Early Christian spirituality of 'seeing the divine' in 1 John

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Apophatic theology and cataphatic theology both occur in the *corpus Johanneum* to describe the character of God. Apophatically the Gospel of John and the first epistle of John state that 'nobody has ever seen God'. Cataphatically, Jesus teaches in the Gospel that, 'Whoever has seen me has seen the Father', and in 1 John we read that after the Parousia has taken place 'we know that when he appears we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is'. This article focuses on the cataphatic phrase 'we shall see him as he is' (1 Jn 3:2). This investigation responds to the variety of interpretations of this particular phrase, as well as to the interest in the spirituality that it could have evoked amongst the readers of this epistle. In order to gain clarity on the 'spirituality of "seeing him" in the first epistle of John', this research focuses on the mechanisms used by the elder in the text to create spiritualities in the readers, such as the *composition of images* in the imagination of these early Christians, the *dynamic interactions* between the reader and the text, as well as the *dialectic of pretension and retention* in the reading of a text.

Introduction

When reading the Bible the reader becomes confused about the references to the visibility or invisibility of God. In both Testaments there are text references to both.[1] There are references to *people who have seen* God and statements that *nobody has ever seen* God. Even today, when searching popular and scholarly publications for opinions on the 'seeing of God', dissimilar views are found.

In the light of this dichotomy, the question that arises is how the readers[2] of 1 John interpreted and experienced the statement made by the author (hereafter elder) in 1 John 3:2: 'Beloved, we are God's children now; what we will be has not yet been revealed. What we do know is this: when he is revealed, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is' (ἀγαπητοί, νῦν τέκνα θεοῦ ἐσμεν, καὶ οὔπω ἐφανερώθη τί ἐσόμεθα. οἴδαμεν ὅτι ἐὰν φανερωθῇ, ὅμοιοι αὐτῷ ἐσόμεθα, ὅτι ὀψόμεθα αὐτὸν καθώς ἐστιν). To state the question differently: how did this text create spiritualities[3] and what spiritualities did the phrase 'for we shall see him as he is' evoke in the lives of the Johannine Christians?

In order to obtain clarity on the meaning of this phrase in 1 John 3:2 and how and what kind of spiritualities it could evoke in the lives of the first readers, I will follow the following modus operandi: firstly, I determine who is the 'object' of seeing in 1 John 3:2 and secondly, what is meant by 'seeing' him. Thirdly, I look into the mechanisms used by the elder in the text to create spiritualities in the readers. Finally, I try to discover the possible 'lived experiences' (spiritualities) of the early Christian readers when they read this text (3:2).

1.In his discussion of the *Covenant Theophany* Terrien (1978:121) points out a tension that exists between two different religious stances in the Hebrew religion. The one interprets divine presence according to the *theologoumenon* of the name, and the other perceives it in terms of visibility. This conflict between ear and eye in terms of making God present persisted throughout the centuries of Hebrew religion, and continues in modified forms in both Judaism and Christianity.

2.The references to 'readers' imply in this essay also the 'hearers' who listened to the reader.

3.In order to define 'spirituality 'I first have to look briefly at the notion of spirituality in consulting, according to my opinion, the works of three influential scholars in this field. Philip Sheldrake (2000:40) defines [*Christian*] spirituality as 'a conscious relationship with God, in Jesus Christ, through the indwelling of the Spirit and in the context of the community of believers'. Sandra Schneiders (2000:254) defines spirituality as 'the experience of consciously striving to integrate one's life, in terms not of isolation and self-absorption, but of self-transcendence toward the ultimate value one perceives'. Spirituality, then, as a lived experience, is by definition 'determined by the particular ultimate value, within the horizon of which the life project is pursued'. In 2002 Kees Waaijman (2002:312) defines spirituality as 'the divine-human relational process of transformation'. This can be dissected as a 'divine-human relationship' and a 'relationship of transformation'. He also speaks of spirituality as that which touches the core of human existence, namely 'our relation to the Absolute'. Due to these three and other related definitions to define Christian spirituality it is necessary for me to define a working definition of Christian spirituality that will feature in this essay. Therefore, I have opted for a combination between these complemented definitions of Waaijman, Sheldrake, and Schneiders. Spirituality, as used in this essay, refers to 'living a life of transformation and self-transcendence that resonates with the lived experience of the divine'. This definition consists of two constituents: 'a lived experience of the divine-human relationship' and 'living a life of transformation and self-transcendence that resonates with that of the divine-human relationship' (Van der Merwe 2014a:373).

Before I plunge into investigating the early Christian spirituality of 'seeing him as he is' and how it is prompted by the text, I must first determine who is the 'object' who shall be seen and what is meant by 'shall see'. What did the elder envisage?

Determining the reference of the personal pronouns αὐτῷ/αὐτὸν

The two personal pronouns, αὐτῷ/αὐτὸν [him] in 1 John 3:2, are the focal point. The question that arises is: 'To whom do the personal pronouns αὐτῷ/αὐτὸν refer: to Jesus, the Son of God or to God, the Father?' Scholars are divided, for the object of vision is not clearly stated in 1 John 3:2.[4] Scholars such as Law (1909:387), Dodd (1953:70–71), Marshall (1978:173), Grayston (1984:103–104), Johnson (1993:68), Walls and Anders (1999:190), Kruse (2000:116), Kistemaker and Hendriksen (2001:295), Akin (2001:137) and Thomas (2004:151)[5] have assigned Jesus as the person referred to in this statement. For Westcott (1902:99), Michaelis (1981:366), Klauck 1991:182, Loader (1992:34–35), Bratcher and Hatton (1993:313), Haas, De Jonge and Swellengrebel (1994:83), Strecker (1996:88–89), Painter (2002:221) and Brown (2006:395) it refers to God; whilst for De Jonge (1978:84) and Smalley (1989:147) it can be either of the two (see also Farrell 1992a:314).[6] In both cases good arguments can be tabled to verify each case.

Arguments in favour of Jesus are: The personal pronouns αὐτῷ/αὐτὸν are assumed to be references to Jesus (see 1 Jn 13:13–17, especially 17:24; cf. Col 3:4). Verse 2:28 refers to the coming of Jesus, which was also referred to in 3:2. In 2:1 and 2:29 the elder refers to Jesus as 'righteous'. Thus the person referred to in 2:28–29 is the same person and object implied in 3:2. What we have here is a phrase referring to Christ in a passage dealing with God as Father (see 2:29–3:2a; cf. Schnackenburg 1992). The elder moves easily between the Father and the Son, as is evident here in 3:1–2 and also in verses 28–29. In fact the Christology of the elder does not make a sharp distinction between the persons of God and Jesus. Therefore the likeness is probably to the Son rather than the Father.

John 17:24 refers to where Jesus asks the Father if his disciples would see his glory. This is in line with the statements that nobody has seen God (Jn 1:18). Three other texts from the New Testament verify this point of view: 2 Corinthians 3:18; Philippians 3:21; 3:4 (similar vocabulary [revealed] occurs and all three have Jesus as subject).

Arguments in favour of the Father are:[7] the pericope is saturated with references to the Father; the eschatological reference in John 4:16–17 implies that the subject here should be the Father; God is also referred to as 'righteous' in 1:9 which links to the reference to 'righteousness' in 2:29. The fact that this pericope is saturated with the relationship between the Father and children, and also in 4:17,[8] favours the Father as the subject here.[9] A strong case is that in 1 John the character of the children of God is paralleled with the character of God and not Jesus (God is light, righteous, love),[10] although in 2:6 the children of God are called to live (περιπατεῖν) as Jesus lived.

This diversity of opinions, and the arguments in favour of both, lead to a *cul de sac*. The Johannine Christians knew that they would not be able to see the face of God (because of their Old Testament[11] and Johannine background knowledge).[12] They also knew, according to John 17:24, that they would see Jesus and that they would see God only through Jesus (cf. 1:18; 14:9–10), as result of the immanent existence between the Father and the Son (according to both the Gospel of John [10:30; 17:20–23] and 1 John). The statement in the prologue of John on the invisibility of God prepares the reader to receive that vision which the Gospel has to offer. For God is completely other than that which is created.[13] The very relationship between Creator and

4.Farrell (1992a:5; 1992c:314) asserts that the idea that one could ever see the divine is not clear or typical of Johannine thought.

5.Although for Thomas (2004:151) the primary reference seems to be Jesus, God can also be a secondary referent of the pronoun 'him'.

6.Farrell (1992a:5; 1992c:314) points out that 'the object of vision is not clearly stated in 1 Jn 3:2'.

7.The vision of God and Christ occurs in Matthew 5:8; John 1:18; John 14:7, 9; 17:24; 2 Corinthians 5:7; Hebrews 12:14; 1 Peter 1:8; Revelation 1:7, 22:4.

8.The third eschatological reference in 1 John.

9.Haas, De Jonge and Swellengrebel (1994:83) point out, from a grammatical perspective, two objections to a reference to Christ. (1) Two Greek forms occur in the verb, which are identical except for the mood. The first form refers to a situation and the second form to a person. There is not even any explicit indication of a shift of subject. (2) There is the assumption that the Elder's implication of Christ in 3:3 ('he is pure') also implies Christ in 3:2b. Although both suppositions are possible, they are improbable, according to Haas *et al.* They refer to several versions (NEB, Zürich, Jérusalem, Luther 1956) which follow a different interpretation. They take the verb form as an impersonal third person 'referring to the future situation of *we*', which may then be rendered as 'when it appears, we shall be like him'. This then implies that the phrase does not refer to the appearance of Christ but of *we*. However, it may implicitly still refer to the appearance of Christ, as it is only then that *we* (the believers) will become what we are. Then the pronouns in *like him* (αὐτῷ) and *as he is* (αὐτὸν) stand for 'God' and not for 'Christ'.

10.The object (person) in the parallelism of the exhortation in 3:3 to purify themselves is unclear.

11.According to Van der Merwe (2014b:1) the writers of the New Testament never felt free to withdraw from the heritage of faith in the Scriptures of the Hebrews. Roth (1987:8) is convinced that the narrative code of the Gospel of John lies hidden in the Old Testament. See also Rivkin (1984:11) and Westermann (1994:7), who states: '[*E*] s kommt die neue Situation hinzu, daß einerseits die jüdische Exegese die Schriften der Tora ohne jegliche Berücksichtigung der Schriften des Neuen Testaments auslegt und anderseits das NeueTestament bei christlichen Exegeten häufig ganz von der jüdischen Tradition her verstanden wird.' See also Westermann (1968). The Gospel of John is saturated with themes and concepts coming from the Torah (Wolfgang 1987:6–29; Kanagaraj 2001:33–60; Casselli 1997:15–41; Wright 2005:302; Wucherpfennig 2003:488; Westermann 1994:7: Creation 1:1–3; theophany at Sinai 1:14–18; a new Covenant 1:14–19; wisdom motif 1:11; Moses 1:17; glory 1:14; grace and truth 1:14, 16, 17). Other Toraic themes in the Gospel of John are: John 3: The lifting up of the serpent (3:14); John 4: Well of Jacob; John 4: I AM (Ex 3:14); John 5: Sabbath – working and resting; John 6: Moses – manna; John 6–10: feasts; John 7: living water, Abraham; John 8: children of Abraham; John 9: disciples of Moses; John 13: foot washing. The Fourth Evangelist also refers to and discusses all 10 commandments in fragments throughout the Gospel. Cf. also Smith (1962:329).

12.'The idea that one could ever see God is not typical of Johannine thought' (Farrell 1992a:5; 1992b:314). Contrary to the rest of the New Testament, the Gospel of John never uses the passive mode of the verb ὁράω (Farrell 1992a:4). See Otto (1975:12–24) on the *mysterium tremendum* of God. A thorough study of the *holiness* of God will verify this point of the totally incomprehensible otherness of God. Christians must realise that a deeper vision of God will never be possible – not now and not after the parousia – and this is due not to the limitation of the human brain or sin, but to the limitless richness of God. We must bear one thing in mind: the boundary between God and man will never disappear. Even in systematic theology the qualitative difference between the eternity of God and the eternity of humans is differently referred to as *aeternitas* and *aeviternitas* (Heyns 1978:63).

13.Cf. for example schools of Hellenistic mysticism, which possess technical language to express their versions of the seeing of God. Gnosticism desires to attain perfect knowledge of God on earth and total union by means of ecstasy (Schnackenburg 1968:278). The mystery religions emphasise that the vision of a god will include the divinisation of the seer (Farrell 1992a:5).

creature expresses this fact (Jn 1:1–4), as does the theme of the invisibility of God (Farrell 1992a:5–6). According to John 12:45 and 14:9, God can only be seen in his revelation in Christ (Michaelis 1981:364).

Because of this uncertainty and the interwovenness and intimate relationship between Jesus and God in 1 John,[14] I have opted for a dualistic interpretation of these personal pronouns αὐτῷ/αὐτὸν [him]. This implies that it refers to both God and Jesus. God is seen *in* and *through* Jesus, according to the Gospel of John (14:9). Believers will see the identity of God *in* Jesus at the παρουσίᾳ as they have seen the identity of God in him on earth (1:18; 10:30; 14:9; 5:17–24). *Through* Jesus the believer can then see (Jn 14:9) or experience God.[15] This is because of the unique relationship that exists between the Father and his Son Jesus Christ.

Throughout 1 and 2 John, Jesus is mentioned in association with the Father, predominantly with the connotation 'the Father of Jesus Christ'.[16] In these epistles this title reflects the intimate, indissoluble unity between the Father and the Son (Coetzee 1993:219). Thus the phrase to 'see him *just as* (καθώς) he is' conveys the idea of seeing God in Jesus.[17] This also relates to all the καθώς statements[18] and comparisons in the Gospel of John between Jesus and God.[19]

When the author of 1 John refers to Jesus as τὸν υἱὸν αὐτοῦ (his Son, 1 Jn 1:3, 7) or μονογενῆ (only, 1 Jn 4:9), it is in close conjunction with 'God' (ὁ θεὸς): πᾶς ὁ ἀρνούμενος τὸν υἱὸν οὐδὲ τὸν πατέρα ἔχει, ὁ ὁμολογῶν τὸν υἱὸν καὶ τὸν πατέρα ἔχει (no-one who denies the Son has the Father. He who confesses the Son has the Father, 2:23; see also 1:3; 4:14). A repeated parallelism occurs, effectively putting the Father and the Son on an equal level (1:3; 2:23; 4:15; 5:11, 12; Edwards 2000:160). The close bond between Jesus and Father is such that, for the believer, the experience of the one carries with it the experience of the other (2:24; Lieu 1997:72; Van der Merwe 2005:444). With this ambiguity about these pronouns the elder creates a space which the reader can fill by seeing both Jesus and God in it.

The kind of 'sight' meant by the elder (ὀψόμεθα αὐτὸν)

The second uncertainty to be addressed in the phrase 'for we shall see him as he is' is what the elder could have meant by 'seeing'. What kind of seeing will believers after the parousia experience? The notion of 'seeing Jesus (God)' in all his fullness (καθώς ἐστιν, 'just as he is') and consequently 'becoming like him' (ὅμοιοι αὐτῷ ἐσόμεθα) is not a new creation or a new thought coming from the elder. It already occurred in Hellenistic mysticism (Smalley 1989:147; cf. Dodd 1953:71). If this is the case then the elder has adapted this concept and used it in a Christianised way to contradict the unwarranted speculations of his opponents about the means (intellectual knowledge) by which a *visio Dei* ('vision of God') may be accomplished.

Conversely, the notion that believers will 'see God' (ὀψόμεθα αὐτὸν) is also present in the Old Testament (see Ps 11:7; 17:15; cf. 42:105). The Hebrew Bible does not contain an abstract word meaning 'presence'.[20] Terrien (1978:65) points out that the Hebrews used expressions such as 'the face of Jahweh' or 'face of Elohim' to denote the 'innermost being of God', which was inaccessible even to a person like Moses. The Hebrew noun [face, presence][21] was used metaphorically to denote a sense of immediate proximity. In the Old Testament the coming of God meant more than a simple revelation. Its use in a cultic environment promoted an expectation of fulfilment and the wait for a final manifestation. This proves the faith of Israel to be eschatological[22] (Terrien 1978:66). Therefore, there is no reason why Judaism should not have provided the elder with a primary background for his use of this motif (see also Schnackenburg 1992:171–174).

An even greater possibility and more immediate setting would have been the fourth Gospel itself. The meaning of the elder's statement 'we shall see (ὀψόμεθα) him as he is' may, according to Thomas (2004:151), be discerned in part by the equivalent theme of seeing God and/or Jesus in the *corpus Johanneum.* According to the Gospel of John the theological idea of seeing God is associated with seeing Jesus. When the author of the Gospel of John states, 'No one has ever seen God', he immediately qualifies it with 'the only Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, he has made him known'. This suggests that Jesus, the Logos (Jn 1:1, 14) and only Son from the Father (Jn 1:14, 18; 3:16, 18) has special knowledge and

14.Also due to the relationship between Jesus and the Father according to the Gospel of John.

15.We must also bear in mind the role and function of the Paraclete (Holy Spirit) according to John 14–16.

16.1:2, 3; 3:1, 22-24; 4:14; 2 John 3, 9; cf. also 4:2, 3, 10; 5:10.

17.Farrell points out that as Israel's faith evolves, the radical notion of a 'face-to-face' vision of the divine is avoided (cf. Ex 9, 33, 18-34). According to Michaelis (1981:331–333) expressions such as 'glory' and 'angel of God' have often been used to substitute more direct types of seeing the divine. Farrell continues that when sight of God is retained, the form of the verb 'seeing' has then often been changed. In the Septuagint in numerous cases the seeing of God has been substituted with references to an 'appearance': 'And the Lord appeared (ὤφθη) to Abraham' (Gen 12:7a; cf. 17:1; 18:1);'And the Lord appeared (ὤφθη) to [Isaac] that night' (Gen 26:24; cf, 26:2); 'And the Lord appeared (ὤφθη) to Jacob in Liza' (Gen 35:9; cf. 26:2). Michaelis (1981) in Farrell 1992a:4) states in his essay that 'this use of the passive voice of the verb does not refer to a vision apparition, but rather to an experience of God's (invisible) presence'. Michaelis (1981:329–330) points out that visionary-Ecstatic Prophetic Seeing is not that God is seen by the prophet. What he heard was God Himself, who gives his word to the prophet in a vision. In no theophany was God seen (1982:331–333). He was only heard. The verb ὤφθη constitutes the beginning of his revelation by word. This indicates the presence of God. He reveals himself in his word. In the Old Testament there is also no attestation of a promise that man will see God after death (Michaelis 1981:334).

18.5:30; 8:28; 12:50; 14:31; 17:2; also cf. 17:18; 20:21. Also see Van der Merwe (2001:131–149).

19.See the work of Thompson (2001:117–121) on 'The work of the Father in the work of the Son'.

20.The Greek noun παρουσία (see 1 Jn 2:28) has a meaning of 'presence' (see 2 Cor 10:10; Phil 2:12). Danker (2000:780) translates it as 'the state of being present at a place, *presence*'. For Friberg, Friberg and Miller (2000:302) it also has the dual meaning of '(1) *being present, presence* (2 Cor 10:10), the opposite of ἀπουσία [*absence, being away*]; (2) *coming, arrival*. This word is secularly used to refer to 'presence' in the works of Aeschylus (*Persians*169); Sophocles (*Electra* 606); and Euripides (*Alcestis* 606). This noun has become a *terminus technicus* of the Second Coming of Jesus at the end of time'.

21.This Hebrew noun has been translated in Exodus 33:14 as 'presence' and in verse 23 as 'face'.

22.See Von Rad (1977:119–125) on 'The day of Jahweh' as the very heart of prophetic eschatology.

communion with the Father and has seen the Father (6:46). The fact that only Jesus sees God 'preserves the divine quality of invisibility' (Farrell 1992a:6). The author verifies this statement with Jesus' teaching that those who have seen the Son have seen the Father as well (14:9). The prayer of Jesus also reveals that seeing the (full) glory of the Son, where he was before, awaits the disciples in heaven (17:24; Thomas 2004:151). Van den Bussche (1961:21) calls Johannine theology a 'theology of vision'.[23]

Every time the Gospel of John refers to the seeing or not seeing of God, the author uses the verb ὁράω (cf. Jn 1:18; 6:46; 11:40; 14:7, 9).[24] This is the same verb used by the elder when he states 'for we shall see (ὀψόμεθα) him as he is'. Therefore, it is relevant in this investigation to look at how the Gospel of John uses ὁράω in an eschatological sense. The future tense of ὁράω is used 10 times (Jn 1:39, 50, 51; 3:36; 11:40; 16:16, 17, 19, 22; 19:37).[25] Unfortunately nothing in the referred texts on seeing in the Gospel of John, nor the research carried out on the eschatological use of the verb ὁράω in the Gospel of John, nor the excellent article of Michaelis on ὁράω (1981:315–367) in the *Theological dictionary of the New Testament* can cast any light on what the elder could have meant by 'seeing'.

With this verse (Jn 3:2) the elder tries to show his readers what believers can expect to experience[26] in eternity (Smalley 1989:147). Not much of the 'way of seeing' or the 'kind of seeing' is clear from the text or contexts in 1 John. The elder does not define what is meant by 'seeing' (ὀψόμεθα) or what kind of seeing it comprises. This can be because these Johannine Christians knew exactly what he communicated to them; he left it undefined for them to fill it with their own understanding; or he himself does not know what kind of seeing it is going to be. Is it physical, spiritual, comprehensive or perceptive seeing, or even something different from this? In 1 John only two noteworthy references to 'see' occur that might cast some light on the comprehension of what is meant by 'seeing', in 3:2. In 1 John 1:1–3 the elder uses the verb to *see* (ἑωράκαμεν [3x], ἐθεασάμεθα) in reference to the encounter of the eyewitness with Jesus[27] and in 3:6 he refers to the one who commits sin as never having *seen* (οὐχ ἑώρακεν) or *known* (οὐδὲ ἔγνωκεν) Jesus. In the first case (1:1–3) *seeing* involves *physical seeing*.[28] In the second case (3:6) it involves failure to see with the eyes of faith. Unfortunately these distinctions do not really help us to understand the elder's reference to the eschatological kind of seeing.

It seems that we shall have to concur with Painter and Michaelis. Painter states (2002:221) that what is clear is that a transformation has already taken place in believers – 'we are children of God now' (1 Jn 3:1–2) – but the Parousia is going to bring more change. According to Michaelis (1981:365), future vision will be completely different from seeing now. This mystery is a lived experience of its own. Believers are going to be like Jesus, which will enable them to see him καθώς ἐστιν (just as he is, 1 Jn 3:2). This emphasises the fullness of this vision (Michaelis 1981:366).

Literary effects exploited by the elder to generate spiritualities

Waaijman (2002:742) points out that readers shape the portrayal of texts in their imagination and effectively participate in the texts. In such an event readers are pulled into texts[29] and texts into readers. During the first century the epistles were read over and over when the Christians assembled on Sundays for worship. This may have brought a sense of proximity to the text.[30] Even copying these texts meant much more than merely reproducing them. 'It was a way of appropriating a text' (Waaijman 2002:744). This suggests that the reading of biblical texts produces various kinds of spirituality or 'lived experiences' of God, and resurrected Christ,[31] depending on what the text communicates about God and also who is reading the text.

These spiritualities are created through the composition of images,[32] a dynamic interaction between text and reader, and a dialectic of retention and pretension. These three effects help to make sense of the reading text and also help to determine some of the lived experiences evoked when the early Christians read the not yet canonised texts. These three effects are now applied to 1 John 2:28–3:3 in particular and making due allowance for 3:4–10, in order to determine the

23.It can further be noted that Farrell published three outstanding essays in the same year on *Seeing the Father (Jn 6:46, 14:9)* according to the Gospel of John. These took their inspiration from her thesis entitled *'Seeing' According to the Fourth Gospel* (1979). From her publications it is evident that the Johannine concept of 'seeing' involves more than mere physical seeing of an historical event (Farrell 1992a:2; also cf. Koester 1989:327–348; Kysar 2007:102–105). She distinguishes seven levels of seeing: non-seeing, sensory seeing, relational seeing (Farrell 1992a); perceptive seeing, comprehensive seeing (Farrell 1992b), eschatological seeing and memorial seeing (1992c), and uses the following verbs from the Gospel to describe the levels of seeing: ὁράω, βλέπω, θεάομαι, εἶδον (functions as the aorist form of ὁράω, Danker 2000:279), and θεωρέω. Unfortunately none of these levels of seeing could cast any light on the kind of seeing in 1 John 3:2.

24.Michaelis (1981:340) refers to 19 occurrences of ὁράω in the Gospel. In most cases it occurs in the perfect mode 'to show the effect of seeing on the subject'. According to Farrell (1992a:4) the Gospel of John, contrary to the rest of Scripture, never uses the passive of ὁράω. This deliberate choice, according to Farrell, implies that the author disassociates himself 'from ancient references to certain "appearances"' of God'. Danker (2000:719) defines ὁράω as 'to perceive by the eye, *catch sight of, notice*'. Zodhiates (2000:3708) defines it as, 'To see, perceive with the eyes, look at'.

25.See Farrell (1992c:315) for a brief discussion of how the author of the Gospel of John uses the future tense of the verb ὁράω. See also Farrell (1992c:315–321) for her discussion on 'eschatological seeing and Jesus' seeing of the Father' (cf. 6:46).

26.This thought of 'seeing God/Christ' has influenced the Christian tradition, especially the mystical tradition. According to Dodd (1953:71) the Elder's 'serene certainty that we shall see our Lord and be like Him, is the model for all our thinking about the life to come'. For the vision of God and Christ elsewhere in the New Testament, see 2 Corinthians 5:7; Hebrews 12:14; 1 Peter 1:8; Revelation 1:7 (cf. further 1 Jn 3:6*b*) (Smalley 1989:147).

27.During the time of Jesus' ministry, the physical seeing, hearing and touching of Jesus created a specific 'lived experience' of him (e.g. his teaching in parables and his performance of miracles). That is what the elder tries to communicate when he refers three times (1:1–3) to the physical experience of seeing Jesus (Van der Merwe 2013:9).

28.The disciples saw Jesus physically (cf. Synoptics) and some people saw the image of God in him spiritually.

29.With his multiple uses of the personal pronoun (ἡμῖν, ἡμᾶς) and first person plural in verbs (ἐσμέν, ἐσόμεθα), the elder pulls the reader into the text to become part of the events described in the text.

30.This also happens today when we read Scripture. Over the years believers have constructed a theological framework that lies latent in the subconscious. When they read scripture or listen to the gospel then this theological framework is called up into the conscious to help cognitively understand the gospel.

31.In Christianity 'divine' can refer to 'God the Father', 'the resurrected Christ' or 'the Holy Spirit'.

32.Cf. terminology referring to the senses (see him), events (revealed) and cognitive (like him).

spiritualities evoked and how they were evoked when the Johannine Christians read the text.

The first effect: The composition of images

When the early Christians read these texts their imagination composed images of the text. The reader subjectively and selectively composes the images out of the multifarious aspects of the text as well as the metaphors and imagery embedded in the text (Iser 1978:150). These created images described in the text are then experienced. The reading process is a catalyst for the passive syntheses through which the meaning of a text and experiences are constituted in the mind of the reader. This implies that text and reader permeate one another:

- The reader himself, in constituting the meaning, is also constituted (Iser 1978:150).
- In the reading process – various perspectives of parts of the text move into focus and take on their actuality in their comparison with preceding segments – the reader forms a sequence of these images in which the successive images gradually constitute a certain configuration: a field of meaning and experience (Iser 1978:108–118).[33]

In the pericope of 1 John 2:28–3:10 the elder writes about the relationship between God and the Johannine Christians in terms of family metaphor. In 3:1 the elder announces the theme of the fatherhood of God. He connects this with the idea that believers can be called 'children of God'. In this pericope even more family terminology is used, such as 'born of him' (2:29), 'God's children' (3:2), 'Son of God' (3:8), 'born of God' (twice, 3:9), 'God's seed' (3:9), 'children' (3:10) and 'brothers' (3:10). The conduct of the family is described as 'doing what is right' (2:29), 'living pure' (3:3) and 'loving their brothers' (3:10). All these references create images and experiences of family life with which the readers were familiar and could identify. All this generates the hope (3:3, ἐλπίδα) of seeing the divine[34] family members (the Father and Jesus the Son) of this divine family one day after the Parousia.

But, opposed to this *familia Dei,* the elder also displays the family of the devil. Again he uses familial (household) terminology. He refers to those opposite to the children of God as 'children of the devil' (3:8). The devil is their Father (see Jn 8:44); he has sinned from the beginning (3:8). The works of this devil and his children are 'to sin', which is depicted here as lawlessness (3:4) and 'not to do what is right' (3:10).

Thus the pictures of opposite images of family life not only constituted in the mind of the reader the environment for 'we shall see him as he is', but would also have created lived experiences of tension in their lives. Gradually, during the reading process, an ideational world is evoked. This is the result of the fact 'that textual perspectives contrast with each other' (Waaijman 2002:745). As these early Christians read the texts figures arose, courses of actions became visible, certain figures were characterised and linked together as the narrative developed, themes developed or were pictorially illuminated from other perspectives (cf. Waaijman 2002:746). The description of opposites helps the reader to understand and to experience an entity or a particular event in a certain way.

The second effect: Dynamic interactions between text and reader

Reading is a continuous dialogical negotiation of meaning between text and reader that evokes varied experiences. According to Iser (1978:107), a text is a 'structured prefigurement'. The way in which a text is received depends as much on the reader as on the text. Reading is not a one-way process; it is a dynamic interaction between text and reader (Iser 1978:107). In contrast to the characters referred to in the text, the implied historical readers are actively involved in imagining the field of meaning and trying to view the text as a whole (Waaijman 2002:748). The reading of a text creates not only pictures but also 'lived experiences' of the identity,[35] ethics and character of the characters in the texts, and these become prolific when the (reading) text informs and allows them to bring their own faculties and experiences into play (cf. Iser 1978:108). The rhetoric of the author influences the 'lived experiences' of the reader.

In 2:28–3:10 we can discern the following formal and informal strategies of the elder, which occur in the text to generate particular spiritualities and conduct. Three formal strategies are:

- *Participation,* in which the elder seeks to keep the text and lived experiences of the text alive by repetition (reveal, abides, right[*eous*], cannot sin, love) or imitation (love, right([*eous*], pure; see also 2:6, to live as Jesus lived).
- *Detachment,* which seeks to surpass earlier practices and ways of living (stop denying the Son, stop being lawless or committing sin, be not deceived, etc.).
- *Transformation* of 'being born of God', 'having the seed of God', 'become the children of God', 'become pure' and 'abide in Jesus'. With these repetitive uses of family metaphor the elder helps the reader to identify with the Father and Son in order to cause a continuous transformation and lived experience in the reader.

Some informal strategies to generate the dynamic interaction between the reader and the text also occur and complement the formal strategies. They consist of the following (also cf. Van der Merwe 2014a:1–11).

Semantic networks in the inner texture of the pericope (2:28–3:10), as well as the intertexture in the epistle, guide the

33.See also Robbins (2008:1–26) on his discussion and explanation on rhetography and rhetology.

34.The reference 'the divine' is used to refer to the dualistic 'seeing' of God in the resurrected Jesus.

35.The interrogative pronoun τί ('what') in the phrase τί ἐσόμεθα ['what we will be'] asks about identity or quality and can be rendered as 'what we shall be like', or even 'what kind of persons we shall be' (Haas *et al.* 1994:83). It also stresses the continuity between the present state of believers and their future states, as well as the quality that lies in store for them as the children of God.

imagination of the readers and strengthen their expectation of the future 'coming of Christ'. The construction of paragraph 2:28–3:3 shows a close eschatological parallelism between the present (νῦν, 2:28; 3:2) and the future (ἐὰν φανερωθῇ, 3:2; Du Plessis 1978:70ff). The identity and conduct of the reader in the present are crucially important for the future (2:28; Du Rand 1981:12). The content of the second paragraph is only a comparison of the children of God with the children of the devil.

The first paragraph (2:28-3:3) is saturated with various groups of semantically related words, concepts and themes. The first semantic network refers to two references (τεκνία/ἀγαπητοί, 2:28; 3:2) the elder uses to indicate the intimate relationship that exists between him and his adherents. The second network refers to the revelation or *parousia* of Jesus (2:28; 3:2; 4:17, is semantically related and refers to it as the 'day of judgment'). The third network refers to two virtues (righteousness and purity, 2:29; 3:3). The elder refers to a third virtue (love) in 3:10. This is achieved when abiding in him happens. The last network refers to family metaphor (3:1, 2; 4-10).

Linguistic features, like the occurrence of the first person plural of personal pronouns, (ἡμᾶς, ἡμῖν), the first person plural of verbs (ὦμεν, ἐσμεν, ἐσόμεθα), the high frequency of adjectives ('every one, all' [πᾶς]; 'no-one' [μηδεὶς]) and the repetitive chiastic structures,[36] parallelisms[37] and cyclic reasoning[38] in the text, help the readers to comply with the text. The use of the adjective πᾶς in conjunction with a participle (3:4, 6 [2x], 9) or only the participle (ὁ ποιῶν, 3:7, 8/ὁ μὴ, 3:10), accentuates the personalised active person (cf. Du Rand 1981:14). These features pull the readers into the text and the text into the readers. It emphasises the close relationship between Jesus and the children of God.

Dialectic language forces the reader to associate with God and to act like a child of God. The children of God are set opposite the children of the devil (3:4–10). For the elder, their Father is righteous whilst the devil commits sin from the beginning (3:8), which is defined as the works of the devil (8). The believers are from God whilst the children of the devil are not from God. The believers know God, but the others do not (3:1). The children of God do what is right, therefore they will see him through the resurrected Christ. The children of the devil commit sin, therefore they will not see God.

Two prominent themes, which are closely related, are important structural markers in this paragraph. They run parallel through the pericope and cause inherent cohesion in the paragraph, and are together responsible for the spirituality embedded in the phrase 'for we shall see him as he is':

- The coming of Jesus – φανερωθῇ [revelation]/παρουσίᾳ [coming], cf. 4:17, which is semantically related, referred to as τῇ ἡμέρᾳ τῆς κρίσεως ['the day of judgment'].
- To conform to Jesus' identity – μένετε ἐν αὐτῷ ([abide in him], 2:28); ποιῶν τὴν δικαιοσύνην ([do what is right], 2:29); ὅμοιοι αὐτῷ ἐσόμεθα ([we shall be like him], 3:2); ἁγνίζει ἑαυτόν ([purify themselves], 3:3) and ἀγαπῶν τὸν ἀδελφὸν αὐτοῦ ([love one's brother], 3:10).

The dominant motif of the first paragraph is to be a child of God in the present and also in the future. *Present indications* are: now little children (νῦν, τεκνία); know that … born of him (γινώσκετε ὅτι … ἐξ αὐτοῦ γεγέννηται, 3:2); that we should be called children of God (ἵνα τέκνα θεοῦ κληθῶμεν, 3:1); and that is what we are (καὶ ἐσμέν, 3:1); the world does not know us (ὁ κόσμος οὐ γινώσκει, 3:1); we are God's children now (νῦν τέκνα θεοῦ ἐσμεν, 3:2); we know that (οἴδαμεν ὅτι, 3:2); who has this hope (ὁ ἔχων τὴν ἐλπίδα, 3:3) (see also Thomas 2004:150). *Future indications* are: when he is revealed (ἐὰν φανερωθῇ, 2:28); may have confidence (σχῶμεν παρρησίαν, 2:28); not be put to shame (μὴ αἰσχυνθῶμεν, 2:28); at his coming (ἐν τῇ παρουσίᾳ, 2:28); what we shall be has not yet been revealed (οὔπω ἐφανερώθη τί ἐσόμεθα., 3:2); when he is revealed (ἐὰν φανερωθῇ, 3:2); we shall be like him (ὅμοιοι αὐτῷ ἐσόμεθα, 3:2); we shall see (ὀψόμεθα, 3:2; Du Rand 1981:12; Thomas 2004:150–151).

Family metaphor is used quite extensively in this pericope.[39] By using this metaphor the elder not only explains to the reader the character of the relationship between God and his children, but also succeeds in pulling the reader into the text to experience the world, characters and events described in the text. In the second paragraph the children of God are characterised in comparison to the children of the devil. Structural markers are: sin (ἁμαρτία and ἀνομία, 'lawlessness'); to reveal (ἐφανερώθη); devil (διάβολος). The expression, 'who do not do what is right' (μὴ ποιῶν δικαιοσύνην), relates semantically to ἁμαρτάνειν, which is the dominant structural marker of paragraph 3:4–10.

The eschatological climate is clearly evident. The expressions παρρησίαν ([confidence], 2:28) and αἰσχυνθῶμεν ([make ashamed], 2:28) form a hendiadys, which is arranged in a chiasm with ἐὰν φανερωθῇ ([when he is revealed], 2:28) and παρουσίᾳ ([coming], 2:28). In the present the readers experience confidence through the Father-child relationship (3:1) and in future by being 'the same as' (ὅμοιοι) him (3:2). The elder clearly states in this paragraph that the certainty of the readers is based upon adoption of God in the present and in the future (Du Rand 1981:13).

Intimate forms of address like 'beloved' (3:2) and 'little children' (2:28) make the reading of the text a personal experience. In order to attract the attention of his readers, both present and future, as well as to identify himself with them, the elder addresses them as 'beloved' (ἀγαπητοί).[40] He attempts to emphasise the spiritual truth, already pronounced in 3:1, that through the love of God true believers can be called children of God (ἵνα τέκνα θεοῦ κληθῶμεν, 3:1, 2, 10) and also

36.2:28; 2:29; 3:1-2; 3:6; 3:8; 3:9.

37.3:2-3; 3:4; 3:5; 3:7; 3:8.

38.Abide (2:28; 3:6); right(eous) (2:29; 3:7, 10); revealed (2:28; 3:2); love (3:1, 10); children of God (3:1, 2, 10); born of God (2:29; 3:9[2x]); children of the devil (3:8, 10).

39.'Seed of God', 'born of God', 'children of God', 'Father' and 'brothers'. See also the previous discussion on the "First effect – family metaphor".

40.Cf. 2:7; 3:21; 4:11; at 4:1, 7 it introduces a new section. See also the use of 'my dear children' (Τεκνία [μου]) and 'little children' (Παιδία) at 2:1, 18, 28.

because they do what is right (ποιῶν τὴν δικαιοσύνην, 2:29). This stresses the present reality of the status of the believer with the Father – νῦν τέκνα θεοῦ ἐσμεν ['now we are' children of God]. This status counterbalances the future character of the children of God, which the elder is about to describe (Smalley 1989:144).

The third effect: A dialectic of pretension and retention

When reading a text the reader is extremely active. The reading of a text phrase evokes in the reader an image that appears against a background of what has already been read and also against what still remains to be read. Thus the text unfolds at every moment of reading, which creates various 'lived experiences'. This unfolding takes place against 'the combined background of memory and expectation' (Waaijman 2002:744).

Husserl (cited in Waaijman 2002:744) calls the remembered background 'retention' and the anticipated background 'pretension' (see also Iser 1978:112). Retention encompasses the past, and pretension – which is still unoccupied – conveys what is potentially to come to fruition. The tension created between retention and pretension controls the reading experience. The text read (retention) is recaptured in every reading event. The text still to be read (pretension) 'constitutes the projection surfaces against the background of which the images take shape' (Waaijman 2002:744). 'Thus every moment of reading is a dialectic of pretension and retention, conveying a future horizon yet to be occupied, along with a past (and continually fading) horizon already filled' (Iser 1978:112). Thus every text-reading moment involves a change of perspective. This consequently constitutes a close combination of 'differentiated perspectives, foreshortened memories, present modifications, and future expectations' (Iser 1978:116). Hence, in the reading event, past and future constantly converge in the present moment. Through these synthetising operations readers experience expanding networks of connections in their minds (Iser 1978:116), networks that move back and forth between the past reading and expected future reading (Waaijman 2002:744). The understanding and 'lived experience' of the reader is at stake in the work of the imagination (Waaijman 2002:745).

This dialectic of retention and pretension is also applied to time (past, present, future) and space ('here' and 'there') in this article. In 3:2 the elder anticipates and depicts a threefold sequence of future eschatological events which hold serious requirements for present conduct: '[*W*]hen he (Jesus) is revealed' (ἐὰν φανερωθῇ); we (the Johannine readers) shall be like him (ὅμοιοι αὐτῷ ἐσόμεθα); because we (the Johannine readers) shall see him as he (Jesus) really is (ὀψόμεθα αὐτὸν καθώς ἐστιν) (cf. Stott 1964:119). In this verse a sequence of events takes place which progresses to a climax (culmination point). This is part of the dialectic and rhetoric the elder uses to mobilise the readers to purify themselves (3:3). The revelation of Jesus will create a dynamic between 'we' and 'him'. These stated events in 3:2 are in tension with what the readers read about 'abide in him' and 'to have confidence and not be put to shame before him at his coming' (2:28).[41] It is also in tension with the next verse (3:3), where the readers are exhorted to purify themselves, as well as the rest of the pericope and following chapters. This tension is released when the readers are guided to knowing what it means to remain in Jesus and what it means 'to be like him'.

The phrase 'when he is revealed' (ἐὰν φανερωθῇ, (3:2), referring to the first eschatological event, alludes to the future παρουσίᾳ, of 'Jesus Christ in glory at the end of time' (Smalley 1989:146). The event of the *coming* (παρουσίᾳ, 2:28) is semantically related to the revelation/appearance (φανερωθῇ, 2:28; 3:2)[42] of Jesus and the day of judgment (τῇ ἡμέρᾳ τῆς κρίσεως, 4:17) and functions in this essay as a 'transitional' event. When Jesus *appears* the 'present eschatological' time will come to an end with the future eschatological event of the Parousia and *day of judgment*, and will introduce a new 'future or final eschatological' time (cf. Dunn 2003:295; Van der Merwe 2006:1054). This understanding is reflected in the close relationship that exists between verses 2:28; 3:2f and 4:17, which helps the readers to understand what the elder is trying to communicate about this eschatological event. These three verses are semantically related, as indicated by cognate expressions and as in the following comparison:[43]

> ἵνα *ἐὰν φανερωθῇ* **σχῶμεν παρρησίαν** καὶ μὴ αἰσχυνθῶμεν ἀπ᾽ αὐτοῦ ἐν *τῇ παρουσίᾳ αὐτοῦ* (2:28)
> ὅτι *ἐὰν φανερωθῇ*, ὅμοιοι αὐτῷ ἐσόμεθα, ὅτι ὀψόμεθα αὐτὸν καθώς ἐστιν (3:2)
> ἵνα ……. **παρρησίαν ἔχωμεν** …….. ἐν *τῇ ἡμέρᾳ τῆσ κρίσεωσ* (4:17). (Van der Merwe 2006:1055)

The elder gives this proclamation a special tone, for he has already referred to another 'revelation' of Christ, namely his incarnation (1:2; cf. 3:5, 8). This seems to be part of a continuous 'manifestation' of the Son of God. This manifestation, which started at the incarnation (1:2) and which is still effective at present (3:5, 8), will be consummated in the future (2:28; 3:2; Smalley 1989:146).

These two events (incarnation and Parousia) converge through the use of the same verb φανερωθῇ [to make visible]. For the elder, the tension-filled union of present and future eschatology is especially clear at this point; whilst φανεροῦν is a *terminus technicus* for the incarnation of Jesus in the past (1:2; 3:5, 8; 4:9), it is used to unmask the deceivers in the

41. This tension is strengthened by the dialectic of 'now' versus 'not yet' and 'are' versus 'will be'. With certainty comes uncertainty.

42. Haas *et al.* (1994:83) propose alternative semantically related meanings such as 'to appear', 'to be revealed', 'to become visible', 'to be seen', 'to become clear'.

43. According to this analysis, it is apparent that verses 2:28 and 4:17 form a parallelism, constituted by the phrases σχῶμεν παρρησίαν and παρρησίαν ἔχωμεν, and the two references concerning Jesus' future appearance, although differently formulated. The phrases σχῶμεν παρρησίαν and παρρησίαν ἔχωμεν form a chiasm to emphasise the 'confidence' believers can have at the *parousia*. The parallelism also helps to relate the coming of Christ (τῇ παρουσίᾳ αὐτοῦ) to the day of judgement (τῇ ἡμέρᾳ τῆς κρίσεως). According to this comparison, the following can be deduced: the event described by the Elder as Jesus' 'revelation' (φανερωθῇ, 2:28; 3:2), is used as a compound word to depict this revelation as Jesus' *parousia* (παρουσίᾳ αὐτοῦ, 2:28) and 'the day of judgment' (τῇ ἡμέρᾳ τῆς κρίσεως, 4:17); whereas Parousia refers to the future eschatological 'event' as such, the day of judgment refers to the nature (purpose) of this event (Van der Merwe 2006:1055).

present (2:19), and also to describe the elder's expectation for the future (2:28; 3:2). The fact that the future revelation is in view here is confirmed by the fact that the revelation of Christ is equated with his *parousia* (Strecker 1996:79).

Thus the elder wants to depict these two events (incarnation and Parousia) as a single, all-embracing manifestation or epiphany of God. In both these events the identity of God becomes visible through Jesus Christ. The first coming was an epiphany of God's love (4:9), of his redemptive involvement (3:5; 4:9, 10, 14) and to destroy the works of the devil (3:8), whereas, in the Parousia, Christ will again appear as an epiphany of the identity of God where his righteousness (1:9; 2:29; also 2:1 (Christ appears as judge)) will be experienced (cf. Schnackenburg 1992:152), as well as his glory (Jn 17:24), love (4:8, 16) and purity (1:5, 3:3; Van der Merwe 2006:1055–1056).

The verb ἐφανερώθη [to make visible or, to reveal] appears thrice in the paragraph 2:28–3:3 (see also 3:8). This high frequency seems to rule the whole line of the thought of the elder (cf. Westcott 1902:98). It connects 'when he is revealed' (ἐὰν ἐφανερώθη) with 'we shall see him' (ὀψόμεθα αὐτὸν). This should create a spirituality of hope and expectation of the παρουσίᾳ [coming]. Jesus was manifested and will again be manifested. His first manifestation made certain things clear and left others a mystery (3:5, 8). Jesus' future manifestation will remove this mystery (cf. Col 3:4). These revelations do not make known to the children of God what they shall be; instead they show that the limitations of the present mode of existence will be removed (Westcott 1902:98). These references to his revelation and the uncertainty and agnosticism about what believers will be creates a spirituality of curiosity and prepares the reader for what is to follow in the second and third events, as described in 3:2.

The 'not yet' (οὔπω) will be much greater than the 'now' (νῦν) (Akin 2001:135). The verb 'know' (οἴδαμεν) carries a definite assurance and knowledge with regard to this particular aspect of the παρουσίᾳ. As in 2:29, the conditional particle ἐὰν ['if' or 'when'] does not cast any doubt on the certainty of occurrence of the event itself, 'but rather on the exact time of the event' (Akin 2001:135). The elder wants his readers to anticipate and be thoroughly prepared for this event, although they cannot even anticipate the timing of the event.

The second eschatological event is that at Jesus' παρουσίᾳ all genuine believers will be revealed as ὅμοιοι[44] αὐτῷ ἐσόμεθα, 'being like him (Jesus)' (3:2).[45] The idea of a transformation that will happen is present and creates a spirituality of expectation, although it is not the primary focus here (cf. Akin 2001:137). This phrase implies spiritual unity rather than complete identity (see also Haas *et al.* 1994:83).[46] The relationship between Jesus Christ and the believer, which is here denoted as an intimate 'likeness' (cf. 2:6; also John 15:20–21), is already operational and experiential on earth.

Kruse (2000:115, cf. 117) states that the likeness of the believer to Christ is a likeness in respect to ethical purity. This is clear from 3:3, 'And every one who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure'[47] (cf. also 2:28).[48] This then implies that in order to apprehend the possible spirituality embedded in the statement 'for we shall see him as he is', the lived experiences embedded in the activities of the entire pericope (2:28–3:10) should be borne in mind. This understanding brings into play the four semantically related statements of 'to abide in him' (2:28), 'who does right' (2:29); 'purify themselves' (3:3) and 'to love one another' (3:10). This reference relates to 2:6: 'whoever say, "I abide in him", ought to walk (live) just as Jesus walks (lives)'. The exhortation in 2:8, 'abide in him' (μένετε ἐν αὐτῷ) in the present imperative mode, which relates to the 'abides in him' (αὐτῷ μένειν, 2:6) in the infinitive, indicates that the elder has in mind here an ongoing action. This exhortation to a particular and continuous conduct ('abide') creates a dialectic tension between the 'present' and the 'future' (Parousia). This conduct should never end because it prepares the believers for the παρουσίᾳ [coming] of Jesus (Kruse 2000:112).

This exhortation to 'correct ethical conduct' runs parallel with the Parousia. The purpose of this is that the children of God must prepare themselves in advance for this Parousia. Therefore, in the three texts about the future eschatological events, the elder exhorts his adherents to 'prepare' themselves for the Parousia and the day of judgement, so that they may have confidence and not be put to shame before him at his coming, and also to become like him, for they will see him as he is. These three exhortations are, as already stated: abide in Christ (μένετε ἐν αὐτῷ, 2:28); purify yourselves just as Jesus is pure (ἁγνίζει ἑαυτόν, καθὼς ἐκεῖνος ἁγνός ἐστιν, 3:3); and live through love just as Jesus did (Ἐν τούτῳ τετελείωται ἡ ἀγάπη μεθ' ἡμῶν … καθὼς ἐκεῖνός ἐστιν, 4:17; also cf. 3:16). All these exhortations are associated with Jesus, who is the Son of God and the personification of 'divine life' (1:2) and how the elder characterises the identity of God (1:5; 2:29; 4:8, 16). All this implies that the characteristics of God, as the elder depicts him, and his Son Jesus, are expected from Christian believers if they want to see God in Jesus.[49] With these references those Christians would have experienced their relatedness with God through Jesus. In 3:6 the elder relates the moral connotation of seeing God: 'No-one who abides in him sins; no-one who sins has either seen him or known him'.

44.Danker (2000:706) translates it as 'of the same nature, like, similar'. For Friberg *et al.* (2000:281) it means 'as introducing similarity, usually with the dative following; (1) of the same nature or kind as, like to, resembling'. Louw and Nida (1996:616, §64.1) interpret it as 'pertaining to being similar to something else in some respect –"like, such as, likewise, similar"'.

45.'When Christ who is your life is revealed, then you also will be revealed with him in glory' (Col 3:4).

46.Haas *et al.* (1994:83) also point out a reference to similarity and not identity.

47.This is confirmed in 1 John 3:5, that Christ 'was revealed to take away sins, and in him there is no sin'.

48.The verb abide (μένειν) occurs 21 times in this epistle to indicate the importance the Elder attaches to it. Other themes that prepare the reader for the statement in 3:2, 'we shall see him as he is' are: 'abide in', 'fellowship', 'to live in the light', 'to do right', 'to love', 'to confess sins', 'to obey his commandments' and 'to confess that Jesus is the Christ'.

49.The seeing of the glory of God through Jesus can also be included here, although not explicitly mentioned in the text.

This relationship between Christ and the believer is not yet fully apparent (Rom 8:29; Phil 3:21; Col 3:3–4; even Stott 1964:118). Only after the παρουσία will these realities be disclosed. Only then will the children of God conform to the likeness of the Son of God (Rom 8:29; Malley 1989:146). This implies that God has begun his redemptive work in believers but that it will only reach full fruition when the 'not yet' has been 'fulfilled' (Akin 2001:135; also Westcott 1902:97–8). The assurance that the likeness of the children of God to Jesus will be a likeness to his glorified being has quite an inspiring power. Although they cannot 'now' really understand what it means, they will see it in the 'hereafter'. This dialectic between 'not yet' and 'will be' (also 'here' and 'there'; 'now' and 'then') creates spiritual tensions within these early Christians, depending on who a person is.

The third eschatological event, 'because we shall see him as he really is' (3:2), refers to a specific moment when the believer will see 'him' (the divine) as he really is. Some light can be cast on what the elder means with this eschatological 'seeing' when the phrase 'we shall be like him' (3:2, retention) is considered. From this verse it is clear that the manifestation of Jesus at his Parousia will cause a transformation (consequentially) of the believers who lived pure lives (provisionally);[50] it will result in them being like Jesus. This transformation can imply, or possibly mean, that as a result of the manifestation of Jesus the bodies of believers will no longer be confined by earthly limitations. At least according to 1 Corinthians 15, the existence of believers 'will be of a different order and on a different level than that currently known' (Thomas 2004:151). With these words the elder encourages his readers that although 'it does not yet appear what we shall be[51] … we shall be like him'. This transformation into the likeness of Jesus will be evoked in and by the transforming moment when 'we shall see him as He is'. This assurance would have comforted them to a great extent and certainly left them with a hopeful expectation and curiosity (cf. Thomas 2004:151).

The believer will see (experience) the divine in his heavenly glory; and the sight (experience) of him, according to the elder, will be enough to make the believer pure like him (cf. 1 Cor 13:12; 2 Cor 3:18; cf. Kruse 2000:115). The practical implication of this futuristic hope lies in space and time. Smalley (1989:147) points out that the next verse (3:3, pretension) reminds us that such eschatological vision 'cannot be detached from experience and responsibility here on earth' (see Law 1909:387–88; Haas *et al.* 1994:79). That believers will see him is because they *know* him and *have abided in him*, as well as because he will be *revealed*. What they will see, or rather experience, according to the elder,[52] is his 'love' (cf. 4:16), 'purity' (3:3; compare 2:5–2:2), 'righteousness' (2:1),'truth' (5:20), 'glory' (17:24) and much more. These characteristics of the divine can already be experienced now. At Jesus' παρουσία believers will experience (see) it in its fullness.

Kistemaker and Hendriksen (2001:295) correctly point out that nowhere does the Bible state that believers shall be equal to Christ.[53] Rather, it communicates that believers shall be conformed to the likeness of the Son of God. In their imitation (to abide in) of the life of Christ the Johannine believers would have 'lived experiences' of the presence of the divine. They already have a foretaste of the experience that awaits them, that 'they will see him as he is'.

Conclusion: The spirituality of seeing him as he is

The spirituality of 'seeing him as he is' lies embedded in the continuous reading, understanding and embodiment of the text and is mobilised through the three effects which is created when the text is read:

- The composition of images of family life help the readers to see and experience themselves as part of this family of God.
- The language features and rhetoric pull the readers into the text and the text into the readers to constitute dynamic interactions between these readers and the text.
- A dialectic is experienced between 'not yet' versus 'will be', 'now' versus 'then' and 'here' versus 'there'.

The elder makes three promises to these Johannine Christians. This implies that they would have lived in hope that Jesus 'will come again', they 'shall be like *him*' and that they 'shall see (experience) *him* as he is' (my emphasis).[54] In order for the last two mentioned to happen, the elder states in the next verse (3:3): 'Everyone who has this hope purifies himself as he (Jesus) is pure'. Also in 3:6, the elder gives a moral connotation to the seeing of God: 'No one who abides in him sins; no one who sins has either seen him or known him'. These Johannine Christians live in the hope (ἐλπίδα)[55] of becoming conformed to Jesus Christ, and the more they hear this (cf. 1:7; 2:4, 10, 29; 3:3, 7, 10; etc.) and contemplate this truth and try to live accordingly, the more they purify themselves from sin (1:5-2:2) and strive constantly for holiness in reverence to God (2 Cor. 7:1; Kistemaker & Hendriksen 2001:296).[56] Thus, they as early Christians are called by the

50.What has been explained here would certainly have been clearly understood by the readers. For readers today, this text presents some difficulties in interpretation. Scholars are divided whether the ὅτι particle should be interpreted conditionally or consequentially. There is uncertainty about what verb the last ὅτι ['that, because'] clause in 3:2 refers to. The phrase qualifies either οἴδαμεν ['we know'] or ἐσόμεθα ('we shall be'). In the case of οἴδαμεν it would mean that seeing him will prove that the children of God will be like him. This implies that their future resemblance to Christ is based on the fact that 'we shall see him just as he is'. If the phrase qualifies ἐσόμεθα, then 'being like him' will be the direct result or outcome of seeing him. Hence, 'we shall be like him' because 'we shall see him just as he is' (cf. Law 1909:122; and Marshall 1978:172–173). This is not a case of either or, rather that both seems to be complementary to one another. See Brown (2006:395–396) for a thorough discussion.

51.This phrase reveals mysteries about how the believers 'shall be' and even what the 'be like him' (likeness of Jesus) shall be.

52.The verb *see* is used here metaphorically for *experience.*

53.Only this knowledge and insight concur that no human being, not even Christians, will be able to see God.

54.In the writings of John, the concept *hope* expressed in verb or noun is rather scarce. The verb appears only three times (John 5:45; 2 John 12; 3 John 14) and the noun once (1 John 3:3).

55.For Danker (2000:319) ἐλπίδα means 'the looking forward to some[thing] with some reason for confidence respecting fulfillment, hope, expectation'.

56.Consult Hauck (1979:123) for the use of ἁγνίζω in the New Testament.

elder to be the same, to live as Jesus lived (2:6) which is depicted according to the characteristics of the Father (and the Son): 'to be light' (1:5), 'to be righteous' (2:1, 29), 'to love' (4:8, 16), and to be 'pure' (3:3).[57] The repetitive reading of this text (Gospel and epistles) when they assembled on Sundays and their obedient response to the text would have caused them to experience a transformation and self-transcendence that relate to their identity as 'children of God' as well as the identities of the two divine beings (the Father and Son) who are part of the *familia Dei*.

This is a dynamic process of continuously changing to become like Jesus. They can only achieve it when they abide in Jesus (2:28). Thus, the spirituality embedded in the declaration of the elder 'for we shall see him as he is' (ὅτι ὀψόμεθα αὐτὸν καθώς ἐστιν) was for the early church an expectation that lies in the future but also an existential experience in the present νῦν [now]. These early Christians already experienced the past and future of time in the present in the reading of the text and to live accordingly. Of course the early Christians would have longed to see the divine, as is also the case with Christian believers today. This implies that in the repetitive reading of the text and their continuous obedient response to it they would already have an embryonic experience of this character and identity of God in Jesus, that what they will experience after the Parousia will result in the ability to 'see him as he is'. The culmination of their identity and character in future is that they 'shall be like him' (ὅμοιοι αὐτῷ ἐσόμεθα, 3:2). The spiritualities that these two promises generate will not only keep their faith alive but also strengthen their desire to be with Christ.

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57.See Van der Merwe (2001:131–148) for a more detailed characterisation of Jesus.

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