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John's realised eschatology as an expression of the wisdom of God

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Wisdom has often been assigned as an attribute of God and links to Wisdom theology in the fourth Gospel that are well presented in scholarship by the works of Sharon Ringe, Elizabeth Johnson, Jörg Frey and Mary Coloe. Yet, John's Gospel never uses the term *Wisdom*. So, what scriptural evidence can demonstrate that a Wisdom theology can be found in the fourth Gospel? What is clear in John's Gospel is that there has been a move from an apocalyptic eschatology to one that is realised and sapiential. Hence, this article attempts to show that this change in eschatological outlook can be linked to the first century understanding of the figure of Wisdom, who had emerged as a divine figure that brought the heavenly into the earthly realm. This article uses a literary critical approach, utilising the Bible as the primary source along with key Johannine biblical scholars, to show that through the use of the attributes of Wisdom, the Johannine evangelist and the Johannine community have appropriated the key aspects of the female divine Sophia onto the notion of the divine Logos, who is in John synonymous with Jesus, the Nazarene. Using scriptural texts from both the First and Second Testaments about the notion of Wisdom and the work of key Johannine scholars, this article shows how John's use of the concept of *Logos*, also ascribed to *Wisdom* in Wisdom 18:15, strongly parallels the attributes of divine Wisdom. This article argues that although John's Gospel does not explicitly use the term *Wisdom*, the parallels between the biblical concept of divine Wisdom and divine Logos are numerous. Eternal life is a central concept in John's Gospel and only found in the biblical Wisdom literature in association with divine Wisdom (Wis 5:5). This notion of immortality or eternal life in the book of Wisdom was the quality of life that Sophia offered the righteous (Wis 6:18; 8:17, 21) and became a central theme in the Johannine narrative, considering their experience of Jesus' resurrection being now, rather than in the future (Jn 4:23; 5:25). The centrality of the wisdom of God was reflected in the figure of divine Wisdom, who was named in the First Testament literature as God's incarnated envoy. However, in the Second Testament in the person of Jesus, John's Gospel showed that the divine Logos is a manifestation of divine Wisdom's all-powerful Word, finding a resting place in human history, imbuing its eschatology with a realised focus rather than a futuristic focus.

Contribution: This article deals with the attribute of *Wisdom* as it is associated with the understanding of who God is. God has revealed God's self in creation and through scripture, by the figure of divine Wisdom and the figure of the divine Logos. These two figures share many common attributes, of which one central feature is that of providing human beings with the opportunity to enter eternal life with the Divine One.

Keywords: divine Wisdom; divine Logos; realised eschatology; future eschatology; resurrection; eternal life; divine attribute.

Introduction

Within the Christian Bible, one can find many diverse and differing images and metaphors that to some degree might help explain the mystery and incomprehensible nature of God. Elizabeth Johnson identified six categories to group language about God (cf. Johnson 2007:21). Each of these categories is also found in John's Gospel, for example: (1) personal relationships: father (1:18; 3:35), children (1:12), bride or bridegroom (3:29), and friend (15:15); (2) from political and social life: advocate (14:16), word (1:1), Messiah (1:41), king (1:49), house of God (1:16), kingdom (3:3), and judge (5:27); (3) from human professions: teacher (1:38), vinedresser (15:1), and

Note: Special Collection: Biblical Theological investigations into the attribute of God's wisdom.

shepherd (10:10); (4) from the feminine world: life (1:4); (5) from the animal kingdom: lamb (1:29), dove (1:32), and sheep (10:14); and (6) from nature or cosmic reality: light (1:5), wind (3:8), living water (4:10), bread of life (6:35), and true vine (15:1).

This article uses a literary-critical approach that engages with the biblical text and publications of various biblical scholars on the implicit links between wisdom and John's Gospel. The article explores how one characteristic of divine Wisdom found in the First Testament text, namely that of a giver of life, is established as a central characteristic of the divine Logos in the central purpose of John's Gospel (cf. 20:30–31). Using the text of Wisdom 18:15, which states that wisdom takes shape as God's '… all-powerful Word … who touched heaven while standing on the earth', this article argues that the divine logo incarnated in the person of Jesus, the Nazarene (cf. 1:14), is that all-powerful Word who brings to humanity God's offer of the gift of eternal life, an expression central to Johannine theology. Having established the biblical links between divine Wisdom, the divine Logos, and the promise of eternal life, this article then further shows how this link influences John's eschatology from one of being future orientated to one that can be identified as a realised eschatology. The literary approach is presented in three parts. Firstly, a brief excursus into the figure of Wisdom and its subsequent influence on John's Gospel. Secondly, a briefly notion of eternal life in both the wisdom literature and John's Gospel. Finally, the position will be considered that John's realised eschatology reveals the figure of the divine Logos as a manifestation of the divine Sophia in action. The divine Logos in John gives insight into the nature of God as divine love incarnated.

The figure of Sophia (Wisdom) and its links to John's Gospel

In the Second Temple period, the female figure of Sophia (wisdom) slowly emerges in the First Testament texts as a figure who is intimate with God and humanity. Johnson (2007) comments:

> After briefly appearing, and elusively, in the Book of Job, at a preliminary stage of personification (Ch. 28), Sophia strides into the Book of Proverbs with a noisy public appearance (1:20–33) as a street preacher, a prophet who cries aloud in the market and at the city gates a message of reproach, punishment, and promise. (p. 4)

Later, in Proverbs, divine Sophia is presented as a figure who existed before the world with the creator YHWH (Pr 3:19; 8:22–31). In the book of Wisdom, the figure of divine Sophia is a divine presence in whom God delights (Wis 1:6), and through whom there is a constant effort to lure human beings to life with God (Wis 2:23; 3:9; 5:15; 6:18). Coloe (2021) comments that specific attributes of divine Sophia emerge:

> Wisdom is the breath, the power, the pure emanation, the image of God (Wis 7:25–26), which passes into holy souls making them friends of God, and prophets (Wis 7:27), and is God's gift to the righteous ones to draw them into an intimate communion of life. (p. 3)

O'Collins (2015:71) concurs: 'By attributing to Sophia the saving deeds of God, the book of Wisdom makes the identification between Sophia and YHWH closer than ever'. In this regard, one finds in the First Testament wisdom texts a certain progression in the understanding of Sophia's 'birth', her first dwelling with God (cf. Pr 3:19), her being in the created world, and finally the enabling of human beings to fill them with life.

The arrival of the divine Sophia in Jewish writings is most probably a response to the wide-ranging influence of the many female goddess figures that dominated the Greek and Hellenistic world of that time, particularly in the cult of Isis (Johnson 2007:5). The appearance of Sophia in Jewish texts enabled Jewish believers to engage with the feminine aspects of the image of the divine. The figure of Sophia was able to rival the appeal of Isis but was not to be found in temples but in the godly gift of the Torah. Johnson (1993a:120) opines that Sophia (Wisdom) became 'a complex female figure (who) personifies God's presence and creative action in the world'. Johnson (2007) indicates that on a close reading of the attributes of Sophia, one finds:

> [*A*] functional equivalence between the deeds of Sophia and those of the biblical God [already exists]; what she does is already portrayed elsewhere in the scriptures as the field of action of Israel's God under the name of YHWH. Sophia fashions all that exists and pervades creation with her pure and mobile and people-loving spirit. (p. 13)

In her recent Johannine commentary, Coloe (2021:2) observes that the Sophia figure in the Wisdom literature sees God at the heart of the world, echoing the earlier observation of Ringe (1999:29) that the divine figure of

> Wisdom is connected to the divine logic undergirding the creation – God's will or plan for the created order and for the structure and relationships that give the world meaning, shape, and coherence. (p. 29)

In considering this deepening personification of the attributes of the creator YHWH in the figure of Sophia, one can understand why the apostle Paul saw that in the figure of Jesus and his intimate knowledge of the things of God, Jesus was the envoy of God's Sophia for humanity. Paul states in 1 Corinthians 1:24, 'Christ who is the power and wisdom of God', and in 1 Corinthians 1:30: '[God] is the source of your life in Christ Jesus, who became for us *wisdom from God*'. Johnson (1993b:103) remarks that by closely identifying Jesus with Sophia, Paul is presenting Jesus to the early Christian community, 'not only as wisdom teacher, not only a child and envoy of Sophia but as an earthly appearance of Wisdom in person; the incarnation of Sophia herself'. Further, the gift and grace of Jesus's continuing presence within the newly gathered community of disciples, through the presence of the Holy Spirit (cf. Jn 20:21–22; Ac 2:1–11), enabled the emerging Christians to see Jesus's Incarnation as a particular gift from God of divine Wisdom in the form of the all-powerful divine Logos that leapt from heaven (cf. Wis 18:15; Jn 1:1–4) walking with them. These early Christians, who were also rooted in the Jewish scriptures, could find further scriptural support for their

emerging understanding of Jesus in Sirach 24, where the precise location for the arrival of Sophia among humanity was prophesied:

> My creator chose the place for my tent: He said: Make your dwelling in Jacob, and in Israel receive your inheritance … Before the ages, in the beginning, God created me, and for all the ages I shall not cease to be. In the holy tent, I ministered before him and so I was established in Zion. (vv. 8–11)

The figure of Sophia was a ready-made Jewish category for the emerging Jewish-Christian communities in their attempts to explain the person and function of Jesus as one who, like Sophia, was one with God. In the Synoptic Gospels, as Schüssler Fiorenza (1994:132) notes, it is only Matthew 11:19; 13:54 that explicitly identifies Sophia with Jesus, although it is implicit in Mark 6:2 and Luke 2:40, 52. Further, she notes that although the fourth Gospel never explicitly links Jesus with divine Wisdom, 'the fourth Gospel implicitly understands Jesus as making Sophia present in and through his/her work'. In contrast, Judith Lieu (1996:238) argues that John has no interest in 'wisdom motifs'. Although Lieu acknowledges that the Johannine prologue draws on wisdom traditions, she further argues (1996):

> Wisdom is not explicitly named and where there are allusions to the Wisdom tradition these links are in no sense part of her gendered character and cannot be said to be an expression of the feminine aspect of the divine. (p. 238)

In contrast, other scholars continue to note the strong links between the figure of Jesus and that of divine Sophia. As Dunn (1989:195) notes: 'Jesus is the exhaustive embodiment of divine wisdom'. Specifically, Brown (2003:10) notes that 'in John, Jesus is personified Wisdom'. One of the reasons for these contrasting positions is possibly found in the observation of Grey (1993), and many other feminist scholars, that the traditional theology for imaging God in John as Logos is at the expense of the silencing of Sophia, who is the voice and the face of God (cf. Radford Reuther 2012:164–168). Yet, as noted, in the book of Wisdom, one can draw a link between the feminine figure of divine Wisdom and the male figure of the all-powerful Logos. In Wisdom 18 one hears the following:

> [*Y*]our all-powerful Word leaped from heaven, from the royal throne, into the midst of the land that was doomed, a stern warrior carrying the sharp sword of your authentic command, … and touched heaven while standing on the earth. (v. 15)

Coloe (2021) notes that in John's Gospel, many attributes of Wisdom are also attributes of the Word. She also observed some close parallels between the attributes of the divine figures of Wisdom and the Word (see Table 1).

Coloe (2021) points out that in the event of the Incarnation, John's Gospel affirms that:

> [*D*]ivine Wisdom who was with God in the beginning, creating order in the world, has now found a resting place, has pitched her tent in human history. Where Israel sought Wisdom's resting place in the Torah, for the Johannine community, Jesus is the incarnation of divine Wisdom. (p. 4)

The gendered male figure of the Logos is probably preferred in John due to the particularity of the maleness of Jesus; however, the link in the book of Wisdom between the female figure of Sophia and the male figure of Logos, in John, as well as the use of the word *Logos* in Philo and its use in the wider Hellenistic world, reflect that both images, Wisdom and Word, are centred in the acceptance that in any gendered talk associated with God, one must accept that both male and female images are possible in literary sources for a God who is beyond limitation. Further, there should be no contradiction in associating the female image of Sophia with the maleness of Jesus, who also is the immanent personification of the transcendent God. One notes that one important link between these figures is that both the female Sophia and the male Logos are a source of eternal life, an attribute that belongs to God. While John does not explicitly use the notion of Wisdom, clearly the attributes of the divine Logos, central to the theological understanding of Jesus's pre-existence, have their origins in the attributes of divine Sophia. Sophia, in the form of the all-powerful Word, has become incarnate in the male Logos, Jesus the Nazarene.

John's Gospel and Sophia: Notion of eternal life

Within the Second Temple period literature, the promise of immortality is unique to the book of Wisdom (5:15). This gift is tied to Sophia's intimate connection to God, whose prerogative is being the source of life (cf. Wis 2:23; 6:18; 8:13, 17; 9:18). Thompson (1999:23) argues that for Jewish authors of the first century, 'the uniqueness of Israel's God was lodged in God's creation of all the world. God is the Lord God who gives life to all things'. In Proverbs, one finds Sophia identified as the giver of life (Pr 3:18; 4:13), and a figure such that whoever finds Sophia finds life and the favour of the Lord (Pr 8:35). In the book of Wisdom, Sophia is aligned with YHWH as being the tree of life; Sophia is ascribed with unlimited power to renew all things (Wis 7:27);

TABLE 1: Parallels between the attributes of Wisdom and the Logos.

Attribute	Wisdom	Logos
Origin in God	Proverbs 8:22; Sirach 24:3; Wisdom 7:25–26	John 1:1–4
Pre-existence and a role in creation	Proverbs 3:19; 8:22–29; Sirach 1:4, 9–10; 16:24–17:7; Wisdom 8:4–6;	John 1:2–4
Infused in creation, giving it order and endurance	Wisdom 1:7; 7:24, 27; 8:1; 11:25	John 1:2, 10
Came to the world with a mission	Proverbs 8:4, 31–36; Sirach 24:7, 12, 19, 22	John 1:14
Speaks personally to the world	Sirach 24:19–22; John 3:16–17	John 3:16–17 supp
Offers life and blessings	Sirach 1:14–20; 6:18–31; 15:1–8; 24:19– 33	John 3:10, 14
Draws people into friendship with God	Wisdom 7:27	John 15:13–15

Source: Based on Coloe, M.L., 2021, *John 1–10*, Liturgical Press, Collegeville, PA. (Wisdom Commentary, 44A).

she can pass into holy souls and make them friends of God and prophets (Wis 7:27); she gives life and immortality to the persecuted just (Wis 8:13); and through Wisdom human beings are saved (Wis 9:8; cf. Johnson 2007:6).

Similarly, one of the strong themes in John's Gospel is that Jesus is the one who makes God known to humanity (cf. Jn 1:18; 17:6–8). Further, one of the key aspects that Jesus reveals to the early disciples is that God, through Jesus, offers the gift of eternal life. This is the purpose of John's Gospel (Jn 20:31):

> These things are written so that you may believe [or come to believe] that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have [eternal] life in his name.

For John, this gift of eternal life is due to God's love for humanity. In John 3:16, one finds: 'For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life'. This eternal life is dependent on *both* a belief in Jesus and a recognition that Jesus has been sent by God (cf. Jn 5:24; 17:3). The life that is being offered is being offered to all people and is non-restrictive by race, class or gender: 'I have come that you may have life and have it abundantly' (Jn 10:10), and 'I will draw all people to myself' (Jn 12:32). As such, Jesus acts in the world to bring to human beings the quality of life that God desires for all people: the kingdom of God (Jn 3:3, 5). Furthermore, Coloe (2021) observes:

> The Johannine narrative depicts Jesus as the embodiment of Sophia, acting as she did, offering nourishment, life, light, and salvation. But her presence is obscured by the predominance of the Son-Father language. (p. 22)

There is still one final comment regarding the clear distinction in John between the resurrection and eternal life. One needs to observe that John's use of these terms is associated with his eschatological thinking. In John, all four references to the resurrection [ἀνάστασις] occur within the context of the eschatological future (Jn 5:28–29 – 2 times; 11:24; 11:25) (cf. Culpepper 2008:254). In contrast, John's Gospel uses the expression *eternal life* [ζωὴν αἰώνιον] 17 times, yet the expression directs to the future only twice (Jn 4:14; 12:15). Eleven times the expression is used with the verb in the present (Jn 3:36; 4:36; 5:24, 39; 6:27, 47, 54, 68; 10:28; 12:50; 17:3) and on four occasions with the subjunctive (3:15, 16; 6:40; 17:2), which has no time significance, since this tense describes a possibility or a probability (Mounce 1993:282). As Coloe (2007:188) points out, for John 'eternal life is something predominately related to present experience'. Culpepper (2008) captures this essential feature succinctly in the following observation:

> John maintains a distinction between eternal life and resurrection that is most apparent in the separation of the present from the future in John 6:40 and 6:54. John distinguishes eternal life from resurrection, claiming that it is the present experience of those who believe. In this way, John moves beyond the common early Christian understanding that the righteous dead are taken to the place of blessedness before the resurrection (Luke 16:22–24; 23:43; Phil 1:23; Rev 6:9–10) For the faithful, the experience of blessedness, the life of eternity, is not withheld until death – it is a present reality. Eternal life is the present experience of those in the Johannine community. John 3:16 can be understood as a promise of life that is either present or future. (p. 256)

For the evangelist, the expected resurrection of the dead lies in the future. Yet, this future promise is inimical to an understanding that eternal life is already offered in the present. In John 6:54, one can read Jesus's words: 'Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood have eternal life, and I will raise them up on the last day'. Here, the claim is that those people who believe in Jesus already, *now* have eternal life, and therefore will be offered in the *future* the promise of the resurrection life. Culpepper (2008) argues:

> Jesus does not eliminate the future hope (cf. Martha 11:24) but emphasizes the present reality of eternal life for those who believe in him. … The hope for the future is already being fulfilled in the present, and their present experience serves as a sign of the eventual fulfillment of future hope. 'I am the way, the truth and the life (14:6)'. (p. 257)

Accordingly, the notion of eternal life that one finds in John's Gospel is the quality of life that one can live now by living under the action of the Holy Spirit. Just as the figure of divine Wisdom ensures a quality of life in the present through an encounter with God, one's encounter with Jesus, the enfleshed divine Logos, can bring about an encounter with God that opens an encounter with God in the present, that will be fulfilled in one's future resurrection. It offers Christians the theological reflection that it is living relationally with God in the now that will enable the 'not-yet' of faith to be fulfilled. The strong parallels between the attributes of Wisdom in the Second Temple thinking, and the attributes of John's Jesus as the divine Logos through his Incarnation, enabled the earliest Christians to speak of Jesus as the all-powerful Word (cf. Wis 18:15) sent by God to make God known and loved (cf. 3:16, 17:6, 23).

John's realised eschatology: Sophia in action

Eschatology is a branch of theology that deals with the concept of Christian hope for the end of time, individually and collectively. It sees the reality of God's saving love as the alpha and omega of all created existence. Kelly (2006) clearly states:

> [*E*]schatology aims to provoke a conversation on the practice of hope and its bearing on our individual and collective destiny. Eschatology inspires conversation, dialogue and hopeful conduct among all people of hope as they ask about the kind of future we share and what we might hope for. (p. 22)

The earliest Semitic eschatology arose from a sense of Israel's belief that God's covenant represented an ongoing commitment to those who remained faithful (Coloe 2007:178). Consequently, the conundrum of what happens post-death to the just who suffer for their faith, and to the fate of the prosperous sinner, led to a belief in the hope for individual vindication beyond death. In the figure of the suffering servant in Isaiah, 'Israel achieved a central insight into the redemptive potential of the suffering of the just person within and for the community' (Schneiders 2005:174). This led to a

resurrection eschatology that sees the redemption of the just, through God's vindication after death, as apocalyptic and futuristic. Judged at death as being faithful or unfaithful, those who die before the final judgement of God are given an interim reward or punishment. 'The martyrs are assured that they will be restored even in their bodies and that Israel will be reconstituted and the unjust punished' (Schneiders 2008:155). However, within the Second Temple Judaism, another branch of eschatological reflection emerged that could be labelled as 'immortality' eschatology, which is 'realised and sapiential'. Here, the image of divine Wisdom is that she is accessible to human beings in the present of their lives: 'To human beings, she is an inexhaustible treasure, and those who acquire it are established as God's friends' (Wis 7:14). She is:

> [*A*] breath of the power of God … herself unchanging she renews the world, and generation after generation, passing into holy souls, she makes them into God's friends and prophets. (Wis 7:24, 27)

Further, Wisdom 8:12–13, 16–17 proclaims:

> [*B*]y means of her, immortality shall be mine, I shall leave an everlasting memory behind me … a life shared with her has no pain, nothing but pleasure and joy … immortality lies in kinship with Wisdom, noble contentment in her friendship.

Wisdom is a figure to be sought after in the now of human existence, so one may share in the future the offer of immortality with God.

Hence, introducing the figure of divine Wisdom into Jewish literature opened the possibility of a relationship with God that is both present and future. Culpepper (2008) argues:

> Jewish thought generally posited two ages, 'this age' (מלועה הזה) and 'the age to come' (מלועה אבה). This age is characterized by sin, struggle and persecution. The age to come will be a time of blessing, peace and presence with God. (p. 258)

This dual understanding led to the emergence of an understanding of what happens after physical death *now* for those who are seen to be righteous in their adherence to the covenant. Now, in Jewish thought, there was evolving a sense of

> the death of the righteous as an exaltation-for-judgement on his enemies and an immediate entrance into an intimate relationship with God in a non-terrestrial, post-death realm (cf. Wis 3:1–6). (Schneiders 2008:156)

Porter (1999:79) argues that this more immediate notion of an *afterlife* in Jewish thought arose through contact with Hellenism. Within Greek thinking, the notion of the immortality of the soul and the possibility of reward and punishments for the virtuous and the wicked, immediately upon physical death, collided with the Second Temple Jewish reflections on the ultimate destiny of the righteous martyrs of Judaism. Hence, if this historical theological understanding is true, then it should not be surprising that one could encounter both strands of eschatology in the emerging Christian understanding of what happens post-death, given their intimate experience of Jesus's resurrection.

Frey points out that in Paul's writings, the earliest Christian texts we have, one encounters the evolving nature of Christian theological reflection. Scholars find the beginnings of the dual future and realise an eschatological outlook. Frey (2021) states:

> Whereas in Pauline passages [eternal] life is still understood as a gift to be granted in the future salvation (Rom 2:7; 5:21; 6:22 –23; Gal 6:8), other passages (Gal 2:20; 5:25; Rom 6:8; 8:2, 6, 10; 2 Cor 4:10–12) conceptualise [eternal] life as a present gift mediated through participation in the life-giving Spirit (1 Cor 15:45). Paul inserts the terminology of life onto the traditional formulaic talk of Jesus' death and resurrection (1 Tess 4; 14; 2 Cor 5:14–15; Rom 6:3–8; 14:7–9). In close analogy to Paul's innovative step, John links faith and life terminology in programmatic sayings, such as John 3:15, 16, 36; 5:24–25. It ensures the continuing force of the relationship between Jesus and the believer, and it preserves the believer from spiritual or eternal death, assuring them of their share in the final resurrection. (p. 404)

Hence, in this collision between eschatological outlooks, while the Johannine epistles generally reflect an older future or apocalyptic eschatological perspective (cf. 1 Jn 2:17, 25; 3:2; 4:17; 5:12), the Johannine Gospel is deeply influenced by this new and evolving sapiential or realised eschatology that introduces the possibility of both an immediate post-death salvation or the possibility of 'eternal' life in the immediate present. As argued, this is evident in the use of the verbs associated with *resurrection* and *eternal life*. John's realised eschatology maintains that 'God's promises of [eternal] life are fully realised in the present' (Koester 2008:175). Similarly, Frey (2005) points out that:

> [*I*]n Jn 4:23 and 5:25, the expression ἔρχεται ὥρα καὶ νῦν ἐστιν shows that the expectation of a "coming" hour, and the idea that this hour is already present, are closely linked. (p. 47)

Schneiders (2005) sees this coming together of both forms of eschatological thinking as 'the theme of exaltation for judgement being combined with the theme of entering into an intimate relationship with God in a non-terrestrial realm'. Again, this thinking can link to Wisdom 3:1–6, where it states that:

> [*T*]he souls of the just are in the hands of God … They seemed in the view of the foolish to be dead … but they are at peace … God took them to himself. (p. 175)

Brown points out as well that both strains of eschatology are present in the Qumran Scrolls, a sectarian Jewish community contemporary to Jesus. Brown (2003:242) states that '[*t*]he War Scroll (1QM) shows Qumran's expectations of a final divine intervention. Yet, at the same time, the sectarians believed that they already shared in God's heavenly gifts'.

In John's Gospel, Jesus is the one who reveals God's person to humanity: 'No one has ever seen God. It is God, the only Son, who is close to the Father's heart, who has made him known' (Jn 1:18). Under the influence of this Christological perspective, through a connection with the image of immortality offered by the figure of divine Wisdom, the evangelist is using the emerging realised eschatology strain,

not to challenge or undermine the future eschatological hope of a resurrection, but to ensure that the Johannine community of believers fully understood the gift of Jesus's humanity and his sharing in the divine life, through the offering of the gift of peace and joy. Jesus, by nature of his intimate union with God, shared in the promise of eternal life in the *now*, that is through his present presence to believers through the gift of the Holy Spirit. Brown (2003:245) points out: 'One of the purposes of the Gospel was to teach Christians what a gift they had received in Jesus who was the source and basis of their life'. Culpepper (2008:257) made the same observation: 'Eternal life, therefore, is the present experience of the believer who lives in the knowledge and fellowship of God through the revelation of Jesus (cf. Jn 17:3)'.

The understanding of the central role of the Holy Spirit becomes intrinsically linked to the eschatological framework developed by the evangelist. In John's Gospel, there is a distinctive proclamation that eternal life is already a present reality. Under the action of the Spirit-Advocate, the post-resurrection context of the believing community understands that the 'now' of human experience connects to the 'not-yet' of the time to come. It is the action of the Spirit-Advocate that enables and empowers everyone who believes in Jesus as the Messiah, to visualise the resurrection hope. It is the Spirit-Advocate who continually reminds the community that the traditional expectation and understanding of future judgement has been transformed because the ultimate decision on the eternal fate of any human being is made in their living out in the present, their encounter and faith in both God and Jesus as the one sent by God (cf. 5:24; 17:3). As such, the promise of a future resurrection from the dead and the abiding communion with Jesus are two elements of the future eschatology that enable the community of believers to experience in their present life that the fears associated with living in a world under the control of forces opposed to God's intentions can be allayed (cf. Frey 2005:81).

Therefore, within the broad Christian understanding of eschatology within the first-century Mediterranean life, the literary evidence in John exists concerning belief in both a future and a realised eschatology. There are clear references to a present, realised eschatology (cf. Jn 4:23; 5:25), just as there are clear references to a future eschatology (cf. Jn 5:28–29; 6:39–40; 12:48; 14:1–2; 17:24). Yet, there are places where both a realised and a future eschatology occur in the same narrative (cf. 5:24–29; 6:39, 40, 44, 47, 51, 54, 58). Moody Smith (1995) noted:

> According to John eternal life is not only the object of future hope but already a present possession (Jn 5:24; 11:24–25). The possession of the gift of eternal life in the believer's present existence is integrally related to the assurance of its permanence (14:1–4; 17:24). (p. 149)

Similarly, Frey (2021) argued:

> The fourth Gospel is the most elaborate testimony to an eschatology focused not on a certain period or sequence of events in the future but on the present: the coming of salvation or judgement in the presence of Jesus or in the proclamation of the gospel. (p. 396)

Hence, any understanding of the Johannine eschatology needs to give due attention to the understanding of both aspects in their interrelation in the Gospel and epistles, as they have been transmitted (Frey 2021:396–408).

However, the fourth Gospel has a clear emphasis on presenting a realised eschatology and the various uses of traditional futuristic eschatology do not diminish this emphasis. Frey (2005) clearly states:

> The use of the [future] tradition in Jn 5:28 ff shows, however, that the stress on present eschatology does not exclude the expectation of a future eschatological act (in which the present spiritual decision will come to its physical consequences). The most important element of expectation is the resurrection of the dead. Such an expectation is important because, according to the fourth Gospel, the believers have not yet reached their final completion. They are on the way, while Jesus has already been glorified, and they can only hope to finally enter that realm 'where Jesus already *is*'. (p. 79)

While the Johannine epistles clearly state that a future eschatology dominates (cf. 1 Jn 2:17, 25; 3:2; 4:17; 5:12), in John's Gospel, there is a stronger emphasis on the notion that God's judgement takes place *now*, yet it still contains a future dimension. Koester (2008:178) argues that the two concepts need to be seen *relationally*, as 'to say that those who believe have life now, and those who do what is good will have life in the future, is to understand that faith shapes action'. Further, Koester (2008) makes the relationality aspect between the two different eschatological outlooks even stronger:

> John speaks of the future in terms of the *relationships* that have been formed in the present. If people find life in a *relationship* with God now, that will be true in the future (cf. 20:17). If people want nothing to do with God now, that will also be true in the future. Judgement, from John's perspective, means letting the human rejection of God take its course. (p. 178)

With this understanding, one can see why Jesus can say that He judges and does 'not yet' judge (Jn 8:15–16, 26), because by judging Jesus, people are, in effect, judging themselves (cf. Jn 12:47–48). Yet, for those who do not believe in Jesus, even though they appear to be judged in the present, any future judgement is ultimately to be left to God, and as in John, it appears that the invitation is open to the last day (cf. Jn 12:44–50).

In the Johannine corpus, the death of believers is a harsh reality due to both internal and external trials and tribulations. People of faith die, as the story of Lazarus and Jesus's death makes abundantly clear. The evangelist also indicates that Abraham and the prophets died (cf. Jn 8:52–53); even Peter and the beloved disciple fall prey to the reality of death (Jn 21:19, 23). Yet, the dual eschatological outlook strongly indicates that, although death is real and an inescapable part of the human condition, it is not final. Koester (2008)

succinctly points this out in discussing the importance of the resurrection event in John, and the post-death narratives from the Gospel indicate:

> The significance of resurrection, since resurrection does not mean avoiding death but going through death to life … Death affects the whole person. The whole person dies and the whole person rises to new life. This differs from the idea that a person can be readily divided into body and soul … A theology of resurrection means confessing without qualification that death is real. It also means believing that death is not final … God who created people, body and soul, through his Word has a future for them. Resurrection means that God is unwilling to limit his work to a purely spiritual form of salvation. God's Word comes to people in embodied form and offers an embodied future, a transformed future. As Jesus extends the hope of resurrection, he brings the promised future into the present: 'I am the resurrection and the life' (cf. Jn 11:26; 6:50; 8:51). People of faith die in an ordinary bodily sense, yet there is another sense in which they do not die. (pp. 180–181)

The Johannine proclamation of a realised eschatology makes it clear that living a life of faith *now* prepares one for the *future* resurrection life. In this way, there is a close parallel to divine Wisdom: searching and encountering divine Wisdom now will lead to the opportunity to share in God's immortality in the future. This dual eschatological aspect provides a strong and comforting counterpoint in what appears to be uncertain times for those communities of believers that are associated with both the origin of the Gospel and the epistles. Hence this dual notion of eschatology indicates that future judgement can only reveal what believers are already assured of in the present (cf. 1 Jn 4:17), where the members of the community can be confident regarding the day of judgement because the positive verdict has already been made (Frey 2021:403). Frey (2021) further states:

> The Evangelist emphasises the fact that the disciples already participate in all the benefits of salvation, such as peace (cf. Jn 14:27; 16:33), joy (cf. Jn 16:22, 24), and in particular, that the Spirit who 'replaces' the earthly Jesus (Jn 14:16–17), will defend the disciples in their trials (Jn 15:26; 16:7–11), and provide a better and deeper understanding of Jesus and the Scriptures. (p. 405)

Through the gift of the Holy Spirit, the community of Johannine believers, from a post-resurrection perspective, came to understand that their life of faith was marked by a quality of peace, joy, love, and forgiveness that one could expect if one was experiencing 'eternal life'. Yet, it was clear that this 'eternal quality of life' was not the same as the resurrection hope that will be found on the last day. For this resurrection hope, death had to be confronted and embraced as willingly and as profoundly as Jesus did.

The realised eschatological viewpoint offers readers the reality that the present gift of life is truly blessed by God. If we are made in God's image and likeness, then like Jesus, we should see that the reward for living an 'eternity life' *now* is the future inheritance of a resurrection life: abiding with God. How one lives one's life in the presence of the Spirit-Advocate *now* determines the reality of the *not yet*: one's future eschatological hope. Coloe (2007) opines:

> The gift of becoming 'children of God' is available in the here and now of human historical existence with the surety that this eternity life continues through death into God's unending now. (p. 199)

In the end, one needs to recognise the reality of physical death, yet believe that whatever happens post-death, God offers the possibility of participating in the future resurrection life. That offer is worth considering: 'Blessed are those who have not yet seen and yet have come to believe' (Jn 20:29). In the figure of Sophia (Wisdom), wisdom literature opens the door to a more nuanced understanding of God's offer of eternal life. The Johannine evangelist, through an association of the divine Logos as the all-powerful Word that leapt into the world (Wis 18:15) with the male figure of Jesus (Wis 1:14), God's μονογενὴς (Jn. 1:18), enables John to associate Wisdom and Logos with the offer of eternal life. John sees eternal life as the future, but it is also something that can realise in the *now*. John states clearly: 'And this is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent' (Jn. 17:3). For John, Jesus's death-resurrection has offered both believers and those willing to believe that God is a God of life and love. Jesus is, according to John, the divine Logos whose all-powerful Word tented among humanity, revealing God's wisdom.

Conclusion

Through his Incarnation, Jesus became the personification of God's desire to be in a relationship with human beings. One notes in John that it is the death and resurrection of Jesus that opened the minds of the disciples to a fuller understanding of the identity of Jesus as the Messiah, the Son of God (cf. Jn 20:31). It is the belief in Jesus as the one, sent by God and a belief in God, that opened the invitation to share in the gift of eternal life in the *now* (cf Jn 5:24; 17:3), a gift that in the Jewish tradition was offered initially by the figure of Sophia (Wisdom). Both the female figure of Wisdom and the male Logos figure of Jesus cleared for the believer the possibility of the gift of salvation now, through a commitment to a relationship with God, who is the God of love. Similarly, God sent the powerful word of Wisdom to usher the awareness that God continues to be a 'warrior figure', acting on behalf of humanity. John also sees Jesus as an example of personified wisdom in the form of God's all-powerful Word, which leapt from heaven (Wis 18:15; Jn 1:14).

God's transcendence has become immanent in Jesus, just as the figure of wisdom enabled God's transcendence to find existence in the world. Like wisdom, Jesus was pre-existent and enabled people to become friends with God. Through the focus on a realised eschatology, John is highlighting that one's relationship with God is not just a future hope of resurrection, a *not-yet* gift, but it is a gift to encounter *now*. John's realised eschatology is a response to the earlier Jewish personification of Wisdom, which had bridged the gap between heaven and earth. In the Second Testament, it is Jesus's Incarnation as the divine Logos that bridges this gap. Consequently, John sees that an eschatology that only focuses on the future limits the impact of Jesus's resurrection and the ongoing gift of the

Spirit-Advocate. Eschatology needed a more realised and sapiential interpretation. Jesus reveals at first God's active and continuing love for humanity. The fourth evangelist reveals in John 3:16: 'For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life'. Secondly, John narrates that through accepting the possibility of a realised eschatology, the words of the figure of divine Wisdom, as one who shares in God's prerogative as a giver of life, are paralleled in the words of Jesus when revealing: 'I am the resurrection and the life' (Jn 11:25). These words show that Jesus, as the enfleshed Wisdom, continues to offer a future resurrection hope; but it exemplifies that this hope also has a present reality. The realised eschatology brings the promise found in Wisdom into focus:

> For God did not make death, [God] takes no pleasure in the destruction of the living. [God] created all things to exist. The generative forces of the world bring salvation. (Wis 1:13–14)

The fourth evangelist has, by closely paralleling the attributes of divine Wisdom with that of attributes associated with the divine Logos, Jesus the Nazarene, revealed how God's wisdom can be encountered in the earthly realm.

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