle and the Gospel tend to have different contextual meanings. Stott gives the following examples.

1. *Λόγος* in the Gospel refers to the 'only begotten Son' thus to a specific person. The same term in the epistle is impersonal in use and refers to the life bringing gospel: *λόγος της ζωής* (1.1)
2. *Παράκλητος* in the Gospel designates the Holy Spirit, the comforter and in the epistle it refers to Jesus Christ, our advocate: *ὁ παράκλητος* (1 John 2.1)
3. In the Gospel, Jesus is described as the true light, the light of the world (John 1:9) and in the epistle; it is God who is the light (1 John 1:5).

It will be too quick at this point to accept or dismiss these arguments against a joint authorship of the Gospel of John and the epistle of 1 John. Nevertheless, before we examine arguments for a common authorship, it is necessary to cross examine the view that it is not John the apostle who wrote the letter.

The argument using the author's diverse use of vocabulary as its premise for a non common authorship can be easily rebutted. It can be said that the different contexts and audiences necessitated a change of vocabulary. The letter which addressed the heretics reflected their own vocabulary, worldview and claims and it can be considered necessary for John to speak in a language where they would understand in order to redress their claims. In

other words, the author's use of words in the letter is echoic. He re-echoes the terms and idioms of the heretics and such a style possibly will have been sarcastic. It is also possible that an author can further develop his ideas and grow in his vocabulary under mitigated circumstances. In modern times, this is seen through 'revised versions' of books where authors come back to update, improve or even change their once held opinions. Thus arguments against a common authorship that evoke language and style might be owed to lack of details about the further development of the author than are necessary right.

No matter how hard and meticulous scholarship tries to disambiguate the authorship behind 1 John, there is always enough grounds that lead one to counter arguments. It is therefore probably necessary at some point to take to Lieu's insinuation to suspend the quest for the author's identity when she prefers the anonymous option. One should concede here that taking such an option will dim some of the meaning within the text given that knowing the author places one at a vantage point to interpret his message.

In spite of the apparent difficulty to ascertain the author of 1 John, most conservative scholars have associated the epistle with John the apostle who is also considered as the writer of the Gospel of John (Westcott 1966; Guthrie 1970; Marshall 1978; Keener 1993; Ladd 1993; Kruse 2000; Rensberger 2001; Harris 2002; Wood 2006; Mac Arthur 2007; Painter 2010; Cereghin 2011). This conclusion is drawn largely from what has been called 'internal evidence'. One way to adduce evidence and make sense of an author's meaning is to determine whether what is stated in the manuscript is consistent with an author's vocabulary, style and theology. This is largely the basis on which 1 John has been attributed to the gospel writer by most scholars.

### ***2.2.2 Internal evidence for the author of 1 John***

It was a common practice in the Greco-Roman world for writers to provide their names and that of their addressees at the beginning of their letter. Only 1 John and Hebrews in the New Testament deviate from this norm, leaving

scholars with the option of determining the author from other evidences found in the text. Despite Lieu's earlier contention (2008) against trying to conjecture an author for 1 John who has not been named, she however concedes that the only parameter to agree or disagree with a particular suggestion about who an author is will be to carefully consider evidence in the text. Thus, she argues her case from evidences presented in the text when she says 'since there are no explicit claims to authorship, issues of style and of language as well as theology have played a major role here'. Lieu argues that one area that raises doubt of a common authorship is that some key terms of the Gospel such as glory are not found in the letter (2008:8). In spite of the absence of such key terms in the letter there are enough grounds of similarities that suggest a common authorship. I shall now discuss these grounds in the following section.

#### *2.2.2.1 Similarities between the Gospel of John and the epistle of 1 John*

There is significant resemblance of the gospel of John and the epistle of 1 John. MacArthur (2007:3) observes similarities of pairs of contrast present in the Gospel and in the Letter. He notes that the concepts of light and darkness; love and hate, truth and lies, children of God and children of the devil etc present themselves in antithetical opposition to each other in both the Gospel and the letter. This pairing of similar antithetical concepts both in the Gospel and the letter is an affirmative pointer to the premise that both books touch on the same source, the author.

Apart from the sharp contrast of similar or identical concepts, the diction of both books is very close. There is a significant overlap of the use of the same words, concepts and phrases in both the Gospel and the epistle that constrain the scholar to the inclination that a common author is at the basis of this. Taylor (1994: 2) gives a list of words and phrases that stand out clearly in both the Gospel and the letter in witness of a common authorship. He observes the occurrence of the following analogous phrases in the Gospel and the epistle:

- To do truth (1 John 1:6, John 3:21)
- To walk in darkness ( 1John 2:11, John 8:12)
- Children of God ( 1John 3:2, John 11:52)
- To be born of God (1 John 3:9; John 1:13)
- Children of the devil (1 John 3:10; John 8:44)
- The Spirit of truth (1 John 4:6; John 14:17, 15:26, 16:13)
- The only begotten Son (1 John 4:9; John 3:16, 18)
- The water and the blood (1 John 5:6; John 19:34)

The question however still remains to be answered on whether the occurrence of words, concepts and phrases that stand out in such closeness could just be the result of mere coincidence. 'The debate has been made more complicated by theories that the Gospel itself may be the result of layers of editing...' (Lieu 2008:8). So, Lieu brings out the argument in scholarship that 1 John could be the result of a particular redactor in the construction of the Johannine tradition (2008:8). This argument is echoed by different scholars (Painter 2010:345; Smith 1991) as they see Johannine literature (the epistles of John, the Gospel of John and Revelations) as produced by a school, 'shaped by the vocabulary, idiom, point of view, and worldview of a single seminal teacher'. Painter argues that if the Johannine corpus was seen in this way, then one or several of them would be responsible for the writing of the epistle of 1 John.

Other scholars have gone further to see the epistles of John as an expansion and explanation of the Gospel. Whereas this submission is strongly disputed, the view of both books as coming from the same source pretty much finds a concord amongst scholars. Westcott (1966) sees the Gospel as a starting point and inspiration for the material of the letter. The author of the Gospel narrates what he saw as an eyewitness in the Gospel and in the letter; he is explaining what the gospel should mean for practical Christianity. In other words, if the Gospel is an enunciation of the truth, the letter is the text of application of that truth. Kruse advises that it is better 'to take with utmost seriousness the claims of the author to be one of a number of elderly people all of whom had been with Jesus during his early ministry who were still alive

when the author wrote this letter' (2000:11). Kruse's comments ostensibly point to the paternal way in which the author addresses his audience. He calls them 'little children' which reflects that he is an elderly man and thus possibly a contemporary of Jesus Christ. If we take Kruse's comment seriously, we will be disposed to the view that such an elderly figure is John the son of Zebedee, the apostle of the Lord. Cereghin (2011:9) further brings out a comparison of parallel phrases in both the letter and the gospel to argue for a common authorship. Amongst others, he brings out the following phrases which appear to be the key concepts that propel the development of the author's themes in both books:

Epistle		Gospel
1:1	the word	1:1
1:2	Christ manifested	1:14
1:5	light	1:7-9
2:6,28	abiding in Christ	15:4,7
2:8a	new commandment	13:34a
2:8b	light in darkness	1:5
2:13	knowing God	17:3
3:1	sons of God	1:12
3:2	seeing Christ	17:24
3:11	love one another	13:34b
4:12	God not seen	1:18

Counter arguments against these similarities have attributed this to mere coincidence but such arguments do not explain why the occurrence of such coincidence appears quite elaborate in both books. One is constrained by the many points of convergence in both books to see them as the work of the same author.

### 2.2.2.2 *The tone of the letter*

Tone refers to the attitude or mood a speaker adopts when he makes declarations. In this regard, 1 John is articulated with an air of confidence, certainty and authority. The epistemic mood of confidence occurs both in the letter and the Gospel and this is clearly seen in 1 John 3:14: *ἡμεῖς οἶδαμεν ὅτι μεταβεβήκαμεν ἐκ τοῦ θανάτου εἰς τὴν ζωὴν* (We know that we have passed from death to life, NIV). We see a parallel to this mood in John 5:24: *μεταβέβηκεν ἐκ τοῦ θανάτου εἰς τὴν ζωὴν* (he has crossed over from death to life). In John 1:14b, the author writes 'we have beheld his glory': *ἐθεασάμεθα*; and this compares with 1 John 1:1 'we have seen with our eyes': *ὁ ἐθεασάμεθα*. Although the context of these utterances differ and consequently the interpretation, we are interested in the attitude of the author who speaks with confidence and authority in the different contexts. The confidence of the author of 1 John stems from the fact that he has been an eyewitness to what he is writing about, hence, 'that which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched' (1:1NIV). Sproston (1992:52) thinks that the author's 'appropriation to himself of these verbs of perception and proclamation demonstrates that "what was from the beginning... concerning the word of life' (1.1) has remained unchanged, is therefore reliable, and will be the burden of the witness he himself is about to give'. Sproston's comments appear to be suggesting that the author does not really aim to describe his physical experience of Jesus but uses the words as a literary device to buttress his credentials and assert a *locus standi* from which he is exhorting his audience. On the other hand Phillips (2003) argues that the author has written to remind the church about the deity of Jesus Christ. For Phillips, the author is John who is not only very close to the Lord but happens to be a cousin to him in his earthly relationships. Phillips' argument that the author physically experienced Jesus is more plausible especially when we consider the reasons that provoked the writing of the Letter. He is writing to refute a Gnostic teaching which claims that the Christ did not come physically but only appeared to be so. John's argument about having seen Jesus is an evidential argument that denies such an erroneous claim of Gnostic teaching

and points to an ocular proof namely: 'we have seen with our eyes'. Thus, I think the words of perception that the author uses are not just a rhetorical form but an insinuation to the physical existence of the Christ.

The claim of an eye witness will be credited more if the one making the claim is an apostle. It is the tone of one who sees himself during the foundational establishment of the church. Such authority can only come from one who has been with Jesus Christ together (Guthrie 1970:864). The claim of an eyewitness and for having touched Jesus appears to be an echo to Jesus' call to Thomas to stop doubting and believe Him as stated in the gospel: 'Put your finger here, see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe' (John 20: 27 NIV). The epistle does not say anything to suggest this view but if we take it as granted that John the apostle wrote the letter, we would agree that he was in the gathering of believers when Jesus spoke these words to Thomas when he suspected that he might not be physically living. John will be able to recall such a situation and juxtapose it with a parallel suspicion that he was now confronting.

We have seen that the mood of the letter is epistemic, one of certainty marked by the occurrence of the phrase 'we know,' several times in the letter. Besides this mood of certainty, the authority of the author is further seen in his choice of words. He addresses the audience as 'my dear children' (2:1). Such affectionate terms indicate that the author had a close relationship with his audience and would be pretty recognized. No other apostle would be credited with this than John given the close similarities between the letter and the gospel of John. It is important to note here that orthodoxy during the time of receiving 1 John would have been to go back to the apostles and find out what they proclaimed given that there was not yet an agreed canon. The argument of the author appealing to closeness with Jesus Christ is ascertaining his readers about this standard of orthodoxy that should ensue only from an apostle or his teachings.

#### *2.2.2.3 Theological themes common to the letter and the Gospel*

Most of the themes treated in 1John appear in the gospel of John. 'First John focuses on selected subjects from the Gospel' (Rensberger 2001:11). One of the main themes treated in both the letter and the gospel is that of eternal life. Like the Gospel, 'one of the purposes of the epistle is to reassure Christians who have rejected the Gnostic higher light that they may know that they have eternal life' (Ladd 1993:661). The theme of eternal life inundates the gospel of John too. 'The Gospel was written so that the readers could have eternal life (salvation), whereas the epistle was written so that the readers could know that they have eternal life' (Derrickson 1993:91).

Both the epistle and the gospel lay emphasis on Christian life. They speak of 'entrance into the Christian life as a new birth, being begotten by God, having a seed of God planted in one's inner being (2:29, 3:9, 4:7, 5:1, 4:18)', (Ladd 1993:664). The emphasis on the Christian life as a new birth is very glaring in John 3:3. The analogous treatment of themes in both the epistle and the gospel is not just mere coincidence. It is an echo of a teaching from the same author who can't resist building up his thoughts on the foundational thoughts expressed earlier in the gospel.

Phillips (2003:24) gives a distinction between the letter and the gospel. He argues that the major emphasis of the gospel is to show the deity of Jesus Christ and the major emphasis of the letter is to show the humanity of Jesus. His argument makes sense because the author wrote at different times in history and was motivated by different circumstances to write. The two books are therefore bound to have different emphasis but at the same time maintaining some distinctive similarities and differences. They are similar because they are written by the same author and this is reflected in some of the expressions he is using. They are different because they belong to two different genres and are motivated by different reasons to be written. The different genre and situation that has caused the writing warrants a change in some degree of the language and style of the author. If this be the case, the author of the letter will be John, the apostle, whose credentials will make his exhortations more authoritative.



### **2.2.3 External evidence for the author of 1 John**

The ecclesiastical writers of the second century attest that 1 John is the work of John the apostle. Irenaeus, Polycarp, Papias, Origen and Dionysius have all cited the epistle and referred to it as an epistle from John (Guthrie 1970: 864-865). Irenaeus particularly is seen as the defender of orthodox faith and tried to oppose Gnostic views (Liftin 2007:83-84). Mac Arthur (2007) cites the particular instance of Irenaeus quoting 1 John and directly associating the letter with the apostle John. Irenaeus' 'list of apostolic writing included not only four Gospels but also the Pauline corpus... and in all probability 1 John and 1 Peter' (Mckim 2007:559). Thomas (1995:72) takes it as a given that the designated Elder of 2 and 3 John is the same person who wrote 1 John. Thus for him, all Johannine corpus were written by John, the Elder who is also the apostle of the Lord.

Irenaeus' contemporaries like Clement of Alexandria and Tertullian also associate the letter with John. 'Tertullian (died AD 215) quotes 1 John more than 40 times and refers to it as the work of the Apostle John' and Clement of Alexandria (died ca. AD 220) not only quotes John a number of times but attributes this to John the Apostle...' (Harris 2002: 10). MacArthur further argues that the Muratorian canon (the second century canon of Scriptures) attributed the letter of 1 John to the apostle John.

However, Eusebius's comments on a statement said to be coming from Papias who was also a disciple of John nurtures another school of thought that attributes the authorship of the letter to a referent called John the Elder. MacArthur (2007:5) mentions the instance where Eusebius quotes Papias as having said:

If ever anyone came who had followed the presbyters, I inquired into the words of the presbyters, what Andrew or Peter or Philip or Thomas or James or John or Matthew, or any other of the Lord's disciples had said, and what

Aristion and the presbyter John, the Lord's disciples, were saying.

In the quotation, Papias mentions John twice thus creating the impression that there are two referents designated by that name. If that be the case, then we will have to identify which of these two is the author of the letter. But both MacArthur and Marshall (1978) express doubt that Papias could have had two referents in mind. They argue that John is mentioned again with Aristion because both of them were still alive and the others in the list were already dead. MacArthur says 'he repeats the word presbyter before naming John again to show that he is referring to the John he had previously described as one of the elders (presbyters) (2007:5). One can argue that since many of the early church writers like Irenaeus showed knowledge of only one referent called John, and given the argument put up by MacArthur and Marshall amongst others, John the Elder and John designate the same referent. He is John, the son of Zebedee who was the apostle of the Lord.

Many manuscripts have titled the epistle with the name of John. Westcott (1966) cites some of the most credible manuscripts and the title as follows: Codex Vaticanus B and Codex Alexandrus A have all titled the letter as *Ιωαννου α, Of John 1*. In Codex Sinaiticus **Σ**, the title is 'John' and is further defined as epistle the first epistle of John. In Codex Angelicus L, the letter is titled as 'the catholic epistle of the holy apostle John'. Given the consistency of the most credible manuscripts to refer to the letter as coming from John, it further adds good evidence to attest that the author of the letter is John.

Lieu (2008) sees in the attribution of 1 John to the apostle as a thought of the 20<sup>th</sup> century than of earlier scholarship. 'In parts of the church, 1 John was not given canonical authority as quickly as was the Gospel' (2008:8). Lieu however admits that 'the manuscript evidence is almost unanimous in identifying the three writings [letters of John] by these labels and in their present canonical order' (2008: ix). She finally concedes that 'in whatever way and at whatever point the association of any of the Johannine writings with

John began, there was never any alternative tradition of authorship despite the anonymity of all four texts' (2008:2).

There is therefore a pretty concord in attributing 1 John to be the writing of John the apostle who also wrote the Gospel of John. No strong evidence has been put forward against this submission. Although Lieu argues for the anonymity of the author to be respected, there are no signals that in the event that the identity is unveiled the author will be anyone else other than John the apostle. It is an argument of silence than one of an alternative view. That argument must at some point be suspended when we admit that understanding the background of an author of a letter helps inform the reader better. The argument that the author uses the first person plural pronoun thus he is not the Gospel writer finds an answer with Griffith's response (1998: 256):

It seems natural, then, to take the first person plural 'If we say/claim' (ἐάν ἔπωμεν) as a *pluralis sociativus*, which was widely used in Greek literature as a means by which the writer or speaker 'brings the reader (or hearer) into association with his own action.

The background understanding of the author helps in clarifying the meaning of his communication. Given the overwhelming tendency in scholarship that agrees with common authorship between the letter and the Gospel and the absence of any strong alternative author, I adopt the view that John the author of the Gospel also wrote 1 John. The writer of this letter therefore is an apostle of the Lord and this is credential information that reinforces the need to heed the exhortations in the letter. The identity of the author is even more necessary for a letter that has been described as 'catholic' if the reader needs to appropriate the message for himself. This is relevant for a church that emphasizes on orthodoxy reflected in a doctrinal persuasion that is described as traditional such as the Kom Baptist Church. The Johannine authorship of the letter also means that one can employ the Gospel to shed light on, and

even confirm interpretations of issues of challenge in the examination of the letter.

### **2.3 Date and place of writing**

Having taken as granted that the author of 1 John is the apostle John, many scholars consider that the letter was written around the same time as the Gospel of John within the last decade of the first century (Westcott 1966; Lieu 2008; Painter 2010; Cereghin 2011). The pointer to this conclusion comes from the particular kind of heresy decried in the letter (1 John 4:3). Most interpreters believe that the heresy was instigated by Cerinthus who lived and taught it in Asia Minor at the end of the first century (Westcott 1966).

John lived in Jerusalem after the death of Christ until after the events preceding the destruction of the Temple in AD 70. Many believers fled from Jerusalem at that time and John fled to Ephesus. 'Irenaeus, a disciple of John's disciple Polycarp, tells us that the apostle continued in the church at Ephesus until the times of Trajan...' (Jackman1988:12). The epistles of John were written at this time that John sojourned in Ephesus. 'Miniscule 1751 contains the subscription "end of the first epistle which was written from Ephesus"...Miniscule 607 and 1838 have the subscription 'written from Ephesus' (Yarbough 2008: 13). These are evidences to show that the letter was written from Ephesus.

It will suffice to note here that the letter was written towards the end of the first century. Lewis (2005) proposes the dates of A.D. 100-115 but Westcott (1966), Kruse (2000), MacArthur (2007) and Marshall (1978) amongst others date the letter within the last decade of the first century.

### **2.4 Recipients**

One of the things that make the interpretation of 1 John difficult is the non identification of the recipients of the letter by the author. The early ecclesiastical writers like Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria and Eusebius

indicated that John was in Ephesus when he wrote the letter. The churches to which the letter was addressed were located in Asia Minor near John's home church in Ephesus (MacArthur 2007:10). This view is corroborated by Painter (2010:346) when he affirms that the epistle was written in Asia and 'it provides evidence that the gospel had spread beyond the limits of Judaism so that John's church was by no means Jewish but it reflects the reality of Christianity in Ephesus in the last decade of the first century'.

One key issue that lingers and creates a nuance in the interpretation of the letter is the identity of the churches to which it was sent. There is the need to understand whether the epistle was designated to be read only in these churches or it was intended to be read as a circular letter. The epistle has been classified as 'catholic' and this points to the direction that the letter was intended for a wider circulation. The view of a wider circulation is adopted by Kruse (2000:4) who sees the letter as a circular letter addressed to a number of loosely related churches having some links with the author. These churches form together what has become known in scholarship as the Johannine community.

The Johannine community points to a tradition that encapsulates the theological thought patterns, terminology, style and language attributed to John. Those who adhered to the Johannine teachings became known as the Johannine community. Raymond Brown (1979) analyses for us the historical development of this community. In his conceptualization, the community evolved through four stages: the pre-Gospel phase, the Gospel phase, the Epistles' phase and the After Epistles phase (Brown 1979:165-166). The pre-Gospel phase consisted of Jews who believed in Jesus but without a strong Christological adherence on Him. Then a second group of Jews became part of the community, opposing the temple institutional beliefs and going ahead to convert Samaritans and to bring them in to belong within the community. Then later on, the Gentiles were also converted and they joined the community. The Christological perception of Jesus as the Messiah grew so strong although this was not generally accepted in the community. Those who adhered

strongly to the Temple saw those who stood for Jesus as the Mosaic Messiah as an aberrant group and thus expelled them from the Temple.

The Gospel phase of the development of the Johannine community saw the community move from its central location in Palestine to the Diasporas with the mission to convert Jews and Gentiles outside Palestine. Brown (1979:62) describes three groups: the world, the Jews and followers of John the Baptist who did not believe in the claims of the community members. The world rejected Jesus so too did the Jews. The Jews are those who belong to the synagogues and drove out those members of the synagogue who believed in Jesus. There was another group referred to as the Crypto-Christians. These were Jews who believed in Jesus but remained in the Temple and were afraid to declare their faith openly.

The Epistle phase of the community refers to that time when the community began to experience some internal tension. This tension was centred on some proto-Gnostic teaching that put some members of the community at odds to understand what the right way to go was. Other members of the community were already swept away by these teachings. These teachings were centred on Christology and ethics. First John was written to address these internal issues and to encourage members of the community to stay together and avoid erroneous doctrines. It was intended to pre-empt further fragmentation of the community thus strengthen the unity of members in the community.

The After-Epistle phase of the community was during the second century and during this time, those who had seceded from the community moved into incipient Gnosticism and the perception of the Gospel of John as orthodox.

First John is addressed to members of this Johannine community. It was a community tottering on the brink of fragmentation orchestrated by erroneous Christological and ethical teachings. It was a community with a mixture of different cultures. It had evolved across time from its nucleic Jewish membership to include Samaritans and Gentiles. The stitches that held the seams of this community together were to be found only on a strong and true Christological belief and an adequate ethical conduct within the community.

Other scholars have subscribed in part or in full to Brown's analysis. One pivotal area that all seem to agree on is the recognition of the influence of the Gospel as the basis for the views of the opponents. Moloney (2003) re-enacts Brown's theory of the community agreeing with his analysis and the four stages development of the community. Kruse (2000) saw the community as a number of loosely related churches in fellowship with the authors of the letters, sharing an adherence to Christianity reflected in the Gospel. Kruse's submission agrees with Brown's second stage in the development of the community namely the Gospel phase where community members spread into the diasporas. Conway's admission (2002) that the tension in the community was generated by the lash out of the Jews i.e. the religious authorities who were harsh to members of the community echoes Brown's submission that the community faced tension, mainly because of a lack of consensus on Christology and a denial of the Temple institution by Jewish members of the community, Samaritans and Gentiles who believed in this Christology.

Painter (2008:76) sees the Johannine community as a network of house churches all belonging to a Johannine school. These churches were located in the same region and the writer had closer contact with some of the churches than others. Although Painter agrees that the community was a network of churches, he adds that they were located in the same region thus partly disagreeing with Brown's postulate of the movement from a central location in Palestine to the Diasporas, notably Ephesus. For Painter, the Johannine community was created by the Johannine School charged with shaping and disseminating the Johannine vision (2008:76).

Smalley (1984) sees the community as made up of three groups. The first group is composed of Jewish Christians who face the challenge to understand the Messiahship of Jesus Christ. The second group is composed of Hellenistic Christians influenced with a dualist world view and facing the challenge to believe the humanity of Jesus and thus inclining towards a docetic view of Jesus. The third group is a mix of the first two groups. Smalley however agrees with Brown that the views of the opponents are derived from their

reading of the Gospel. The class of Hellenistic Christians will contain the category of Gentiles mentioned in Brown's analysis.

The Johannine community idea is a scholarly construct. The basis of the methodology of deriving the features of the community has been a point of debate. Most of the information about the community has been derived mainly through historical criticism and mirror reading of the Johannine corpus. One therefore has to concede here that reconstructing events in history cannot always be accurate. There are always some 'reasoned conjectures and assessments of comparative possibilities' in historical criticism (Marshall 1977:127) thus the limitation to ascertain the composition of the Johannine community through this method. On the other hand, mirror-reading a text can always engender some unjustified assumptions or unwanted inferences. This also tends to weaken the arguments about the Johannine community derived through this method. Nonetheless, the Johannine corpus suggests that its audience was not a single church but a group of churches. First John for example has no explicit addressees and is thought of as a circular letter for a group of churches. Second John is addressed to 'the elect lady and her children' and 3 John is addressed to 'the beloved Gaius'. Revelations addresses the 'seven churches'. Taken as a given that it is the same author who wrote all these books, his audience suggests several groups of churches in different places. This strengthens the argument that the Johannine community though heterogeneous was an all inclusive audience. Secondly, the themes developed in the Johannine corpus suggest an audience that includes both Jews and non Jews. Brown's reconstruction of the original audience of John lends credence to such an all inclusive audience that stretches from Palestine to Ephesus. Most of the other theories about the Johannine community are a reworked versions of Brown's theory thus making his theory as the point of departure for this scholarly construct.

Two key issues that prompted the writing of the epistle ensue from the discussions about the Johannine community. These issues are the Christology and the tension orchestrated by the different ethnic and/or cultural and intellectual layers represented in the community. The Gospel of John is



seen to be at the centre of the understanding and thought patterns of members of the community and different groups within the community perceived and appropriated different epistemological interpretations of the Gospel. The author of the epistle sees it incumbent on his part to write to impart the 'right' understanding about these issues. The second key issue is ethical. Divergent views about the Messiah nurtured tension in the community. The strong and prescriptive stance of Jewish religious authorities about the Christ triggered a dichotomy in the community by pitting those on the one hand who thought that their philosophical understanding of the Christ was superior. The situation is made cumbersome by the multi-cultural layers of the community with the Gentiles and some Jews on the one hand and the Jewish authorities and other Jews on the other hand.

As it will be shown in a later chapter five, the Kom Baptist community exhibits parallels with the Johannine community. Although originally the Baptist church in Kom was composed mainly of indigenous people, it has grown across time to include people of different ethnic groupings and nationalities. The growth of urbanization and the increasing cosmopolitan nature of the villages and towns in the Kom area has nurtured layers of intercultural groupings within the church. There is increasingly a membership of the church that is learned unlike the predominantly illiterate membership during the early days of the church. This growth warrants a strong Christian identity over ethnic and cultural identities that make up the church. Such a strong Christian identity will invariably be based on a strong faith in Jesus as the Christ and an ethical conduct that agrees and is commensurate to that knowledge. The Kom Baptist Church community is par excellence a replica of the community to which 1 John was addressed thus the relevancy of its message to this community.

## **2.5 Motivating circumstances**

### ***2.5.1 Situation***

The situation that provoked the writing of 1 John is derived mostly from a mirror reading of the text and as such scholars have had varied arguments about the circumstances that motivated the writing of the Letter. Lieu for example thinks that 'the author's concern consistently is not what is going on outside but with the internal commitment and adherence of those to whom the letter is written' (2008:11). Griffith on her part sees the letter as 'the product of a continuing debate between Jews and Jewish-Christians over whether Jesus was the Messiah at the time when some Jewish-Christians belonging to Johannine Christianity had reverted to Judaism' (2002:2). Griffith further believes that the letter has pastoral rather than polemical concerns (1998). It will make more sense to integrate the different schools of thought about the writing of the letter so as to maximize the dividends of reading it. This will entail viewing the letter as addressed to a church community to encourage them against a backdrop of external doctrinal pressure but also as a way of counteracting the perpetrators of the wrong doctrine.

In spite of the points of divergence that have characterized the perception of the situation behind this letter amongst scholars, most of them agree that there was a situation in the author's community that centered on a proper acknowledge of Jesus as the Christ (Lieu 2008, Kruse 2000, Marshall 1978). Kruse (2005:15) builds on what he calls 'reasonable mirror reading hypothesis' to construct the situation behind the writing of the letter as follows.

- Some people have left from the community the author is addressing. This is evident where the author says, 'they went out from us but they did not really belong to us for if they had belonged to us they would have remained with us; but their going showed that none of them belonged to us (2:19 NIV).
- The reason why a group of people left from the community is because they held different views about Jesus Christ (4:1-3).
- Some secessionists appear to have undertaken an itinerant ministry among the churches (2:18-19, 26).
- The secessionists were detested by the author for their teaching (2:22, 23) and for their behaviour (2:11, 3:15, 4:8, 4:20).

Streett (2011:7-8) highlights five scholarly views on the identity of the secessionist:

- The secessionists are Gnostics who stress their advanced knowledge advocating for libertinism and perfectionism and regarding matter as evil.
- The secessionists are docetists who hold that Jesus Christ was not truly flesh and blood human being but only appeared to be so.
- The secessionists hold to a separation Christology which distinguishes the human being Jesus from the Christ as a divine Spirit-being.
- The secessionists deemphasize or devalue Jesus' historical ministry and atoning death while emphasizing the Son's glory and pre-existence.
- The secessionists are apostate Jews or Judaizers (i.e. judaizing gentiles) who have forsaken their confession of Jesus as the Messiah and have left the community to return to Judaism.

One of the key concerns of the letter therefore is to address a form of proto-Gnosticism that had crept into the community of the author, which is also the concern of the gospel of John (Morris 1995: 57). It can be said that the views about the opponents are not mutually exclusive of one another but there are elements in the different views that find some interplay amongst themselves. The letter has been interpreted as 'a response to an intra-Christian dispute, the details which are filled out by reference to later second-century CE heresies' (Griffith 2002:1). The writing of the letter is therefore orchestrated by teachings in the Christian community by the secessionists which are in opposition to the one traditionally held by the author. Scholars agree that there were two kinds of heresies here. The common error of these heretical teaching was to downplay the humanity of the Christ. Apparently influenced by the dualistic worldview of the environment where the spiritual was seen to be essentially good and sublime and the material as essentially bad and evil, these teachings questioned how the Christ could condescend to inhabit the material body. Docetism, one form of the heresies taught that Jesus was not really the Christ but only appeared to be so. Cerinthianism on its part taught

that the Christ came down to the man Jesus during his baptism and left just before his suffering and death. The Christ did not therefore suffer. For the author of 1 John, such a teaching was erroneous and a doctrine that came from the antichrist himself: 'Every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist which you have heard is coming and even now is already in the world' (4:3, NIV).

The consequences of a wrong understanding of Christology would be manifested in wrong behaviour. The author seems to be saying that ethical behaviour is the product of right knowledge. Instilling virtuous living in people will require imparting the right understanding of doctrine in them. A dualistic world view tended to nurture a carefree attitude for the believers leading to what Griffith (2000) calls apostasy. A right Christological understanding will free people from such ignorance which was paradoxically perceived as wisdom.

'The letter represents a sustained effort to prevent further apostasy among Johannine Christians by strengthening their identity and cohesion...This aim is achieved through: a) a call to maintain foundational confession of Johannine Christianity, namely that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God (as in John 20:31); b) an appeal to strengthen fellowship with one another by obedience to the command to love one another; c) a strong warning to avoid idols (Griffith 2002:1-2).

The vocabulary of the letter is a good indication of the circumstances surrounding its writing. Von Wahlde points out words like anointing (2:20), antichrist (2:18, 22, 4:3), Jesus as the 'paraclete' (2:1), coming in the water and in the blood (5:6-7). 'All of these, support that 1 John was composed in a time of crisis and of great emotion' (2010:23). Evidently, this is strong symbolic language with a tone of urgency. But in the midst of such strong words, Jesus is described as the 'paraclete' (comforter) signaling to the

reader that there is impending danger but there is some source of hope nevertheless.

The view that 1 John is essentially polemical is erroneous. It has been demonstrated that there are significant portions of the letter that are intended to exhort members of the author's community to ethical conduct that is commensurate to the knowledge they profess. Griffith (1998) asserts for a non-polemical reading of the letter. For her, 'it is far more likely that 1:5-2:11, indeed the whole of 1 John, has a pastoral rather than a polemical outlook, since nowhere are the views of opponents positively stated and refuted' (1998: 255). Griffith (2002:2) further elaborates on a non polemical view of the epistle. She maintains that the letter has pastoral rather than polemical claims. It is the author's effort to prevent apostasy and he achieves this through the call on his audience to appropriate the right knowledge of Christology. The author also seeks to strengthen the fellowship by calling on members of the community to exercise love towards one another and warns them against idols which presumably can be the source of discord amongst them. Scholarship in its attempt to establish the situation behind 1 John might be over reading the situation and imputing into the letter.

Bruce (1994) corroborates Griffith's view when he says that both the form and content of the letter portray a message of encouragement to an audience who were 'perplexed and bewildered by recent happenings in their midst' (1994:29). Bruce further substantiates his viewpoint by suggesting that in form, the letter is delivered in homiletic style thus its pastoral leanings. Streett (2011:121) sees the letter in the same light viz., a pastoral letter and says 'the author writes not to correct his audience or to combat the secessionists or false teachers but rather to encourage his audience to maintain their faithfulness to the message'.

Nevertheless, Painter (2008:4) sees the whole epistle as polemical with the intentions of setting 'tests that distinguish the true from the false'. The view of the letter as essentially polemical suggests that the letter is destined to refute the views of the false teachers. A polemical reading of the letter sees it as an

attack on the false teachers and the secessionists. Other scholars take a middle position here and see in the letter both as an attempt to attack and refute the erroneous teachings of the secessionists and false teachers but also as an encouragement for members of the author's community. This is the position of Ladd (1993), MacArthur (2007), and Rensberger (2006).

The letter is addressed to members of the author's community but through it he alludes to the problem of the schism in the community. It makes good sense to adopt the middle position and see the letter as an attempt to reprimand wrong teaching and unethical behaviour. In rebuking wrong behaviour, the author is at the same time exhorting members of the community to exercise love and show proof that they live in the light. The letter therefore has more of pastoral concerns although at the same time it reprimands recalcitrant people around the community. John is prompted by the need to strengthen ethical conduct within the community and to correct and discard erroneous conceptions about the Christ. These conceptions advocated for knowledge which to the false teachers was not just an intellectual apprehension but a mystical experience. This type of teaching encouraged the disregard for one another and saw in the material world as darkness. John's purpose is to refute such arguments but also to bring encouragement to members of the community and kindle the value of human relations through love in his community.

### ***2.5.2 Purpose***

The question of John's purpose in writing the letter has been touched considerably in the preceding section. Nonetheless, it will be necessary to buttress the point here.

The author sees Christology as the foundational aspect of the Christian faith. The letter is therefore orchestrated by the need to help instil the right knowledge about the Christ and Christian virtues and attitudes to its audience. One key concern of the letter would be to inculcate the value of love among

members of its audience. The apostolic witness wants to highlight the ‘vision of the Christian life as growing in conformity to the pattern of Jesus’ self-disposing love’ (Wagner 2011: 30).

The purpose clauses are a good indication of the intentions of the letter. They are marked by the Greek particle ὅτι, which is translated in English with the conjunction: because, so that and that. Thus, John writes to his audience for the following purposes:

- So that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ (1:3 NIV).
- So that you will not sin. But if any one does sin we have One who speaks to the Father in our defence—Jesus Christ the Righteous One (2:1)
- Because your sins have been forgiven on account of his name (2:12)
- So that you may know that you have eternal life (5:13)

From the above, we can say generally that the purpose of John’s letter was to strengthen his audience in their knowledge of Christ. He wrote to abate the spread of heresy within the Christian community and to encourage them to live out the values of the Christian faith notably the need to desist from sinning and to love one another.

## **2.6 Structure and genre of 1 John**

### ***2.6.1 Literary structure***

Literary structure refers to the arrangement of a book in an orderly and predictable fashion that makes its interpretation easier for readers. The themes of a book are often arranged within a conventional literary grid that shows the thought flow and development of the ideas of the author and how these ideas are connected with one another to form an overall cohesion of the whole book. In this regard, 1 John has been labelled as a book with no structure or as a book having either a very simple structure or a very complex one (Andrew 1990; Hansford 1992; Iver 1990; Lieu 2008; Ott 1990; Painter

2002; Wood 2006). The indication of this difficulty for establishing the structure of the book is 'the lack of consensus among scholars' (Thomas 1998: 369) and the spiral way in which the author moves back and forth with his ideas. Westcott (1966: xlvi) writing about this spiral nature of the epistle says:

It is extremely difficult to determine with certainty the structure of the epistle. No single arrangement is able to take account of the complex development of thought which it offers and of the many connections which exist between its different parts.

In spite of the expressed difficulty to establish a structure for the book, 'many scholars have sought to analyze the structure of 1 John based on the text and its natural divisions' (Wood 2006:5). Jackman (1988:18) thinks that 1 John has no need of an extensive structure as it has only one or two main themes around which it rotates. Given the few themes of the book the author has the ease to move from one to another in a spiral way. This has made the structural layout to be perceived as both simple and complex.

In spite of the divergent views to establish the structure of the book, scholars agree that in the structure, there is an obvious prologue (1:1-4) and a conclusion (5:13-21). The body of the letter is seen to have two main thoughts or parts that are intertwined in their treatment. This can be represented schematically as Nelson has done (1996:471) as follows:



Table 1: A schematic structure of 1 John

Focus	Basis of fellowship		Behaviour of fellowship	
Reference				
	1:1	2:15	2:28	5:4 5:21
Division	Condition for fellowship	Cautions to fellowship	Characteristics of fellowship	Consequences of fellowship
Topic	Meaning of fellowship		Manifestations of fellowship	
	Abiding in God's light		Abiding in God's love	
Location	Written in Ephesus			
Time	C. A. D 90			

Nelson divides the letter into two main parts viz. the basis of the fellowship (1:1-2:28) and behaviour in the fellowship (3:1-5:21). In the first section the author is defining what it means to be in fellowship and for him, being in fellowship means 'abiding in God's light'. In the second section he shows what character ensues from fellowshiping in the right way and which he describes as 'abiding in God's love'.

With regards to form, there is a tendency for the author to use tail head-linkages thus making the letter intertwined. A tail head-linkage is a discourse device where an author uses ideas from the theme recently developed into a new theme. It is like cutting the tail of a previous idea and making it the head of a new theme or section or paragraph of the book. This is seen in 1 John through its repetitive nature where the next theme is developed by repeating the ideas of the preceding theme. Von Wahlde (2010: 24) calls this 'catchword technique' and gives the following examples: In 1:3, ἀπαγγέλλομεν (proclaiming) is linked to ἀναγγέλλομεν (proclamation) in 1:5 that leads to a discussion of σκότει (darkness) in 1: 6a which leads to a discussion of ἁμαρτίας (sin) in 1: 7c. We can further see that the theme of sin introduced in the 1:8-10 becomes the topic of 2:1 (ἁμάρτητε—not sin; ἁμάρτη-if one sins). The theme of light started in 1:5-7 is carried forward in 2:9-11. The book therefore can be better structured from its thematic development such as Nelson (1982:472) has done:

#### Part 1 Basis of fellowship

- |                                  |            |
|----------------------------------|------------|
| 1. Introduction                  | 1:1- 4     |
| 2. Conditions for fellowship     | 1:5 – 2:14 |
| A. Walk in the light             | 1:5 – 7    |
| B. Confession of sin             | 1:8 – 2:2  |
| C. Obedience of his commandments | 2:3 – 6    |
| D. Love for one another          | 2:7-- 14   |
| 3. Cautions to fellowship        | 2:15 --17  |
| A. Love of the world             | 2:15--17   |
| B. Spirit of the Antichrist      | 2:18-- 27  |

#### Part 2 The behaviour of fellowship (2:28—5:21)

- |                                  |            |
|----------------------------------|------------|
| 1. Characteristics of fellowship | 2:28 – 5:3 |
| A. Purity of life                | 2:28 – 3:3 |
| B. Practice of righteousness     | 3:4 – 12   |
| C. Love in deed and truth        | 3:13 – 24  |
| D. Testing the spirits           | 4:1 – 6    |

E. Love as Christ love	4:7 – 5:3
2. Consequences of fellowship	5:4 – 21
A. Victory over the world	5:4, 5
B. Assurance of salvation	5:6 – 13
C. Guidance in prayer	5:14 -17
D. Freedom from habitual sin	5:18 -- 21

It is easy to see from the themes outline above how some of the themes override the book. For example, John writes about the love for one another in 2:7-14 and in 2:15-17, he restates the theme in a negative way i.e. exhorting them not to love the world. In 3:13-24 he comes back to the theme of love and truth and interrupts it with the methods to test the spirits. He goes back to the theme of love in 4:7-5:3. It is easy to see the pastoral concerns through this theme of love which meanders throughout the letter. Similarly, he begins talking about sin in 1:8-2:2 and then stops but goes back to it at the close of the letter in 5:18-21.

Other scholars think that 1 John is poetic (Brown 1982; Hansford 1992). It is the poetic nature of the letter that is at the root of its apparent lack of structure. Hansford (1992: 133) on the other hand argues that 1 John 'is a document whose structure is highly organized'. He proposes a three part division of the letter. These parts are based on their thematic thought flow than on the formal presentation of the letter. For Hansford, (1:1-7) probably identifies the author of the letter and consolidates his apostolic authority. He gives the heading of the second division as 'human action and Jesus' ministry on earth'. Examples of thoughts under this division include phrases such as 'if we say we have no sin' (1:8), 'he who loves his brother' (2:10), 'he was revealed (3:2) and '[God] sent his son' (4:10). The third division has the title of 'God's reaction and judgment on the content of column [division] two'. Examples that fall in this division include phrases such as: 'we deceive ourselves' (1:8), dwells in the light (2:10), that our sins he might bear (3:2) and 'a propitiation for our sins' (4:10). In this way, the letter is structured on its themes rather than linearly.

The poetic nature of the letter is evident in the use of sustained metaphors. The metaphors of 'walking in the light' and 'walking in darkness' are sustained implicitly in the whole letter. For example,

This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: God is light; in him there is no darkness at all. If we claim to have fellowship with him yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live by the truth. But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin (1:5-7, NIV).

The writer also used parallelism to develop his thoughts. For example,

The life appeared; we have seen it and testify to it, and we proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and has appeared to us (1:2). We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ (1:3).

Another example of synonymous parallelism is between 1:2a and with 1:3a. They are almost synonymous in propositional meaning. There is also an example of antithetical parallelism between 1:6 and 1:7. 'If we claim to have fellowship with him yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live by the truth' (verse 6), 'but if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin' (verse 7). This juxtaposes 'walk in the darkness' in 1:6 with 'walk in the light' in 1:7 helping to highlight the anti thesis of the declaration. In other words, 'we lie and do not walk in the light' (1:6) is opposite in meaning to 'we have fellowship with one another and the blood of Jesus his Son purifies us from all sin' (1:7).

The letter has its own structure and it will be better to seek to understand its structure than impose a different structure on it. Its intricate structure can be unravelled more by understanding the thought-flow of the author and the themes he is developing in its zigzag interconnection than on a formal linear flow. In this way, some themes are started in a preceding chapter and completed in a later chapter of the book, interrupted by different thoughts and themes that spring up in the mind of the author as he writes. The presence of well developed poetic features like metaphors and parallelisms shows that the letter has its own structural style and it will be inaccurate to claim that the letter is completely lacking in structure. One can argue here that John wrote as he thought. He sometimes suspended his argument in favour of some spur of the moment exhortations only to be picked up on his argument later in the communication. However, there were two key issues that helped to propel his thoughts and these were his ethical exhortations and reproach of the fallacious teachings about the Christ.

The letter is not structured linearly. Rather, one theme meanders through the different chapters of the letter with the author oscillating from one theme back to another and then to the next. This will constrain that in developing the theme of love for example which is necessary for the contextual situation of Kom Baptist Church, the exegesis will run through different chapters. Those themes that are not relevant to prove the hypothesis of this dissertation will be ignored. This will necessitate an intermittent exegetical analysis of the letter.

### **2.6.2 Genre**

The difficulty to determine the structure of 1 John comes from its abstruse genre. Is 1 John a letter, an epistle or a homily? This question has not found a satisfactory answer from any one proposal. In this dissertation, I have been referring to 1 John interchangeably as a letter and as an epistle but this has been terms of convenience than of strict designation of the character of the writing.

Wood (2006:8) highlights some characteristic features of an epistle:

The usual epistolary format began with an opening formula (praescription) which included a sender (scriptio), an addressee (adscriptio) and a greeting (salutio). This formula was followed by a word of Thanksgiving (eucharistio). The body or the main portion of the message followed the thanksgiving. Generally, epistles were ended with a closing formula which generally contained a personal word or a personal greeting.

Given the above genre stipulations for an epistle; 1 John falls short of the expectations of the epistolary genre. It has no sender and recipients and no overt thanksgiving. As a result, the search for a more convenient description of the genre of 1 John continues to be a debate in the scholarly world. The term 'circular epistle' has been coined to meet the need of 1 John given its abstruse character.

This view seeks to attempt to do justice to both the lack of epistolary format and the presence of specific contents. It also accounts for the lack of opening and closing formulas and a lack of personal names in the greetings. It also allows for a wide range of recipients since none are designated formally (Wood 2006:9).

Some scholars view 1 John as a religious tractate (Wood 2006: 9). Yet another label goes beyond the term tractate and labels the epistle as 'a pastoral tractate' because of its exhortations that are clearly pastoral in style (Wood 2006:9; Hansford 1992:129). 'Although it has many of the characteristics of a tract, it certainly is not an impersonal one. It is addressed to the members of the author's community (not to the adversaries) and there is a regular use of the first and second person in direct address' (von Wahlde 2010:18). It therefore strictly speaking defies the grid of a tract. Lieu (2008:5)

says 1 John lacks any conventional components of a letter and can be addressed rather as 'a word of exhortation' or a homily. For Lieu, the appellation of the book as a 'letter' is one of convenience than of descriptive of its genre. Rensberger thinks in a similar way and wonders whether the letter can aptly be described as a sermon or a letter (2006:282).

First John is clearly not 'a paper' or an essay as used in academic jargon where a discourse or speech or even a write-up on a particular topic could be described as a paper. It is not a commentary on the Gospel. Lieu (2008: ix) argues that 'the letters can and should be understood free from the shadow of the fourth Gospel to which they are undoubtedly related'. Lieu thinks the letters share a relationship but with a superficially similar language and ideas but this is 'not necessarily evidence of common authorship or literary dependency—the Johannine style is not too difficult to imitate' (2008:4). I agree with Lieu that the letter is not a commentary of the gospel though not with the same reasons. The letter was written to address a Christian community and to nurture love and cohesion within the community. The gospel was written so that people might believe in Christ. The motivations behind the two books are different. They are written in different historical situations and though they are written by the same author, they are addressing different issues and so one cannot be considered as a commentary of the other.

It makes sense as suggested by Wood (2006) to regard 1 John as having a multi-dimensional genre. No one single genre can describe the nature of the book but perhaps the book could be described as an epistle in conjunction with another genre types such as tractate. There is a clear stylistic variation in the book in which we see elements of poetry, exhortation and reprimand fused together. The book has thus been described as a poetic sermon (Hansford 1992) or as 'an exhortatory exposition (von Wahlde 2010: 18). These descriptions owe to the internal characteristics of the book than to broad genre categories.

However, the book has been *prima facie* labelled as a letter in the canon. The label of a letter is used as Lieu says (2008:4), more as a term of convenience than descriptive of the genre. As a letter, the author definitely has a message written to affect the behaviour of his audience. This gives the letter its pastoral overtones. To associate the term to the biblical genre of letters in my judgment owes more to its proximity to the epistolary or letter genre in the Bible than to other broad genres of Scriptures such as narratives, parables, repartee etc. In other words, its degree of resemblance to the epistolary genre is closer than to whatever other genre there might be in the Bible. Moreover, the author's frequent emphasis of *γράφομεν* (writing to them; 1:4; 2:21; 2:26; 5:13) is another reason why 1 John is considered as an epistle. This is also probably why ancient writers called it an epistle. Dionysius of Alexandria, Irenaeus and Eusebius all described 1 John as a letter (Yarbough 2008:16).

## **2.7 Theological themes of the book**

There is no gainsaying to the fact that the main issue underlying the writing of 1 John is to correct a theological fallacy of the author's adversaries and to encourage correct knowledge and harmony in his community. In so doing, it touches on other theological domains but for the purposes of this dissertation, I will briefly highlight just a few that touch on the thrust of the objectives of this dissertation.

The key issue that John is addressing in his letter is the need to understand who the Christ is so that the insidious Gnostic teaching can be countered. The proponents of this teaching appeared to be denying 'the incarnation' (Ladd 1993: 658). This view was held by those who believe and taught Docetism. 'The Gnostic docetics held to the typical Greek contrast between spirit and matter, and thought that since matter was *ipso facto* evil, God could not possibly have come into direct contact with the phenomenal world in Christ' (Ladd 1993:658). John appealed to his readers not to give in to such a theological fallacy thus his exhortations (2:22, 4:1). John wrote to show that it is the suffering of Jesus and his death that has ushered mankind to salvation



(1:8, 3:16, and 2:2). John's emphasis therefore was to press on for a correct doctrinal understanding of the person of the Christ, particularly with regards to his humanity and his deity.

John also touched on one of the features of the end times and this is the antichrists. Ladd says this word occurs only in the Johannine epistles in the New Testament (2:18, 4:3, 2 John 7). 'Antichrist is the adversary of the Messiah, either opposing him or replacing him' (ibid). For John, the antichrists are responsible for the division in the church (2:19) with a mission to ensnare and derail members of the church. John proposed that the way to check against the antichrists is to have the right knowledge about the Christ and to live in ways that show that they possess such knowledge by loving one another.

Another theological issue that John grapples with is the presence of sin in the Christian community (1:8, 1:10) and thus the need for confession of sin (1:9). The remedy for sin is found in Christ Jesus (2:2). John establishes the fact of sin in the Christian life and defines what it takes to be forgiven. The way out of sin is through confession in order to achieve forgiveness.

The love of God is the condition through which people come into the Christian community. This love is seen through the keeping of the commandments of God (2:5, 2:15, 4:7-10, 14-16). Believers have been saved to belong to the Christian community and to fellowship with one another (1:3). Mutual relationships are established in the Christian community (2:6, 3:24a, 4:13) and the distinctive marks separating the community with the rest of the world (3:17, 4:17) should be clear. John hinges on major theological themes such as salvation, love and fellowship and correct Christological understanding and avoidance of sin. There seems to be interplay between all of these themes and this study seeks to see how some of these themes interplay together in a Christian community such as that of the Kom Baptist Church.

## **2.8 Summary and conclusion of chapter two**

In this chapter, I have examined the question of authorship of 1 John, the date and place of writing, its recipients, and the motivating circumstances that orchestrated the writing of the letter, its purpose, genre and theological themes. I observed that unlike other biblical books labelled as letters, 1 John is unique in its genre. It is perceived by many as a polemic and others as a pastoral letter. To those who see it as a polemic, they associate it with the attempt to refute a heretical teaching spreading around the author's community. For those who see the letter as a pastoral one, they think he is out to encourage members of his community to stay close to one another by exercising love and avoiding sin. Yet there is a middle position where some scholars see both polemical and pastoral elements in the letter. The audience of the letter was seen as the Johannine community, a heterogenous community that witnessed tension because of discordant beliefs. These beliefs engendered sin and orchestrated a schism. The challenge for church communities living in tension was demonstrated through the Johannine community from which background lessons have to be learnt for the Kom Baptist Church community also experiencing tension.

Given this distinctive characteristics of 1 John, the letter solicits an approach to studying it that departs from the default way of studying letters. In the next chapter, I shall present a theoretical framework for studying the letter proposing different theoretical models to interplay together in order to delve into the letter's unique character.

Apart from the unique character of the letter, this study overlaps between biblical exegesis and practical theology and necessitates a combination of models to speak to the different domains of the study. Thus, my approach to studying the letter will draw from across different theoretical models.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK ON METHODOLOGY**

#### **3.1 Introduction**

Every Bible interpreter comes to the text with an approach with which to interpret the text. Such an approach needs to be carefully thought out so that it should help them fill out the epistemological gaps created by the socio-cultural and literary distances from the original addressees of the texts. No one single approach appears to be an all inclusive method of garnering facts necessary for understanding the text. Selecting the investigative approach to examine 1 John is even more challenging given its abstruse nature evident in the varied descriptions labelled to it by different scholarship. In other words, 1 John has been variedly described as an epistle, a treatise, a polemical letter, a pastoral letter (Kruse 2000:1; Painter 2008:37; von Wahlde 2010:18). Furthermore, the argument that 1 John was only intended for public reading and so was written to be understood orally (Dudrey 2003) renders any approach that is based only on literary artistry wanting in its interpretive intentions. This is because it is argued that 1 John was written to be orally delivered and it is pastoral in tone and not necessarily scholarly.

The desire here is to investigate a methodology that does not just enable us to appreciate the socio-historical, theological and cultural issues that 1 John addresses, but also a methodology which enables the letter to address a similar contemporary situation of Kom Baptist Church. The focus of the present chapter is to define such a methodological path fitting for studying 1 John and applying its message to the contextual situation of Kom Baptist

Church. A number of interpretive paradigms will be used simultaneously to interpret the letter. Before I explain this intended methodology, it is necessary to see some of the approaches of interpretation that are widely used in studies in the New Testament.

### **3.2 A brief summary of scholarly approaches to biblical exegesis**

One outstanding thing in biblical studies is the multiple methods for studying biblical texts. Many critical methods of interpretation have been suggested for studying Scriptures. For example Marshall (1977) writes about historical criticism, Thiselton discusses the use of semantics in biblical interpretation (1977:75-100), Wenham looks at source criticism (1977:139-145), Travis talks about form criticism and Smalley talks of redaction criticism (1977:181-182). My concern here is to briefly describe some of the major approaches to biblical interpretation before turning on to describe the different methods I intend to use in interpreting 1 John. Some of these approaches overlap and many students of the Bible combine several of them to study the Bible.

#### ***3.2.1 Historical criticism***

Historical criticism aims at conveying historical information in order to determine what most likely happened as is described in a given biblical passage. It seeks to determine more precisely the nature of the events as they occurred by studying and bringing out their historical context (Carey 2010; Barton 2010; Strawn 2008). Historical enquiry also seeks to identify and document the factors which shaped the manner in which the events happened. In other words, it is not just interested in what exactly happened but more importantly, why it happened the way it did. It is hoped that proper knowledge of the events as they actually occurred and the reasons for why they occurred will give better insight in understanding biblical texts written in

response to those circumstances. Aune (2010:101) gives a clearer definition of historical criticism:

The adjective 'historical' has two different meanings often conveyed by two metaphors: (1) the text can be regarded as a mirror in the sense that it reflects the historical and cultural setting in which the biblical text originated, and (2) the text can be regarded as a window in the sense that it provides interpretive textual access to people, places, and events in the ancient world, making it both possible and necessary to judge the truth or falsity of the historical claims made in the text. The term 'criticism'... refers to the use of independent reason in investigating the origins, text, composition, history, content, and claims of books of the Bible and to the ability to make informed decisions about authenticity and in-authenticity, truth and falsehood.

Historical criticism is sometimes designated as the historical-grammatical approach that attempts to recover the author's meaning and intentions by establishing the context of the meaning of the words, the grammar of the author's language and the historical and cultural circumstances in which he wrote (Waltke 1984:73). It is called historical-critical because it borrows its teaching techniques from historical and literary criticism. Source criticism and literary criticism turn to be refinements of historical criticism (Fitzmyer 1989:246).

Application of the historical criticism method to 1 John has yielded answers to questions regarding the recipients, the author, and date of composition of the book, the content of writing, the nature of the socio-theological problems that occasioned the writing of the book and the author's relationship with the

recipients which shaped the writing. Painter (2000:28) argues for this method of interpretation when he says: To treat the texts as,

Repositories of meaning to be under locked in the head of the reader without reference to any realities in the world are manifestly mistaken. Readers need to do the best they can in relating what is written for events, issues, actions and responses. To do otherwise is to trivialize the texts and turn the process of reading into a game in which the reader is in control of the process.

Painter applies this to his commentary on the epistles of John through a careful study of the traditions that led to the writing of the epistles (2000), the context or situation, authorship etc. He demonstrates that texts become difficult to understand when they become distant to the reader and conversely, when the circumstances are reconstructed with some degree of certainty and the text situated in the writer's context the contemporary reader understands the text better. This reconstruction of the background issues is more exigent in 1 John to help derive the situation behind the text seen to be incipient Gnosticism.

Nonetheless, in spite of the legitimacy of historical studies, the historian's reconstruction of events as they happened is often challenged with lack of some degree of objectivity. The gaps of culture and literary situation do engender some weaknesses in this approach to interpreting a text. Waltke (1984) and Fitzmyer (1989) highlight some of the limitations of historical criticism as an interpretive model of biblical texts: It pays a lot of attention to the context of the biblical author in order to discern meaning but the context of the interpreter is often neglected. This one sided approach runs the danger of over reading the context when the writer might not have been influenced as much by that context. An over reading of the historical context to the detriment of the context of the reader tantamount to saying that the reader is coming to the text with a *tabula rasa* mind. Historical criticism is overly preoccupied with

the pre-history of the texts and neglects its final form, literary features and canonical setting (Fitzmyer 1989:245). If we believe that Scriptures are inspired and then rely totally on historical circumstances as the basis of the communication then we run the risk of contradiction by not allowing a place for illumination of the Holy Spirit in the role of interpreting His word. The role of the human in interpreting Scriptures takes precedence and pre-eminence over that of the Holy Spirit. It is possible that some of the biblical events might never have been orchestrated by any historical happenings but God choose them and impressed them on the minds of the biblical authors.

Reconstructing events as they happened is a difficult task and is not completely dependent on the historian; there may be other socio-cultural parameters. The historian himself is part of an interpretive community and the choices he makes are therefore not completely his. It is this interpretive community rather than the text or the reader that produces meaning. The conventions of this community are brought to bear in the interpretive exercise.

Despite these criticisms of the historical-critical method of interpretation, one must concede here however that, there is no exegetical work that can be void of historical elements. Understanding the background context of the text engenders a look into history *ipso facto*. This is necessary if one must fill out the many ellipses often found in Scriptural passages because the author presumed that his addressees had knowledge of the issues he was addressing. A secondary audience will need to study these background circumstances in order to make full propositional meaning involved in the utterances and this often draws him to a leap into history. Thus, there is need to apply this method particularly for 1 John where the author is not stated in the letter and uncertainty about its relationship of the Gospel.

However it must be noted that the context of the reader shapes his interpretation. Failure to acknowledge the interpreter's context skews the interpretation in ways that are difficult to objectively assess. If the interpreter reflects on and articulates the contextual situation behind his studies, this would enable a constructive comparison between the biblical context and the

interpreters'. This is the inclination of this dissertation. Chapter two of the dissertation borrowed so much from historical criticism to be able to establish the contextual situation of the letter necessary for understanding its exhortations. Painter summarizes this when he says that it is only when we wrestle with meaning in its past context that we set the stage for the reader to discern the implications of the text for the present (2000:31).

### **3.2.2 Rhetorical criticism**

The term rhetoric refers to 'the use of carefully selected and arranged stylistic devices and compositional techniques in a given language and literary tradition to support or enhance the content and purpose of an oral or written message' (Wendland 1998:43). Rhetoric is applied according to established conventions of a given culture to inform, motivate, or persuade an audience about a given subject matter in order to influence the attitude of the audience. Rhetorical criticism therefore takes us from viewing language as a reflection of reality to seeing it as an aspect of social communication (Wuellner 1987:449). This means that the text reflects the context in which it has been written (Black 2010:185). In the case of Scriptures, the rhetorical conventions are drawn from the principles of both Greco-Roman rhetoric in which context the different New Testament texts were written given that Greco-Roman rhetorical conventions had incorporated considerably Jewish rhetorical practice before Christianity. Therefore, the question of classifying an epistle like 1 John as Jewish or Greco-Roman rhetorical tradition will lead to a false distinction (Watson 1997:177, 180).

Greco-Roman rhetoric was broadly categorized into three genres (Kruse 2000). These are judicial rhetoric which had to deal with questions of truth or falsity of a given matter and thus forensic in nature, deliberative rhetoric intended to persuade an audience to adopt a particular line of thought or to dissuade the audience from some pattern of behaviour and epideictic rhetoric related to attitudes and values and was intended to reaffirm values already



held by the audience. First John has been classified variously both as epideictic rhetoric and as a deliberative rhetoric (Watson 1997; Painter 2000).

As a deliberative rhetoric, it seeks to discourage its audience from the schemes of proto-Gnosticism and to exhort them to uphold the values that were earlier imparted to them. As a deliberative rhetoric, Watson (1997:197) proposes the following outline for the letter:

- Epistolary prescript 1:1-4
- Exordium (introduction) 1:5-2:17
- Narration (statement of facts) 2:18-27
- Proposition 2:28-29
- Probatio (argument) 3:1-24
- Exhortatio 4:1-21
- Peroratio (conclusion) 5:1-12
- Epistolary conclusion 5:13
- Epistolary poscript 5:14-21

The argument that 1 John is not deliberative rhetoric advances the reason that the author's addressees are those who remained faithful to his teachings and did not leave the community. He can therefore only write to encourage them and will not need to persuade them to return to the community as deliberative rhetoric will require.

As epideictic rhetoric, it is intended to adumbrate an adequate Christology to its audience and bring about values of fellowship, love and confession in the community. For Painter, 1 John is demonstrative, advancing knowledge by setting out accepted views to establish and maintain group unity (2000:87). Watson argues that 1 John employs epideictic rhetoric in order to bolster compliance of the faithful to the received Christology. He advances five qualities of an epideictic rhetoric that 1 John exhibits:

- It is intended to help the audience to keep on with their faith
- Its exhortations are intended for a present audience
- It increases ethos by using praise and blame

- It stresses the best course of action to take under the prevailing circumstances
- It uses amplification rather than formal proof as content of the probation (body) of the epideictic rhetoric

These five qualities are echoed across 1 John. For example, the letter is personal, John is writing to a specific audience, exhorting them to keep the faith as he explains: 'I am not writing you a new command but an old one which you have had since the beginning (1:7, NIV). He stresses the best course of action to take under the prevailing circumstances for members of his community as he says: 'I am writing these things to you about those who are trying to lead you astray. As for you the anointing you received from him remains in you, and you do not need anyone to teach you...just as it has taught you remain in him' (2: 26-27 NIV). The amplification technique is evident in 1 John through the use of strong words, metaphor and/or comparison, argument (Painter 2000:30). For example, in 1 John 3:15 John writes: 'Anyone who hates his brother is a murderer' (NIV). The word murder/murderer appears too strong. John's use of metaphor is evident in 'God is light', 'walk in darkness' (1 John 1:5, 1:6 NIV). First John therefore demonstrates epideictic qualities particularly with the use of amplification. Amplification functions in epideictic rhetoric to strengthen adherence to traditional and honourable truths and weakens adherence to aberrant substitutes (Watson 1997:198). Amplification is designed to win credence in the course of an argument and is closely tied to the discussion of invention, arrangement and style in Greco-Roman rhetorical handbooks (Watson 1993: 101).

Kruse thinks that it is probably best to try to understand 1 John from the point of view of its functions than try to match it with some known type of writing in the Greco-Roman world (2000:28). This means it is difficult to neatly classify 1 John rhetorically as it exhibits strong tendencies of both epideictic and deliberative rhetoric. Wendland (1998) calls 1 John 'the rhetoric of reassurance' where he singles out four techniques which 'the author heavily relies upon as the basis for his rhetorical strategy of reassuring

argumentation' (1998:45). These techniques include recursion, contrast, focus and mitigation.

Besides this show of rhetorical mix, Watson (2010) sees some inherent weaknesses in rhetorical criticism as an approach for studying the New Testament: The approach seems to assume that all the New Testament writers were necessarily familiar with or trained in the standard skills of Greco-Roman rhetoric of their time. Although some of the New Testament writers like Paul may have had some rhetorical training, it will be incorrect to say that this is true of some of the biblical authors recruited by Jesus as disciples who later authored some of the books of the New Testament. The rhetorical approach has historical inclinations as it seeks to analyze New Testament writings using Greco-Roman rhetoric. It therefore also engenders the weaknesses of the historian in reading the text. To what extent did the Greco-Roman rhetoric influence Jewish culture during the writing of the New Testament books? Was there a Christian rhetoric distinctively separate from the Greco-Roman rhetoric? The answers to these questions will appear uncertain.

Rhetorical criticism broadly categorizes texts into three genres of rhetoric. It is possible that an author may for some reasons not lean grossly on one rhetorical convention of his time and will be able to create his own unique style to communicate his message. First John resonates this sentiment given that it is difficult to fit the letter in any of the broad categorizations of the first century letters. It has been demonstrated that 1 John overlaps significantly between epideictic rhetoric and deliberative rhetoric. This is why 1 John is described both as polemical (trying to refute the heretics) and as pastoral (trying to persuade and encourage its readers to take a given doctrinal stand and stand strong in their faith).

In summary, a rhetorical analysis of 1 John is difficult because of the thin line that separates epideictic and deliberative genres of these rhetorical forms in the book. Secondly, the historical elements of rhetorical studies will render the study too elaborate. Nonetheless, text linguistics or discourse analyses also

address some rhetorical concerns. For example, the repetitive element seen in rhetorical studies as a strategy of amplification is considered in discourse analysis as a strategy of cohesion and connectivity. Every kind of text has its own rhetorical forms. Therefore, a study like this one cannot completely stay away from a minimal discussion on rhetorical elements of a text like 1 John since discourse analysis and relevance theory that will be used in studying 1 John have a rhetorical character.

### ***3.2.3 Socio-rhetorical interpretation***

One of the recent approaches to interpretation is socio-rhetorical interpretation. It does not present new techniques of reading the New Testament but it is a multi-dimensional approach to the text (Robbins 2010:192; Watson 1998; Culpepper 1998). It uses insights from sociolinguistics, anthropology, literary studies and social sciences among others to interact with the text. It tries to harness the different approaches in order to interpret Scriptures holistically.

Robbins (2010) sees texts as composed of several textures. The inner texture is the linguistics patterns within a text and its literary features used to convey its message. The inter-texture is the text's representation and use of phenomenon in the real world. The social and cultural texture is the way the text interacts with society and culture as it shares cultural values and norms of the society. The ideological texture is the ideology that the text evokes and the sacred texture shows how the texts communicate insights into the relationships between humans and the divine. Given this, every text interacts with different layers of society to communicate meaning. Robbins sees a text as an interwoven piece communicating layers of meanings, convictions, values, emotions and actions embedded in the different textures. This means for example that 1 John has a sacred texture through which John tries to show his understanding of God, holiness, spiritual beings, human redemption and ethics. His rhetorical approach through the use of amplification, repetition, metaphorical language etc falls within what Robbins calls inner texture. Klint's

methodological proposal in reception criticism echoes considerably the socio-rhetorical analyses of textures of a text. Klint proposes a distinction between the literary text world (the imaginary universe of the text), and the concrete world (the author's or the reader's thoughts, values and convictions etc) and the historical world (the historical setting of the actual writing of the text) (2000:92). These three layers of the text interplay in discerning the meaning of the text.

Culpepper (1998) thinks that Robbins's work on socio-rhetorical criticism builds a good environment for interpretation and 'provides interpreters with a basic overall view of life as we know it and of language as we use it' (1998:71). However, Culpepper thinks that Robbins's treatment of some of the textures is limited. For example, Culpepper enlarges the territory of the inner texture to include the entire range of features of the world within the text (the narrator, the plot, characters, settings and other aspects of narrative discourse) (1998:73). Culpepper also notes the absence of the treatment of genre in Robbin's analyses of the rhetorical criticism and points out that Robbin fails to adequately identify the kind of analyses that is required to identify first century texts with a social or cultural context in the social-cultural texture (1998:74, 75).

Using sociological information to explain a text certainly throws light into the text although the archaeological accuracy of such information in some cases may not be ascertained. The socio-rhetorical method of interpretation appears over-elaborate and requires a careful explanation of the different elements that interplay in the interpretation of texts. Like historical criticism, socio-cultural and historical information in the interpretation of 1 John puts the scholar at the risk of over reading the text.

### **3.3 The commentary approach to exegesis**

Historical criticism and the historical grammatical approach to interpreting Scriptures have their merits and demerits. Rhetorical criticism and socio-rhetorical approach do have their own advantages. However, exegetical

studies often blend all of these approaches to explain the meaning of biblical passages. One of such approaches that oscillate through different approaches to determine the meaning of biblical propositions in the exegetical model is called the commentary approach. I will now briefly describe this approach of interpreting Scriptures which will be used in this study.

The main thrust of this study is exegetical and it intends to use the exegetical insights from 1 John to apply it to the contextual situation of Kom Baptist Church. It will therefore borrow the exegetical approach in biblical studies and some approaches of practical theology. There are several approaches to doing exegesis. One of such approaches is called the dogmatic approach. The dogmatic approach seeks to unlock meaning contained in key-words or phrases or verses without much respect to its context (Martin 1977:220). This approach does not give considerations to larger chunks of discourse whose context will guide in the interpretation of different phrases but seeks to infer meaning from particular words and phrases.

The grammatico-historical approach to exegesis sees the need for Scriptures to be interpreted within its historical context and pays significant regard to the language used. There is therefore a need of transition from what the text meant to its original hearers to what it means in a contemporary situation so that the modern reader can appropriate the message for himself. Thus, he begins by an exegetical study and progresses to a hermeneutical understanding of the passage.

In the commentary approach, the exegete uses a combination of historical and grammatical contexts of the text to explain what the text meant. Each verse or passage is followed by a commentary in which the exegete interacts with the passage explaining the different elements that make up for the meaning. He uses elements of the dogmatic approach when he tries to understand and explain meaning of some key terms of the text he is treating. Smith (2008:178) explains the commentary approach in the following words:

This approach moves through the passage verse  
by verse, presenting relevant exegetical insights

as they occur in the pericope. It needs an introduction section and a section discussing the overarching background issues, but it presents most of the exegetical details in the verse-by-verse discussion. The commentary integrates the historical, cultural, redactional, grammatical, lexical and other types of observations.

Martin (1977:226-227) highlights some of the principles which should be kept in view as one approaches any given passage. These principles include those of determining the literary form of the passage and the background meaning of the passage. These principles are integrated in the commentary approach in doing exegesis which I shall use in this study. This means the commentary shall allude to the background and cultural context of a passage or verse and other contexts as a guide to stay within a framework to determine the original meaning of that passage or verse.

Determining the literary form helps the exegete to stay consistent with the literary conventions that were used by the author. Sometimes the background meaning of a New Testament passage is clearly an Old Testament passage and at other times the background is drawn from the Greco-Roman world evident in Hellenistic culture. The cultural setting of the passage is necessary to help make that its meaning of the passage be made more manifest by understanding the customs and traditions. In the commentary approach, the exegete also explains the theological purpose of an author and how he expresses it. The commentary approach therefore integrates different methodological guides of reading the passage.

This study seeks to use this exegetical approach to decipher the meaning of some passages of 1 John. In its historical and cultural inclination, the study will look at the communicative context of 1 John by looking at the 'overarching background issues' necessary for understanding the text. In the grammatical analysis, there is special focus on discourse analysis to determine the key issues John intended to communicate in the passages under study as

opposed to background issues which only try to substantiate and beef up what has been adumbrated. These methods will therefore be used interactively in running the commentary to explain the different passages. In this dissertation, I use the following steps in running the commentary.

1. Translation features of the passage: This will present the passage under study and any textual variants in the translation with a comparative study of some translations.
2. The validity of the passage as a unit: This will argue out the distinctive features of the passage that make it capable of standing as a discourse unit thus the literary structure of the passage
3. Overview of the passage under study: This will seek to answer questions on the background issues of the passage such as its literary feature, the communication situation and other background issues necessary for understanding the communication
4. Analyses of the grammatical relations verse by verse using a discourse analyses features and relevance theory to discuss on the meaning of key words, grammar, rhetorical features and the communication situation
5. Summary: A discussion on the overall discourse communication of that passage and its meaning

### **3.4 Discourse analysis**

Discourse analysis is that branch of linguistics that studies the dynamics of a text and examines the text as an act of communication, and explicates what it says and the manner in which the message has been encoded (Green 2010; Reed 1996). The question has been asked whether linguistics has any role in biblical interpretation. Coterell and Turner (1989:26) answer that question succinctly when they say: 'Since the Bible undeniably comes to us in language, it might be said the real question is not "has linguistics anything to do with Bible interpretation" but "how is it that biblical interpretation has so far survived without involving itself in the relevant aspects of linguistics?"'.



Discourse is the sum total of utterances (written or spoken) that constitutes a text. A text is the sum total of sentences with devices that give it an internal cohesion and this makes its meaning richer than the sum of the meaning of the individual sentences. All of the literary devices a writer or speaker may employ to communicate a message forms part of the text. Discourse analysis seeks to distinguish the different kinds of information embedded in different layers of the text using some text linguistic pointers. Discourse analysis looks at the mechanisms of coherence inherent in the text and how they contribute to meaning (Cotterel and Turner 1989:230). Discourse studies have contributed great insight to understanding 1 John (Greenlee 2000; Hansford 1992; Wendland 1991; Jim and Hollenbrach 1998; de Jonge 1978).

What constitutes the main driving force of what an author intends to communicate and what constitutes the background material to the communication? How does the speaker pack together what he considers as background information together with what he considers main proposals of his communication and how can the two be distinguished? What is the genre of the text? Genre is the conventional repeated patterns of communication (Bailey 2010) that enable the reader to use it as a grid to understand the text. These are some of the questions that discourse analysis seeks to answer. These are the questions that I shall seek to answer in using discourse analysis as an interpretive model to 1 John.

It will be necessary here to determine the genre of 1 John in discourse analysis. There are four broad genre classified in discourse studies viz. narrative texts, procedural texts, expository texts and hortatory texts.

Figure 2: Schema structure of the four main kinds of discourse in discourse analysis (adapted from Russell 1998:5).

+ AGENT ORIENTATION		- AGENT ORIENTATION	
	Narrative		Procedural
+ CONTINGENT SUCCESSION	Prophecy, Story		'How to do it'
	Behavioural		Expository
-CONTINGENT SUCCESSION	Hortatory (imperatives)		Budget proposals, scientific papers

Narrative texts recount events as they happened or will happen. They are chronological or contingent on others. This means one event triggers another and the order in which the events occurred is therefore important. The agent of the events is equally important when dealing with narrative texts because it answers the question who did what and when. Procedural texts describe the chronological processes or steps involved in doing something. The agent is not as important here because what is highlighted is what happens and the time it happens. Expository texts expound on a given topic. The agent of the action is not in focus and the chronological order is also not in focus. It is the topic being discussed that is paid attention to and not who does what and when but what is being done. Examples of expository texts will include scientific papers or budget proposals.

The genre that concerns us here for the purposes of 1 John is called behavioural or hortatory discourse. Hortatory discourse does not focus on succession of events or processes but it aims at affecting behaviour. The exhorter who seeks to impart a change of behaviour is important because he gives credence to why the exhortation or behaviour change should be responded to. Hortatory texts can be classified into two different categories: instruction and persuasion (Levinsohn 2007:16). In instructive hortatory texts, the exhorter considers himself to have the right or authority to tell the exhortee how to behave. This may include strong rebukes for an existing behaviour and requires the exhortee to change and act in a certain way. In a persuasive hortatory text, the exhorter appeals to the reasoning of the exhortee and seeks to convince them. Some texts may have a combination of both kinds of hortatory texts where at one point the exhorter is persuading his addressees and at another point he is giving instructions and rebuking them. First John seems to exhibit this quality of both persuading and giving instruction and has thus been described as both pastoral and polemical by different scholars. For example, Painter (2008) and Reno (1997) see the epistle as essentially polemical while for Griffith (2002) and Streett (2011) are concerned about the pastoral quality of the letter. Kruse (2000) has treated quite significantly the rhetorical forms of the letter that show an overlap between deliberative rhetoric which has the essential character of persuading and epideictic rhetoric which has the character of affecting attitude by deepening of values already held and refuting erroneous ones (polemic). Generally, all epistles of the New Testament can be considered as hortatory texts although elements of all broad types of discourses can be found in some.

It is important to explain here how this interpretive model will be used in interpreting the message of 1 John. I will therefore in the following sections explain some of the features of hortatory discourse in order to show how they will be applied in the exegetical study of 1 John.

### ***3.4.1 Types of information in a hortatory discourse text***

Discourse analysis affirms that there are different types of information embedded in a text and gives guidance on how these different kinds of information in a text can be distinguished. Breeze (1992) distinguished two basic kinds of information in a text namely mainline information and supportive information. Mainline information presents the main points of an argument. Mainline information is also called the message core or argument. The message core is information that communicates the purpose for which the discourse has been spoken or written. It constitutes the driving force behind the communication. Breeze says the purpose of the core message may be to pass information, instigate action or change a state of affairs or express an attitude. For example, in 1 John 2:15-16 states that:

Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For everything in the world—the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does—comes not from the Father but from the world (NIV).

The message core in the above verses is the exhortation 'do not love the world'. The rest of the verses provide supportive information for the message core. Supportive material is also called message support. The message support gives backing to the message core by assisting the hearer to understand and receive it (Breeze 1992:314). Supportive information situates the context of the communication and blends the different key issues the author is communicating.

Supportive information or message support is further subdivided into four groups namely situational, motivational, credential and enabling information (Levinhson 2007:22). Situational information explains the circumstances out of which the discourse arises and why the exhortation is necessary. In other words, what has occasioned or provoked the exhortation to be made? What prompted John to write 1 John for example? There are elements of these motivational circumstances that made him to write that are echoed in the

epistle in the message support and is classified as situational information. Motivational information encourages the hearer to heed the exhortation by giving the reasons for obeying. It points to the consequences of disobedience and draw attention to the moral or religious values of the hearer's society that provide motivation to conform to the exhortation. It appeals to the hearer's sense of responsibility to heed to the exhortation. In other words, why would members of the Johannine community feel led to heed to his exhortations? This question is answered by looking at the motivational information in the message support of the text. In the above verses, the motivation for not loving the world is stated thus 'If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For everything in the world—the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does—comes not from the Father but from the world' (1 John 2:15b, 16). Credential information supports the speaker's authority or right to exhort his audience with the expectation that he will be listened to and obeyed. It shows the authority of the exhorter over his addressees or the *locus standi* he has in order to instruct or persuade his audience over a particular topic. The first four verses of 1 John 1 present enabling information. He writes about 'that which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched' (1John 1:1) and this gives him the *locus standhi* to make the exhortations that will follow in the letter. Enabling information informs or reminds the readers of what already has been done to help them keep the exhortations. It shows that the exhortation is feasible because of some ground work that has been established in favour of the audience to help them accomplish what the author is asking them to do. For example, John says 'I write to you, dear children, because your sins have been forgiven on account of his name' (1 John 2:14 NIV). They have been enabled to heed the exhortations through the forgiveness of their sins 'on account of his name'.

### ***3.4.2 Form of the core message in hortatory discourse***

The message core is the main information that the speaker intends to communicate. It forms the forefront aspects of the communication. Exhortations in a hortatory discourse form the message core of the discourse. The speaker uses exhortations to express the desired behaviour. Some exhortations are stronger than others. The main strategy of communicating exhortations in hortatory discourse is through the use of the imperative verb form. There are however other ways of encoding exhortations and the ways the exhortations are rendered determine their potency. Levinsohn (2007:79) shows the different ways in which information is given to show its relative potency.

One of the things an author does to determine the potency of his message is through his mood. Mood refers to the attitude a speaker adopts when he speaks. Levinsohn says the imperative mood typically conveys more potent message than expressions in the indicative mood. The imperative mood is achieved by the use of the imperative verb form. Imperatives are therefore the main strategy that shows the message core of a hortatory discourse. In 1 John 2:15, John exhorts that 'do not love the world or anything in the world'. Exhortations in the second person are more potent than exhortations in the first person which in turn expresses more potent exhortations than exhortations in the third person. Levinsohn gives an ordinary example to demonstrate this: the exhortation 'you must work' is stronger than the exhortation 'we must work' which in turn is stronger than the exhortation 'people must work'. Exhortations expressed in independent clauses are typically more potent than those expressed in dependent clauses.

Mitigated expressions or commands make exhortations less potent. Mitigated expressions are expressions with words like: please, would you, can you etc. Thus the exhortation 'please would you close the door' is weaker than the exhortation 'close the door'. While this may be true in ordinary conversation, a mitigated command in Scriptures might not be said to be less potent but may

hang on the hinge of tone i.e. persuasive or rebuking. We will look at this features in the chapter on exegesis.

Levinsohn (2007) further outlines some factors that influence the form of the exhortation in a hortatory discourse. These include the social relationship between the exhorter and the addressees. The relationship between the speaker and his audience determines the potency or authoritative weight of the exhortation. The relationship and consequently the authority of the speaker may ensue from several areas. If he is an elder, he tends to wield more power than a peer would over his audience. His knowledge and wisdom of the topic of discussion gives him more impetus and superiority of his addressees.

The position of the exhorter on the text also has an influence over the strength of what he says. Levinsohn says the exhorter usually begins with less potent exhortations and ends with more potent ones in the situation where there is more than one form of exhortation. This role is not strong because when a text is given in order to rebuke, it might as well begin by a more potent exhortation. In a text like 1 John where the writer uses repetition and intertwines the letter with both persuasion and instruction, the position of the exhorter on the text does not present clearly what is the end of the text and cannot therefore be considered as an indicator of the potency of the exhortation. However, in fairly shorter discourse units of the text, this can help in determining which exhortations within that unit are stronger than the others.

### ***3. 4. 3 Discourse analyses as an exegetical tool for interpreting 1 John***

Breeze says 'the analysis of the information structure of the text can lead to significant insights in understanding the message and purpose of each epistle' (1992:313). Discourse analysis supplies a helpful theoretical framework for analyzing the information structure of the text. This study seeks to use this theory to study how information has been packed in the text and how it contributes to meaning of what John intended to communicate. The theory will

help to show what kind of hortatory discourse 1 John is. Is 1 John an instructive or a persuasive discourse text or both? What constitutes the main observations of the exhortations, thus the main argument of 1 John in the passages under study? The determination of what constitutes the message core and what constitutes supportive information will be achieved using discourse considerations. Which part of the message support is credential information and which aspects of the information constitute situational information, motivational and enabling information? A distinction of these different kinds of information will map out what constitutes John's main argument to his community.

First John is repetitive or cyclical in nature so that cutting out neatly the seams of its discourse features is not apparent. Nonetheless, using discourse features it can be easy to see the seams of the book using discourse devices and indicators such as, the presence of full noun phrases in a discourse unit when the noun had already been introduced, switches of time, place and participants which are discourse indicators of new units in the discourse. These devices will be used to map out 1 John and determine the units that impact the topic of this dissertation which will be studied in details.

Discourse analysis can help in understanding a text without necessarily communicating historical information as in historical criticism or rhetorical conventions of a particular culture like those of the Greco-Roman world. Considered in this way, discourse analysis is relatively a more objective interpretive model to behavioural text like 1 John. Hansford (1992), Jim and Hollenbrach (1998) and Lieu (2008) have all brought significant understanding of 1 John through the application of this methodological guide.

#### ***3.4.4. Information structure of 1 John***

There is an expressed difficulty to establish an overall structure of 1 John (Westcott 1966; Ott 1990; Iver 1990; Andrew 1990; Hansford 1992; Painter 2002; Lieu 2008). The difficulty derives from the spiral way in which the author



oscillates with his ideas. The traditional chapter division of the book has been described as unfortunate because the chapters tend to blur the unity that the author built into the message (Ott 1990: 45). The divisions create ruptures where there are no natural discourse divisions and ignore to create points of departure in the letter where there are natural discourse boundaries in the discourse (Iver 1990:27).

The boundary markers of the discourse of 1 John are therefore not clearly visible and to the most part have been stitched by the technique of reiteration or recursion. The phrase ἐν τούτῳ (in this) is the main linking strategy to connect ideas and propel the development of thought. The phrase is used 27 times in the New Testament and 12 of these times occur in 1 John (Iver 1990:27). As an anaphora, the phrase refers back to what has been mentioned in previous discourses and used as a cataphora, it anticipates what the author will say upfront. When the phrase is sandwiched between two phrases it sometimes plays both roles. The phrase occurs in the following passages: 1 John 4-5, 3:18-19, 2:3, 2:5b-6, 3:10, 3:16, 3:24, 4:2-3, 4:9, 4:10, 4:13, 4:17.

In spite of this apparent difficulty to see the distinctive discourse units of the book, most scholars agree it has five main discourse units:

- 1:1-4            The prologue
- 1:5- 2:27       First presentation (appeals for believers to remain in Christ)
- 2:28-4-6       The second presentation (appeals to community members to love one another and to test the teachers).
- 4:7-5:12       The third presentation (appeals to the members of the community to continue to love each other God's love)
- 5:13-21       Conclusion

Watson (1997:197) argues that 1 John is a deliberative rhetoric and as such he proposes the following rhetorical outline for the letter whose major divisions do not change very much from the above outline. Otto (1990) on his

part argues that there are only three major rhetorical divisions in the book and consequently, the book can be made a three-chapter book instead of five.

- The prologue            1:1-4
- The body                1:5-5:12
- The closure            5:13-21
- Chapter 1                1:1-2:27        37 verses
- Chapter 2                2:28-4:6        32 verses
- Chapter 3                4:7-5:21        36 verses

Cereghin (2011:12) highlights the parallelism that characterises the letter with love at its very centre as follows:

- A. 1:1-2:17 Christ
  - B. 2:18-29 Antichrists
    - C. 3:1-24 Love
  - B. 4:1-6 Antichrists
    - C. 4:7-21 Love
- A. 5:1-21 Christ

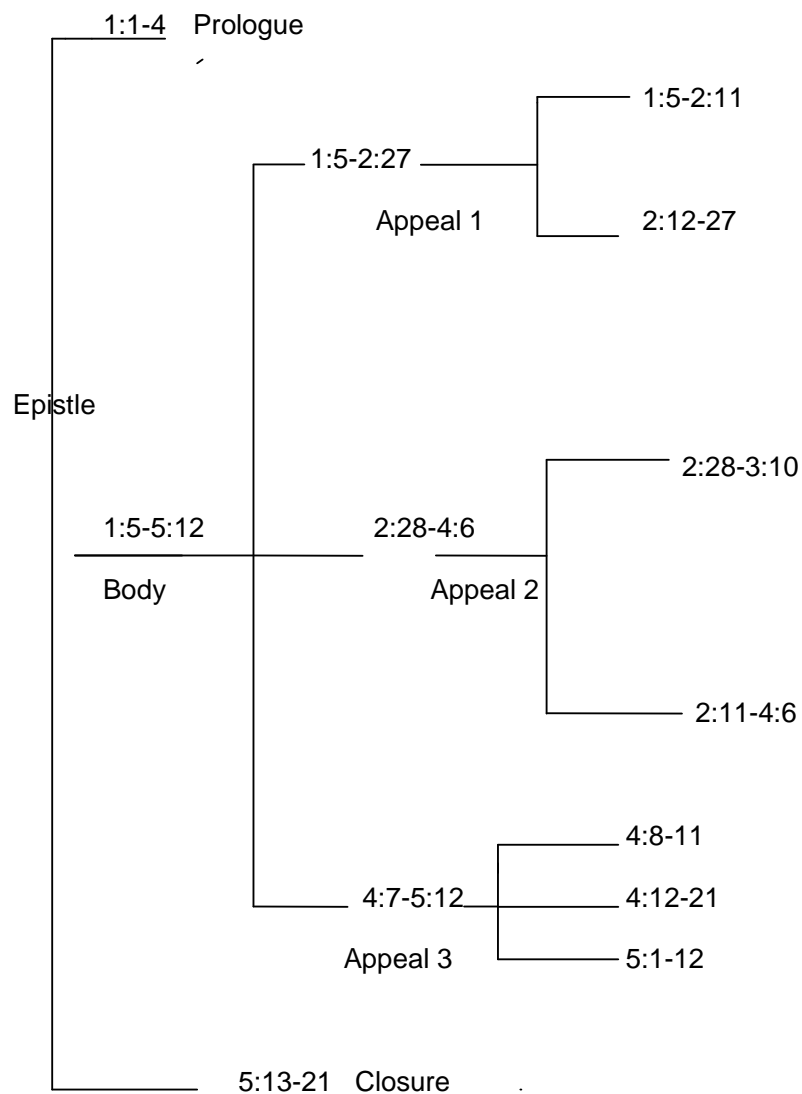
It can be shown that even though the theme of love lies at the centre of the letter as shown in the above, the theme is actually evenly distributed throughout the letter. Every chapter of the letter has love as part of its teaching as follows:

- 1:3-4            Foundations for love (fellowship)
- 2:7-11          Exhortations to love
- 3:1- 24        The role of the Trinity to bestow love
  - 3:1- 2    The Father bestows love
  - 3:4- 5    The Son's death is an expression of love
  - 3:11- 15    The need to love
  - 3: 24    The Spirit indwells us as an expression of love
- 4:7-21          Love of the saints
  - 4:12-13, 15-18    The fruits of love

4: 11, 19-21     Prove of God's love  
 5:2-4                Christians need to love and obey God

Love is therefore preponderant in 1 John. John oscillates between different themes of the letter treating them in varying degrees but love has constantly been given a key focus throughout all the chapters of the letter.

Figure3: Constituent organization of 1 John ( slightly adapted from Sherman and Tuggy 1994:9)



The schema shows that the letter has three main discourse divisions viz., the prologue, the body of the letter and the closure. The prologue is made up of the first four verses with the main assertion of the prologue made in verse 3: 'We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard so that you also may have fellowship with us' (NIV). The body of the letter begins in 1:5 with a clearly marked boundary: The verse assumes a different verb tense and topic to the preceding four verses which elaborate on the testimony of the author and his credentials to establish the grounds for the exhortations that will follow. The closure of the letter runs from 5:13-5:21 and all the verses in this section provide grounds and motivations why the audience must guard against idols as exhorted in 5:21. In 5:13 ('I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God'), a transition is marked from the topic of eternal life in 5:12. The verse 5:13 is seen as referring to the whole letter and parallels what was said at the introduction in 1:4, 'we write this to make our joy complete' (NIV).

### **3.5 Relevance theory**

Communication relies on a text or utterances but it goes beyond the text and utterances for its meaning to be understood. Many features such as the clothes one is wearing, the relationship between the speaker and the hearer, the gesticulations of the speaker as he speaks, his countenance, his intonation and what they have known in common before the text present utterance or text all have a bearing on the meaning to be inferred from the communication. Relevance theory is a theory of communication that goes beyond the utterances or text that has been communicated to garner elements within the context of the communication that contribute to the meaning of what a speaker is saying.

The debate on how far a text like 1 John can be mirror read to infer the contextual situation behind the text is rife among scholars. Kruse (2000:15) talks about 'judicious mirror reading' or 'responsible mirror reading' but with no guiding principles on how to establish such responsibility. Sperber and

Wilson's Relevance theory (1995) provides a useful guide to explaining inferences and check the limits of how inferences can be drawn from a text.

Nevertheless, attempting to introduce a fairly recent theory on communications like relevance theory as a methodological guide in the study of 1 John can be cumbersome and predisposed to skew the focus of the study. I will therefore not attempt to explain the whole theory here but will hinge on only areas of the theory that have a bearing on drawing of inferences which I shall use to show to what extent inferences can be drawn in the interpretative process of 1 John. This therefore limits me mainly to explain the principle of relevance and explicatures and implicatures which will be integrated in the commentary approach in the verse by verse exegetical analysis.

### ***3.5.1 How relevance theory works***

Relevance theory as a theory of communication moves away from the code model of communication which saw communication as the encoding of information by a speaker and the decoding of that information by the audience to derive meaning that was embedded in the code. According to the code model of communication, the meaning of 1 John is contained solely in what the author wrote in the text and will require no mirror reading or study of background information to understand it. Relevance theory sees communication as a process of drawing inferences from a context which goes beyond what has been encoded. What the speaker says (the code) is simply a blueprint of the information he intends to pass across and the hearer has the responsibility to flesh out the full content of the communication with contextual clues helping him to do so. The speaker and hearer together share a context of communication which is called the cognitive environment. The cognitive environment is the set of facts that are manifest to an individual and are inferable (Sperber and Wilson 1995:39) in a given communicative situation. Gutt (2006) examines the background knowledge (context) necessary for the successful understanding of a biblical text and later (2008)

treats cognitive effects as a crucial aspect of communication that needs to be paid full attention to in order to better understand the meaning.

The principle of relevance states that 'every act of ostensive communication communicates a presumption of its optimal relevance' (1995:158). In other words, every author ostensibly wants to inform or educate his audience to fully understand what he is communicating. It is the role of the author to give the information in succinct ways so that his hearers quickly get what he is saying and he thus impacts them without belabouring his point. Sperber and Wilson call the effort used to understand information communicated as 'processing effort' and the change or influence that the incoming information brings to bear on the hearers as 'cognitive benefits'. It is the responsibility of every communicator to help his audience get enough cognitive benefits with the least effort trying to process what he has said. The core idea of relevance theory therefore is that an audience should harvest much cognitive effects with the least processing effort where processing effort is the degree to understand with ease and cognitive benefits are the influence the communication impacts on the hearers. Put differently, an author seeks to influence his audience as much as he can without making it difficult for them to understand what he says. Relevance as used in this theory therefore signifies the satisfaction or influence one derives from a piece of communication with little effort to understanding it. If the processing effort increases, one must expect greater cognitive benefits in return if the communication is expected to stay relevant.

### ***3.5.2 Some key concepts of relevance theory***

#### ***3.5.2.1 Cognitive benefits and processing effort***

Using the principle of relevance, we would say that John wrote to his audience with the desire to impact them. Such an impact could be by way of strengthening what they already knew and cancelling wrong information that false teachers brought to them. He wanted to reinforce what was taught to

them and to allow them to make adjustments with what they had heard. This impact or influence in relevance theoretic terms is called cognitive benefits. Cognitive benefits are of three kinds: strengthening what a hearer already knows, eliminating what he has heard or known before and forming new implications or adjustments to what he knows based on what he has heard. Any speaker will want to impact his audience without making them strain to hear what he was saying. In relevance theoretic terms, avoiding strain is called least processing effort. In other words, if there is a way a speaker can be succinct enough to make a short utterance and pass across a whole lot of message, he will prefer to be that concise and informative than be verbose and pass across the same amount of information. This is to avoid the hearer taking much time to analyze what he has said. The rule is that the more the cognitive benefits and the less the processing effort, the more the relevance of the message to the audience.

#### *3.5.2.2 Contextual information or cognitive environment*

Blakemore (1992:14) tries to define the context of an inference and explains that this is a product of deductive or inductive reasoning that hails from religious beliefs, cultural assumptions, preceding texts and the physical environment of the audience and speaker. The speaker has a varied amount of information from which to choose to interpret an utterance. 'Successful communication depends on the hearer selecting the right assumptions, the ones that yield the intended interpretation (Blakemore 1992:18). Communication succeeds only when the context selected by the hearer matches the one intended by the speaker. Any mismatch between the intended context and the one selected leads to wrong interpretation. Contextual information is information needed to process and understand a text. What John said to his community had a context that needs to be supplied in order to flesh out the communication and understand it well. Understanding his message well will depend on selecting and matching the right context to what he said.

### 3.5.2.3 *Explicatures*

To understand an utterance, one needs to move from just knowing the meaning of the words represented in the utterance to drawing of inferences to fill the elliptical parts of the proposition (Blakemore 1992:57). Sperber and Wilson (1995) call the result of fleshing out the semantic representation of an utterance as an explicature. Utterances are an abridged form of what an author intends to communicate. Explicature is the recovery of the full propositional form of an expressed utterance by filling out the ellipsis therein. It also includes disambiguating the terms as well as assigning reference to entities expressed in an ambiguous way such as pronouns. The use of metaphorical language hides the true propositional form and metaphors for example will need to be disambiguated. For example what does John mean by 'God is light' can be disambiguated.

### 3.5.2.4 *Implicatures*

Implicatures are the contextual assumptions which the hearer has to supply to an utterance to preserve her assumption that the utterance is relevant (Blakemore 1992:137). For example, if one speaker asks the other the question: 'have you closed the gate' and the hearer responded 'it is not yet 6:00pm', we can derive some assumption from the answer. The implied assumption will be that the gate is usually closed when it is 6:00pm. Implicatures account for what a speaker implies by what he has expressly communicated. A speaker may suggest a range of things in a single speech act that will be assumed by the hearer. The proposition 'God is light' has the propensity to give several implications or assumptions. These assumptions in relevance theoretic terms are called implicatures.

There can be a range of implicatures that can be derived from a text or an utterance. Some of the utterances can direct in a strong way the inclination the hearer should assume and some may allow the hearer higher flexibility to interpreting what he has heard. These are called strong and weak. When the



hearer guides in a strong way the interpretation he intends the reader to take from a given utterance, he takes responsibility of such a meaning. When the speaker gives very weak guidance, the responsibility of correct interpretation lies with the hearer. One of the things a speaker can do to constrain a particular interpretation or implicature can be through the use of discourse connectives. For example, the connective 'therefore' constrains the hearer to draw a conclusion. The connective 'nevertheless' grants a concession and the connective 'but' indicates a contrastive thought. The use of these connectives by a speaker guides the hearer in the interpretive process as he draws inferences from the communication (Jim and Hollenbrach 1998).

### **3.6 Relevance theory and the interpretation of 1 John**

Scriptures are communicated to nourish cognitive and behavioural benefits to its readers. In other words, anything communicated in Scriptures is meant to influence behaviour and impact thoughts and attitudes of the audience. The biblical writers wrote to be understood and they intended that the audience will understand them without a heavy processing effort. When a writer deliberately creates ambiguity in what he is saying, this will necessitate a more processing effort on the part of the hearer. Greater processing effort will in turn require greater cognitive benefits. Thus relevance theory still applies in any instance of communication of biblical texts.

Any scriptural passage or verse has the intention and propensity to strengthen what an audience has already known and is favourably practicing or seeks to eliminate thoughts and character in the audience that is opposed to what the communication is saying. The communication also helps the audience to form new implications or ideas about the state of affairs. All of these forms of impact on the hearer form what is called cognitive benefits for the audience. The style of the speaker therefore is not done by chance but is intentionally designed to pass across the message in ways that will enable the audience understand easily. In relevance theoretic terms, we will say the author speaks with the intention of allowing a low processing effort to his hearers. Therefore,

the repetitive nature of 1 John for example necessitates the reader to ask for the additional cognitive benefits for such added processing effort caused by the author. Why does John chose to repeat what he has said several times? Did his audience not get it or there are additional layers of meaning to be derived from the repetition? Why does John choose to be idiomatic and metaphorical? These are questions that relevance theory attempts to answer using the principle of cognitive benefits and processing effort. Given the principle of relevance, the cognitive benefits to be tapped from such a high cost bargain for information should be expected to be high. The use of metaphorical language for example increases processing effort and adds to the range of implicatures and thus cognitive benefits that can be derived.

Furthermore, we will study the different kinds of cognitive benefits John wants to impart to his community. Is there some attitude he wants them to desist from it? Are there some thoughts he wants to strengthen that they already knew and is there some knowledge he intends to eliminate? These different ways of reacting to his message are called the cognitive benefits of the communication.

I used the process of implicatures and explicatures to show to what extent 1 John can be mirror-read. Each argument was verified on the basis of contextual assumptions that are made manifest in the argument and from there the contextual implications (implied conclusions) were drawn. This was blended with discourse analysis to show what the main argument of John is and how he thought the audience will reconstitute the meaning contained in his utterances.

### **3.7 Field study**

This study is an exegetical study but overlaps considerably with practical theology. 'The key characteristic of practical theology is that it seeks to apply a theological reflection to solve a real-life problems' (Smith 2008:204). Practical theology examines the state of affairs in real life and cross examines them with the ideal situation in order to influence a change. The ideal situation

is always what is exhorted in Scriptures. Thus, there was the need to use the exegetical approach to study God's word to present the ideal situation but also to carry out a field study to interpret the situation that exists in the real world namely Kom Baptist Church community. In order to do this, this study therefore had to undertake an empirical component that helped to portray the prevailing situation on the field.

Field study is both a method of data collection and a research model (Amin 2005:203). As a research model, field study is classified under what has been called 'LIM model' of research (Smith 2008: 205). Smith explains that this aims at a systematic investigation of a situation in the real world. The purpose of field study in this research is to observe the prevailing circumstances of the crisis in Kom Baptist Church and the socio-cultural context of the church in the Kom area.

I used semi structured interviews to talk with people in the community to find out the state of affairs *viz a viz* their relationships with one another in a post schism situation. Semi structure interviews earmark some questions that should be asked to respondents but does not limit it only to these questions. The members interviewed were selected by purposive sampling from across the different layers of the congregations *viz.*, women, men, youths and leaders. One of these leaders was a pastor of the church and the other leader was a deacon in the congregation. This was to tap opinions from a representative sample of the whole church.

As a Baptist Christian of Kom origin, I carried out a participant observation in which I took turns to fellowship in congregations across the divide to observe the prevailing situation in these congregations. What is the attitude of Christians in the church towards one another and what do they echo in the church about the crisis? What place do they hold for biblical expositions and what is the character of the sermons? What values are nurtured in the church that is encouraged by 1 John?

Focus group discussions were also carried out because of the flexibility they allow and the many possible answers that can be generated from this method

of gathering data. The focus groups focused on a study of key portions of 1 John relevant to community values. They did a mini Bible study on how these passages inform the dynamics of the division in Kom. The two focus groups from each parallel congregation in the same locality were brought together for the same exercise to see how the study of the epistle can help shed light on the problem they have faced prior to and after the separation. The key foci of these focus group discussions were to establish how the participants perceive the practical application of 1 John to the situation in Kom, especially regarding how to practically live together in harmony.

Morgan argues that the size of the group should range from four to eight participants as small groups 'make it easier for the moderators to manage the active discussions that often accompany high levels of involvement and emotional topics...' (1996:146). In this study, I carried out four focus group discussions comprising of eight members of the congregation in each focus group. The results of the focus group discussions were compared with those of the separate interviews. 'One reason for comparing focus groups to more familiar methods has been to determine whether the two methods produce equivalent data' (Morgan 1996:136).

The analysis of the data was 'primarily, a matter of scrutinizing the data, looking for themes or patterns in people's views, observations, or experiences' (Smith 2010:35). Opinions of the focus group that concurred with those of separate interviews were harnessed and proposed as the main view of the crisis. Strategies for living in togetherness were drawn from these tenets gathered from the research.

As a native of Kom, most of the cultural values of Kom that I brought to this study were based on my intuitive understanding of the culture. Intuitive insights are also seen to be legitimate knowledge in qualitative research (Amin 2005:49). However, the interviews also ascertained how different Baptist Christians understand and apply values of the Kom culture in their daily live. This helped to facilitate a relevant application of the message of 1 John to be drawn within the context of the Kom culture.

Klein, Blomberg and Hubbard (1993: 406-424) suggest methodological procedure for a legitimate contextual application. This includes determining the original application(s), evaluating the level of specificity of the original application(s) and identifying the cross-cultural principles. The exegesis of the passages led to the discovery of the original applications i.e. what the text meant to those who were the primary addressees. Given insights from the Kom culture, the message was applied to the contextual situation of Kom Baptist Church given the cross cultural principles.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **AN EXEGETICAL STUDY OF SOME KEY RELEVANT PASSAGES OF 1 JOHN**

#### **4. 1. Introduction**

Every book of the Bible is accustomed by language, genre, culture of the original recipients, theological thought patterns of the author and the communication situation amongst other parameters. Identifying the author's intended meaning will require an understanding of these issues and particularly the communicative situation in which he wrote. This chapter seeks to determine the author's intended meaning of 1 John through an exegetical study of some key passages pertinent to the hypothesis of this dissertation, particularly John's treatment of the theme of love and fellowship. It is only after one has understood what a passage meant to its first readers that he can determine what it means to a contemporary audience like the Kom Baptist Church. I shall first review the situation behind the writing of the letter, then present an overview of the overall message of 1 John and its structure before studying the key passages relevant to the hypothesis of this dissertation.

Smith (1998:173-175) proposes a procedural guide to doing an exegetical study that includes amongst others an examination of the legitimacy of the discourse unit of a passage, its structure, a brief identification of major textual variants which may influence exegetical outcomes, a verse by verse commentary of the passage and a conclusion that summarizes the message of each discourse unit. This is the approach that will be used to study passages of 1 John that hinge on the hypothesis of this dissertation.

## **4.2 The communicative situation of 1 John**

The situation behind the writing of 1 John has been a matter of debate amongst scholars given that the issues discussed are derived mainly through a mirror reading of the text. Lieu for example thinks that the author is primarily concerned with what is going on within his community and thus the letter has been written to encourage those who form part of this community (2008:11). Griffiths thinks the letter is part of the debate between Jews and Jewish-Christians over Christological differences (2002:2). Many scholars agree that the central issue behind the writing of the letter was to clarify the understanding of Jesus as the Christ in the Johannine community (Kruse 2000, Marshall 1978, Smalley 2007). The issues surrounding the different views about Jesus in the Johannine community can be summarized as follows:

Raymond Brown (1979) proposed the different stages in the evolution of the Johannine community as follows: the pre-Gospel phase, the Gospel phase, the Epistles' phase and the After Epistles phase (Brown 1979:165-166). Each of the phases had believers that had their own views about the Christ. The pre-Gospel phase for example consisted of Jews who believed in Jesus but without regarding Him as the Christ. The Gospel phase consisted of a group of Jews who became part of the community, opposing the temple institutional beliefs and going ahead to convert Samaritans and to bring them in to the community. The Gentiles were also converted and they became part of the community. Jews who adhered strongly to the Temple laws saw those who regarded Jesus as the Mosaic Messiah as renegades and thus expelled them from the Temple. Jewish Christians who believed in Jesus Christ but were still loyal to Judaism found it difficult to accept the 'messiah-ship' of Jesus. Hellenistic Christians who came from pagan backgrounds were influenced by their dualistic world view. The Jewish Christians thus maintained a low Christological view of Jesus and drifted towards what became known as Ebionism. The Hellenistic Christians had a very high Christological view of Jesus and this pushed them to a Gnostic inclination particularly on what became known as Docetism. These different beliefs in the community

engendered ethical implications given that the Jewish members of the community found the Law necessary and relevant for salvation (1 John 2:7-8) while the Hellenistic Christians despised the material body (given their perception of the body as intrinsically evil (1 John 3:10-11) and thus to them it didn't matter how the body was treated.

Evidently, the different groups that constituted the community came from different cultural and ethnic backgrounds and as such ushered in idiosyncrasies that later interfered with the integration of its members in the community. For example, the Gentile's background belief that matter was intrinsically evil and the spirit was intrinsically good engendered an ethical concern that made them live unethically. Thus John says, 'if we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us' (1:8). The Jewish expectations of a Messiah led those of that background to the inclination that they also had to keep the commandments as a way of procuring their salvation. There were thus two distinct perceptions of the Christ, a high Christology held by non-Jewish members of the community and a low Christology adhered to by Jewish members of the community. This created suspicion which engendered other ethical issues, mainly the lack of love across the seams of the community. Brown's proposal thus portrays a heterogeneous community and its eventual logical development of thought which created the problem that John is addressing. This offers exegetical clues for understanding the epistle.

The claims that the author is reviewing are reflected in the letter in the following verses: 1:6, 8, 10, 2:4, 6, 9 and 4:20. Sherman and Tuggy (1994:14) say a summary of the false assertions that John is warning against is clearly seen through words with the meaning component of speaking such as εἶπωμεν (we say), ψευδόμεθα (we lie), πλανῶμεν (we deceive) and ὁμολογῶμεν (we confess). John wrote to reassure the readers (Rockwell 2010) about the truth as it was taught from the beginning and to encourage those who were committed to the apostolic teachings. He also wanted to encourage adherents of the apostolic message to stay within his community and to persuade those who held these views but had not yet left the author's



community to reconsider their beliefs. By encouraging adherents of his community, he on the other hand was also refuting the inadequate views of the heretics who had already moved out of the Johannine community to prevent further fragmentation of the community. The letter is thus 'a response to an intra-Christian dispute, the details which are filled out by reference to later second-century CE heresies' (Griffith 2002:1).

### **4.3. Overview of the message of 1 John**

The letter has been described as a pastoral letter thus, persuasive and encouraging the audience to a right attitude and behaviour in a community that has witnessed turmoil following controversial teachings (Griffith 2002; Ott 1990; Streett 2011). In other words, the letter was written to reassure members of the author's community about their faith and to rebut the claims of the heretics as established in 1 John 1:6, 8, 10, 2:4, 6, 9 and 4:20. The letter however, is also described as polemical, thus reprimanding the architects of the schism in the author's community (Reno1997). There is therefore a duality of tone that swings from polemical passages to pastoral concerns (Painter 2008:115) and weaves the letter into a net of ideas.

The body of the letter runs from 1:5-5:12 and has three main discourse units in which the author makes three main appeals or exhortations. The first main discourse unit is 1:5-2:27 in which the author exhorts members of his community to desist from loving the world and to continue to live in ways in which they were originally taught. The next major discourse unit is 2:28-4:6 and here the author encourages his readers to live in union with Christ and to love one another making sure they test the teachings they received. The last discourse unit of the body of the letter runs from 4:7-5:12 in which the author repeats himself by further encouraging love amongst the brethren.

The author switches from one topic to another using strategy like anaphora and lexical coherence. He reiterates his appeals and themes on morality (1:7, 9, 2:1, 2:15), God's will (2:3, 7, 17, 3:22, 5:2), believing in God's Son (3:23, 5:21), holding on to the apostolic message (2:24, 4:1, 15, 5:21) throughout the

letter (Sherman and Tuggy 1994:14). Sherman and Tuggy identify thirty five words in the domain of 'abiding', twenty words in the domain of 'conduct', forty-five words in the domain of 'righteousness' and fifty-seven words in the domain of 'love and hate'. This is a high prevalence of recurrence of words in the same semantic domain if we consider 1 John as a relatively short letter. This portrays the significance of the themes treated for the author.

The main themes that John is addressing can be classified into two groups, theological and ethical themes. John wrote mainly to reassert the Christological foundations of the faith for his community. Christology therefore is at the centre of the letter but in communicating this, the Trinitarian nature of God is clearly presented. For example, John talks about the love of God the Father (4:16) and the abiding presence of the Son (3:24) and the gift of the Spirit (4:13). All the God-head is presented with the role they play in the life of the believer. The believers have been adopted by God (Peppard 2011:102) and because of this, one can easily distinguish them because they conform to God's character, they abide in His truth and are filled with love and believe that Jesus came in the flesh (McLean 2012:68).

Ethical issues and its associated themes such as Christian conduct are treated repeatedly in the letter. Thus, the author talks about the need of forgiveness in (1:9), mutual love in the community (4:7), righteousness (2:29), the need to renounce sin (1:8), obedience (2:3, 3:10), the need to reject worldliness (2:12, 4:1) and keeping the faith (2:18, 3:5). Jackman (1992:18), talking about these themes draws the analogy of a spiral staircase, where one sees the same things from a different angle. John rotates the same themes over and over at different vantage points in the letter to give the reader an all inclusive gaze of what he is talking about.

This study hinges on the need for an adequately honed Christology and an ethical conduct that ensues from such knowledge for a contemporary Kom Baptist Church. In order to do this, I have carried out an in-depth exegesis of 1 John 1:5-2:11 and 1 John 4:1-11, relating these passages to other parts of the letter where necessary. These two passages constitute the pivotal axes of

the letter as they succinctly handle the major themes of the book. In other words, the teaching and basis of the exhortations in the letter all spring from the metaphorical declaration that ‘God’s light’ (1:5) and that ‘God is love’ (4:6). These axiomatic phrases provide the motivations for all the exhortations that John will give in the letter.

## 4.4. Exegesis of 1 John 1:5-2:11

### 4.4.1. *Discourse unit, setting and macro structure*

The discourse unit (1:5-2:11) falls within the larger discourse context of 1:5-2:27. The unit clearly has defining boundary features from the preceding unit (1:1-4) in which the author ‘elaborates on his personal testimony concerning the validity of the contents’ of the rest of the letter (Wendland 1998:40). The tense (of 1:1-4) is the aorist tense as opposed to the present tense in 1:5. The section (1:1-4) is of the proclamation genre (Sherman and Tuggy 1994) and the next verse (1:5) is exhortative in nature. Lexical coherence of 1:1-4 is achieved through repetition of certain words or phrases: ἀκηκόαμεν (1:1b, 3a) ἑώρακάμεν (1:1b: 2a, 3a), ἐφανερώθη (2a, 2c), μαρτυροῦμεν (2a, 3a) ζῶν (1c, 2a, 2b) which tense differs from what follows in 1:5ff. It is reasonable, therefore to regard 1:5 as beginning a new section. The metaphorical declaration of the verse forms the basis of the exhortations that will follow in the rest of the section (1:5-2:11).

Most scholars agree that the discourse unit of 1:5-2:11 has two sub units (1:5-2:2 and 2:3-11), (von Wahlde 2010, Kruse 2000 and Sherman and Tuggy 1994, Lieu 2008). The verses (2:1-2) liaise the preceding subsection (1:5-2:2) and the one that follows (2:3-11) (Sherman and Tuggy 1994:29). In other words, 2:1-2 could be read both as anaphoric and cataphoric verses. Read as a cataphora, the use of the pronoun αὐτόν (him) and αὐτοῦ (his) in the following verses (2:3ff) are seen to be in reference to the noun ‘Jesus Christ, the Righteous One’ mentioned in mentioned earlier in verse 1. As an anaphora, these verses are linked with the preceding section because τέκνιά μου’ introduces a reassurance after the strong denunciation in an earlier verse

(1:10) and *καὶ ἔάν* (and if) completes the series of conditionals begun in 1:6. The verse 2:2 is read as closing the discussion on sin thus not linked to verse 3. However, despite the boundary marker in 2:3 and given the ambiguity of whether to consider 2:1-2 as cataphoric or anaphoric verses I will treat the section (1:5-2:11) as the same macro discourse unit.

Some scholars disagree on where the section (1:5-2:11) should begin. For example, Painter (2008) argues that the prologue is composed of the first five verses and not four verses and thus for him, the next discourse unit begins in verse 6 and not verse 5 thus (1:6-2:17). Yarbrough (2008) sees the section as running from 1:1-2:6 and 2:7-2:17.

There are good reasons to take 1:5-2:11 as a distinctive discourse unit. The unity of the section is attested by the lexical coherence with the frequent use of *ἐντολή* (occurring six times in 2:3-4, 7-8). Other recurrent lexical items are 'darkness' (2:8, 9, 11), light (2:8, 9, 10), 'know' (2:3, 5, 8) and love (2:5, 7, 10) (Sherman and Tuggy 1994:23). The metaphor of light and darkness runs throughout the section and helps to give cohesion and coherence to the section. The end of the section (2:9-11) repeats the theme of light and darkness introduced at the beginning of the section in 1:5-7a thus bracketing the section as a discourse unit of its own.

Also, the conditional statements that run from 1:6 to 2:1 convey cohesion. In 1:6a, 8a and 10a, the author states the protasis 'if we say', meta-representing the beliefs of his opponents which he does not agree with. He goes on to state the negative consequences of these conditionals in the apodosis in 6b, 8bc and 10bc. He then goes on to contrast this and state what he agrees with in 7a, 9a and 2:1b and then the positive consequences in 7bc, 9bcd and 2:1c. There is thus an alternation of positive and negative conditions in this discourse unit suggesting that the chapter division was not well structured as the conditions run through chapter 1 to chapter 2:1 (Wendland 1998:47).

Another important feature of this discourse unit is the recurrence of antonyms in 2:3-11: The term 'darkness' occurs in 2:8, 9, and 11 and come in contrast of the term 'light' in 2:8, 9, and 10). Coherence is seen in the repetition of certain

words: 'know' (2:3, 5, 8), 'love' (2:5, 7, 10), 'truth' (2:4, 5, 8) and 'remain' (2:6, 10).

Parallelisms occur significantly in 2:3-11. The phrase 'the one claiming' in 2:4 has parallels in 6-8, 9-11. For example in 2:4a, the author talks about the one 'not keeping his commandments' and contrasts this in a parallel manner in 2:5a to 'the one who keeps His word'. In 2:4c, the phrase 'is a liar' occurs parallel to 2:4c with the phrase 'the truth is not in him'. In 2:7 the phrase 'new commandment' occurs as an antithetical parallel to the phrase an 'old commandment'. In 2:8b, the phrase 'darkness is being taken away' also occurs as an antithetical parallel to 2:8c in the phrase 'and the true light is already shining'. It is therefore to see the dichotomy of opinions formed in the letter. Beliefs and actions are mentioned alongside their counterpoise, signalling the disagreement in the letter.

Verse 12 is marked by a series of performative speech acts: 'I write' and vocatives (*τεκνία, πατέρες, νεανίσκοι* etc). The central theme of the importance of obeying God's commands is seen running across the section beginning from 2:12. The performatives and vocatives are indicative of the mood of encouraging and spurring the addressees to action in this section.

Figure 4: Semantic analysis schematic structure of 1:5-2:2 (slightly modified from Sherman and Tuggy 1994)

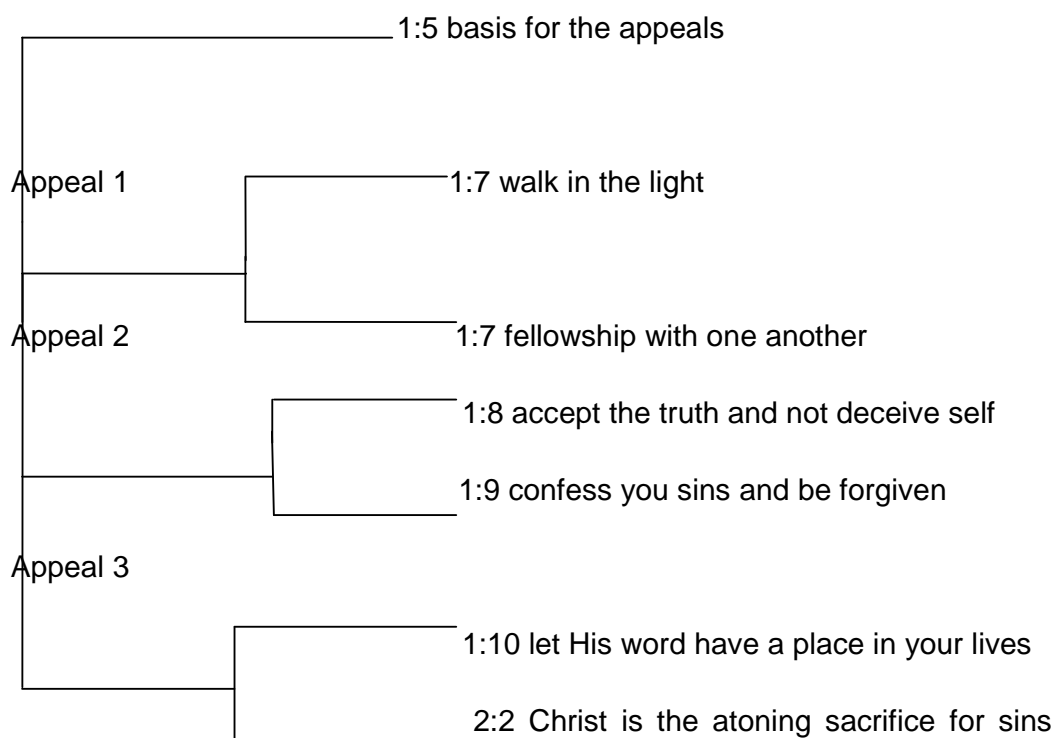
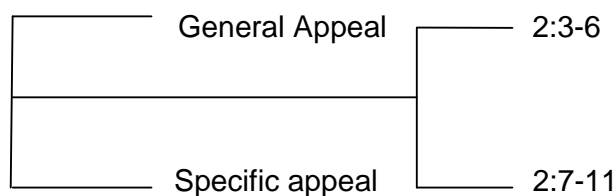


Figure 5: Semantic analysis schema of the macro structure of 1 John 2:3-11 (adapted from Sherman and Tuggy 1994)



There are three specific appeals or exhortation in the section: walk in the light (1:7), confess your sins (1:9) and let the word of God have a place in your lives (1:10). The general appeal in 2:3-6 is for the addressees to obey God's commands and in 2:7-11 there is another specific appeal: loving one another.

#### 4.4.2 Textual variants

The texts of the epistles of John exist in about six hundred manuscripts and offer ‘relatively few text-critical problems’ and ‘no major doctrines or points of interpretation are seriously affected by the manuscript deviation’ (Yarbrough 2008: 4). Westcott (1966) cites some of the major manuscripts including three primary uncials and three secondary uncials. The primary uncials include: Codex Sinaiticus A IV, Codex Alexandrinus A V AND Codex Vaticanus IV. The present discourse unit (1:5-2:11) has no major textual variants. Nonetheless there is need to cite in passing a few variants whose differences of interpretation do not necessarily shape the meaning significantly but show some small variations. These include:

1 John 1:5.

- a. *ἔστιν αὕτη* ( aBC), *ἔστιν αὕτη ἔστιν* (A).
- b. *ἀγγελία*, *message* ( aAB), for *ἐπαγγελία* (C), *promise*.
- c. *οὐκ ἔστιν αὐτῷ*/ (B), for *ἐναυτῷ οὐκ ἔστιν* ( aAC).

Of all the variants above, (b) has a word change and the rest are slight alternations in word order. The word order does not change the message in these cases. However, (b) shows differences of meaning where one meaning is ‘message’ and the other ‘promise’. Most of the manuscripts take the variant that interprets this as ‘message’ and this is consistent with the semantic flow when we consider that ‘God is light’ is a declaration, a message and not a promise.

In 1 John 2:7, some manuscripts have *ἀγαπητοί*, (beloved ones) and others have *ἀδελφοί* (brethren). Both are seen as terms of endearment that are mutually substitutable. However, the majority manuscripts consider ‘beloved’ as the most appropriate rendering.

#### 4.4.3 Form, micro structure and redactional considerations

In hortatory discourse, the core message (exhortations or appeals) has varying degrees of forcefulness. Strong exhortations in hortatory discourse

like 1 John are achieved through the imperative form of the verb but mitigated exhortations are the most common in the letter and are marked in various ways. The mitigation on the exhortations are owed to the tone of the letter which to the most part is pastoral and appealing for a change of attitude based on an understanding of the truth and true nature of God. Sherman and Tuggy (1994:2) identify three other kinds of exhortations in 1 John:

The first one refers to a command or proclamation with an obvious implication that it should be obeyed. This form of strong exhortation is not found in the present discourse unit but find an example of it in 4:1: 'do not believe every spirit but test the spirits'.

The second type is mitigated exhortations expressed by *ἵνα* with the subjunctive or ought to (2:1): 'I write this to you so that you will not sin' (NIV).

The third type refers to mitigated exhortations expressed by a conditional clause attached to an independent clause whose meaning is positive value to the reader. For example, the conditional of 1:9 'if we confess our sins He is faithful and just and will forgive our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness'. This can be seen as a mitigated exhortation where the author is saying that 'we should confess our sins, since He is faithful and just and He will purify us and forgive us from all unrighteousness'.

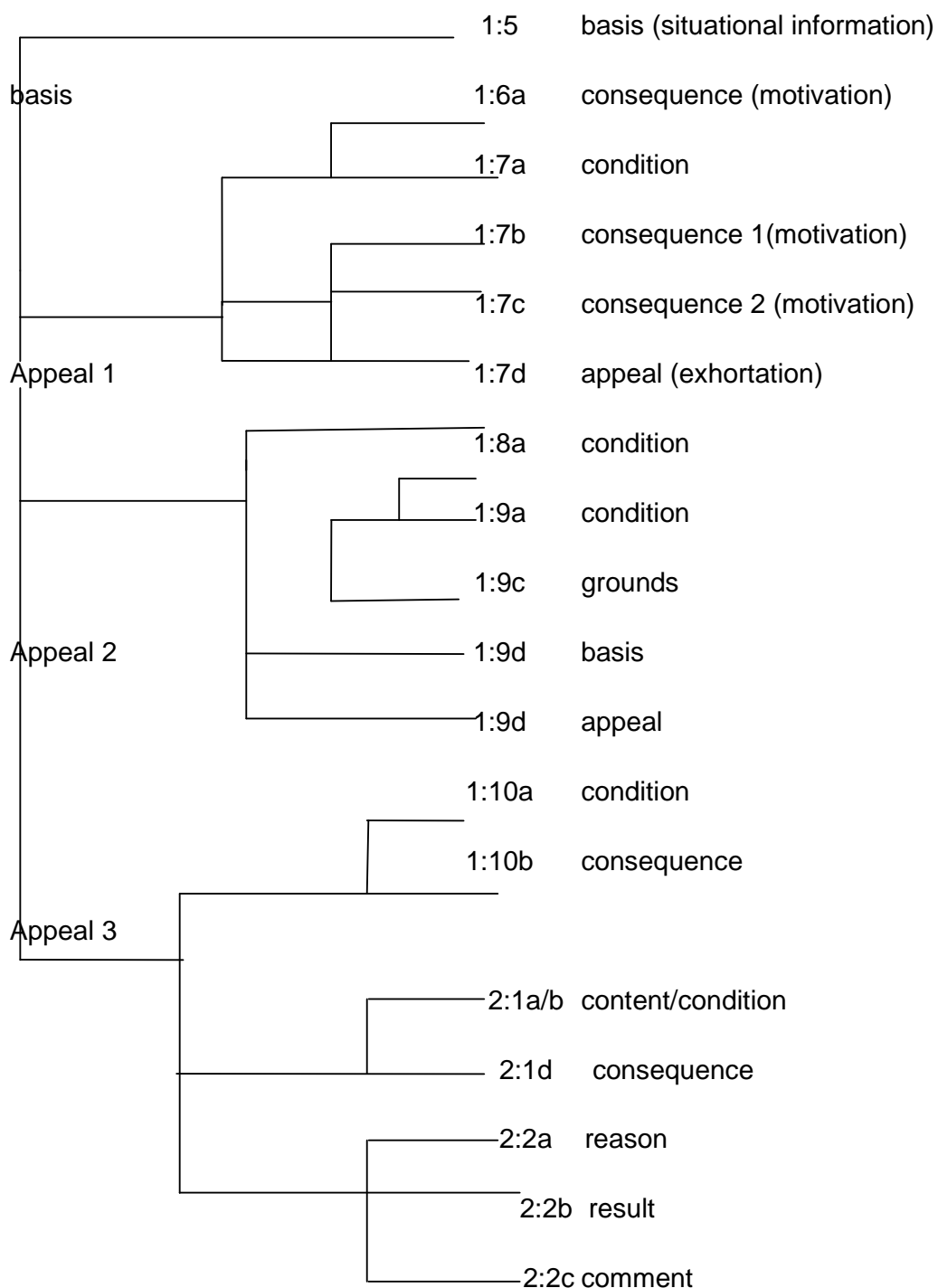
The nature of the supportive information in this discourse unit is mainly situational and motivational information (Levinhson 2007:22). Situational information explains the circumstances out of which the discourse arises and why the exhortation is necessary. In other words, what has occasioned or provoked the exhortation to be made. In 1:5 the main motivation or situation for the exhortations that follow is made: 'this is the message we have heard from Him and declare to you: God is light, in Him there is no darkness at all' (NIV). In 1:7-10 the author presents a series of mitigated exhortations using conditional phrases and stating the motivations behind these exhortations in the apodosis of the conditions. For example, in verse 10, he states that 'if we claim we have not sinned' as the protasis and the situation is presented in the apodosis 'we make him to be a liar and his word has no place in our



lives'. In other words, the exhortation is 'do not claim you have not sinned' and the reason for this is that 'God is not liar when he says we have sinned'.

Motivational information encourages the hearer to heed the exhortation by giving the reasons for obeying. It points to the consequences of disobedience and draws attention to the moral or religious values of the hearer's society that provide motivation to conform to the exhortation. It appeals to the hearer's sense of responsibility to heed to the exhortation. For example, in verse 7, the author exhorts the readers in 7a to 'walk in the light as he is the light' and the motivation for this is provided in the rest of the verse. : so that we should 'have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son purifies us from all sins' (NIV).

Figure 6: Semantic analysis schema of the micro 1:5-2:2 (slightly modified from Sherman and Tuggy 1994)



John's main strategy in this section has been achieved through the use of situational and motivational information in which he states the conditions,

consequences and results for behaving in a particularly way. This information provides the basis for the three mitigated exhortations he has made in 1:7d, 1:9d and 2:1a.

#### **4.4.4. Exegesis**

**Verse 5:** This verse supplies the main motivation for which the ensuing exhortations will be made. The verse is the reason for the hortatory text of 1 John as a whole. Commentators generally have agreed that the use of ‘we’ in this verse is a redactional technique where the author refers to himself and in this sense it is an exclusive pronoun that could include other apostles who can be identified with the verbs in 1:1-4. ‘One of the peculiarities of the letter is that ... the dominant verb forms are in the first and second person plural, with a complementary significant use of the appropriate pronouns: the letter is articulated in terms of “we” and “you”’ (Lieu 2008: 809).

The demonstrative αὕτη (this) is agreed by all commentators as pointing forward to the phrase ‘God is light’ and the message (ἡ ἀγγελία) refers to the gospel which was taught ‘from the beginning’. The real referent designated by the pronoun αὐτοῦ (him) in the phrase ‘this is the message we have heard from him’ is in debate. This may be referring to God but could also be referring to Christ. Most English versions stay ambiguous. NLT assigns the reference to Jesus by translating this as ‘this is the message we heard from Jesus’ and TEV translates it as: ‘this is the message we have heard from His Son’. Although the use of the pronoun ‘him’ is ambiguous, John declares that he heard the message and the content of the message is that ‘God is light’ suggesting that his informant is not God. It therefore makes sense to consider the designate of this pronoun to be Jesus.

The metaphorical expression θεὸς φῶς ἐστίν (God is light) presents the basis of the exhortations that will follow in the whole discourse unit (1:5-2:11). ‘The declaration describes the being and nature of God: it means that he is absolute in his glory, (the physical connotation of light), in his truth (the

intellectual) and in his holiness (the moral)' (Smalley 2007:19). In other words, God is absolutely morally pure like light and has no trace of impurity.

The use of metaphors and symbols is the author's technique to allow the reader to draw for himself the relevant implicated assumptions (implicatures). Metaphors make manifest before the reader a plethora of meanings and leaves the reader to take responsibility over which of these meanings he considers to be the strongly communicated component. By allowing the reader to infer what the image of light conveys makes him to take responsibility over any contradictory behaviour to the meaning he has highlighted. The reader is guided in his choice when the metaphor of light is further juxtaposed with that of darkness. What they symbolize are self evident thus contrasting between the virtue of light which stood for righteousness and the vice of darkness that represented evil.

**Verses 6-7:** These two verses present a pair of one false and one true condition that are motivations for the exhortations. Verse 6 draws the attention of the reader to the ethical or moral values of the society and appealing to the hearer's sense of responsibility against telling lies. On the basis of seeing lies as wrong doing, the hearer is exhorted in verse 7 to 'walk in the light' and 'have fellowship with one another'. Further motivation for heeding this exhortation is given in verse 7bc with reasons why the believer should walk in the light. The believer has to 'walk in the light' because 'he [God] is in the light' and 'the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin' (NIV). These exhortations are mitigated, showing the tone and mood of the author; he is alluring in tone. The pronoun in the phrase μετ' αὐτοῦ (with him) designates God who is the last explicitly referent in the preceding sentence.

The use of 'we' in the conditional phrase Ἐὰν εἴπωμεν ὅτι κοινωνίαν ἔχομεν in 1:6ff does not mean that John shares these views, it is editorial i.e. John is using 'we' as a way of stating a viewpoint. This is a metarepresentation (Blakemore 1992) i.e. a representation of another representation. John is using this to represent the representation of his opponents. Thus this could be rephrased as 'anyone who says...' John echoes the argument of what people

who hold this opinion would say and this is suggestive of the fact that anyone could sin. In 1 John, when the writer uses the 'if' clause with the subject 'we', this most of the time will be representing an opinion that he does not necessarily agree with it. The author's dissociation from the inclusive 'we' is marked by the contrastive thought that usually follows the precedent clause. For example, in (1:6) he states the 'if' clause as follows: 'If we claim to have fellowship with him' and the contrastive thought that follows is 'yet walk in the darkness' (NIV) which clearly shows that the author does not identify with the preceding assertion by 'we'.

Smalley (2007:48) takes the pronoun 'him' in μετ' αὐτοῦ to refer to Christ but this should refer to the foundational assertion of 1:5 that 'God is light' thus the referent here should be taken as God. This is supported by what follows i.e. we cannot say we have fellowship with God who is light but we 'walk in darkness'. The metaphorical expression 'darkness' is repeated in this verse and stands for untruthfulness and spiritual gloom or godlessness.

The phrase, *ψευδόμεθα καὶ οὐ ποιοῦμεν τὴν ἀλήθειαν* suggests that if we admit that 1:6a is true, not only will 1:6a be a lie, but the person who admits this would not be living in accordance with the truth (von Wahlde 2010:38). Not living in the truth is synonymous to 'walking in the darkness' (1:6b). Many commentators differ in what truth here will refer to but it makes good sense to agree with Sherman and Tuggy (1998:26) that the use of the term throughout 1 John has two connotations: the true Christian teaching or message and behaviour that is in consonance with this true message.

The phrase *ἐὰν δὲ ἐν τῷ φωτὶ περιπατῶμεν* (if we walk in the light) is a positive contrast to verse 6. The author identifies with this as what should be the case among his audience. Walking in the light has been used figuratively throughout the letter and draws its analogy from the declaration in 1:5, 'God is light'. God is further described as being 'in the light'. 'Walk in darkness' and 'light' are used to explain each other. For Baylis (1992:220), 'darkness hinges on the meaning of "God is light" in verse 5' and light is used in reference to life as revealed by Christ in verse 1. Walking in the light refers to receiving God's

revelation and walking in darkness leans on rejecting this revelation (Baylis 1992:220).

‘Walk in the light’ is an exhortation directed to behaviour in the same way as God is not only the light but He is ‘in the light’. Thus, the good and pure actions of God are in consonance with His nature. ‘He is in the light’ is seen as synonymous with ‘there is no darkness in Him’. ‘If we [then] say we have fellowship with him’, we are supposed to ‘walk in the light’ as he also is ‘in the light’.

There is an ambiguity to the phrase *κοινωνίαν ἔχομεν μετ’ ἀλλήλων* (we have fellowship with one another). Does this refer to having fellowship with God, the referent of the preceding discourse or we have fellowship with one another as people who walk in the light. There is the possibility that this points in both ways as Smalley (2007:22) explains: ‘it is axiomatic for John that fellowship with God involves fellowship with his people’, which might have been neglected by the secessionists as they claimed fellowship with God.

Fellowship with God is enabled by ‘the blood of Jesus his Son’ which ‘cleanses’ or purifies the believer from sin. This is the grounds in which the believer can claim to belong and to fellowship with God, by believing in the cleansing power of ‘the blood of Jesus His Son’. Blood is seen as the symbol of the crucifixion, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Fellowship is an experience of community and is linked to the metaphoric words of ‘darkness’ and ‘light’. Thus ‘If we claim to have fellowship with him yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live by the truth’, 1:6, NIV). In other words, the cognates of fellowship are truth and light and what it represents. Truth ensues from the knowledge that was revealed to the apostles as it was in the beginning. Darkness is antonymous to fellowship.

In relevance theory (otherwise known as the inferential theory of communication), ‘the expression ‘if–then’ provides a procedural instruction, telling the audience to construct a logical argument where the proposition marked by ‘if’ acts as a premise and the proposition marked by ‘then’ as a conclusion’ (Gutt 2006:6). The verses 1:6-9 and 2:1 have all been constructed

with a characteristic 'if' and 'then' (although sometimes the 'if' and 'then' are not explicit). Using this principle, the implicit 'then' in verse 6 can be supplied in the apodosis and the logical argument can be constructed from the 'if' protasis. Verse 6 can therefore be read as: 'If we claim to have fellowship with him yet walk in the darkness, [then] we lie and do not live by the truth' (NIV).

Three things can be done to render a proposition an explicature i.e. full and explicit propositional form of the assertion. This includes the disambiguation of terms or ambiguous renderings such as darkness in verse 6, the enrichment of the proposition i.e. filling out the ellipsis and assigning reference to ambiguous renderings like pronouns. In the preceding paragraph, we have disambiguated and assigned reference to most of the ambiguous expressions and pronouns of verses 6-7 thus we know for example that darkness refers to evil and its associated meanings and light refers to righteousness and its associated meanings. Implicatures (implicated assumptions) need to be supplied to draw a valid argument in an 'if/'then' construction. Thus the logical argument of verse 6 can be constructed as follows:

Premise 1: 'if anyone claims to have fellowship with God yet lives in sin (darkness) and not having the right doctrine (truth)... The following assumptions ensue from holding this premise:

Premise 2: There are some people who claim that they have fellowship with God but live in sin (implicated premise).

Premise 3: Darkness or sin is opposed to fellowshiping with God (implicated premises).

Then (conclusion): The person who claims to have fellowship with God but lives in sin lies and does not live by the truth (explicature).

Similarly, verse 7 states: 'but if we are living in the light, as God is in the light, then we have fellowship with each other, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, cleanses us from all sin' (NIV). The logical argument of verse 7 can be constructed as follows:

Premise 1: The author's addressees need to live in the light because God is the light. This premise engenders the following assumptions:

Premise 2: People who do not live in the light do not relate with God and should not expect things from God (implicated premise).

Conclusion: The blood of Jesus cleanses only those people who live in the light.

Verse 6 then shows the apparent contradiction to claim to have fellowship with him yet 'walk in darkness' and verse 7 restates verse 6 positively thus 'if we walk in the light as he is the light'. The two verses have be communicated clearly by the help of the metaphors of 'walking in the light/darkness'. The appeal to figurative language creates focus and allows the reader the liberty to draw the obvious implications though succinctly veiled in a metaphor for himself.

**Verses 8-9:** These verses present another pair of positive and negative propositions. The formula, ἐὰν εἴπωμεν ὅτι ἁμαρτίαν οὐκ ἔχομεν (if we say we do not have sin) is again used. To 'have sin' is the equivalent of possessing a sinful disposition or the propensity to sin (von Wahlde 2010:39) and this reflects the claims of the secessionists (Yarbrough 2008:59). They claimed that they have been sanctified and do not need to be purified of sin because they were without sin. By extension, this would imply that whatever Christians do is right and so cannot be accused of committing sin.

The author says this claim is self deceptive, 'we deceive ourselves' and 'the truth is not in us'. There are two main ways that 'truth' can be interpreted here: the truth about man's sinfulness and God's holiness and truth as revealed knowledge or doctrine about God. I take truth here to be both meanings because one patently entails the other and a sharp distinction between the two cannot be drawn. This also concurs with the author's foundational declaration and basis for the exhortation in 1:5: 'This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light and in him is no



darkness at all' (NIV). In other words, verse 5 both reveals a truth about God and about His character.

The contrast of wrong belief denounced in verse 8 is presented in verse 9. The contrastive force is implied by contrast between verse 8 and verse 9. Instead of denying that 'we' have not sinned, John recommends that we should own up to our sin and this will yield a positive impact in our lives. The verse thus carries another mitigated exhortation, thus, 'if we confess our sins' is appealing to the reader to confess his sins. The motivations for doing this is presented in the second half of the verse: 'God is just and faithful to forgive us from all unrighteousness'.

In the phrase πιστός ἐστιν καὶ δίκαιος (he is faithful and righteous), faithfulness, is implied that God is trustworthy. TEV takes faithfulness as the fulfilment of a promise thus translates the phrase as 'he will keep his promise and do what is right'. Both meanings are in view here, i.e. in his nature, God is faithful and thus will keep to his promises ipso facto. The nature of God as δίκαιος is in contrast with the nature of man as ἀδικίας thus a play of words to show the contrast between man's unrighteousness and God's righteousness.

Using relevance theory, we can draw inferences to provide bridging assumptions (implicated premises) in the logical thought frame of the hearers of John and also fill out the full propositional form (explicatures) of what was said as follows:

Verse 8: 'If we claim we have no sin, we are only fooling ourselves and not living in the truth' (NIV). The first premise comes from the protasis, the "if" clause: Premise 1: If people claim that they have no sin they only fool themselves. Premise 2: There is no one without sin (implicated premise)

Premise 3: Some people can claim that they do not have sin (implicated premise)

Premise 4: People who claim that they do not have sin are wrong.

Conclusion: People who claim that they do not have sin do not live according to the truth that God has revealed (explicature).

Verse 9 by itself is a conclusion to the argument raised by verse 8. ‘But if we confess our sins to him, [then] he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all wickedness’ (NIV). Inferences can be drawn to show the logical pattern entailed by the verse as follows:

Premise 1: All people have sins (implicated premise).

Premise 2: People need to confess their sins to God (implicated premise).

Premise 3: God forgives sins only if they are confessed (implicated premise).

Conclusion: It is in the nature of God to forgive people from their sins and cleanses them from all wickedness

**Verse 10:** This verse marks the last conditional clauses that began in 1:6 that envisaged ‘the kind of things that those among John’s readership have said in recent times or may be tempted to say’ and summarizes the section 1:6-1:10 (Yarbrough 2008:65). There are close similarities with the first conditional that was stated in 1:6 as Yarbrough (2008:66) observes in the following phrases:

Table 7: Similarities in the conditionals in 1:6 and 1:10

1:6 Ἐὰν εἴπωμεν (if we say)	1:10 ἐὰν εἴπωμεν (if we say)
ψευδόμεθα (we lie)	ψεύστην ποιοῦμεν αὐτὸν (we make him a liar)
καὶ οὐ ποιοῦμεν τὴν ἀλήθειαν (and do not do what truth dictates)	καὶ ὁ λόγος αὐτοῦ οὐκ ἔστιν ἐν ἡμῖν (and his word is not in us)

These similarities show that 1:6 and 1:10 form a bracket around the exhortations that have been made whose distinctive feature was the echo of the arguments that the opponents of John’s letter were saying. Verse 1:10 is a recast of 1:8, the logical ordering of the thoughts should have 1:10 before the

exhortation in 1:9 which presents the remedy to the admittance that we have sinned (1:8) and the obvious implications if we fail to admit sin (1:10).

The logical argument of verse 10 can be constructed as follows:

Premise 1: If anyone says he has not sinned (explicature)

Premise 2: Everyone has sinned (implication)

Premise 3: God knows and says we all have sin (implication).

Conclusion 4: Anyone who says he has not sinned is making God a liar and the word of God is not in that person (explicature).

**2:1:** Sherman and Tuggy (1994:29) argue that the vocative, 'my dear children' at the beginning of this verse 'serves to introduce a reassurance after a strong denunciation (1:10) rather than to indicate a boundary'. However, it is easy to see that there is a switch of tone of the speaker from the strong denunciation in 1:10 to the soft and intimate appellation of the addressees as 'my children'. The vocative *Τεκνία μου* is diminutive and shows the intimacy of the relationship the author has with his audience (von Wahlde 2010:42). As such, the author writes with the expectation to be obeyed (Yarbrough 2008:72).

Sherman and Tuggy (1994:29) argue that the aorist prohibition *ἵνα μὴ ἁμάρτητε* (that you should not sin) 'suggests a definite act of sin indicating the possibility of a behavioural lapse because of human frailty than a set attitude of disobedience'. Lieu (2008: 61) corroborates this and sees the aorist form of the verb 'sin' as an indication of individual acts of wrong doing contrasting with the present tense of 1:8 and the perfect tense of 1:10 'both of which put some emphasis on persistence', thus the reality of sin in human life. The exhortation in 2:1 therefore is 'do not sin'.

Exhortations of different forms have different strengths and the exhortation in 2:1 (imperative) relatively is a stronger appeal than the exhortations in the conditional mood in 1:6 to 1:9. John recognizes the strength of this exhortation and clarifies it by showing that sin is an ever present possibility as he indicated in verses 7 and 9 and therefore grants a concession of *καὶ ἂν τις*

ἁμάρτη (and if any should sin). The remedy for sin borne out of human frailty remains in the παράκλητον (advocate) Jesus Christ the righteous One. Ταῦτα γράφω (I am writing these) points more to what has been said in 1:6-9 than to what follows (Smalley 2007:33, Sherman and Tuggy 1994:29).

The term παράκλητον is here applied to Ἰησοῦν Χριστὸν δίκαιον and not the Holy Spirit as used elsewhere in Scriptures. He is further described as Ἰησοῦν Χριστὸν δίκαιον (Jesus Christ the Righteous One, NIV) and (Jesus Christ, the one who is truly righteous, NLT). The question here is to find out why the heavy coding? He has been described as the ‘advocate’ and his name has been identified as Jesus Christ and yet another characteristic quality has been labelled on him ‘the Righteous’. Relevance theory asserts that such a heavy coding of a referent necessitate a high ‘processing cost’ i.e. the mental processes to infer the meaning and the expectation from such a process is more cognitive gains (Sperber and Wilson 1996). In other words, the reader should ask himself the question why all of these appellations and qualifications have been used to describe Jesus at this point in time.

Smalley offers some explanation to yield the dividends warranted by the heavy coding when he says the human and divine nature of Jesus who as man remained righteous and thus has the quality to act on behalf of human beings (Smalley 2007:33) is in view here. In other words, Jesus is the man who lived but who remained without sin and by virtue of this, He has the right standing to intercede for men when they sin. The same adjective ‘righteous’ was used in 1:9 to describe God as able to forgive sins. In other words, the central issue of the personality of Jesus as both God and man and thus His role as advocate before God and through whom our sins can be forgiven is highlighted by the description of Jesus as the advocate and as the righteous one. This highlights the uniqueness of Jesus as the only one who can be advocate for humanity. The verse by this presents the enabling information showing the reader what has already been done to help him in view of the exhortation that has just been made.

**Verse 2:** The verse has two key concepts here that need to be disambiguated: ἱλασμός (atoning sacrifice NIV, expiation RSV, propitiation NASB, means by which our sins are forgiven TEV) and κόσμου (the whole world NIV and RSV, all the world NLT, everyone TEV). Smalley explains that the term propitiation ‘recapitulates and expands the reference to the blood of Jesus that purifies us from sin referred to in 1:7b’ (2007:36). Jesus is demonstrated here as a heavenly intercessor pleading the case of the sinner in the world and is himself the offering for their sins (2007:37). In other words Jesus is able to ask God to forgive us because he Himself bore punishment in our place when He died on the cross. There is thus an implicit comparison of Jesus as an animal of sacrifice for our sins.

The ‘world’ is interpreted as a metonymy representing all human beings. Thus, Jesus Christ is the sin offering for not just those the author is addressing in his community but also those who have left the community and those who are still to join the community of believers. The ‘world’ can also be seen as the system and thought patterns that are not in consonance with faith in Jesus Christ.

**Verse 3:** Even though there are boundary markers in verse 3, the preceding verses 1 and 2 could be viewed as a tie between the 1:5-2:2 whose central idea has been sin and how it is remedied and 2:3-11. Thus ἐν τούτῳ (by this) is seen to have its reference both to the preceding and to the following context.

Verse 3b is ‘a mitigated exhortation expressed by a conditional clause [ἐὰν τὰς ἐντολὰς αὐτοῦ τηρῶμεν, if we keep his commandments, RSV] attached to an independent clause that states something of value to both the author and the hearer (2:3a) [and by this we may be sure that we know him, RSV] (Sherman and Tuggy 1994:29). Commentators are generally agreed that ‘know him’ implies a personal relationship with God. John uses it as a formula though with some variations in (2:5, 3:16, 19, 24, 4:2, 13, 5:2, 2:18 and 4:6) (Smalley 2007:41, Lieu 2008:68, Stott 1988:94). TEV assigns the referent of the pronoun to God but the pronoun αὐτόν can be interpreted in different

ways. It could mean God or Christ or both. Most English versions take the interpretation as God. For ἐντολὰς, 'John has in mind not only a command in a situational limited sense but a commandment in the more encompassing and transcendent sense' (Yarbrough 2008:83). Thus RSV translates this as 'commandment' and rendering it as 'command' as NIV has done may give the impression of a one time action than a habitual action.

**Verse 4:** This verse is the opposite or negative version of verse 3. The person who says he knows God but does not obey his commandments is a liar i.e. the person is lying when he says that. Καὶ ἐν τούτῳ ἡ ἀλήθεια<sup>1</sup> οὐκ ἔστιν. Commentators are agreed that 'truth' here is what God has revealed .

**Verse 5:** This verse picks back the necessity of obeying the 'commands' of God from 2:3-4. Marshall (1978) sees 'the writer's thought in verses 3–5 has an "A B A" pattern; having stated a contrast to his original point, he now restates the latter once more'. He explains that this is a strategy to reassure his readers of the need to really know God and to discourage those who were under the wrong teaching of his opponents. The verb τηρῇ (keep) is in the present tense marking an ongoing necessity (Kruse 2000:80). The genitive ἡ ἀγάπη τοῦ θεοῦ (love of God) is ambiguous. It can mean our love for God or our love for others (Sherman and Tuggy 1994: 34). Most commentators agree with the last interpretation.

**Verse 6:** The expression 'to live in him' (ἐν αὐτῷ μένειν) is more than just keeping commandments. 'It is the new and very spiritual existence that believers enjoy and which is effected through the agency of the Spirit who bears witness to the truth' (Kruse 2000:81). To live in him is a deep and lasting commitment in the relationship with God (von Wahlde 2010:60).

Jones (2010) clarifies that the expression 'remain in' or abide is a presiding metaphor in 1 John. 'Figuratively it suggests someone who does not leave the realm or sphere in which one finds oneself, hence remain, continue, abide. It can mean generally stand fast in battle, stay where one is, lasting, remain as one was, abide by a conviction, some of which conjure up perseverance' (2010: 183). Thus, when John says ἐν αὐτῷ μένειν he means that his

audience should develop deep convictions and resist through perseverance the tendencies that are pushing them away from of the community.

The person who claims to remain in him (ἐν αὐτῷ μένειν), 'has to walk in the same way in which he walked' (ὀφείλει καθὼς ἐκεῖνος περιεπάτησεν καὶ αὐτὸς). This means the person has to keep God's commandments as Jesus did (Kruse 2000:82) which is the model for behaviour (von Wahlde 2007:60). Jesus is presented here as the model to follow and living in him implies a conduct in conformity with the standard that he has set.

**Verse 7:** John begins the verse with the vocative Ἀγαπητοί (beloved) which is intended to reflect his caring attitude or intimacy (Wahlde 2010:61). He explains to that 'I am not writing a new commandment for you' and so he is sharing views that have been expressed to them from the beginning (Kruse 2000:82, von Wahlde 2007:61). The views of the opponents were seen to be new, contrasting with the views of the author seen to be old because they have been there from the beginning. The 'beginning' is in reference to the time that the readers first heard the gospel. Members of the Johannine church had been familiar from the beginning with the law of love (Smalley 2007:51) from John 13:34. The verb 'heard' (ἠκούσατε) is not a passive listening but an active response (Lieu 2008:77). Thus, 'heard' involves obedience or a demonstration that one has heeded to what he heard. This implies that members of the author's community believed the message that was given to them from the beginning.

**Verse 8:** The connector 'nevertheless' refers to verse 7 and not to some other command. Commentators are at odds to understand the relationship initiated by this connector. Does the neuter pronoun ὃ (which) refer to 'commandment', which is a feminine noun, or to 'newness' or to the writing in verse 8a? Sherman and Tuggy (1994:36) think this is referring to the newness and that the relative clause is a description of how the command is new. The 'new command' is new in that its source is Jesus' own demonstration of how to love other people.

The images of 'darkness' and 'light' in this verse represent sinful behaviour or the realm of sinful behaviour and the true light who is Jesus himself without any trace of sin (Kruse 2000:84).

**Verse 9:** The images of light and darkness are brought back in this verse with one specific example of what darkness entails viz. hating a brother. 'It is with the secessionists in mind that he says anyone who claims to be in the light but hates the brother lives in darkness (Kruse 2000:85). Stott (1988:98) echoes this view that hating a fellow believer is an indication of the darkness one is in. The verse compliments verse 8 in that 'the darkness is passing and the true light is shining' (verse 8) is addressing the need for hatred and other forms of darkness to pass away from the believer and for them to emulate the example of the 'new command' and love as Jesus did. Anyone who claims to be in the light and still hates has not had the light shine and allow the darkness to pass away.

**Verse 10:** The term 'brother' here refers to one whom one might expect love or might love, a coreligionist (Lieu 2008:79, von Wahlde 2010:63). The pronoun 'him' in *σκάνδαλον ἐν αὐτῷ οὐκ ἔστιν* (there is no cause for stumbling in him) could mean that in the light there is no stumbling. Thus from this perspective, the pronoun is translated as 'it'. It can also be taken as a personal pronoun 'him', thus, there is no cause for stumbling in the one who loves one another. Most English versions go with this interpretation agreeing with von Wahlde's idea that 'in contrast to the person who does not love the brothers, the person who does love the brothers does not walk in darkness and is not blinded. Therefore the individual will not trip or fall' (2010:63).

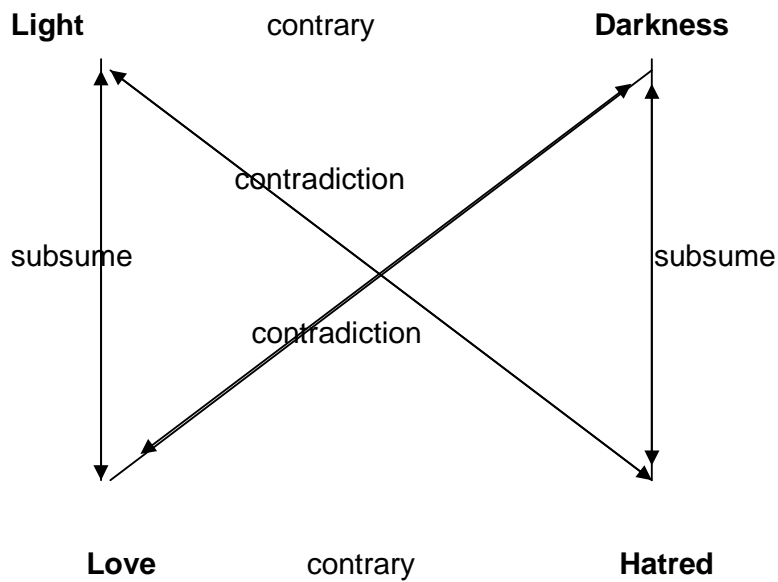
**Verse 11:** This verse repeats and expands what was said in verse 9. Kruse (2000:86-87) explains that the word darkness in this verse both stand for a realm of sin and sinful behaviour. 'People who hate fellow believers walk in the realm of darkness in which sinful behaviour predominates, and their own sinful behaviour in this case their hatred blinds their eyes so that they do not know where they are going'.



John demonstrates in this section that the proposition 'God is light' has repercussions for all those who claim to be in the light. The metaphor is sustained with other metaphors such as 'walking in the darkness' and 'walking in the light'. The believer has been cross-examined (1:6-2:1) in light of this proposition showing that those who love and obey God's commands are those who are in the light and those who hate are of the world and cannot claim to know the truth about God. Believers need to 'abide in Him' (2:6) and 'hear Him' (2:7), which involves obedience and demonstration that one has heeded to what he heard. The images of light and darkness (2:9, 11) have a particular bearing on 'hating a brother' and 'loving a brother'. John has used the term 'brother' (2:10) to refer to anyone that one might expect love.

Light as used in John is invariably linked to love and hatred invariably is linked to darkness. In other words, light engenders love and darkness engenders hatred. Love and hatred are contrary terms as light and darkness are contrary terms. Light and hatred put together is a contradiction and love and darkness put together is a contradiction. This can be put diagrammatically as follows:

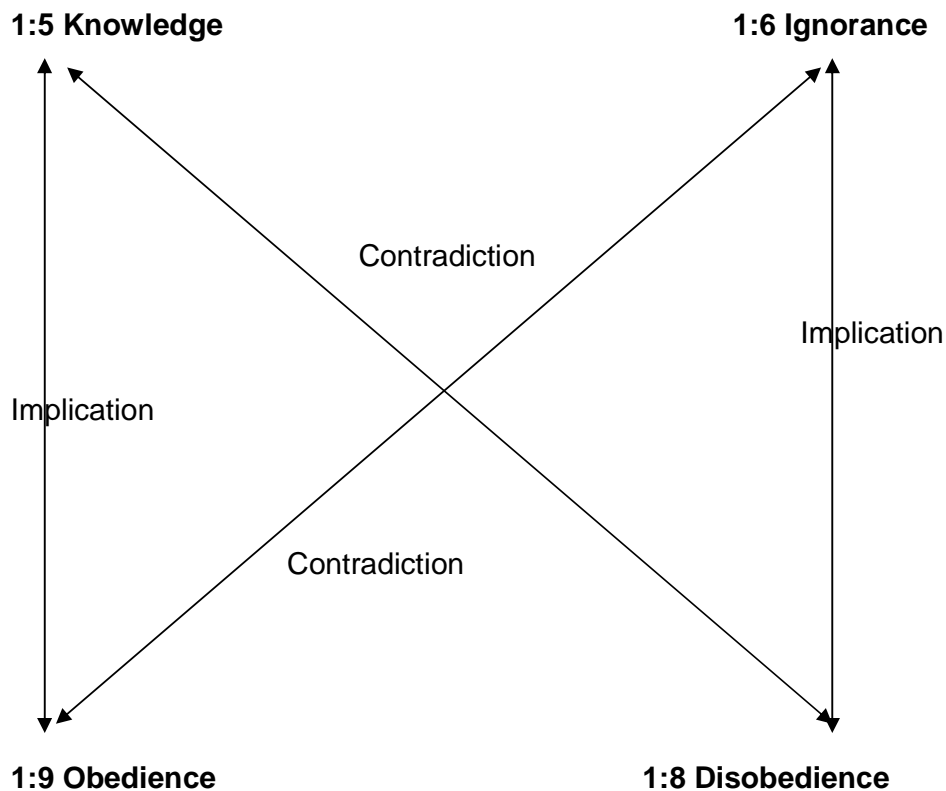
Figure 8: A chiastic structure summarizing John's ethical exhortations



At each pivotal point of John's exhortation to love are the notions of light (1:5) and love (1:9)(exhortations of 1 John to members of the believing community) and the notions of darkness (1:6) and hatred (1:8)(symbolizing the world and its ways). John is saying that love must necessarily be inferred from light. Love and light form the intrinsic nature of God. Hatred is also immediately inferred as a characteristic trait of darkness, standing outside the nature of God.

One cannot love and hate at the same time and one cannot be in the light and hate others. Either one is in the light and loves others or he is in the darkness and hates others. Thus, each notion produces a conduct that it epitomizes. Members of the Johannine community are seen to be seeking after the Light but without showing the corresponding love that ensues from light. There can be no interface between light and love and darkness and hatred.

Figure 9: A chiasm of John's argument on ethics



John's message can be put diagrammatically in a chiastic structure as above. The pivotal points of the chiasm are knowledge, ignorance, obedience and disobedience. Knowledge entails obedience and ignorance engenders disobedience. Knowledge and ignorance are contrary terms just as obedience and disobedience are contrary terms. Knowledge and disobedience are contradictory in conceptual meaning just as ignorance and obedience are contradictory. In other words, a person who does not know the truth cannot act truthfully and if he does, this will be accidental than purposeful. For John, the knowledge that 'God is light and in Him there is no darkness' (1:5) will inadvertently lead to obedience of the Word of God. That is, knowledge should cause us to walk in the light even as God is the light (1:7) and walking in the light enables fellowship with Him and with one another. Nobody who truly looks at God will fail to see himself as sinful and this knowledge will lead such a one to confession (1:9). Knowledge of God will lead one into seeing that 'Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God' (4:1) and ignorance that

leads to disobedience will not confess that Jesus Christ is from God (4:2). Knowledge is demonstrated too in love for 'whoever loves has been born of God and knows God' (4:7). John demonstrates that people who have claimed that they know God yet living in sin (1:5-2:2) deceive themselves 'and the truth is not in them' (1:8). Those who claim to know God should be validated by their obedience to His commandments (2:3-11).

#### ***4.4.5. Summary of exegesis of 1:5-2:11***

In the preceding section, John demonstrates the need to recognize and confess sin in the life of the believer. Two overriding metaphors run through the section: the metaphors of light and darkness contrasting righteousness, the character of God and the sinfulness of the believer. The believer both lives within a sinful realm and does sins himself. John urges his readers to recognize the existence of darkness and thus strive to come out of it if they have to stay in the light as God is 'in the light'. The metaphor of light illustrates a community of love for one another as a demonstration that they know God.

The metaphor of darkness demonstrates and denounces a community that lives in hate and absence of love and John is saying by this that believers have not just been saved from sin but they have been saved to belong in God through their daily lives in a community that exemplifies and testifies that they know who He is. John demonstrates some claims that might ensue in the community to show that people live in darkness. He has done this through echoing the views of people (most probably those who had left from his community) and rebutting their argument with what he considers to be sound. One of the ways for the believer to show that he belongs in God is for him to be part of the community of God's people. Fellowship is an essential part of the message that John seeks to communicate. Truth has been demonstrated as the believers understanding of the message of God and he is called to behave in ways concomitant with such knowledge. Failure to live in ways compatible with one's knowledge about God reveals that the believer does not actually know the truth about God and about Christ.

I therefore agree with Griffith (1998:255) that the section has a pastoral than a polemical outlook. It is intended to encourage believers in the author's community not to sin. Griffith's comments give a fitting summary of the section:

‘John is concerned to underline what is appropriate behaviour within the community when he talks about sin...the image of light and darkness, the concept of truth and falsehood and the experience of forgiveness and loving one another within the circle of the fellowship of believers all combine to strengthen the sense of community and to define its limits (Griffith 1990: 261).

## **4.5. Exegesis of 1 John 4:1-6**

### ***4.5.1. Discourse unit, micro structure and redactional considerations***

This discourse unit (4:1-6) is clearly marked. Verse 1 begins with a vocative Ἀγαπητοί, introducing the topic of ‘the spirits’. Sherman and Tuggy (1994:75-78) highlight some of the characteristic features of the discourse unit: The section aims to affect the reader by warning against believing any teaching. The structure of the unit is that of an inclusio with 4:2a (This is how you can recognize the Spirit of God, NIV) and 4:6d (This is how we recognize the Spirit of truth, NIV) almost identical. ‘Words in the domain of discernment provide lexical coherence to 4:1-6 unit: δοκιμάζετε ‘test’ (4:1), γινώσκετε ‘know’ (4:2), ψευδοπροφήται ‘false prophets’ (4:1), ἀληθείας ‘truth’ (4:6) and πλάνης ‘deception’ (4:6).

Smalley (2007:206) highlights the structural thematic shape of the section. The author presents the theme of testing the spirits in verse 1, develops it in verses 2-6 in a chiastic manner as follows:

- A. Spirit from God (2a)
- B. Spirit derives from God (2b)
- C. You...are from God (4a)
- D. You are from God (4a)
- C'. They derive from the world (5a)
  
- B'. We derive from God (6a)
- A'. The Spirit of truth (6b)

Von Wahlde (2010:146) sees the section as attached to 3:24c and reads an inclusio between 1bc (the need to distinguish the spirits) and 6d (stating the assurance for the believer. He also points to the parallelisms that characterize the section. For example, 1b states: 'do not believe every spirit' (NIV) and 1c: 'but test the spirits'. There is a triple parallelism in verse 4, 5, 6 as follows:

- You dear children from God (4a)
- They are from the world (5a)
- We are from God (6a)

There are other minor parallelisms within the same verses. For example, verse four asserts that 'the one who is in you' and 'the one who is in the world'. Verse 5 states that 'they speak from the viewpoint of the world' and 'the world listens not'.

#### **4.5.2. Textual variants**

There are minor textual variants in this section that do not pose major problems of interpretation.

In verse 2, some manuscripts vary from ἐληλυθότα (perfect active infinitive) to ἐληλυθεναι (perfect active participle). This does not necessitate much attention given that 'the difference in meaning is nil, but the variant is too sparsely attested to be considered original' (Yarbrough 2008:225).

Verse 3 has some important textual differences: μὴ ὁμολογεῖ (does not confess) varies with λυει (destroys) in other manuscripts.

The variant is intriguing but lacks serious external support. Even if the variant were accepted, the net effect of the clause would be much the same from the point of view of John's Christology: not to confess a Jesus of apostolic proportion is tantamount to confessing no Jesus at all (Yarbrough 2008:225).

Some manuscripts omit the phrase *ἐν σαρκὶ ἐληλυθότα* although commentators think that this is inferred from verse 2. The absence of the phrase in verse 3 is therefore considered as an ellipsis that needs to be filled by the reader. Considered as an ellipsis, the full propositional form of the verse should read: 'but every spirit that does not acknowledge that Jesus Christ came in flesh'. Most of the English translations like the NIV for example translates this as 'every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God' while the GNT (UK) translates this as 'anyone who denies this about Jesus does not have the Spirit of God' thus going for the minority option.

#### **4.5.3. Exegesis**

**Verse 1:** John begins the chapter with a vocative *Ἀγαπητοί*, a well suited term to fit with the theme he is about to address viz., love. Different English translations translate the term differently (KJV—brethren, NIV and TEV—dear friends) but each of these translations is an expression of the intimacy the author has for his addressees.

The phrase *μὴ παντὶ πνεύματι πιστεύετε* (do not believe every spirit) is a very strong exhortation. The imperative form of the verb is the default way of encoding exhortations. This is one of the few unmitigated exhortations in 1 John thus showing the author's interest and uncompromising mood on the subject matter. It is categorically necessary for the author to exhort his audience to prohibit what the spirits claim. The term 'believe' is taken by most

commentators to mean lending credence to, thus the exhortation is 'do not give credence' or accepts the message of every spirit as true.

All English translations maintain the expression 'spirit' apart from TEV that translates this as 'all who claim to have the Spirit'. Taken from this angle, the spirit will be referring to the Holy Spirit. This can be interpreted to mean that John is warning his addressees that there are false prophets who claim to be speaking from the Holy Spirit. However, 'spirit' can also be referring to the human spirit, i.e. the ego of those speaking or to demonic influence. 'New Testament writings associate πνεύματα (spirits) with evil (Matt 12:45, Luke 11:26, Acts 19:12-13) ... false prophecy (Rev 16:13) and demons (16:14)' (Yarbrough 2008:220-221). It will be necessary therefore to verify whether a particular spirit is from God or not. 'Spirits' in this verse can mean either demonic influence or false prophets. This tallies with what John says next: ἀλλὰ δοκιμάζετε τὰ πνεύματα (but test the spirits). Thus people who claim to be inspired by the Holy Spirit need to be cross examined. Sherman and Tuggy (1994:82) explain that 'testing' is in the present tense suggesting a habitual action. The audience is exhorted to be in the habit of testing anyone who claims to speak as a prophet.

**Verse 2:** This verse begins with the demonstrative ἐν τούτῳ (by this) pointing to what the author will say in verse 3. All English versions translate πνεῦμα (spirit) with an upper case thus referring to Holy Spirit. The mood of the verb γινώσκετε (you know) can be considered in two ways, first as the indicative thus a statement where the author is saying the audience know the Spirit of God by this or as an imperative where the author is exhorting the readers to know the Spirit of God by this. Most English translation prefer the first option which makes more sense when considered with what follows (Yarbrough 2008:221).

Commentators disagree on whether Χριστὸν (Christ) is part of the name thus a surname or it is here applied as a title meaning 'Messiah'. TEV, NIV, RSV, KJV, NEB consider Christ as part of the name thus 'Jesus Christ' has come in the flesh. This makes more sense as we are talking about the humanity of



Jesus here than about his messianic character. JB however takes Christ to mean the Messiah thus Jesus, the Christ.

‘Has come’ refers to Jesus’ coming into the world and ‘in the flesh’ refers to his humanity (TEV, JBP, LB). In this verse πνεῦμα (spirit) refers to human beings. Von Wahlde (2010:142) explains that ‘Jesus Christ come in flesh’ is an anti-docetic in intention. Jesus was incarnate in his earthly existence and “his flesh” was not merely an accidental feature of his existence’. ‘Come in the flesh’ is a metonymy that points to all that Jesus did as a human being. ‘At its very least, this present expression is a variant expression for the author’s conviction that the death of Jesus was of soteriological significance’ (von Wahlde 2010:143).

**Verse 3:** καὶ πᾶν πνεῦμα (and every spirit) here is considered as human beings or spirit of people hence TEV, ‘anyone’, NLT, ‘someone’. The phrase μὴ ὁμολογεῖ (does not acknowledge) has textual variants. The UBS Greek text chooses the reading ‘does not confess’ whereas TEV translates this as ‘denies’ thus the second option. Von Wahlde goes in line with TEV and explains that ‘does not confess’ is ‘not simply elliptical [as many other English translations infer] but a statement that articulates a complete rejection of Jesus (2010:144). He adds that ‘it is not a rejection of this or that aspect of Jesus’ role (that is as Christ, as Son, as come in the flesh) but a denial of any permanent role for him’ (2010:144).

Yarbrough (2008:225) has said, ‘the difference in meaning is nil, but the variant is too sparsely attested to be considered original’. It will be consistent with the anti docetic sentiment of the letter to consider the interpretation that there is an ellipsis in this verse. John wants to emphasis the fact that Jesus came ‘in the flesh’ as opposed by the docetic and anyone who does not confess [that Jesus Christ came in the flesh] is ἀντίχριστου (antichrist) or such a person is teaching by the power of the antichrist. TEV translates this as ‘Enemy of Christ’.

ὁ ἀκηκόατε ὅτι (which you have heard) ‘that the end time will be marked by the appearance of an ultimate opposition to Jesus Christ and this would be a

manifested in the deceitful activity of particular (human) individual (Smalley (2007:214). John explains that that antichrist was already in the world.

**Verse 4:** τέκνία (children) further highlights ὑμεῖς (you) which has been fronted giving a contrastive focus between the author's addressees as having overcome 'them' (the false teachers). Smalley (2007:215) explains that 'have overcome' is a metaphor that symbolizes the rejection of the activities of the false prophets by the author's addressees. They are able to do this because 'the one who is in you' (the Holy Spirit, TEV) has more authority or power (TEV) than 'the one who is in the world (i.e. spirit of the antichrist mentioned in verse 3).

**Verse 5:** αὐτοὶ ἐκ τοῦ κόσμου εἰσίν, διὰ τοῦτο ἐκ τοῦ κόσμου λαλοῦσιν καὶ ὁ κόσμος αὐτῶν ἀκούει: RSV translates this verse as: 'They are from the world and therefore speak from the viewpoint of the world, and the world listens to them'. The verse needs to be rendered as an explicature in order to get its full propositional meaning. This requires that it be enriched (explicitly fill out the implied words), ambiguous words need to be disambiguated and reference needs to be assigned to the pronouns and other referents. TEV brings out the explicature of the verse as follows: 'Those false prophets speak about matters of the world, and the world listens to them because they belong to the world'. John uses the word 'world' here three times.

Marrow Stanley (2002: 97) discusses the use of the term κόσμος in Johannine literature, maintaining that it is plurivalent with all ranges of meanings from the universe, to 'the world of those estranged from God and imprisoned in the darkness'. 'One has to keep in mind that "God sent his son into the world, not to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him" (John 3:17). Yet that very world, which "was made through him," chose to "know him not" (John 1:10) and to love "darkness rather than light" (3:19). In the present context of 1 John, 'the world' refers to this evil system that chose not to know Christ and rather loves darkness than light. Talking about this verse, Marrow says 'the fact to be recognized is that "the world" is within the community of

believers as well as outside it. "They are of the world, therefore what they say is of the world, and the world listens to them' (2002:101).

The point that must not be lost sight of here is the Johannine community's situation, the circumstances that lay behind the preservation and formulation of these statements... Their situation in life must have made amply clear to them the incursions of the world into their own community. They needed to look no farther than their own immediate surroundings to appreciate the implacable hatred of themselves and all they stood for, not only by those outside, nor only by those who did not share their faith, but also by members of their own community, their own brothers: "They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us; but they went out, that it might be plain that they all are not of us" (1 John 2:19) (Marrow 2002: 99).

**Verse 6:** This verse presents a contrast to verse 5 thus TEV begins the verse with the contrastive word 'but'. 'The function of 4:6 in the context is to reaffirm the apostolic origin of John's message in contrast to the deceptive currents implied in 4:1-3' (Yarbrough 2008:229). Those who know God hear and accept what John and the other apostles say and those who do not know God do not heed to his message. The 'spirit of truth' (Holy Spirit) who reveals the truth about God is contrasted with the spirit of error that influences the author's opponents.

John highlights the necessity to cross-examine the spirits (4:1) and here he is referring to human spirits or human beings and anyone that does not acknowledge that Jesus Christ came as a human being in the world (4:3) should be considered as lacking in knowledge and living in deception. These

people are from the world ipso facto and but those who know God will hear and accept the message of John (4:6). Knowledge is presented here as a key component of living in accord with God's will. John highlights that believers need to be careful because of the deceptive tendencies that surround them.

#### ***4.5.4. Summary of exegesis of 1 John 4:1-6***

The section begins with a strong exhortation for readers to cross examine the spirits or the teachings they are exposed to in order to see whether they are from God (in verse 1) or not. The rest of the section sets the criteria for cross examining these spirits with verse 6 defining two kinds of spirits: the Spirit of truth and spirit of error. The section (4:1-6) is 'such a prominent unit that it is a climax in the letter' (Sherman and Tuggy 1994:78). The section launches its offensive against one of the main concerns of the letter viz., docetism taught by the false teachers. This insinuates so much on Christology which is the key focus of John, to demonstrate that 'Jesus Christ came in the flesh' and any denial of this is tantamount to compliance with the antichrist who has been announced.

The section therefore forms part of the key message that John sets out to communicate, namely the need to know the truth as was taught by the apostles and the need to be aware of the deceptions and fallacies that can attack one's faith. Every believer is called upon to cross examine what he receives as teaching with the foundational aspect of Christianity namely the deity of Jesus Christ as the anointed One. A confused understanding of Jesus can waylay one's faith and ignorance of the truth can lead to a distorted view of Christ. Knowing Christ haphazardly is tantamount to not knowing him.

### **4.6. Exegesis of 1 John 4:7-11**

#### ***4.7.1 Discourse unit, micro structure and redactional considerations***

The section 4:7-11 is marked by an inclusio. 'John's intent in the 4:7-11 paragraph is to affect the actions of the reader using a command that they love each other. The paragraph consists of three propositional clusters: two nuclear (4:7-8 and 4:11) and one satellite (4:9-10)' (Sherman and Tuggy 1994:82). The parallelism that characterises the section clearly marking the section as a discourse unit as follows:

- A. Love each other (verse 7a)
  - B. is from God (verse 7b)
- B. God so loved us (verse 11a)
  - A. We likewise must love each other (verse 11b)

The next discourse unit from 4:12 has other features that attest to the boundary between 4:11 and 4:12 as Sherman and Tuggy (1994:82) analyzes:

1. The contents moved from loving others just because God has enabled us to loving in order to be assured of our relationship with God.
2. There is no conjunction between the two sections.
3. The section 4:7-11 is marked by the presence of the aorist tense but with no aorist in the following section.

'The entire theological and ethical relationship between the indicative (God's love for us) and imperative (our love for others) is the crux of the text' (Yarbrough 2008:241). He analyses the content of the section as follows:

- Verse 7 origin and effect of God's love
- Verse 8: status of the one who does not love
- Verse 9: God's goal in revealing His love
- Verse 10: God's means of revealing His love
- [Verse 11: the implications of God's love]

#### 4.6.2. Textual variants

Verse 10: The verse has variants: *ἠγαπήκαμεν* (B Ψ 322 323 945 1241 1739 2298) and *ἠγαπήσαμεν* (A 048vid 33 81vid 436 1067 1175 1243 1292 1409 1505 1611 1735 1844 1852 1881 2138 2344 2464 Byz [K L] Lect arm geo slav Philo-Carpasia). Thus there is a between the aorist tense (we loved) and the perfect tense (we have loved). EV translates this with the perfect tense. Other English translations such as NIV, NJB, KJV, NRSV etc render the translation with the aorist tense (we loved). Yarbrough (2008:241) argues that if the perfect tense is chosen as the original rendering, then it would be the only perfect form of the verb *ἀγαπαω* in the entire New Testament and would seem to be a harder reading especially in conjunction with the aorist form of the verbs that follow in the verse. He argues that there is no much difference between the two forms for interpretation. Based on this, I adopt the translation of the NIV as the correct reading in order to align with the form that follows.

#### 4.6.3 Exegesis

**Verses 7:** This verse begins with a relatively strong exhortation: *Ἀγαπητοί, ἀγαπῶμεν ἀλλήλους* (beloved, let us love one another). Commentators are agreed that 'one another' here refers to members of the Johannine community thus members of the Christian community (Kruse 2000:157, Painter 2008:268, Smalley 2007:225, von Wahlde 2010:156). It is an encouragement for the audience to love each other. 'The present tense calls for love as a characteristic practice, while the reciprocal pronoun "one another" insists that it must be mutual: the love must flow in both directions! It is a call to seek unselfishly the true welfare of the one loved. Such love should characterize the mutual relations of believers' (Hiebert 1990:69).

The motivation for such love is given in the remaining part of the verse: *ὅτι ἡ ἀγάπη ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ ἐστίν* (for love is of God). This is seen as a metaphor to mean that love is associated with God as the source and He enables Christians to love each other. Given that love is from God, it should be sought

and nurtured. In other words, the author is saying that faith in God invariably must move with the attribute of love because love is the essential defining quality of God (Yarbrough 2008:233). Hiebert captures the meaning of the phrase with the following explanation:

‘The use of the definite article with "love" (*ἡ ἀγάπη*) centers attention on the kind of love John was urging, "the love" that has its source in God. It is not the natural love of the world for its own (John 15:19), nor the love of publicans for fellow-publicans (Matt. 5:46), but a self-sacrificing love motivated by good will and implemented in action, as portrayed in 1 John 4:9-10. The preposition "from" (*ἐκ*, "out of") denotes that this love flows from Him, as the one spring, and in such a way that the connection with the source remains unbroken.’ (1990: 71).

*Πᾶς ὁ ἀγαπῶν ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ γεγέννηται* (everyone who loves is from God): Everyone refers to members of the community and not to love outside of the believing community. The object of the love here is inferred from the preceding phrase to be ‘one another’ thus everyone who loves fellow members of the believing community. The expression *ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ γεγέννηται* (is born of God) is another metaphor referring to the same idea as being a child of God. Love is evidence that a person knows God (*γινώσκει τὸν θεόν*). ‘This means that the one who loves is living out of the divine source of love...human loving is not the cause but the manifestation of being begotten of God’ (Painter 2008:268).

**Verse 8:** This verse inversely reflects verse 7. ‘The absence of love for one another is evidence that a person does not know God because God is love and there can be no real knowledge of God which is not expressed in love for fellow believers’ (Kruse 2000:157). Everyone who knows God will reflect this by showing love which is the way God expresses Himself. ‘God is love’ does

not mean in essence but in expression i.e. God by nature lives out love and He loves humankind (Sherman and Tuggy 1994:81). Hiebert explains that verse 8 is the counterpoise of what John has just said: 'The one who does not love does not know God'. He writes, 'the negative with the present tense participle (ὁ μὴ ἀγαπῶν) pictures one who is unloving in attitude and practice. The absence of love in his life proves that he "does not know God" (οὐκ ἔγνω τὸν θεόν), that he has never come to know personally what God is like...not knowing love shows that he is still a stranger to God' (1990: 72). In other words, anyone who does not know God cannot represent Him through love and cannot correctly interpret what He says.

**Verse 9:** The genitive *ἀγάπη τοῦ θεοῦ* (love of God) is taken to mean the love that God loves people (von Wahlde 2007:153). The phrase *ἐν ἡμῖν* (in us) has been interpreted variedly. This can be considered as the love that God has revealed to us (exclusive) for people. NIV, RSV and other English translations assume this understanding while TEV, JB and other English translations take this to mean that God showed the love to us (inclusive). It is plausible to consider the latter meaning i.e. people were the recipients of God's love

*ἵνα ζήσωμεν δι' αὐτοῦ* (in order that we might live through him) is referring to the atoning death of Jesus (von Wahlde 2007:153). 'Living' is referring to eternal life (ditto). Jesus died to win our forgiveness thus causing humankind to live eternally (Sherman and Tuggy 1994:82). The 'world' in this verse refers to the world of people, humankind to whom Jesus was sent.

**Verse 10:** *ἐν τούτῳ* (this), points to what will follow in the rest of the verse i.e. God loved us and sent His Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. TEV renders this as: 'this is what love is:'

'The combined effect of verse 9-10, then, is that the expression 'God is love' is to be understood not as an ontological statement about God's essential being but in terms of the love of God expressed historically in the sending of His One



and only Son into the world as an atoning sacrifice  
for our sins' (Kruse 2000:160).

This is a demonstration of the character of God and John by this seeks to induce the believer to reflect the image of the one they believe on.

Verse 11: *εἰ* (if) is expressing not a doubt but a known condition and NIV therefore translates this with 'since'. *ἡγάπησεν ἡμᾶς* (loved us) is expressing the magnitude of God's love which should kindle us to *ἡμεῖς ὀφείλομεν ἀλλήλους ἀγαπᾶν* (to also love one another). This is another exhortation where John identifies with his audience and encourages them to let love reign within the community. God has loved us in this way (indicative) so we must love one another (imperative) (Smalley 2007:234).

John's appeal is, 'if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.' The first class conditional statement, 'if God so loved us' (*εἰ οὕτως ὁ θεὸς ἡγάπησεν ἡμᾶς*), states gently the motivating reality and implies no doubt. The adverb 'so' recalls the sacrificial love portrayed in verse 10, while the repeated use of 'God' (*ὁ θεός*) stresses the majesty of the love shown by the God they have come to know. The verse echoes John 3:16, but the use of the pronoun 'us' makes it more personal in its direct application to John and his readers. God loved us 'not because of our merit but because of our need'. In view of God's love 'we also ought to love one another' (Hiebert 1990: 77).

In this section, John begins with a vocative, calling his addressees as 'beloved' and exhorting them to love one another (4:7) and the motivation for that love is because God is love and those who are from God must exhibit this character of love. In 4:8, he restates verse 7 negatively by saying that the one who does not love is not from God. The section handles what it means to love and shows that those who know God must love ipso facto. It demonstrates

that community life is possible only when members of the community love themselves.

#### **4.6.4. Summary of the exegesis of 4:7-11**

This section has two direct exhortations all emphasizing the need of love within the believing community in 4:7 (Dear friends, let us love one another for love comes from God) and 4:11 (Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another). These two exhortations are almost identical and bracket all of what John says in the section. John presents the situation and motivation for these exhortations and the fundamental reason to love is the fact that Jesus was offered by God as a propitiation of sin for the forgiveness of the sins of mankind. 'The strong connection with love in this unit makes it important, to emphasize the voluntary nature of the sacrifice and the great cost involved in true love' (Sherman and Tuggy 1994:82). In other words, in this section, John has demonstrated what love is practically by using the example of God and what he lost to demonstrate his love. The imagery of family and thus the believing community as children of God has been used to show that there needs to have a functional resemblance to God if we claim that we are His children. The entire section therefore is about love in the community. Love is greases community life and avoids friction thus helping people to live together.

#### **4.7. The pragmatic use of 'καί' to effect unity amongst the recipients of 1 John**

The author of 1 John has used several linking techniques to knit the formal structure of his letter together. For example, the phrase ἐν τούτῳ (in this) is one of the main linking devices that propel the development of thought throughout the letter. The phrase is used 12 times in 1 John both as an anaphora and as cataphora. Verbal recursion also 'serves to lead surface cohesion or formal connectivity as well as to give conceptual coherence to

many of the included periscopes and other (larger or smaller) textual units' (Wendland 1998:46).

Nonetheless, the most outstanding device to develop cohesion, coherence and connectivity in 1 John is achieved through the use of the conjunction *καὶ* (and), used at least 110 times in the letter. Apart from achieving cohesion and connectivity, the extensive use of this particle suggests a pragmatic function in the letter that beckons for attention. In other words, by using this particle, the author is encoding a message that does not just suggest the additive or disjunctive role that the connector plays generally but carries an attitude of the speaker with it. In this vein, the connector can be said to carry an illocutionary force whereby the author is carrying out a speech act that requires a perlocutionary act on the part of his audience. But before considering in detail the use of this connector and its pragmatic function, it will be necessary to briefly review connectives in general and the role they play in the interpretive process of a text and in 1 John in particular.

#### ***4.7.1. Discourse connectives as constraints on implicatures***

The use of a particular linguistic connector in discourse streamlines the implicatures that a hearer can draw from those utterances. Relevance theory asserts that there are three main contextual effects one can get when he reads a text viz., his presumptions may be confirmed or strengthened, his presumptions may be eliminated or weakened and he might revise his original thoughts and form new implications. Connectors help to orientate the inclination to the implicatures that the author intended to be adopted in a text.

First John uses connectors and other chaining devices such as recursion or repetition, contrast and mitigation to weave the letter together. These different strategies have been knitted together with the overriding connector *καὶ* used throughout the letter which also suggests that there implicatures to be drawn through its pragmatic use. Before looking at examples of the use of this

conjunction in 1 John, it will be helpful to oversee some of the connectors that have been used in the letter and their implication to the discourse.

Table 10: List of some connectors in discourse and the interpretation they constrain in 1 John

<b>Greek</b>	<b>English</b>	<b>Constrained interpretation</b>	<b>Some examples in 1 John</b>
<i>γὰρ</i>	for	reason, background, explanation	2:16, for anyone who loves the word the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does comes not from the Father but from the world (explanation) 4:7, let us love one another for love comes from God (reason) 2:11 But whoever hates the brother is in darkness and walks around in the darkness(contrast)
<i>ὁὖ</i>	now, then, but	Introduces new topic, contrast	2:2 and this is the message we have heard (coordinating conjunction) 2:2 and if anyone sins (contrast)
<i>καὶ</i>	and	coordinating conjunction, contrast	
<i>ἐὰν</i>	if, since	condition, grounds	1:8 if we claim to be without sin we deceive ourselves (condition) 1:9 if we confess our sins (grounds for forgiveness)
<i>ἀλλὰ</i>	but	strong contrast	2:2 He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins and not only for our sins but also for sins of the world

#### **4.4.2. The frequency and manner of use of the connector *kai* in 1 John**

The connector *kai* by default is used as a coordinating conjunction to link up lexical items, clauses and thoughts in the discourse of 1 John and has been used at least 110 times in the letter. In chapter one, the particle has been used 21 times. In chapter two, it is used 27 times. In chapter three it has been used 24 times and 20 times in chapter four and 18 times in chapter five. Most of the time, the particle has been used as an additive conjunction. When used as an additive conjunction, all that the reader needs to track down is the sequence of items and thoughts connected by the particle. In 1:3 for example, John writes, 'we have seen and we proclaim' and in 1:4, he writes, 'and we now proclaim'. The verbs 'seen', 'proclaim' have been used almost serially with the help of the conjunction *kai*. As a coordinating conjunction, the use of the particle creates cohesion and connectivity to the discourse. The particle is also used as an adverbial. For example, John continues in 1:3, by saying, 'what we have seen and what we proclaim to you that you also (*kai*—adverb) may have fellowship with us. And (*kai*-adverb) our fellowship is with the father'.

'*Kai*' has also been used in 1 John as a super-ordinate conjunction between different strings of the text. This use is noticed mostly when the particle is used at the beginning of a sentence as in 2:20, 3:12 and 2:28. Each time the particle is used in this way, interpreters have tended to vary in their interpretation of the article. For example, in 1:2, *kai* is translated by the KJV as 'for' thus an explanation. The NIV, NRSV, TEV amongst others do not apply any explicit connector here and allow the reader the wider choice of inferring the implicature from his own logical conclusions of the preceding discourse. In other words, these versions have not placed any constraints on the implicature through the use of a connector for the audience perhaps because they judge that it is easy for the reader to draw the relevant inference without erring. Thus instead of the literal rendering 'and the life appeared', these versions leave out the 'and' and begin with 'the life appeared'. In this

way, the particle can be perceived to also be playing the role of a consecutive marker in Greek, showing the development of the discourse.

In 1:4 *καὶ* is read as a coordinating conjunction by NASB and KJV but the NIV again omits it and it is read as an adverb by NAB thus the translation 'indeed'. In 1:5 different versions in English treat the particle differently thus KJV translates it as 'then' (a development marker), TEV translates it as 'now' (marking a point of departure in discourse or development marker), NASB translates it as 'and' (an additive conjunction) and NIV, NJB and NRSV leave it implicit. In 1:6 the particle is translated as 'and' (KJV, TNT), 'and yet' (concessive or contradiction interpretation) by NASB, 'yet at the same time' (concessive or contradiction interpretation) by TEV and 'while' by NJB, REB and NRSV. In 2:1, *καὶ* is rendered as 'but' (NASB, KJV), 'and' (NIV). In 2:2, TEV, NRSV, NASB, KJV translate the particle as a coordinating conjunction 'and', while NIV, NJB, TNT are not explicit. Similar uses of this particle occur in 2:3. It is worth mentioning that in 2:10 *καὶ* is also translated by NRSV as 'so' while NIV translates it as 'even' and REB translates it as 'well'. In 2:24, it is translated as 'in turn' (NAB) and by 'this means' in 2:26 by NAB.

One other verse that is noteworthy in its interpretation of *καὶ* in 1 John has led to some wide discrepancies by different scholars is at the beginning of 2:20. Whereas the particle can be taken to mean 'and' thus with an additive function, or 'but' with a contrastive function, most English versions have applied the contrastive particle 'but' even though this is not the generally recognized meaning of *καὶ*. The differences in interpretation and translation of this particle come from the way verse 19 and verse 20 are read together. It is perceived that the 'you' in verse 20 is contrasting those who left from the Johannine community if the generally understood meaning of *καὶ* is applied here. If the particle was applied here with its additive function, the contrast will not come out between these verses. Another reading sees the particle as linking the proposition of verse 20 with that of verse 18 and not verse 19. Verse 19 is read as a parenthetical occasioned by the mention of the

antichrist (Person 1990:21). The NEB reads the particle at the beginning of 2:20 as an adverbial thus; you as well as they have an anointing.

The verse in particular and the rest of the verses cited above demonstrate the important role the conjunction can play to constrain meaning. As such, *καὶ* also places some constraints of implicature and should not be taken *prima facie* just as a coordinating conjunction in the discourse of 1 John. In more cases than not, it appears to be used in an additive rather than in a subordinate sense. Nonetheless, in some other cases, it is applied in a superordinate or subordinating sense and as an adverbial. Sometimes it has unclear functions. I argue here that the use of *καὶ* in 1 John has a pragmatic sense suggesting that the author is using it sometimes as a speech act i.e. to effect change on the recipients.

#### **4.4.3. The pragmatic use of *καὶ* in 1 John**

The default way exhortations in hortatory discourse are carried out is through the use of the imperative verb form. John has not used this verb form very much in the letter. Direct exhortations from the imperative verb form occur only in 2:15, 24, 27, 28; 3:7, 13; 4:1 and 5:21. There are therefore only eight direct exhortations in the letter and this appears rather small for a letter like 1 John that intends to exhort members of the Johannine community to desist from following the teachings of the secessionists and to persuade them to remain in the community. The concentrations of these direct commands are found from the middle of chapter two. This is the section that John warns members of his community from loving the world and about the antichrist. John therefore talks commandingly mostly when it has to do with sin and erroneous teaching but for the rest of the letter he uses very few direct commands and chooses to mitigate his exhortations to sound persuasive.

How then has his exhortations been conducted in most of the letter? He has rather chosen to use persuasive tone that avoids giving commands and has applied the use of mitigated exhortations. Although performative speech acts

are marked with words that pronounce an action such as bless, order and promise, it is inferable that John's use of the conjunction *kai* is done in a pragmatic way that suggests some performative action. The conjunction however has been overlooked by many exegetes (Titrud 1991). John appears to be saying each time he uses the conjunction at the beginning of a sentence that 'this is what you should do'. In other words, there is always a tone of encouragement when he tries to link up two propositions with *kai* at the initial position of a sentence. The first proposition most of the time states an example of what should not be done and the second proposition beginning with '*kai*' asserts the performative or exhortation he wants to be heeded.

Speech acts consist of three parts namely the locution (the actual encoded text or utterance), the illocutionary act (the making of a statement, promise, ordering, urging, advising, offer or any kind of exhortation) and the perlocutionary act which is the effect of the illocutionary force on an audience. The locution is what is encoded in 1 John and the illocutionary force conveys the author's persuasive tone behind what he has said to his audience. In other words, the intentions of John behind the statements he made were to persuade and encourage his audience to abide in the author's community. This gives the letter its qualification as a pastoral letter. The following are some examples of the uses of the *kai* in the discourse of 1 John.

#### *4.4.3.1. Effecting unity amongst the recipients through the use of kai in 1 John*

In 1:2, the NASB renders the following literal translation from the Greek: 'and the life was manifested, and we have seen and testify and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was manifested to us' (1:2 NASB). The verse begins with the conjunction *kai* (and) which echoes 1:1 thus, 'what was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our own eyes...' John appears to be telling his audience that he has the credential to pass on the information he is giving them because of the palpable evidence of his testimony. In other words, John by using *kai* to chain verses one and two strengthens his argument and launches an appeal to be listened to by the



super-ordinate use of the conjunction to show the reasons why he should be listened to. It is the conjoint force of these verses that brings out the appeal. By leaving out the *kai* NIV fails to tie the evidence of verse 1 as subordinate to verse 2 and the attitude of insistence of the author fails to be demonstrated.

*Kai* appears to be John's other strategy for inclusivity. He has chosen to use the language of inclusiveness, 'if we say'. By doing this, he avoids a separatist diction. Part of the way to continue to appear inclusive has been to use the connector *kai* extensively. So each time he uses, the first person inclusive pronoun 'we' he goes on to chain other propositions with the same pronoun 'we' as subject through the help of *kai*. For example, in 1:6, he says, 'if we claim to have fellowship in Him [*kai*] yet walk in darkness, we lie [*kai*] and do not live by the truth' (NIV). John succeeds in pulling the pronoun 'we' as the subject of verse six through all its propositions with the help of *kai*.

The sense of *kai* as mitigating an appeal comes out each time the particle is used at the beginning of a sentence as in 2:20, 3:12, 2:28. At 2:20, most English versions like NASB translate the particle with a contrastive conjunction 'but'. 'But you have an anointing from the Holy One, and you all know' (NASB). Reading verse 20 straight from verse 19, 'you' will be posited in contrast to those who left the Johannine community. The contrast marker translated as 'but' has a pragmatic function. By applying *kai* (but) at the beginning of the sentence, the author is performing an action namely, contrasting members of his community and the secessionist and by so doing approving of those who are in the community and disapproving of those who left. Without the use of this particle, this pragmatic understanding will not be shown. It is this pragmatic understanding that has led translators of most English versions to apply the strong contrast marker 'but' here even though this is usually translating the Greek word *ἀλλὰ*. However, NEB translates *kai* not as a contrastive marker but as an adverbial and thus suggests the erroneous reading that members of the author's community have an anointing as well as those who have left.

John has also been using the conjunction to enchain parallelism and chiasms and other rhetorical devices such as contrast. It is the particle *καὶ* that helps him to be able to use these strategies. For example, in 2:1, John says ‘my dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defense—Jesus Christ, the Righteous One’ (NIV). The contrast marker at the beginning of the second sentence is translating the Greek conjunction *καὶ*. It marks the second line of an antithetical or contrasted parallelism. In the parallelism, John echoes the possibility of sin in the second line and gives it a therapeutic solution. The illocutionary force of the second line marked by the contrast marker encoded in *καὶ* is John’s way of saying, ‘do not despair, there is a way out when one sins’.

In this section, I have argued that the use of *καὶ* in 1 John is too numerous to be taken for granted. It is John’s way of avoiding direct commands, enchainning inclusive language and enjoining his audience to feel together. It can be said in this conclusion that the use of *kai* far outweighs its use in other Johannine material. In 2 John for example, the author has used the conjunction only 13 times and they have all been used with an additive function. In 3 John, the author has used the conjunction only 10 times and one of these times as an adverb. Even though 1 John is a relatively longer letter, the multiple uses of this conjunction suggests that the author is also using it persuasively as part of his appeal to his audience. He has been careful not to use outright commands and has chosen to do so through mitigated exhortations one of which is achieved through the manner in which *καὶ* is applied.

#### **4.8 Summary of chapter four**

The major focus of 1:5-2:11 had to deal with sin in the community of believers. Those who claim to fellowship with God should necessarily reflect God’s character. After declaring that ‘God is light’ (1:5), the author expands on the necessity for those who are in the community to behave in conformity with this

truth. Sin in the community hampers love and love builds up a community to avoid sin.

One of the explicit purposes of the letter is given in 2:1: "my dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin". This strong exhortation against sin gives the letter an ethical focus. The section (2:3-6) focuses on obedience to the truth that one holds. The person who claims to know God necessarily obeys His commands. John seems to be saying that truth and obedience move together. John in (2:7-11) demonstrates what he means by obedience to the truth. One obeys the command by loving a fellow believer and stumbling is the consequence of failure to obey (2:10). Friction and stumbling in the faith community emanate from the hatred (2:11).

In 4:1-7, John exhorts believers to exercise love in the Christian community. John has demonstrated that the Johannine community suffered because of ethical concerns, namely hatred and or the absence of love. Two key assertions stand very prominent throughout in the letter viz., 'God is light' (1:5) and 'God is love' (1:8).

John has demonstrated what it takes for a community to live together in the community. Living together entails avoidance of sin and the need for members of the community to confess their sins. The uniting force in the community is love. This love reflects the character of God who is love. By loving one another, members of the community demonstrate that they are children of God.

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **SOCIO-CULTURAL CONTEXT OF THE BAPTIST CHURCH IN KOM**

#### **5.1 Introduction**

The advent of Christianity to African communities did not meet a socio-cultural vacuum but came amidst a setting of established cultures and traditions where traditional religions entwine with cultural beliefs in a fuzzy manner making it difficult to draw a distinction between the two. The community included the dead who wielded a lot of influence on the lives of its living members (Ijatuyi 2011; Gehman 1999; O'Donovan 2000). Christians in Africa therefore do struggle with how to preserve both their cultural identity and their Christian identity and many end up not doing justice to one or the other. Reading the Bible in a given African culture therefore engenders cultural undertones that shape understanding of the message. It is thus necessary to study the cultural environment of any given people before appreciating their understanding of Scriptures.

The New Testament writers wrote within a particular cultural lens (Madu 2004) and understanding their message warrants an awareness of the cultural frame of first century Greco-Roman culture in which context the Johannine community lived. The Kom Christian who seeks to understand the cultural context of the Johannine community goes to the text with his own cultural lens. This means that for such a reader of the New Testament, there are at least two world views that he has to harness in order to decipher the meaning of the text (Madu 2004; Leidden 1994; Kanyoro 1999; Pobee 1996; Kunhiyop 2012; Loader 1992; Volf 2005). The problem is exacerbated by the fact that Christianity came to Kom as in other parts of Africa through the mediation of

western missionaries who used their own cultural thought patterns to impart it. The Bible exists in most of the African communities in European languages. The idioms, metaphors and concepts of the Bible in English for example need to be rethought and recast with local equivalences as Kom idioms and thought patterns in order to make the meaning clearer and more accessible. It is therefore necessary to understand the interplay between cultures so as to determine to what extent they facilitate access to meaning of biblical texts. How can understanding the Kom culture help the reader to better understand the message of 1 John? This chapter seeks to explore the socio-cultural background of the Baptist Church in Kom as a way of answering the above questions given that the 'translation of the biblical world view into an African worldview helps to make Christianity truly African' Kunhiyop (2012:79).

In order to adequately survey elements of the Kom culture necessary for understanding 1 John, it will be necessary to survey some elements of first century Mediterranean culture in which context the Johannine community evolved. Tienou (1991:4) warns about the dangers of neglecting culture and the need to draw a neat balance between culture and the word of God:

African Christianity is doomed in the long term if it allows itself to be imprisoned either in westernization or in indigenous cultures and religions. Both of these roads lead to irrelevance. The former will make Christianity irrelevant through foreigners and the latter will cause it to be superfluous and thereby irrelevant... consequently the way forward for African Christianity lies in its ability to provide a thorough going critique both of westernization and of cultural authenticity while developing creative solutions to the continent's staggering and multifaceted problems.

Christianity is supra cultural i.e. it permeates all cultures and for it to make good meaning and impact, the people need to understand to what extent

culture has been wrapped around the meaning. They also need to know what cultural forms within their own culture can be used as jump off points for communicating and appropriating the message. In other words, culture is a container and biblical propositions can be moved from one container to another.

## **5.2 Key values of first century Mediterranean culture**

The New Testament texts were written within first century Greco-Roman culture which also included the Jewish subculture. This is the culture in which 1 John was written, read and applied. This culture hung on the social hinges of honour and shame (deSilva 2000; Malina 1993; Neyrey 1998; Jewett 2003; Crook 2009; Chance 1994; Lakin 1992). An understanding of the notion of honour and shame is key to understanding the message of 1 John and other New Testament writings. This understanding is even more appropriate for a Kom Christian given that the Kom culture also revolves on the axis of honour and shame (Kimeng 2010). It will therefore be necessary to briefly describe this concept as practiced in the first century so as to observe the underlying assumptions of 1 John to the Johannine community before looking at honour and shame and other cultural values of the Kom culture that have a bearing on the message 1 John.

Honour and shame is a concept of approval and disapproval by the community. 'Honour is the value of a person in his or her own right' i.e. one's claim of worth and how his social group perceives that worth (Malina 1993:31). On the other hand, shame is the idea of being insensitive to one's reputation and the reputation of his group. It is being insensitive to the opinion of others. The shameless person does not respect established cultural norms for interaction in the community. For example, 1 John 2:28 says: 'and now, dear children, continue in him, so that when he appears we may be confident and unashamed before him at his coming' (NIV). In other words, there is a standard of behaviour that brings confidence and honour as opposed to shame. The author argues that members of his community have greater

honour because they are of God and the defecting members of his community were from the world and thus not with honour so cannot be listened to by those who know God (4:5-6). The realm of people who are with God brings more honour than people who are in the realm of the world.

First century Mediterranean world had a collective approach to life with relationships based on collateral rather than on individual orientation. One of the main themes of 1 John is 'fellowshipping with one another' (1:7) in the community thus a reflection of the collateral relationship encouraged in the community of faith. Members of the Johannine community came from various backgrounds viz, Jews, Samaritans, Gentiles etc (Brown 1979). This means that they were first socialized in different sub cultures and now within the community of faith there is a tendency to borrow from external cultures into the Christian culture and values that John taught. The challenge for John is to prevent the primary socialization of members of his community from short-circuiting the Christian ethos in this new community. How can these substrata of the community fellowship together? The contemporary reader who comes from a background of an individualistic society will find it difficult to understand the emphasis on fellowship and community life. On the other hand, it will be supposed ipso facto that a contemporary reader from a group orientation and shame and honour culture like Kom will be better placed to understand this theme of 1 John. What aspects of community life are practiced in Kom and how can they help propel the message of fellowship which John tries to inculcate in the Johannine community? Are there cultural values from the wider Kom culture that Kom Christians drag into the church which can short circuit the values in the new community of faith? For the Johannine community, these were the various layers of ethnic and cultural values brought into the community. The above questions give the inclination of elements of Kom culture to be studied below.

Another key value of the first century culture is the concept of patronage and reciprocity (deSilva 2000, Malina 1993, Chance 1994, Crook 2009, Marshall 2009). In a patronage relationship, someone of lesser power, honour and wealth sought the protection of someone with superior power and honour. The

patron was the benefactor and his clients were the beneficiaries. Personal patronage was an essential means of acquiring access to goods, protection and other advantages for the client (deSilva 2000: 96, 99). The largesse of the patron entailed a moral responsibility of loyalty and gratitude of the client to the patron thus reciprocity.

The concept of patronage and reciprocity has been used to explain the concept of grace and thus loyalty of believers to God as their patron (deSilva 2000, Malina 1993, Chance 1994, Crook 2009). The New Testament letters offer an antidote to shameful status and asserting that the people held in low status by the society are raised to a position of honour through their faith in Christ (Jewett 2003:551). The death of Jesus was seen as an act of grace from God and the blood of Jesus is there to purify the believer (1 John 1:7). This act of grace from God necessitates that the believer will act honourably in reciprocity by not loving the world but rather loving the Father (1 John 2:15). The early Christians were exhorted to live as a family because they have now been born into the family of God (1 John 3:9). In the same way that kinship was a reference to one's identity; the early Christians had to see themselves as related and thus had to show solidarity to each other. It is also perceivable that John writes from the background of a patron to his community and expects that members of this community should heed to his instructions and advice as a display of their reciprocity to him.

The focus of the addressees of 1 John as is the case of other New Testament primary audience was to conform to the values of honour and shame and patronage and reciprocity as expected by their culture. This audience was oriented towards approval and disapproval of others in the community. The early church appeared within its wider community as a group of people deviating from some established cultural norms and were consequently disapproved of and judged to be deviant by this wider culture. As a survival strategy, the church evoked sentiments of God's grant of honour as far exceeding the approval of the community.



What points of similarities or divergence are there with these social frames of culture i.e. honour and shame and patronage and reciprocity and the Kom culture? Approval and disapproval of the community on individual and group activity is an essential feature of the Kom culture. Personal choices and daily decisions made in life by a Kom Christian apparently are not entirely free but constrained by the overwhelming influence of the keen eye of culture on the individual. The choice of where one would belong across the divide in the Baptist church apparently were motivated by which group of people one considered as the significant others and sought their approval in the camp he or she joined. Culture therefore appeared as a key motivating factor of decisions in the church than biblical exhortations. To establish in details how culture influences the hermeneutical life of the Kom Christian, I shall now describe Kom culture in some relative detail.

### **5.3 The Kom culture**

#### ***5.3.1 Sources of data***

The Kom community is to a very big extent an oral culture. Literacy in the Kom language is about 10% and literacy in the second language (English) is 35% (Gordon 2005: 64). Although there are some ethnographic reports and publications on the culture (Nkwi1974, 1976, 1985, 1990, Shanklin1985), there still remains many areas of the culture that need to be observed by the student seeking to understand the culture. Given these circumstances, a study like this one will have to borrow from different sources of data notably participant observation on the field and ethnographic reports. O'Neil (2006) argues that there are five key methods for ethnographers to gather reliable data that any student of the culture should use. He cites proper mental attitude of the researcher, participant observation, competence in using host culture's language, long term residence and luck of being in the right place where those cultural traits are exhibited.

As an indigene of Kom, born and raised in Kom, most of my description of the Kom cultural elements in this chapter is owed to my participation in and

observation of the culture for many years. I agree with O'Neil (2006) that a long stay within a culture and an understanding of the language are conditions prerequisite for understanding the culture. Having lived uninterruptedly in Kom for the first twenty years and having served as a mother-tongue translator of the Kom New Testament at a later age for seven years during which I was involved in studying the culture and cultural expressions of the language to permit me translate the New Testament into the Kom language, some of what is presented in this chapter comes from interacting with the people then. Nonetheless, data of this nature can be quite subjective if not verified by others. In order to ascertain the reliability of my data, I have talked in informal conversations with some selected leaders of the community to cross examine and clarify my understanding of these elements of the culture.

### ***5.3.2 Brief historical origins of the Kom people***

The history of a people plays a significant role in ascribing their identity and in establishing their subsequent culture. Often, there are events in the history and subsequently culture that can provide clues for the theological inclinations of the people. What is it in the historical origins of Kom that gives the people their identity? An understanding of the historical and cultural context of the church in Kom will also provide a better appreciation of values that can be used to understand some of the contentions of 1 John particularly one of its key focus namely Christology.

Kom is found in Boyo division of the North West Region of the Republic of Cameroon. The name refers both to an ethnic group, the language and the geographical location. The Kom people number about two hundred and thirty three thousand inhabitants (Gordon: 2005). Boyo Division is the government administrative unit that has four sub divisions namely Belo, Njinikom, Fundong and Bum. The first three sub divisions make up the Kom tribe with the Kom language being the main identification and unifying factor of the group. Bum sub division has historical and cultural links with Kom but speaks a different language, the Bum language and have a different traditional ruler.

Immediate neighbours to the south are the chiefdoms of Babungo and Kijem Kegu (also known as Big-Babanki), the kingdom of Bafut to the southwest, the Aghem federation to the northwest, the chiefdom of Mmen (Bafumen) and the kingdom of Bum to the north, the kingdom of Nso and the chiefdom of Oku to the east'(Geary 1980:43).

All of these tribes have many cultural and historical links with the Kom tribe though all of them practice the patrilineal system of kinship except Kom and Aghem which have a matrilineal system of succession thus giving Kom a distinctive cultural heritage.

The history of the origin of the Kom tribe and its evolution is largely legendary (Ngam 1997:1). According to oral sources, the Kom people had been wanderers until they sought refuge in another tribe of the North West Region of Cameroon called Babessi. They soon became very prosperous thus provoking jealousy in their hosts who plotted and killed most of the working population of the Kom. The leader of the Kom people realized that he had been tricked in a plot that led to the assassination of his people and he committed suicide. He had warned his people before the suicide that there would later emerge a fish pond somewhere within the village after his death but that they were never to participate in the catching of the fish alongside other Babessi people. The Babessi people eventually got drowned in the fish pond. The Kom people had been cautioned 'to remain vigilant for a python trail would appear after his death and they were expected to follow the trail to wherever it led them' (Ngam 1997:2). When the python trail appeared, it led the people of Kom through forest and savannah areas to their present hilly savannah grass fields in the North West Region of Cameroon.

The origin of Kom and its present geographical position is thus linked to a python. Ancestry is also a key element of its historical origins. Africa Traditional Religion which is thus rife in Kom traces its origins with the

founding of the tribe. Africa Traditional Religion poses a challenge to the Kom Christian particularly on understanding and appropriating some theological issues treated in 1 John such as an adequate understanding of Christology. How would the people for example pay their allegiance to their patriarchal deceased *fon* and still stay faithful to the idea that Jesus Christ is the Messiah? In other words, there appear to be some conflicting roles in the thought patterns of the Kom Christian when he or she considers that Christ was crucified for his sake and at the same time believes that Kom exists as a tribe because the *fon* sacrificed his life to deliver it from the intrigues of their host. Does the suicide of the *fon* as a way to make a python trial appear for the escape of his people help the people in understanding Jesus Christ as the escape way from sin or it rather engenders syncretistic tendencies to believers within the culture? How can the predominantly oral culture of Kom make use of the message of the written message of 1 John? The answers to these questions are needed to evaluate the state of understanding of the message of 1 John among Christians of the Baptist Church in Kom.

#### **5.3.4 Traditional authority in Kom and social order**

Kom culture hangs on a community orientation where individuals are all interconnected with all and sundry having responsibilities towards each other. In the first century, the head of the group was responsible for the honour of the group (Malina 1993:39). Loyalty and respect and responsibility towards the community and its traditions in first century Mediterranean world were naturally part and parcel of the life style of members of the community (Van der Watt 1999:500). This strong communal lifestyle in the first century is paralleled in the Kom culture with a traditional authority represented by the *fon* or chief who acts as the hub of a communal life.

The *fon* of Kom is the focal point and head of the whole tribe and symbolises the community's honour as well. Disrespecting the *fon* brings shame and paying due tribute to him is something honourable given that he is the owner of all land and the intercessor for the protection of the people. He wards off

spiritual forces that can harm the people and thus plays a patronage role to his people who need in turn show reciprocity by paying allegiance to him. The whole tribe is seen as an extrapolated family with the *fon* assuming the role of the head of the family. During the crisis in the Baptist Church, each party across the divide sought to win the approval of the *fon* by going to Laikom, the traditional capital of Kom to justify its stance. In this light, the *fon* appears to be playing a role in 'the family's concilium as "the family court"...as an organ of discipline' (van der Watt 1999:500). In 1 John 1:9-2:2, the author reflects this idea of conciliation in the community because there is one 'who speaks to the Father in our defence'.

The *fon* of Kom is seen as the symbol of unity of the Kom people. He holds the patron's responsibility to bring discipline among his subjects. 'Becoming *fon* in Kom means becoming spiritually transformed and assuming both religious and political responsibilities of a people' (Nkwi 1990: 242). Shanklin (1990:164) describes the *fon* as 'sacred or semi-divine ruler'. This perception of the *fon* as a spiritual being is widely held by Kom people including many Christians of the Baptist church. He is considered as the chief traditional priest who communes with the gods of the land and intercedes for his people. He incarnates the values of the tribe as prescribed by his predecessors and ancestors and his authority is never contested by anyone. He offers sacrifices, conducts rituals of purification for the land when it is defiled. *Fons* 'never die', they only go missing and then new ones are enthroned. Their influence is therefore extremely strong and observably, Christians seek to win their approval by heeding to their guidance even when sometimes this guidance is opposed to biblical exhortations. Thus, for some Christians, the authority of the *fon* sometimes rivals that of Scriptures. Whose authority will prevail over the other, the Bible's authority or that of the *fon*? It is in such a setting that the Baptist church was planted and grew in Kom. The Christianity that evolves in such may easily be exposed to syncretism.

#### **5.3.4 The Kom kinship system**

Selecting a model through which to learn about the culture of a given people can be difficult owing to the wide range of domains that culture covers. However, given that John uses family imagery throughout his letter to communicate his message, it will be fitting to learn about these aspects of the culture in Kom. In order to understand this metaphor of the family used by John, it is necessary to look at some aspects of the kinship system of first century Mediterranean culture.

The family was perceived as the social unit of the community. 'Birth into a family meant assuming everything involved in that family, its honour and its shame (van der Watt 1999:495). Malina (1993) analyzes some features of New Testament kinship system. It was a culture that favours paternal and male line of descent. Families lived together in patrilocal residences as households where parents readily interfered in the families of their adult married children. The father was the authoritative head of the family and he had the responsibility to supply the needs of his children. The child's response to the father was not voluntary given that children were obliged to respond in obedience. 'The social dynamic of interrelatedness between the father and the child will be automatically activated in the commands in 1 John 4 for children to love because the Father loves (van der Watt 1999:492). The honour of the wider kin group was a concern of all and sundry.

John sees the believer as belonging to a family whose identity determines the way he should conduct himself in the community. The family determines the *modus operandi* in life. The use of the terms, 'born of God', 'seed', 'children', 'children of God', 'child of God' and 'his brother' all evoke family ethos. The expectations for members of the family are presumed in the light of first century filial expectations. For example, van der Watt (1999:495) explains John as saying a true and loving child acts according to his identity and this social image is reflected in the epistle in that a child of God does not sin (1 John 1:8) but by confessing sin and declaring loyalty to the family the believer is restored.

What does John expect as behaviour from members of the family given that they have become the children of God and what does the culture in Kom expect of the behaviour of a family member? What are the points of convergence or divergence and what does this mean for Christians who belong both to their Kom families and to the family of believers? Is their identity within the cultural framework of the family affected when they assume filial ties as Christians and vice versa? It has been observed that becoming truly 'born again' in Kom often leaves damaged relationships with most members of one's family who are not yet Christians. Most often, the pressure to compromise the Christian message is created by one's family responsibilities. Understanding kinship relationships in Kom can provide some bridging assumptions for a better understanding, communication and appropriation of the message of 1 John in Kom.

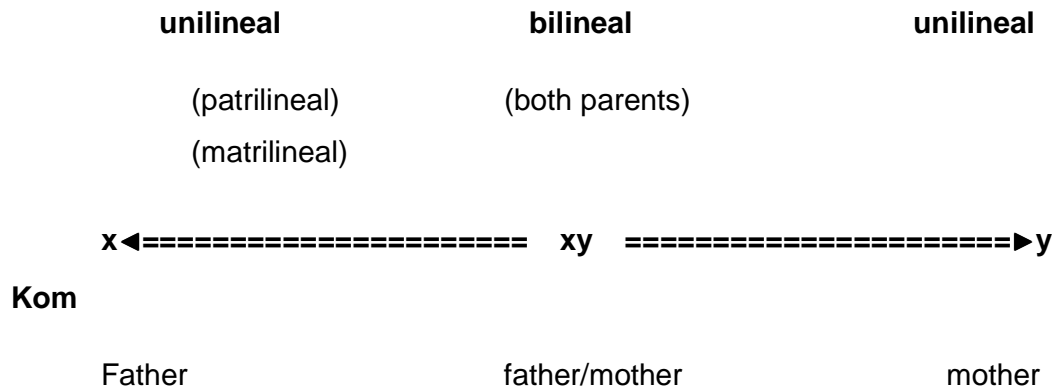
#### *5.3.4.1 The Kom family*

The Kom kinship system unlike that of the community behind 1 John has a matrilineal lineage that also contrasts with the patrilineal lineage of its neighbouring tribes and that of first century Mediterranean culture. Nkwi (1990) intimates that 'Although the Kom claim to have historical connexion with the Tikar groups of the Western Grassfields which are largely patrilineal, they have a matrilineal descent system which permits only fraternal or sister's son succession'. This puts the Kom Christian at odds to fully understanding the concept of children of God as addressed by 1 John. How will believers in Kom understand the idea of being 'children of God' and how do they view their relationship with Jesus Christ as the Son of God?

I consider the distinction between unilineal and bilineal systems of kinship as a continuum. A unilineal family is one in which the family is leaning towards one of the parents and a bilineal family is one where both parents are equally important and regarded as such by the offspring and the community. These categories are not to be viewed as enclosures but as a continuum in which the relationships for a unilineal kinship system (relationship leaning either on

the mother or the father) are strong at one end of the continuum but weak in the middle and the bilineal system is strong in the middle but weak at both ends. It is on this basis that Kom is considered as a matrilineal society where there is a strong attachment to the mother and her kin but a loose one to the kin of the father. Vubo (2005:155) affirms the centrality of women in the Kom matrilineal family system; 'women are central to kinship continuity and growth, constituting the key elements in the definition of clan identity. The kin group can either grow through the fertility of female members who ensure multiplication and eventual segmentation'. This does not completely take away the fact that the father's line of family does not have his own influence even in a matrilineal system of kinship, but such influence is peripheral. Does this mean that as a Father, the Kom Christians see God from this less intimate perception than they see the mother? This relationship can be represented diagrammatically as follows:

Figure 11: Schema of the Kom kinship system



The Kom kinship system is represented in the diagram above by the point **y**. This means that in this kinship system, it is the relationships engendered by the mother that are more important to the child. The child's name in Kom is linked to the name of the mother. If the child's name for example is *Ntam*, he will be known in the community as *Ntam Nain* (Ntam of Nain) where Nain is the mother's name. The occurrence of the father's name as a surname for the



child is an official arrangement based on western influence infiltrating through schools. The child belongs to the clan of the mother. It is the genealogy of the mother that is important to the child as it counts as the clan to which her children all belong.

A question that ensues from this relationship is how Kom Christians understand the accounts of genealogy in New Testament writings? What sense will it make to them to see a genealogy that highlights one's father and grandfather and great grandfather instead of one's mother and grandmother? To make this point clearer, let us take the case of polygamous families in Kom. Children from the same mother consider themselves as siblings but children from the same father do not consider themselves as siblings. How can Christians with this cultural mindset understand the concept of brotherhood and children of God? A child in Kom is not a member of the clan of his father but is identified as 'a child of the family' of his father, '*wayn ndo*' (child of the house). This relationship is not as intimate as '*wul ndo*' (person of the house).

Vubo (2005: 167) saliently underscores the basis of the Kom matrilineal system of family:

One general conclusion that could be drawn from my analysis is that the kinship systems operate according to one basic principle which takes the household... as the basic unit from which all else evolves. It is this principle that puts the woman at the foundation of all kinship relations and, beyond that, social relations. Whether patrilineal or matrilineal, it is the community of persons born of one woman that lays the foundation for the elaboration of kinship ties.

Kom has a patrilocal system of residence i.e. the place of residence is the responsibility of the man or husband and not that of the wife. The 'Kom family' involves a larger kin group that extends to any known degree level of cousins,

aunts and uncles. This means that at conversion, a member of a given family draws many within the family residence into his faith. Many of the people who are thus Baptist Christians today did not choose to become Baptist at conversion but were influenced by those who had already become Christians within the family set up or even the village. During the divide, the head of the residence determined the way everyone else went in the church. This means that people went to some Baptist churches across the divide not out of choice but because of their residence and the choice was made for them by the head of the residence. It can be said that the Kom residential system is in some measure akin to what happened in the Johannine community. The Johannine community is said to be a group of home churches where false teachers had initiated a schismatic movement (Ladd 1993:219). The fact that these churches were in separate homes facilitated the task of these teachers because converting the leader of the home church would engender the conversion of group.

#### *5.3.4.2. Kinship responsibilities*

The family is 'a social womb' to Africans. Drives, values, affections, outlook to life are determined by the family (Mekonnen 2009: 77). This means the responsibility of each member of the family has to be defined towards upholding these values. This description of the African family is also fitting for ancient first century Mediterranean culture. Thus, 1 John uses metaphors to illustrate the responsibility that a believer should exercise towards God and within the family of believers.

In ancient Mediterranean culture, being born into a family created certain social expectations. This included the need for children to be responsive and obedient to their parents (Watt 1999:495). A true and loving child had to act according to his identity. John echoes these responsibilities in his letter. For example, he says a child of God cannot sin (1 John 3:9) but also indicates that even if he sins (1:8) by confessing and declaring loyalty to the family he is restored (1:9). The child must love because the Father loves and 'everyone

who loves has been born of God and knows God' (1 John 4:8). What are the responsibilities of members of the family in the Kom family set up?

Different clans in Kom have different ethos to family responsibility but overall, the privileges and responsibilities ascribed to members of the family are pretty universal in the tribe. Most of these responsibilities rotate around celebrations in the family and taking care of different family members under given circumstances. All that a given member does as responsibility to other members of the family emanate from a sense of love which constrains responsibility as a duty. Thus as it was in the first century Mediterranean culture, the child's response to parents and other family members in Kom is not voluntary but mandated.

Clan members gather together during birth, marriage and death celebrations and other traditional rites events. During births, clan members come with food items to celebrate. During deaths, each clan member is mandated with specific task and gifts within the period of three days that death celebrations are conducted. It is the honour of the family that is at stake when birth and death celebrations are not conducted in decorum as prescribed by the culture. A son has to offer the sacrifice of a goat to his deceased mother during her death celebration or during the death celebration of any of his maternal aunts. He also has to offer the sacrifice of a goat too during the death celebration of his deceased father but not to any of his paternal uncles or aunts. Responsibility of feeding and performing assigned traditional rites in the funeral and death celebrations of a close maternal relative is obligatory. The woman or the girl child has to offer the sacrifice of grain to his late mother of aunts and to the late mother in-law. The main responsibility of the child towards the parents is therefore during the death celebration of the latter.

Members of the family have great responsibility towards the dead members of the family and this is for a twofold reason namely, (a) to save the dignity of the family in the face of the other members of the family and (a) to appease the deceased in the ancestral world. The ancestors are thus revered and feared. This is practiced by all and sundry including many of those who have been

converted to Christianity. It is common knowledge for children to take care of their aging and ailing parents or other members of the family. The Kom proverb that *nji ñin dvina yi nyon wayn* (when a sheep grows old, it is suckled by its young) is spoken ostensibly to advise the children to take care of their parents at their later and feeble age.

John's ethical theory is centred on love expressed through the responsibilities by all and sundry in the family of believers. Thus, he says 'this is how we know who the children of God are and who the children of the devil are: Anyone who does not do what is right is not a child of God; nor is anyone who does not love his brother' (1 John 3:10, NIV). This enunciation fits the ethical conduct perceived from the Kom family viewpoint. A member of the family must show love and do what is right as viewed by the culture. A loving child of the family acts in accordance to his identity and brings honour to the family.

## **5.4. Worldview of the Kom people**

### **5.4.1. Introduction**

World view refers to the way a people perceive and interpret reality. A person's pre-existing world view has an impact in the way he or she understands or shares the Christian message (Billingsley 2003:25). Understanding a person's world view is necessary given that the Bible itself was written from a particular world view. Misunderstanding the world view of a people will definitely lead to misinterpretation and consequently miscommunication in the case of sharing the biblical message. It is therefore fitting here to look at what constitutes the frame or the system of belief in Kom so as to understand their behaviour and what meaning they will make out of John's ethical enunciations. There are many ways to approach a description of world view (Willingsley 2003:29) and amongst these are the view of self and others and relationships (exemplified in the treatment of honour and shame above. The key explanations, interpretations and evaluations of human thinking in Kom appears to be borne out of the category of causality thus religion.

#### ***5.4.2 Traditional religious beliefs***

Religion is an integral part of the Kom culture and a spiritual interpretation of phenomena is applied in all facets of life. Christianity is perceived to be just another form of religion emanating from the western world. It is common place to see even those who have professed Christianity and who regularly attend church services paying allegiance to traditional gods and revering the ancestors. This weakens considerably the authority of Scriptures in the culture and the peoples' compliance to its exhortations. This also ushers in syncretism in the church leaving the interpreter of the Bible with the worry of what it can take to de-emphasize the ancestors and the spirits and make Christ more meaningful within the community. In other words, the Christological perception of Jesus as the go-between between man and God is diluted and even replaced in some quotas by the ancestors who are seen to be playing the mediating role between the spiritual world and the physical world. How is the reader of 1 John in Kom going to understand John's exhortation for members of his community to stay away from idols (1 John 5:21). Behind the Christological problem in 1 John was a form of idolatry that can be also seen in the Baptist Church community in Kom. Fon and Grebe (1995) analyse some of the areas of African Traditional Religion that are concurrent in most African communities. I will take those categories and snap the picture of the situation in Kom.

##### ***5.4.2.1. The view of God, the universe and the spirit world***

The Kom culture perceives God to be self-created and existing from the beginning of the world. He is called Fiyini (with no direct semantic meaning) but is alternatively referred to as 'Mbom' (creator). Mbom is perceived as moral and one who punishes immoral behaviour. He is also omnipresent and eternal. However, he is remote from daily life and the spirits are seen as His agents. His judgment is reserved for the end of time and judges evil and wicked behaviour.

The fertility of the land is perceived as a blessing from the spirits and the infertility and bad harvest is an affliction from the spirits. The spirits can be placated from afflicting people by offering the relevant sacrifices at the right seasons. Fertility can thus be increased when one is obedient to the spirits also called m̄yini (gods). The gods can therefore be placated and controlled through ritual performances, sacrifices and the prayers or incantations that accompany them and through other spirits. The intermediaries between the gods and people are diviners, and other forms of spiritual workers generally called 'traditional doctors'. Families, including some apparently 'Christian families' visit traditional doctors to find out what the gods are thinking about them and how they can ward off calamities from befalling the family. Most families in Kom have some kind of god they worship and the ancestors are revered, feared and even worshipped.

In some sense, promulgating God to a level beyond the realm of human interference and placing the spirit beings in-between Him and the people hinges on one of the key issues that befell the Johannine community viz., Gnostic sentiments particularly docetism that maintained that Christ was a phantom. He could not leave the realm of God to condescend and come down to the realm of humanity.

#### 5.4.2.2. The ubiquitous ancestors

The ancestors are everywhere in the Kom culture and are venerated. The living members of each family are influenced by their deceased ones everywhere they go and see them as their intercessors and mediators with the gods. The living members of the family have some responsibilities to carry out in order to please and appease the ancestors. Such responsibilities include sacrifices of fowls, goats, grain (maize) and palm wine. Wendland (1991:13) describes the perception of the ancestors and spiritual inclinations in African life to which the Kom culture clearly exemplifies.

In Africa, the component of wisdom is directed towards the past and the revered teachings of the fathers. These ancestors however are believed to continue to exert their conservative influence as personal spirits in various ways...by inflicting punishments upon those who violate established culture.

One of the purposes of 1 John is to appeal to the believers in the Johannine community to strengthen their faith through an encouragement to maintain the apostolic teachings on Christology and ethics (Smalley 2007: xxv). How will Christ be represented in Kom given their beliefs and thoughts about the ancestors? Does the work of Christ conflict with the role the ancestors play in the culture? Ancestors play the role of mediators but ancestors are considered as members of different families and not divinities. Osei-Bonsu (1990: 355) tries to answer these questions suggesting that Christ can be considered as a kind of 'pro-ancestor' or as a healer but each of these suggestions finds enough weaknesses. It is therefore evident from this veneration of ancestors that one of the chief concerns of 1 John namely an adequately honed Christology in which Christ is the mediator between God and humans also addresses the community of Baptist Christians in Kom whose understanding of Christ is tainted by their belief in ancestors.

#### *5.4.2.3. Some relevant taboos in Kom*

The main prohibitions in Kom culture concern work days. There are two days of an eight days week that are considered sacred and are observed mainly by staying at home and avoiding farm work. Defaulters are believed to be punished by the gods who cause a poor harvest and also by the traditional authorities. It takes sacrifices and cleansing to restore a defaulter by a traditional priest or traditional doctor. Even Christians observe these days without many qualms and refer to it as 'local sabbath' or 'country Sunday'.

Some members of the community are ascribed as possessing witchcraft. It is considered an act of love and blessing for an elderly member of a family to designate a younger member and transfer spiritual powers to the latter such as those of witchcraft. The community however sees witchcraft not only as anti social behaviour but for Christians, it is considered as one of the major sins. As a shame culture, people found with such deviant behaviour as perceived by the culture are ostracised socially i.e. the traditional authorities advise members of the community to desist interacting with the deviant.

The ethical concerns of 1 John need to be considered keenly in light of the Kom culture. What John considers as love and encourages members of his community to do does not equate to what is considered in the Kom culture as love. Love is expressed in Kom by a faithful adherence to one's traditional values, the care for ancestors and consulting the dibias on to find out what are the dangers surrounding an individual. People come together to unite their efforts to appease the ancestors even when this may involve sacrificing food items that are needed by a family for their survival. The morbid fear of ancestors determines one's ethical conduct in Kom. There are also theological concerns when one looks at the phenomenon of 'local Sabbath' in Kom. To whom is this day revered? Have the Christians in Kom understood that they need to keep away from idols as exhorted in 1 John 5:21? Evidently, the Baptist church in Kom exists in a complex theological sphere with some ethical concerns that needs to be carefully rethought.

#### *5.4.2.4. Other values of Kom culture expressed through proverbs*

John's pervasive use of metaphors can be compared with the pervasive use of proverbs to communicate Kom values. Kom philosophy or wisdom is expressed through proverbs and songs. The Kom proverb is rich in content and in scope expressing a wide range of perception. Most shame reprimands are spoken of in proverbs. This causes uneasiness to the one being shamed but spares him the embarrassment of publicly shaming him. Proverbs are also used because of the oral nature of the culture.



Ngam (1997: 38) highlights some of the themes reflected in Kom proverbs and argues that ‘proverbs of a people are a sure guide to their character and temperament’. From them we can see the ethos of the Kom society and their social inclinations. Advice is also given through proverbs and it is common place for parents to talk proverbially to their children when they want to advice them to stay true to the values of the land. In other words, just like the author of 1 John uses metaphors of the family to impart values to his audience, the Kom culture will use proverbs in educating its people.

Some of the major themes embedded in Kom proverbs are themes that the author of 1 John has treated in the letter. This includes the theme of love, truth, community, generosity, humility etc. The following are examples of proverbs show these values of the culture:

Advice:                    *a fom mĩ gha            kĩ            bu            faŋ            ichfĩ*  
                                   sweet whatever    it            never remain mouth  
                                   (No matter how delicious food can be, it has to be  
                                   swallowed)

This advice is given to people to impart the value of sharing and avoid greed among members of the community. Underlying this is the theme of fellowship which the author of 1 John seeks to inculcate in his community. It encourages the people to avoid ephemeral pleasures at the expense of lasting relationships.

Community: *awu a mò' a nĩn kul wi ibu'*  
                                   hand one    does tie    not bundle  
                                   (one hand cannot tie a bundle)

Generosity: *awu a nĩn zĩ ta            kĩ nĩn fvĩ*  
                                   hand enters            as            it emits  
                                   (a person can receive as much as he is generous)

Again, the theme of fellowship and the encouragement to unite forces as a community are exhorted in Kom through the use of the two preceding

proverbs. Sharing and fraternity are encouraged when these proverbs are spoken.

Love:            *wa    wo    atem           ka    wa    sfi    jva*  
                     you   lack   calabash    not    you   stir    water  
                     When you do not have a calabash to fetch water, do not  
                     stir up dirt in the spring so that those who have can fetch water

Love is a major theme in Kom proverbs. Kom people see themselves as 'brothers' and acting for the good of the other Kom person is encouraged. The need to give and to let a chance for a fellow Kom person thrive is evidently the essence of the above proverb.

The examples above help to point to some of the key values of the Kom culture as expressed in the language. Interestingly, some of these values are also the key concerns of 1 John. Conceptually, these values can be seen to echo some of the values or themes in 1 John but practically the Christian might find the challenge of expressing love in a culturally appropriate manner. Can the use of these relevant proverbs be a springboard to encourage believers of the Kom Baptist Church to heed the message of 1 John? This is the inclination of this dissertation.

## **5.5. The Baptist Church in Kom**

### ***5.5.1. Brief historical background of the Baptist church in Kom***

Brown (1979) describes the evolution of the Johannine community and shows that it started with a group of Jews and later grew to include Samaritans and Gentiles. In the course of its growth, three key theological debates related to Christology, ethics and pneumatology (Brown 179:109) crept into the community from within the wider culture and severed the seams of unity. These theological and ethical concerns in 1 John apparently fit the contextual situation of the community of the Baptist Church in Kom. There is need to answer the question on what it is within the community of the Baptist church in Kom that is responsible for the division it has experienced. To do this, it will

require us to briefly review the historical background of the Baptist Church in Kom.

Baptist missionaries first came to Cameroon by 1841 through a joint venture between British and Jamaican Baptists (Russell 1983:217). The first Baptist missionary to the country was called Joseph Merrick from Jamaica. He was later followed by Alfred Saker and John Clarke. In 1885, a missionary conference was held in Bremen, Germany and there it was proposed that German missionaries take over the British work in Cameroon. The Basel mission took over from the British missionaries in Cameroon in 1886. After the First World War also fought in Cameroon (1918), the German missionaries did not return to Cameroon until 1927. When the first missionary was allowed to return to the British sector, he remained until 1935 and together with others opened work in Belo [Kom area], Ndu and Mbirkpa' (Russel 1983:221).

The first missionaries who arrived in Kom came from Fernando Po (today Equatorial Guinea) during the reign of *Fon* Ngam who reigned between 1912 to 1926 (CATID 1999:13). These Christians settled in the central location of Kom in a village called Wombong. They soon ran into problems with the *fon* because they settled in the land without his permission and got some of his many wives converted to Christianity. This induced a very high level of suspicion about Christianity in the *fon*.

The first converts to Christianity in Kom in the Baptist faith had been sojourners in the coastal area of Cameroon where they came in contact with German missionaries. These Kom Christians came back home in 1924 but faced the challenge of ensuring that they were culturally relevant as indigenes and biblically sound in the conduct of their daily lives. This was exacerbated by the tension already created by the Roman Catholic faithfuls in the Wombong village through the conversion of the *fon*'s wives into Christianity. Those who came included Petrus Ndikvu, Robert Jam, Thomas Yuiwe, Marcus Ndoh, Isaac Ndong, Abraham Chi and Jacob Yong (CATID 1999:13). Petrus Ndikvu and Robert Jam soon started house churches in their

respective villages of Boyo and Mughef. Some of the first Kom people to be baptized were Sam Chiabi and Ambongha Magdelene.

The Baptists missionaries to Kom also developed social services. This included hospitals, schools and vocational training centres. One of the two main hospitals in the Kom area is the Mbingo Baptist Hospital and until 1980, the Kom Baptist Technical College was one of only two secondary schools in the Kom area. Some of the main primary schools to which most of the present Kom elites schooled were Baptist primary schools such as the one in Belo opened in 1933. A Baptist seminary and teachers' training colleges were also started in Kom but later moved to Ndu and Ndop villages.

Most of the active members of the church in Kom are women. There are respected members of the community in the church. Young people are also very much active in the churches. The church services are conducted mainly in Pidgin English and English with an interpretation in the Kom language to the many Christians who do not understand English. Church leaders such as pastors and deacons are well respected in their communities.

Christianity has not changed very much the traditional beliefs of the people in Kom. For example, the taboos of working on certain sacred days are respected by almost all the Christians without any questioning. Contrarily, the the culture seems to have very much shaped the understanding of the gospel. For example, deaths and illness are perceived even by many Christians as an affliction of the gods and they do believe that the gods have to be placated.

#### ***5.5.2. Brief origins of the crisis in the church***

The Baptist church was planted in Kom as a missionary church in 1928 and was administered by the Cameroon Baptist Missions. In the 1950s, the church became a self governing church and adopted the name of Cameroon Baptist Convention (CBC). By 1998 there were more than sixty seven congregations in the Kom area (Jam 1998). These congregations were administered as one of the field areas of the Cameroon Baptist Convention (CBC) and the

congregations were collectively called Belo Field Council of Baptist Churches (abridged as Belo Field) of the CBC.

From the mid 1990s, tension developed among the congregations in Kom which resulted in the group splinting into two competing camps namely those that were loyal to the CBC and those that were opposed to the administration of the CBC. The latter advocated for secession from the CBC and for the formation of another convention designated as Cameroon National Baptist Convention (CNBC). The decision to secede from the umbrella convention was arrived at during a Bible conference in a village called Anyajua in 1997 by a decision that later came to be known as the 'Anyajua declaration'. The declaration stated that:

We the undersigned fully mandated delegates of the following churches of the Belo Field Council of Baptist Church, sitting in a massively attended session at the 1997 Bible conference at Anyajua Baptist Church, today 26th November, 1997, at the hour of 3:00p.m. prayerfully declare as follows: to withdraw our membership from the CBC and assume full autonomy in order to henceforth function and worship God without hitches or suppression of any sort as it is presently the case and to work harder to evangelize the unbelieving world far and near (CODERU 1999:25).

The deserting group argued that the administration of the CBC was tribalistic and vindictive in its methods. They cited that institutions of the church began in Kom and later moved to different tribes owed the decisions to tribalism. The key figures for this was the Belo Field pastor and administrator of the field, Rev Mbong Valentine, himself a non-Kom about whom it was said that CBC administration put on discipline because he did not hail from one of the popular tribes of the CBC. Another key figure was Mr Elijah Nyahkeh who was appointed the Baptist Education Secretary by state authorities upon proposal

of the CBC in 1996 but later on, CBC viewed this proposal and subsequent appointment as irregular and asked for the appointment to be revoked. The Belo Field Christians regarded this as vindictive and as evidence of marginalization of Belo Field Christians.

The group that was loyal to CBC argued against this view and claimed that the behaviour of the opponents was rather a spiritual act of rebellion and an off shoot of end times manifestations. They thus adopted as watchword the term 'watchmen of the true faith'. The adoption of this name brought a useful distinction between both parties given that before now, there was an ambiguity because those members of the Field who were calling for secession and those who advocated for loyalty to the CBC all hung on to the appellation 'Belo Field'.

The crisis took an interesting twist in 1997. People adhered to one group or the other in clusters. If a key member of a family was found in one group then the trend was for all members of the family to be found in that group. Families that had different members of the family adhering to different camps in the divide developed tension and it was common place to find some members of the family not talking to each other. Victimization and outright hatred characterized by avoidance to come together in social occasions was conspicuous. The struggle to win the favour and approval of non Baptists was rife. This included wining over the support of the *fon* and the village heads. In the course of this, the relationship between the Christian and the non Christian in terms of cultural practices became very close.

Three main issues can be seen in the history and evolution of the Baptist Church in Kom that are akin to issues that are addressed in the Johannine community. These issues are both theological and ethical. Theologically, there are cultural undertones in Kom that appear to impede a proper understanding of the Christian message. The conversion of the wives of the *fon*, who incarnates the culture sewed a seed of suspicion and resentment from the wider culture. What theological thought patterns were developed by the missionaries and how do these correlate with the cultural situation on the

ground will need to be revisited. At the ethical level, there are echoes of tribalism, nepotism and personality conflict practiced in the church. Many people appear not to have consciously thought through the decision to join one or the other camp given that people joined camps in clusters. The question of the theological teachings at the inception of the church by the missionaries also needs to be carefully reviewed. For example, the missionaries saw the practice of divination as ensuing from demonic powers but they dismissed the practice with other associated practices such as herbal treatment in favour of conventional medical facilities. However, most of the population in Kom did not have access to such conventional western medicine. The theological reflections were done by missionaries without drawing adequately from the Kom cultural context. Evidently, there were personality issues and tribal sentiments at the root of the crisis thus implicating ethical issues.

## **5.6. Culture and the biblical message**

Culture is very intrusive and insinuating and sometimes disguises itself and makes its way in very subtle ways into shaping meaning that was never really intended within a community of a given people. The author of 1 John wrote to encourage his primary audience to guard against cultural insinuations that were antithetical to the apostolic teachings. He did this by providing them with criteria with which they could use to evaluate the claims made by the secessionists and with which they could reassure themselves that they were in the truth and not just naive victims of Greek philosophical thoughts (Kruse 2000:3).

The African is said to be enshrined in his culture and neatly separating what is cultural and what is the Christian message can be difficult. This often leads to contradictions and compromise of either the culture or Christianity. It will be necessary here to see the interplay between culture and the biblical message so as to learn from the experience of the Johannine community for the gain of Kom Baptist Church Christians.

Ezeogu (1998:27) sees African Christianity as having four strands viz. ancient Christianity as reflected by the Coptic Orthodox Church in Egypt and Ethiopia, the missionary churches that were founded between the 18<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century by Europeans and American missionaries, the independent Christianity that benefited from but unsatisfied with the teachings of the missionaries and so made no allegiance to churches outside Africa and lastly, immigrant Christianity founded by westerners with no interest on African membership. The Baptist church in Kom falls within the second strand. Baptist missionaries came to Cameroon in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and moved inland into the Kom area in early 20<sup>th</sup> century. I agree with Kunhiyop (2012:79) that 'it is too optimistic to think that the perception and understanding of God in the African world view is exactly the same as the understanding we derive from the Bible'. Nonetheless, it will be dangerous to try to transpose every biblical scene into an African context. The temptation and tendency for the missionaries in Kom was to do the former and the temptation for the African theologian is to do the latter.

The activities of the Baptist missionaries in Cameroon were conducted under the banner of Cameroon Baptist Mission and mainly led by missionaries of the North American Baptist Mission. When the church grew in scope and in depth; and Cameroonians were able to handle the affairs of the church, Cameroon Baptist Mission was later transformed into the Cameroon Baptist Convention (CBC) but continued to be liaised to the missionary body, the North American Baptist Mission (NAB), by a Field Director from America. Teaching manuals, Sunday school material and training in the Cameroon Baptist Theological Seminary was led and provided for by the missionaries. Hymns and hymnals, were written and taught by the missionaries. As a result, the conduct of church business was significantly influenced by the western culture.

The culture of the missionary and what can be called Christian culture has been misunderstood many times by the Christians and sometimes by the missionaries themselves, ignoring the African context. Upkong (2000:4) argues that there is a need to create:



an encounter between the biblical text and the African context. This involves a variety of ways that link the biblical text to the African context such that the main focus of interpretation is on the communities that receive the text rather than on those that produced it or on the text itself, as is the case with the western methods. To be sure, there are two currents of academic readings of the Bible in Africa: one follows the western pattern, while the other follows the African pattern of linking the text with the African context.

Pobee (1996:166) concurs with Upkong and adds that 'theologians from the North come to Scripture with cultural baggage'. Three models of missionary communication can be adopted by the missionary in communicating the gospel namely ethnocentrism, accommodation and contextualization. In the ethnocentric model, the missionary runs the risk of communicating the gospel in his own cultural forms without separating the message from the baggage of culture. This is what Pobee and Upkong are denouncing. The danger here is that the missionary reads his culture as good and transmits the biblical message in his cultural forms. Pobee (1996:162) sees this as an inclination of the 'use of the Bible for political rhetoric' and 'it has sometimes been argued that the Bible was an instrument for the subjugation of African peoples to colonialism with which Christian missions were perceived to be hand-in-glove'. He therefore argues for the contextualization model and affirms that 'context has everything to do with how the Bible is used' (1996:163). Accommodation on its part sees the receptor culture as having some neutral values which could be used as jump off points for communicating the gospel message. Contextualization looks for ways to marry the content of the message. Hesselgrave and Rommen (1989) argue that the communicator of the biblical message is caught up between three contexts viz., the text and the historical culture from where the text emanated; the culture of the interpreter and the culture of a recipient community like Kom. The challenge for the

interpreter or missionary in this case is to communicate the message in ways that are natural to the recipient culture without distorting its contents and for them this challenge can be overcome only through a careful study of the text by identifying what is cultural and what is the message.

'It is well known that the question of identity for Africans is often posed in terms of an alternative between westernization and the authentic Africanness' (Tienou 1991:3) but transmitting the message with western cultural baggage destroys this identity. Faced with the challenge of understanding the message apart from its cultural baggage in which it was delivered to Africans, the African has to select a methodology of integrating Christianity but without alienating from his cultural roots. Contextualization is the model that has been proposed for this. How can the believer in Kom be authentically Kom but also genuinely a Christian? What are the stakes that such a believer faces?

Ezeogu (1998:28) highlights two models that are used to answer the question on the relationship between the Bible and the culture. These two models are what he calls the dialectic and the dialogic models. He explains that the dialectic model sees culture and the gospel as opposed to each other and standing in conflict perpetually. The dialogic model on the other hand sees the gospel and culture as compatible that could and should be reconciled in a dialogue. He advances some reasons at the root of the dialectic relationship and one of these reasons is that Christian missionaries in the early days were often theologically ill equipped and saw themselves as marching to capture a demonic world (1998:29). There was the quasi total dismissal of the African culture and the communication of the gospel in a foreign culture. This prompted the Africans to describe Christianity as a foreign religion that does not work in the African context.

The key point of the dialogic model is that the essential values of culture and Bible are not necessarily contradictory even though they may appear different and can be exploited by an individual in his Christian life. What this means is that it is possible for a Kom Christian to maintain his 'Kom-ness' and at the same time be authentically Christian.

Christianity and Christians have been perceived in Kom by non Christians and staunch cultural promoters as standing in the way of culture and teaching against cultural values. Some Christians on the other side have seen those who uphold cultural values as unbelievers. This gives an inclination of culture and the receptivity of the gospel in Kom to a dialectical model. Many Christians who reject the culture do so spontaneously without a careful study of the culture and the Bible to say what the points of divergence are. Only a careful study and understanding of the culture will be able to expose the underlying assumptions behind certain cultural practices and how Christianity can accommodate this or circumvent them. On the other hand, only sound exposition of the biblical message can highlight meaning and orient the believer to know the extent to which he can accommodate his culture or circumvent it. Ezeogu (1998:35) draws the meaning and determines the way this should be done. 'As we avoid an overly dialectic approach that locates unchangeables in the gospel and culture, we must also avoid an overly dialogic approach that relativizes even the "kernel" of the gospel'. This appears to have been the mistake of the Johannine community. The secessionists did not consider the appropriate conditions for a constructive dialogue between what came from the culture and what the apostle taught. The configuration of the community was made up of multiple cultures (believing Jews who opposed the temple practices, Samaritans who came with their own baggage of culture and Gentiles who brought Greek philosophy). This multicultural community soon developed ethical problems because of cultural insinuations of each and sundry. It was easy to confuse the other's culture as part of the message of the apostolic teaching.

### **5.7. Cultural undertones in 1 John**

Every biblical book has a specific contextual situation in which it was addressed. God uses particular cultures and situations to address. 'Some of the assumptions and world view of the writer may be an inseparable part of the message that God is getting across' (Anderson 1990:39), but some of the cultural context may just provide the context to understand the message

(Flemming 2005). First John was written to a community that 'consisted of a number of churches, probably located in and around Ephesus in the Roman Province in Asia' (Kruse 2000:2). Some members of this community had adopted views about Jesus Christ (1 John 4:1-3) that were unacceptable to the author of 1 John and they continued to influence other members of the community with these extraneous beliefs. Most of their views were insinuation from the culture. In this section, I will like to examine some of the cultural assumptions behind the text of 1 John so as to further stress on the point that understanding the culture creates greater latitude for understanding and applying the biblical message.

Anderson (1990) discusses the world view and some cultural symbols that lie behind 1 John. Concerning the world view, he points to the dichotomy that exists in 1 John. The author of 1 John polarizes concepts. This is seen when he pits the concepts of love and hate in 1 John 2:11, 'one walks in the light or remains in darkness' (1 John 2:9), (Anderson 1990:40).

Perhaps nowhere else does an author or a book of the Bible so forcibly come against one of the major assumptions of the world view of his culture as does the author in 1 John. Actually, what he comes against is a logical deduction from the Platonic world view that all matter is evil' (1990:41).

The false teachers in 1 John were indoctrinated by Greek philosophy, particularly the binary polarity. Matter was regarded as evil whereas what was spiritual was regarded as the good. 'The author [of 1 John], as a member of that culture, drew nine times on Platonic vocabulary in equating the world with everything against God...' (1 John 2:15, 16; 3:1; 4:2, 3, 4; 5:3; Anderson 1990:42). First John was written amidst an environment of Greek philosophy and Greek culture. Because of this, the message of 1 John has been influenced by Hellenistic culture. John sees that some members of his community have deviated from the apostolic teaching and have received and

are involved in fallacious ideas because of the influence of logic and philosophy as a whole.

Other elements of Hellenistic culture in 1 John include the strong filial symbolism of father and son as evident in 1 John 1:2, 3, 7; 2:1, 22, 23, 25 etc. This prompts John to use father/children symbolism to communicate what true faith and love means. Anderson wonders what relationships would have been available to the writer of 1 John if he had grown in a strongly matrilineal society like is the case in Kom. 'Might he have chosen the maternal uncle and nephew relationship as better representing the close affiliation in the Godhead' (1990:42)? The question highlights the strong cultural influence and background to the letter. Part of the culture strongly yokes with the message such that separating the world view of matter as evil and spirit as good forms the key issue that John is addressing.

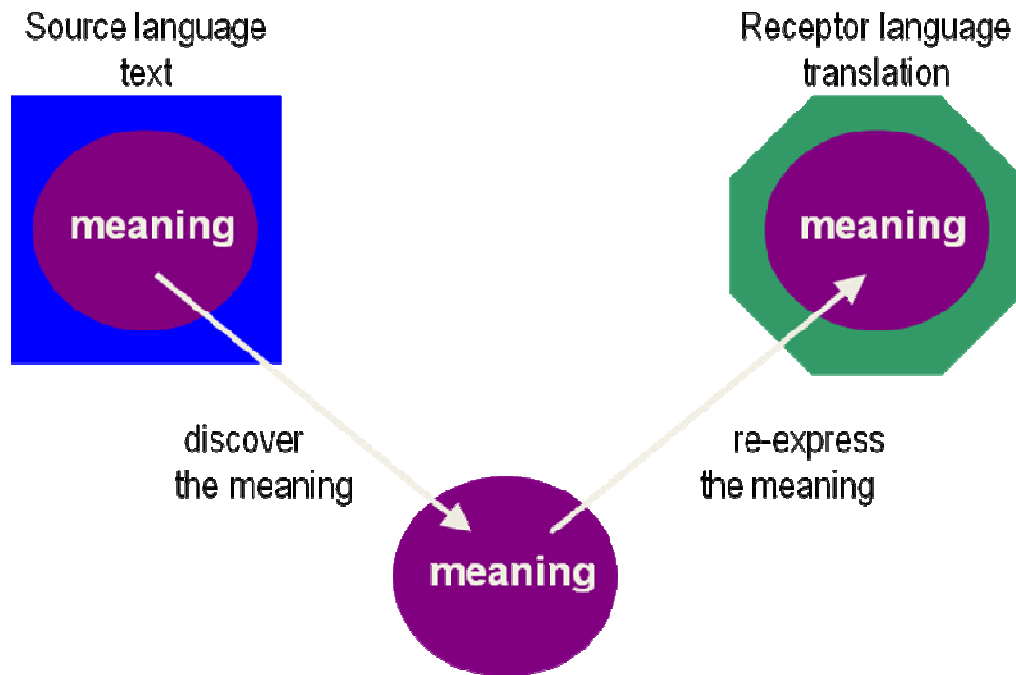
Transmitting the message of 1 John to a different culture will require a careful study of the receptor culture to understand to what extent the message can be applied so that it stays relevant. For example, the Father and Son relationship forcefully communicated in the text will need to be carefully understood and transmitted to a culture like the Kom culture where the maternal uncle and nephew relationship forms the key focus of inheritance. Gavriluk (2010: 344) is right in saying that 'to conceive of the Christian message as being petrified in one cultural form, be it Hellenism, Slavism, or Americanism, would be a serious failure of theological imagination'. However, the African theologian needs to take care so that in the attempt to convey the message in his culture, the meaning is accurately conveyed without omissions, additions and distortions.

Furthermore, the polar dichotomy of the first century Hellenistic culture behind 1 John is contrasted with the integral or holistic approach to seeing life in the Kom culture where the spiritual and physical worlds are all fused together and one can both love and hate at the same time. The spirits are seen to be everywhere and the ancestors are members of the family. People avoid going to their farms on sacred days so that they do not meet with the gods. Physical

ailments are quite often perceived to have spiritual causes so that treating malaria might necessitate a spiritual treatment such as the sick person confessing certain offenses he has committed and doing some incantations. How can the message of 1 John be striped up from a dualist culture and fitted into a monistic culture? The message itself is supra-cultural and eternally relevant. How can we move away from its historical particularity and give it its relevance in a contemporary society of Kom? Any answer to these questions will pinch on a careful study and on culture.

The problem of cultural transmission is a danger in communicating the gospel message (Shaw 1988; Kraft 2005) particularly to African communities like Kom who for over a century of Christianity have continued to have the message being mediated in a foreign language. This adds another level of culture, the culture of transmission of the word of God where English concepts as is the case in Kom have to be disambiguated to make them meaningful to a Kom audience reading 1 John. This can be represented diagrammatically using what Muri (2009) calls the SIL translation model. Muri adds colours to Barnwell (1986: 30) diagram on translation.

Figure 12: Schema of the SIL translation model (Muri:2009)



The blue square represents the culture of the text, the culture in which the original recipients received the message as it is expressed in their language. This is the Greco-Roman culture in the case of the New Testament. Within this culture there is a message that was communicated by the apostles like John. It will require that people in the culture move from what to know in the culture to what they need to know that has been communicated represented by the purple circle in the blue square. The SIL translation model affirms that it is possible to study this culture and understand the message and neatly take it out and feed in a new culture represent by the green hexagon. The green hexagon could therefore be the Kom culture which in shape is different from the square but which is what the people are familiar with. Using this model, understanding the source culture is necessary and the message can only be correctly appropriated when we study and understand the receptor culture too and neatly carve out the message without destroying it and fit it in a new culture that can facilitate its appropriation.

## **5.8. Summary and conclusion of chapter five**

In this chapter I have argued that understanding the biblical message requires of the student of the Bible to understand the culture in which the message was transmitted. Consequently, transmitting the message to a present audience will also require of that student to understand the receptor culture so that he fits the message accurately without distorting it thus making it receptive and easy to be appropriated.

I have shown that Greek philosophical thought was behind the fallacy against which John is addressing in 1 John. The focus of the Kom culture has been particularly hinged on the kinship system which is a matrilineal one and it makes good sense to study this area of the culture given that the epistle of 1 John dwells so much with a family ethos. The patrilineal inclinations of the community to which 1 John has been addressed and the matrilineal background of the kinship in Kom makes this cultural study an interesting one. Are there issues of kinship in Kom that create nuances in understanding the message of 1 John? This is a question I will consider subsequently in this dissertation.

The note of caution to theologians is to avoid an overly explicit attempt to transpose the biblical message from one culture to another. The danger here can be in making culture the object of studies than the biblical message. To try to develop theology from an anthropological orientation undermines exegesis (Kunhiyop 2012:80). One key concern of 1 John is a balanced Christology and this must be the result of sound exegetical practices.



## **CHAPTER SIX**

### **SIGNIFICANCE OF THE THEME OF LOVE AND FELLOWSHIP IN 1 JOHN TO THE CURRENT SITUATION IN KOM BAPTIST CHURCH**

#### **6.1 Introduction**

It is commonly assumed that members of a Christian community will associate together with one another in convivial manner because they have been exhorted thus in Scriptures. It is therefore assumed *ipso facto* that the message of 1 John will be practiced by members of Christian communities. Unfortunately many Christian communities lag behind in appropriating and practicing the values enunciated in Scriptures in general and in 1 John in particular. Some Christian communities have stayed on for a long time as aggregates of believers than communities of believers, tottering on the brinks of distrust, discord and disintegration. This has been experienced in Kom Baptist Church in the 1990s. This chapter seeks to examine the relevance of the message of Christian love and fellowship in 1 John to Kom Baptist Church in the face of the disagreement and disintegration the church has witnessed.

The issues facing Kom Baptist Church are akin to those faced by the Johannine community. It was a community that tottered on the brinks of disintegration orchestrated by a diverse Christological understanding and consequent secession of some members of the Johannine community. It demonstrated a lack of love amongst community members and some members claimed that they were without sin. These are some of the issues that have plagued Kom Baptist Church: the lack of love, lack of adequate

knowledge of Scriptures and unforgiveness. John's response to these issues will therefore be relevant for the situation in Kom Baptist Church.

In this chapter I want to highlight some of the challenging impediments of an adequate understanding and appropriation of the message of 1 John for a contemporary audience like Kom Baptist Church and the different manifestations and perceptions of the crisis facing the church. I will also highlight the values in 1 John that address these different problems.

## **6.2. Some challenges at appropriating the message of a biblical passage in a contemporary context**

Several factors interplay in understanding and appropriating the message of a biblical text by a contemporary audience. These include the context in which the New Testament was written (Bauckman 2010), the presuppositions of the reader prior to his exegetical enterprise (Vanhoozer 2010:263), the text itself (Thiselton1992:163), context and language of the author (Pobee 1996:164) and the context in which the message is being read. The reader's understanding of the meaning of a given passage will therefore depend on which inclination he decides to approach his study of Scriptures from. Bible study has been qualified as an 'interpretative translation of the Bible into contemporary/contextual language...a dynamic equivalent interpretation of the Bible' (Thiselton1992:170). Thiselton is suggesting by this that the reaction that the message had on the primary audience would be of the same kind to the reaction of the present readers, hence dynamic equivalence. However, a dynamic equivalent reaction is an abstruse expectation for many given that in a situation like the one facing the Kom Baptist Church, believers hold opposing opinions and would want to interpret with Scriptures in ways that justify their position. This is because no writer can say everything (Green 2010) as we will need the historical background to understand (Barton 2010, Alexander 2010, Carey 2010) and getting the message across cultural boundaries often suffers some distortion (Bach 1994). The application of Scriptures to the reader will therefore be slanted by his biases. It will

consequently be difficult to qualify which of the two scenarios in a rival situation would best be described as a dynamic reaction of the audience of a biblical text today. Postmodernism asserts relativity of meaning and each reader tilts interpretation in relatively appropriate ways to suit his whims. In this wise, it will be seen that readers do not only harvest meaning, they plant meaning given that 'texts [sometimes] are unfinished objects whose "gaps" and indeterminacies call out for completion by the reader' (Vahoozer 2010:266).

Despite what is considered as indeterminacies of the meaning in the text and the challenges posed on appropriating the message of a biblical text, there are contemporary situations today that are parallel to some contextual situations behind the production of certain texts. Fee and Stuart (1999:60) acknowledge this when they say:

Whenever we share comparable particulars (i.e., similar specific life situations with the first century setting, Gods Word to us is the same as His Word to them. It is this rule that causes most of the theological texts and the community directed ethical imperatives in the Epistles to give twentieth century Christians a sense of immediacy with the first century.

In other words, the situation of the Johannine community informs the writing of the letter and suggests in which situations the message can fittingly be applied. There is a comparable situation of breakdown of fellowship in Kom Baptist Church akin to the case of the Johannine community. The reasons for the breakdown of fellowship in Kom Baptist Church community are not essentially the same reasons for the breakdown of the Johannine community but John's prescriptions for fellowship makes his message fitting for Kom Baptist Church and should be read as a way of addressing their challenge of living in togetherness.

Reading 1 John by Kom Baptist Church should be 'a balancing act between, on the one hand, believing that each text has only one correct interpretation and, on the other hand, projecting ourselves in the text' (Vanhoozer 2010:268). The preoccupation of this chapter therefore is to read 1 John against the background of the situation of Kom Baptist Church under the supposition that the message of 1 John relevantly addresses the issues that this church faces.

Klein, Blomberg and Hubbard (1993: 406-424) suggest a methodological procedure for a legitimate contextual application. This includes determining the original application(s), evaluating the level of specificity of the original application(s) and identifying the cross-cultural principles. This methodology can be combined with the relevance theoretic model to allow these passages address the situation of Kom Baptist Church.

### **6.3. Relevance theory and the interpretation of 1 John**

Relevance theory proposes a basic comprehension procedure (Hill, Gutt, Hill Unger and Floyd 2011:23) and asserts that in any communication, the audience or readers look for what seems to be most important. In other words, we cannot pay even attention to all that has been said in 1 John for example and thus we have to choose what is most important for us and ignore the rest. What is important is what is relevant in a particular contextual situation. This means that not all of what John said will be evenly relevant for an audience of Kom Baptist Church as it will be for another audience within their context. Each audience will have to select what renders the most dividends. The audience needs to ask the question about what is in the message that is worth paying attention to. For Christians of Kom Baptist Church, John's message is worth paying attention to because of the challenge the Johannine audience was facing. In other words, the challenge of division in 1 John solicits the attention of any Christian community that struggles with divisive tendencies.

John counted on the background context he shared with his hearers for them to zoom in and make sense of his communication. John's message to his original audience provided clues to what he was saying but it was the audience to fill out the indeterminacies and blanks of his message. This raises the issue of context and the correct inference of meaning. What information will Kom Baptist Christians supply to make sense of the message of John? How will this audience know when they have understood? Relevance theory attempts an answer when it says:

We feel we have understood what someone says when what they say 'makes sense' for us. For it to 'make sense' it needs to connect with what we already know. It also has to change what we know in certain ways. We refer to these changes in our thought as cognitive benefits because they improve the way we think about the world. The better our thoughts are, the better we do in life if it brings us cognitive benefits (Hill, Gutt et al 2011:22).

Given the above comprehension procedure, the relevance of 1 John to Kom Baptist Christians can be accounted for in terms of the dividends (cognitive benefits) it will bring to the audience. What is it in the letter that needs to inform the Kom Christians and change or influence a change of the status quo? In other words, the message of love in 1 John can strengthen an already existing practice of love or can reveal a wrong practice of love or improve on the practice. There are different amounts of cognitive benefits and the search for relevance in 1 John can be satisfied only when these Christians have had adequate understanding about what the message proposes as improvements in their Christian walk.

In relevance theory, it is believed that communication is ostensive, i.e. there is information to be heard and heeded and so the communicator intends to be understood and thus delivers his message in a way simple enough for

comprehension. Relevance theory therefore proposes the path of least processing effort in reading or understanding a text like 1 John. Processing effort is the effort it takes to understand something that has been said. Relevance theory assumes that the speaker will encode his message in a way that will easily be decoded and understood. When we search for meaning, we stop at the first meaning that satisfies us in our context and thus we assume understanding and stop processing. So, if one began to read 1 John for example in a situation of a divided church like Kom Baptist Church, John's exhortation about love and forgiveness as prescriptions for fellowship and unity should immediately be the contextual information that will satisfy his reading. In other words, a church that lives in a context of hatred, unforgiveness and division will quickly be lured by concepts that connect to its contextual situation. 'Contextual information is the bits of information that come to mind from everything we know as we try to understand a communication'. Together, all the bits of contextual information make up the context for that part of text' (Hill, Gutt et al 2011: 40) and the present context of the church in Kom will draw the church to seek to understand 1 John.

### ***6.3.1. Kinds of cognitive benefits to be expected from reading 1 John***

Relevance theory asserts that there are three kinds of gains one can derive from reading a text like 1 John. One can strengthen knowledge he already holds by getting a confirmation from an author. This is the kind of cognitive benefit that members of the Johannine community would have had. John wants to strengthen them with what they already knew and so he told them, 'I am not writing you a new command but an old one which you have had since the beginning' (1 John 2:7, NIV). He is writing to strengthen what they already knew. The technical name for such reinforcement of knowledge in relevance theory is said to be 'strengthening cognitive benefits'.

For a secondary audience like Kom Baptist Church, what would the message of 1 John strengthen? What knowledge already exists? Before answering this question it will be necessary to discuss the other two kinds of cognitive

benefits viz., elimination of thoughts already held that constitute wrong knowledge and the forming of new implications. When one reads a biblical text or gains access to any kind of information, he might realize that he had wrong understanding and the information he has received will help him to discard the wrong knowledge and to form new implications on what he had before. For the primary audience, John addresses them to strengthen the message they had before and to help them to eliminate the new teaching influenced by the proto-Gnostics. John's audience will quickly understand his message because of the mutual context of communication between him and this addressee otherwise called the cognitive environment between him and members of the Johannine community. It will take more processing effort by members of the Kom Baptist Church to understand John because the contextual information necessary for understanding is not manifest to them, nevertheless, their own encyclopaedic experiences in the church provide a context of interpretation of the letter.

### ***6.3.2. The cognitive environment of the original audience and the Kom Baptist Church audience***

For communication to be successful, the audience needs to know why they are being told this (Gutt 2008:3). In other words, communication is inferential and the audience has to figure out what the other person intends to communicate by inferring from the context of the communication. Context is the information that we already know and need to use to understand what is being said. Gutt (2008:3) also asserts that communication is also thoroughly meta-representational i.e. it involves our thoughts and what things they represent in the world. When we try to understand what an author has said, we take into account what relevance the information has for us and what has triggered the communication in our cognitive environment. 'Comprehension is not accomplished by decoding linguistically expressed meaning alone but by forming hypothesis about what thoughts the communicator might be intending to share and by inferentially evaluating them (Gutt 2008: 4).

What a secondary audience of 1 John needs to do is to familiarize itself with the message through meta-representation i.e. imagining the context of the original audience and drawing parallels with their own context in order to see how they can apply the message contextually. For this to happen, the secondary audience needs to understand the cognitive environment or the background situation of the original audience. What then was the cognitive environment of the Johannine community necessary for members of Kom Baptist Church to know in order to draw relevantly with their own situation?

Members of the Johannine community to whom 1 John was addressed lived during the first century in a Greco-Roman culture. They were thus inculcated with the values of first century Greco-Roman culture such as the notions of honour and shame (deSilva 2000:518) which formed the hinges through which information was interpreted. For example, 1 John 2:28 says: 'and now, dear children, continue in him, so that when he appears we may be confident and unashamed before him at his coming' (NIV). The way the hearers of this information would interpret αἰσχυνθῶμεν (unashamed) hinges on the framework of the community's pivotal value for honour and shame. The author argues that members of his community have greater honour because they are of God and the defecting members of his community were from the world and thus not with honour so cannot be listened to by those who know God (1 John 4:5-6).

The context in which the Johannine community lived had a collective approach to life and relationships were based on collateral than on individual orientation. One of the main themes of 1 John is 'fellowshipping with one another' (1:7) in the community thus a reflection of the collateral relationship encouraged in the community of faith.

Another key value of the first century Mediterranean cultures that constitutes part of their cognitive environment which can be taken into consideration as an interpretive aid is the concept of patronage and reciprocity (deSilva 2000; Malina 1993; Chance 1994; Crook 2009; Marshall 2009). In a patronage relationship, someone of lesser power, honour and wealth sought the



protection of someone with superior power and honour. The patron was the benefactor and his clients were the beneficiaries. The concept of patronage and reciprocity has been used to explain the concept of grace and thus loyalty of believers to God as their patron (deSilva 2000; Malina 1993; Chance 1994; Crook 2009) which forms part of the teaching of 1 John. The New Testament letters like 1 John and the Pauline letters offer an antidote to shameful status and asserting that the people held in low status by the society are raised to a position of honour through their faith in Christ (Jewett 2003:551). The early Christians were exhorted to live as a family because they have now been born into the family of God (1 John 3:9). In the same way that kinship was a reference to one's identity; the early Christians had to see themselves as related and thus show solidarity to each other. It is conceivable that John writes from the background of a patron (1:1-4) to his community and expects that members of this community should heed to his instructions and advice as a display of their reciprocity to him.

An understanding of the context in which John wrote constitutes the cognitive environment of his communication. Necessary inferences were drawn from what he said because of the mutual understanding of the values of the culture. It is seen from this that group pressure was considerable on members of the community. Members of the Johannine community would have asked questions about what honour or what disgrace would adhering to the teachings of the secessionists entail? In what way were the secessionists patrons to merit their reciprocal clientele? These questions would have formed the framework for them to judge whether to heed to the message of John or not.

Members of the Kom Baptist Church will need to draw parallels between this cognitive environment with their own contextual situation. What aspects of community life for example are practiced in Kom and how will they interpret the concepts of honour and shame? The Kom cultural environment can play a big influence in the way Christians appropriate biblical teachings. Like the Johannine community, it is an environment with strong community values and group identity. Extended family emphasis and a holistic approach to life are

also practiced. This provides cognitive incentive for Christians of Kom Baptist Church as they receive and deal with the message of 1 John. The key concern here will be to see what elements of this cognitive environment are analogous to that of the Johannine community. For example, the Johannine community was also a group oriented culture where family ties were treated with seriousness and provided an angle for the reception of the Johannine message. John therefore uses family imagery presumably to evoke honour for those who stayed in the family and shame for those who left.

#### **6.4. Overview of the message of love and fellowship in 1 John**

In chapter five, an exegetical study of some passages that hinge on the relevance of 1 John to the contextual situation in Kom Baptist Church was done. The exegetical study of 1 John (1:5-2:11) established that its major focus was to warn members of the Johannine community against the presence of sin in the community. For John, sin destroys fellowship and fellowship is expression of love. Sin rather engenders hatred. John advocates that those who claim to be children of God should necessarily reflect His character because 'God is light' (1:5). The metaphorical assertion that 'God is light' has as its principal point of similarity purity and it means that 'He is absolute in his glory, (the physical connotation of light), in his truth (the intellectual) and in his holiness (the moral)' (Smalley 2007:19). God is absolutely morally pure like light and has no trace of impurity. John implies by this that it will be contradictory for anyone to affirm that God is light and yet walk in darkness (1:6). The metaphor of darkness for John primarily refers to the absence of love and the presence of hatred. Sin is a contradiction to the claim that one knows the truth (1:10) but truth engenders obedience for whoever who holds it (2:4).

In the section 4:1-11, John demonstrates the necessity of love in the believing community. 'God is love' (4:8) and the one who claims to belong to God must necessarily love (4:7-11). 'The absence of love for one another in a believing community like the Johannine community is evidence that a person does not

know God because God is love. In other words, knowledge of God is and should be expressed through love for fellow believers' (Kruse 2000:157). 'God is love' does not mean in essence but in expression i.e. God by nature lives out love and He loves humankind (Sherman and Tuggy 1994:81). The one who does not love cannot therefore claim that he knows God. A Christian community by implication will have to exhibit love based on their knowledge of who God is and on their understanding of whom Christ is (4:1-6). Those who know God demonstrate their knowledge in practical living.

These two sections picture the two key concerns of 1 John viz., ethics (love versus hatred) and theology (knowledge of Christ and obedience). Both concerns articulate how a believing community can stay together in fellowship. Love is the hinge of a believing community seaming the different members into a fellowship. John treats the theme of love repetitively in the whole letter. The main burden of the letter therefore is to portray the character of God and how believers consequently should behave in consonance with their knowledge of that character. God is love and love is the core teaching of the letter.

The centrality of love in 1 John can be seen in the fact that it has been talked about explicitly or implicitly in all the chapters of the letter. In chapter one, the author gives the foundational basis for love and fellowship (1:3-5). In chapter two he exhorts members of the community to love God and love other people (2:7-11). In chapter three he shows the role of the Trinity in love. For example, he demonstrates that it is the Father who bestows love (3:1-2), the Son demonstrated love by His sacrificial death (3:4-5) and the Spirit indwells us (3:24). In chapter four there is the exhortation for love for the saints (4:7-21) and in chapter five he shows that Christians have a responsibility of love and obedience to God. Love is at the fulcrum of a fellowship or believing community.

John's ethical exhortations in the two passages can be said to form four points of a chiasm. The four points have the notions of light (1:5) and love (1:9) (which constitute exhortations of 1 John to members of the believing

community) and the notions of darkness (1:6) and hatred (1:8) (symbolizing the world and its ways). John is saying that love must necessarily be inferred from light. Love and light form the intrinsic nature of God. Hatred is inferred as a characteristic trait of darkness which stands outside the nature of God. Light and darkness do not meet or are opposing terms just like love and hatred are opposing terms. Light and hatred form a contradictory pair just like darkness and love are a contradiction. In other words, one cannot love and hate at the same time and one cannot be in the light and hate others. Either one is in the light and loves or he is in the darkness and hates. Thus, each notion produces an epitome of its conduct and a counterpoint. Members of the Johannine community are seen to be seeking after the light but without showing the corresponding love that ensues from light.

Another chiastic structure of concepts in 1 John has as pivotal points knowledge, ignorance, obedience and disobedience. Knowledge entails obedience and ignorance engenders disobedience. Knowledge and ignorance are contrary terms just as obedience and disobedience are contrary terms. Knowledge and disobedience are contradictory in meaning just as ignorance and obedience are contradictory. In other words, a person who does not know the truth cannot act truthfully and if he does, this will be accidental than purposeful. For John, the knowledge that 'God is light and in Him there is no darkness' (1:5) will inadvertently lead to obedience of the Word of God. Knowledge of Christ is foundational for an ethical conduct in 1 John. That is, knowledge of who Christ is should cause us to walk in the light even as God is the light (1:7) and walking in the light enables fellowship with Him and with one another. In other words, nobody who truly looks at God will fail to see himself as sinful and this knowledge will lead such a one to confession (1:9). Knowledge of God is recognition that 'Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God' (1 John 4:1, NIV) and ignorance that leads to disobedience will fail to confess that Jesus Christ is from God (1 John 4:2). Knowledge is demonstrated too in love for 'whoever loves has been born of God and knows God' (1 John 4:7). John demonstrates that people who claim that they know God yet live in sin (1:5-2:2) deceive themselves 'and the truth is not in them'

(1:8). Those who claim to know God should be validated in their claims by their obedience to His commandments (2:3-11). I shall now proceed to examine how this message of love can be made relevant to the current situation in the Kom Baptist Church.

## **6.5. Appropriating the theme of love and fellowship in 1 John for Kom Baptist Church**

### ***6.5.1. The situation of Kom Baptist Church***

#### *6.5.1. 1. Sources of data*

There is very little documentation on the crisis which hit Kom Baptist Church a few decades ago. As such, data about how the Christians live with the crisis can mostly come from observing them. I therefore went to the Kom area for a week in December 2013 to interview Baptist Christians living within the situation to find out what are the repercussions of the crisis on their Christian lives and on the congregations. There have been reports of victimization and outright hatred characterized by avoidance to come together in social occasions by Christians belonging to one or the other group. Litigations, calumny and caricaturing have been reported among believers. The interview sought to verify these allegations and to measure the depths of the convictions of believers in their claims. For example, what motivates a member of Kom Baptist Church to adhere to one or the other group and what bearing does such a motivation have on his or her faith? Observing the situation and interviewing different believers would paint a picture of the actual situation and thus determine how the Christians understand, apply, articulate and live Scriptures. This understanding will help in drawing a relevant application of the message of John.

I used semi structured interviews to interview people. A total of fifty people were interviewed including six pastors and four deacons, thus ten leaders in four different churches. Those who were interviewed were selected purposefully to include people from all wings of the church thus, women, men,

youths and church leaders. This enabled me to get opinions of all the segments of the church. The questionnaire covered questions on knowledge of Scriptures and awareness of Baptist distinctive, causes of the crisis, impact of the crisis, attempts at solving the crisis, Kom cultural values and personal opinion about what solutions would be recommended for solving the crisis.

As a Baptist Christian of Kom origin, I participated in some church services from March 2013, but I also lived in the area for more than five years during the period of the crisis, translating the New Testament into the Kom language. Thus, I have taken turns to witness worship services in the congregations of Bethel Baptist Church Twantoh (CNBC), Belo Baptist Church (CNBC), Belo (CBC) Baptist Church and Grace Baptist Church Bamenda (CNBC), Antioch Baptist Church Wombong (CNBC), Djichami Baptist Church (CBC), First Baptist Church Wombong (CBC), Joseph Merrick Baptist Church Fundong (I and II<sup>3</sup>). I observed what place these congregations give for biblical expositions and what is the character and content of the sermons?

I led Bible studies in four groups comprising of eight members each in four different congregations. The congregations chosen for this were Joseph Merick Baptist Church Fundong I and Joseph Merrick Baptist Church Fundong II. These two congregations prior to the crisis constituted a single congregation and during the crisis, one faction moved out of the matrix group to form a parallel congregation in the same neighbourhood. This situation is similar to that of Antioch Baptist Church Wombong and First Baptist Church Wombong. Antioch Baptist Church separated from First Baptist Church to become a separate congregation and acquired a church building just about 150m away from First Baptist Church. The proximity of the two congregations in Wombong and the claim of the name of the church in Fundong made these four congregations interesting for the case studies.

The study focused on some key portions of 1 John relevant to community values (1 John 1:1-2:11 and chapter four) and how these passages inform the

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<sup>3</sup> These are two congregations bearing the same name and found in the same locality.

dynamics of the division in Kom. The key foci of these focus group discussions were to establish how the participants perceive the practical application of 1 John to the situation in Kom, especially regarding how to use such knowledge as they interact together in the community.

Most of the women in these congregations could not write and I had to move from one to another to transcribe their answers to the questions that were asked. In all these groups, the eight people selected for the study did not all come on time. Some came when the discussions were already halfway through.

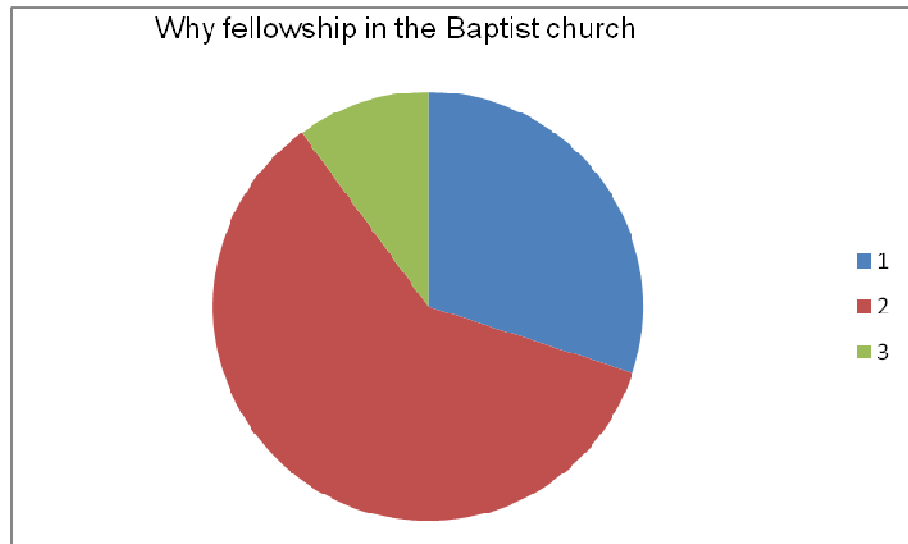
Despite these irregularities, there is little to suggest that this affected the findings. The overall inclination of this research was to gauge the dynamics of the presence of or lack of love and breakdown of fellowship which also encompasses the lies and distortions and rumours which altogether affect for the dynamics of Christian fellowship and love. It was therefore an attempt to diagnose how a group of Christians comparable to the Johannine community respond to the message of love in 1 John

#### *6.5.1.2. Responding to the questionnaire and interviews*

Ten leading questions were addressed in the questionnaire with follow up questions to clarify the expectations of the questions. Respondents gave a variety of answers for each question. The questions are stated below with some explanations to define the rationale of the question asked. The answers have been grouped under the ideas or thought lines portrayed by different respondents. The phrases used to state the main idea of the answers do not necessarily express the direct words of the respondents but rather represent the idea shared by groups of respondents. A pie chart indicating the groups (or percentages) of the respondents sharing the thought is shown under each question. The number of people sharing an idea is also indicated after each thought.

1. What is it about the Baptist church that you like very much?

This question was intended to find out whether Christians in the Baptist church chose deliberately to worship in this church and thus understood the exigencies and distinctive features of the Baptist Church as different from other denominations they know. The following chart represents the different major thoughts patterns responding to the question.



1. It is a Bible believing church with the Bible considered as the highest authority in matters of faith and practice and practices congregational autonomy (democratic values) (15)
2. It is the channel through which we were led to Christ and we were also born into a Baptist family and the Baptist church was the only congregation in the neighbourhood thus we had little or no choice (30)
3. We do not really understand the difference (5)

Only about 30% of the respondents, most of whom were church leaders demonstrated strong and clear convictions about the choice they made to be Baptist Christians. Although Jam (2008) who is also one of the Baptist pastors in the area outlines nine Baptist distinctive beliefs, only two of these distinctive beliefs were cited by different respondents and these two that were cited talked about the authority of the Bible and the autonomy of the congregation.



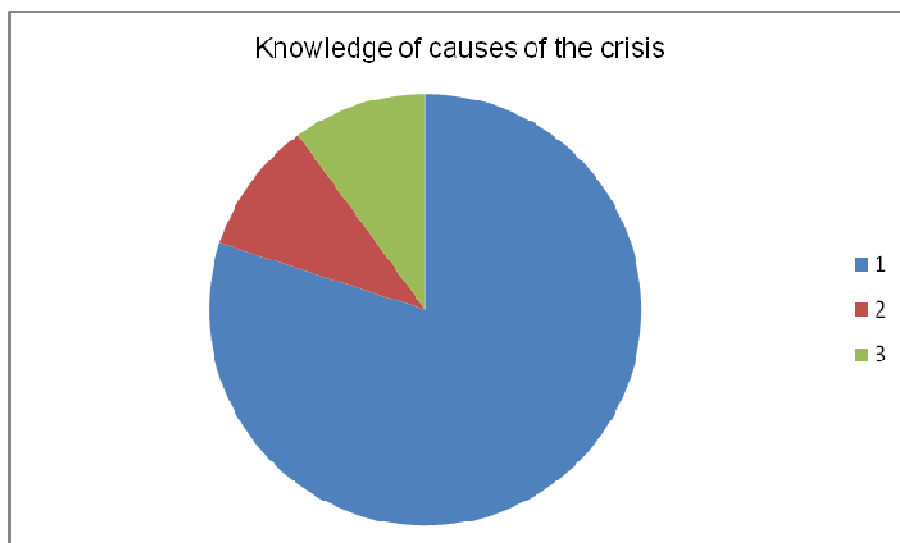
In expressing the fact that the Baptist church practices a congregational system of worship, respondents used expressions such as 'independence in its form of worship', 'democratic worship' and 'Baptist autonomy'. The point of the authority of Scriptures was passed across in expressions such as 'Bible centred church' and 'Bible believing church'. Some of the answers were confusing and vague. Phrases such as 'the Baptist church points to salvation', 'it is not like the Catholic church', 'I was born to Baptist parents' and 'it is the better church' were also recorded.

Democracy was directly implied or alluded to in more than 60% of the answers. During my visit to Belo Baptist Church (CNBC) in June 2013 a local politician was also visiting the church and was given an opportunity to greet members of that congregation and when he took to the rostrum, he lauded the Baptist Church for being 'democratic' and his affirmations were applauded in the church. The understanding of democracy was understood by over 60 % of the respondents to mean the self governance of a congregation particularly in line with the prerogative to sack and appoint new pastors and to manage its own budget. Very few of the respondents could attempt to say in what way democracy of the church is different from that of secular politics. Church constitution and church bylaws were alluded to and took centre stage in the decisions that are taken in the church. There seemed an apparent contradiction between acknowledging that the Bible is the highest authority in matters of faith and practice and in taking decisions affecting the life of the church based on the church bylaws and other extra canonical rules.

Most of the people became Baptist Christians because they were born into Baptist families or believed through the Baptist Church. Others did not even know why they were Baptist and this can influence their understanding of fellowship. The authority of Scriptures does not appear to take precedence over the authority of those who influenced these members to become Baptist Christians and this can weaken their commitment biblical exhortation to love and fellowship together.

2. What in your opinion are the causes of the crisis currently shaking the Baptist church in Kom?

It is possible that many of the Christians living with and within the crisis were caught up by circumstances they cannot explain and cannot say what the anticipated outcomes of the different sides are. This question was intended to observe whether the Christians are aware of the issues that led to the crisis and thus are aware of the goals they want to achieve by taking different positions across the divide. This self-awareness could inform how in the imaginative process of seeking relevance from the Scriptures, they would be able to associate themselves with the context behind 1 John.



1 It is due to the egoistic, power seeking and money minded leadership (40)

2 It is due to the misrepresentation of the notion of congregational autonomy and the practice of excessive democratic ideals in the church (5).

3 We do not really know (5)

More than 80 % of the respondents to this question evoked bad leadership as a cause of the crisis. Words such as 'power struggle', 'egoism and selfishness' were used. One respondent directly linked the cause of the crisis

to one of the answers of question the above when she said, 'it is due to the misrepresentation of the church autonomy and position seeking by the leadership of the church'. About 10% of the respondents linked bad leadership to the absence of love and spiritual minded leaders. In this vein, one of the respondents said 'the absence of love among Christians, selfish ambitions, poor leadership skills and marginalization of some Christians' was at the centre of the crisis. Words such as 'carnal leadership', 'failure to use the Bible adequately' and 'lack of Spirit filled leaders' came across in some of the answers.

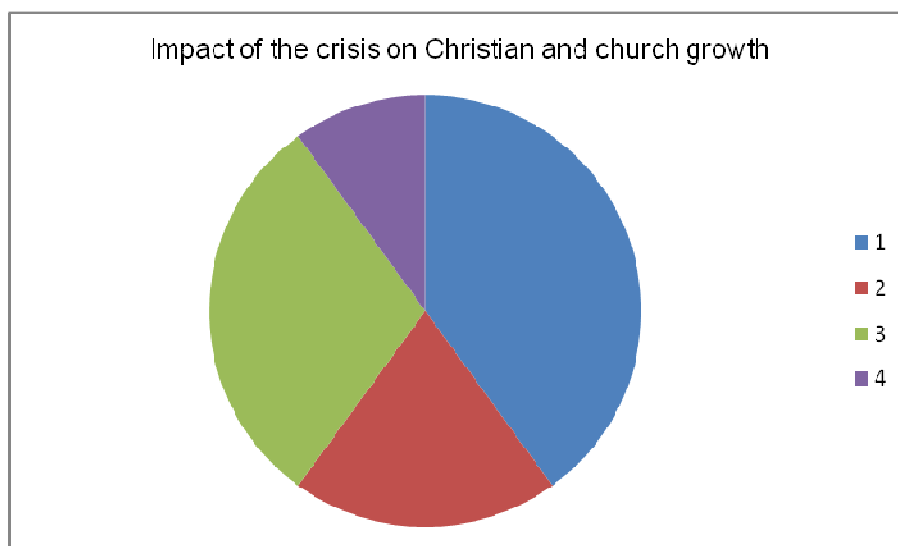
Respondents from the CNBC faction also associated the cause of the crisis to their refusal in handing harvest thanksgiving money to CBC authorities because the CBC management of money was questionable. Evidently, there was a heavy indictment of leadership for orchestrating the crisis. All the women of the CNBC faction also pointed out that the fact that manuals for teaching women were denied CNBC women by the CBC Womens' Union is one of the biggest causes of the crisis. Youth from both factions from both factions were inclined to blaming leadership. 'The church is in crisis because of misunderstanding among leaders. It has lost its focus because materialism and selfishness has replaced spirituality', said one of the youths.

The main trigger of the crisis for most people was the refusal of CBC authorities to sell manuals for women in Kom. However, one of the members of JMBC wondered whether this was an intentional action or an accident. In other words, they are not sure whether the women's' leader who refused to sell these manuals was instructed by CBC hierarchy or she took her own personal liberty to do this.

The historical causes of the crisis are blamed on leaders. Members of one faction tend to blame the leadership of the other faction. However, Christians blame leaders irrespective of their faction for the prevailing effects of the crisis and a failure of reconciliation. Most of the Christians believe that the current leaders do not want to see an end of the stalemate because it permits them to have some gains.

3. What is the impact of the crisis on your Christian growth and on the growth of your congregation?

This question wanted to observe how much of intentional discipleship and purposeful Christian values and commitment are observed in the course of the crisis. It is possible that different leaders might have fought to justify their position about the crisis and failed in the primary responsibility of edifying the members of the congregation.



1. There is slow Christian growth but with a rapid growth of the congregation in remote villages (20)
2. Congregations have been recruiting members than converting them to help in the democratic argument of the church (10)
3. There is quantitative growth but with no qualitative growth of the church thus numerical competition among the congregations (15).
4. It is not very clear to us

Ten percent of the respondents loyal to CNBC admitted that they are suspicious of what they hear each time they fellowship in a congregation that has CBC loyalists. They claim that the messages preached during such occasions and particularly when it is in a CBC congregation are slanted with

the intention to justify, promote and acquit CBC from blame. One respondent among these CNBC loyalists said she had great pain in her heart for a niece who is a loyalist of the CBC. She has tried to forgive the niece for 'the mistake' of belonging to a different faction from her but finds it difficult to do so as she continues to feel hurt whenever she sees this niece. One pastor intimated that 'the crisis has reduced Christian fellowship by breeding suspicion with a shift from evangelism and discipleship to justification of the different positions held by the two factions. A lot of church resources on both sides of the divide have been spent on litigations.

Christians of CNBC congregations particularly those that moved from the matrix group affirmed that there has been growth both at the congregation level and individual level. One of them said, 'the crisis has strengthened my faith in Christ, has caused the growth of the church and promoted spiritual stimulation among the believers in the place'. This claim was substantiated by the claim that there were now congregations in remote villages that never used to have one.

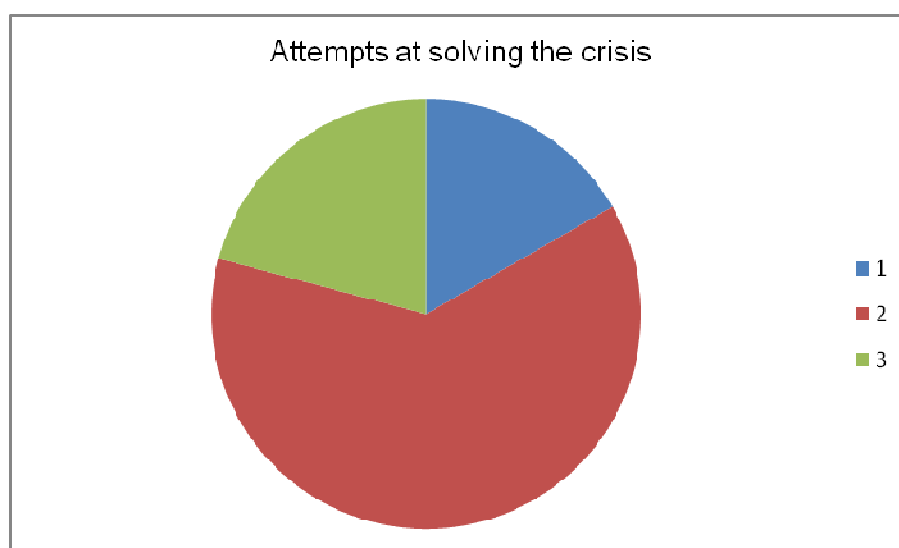
Many of the CBC Christians hesitated to admit that there was church growth. 'The growth of my congregation is greatly retarded because of the crisis', one of them said. One of the CBC pastors said the increase in the number of Christians in different congregations was not owed to conversion but to conscription. He explained conscription as the lobbying for people to join particular congregations for those congregations to appear substantial. Congregations were disposed to hastily admit people whose testimony of their experience of salvation or conversion story was not clear to them at best or never even happened. What was called the growth of the congregations for him was therefore not a real growth.

There are therefore mixed feelings about the impact of the crisis on individual Christian growth and on church growth. More than 60% of Christians both from CNBC and CBC think that there has been very little spiritual edification of members even though there has been an increase in the number of congregations. At an aggregate level, there appears to be growth but with no

growth of Christian community values, hence a quantitative but not qualitative growth.

#### 4. What attempts have been made thus far to solve the crisis?

This question sought to know what Christians in both factions felt and whether they desired a solution to the crisis. It also sought to evaluate the attempts that were made at reconciliation and whether the Christians were aware of these attempts made and how satisfied they were with the attempts.



1. There has been a few attempts to dialogue (8)
2. There are law court cases and the legal procedures to get an authorization of CNBC from the government(30)
3. People have been praying (12)

About 63% of the Christians think that there has been very little and intangible attempts to seek solutions to the crisis. Attempts at dialogue have been few and weak. Some of the attempts to dialogue cited by some Christians loyal to the CNBC included the sending of a delegation to the induction ceremony of the General Secretary of the CBC each time a new General Secretary was elected. There have been other attempts by different Christians to bridge the gap when they find occasion to worship in churches of the other faction. Ten percent of respondents loyal to the CBC cited that their present leader, the

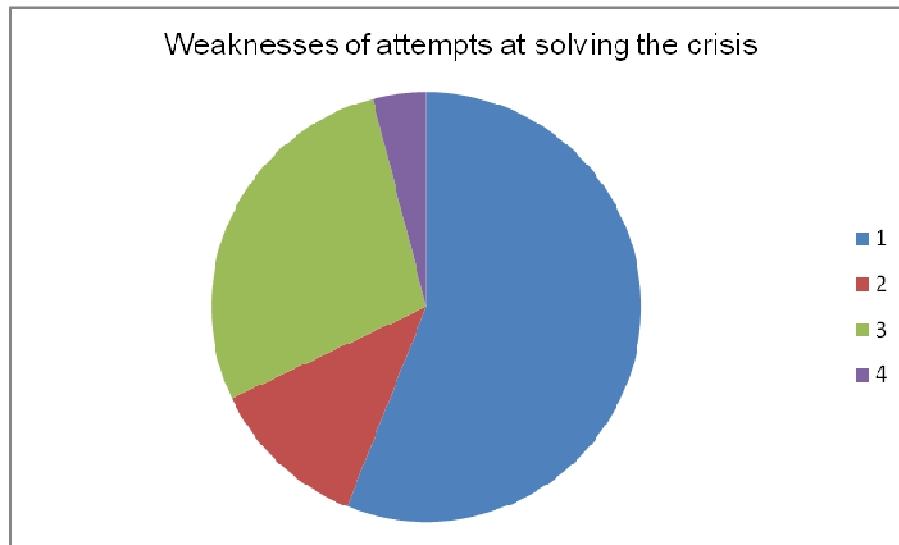
General Secretary of the CBC has ignored the various law suits against some CNBC members and is seeking dialogue.

On the 3<sup>rd</sup> of January 2013, I witnessed the funeral ceremony of one of the pastors of CBC. All the top leaders of CBC and CNBC were there. Although it was in a CBC congregation, an opportunity was given to the CNBC leader to present his eulogies about the deceased. There was a visible atmosphere of camaraderie as both leaders sat on the same table and occasionally made remarks about the conduct of the service to each other. The CBC chairman of the pastors' fellowship while paying tributes to the deceased said, 'Amos was a unifying factor to both CNBC and CBC'. The deceased pastor was one of those who took liberty to worship in CNBC congregations whenever he had the opportunity even though he was loyal to CBC.

The most widely felt attempt to solve the crisis were through law court with more than a dozen cases filed in for arbitration by the CBC faction against some individuals or congregations and leadership of the CNBC. These court cases included charges of 'illegal occupation of CBC infrastructure' by CNBC congregations and criminal charges against some members of the CNBC alleged to have assaulted physically or with words some CBC leaders. There have also been appeals to government officials such as cabinet ministers and local government officials to arbitrate in the crisis. CNBC leadership has been inclined to appeal to some respected members of the Kom community to arbitrate in the matter.

5. What in your opinion have been the weaknesses of these attempts?

This question intended to evaluate whether the Christians were satisfied with the efforts being made to solve the crisis.



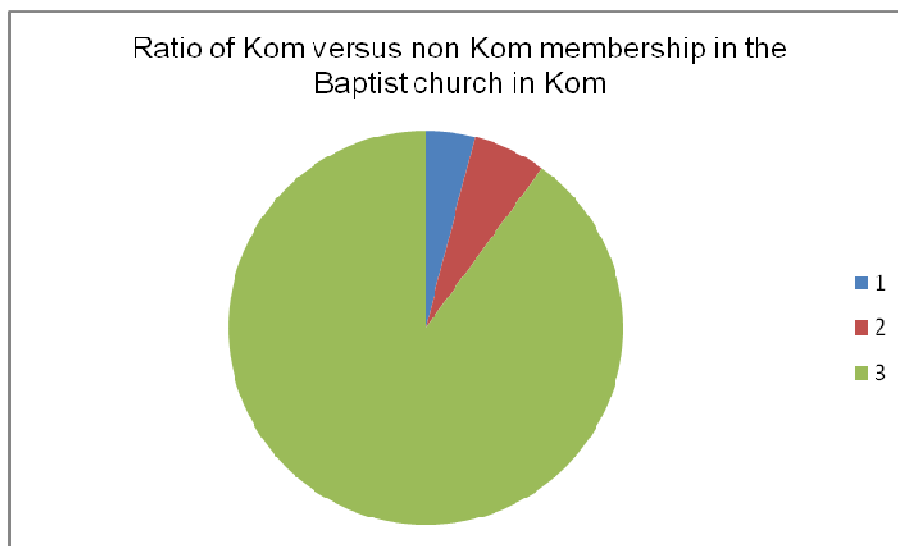
1. There has been a lot of pride from both parties (28)
2. The attempts have been done with intimidation (6)
3. There has been a lack of genuine forgiveness (14)
4. We do not know (2)

Some of the weaknesses of the attempts to solve the crisis that were cited include the lack of finances and lack of seriousness on the part of those involved. One of the respondents pointed out that very little biblical approach was paid attention to: 'One of the weaknesses I see is that some of the leaders have not handled the crisis spiritually'. Another said the search for a solution to the crisis comes not from a neutral vantage point but each faction has sought to justify its position and no one is ready to take responsibility and to confess for wrongs done during the crisis. Others admitted that attempts at reconciliation were made without an attempt to forgive one another. Those who came to the negotiating table came with bitterness, accusations and counter accusations. CBC Christians tended to put up a legal argument because it is the faction of the church that is recognized by the government while CNBC Christians put up an argument of legitimacy as having been nurtured as Baptist Christians from birth even before the government could give legalise CBC. In other words, the issues have been treated logically and legally with little opportunity allowed to Scriptures to speak.



6. What in your estimate is the ratio of indigenes versus non-indigenes membership in Kom Baptist church?

This question was intended to evaluate the composition of the church in Kom in order to observe whether the crisis has a wider coverage or it is essentially between the Kom people. This information can also help inform on the causes of the crisis.



1. Very few strangers 2
2. Some strangers 3
3. All indigenes 45

More than 90% of the respondents admitted that their congregations were essentially made up of Kom indigenes. The non indigenes were mainly Christians who take up membership in the church for a few years because they are migrant workers in the area and once the work is finished they leave. Even then they constitute to the most part less than 5% of membership of any given congregation.

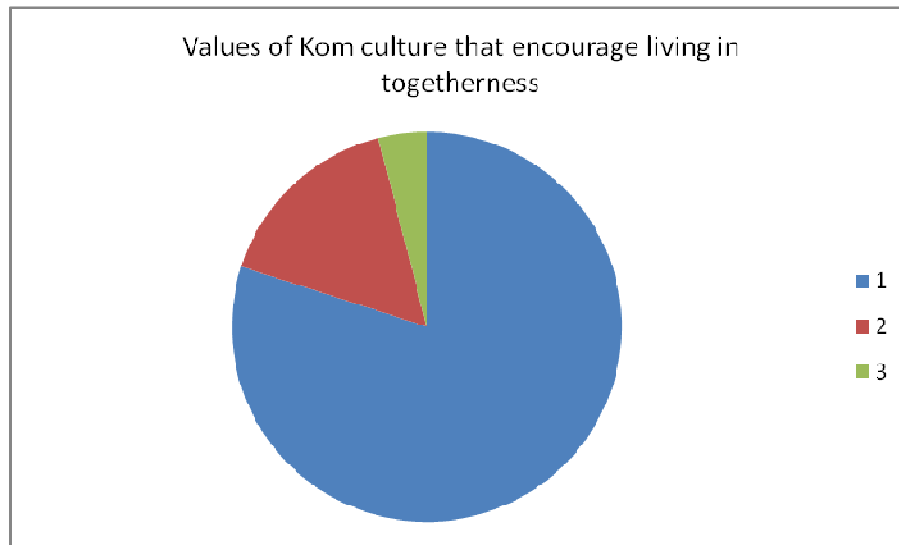
I observed that church services were mostly conducted in English language or Pidgin English with an interpretation of the sermon done into the Kom language even in remote villages that were essentially made up of Kom indigenes who primarily spoke Kom. In some villages, the pastors spoke very

fluently in Kom but every sermon that was preached as I observed was done in English with an interpretation in the Kom language even though there is a New Testament in the Kom language. One would have thought that Kom will be the language of church business given that more than 90% of the Christians are Kom indigenes in each given congregations and most of the pastors also hail from Kom. Key biblical terms like righteousness, glory, flesh, confession and even forgiveness did not appear to have been well interpreted most of the time it was used.

There seems to be an established style of preaching handed down by the missionaries who evangelized the Kom area. They preached in English and the message was interpreted into the Kom language. This practice has been adopted by pastors and the general understanding of the common man is that English is the original language of Scriptures and is more authoritative *ipso facto*. Besides, many pastors have over-simplified preaching to be the reading of Scriptures in English and the interpretation of what is read into the Kom language and hence would not have much to say if they read the Scriptures directly in the Kom language. Preaching is perceived as transferring meaning of biblical propositions across languages.

7. What in your opinion are the key values of the Kom culture that encourage living in togetherness?

This question was intended to examine whether the instances of togetherness observed amongst the Christians are borne out from the exhortations of Scriptures or are culturally motivated. It is possible that some moral behaviour is done more out of the cultural norms than in obedience to Scriptures.

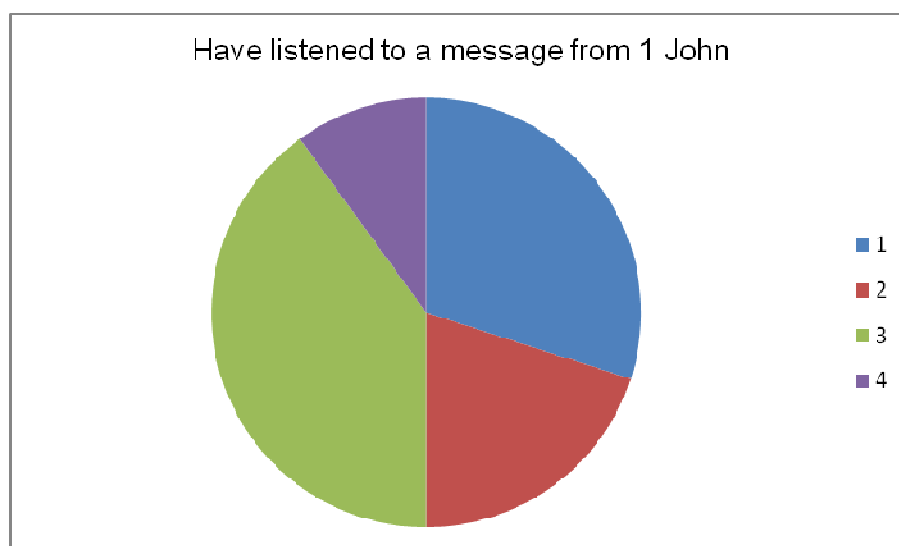


1. Solidarity during birth, death and other celebrations (40)
2. Love and communal values expressed through farming together (8).
3. We do not know (2)

More than 95% of the respondents affirmed that the key values of the Kom culture encouraged communal living and shuns selfishness and individualistic tendencies. Togetherness is encouraged mainly through participation in activities like celebrations in both sorrowful and joyful events like birth and death celebrations, house dedications, village development associations and financial self help schemes otherwise called 'njangi'. For example, all the members of the village are supposed to announce to each other when there is a discovery of mushroom sprouting in a given area for all and sundry to come and have their share. Everyone is supposed to participate in community work such as making a bridge across a stream. Those who affiliate to different social groups such as partisan political parties or members of the different factions of the Baptist church who live in the same village are supposed to come together irrespective of their differences during such gatherings. Such cooperation is remarked to have weakened during the peak of the crisis with Christians from each faction inclined to show solidarity only to fellow members.

8. How many times have you listened to a sermon in 1 John or read the book?

This question sought to know whether Baptist Christians in the Kom area are familiar with the teachings of 1 John and whether it impacts them.



1. Many times (15)
2. A few times (10)
3. We cannot remember (20)
4. Some time though not sure (5)

More than 60% of respondents admitted to having listened to a sermon in 1 John or read 1 John in the past one year although most of them were unable to say succinctly what the sermon was all about. Those who cited love as an aspect of the sermon that they heard could not say exactly what the sermon exhorted about love or even say what the practical indicators of such love are. Pastors who admitted to having preached from the book also cited love and forgiveness but were unable to say in what ways love should manifest itself practically in the community. Their sermons were tailored to exhort people to love others but love was used as a blanket term without denoting what actions and attitudes define love. One of the pastors said, 'I have preached from it and it has been my favourite book of the Bible during this crisis period. I have

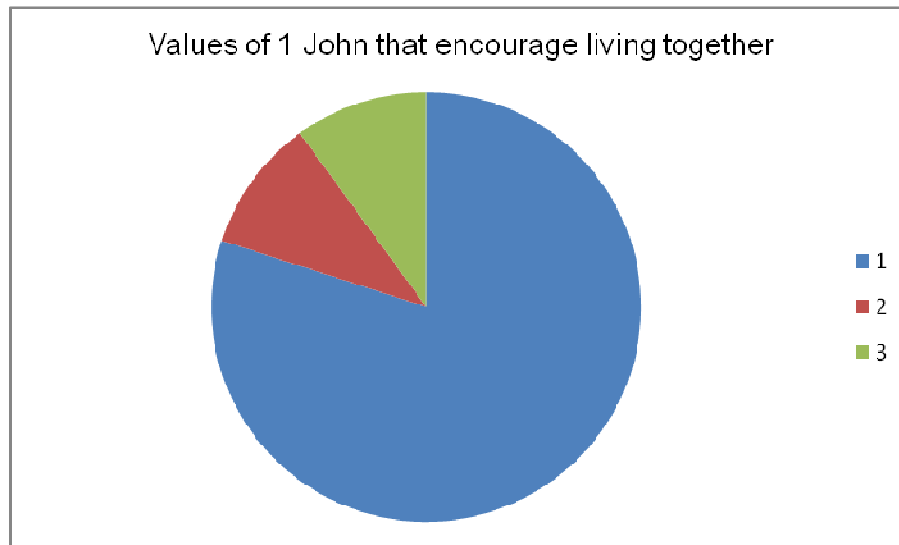
instructed many pastors to allow God's will to reign according to 1 John and 2 Chronicles 20:15'. However, the pastor did not cite any particular verse from 1 John nor say what God's will is in the book that he was alluding to.

Thirty percent of the respondents were able to quote partly or in full 1 John 1:9 which talks about forgiveness. They were unable to show the link that exists between love and forgiveness. Those who admitted that they do seek forgiveness said they had sought such forgiveness in prayer but have not really sought forgiveness from individuals they have offended. Sixty percent of the people did not think that they had committed any sin to warrant them to seek forgiveness even when they admitted that they harboured hatred and have spoken defamatory words against fellow Christians in the other faction. They justified their position as doing so in service of the truth of what they believe as a faction.

The correlation between love and truth appears confusing to many. Knowledge of the truth as presented in the Kom Christian community drives away love. Whereas John says truth should engender love, this appears to be the reverse in Kom Christian community. This has led to the use of lies to cover up the truth. This seems to have a bearing on the cultural notion of honour and shame. Truth that is disgusting will rather lead to naming and shaming than to forgiveness and love.

9. What in your opinion are the values of 1 John that encourage living in togetherness?

This question was intended to find out how much of the values upheld are perceived as coming from Scriptures and whether there was a clear understanding of separate Christian values from Kom cultural values.

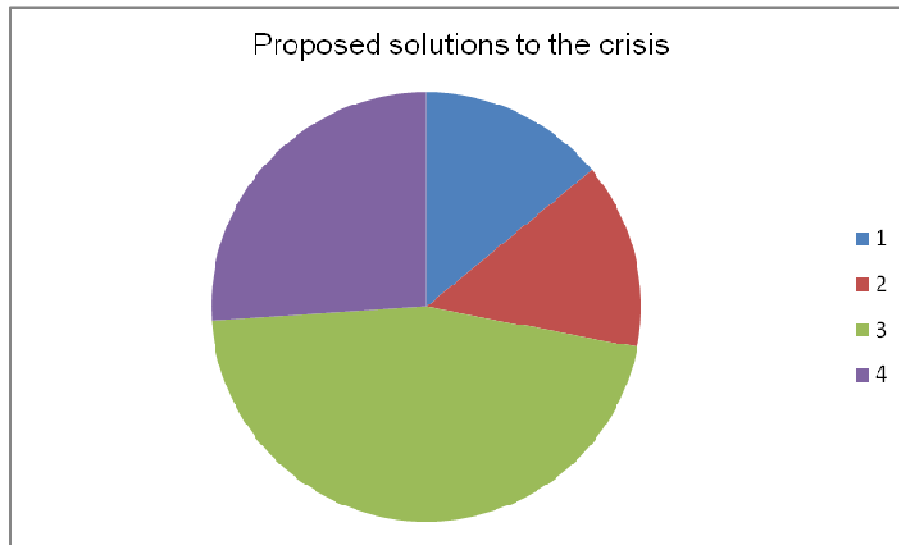


1. Love (40)
2. Reconciliation (5)
3. Frank forgiveness (5)

The most recurrent answer to this question was stated with one word namely 'love' but without a further clarification on what love entailed. More than 70% of the respondents cited love as a key value of 1 John but they were unable to explain what practically the term means. Those who attempted to explain love did so by defining it negatively i.e. 'not to hate other people'. Forgiveness was also cited and explained to mean the tendency not to retaliate and 'not to keep a record of wrongs'.

10. If you were asked to prescribe a solution to solving the crisis in the church what would that be?

This question sought to explore how much desire the Christians had for a resolution of the crisis and what scriptural values they hold and enunciate as an approach for solving the crisis.



1. Sacrificial love (7)
2. Legal independence of the CNBC (7)
3. Prayers (23)
4. Humility and selfless service (13)

Towards proposing solutions for the crisis, one respondent suggested that: 'I would suggest a definite time of fasting and prayers and encouraged fellowship for a long period of about five years within which time God will speak to the people'. However, he did not explain further how God will speak and how they will be able to perceive that God has spoken. Others suggested forgiveness, independence and legalization of CNBC by the government, sermons on love, avoiding discussions on what has happened, shunning of greed and pride. More than 70% of the Christians believed that the solution to the crisis laid at the level of leadership. If their leaders came together and asked them to fellowship together they will follow. One of them said:

In my opinion, if our leaders could take up the challenge to handle the crisis spiritually and frankly, we will not be where we are now. I also believe ignorance is contributing to this crisis. If

our pastors could educate Christians on the importance of unity it will ease up the tensions.

None of the respondents suggested a Scriptural approach to solving the crisis. Only one of the attempts that tried to resolve the crisis considered Bible studies and listening to God in a booklet titled: *The Belo CBC crisis: which way forward (2007)* written and distributed free of charge by Chiambah Abraham Bujoff. In the book, Chiambah (2007) asked the question what is the will of God in the crisis and how can the Christians discern the will of God. He went on to suggest seven steps to hearing the will of God which included the following procedural method:

- Individual and cooperate prayers
- A prayer session to be organized at the various factions
- Set a day when both factions will come together
- Use 6000 envelopes of the same size and colour with 3000 of the envelopes having a statement that says 'my children pursue the new convention' and another three thousand with the message 'my children ignore the treatment from the CBC and return and be reconciled'
- Ask three thousand Christians to randomly choose from the 6000 envelopes
- Read which of the messages in the envelopes outnumbers the other and consider that to be the will of God.

Leadership was blamed for lack-lustre attempts at solving the crisis. A pastor saw the solution to the crisis as lying in 1 John when he said, 'let 1 John be put into practice by the Christians and the churches. Love needs to reign among the Christians'. He did not clearly articulate what message is contained in 1 John that will help heal the wounds of the crisis except that he mentioned love. However, the expressions in which love could be demonstrated were not stated.



### **6.5.2. Trends observed**

#### *6.5.2.1. Evidence of breakdown of fellowship*

There is observable breakdown of fellowship in Kom Baptist Church with several congregations having splintered. For example, the Baptist congregations in the villages of Fundong, Wombong, Anjang, Djicami, Tumuku, Belo, Afua and Fudeng all experienced a split in their congregations with splinter groups moving out to form new congregations. In some cases, the splinter group that left did so in loyalty to the CBC thus leaving the matrix group in a situation where the matrix group was predominantly CNBC and vice versa. In each congregation that witnessed tension, the numerically small group moved out of the bigger group to form its own independent congregation and show loyalty to its umbrella organization. The situation is clearly seen in Wombong village whose only Baptist congregation before the crisis was called First Baptist Church. The majority of Christians within this congregation were loyal to CBC prior to the split thus; the smaller group that advocated for the CNBC had to move out to form Antioch Baptist Church in the same locality. The two congregations have church buildings about 150 metres apart. Antioch Baptist church (CNBC faction) like many other splintered groups that left started off in the home of its key member before gradually acquiring resources to buy a parcel of land and construct a church house.

When I went to First Baptist Church Wombong, it was on Thursday 26<sup>th</sup> of December 2013 and I met the pastor teaching a group of ‘inquirers’ (people who were scheduled to be baptized otherwise known as baptismal candidates). Then I moved over (150 metres apart) to Antioch Baptist Church and found that their pastor was also teaching a group of people scheduled to be baptized within a week. This suggests routine or stereotype practices in the congregations of the Baptist Church in Kom.

More than 50% of the people interviewed acknowledged that they found difficulties talking to people belonging to one or the other congregation in these two congregations. More than 80% of the people interviewed here also

admitted that there was the absence of love among Christians and this is one of the reasons that led to the split. In some cases, members of the same family were caught up on different strands of the divide and they had difficulties relating with one another even at family level. Love and forgiveness evidently appears lacking among Christians across the divide.

The situation behind 1 John therefore mirrors itself in several aspects in the Kom Baptist Church. To begin with, the cognitive environment of the Johannine audience has close parallels with that of the Kom Baptist Church community. Both communities have a group orientation and group approach to knowledge. Families are expected to show honour of the family and to shun behaviour that can bring disgrace. Honour and shame therefore form the hinges of behaviour. The family imagery in 1 John and allusions to shame and honour will therefore appeal to Christians of Kom Baptist Church whose cognitive framework hinges on these notions too. For example, in 1 John 2:1, 2:18, 2:28, 3:1), John addresses his audience as his children. The imagery of being born by God (3:9) is sustained throughout the letter. This similar cognitive environment is fitting for an adequate application of the themes of love, confession and forgiveness, fellowship and knowledge of Christ that John sets out to inculcate to his audience.

Secondly, the study of the situation of Kom Baptist Church shows a lack of an adequate understanding of Scriptures. Although members talk about love, they are unable to clearly define what it takes to love. They have listened to sermons in 1 John and have been evangelized just like members of the Johannine community who had heard the apostolic teachings (2:7) but were now faced by a teaching that was opposed to what they heard and some of them became preys of this new teaching. Ignorance or inadequate understanding of Christ and the apostolic message as a whole appear to be at the snare in the Johannine community just as it is for the crisis in Kom. It is therefore to be expected that there is much cognitive gains for members of the Kom Baptist Church when they study the message of John. They will form new implications of what it means to love and eliminate a wrong understanding of love held thus far.

Thirdly, John writes to members of a community in crisis, who have experienced a split. Although the issues of the split were doctrinal, Kom Baptist Christians have experienced a split apparently because of leadership issues but fundamental behind poor leadership, one can trace ignorance too. Prior to the crisis Kom Baptist Church was made up of a single community under the same leadership but experienced a split in the 1990s. This forms a contextual assumption for them to see 1 John as relevant given that it addresses a community that has witnessed a schism.

#### *6.5.2.2. Low Christology and an inadequate knowledge of Scriptures*

I gathered evidence that there are syncretistic tendencies among several of my respondents and this contributes significantly to the crisis as well as impairs their ability to appropriate the message of 1 John in its solution. The belief in ancestors as intercessors between the gods and the living for example, is clearly practiced by some Baptist Christians in the Kom area. Several of the respondents admitted to me that they see nothing wrong in the sacrifice of a goat for when one's parent dies. It is believed that such a sacrifice appeases the spirit of the deceased and placates him or her from punishing the living members of the family. When there are problems in the family, soothsayers are consulted for fear that the ancestors might be responsible for the problems and often, the soothsayers confirm this and sacrifices are offered to appease these ancestors. At least 50% of the people I interviewed admitted to me that they have consulted soothsayers before and would do that again when there is need. They refused to see the consultation of mediums as sinful and many chose a euphemistic appellation given that they qualified that practice as a cultural practice. Those who did not admit that they venerate ancestors were hesitant to qualify the behaviour as pagan behaviour. Syncretism is therefore rife with at least 50% of those who say they are Christians seeing nothing wrong with ancestral veneration.

The aspect of syncretism is clearly seen when some of those who organize funeral celebrations in honour of the death where they intend to offer

sacrifices of goats begin by organizing Christian thanksgiving services in their congregations to celebrate the lives of deceased members of the family. Some of the Christians did not see any clash between believing in Christ and performing practices that soothe the ancestors. They claimed that culture is necessary for everyday life and that the Christians should not be the exception. They did not however make any distinction between neutral cultural practices and cultural practices that are antithetically opposed to the teaching of Scriptures.

Furthermore, almost all the Christians of Kom Baptist Church observe the local public days otherwise called 'county-sunday'. There are two of these days in a working week where members of the Kom community are not allowed to go to their farms because this is the day the gods visit the farms. Those who disregard this practice amongst other acts of justice are said to face a very low yield of their crops. Both Christians and non Christians evidently stay at home during this day in obedience to the gods of the land of Kom. This highlights the paradox of many belonging to the Baptist church because the Bible 'is the highest authority in matters of faith and practice' yet relegating the Scriptures in practical daily life and attributing daily occurrences to the ancestors and the 'gods'. This weakens their dependence of Christ.

In daily life, it is the ancestors that are appealed to, for intervention in matters concerning the wellbeing of the people. There is evidence *ipso facto* of a lack of proper understanding of the word of God and particularly on the person of Christ and His role in the life of the believer. For example, 1 John teaches that 'everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God' (5:1). Understanding of Christ as the Messiah or Anointed One of God who is the ultimate sacrifice for the believer apparently is not heeded here.

Abang-kimbong is one of the persons remembered in Kom as an ancestor. He lived a long time ago and has come to be proverbially referred to as the 'miracle worker' in Kom due to his extra ordinary deeds amongst the Kom people. He distinguished himself in performing miracles such as burning fresh banana stems. It is alleged that he was able to cause rain to fall or to stop the

rain by mere incantations. For the Kom person, Abang-kimbong was extraordinary, wise and endowed with most of the powers associated to Christ. Later on, when the Kom people were Christianized, and learnt that Jesus did miracles, He was equated in the minds of many to Abang-kimbong. Otherwise put, many do struggle with the question to know in what way Jesus is different from and apparently many seem to think that He was just one person who lived like Abang-kimbong. This sentiment was expressed during one of our Bible study on 1 John in JMBC1 Fundong. Some Christians were at odds to distinguish between the powers of Abang-Kimbong and that of Jesus Christ and why it will be said that the former had devilish power and the latter godly power when both did perform miracles that helped improved lives. This Christological mismatch has created confusion and weakened the faith of many, more so because there are still many people in Kom who claim to do what Abang-kimbong was doing. When the crisis started, many people left the church and consulted soothsayers and marabouts to help them prevail over their 'enemies' (i.e. Christian brothers who did not hold their view).

First John also teaches against idols: 'dear children, keep yourself from idols' (5:21). What John means by idols has been a matter of debate among scholars. 'The word is used in the New Testament to refer to the golden calf which Israel made sacrifice (Acts 7:41) and more broadly to objects made of wood or stone or metal representing the deities of classical antiquity' (Yarbrough 2008:323). The fact is John is interested in love *with* doctrinal purity, and not just love at all costs. So he warns in this verse that correct Christology is at the basis of fellowship. It is a common understanding of who Christ is that should unite members of his community.

With regard to *ᾧνειδώλων* in 5:21, there are many alternative scholarly interpretations. Berkle (2012:331) summarizes some of the major interpretation. Idols thus have been taken to mean at least ten things which include, Plato's designation of unreal objects of sense, an abbreviated way of talking about food offered to idols, compromise with paganism, mystery religions and their practices, Gnostic ideologies and their philosophies, Jewish worship in the Jerusalem temple, various sins, anything that takes the place of

God and session from the community. This list is further grouped into two categories, the metaphorical idol worship and the literal. Taken metaphorically, idols is said to be the failure of one to correlate with the right doctrine which has at its core the belief that Jesus came in the flesh. Right doctrine engenders love (1 John 2:9, 3:10), and righteous living (1 John 1:6, 2:4, 3:6, 9). So then, John is exhorting members of his community to stay true to the right doctrine because failure to exercise this is tantamount to worshipping idols or the wrong thing. Taken literally, Berkle summarizes the opinion that keeping away from idols refers to physical images (2012:334). The tenets of this opinion argue that John wrote from Ephesus where idol worship in the Roman Empire was preponderant. Ephesus was the home of the Roman god Artemis (Acts 19:24-25). The strong influence of idol worship here would have been enough to require John to warn his readers to 'keep away from idols' literally.

Whether we take idols here as a metaphorical expression or as a literal one will be fitting to the contextual environment of Kom Baptist Church. People are known to carry amulets or charms with them. Many who are in church are said to still carry these things which explains why there are still so many sermons tailored against idol worship. Ancestral veneration, consultation with soothsayers and even use of talismans are common features of the Kom culture from which Christians of Kom Baptist Church emanated before their conversion. Others have continued to linger in these practices even though they have become members of the church and do regard them as cultural practices and not necessarily sinful. The exhortation to keep away from idols resonates well with contextual clues in Kom even at a metaphorical level. Metaphorically, there have been indications of the absence of love (1 John 2:9, 3:10), righteous behaviour and an appropriate knowledge of Scriptures. If John by exhorting his audience to stay away from idols was referring to the absence of these biblical virtues, then this will also find a fitting relevance for Christians of Kom Baptist Church.

Syncretism therefore appears rife within the Christians of Kom Baptist Church. Ishola (2002), Gehman (1989) amongst other have identified some of the

main features of syncretism that are apparent within the Kom area. These include amongst other, the belief in a Supreme being or Creator, the concept of lesser deities below the Supreme Being, deified spiritual ancestors, mystery powers, diviners and medicine men and women who help people to cope with challenges and a community spirit. It is commonplace to find Christians consult with soothsayers and visit diviners in the Kom area when they suffer with challenges such as prolonged sickness and even death. Sacrifices are offered to the ancestors even by Christians who have been told that Jesus Christ is the ultimate sacrifice for them.

More than 50% of the respondents admitted that they are Baptist Christians because the Baptists uphold the Bible as the final authority in matters of faith and practiced. According to Jam (1997:87-88), a Baptist pastor in Kom, there are nine Baptist distinctives. The first five of these touch on Scriptures and assert:

- The Lordship and deity of Jesus Christ
- The Bible is the highest and only authority (2 Timothy 3:15 and 17)
- The New Testament is our only guide in matters of faith and practice
- The priesthood of all believers (1 Timothy 2:5, 1 John 1:9)
- As born again church membership (John 3:3, Romans 8:16) we profess and live separated lives as new creatures in Christ Jesus

Evidently, Scriptures are officially upheld in the Baptist Church in Kom and an emphasis is placed on the need for believers to study the Scriptures. Many Christians showed enthusiasm in our study of some passages of 1 John. All of those who admitted to have listened to sermons or read 1 John were able to cite love and forgiveness as the themes of the books. Nonetheless, most of them admitted that they had been very bitter to members of rival congregations and found it very difficult to forgive or to love members from the opposite camp.

It is intriguing to see that Christians from congregations across the divide all affirmed that they liked the Baptist Church because it gives authority to Scriptures and actually understood the values of 1 John yet found it difficult themselves to allow the supremacy of Scriptures deal with the issues they were facing. The cultural values of the Kom area where the Christians live appear to be so strong that fear of shame and seeking of honour among the people inhibit them from living out the values of Scriptures.

Several of the respondents pointed to bad leadership as the cause of the crisis and more than 50% suggested that they decided to follow the different strands of the divide because of family or other affiliations other than a careful reflection of what Scriptures want them to do. More than 50% of respondents admitted that they were influenced by different people to belong to one or the other camp. Do they therefore really have a value for Scriptures? Have they fully understood the importance of Scriptures? One of the things emphasized in the Baptist distinctive is the priesthood of every believer i.e. the believer is encouraged to read the Bible and evangelize but this seem to be pushed back to leadership and the clergy. Nevertheless, some of the Christians could not explain clearly what they understand to be the role of Christ in redemption. They were able to say that Jesus is the Son of God but saw no difference He makes in their daily lives. He is acknowledged as Lord but far removed from the affairs of ordinary life.

The most appeal to solving the crisis was made at the law courts or to the government officials and other influential members of the community to bring their influence to bear on one or the other faction. Very little appeal was made to Scriptures and there is an apparent contradiction to say that the Bible is the only authority in matters of faith and practice.

First John has been described as a pastoral letter, intending to exhort Christians to a change of behaviour. John calls his addressees several times as 'my children' (as for example in 2:1) and as 'dear friend' (2:7). Thus, 1 John offers one relevant way of treating the issues of division through a pastoral approach.



First John addresses considerable the Christological concerns. John exhorts his audience to test every spirit to see whether it comes from God and any spirit that does not acknowledge that Jesus came in the flesh is not from God (4:1-3). He further exhorts that everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ is from God (5:1). First John therefore addresses the Christological problems that Christians of Kom Baptist Church seem to have problems with.

#### *6.5.2.3. Ethical concerns: lack of forgiveness and love*

The ethical concerns in 1 John are mainly towards the lack of love and sin in the community. All respondents in the focus group discussions agreed that various kinds of sins have been committed by Christians from both factions such as mutual hatred, distrust, blackmail and outright verbal abuse. All of the respondents addressing the question about the causes of the crisis evoked moral reasons such as egoism, power seeking and money minded leadership, misrepresentation of the notion of congregational autonomy and biblical concepts, refusal to sell Christian materials to the churches in Kom by CBC etc. Hatred and calumny characterize the crisis with Christians across the divide having composed songs to stigmatize the other.

The nicknaming of the CBC loyalists as 'watchman' took a derogatory semantic tone used by some members of the CNBC to mock and to stigmatize CBC loyalist. CNBC advocates were derogatorily called 'Mbong', after the name of their leader with the intention to mock and lampoon them. Some families were split into two with members of the family acknowledging that in the early days of the tension, they avoided each other and were bitter towards each other whenever they met.

First John recognizes the presence of sin in the community and proposes an antidote for sin which is forgiveness. Thus John says if anyone says he has not sin he is deceiving himself (1:8). 'If we claim we have no sin, we are only fooling ourselves and not living in the truth' (NIV). There are implicatures that can be drawn from this. The first premise comes from the protasis, the "if"

clause: Premise 1: If people claim that they have no sin they only fool themselves. Premise 2: Some people can claim that they do not have sin (implicated premise) Premise 3: People who claim that they do not have sin are wrong. The conclusion is therefore that people who claim that they do not have sin do not live according to the truth that God has revealed. Verse 9 is a conclusion to the argument raised by verse 8. 'But if we confess our sins to him, [then] he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all wickedness' (NIV). Inferences that can be drawn to show the logical pattern entailed by the verse are: Premise 1: All people have sins (implicated premise). Premise 2: People need to confess their sins to God (implicated premise). Premise 3: God forgives sins only if they are confessed (implicated premise). Conclusion: It is in the nature of God to forgive people from their sins and cleanses them from all wickedness.

Secondly, 1 John exhorts its audience to walk in the light and the author exemplifies this in his pastoral approach to addressing the issues. The tendency has been for different people in Kom Baptist church to justify their different stances and actions without acknowledging that they have sinned. The teaching of 1 John exposes such behaviour as sinful and helps all and sundry to look for the remedy of sin which is confession. This makes 1 John very relevant in these circumstances.

#### *6.5.2.4. Over-professionalization and/or intellectualization of the pastoral ministry*

All the pastors I talked to received formal training in the Cameroon Baptist Theological Seminary (CBTS) and most of them had Bachelors in Theology. Nonetheless, many Christians I talked with accused church leadership and particularly the pastors for being the cause of the division in Kom Baptist Church. This makes one to wonder why pastors trained to communicate the total counsel of the Bible would be at the centre of controversies surrounding division in the church. Where did they go wrong and how do they reconcile the message of 1 John in particular and other biblical exhortations with the

present state of affairs in Kom Baptist Church? How can the curriculum of the training be revised to address contextual issues more aptly?

It was observed during our Bible studies that the participation of pastors showed their learning and ability to interpret Scriptures correctly. Why then is it difficult to practice this? Is there an overly professionalized and/or overly intellectualized exposition of the Bible above praxis? In my visits to the churches, I noticed that on the whole, messages are well expounded in the pulpits but the application of these messages appears lacking. From our focus group discussions on 1 John, it was clear that the pastors could easily identify the exhortations and trace the argument of John even though they failed to heed to some of these exhortations. But it is not clear how and why this understanding appears not to be reflected in the practical relationship with others. Believers seek the opinion of the pastor in a given matter and not necessarily the counsel of Scriptures. Pastors who were taken to court or ridiculed by members of the opposite camp in the church maintained that it was difficult for them to completely forgive those who perpetrated these things against them.

John is saying that ignorance engenders disobedience and knowledge should engender obedience. There is a considerable effort by the clergy to preach on love and forgiveness but apparently, there is a dissonance between knowledge and praxis that impedes on the application of these messages. Part of the difficulty to apply biblical exhortations soundly appears to be coming from anxiety among some of the members of the church losing their employment and positions of influence once unity occurs. There is also the tendency to mix cultural values that are antithetical to the biblical message together with Christian values in Kom. Most of the respondents who addressed the question of Kom values and those of 1 John drew a parallel of 'togetherness' from both the Kom culture and 1 John. This leads to a disguised syncretism whereby one lives according to his culture and appears to be practicing the Christian values. It has also been noted that in the Kom area, politicians quote and use the Bible for political reasons. Some of the

attempts cited for solving the crisis were the appeal to the political elite of the community to intervene with the crisis in the church.

There appear to be quite several issues at the background of the crisis in Kom Baptist Church but the fundamental issue appears to be with the leadership. There is therefore need for pastors and other leaders to model more the gospel and set the practical pace for obeying Scriptures. One way of doing this will be for these pastors to openly show that they have forgiven the people they have been grudging when they expound on a passage that deals with forgiveness like 1 John. Care needs to be taken that the Bible is not used for selfish gains or political interest.

## **6.6. Significance of the themes of fellowship and love in 1 John to Kom Baptist Church**

The significance of 1 John to Kom Baptist Church can be seen in the purpose of the letter, the issues treated in the letter and the style of the author. In other words, the reasons for which 1 John was written fit well with the contextual situation of Kom Baptist Church. The themes expounded in the letter consequently address issues that Christians of Kom Baptist Church struggle with and the mode of approach of the author in addressing his concerns are of particular relevance to Kom Baptist Church.

### ***6.6.1. The overriding purpose of 1 John cogently fits the situation of Kom Baptist Church***

Fellowship is unquestionably one of the key foci of 1 John. John introduces the purpose of this book with a reason clause in 1:3: 'so that you may have *κοινωνίαν* (fellowship) with us, and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ'. The word '*κοινωνίαν*' occurs again in 1:6 and 1:7 and the word is implied in 1:5, 1:8, 1:10, 2:4, 2:5, 2:7, 2:8, 2:9, 2:10, 2:11) thus giving it prominence and giving the letter lexical cohesion, connectivity and coherence. As Jones (2010:191) affirms, it gives it 'an organic unity in 1

John'. This unity is partly knitted by the term fellowship. Given that John's intention is to strengthen fellowship in the Johannine community, Jones (2010:181) argues that 1 John is governed by a 'presiding metaphor': μένειν ἐν (remain in). The image is used many times in the letter (2:6, 24, 28, 3:6, 24, 4:12, 13, 15, 16). Jones explains that its constant intransitive use figuratively suggests 'someone who does not leave the realm or sphere in which one finds himself' and thus signifies one who continues to abide in the faith community. The use of this image is not just fortuitous but expresses a key thematic concern of John. Fellowship is therefore a controlling theme of 1 John. John's concern is to 'bring his readers into fellowship with those who truly proclaim the word and with the Father and the Son' (Kruse 2000:59). Kruse further defines fellowship as a concept that has to do with 'mutual commitment to a common purpose' (2000:60).

Fellowship as a controlling theme is related to terms such as 'abiding', 'eternal life', and 'knowing God' (Tan 2002: 97). Nonetheless, John had other reasons why he wrote the letter as stated in 1:4: 'we write this to make our joy complete', 'I write this to you so that you will not sin' (2:1, NIV), 'I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life' (5:13, NIV).

In summary, John writes to exhort members of his community to 'remain in' the community, to avoid sin, to assure them of their salvation and to exhort them of the commitment to the common purpose of their faith as they were originally taught. In other words, John is encouraging the unity of the believers and the believing community. Factionalism is therefore something that John is decrying. In the words of Oduyoye (2002:97), 'the church is intended to be the ecclesia of all people, women and men, across all social barriers. In the church we expect to experience reciprocity and mutual respect, support and protection...' Such a fellowship needs to be pivoted in Christ as the founder of the church.

The purpose of 1 John speaks to the contextual situation of Kom Baptist Church where there has been a split and a clamour to belong to one or the

other faction. John's exhortation for Christians to stay in the realm where they find themselves evidently finds an audience in the community of Baptist churches in Kom. The concept of fellowship as a commitment to a common purpose needs to be revisited in this community. The church needs to define what its mission is and thus point people to a common purpose. Fellowship has been short circuited in Kom Baptist Church with the absence of a strong commitment to stay and grow together with the common purpose to communicate the faith. The church community has taken issues of internal cohesion lightly and there is a rupture in its community and the message of John needs to be reread and applied in the church.

First John teaches that fellowship with God is enabled by 'the blood of Jesus his Son' which 'cleanses' or purifies the believer from sin. John says 'if we walk in the light as he is the light, we have fellowship with one another' (1:7 NIV). This therefore according to John is the grounds for Christian fellowship i.e. by believing in the cleansing power of 'the blood of Jesus His Son'. Fellowship is an experience of community and is linked to the metaphoric words of 'darkness' and 'light'. Thus 'If we claim to have fellowship with him yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live by the truth', 1:6, NIV). In 1:6 John shows the apparent contradiction to claim to have fellowship with Christ or God and yet 'walk in darkness'. Verse 7 restates verse 6 positively thus if we walk in the light as he is the light'. These verses have been expressed through the help of the metaphors of 'walking in the light/darkness'. The appeal to figurative language creates focus and allows the reader the liberty to draw the contextual implications. In other words, the range of implicatures for these metaphors are made manifest to the Kom Baptist Church and with the possibility of selecting the meaning that gives them more cognitive benefits.

The expression 'to live in him' (ἐν αὐτῷ μένειν) is more than just keeping commandments. 'It is the new and very spiritual existence that believers enjoy and which is effected through the agency of the Spirit who bears witness to the truth' (Kruse 2000:81). To live in him is a deep and lasting commitment in the relationship with God (von Wahlde 2010:60). Jones (2010) says that the

expression ἐν αὐτῷ μένειν (remain in) or abide is a presiding metaphor in 1 John and 'figuratively it suggests someone who does not leave the realm or sphere in which one finds oneself, hence remain, continue, abide. It can mean generally stand fast in battle, stay where one is, lasting, remain as one was, abide by a conviction, some of which conjure up perseverance' (2010: 183). Thus, when John says ἐν αὐτῷ μένειν he means that his audience should develop deep convictions and resist through perseverance the tendencies that are pushing them away from the community. The person who claims to remain in him (ἐν αὐτῷ μένειν), 'has to walk in the same way in which he walked' (ὀφείλει καθὼς ἐκεῖνος περιεπάτησεν καὶ αὐτὸς). This means the person has to keep God's commandments as Jesus did (Kruse 2000:82) which is the model for behaviour (von Wahlde 2007:60). Jesus is presented here as the model to follow and living in him implies a conduct in conformity with the standard that He has set.

Given the situation of Kom Baptist Church, John is challenging the believers to resist the tendency 'not to abide' and to remain within the fellowship. This for John will be obeying Jesus Christ and walking in the same way as He walked. Those who claim to remain in Him must walk as Jesus did. This strengthens the need for fellowship in Kom and demonstrates that fellowship is won through perseverance. There is need for Christians of Kom Baptist Church to stay within the believing community and reconcile with those that they have differences for the sake of heeding the commandments of the Lord. It will take forgiveness of the wrongs of one another and love to be able to stay within the community. This also entails the need for self introspection so that each member should be able to see the role he or she has played in bringing distrust and hatred in the community.

#### **6.6.2. *Forgiveness as a key element of fellowship is needed in Kom***

Ethical conduct in the community should be expressed through love and forgiveness. The promise of forgiveness in 1John 1:9 is made to members of the Johannine community and therefore to believers in general. This is

suggested by the fact that John includes himself in the hypothetical clauses of 1:1-10. Three sins are pointed out in need of confession for forgiveness viz., the claim to have fellowship with God while walking in darkness (1:6), the claim that the audience does not have sin(1:8) and the claim that they have not sinned (1:10). John introduces the remedy for sin in 1:9. God is light and sheds light and all those who come to Him realize that they have sinned thus the need to confess sins. This is the ethics of emulation. Members of the believing community should resemble God. Anyone who affirms that God is light invariably sees himself as falling short of the standard requirement of God's righteousness and consequently confesses his sins. 'Any claims of fellowship with God (v.6) must be evaluated by God's own nature' (Glasscock 2009:220). To confess means:

One recognizes the truthfulness of God's testimony about sinfulness in contrast to denying it—implying that a person acknowledges or says the same thing that God says. In other words, if one declares God's testimony about him or her to be true, then God responds in grace by forgiving and cleansing the one who has confessed sin' (Glasscock 2009:220)

Forgiveness is borne out of confession or the acknowledgement that certain behaviour is unacceptable in the community of believer. 'Children of God are challenged upon to agree with God's viewpoint of sin' (Glasscock 2009:222). This means that while they agree that they are in need of forgiveness they should be able to confess to one another and to forgive one another. The passage shows that the one who bestows forgiveness in 1:9 is God. Instead of denying that 'we' have not sinned, John recommends that we should own up to our sin and God will forgive us. The verse thus carries another mitigated exhortation, thus, 'if we confess our sins' is appealing to the reader to confess his sins. The motivations for doing this is presented in the second half of the verse: 'God is just and faithful to forgive us from all unrighteousness'. But the implication of us seeing God as πιστός ἐστὶν καὶ δίκαιος (he is faithful and



righteous), and as light (1:5) necessitate us to stay in the light. The nature of God as *δίκαιος* is in contrast with the nature of man as *ἀδικίας* thus a play of words to show the contrast between man's unrighteousness and God's righteousness. By confessing their sins, believers are reneging on their misbehaviour towards fellow believers. Yarbrough succinctly puts it that, 'First John reminds readers that the first problem to confront is the person in the mirror' (2008:25). In other words, the person in the mirror needs to confess before he claims himself as a member in good standing of the community of faith.

Almost everyone I talked to in the Kom area agreed that he or she has heard a sermon or read 1 John in the past two years and most of them who could recite only one verse in Scriptures pointed to 1 John 1:9. Almost everyone also admitted having harboured anger and hatred towards other members of the community. Glasscock is asking the question 'why is confession of sin not a common practice in churches (2009:224)?' In other words, most Christians of Kom Baptist Church have read and learnt about 1John 1:9 yet unforgiveness and resentment of one another across the divide is very strong. Glasscock (2009:224) suggests that the fear of rejection, gossip and exposure to public disgrace prohibit confession of sins in Christian communities. More than 70% of the Christians I talked to demonstrated that they harboured resentment and bitterness against fellow Christians in the other faction. Evidently, there has been lack of forgiveness of sins and there has not been any genuine confession of sin. Apparently, there is the fear of stigmatization, resentment and taunting for those who would confess.

The message of confession and forgiveness needs to be revisited in Kom Baptist Church and a more practical approach to its application drawn. Christians need to be taught how to model the teachings of 1 John. The ethics of emulation of God needs to be practiced. Glasscock's affirmation is relevant in dealing with the issues of unforgiveness when he says 'Children of God are challenged upon to agree with God's viewpoint of sin' (Glasscock 2009:222). Agreeing with God will entail an intentional behaviour that is patterned towards what God expects. While they agree that they are in need of

forgiveness they should be able to confess to one another and to forgive one another as God does (1:9). Instead of denying that 'we' have not sinned, John recommends that we should own up to our sin and God will forgive us. Rather than justify whatever were the reasons for the sins, confession and forgiveness are therapeutic and should be the approach to be adopted to ensure a healthy Christian fellowship.

### ***6.6.3. Christological concerns and emphasis on the Godhead is a key concern in Kom Baptist Church***

Christology is 'arguably the most important defining feature of the debate of 1 John' (Griffith 2002:149) and not fully understood by many Christians today, (Krieg RA 2002, Wagner 2009, Osborne 1984, Farrell 1998). The Johannine community was composed of Jewish Christians in its early days and the Jewish traditions played an important role in influencing their beliefs on the Christ. The Jewish religious culture disagreed and did expel members who espoused a high Christology from their synagogues. On the other hand, Greek members of the community influenced by a dualistic world view led them to subscribe to aberrant Christological views. Christology is therefore one of the key issues that John sought to address. John wrote to appeal to members of the Johannine community to make sure that their faith was based on the apostolic teaching on Christology (Smalley 2007: xxv).

Like the Johannine community, there is a Christological problem in Kom. This is seen clearly in the contradictions of believing in the Christ and offering sacrifices of goats to ancestors to appease them. Some Christians of the Baptist church in Kom agreed that they have occasionally offered sacrifices to their deceased loved ones. Have they really understood who Christ is? When a Christian community confesses the Lordship of Christ but inconsistently with what it confesses, it is deceiving itself (Brusic 1997: 214). Thus for the Kom Baptist Church community, there is either an issue of self deception or ignorance.

The recognition of God's love must necessarily be done through the acknowledgement of Jesus Christ as the Mediator between man and God. Sometimes, even the most determined believers will sin (Adeyemo 2006:1530) and must appeal to Jesus as their Advocate.

'The indispensable unity of incarnational belief and mutual love as the response which we accept God's gift is 1 John's unique contribution to New Testament theology' (Rensberger (2001: 286). The recognition is through obedience to Scriptures and this appears lacking in Kom Baptist Church. At a philosophical level, Jesus is known among the Christians of the Baptist church in Kom as Lord but apparently there is little effort to heed to His word, particularly the message of 1 John. Christians have been observed to consult soothsayers and marabouts to address their concerns of sicknesses, low harvest, poverty, barrenness and even poor relationships with others in the community. Christians have tended to tilt towards miracle workers, ancestors and marabouts than to believe what the Scriptures say about Christ in the conduct of their daily lives.

When I asked the question what impact the crisis has had on the church, a large number of respondents agreed that there has been a numerical growth in the congregations but with no corresponding growth in the faith. Many people were recruited to join the camps of the Baptist Church who were not yet converted. The influx of the recruits was meant to present an argument of democracy to the Government of Cameroon and thus sway justice to their side. Conversion thus was relegated and many came to the church without an adequate knowledge of Christ and His centrality in Christianity (Grudem 1994: 553). Christ is perceived mentally as the Son of God by many and as a Saviour and Lord but practically, the people appeal to different mediators and powers for solutions to their challenges in life.

One of the theological underpinnings of the encounter of the Bible and African Traditional Religion (ATR) can be an inadequate Christology given that in some areas ATR is hardly differentiated from culture and the confessions of ATR are assumed by many to be cultural beliefs. This is the situation of Kom.

The spirituality of Kom Baptist Christians is therefore not only shaped by the church and/or the Bible but also by the social and cultural milieu which is heavily interconnected with another religion and exhibits and interplay a communitarian epistemology and ontology and an interplay between culture and religion (Hiebert 2006; 2008; 2009; Kanyoro 1999; Moreau 2006; Pobee 1996; Rheenen 2006; Strauss 2006; Ukpong 2000). The African community is a 'community of the living and the "living death" and those who are yet to be born' (Pobee 1996:6). The African context therefore is used as a hermeneutic as expressed through inculturation (Ukpong 1996). But inculturation and contextualization of the Gospel carry with them some dangers (Bediako 2000; 1995; Hesselgrave 2006; Kato 1975; Light 2012). For example, it is not always clear where contextualization should begin or end. The lines between what is a neutral cultural value that can be used as a stepping stone to preaching the gospel are usually fuzzy.

The fact that African Traditional Religion was condemned entirely by early missionaries when they brought Christianity to Africa is perceived by many Christians to be wrong. Indeed, there are some positive values of the culture that can become connecting points for the Gospel. For example, more than 90% of the respondents I talked to believe and rightly so that solidarity of the Kom people expressed through funerals and birth celebrations as well as through other communal activities is a value to be preserved. During such occasions, singing, dancing and gifts to show compassion or joy are given. However, there are attempts by some Africans to legitimize ATR under the claim that this is cultural.

The emphasis of John on the apostolic faith fits very well in a context where African Traditional Religion seems to take centre stage in the church and the values of the culture are confused with the values enunciated in Scripture. There seems to be a shift from 'that which was from the beginning' (1:1). What John focuses on is to assemble the basic fundamentals of the apostolic faith and weave them together to address those who remained in fellowship. It is as if to say, in situations where the faith is in danger of becoming

adulterated and syncretized, the key thing is to affirm and define what we have received as the truth.

The name of 'Jesus' is used sometimes as a magical formula thus during swearing, a value that seems to be borrowed from the cultural context. Christology is thus a key concern within the Baptist church in Kom especially as Christ appears to be just one of the names in which people believe in.

Kom Baptist Church needs to revisit these fundamentals, of Christology, of soteriology and of ethics, the three pre-occupations of 1 John as a way of rebuilding his divided community. What does it mean to be saved and who is Christ? How should we behave given such knowledge of who Christ is and what salvation is? John is concerned about right doctrine and the behaviour that ensues from it. Apparently, the interconnectivity of these three pillars of the message of 1 John have been understood in a fuzzy way within the Kom Baptist Church community.

#### ***6.6.4. First John and inadequate contextualization in Kom Baptist Church***

Raymond Brown (1979) analyses the situation of the Johannine community showing that it was a multicultural community. The community evolved through four stages: the pre-Gospel phase, the Gospel phase, the Epistles' phase and the After Epistles phase (Brown 1979:165-166). The pre-Gospel phase consisted of Jews who believed in Jesus with an inadequate Christological adherence while the second group of Jews became part of the community, opposing the temple institutional beliefs and going ahead to convert Samaritans to become part of the community. The Gentiles also were converted and they joined the community. It was thus a community that had different sub-cultural strata. The stitches that held the seams of this community together were to be based on their doctrinal stance and particularly on Christology. In other words, it was supposed to be true knowledge of who Christ is that kept them in fellowship. But once there was a

deviation from the apostolic faith and other forms of knowledge about Christ different from that which was taught from the beginning, the community suffered disintegration. The right knowledge about Christ was what trimmed off cultural leanings that were opposed to the right doctrine.

Smalley (1984) saw the Johannine community as made up of three groups. The first group was composed of Jewish Christians who face the challenge to understand the Messiahship of Jesus Christ. The second group was composed of Hellenistic Christians influenced with a dualist world view and facing the challenge to believe the humanity of Jesus and thus inclining towards a docetic view of Jesus. The third group is a mix of the first two groups. This multicultural community could only stay together if each stratum heeded to the Gospel in relevant ways. In other words, adequate contextualization was necessary for the survival of the community. But the community face tension because of some of the cultural carryover that impinged into the understanding of the Christ.

Scholars agree that there were two possible kinds of heresies brought in into the Johannine community viz., Cerinthianism and Docetism. The common error of these heretical teaching was to downplay the humanity of the Christ. Apparently influenced by the dualistic worldview, these teachings questioned how the Christ could condescend to inhabit the material body. Docetism taught that Jesus was not really the Christ but only appeared to be so. Cerinthianism on its part taught that the Christ came down to the man Jesus during his baptism and left just before his suffering and death. The false teachers in 1 John were thus influenced by sub-cultural and philosophical teachings. 'The author [of 1 John], as a member of that culture, drew nine times on Platonic vocabulary in equating the world with everything against God...' (1 John 2:15, 16; 3:1; 4:2, 3, 4; 5:3; cf. Anderson 1990:42). John's use of these terminologies and phrases is done in an echoic way. John draws from the teachings of the culture but shows the connection on how this can be perceived within the Christian community. In chapter 1 for example, the series of disjunctive statements showed in the 'if' clause what wrong teach was and then John moves on to state what the right belief would entail.

Similarly, adequate contextualization of Christian teaching is necessary in Kom for a proper understanding of the message of 1 John in particular and Scriptures as a whole. Contextualization makes the Gospel accessible; it helps the new audience to internalize the message and helps in the transformation of the society (Whiteman 2005; Kraft 2005; Lingenfelter 1998; Tienou and Hiebert 2005). 'As Christians we are often unaware that our beliefs are frequently shaped by our culture than by the gospel' (Hiebert 2009:17). It is contextualization that helps to highlight the cultural factors involved in the communication of the message.

There is a sentimental attachment to Kom culture by its citizens including those worshipping in Kom Baptist Church. The Kom cultural values sometimes can be confused with the values of 1 John, particularly on the themes of fellowship given that fellowship and solidarity are very much encouraged within the Kom culture. When this happens, it can become a launch pad for even incompatible values such as the veneration of ancestors and the belief in Christ to be put together in the same basket and confused to be the same thing.

There are other cultural issues that need to be well thought out and a balanced teaching developed amongst Christians of Kom Baptist Church. How will they for example understand the family imagery used in 1 John? How will they understand for example the maternal uncle and nephew succession in Kom with the sonship imagery of 1 John as heirs of the Kingdom of God? Kom has a matrilineal succession system where the maternal nephew succeeds the maternal uncle. First John teaches about a family identity with reference to sons and not to nephews. Is there a mismatch and how can this teaching be integrated in a matrilineal succession system like Kom? These questions highlight the need to adequately contextualize the message. Transmitting the message of 1 John to a different culture will require a careful study of the receptor culture to understand to what extent the message can be applied so that it stays relevant. There is therefore the need to re-examine 1 John in Kom and contextualize it in a fitting way. This may

imply that pastors and leaders of Kom Baptist Church should have regularly seminars to support them to develop this contextualization.

Furthermore, the dichotomy between the first century Hellenistic culture behind 1 John and the integral or holistic approach to seeing life in the Kom culture needs to be understood well. The first century Hellenistic culture viewed life at two levels *viz.*, the material and the spiritual while the Kom culture sees life holistically and one can both love and hate at the same time with no qualms of a contradiction. For example, Baptist Christians in Kom have been observed to avoid going to their farms on sacred days so that they do not meet with the gods of the land on the farm and the same thought is maintained for Sundays. There is a contradiction here yet apparently no teaching has been developed to counter this contradiction. Kanyoro is therefore right in his affirmation that 'the religiosity of African Christians is not shaped by the church alone, but by all that is part of their social and cultural milieu' (1999:19). How can we move away from the historical particularity of the gospel while maintaining its relevance in a contemporary society of Kom? Any answer to these questions will pinch on a careful study of culture and an adequate contextualization. One such step to address this issue can be pamphlets written on contextualization to help the leaders.

The Johannine community was marked by layers of ethnicity and subcultures in its development. In its early days, the Johannine community was probably located in Palestine (most probably in Judea) with evidently a Jewish population as evident in the use of Hebrew and Aramaic terms, traditional Jewish Christological categories etc (Von Whalde (n.d). 'As the church moved out into Judea and Samaria, or more accurately was pushed out into Judea and Samaria by persecution (Acts 8:12; 11:19ff), the church had to cross geographical and cultural boundaries' (Wood 2003). The community then grew to include members of John the Baptist's followers, Samaritans, Jews and gentiles. A conflict arose about the interpretation of its traditions particularly about Christology and ethics and thus the splitting of the community. In this way, 1 John exemplifies a community that has failed to adequately contextualize the message with Judaism as a subculture of the



Greco-Roman culture and Hellenism opening up horizons of interpretation of Scripture to members of the community. The Baptist church in Kom appears to have taken lightly the issue of adequate contextualization and has failed to develop an adequate teaching on love, holistic growth. Kraft (2005:340), talking about the need for adequate contextualization says this means 'a culturally appropriate expression of love toward God and a receptor oriented love between Christians' need to be rethought and lived.

First John sees love not as a feeling but as a practical response to what God requires of His people. Love in 1 John first of all entails a right understanding of who God is and a right belief about what He has done (1:5, 4:1-5, 8,). The right knowledge needs to move to the right behaviour (1:1-3, 24), imitating Christ (2:6), loving members of the community irrespective of their background (2:22). In other words, the ethics of the new community of faith should take precedence of ethical values of the cultural communities where its members are drawn from.

#### ***6.6.5. First John and the manner of church administration in Kom Baptist Church***

There is a blend of rebuke and persuasive language in 1 John. It has been said that 1 John is polemical, i.e. countering the claims of the secessionist as marked in the use of harsh language in words such as antichrist, liars, deceivers, false prophets etc (1 John 2:18, 22, 26, 4:1, 3:2). The use of harsh language has also been noted in the Kom Baptist Church crisis that sometimes has degenerated into calumny, lampooning, insults and intimidation.

Nonetheless, John's letter is to the most part pastoral. John chooses to argue through persuasion and encouragement. This is marked by the use of terms of endearment such as 'little ones' (2:12), 'my children' (2:18), 'beloved' (2:7). Although he is an apostle, he appeals to them not from the point of view of authority but with persuasion. Love is presented as one of the key themes of

the letter with the exhortation that Christians ought to love if they have been borne of God because 'God is love' (4:8). We imitate God when we love and demonstrate *ipso facto* that we have been borne of God. Love in this sense is relational.

Through persuasion, John assures his community, weakened by the activities of the secessionists of their eternal life (1:2), of atonement (2:2) and of the fact that they have been borne of God (1:8-9) and the need to rely on the Holy Spirit and stay on the truth of what they have been taught (2:20-26). He is concerned about the members of his community and identifies himself with them when he addresses them in the first person inclusive pronoun 'we' that runs throughout the letter. Yarbrough affirms this when he says 'John's letters contribute to a template for Christian ministry; they model an influence that is simultaneously top-down and side-by-side' (1:3, 1:4, 2:1, 5:13).

This is the message that is needed in a situation like that of the Kom Baptist Church. Christians need to be reassured of their salvation, of eternal life, of the work of the Holy Spirit and the immutability of the truth. They need to reconsider the foundational messages that were taught when they believed and such a message can only be conveyed through a pastoral approach as John does.

The top-down and side-by-side approach of John in addressing issues to members of his community is a lesson to leaders of Kom Baptist Church who have appealed rather to a hierarchical order for solutions to their conflict. In other words, John appeals to members of his community rather than give commands and the leadership of Kom Baptist Church tends to give instructions than appeal. John begins his letter with an appeal to be heard by showing his credential information as an apostle thus an eyewitness of Jesus Christ (1:1-4). He has been using the pronoun 'we' to refer sometimes to other eyewitnesses (apostles) (1:1-4) and to include the other believers he is addressing (1:6-10) and show the possibility of sin for all human beings in what he says. Thus he says for example that 'if we say we have fellowship with Him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth' (1:6).

He also acknowledges that no one can say he is without sin (1:8) and this necessitates everyone to confess his sins and receive forgiveness (1:9). John does not detach himself from the range of these possibilities of sin, he identifies with his audience through the use of the inclusive pronoun 'we'. He also uses the pronoun to metarepresent the claims of others and chooses to do so not disputatiously but by identifying himself with them through this inclusive pronoun.

Secondly, John uses intimate terms of address such as 'my little children' (2:1), 'beloved' (2:7), 'children' (2:19) etc. John begins 2:1 with the vocative *Ἀγαπητοί* (beloved) which is intended to reflect his caring attitude or intimacy (Wahlde 2010:61). In 4:7, he uses another intimate vocative: *Ἀγαπητοί, ἀγαπῶμεν ἀλλήλους* (beloved, let us love one another). Commentators are agreed that 'one another' here refers to members of the Johannine community thus members of the Christian community (Kruse 2000:157; Painter 2008:268; Smalley 2007:225; von Wahlde 2010:156) but John uses a cohortative form of exhortation (let us) to identify with them. It is an encouragement for the audience to love each other. John therefore does not come with the authority of the apostle to members of his community but identifies himself with them and encourages them. He only states his credential information as an apostle where he wants to show the grounds for the exhortations that he is about to give.

The ordinary members of the Kom Baptist Church congregations have largely blamed the crisis on the leadership of the church. Many believers have indicated that they adopt the opinion of their leaders in the crisis. Many Christians also indicted the leaders for pride, greed, and authoritative nature. This is contrary to the situation of the author of John who uses a humble approach to exhort his audience. He subsumes his authority under the authority of 'that which was from the beginning' (1:1).

The leadership of Kom Baptist Church need to review how they have led the administration of the church. John is largely persuasive in his approach and identifies himself with members of his community in what he is reproaching

them for. John therefore uses a mitigated form of exhortation rather than giving direct commands. He uses direct commands only in 2:15, 24, 27, 28; 3:7, 13; 4:1 and 5:21, therefore only eight direct exhortations in this letter to exhort members of the Johannine community to desist from following the teachings of the secessionists and to persuade them to remain in the community. The concentrations of these direct commands are found from the middle of chapter two where John is warning against wrong teaching and wrong ethical behaviour. John therefore talks commandingly mostly when it has to do with sin and erroneous teaching but in the rest of the letter, he uses the 'we' approach to identify with the people and exhort them in appropriate ways. This can be a model for leadership in the Kom Baptist Church community that needs healing from the wounds of division. Leadership needs to identify with the people in saying 'if we say we have not sinned, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us' (1:8).

#### ***6.6.6. Exposing abhorrent Christian beliefs and conduct***

The church in general has suffered heresy, distortion and dilution of its message across the ages. The letter of John teaches that

Christians in subsequent periods need not be demoralized when deception, corruption, falsehood arise. There are resources for offsetting these ills because they are precisely the things that Christ came to challenge and vanquish and then to give His followers victory over as they respond to Him in faith' (Yarbrough 2008:25).

Christians of Kom Baptist Church can be disillusioned by the controversies surrounding them. The conflict in 1 John serves to let these Christians see that the things happening to them are not strange and that the church has always thrived in the midst of aberrant religious beliefs and attacks on the truth. Although other New Testament writers have written quite much on conflict in the church, 1 John 'presents a non Pauline depiction of early Christian belief'

(ditto:25) and a different kind of struggle for the church. First John exposes an intra church struggle with the mixture of right belief and obedience put in focus. The letter appeals to the Scriptures and apostolic teaching as the basis of solving the crisis in the church. The Kom Baptist Church crisis has had a heavy package of litigations and appeal to secular authorities to mediate in the conflict. First John will serve an encouragement to Christians of Kom Baptist Church in their intra-church struggle that Scriptures should be used in addressing church conflict.

The emphasis of 1 John is on right belief (4:1-5, 11). Right belief sees Christ as having come in the flesh (4:1-2, 10, 5:20, 21), His deity (4:15), the love of God (4:8). Right belief will in Johannine thought lead to right behaviour which includes walking in the light (1:6), confession (1:9), obedience (2:4) and righteous living (2:22). The emphasis of the church should therefore be on correctly expounding the message of 1 John.

## **6.7. Summary and conclusion of chapter six**

This chapter has drawn an application of the message of love and fellowship in 1 John to the situation of Kom Baptist church. I argued that the contextual situation of every reader of the Bible influences the reception of a particular text. The way 1 John will apply to Kom Baptist Church will therefore differ from how the letter will be applied in other situations.

An examination of the contextual situation of Kom Baptist Church was shown through an analysis of the empirical findings on the field. The state of lack of forgiveness, over-intellectualizing the faith, Africa Traditional Religious inclinations and an apparent lack of proper understanding of the text are evidently some of the issues that prevail in Kom Baptist Church.

The relevance of 1 John to Kom Baptist church can be seen on the issues it addresses such as an adequately honed Christology and the ethical concerns of love and forgiveness. The overall purpose of the letter and the manner in

which the apostle argues his case significantly address the issues challenging the Baptist church in the Kom area.

## **CHAPTER SEVEN**

### **Summary and conclusions**

#### **7.1 Introduction**

The church's mission to witness to the world around it is often impaired or rendered ineffective by the internal strifes that do pop up within church communities. Internal cohesion and church unity has suffered threats of disintegration in many places because of the absence of love to grease its members and avoid friction as they live and grow together within the community. This dissertation set out to examine this challenge faced by the Kom Baptist Church of North West Cameroon. It aimed at gauging the dynamics of the presence of, or lack of love among Christians of this church community and went on to diagnose how this group of Christians comparable to the Johannine community responded to the message of love in 1 John. The situation behind 1 John presents a parallel situation to that of Kom Baptist Church, thus the hypothesis of this dissertation that the values articulated in 1 John for an integral Christian community notably love, fellowship and knowledge of an adequately honed Christology also address the prevailing situation of Kom Baptist Church. This chapter summaries the main findings of the dissertation.

#### **7.2. Summary of Chapter One**

Chapter one served as an introduction of the dissertation, situating the motivational background, rationale and design of the study. It reviewed the extant literature and scholarly approaches to studying 1 John, noting that the key bone of contention in understanding the letter lies in defining a suitable methodological procedure for reading it. The traditional approach to reading

the letter has been what scholars have called a 'mirror reading' whereby several of the statements of the letter are thought to be polemically addressing the specific situation of the secessionists in the Johannine community. The chapter however took the leaning that 1 John is more a pastoral letter than a polemical one that seeks to encourage members of the author's community to stay together in fellowship. The chapter insinuated that studies in 1 John are even more relevant for a contemporary society that is faced by issues of globalization, the proliferation of theologies and Biblical interpretation using philosophical grids like postmodernism that leave the ordinary Christian at crossroads wondering what inclination should be followed in the midst of these discordant views. The chapter also treated briefly the history of the situation surrounding the Kom Baptist Church crisis. It proposed the methodological approach for carrying out the study and intimated that a multi-disciplinary approach comprising relevance theory, field studies and commentary approach in studying exegesis will yield greater dividends in the study than any single approach can offer.

### **7.3. Summary of Chapter Two**

Chapter two established the background necessary for understanding 1 John. It demonstrated that the need to understand the background issues that motivated the writing of the letter is very exigent given the diverse and sometimes conflicting scholarly perceptions of the letter as exemplified by the description of the letter by some as pastoral and yet by others as polemical. The author of the letter, the genre, date and place of writing as well as the recipients and motivational circumstances that prompted the writing of the letter were also established. Two key issues were identified as the mitigating circumstances that prompted the writing of the letter and these are theological (Christological concerns) and ethical issues (love and fellowship) within the Johannine community. The chapter demonstrated the difficulty of establishing a clear genre type for the letter and showed that its structure was equally complex to be established. The chapter therefore highlighted the necessity of



drawing from across different theoretical frameworks in order to touch on the different issues necessary for the study.

#### **7.4. Summary of Chapter Three**

Chapter three focused on the theoretical framework and how the message of 1 John can be applied to the contextual situation of Kom Baptist Church. It hung on the hinge that no one comes to the text without presuppositions and thus some kind of approach to interpret the text. A number of interpretive paradigms used in reading the New Testament were reviewed notably historical criticism, rhetorical criticism and socio-rhetorical interpretation. It then went further to analyze the commentary approach in exegetical studies, discourse analysis, relevance theory and field study methods as tools to be used in the dissertation. With regards to relevance theory, the chapter explained some key concepts of the theory showing that for an effective understanding of Scriptures, there is need to understand the implicit information which could be derived through the relevance theoretic model and this may include explicating the language of the author (explicatures) such as assigning reference to ambiguous references. It also includes making explicit the contextual information that is necessary to be used as premises to derive author intended meaning (implicatures) and making explicit the author's intended implicatures. The chapter saw the use of implicatures and explicatures as a helpful guide to mirror-read the letter thus avoiding the risk of over-mirror reading. The advantages of each of the approaches used in reading 1 John in the dissertation were then highlighted.

#### **7.5. Summary of Chapter Four**

Chapter four examined some of the approaches to good hermeneutics and established that any of these approaches needs to take cognizance of the fact that biblical texts were written from within a cultural context. It will therefore require the cultural lenses through which the authors saw and interpreted the world to adequately decipher the meaning of biblical passages. Thus, the

chapter highlighted some of the key cultural issues surrounding 1 John. The cultural grid of first century Greco-Roman culture in which context the Johannine community lived was thus highlighted.

The Kom Christian who seeks to understand the cultural context of the Johannine community goes to the text with his own cultural lenses and presuppositions. This means that for such a reader of the New Testament, there are at least two world views that he has to harness in order to decipher the meaning of the text. The chapter further demonstrated the complexity of the cultural factor in reading and understanding biblical material for an African audience like the Kom community who to the most part go to the text through the mediation of foreign languages such as English or French. Language as a vehicle of culture means that the Kom reader of the Bible will have to disambiguate the idioms, thought patterns, metaphors and figures of the mediating language in order to come to terms with the meaning in his own cultural thought forms. The chapter therefore highlighted the necessity to understand the interplay between cultures so as to determine to what extent they facilitate access to meaning of biblical texts. Given this, the chapter explored some socio-cultural background of the Baptist Church in Kom and the cultural hinges of the world of the Johannine audience. One key cross-cultural issue that was highlighted for example is the author's use of filial terms in a patrilineal society to demonstrate the role of the Christ. The question was highlighted on how members of the Baptist Church in the Kom tribe which practices matrilineal succession will understand this and whether the maternal uncle and nephew relationship will do justice to understanding the 'sonship' overtones in the letter. The conclusion was that there needs to be a careful understanding of the receptor culture to be able to appropriate well the message of Scripture that often comes within the matrix of a different culture. To do this, the form of the message (language and culture) will have to be carefully delineated from the function. Culture is the container and it takes careful studies to take out the contents to put in a different container.

## 7.6. Summary of Chapter Five

Chapter five investigated the meaning of some key passages of 1 John that hinge on the hypothesis of the dissertation. It established the communicative situation of the letter, an overview of the letter and pointed to one of the main strategies John uses to weave the letter together into a continuous and repetitive letter which is his pragmatic use of the connector *kai*. It demonstrated that the major focus of the section 1:5-2:11 dealt with the ethical conduct of members of the Johannine community with John insinuating that those who claimed to belong to God should demonstrate that through proper ethical conduct. John treats an ethics of emulation or imitation and insinuated that as children of God, members of a believing community are called upon to reflect God's character as identified in 1:5 and 4:8. Children are normally supposed to resemble their parents and so too should children of God reflect light and love because God is light and God is love. John's key insinuation in this section exposed the absence of love that is needed to grease the unity of a believing community. The section also contained one of the few explicit strong exhortations of the letter in 2:1 ('my dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin') giving the section in particular and the letter as a whole its ethical focus. The section (2:3-6) focused on some other ethical values namely obedience and truth. It was revealed that John's key concern here was to show that the person who claims to know God necessarily has to obey His commands. Truth and obedience were shown to be in subordination of one another. There is a contradiction in holding a message to be true and not yielding to it in obedience and there is a contradiction to obey that which one holds as not true. John (in 2:7-11) demonstrates what he means by obedience to the truth by showing that this means loving a fellow believer and stumbling is the consequence of failure to obey (2:10). The chapter highlighted the chiasms in the letter notably those between light and darkness and love and hatred. For John, love ensues from light and hatred ensues from darkness and darkness and light are mutually exclusive in the same way as love and hatred are mutually exclusive. Friction and stumbling in the faith community emanate from hatred (2:11) and the lack

of love. In 4:1-7, John again comes back to the theme of love and exhorts believers to exercise love in the Christian community.

### **7.7. Summary of Chapter Six**

Chapter six focused on the relevance of Christian love and fellowship in 1 John to Kom Baptist Church. The chapter drew an application of the study of 1 John for Kom Baptist Church and highlighted that every reader of the Bible is influenced by context in his reception of a particular text. It demonstrated that relevance theory was a helpful tool to draw this application given its requirement for the reader to understand the cognitive environment of the original audience and that of the new audience. An examination of the contextual situation of Kom Baptist Church was shown through an analysis of the questionnaire that was administered in the area. Some trends were observed after the field study and this showed that evidently there was a breakdown of fellowship within the Baptist congregations of Kom and that some members of this Christian community live in a state of bitterness. It also demonstrated that there is a confused value system for these Christians who try to mix Kom cultural values with those of the Christian faith. There is an over-intellectualization of the pastoral ministry, Africa Traditional Religion is rife and there is a lack of proper Christological understanding in the area.

The relevance of 1 John to Kom Baptist church was shown to be on the issues the letter addresses such as the lack of love amongst members of the community, the need for a better relationships or fellowship, the lack of an adequately honed Christological understanding and the lack of forgiveness for members of the community. The overall purpose of the letter and the pastoral approach in which the apostle argues his case significantly challenges the current state of affairs within Kom Baptist Church. Thus the apostle's tact of persuasion and humility, his repetitive style to emphasize the key issues of the apostolic faith appear lacking in Kom. There is a need for an adequate contextualization of the Christian message in Kom that needs to come through leadership, teaching and training seminars, relevant pamphlets

written on the topic and a servant hood leadership style. The curriculum for training pastors need to be more adapted to the contextual situation.

## **7.8 Implications and conclusion**

The concern of this dissertation was to look at John's teachings amidst a background of a schism in the Johanine community and posit it to impact a parallel situation of a schism observed in the Baptist Church in the Kom area in North West Cameroon. The study was necessitated by the argument that a crisis in church can bring with it a defective or distorted interpretation of Scriptures by different interpreters across the divide and can even cause the church leadership to relegate the use of Scriptures to resolve their differences. Given the prevailing circumstances of division within the Kom Baptist Church, the study thus focused on understanding and appropriating the values of fellowship and love as taught in 1 John for the gain of this Christian community. This was under the hypothesis that both the ethical and theological values necessary for a harmonious Christian community particularly love, fellowship, forgiveness and an adequately honed Christology as expounded in 1 John pungently address the situation of Kom Baptist Church today.

John is interested in love with doctrinal purity, and not just love at all costs. Correct Christology is therefore very important in underlining the aspect of doctrinal purity in John's strategy of rebuilding his community. John is interested in love borne out of knowledge of the apostolic faith, untainted with doctrinal fallacies. This knowledge for John is rooted in the person of Jesus Christ. Such an adequate knowledge makes the believer to resist tendencies that can compromise his or her faith. So John's message has been to challenge members of his community to live in the light (1:5-10), to take Jesus Christ as their advocate in the issues they face in the community (2:1-2), to live a life of obedience (2:3-17), to love each other and to live in God's love (4:7-21). The key findings of the study revealed that the letter convincingly

addresses the issues that Christians of Kom Baptist Church struggle with. These issues include the following:

- The overriding purpose of John to strengthen fellowship (1 John 1:3), encourage love and avoid further breakdown. This has been shown to be justifiably addressing Kom Baptist Church which was seen to have witnessed a breakdown of fellowship.
- Forgiveness as a key ingredient of fellowship as taught in 1 John was demonstrated to be lacking amongst the Christians of Kom Baptist Church and many of its members live in bitterness thus an indication that they have failed to heed to the exhortation to confess sin and to love one another.
- There was is a Christological problem observed in Kom Baptist Church as evident in its low Christology given that although Christ is acknowledged as Lord, members of the church appeal to ancestors as mediators for their daily challenges. African Traditional Religion therefore is rife and engenders syncretism in the church. Just like the Johannine community, Kom Baptist Church Christians have failed to adequately draw the distinction of what is cultural from what is Christian.
- John's pastoral approach at resolving the conflict as evident in his persuasive style and the use of terms of endearment to address members of the community such as 'beloved' is a lesson for the leadership of the Kom Baptist Church that have resorted to litigation to the most part in resolving the conflict. John in dealing with the crisis appeals mainly to Scriptures and the apostolic faith but the use of Scriptures in resolving the Kom Baptist Church crisis was found to be wanting.

Evidently, both the ethical and theological exhortations enunciated in 1 John as hypothesized at the beginning of the study are relevant for Kom Baptist Church that witnessed an unprecedented tension in the 1990s leading to a

split of the congregations. The phenomenon was largely blamed on the absence of love in the church and lack of commitment or ignorance to the teachings of the Bible.

One of the main concerns of this study was to encourage the practice of values taught in 1 John among members of the Kom Baptist. Feeding the church with the findings of this dissertation will therefore be necessary, more especially as the leadership of the Church also participated in our focus group discussions and interviews. I therefore intend to share the findings of this dissertation with the leadership of Kom Baptist Church for their appreciation and digestion. This will serve as a launch pad for more discussions and examination of the issues raised in this study by members of this Christian community. The hope is that this will motivate the application of the values of 1 John in the community.

The church needs to revisit the Baptist distinctive features that it upholds, one of which is the belief that the Bible is the highest authority in matters of faith and practice. This calls for a re-evangelization and stronger discipleship in the church. Strong discipleship will entail an adequate use and modelling of Scriptures. What John focuses on is to assemble the basic fundamentals of the apostolic faith to weave them together in order to address those who remained in fellowship in his community. It is as if to say, in situations where the faith is in danger of becoming adulterated and syncretized, the key thing is to affirm and define what we have received as the truth and this comes through an adequate knowledge and application of Scriptures. The church therefore needs to revisit the Christian fundamentals of Christology, and ethics, the pre-occupations of 1 John as a way of rebuilding a divided community. This study found out that although the church has set this (Bible studies) as a value, it is not strongly applied.

The dissertation also demonstrated that 1 John challenges every Christian community to exhibit love as a greasing factor to stay united. It articulated that John is talking about an ethics of resemblance. Children are necessarily suppose to resemble their parents and given God's character, those who now

affirm that they are the children of God should demonstrate that through emulating Him and becoming light and love (1:5, 4:8) in their communities. For this to happen in Kom Baptist Church community, a number of things need to be adjusted. The leadership of the church needs to demonstrate a keen desire to pool resources together. There is an apparent anxiety among some of them of losing their employment or positions of influence once unity occurs. Over intellectualization reveals the latent competitive urge amongst the clergy. The dissertation therefore moved from the scholarly approach of global contextual hermeneutics where Africa is broadly seen as the context of application of Scriptures to a delineation of context to the particular socio-cultural group of the Kom people in North West Cameroon.



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## INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Dear respondent,

I am undertaking doctoral studies at the South African Theological Seminary on the topic: Living together in the community: the contemporary significance of 1 John to Kom Baptist Church. To achieve this purpose, I need to understand the background issues that motivated the split among the Baptist congregations in the Kom area. I therefore implore you to kindly use a few minutes of your time to fill the questionnaire below.

Name\_\_\_\_\_

Church\_\_\_\_\_

Village\_\_\_\_\_

1. What is it about the Baptist church that you like very much?
2. What in your opinion is/are the cause(s) of the crisis currently shaking the Baptist church in Kom?
3. What has been the impact of the crisis on: a) Your Christian growth? b) Both the spiritual and physical growth of your congregation?
4. What attempts have been made thus far to solve the crisis?
5. What in your opinion have been the weaknesses/strengths of these attempts?

6. What in your estimate is the ratio of Kom indigenes and non-indigenes membership in your congregation?

7. What in your opinion are the key values of the Kom culture that encourage living in togetherness?

9 a) How many times have you read 1 John or listened to a sermon expounded from it in the past three years?

b) What in your opinion are the values of 1 John that encourage living in togetherness

10. If you were asked to prescribe a solution to solving the crisis in the church what would that be and why?