

The Hope of Being Similar to God in 1 John 2:28–3:10

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ABSTRACT: Among the three Epistles of John, only the first one explicitly addresses the theme of hope (1 John 3:3), with a particular focus on believers' likeness to God. The pronouns *αὐτός* and *ἐκείνος*, used by the author in 3:2–3, are sometimes interpreted by exegetes as referring exclusively to either the Father or Christ. This article offers a resolution that reconciles these interpretations, arguing that the author's aim, as reflected in 1 John 2:28–3:10, is to present the history of salvation as a unified work of the one God: the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The hope of becoming like Him serves an evidently pragmatic function that can shape the believers' life and potentially inspire even those outside faith to foster social relationships characterised by mutual respect for life, fraternity, fairness and the fulfilment of rights, devoted service, forgiveness and peace. This study employs a synchronic approach, which involves the delimitation of the text and the definition of its structure in 1 John 2:28–3:10, a rhetorical analysis of this excerpt and a discussion focused on the pragmatic function of the *paraenesis* of becoming like God.

KEYWORDS: hope, similarity, God, eschatology, First Epistle of John, rhetorical analysis

Hope: if it were identical to faith, it would have no reason to exist. However, hope as motivation inspired by faith¹ in what cannot yet be seen but is expected as the true aim becomes the driving force of human activity to achieve specific good.² In Christian life, hope is born out of a meeting with God.³ Those who have met Him, have found hope and may share it with others, in particular when experiencing an existential crisis. A Christian knows that his or her life does not end in emptiness,⁴ which is why his or her hope is determined eschatologically and reaches beyond death.⁵ In three Epistles of John, this kind of hope is mentioned only once – in the first of them (3:3). Using *ἐλπὶς* as absolute *hapax* points to the

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1 Cf. M. Magrassi, "La speranza cristiana," *PSV* 9/1 (1984) 5.

2 Cf. J. Baur, "Die christliche Hoffnung über den Tod hinaus. 'Es ist noch nicht erschienen, was wir sein werden' (1 Joh 3,2)," *KD* 66/3 (2020) 262.

3 Cf. Benedict XVI, Encyclical Letter *Spe salvi*, 3.

4 Cf. Benedict XVI, Encyclical Letter *Spe salvi*, 2.

5 Cf. I. de la Potterie, "Speranza in Cristo e purificazione (1 Gv 3,3)," *PSV* 9/1 (1984) 227; Baur, "Die christliche Hoffnung über den Tod hinaus," 263.

exceptionality of the category under discussion,⁶ in particular as the pronouns αὐτός and ἐκεῖνος referring to it raise doubts as to their interpretation.⁷ Do they signify God the Father or Christ, who the believer shall resemble (3:2)? In the author's opinion, the most justified is to speak about becoming like God, whose saving work in its different aspects is presented by John to the addressees of his Letter. In the studies carried out so far, the significance of hope⁸ preached by John has been mentioned, but the unique approach to it as compared to the remaining texts of the New Testament or the pragmatic function of *paraenesis* concerning hope in 1 John 2:28–3:10 have failed to be recognised.

The shortages indicated justify the need for new exegetical explorations employing a synchronic approach oriented at the text in its final, i.e. canonical form. The text type determines the choice of rhetorical analysis as the fundamental research method. It focuses on the relationship between the linguistic elements contained in the text, such as lexemes, morphemes, syntactic structures, structural elements and thoughts. Their analysis at the level of segments in both parts of the indicated excerpt, with combined non-uniform symmetry,⁹ will make it possible to achieve the intended exegetical aims: define the One to whom a Christian should eventually bear similarity; determine the ways to achieve it and indicate its practical consequences in Christian and social life.

1. Delimitation and Literary Structure of 1 John 2:28–3:10

The delimitation of the indicated excerpt of the Letter is burdened with uncertainty.¹⁰ On the one hand, it is caused by the aphoristic nature of the Letter, on the other, by the difficulties with the allocation of verses 28 and 29,¹¹ whose placing in the oldest manuscripts from the 4th and 5th century is not unambiguous. An evident gap in the *scriptio continua* of the Codex Sinaiticus between the syllable TOY in the sixteenth (counting from the bottom) line of the first column of the Egyptian manuscript and the phrase ΕΑΝΕΙΔΗΤΕΟΤΙΔΙ in the seventeenth line allocates the abovementioned verses to different parts of the Letter. The Codex Vaticanus, however, does not include this distinction, while the Codex Alexandrinus indicates that the next fragment begins with the phrase ΙΔΕΤΕΠΟΤΑΠΗΝΑΓΑ

6 Cf. S. Hareźga, “‘Będziemy do Niego podobni’ – nadzieja chrześcijan według 1 J 3:1–3,” *WV* 9 (2006) 121.

7 Cf. R.E. Brown, *The Epistles of John. Translated with Introduction, Notes, and Commentary* (AB 30; New York: Doubleday 1982) 394–395.

8 Cf. R. Coggi, “Lo vediamo così come Egli è (1 Gv. 3,2),” *Sacra Doctrina* 27 (1982) 134–152; Hareźga, “‘Będziemy do Niego podobni’,” 121; D.A. Lee, “Hope in a Time of Change: A ‘Johannine’ Perspective (1 John 2:28–3:10),” *Hope. Challenging the Culture of Despair* (ed. C. Mostert) (ATF Series 13; Adelaide: ATF 2004) 21–47.

9 Cf. R. Meynet, *Traité de rhétorique biblique*, 3 ed. (RBSem 28; Leuven – Paris – Bristol, CT: Peeters 2021) 210.

10 Cf. H.-J. Klauck, *Der erste Johannesbrief* (EKKNT 23.1; Zürich – Neukirchen-Vluyn: Benziger – Neukirchen 1991) 170.

11 Cf. A.E. Brooke, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Johannine Epistles* (ICC; London: Bloomsbury 2014) 64.

in 3:1. The editors of the latest critical edition of the New Testament (Nestle-Aland 28) include fragment 2:28–3:10 in a broader literary unit ending with verse 3:24, which is unanimously defined by the eldest witnesses of the text as the end of the compact sequence of John's *paraenesis*.¹²

The ambiguous internal structure of the Letter is reflected in different proposals concerning its internal division, including highlighting the fragment on the hope of becoming like God.¹³ More often, however, the commentators accept the delimitation of the fragment as proposed in this study,¹⁴ which is confirmed by a number of text-related arguments.

Firstly, verse 2:28, as the beginning of the new section, is preceded by the initial formula καὶ νῦν and the noun τεκνίον expressed in the plural vocative.¹⁵ It is used – just like in 2:1.12; 3:18; 4:4; 5:21 – to animate the addressees of the Letter, and urge them to pay attention to the content of the next part of the *paraenesis*, which encourages the addressees to abide in God. This is expressed by the pronoun αὐτός in the dative, specified by the adjective 'righteous' (δίκαιος)¹⁶ in 2:29.

Secondly, the verb μένω in 2:28 is emphatic in its nature. On the one hand, it plays the connecting role between the excerpt analysed here and the previous section, where in 2:27 the author of the Letter recommends it to believers to remain in the anointing received from Christ.¹⁷ On the other, it accentuates the significance of the relationship with Jesus protecting those that believe in Him against false preaching, enabling them to have confidence (ἔχειν παρρησίαν) so that when God (in Christ) reveals Himself again

¹² E. Ruckstuhl comments on the section as part of an even larger fragment starting from 2:18. See E. Ruckstuhl, *Jakobusbrief, 1.-3. Johannesbrief* (NEchtB 17/19; Würzburg: Echter 1985) 50.

¹³ All the proposals cannot be cited here. However, the opinions of representative commentators are worth mentioning. E. Malatesta analyses section 2.29–3.10 but focuses on the theme of internal life, doing good and encouraging God's children to avoid sin. See E. Malatesta, *Interiority and Covenant. A Study of εἶναι ἐν and μένειν ἐν in the First Letter of Saint John* (AnBib 69; Rome: Biblical Institute Press 1978) 237. Identical section boundaries are determined by G. Giurisato in his study of the First Epistle (*Struttura e teologia della Prima Lettera di Giovanni. Analisi letteraria e retorica, contenuto teologico* [AnBib 138; Roma: Pontificio Istituto Biblico 1998] 423), while M. Morgen, because of the difficulties with the classification of 2:28–29, investigates them separately, also distinguishing the section 3:1–10 (see M. Morgen, *Les épîtres de Jean* [Commentaire Biblique: Nouveau Testament 19; Paris: Cerf 2005] 110, 116–118). G. Strecker places the pericope discussed here in the broad section 2:28–3:24 (G. Strecker, *The Johannine Letters. A Commentary on 1, 2, and 3 John* [Hermeneia; Minneapolis, MN: Fortress 1996] XLII), similarly to J.L. Houlden (*A Commentary on the Johannine Epistles*, 2 ed. [Black's New Testament Commentaries; London: Black 1994] 84–85).

¹⁴ Klauck, *Der erste Johannesbrief*, 170–171; J. Beutler, *Die Johannesbriefe* (RNT; Regensburg: Pustet 2000) 78–79; D. Rensberger, *The Epistles of John* (WBC 51; Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox 2001) 43; J. Painter, *1, 2, and 3 John* (SP 18; Collegeville, MN: Glazier 2002) 212; Lee, "Hope in a Time of Change," 21; D.F. Watson, *The Letters of John* (New Cambridge Bible Commentary; Cambridge – New York: Cambridge University Press 2024) 79–80.

¹⁵ Cf. R. Fabris, *Lettere di Giovanni* (Nuovo Testamento – commento esegetico e spirituale; Roma: Città Nuova 2007) 64.

¹⁶ Cf. B. Findlayson, *The Epistles of John. A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Sydney: Pumpkin Cottage Publications 2021) 63.

¹⁷ Cf. J.P. Heil, *1–3 John. Worship by Loving God and One Another to Live Eternally* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books 2015) 103.

(φανερῶ), comes again (παρουσία), they will not feel ashamed (αἰσχύνομαι). The message of the *paraenesis*¹⁸ used by the Letter's author is strengthened by the phonetic similarity of the components of his statement (*parechesis*).¹⁹ It introduces a new sequence of instructions, thematically compact and based on oppositions, different from the previous considerations of the Letter's author, who, in 2:27, ends the theme of false preachers described as antichrists (2:18, 22).²⁰ According to G. Giurisato, this new sequence should include the antithetical verses 2:29 and 3:10.²¹ Nevertheless, righteousness and coming from God, which is already mentioned in 2:29, becomes intertwined with a reflection on the hope of God's children, consistently developed in the next verses of the Letter. Moreover, a clear distinction between God's children and the devil's children in 3:10 links this verse lexically with the context of 3:4–9, which precedes it directly, where sin and being born from God are discussed.

Thirdly, the internal division of the new sequence of instructions, subordinated to the hope of becoming like God, is determined by extended sequences containing the generalising formula: *πᾶς* – 'everyone', *πᾶς ὁ ποιῶν* – 'everyone who acts' (2:29; 3:4), *ὁ ποιῶν* – 'the person who acts' (3:7.8), *πᾶς ὁ ἔχων* – 'everyone who has' (3:3), *πᾶς ὁ [...]* *μένων* – 'one who remains' (3:6), *πᾶς ὁ ἁμαρτάνων* – 'one who sins' (3:6), *πᾶς ὁ γεγεννημένος* – 'one who is begotten' (3:9).²²

Fourthly, the regularities observed in excerpt 2:28–3:10 make it possible to distinguish smaller thematic units of the text. Because of the vocabulary used in them, they may be titled, respectively, 'Hope of God's children' (2:28–3:3) and 'God's children and the devil's children' (3:4–10).²³ This division precisely determines the order of further exegetical work on the fragment of the Letter analysed here. An important tool facilitating the discovery of its theological perspectives is rhetorical analysis.²⁴

2. Rhetorical Analysis of 1 John 2:28–3:10 in Context

Accurate understanding of the structure of the studied text makes it possible to determine its function and define the message conveyed by the Letter's author using certain literary

18 Cf. A. Pitta – F. Filannino, *L'officina del Nuovo Testamento. Retorica e stilistica* (StudBib 57; Roma: Gregorian & Biblical Press 2023) 338.

19 Cf. Pitta – Filannino, *L'officina del Nuovo Testamento*, 321.

20 Cf. I.H. Marshall, *The Epistles of John* (NICNT; Grand Rapids, MI – Cambridge: Eerdmans 1978) 164.

21 Cf. Giurisato, *Struttura e teologia della Prima Lettera di Giovanni*, 424.

22 Cf. J.M. Lieu, *I, II & III John. A Commentary* (NTL; Louisville, KY – London: Westminster John Knox 2008) 117.

23 This kind of a division is also advocated by Marshall, *The Epistles of John*, 28; cf. J.R.W. Stott, *The Letters of John. An Introduction and Commentary*, 2 ed. (TNTC 19; Leicester – Grand Rapids, MI: InterVarsity – Eerdmans 1988): '1. Christ's future appearing (2:28–3:3); 2. Christ's past appearing (3:4–10)'.

24 Cf. Pontifical Biblical Commission, *The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church*, 34.

means of expression.²⁵ They make the material for theological argumentation²⁶ employing the hermeneutical spiral process, which justifies the Christian hope of becoming like God shared by all believing in Him, abiding in the Father and Son by anointment by the Holy Spirit (2:20, 27).²⁷ It evidently lays the foundation for being God's child, which is naturally contrasted in the First Epistle of John with being the devil's child. It is worth exploring this stark contrast as for John it does not express an idea inasmuch as the spiritual condition of the addressees of the *paraenesis*, who are walking in the light and being cleansed from all sin by the Blood of Jesus (1:7; cf. 1:6).

2.1. Hope of God's Children (2:28–3:3)

Verse 28, which introduces the next part of the author's argumentation, is an example of literary *parrhesia* (license). In an emotional manner, the author addresses his audience in candid speech²⁸ expressing his faith openly and thus striving to strengthen the community²⁹ close to him, which he describes as 'children' (τεκνία).³⁰

Apart from the First Epistle of John, this noun is only used once in the entire Christian Bible, i.e. in John 13:33, where, used by Jesus to refer to His disciples gathered in the Cenacle, it expresses the attitude of an elder to younger men.³¹ It has exactly the same meaning in the exhortation in 1 John 2:28 and in his other speeches referred to in the Letter. They include an encouragement to stop sinning (2:1); a firm assurance that their sins will be forgiven (2:12); a call to love not in word or speech but in deed and truth (3:18), and as they come from God and conquered antichrists (4:4), they should also, in accordance with John's call, be on guard against idols (5:21). In all the abovementioned cases, the emotionally charged word 'children' expresses the privileged position the speaker enjoys as an authority in the community of believers but, above all, it conveys his tenderness.³² The display of it inclines the addressees to abide (μένω) in God, pursuant to the spiritual instruction³³ under the anointment received (2:27).³⁴

²⁵ Cf. A. Posadzy, "W kierunku lepszego rozumienia Biblii – metoda analizy retorycznej," *CTO* 1 (2002) 11.

²⁶ Spiral argumentation denotes the process of reasoning in which the author in its discourse returns to key statements, which are gradually expanded by new themes. Cf. J.A. Du Rand, "A Discourse Analysis of 1 John," *Neot* 13 (1978) 2.

²⁷ Cf. Brown, *The Epistles of John*, 372–373.

²⁸ Cf. Lieu, *I, II & III John*, 116.

²⁹ Cf. Pitta – Filannino, *L'officina del Nuovo Testamento*, 338.

³⁰ This term does not feature in 1 John at all. Speaking of a community, the author of the Letter uses the term κοινωνία, which means co-participation not just with witnesses of faith but above all with the Father and His Son – Jesus Christ (1:3, 6, 7) in unity with the truth, which is the Spirit (5:6).

³¹ Cf. F. Manns, "The Christology of the First Letter of John," *Liber Scripturae. Miscellanea in onore del prof. P. Francesco Tudda ofm* (eds. V. Lopasso – S. Parisi) (Teologia e Teologi 3; Soveria Mannelli: Rubbettino 2002) 75.

³² Cf. B.F. Westcott, *The Epistles of St John. The Greek Text with Notes and Essays*, 2 ed. (Cambridge – London: Macmillan 1886) 81.

³³ Cf. Marshall, *The Epistles of John*, 164.

³⁴ I. de la Potterie identifies 'anointing' mentioned by John as 'internal speech, teaching by the Spirit' (la parole intérieure, l'enseignement par l'Esprit). Cf. I. de la Potterie, "L'impeccabilité du chrétien d'après 1 Joh., 3,6–9,"

By using the verb μένω in the imperative form of the present tense for the second person plural, the Letter's author recapitulates the instructions contained in 2:18–27. Then, using the conjunction ἵνα, he introduces an intentional phrase (the reason why to abide) with the structure of microchiasmus³⁵ containing parallelisms. In the scheme of both segments of the statement in 2:28 presented below, they correspond to the elements in bold, following the abb'a' pattern:

Καὶ νῦν, τέκνία, μένετε ἐν αὐτῷ,	And now, children, remain in him
ἵνα ἐὰν φανερωθῇ, (a)	so that when he appears, (a)
σχωμεν παρησίαν (b)	[we may] have confidence (b)
καὶ μὴ αἰσχυνθώμεν ³⁶ ἀπ' αὐτοῦ (b')	and not [be put] to shame by him, (b')
ἐν τῇ παρουσίᾳ αὐτοῦ. (a')	at his <u>coming</u> , (a')

The symmetry of the statement is based on parallels concerning the manifestation of God in Christ (a) and His Second Coming (a') as well as having confidence (b) and not being ashamed (b'). It should be noted that these dependencies are intensified by the assonance of the forms of the terms used, which combine the experience of Parousia with Christian boldness towards God,³⁷ fully dependent on abiding in God and the Son (2:24; cf. John 14:20). This eschatologically motivated need to remain in unity with Him must have its consequences in the presence of the Letter's addressees and in the hope in which they live (cf. 4:17). The reappearance of God in the coming of Christ – or His revelation – is not a question of probability but of time.³⁸ This must have been emphasised by the copyists in the Byzantine text (Byz) and in the minuscules supporting it (307, 436, 442, 1175, 1448, 1611) by replacing the conjunction ἐὰν (if/when) with firmer ὅταν (when).³⁹ Nevertheless ἐὰν, preserved in the Critical Text, invites the reader to follow the events related to Christian revelation.⁴⁰ What was the reason for choosing revelation? It is indicated by the verb φανερώω used in the analysed part of the second segment. Apart from 2:28, this term can be found eight more times in the Second Epistle of John. It appears twice in the prologue, where the revelation of life is mentioned (ἡ ζωή), which is synonymous with eternal life (ἡ ζωὴ αἰώνιος) that was with the Father (1:2) and was given to us with the incarnation

L'Évangile de Jean. Études et Problèmes (eds. M.-É. Boismard *et al.*) (RechBib 3; Paris: Desclée de Brouwer 1958) 175. J. Painter, on the other hand, defines 'anointment' as figurative but admits its understanding as baptism, which seems fully justified. Cf. Painter, *1, 2, and 3 John*, 198; R. Osculati, *La Prima Lettera di Giovanni* (Lecture dal Nuovo Testamento; Milano: Istituto Propaganda Libreria 1979) 39.

35 Cf. Heil, *1–3 John*, 6.

36 Used in 1 John 2:28 in the aorist middle form of the verb αἰσχύνω, it is an absolute *hapax legomenon* in the entire work of John.

37 Cf. J.G. van der Watt, "Ethics in First John: A Literary and Socioscientific Perspective," *CBQ* 61/3 (1999) 307.

38 Cf. S.S. Smalley, *1, 2, and 3 John* (WBC 51; Nashville, TN: Zondervan 2008) 128.

39 B. Corsini notes that ἐὰν with the aorist form may express certainty when the condition is certain or the consequences are considered certain by the author writing or thinking about it. Cf. B. Corsani, *Guida allo studio del greco del Nuovo Testamento*, 2 ed. (Roma: Società Biblica Britannica e Forestiera 1994) 228.

40 Cf. R.L. Plummer – E. R. Elledge, *1–3 John* (EGGNT; Nashville, TN: B&H Academic 2024) 69.

of the Son, opening the way forward to have fellowship with Him.⁴¹ In 2:19, the deserters, who did not share the spirit with the addressees of John's Letter, appear. Twice in 3:2, the term φανερώ refers to them and who they will become in the future, together with the Letter's author, when they see God as He is. The next two examples of the use of the above-mentioned verb refer to Christ, who was revealed to take away sins (3:5) and destroy the works of the devil (3:8). Finally, God sent His only Son into the world thereby revealing His love for people (4:9). Experiencing it through the gift of anointing received from the Holy One (2:20) in baptism⁴² is the reason for boldness which, motivated by hope, cannot become the cause of shame for believers in the hour of the Second Coming of Christ and God's revelation⁴³ (!). Is this anointment and instruction on Christ being the Son of God sufficient? Verse 29, in the form of an enthymeme, claims it is not:

ἐὰν εἰδῇτε (a)	If you consider , (a)	<i>Major premise</i>
ὅτι δίκαιός ἐστιν, (b)	that he is <u>righteous</u> , (b)	
γινώσκετε (a')	You also know (a')	<i>Minor premise</i>
ὅτι καὶ πᾶς ὁ ποιῶν τὴν δικαιοσύνην (b')	that everyone who acts in <u>righteousness</u> , (b')	
ἐξ αὐτοῦ γεγέννηται. (c)	is begotten by him. (c)	<i>Conclusion</i>

The argumentation presented to the readers ignores the premise clear for the author,⁴⁴ i.e. that the anointed acts in a righteous way, just like the Father (assuming that the adjective δίκαιός⁴⁵ refers to Him) (cf. 1:9).⁴⁶ Repeated in 3:7, it is not the only criterion of recognising those who are born (γεννάω) from God⁴⁷ through faith. This fact, according to the Letter's author, is additionally confirmed by freedom from committing sins (3:9) and the influence of evil (5:18), mutual love of believers for each other (4:7) and their faith in Christ (5:1), which enables them to conquer the world (5:4). The encouragement to adopt this position is expressed using the conjunction ἐὰν (if), which introduces a positive premise that the Letter's readers are aware of the Father's justice⁴⁸ implied by His holiness,⁴⁹ and consider

⁴¹ Cf. R. Schnackenburg, *Die Johannesbriefe* (HThKNT 13; Freiburg – Basel – Wien: Herder 1984) 164.

⁴² Cf. C.H. Dodd, "The First Epistle of John and Fourth Gospel," *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library* 21/1 (1937) 153.

⁴³ R.E. Brown indicates the proximity of John's concept of linking boldness (παρρησία) and not being put to shame with the thought, present in Prov 13:5, that the just one hates the words of the unjust one, and that the godless will be ashamed and will not have boldness. According to New York's exegete, the idea of being ashamed on the judgement day is common with Isa 1:24, 29 and Jer 2:35–36. Cf. R.E. Brown, *The Epistles of John*, 381.

⁴⁴ Cf. H. Lausberg, *Elemente der literarischen Rhetorik. Eine Einführung für Studierende der klassischen, romanischen, englischen und deutschen Philologie*, 10 ed. (München: Hueber 1990) § 371.

⁴⁵ To denote justice as a synonym for saintness and being fair with respect to God and people, the Hebrew Bible uses, respectively, the terms נָחַם and צָדִיק (see Gen 6:9; 15:6; Ex 9:27; Neh 9:33; Ps 58[57]:11; 92[91]:13).

⁴⁶ Cf. Findlayson, *The Epistles of John*, 63.

⁴⁷ Being born of God (Spirit) is one of the key theological categories of John's Gospel introduced in the prologue (1:13) and developed in the dialogue of Jesus with Nicodemus (3:3, 4[x2], 5, 6[x2], 7, 8). Indirectly, albeit erroneously, it is credited to the adversaries of Jesus when they indicate God as their Father (8:41).

⁴⁸ Cf. Giuriso, *Struttura e teologia della Prima Lettera di Giovanni*, 428.

⁴⁹ Cf. Brown, *The Epistles of John*, 383; however B.F. Westcott equates righteousness credited to Jesus with His divine nature. Cf. Westcott, *The Epistles of St John*, 84.

the righteous ones, whose conduct is favoured by God, to be born from Him. This procedure serves to attract the readers and make them believe that they are on the side of the writer.⁵⁰ Even more – by identifying with him, they share his hope and accept his way of thinking as their own. This reasoning is different from the logic of the world that does not know the sublime dignity of being God's children. What is the cause of it and what is this quality, unknown to the world? What is its value?

The Letter's author answers these questions in 3:1. Reversing the natural, i.e. formal-logical, order of reasoning there, he presents to the addressees first the result and then the premise that determines it (*hysteron-proteron*):⁵¹

Ἰδετε ποταπὴν ἀγάπην δέδωκεν ἡμῖν ὁ πατήρ,
ἵνα τέκνα θεοῦ κληθώμεν, καὶ ἐσμὲν.

See what love the Father has bestowed on us
that we may be called the children of God. Yet so we are.

διὰ τοῦτο ὁ κόσμος οὐ γινώσκει ἡμᾶς,

The reason the world **does not know us**,

(hysteron)

ὅτι οὐκ ἔγνω αὐτόν.

is that **it did not know him**.

(proteron)

This rhetorical figure adds dynamics the author's message and lets the thought go forward. The imperative form ἴδετε, present in the first segment of the statement, focuses the readers' attention not on the ignorance of the world (ὁ κόσμος) completely opposed to God, but on the love of the Father, which was given once and for all and gives man the hope of perfecting himself in it. The irrevocable nature of this gift is indicated by the use of the verb δίδωμι in the past perfect tense.⁵²

Of the New Testament authors, John refers most often to love expressed by the noun ἀγάπη and the verb ἀγαπάω. This predominance is particularly evident in the First Epistle. Out of the 42 occurrences of both terms, as many as 23 are related to God. Thus, he is talking about the love of God (2:5; 3:16, 17; 4:7–12, 16, 19) and the Father (2:15; 3:1), of which He is the subject and source, with which He loves Himself and which He desires to share with His creation,⁵³ therefore it should also be shown to Him by people (4:19–21; 5:2, 3), who are encouraged by the Letter's author to practice brotherly love (2:10; 3:11, 14[x2], 18, 23; 4:7[x2], 8, 10–12, 17, 18[x3], 20, 21; 5:2). Only twice is the world the object of love expressed with ἀγαπάω (2:15). Turning toward it entails ignorance of God (2:15), who John defines as love (4:8, 16). And its most perfect expression is the offering of the Son (4:9) for our sins and those of the entire world (2:2; 4:9.10). Whoever accepts this personal gift of God's generous love in truth becomes by faith a partaker of the divine nature,⁵⁴ earning the title of God's child. However, this is not an empty title without any reference to the essence, as the first addressees of the Letter, raised in the Hellenistic

50 Cf. remarks on the persuasive function of an enthymeme in J. Walker, "The Body of Persuasion: A Theory of the Enthymeme," *College English* 56/1 (1994) 53.

51 Cf. Lausberg, *Elemente der literarischen Rhetorik*, § 413.

52 Cf. C. Spicq, *Agapè dans le Nouveau Testament. Analyse des textes* (EBib 3; Paris: Lecoq 1959) 254.

53 Cf. Spicq, *Agapè dans le Nouveau Testament*, 247.

54 Cf. Spicq, *Agapè dans le Nouveau Testament*, 254.

culture, might have thought.⁵⁵ Being born of God (1 John 3:9; 4:7; 5:1, 4, 18; cf. John 1:12), or of water and the Spirit (John 3:5) or the Spirit alone (3:6, 8), as explicitly mentioned in the Fourth Gospel, occurs by virtue of faith in Jesus Christ and involves baptism.⁵⁶ In Christian life, instead of being the culmination of God's work, it marks its beginning. For love is to strive for perfection within believers as they keep God's teaching (1 John 2:5). And it is this eternal love that brings about a qualitative change in their lives – they become God's children⁵⁷ worthy of the hope of beholding their likeness to the Father. At the level of the syntagma in 1 John 3:1, this explanation captures the typical use of ἵνα with a conjunction⁵⁸ in John's writings, which resonates with an undisguised rapture – 'that we may be called the children of God. Yet so we are.' Since this attribute of believers in Christ is supernatural (cf. John 1:13), it remains naturally unrecognisable to the world, which is unaware that God-Love and Christ, who has fully revealed it, are the cause behind it.⁵⁹ However, regardless of the world's attitude, for the addressees of John's *paraenesis*, who are called 'beloved' (ἀγαπητοί) (2:7; 3:2, 21; 4:1, 7, 11), the privilege of being God's children is an essential premise in defining the ultimate purpose of their lives – what they will be like when they see God⁶⁰ (cf. Matt 5:8; 1 Cor 13:12; Rev 22:4),⁶¹ which is considered in 3:2:

ἀγαπητοὶ νῦν τέκνα θεοῦ ἐσμεν,
καὶ οὐπω ἐφανερώθη τί ἐσόμεθα.
οἶδαμεν ὅτι ἐὰν φανερωθῇ, ὅμοιοι αὐτῷ ἐσόμεθα,
ὅτι ὁψόμεθα αὐτόν, καθὼς ἐστιν.

Beloved, we are God's children now;
what we **shall be** has **not yet been revealed**
We do know that when **it is revealed**, we shall **be like** him,
for we shall see him as he is.

The tension between what is ('we are God's children', 'we do know') and what will be ('not yet revealed', 'we shall be', 'it is revealed', 'we shall [...] be like', 'we shall see'), who believers are now and what God is, is highlighted in the excerpt cited above by the anadiplosis used. It is formed there by the appositionally repeated (having a similar inflectional form)⁶² verbs εἶμι (to be) and φανερώω (to reveal) within two complex-compound sentences. They

55 Cf. A.V. Cernuda, "La filiación divina según καὶ en 1 Jn 2,29 y 3,1," *EstBib* 36/1–2 (1977) 88.

56 Cf. Beutler, *Die Johannesbriefe*, 82.

57 Cf. Harežga, "Będziemy do Niego podobni," 124.

58 Cf. C.F. Moule, *An Idiom Book of New Testament Greek*, 2 ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1960) 145–146.

59 Cf. Painter, *1, 2, and 3 John*, 220.

60 According to E.J. Jezierska, God's children referred to in 3:2 'contain both expectation and hope.' See E.J. Jezierska, "Eschatologiczne podobieństwo do Chrystusa (1 J 3,2) kresem upodobnienia się do Niego w doczesności (2 Kor 3,18)," *"Sanctificetur Nomen Tuum" (Mt 6,9). Księga pamiątkowa dedykowana Księdzu Profesorowi Januszowi Czernieckiemu z okazji 65. rocznicy urodzin i 38 lat pracy naukowo-dydaktycznej* (eds. B. Polok – K. Ziaja) (OBT 40; Opole: Wydział Teologiczny Uniwersytetu Opolskiego 2000) 153.

61 Many exegetes believe that the pronoun αὐτός used in 3:2, refers to Christ arguing that the aorist φανερώω used in the sentence corresponds to the Parousia mentioned in 2:28, where the protagonist is Jesus. See Westcott, *The Epistles of St John*, 98; Beutler, *Die Johannesbriefe*, 83–84; Smalley, *1, 2, and 3 John*, 147; Painter, *1, 2, and 3 John*, 220. Nevertheless, others sustain the interpretation that it reveals the similarity of Christians to God the Father: R. Schnackenburg, *Die Johannesbriefe*, 170; Brown, *The Epistles of John*, 394–395; Klauck, *Der erste Johannesbrief*, 179, or Giurisato, *Struttura e teologia della Prima Lettera di Giovanni*, 429.

62 Cf. Lausberg, *Elemente der literarischen Rhetorik*, § 251.

have a deictic function. As hook-words (mot-crochet), they attract the readers' attention, indicating the momentous importance of the two terms mentioned in the argument John is developing.⁶³ Together with the verb of perception ὁράω (to look), they are crucial to understand the text under analysis.⁶⁴ The novelty announced by the author using them does not consist of an identity change but the viewing of God.⁶⁵ It will not be a circumstance for them (even those chosen by Him!), such as in Gen 32:3; Ex 33:23; Judg 6:22–23; Isa 6:5, which involves the risk of the loss of life, but it will prove to be a prerogative testifying to the fullness of having Him in eternity (cf. 2 Cor 3:18; 1 Thess 4:17). At the same time, the possibility to see God is what distinguishes the status of His children now (cf. John 14:8–9) from their status when they become like Him (1 John 3:2; cf. Gen 1:26).⁶⁶ What those born of God full of hope expect today will be fulfilled. What, then, can this likeness to God realised in love consist of? What will allow it to be revealed and how is it expressed in the syntagma?

In addition to the adjective ὅμοιος (similar/like)⁶⁷ and the adverb καθώς (like/as) (see 2:6; 3:3, 7, 12; 4:17), which in 3:2 introduce a comparison, the mimetic categories used in the First Epistle of John include the indicative pronoun οὗτος (this), which is present in 4:11, and the conjunction καί (and), which appears in 3:6; 4:11, 17. The indicated forms are performative and existential in nature.⁶⁸

The first type (2:6; 3:3, 12, 16; 4:11) points to the imitation of all actions,⁶⁹ exemplified by God doing the saving work through His Son. The believer's task, therefore, is to follow, just like Christ did⁷⁰ (2:6). The verb περιπατέω, which expresses this action, functions as a metaphor describing the course of action (cf. John 13:15; 15:10).⁷¹ It primarily involves offering one's life (τιθήμι) for the brethren (3:16). This is clearly indicated in 2:1–2 by the image of Christ as the Paraclete with the Father, and the atoning sacrifice for our sins and those of the entire world, which opened the way for God's children to be morally cleansed (ἁγνίζω),⁷² just as Christ is pure and as God is undefiled⁷³ (3:3; cf. Matt 5:48).

63 Cf. Pitta – Filannino, *L'officina del Nuovo Testamento*, 32.

64 Cf. Giurisato, *Struttura e teologia della Prima Lettera di Giovanni*, 36–39, 58–59.

65 Cf. Giurisato, *Struttura e teologia della Prima Lettera di Giovanni*, 428.

66 Cf. Giurisato, *Struttura e teologia della Prima Lettera di Giovanni*, 429.

67 The term ὅμοιος is absolute *hapax* in the First Letter of John.

68 Cf. C. Bennema, *Mimesis in the Johannine Literature. A Study in Johannine Ethics* (LNTS 498; London: Clark – Bloomsbury 2017) 59–62.

69 Cf. Bennema, *Mimesis in the Johannine Literature*, 62.

70 Cf. Schnackenburg, *Die Johannesbriefe*, 166; D.M. Smith, *First, Second, and Third John* (IBC; Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox 1991) 78. However, as rightly noted by J. Painter, the differences in the use of the pronoun ἐκεῖνος in John's Epistles (John 8:42 – it applies to the Father; 8:44 – it applies to the devil; 1 John 5:16 – it applies to the sin leading to death), make it impossible to link it unambiguously to Christ. Hence, the term in 2:6 is rather emphatic in its nature. Cf. Painter, *1, 2, and 3 John*, 170.

71 Cf. Painter, *1, 2, and 3 John*, 170.

72 Cf. Harežga, “Będziemy do Niego podobni,” 130.

73 Unlike G. Giurisato, R.E. Brown and G.L. Parsenios supports the opinion of the majority of exegetes stating that the pronoun ἐκεῖνος, used in 3:3 – as well as in 2:6 – refers to Christ. Cf. Brown, *The Epistles of John*, 397; G.L. Parsenios, *First, Second, and Third John* (PCNT; Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic 2014) 93;

Since Christ is the mediator on this path of purification, He, too – being the image of the Father (cf. John 14:9; 2 Cor 4:4; Col 1:15) – remains the divine-human measure of unique hope (ἐλπίς)⁷⁴ for those who believe in Him. The special role of hope in John's *paraenesis*, and above all its particular depiction, can only be seen against the background of other New Testament texts. The object of hope mentioned in them varies. It includes matters of everyday life, but also the hope of the fulfilment of the promise of salvation and participation in God's glory.⁷⁵

Meanwhile, the hope that John speaks of in his First Epistle appears to be the most personalistic and theocentric because it is oriented toward man's encounter with God in eternity, without omitting Christ's participation. The hope that John shares with his addressees is an important factor motivating the ethical life of Christ's followers. In what John says about hope, there is no room for alternatives. For anyone who permanently possesses it (ὁ ἔχων) should act righteously like Christ (3:7) and live his or her life and in accordance with his or her expectations as to what he or she shall see having faith thanks to Him. Thus, a Christian

Giurisato, *Struttura e teologia della Prima Lettera di Giovanni*, 431. On the other hand, R.B. Edwards leaves the issue of the identification of this pronoun open (cf. R.B. Edwards, *The Johanne Epistles* [NTG; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press 1996] 76), which seems reasonable. If the Letter's author had wanted to use pronouns precisely and identify objects, he would have definitely made it clear for the reader. However, as he is trying to convince them to abide in the community (κοινωνία) with the Father and Son (1:3, 6, 7) by the anointment with the Spirit (3:24; 4:13), it may be assumed that he attempts to accentuate more the unity of God's work in the history of salvation without abandoning clear attributes where necessary.

⁷⁴ Cf. Harežga, "Będziemy do Niego podobni," 126.

⁷⁵ Here, hope refers to the Biblical idea of saving from the decay of death (Acts 2:26–27), the resurrection of the dead (Acts 23:6; 24:14; 26:6–7; 1 Thess 4:13), the fulfilment of the promises made to Israel (Acts 28:20), participation in God's grace/salvation/rewards in heaven/rewards (legacy) of eternal life (Rom 5:2, 4, 5, 20; 8:20, 24[x2]; 12:12; 15:4, 13[x2]; Eph 1:18; 2:12; 4:4; Col 1:5, 23, 27; 1 Thess 2:19; 5:8; 2 Thess 2:16; Titus 1:2; 2:13; 3:7; Heb 3:6; 6:11, 18; 7:19; 10:23; 1 Pet 1:3, 21; 3:15) and abiding in glory (2 Cor 3:12), possessing spiritual good (1 Cor 9:10[x2]; 13:13), confidence in Jesus Christ (1 Thess 1:3; 1 Tim 1:1), ability to endure suffering (2 Cor 1:7), growing in faith (2 Cor 10:15), awaiting righteousness (Gal 5:5) and not be put to shame (Phil 1:20). In other cases, it refers to expected offspring (Rom 4:18[x2]), material gains (Acts 16:19) or being saved from death (Acts 27:20). Apart from the noun denoting hope, one should also look into the verb ἐλπίζω, which expresses this idea. In the New Testament, it can be found 31 times: in the sense of putting hope in Christ (Matt 12:21; cf. Isa 42:1–4), expecting the repayment of a credit (Luke 6:34), seeing a sign (Luke 23:8), redeeming Israel (Luke 24:21), putting trust in Moses (John 5:45) and expecting money in the form of a bribe (Acts 24:26). Hope also refers to the fulfilment of God's promise made to generations of Israel (Acts 26:7); and salvation (Rom 8:24, 25). It applies to having hope in Jesse's Messianic descendant (Rom 15:12) and meeting the addresses of the Letter (Rom 15:24; 2 John 12; 3 John 14), to hope as such (1 Cor 13:7) and having hope in Christ limited to our temporality (1 Cor 15:19). Additionally, it is mentioned in the context of an expectation to spend some time with Christians in Corinth (1 Cor 16:7), delivery from death (2 Cor 1:10), understanding Paul's words that on the day of the Second Coming of Christ, the Apostle will boast of Corinthians and they will boast of him (2 Cor 1:13), and that nothing is hidden in your conscience (2 Cor 5:11). Hope refers to the sacrificial position of the Churches of Macedonia (2 Cor 8:5), a conviction held by the addresses of the Letter that Paul has not been rejected by Christ (2 Cor 13:6), trust in Jesus Christ as the principle of action (Phil 2:19, 23); and a visitation (1 Tim 3:14). Additionally, there is hope in the living God, who is the Savior of all people (1 Tim 4:10; 5:5; 1 Pet 3:5) and richly provides us with everything (1 Tim 6:17). Hope applies to the return to the Letter's addresses (Phlm 1:22) and to what we do not see (Heb 11:1). Finally, there is grace that will be brought to Christians at the revelation of Jesus Christ (1 Pet 1:13).

must not act like (καθώς) biblical Cain, in whom the author of the First Epistle of John sees the prototype of a man gripped by hatred⁷⁶ and its embodiment coming from Evil (ἐκ τοῦ πονηροῦ ἦν) (1 John 3:12; cf. 3:10).⁷⁷ Human relations should definitely reflect God’s attitude toward people, which is also expressed by the conditional sentence: ‘if (εἰ οὕτως) God so loved us, [then] (καί) we also must love one another’ (4:11).

The second type of comparison constructed by John is related to the similarity of Christians’ state of existence (3:2, 77⁷⁸; 4:17) to that of God. The personal pronoun αὐτός used in 3:2 points precisely to Him, as justified by the earlier mention of God as the giver of eternal life (2:25) and the closest reference to the one who has bestowed love on us (3:1; cf. 4:16). In the theology of the First Epistle of John, however, God is first and foremost the Father (πατήρ), as pointed out by the author as many as twelve times (1:2, 3; 2:1, 13–16, 22–24; 3:1; 4:14). Therefore, if love expresses the essence of God’s fatherhood, then His children must be like Him in terms of love, too. Therefore, once love has reached its end in them on earth, they can remain bold on the judgment day, which *ibid.* John’s Epistle appears as certain as (καθώς) the fact that God is in heaven and His children are still in this world (4:17).

The light in which God’s children walk and abide there (1:7; 2:8–11) is the reason for the contrast. For by living in the hope of seeing God and becoming like Him, acting like Christ, believers stand in opposition to the devil’s children. The criteria for recognising them are provided by John in the second part of the *paraenesis* examined here, free from the temptation to compromise with the world.

2.2. Children of God and Children of the Devil (3:4–10)

In the second part of the analysed excerpt from the Epistle, the reflection opens with verse 3:4, with opposing content to the one preceding it. The extracted segment has a chiasmic structure, which follows the abb’a’ pattern, and ends syntactically with the syllogism ‘for sin is lawlessness’.⁷⁹

Πᾶς ὁ ποιῶν (a)	τὴν ἁμαρτίαν (b)	Everyone who commits (a)	sin (b)
καὶ τὴν ἀνομίαν (b’)	ποιεῖ, (a’)	lawlessness (b’)	commits (a’)
καὶ ἡ ἁμαρτία ἐστὶν ἡ ἀνομία. (c)		for sin is lawlessness (c) ⁸⁰	

76 Cf. Plummer – Elledge, *1–3 John*, 85.
77 Cf. R.W. Yarbrough, *1–3 John* (BECNT; Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic 2008) 199.
78 C. Bennema notes the performative aspect of the comparison contained in 3:7. See Bennema, *Mimesis in the Johannine Literature*, 60.
79 Referring to the Septuagint and rabbinic literature, F. Manns proposes that the phrase ἡ ἁμαρτία ἐστὶν ἡ ἀνομία (3:4) should be rendered as ‘sin is Belial, i.e. one who rejects the yoke of the law’ (‘le péché, c’est Bélial, c’est-à-dire celui qui fait rejeter le joug de la loi’). See F. Manns, “«Le péché, c’est Bélial» 1 Jn: 3,4 à lumière du judaïsme,” *RevScRel* 62/1 (1988) 9.
80 This word order is not allowed by English syntax. The phrase should read: ‘Everyone who commits sin, commits lawlessness, for sin is lawlessness.’

The statement begins with the generalising formula $\pi\alpha\varsigma \delta \pi\omicron\iota\omega\upsilon\upsilon$ (everyone who commits),⁸¹ preferred by the author. Unlike in the parallel phrases in 2:29 and 3:7, 10, which apply to righteousness, in 3:4.8 the object of the action introduced by it is sin.⁸² The present tense of the verb forms in the studied segment indicates the repetitiveness of the actions expressed with them, i.e. the permanent quality of the sinner,⁸³ which testifies to his attachment to evil. It should also be noted that the sin referred to by the Letter's author does not involve a breach of a commandment or law only, but as such it is considered to be lawlessness (c).⁸⁴ This idea is not a literary copycat of the Jewish thought in which such lexemes as ἡ ἀδικία (injustice), ἡ ἁμαρτία (sin) and ἡ ἀνομία (lawlessness) were treated interchangeably as synonyms.⁸⁵ In 1 John 3:4, lawlessness means more – it is a condition of disbelief,⁸⁶ opposition to just God (1:9; cf. 2:9; 3:7), who is love (4:8, 16). Therefore, lawlessness becomes clearly linked to the hour of the coming of the antichrist and his supporters (2:18),⁸⁷ imitators of Cain (3:12; cf. John 8:44), who, like the devil, reject being God's children, do not have love and remain in death (3:14); hate and become murderers (3:15a), which is why they do not have eternal life in them (3:15b), and – not resembling God,⁸⁸ *de facto* become His opponents.⁸⁹ The axis of contrast between them and the Letter's addressees is the relationship with Christ. He is indicated by the pronoun ἐκεῖνος (that one) used in the first part of the three-part *epicheirema* in verse 3:5. (cf. 2:6):⁹⁰

καὶ οἶδατε ὅτι ἐκεῖνος ἐφανερώθη,	You know that he was revealed	(premise)
ἵνα τὰς ἁμαρτίας ἄρῃ,	to take away sins,	(consequence)
καὶ ἁμαρτία ἐν αὐτῷ οὐκ ἔστιν.	and in him there is no sin	(conclusion)

The syllogism opens with a premise about the knowledge of the Revealed, which forms a bridge between the remaining parts of the figure of speech used by the author. The semantic emphasis of the entire statement rests not so much on the presented consequence of God's epiphany in time, and thus the removal of sins (3:5b; cf. John 1:29), as on the content of the claim: 'and in Him there is no sin'.⁹¹ Indeed, the absolute impeccability of God (and Christ) determines the behaviour of every Christian. However, it is not without

81 Cf. Strecker, *The Johannine Letters*, 93.

82 Cf. Painter, *1, 2, and 3 John*, 222.

83 Cf. B.M. Fanning, *Verbal Aspect in New Testament Greek* (Oxford Theological Monographs; Oxford: Clarendon 1990) 213.

84 Cf. Klauck, *Der erste Johannesbrief*, 186.

85 Cf. Brown, *The Epistles of John*, 389–399; A.W. Argyle, "1 John 3,4f" *ExpTim* 65/1 (1953) 62.

86 Cf. Giurisato, *Struttura e teologia della Prima Lettera di Giovanni*, 451.

87 In 1QS 3:18–21 and 4:17–20 the time of widespread lawlessness precedes the coming of divine judgement. See J.H. Charlesworth *et al.* (eds.), *The Dead Sea Scrolls: Rule of the Community. Photographic Multi-Language Edition* (Philadelphia, MA: American Interfaith Institute – World Alliance 1996) 36–39, 58–59.

88 Cf. K.H. Jobes, *1, 2, and 3 John* (ZECNT; Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan 2014) 157.

89 Cf. Yarbrough, *1–3 John*, 182.

90 Cf. Smalley, *1, 2, and 3 John*, 156.

91 Cf. Pitta – Filannino, *L'officina del Nuovo Testamento*, 188.

significance that Christ removes sins, which in the Christian Bible is already signalled by the verb αἶρω, used for the first time.

In Gen 35:2 the term refers to the instruction given by Jacob, standing near Shechem, to the members of his household and companions of the road before going to Bethel, in which he tells them to remove the images of foreign Gods from among themselves (τοὺς θεοὺς τοὺς ἄλλοτρίους (Gen 35:2)).⁹² Just like getting rid of (ἐκκλίνω) false idols in Judg 10:16, this action signifies the rejection of foreign cults, while purification and a change of clothing indicate spiritual renewal, a different status for clan members and a completely new quality of life (cf. Lev 13:34).⁹³ However, these external procedures, although necessary to meet the true God, did not rid people of sin. Only the saving work of Christ, of whom John the Baptist in John 1:29 says that He is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world (ὁ ἄμνος τοῦ θεοῦ ὁ αἶρων τὴν ἁμαρτίαν τοῦ κόσμου), can be effective in this respect. It is a permanent action, as indicated by the active participle of the verb αἶρω, which allows us to hope that everyone who falls into sin will be freed from it, to become like God in His holiness again.

Presented in 1 John 3:5b, the consequence of the manifestation of the Son of God clearly echoes the words of Jesus' predecessor in the Fourth Gospel.⁹⁴ The last time the term in question is used in the Christian Bible is in Rev 18:21, where an angel takes up a great stone and throws it into the sea to symbolically show the irrevocable destruction of Babylon as the embodiment of all evil. Since it is effectively removed by Christ, in whom there is no sin, anyone who abides in Him (μένω) does not sin, which is also highlighted by the *anadiplosis* employed in 1 John 3:6:

πάς ὁ ἐν αὐτῷ μένων οὐχ ἁμαρτάνει· πᾶς ὁ ἁμαρτάνων οὐχ ἑώρακεν αὐτὸν οὐδὲ ἔγνωκεν αὐτόν.

No one who remains in him sins; no one who sins has seen him or known him.

The verb ἁμαρτάνω (to sin), repeated twice in the above rhetorical figure, serves to express the opposing attitudes resulting from the lack of experience of God. Although this consists of visual perception (ὁράω) and cognition (γινώσκω) in the light of John's statement, it is not necessarily the same as what is presented as his own experience by the Letter's author, who thus appears to have been an eyewitness to Jesus' activity (1:1–3). What, then, is involved in this lack of experience of those who continually sin, although they went out from us, the community of believers, but they were not really of our number (2:19)? What lies at the root of the tragic schism which results in deviants earning the name of the devil's children (3:8, 10)?

92 The context, close Gen 35:2, makes it possible to assume that it probably refers to the household idols that Rachel stole from Laban (31:19, 32).

93 Cf. C. Westermann, *Genesis 12–36* (BKAT 1.2; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener 1981) 670–671.

94 Cf. Marshall, *The Epistles of John*, 177.

From the warning contained in the next verse, antithetically parallel to 3:6, one can derive a premise that they have abandoned acting in righteousness,⁹⁵ i.e. doing what is pleasing in the eyes of God (cf. Ps 106[105]:3; Sir 27:8) and pursuant to the order of love. This solution is implied by the paronomasia employed in 3:7, which juxtaposes two terms⁹⁶ with the same nominal root, δικαιοσύνη (righteousness) and δίκαιος (righteous):

Παιδία, μηδεὶς πλανᾷτω ὑμᾶς· ὁ ποιῶν τὴν δικαιοσύνην δίκαιός ἐστιν, καθὼς ἐκεῖνος δίκαιός ἐστιν.

Children, let no one deceive you. The person who acts in **righteousness** is righteous, just as he is **righteous**.

Since righteousness is one of God's primary attributes (1:9),⁹⁷ practising it, which stems from love,⁹⁸ can be considered one of the ways of establishing a true relationship with Him,⁹⁹ and through it also experiencing Him, seeing and knowing Him, and finally becoming like Him. Whoever commits lawlessness by persisting in sin has neither the capacity to see God nor the hope of seeing Him when He reveals Himself at the end of time.¹⁰⁰ Following the logic of the aforementioned relationships, the Letter's author, concerned for the spiritual well-being of his addressees and the integrity of their community, proceeds in 3:8–9 to formulate criteria that will enable believers to distinguish those in this world who 'belong to the devil' (ἐκ τοῦ διαβόλου ἐστίν), and thus originate from him and act on his inspiration (3:8), from those who 'are of God' (ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ), 'begotten by God' (ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ γεγέννηται):

8 ὁ ποιῶν τὴν ἁμαρτίαν (a)	Whoever sins (a)
ἐκ τοῦ διαβόλου ἐστίν, (b)	belongs to the devil, (b)
ὅτι ἀπ' ἀρχῆς ὁ διάβολος, (b')	because the devil (b')
ἁμαρτάνει (a')	has sinned from the beginning (a')
εἰς τοῦτο ἐφανερώθη ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ θεοῦ, ἵνα λύσῃ τὰ ἔργα τοῦ διαβόλου. (c)	Indeed, the Son of God was revealed to destroy the works of the devil. (c)
9 Πᾶς ὁ γεγεννημένος ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ (d)	No one who is begotten by God (d)
ἁμαρτίαν οὐ ποιεῖ, (e)	commits sin, (e)
ὅτι σπέρμα αὐτοῦ ἐν αὐτῷ μένει, (f)	because God's seed remains in him, (f)
καὶ οὐ δύναται ἁμαρτάνειν, (c')	he cannot sin, (c')
ὅτι ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ γεγέννηται. (d')	because he is begotten by God. (d')

The rhythm of chiasmic structures following the patterns of abb'ac and defe'd', noticeable in the two-verse segment 3:8–9, reinforces the content of the contrast-rich *paraenesis*,

95 Cf. U.C. von Wahlde, *The Gospel and Letters of John*. III. *Commentary on the Three Johannine Letters* (ECC; Grand Rapids, MI – Cambridge: Eerdmans 2010) 114.

96 Cf. Lausberg, *Elemente der literarischen Rhetorik*, § 279.

97 Cf. Houlden, *A Commentary on the Johannine Epistles*, 95.

98 Cf. A.R. Sikora, "'Widzenie' Boga w Listach św. Jana," *WV* 16 (2009) 193.

99 Cf. Strecker, *The Johannine Letters*, 105; Findlayson, *The Epistles of John*, 70.

100 Cf. Sikora, "'Widzenie' Boga w Listach św. Jana," 194.

so that it can be well remembered by the audience. While the gravity of the statement in the first part of the two-verse fragment rests on the association of the sinner with the devil (bb'), in the second, with a concentric structure, the emphasis is on the mention of the seed of God (f). The term σπέρμα denoting it can be identified with the Word of Life – revealed in time (1:1) and then proclaimed (1:2–3) and heard, which, through the gift of anointing, instructs believers in Christ about all things (2:24), which is consistent with the hope of salvation (2:27–28).¹⁰¹ This seed, here an absolute *hapax*, makes everyone who is born of God 'not sin' or unable to sin (3:9; cf. 5:18). The statement does not signify complete sinlessness in mortal life or the absence of any inclination to sin. This is ruled out by John, who first declares that if we deny sin, we deceive ourselves and there is no truth in us (1:8), that we make God a liar and His word is not in us, and that only by confession our sins may be remitted and we will be cleansed of them (1:9). Finally, when one sins, he has an Advocate in Jesus Christ, who before the Father atones for the sins of believers, but also of the entire world (2:1–2). Thus, having God's seed in oneself, in the light of the Son's revelation (c), empowers those born of God to live in truth and be cleansed of sin. It secures them against the state of lawlessness (5:18), life in unrighteousness and hatred, which has been inherent in the devil from the beginning (ἀπ' ἀρχῆς ... ἀμαρτάνει)¹⁰² (3:9), brings death (5:16) and is alien to the nature of God, the Giver of life, offering Himself to man in love (3:16; 4:9, 16; 5:1, 11–13). He, and He alone, is here the subject of begetting (γεννάω) by which the children of God also share in His eternal life. Being begotten by God is what fundamentally distinguishes believers from the children of the devil (τὰ τέκνα τοῦ διαβόλου), who, as a murderer from the beginning, does not produce life and deprives the sinner, who comes from him, of the hope of becoming like God and seeing Him.

Verse 10 contains a succinct summary of the argumentation presented in the excerpt of the Epistle under examination, which is reinforced by the use of an ellipsis,¹⁰³ also referred to as brachylogy.¹⁰⁴

ἐν τούτῳ φανερά ἐστιν τὰ τέκνα τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ τὰ τέκνα
τοῦ διαβόλου·

πᾶς ὁ μὴ ποιῶν δικαιοσύνην οὐκ ἔστιν ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ
καὶ ὁ μὴ ἀγαπῶν τὸν ἀδελφὸν αὐτοῦ.

In this way, the children of God and the children of the
devil are made plain;

no one who fails to act in righteousness belongs to God,
nor anyone who does not love his brother.

In the second part of the quoted sentence, its author omits the phrase οὐκ ἔστιν ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ, already known to the addressees, which refers to one who fails to act in righteousness

101 Cf. G. Segalla, "L'impeccabilità del credente in 1 Giov. 2,29–3,10 alla luce dell'analisi strutturale," *RivB* 29/29 (1981) 333–334. However, J. de Waal Dryden claims that the author of the Epistle has replaced the noun τέκνα with the term σπέρμα in 3:9 to emphasise the act of God in begetting. Hence the postulate that the formula σπέρμα αὐτοῦ ἐν αὐτῷ μένει should be translated 'His children abide in Him' Cf. J. de Waal Dryden, "The Sense of σπέρμα in 1 John 3:9: In Light of Lexical Evidence," *FgNt* 11/21–22 (1998) 99–100.

102 Cf. Strecker, *The Johannine Letters*, 100–101.

103 Cf. E.W. Bullinger, *Figures of Speech Used in the Bible: Explained and Illustrated*, 10 ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House 1968) 1.

104 Cf. Pitta – Filannino, *L'officina del Nuovo Testamento*, 93.

and implicitly does not love his brother either. This device significantly dynamises the statement. It should also be added that it signifies complete understanding between the writer and the audience. When used in the argumentation strategy, it allows the author of the Epistle to avoid obvious formulations and tie the statement loosely to the preceding context¹⁰⁵ on the one hand, and on the other, it creates another link in the theological discourse. At its centre, there is brotherly love (ἀδελφός), i.e. love of thy neighbour.¹⁰⁶

Of the three Epistles of John, the first refers most frequently (13 times, with no mention in 2 John and three occurrences in 3 John) to the concept of brotherhood. In 1 John it is not narrowed down to relationships arising from blood ties. However, the reminder of the tragic story of the first brothers, Cain and Abel in 3:12 (Gen 4:1–16), has important implications for John.¹⁰⁷ Firstly, it serves to explain why the world steeped in injustice – like biblical Cain – hates Christians who perform acts of righteousness (3:12–13). Secondly, it provides reasons why Christians love their brethren in the sense of neighbours, even if those neighbours do not share their faith or hope – ‘We have come to know and to believe in the love God has for us. God is love, and whoever remains in love remains in God and God in him’ (4:16a). The love that Christians live by makes them walk in the light without stumbling in a moral sense (2:10) for they are not afflicted by spiritual blindness (2:11); they have passed from death to life (3:14). The knowledge gained on this subject has its effects in the present, at the moment of speaking to the Letter’s addressees, as evidenced by the verb οἶδα (to know) in *perfectum* used in 4:16a. The awareness of having eternal life in themselves, in contrast to those who hate (3:15), motivates believers to think and act differently (5:20). Christians find a perfect example of this in Christ, who gave His life for us (3:16). John’s use of the formula ὑπὲρ ἡμῶν, however, should be understood more broadly, not just in relation to the addressees of the Epistle and its author. The phrase ‘for us’ includes all people¹⁰⁸ for Christ’s death is not exclusive, i.e. it does not affect only a select few but the entire world (2:2), including those who, like the world, are in the power of the Evil One (5:19).¹⁰⁹ If someone persists in sin that brings death (ἁμαρτία πρὸς θάνατον), it is not the prayer of brethren that is necessary for him (5:16), but his conscious return to Christ¹¹⁰ as an Advocate with the Father (2:1–2). For He has revealed Himself in order to

105 Cf. Pitta – Filannino, *L’officina del Nuovo Testamento*, 97–98.

106 Cf. H. Balz – W. Scharge, *Die “Katholischen” Briefe: Die Briefe des Jakobus, Petrus, Johannes und Juda*, 13 ed. (NTD 10; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht 1985) 190.

107 The figure of Cain is the only direct reference to the Old Testament in 1 John. J. Oniszczyk puts forward a conjecture that this reference may go beyond the biblical framework and be related to an ancient Jewish tradition later recorded in Pseudo-Jonathan’s Targum to Gen 4:1, where reference is made to Cain being conceived by Eve with the devil. Cf. J. Oniszczyk, *La Prima Lettera di Giovanni. La giustizia dei figli* (Retorica Biblica 10; Bologna: Dehoniane 2008) 121.

108 Cf. M. Fossati, *Lettere di Giovanni, Lettera di Giuda. Introduzione, traduzione e commento* (Nuova versione della Bibbia dai testi antichi 55; San Paolo: Cinisello Balsamo 2012) 97.

109 Cf. Saint Augustine, “Tractatus in Epistolam Joannis ad Parthos,” *Homilies on the First Epistle of John* (eds. D.E. Doyle – T. Martin; introd., trans. and notes by B. Ramsey) (The Works of Saint Augustine 14; Hyde Park, NY: New York City Press 2008) I, 4.

110 Saint Augustine, “Tractatus in Epistolam Joannis ad Parthos,” IV, 7.

destroy the works of the devil (3:8b). In this process of transition from death to life, the role of brothers in the community of faith is different. Their being God's children aims to incarnate the love of God¹¹¹ shown in Christ – as He is in Heaven, so are we in this world (4:17), living the hope of becoming like Him and bearing witness to it to every human being. This practical dimension of the message contained in the Epistle, which is to influence the attitudes of the addressees, deserves more attention. It provokes an answer to the question as to what characteristics and actions of God toward brethren are to be incarnated by His children in order to become like Him when He is revealed again (3:2).

3. The Pragmatic Function of the *Paraenesis* Concerning the Hope of Being like God

There is no doubt that a significant number of literary means of expression, which structure the text and hold the addressees' attention, testify to the Letter's high persuasive qualities, its author's rhetorical skilfulness and a special pastoral bond between him and the community of believers. In view of the drama of an internal schism and external threats of false teaching,¹¹² employing hope to strengthen it appears to be the fundamental, if not the most important, aim of the Epistle. Hope, as taught by its author, is not related to something but Someone. Therefore, it is evidently the hope of meeting and seeing in the light of truth – first, the One who remains invisible and thus unknown to the world (2:11; 3:1, 3, 6; 4:8), and then – God's image in oneself.

The postulate of living with Christian hope, which the author of the Epistle mentions in many contexts, appears a continuously vital programme, not limited by a historical framework. The hope of being like God (3:2) is timeless. In order to speak of what Christians will be like in the eschatological future, it is necessary to understand what God continues to reveal about Himself in the story of salvation. The author of the First Epistle calls Him faithful and just (1:9; 3:7), who forgives our sins and cleanses us from every wrongdoing (1:9); He is the Father (2:15) making the promise of eternal life (2:25). God anoints (2:27), He is holy (3:3), there is no sin in Him (3:5), God is greater than our hearts and knows everything (3:20); He is greater in you than who He is in this world (4:4). Above all, however, God is love (4:8), which is most fully expressed by the fact that He sent His Son (4:10), who laid down His life for us (3:16). He abides in believers when they love one another (4:12), He loves man (4:16) and, although remaining in heaven (4:17), He makes Himself known in believers who are God's children. Those who themselves have first heard the Word of Life, seen It, watched It and even touched It, make a tangible link of communion with God (1:1–3). This *κοινωνία* becomes the object of the believers' hope. Since God

111 Cf. Spicq, *Agapè dans le Nouveau Testament*, 259.

112 A noteworthy discussion of the crisis in the Johannine community with an insightful analysis of the state of research can be found in A. Kubiś, "Listy Janowe jako świadectwo wspólnoty przeżywającej kryzys," *Symposium* 22/1 (2012) 37–58.

reveals Himself in the communion of Persons – the Father, Son and Spirit (1:3; 5:6) – in their perfect unity, believers will find the perfect model of a relationship with brethren and of an integrated spiritual life. What, then, should those who have been born of God do to give a perfect shape to their likeness of Him through participation in eternal life?

Bearing in mind the direct, intratextual context of John's *paraenesis* concerning hope, it is important to point out the following: walking and remaining in the light (1:1; 2:9), acknowledgement of sins (1:9) as a prerequisite for being cleansed of them (1:7–9) and keeping within oneself God's Word (1:10), the word of Christ (2:5) and the commandments (2:3; 5:3), and obeying them (5:2). The believers' task is to act like Jesus (2:6), love brethren (2:10; 4:20–21) – above all in deed and truth (3:18), love one another (3:23; 4:7, 11, 12) and God (4:19–21; 5:1); abide in what believers heard in the beginning (2:24) and in the instruction received from the Spirit in the anointment (2:27), without allowing anyone to deceive them (3:7). Further, those born of God should, like Christ, give, or literally 'lay down' (τίθημι), their lives for brethren (3:16); have boldness, i.e. openness to God (3:21); not believe every spirit but test them (4:1); acknowledge (4:15) and believe that Jesus is the Son of God (5:5, 10), have the testimony of God in themselves because of this (5:10); pray in accordance with God's will (3:22; 5:14; cf. John 14:13, 14; 15:7, 16; 16:23, 24, 26), also for the ones who sin but do not commit deadly sins (5:16). The absence of a recommendation to pray for the ones who nevertheless commit such a sin (5:16) is not unfounded. Since Christian prayer is modelled on the prayer of Jesus, justification for John's *paraenesis* can be sought in Christ's farewell speech in the Fourth Gospel, where the Son of God does not pray for the world but for the disciples that He has given Him because they are His (John 17:9).¹¹³ Therefore, those who, as understood by the author of the Epistle, have rejected Christ and do not want to be cleansed of their sins, by living in lawlessness, have placed themselves outside the order of the hope of eternal life – they have left the world, they speak like the world (1 John 4:5) and do not listen to the community (4:6). So should their loss be considered irreparable? This is not prejudged by the author of the Epistle. He devotes his attention to believers, with an evident emphasis on the aim to strengthen the divided community, whose members should be on guard against false idols (5:21).

Rare in the New Testament, the term εἰδωλον¹¹⁴ denoting an object of religious veneration in the form of a false deity's image does not merely refer to a threat posed by the influence of pagan cults. This environmental context is important¹¹⁵ but it does not seem at all to be the only one. In John's recommendation regarding false idols, one must see a warning that the addressees of his Epistle should not follow the false image of God¹¹⁶ created by antichrists, nor should they shape their lives according to false images of Christ, who would

¹¹³ Cf. P. Trudinger, "Concerning Sins, Mortal and Otherwise. A Note on 1 John 5,16–17," *Bib* 52/4 (1971) 541.

¹¹⁴ Apart from 1 John 5:21, this noun can be found only 11 times in the New Testament, primarily in the Epistles of Paul: Acts 7:41; 15:20; Rom 2:22; 1 Cor 8:4, 7; 10:19; 12:2; 2 Cor 6:16; 1 Thess 1:9; Rev 9:20.

¹¹⁵ Cf. T. Griffith, *Keep Yourself from Idols: A New Look at 1 John* (LNTS; London: Sheffield Academic Press 2002) 190.

¹¹⁶ Cf. Smalley, *1, 2, and 3 John*, 310.

not be the Son of the Father and the true hope of believers. Meanwhile, the desire for its fulfilment through the believers' ultimate likeness to God, as the Son is likened to the Father, determines the obedience of entire Christian life¹¹⁷ to the Holy Spirit, which also brings practical social benefits.

Those who live with hope as preached by John, and accepting the attributes of Christ¹¹⁸ from communities based on truth and free from falsehood (1:6; 2:4), are aware of the need to purify themselves and work through their own moral weaknesses and limitations (1:7–9). Christian life based on the commandments summarised in the commandment to love God and thy neighbour (2:7, 10), aimed at perfecting oneself in the self-sacrificing practice of mutual love (3:16, 18, 23; 4:11, 12, 17, 21), creates an environment free from hatred or desire for revenge, with a clearly defined value system, striving to form mature interpersonal relationships that are not dominated by emotions, low motives, uncontrollable instincts and pride (2:16, 17; 3:12). In a thus formed society, guided by principles of justice according to the order of the law (2:29; 3:7), it is possible to maintain harmony in personal life, and develop non-violent interpersonal relationships free from materialism (3:11, 17). Finally, living with the hope of becoming more like God brings a peace of heart (3:19) and, in times of spiritual confusion, an ability to distinguish truth from deceit (4:6) and reject worthless patterns of life (5:21; cf. Rom 12:2), transient nonetheless, just like the world, in which they originate. Against the background of many proposals for perfecting humanity known to history, the path indicated in the First Letter of John continues to present itself as valid, reliable and much needed. When one seeks a more perfect version of oneself in and through oneself in the changing world of relative 'truths', the Christian hope of seeing God and being like Him offers the stable prospect of living in a relationship with and finding fulfilment in Someone, not just something. Finally, it is not a prospect of life limited by mortality but one that culminates with eternal communion with the one God in three Persons – the Father, Son and Spirit.

Conclusions

This rhetorical analysis and pragmatic study of 1 John 2:28–3:10 lead to several key conclusions. Firstly, John's perspective on the believers' likeness to God (3:2–3) appears particularly valuable against the background of the New Testament narrative about Christian hope oriented towards participation in eternal life with Him. It helps us better understand the sense of the incarnation of the Word of Life, who, by becoming one of us, reveals the best image of humanity in the world. Further, the aforementioned hope makes it feasible for those who have been born of Him and are God's children to attain likeness of God through the practice of the commandment of love. Secondly, the ambiguous use of the personal

¹¹⁷ Cf. Malatesta, *Interiority and Covenant*, 324.

¹¹⁸ Cf. de la Potterie, "Speranza in Cristo e purificazione (1 Gv 3,3)," 228.

pronouns αὐτός and ἐκεῖνος, referring to the object of the hope of becoming like God, in the First Epistle of John should be understood as a deliberate effort of the author, who wants to familiarise the addressees of his writing with the work of salvation as a coherent process of integrating believers into one divine life of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Thirdly, Christians – as born of God – are to make His presence visible in the world through sanctification, righteous acts and mutual love, ready to give their lives for their brethren, as exemplified by the Son of God. Fourthly, for believers, Jesus Christ is the model of perfect humanity, united with the Father and abiding in anointment by the Holy Spirit. Therefore, it is only through Christ, with Him and in Him, that Christians can attain full likeness to the one God in three Persons: the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Fifthly, living with the hope referred to in the First Letter of John seems a timely and effective means of achieving spiritual balance and lasting peace in social life.

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