

Rethinking the Ethics of John

Edited by
JAN G. VAN DER WATT and
RUBEN ZIMMERMANN

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Rethinking the Ethics of John

“Implicit Ethics”
in the Johannine Writings

Kontexte und Normen neutestamentlicher Ethik /
Contexts and Norms of New Testament Ethics

Volume III

Edited by
Jan G. van der Watt and Ruben Zimmermann

Mohr Siebeck

JAN G. VAN DER WATT, born 1952; Professor in Source text of early Christianity at the Radboud University Nijmegen, Netherlands, and extra-ordinary professor at the Northwest University, South Africa. Previously, he was professor in New Testament at the University of Pretoria (South Africa) and Mercator international professor at Bonn (Germany).

RUBEN ZIMMERMANN, born 1968; 1999 Dr. theol. from Ruprecht-Karls-University of Heidelberg; 2003 Habilitation Ludwig-Maximilians-University of Munich; 2005–09 Professor for Biblical studies, University of Bielefeld; since 2009 Professor for New Testament Studies, Johannes Gutenberg-University of Mainz; since 2008 Associate Professor at the University of Pretoria, South Africa.

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Preface

Until about a decade ago the general, scholarly consensus held that there was no, or essentially no ethical material in the Gospel and Letters of John. Expressions that there is “eine[r] gewaltige[n] Reduktion ethischer Fragen und Aussagen” in this Gospel,¹ or “ein ethisches Interesse an der Gestaltung der Lebensbereiche der Gemeinde wird im Buch nirgends greifbar”² were not uncommon. For instance, Matera contended: “For anyone interested in the study of New Testament ethics, the Gospel according to John is a major challenge ... there are remarkably few references to moral conduct ... and its most explicit ethical teaching raises a host of questions.”³ Some offered strongly critical, even harsh assessments, speaking of the “weakness and moral bankruptcy of the Johannine ethics” that would presumably only be interested in whether a person is saved or not, irrespective of and indeed insensitive to any other needs.⁴

It was opined that these documents offer very little, if anything, regarding everyday ethical issues like marriage, sexual behavior, detailed social expectations, etc. They contain no typical ethical indicators like virtue and vice lists, paraenetic material, law texts or clear discussions about ethical issues. Strecker consequently remarked: “Versteht man unter ‘Ethik’ ein System von ethischen Normen, die verpflichtende Weisungen für konkrete Einzelfälle abgeben, dann wird man im Johannesevangelium vergeblich nach einer Ethik suchen.”⁵ Johannine literature was in many ways pushed to the periphery of, or even banned from, ethical discussions and debates.

Recently, the climate has changed, as Labahn indicates in his article on the history of research into the ethics of John in this volume. A few key publications (which are mentioned by Labahn and also interacted with

¹ Heinz-Dietrich Wendland, *Ethik des Neuen Testaments: Eine Einführung* (3rd ed.; NTD.E 4; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1978), 109.

² Michael Theobald, *Herrenworte im Johannesevangelium* (HBS 34; Freiburg et al.: Herder, 2002), 564.

³ Frank J. Matera, *New Testament Ethics: The Legacies of Jesus and Paul* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox, 1996), 92.

⁴ Jack T. Sanders, *Ethics in the New Testament: Change and Development* (Philadelphia, Pa.: Fortress, 1975), 91–100, especially 100.

⁵ Georg Strecker, *Theologie des Neuen Testaments* (Berlin and New York, N.Y.: De Gruyter, 1996), 539.

throughout this volume) not only challenged the methodological approach to the ethics of John, but also indicated that there is much more in John than meets the eye, when it comes to ethics. Thus, a new field of inquiry was opened. New questions were asked, new methodologies were applied, and new results led to further questions. The dynamics of Johannine ethics became alive. At the same time, the question of whether it is adequate to name the moral aspects in the Johannine writings ‘ethics’, if ethics is understood as the systematic reflection of norms, remains open. Of course, no ethical theory is explored in John. However, it is our contention that, by means of narration, there is a coherent reflection on values and behavior. In other words, our primary interest lies not in the ethos as lived by the Johannine group, which might be reconstructed from the text, but rather in how the narrated text reveals an underlying value system and ethical reflection *sui generis*, which can retrospectively be classified as ‘ethics’, or better as ‘implicit ethics’. This ethics should be called ‘implicit’ because the author of the Johannine Writings himself offers no systematic or theoretical account concerning the norms of actions. This volume not only challenges the earlier consensus concerning John’s ethics, but also the terms and methods of the study of Ethics in New Testament literature more generally. As such, the volume can be located within the wider range of the scholarly activities of the editors in their exploration of the foundation for and inquiry of New Testament ethics (“Begründungszusammenhänge frühchristlicher Ethik” at both Radboud University/Nijmegen and at Johannes Gutenberg University/Mainz, where the editors are part of the “Research Center of Early Christian Ethics”. This volume is part of the larger project series ‘Contexts and Norms of New Testament Ethics’, which puts this volume in a more wide perspective.

Early stages of this volume were made possible with support by the Alexander von Humboldt Stiftung (Germany) for Ruben Zimmermann, who received funding as a Fyodor Lynen Stipend and worked with Jan van der Watt on a project on ethics. In 2008 a conference was held with the support of the Humboldt Stiftung in Pretoria (South Africa), which set the stage for the book *Moral Language in the New Testament* (WUNT 2.296, 2010). A subsequent conference with continuing support from the Alexander von Humboldt Stiftung was organized in order to focus specifically on the ethics of John. This conference was held in Nijmegen in 2010, from which this volume arose. Several leading Johannine scholars were invited to contribute to this theme and contributors were presented with a simple request: write something on the ethics of John. We did not want to predetermine the results by only asking certain questions, and we intentionally wanted to encourage the contributors to ‘explore’ the issue. In the end, only the papers on research-history and method were requested and two

Old Testament scholars were invited to offer their thoughts on the significance of this material, in considering the ethics of John.

The result is this 'first volume in history' devoted exclusively to the ethical dynamics of John. Of course, it does not offer a comprehensive perspective on the ethics of John. On the contrary, it explores different approaches in both the Gospel and Letters and some articles are more detailed than others. As a whole, the volume offers an initial presentation of the type of scholarly inquiry that could arise when the texts of the Gospel and Letters of John are approached with new questions supported and driven by new methodological insights. The attendees of the conference expressed that (at least for them) some breakthroughs were made during this meeting. The richness of ethical information in John was thus brought forth with the hope that it would provide ample stimuli for further research, not only in Johannine studies, but also on a much broader level. We are convinced that applying the methodological approaches discussed in these articles to other New Testament material and beyond, could stimulate anew the scholarly discussion concerning 'ethics' in John.

First and foremost, we would like to express our appreciation to the Alexander von Humboldt Stiftung for supporting this venture both financially and in spirit. Thanks are also due to Radboud University of Nijmegen (Netherlands) for their contribution to the conference and financial support for the editing of this volume. The majority of the editorial work was done by Frederik S. (Ferdie) Mulder of Radboud University Nijmegen, with the assistance of Susanne Luther. Last but not least we would like to thank Jörg Frey and Mohr Siebeck for accepting this volume in their WUNT series.

Nijmegen and Mainz
January, 2012

Jan G. van der Watt
Ruben Zimmermann

Introduction: Overview of Research

“It’s Only Love”¹ – Is That All?

Limits and Potentials of Johannine “Ethic” – A Critical Evaluation of Research²

Michael Labahn

1. Introduction

This article is not intended to present a complete history of research with a detailed presentation of different positions and opinions. This contribution is rather about an analysis of the limits and potentials of talking about a Johannine ethics against the background of the history of research. It aims at describing the current discussion, based on the denial of any kind of Johannine ethic. The current discussions represent a shift in approach, which will become evident in the following discussion. As far as the author forms part of these discussions this article represents a plea for new approaches and methods in approaching the problem of Johannine ethics.

1.1 “Kiddies, Love One Another!”: Taking Lessing as Point of Departure

In *Das Testament Johannis* (1777), which takes up the apocryphal episode of the old apostle John transmitted by Jerome (*Epist. ad Galatas* 6), the great Enlightenment thinker Gotthold Ephraim Lessing offers a clue to John’s thinking. Before he died, John summarized his preaching about Jesus in the repetition of the simple but basic statement, “Kinderchen, liebt

¹ Although it might be true that John Lennon hated this Beatles’ song from 1965 (cf. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/It's_Only_Love), the title is a good starting point into an analysis of limits and possibilities of Johannine “Ethic”. As far as the Johannine semantic concept of love plays a major role in discussion, such a presentation will also show that the Johannine concept of ethics is based on the concept of “love” but that more about the Johannine ethical teaching could be said. We will return to that question in reference to Lessing’s interpretation of the Johannine message (section 1.1).

² I am very grateful to Tom Thatcher who did much more than simply revising the English of my article. His critique, questions and hints helped to improve the argument of the current paper.

euch!” (“Little children, love one another!”).³ According to Lessing, this apocryphal note is more authentic than the Gospel of John, which causes conflicts. This simple statement on love represents the core of the Johannine message, which is ultimately more significant than the message of the written Fourth Gospel. In Lessing’s interpretation, love is a basic ethical criterion, which is relevant not only for Christianity but for all humanity.⁴

There can be no doubt that the statement ὁ θεὸς ἀγάπη ἐστίν (1 John 4:8) is one of the highpoints of New Testament theological reasoning.⁵ The preceding comment in this context further aims to define those who are loved by God in terms of their interrelation to God and to humanity: πᾶς ὁ ἀγαπῶν ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ γεγέννηται καὶ γινώσκει τὸν θεόν (1 John 4:7).⁶ This declaration in 1 John 4:7–8. could be read as the foundation of a powerful ethical program of love, such as that found by Lessing in the “Testament of John”. But does Johannine thinking elaborate such a program, so that we can speak of a Johannine “ethic” based on love for humanity? And if the Johannine literature does elaborate an ethic of love, how and by what means do Johannine arguments elaborate such a program? Is Lessing correct to view the Johannine conception of love as the grounds for a general ethical program, or do the Johannine statements on “love” refer to a group-bound ethos or “conventicle ethics”⁷ that serves only to establish social identity, perhaps in the context of a severe social/religious conflict?

Johannine scholarship offers a broad range of answers to the above questions, and there is no current consensus on these issues. An earlier generation of critical scholarship assumed that there was no distinctive Johannine “ethic” at all (cf. Ruben Zimmermann’s article below, pp. 44ff.). However, a new trend appears to be emerging. At least since the 1980s,

³ Gotthold E. Lessing, *Das Testament Johannis*, 1777 (vol. 8 of *Werke: Theologiekritische Schriften III; Philosophische Schriften*; ed. Helmut Göbel; Munich: Hanser, 1979, 15–20, here 18).

⁴ Cf. Björn Pecina, *Fichtes Gott: Vom Sinn der Freiheit zur Liebe des Seins* (Religion in Philosophy and Theology 24; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2007), 321–322.

⁵ Cf., for instance, Tobias Nicklas, “‘Gott ist die Liebe’ (1 Joh 4,8b) – 1 Joh als Knotenpunkt biblischer Theologie”, *BiLi* 79 (2006): 245–248; Thomas Söding, “‘Gott ist Liebe’: 1 Joh 4,8.16 als Spitzensatz Biblischer Theologie”, in *Der lebendige Gott: Studien zur Theologie des Neuen Testaments* (ed. Thomas Söding; Festschrift Wilhelm Thüsing; NTAbh 31; Münster: Aschendorff, 1996), 306–357.

⁶ On the relation of John 4:8 unto 4:7 cf., for instance, Udo Schnelle, *Die Johannesbriefe* (THKNT 17; Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2010), 148–149.

⁷ Wolfgang Schrage, *Ethik des Neuen Testaments* (GNT 4; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1989), 322: “partikularistische Konventikelethik”. See already Ernst Käsemann, *Jesu letzter Wille nach Johannes 17* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1971), 122–124. Cf. Wayne Meeks, “The Ethics of the Fourth Evangelist”, in *Exploring the Gospel of John: In Honor of D. Moody Smith* (eds. R. Alan Culpepper and C. Clifton Black; Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox, 1996), 317–326, here 324.

research has adopted a "new look" on the Johannine writings⁸ using new interpretive methods. At about the same time, Johannine research began to free itself from the boundaries of Bultmann's existential hermeneutics.⁹ Both developments have led Johannine scholarship to more balanced answers to questions related to Johannine ethics. This paper will survey several major trends in this more recent research and their methodological presuppositions, with a view to determining the extent to which John promotes a distinct ethical system. Is it "all love", as Lessing argued, or is the Johannine ethical vision more complex?

1.2 "Ethics" or "Ethos" – What Are We Looking For?

Before proceeding, it is necessary to clarify the value of the term "ethics" in general usage and with regard to the New Testament data in particular. Clearly, the books of the New Testament do not resemble the philosophical essays or moral epistles produced by ancient philosophers like Aristotle or Seneca. At the same time, however, many later Early Christian letters (or so-called "letters") reflect on ethics in terms of the relationships between Christian believers and those inside, and outside, Christian communities.¹⁰

⁸ Cf., for instance, the reports on research given by Udo Schnelle, "Ein neuer Blick: Tendenzen gegenwärtiger Johannesforschung", *BTZ* 16 (1999): 21–40, and Klaus Scholtissek, "Eine Renaissance des Evangeliums nach Johannes: Aktuelle Perspektiven der exegetischen Forschung", *TRev* 97 (2001): 267–288; idem, "Johannes auslegen I–IV: Ein Forschungsbericht", *SNTU* 24 (1999): 35–84; 25 (2000): 98–140; 27 (2002): 117–153; 29 (2004): 67–118.

⁹ On Bultmann's hermeneutics and his ongoing influence on Johannine research cf. Michael Labahn, "Bultmanns Konzeption der existenzialen Interpretation des neutestamentlichen Kerygmas am Beispiel seiner Exegese des Corpus Johanneum: Versuch einer Annäherung im Spiegel der neueren Johannesauslegung", in *Bultmann und Luther: Lutherrezeption in Exegese und Hermeneutik Rudolf Bultmanns* (eds. Ulrich H. J. Körtner et al.; Hannover: VELKD, 2010), 171–207.

¹⁰ For instance: 1 Peter, cf. Christian Münch, "Geschwister in der Fremde: Zur Ethik des Ersten Petrusbriefes", in *Hoffnung in Bedrängnis: Studien zum Ersten Petrusbrief* (ed. Thomas Söding; SBS 216; Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 2009), 130–164; J. de Waal Dryden, *Theology and Ethics in 1 Peter: Paraenetic Strategies for Christian Character Formation* (WUNT 2.209; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2006). In general cf. Schrage, *Ethik des Neuen Testaments* (n. 7), 10: "Nun ist das Neue Testament gewiß kein Handbuch oder Kompendium christlicher Ethik mit allgemeingültigen Regeln oder einem detaillierten Verhaltenskatalog. ... Aber in den verschiedenen Schriften, die alle je auf ihre Weise von dem in Jesus Christus geschenkten Heil und der in ihm angebrochenen Herrschaft Gottes Zeugnis ablegen wollen, wird nun doch immer wieder zu einem dementsprechenden Verhalten der Christen aufgerufen, und zwar nicht nur zu einem individualethischen Verhalten im persönlichen Bereich des einzelnen. Vielmehr werden trotz mancher sozialethischer Defizite wenigstens umrißartig auch Handlungsmuster für das soziale Bezugsfeld und die gesellschaftlichen Strukturen sichtbar, die von der Erneuerung keineswegs ausgenommen werden."

Closer to the interests of the present essay, Udo Schnelle's recent commentary (see discussion below) argues that 1 John articulates an "ethical theology".¹¹ Thus, while the New Testament does not elaborate a systematic approach to ethics, passages like 1 John 4:7–8 reflect a critical examination of the foundations of ethics. Scholars have seen that much of the New Testament addresses the ethical implications that emerged from the new faith in Jesus Christ.

Before discussing the ethical aspects of the Early Christian writings, however, one must define the scope and value of the term "ethics". According to Trutz Rendtorff, "ethics" is "a theory of the human behavior" ("Theorie der menschlichen Lebensführung"), one that assumes that the individual human being is a responsible subject who is able to make reflective judgments about his or her deeds. The term "responsible" here encompasses the individual's relationships to other human beings in her/his social context and environment,¹² while the term "theory" encompasses critical reflection based on a theoretical and methodological framework. Indeed, critical reflection has been an essential premise in discussions of ethics since Aristotle: ethics is a critical analysis of moral rules and their conditions and motifs.¹³ Any system of ethics develops a methodological and intellectual line of argument that should evidence a systemic quality and on which any ethical decision or advice is based.

As noted above, the New Testament authors do not undertake such a systematic approach to ethics and generally fail to provide critical reasoning in support of their moral teachings. Further, New Testament research requires a definition of ethics that is broad enough to cover narrative texts such as the Gospels. In view of these concerns, one may define an "ethical text" as a text that

¹¹ Udo Schnelle, "Ethics in 1 John" (below, pp. 321ff.). On ethics in 1 John see also Dirk G. van der Merwe, "'A Matter of Having Fellowship': Ethics in the Johannine Epistles", in *Identity, Ethics, and Ethos in the New Testament* (ed. Jan G. van der Watt; BZNW 141; Berlin and New York, N.Y.: De Gruyter, 2006), 535–563.

¹² Trutz Rendtorff, *Ethik: Grundelemente, Methodologie und Konkretionen einer ethischen Theologie*, vol. 1 (Theologische Wissenschaft 13.1; Stuttgart et al.: Kohlhammer, 1990), 9.

¹³ See, for instance, Svend Andersen, *Einführung in die Ethik* (2nd ed.; Berlin and New York, N.Y.: De Gruyter, 2005), 1–3; Folker Blischke, *Die Begründung und die Durchsetzung der Ethik bei Paulus* (Arbeiten zur Bibel und ihrer Geschichte 25; Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2007), 13; cf. the critical survey of definitions given by Martin Honecker, *Evangelische Ethik als Ethik der Unterscheidung: Mit einer Gesamtbibliographie von Martin Honecker* (Ethik im theologischen Diskurs 20; Münster: LIT, 2010), 13–15.

- a) provides a reflective orientation toward the reader's actual "way of life"
- b) by defining how to behave and act¹⁴
- c) according to a value system that is developed or supported¹⁵ by the text, its characters, and/or its setting,
- d) in relation to a specific social group and/or in relation to the surrounding society at large.

As a corollary to the above definition, ethical texts will attempt to persuade the reader to embrace the norms that they promote as normative.¹⁶ The precise means by which this climate of acceptance is developed will, of course, depend on the genre and form of the text in question.

Of course, scholars who deny that such a "reflective orientation" is sufficient to define a text as "ethical" – insisting instead that "ethical" texts must evidence overt theoretical reflection on the frameworks of the value systems they promote – will conclude that the Johannine writings should not be understood as ethical discourses. Responding to this argument, Jan Van der Watt (2006) has attempted to broaden the methodological approach and to gain insight into the moral world of the Gospel of John by using the analytical category "ethos",¹⁷ which he differentiates from ethics. Ethos refers to "the habitual – often unreflected – behaviour of a group".¹⁸ Van der Watt draws here on Michael Wolter,¹⁹ who in turn refers to the

¹⁴ This "definition" may be achieved in a number of different ways, including direct commandments, the examples of characters in the text, imagery, and other textual features that can communicate values.

¹⁵ A text could signal acceptance of a value/ethical system(s) adopted from the broader cultural context, and might guide its readers to act in conjunction with these established norms. Such an acceptance does not exclude certain changes of or corrections to the adopted system.

¹⁶ On the relation of text and ethical orientation cf. Dietmar Mieth, "Literarische Texte als Quelle ethischer Verunsicherung oder ethischer Modellbildung?", in *Schön und gut? Studien zu Ethik und Ästhetik in der Literatur* (eds. Susanne and Christian Krepold; Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2008), 19–40, here 21. A text establishes "Regulierungen", "die eine gewollte Balance herstellen, welche die Rezeption zwar nicht beherrschen will, aber ihr doch bestimmte Wege empfiehlt und andere versperrt".

¹⁷ Jan G. van der Watt, "Ethics and Ethos in the Gospel according to John", *ZNW* 97 (2006): 147–176.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 150.

¹⁹ Michael Wolter, "Ethos und Identität in den paulinischen Gemeinden", *NTS* 43 (1997): 430–444; *idem*, "Die ethische Identität christlicher Gemeinden in neutestamentlicher Zeit", in *Woran orientiert sich Ethik?* (eds. Wilfried Härle and Reiner Preul; Marburger Jahrbuch Theologie 13 = Marburger Theologische Studien 67; Marburg: Elwert, 2001), 61–90; *idem*, "Christliches Ethos nach der Offenbarung des Johannes", in *Studien zur Johannesoffenbarung und ihrer Auslegung* (ed. Friedrich W. Horn; Festschrift Otto Böcher; Neukirchen-Vluyn 2005), 189–209; *idem*, "'Let No One Seek His Own, But Each One the Other's' (1 Corinthians 10,24): Pauline Ethics according to 1 Corinthians", in *Identity, Ethics, and Ethos in the New Testament* (ed. Jan G. van der Watt; BZNW

theory of ethos developed by Wolfgang Kluxen²⁰ and Thomas Schmeller.²¹ However, Van der Watt's application focuses on "functional descriptions" in contrast to technical terms.²² Specifically, narrative-critical approaches may analyze characters and their behaviour to detect an underlying concept of ethos/ethics in a text such as the Fourth Gospel. Such a methodological approach gives attention to elements of the Johannine narrative such as shared values, the love commandment, and the "family" ethos (including meals and footwashing).

While Van der Watt's approach has proven fruitful, within the broader Johannine system of meaning, values, and general demands distinct decisions on how to act morally are still necessary. It might therefore be asked whether and by what means a differentiation between ethics and ethos is helpful and appropriate.²³

1.3 Johannine Ethic – Different Ethics?

Any discussion of Early Christian ethics, and especially of a Johannine ethic, must explore the historical, sociological, and political context²⁴ in which such a concept or program developed. Two points of consideration are particularly important for the present discussion.

First, there is a need to define the range of sources that would form a database for reconstructing the Johannine ethic. Five New Testament writings are traditionally ascribed to an author called "John". The Gospel

141; Berlin: De Gruyter, 2006), 199–217, here 200. According to Wolter, "ethos" is a "Kanon von habitualisierten Handlungen, der innerhalb eines sozialen Systems in Geltung steht. Diese Handlungen werden von einem überindividuellen Konsens getragen und sind so eindeutig, daß sie reproduziert werden können und nicht mehr durch ethische Entscheidungen generiert werden müssen" ("Ethos und Identität", 430–431).

²⁰ Wolfgang Kluxen, *Die Ethik des Ethos* (Fermenta philosophica; Munich: K. Alber, 1974).

²¹ Thomas Schmeller, "Neutestamentliches Gruppenethos", in *Der neue Mensch in Christus: Hellenistische Anthropologie und Ethik im Neuen Testament* (ed. Johannes Beutler; QD 190; Freiburg et al.: Herder, 2001), 120–134; see now Rudolf Hoppe, "Paränese und Theologie im Galaterbrief – eine Profilskizze", in *Umstrittener Galaterbrief: Studien zur Situierung und Theologie des Paulus-Schreibens* (eds. Michael Bachmann and Bernd Kollmann; Biblisch-theologische Studien 106; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 2010), 207–230, here 211–212.

²² Van der Watt, "Ethics and Ethos" (n. 17), 151.

²³ See Van der Watt, "Ethics and Ethos" (n. 17), 165, regarding the love commandment: "Based on the reciprocal and exemplary nature of loving identity, ethics (in the sense of rules or commandments) and ethos (in the sense of behaviour in a fixed way) are interrelated and indeed merged."

²⁴ See here Stefan Schreiber, "Imperium Romanum und römische Gemeinden: Dimensionen politischer Sprechweise in Röm 13", in *Die Bedeutung der Exegese für Theologie und Kirche* (ed. Ulrich Busse; QD 215; Freiburg et al.: Herder, 2005), 131–170.

and the three letters of John form a distinct corpus because they share a large number of common linguistic and theological details. These writings are best viewed as the product of a "Johannine school",²⁵ with three *different* authors producing the various texts: one individual produced the Fourth Gospel, another 1 John, and a third, who calls himself "the Elder", produced 2 and 3 John. Further, these texts, and the Johannine school that produced them, stood in a particular relationship to certain Johannine communities. Therefore, each of the three authors and their respective writings should be treated on his/its own terms, with each dealing with a distinct situation and developing its own concept of meaning and, correspondingly, its own concept of ethical demands within that situation – all, of course, engaging and drawing upon the larger Johannine agenda in various ways.²⁶ Within the quest for a Johannine ethic, such an approach means, for example, that one should view 1 John and the Gospel of John as distinctive contributions.²⁷ The tendency to interpret 1 John as commentary on, or supplement to, the Gospel is not only misleading, but also delimits the contribution of the letter to the understanding of Johannine ethics in a problematic fashion.

The Revelation of John is connected to the Johannine writings not only by its name, but also by significant linguistic overlaps and common motifs.²⁸ Therefore, the book of Revelation may be associated with the

²⁵ On the "Johannine school" cf., for instance, Udo Schnelle, *Antidoketische Christologie im Johannesevangelium: Eine Untersuchung zur Stellung des vierten Evangeliums in der johanneischen Schule* (FRLANT 144; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1987), 53–55; Michael Labahn, *Jesus als Lebensspender: Untersuchungen zu einer Geschichte der johanneischen Tradition anhand ihrer Wundergeschichten* (BZNW 98; Berlin and New York, N.Y.: De Gruyter, 1999), 21–23.

²⁶ Cf. with regard to the idea of love: Schnelle, *Die Johannesbriefe* (n. 6), 163, pointing to (1) the relationship between "love" and "light", (2) the love relationship between God and believers, and (3) the discussion of the "Handlungsebene des Gesamtgeschehens" in 1 John compared to the Fourth Gospel. The significance of such an outline is challenged by Willi Marxsen, "*Christliche*" und *christliche Ethik im Neuen Testament* (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 1989), 246: "Zwar könnte man vermuten, daß sie [the Johannine writings; M. L.] in ihrer Ethik im wesentlichen übereinstimmen, doch genau das Gegenteil ist der Fall. Es läßt sich nämlich zeigen, daß sich die Ethik des 'Johannes' grundlegend von der Ethik seiner Schule unterscheidet." Even more doubtful is Schulz's suggestion that one may distinguish the ethical conceptions of a hypothetical Johannine source document, possibly of Gnostic origin, from the presentation of the final form of the Gospel, which may, in turn, be distinguished from the moral teachings of the opponents described in 1 John (Siegfried Schulz, *Neutestamentliche Ethik* [Zürcher Grundrisse zur Bibel; Zurich: TVZ, 1987]).

²⁷ The approach advocated here is rejected by Schrage, *Ethik des Neuen Testaments* (n. 7), 301.

²⁸ A short overview is given by Udo Schnelle, *Einleitung in das Neue Testament* (6th ed.; UTB 1830; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2007), 548–550.

history of the Johannine writings,²⁹ a position adopted, for example, by Siegfried Schulz.³⁰ The present discussion, along with the remainder of the essays in the current volume, subscribes to the theory that the ethical program of Revelation should be read on its own terms. Revelation develops meaning³¹ through a radicalization of reality³² that promotes a certain group ethos as well as a Christologically-grounded ethic³³ – an ethic that specifically opposes the norms and lifeways of the extra-textual world governed by the Roman Empire. Since this mode of sense building is not evident in the other Johannine texts, Revelation may be excluded from the present discussion.

Second, there are a number of different theories regarding the historical setting of the Gospel of John and the other Johannine writings. Obviously, the Johannine ethic, as developed in the Fourth Gospel, will be understood differently depending on the socio-historical background within which the text is framed. If, for example, the Gospel of John is assumed to have originated from a severe conflict with Judaism, its narrative presentation and ethical arguments will be evaluated differently compared to a reading that orients the text to conflicts within the Johannine community. The

²⁹ Cf. the history of research presented by André Heinze, *Johannesapokalypse und johanneische Schriften: Forschungs- und traditionsgeschichtliche Untersuchungen* (BWANT 142; Stuttgart et al.: Kohlhammer, 1998).

³⁰ Cf. his extensive reasoning in Schulz, *Neutestamentliche Ethik* (n. 26), 529–530.

³¹ Cf. Franz Tóth, *Der himmlische Kult: Wirklichkeitskonstruktion und Sinnbildung in der Johannesoffenbarung* (Arbeiten zur Bibel und ihrer Geschichte 22; Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2006); see also Udo Schnelle, *Theologie des Neuen Testaments* (UTB 2917; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2007), 712–733.

³² Harald Ulland, *Die Vision als Radikalisierung der Wirklichkeit in der Apokalypse des Johannes* (TANZ 21; Tübingen: Francke, 1997).

³³ Klaus Scholtissek, “‘Mitteilhaber an der Bedrängnis, der Königsherrschaft und der Ausdauer in Jesus’ (Offb 1,9): Partizipatorische Ethik in der Offenbarung des Johannes”, in *Theologie als Vision: Studien zur Johannes-Offenbarung* (ed. Knut Backhaus; SBS 191; Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 2001), 172–207; on the “ethic” of the Book of Revelation cf. further: David L. Barr, “Towards an Ethical Reading of the Apocalypse: Reflections on John’s Use of Power, Violence, and Misogyny”, *SBLSP* 36 (1997): 358–373; Jan A. du Rand, “The Ethical Response of an Alternative Community in a Critical Situation: Marturia and Martyrdom in the Apocalypse of John”, in *Identity, Ethics, and Ethos in the New Testament* (ed. Jan G. Van der Watt; BZNW 141; Berlin and New York, N.Y.: De Gruyter, 2006), 565–593; Jürgen Kerner, *Die Ethik der Johannes-Apokalypse im Vergleich mit der des 4. Esra: Ein Beitrag zum Verhältnis von Apokalyptik und Ethik* (BZNW 94; Berlin and New York, N.Y.: De Gruyter, 1998); Dieter Sänger, “Destruktive Apokalyptik? Eine Erinnerung in eschatologischer und ethischer Perspektive”, in *Eschatologie und Ethik im frühen Christentum* (ed. Christfried Böttrich; Festschrift Günter Haufe; Greifswalder theologische Studien 11; Frankfurt et al.: Peter Lang, 2006), 285–307, here 299–303, 304–307; Wolter, “Christliches Ethos nach der Offenbarung des Johannes” (n. 19), 189–209.

textual data suggests that both historical dimensions have become part of the formation of meaning in the Gospel: the first context of conflict is reflected in the *apostynagogos* texts (John 9:22; 12:42; 16:2) and related passages, while the second is evident in the schism among the disciples at John 6:66. Readings of the Johannine "ethic" against the backdrop of these conflicts³⁴ will be discussed below (3.2.1).

2. No Ethic in John?³⁵ A Critical Evaluation of Main Arguments

As noted earlier, scholars have shown some reluctance to speak of a Johannine ethic at all, much less to describe elements of John's moral vision in detail.³⁶ Five such approaches will be briefly reviewed here.

(a) Rudolf Bultmann's reading of the Gospel of John portrayed the Incarnation as the revelation of the "Dass" ("that") of God in Jesus, a revelation that negates any human self-confidence. Exposure to this revelation leads to a crisis that provokes an "Entscheidung".

In der Entscheidung des Glaubens oder des Unglaubens konstituiert sich definitiv das Sein des Menschen, und jetzt erst erhält sein Woher seine Eindeutigkeit.³⁷

³⁴ Modern understandings of the Fourth Gospel as a document that emerged from a context of conflict may be traced to the research of J. Louis Martyn, *History and Theology in the Fourth Gospel* (2nd ed.; New York, N.Y.: Westminster John Knox, 1979); idem, "The Johannine Community among Jewish and other Early Christian Communities", in *What We Have Heard from the Beginning: The Past, Present, and Future of Johannine Studies* (ed. Tom Thatcher; Waco, Tex.: Baylor University Press, 2007), 183–190. See also the discussion of Klaus Wengst, *Bedrängte Gemeinde und verherrlichter Christus: Ein Versuch über das Johannesevangelium* (4th ed.; Kaiser-Traktate 114; Munich: Kaiser, 1992); idem, *Das Johannesevangelium*, vol. 1: *Kapitel 1–10* (Theologischer Kommentar zum Neuen Testament 4.1; Stuttgart et al.: Kohlhammer, 2000), 26–28. For a critical evaluation of this thesis cf. Jörg Frey, "Das Bild der 'Juden' im Johannesevangelium und die Geschichte der johanneischen Gemeinde", in *Israel und seine Heilstraditionen im Johannesevangelium* (eds. Michael Labahn et al.; Festschrift Johannes Beutler; Paderborn: Schöningh, 2004), 33–53, here 38–45.

³⁵ See also the essays "Is There Ethics in the Gospel of John?" by Ruben Zimmermann (below, pp. 44ff.) and János Bolyki, "Ethics in the Gospel of John", *CV* 45 (2003): 198–208.

³⁶ See also Rainer Hirsch-Luipold, "Prinzipiell-theologische Ethik in der johanneischen Literatur", in *Jenseits von Indikativ und Imperativ* (eds. Friedrich W. Horn and Ruben Zimmermann; Kontexte und Normen neutestamentlicher Ethik/Contexts and Norms of New Testament Ethics 1 = WUNT 238; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2009), 289–307.

³⁷ Rudolf Bultmann, *Theologie des Neuen Testaments* (ed. Otto Merk; UTB 630; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1984), 377–378.

Bultmann's existential interpretation, accompanied by his program of demythologizing,³⁸ was not interested in the quest for a Johannine ethic³⁹ and in fact did not leave room for the development of a Johannine ethical concept. His focus on the paradox of the Incarnation did not support an understanding of the narrative development of the Word who became flesh – on the contrary, Bultmann claimed that the Johannine depiction of the incarnate Jesus lacks “jede Anschaulichkeit; die Begegnung mit ihm ist nur Frage und nicht Überredung”.⁴⁰ According to Bultmann, the Johannine Gospel only illustrates the “Daß der Offenbarung, ohne ihr was”.⁴¹ Despite its genius, a major weakness of this approach was its tendency to reduce the Johannine text to a mirror of Bultmann's own hermeneutics. Of course, recent research may still benefit from the many philological, exegetical, and even theological insights of Bultmann's interpretation,⁴² but it cannot follow his diminution of the Johannine arguments and its story.

Nevertheless, Johannine scholarship largely followed Bultmann in neglecting to identify, or even to seek to identify, a distinctly Johannine ethic. To take a notable recent example, Michael Theobald, who revises and updates Bultmann's theory of an “Offenbarungsredenquelle”, joins him also in his doubts about a Johannine concept of ethics. “Ein *ethisches* Interesse an der Gestaltung der Lebensbereiche der Gemeinde wird im Buch [i.e. the Gospel of John] nirgends greifbar.”⁴³ Theobald's search for a

³⁸ Rudolf Bultmann, *Neues Testament und Mythologie: Das Problem der Entmythologisierung der neutestamentlichen Verkündigung* (Beihefte zur Evangelischen Theologie 96; Munich: Kaiser, 1984). On the relation for instance Hans Hübner, “Was ist existentielle Interpretation?”, in idem, *Biblische Theologie als Hermeneutik: Gesammelte Aufsätze* (eds. Antje Labahn and Michael Labahn; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1995), 229–251, here 230.

³⁹ Bultmann's reference to faith is not without reference to ethic/ethos: Konrad Stock, “Das Ethos des Glaubens nach Rudolf Bultmann”, in *Christliche Ethik – evangelische Ethik? Das Ethische im Konflikt der Interpretationen* (ed. Ulrich H. J. Körtner; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 2004), 69–89.

⁴⁰ Rudolf Bultmann, *Das Evangelium des Johannes* (21st ed.; KEK 2; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1986), 43, interpreting John 1:14.

⁴¹ Bultmann, *Theologie des Neuen Testaments* (n. 37), 418.

⁴² A critical evaluation is given by Labahn, “Bultmanns Konzeption der existenzialen Interpretation” (n. 9), 202–206; see also Jörg Frey, *Die johanneische Eschatologie*, vol. 1: *Ihre Probleme im Spiegel der Forschung seit Reimarus* (WUNT 96; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1997), 156.

⁴³ Michael Theobald, *Herrenworte im Johannesevangelium* (HBS 34; Freiburg et al.: Herder, 2002), 565. In his commentary Theobald refers to additions by the later redactor that “betrifft das Verhältnis von Glaube und Ethos: Wenn die Redaktion in 5,29 mit universalem Geltungsanspruch vom Tun des Guten und des Bösen als Kriterium über ‘Leben’ oder ‘Verdammnis’ spricht, wirft sie die Frage nach dem Verhältnis von Glaube und Werken auf, nach der Bewährung des Glaubens in einer Lebensgestalt des ‘Guten’”. However such a reference only forms a “theologisches ‘Ausrufezeichen’” (*Das Evange-*

Johannine ethic focuses on inner-community dynamics. Therefore, his assumption is a bit surprising, inasmuch the concept of mutual love for brothers/sisters (see below 3.2.1–3) would seem to touch on the community's inner relations.

(b) Much research has assumed that the Gospel of John deals mainly with Christology and theology. Such an approach tends to leave little room for considerations of the text's ethical and moral insights.

An emphasis on the christological or theological facets of the Fourth Gospel need not necessarily exclude ethics. Following Rainer Hirsch-Luipold, one may speak of a 'prinzipiell-theologische Ethik'⁴⁴ in the Johannine writings, positing a close connection between God as love and the act of love that builds a close relationship between God and human beings (1 John 4:7–8). Udo Schnelle's recent commentary on the Johannine letters moves in a similar direction.

Die johanneische Schule bedenkt die Offenbarung Gottes in Jesus Christus durchgehend in ihren prinzipiellen Dimensionen und entwickelt eine *ethische* Theologie. Es geht um umfassende *theologische* Begründungen menschlicher Existenz und grundlegende Ausrichtungen menschlichen Handelns. Theologie und Ethik gehören in der johanneischen Theologie uneingeschränkt zusammen, weil Gott selbst Liebe ist (vgl. 1Joh 4,8.16).⁴⁵

However, one must ask if such an ethic is specific in detail and if it opens a window to concrete actions by the presentation of God, Jesus, his disciples, his adversaries, and other characters in the narrative. Neither Schnelle nor Hirsch-Luipold would deny that. An ethic needs examples and guidelines, and the further presentation of research below will show how such an orientation is given, in different ways, in the Fourth Gospel and 1 John.

(c) Frequently used forms, themes, and terms of Early Christian paraenesis have often been missed within the Johannine literature, especially within the Fourth Gospel (see the approach of Meeks below).⁴⁶

Wiard Popkes, in his exploration of New Testament paraenesis, acknowledges this oversight will also stress the insufficiency of a methodological approach that would consider only forms, contents, and terms.

lium nach Johannes: Kapitel 1–12 [RNT; Regensburg: Pustet, 2009], 73), which claims "Recht und Notwendigkeit der Ethik ... Der lebensrettende Glaube an den Sohn Gottes muss sich in guten Werken verleblichen ..." (ibid., 402).

⁴⁴ Hirsch-Luipold, "Prinzipiell-theologische Ethik" (n. 36), 289–307.

⁴⁵ Schnelle, *Die Johannesbriefe* (n. 6), 163.

⁴⁶ Cf. the evidence presented by Wiard Popkes, *Paränese und Neues Testament* (SBS 168; Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1996), 118.

Textpragmatisch betrachtet, spannt sich der Bogen des paränetisch Bedeutsamen jedoch weiter und umfasst auch das JohEv. Elementare Linien der joh Botschaft haben p. [= paränetische] Relevanz; vieles lässt sich nach dem Modell von V. Turner/A. van Gennep als 'postliminale Mahnung' erfassen.⁴⁷

"Postliminal" here refers to "rites of reincorporation", which Popkes links with conversion. He identifies different Johannine terms and motifs that provide instructions connected with conversion and that cite Jesus as a moral example: "Das Vorbild Jesu wird zum zentralen Bezugspunkt des Imperativs."⁴⁸ These themes are elaborated in more detail in the Farewell Discourses (John 13–17), where the Paraclete appears as "'der Träger der Paraklese' in Person".⁴⁹ At first sight, Popkes' presentation may focus too much on the structure of conversion, but his "postliminal" model also includes the aftermath of conversion. Most of the terms and motifs he mentions are connected with staying inside the group.

On the other hand, the fact that the Johannine literature does not include certain forms, themes, and terms that were common in Early Christian paraenesis cannot be cited as evidence that the texts lack a moral orientation. As Popkes notes,

der konversionale Ortswechsel (auf dem Hintergrund des Dualismus) ruft nach dem Bleiben in Christus (das heißt zugleich in der Wahrheit, im Licht, Leben), nach dem Befolgen seines Wortes, besonders des Liebesgebots, nach dem Fruchtbringen und nach der Einheit.⁵⁰

Interestingly enough, a shared moral orientation is a point of common ground between the Johannine Letters and Gospel. Again, it is not necessary to highlight the absence of certain elements of ethical instruction, but rather to explore the ways in which the Johannine writings develop an orientation toward the actual lifestyle of their addressees.

(d) In his contribution to the Festschrift for D. Moody Smith, Wayne Meeks denies that one can identify a distinct Johannine ethic, but suggests that one can identify an "instrument for moral formation" in the Johannine literature.⁵¹ Meeks' contribution is of special interest because his argu-

⁴⁷ Popkes, *Paränese und Neues Testament* (n. 46), 118. Popkes in his footnote does not refer to the contributions of Victor Turner (*Das Ritual: Struktur und Anti-Struktur* [Frankfurt: Campus, 2005]) and Arnold van Gennep (*Übergangsriten* [Frankfurt: Campus Fachbuch, 2005]), but to Klaus Berger, *Formgeschichte des Neuen Testaments* (Heidelberg: Quelle & Meyer, 1984), 130–135.

⁴⁸ Popkes, *Paränese und Neues Testament* (n. 46), 119.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 122.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 121.

⁵¹ Meeks, "The Ethics of the Fourth Evangelist" (n. 7), 318–320.

ments are grounded in an interpretation of the Fourth Gospel that differs from that of Bultmann. According to Meeks,

- (1) there is no significant "explicit moral instruction" in the text;
- (2) the Johannine story does not develop "a plausible and universalizable model for behaviour";
- (3) the story simply aims at an acceptance of a certain worldview developed by the text⁵² without "rational kinds of moral discourse"; and,
- (4) the text posits a predestination model to explain various characters' decisions, so that there is "not a morally free decision" in the Fourth Gospel.

Consistent with these observations, Meeks criticizes the stigmatization of the opponents as "children of the devil" (esp. John 8:44).⁵³ This issue has become significant to recent criticisms of the Fourth Gospels' value system. Adele Reinhartz, for example, has drawn attention to the fact "that the gospel of love has also been an instrument of hate, not once, not occasionally but frequently and pervasively in the history of Jewish-Christian relations".⁵⁴

The critical approach of Meeks clearly indicates that there is a need to clarify what is meant by the term ethics and the relationship of the Johannine arguments to an ethos. Although important insights have been gained in research, scholars are still in the process of developing adequate methodological and hermeneutical tools in understanding the Johannine concept of ethic. As noted earlier, moral orientation can be provided through various means, not only by direct instruction. As will be seen, the Johannine story does aim at a "universalizable" interpretation – of God, of his love expressed in the sending of his son, of the world and those who

⁵² Meeks relies here on his model of Johannine sectarianism: Wayne A. Meeks, "The Man from Heaven in Johannine Sectarianism", in idem, *In Search of the Early Christians: Selected Essays* (eds. Allen R. Hilton and H. Gregory Snyder; New Haven et al.: Yale University Press, 2002), 55–90.

⁵³ Michael Labahn, "Die παρηγοία des Gottessohnes im Johannesevangelium: Theologische Hermeneutik und philosophisches Selbstverständnis", in *Kontexte des Johannes-evangeliums: Das vierte Evangelium in religions- und traditions-geschichtlicher Perspektive* (eds. Jörg Frey and Udo Schnelle; in collaboration with Juliane Schlegel; WUNT 175; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2004), 321–363, here 330–331, 342–343, points to the construction of a certain "discourse universe" – a term borrowed from Charles S. Pierce – which the characters in the Johannine story and the model readers are invited/forced to accept in order to follow the line of reasoning within the textual world.

⁵⁴ Adele Reinhartz, "The Grammar of Hate in the Gospel of John. Reading John in the Twenty-First Century", in *Israel und seine Heilstraditionen im Johannesevangelium: Festgabe für J. Beutler SJ zum 70. Geburtstag* (eds. Michael Labahn et al.; Paderborn: Schöningh, 2004), 416–427.

believe or refuse to believe – that includes an orientation for the reader's actual lifestyle.

(e) As a final example, some past research has acknowledged that the Johannine literature develops an ethical vision, but has tended to concentrate the Johannine moral teaching in a single main point. Most frequently, this approach has asserted that the love command is “the only moral rule given by John”.⁵⁵ Recalling the first point of Meeks' critique noted above, this approach essentially understands that John does not provide specific moral instruction, but rather only a general rule.

Against this approach, Johannes Nissen maintains that, in the search for a Johannine ethic, “our focus cannot be confined to the explicit moral teaching of the Gospel”.⁵⁶ Understanding the Johannine text as a meaningful narrative world helps one to interpret the Gospel as a story that develops a reflected system of values through its interpretation of Jesus (Christology) and through the interactions of its characters, with direct or implicit assessments by the implied author. Such a system of values is a guide to the readers as they develop their own moral conceptions, founded in the text and its value system. The quest for a Johannine ethic cannot be limited to direct moral instructions such as the “new commandment”, but must also consider the whole story and its underlying value system, which together lead the reader toward certain actions that are in accordance with the text's ideas.

Of course, such a broader approach would not disregard the significance of the love command in the Fourth Gospel and 1 John. To the extent that love could be regarded as the centre of Johannine thought,⁵⁷ love has a systemic quality and can be viewed as the platform from which the Johannine ethic, as expressed within both the texts and the narrative worlds behind them, developed.

⁵⁵ J. Leslie Houlden, *Ethics and the New Testament* (London/New York, N.Y.: Continuum, 2004), 36.

⁵⁶ Johannes Nissen, “Community and Ethics in the Gospel of John”, in idem, *New Readings in John: Literary and Theological Perspectives* (eds. Johannes Nissen and Sigfred Pedersen; JSNTSup 182; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), 194–212, here 195.

⁵⁷ Enno E. Popkes, *Die Theologie der Liebe Gottes in den johanneischen Schriften: Zur Semantik der Liebe und zum Motivkreis des Dualismus* (WUNT 197; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2005); Schnelle, *Die Johannesbriefe* (n. 6), 164–165.; idem, “Die johanneischen Abschiedsreden und das Liebesgebot”, in *Repetitions and Variations in the Fourth Gospel: Style, Text, Interpretation* (eds. Gilbert van Belle, Michael Labahn, and Petrus Maritz; BETL 223; Leuven: Peeters, 2009), 589–608, here 602–603.

3. Traces of the Johannine "Ethic" in Recent Research

3.1 Johannine "Ethic" in Handbooks on New Testament Ethics

Although the Johannine writings are typically treated in the major reference works on New Testament ethics,⁵⁸ one detects a significant reluctance to discuss John's contribution to a larger New Testament ethic.⁵⁹ Wolfgang Schrage, who acknowledged that "Sein und Sollen beinahe identisch werden",⁶⁰ claims that "Weltdistanz und Sündenfreiheit" are the most significant Johannine ethical appeals.⁶¹ Frank Matera complained that "there are remarkably few references to moral conduct" in the Gospel of John,⁶² and Heinz-Dietrich Wendland thought that the Johannine writings give the "Eindruck einer gewaltigen Reduktion ethischer Fragen und Aussagen".⁶³

One significant example may be explored here as an illustration of this larger trend in research. Of special interest is the contribution of Rudolf Schnackenburg in the revised version of his *Die sittliche Botschaft des Neuen Testaments* (1988).⁶⁴ As a well-known Johannine scholar who has contributed major commentaries on both the Gospel⁶⁵ and the Letters of John,⁶⁶ Schnackenburg developed his interpretation of the Fourth Gospel from a source-critical understanding, partly following Bultmann into a

⁵⁸ Cf., for instance, Houlden, *Ethics and the New Testament* (n. 55), 35–41; Jack T. Sanders, *Ethics in the New Testament: Change and Development* (Philadelphia, Pa.: Fortress, 1975), 91–100; Schulz, *Neutestamentliche Ethik* (n. 26), 486–511; Eduard Lohse, *Theologische Ethik des Neuen Testaments* (Theologische Wissenschaft 5.2; Stuttgart et al.: Kohlhammer, 1988), 39–43, 104–106; Marxsen, "Christliche" und christliche Ethik (n. 26), 246–264; Schrage, *Ethik des Neuen Testaments* (n. 7), 301–324; Richard B. Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament: Community, Cross, New Creation: A Contemporary Introduction to New Testament Ethics* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1997), 138–157.

⁵⁹ Van der Watt, "Ethics and Ethos" (n. 17), 147 (nn. 2, 4–5), is giving selected but illuminating examples.

⁶⁰ Schrage, *Ethik des Neuen Testaments* (n. 7), 302.

⁶¹ Ibid., 312–314.

⁶² Frank J. Matera, *New Testament Ethics: The Legacies of Jesus and Paul* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Know, 1996), 92.

⁶³ Hans-Dietrich Wendland, *Ethik des Neuen Testaments: Eine Einführung* (GNT 4; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1970), 109; see also Houlden, *Ethics and the New Testament* (n. 55), 35–36.

⁶⁴ Rudolf Schnackenburg, *Die sittliche Botschaft des Neuen Testaments*, vol. 2: *Die urchristlichen Verkündiger* (HTKNTSup 2.2; Freiburg et al.: Herder, 1988).

⁶⁵ Rudolf Schnackenburg, *Das Johannesevangelium* (HTKNT IV; Freiburg et al.: Herder, 1965); ET, *The Gospel According to St. John* (New York, N.Y.: Crossroad, 1968).

⁶⁶ Rudolf Schnackenburg, *Die Johannesbriefe* (6th ed.; HTKNT XIII; Freiburg et al.: Herder, 1979).

more synchronic literary approach.⁶⁷ Referring to the common opinion that there is no Johannine “ethic”, he identifies a new research objective.

Die johanneischen Schriften (Ev. und Briefe) enthalten eine eigenständige, christologisch orientierte Theologie und sind so sehr von ihr beherrscht, daß eine Ethik, zumal eine konkrete, auf die Verhältnisse von Kirche und Welt bezügliche Ethik völlig zurückzutreten scheint. Aber man kann es auch anders sehen: Der sittliche Zuspruch, der erst im großen Brief in einer besonderen Situation der joh. Gemeinde eine deutlichere Gestalt gewinnt, geht unmittelbar aus dem ‘Wort des Lebens’ (1 Joh 1,1), aus der Selbsterschließung des Sohnes Gottes (Joh 1,18) hervor. Der sittliche Imperativ bedarf keiner ausdrücklichen Artikulation, weil er im Hören auf das Wort des göttlichen Gesandten wie selbstverständlich mitgesetzt ist.⁶⁸

The call of God’s revealer forces a response of faith and love from the addressee. Consistent with his theory of the history of the Johannine writings, Schnackenburg sets 1 John and 2/3 John apart from the Gospel of John.⁶⁹ The letters mirror the Christological controversies created by the content of the Gospel: “Dadurch sind die Briefe für eine Ethik ergiebiger.”⁷⁰ This opens a space to consider broader ethical recommendations within the teaching of the letters, mainly with regard to relations between members of the community. At the same time, there is a basic ethical demand implied by the call of the revealer, which does not need to be elaborated in structure and content but which can be identified by the answer of faith and love.

In his interpretation of Johannine ethics, Schnackenburg clearly relies on Bultmann’s existentialistic hermeneutics (to which he explicitly refers)⁷¹ but tries to avoid emptying the historical revelation into myth. Although an entire paragraph in his entry reflects this approach, his presentation should be explored more closely in terms of the content and meaning of faith and love. Schnackenburg himself deals primarily with theological and Christological matters relating to the call based in God’s love and the answer in faith of love. Consistent with this approach, his interpretation of love may be labeled “theocentric” in the sense that the believer’s love is nothing more than an answer to the call that leads him/her back into the community of

⁶⁷ Cf. Joachim Gnilka, “Rudolf Schnackenburg (1914–2002)”, in *Neutestamentliche Wissenschaft nach 1945: Hauptvertreter der deutschsprachigen Exegese in der Darstellung ihrer Schüler* (eds. Cilliers Breytenbach and Rudolf Hoppe; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 2008), 407–415, here 412–413.

⁶⁸ Schnackenburg, *Die sittliche Botschaft des Neuen Testaments* (n. 64), 148–149.

⁶⁹ Rudolf Schnackenburg, “Ephesus: Entwicklung einer Gemeinde von Paulus zu Johannes”, *BZ* 35 (1991): 41–64.

⁷⁰ Schnackenburg, *Die sittliche Botschaft des Neuen Testaments* (n. 64), 148.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 149 with n. 216.

the loving God.⁷² "Insofern kann man von einer Reduzierung der Forderungen Jesu auf die grundlegende Haltung des in der Liebe wirksamen Glaubens sprechen" – such an interpretation of faith includes a moral claim.⁷³ Interestingly, Schnackenburg also refers to characters portrayed within the narrative, along with a "zum Glauben disponierende Haltung",⁷⁴ including moral integrity. However, there is no real unfolding of such an attitude in John. Keeping Jesus' commandments is nothing more than the answer of faith and love, so that the commandments may be reduced to these two attitudes. Schnackenburg summarizes: "Liebe ist der Anfang und das Ziel aller Sittlichkeit."⁷⁵ With regard to content, such a love is Christologically-grounded in the love of Jesus toward his disciples, which leads him to death and which asks the believer to follow his example in the community's life (1 John 3:16).⁷⁶ As an "eschatological regulation for the community",⁷⁷ it is a "new commandment" (John 13:34), which is further elaborated in 1 John. There it is called an "old" commandment (1 John 2:7) in the sense that it is known from the baptismal catechesis. In 1 John the commandment appeals to particular deeds within the life of the community.

Schnackenburg highlights the necessity of specific deeds that fulfill the commandment of love, a duty that establishes the main difference between John's outlook and any form of mysticism.⁷⁸ Further, the commandment to mutual love is not to be understood as discouraging love for those outside the community – notably, Schnackenburg deduces this open posture not from the Johannine texts themselves, but rather from a posited parallel to Gal 6:10.⁷⁹ Even the polemic against the group of dissidents is understood

⁷² Ibid., 152: "Besser spricht man vom 'Prinzip Liebe', das nach Johannes in Gott seinen Ursprung hat und die Menschen durch den liebenden und sich bis zum äußersten aufopfernden Sohn (Joh 13,1) in die Gemeinschaft mit Gott zurückruft (1 Joh 4,8.16)."

⁷³ Ibid., 165.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 162.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 170–171.

⁷⁶ On this section cf., for instance, Hans-J. Klauck, "Brudermord und Bruderliebe: Ethische Paradigmen in 1 Joh 3,11–17", in *Neues Testament und Ethik* (ed. Helmut Merklein; Festschrift Rudolf Schnackenburg; Freiburg et al.: Herder, 1989), 151–171.

⁷⁷ Schnackenburg, *Die sittliche Botschaft des Neuen Testaments* (n. 64), 174.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 177.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 179: "Ohne die Liebesverpflichtung gegenüber anderen Menschen zu leugnen oder beiseite zu schieben, wollten jene Christen das Gebot der Liebe konkret in ihrem Lebensraum verwirklichen, und das war ihre Gemeinde, die ringsum von Menschen anderen Glaubens umgeben und bedrängt war." Schnackenburg is aware of his argument: "... vor allem die Einbettung des joh. Christentums in das übrige Urchristentum mit seiner Jesustradition erlauben es kaum, den joh. Gemeinden eine solche Außenseiterrolle nachzusagen" (ibid., 180).

as a rhetorical strategy to strengthen love inside the community, in contrast to the “sittlicher Indifferentismus” of the opponents.⁸⁰

Overall, Schnackenburg’s discussion of Johannine ethics combines various hermeneutical and methodological approaches. He acknowledges differences in the ethical vision of the individual Johannine writings while accepting a unified Johannine agenda behind the respective texts. He undoubtedly works out the Johannine language of love. His understanding centers very much on Christology, to which love and faith are related in accordance with the text. Schnackenburg also acknowledges that love stands in relation to distinct acts of love, also toward those outside the community, a point which he does not argue from the Johannine texts but from the analogy with Gal 6:10. He also points to the exemplary role of characters in the story, and in this respect anticipates recent methodological approaches that seek to identify a narrative ethics in John. At the same time, Schnackenburg’s model makes little progress toward defining the value system of the Johannine text and its possible impact on the readers and their way of life, or toward identifying specific deeds that would follow from love and faith.

3.2 Reading Johannine Ethic in Its Textual and Cultural Contexts⁸¹

3.2.1 Love and Love of Jesus’ Disciples/One’s Brothers

As noted in the introduction to this paper, Lessing correctly identified the major theological “context” of Johannine ethics, i.e., the Johannine language of “love”:⁸² God’s love (he loves Jesus, his son: 3:35; 5:20; 10:17;

⁸⁰ Ibid., 180.

⁸¹ The term “contexts” is used here in a broad sense that includes history of religion, history of tradition, and the text itself, cf. Jörg Frey, “Auf der Suche nach dem Kontext des vierten Evangeliums: Eine forschungsgeschichtliche Einführung”, in *Kontexte des Johannevangeliums: Das vierte Evangelium in religions- und traditionsgeschichtlicher Perspektive* (eds. Jörg Frey and Udo Schnelle; in collaboration with Juliane Schlegel; WUNT 175; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2004), 3–45, here 44–45.

⁸² On the love language in the Johannine writings see, for instance, Jörg Augenstein, *Das Liebesgebot im Johannevangelium und in den Johannesbriefen* (BWANT 134; Stuttgart et al.: Kohlhammer, 1993); Michael Lattke, *Einheit im Wort: Die spezifische Bedeutung von ἀγάπη, ἀγαπᾶν und φιλεῖν im Johannevangelium* (SANT 41; Munich: Kösel, 1975), Popkes, *Theologie der Liebe Gottes* (n. 57); Fernando F. Segovia, *Love Relationships in the Johannine Tradition: Agape/agapan in I John and the Fourth Gospel* (SBLDS 58; Chico, Calif.: Scholars Press, 1982); Sjef van Tilborg, *Imaginative Love in John* (BIS 2; Leiden et al.: Brill, 1993); Jan G. van der Watt, “Radical Social Redefinition and Radical Love: Ethics and Ethos in the Gospel according to John”, in *Identity, Ethics, and Ethos in the New Testament* (ed. Jan G. van der Watt; BZNW 141; Berlin and New York, N.Y.: De Gruyter, 2006), 107–133; Johns Varghese, *The Imagery of Love in the Gospel of John* (AB 177; Rome: Gregorian & Biblical Press, 2009).

15:9; 17:23, 24, 26; the world:⁸³ 3:16; those who keep Jesus' words: 14:24 and who belong to Jesus: 16:27; 17:23) and Jesus' love (he loves his own/disciples: 13:1; 15:9, 12; Martha: 11:5; Lazarus: 11:5, 36; the Beloved Disciple: 13:23; 19:26; 20:2; 21:7, 20). God's love in Jesus culminates in Jesus' death on the cross (10:17; 13:1; 15:13), which is viewed as an act of supreme love that serves as the foundation for Jesus' "new commandment(s)" of love: John 13:34–35; 14:21; 15:9–10, 12, 17 (in line with "expected action"⁸⁴). Keeping the commandment(s) of mutual love⁸⁵ is the way to love Jesus: 14:15, 21, 23 (↔ 14:24) and thus is naturally correlated to faith (16:27). Furthermore, it is God's love for Jesus that ought to become effective within believers (ἡ ἀγάπη ἣν ἡγάπησάς με ἐν αὐτοῖς; 17:26).⁸⁶

Of major importance is the "new commandment" (John 13:34–35), which is frequently discussed with regard to Johannine ethics.

⁸³ Human beings, however, do not love God/light, but rather darkness: 3:19; see also 5:42; 8:42; 12:43. John 15:19 suggests that love of the world is evidence that one does not belong to God/his son. Although the readers of John learn that God and his sent Son are rejected, and his followers are rebuked, by the world, the world is the object of God's love.

⁸⁴ Van der Watt, "Ethics and Ethos" (n. 17), 159. According to Schnelle, "Die johanneischen Abschiedsreden und das Liebesgebot" (n. 57), 607, the Johannine farewell discourses highlight "aus textpragmatischer Sicht die Handlungsdimension des Liebesgebotes". In the passage where the situation of the actual community is most clearly at stake, the Johannine concept reflects not only the origin but also the effect of love, an effect that, according to Schnelle, includes the people outside the limits of the Johannine community: "Angesichts der konkreten Anfeindungen werden die johanneischen Christen zur Einheit in der Liebe und damit zu konkretem Handeln nach innen und außen aufgefordert." Statistically 25 of 37 references of ἀγαπάω are found in John 13–17.

⁸⁵ On the love command in John cf., for instance, Raymond F. Collins, "'A New Commandment I Give to You, That You Love One Another ...' (John 13:34)", in *These Things have been Written: Studies on the Fourth Gospel* (ed. Raymond F. Collins; Louvain Theological and Pastoral Monographs 2; Louvain: Peeters, 1990), 217–256; Martin Hochholzer, *Feindes- und Bruderliebe im Widerstreit? Eine vergleichende Studie zur synoptischen und johanneischen Ausprägung des Liebesgebots* (Europäische Hochschulschriften. Theologie 850; Frankfurt et al.: Peter Lang, 2007); Hans Weder, "Das neue Gebot: Eine Überlegung zum Liebesgebot in Johannes 13", in *Studien zu Matthäus und Johannes/Études sur Matthieu et Jean* (eds. Andreas Dettwiler and Uta Poplutz; Festschrift Jean Zumstein; ATANT 97; Zurich: TVZ, 2009), 187–205.

⁸⁶ Cf. Udo Schnelle, *Das Evangelium nach Johannes* (THKNT 4; Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2004), 284: "Die Liebe erwächst aus der Einheit, und nur wer in der Liebe wandelt, verbleibt in der Einheit"; Klaus Scholtissek, *In ihm sein und bleiben: Die Sprache der Immanenz in den Johanneischen Schriften* (HBS 21; Freiburg et al.: Herder, 2000), 335, focuses primarily on the promise of the presence of Jesus.

Ἐντολὴν καινὴν δίδωμι ὑμῖν,	A new commandment I give to you
ἵνα ἀγαπᾶτε ἀλλήλους,	that you should love one another
καθὼς ἠγάπησα ὑμᾶς	as I have loved you
ἵνα καὶ ὑμεῖς ἀγαπᾶτε ἀλλήλους.	that you also should love one another.
ἐν τούτῳ γινώσκονται πάντες	By this, all will recognize
ὅτι ἐμοὶ μαθηταὶ ἐστε,	that you are my disciples,
ἐὰν ἀγάπην ἔχητε ἐν ἀλλήλοις.	if you have love for one another.

The content of the new commandment is highlighted by a threefold repetition and variation on the theme of mutual love (ἀγαπᾶτε ἀλλήλους = ἀγάπην ἔχητε → ἀλλήλους = ἐν ἀλλήλοις). This love for others is related to the exemplary love of the speaker, Jesus (καθὼς), in a way that makes a general statement but that also refers, in the immediate context, to Jesus' ὑπόδειγμα in washing the disciples' feet, which relates the mutual and egalitarian⁸⁷ relationship of the disciples to the cross as the final act and highpoint of Jesus' love.⁸⁸ The commandment thus alludes to an act that is both the philosophical basis and the historical point of origin of an active love.⁸⁹ The commandment is structured around an "I – you" relationship, which could easily be understood as a foundation for group identity in contrast to the outside world. However, there is a third group, πάντες, which is impacted by this mutual love. By following the example of Christ in mutual love (ἐν τούτῳ), the disciples reveal to "all people" that they are disciples of Jesus – the verb γινώσκονται indicates that mutual love functions as a testimony to the world outside. Thus, care for one another includes care for outsiders.

The followers of the son are told "to love one another" – Christian brothers and sisters – but there is no direct command that they are also to love the world. The implications of this point have been vigorously debated.⁹⁰ The Johannine love language is frequently compared to the commandment of the synoptic Jesus to love one's neighbour (Mark 12:29–31 par.) and even to love one's enemies (Matt 5:43–44 par. Luke 6:27–28,

⁸⁷ Cf. Wolter, "Die ethische Identität christlicher Gemeinden" (n. 19), 61–63.

⁸⁸ Schnelle, "Die johanneischen Abschiedsreden und das Liebesgebot" (n. 57), 600.

⁸⁹ Cf. Schnelle, *Theologie des Neuen Testaments* (n. 31), 690: "Die Fußwaschung macht deutlich, dass es für die Glaubenden keine Entsprechung zu Jesus ohne ein Tun geben kann, d. h. eine rein werthafte Bestimmung des Liebesgedankens bliebe hinter Jesu eigenem Tun zurück! Das Handeln ist ein grundlegender Bestandteil des joh. Liebesgedankens, der gerade in seiner prinzipiellen Struktur höchst konkret ist!"

⁹⁰ See the survey of research in Augenstein, *Das Liebesgebot im Johannesevangelium* (n. 82), 11–21; see also Hartwig Thyen, "Das Neue Gebot Jesu, einander zu lieben (Joh 13,34–35), im Streit der Auslegungen", in: idem, *Studien zum Corpus Iohanneum* (WUNT 214; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2007), 623–630.

35), often in a way that leads to unfavourable conclusions about the historicity and validity of John's presentation.⁹¹

There can be little doubt about the importance of love terminology in the Johannine literature, which Enno Popkes calls a climax of early Christian theological thinking.⁹² However, it is highly disputed whether the language of love contributes much to an understanding of a Johannine ethic. Some scholars set the Johannine "love" terminology in the broader context of a theology of revelation. In the semantic framework of Johannine revelatory language, "love" becomes a kind of "Wortgemeinschaft"⁹³, essentially another term for πίστις.⁹⁴ As such, the word "love" contributes nothing to a Johannine ethic – as Käsemann programmatically claimed, "daß Liebe hier etwas anderes als ein Gefühl bezeichnet und sogar den Bereich ethischer Entscheidungen transzendiert".⁹⁵

Other scholars, however, allow that the Johannine concept of "love" does not neglect the neighbour, but instead assumes and builds upon the principle of neighbour-love by adding the concept of mutual/brotherly love in response to the actual situation within the Johannine community.⁹⁶ Some exegetes suggest that the concept of "love" works in the Johannine literature to create a sectarian group identity.⁹⁷ Jürgen Becker, for example,

⁹¹ This position is taken pointedly by Martin Rese, "Das Gebot der Bruderliebe in den Johannesbriefen", *Theologische Zeitschrift* 41 (1985): 44–58, here 57: the commandment to love one's neighbour is "schlicht außer Kraft gesetzt". Differently Schulz, *Neutestamentliche Ethik* (n. 26), 527: "Vielmehr behält das alte Gebot der Nächstenliebe neben dem alt-neuen Gebot der Bruderliebe seine eschatologische Relevanz, womit jeder weltlosen wie entweltlichenden Konventikelethik in der johanneischen Kirche der Boden entzogen ist."

⁹² For instance, Popkes, *Theologie der Liebe Gottes* (n. 57), 361, claims that "die 'dramaturgische Christologie der Liebe Gottes im Johannesevangelium' einen Höhepunkt urchristlicher Theologiebildung verkörpert".

⁹³ Lattke, *Einheit im Wort* (n. 81), 52, critically referring to Martin Dibelius, "Joh 15,13: Eine Studie zum Traditionsproblem des Johannes-Evangeliums", in idem, *Botschaft und Geschichte: Gesammelte Aufsätze*, vol.1: *Zur Evangelienforschung* (ed. Günther Bornkamm; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1953), 204–220, here 213; see also Alois Stimpfle, *Blinde sehen: Die Eschatologie im traditionsgeschichtlichen Prozeß des Johannesevangeliums* (BZNW 57; Berlin and New York, N.Y.: De Gruyter, 1990), 183–184.

⁹⁴ Cf., for instance, Houlden, *Ethics and the New Testament* (n. 55), 36: "... even when he speaks of the command to love and of doing what Jesus commands, John's real concern is not primarily ethical at all. His concern is with the new condition of life conferred on the believer through Christ".

⁹⁵ Käsemann, *Jesu letzter Wille* (n. 7), 128.

⁹⁶ For instance, Schulz, *Neutestamentliche Ethik* (n. 26), 526–527; Hartwig Thyen, "... denn wir lieben die Brüder" (1Joh 3,14)", in *Rechtfertigung* (ed. Johannes Friedrich; Festschrift Ernst Käsemann; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1976), 527–542.

⁹⁷ For instance Meeks, "The Ethics of the Fourth Evangelist" (n. 7), 323; D. Moody Smith, "The Love Command: John and Paul?", in *Theology and Ethics in Paul and his*

claims a “Rückzug in die begrenzte Kleingruppe in Gestalt nur noch praktizierter Bruderliebe”⁹⁸ – a reading that not only offers a sociological interpretation of the Johannine ethical concept but also implies a negative moral judgment.

More nuanced is the argument of David Rensberger in his *Overcoming the World* (1989). In sharp contrast to most readings of John 3:16, Rensberger understands the Johannine ethical limitation of love as being in accordance with the extent of God’s own love.⁹⁹ Rensberger thus envisions a theologically motivated instruction to mutual love, a conclusion that must be criticized. Even if there is some question as to the limits of love in John’s moral instruction – is Johannine love limited to the disciples/brothers and sisters, and how? – there is no clear limitation of the love of God.¹⁰⁰ Surely, the Johannine view of God’s love for the world must have carried some meaning for believers in his sent Son, and therefore would carry moral value in considerations of their relationships to people outside the Johannine group.

Some assistance in understanding the Johannine command to love one’s brothers/sisters may be drawn from the ancient model of the “ethic of friendship” (cf. John 15:13),¹⁰¹ which is an important socio-historical context for the Johannine concept of love.¹⁰² Most scholarship, however, has

Interpreters: Essays in Honor of Victor Paul Furnish (eds. Eugene H. Lovering and Jerry L. Sumney; New Testament Studies; Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon, 1996), 207–217; see also Dietrich Rusam, *Die Gemeinschaft der Kinder Gottes: Das Motiv der Gotteskindschaft und die Gemeinden der johanneischen Briefe* (BWANT 133; Stuttgart et al.: Kohlhammer, 1993), 225–226, on 1 John.

⁹⁸ Jürgen Becker, “Feindesliebe – Nächstenliebe – Bruderliebe”, *ZEE* 25 (1981): 5–17.

⁹⁹ David K. Rensberger, *Overcoming the World: Politics and Community in the Gospel of John* (London: SPCK, 1989), 124, on his social reading cf. idem, “Sectarianism and Theological Interpretation in John”, in: Fernando F. Segovia, ed., “*What is John?*”, vol. 2: *Literary and Social Readings of the Fourth Gospel* (SBLSymS 7; Atlanta, Ga.: Scholars Press, 1998), 139–156.

¹⁰⁰ See also the earlier, and more hesitant, statement by Schnelle, *Antidoketische Christologie* (n. 25), 56: “Sowohl die Briefe (1Joh 2,2; 4,9.14) als auch das Evangelium (Joh 3,16; 10,17; 12,25; 15,13) enthalten universalistische Aussagen, die einer worthaften und spirituellen Interpretation joh. Ethik widersprechen, eine reine Konventikelethik sprengen und zeigen, daß die Bruderliebe als Exemplum der Nächstenliebe verstanden werden kann. Dennoch muß diese Ethik primär als Gruppenethik begriffen werden: Objekt der Liebe ist zuerst der Bruder, nicht die Welt.”

¹⁰¹ Important parallels from ancient texts are presented in *Neuer Wettstein: Texte zum Neuen Testament aus Griechenland und Hellenismus*, vol. I/2: *Texte zum Johannes-evangelium* (eds. Udo Schnelle, Michael Labahn, and Manfred Lang; Berlin and New York, N.Y.: De Gruyter, 2001), 715–725.

¹⁰² For instance, Klaus Scholtissek, “‘Eine größere Liebe als diese hat niemand, als wenn einer sein Leben hingibt für seine Freunde’ (Joh 15,13): Die hellenistische Freund-

interpreted Johannine soteriology, and the related ethic of love, within a moral-philosophical framework.¹⁰³ The "friendship" model was, in the ancient world, an established framework for debating ethical claims.¹⁰⁴ Moral teaching on friendship is naturally related to a community of people who each sacrifice aspects of their individuality to achieve a common existence.¹⁰⁵

To clarify the contribution of the "love" motif to the search for a Johannine ethic, the question should be raised as to what "loving" actually involves, or how "love" expresses itself.¹⁰⁶ John 15:10 explains that "remaining in the love of Jesus" (μείναι ἐν τῇ ἀγάπῃ τῇ ἐμῇ; v. 9) means keeping Jesus' commandments (τὰς ἐντολάς μου τηρήσητε). It is an oversimplification to argue that John refers here to a general hearing of and/or believing in Jesus' word.¹⁰⁷ According to Gerd Theissen, the love commandment should lead into a "Transformation der ethischen Zeichensprache".¹⁰⁸ Within Theissen's theory of a "Stufenhermeneutik", the Johannine sign system constructs a new structure with regard to ethos, rite, and myth. The love command is related to the inner relationship of the group and therefore addressed to the behavior of group members; logically, then, it may be called an "ethos". As a commandment, it aims to produce concrete action modeled on the episode of the footwashing, including unity and loss of personal position ("Statusverzicht").¹⁰⁹ Theissen is correct in understanding the Johannine love command not as a theological or Christological symbol but as a call to distinct action(s) led by the principle of love.

schaftsethik und das Johannesevangelium", in *Kontexte des Johannesevangeliums* (n. 53), 413–439.

¹⁰³ See, for instance, Jens Schröter, "Sterben für die Freunde: Überlegungen zur Deutung des Todes Jesu im Johannesevangelium", in *Religionsgeschichte des Neuen Testaments* (eds. Axel von Dobbeler and Kurt Erlemann; Festschrift Klaus Berger; Tübingen: Francke, 2000), 263–287.

¹⁰⁴ Schnelle, *Die Johannesbriefe* (n. 6), 166 – on Schnelle's hermeneutics of communication ("Anschlussfähigkeit"); cf. idem, "Historische Anschlußfähigkeit: Zum hermeneutischen Horizont von Geschichts- und Traditionsbildung", in *Kontexte des Johannesevangeliums* (n. 53), 47–78.

¹⁰⁵ Hartwig Thyen, "'Niemand hat größere Liebe als die, daß er sein Leben für seine Freunde hingibt' (Joh 15,13)", in *Theologia crucis, signum crucis* (eds. Carl Andresen and Günter Klein; Festschrift Erich Dinkler; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1979), 467–482. Bruce J. Malina and Richard L. Rohrbaugh, *Social Science Commentary on the Gospel of John* (Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress, 1998), 228, underscore that in ancient social and religious contexts love is always related to a specific group.

¹⁰⁶ Cf. Van der Watt, "Ethics and Ethos" (n. 17), 148.

¹⁰⁷ For instance Schnackenburg, *Die sittliche Botschaft des Neuen Testaments* (n. 64), 167.

¹⁰⁸ Gerd Theissen, *Die Religion der ersten Christen: Eine Theorie des Urchristentums* (Gütersloh: Kaiser/Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 2000), 269.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 270.

The example (ὑπόδειγμα [13:15]) given by Jesus in the footwashing pericope opens a “Handlungsraum” (Jean Zumstein) – a space that needs to be filled with particular acts (καθὼς ἐγὼ ἐποίησα ὑμῖν καὶ ὑμεῖς ποιῆτε) by creatively following Jesus’ example.¹¹⁰ Although the term τὰς ἐντολάς μου is not elaborated within the narrative world of the Fourth Gospel, it might be read as a narrative “gap”, one that leads real readers to knowledge outside the textual world. Even if John 15¹¹¹ does not belong to a *relecture* of the Johannine farewell situation, it reminds the reader that love for Jesus is related to the act of keeping his commandments,¹¹² which might include his ethical demands known from the synoptic Gospels or from other oral or written sources spread among the Johannine community.

The Johannine love language also provides the basic structure of the arguments in 1 John. As Udo Schnelle has pointed out, 1 John presents an individual application of the idea of love, which is related to the light (2:9–11) and embedded in a communicative relationship between God and the believer (3:10).¹¹³ The love relationship with God comes to fruition through obedience to the words of Jesus (2:5) in accordance with his example (2:6).¹¹⁴ Both aspects are important for the “ethic” of 1 John, because loving by distinct deeds¹¹⁵ sets one into a qualified relationship with light

¹¹⁰ Jean Zumstein, “Die johanneische Auffassung der Macht, gezeigt am Beispiel der Fusswaschung (Joh 13,1–17)”, in idem, *Kreative Erinnerung: Relecture und Auslegung im Johannesevangelium* (2nd ed.; ATANT 84; Zurich: TVZ, 2004), 161–176, here 172.

¹¹¹ On the interpretation of John 15 and its ethic cf., for instance, Rainer Borig, *Der wahre Weinstock: Untersuchungen zu Jo 15,1–10* (SANT 15; Munich: Kösel, 1967); Hubert Ritt, “Der christologische Imperativ: Zur Weinstock-Metapher in der testamentarischen Mahnrede Joh 15,1–17”, in *Neues Testament und Ethik* (ed. Helmut Merklein; Festschrift Rudolf Schnackenburg; Freiburg et al.: Herder, 1989), 136–150.

¹¹² Such an interpretation is provided by Jean Zumstein, “Bildersprache und Relektüre am Beispiel von Joh 15,1–17”, in *Imagery in the Gospel of John: Terms, Forms, Themes, and Theology of Johannine Figurative Language* (eds. Jörg Frey, Jan G. van der Watt, and Ruben Zimmermann; WUNT 200; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2006), 139–156 (153: “Dieser kurze Überblick lässt erahnen, dass 15,1–17 Motive aus Kap. 14 wieder aufnimmt, sie aber in einem neuen Sinn, d. h. in einem ethisch-ekklesiologischen Sinn umgestaltet”).

¹¹³ See above n. 26.

¹¹⁴ Popkes, *Die Theologie der Liebe Gottes* (n. 57), 104, drew from 1 John 2:6 a so-called “Vorbild-Ethik”, for which he finds next to 1 John 4,11–12 only one other example in the New Testament in Eph 5:1.

¹¹⁵ See also Popkes, *Die Theologie der Liebe Gottes* (n. 57), 129, who notes that distinct deeds are included in the love command in 1 John: “Doch auch wenn die johanneischen Briefe im Gegensatz zu anderen neutestamentlichen Zeugnissen kaum konkrete Verhaltenskodizes skizzieren, zeigt sich gerade hier, daß die Ethik in der johanneischen Theologie nicht marginalisiert, sondern im Liebesgebot und den Geboten impliziert ist. ‘Die ἐντολαὶ reflektieren die eine ἐντολή’” (the last sentence is a quote from Georg

and God (1 John 5:2–3). 1 John is in accordance with the model of the Fourth Gospel that love is an active love. Further, as many scholars have noted, the question of how to act in response to light and to God as love is more explicitly elaborated,¹¹⁶ particularly at 1 John 3:11–24.¹¹⁷ Love does not aim at “word or speech, but truth and action” (μη ἀγαπῶμεν λόγῳ μηδὲ τῇ γλώσσῃ ἀλλὰ ἐν ἔργῳ καὶ ἀληθείᾳ); this means, on the positive side, to provide help and support to brothers/sisters. Although it is not mentioned in 1 John that the scope of mutual brotherly love is strictly limited to the community, any suggestion that this text points to a more universal love remains speculative.¹¹⁸

To summarize: while it would not be wrong to emphasize “love” as a foundational element of the Johannine ethic, a more balanced approach would view love as a basic and valuable ethical principle that permeates various aspects of John’s presentation, and therefore cannot be reduced simply to the very few direct statements regarding “love” and the actions that proceed from it. According to the interpretation of the Johannine texts surveyed above, it seems that love is a basic principle in the Johannine writings that needs to be worked out in relation to the deeds of, and to faith in, Jesus. The concept is elaborated in more detail in 1 John, which shows that the love principle aims at precise deeds according to the Johannine agenda.

Is love a universal principle, or a value system that is used to build identity – a method of creating group boundaries by focusing on the disciples/brothers and sisters? This crucial question suggests that research should consider the whole Johannine story, including the portrait of God loving the world and characters witnessing with their deeds to the world outside. Research also needs to take into consideration the concept of the ethic of ancient friendship, which is a widely accepted moral value system developed in relation to a group, be they friends or simply other people

Strecker, *Theologie des Neuen Testaments* [ed. Friedrich W. Horn; De Gruyter Lehrbücher; Berlin and New York, N.Y.: De Gruyter, 1995], 476).

¹¹⁶ For instance Strecker, *Theologie des Neuen Testaments* (n. 115), 476 (“Auf diese Weise wird die erfahrene Liebe Gottes weitergegeben und Christsein nicht allein mit Worten, sondern in der konkreten Tat verwirklicht, die der geglaubten Wahrheit angemessen ist [3,17–18]”). See also Hochholzer, *Feindes- und Bruderliebe im Widerstreit?* (n. 85), 303.

¹¹⁷ Cf., for instance, Johannes Beutler, *Die Johannesbriefe* (RNT; Regensburg: Pustet, 2000), 100: “Dabei werden die Anforderungen dieses Gebots nun erheblich konkreter dargestellt. Die Liebe zu den Brüdern und Schwestern in der Gemeinde darf sich nicht auf Worte beschränken, sondern muß sich in Taten bewähren. Wer nicht zum Teilen seines Lebensunterhalts mit dem notleidenden Bruder oder der notleidenden Schwester bereit ist, folgt nicht dem Beispiel Jesu, sondern steht in der Erbfolge des ersten Menschenmörders, Kains” (M. L.).

¹¹⁸ Differently Popkes, *Die Theologie der Liebe Gottes* (n. 57), 136.

who live in the same social/cultural context. To the extent that God's love extends to "the world", one can reasonably argue that the love terminology in the Johannine writings does not promote a "conventicle ethic".

3.2.2 Johannine "Ethnic" and Its Context/Background in Scripture

The process of reconstructing a Johannine ethic requires consideration not only of inner-textual concepts but also of the larger intellectual and religious context from which the Johannine writings originated. The Scriptures of Israel are an important background for Johannine ethics and could even be called a "source" of the Johannine moral vision, inasmuch as the author of the Gospel frequently quotes or alludes to these texts. John's various references to Scripture provide a value system or a reference system, and thus may function as indirect commandments.

With regard to the preceding discussion of the Johannine love terminology (see above 3.2.1), the "great commandment" in Deut 6:4–5 forms an important backdrop for the theological and Christological discussions of the Fourth Gospel.¹¹⁹ Johannes Beutler underscores the basic role of the "theology of covenant" in light of Deut 6:4–5 for the whole Johannine concept of love, including the new commandment in John 13:34–35 and the commandments of love in 1 John.¹²⁰ Beutler deduces, in relation to 1 John particularly,

Der Erste Johannesbrief führt die Gedanken von Joh 14 weiter und verdeutlicht sie – im Anschluß an die nachjohanneischen Abschiedsreden – in Richtung auf die Notwendigkeit der Bruderliebe. Gerade so wird dann auch das Hauptgebot in seiner doppelten christlichen Form nach den Synoptikern (Mk 12,38–34 par.) erreicht, auch wenn an die Stelle des Nächsten in den Johannesbriefen aus ihrer speziellen Situation heraus der Bruder tritt.

While the influence of Deut 6:4–5 should not be overstated, and while Johannine reshaping should be taken into account, Beutler's observation cautions against any attempt to differentiate the Johannine love terminology from other early Christian concepts of love, or even from Jesus' double commandment of love. Further methodological and hermeneutical discussion is needed in this direction.

A broader approach to the influence of Scripture is taken by Jey J. Kanagaraj, who has surveyed allusions to the Decalogue and its command-

¹¹⁹ Cf., for instance, Michael Labahn, "Deuteronomy in John", in *Deuteronomy in the New Testament* (eds. Steve Moyise and Martin J. J. Menken; London: T. & T. Clark, 2007), 82–98, here 95–96.

¹²⁰ Johannes Beutler, "Das Hauptgebot im Johannesevangelium", in *Das Gesetz im Neuen Testament* (ed. Karl Kertelge; QD 108; Freiburg et al.: Herder, 1986), 222–236.