

# REDEMPTION OF THE EARTH OR FROM THE EARTH? The Gospel of John and the Johannine Epistles

Niek Pretorius

Department of Biblical Studies and Languages  
University of the Western Cape

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## 1. Introduction

The task of this essay is to investigate the content of Christian hope, as it is portrayed in the Fourth Gospel and in John's Letters. What exactly is it that Christians hope for? In other words, how does John portray the content of the promise of salvation that is linked to the call for faith? As this investigation is done as part of a broader scheme under the heading 'Hope for the earth?', the question must be asked if John's portrayal of the redemption of 'the world' (6:33) allows an interpretation that includes the earth, as the dwelling place of mortal men, in the expected salvation? Such an approach may determine if those people who wait in hopeful anticipation on the final fulfilment of the promise of everlasting life, have a responsibility for the protection and restoration of the earth as their final place of dwelling.

The essay is structured along the following lines: The first task (Par. 2) is to find a key for the reading of John's concept of eternal life, that is, for the promise which is attached to the call for faith. This problem is approached by comparing the views of the existentialist, Rudolf Bultmann, and the conservative catholic theologian, Rudolf Schnackenburg, on John's eschatology. Par. 3 focuses on the cosmic and universal nature of redemption as seen by John. Par. 4 describes the nature of the *world below*, the world that is to be saved. In John's dualistic scheme where he works with contrasting concepts like 'life' and 'death' (5:24), 'light' and 'darkness' (1:5), 'heavenly things' and 'earthly things' (3:12) and especially 'above' and 'beneath' (8:23), a description of the *world below* might, by way of contrast, have something to say about the *world above*. In paragraph 5 the concept of *life* as the object of Christian hope is investigated. The purpose of this investigation is to determine whether it is possible to draw a distinction between John's understanding of a *life in Christ* and *eternal life*, where *eternal life* is seen as the ultimate realization of the promise of salvation. Finally, in par. 6, the focus falls on the vocation of the community of believers in this world where the commandment of neighbourly love is the essence of life in the eschatological congregation. Here, the essay points to the relation between a life in Christ and ethical conduct in response to the ecological crisis.

## 2. The promise of salvation: life and eternal life

The concept of redemption lies at the very heart of the Fourth Gospel. The fourth evangelist declares the purpose of his Gospel: '*This has been written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that through (this) faith you may have life in his name*' (20:31). He also states the purpose of God's act of redemption: '*For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life*' (3:16). The purpose seems reasonably clear, but not the content of the promise. What does 'eternal life' mean? From the above two verses it seems that 'life' and

'eternal life' are two words for the same concept.<sup>1</sup> In paragraph 5 more will be said about the quality of this concept. Here the question is when does it take effect? Should we understand it as taking effect immediately on the declaration of faith in Jesus Christ as the Son of God, as in 5:24: '*... he who hears my words and believes him who sent me, has eternal life; he does not come into judgement, but has passed from death to life*' (cf. 3:15, 16; 3:36a, 6:40, 47; 20:31; 1 Jn 5:13), or should we think in terms of a state of existence after an apocalyptic event in the future as in 5:28: '*Do not marvel at this; for the hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice and come forth, those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of judgement*' (cf. 6:39-40; 11:25-26).

This tension between the *already* and the *not yet* has given rise to a variety of widely differing interpretations in the past. There are the 'consistent eschatology' of Johannes Weiss and Albert Schweitzer, the 'realized eschatology' of CH Dodd and Rudolf Otto, the 'dialectic eschatology' of Karl Barth and Rudolf Bultmann, the 'death of God' eschatology of Thomas JJ Altizer and still others.<sup>2</sup> This essay will follow the lead of the commentaries of Rudolf Schnackenburg and Rudolf Bultmann as two prominent theologians who are normally perceived as holding opposing views regarding eschatology in the Fourth Gospel and the Letters of John. The difference is there, that is true, but I am uncomfortable when I read that Bultmann rejects 'all forms' of futuristic eschatology.<sup>3</sup> Other than Schnackenburg's more traditional view, Bultmann has the unique perspective where 'the facts of salvation', viz. the incarnation, the cross, the resurrection, Pentecost and the *parousia*, is one salvation-drama, a single act of redemption<sup>4</sup>, which brings him to the statement: 'The judgement, then, is no dramatic cosmic event, but takes place in the response of men to the word of Jesus'.<sup>5</sup> But even so, Bultmann does not deny that John has a beyond the grave vision of eschatology, of life after death. Surely, rejecting the *parousia* or 'the day of judgement' as dramatic events in history is not the same as rejecting 'all forms' of eschatology. In analysing the concept of faith in the Fourth Gospel, he states: 'All human knowing of God must always be a believing knowledge. This 'must' will not cease until earthly existence is over and 'believing' is succeeded by a direct 'seeing' that is no longer directed toward the 'glory' veiled in 'flesh' but has 'glory' itself for its object (17:24)'.<sup>6</sup>

It seems as if Schnackenburg also recognizes that Bultmann's denial of a futuristic eschatology must be limited to the 'facts of salvation', to the 'dramatic events'. Although he does not mention Bultmann by name, he clearly has him in mind when he deals with the question of what has led to this 'realization' and 'actualization' of the eschatology: 'It is undoubtedly the expression of a special ('eschatological') Christian understanding of existence, but it is neither 'Gnostic' nor 'existentialist': it does not do away with the whole of the old ('dramatic') eschatology in favour of each present moment of decision. Given the primitive Christian eschatological consciousness of living between salvation accomplished and fulfilment yet to come, the process was almost inevitable and was furthered by the

1 CH Dodd (1978:144) comes to the same conclusion: 'In just short of half of the occurrences of the word ζωησ it has the epithet αφωσνιστο, without any apparent difference of meaning.'

2 Crolier Electronic Publishing, Inc., 1996, *Eschatology*.

3 BA Müller (1985:10): 'Die eksistensiale eskatologie ... gaan nog verder en verwerp elke vorm van 'futuristiese eskatologie'.'

4 R Bultmann (1955:58).

5 R Bultmann (1955:38).

6 R Bultmann (1955:74).

recession of an imminent expectation of the end'.<sup>7</sup>

Bultmann (in the work cited) offers an illuminative exposition of the *already*, that interpretation of John's Gospel and Letters which holds that the blessings of salvation have already been and are continuously realized in the present in the life of believers. This is not much different from Schnackenburg's concept of 'actualization of eschatology'.<sup>8</sup> But, where Schnackenburg sees references like '... all who are in the tombs will hear his voice and come forth...' in 5:28 as not being in conflict with John's concept of 'life' or 'everlasting life',<sup>9</sup> Bultmann resorts to 'cases of addition by an ecclesiastical editor (like in Jn 5:28f., etc.)'.<sup>10</sup> Nevertheless, apart from those verses (like 5:28-29, 6:39,40,54, 11:24, 12:48, 1 Jn 2:18) which directly refer to the resurrection 'on the last day' both commentators, each one from his own point of view, tries to unlock the theology of the Fourth Gospel by showing that the Johannine theology intentionally tries to overcome the early-Christian tradition of an imminent and 'dramatic' end of the world. Schnackenburg states this explicitly when dealing with 5:28 (I translate the German): 'The resurrection of the body is not described, but it is implied (by the opening of the 'graves'); The act of judgement remains in darkness. This reticence respects the manner/style of Jesus and of the very early Christian community, that is, not to spell out the eschatological circumstances, and more so for the Johannine theology that wants to overcome such apocalyptic thoughts.'<sup>11</sup>

We have now established that both Bultmann and Schnackenburg allow that John retains the early Christian tradition of *life after death* as the ultimate goal of those who believe, but in his theology he presents the traditional eschatology as already present in the faith and life of the believer while still living in this world. The tension between the *already* and the *not yet* must remain. As it is the expressed intention of this essay to focus on the theme of Christian hope, it will be necessary to distinguish between the world that is to be saved (4:42), the status of the believers who are in this world but not 'of this world' (13:1), and the Christian hope of fulfilment yet to come (5:28).

### 3. The universalist<sup>12</sup> nature of salvation in John's writings

Throughout his writings John uses the concept of 'world'.<sup>13</sup> In this the universalist nature of salvation in John's theology comes to the fore with great emphasis: *'It is no longer because of your words that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that*

7 R Schackenburg (1968:160).

8 R Schnackenburg (1968:159).

9 R Schnackenburg (1971:149): 'Mit dem joh. Lebensbegriff, der den ganzen Menschen betrifft, steht die 'Lebens-Auferstehung' nicht im Widerspruch; sonst könnte die Auferweckung des Lazarus nicht zum Symbol werden und würde sich der auferstandene Jesus selbst nicht in seiner Leiblichkeit den Jüngern zu erkennen geben. Aber nicht das künftige Ereignis liegt dem Evangelisten am Herzen, sondern die gegenwärtige Lebenserlangung durch den Glauben an den Sohn Gottes.'

10 R Bultmann (1955:85), footnote.

11 R Schnackenburg (1971:149): 'Die Auferweckung des Leibes wird nicht beschrieben, aber vorausgesetzt (vgl. die 'Gräber'); der Akt des Richtens bleibt im Dunklen. In dieser Zurückhaltung wirkt die Art Jesu und des Urchristentums fort, die eschatologischen Zustände nicht auszumalen, noch mehr die Verpflichtung gegenüber der joh. Theologie, die solches apokalyptisches Denken überwinden will.'

12 The word *universalist* is not used here in the sense that is meant by the term *apocatastasis*, namely, that salvation is extended to all humankind by divine predestination. For that, the grim reality of unbelief plays too large a part in the theology of the Fourth Evangelist (cf. 16:9). Rather, it must be understood in the sense meant by Karl Barth in his restatement of the doctrine of single predestination where he claimed that God's will is revealed in Jesus Christ, and all are elect through him. In this form the doctrine of predestination is virtually universalist—that is, all are promised salvation (cf. Encarta 97 Encyclopedia, 'Predestination').

13 The word 'world' occurs 287 times in the Gospel and the three Letters of John.

he is indeed the Saviour of the world' (4:42). John confronts all people 'of the world' with God, seeing them estranged from God and doomed to death, outside the divine realm of light and life, till the Revealer and Saviour sent by God shows them the way to the heavenly world of everlasting life: 'I am the living bread which came down from heaven; if any one eats of this bread, he will live for ever; and the bread which I shall give for the life of the world is my flesh' (6:51; cf. 1:4; 3:13, 16, 19, 31f.; 5:24; 6:33; 8:23f.; 12:31 f., 46). In the lower world people are imprisoned in their historical situation. But they really belong to the higher world of God: 'He came to His own home, and his own people received him not' (1:11 RSV). The way to the higher world is through Christ: 'But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God' (1:12).<sup>14</sup>

#### 4. The nature of the 'world below', the world that is to be saved

The concept of redemption only makes sense if it is clear what it is that is to be redeemed from what. On this matter John is quite clear: people are to be redeemed from the world where they live in bondage, held captive by their sins (8:23-24). In the cosmic and universal redemption, as seen by John, the traditional formula for redemption, where the death of Jesus is seen as a sacrifice of expiation, has been expanded to take in the cosmos, and linked with the guiding Johannine concept of 'life': Jesus gave his life for the life of the world (ὑπὲρ τῆς ζωῆς τοῦ κόσμου—6:51c, cf. 33). For John the *kosmos* means primarily the world of people;<sup>15</sup> on it the judgement falls that it is evil and would be lost were it not for the coming of the 'Son'. Nowhere does he show any concern for an uninhabited planet. In the term 'this world', οὗτοῦτοῦ κόσμου (8:23; 9:39; 11:9; 12:25, 31; 13:1; 16:11; 18:36; 1 Jn 4:17), the point is the contrast between the nature of the world and God, not a contrast between two ages (except in the quotation at 12:25).<sup>16</sup> Accordingly, John speaks neither of 'this age' or 'the present (ἐφ' ἡμῶν) age' nor of the 'future' (μετὰ ταῦτα) or 'coming (ἐρχομένου) age'.

What is the essence of this *kosmos* (οὗτοῦτοῦ κόσμου) from which people are to be saved? Let me dwell on this for a moment, for it is only in contrast to 'the world' that the promise of 'life' takes on meaning.

First of all, the essence of the *kosmos* is *darkness*: '... God is light and in him is no

14 The focus of this essay does not allow a lengthy digression by comparing the Johannine language with that of Gnosticism, but it needs to be pointed out here that although John shares the language of the Gnosticism, he does not share its world-view. Bultmann (1955:76) gives the following explanation: 'In Gnosticism the world is a cosmic power foreign to man's nature (φύσις, which belongs to the world of light), which encompasses man with fateful compulsion. Not so for John. For him the world is a historical power constituted by man who has rebelled against God. The membership of a person to this world of darkness or to the world of light is determined not by his fate nor his 'nature' but by his decision. The Gnostic dualism of fate has become a dualism of decision. And faith is neither more or less than the *decision*, achieved in the overcoming of the offence, *against the world for God*.' On this matter Schnackenburg (1968:575) has a less radical view: 'The decision of faith is not a human achievement like the Jewish works of the Law, but simply the fitting answer, made possible by the grace of God, to the revelation given by Jesus.'

15 Of the 287 times that the word 'world' occurs in John's Gospel and three Letters, only four stand in contexts where they do not directly refer to the world constituted by people, viz., 'Never since the world began ...' (9:32); '... before the world was made' (17:5); '... before the foundation of the world' (17:24); '...the world itself could not contain the books that would be written' (21:25). In all other cases 'world' can be understood as referring to the world of people outside the realm of God as in 1 Jn 2:16: 'For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the father, but is of this world', or simply as the people as in 12:19: '... look, the world has gone after him'.

16 R Bultmann (1955:15).

darkness at all. If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not live according to 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 cleanses us from all sin' (8:12; 12:35, 46; 1 Jn 1:5f.; 2:8f., 11). The darkness of the world is not a darkness as a shadow lying upon the world, an affliction imposed upon it, but the darkness is its own peculiar nature in which it is at ease and at home, for: '*... the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than the light*' (3:19 RSV). So, because the world appropriates for itself the darkness, it is blind without knowing it (9:39-41; cf. 12:40; 1 Jn 2:11).

Hence, it means the same thing when the world's nature is designated as *falsehood*, which indirectly takes place by Jesus' assertion that he came into world to bear witness to the truth (18:37; 8:32; 1:17; 17:17; 14:6, cf. also 1 Jn 2:21; 3:19). But the world's nature is directly designated as falsehood when Jesus accuses 'the Jews' of not being able to hear his word because they are of the devil, i.e. sprung from falsehood, and therefore do not believe when Jesus says the truth (8:43-45; cf. 1 Jn 2:21, 27). Whoever does not acknowledge Jesus as the Messiah is a 'liar' (1 Jn 2:22).

The *kosmos* is in essence *existence in bondage*, an idea which comes to the fore in the promise of freedom to those who know the truth (8:32). In fact, the world is already dead, for of those who believe in Jesus it is said that they have already gone over into life from death (5:24), and it is just because the world lies in death that Jesus brings the water of life and the bread of life (4:10, 6:27ff.), that he is the light of life (8:12), the resurrection, and life itself (11:25; 14:6). The *death* which is in view here is the mode of existence of unenlightened, unredeemed humanity.

According to John 5:41-47 the world has a hope of its own. It knows the right concepts and the right quests. It speaks of 'honour' (δοῦξα; also = 'glory'), and in its craving for mutual approval the correct knowledge comes to light that a human being, just by being a human being, is insecure and must seek for approval from outside itself. But the world perverts this proper quest by providing itself with its own answer. In 5:39 we read: '*You search the scriptures, because you think that in them you have eternal life*'. 'The 'honour' that God gives is not sought by the world (5:44). For to seek it would mean to recognize the utter insecurity of all human existence and to relinquish one's self-created world and security.

If we apply the foregoing to the central theme of this research project, it is not difficult to see that this attitude of the world, to find its own answers and to create its own security outside the realm of light and truth, is the real cause for the exploitation of the earth in a manner that shows no concern for the commandment of neighbourly love. The endless ravaging of the earth for economic progress, and the consequential pollution of the earth, the atmosphere and the oceans, are all symptoms of the world's blindness, its mindless quest to establish a security of its own, to erect its own modern Tower of Babel. The question is, is it possible to deduce from John's doctrine of salvation some hope for the earth?

The above description of the nature of 'this world' must serve as a point of reference to verses like 17:15 (KJV): '*I do not pray that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil.*' By way of contrast it throws some light on the 'life' that is promised to those who are saved out of this world through their faith. In par. 6 an attempt is made to draw a positive picture of the body of believers who are *in the world, but not of the world* (15:19), but first it is necessary to investigate the concept of 'life' as it is used by John.

## 5. The concept of 'life'

It cannot be denied that the evangelist retained the traditional outlook where the end of all earthly things is expected at some time in the future. He speaks of the 'last day' in numerous places, like in 6:39: *'...and this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up at the last day'* (6:40, 44, 54; 12:48); so he also speaks of bodily resurrection and judgement according to works (5:28f.); and of 'eternal life' in a futuristic sense: *'He who loves his life, loses it, and he who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life'* (12:25). And also in 11:25: *'Jesus said to her, I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in me, though he die, yet shall live,<sup>17</sup> and whoever lives and believes in me shall never die'*.

The idea of 'life' (ζωή, ζ. αἰωνίου, ζῆν, ζωοποιεῖν) is spread throughout John's work and is an inseparable part of his theology. It is the content of the promise of salvation that Christians hope for. Just the word 'life' occurs 59 times in the Gospel and his Letters, and 'to live' 9 times. Without pretending to offer an exegetical case-study, I note 62 occurrences in a roughly categorized form.<sup>18</sup> The purpose is to get an overview of the range of the semantic field as John uses the words 'life' or 'to live':

- 1) seven times biologically, but not only as a living being; it carries with it the sense of uniqueness, your very own life, e.g. *'Peter said unto him, Lord, why cannot I follow thee now? I will lay down my life for thy sake'* (13:37; cf. 10:11, 15, 17; 13:38; 15:13; 1 Jn 3:16).
- 2) twice as a way of living before coming to faith in Christ. John qualifies the life of such a person with the words 'of this world', e.g. 1 Jn 2:16: *'For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world.'* The other example is *'He that loveth his life shall lose it; and he that hateth his life in this world shall keep it unto life eternal'* (12:25).
- 3) forty one times as a quality of life of a believer in Christ while living 'in this world' but not being 'of this world'. This 'quality' stands in contrast to 'death' as a way of life: *'Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life'* (5:24). The notion of 'death' as a quality of life is more closely described in 3:36: *'... the wrath of God abideth on him'*. Apart from certain visible qualities, such as neighbourly love, this 'life' carries within it the promise of 'life eternal'. The promise is so unbreakable that 'eternal life' can be regarded as a present possession. The relation between 'life' and 'eternal life' is so close that the words are interchangeable. Cf. (with 'to live') 5:25-26; 6:51, 57-58; 1 Jn 4:9; (with life) 1:4b; 3:15, 16, 36; 4:14, 36; 5:24, 40; 6:33, 35, 40, 47, 48, 51, 53, 54, 63, 68; 8:12; 10:10, 28; 11:25; 12:50; 14:6; 17:2, 3; 20:31; 1 Jn 1:2b; 2:25; 3:14, 15; 5:11, 12, 13, 16, 20.
- 4) twelve times as living forever. This life will physically ensue after death (on the day of judgement/the Lord) when a new life will be granted to the faithful; it will not be subjected to death again. I use the word 'physically' here because this life carries something of a continuation of life before death, as in John 10:17 (KJV): *'Therefore doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life, that I might take it again.'*

17 The futuristic focus of this expression clearly comes to the fore if ζῆσεται is given the ingressive sense of 'he will come to life' (cf. JH Moulton, *Prolegomena* (1906:149).

18 The statistics do not quite match because the words sometimes occur more than once in the same context.

Fundamentally this category cannot be separated from the previous one, but in certain contexts a slight emphasis on 'eternity' could perhaps be detected, e.g. *'This is the bread which came down from heaven: not as your fathers did eat manna, and are dead: he that eateth of this bread shall live for ever'* (6:58 KJV). Cf. (with 'to live') 11:25; 12:25c, 14:19; (with 'life') 1:4a (life absolute); 5:29 (life absolute x 2), 5:29, 39; 6:27; 1 Jn 1:1 (life absolute), 1:2a (life absolute).

The great concentration on 'life' as a way of existence 'in this world' for the believer is clear. For the purpose of this essay, it is not necessary to dwell on the nature of the ultimate state of 'everlasting life', for once the believer has passed over to that 'future world' where all believing becomes seeing (17:24), John gives no indication of any further moral responsibility as we understand that term here in the present world. He refers to life after death only in vague terms as in 17:24: *'Father, I desire that they also, whom thou hast given me, may be with me where I am, to behold my glory which thou hast given me in thy love for me before the foundation of the world'*, and in 17:3: *'And this is eternal life, that they know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent.'*

It is clear that for John the *resurrection and life after death* remains the ultimate goal of a life in Christ (6:39,40,44,54; 12:48), but he is mainly concerned with Christology as the content of the faith he is calling for; he describes the saving power of Christ as present in the faith and life of Christians. It is in this sphere, in the life of the believers while they are still living in this world, that John shows the greatest interest.

In its original meaning, and outside the Johannine writings, 'eternal life' is an eschatological concept mostly (but not always) referring to the future world.<sup>19</sup> In John it is understood in the sense that the blessings of salvation are already present, as the essence of the salvation already attained in faith in Christ.<sup>20</sup> Schnackenburg also finds this 'actualization of salvation' in respect of other concepts and expressions like 'judgement' (as 'verdict of death'), and 'that day' (14:20; 16:23, 26—beginning with the Resurrection of Jesus), 'joy (fulfilled)' (15:11; 16:20,22,24), 'victory' (16:33; cf. 1 Jn 5:4), 'peace' (14:27; 6:33), and also 'kingdom of God' (3:3, 5).<sup>21</sup> All these terms are used in a realized eschatological manner.

CH Dodd has made an exhaustive study of the term ζωη as it occurs in 17:3, and it is a worthwhile exercise to take note of his findings: 'We seem now to have fixed, provisionally, pending the investigation of related concepts, the sense in which the Fourth Evangelist uses the term ζωη. He means by it life perfect and absolute, timeless in quality and therefore exempt from death. He conceives it as possible for men here and now, but to be realized in its fullness beyond the grave. Such life for men consists in the knowledge of God: αὐτῆ εἰσὶν ἡ ἀφωτισθῆναι ζωη, ἵνα γινώσκωσιν σε τοῦ μόνου ἀληθινοῦ θεοῦ (xvii.3). After our study of Philo, the *Hermetica*, and gnosticism, we need only recall that the evangelist, in enunciating this maxim, is putting his teaching in line with

19 R Schnackenburg (1971:435): 'Wenn man von den Synoptikern herkommt, fällt vor allem die Umprägung des Begriffs 'ewige Lebens' auf. Bei jenen ist er streng auf die eschatologische Zukunft bezogen, bei Joh entschieden in die Gegenwart verlegt: Wer an den Sohn glaubt, hat ewiges Leben (3,15. 16. 36 u.ö.), ist aus dem Tod ins Leben hinüberschritten (5,24).'

R Bultmann (1955:159): 'In general 'life eternal' is understood (otherwise than in John) as life to come (1 Tim. 1:16; 6:12; Tit. 1:2, 3:7; Acts 13:46, 48; Jude 21; Herm. vis. II 3:2).'

20 CH Dodd (1978:148): 'The evangelist agrees with popular Christianity that the believer will enter into eternal life at the general resurrection, but for him this is a truth of less importance than the fact that the believer already enjoys eternal life, and the former is a consequence of the latter.'

21 R Schnackenburg (1968:159).

religious tendency dominant in his time over a wide area. His readers would recognize in him one more teacher who set out to do for his readers what the mysteries offered to do for their initiates, to lead them to such supernatural knowledge as should confer immortality. But this does not in itself decide the question, what this writer meant by  $\gamma\upsilon\omega\sigma\kappa\epsilon\iota\nu\ \tau\omicron;\nu\ \theta\epsilon\omicron\upsilon\omega\nu$ .

Dodd continues his investigation, concentrating on the LXX, and finally comes to the following conclusion: 'Finally, the content of knowledge is enlarged to include the unity of men in and with Christ, in God: xiv.20  $\epsilon\phi\nu\ \epsilon\phi\kappa\epsilon\iota\omega\nu\eta/\ \tau\eta\epsilon/\ \eta\theta\mu\epsilon\omega\rho\alpha/\ \gamma\upsilon\omega\sigma\sigma\epsilon\sigma\theta\epsilon\ \upsilon\theta\mu\epsilon\iota\omega\ \nu\ \omicron\{\tau\iota\ \epsilon\phi\gamma\omega;\ \epsilon\phi\nu\ \tau\omega\epsilon/\ \pi\alpha\tau\rho\iota\omega\ \mu\omicron\upsilon,\ \kappa\alpha\iota;\ \upsilon\theta\mu\epsilon\iota\omega\ \epsilon\phi\nu\ \epsilon\phi\mu\omicron\iota;\ \kappa\alpha\phi\gamma\omega;\ \epsilon\phi\nu\ \upsilon\theta\mu\epsilon\iota\omega\nu$ . That is to say,  $\gamma\upsilon\omega\sigma\iota\omega\ \nu$  is awareness of a relation of mutual indwelling of God and man.'<sup>22</sup>

It now remains to focus on those people who live an eschatological existence in this world and to try to understand the essence of their lives as seen by John.

## 6. Unity in Christ as an eschatological congregation in the world

Conversion, though individually experienced, is nevertheless essentially a community matter. The unity of believers in a corporate body finds numerous expressions in John's concept of unity in Christ, as in 19:20: '*On that day you shall know that I am in my Father and you in me and I in you*' (1 Jn 1:3; 17:11; 17:21). Also, the legitimate position that John allows for the baptism with water (1:33), points to the fact that acceptance of Christ as Saviour and Lord means incorporation into the eschatological congregation.

The community of believers must have an eschatological existence in this world: '*I do not pray that thou shouldst take them out of the world, but that thou shouldst keep them from the evil one*' (17:15), and also: '*As thou didst send me into the world, so I have sent them into the world*' (17:18).

### *'Abiding in Christ' and ethics*

The Johannine fellowship with Christ is inseparable from ethics. '*Bringing forth fruit*' is the goal of '*abiding*' in the vine, (15:4-8); '*abiding in the love of Christ*' presupposes the keeping of his commandments (15:9f). The '*new*' commandment of neighbourly love, '*that you love one another, as I have loved you*' (13:34), sums up the moral exhortation for those who believe. The divine love in the ultimate self-sacrifice on the cross became reality in him, obliging his own to love in the same way, and to prolong the movement of love which went forth from God (cf. 1 Jn 2:7f.; 3:16, 23; 4:9ff.). Ethics, too, forms part of the Christological perspective of John.

### *The vocation of the Church*

If we hope to find 'hope for the earth' in the redemption of the world through the redeeming work of the Son of God, it is in the ethical perspective of John's Christology that we may find it. The unity in Jesus Christ of those who believe in him as the Saviour of the world, finds its expression in the Church in the world. Believers are not removed out of the world but within it have their task. To describe the status and vocation of this eschatological congregation, we can do no better than to listen to the words of Jesus himself in his farewell discourse in John 17:14-21. But I wish to highlight only three sentences taken from that text: '*I have given them thy word*', '*I have sent them into the world*', '*so that the world may*

22 CH Dodd (1978: 151, 169).



*believe that thou hast sent me'.*

From the above quotation it is clear that the world constantly has the possibility of being drawn into this circle of mutual love. This will happen through the witness of the faithful. In this they are not alone: *'And when he (the Spirit) comes, he will convince the world of sin and of righteousness and of judgement'* (16:8). The knowledge bestowed by the Spirit is to have its activity in the proclamation, in preaching. The eschatological occurrence which took place in Jesus' coming and going is to continue to take place in preaching.<sup>23</sup> As this occurrence takes place in the Spirit's *'convincing'*, it likewise takes place in the neighbourly love which also manifests itself in the fellowship of believers (13.35).

This paper is not the place to work out the full power and influence that neighbourly love can have on this world. But it is clear, that if neighbourly love should be given its rightful place as the life and existence of the Church in the world, then there would be hope for the earth. For neighbourly love must take on a concrete form, and there is no way that people can continue to ravage their neighbours' environment and pollute the air that they must breathe and still say that they are walking in the light, that they are keeping the commandment of neighbourly love. On the other hand, there will be no hope for the earth if the plans and schemes to save the earth spring from people's desire to build a security for themselves—a new world in rebellion to God.

The task then, which the believers have received, and through which the Church's life in this world makes sense, is this: that it exist as a non-worldly eschatological entity within the world, having been *'sent'*, as Jesus was (17:18), into the world from without. Delimited from the world as the congregation of the *'hallowed'* (ἡθγιασμενοι, 17:17, 19), a constant offence to the world and hence persecuted by it (15:18-16:4),<sup>24</sup> nevertheless united with the Father and the Son, the Church constantly offers the world the possibility of believing (17:20-23). Since it is Jesus himself who speaks in the Church's word, wherever it sounds forth it again and again becomes true that *'... the hour is coming, and now is, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God and those who hear will live'* (5:25). I conclude with a quotation from John 16:33: *'In the world you have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.'*

23 R Bultmann (1955:90).

24 RE Brown (1979:66): *'Nevertheless, the Fourth Gospel remains a warning against naïveté. The world is not simply unploughed ground waiting to be sown with the Gospel; it is not simply neutral terrain. There is a Prince of this world that is actively hostile to Jesus, so that the maxim *Christus contra mundum* ('Christ against the world') is not without truth.'*

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