

**REFLECTIONS OF JOHANNINE EPISTLES'
CHRISTOLOGICAL HERESIES IN THE ACTIVITIES OF
ANGLICAN FASTING AND PRAYING SOCIETY IN THE
DIOCESE OF UGHELLI, DELTA STATE, NIGERIA**

BY

CYRIL ODIBOROGHENE, ODUTEMU
DIP.TH., DIP.RS.,(Immanuel Co., Ibadan) B. A. (Hons), M.A.(Ibadan)
(Matric. NO. 124394)

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CERTIFICATION

I certify that this thesis was carried out by Cyril OdiborOghene ODUTEMU, under my direct supervision in the Department of Religious Studies, Faculty of Arts, University of Ibadan.

UNIVERSITY OF IBADAN

SUPERVISOR

Rev. Dr. Godwin N. Toryough

B.A, M.A, Ph.D (Ibadan)

Senior Lecturer in New Testament Studies

DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to the Blessed Trinity (God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit) for the grace, mercies and providence throughout this study.

UNIVERSITY OF IBADAN

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ABSTRACT

Christological heresies, which refer to the misconception of the divinity and humanity of Jesus that plagued the first century Johannine community, was overcome after three centuries of its emergence. These have resurfaced in Nigeria through the teachings of Evangelist Daniel Mimeyeraye of the Anglican Fasting and Praying Society (AFPS) in the Anglican Diocese of Ughelli. Previous studies on Christological heresies focused on heretics' background and the effects of their teachings on the Johannine community without reference to their resurgence in the contemporary Christian community, particularly the Anglican Diocese of Ughelli. This study, therefore, examined the manifestations of Christological heresies in the Johannine Epistles and related them to the teachings of Evangelist Daniel Mimeyeraye and the activities of AFPS with the aim of establishing their effects on interpersonal relationships in Ughelli Diocese.

The study adopted Van Baalen's action and practice theory. Six hundred copies of a questionnaire were administered to 25 clergymen and 575 laity purposively selected from 17 of the 21 Archdeaconries in Ughelli Diocese where heretical teachings were prevalent. In-depth interviews were conducted with the founder of AFPS, Evangelist Mimeyeraye and six founding members. Church records were also consulted. Data were subjected to exegetical analysis (with reference to I Jn. 4:1-3, II Jn. vs 7-11, III Jn. vs 9-14) and percentages.

Christological heresies in Johannine Epistles comprised Docetism (the teaching that Jesus was a spirit not a human entity), soteriological conflict (the belief that salvation comes through secret knowledge) and unethical behaviour (a sinful lifestyle). These teachings negated Christian belief in Jesus' humanity (II Jn. vs 7), divinity (I Jn. 2:22), exclusive salvation (Acts 4:12) and piety (I Jn. 3:6). These concepts divided the Johannine community, leaving believers confused about Christ. Evangelist Mimeyeraye's teachings were consistent with those of the heretics in Johannine epistles. Like the docetists, Mimeyeraye misconstrued Jn. 10:30 that Jesus is a spirit and not human. This is inconsistent with I Jn. 4:2-3, which agreed with Jesus' claim in Jn. 1:14. On soteriology, he misinterpreted Jn. 16:12-14 to mean that esoteric knowledge would lead to salvation for believers and their dead relatives who died without Christ. This teaching is contrary to Acts 4:12 which bestowed salvation on Jesus alone and Jn. 3:18 which condemned unbelievers. In spite of the wrong conception, 33.6% of the respondents subscribed to this teaching. Furthermore, he taught that unethical behaviour of AFPS members would not affect their salvation. This is against biblical teachings in Rom. 6:1-2, Heb. 12:14. However, 22.1% of the respondents agreed with Mimeyeraye's teaching. As in the Johannine community, Mimeyeraye's teaching divided Anglican Parishes in Ughelli Diocese and caused interpersonal clashes as recorded in the 1998 Ughelli diocesan synod report.

Mimeyeraye's teachings, representing the ideology of the Anglican Fasting and Praying Society which were consistent with Christological heresies are at variance with Jesus' divinity, Christian salvation and ethical standards. Consequently, the church should institute a teaching against heresies and administer sound theological training to her ministers in order to stem the tide of wrong doctrine and interpersonal clashes.

Key-words: Johannine Epistles, Heresies, Christology, Anglican Fasting and Praying Society, Anglican Diocese of Ughelli.

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CHAPTER ONE

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background to the study

The place of teaching and its effect on a society cannot be ignored. Religious teachers have made great impact on society, their generations and those who lived after them with what they taught. Rudolf Graber rightly observes that:

What happened over 1600 years ago at the time of Arian heresy is repeating itself today, but with two or three differences: Alexandria is the whole universal church, the stability of which is being shaken and what was undertaken at that time by means of physical force and cruelty is now being transferred to a different level. Exile is replaced by banishment into the silence of being ignored; killing, by assassination of character.¹

The charismatic movement in Christendom has given rise to different hermeneutical approaches to scriptures² and many people are carried away by the eloquence of teachers who sometimes give heretical teachings.³

Like in the days of Arius, millions of people are being misled today on the different ways people see the gospel and society.⁴ The situation today fits into the era in which the writer of the Johannine corpus released his directives to the believers around him. The writing of 1 John has been described “as a crisis of false teaching by heretics who left the Christian community and continued to spread their false teaching to Johannine churches hence the need to check their activities by writing...”⁵ The dangers of erroneous teaching today are not confined to one denomination. Heresy spread has negative impact on the society and salvation of man and woman. Stevenson argues that heretical teachings

¹ Rudolf, G. 1974. *Athanasius and the church of our time*: Van Duren, p.23

² Thomassen, E., 2004 *Orthodoxy and Heresy in 2nd Century Rome*, *Harvard Theological Review*, Vol.97, July, p. 242.

³ Okafor, L.E., 2004. *Watch out saints*, Ibadan: Day Star Press, p 18.

⁴ Cf., Rudolf G. 1974 *Athanasius and the Church of our time*, p.23

⁵ Akin, D.L., 2001. “1,2,3, John: an exegetical and theological exposition of Holy Scripture,” *The New American Commentary*, Nashville: Broadman and Holman, p. 29.

threaten the leadership and stability of the church.⁶ Against this backdrop, this study attempts to reflect on Johannine epistles' Christological heresies in the activities of Anglican Church's fasting and praying society in Ughelli Diocese.

The earliest works against false teachers are those found in the writings of the apostles commonly called letters or epistles in the New Testament. Another major source of information about the heretics and their activities are those written by church fathers. According to Garry L. Waller, "Church fathers such as Irenaeus spent considerable time refuting the views of such strange and fringe groups, stressing that their beliefs were the very opposite of what Jesus and the first Christians had brought to the world."⁷

This assertion presupposes that the cankerworm of heresies had started eating deep down into the fabrics of the church from a very early stage. The Gnostic movement, which Irenaeus combated, appeared to have been known to the writer of the Johannine epistles.⁸ Raymond Brown argues that it was through this branch of Johannine Christians, that is, the smaller group of Johannine Christians, represented by the author of the First Epistle, which have kept *koinonia* with the Christians of the Apostolic Churches by sufficiently correcting secessionist misinterpretations of the gospel, that the gospel found acceptance among second-century traditionalists, such as Irenaeus.⁹

Also, the first council in Jerusalem, as recorded in Acts 15, was actually on heretical ideas that some evangelists were spreading in the Gentile world,¹⁰ although the majority of scholars look at it as emphasis on work over and above grace. Gnosticism claims knowledge of a special revelation or insight that supersedes the information provided by the revelation of the written word of God as contained in the scriptures. This special knowledge that the Gnostics claim

⁶ See Rudolf G. 1974. *Athanasius and the Church of our Time*, Van Duren.

⁷ Waller, G.L., 2006. *Reflection and discussions on the Da Vinci Code* p. 2.

⁸ Waller, G.L., 2006. *Reflection and discussions on the Da Vinci Code* p. 4.

⁹ Raymond, B. "Other Sheep Not of This Fold": The Johannine perspective on Christian diversity in the late first century *Journal of Biblical Literature*, Vol. 97, No. 1 (Mar., 1978), p. 21.

¹⁰ Waller, G.L., 2006. "Reflection and Discussions on the Da Vinci Code". p. 4.

access to makes them a special and well-privileged class in the fold. The said knowledge, perhaps, led to the name of the group γνῶσις (Gnosis) which is a Greek word of knowledge or knowing something. Abogunrin S.O. holds that “The situation within the early church in Africa was a complex one. Just as the North African church paraded many of the earliest Christian scholars, so also did it harbour many of the early heretics?”¹¹ This same situation is very visible in the church today. Many evangelical preachers are passing on unfounded theories to innocent and unsuspecting people under the guise of special revelation from God. In some quarters, the teachings of some people are considered as directly from God and their revelation has been ranked equal to the word of God; disobedience to such teaching is considered grave.

This research, therefore, examined the Johannine epistles and how the apostle used his privileged office to guide the church in his days. This was used as a template for addressing heretical teachings and prayer groups in Anglican Church in Ughelli diocese. Given that teaching determines conviction and faith as professed by the teacher, and faith determines the church, teaching also determines the discipline and the future of the church.¹² Historically, the second century leaders from Asia Minor opposed heretics and their teachings; many of them were tolerated, at least for decades, by the main churches in Rome and Alexandria.¹³ Part of the reason for the accommodation of certain Gnostic members was that Gnosticism greatly increased the number of Gentiles into those churches where their background and former faith were not overemphasised as final condemnation.

Gibbon E. opines that the Gnostics blended with the faith of Christ many sublime but obscure tenets. The Gnostics were imperceptibly divided into more than fifty particular sects, the celebrated of whom appear to have been the Basileidians, the Valentinians and the Marcionites. He adds that:

¹¹ Abogunrin, S.O. 2003. *Christology and the contemporary Church in Africa*. Publication of Nigerian Association of Biblical Studies Series, No. 2. p. 4.

¹² Sobasan, G.J. 1987. The Role of the Presbyter: an Investigation into the Adversus Heresies of St. Ireneaus in *Scottish Journal of Theology*, p. 17

¹³ *Christian history today* 2009, Vol. 2. p. 27

Each of these sects could boast of its bishops and congregations, of its doctors and martyrs; and instead of the four Gospels adopted by the church, the heretics produced a multitude of histories in which the actions and discourses of Christ and of his apostles were adapted to their respective tenets. The successes of the Gnostics were rapid and extensive. They covered Asia and Egypt, established themselves in Rome and penetrated into the province of the West.¹⁴

All these teachings centre on the divinity and humanity of Jesus Christ. Some argued that if He be the Christ, he could not have died, while others affirmed that he died when the Christ left him. These spurious claims are still resurfacing in Christendom today.

1.2 Statement of the problem

Although previous studies have examined heresies in the Johannine Epistles, which manifested under Christological, Trinitarian and religious dualism as a major challenge to Christendom in general and the Johannine community in particular, a thorough contextualisation of these teachings with their current manifestation in the contemporary Nigerian society and the Anglican Diocese of Ughelli, in particular, remains a vacuum in scholarship that needs to be filled.

A major problem is visible in the Johannine Epistles. The entire content of the Epistles propagate love for the brethren as a means of loving God, yet it recommends avoidance mechanism for those who have gone out of the fold by their teachings and confession (2 Jn. vs. 10). How can we reconcile the message of love preached in these epistles and the avoidance mechanism as the work of a single author?

The Johannine Epistles, which address Christological heresies (I Jn. 4:1-3) and the need to guard against heretics (II Jn. Vss. 7-11) bring to light the activities of the Docetists who denied the physical existence of the historical Jesus and assumed that a phantasmal being manifested as the saviour of the world under the name Jesus. These teachings, no doubt, provoked a division in the community, as

¹⁴ Gibbon E. "Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire" Vol. III Chapter XXVII. Ca. 1776-1788.

the orthodox group believed that Jesus' nature was both human and divine. Progressively, there was need for recognition and direction, which led to leadership tussle (III Jn. Vss. 10-14). The author of the Johannine Epistles set out to give spiritual directives against these Docetists who were misleading the community and reminded them of what they had heard from the beginning, namely that Jesus was a complete human as well as divine being.

In a similar vein, there are various fasting and praying groups in the Anglican Diocese of Ughelli whose teachings are heretical. These include the Anglican Adam Preaching Society Prayer Meeting, the Anglican Fasting and Praying Society, the Anglican Deliverance Ministry, and so on. While the first group grew from the Anglican Adam Preaching Society (A.A.P.S.) founded by Evang. Cornelius Adam Igbudu, the second one emanated from Daniel Mimeyeraye and the third group was founded by Evang. Francis Usenu. Evang. Daniel Mimeyeraye came up with various teachings which are difficult to trace in scriptures. He claims that he has laboured more than Jesus and, therefore, God the Father asked Jesus to vacate his throne for him and he thereby, became a fourth person in the Trinity. He also taught that women who are married are not to have sexual intercourse with their husbands on the night which precedes prayer meeting day. This, according to him, will make them unclean. They must, therefore, confess such "sinful acts" to the leader for prayers of forgiveness before they can join the community of the faithful.

Furthermore, he teaches that dead people can be transferred from hell to heaven if their living siblings labour in righteousness. He claims that his late father who died as a priest of the local deity has been moved to heaven because of his good works. He has also been advocating that Jesus was fully divine and not human. These teachings have spread into the Diocese and some people believe them to be true.

Although Evang. Daniel Mimeyeraye has left the Anglican Church, his teachings still linger within the Anglican Diocese of Ughelli. Tackling this in the light of the Johannine teachings is the crux of this research.

1.3 Purpose of the study

This study was designed to examine the manifestations of Christological heresies and Soteriological conflicts in the Johannine epistle and relate them to the teachings of Evangelist Daniel Mimeyeraye and the activities of the AFPS, with the aim of establishing their effect on interpersonal relationship in Ughelli Diocese. The work studied in detail the Johannine Epistles, examined the heresies combated by the Johannine Epistles, and the current teachings that are prevalent in Ughelli Diocese and sought synergy to resolve these issues that are threatening the main fabric of the Christian faith.

In the light of the above problems x-rayed in II Jn. Vss. 7-12 and III Jn. Vss. 9-14, this study critically examined heretical teachings in the Johannine Epistles with the aim of assessing their implications for the Anglican Diocese of Ughelli. It also explored the mechanism used to combat heretical teachings in the Early Church and its relevance to the present day-church in the face of many teachers whose current interpretation of Scripture is more on “revelational knowledge.” The claim to various revelations and secret knowledge by some teachers of Scripture has become a concern and the need to actually examine their teachings, which have caused an internal division amongst the clergy and the laity, has become unavoidable.

The relevance of the epistles of John in this study is quite visible and the church affirmation with due recognition of the epistles being Catholic (universal) to all churches and ages makes it appropriate for use in the situation mentioned above. This study further examined the response of the writer of these epistles to heretical teachings in his time, significance of its creedal confessions and doctrinal teachings to the Anglican worshippers in Ughelli Diocese.

1.4 Scope of the study

The Johannine Epistles were our major focus, with special attention to I Jn. 4:1-3, II Jn. Vss. 7–12 and III Jn. Vss. 9–14. The heretical crisis that rocked the community and how the author addressed it in the chosen passages were

studied in details, and the Anglican Diocese of Ughelli, the field and place of current resurfacing of heretical teachings, was also covered.

Ughelli Diocese of the Anglican Communion covers five local government areas. These are Ughelli North, Ughelli South, Udu, Uvwie, and Patani Local Governments of Delta State, Nigeria. The Diocese is made up of seventeen administrative units, eighty-seven parishes and two hundred and forty nine churches. Out of all these, the seventeen Archdeaconry headquarters were purposively selected for study owing to prevalence of heretical teachings in those areas. This is the geographical area where the field survey for this research was carried out.

The Johannine corpus is known as a major address to churches and individuals who resided in places where heretical teachings about the nature of Jesus Christ were predominant, hence our choice of studying the Epistles of John as a major tool for this research. The research was limited to the selected passages for critical study and only made references to relevant passages that buttress the message documented by the writer of the epistles. The research findings from these epistles were then related to the activities of the praying and fasting groups whose teachings truly aligned with the heretical Christology found in Johannine community. The work affirmed that the reference to apostolic tradition as regards the question of Christology best addressed the heretical movement within the Anglican Diocese of Ughelli. Also, constant recourse to the spirit of apostolic tradition strengthens the relationship between Church leaders and members.

1.5 Research methodology

This study employed the synchronic approach in its exegesis of the chosen passages. This included the narrative, critical and social-scientific interpretation of the Johannine passages chosen above. The synchronic approach¹⁵ was used to analyse the text itself and the text in relation to the world in which it first existed as a text. The comparative and evaluative studies approach postulated

¹⁵ Gorman, M.J. 2001. *Elements of Biblical exegesis*, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers Inc., p. 12.

by Adamo¹⁶ was also applied to unravel the avoidance mechanism seen in the Johannine Epistles. Data were gathered through oral interview, archival search and questionnaire administered to respondents who were members of the fasting and prayer groups and other members of the Church in Ughelli Diocese.

A total of six hundred (600) copies of a questionnaire were administered and seven (7) resource persons were interviewed. The data collected from these sources were analysed with the descriptive statistics analytical format, which is based on simple percentage. This formula was used:

$$\frac{N}{TN} \times \frac{100}{1}$$

where:

N = Number of responses

TN = Total number of responses to question item on the questionnaire.

1.6 Theoretical framework

This study employed the Johannine creedal formula and the Van Baalen ‘theory of Action and Practices’ as theoretical framework to address the effect of teachings on recipients and how a wrong teaching can affect the behavioural attitude of people. According to Baalen, ‘If practice follows from theory, if life is based upon teaching, it follows that the wrong doctrine will issue in the wrong attitude towards God and Christ, and consequently in warped and twisted Christian life’. This will create ways to liberate those in Christological and Soteriological error. The above theoretical framework guided our hypotheses:

- (a) That the truth about God, Jesus and the Holy Spirit are all in the Bible, but those who wish to go astray seek secret and deeper revelations.
- (b) God’s promise of salvation is enacted in Christ’s justifying death and resurrection.
- (c) Jesus Christ is true God and true man, one in being with the Father, having two natures, with no confusion between natures, no separation, no change

¹⁶ Adamo, D.T. 2005, What is African Biblical studies, in *Decolonization of Biblical Interpretation in Africa* – A Publication of The Nigerian Association of Biblical Studies (NABIS), Ibadan, p. 19.

and no division between the natures. Orthodox Christology recognises the two natures of Christ in one divine person.

1.7 Significance of the study

The significance of this work cannot be overemphasised. It was designed to study the Johannine literature and its corrective measures used to safeguard the Christian community from error in their days. The entire Christian community in Nigeria and the Anglican Diocese of Ughelli, in particular, will benefit from the study by using its findings to guide against strange teachings that are inimical to orthodox biblical teachings.

It will also function as a guide for teachers of the aforementioned fasting and praying groups and make them seek ways to correct the wrong teaching that emanated from them. The study made useful suggestions that could redirect members of the church to sound biblical teachings. Thus, an authentic Christian doctrine saves innocent believers from derailing in the midst of many teachings about Christ and the Christian faith which are common today.

1.8 Limitations to the study

This research encountered some hitches in the process of interview and administration of questionnaire on the grounds of fear. Data were collected from the chosen area of study with patience and persuasion on the condition that they will not be used for any punitive measure. This is due to the fact that the researcher, who was the erstwhile parish priest, was made the Bishop of the area within the period. Furthermore, the new church founded by Evang. Daniel Mimeyeraye felt threatened that their church would be ridiculed if the findings of the research were published. This was also resolved with the understanding that the work was a research and not a legal document that would be used to persecute the church. Thus, the information collected was within the geographical region of members of this fasting and praying group in the Diocese.

UNIVERSITY OF IBADAN

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF RELEVANT LITERATURE

2.1 Introduction

It is sacrosanct for every sound academic to understand and understudy

the past in the world of scholarship of any situation before engaging himself in a research. This will save the researcher from ignorance of exiting scholarly work that has done in-depth study in the same field. It also gives the researcher a better understanding of the situation with the knowledge of earlier suggestions that could correct their anomaly. We shall, in this chapter, review existing works on heresies in the early church, heresies as addressed by the Johannine epistles, and heresies in contemporary society.

2.2 Heresies in the Early Church

According to Gunther Bornkamm:

The scattered and dispersed band of his disciples gathers together, and through their belief in him and their hope of his second coming, becomes a community. The Spirit of their Lord, risen and lifted up, makes them sure that he is present and that the future is his. Their sealed lips are opened and they show forth the mighty works of God (Acts 2:11). Their witness shows new faith, but at the same time arouses new opposition and persecution. The story of the Church begins...¹⁷

The story of the early Church is tied up in the witness that Jesus is the Christ. Raymond Brown writes that “Christology in its most literal sense would be the discussion of how Jesus came to be called Messiah or Christ and what was meant by that designation.”¹⁸ Christology, thus, consists of “any evaluation of Jesus in respect to who he was and the role he played in the divine plan”¹⁹ Brown further highlights several kinds of Christology expressed in the New Testament writings.²⁰ Low Christology evaluates Jesus of Nazareth in terms that do not necessarily include divinity. It takes off by analysing the traditions, which refers to him as Rabbi, prophet, high priest and so on. Higher Christology, on the other hand, covers the evaluation of Jesus that includes an aspect of the divinity, for example, Son of God, Lord and God. In Raymond Brown’s opinion, Low

¹⁷ Gunther, B., 1959, *Jesus of Nazareth*, Minneapolis: Fortress Press, p.179

¹⁸ Raymond, B., 2004 *Introduction to New Testament Christology*, New York: Paulist Press, p.3

¹⁹ Raymond, B., 2004 *Introduction to New Testament Christology*, New York: Paulist Press, p.3

²⁰ Raymond, B., 2004 *Introduction to New Testament Christology*, New York: Paulist Press, p.3

Christology does not necessarily exclude elements of higher Christology that is the divinity of Jesus; neither does High Christology exclude the humanity of Christ.²¹ However, High Christology leaves open the problem of the *degree* of Jesus's divinity: Was he qualitatively inferior to God the Father (Subordinationism) or equal in divinity to the one true God? It also leaves open the *manner* in which he is divine: Is he deified at some particular point (adoptionism) or is he divine in the sense of being the deity who expresses himself in the form of man (modalism)? Again, is he the deity who is uncreated with God before all creation? These possibilities are played out in the development of the identity of the Christ of faith and resulted in the dogmatic developments reached in the council of Chalcedon.²² It is the clash of these heretical ideas that bring forth the development of doctrine. For instance, Gnosticism and Docetism are the results of a syncretism of Christian and pagan world views.

The issue of doubt on the divinity of Jesus Christ by the Jews, no doubt, unsettled the minds of many Christians of the early Church. This contributed to their quest for knowledge, which later became a snare to the very fabrics of their faith. According to Lightfoot, "the heresy which the Catholic Epistles, the pastoral letters and the apocalypse addressed was primarily Judaism crossed with Gnosticism". J.N.D. Kelly observes that:

Ebionism was an offshoot of that specifically Jewish form of Christianity which was a potent force in the apostolic age when only prevented from saddling the Church with the full observance of the Jewish law.²³

The Ebionites declare the faith in Jesus Christ but, for them, he was no more than a man who had a special call from God. They left out the bulk of the soteriology of the New Testament not venturing beyond the teachings of the Old

²¹ Raymond, B., 2004 *Introduction to New Testament Christology*, New York: Paulist Press, p.4

²² Ometan, B. Feb, 2010 *Flight from dogma: African Christologies and the Third Quest for the Historical Jesus* Unpublished M.A Dissertation, Dominican Institute, Ibadan.

²³ Kelly J.N.D., 1958 *Early Christian Doctrines*, London: Continuum, p. 139

Testament.²⁴ The Ebionites rejected the virgin birth, regarding Jesus as having been a man normally born from Joseph and Mary. He was the predestined messiah and, in this capacity, would return to the earth on the appointed date and his reign would have no end. This seems to be the core of their teaching, but, in some quarters, this is seen to have a pronounced Gnostic colouring. Waiting for the Lord to return, the first Christians were reluctant to attempt to put their faith and convictions into a comprehensive form.

2.2.1 Gnosticism and Docetism

The Gnostic peopled the heavens with aeons who were in fact celestial beings which, having emanated from the deity, were less perfect than he and sometimes malignant in character. In an attempt to solve the problem of evil, the classical Gnostics thought that matter is evil and is the result of the creation of evil aeons. Gnosticism offered a doctrine of salvation through a secret knowledge only available to those who had been initiated.²⁵ For the Gnostic, man's salvation consisted in an escape from the material cosmos since that cosmos was not the creation of God who was the origin of the spiritual world which is the principle of goodness itself but it was the creation of perverted demonic powers which ruled the heavens. Salvific ascent to the deity who transcended the world of matter was through inner spiritual enlightenment or gnosis.²⁶ Gnosis was hence ineffable knowledge of a transcendental God received passively into the soul.

Jesus and Christos appear in the various Gnostic mythologies as aeons that are sent to outwit the malignant forces of darkness and to lead men to illumination.

Arising from Gnosticism is a certain form of tendency towards Docetism, which became the Christological expression of Gnosticism. While the Docetists saw Christ as a mediator, what they could not accept was that the divine word (the Logos) had become flesh with all its earthly connotations. They thought that Jesus "seemed" or "appeared" to have a human body (Docetism). The Marcionists

²⁴ Kelly, J.N.D. 1958. *Early Christian doctrines*, London: Continuum, p.18

²⁵ Kelly, J.N.D. 1958. *Early Christian doctrines*, London: Continuum, p.139

²⁶ Gelpi, D. 1971. *Pentecostalism: a Theological Viewpoint*, New York: Paulist Press, p. 105

taught that he only had an apparent body, while Valentinian Gnosticism taught that he had a spiritual or a pneumatic body. The consequence of this is that the humanity of Jesus is denied. It is against this background that the Johannine first and second epistles argue that “he who does not believe that Christ came in the flesh is the antichrist” (1 John 4: 1; 2 John 7). Two levels of Christology are seen here.

The Gnostics saw knowledge as the pivot of salvation and not faith, as some of the apostles have taught. They believed that Christ was a revealer of the hidden knowledge necessary for salvation. This knowledge they professed is shrouded in secrecy. They laid claim to secret instructions that were given to the apostles by Christ in some occasions.²⁷ They sometimes quoted the gospel accounts and some writings of St. Paul as indicators to this belief. Jesus’ teaching methods, of explaining something to the disciples after a busy general assembly gathering in Mark 4:33-37 and Paul’s exegesis on the wisdom of God (1 Cor. 2:6-7) are their major citations.

Another group of Gnostics viewed Christ as a great prophet, but not as a divine being who is equal to God the Father as the Apostles have professed. According to Ehrman, they believed that there are two gods of equal power in the universe - one of good and the other is evil. This theology of dualism gave credence to the teaching that the evil God created the world and all material things, while the good God created all spiritual and heavenly things.²⁸ They further associated the evil God with the Old Testament, one who favoured a particular tribe (Israel) and rejoiced at the spilling of blood in battles between Israel and other nations. The fight between the good and evil gods was often expressed in terms of the war of the kingdom of light against the kingdom of darkness. In further pursuance of this, they viewed the soul of man as created by the good god to be pure until it is lured by the evil god into transitory physical body. This also explains why the natural man, whose body is continually imagining evil, is at war with the spiritual man who seeks freedom from the evil body. The goal of humankind in this regard will be to

²⁷ Taylor, J. 2009. *The Epistle of John and Gnostic sects*, p. 3.

²⁸ Ehrman, B.D. 2003. *Lost Christianities: the Battle for scriptures and the faith we never Knew*, New York: p. 37.

escape from the evil physical body and return to the godhead. This is the foundation of the doctrine of reincarnation. The souls in this process go through multiple iterations to cleanse itself from the impurity that the body has cost it.

This belief of the evil god creating everything worldly or material brings with it the evil nature of every created being. It further leads to two extremes. The first is the denial of all worldly things, which leads to ascetic life while the second is antinomians. This basically states that, since the body is inherently evil, but the soul is pure; do what you do with your body does not matter; sex, drugs, rock and roll are immaterial. The soul will get to its final destination. This cumulates into the belief that there are different spiritual levels of human being. Those on the highest level are guaranteed salvation; those on the lowest level are denied salvation. Those in-between the group must therefore struggle to acquire the required knowledge which will help them to fight and obtain salvation.

The Gnostics tried to interpose their belief on the Christian faith by quoting the works of John. The writer of the epistle used the imagery of light versus darkness (1 John 1:5-7; cf. John 1:1-14). The Gnostics found a dualistic tone to this passage and John wrote to refute this. Other Johannine works, which this Gnostics cited and misinterpreted, included John 8:32; 30:30; 21:25.

The writer of the Johannine corpus refuted these erroneous interpretations vehemently.²⁹ One of the Church fathers (Irenaeus) who refuted the teachings of the Gnostics of the second century said, “Those, moreover, who follow Valentinus, making copious use of that according to John, to illustrate their conjunctions, shall be proved to be totally in error by means of this very Gospel” (Irenaeus; Against Heresies Book 3).

2.2.2 Marcionism

The various heresies pushed the Early Church to define and articulate more clearly what it believed. The biggest danger faced by the Early Church was

²⁹ Sandra, L. 2005, “*Gnosticism and the Johannine literature*”, p. 7.

not losing believers to these groups-- the danger was that the heretical groups used many of the same "sacred" texts. This was part of the struggle the Early Church faced when it came to which texts were accepted--- what becomes known as the New Testament "canon" (or rule) for which texts are "inspired" and which were not. The wind of teaching of various doctrines was blowing across the Church from Gaul to Lyons. It blew very strongly, with people like Marcion teaching the believers to discard some of the canonized books of the Bible today. He claimed to have the knowledge to design the differences between the activities of the God of the Old Testament and the one of a New Testament. Marcion misled the flock of Christ by teaching that God who is the father of Jesus Christ is different from Yahweh of the Old Testament. He compared the God in the writings of Luke and Paul, marked by love and peacefulness, with the God of the Old Testament law who upheld justice.³⁰ According to Frend, Marcion was such an advocate of the writings of Luke and Paul. He upheld that the gospel of Luke and ten of Paul's letters were the sum of the word of God, but he rejected the book of Acts, claiming it to be the work of Judaisers.³¹

Marcion declared that Christianity was distinct from and in opposition to Judaism. He rejected the entire Hebrew Bible, and declared that the God of the Hebrew Bible was a lesser demiurge, who had created the earth, but was (de facto) the source of evil.

The premise of Marcionism is that many of the teachings of Christ are incompatible with the actions of the God of the Old Testament. Focusing on the Pauline traditions of the Gospel, Marcion felt that all other conceptions of the Gospel, and especially any association with the Old Testament religion, was opposed to, and a backsliding from, the truth. He further regarded the arguments of Paul regarding law and gospel, wrath and grace, works and faith, flesh and spirit, sin and righteousness, death and life, as the essence of religious truth. He ascribed these aspects and characteristics as two principles, the righteous and wrathful God of the Old Testament, who is at the same time identical with the

³⁰ Frend, W.H.C. 1996, *The Early Church from the beginning to 461 AD, Fourth Edition*, London: S.C.M. Press, p. 56.

³¹ Frend, W.H.C. 1996, *The Early Church from the beginning to 461 AD, Fourth Edition*, p.57.

creator of the world; and a second God of the Gospel, quite unknown before Christ, who is only love and mercy.

The Marcionites held dualistic views of the God of the Hebrew Bible (known to some Gnostics as Yaltabaoth), that he was inconsistent, jealous, wrathful and genocidal, and that the material world he created was defective, a place of suffering; the God who made such a world is a bungling or malicious demiurge. In the God of the Old Testament he saw a being whose character was stern justice, and therefore angry, contentious and unmerciful to the people. He claimed to have created. The law which rules nature and man appeared to him to accord with the characteristics of this God and the kind of law revealed by him. And, therefore, it seemed credible to him that this God is the creator and lord of the world (**κοσμοκράτωρ** [English transliteration: kosmokrator/cosmocrator]). As the law which governs the world is inflexible and yet, on the other hand, full of contradictions, just and again brutal, and as the law of the Old Testament exhibits the same features, so the God of creation was, to Marcion, a being who united in himself the whole gradations of attributes from justice to malevolence, from obstinacy to inconsistency.

In Marcionite belief, Christ was not a Jewish Messiah, but a spiritual entity that was sent by the Monad to reveal the truth about existence, and thus allowing humanity to escape the earthly trap of the demiurge. Marcion called God the Stranger God or the Alien God, in some translations, as this deity had not had any previous interactions with the world, and was wholly unknown.

Marcion is often reckoned among the Gnostics, *Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church* (3rd Ed, p.1034.) puts it, "it is clear that he would have had little sympathy with their mythological speculations". Henry Wace opines that

A modern divine would turn away from the dreams of Valentinianism in silent contempt; but he could not refuse to discuss the question raised by Marcion, whether there is such opposition between different parts of what he regards as the word of God, that all cannot come from the same author.

Primarily, the difference between Marcionites and Gnostics was that the Gnostics based their theology on secret wisdom (as, for example, Valentinus who claimed to receive the secret wisdom from Theudas who received it direct from Paul) of which they claimed to be in possession. Conversely, Marcion based his theology on the contents of the Letters of Paul and the recorded sayings of Jesus – in other words, an argument from scripture, with Marcion defining what was and was not scripture.

Also, the Christology of the Marcionites is thought to have been first and foremost Docetic, denying the human nature of Christ. This may have been due to the unwillingness of Marcionites to believe that Jesus was the son of both God the Father and the demiurge. Classical Gnosticism, by contrast, held that Jesus was the son of both, even having a natural human father; that he was both the Messiah of Judaism and the world Saviour.³² Scholars of Early Christianity disagree on whether to classify Marcion as a Gnostic: Adolf Von Harnack does not classify Marcion as a Gnostic, whereas G. R. S. Mead does.³³ Von Harnack argues that Marcion was not a Gnostic in the strict sense because Marcion rejected elaborate creation myths, and did not claim to have special revelation or secret knowledge. Mead claims that Marcionism makes certain points of contact with Gnosticism in its view that the creator of the material world is not the true deity, its rejection of materialism and affirmation of a transcendent, its view of purely good spiritual realm in opposition to the evil physical realm, the belief that Jesus was sent by the "True" God to save humanity, the central role of Jesus in revealing the requirements of salvation, the belief that Paul had a special place in the transmission of this "wisdom", and its Docetism.

According to the 1911 *Encyclopaedia Britannica* article on Marcion;

It was no mere school for the learned, disclosed no mysteries for the privileged, but sought to lay the foundation of the Christian community on the pure gospel, the authentic institutes of Christ. The pure gospel, however,

³² Stevenson, J. 1957, *A new Eusebius*, London: SPCK, p. 77.

³³ Mead, G.R.S. 2006. *Fragments of a faith forgotten: some short sketches among the Gnostics of the first two centuries*, 5th Edition, London: London University Press, p. 246.

Marcion found to be everywhere more or less corrupted and mutilated in the Christian circles of his time. His undertaking thus resolved itself into a reformation of Christendom. This reformation was to deliver Christendom from false Jewish doctrines by restoring the Pauline conception of the gospel, Paul being, according to Marcion, the only apostle who had rightly understood the new message of salvation as delivered by Christ. In Marcion's own view, therefore, the founding of his church - to which he was first driven by opposition - amounts to a reformation of Christendom through a return to the gospel of Christ and to Paul; nothing was to be accepted beyond that. From the above assertions, it will be out of place to reckon Marcion among the Gnostics. A dualist he certainly was, but he was not a Gnostic.³⁴

Marcionism shows the influence of Hellenistic philosophy on Christianity, and presents a moral critique of the Old Testament from the standpoint of Platonism. According to Harnack, the sect may have led other Christians to introduce a formal statement of beliefs into their liturgy and to formulate a canon of authoritative Scripture of their own, thus eventually producing the current canon of the New Testament.

Marcion, on the contrary, treats the Catholic Church as one that “follows the Testament of the Creator-God”, and directs the full force of his attack against this Testament and against the falsification of the Gospel and of the Pauline Epistles. His polemic would necessarily have been much less simple if he had been opposed to a Church which, by possessing a New Testament side by side with the Old Testament, had ipso facto placed the latter under the shelter of the former. In fact, Marcion's position towards the Catholic Church is intelligible, in the full force of its simplicity, only under the supposition that the Church had not yet in her hand any *litera scripta Novi Testamenti*. Marcion is believed to have imposed a severe morality on his followers, some of whom suffered in the persecutions. In particular, he refused to re-admit those who recanted their faith under Roman persecution.

In the view of Robert M. Price, the Marcionite concept of Christianity was

³⁴ *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 1911, England.

blown out of proportion as the canonization of the Scriptures, which Marcion did, brought Pauline corpus to light. This praise of Marcion tend to sweep under the carpet the destruction theology of Marcion that make the work of Jesus Christ baseless if Marcion's rejection of the Old Testament is to be accepted.

2.3 Johannine Epistles and heretical teachings

Heresy in the early church cannot be pinned down to a particular date of emergence. Most documents on heresy and various activities were written by church fathers that stood against these deviant versions of authentic Christianity. According to Gary L. Waller and church fathers, such as Irenaeus, spent considerable time refuting the views of such fringe groups, stressing that their beliefs were the very opposite of what Jesus and the first Christians had brought to the world.³⁵ This presupposes that the cankerworm of heresies had started affecting the church from a very early stage. The Gnostic movement, which Irenaeus combated, was known to the author of the 1st epistle of John. This further suggests that heretical teachings were a monster that confronted the early church and it was adequately addressed. The insistence on the imposition of the laws on the gentile converts in the Jerusalem Council, as stated in Acts 15, is also an indication of heretical teaching in the Early Church. This emphasis on the imposition of law by some Jewish Christians on the Gentile converts points to the fact that salvation is based on Law of Moses and grace is not sufficient for salvation. This belief is in contradistinction to the message of the Gospel.

Waller, in asserting the role of Irenaeus against the Gnostic movement of their days said that the writings of the Gnostic groups date back to the end of the first century of Christianity. Going by this view, the earlier claim of the Da Vinci Code that their writings were lost books of early church fathers is unimaginable. The Gnostics claim a knowledge of a special revelation or insight that supersedes the information provided by the revelation of the written documents of Scriptures. This knowledge, perhaps, led to the name of the group – Gnostics, which is a

³⁵ Cf. Waller, G.L. 2006. *Reflection and discussion on the Da Vinci Code*, p. 2

Greek word meaning knowing. The knowledge or insight meant was additional information beyond what the written documents of the Christian tradition provided. In exposing some of the beliefs of the Gnostic groups part of which the Johannine corpus addressed, Gary says “The self-image of the Gnostics made them into an exclusive group; a spiritual elite who had received insight that others did not have.”³⁶

The writer of the Epistles of John clearly established the faith of the early church which proclaimed that salvation could only come by believing that Jesus’ death had paid the price for sin once and for all. The Gnostics believed something different. They (Gnostics) believed that salvation came from something within us, not something outside us.³⁷ This concept of belief stressed the importance of special knowledge of divine mysteries. Once you know it, you receive salvation from the oppression of material existence. This clear deviation from the doctrines of the church and the teachings of Jesus make those professing these beliefs heretical.

Heresy is any opinion or doctrine at variance with the official or orthodox position.³⁸ It could be said to mean “a theological or religious opinion or doctrine maintained in opposition, or held to be contrary to the catholic or orthodox doctrine of the Christian church, or by extension heresy is an opinion or doctrine in philosophy, politics, science, art, etc at variance with those generally accepted as authoritative.”³⁹ Thus, it can be argued that heresy has no purely objective meaning. The phenomenon exists in various categories from the point of view within a group or sect that has been previously defined as “orthodox.” The heretics do not consider their stand heretical. For instance, Roman Catholics hold Protestantism as a heresy, while most Protestants see the Roman Catholics veneration of images as great apostasy.

Akin Daniel L. describes the author of the Johannine epistles as “a

³⁶ See Waller G.L. 2006. “*Reflection and discussion on the Da Vinci Code*”, p. 3

³⁷ See Waller G.L. 2006. “*Reflection and discussion on the Da Vinci Code*”, p. 3

³⁸ See Waller G.L. 2006. “*Reflection and discussion on the Da Vinci Code*”, p. 100.

³⁹ See Waller G.L. 2006. “*Reflection and discussion on the Da Vinci Code*”, p. 272.

dogmatically authoritative writer, consistent with his being the apostle John, a disciple and Apostle of Jesus Christ, one of the “Sons of Thunder” who indeed wrote the fourth Gospel.” He opines that the letters were written after the composition of the fourth Gospel at Ephesus and the purpose of the letters were to correct a Christological misinterpretation of the fourth Gospel. The author describes the occasion of I John as a crisis of false teachers who use their teachings to disorganise the young churches. He prefers to call the opponents “heretics” who have left the Christian community and have continue to spread their false teachings to other Johannine churches and they sent out itinerant missionaries, as mentioned in 2 John. In the view of Akin, the First Epistle of John has two principal purposes: “To combat the propaganda of false teachers which is disseminated to the Johannine churches doctrinally, morally, socially and to reassure believers that the occurrences within the fold are part of the Eschaton.”

Griffith draws the attention of Bible scholars to a possible reason for the writing of Johannine epistles. According to him, the sucessionists did not leave the Christian fold in favour of a Gnosticizing Christology; rather, they rejected life in the Christian community and returned to life in the synagogue, which is idol worshipping in the view of the author. He suggests that the move from a messianic Christology towards a Father-Son Christology, which seems to emphasise equality, may well have been the trigger for the apostasy referred to in I John. He affirms that ethnic Jews who had become Christians were returning to the synagogue and thereby denying their formerly held beliefs that the Messiah is Jesus.⁴⁰ This view of Griffith is a new approach to scholarship in the Johannine epistles; however, this concept presupposes that idolatry was the major problem that the writer of these epistles was trying to combat in the region. This view seems very narrow, as the teaching of the person of God in expressing himself as love and how Christians ought to behave among unbelievers is jettisoned and the

⁴⁰ Griffith, T. 2002. “keep yourself from Idols: a new look at 1st John”. *Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series* 233, p. 175.

instruction to believers are not taken into record.

Kerry Garreth C. discusses the epistles as a theological and moral corrective guideline to the docetic tendencies of the fourth Gospel.⁴¹ In his introduction, he raises the conventional issues of authorship, relationship to the fourth Gospel and the identity of the secessionists whom he affirms are Docetist.⁴² He disagrees with the early church's stand of authorship.⁴³ According to Kerry: The Elder associated with I John does not write or act as one with apostolic authority. He is concerned with the correct interpretation of the authoritative tradition of the Fourth Gospel, produced about a decade before his writing of the letters, and is best understood as a disciple of the author of the Gospel and possibly as the final redactor of the gospel.⁴⁴

Although Kerry has examined the epistles from ethical perspective, he delves into citing the language and theological differences in the fourth gospel and the first epistle of John.⁴⁵ This view, no doubt, seems to be influenced by the work of C.H. Dodd⁴⁶ on the same epistle.

In the exegesis and commentary, Kerry observes that the secessionists had a Docetic understanding of the Christology of the fourth Gospel in which the humanity of Jesus is relatively compared to the glory of his pre-existence and self-revelation.⁴⁷ There is ample reason to think that the secessionists do not believe on incarnational Christology. Rather, they rejected the notion of Jesus Christ having come in the flesh (I John 4:1-2; 2 John 7).

Thomas, writing on 1 John, 2 John and 3 John in the Pentecostal commentary, asserts that the fourth Gospel and all the Johannine Epistles come from the same source, the same community and, therefore, the same author. In particular, he discusses John the son of Zebedee and John the Elder as possible

⁴¹ Kerry, G.C. 2001. *The relation of Christology to ethics In The 1st Epistle of John*, Lanham: University Press of America, p. 2.

⁴² Kerry, G.C. 2001. *The relation of Christology to ethics In The 1st Epistle of John*, pp.1-4.

⁴³ Kerry, G.C. 2001. *The relation of Christology to ethics In The 1st Epistle of John*, p.10.

⁴⁴ Kerry, G.C. 2001. *The relation of Christology to ethics In The 1st Epistle of John*, p.17.

⁴⁵ Kerry, G.C. 2001. *The relation of Christology to ethics In The 1st Epistle of John*, p. 11

⁴⁶ Dodd, C.H. 1971. *The problem of the Johannine Epistle*, Illinois: Intervarsity Press, p. 61.

⁴⁷ Kerry, G.C. 2001. "The relation of Christology to ethics, p.25.

authors, but favours John the Elder in most of his arguments.⁴⁸ Thomas takes the unusual route of dealing with the Epistle in reverse order. He offers two reasons for this: First it means that 3 John could stand out and be read in its own right rather than as an addition to 1 John. Second, he feels that there is justification for believing that 3 John was the first to be written.⁴⁹ He asserts that canonical order often does not indicate chronological order. Thomas avers that the probable reason why epistolary markings⁵⁰ was omitted in this letter was because the Elder was well known to the congregation and his representative was going to travel round with it.⁵¹

In his discussion of the meaning of *hilasmos*,⁵² he argues that the concept of Jesus serving as a propitiating sacrifice to appease the wrath of God is not the best in Johannine context. He sees the main emphasis of the word as demonstrating the atoning death of Jesus, being the basis of cleansing and forgiveness.

Richard Heard, devotes the twenty-second chapter to the Johannine epistles in his book. In his view, the authors of the epistles clearly wished to build up the faith of a community well known to him in view of the activities of heretics.⁵³ The separation of the heretics from the church and denial of Jesus as the Christ must have spurred the writing. These heretics spoke in the spirit, but the spirit of the antichrist, and did not confess that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh (I Jn 4:1-3). Richard opines that the references to Jesus' life and spiritual consciousness clearly reveal that the heresy attacked is the Docetic movement.⁵⁴ This group refutes the reality of the incarnation by refusing to admit that the divine Christ could, in any true sense, come in the flesh, suffer or die.⁵⁵

F.F. Bruce argues that "The Johannine writing of the New Testament makes several allusions to a school of thought which denied that the son of God

⁴⁸ Thomas, J.C. Ed. 2004. *The Pentecostal commentary on 1st, 2nd and 3rd John*, London: T & T. Clark, pp 3-26

⁴⁹ Thomas, J.C. Ed. 2004. "The Pentecostal commentary on 1st, 2nd and 3rd John," p. 49.

⁵⁰ Thomas, J.C. Ed. 2004. "The Pentecostal commentary on 1st, 2nd and 3rd John," p. 29.

⁵¹ Thomas, J.C. Ed. 2004. "The Pentecostal commentary on 1st, 2nd and 3rd John," p. 31.

⁵² Thomas, J.C. Ed. 2004. "The Pentecostal commentary on 1st, 2nd and 3rd John," p. 36.

⁵³ Thomas, J.C. Ed. 2004. "The Pentecostal commentary on 1st, 2nd and 3rd John," pp. 93-94.

⁵⁴ Richard H. 2009 *An Introduction to the New Testament*, p. 402.

⁵⁵ Richard, H. 2009 *An introduction to the New Testament*, p. 537.

really became a man and died”.⁵⁶ He notes that John was opposing a doctrine called Doceticism.⁵⁷ Cerinthius has taught that the Christ spirit came upon Jesus at baptism and left him at crucifixion, hence the Docetic gospel of Peter translated Jesus’ cry on the cross as “my power, my power why hast thou forsaken me?” Other Docetists believed that Jesus was never crucified, as he stood afar on a safe place to watch Simeon of Cyrene who was actually crucified”.⁵⁸ F.F. Bruce posits that the Gnostic, who saw the supreme God as too holy to associate with the ordinary man, used the lords of the planetary as intermediaries. This special knowledge which was brought into the church tried to restate Christianity in terms of *gnosis*. The special knowledge that this group of persons possessed gave them confidence of being very special and endowed with the secret of the kingdom of God. To them, the death of Jesus had a different undertone. The Gnostics believed that Jesus descended at death to the “lower world to release the divine element that had become imprisoned in the flesh, and to lead it back to its true home. The biblical fall of man became transmuted in Gnosticism into the fall of the divine element which is seen in the material realm...”⁵⁹

Bruce argues that the cosmological speculations, which Paul addressed in his letter to Colosse, were to nip in the bud the Gnostic movement, which was infiltrating that congregation.⁶⁰ The in-depth teaching of St. Paul on the fullness of deity absolutely embodied in Christ and his final triumph over cosmic rulers at Calvary and resurrection proves the inadequacy of the theosophy propagated by these groups. Bruce agrees that this teaching made a considerable headway among the more intellectual Christians of the Graeco-Roman world.⁶¹

Heretical teachers always claim special revelation. Their works are fantastic according to Bruce:

Particularly fantastic are the Gnostic writings which have come down to us in the Coptic language of Egypt. One of these, entitled *pistis Sophia* (Faith Wisdom) tells how Jesus

⁵⁶ Bruce, F.F. 1973. *The growing day*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, p. 123.

⁵⁷ Bruce, F.F. 1973. *The growing day*, p 123.

⁵⁸ Bruce, F.F. 1973. *The growing day*, p 123.

⁵⁹ Bruce, F.F. 1973. *The growing day*, p. 126.

⁶⁰ Bruce, F.F. 1973. *The growing day*, p. 127.

⁶¹ Bruce, F.F. 1973. *The growing day*, p. 127.

continued to teach His principal disciples for twelve years after his resurrection, and professes to record the last revelation which he gave them before He withdrew for the last time to the upper realm of light.⁶²

The teachings of Marcion were considered as one of the greatest heresies: Marcionism, in spite of the fact that its ascetic principles and prohibition of marriage meant that it could not perpetuate itself by the ordinary means of family life, did show a surprising vitality, and endured as a sort of rival church for many generations.⁶³

We agree with Bruce that the teachings of heretics are always attractive to the people and that their teachings survive a long time in the Church. We also agree that the majority of their experiences and claims are always on revelation that nobody can bear witness to or verify empirically. The canonized word of God remains a yardstick to verify the authenticity of such claims.

2.4 Contemporary heretical teachings

John M. Frame wrote on knowledge, its application to faith and the various effects of how many teachers of Scriptures erroneously pass wrong concepts of faith in God under the banner of knowledge. According to him, a "Christian has obligation to hear the teachers that God has given the church over a thousand years of its existence, they must be heard critically, this will make us to profit from their mistakes, as well as from their achievement."⁶⁴ He adds that a heretic is not a Christian who makes a doctrinal or practical mistake only. Rather, he is one who commits the above sins, and challenges the gospel of Jesus Christ at its core and seeks to win the rest of the church to his erroneous position.⁶⁵ There are new heresies in theology today, which, of course, are only old ones in new terminologies with new slants.⁶⁶ The solution to these problems in the church is the writing of creedal statements and all Christians confessing their faith anew

⁶² Bruce, F.F. 1973. *The drowing day*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, p. 128.

⁶³ Bruce, F.F. 1973. *The growing day*, p. 130.

⁶⁴ See Bruce, F.F. 1973. *The growing day*, p. 132.

⁶⁵ John, M.F. 1987. *A theology of lordship: the doctrine of the knowledge of God*, New Jersey: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, p. 304.

⁶⁶ John, M.F. 1987. *A theology of lordship: The doctrine of the knowledge of God*, New Jersey: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, p 307.

against modern heresies. Creedal confessions are the best approach to addressing heretical teachings and their exponents.⁶⁷

The first Christian doctrinal handbook, *The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles, or Didache*, was written, perhaps, a century after Christ, as a response to heretical teachings. The *Didache* is a very early manual of the instruction for Christian converts. It consists of two quite distinct parts, namely, a brief account of the moral law, and a somewhat longer account of the various rites of the Church and the regulations governing its organization.⁶⁸ Apart from the *Didache*, which is rather brief and not very comprehensive, the first major treatments of Christian doctrine appeared as *apologies*, a distinctively literary form of the early church. The apology was a defence of the faith and conduct of Christians addressed to the outside world, usually to the government, sometimes-- as in the case of Justin's *Dialogue with Trypho the Jew*-- to the Jews. For the first two centuries or so, the early Christians were so persuaded that the knowledge that came from their faith was totally superior to the philosophy and mythology of the Hellenistic world that they made little or no attempt to compare the one to the other. John the Evangelist wrote, "Ye need not that any men teach you..." (I John 2:27). Tertullian of Carthage expressed Christian disdain for worldly wisdom; he was a Roman jurist turned Christian (ca. 160-ca. 230): "What has Athens to do with Jerusalem, or the Stoa with the Porch of Solomon?" Tertullian became one of the pioneers of Christian theology in Latin. In the latter part of his life, he found the church too lax, and went over to a heretical "reform" movement called Montanism.⁶⁹ The church has continually responded to heretical teachings, for instance, the case of Arianism with the Nicene and Constantinopolitan creed; the Eutychians and Nestorians; and the Chalcedonian Declaration. These were made to quash the disgruntled elements within the fold.

A general survey of the literature reviewed so far affirms that much work has been done on heretical teaching as it affected the believers and congregations

⁶⁷ John, M.F. 1987. *A theology of lordship: The doctrine of the knowledge of God*, p. 306.

⁶⁸ Ayer, J.C. 1949. *A source book for Ancient Church history*, New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, p. 38

⁶⁹ Ayer, J.C. 1949. *A source book for Ancient Church history*, p. 43

of old. The relevance of the Johannine epistles in correcting heretical teachings, that glaringly threaten the major foundation of the Christian faith, provides a theoretical framework for this research. The upsurge of teachings by modern miracle workers, who make claim of divine ordination and revelations that are superior to the sacred scripture, calls for attention of Church leadership.

2.5 Conclusion

In spite of the fact that different scholars have worked on heresies in the church, from the different reviews made, there has been no work which examines heresies in the Johannine Epistles and their implications for the Anglican Diocese of Ughelli. This major and very significant gap in scholarship is what this research tried to fill.

UNIVERSITY OF IBADAN

CHAPTER THREE

ORTHODOX JUDAISM AND HERETICS AS A BACKGROUND TO UNDERSTANDING HERESIES IN JOHANNINE EPISTLES

3.1 Introduction

Heresy is defined by reference to orthodoxy. It does not exist alone. A doctrine or a sect or an individual becomes heretical when condemned as such by the church for this: there has to be a body of accepted beliefs to violate and a recognized authority to enforce it. In this chapter, attempt is made to examine the nature and content of heresy and then proceed to the Jewish concept of heresy; relationship between orthodoxy and heresy within Judaism and Christianity and then followed by conclusion. According to Harold Brown, the concept “heresy” is, to a large extent, a response to truth. It is a response to truths imperfectly understood, taken out of context or perceived as inadequate or unsatisfying. Nevertheless, the existence of heresy in Christianity presupposes the existence of a truth to which the heretics were responding, and which they sought to explain or to understand better than they perceived the more conventionally orthodox to be doing. Orthodoxy is derived from two Greek words meaning “right” and “honour.” Orthodox faith and orthodox doctrines are those that honour God rightly, something that ought to be desirable and good.⁷⁰ Thus, in a sense, even when heresy advances to the point of denying certain fundamental assumptions of orthodoxy, it gives evidence for the fact that those assumptions existed, and that they were held to be fundamental⁷¹.

3.2 Jewish religion and creed

Authority in any religion, according to Joseph Kenny, is prophetic.⁷² Scripture is a record of prophetic utterances and is a way of extending the time span of a prophetic event that occurred at a specific time in history. Thus, scripture becomes an authority in religion. A religion may stop with that, or there may be ongoing prophecy on the part of some leaders or among the people in general.⁷³

⁷⁰ Brown, H.O.J., 2007. *Heresies: Heresy and Orthodoxy in the history of the Church*, U.S.A: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc. p.1

⁷¹ Brown, H.O.J., 2007. *Heresies: Heresy and Orthodoxy in the history of the Church*, p.10

⁷² Cf., Joseph, K., David, O. O., and Akintunde, E. A., Eds. 2010. Authority in Pentecostalism: comparative theological perspectives in *Creativity and Change in Nigerian Christianity*. Lagos: Malthouse Press Limited, p.75.

⁷³ Cf., Joseph K., David, O. O., and Akintunde, E. A., Eds. 2010. Authority in Pentecostalism: comparative theological perspectives in *Creativity and Change in Nigerian Christianity*, p. 75.

The Jewish religion was decisively shaped by Moses, and took its origin in the tremendous event of the Exodus from Egypt. Judaism, more than any other great religion, is characterized by the law, and the Jewish law specifically refers back to the liberation of the Hebrews from Egypt: "I am the Lord thy God, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt..." (Exod. 20:2). These words - reference to an epoch-making historical event - introduce the Ten Commandments:

- 1 "I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. You shall have no other gods before Me".
- 2 "You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth; you shall not bow down to them nor serve them. For I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and fourth generations of those who hate Me, but showing mercy to thousands, to those who love Me and keep My Commandments".
- 3 "You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain, for the Lord will not hold him guiltless who takes His name in vain".
"Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labour and
4 do all your work, but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord your God. In it you shall do no work: you, nor your son, nor your daughter, nor your male servant, nor your female servant, nor your cattle, nor your stranger who is within your gates. For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and hallowed it".
- 5 "Honour your father and your mother, that your days may be long upon the land which the Lord your God is giving you".
- 6 "You shall not murder".

- 7 “You shall not commit adultery”.
- 8 “You shall not steal”.
- 9 “You shall not bear false witness against your neighbour”.
- 10 “You shall not covet your neighbour's house; you shall not covet your neighbour's wife, nor his male servant, nor his female servant, nor his ox, nor his donkey, nor anything that is your neighbour's.” (Exodus 20:2-17 NKJV)

Moreover, commandments of the Torah require the acceptance of certain basic beliefs, such as the first and second Positive commandments, which mandate the belief in God and His indivisible unity, or the recitation of the Shema. Thus, describing Judaism solely in orthopraxic terms is not accurate.

Orthopraxy is a term derived from modern Greek **ὀρθοπραξία** (*orthopraxia*) meaning "correct action/activity" or an emphasis on conduct, both ethical and liturgical, as opposed to faith or grace, and so on. This contrasts with orthodoxy, which emphasizes correct belief, and ritualism, the use of rituals.

While orthodoxies make use of codified beliefs, in the form of creeds, and ritualism more narrowly centred on the strict adherence to prescribed rites or rituals, orthopraxy is focused on issues of family, cultural integrity, the transmission of tradition, sacrificial offerings, concerns of purity, ethical systems, and the enforcement thereof. Typically, traditional or folk religions (paganism, animism) are more concerned with orthopraxy than orthodoxy, and some argue that equating the term "faith" with "religion" presents a Christian-biased notion of what the primary characteristic of religion is. In the case of Hinduism orthopraxy and ritualism are mixed to the point that they become a single identity.

Passover, one of the two greatest feasts of the Jewish calendar, involves the effort to embed the memory of the Exodus and its importance in the mind of every Jewish child by the family observance of the Passover meal. But other things have happened to the Jewish people that have caused the present awareness of that historic event, no more than three millennia in the past, to fade. There was

captivity in Babylon, then return from exile. There was oppression under various rulers, then a brief time of national renewal under the Maccabees. There was submission to Rome, revolt, and virtual wiping out of Palestinian Judaism in the Jewish Wars of A.D. 66-70.⁷⁴

3.2.1 Contributions of Judaism to Christianity

Judaism gave to Christianity its fundamental conviction that the eternal, omnipresent, changeless God works in time and space, in the particular circumstances and conditions of human history. The Apostles' Creed tells us that Jesus Christ suffered and died "under Pontius Pilate," a rather mediocre, middle-level Roman bureaucrat. The reference is Roman, but the idea is Jewish: that the Word of God is not an ineffable, timeless, spaceless Principle, but lived in human flesh and blood at a particular time, in a particular place, and under a rather undistinguished Roman governor.⁷⁵

The contributions of Judaism to Christianity are so many that it is impossible even to list them here. For our purpose, it is enough to note that because Christianity grew out of Judaism, it was a second-generation religion and did not need to go through a stage of primitivism. Conservative Jews as well as Christians would deny that Judaism itself was ever primitive, inasmuch as they hold that it was divinely inspired from the very beginning. It is not necessary for us to argue that point here, as it is abundantly clear that Judaism was a higher religion at the time of Jesus. It was well thought out, intellectually developed, reflective and coherent.

Judaism was passionately monotheistic and believed in the personal nature of God. Consequently, early Christianity did not have to free itself either from polytheism, belief in many gods, or pantheism, the idea that God is impersonal. From time to time during the history of the Church, polytheistic tendencies emerge within Christianity, and pantheism is a recurring problem. But both of these tendencies would arise out of the encounter with paganism and Gentile

⁷⁴ Cf. Brown, H.O.J., 2007. *Heresies: heresy and orthodoxy in the history of the Church*, U.S.A: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc. p.11

⁷⁵ Cf. Brown, H.O.J., 2007., *Heresies: heresy and orthodoxy in the history of the Church*, p.11

culture, not from the Christian heritage itself. The Jewish people had already fought and won major spiritual and intellectual battles against the deeply rooted human religious impulses to polytheism and pantheism. The Christian church inherited the fruit of these victories and did not need to fight the battle again.

Harold Brown argues that because Christianity came into the world as a “higher” rather than a “primitive” religion, Christianity inherited four fundamental concepts from Judaism:

- (1) Monotheism;
- (2) Personal God;
- (3) The concept of verbal revelation;
- (4) The idea that God intervenes in real, space-time human history.

The loss of any one of these destroys Christianity, just as historic Judaism is unthinkable without all of them. These four fundamental concepts of Judaism stood as a test against heretic teaching and practices.⁷⁶

Because of monotheism, Jesus neither presented himself nor was he understood by his followers as another god alongside of the Father. Because the God of the Jews is personal, Jesus could enter into dialogue with the Father, not merely manifest or reflect him. Because God’s revelation was in the form of words, not of inexpressible religious illumination, Jesus could repeat it, interpret it, and supplement it. It is this third point that brought him into conflict with contemporary Jewish religion, which considered the Word of God complete and already perfect and regarded any attempt, like amplification, as blasphemous. Because Judaism holds that God intervenes in history, for example, in liberating the Hebrews from slavery in Egypt and in giving them the Law at Sinai, it was possible for Jesus to present himself and his ministry as the action of God, not merely the activities of a man illuminated by the divine.

What distinguishes Christianity from Judaism are not its general principles. They are compatible with Judaism, just as they are incompatible with pagan religion and Hellenistic culture (and indeed with the popular culture of the modern

⁷⁶ Cf. Brown, H.O.J., 2007, *Heresies: heresy and orthodoxy in the history of the Church*, U.S.A: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc. p.11

West). The conflict lies in the way Jesus and his disciples saw him and his ministry as the specific, divinely appointed fulfilment in space and time of those theological principles in which the devout Jews already believed. Thus, in the dramatic confrontation between Jesus and the High Priest Caiaphas during his trial, the high priest did not object to the principle of a coming judgment of the world. Pilate would have found it ridiculous, but not Caiaphas. What was intolerable for Caiaphas was that Jesus presented himself as the Son of man who would come, in person and in great glory, to carry out that judgment (Mark 14:61-63).⁷⁷

3.2.2 Morality in Judaism and Christianity

The morality Jesus taught was quite compatible with traditional Jewish morality, even in its spiritual rigour. The rabbis of His days taught in the same way. But Jesus gave the primary reason for observing the commandments, not the historical reference to Moses and to God's deliverance of the Hebrews from Egypt (Exod. 20:20), but his disciples' relationship to himself: "If ye love me, keep my commandments" (John 14:15). Even those who were to come after him, who would not see him or know him in the flesh were to be blessed by believing in him whom they did not see (John 20:29).

Christianity is characterized by its ethical rigour. In both of the great biblical religions, this ethical orientation is generally based on the doctrine of the Creation, on the conviction that the entire universe was made by the Word of God and that human beings, as rational creatures, accordingly, ought to bring themselves into voluntary conformity with the will of God by obeying His word. In both Judaism and Christianity, this general orientation is given a specific focus in history. The reason for obeying God is not a general, philosophical insight into the rightness of his commandments (although such an insight is not altogether discounted), but rather the moral obligation God's people bear because of something He has done for them in their own history. For the Jews, this great deed of God is epitomized in the release from Egypt, and thus, God's deliverance from Pharaoh stands at the beginning of the commandments, the most fundamental expression of God's Law (Exod. 20:2). This

⁷⁷ Cf. Brown, H.O.J., 2007. *Heresies: heresy and orthodoxy in the history of the Church*, p.11

was an epoch-making historical event, and part of the historical memory and family culture of the whole nation, reaffirmed every year at Passover. Although striking, the Exodus was a simple event, and easy to understand. Its implications are plain: because God delivered the Hebrews from their servitude in Egypt, they clearly have an obligation to render him a grateful obedience.

For Christians, however, the moral obligation arises not out of a widely experienced historical event, the exodus, but out of an event no one directly experienced, the resurrection of Jesus on Easter morning. And indeed it is not directly centred on the event of the resurrection, but on the person of the Risen One: “If you love me, keep my commandments” (John 14:15).

It is important for Christians not only to remember their history, as the Jews had to remember theirs, but to know precisely who and what Jesus was and is, in a degree to which Jews need not know Moses in order to know that they should follow the Mosaic Law. Christology is essential to Christianity, whereas Judaism really does not have a “*Moseology*.” It is this contrast that creates the tremendous importance of right doctrine about Christ. Judaism is equally historical but less dogmatic in its interest. Those who are by nature and temperament antidogmatic will always find Christianity uncongenial, for it cannot be what it must be without being deeply concerned with dogma.

3.2.3 Characteristics of Prophet Moses

In this section, attempt is made to highlight the characteristics of Moses within Judaism. Old Testament Judaism is noted for ongoing prophetic experience in many different forms. Its oral transmission and eventual commitment to scripture is another facet of prophecy.⁷⁸ The prophecy of Moses was different from all others in four ways:

- (1) Concerning all other prophets, God spoke to them through intermediaries. For Moses, it was without one, as shown in “face to face I spoke to him” (Num. 12:6-8).
- (2) As for all other prophets, prophecy came to them at night while they were asleep in a dream as it says, “In a dream of the night” and other such

⁷⁸ Cf. Kenny J. 2010 , *Authority in Pentecostalism: comparative theological perspectives*, p.75

references; or in the day but only after a deep sleep-like state came over them, and all their senses were shut off except their thoughts. Not so by Moses. Moses would receive a prophecy any time when he would stand between the two figures [fixed] on the ark, as God attests to it, “and I will make it known to you there” and “not so my servant Moses. Face to face I speak to him.”

- (3) When a prophet would receive prophecy he would not be able to stand the intense effect and he would shake and not be able to stand, as it relates to the experience of Daniel in his encounter with the angel Gabriel. As for Moses, he did not suffer from this. As it says, “Face to face do I speak to him as a person speaks to his friend”. And even though this is the greatest connection to God, still, he did not suffer.
- (4) All other prophets could not receive prophecy at their will, [but] only when God desired to tell them. Some would go days or months without prophecy. Even if they wanted or needed something, sometimes it would be days or months or years or even never that they would be told [a prophecy]. Some would have people play music to put them in a good mood such as Elisha. But Moses received prophecy whenever he wanted, as revealed in, “Stand here and listen to what God will tell you what to do” and “God said to Moses tell Aaron your brother that he can’t come to the holy of holies at any time [he wants]”. Aaron was prohibited to come whenever he wanted, but not Moses.

From the analysis above, the concept heresy may not be applied strictly to Judaism on the ground that Jews need not know Moses in order to know that they should follow Mosaic Law. Christology is essential to Christianity, whereas Judaism really does not have “Moseology.” It is this contrast that creates the tremendous importance of right doctrine about Christ. Any teaching that falls short of knowing precisely who and what Jesus was and is marks the beginning of heretical teaching.

Heresy is the English version of the Greek noun *hairesis*, originally meaning nothing more insidious than “party.” It is used in this neutral sense in

Acts 5:17; 15:5; 26:5. Early in the history of the first Christians, however, “heresy” came to be used to mean a separation or split resulting from a false faith (1 Cor. 11:19; Gal.5:20). It is designated either a doctrine or the party holding the doctrine, a doctrine that was intolerable to the unity of Christian church. In the early church, heresy did not refer to simply any doctrinal disagreement, but to something that seemed to undercut the very basis for Christian existence. Practically speaking, heresy involves the doctrine of God and the doctrine of Christ--later called “special theology” and “Christology.”⁷⁹

3.2.4 Religion and doctrine

In the modern period, religion is often defined as a belief system centred on a creed. A creed is a fixed formula promulgated by an authoritative figure or body summarizing the essential dogmas of the religion and serving as an admission test for converts and as a loyalty oath for faithful adherents. In the Hellenistic period, *religio* referred to the ancestral customs and way of life believed to be enjoined by the gods for the betterment of humankind and the proper conduct of society at large. If one wished to speculate on questions like free will, immortality, or the problem of evil and develop belief systems about such matters, one turned to the traditions of *wisdom* (in the Ancient Near East) or philosophy (in Greece and the Hellenistic Near East), not *religio*. Persons with widely different beliefs could join together in the practice of a common religion because religious communities were defined less by doctrine than by a prescribed way of life and mode of worship.

3.2.5 Judaism, heresy, heterodoxy and doctrine

The early church was defined and held together almost entirely by a particular set of credal convictions. On the other hand, Judaism’s origins were not doctrinal and Jews did not need a catechism to create or establish an identity. Jewish identity in antiquity was based on membership in a historic people and or participation in a distinctive ethnic-religious culture (including observance of the

⁷⁹ Brown, H. O. J., 2007 *Heresies: Heresy and Orthodoxy in the History of the Church*, pp2-3

ancestral laws and customs of the covenant). Certainly, Jews were known to deny the gods of other nations and to assert that their God was the God of the universe. Nevertheless, even outside observers in antiquity described the difference between Jews and Gentiles in terms of practice-- a distinctive way of life, rather than theology or beliefs. Although various Jewish sects arose in the Second Temple period, the debates among these sects tended to focus on matters of practice rather than theology. The separatist literature found at Qumran criticized other Jews for their purity practices, temple practices, their calendar, and their rules concerning interaction with Gentiles, not for their theological views which were held by the authors of those works.

Formal creeds and the discipline of theology, in general, played little role in the maintenance of ancient Jewish identity and the construction of rabbinic Judaism. The early church fathers produced theological treatises, in which they carefully formulated the entire systems of belief and developed arguments in defence of their philosophical validity. These treatises were often directed to persons outside the faith, and sought to persuade them of the truth of the writer's belief system. The Rabbis of the Talmudic period simply did not produce theological writings of this type. The central focus of rabbinic thought was *halakhah* and rabbinic literature is overwhelmingly directed to an internal Jewish, or even rabbinic audience.

Nevertheless, although the rabbis did not produce works of systematic theology, they did reflect on issues of central concern to theologians-- the nature of God, the nature of humanity, the ethical life, the problem of suffering and evil, reward and punishment, immortality and resurrection. Their reflections on these matters were not presented systematically, but appear in the form of maxims, parables, stories and biblical interpretations scattered throughout the anthological compilations that make up the rabbinic corpus. They can be discerned as the often unspoken principles guiding rabbinic discussions of civil, criminal, marital and agricultural law. Do these reflections and principles taken together form a rabbinic theology? No, if by the term *theology* we mean a unitary system of doctrines developed and argued systematically. We would do better to speak of a

rabbinic world view or religious outlook. This world view is often complex and variegated. That is not surprising, considering that rabbinic writings contain the teachings and traditions of literally hundreds of sages over the course of several centuries.

3.2.6 Judaism and doctrinal practices

Judging from the rabbinic literature that has come to us from late antiquity, the rabbis did not often speculate on theological matters in isolation of some practical or exegetical concern. Thus, while it is rewarding to explore the religious world view of the rabbis, we must remember that for rabbinic Jews, this world view was the organic background to the religious life, important precisely and only because it engendered obedience to God's commandments and commitment to the task of humankind in this world. Continuing an ancient practice, the rabbis prescribed the twice – daily recitation of a biblical passage known as the *shema* after its opening word (Deut 6:4-9). The first paragraph of that passage reads:

Hear (*shama*), O Israel! Yahweh is our God, Yahweh alone. You shall love Yahweh your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. Take to heart these instructions with which I charge you this day. Impress them upon your children. Recite them when you stay at home and when you get up. Bind them as a sign on your hand and let them serve as a symbol on your forehead, inscribe them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.

The passage opens with an affirmation of God's sovereignty and then ordains complete love of God and devotion to and immersion in his commandments. Successive paragraphs outline the rewards and punishments for obedience and disobedience, and the obligation to meditate on God's commandments and his redemption. This central and daily recitation encapsulates the essence of rabbinic religion -- to acknowledge God necessarily entails accepting upon oneself his commandments. For the rabbis, a "heretic" is one who denies God not so much in word or belief, but in deed and practice, by breaking the commandments, *acting* as if there is no God and no covenant. The rabbis refer

to a heretic as *an apikoros*, from Greek *Epicurus*, since Epicurus' philosophy claimed *not* that there were no gods but that the gods were indifferent to humanity. For the rabbis, faith is not belief in a set of doctrines, but trust that there is a permanent relationship between God and creation, a relationship that places demands on humans.

3.2.7 God and mankind in Judaism

There is the problem of: how can there be a relationship between an omnipotent, exalted creator God and the physical world? Monotheistic system, that views God as abstract and transcendent, often tries to bridge the gap between the divine and human orders, ensuring a vital intimacy and nearness to God. In Second Temple times, the Jews populated the heavens with all sorts of intermediate angels who communicated with humans. Philo and Greek-speaking Jews saw God's reason, or Logos, as the intermediary between the divine and human realms. Christians believe that Logos became flesh in Jesus Christ. Later, the Holy Spirit was believed to mediate between God and the Christian community.

By contrast, the rabbis spoke of the *Shekinah*⁸⁰ – the presence or *in-dwelling* of God. At first, the *Shekinah* referred to a manifestation of God in a particular place but later it came to mean the divine presence (particularly in its feminine aspect) everywhere. According to one tradition, there is no place upon earth devoid of the *Shekinah*, while, according to another, the *Shekinah* is present whenever two or more persons share words of Torah. In some traditions, it appears that God's in-dwelling, or *Shekinah*, is linked to human conduct. Sin drives the *Shekinah* from the earth, while righteous deeds draw the *Shekinah* closer.

3.3 Communal life with a heretic in Judaism

⁸⁰ Hayes, C., 2011. *The emergence of Judaism: Classical traditions in contemporary perspective*, Minneapolis: Fortress Press, p. 29.

The greater emphasis on normativity in *halakhah* than in *aggadah* accounts for the popular characterization of classical rabbinic Judaism as an orthopraxy (requiring right praxis) rather than an orthodoxy (requiring right belief). In rabbinic *halakhah*, the Gentile is imagined as an ethnic order or as a religious order. As an ethnic order, the Gentile is merely a non-Israelite or *goy* (member of a non- Israelite nation) to whom the laws of the Mosaic covenant do not apply. Because the Gentile is ignorant of the terms of the law, the Jew must be on guard against unintentional violations of the law in his interaction with a Gentile. One *tractate* of the Mishnah consists of regulations that make it possible to deal with Gentile with the confidence that one is not violating any religious prescriptions.⁸¹ For example, one chapter contains a list of Gentile foods prohibited because of the possibility of mixture with, absorption of, or defilement by impure or forbidden substances (such as pork or blood), as well as a list of foods to which no such anxiety attaches.

The Gentile is also imagined as a religious order (idolater) who worships a deity or deities other than Yahweh. The Bible charges Israelites with the complete eradication of idolaters and idolatry from the land of Israel (Deut 7:1-5). Remarkably, despite some expressions of deep hostility and intolerance toward paganism, the Mishnah lacks any normative command to destroy pagans living in the land of Israel. As one scholar has argued, the *tannaitic* rabbis adopt a policy of passive resistance instead. Forced to accept the entanglement of Israelite and pagan society they adopt a twofold strategy:

- (1) Distancing themselves from pagans through various avoidance mechanism, and
- (2) Creating a neutral space for legitimate interaction.

As regards the first strategy, the rabbis rule that a Jew must not benefit from or contribute to the existence of idolatry. As regards the second strategy, the rabbis create legal distinctions and categories that open the door for licit interactions. For example, pagan images need not be avoided if they are merely aesthetics rather

⁸¹ Hayes, C., 2011. *The emergence of Judaism: Classical traditions in contemporary perspective*, p. 126.

than genuinely cultic. Other conceptual and legal distinctions create a neutral (noncultic) status or space in which Jews may interact with pagans and paganism.

The rabbinic regulations concerning interaction between Jews and Gentiles as both ethnic and religious order are not both ethnic and religious orders -- are not designed to prevent all interaction between Jews and Gentiles or even to make such interaction difficult or cumbersome for Jews. Rather, these regulations are designed to prevent interaction that would involve the observant Jew in a violation of the *halakhah*. Setting out required standards and precautionary criteria, constructing legal distinctions and classifications, the rabbis negotiated a neutral space in which extensive commercial, business and legal interactions -- and even social contacts between Gentiles and *halakhically* observant Jews could occur. Certainly, there are some laws that bespeak a general distrust of Gentiles as dangerous and licentious, and warn against making oneself vulnerable to assault or injury at a Gentile's hands. On the whole, however, there is a tendency toward leniency and trust in the conduct of everyday life. The maintenance of peaceful relationship with Gentiles and avoiding their enmity are cited as relevant considerations in many legal rulings and determinations within Jewish religious life.

3.4 Punishment for heretics in Orthodox Judaism

We shall attempt to look at punishment for heretics/deviants by legitimate authority in the execution of punishment in the Jewish society. Temporary exclusion from the services of the sanctuary for violation of ritual taboo was an integral part of Israelite-Jewish ceremonial laws. This is further revealed in the regulations of clean and unclean living. For serious ritual offences, such as eating leaven during the Passover season (Exod. 12:15, 19), failure to bring a slaughtered animal to the door of the tent of meeting (Lev. 17:4, 9) or failure to cleanse oneself from ritual impurity (Num. 19: 20), the prescribed penalty was to be cut off from (the congregation of) Israel, from the people, or from the assembly.

The first instance of use of the threat of excommunication against recalcitrant members of religious community was that of Ezra, in his campaign against mixed marriage. Furthermore, failure to respond to Ezra's summons to a meeting in Jerusalem was to be punished by the confiscation of all the offenders' property and expulsion from the congregation of the exiles (Ezra 10:8). This was a mitigation form of the ancient *herem*⁸², which involved death for the person and destruction for his property (Lev. 27: 28-29).

The book of Ezra, it goes further to show that punishment is imposed by legitimate authority:

And you, Ezra, by virtue of the wisdom of your God, which is in your possession, you are to appoint scribes and judges to administer justice for the whole people of Transjordan, that is, for all who know the Law of your God. You must teach those who do not know it. If anyone does not obey the law of your God- which is the Law of the king- let judgment be strictly executed on him: death, banishment, confiscation or imprisonment" (Ezra 8: 25-26).⁸³

The rabbis do prohibit intermarriage between Jews and *unconverted* Gentiles. Nevertheless, the rabbinic position on intermarriage is not to be confused with extreme separatism of Ezra or Second Temple groups, as represented in some Qumran writings that prohibited both intermarriage and conversion. The rabbis reject Ezra's exclusively genealogical definition of Jewish identity and adopted a (primarily) moral religious definition that creates a permeable group boundary and allows the assimilation of – and marriage to –converted foreigners. The genealogical or ethnic component of Jewish identity is muted but not entirely obliterated in rabbinic literature.

Despite the rabbinic declaration that a convert is a Jew in all respects, the non-native origin of the convert is a relevant consideration in certain legal situations. Nevertheless, there is broad tendency within rabbinic literature to

⁸² Hayes, C., 2011. *The emergence of Judaism: classical traditions in contemporary perspective*, Minneapolis: Fortress Press, p. 130.

⁸³ Jerusalem Bible, p. 557

remove the obstacles to full assimilation borne by persons of foreign descent -- a tendency stronger in Palestinian sources than in Babylonian sources, where a preoccupation with genealogy is more pronounced.

3.5 Penance process for heretics in Orthodox Judaism

The process of penance begins with a personal confession of faith in Yahweh as the penitent acknowledges his failure. This is followed with thanksgiving and offering a sacrifice of ram in the Orthodox Judaism, as exemplified in the book of Ezra. Then Ezra the priest stood up and spoke:

You have committed treason by marrying foreign women; you have added to the sin of Israel. But now give thanks to Yahweh, the God of your ancestors, and do his will, by separating from the natives of the country and from your foreign wives. In a loud voice the whole assembly answered, 'Yes' our duty is to do as you say. (Ezra 10:10-12).

Jozadak and among his brothers; Maaseiah, Eliezer, Jarib and Gedaliah; they pledged their word to put their wives away and, for their sin, offered a ram as a sacrifice of reparation" (Ezra 10:19).

3.6 Readmission of repentant heretics to faith in Orthodox Judaism

For better understanding of readmission within Orthodox Judaism, it will be appropriate to look at it from the perspective of non-Jewish or Gentiles who want to embrace Judaism. Rabbinic Law views involuntary conversion as illegitimate. But, by the end of the rabbinic period, a process of voluntary conversion has become fully formalized and a conversion ceremony has been created. The ceremony assumes the initiative of the convert and an initial coolness on the part of the rabbinic authorities who interview him, in order to test the sincerity of his motives. Efforts are made to dissuade the potential convert by pointing out the many difficulties and disadvantages of life as a Jew. But should the convert persist, he is warmly accepted and taught a few of the commandments, so as not to be overwhelmed by the challenge of life lived under Torah. This learning process continues until the convert is assimilated into his or

her new way of life. One does not find in this rabbinic conversion ceremony the convert's confession of a formal creed or catechism. There were some evidences of Jewish *proselytism*, particularly in the first century of the Common Era, but rabbinic literature reflects little interest in or enthusiasm for these activities. Rabbinic abstention from active proselytising reflects certain ambivalence toward converts. There were individual traditions that express hostility to converts and question their sincerity. However, such views were distinctly in the minority, countered by numerous traditions that praised and bless the convert.

3.7 Conclusion

The history of Christian theology is, in large part, a history of heresies because Jesus and the claims he made, as well as the claims his disciples made about him, seemed to be incredible. The religious orthodoxy of his own day and nation found his claims blasphemous, and had him put to death for making them. Orthodox faith and orthodox doctrines are those that honour God rightly. Judaism is based primarily on the teaching of Moses; Christianity is based primarily on the *person* of Christ. The Christian faith is not belief in his teaching, but in what is taught about him. Judaism, being historical and less dogmatic, looks at heresy in relation to orthodoxy and orthopraxis, that is, right practices or actions; while Christianity looks at heresy primarily in relation to orthodoxy.

CHAPTER FOUR

JOHN'S CRITIQUE OF THE TEACHING AND LIFESTYLE OF HERETICS: AN EXEGESIS

4.1 Introduction

In this chapter, attempt is made to explore the characteristics of the epistles in order to identify the author of the writings. John's critique of the teaching and lifestyle of heretics is also presented. This exploration is geared toward providing a viable platform to address contemporary heretical teachings and practices among Christians in Anglican Communion.

The Early Church knew three distinct persons called John: *John the Baptist, John the Elder and John the Apostle*. At times, also John the Apostle was called John the Elder, because of his seniority and his age. Some confusion has arisen among later Christian writers about the question: who wrote the fourth Gospel? Was it John the Apostle or John the Elder? And even today, some authors express doubt and uncertainty regarding the matter. Without intending to discuss the question at length, we will briefly indicate the grounds we have for accepting John the Apostle as the author of the fourth Gospel.

According to Raymond Brown,⁸⁴ Second and Third John are alike in letter format, especially in the opening and closing; plausibly, there are other works of same "presbyter" and may have been written about the same time. Second John has similarities of content with First John (which has no letter format), especially in 2 John 5-7, which emphasizes the commandment to love one another (1 Jn 2:7-11) and condemns the deceivers (antichrists) who have gone forth into the world (1 Jn 2: 18-19). Thus, although the writer of First John does not identify himself, most scholars think that the presbyter composed all three works.

4.1.1 Chronological priority

1 John's Christology is, by no means, 'low': Jesus and the Father are frequently treated on an equal footing and, in many sentences, it is difficult to get which of these the author refers; at least one text may attribute divinity to Jesus (1 Jn. 5:20, cf. Jn. 17:3). 1 John also contains several passages which *may* echo the

⁸⁴ Raymond, B., 2004. *Introduction to New Testament Christology*, New York: Paulist Press, p. 11

Gospel, notably 2.7; 3.14 and 3.15 (cf. Jn 13.34; 5.24; 8.44). All this is consistent with the view that 1 John was written *after* the Gospel of John, as has been argued by many recent scholars, including Houlden, Brown, Marshall and Smalley. On the other hand, theological simplicity does not necessarily mean chronological priority. While no certainty is possible, the balance of the evidence favours the idea that 1 John was written after at least a first edition of the Gospel of John, as opined by Schnackenburg. But one cannot deny that parts of the Gospel (for example, the Prologue and ch.21) were composed after 1 John was written. With that, we should be content. It should also be noted that the dating of the Gospel is itself controversial. While some scholars have supported an early date, most experts favour one date in the first century, after the split between Christianity and Judaism (c. 85-100 CE). The idea that 1 John was written to *accompany* the Gospel or as an explicit refutation of misunderstandings of it seems unlikely in view of the shortage of clear citations from it.

As for 2 and 3 John, the evidence is even scantier. Some see the reference to a previous letter in 3 Jn vs. 10 as an allusion to John; more probably, it refers to a lost letter. The fact that 3 John is written in a very simple style does not mean that it *must* be early. It seems plausible, on literary grounds, that 2 John is dependent on 3 John, but we have to admit no certainty is possible.⁸⁵

4.1.2 The relationship among the three epistles

Comparison of these epistles with the Gospel of John suggests that they were not by the author of the Gospel. If the Gospel was written about AD 90, the epistles would represent the situation of the communities for whom the Gospel was written, about AD 100. The power of many of the passages in 1 John depends on echoing the tradition established in the Gospel.

1 John echoes the relationships between God (Father, Son, and Spirit) and the Christian: the Father loves the Christian (John 14:21; 1 John 4:16); the Son

⁸⁵ Edwards, R.B., 1996. *The Johannine Epistle: New Testament guides*. England: Sheffield Academic Press, p. 54

lives in the faithful Christian (15:4; 1John 3:13). Important factors in the way in which the Christian relates to God are

1. Mutual indwelling (John 14:20; 1 John 3:24);
2. Forgiveness (John 15:3; 1 John 1:9);
3. Eternal life (John 17:2; 1 John 2:29); and
4. Righteousness (John 16: 10; 1 John 2: 29)

Basic conditions for Christian discipleship are reasserted: the believer is not 'in sin' (unlike the unbelieving 'world', John 16: 8-9; unlike the false perfectionism of the dissidents, 1 John 1:8; 3:4 -9); one must love Jesus, keep commandments (John 14:15; 1 John 2:3).

2 John and 3 John are letters. They are untypical in not giving a personal name for the sender and, in 2 John, not stating where the church addressed is located. However, both letters address concrete problems. They should not be taken as 'fictional' letters. 2 and 3 John are short letters from a person called 'the presbyter' (elder) to other communities. 2 John forbids association between members of the church and a separatists group of Christians. 3 John seeks to secure hospitality for missionaries associated with the presbyter from Gaius after another leading Christian, Diotrephes, had refused it.

1 John is an appeal to Christians in the churches associated with John to be faithful to their tradition; the opponents who failed to observe the commandment of love are deceivers and antichrists; they do not believe in the coming of Jesus 'in the flesh'. The community does not seem to have established authorities, though they did have teachers and may have called them presbyters. But the writer of 1 John asks them to remember that his teaching represents what they have heard from the beginning.

In order to have heresy, to be a heretic, it is necessary that there be orthodoxy against which to react. In religious matters, to have an orthodoxy demands a reliable source of religious knowledge upon which to build it. In other words, it demands a reliable divine revelation, the Word of God. It is thus no accident that the term "heresy" is far more relevant to the religions of revelation

than to others, specifically, to Judaism, Christianity and Islam⁸⁶. In principle, each of the three great “religions of the Books,” Judaism, Christianity and Islam, has definite revelation that permits it to classify certain doctrines, ideas and practices as true or orthodox or orthopraxis and others as false or heretical. Traditionally, the Christian church has often been symbolised by an ark: those who board will survive the deluge⁸⁷. Heresy not merely undermines one’s intellectual understanding of Christian doctrine, but also threatens to sink the ark, and thus to make salvation impossible for everyone, not merely for the individual heretic.

4.2 The Early Christian and heretical teaching

The first congregations were inspired in almost equal measure by the conviction that the Messiah had just come and by the eager expectation that he would speedily return in power and glory. The expectation of Christ’s imminent return led to a short-lived experiment with community of goods, and then to a typical pattern of sharing and mutual support and concern⁸⁸. The loving and practical ways in which members of the Early Church supported one another caught the attention of pagans and was one of the reasons the church attracted so many converts despite the disapproval of the government and the ever-present threat of persecution. Raymond observes that because the return of Christ was expected at virtually any moment, there was no tendency in the early congregations to develop a systematic structure of doctrines.

The first Christian doctrinal handbook, *The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles, or Didache*, was written perhaps a century after Christ. The *Didache* is a very early manual of the instruction for Christian converts. It consists of two quite distinct parts: a brief account of the moral law, and a somewhat longer account of the various rites of the Church and the regulations governing its organisation.⁸⁹ Apart from the *Didache*, which is rather brief and not very

⁸⁶ Brown, H.O.J., 2007. *Heresies: heresy and orthodoxy in the history of the Church* U.S.A: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc. p.2

⁸⁷ Brown, H.O.J., 2007. *Heresies: heresy and orthodoxy in the history of the Church*, p. 2

⁸⁸ Brown, H.O.J., 2007. *Heresies: heresy and orthodoxy in the History of the Church*, p.42

⁸⁹ Ayer, J.C., 1949. *A Source book for Ancient Church history*. New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, p. 38

comprehensive, the first major treatments of Christian doctrine appeared as *apologies*, a distinctively literary form of the early church. The apology was a defence of the faith and conduct of Christians addressed to the outside world, usually to the government, sometimes -- as in the case of Justin's *Dialogue with Trypho the Jew* -- to the Jews. For the first two centuries or so, the early Christians were so persuaded that the knowledge that came from their faith was totally superior to the philosophy and mythology of the Hellenistic world that they made little or no attempt to compare the one to the other. John the Evangelist wrote, "Ye need not that any men teach you..." (I John 2:27). Christian disdain for worldly wisdom was expressed by Tertullian of Carthage; a Roman jurist turned Christian (ca. 160-ca. 230): "What has Athens to do with Jerusalem, or the Stoa with the Porch of Solomon?" Tertullian became one of the pioneers of Christian theology in Latin. In the latter part of his life, he found the church too lax, and went over to a heretical "reform" movement called Montanism.⁹⁰

Waiting for the Lord to return, the first Christians were reluctant to attempt to put their faith and convictions into a comprehensive form. While they tarried, others began to try to fit the overwhelming spiritual fact of Christ into a universal framework. The first and most dangerous of these attempts was made by the Gnostics. Raymond asserts that it is long hesitation of early Christianity to produce a comprehensive theology that made it possible for Gnosticism to present its synthesis between the Gospel of Christ and its own *gnosis* first. As a result, Christian theology had to be developed in reaction to Gnosticism, and this inevitably led the first theologians to choose their points of concentration in reaction to false doctrines, rather than in a fully logical and systematic exposition of the Gospel as proclaimed in the New Testaments. We now recognise that what we call Gnosticism -- the Christian side of the movement -- was only one aspect of an extremely broad philosophical-spiritual current that swept across that ancient world.⁹¹

⁹⁰ Brown, H.O.J., 2007. *Heresies: heresy and orthodoxy in the history of the Church*, p.43

⁹¹ Brown, H.O.J., 2007. *Heresies: heresy and orthodoxy in the history of the Church*, p.45

4.2.1 Christianity's encounter with Gnosticism

The encounter between the Apostles and their successors, on the one hand, and the followers of Simon and Menander, on the other hand, were the prelude to the first full-fledged doctrinal challenge to confront Christianity. We may date this crisis to the half century between the time that the old Roman (Apostles') Creed began to come into use, around 125, and Irenaeus' composition of *Against Heresies* (180-89). The Gnostic crisis could not have burst upon the church prior to the introduction of Roman creed; for, if it had, the creed would surely have stressed that there is but one God, the Creator, who has made both visible, material world as well as the invisible world of spirits. These affirmations are made in the Nicene Creed of 325⁹².

Irenaeus wrote *Against Heresies* to refute Gnosticism, but the movement was already waning by the time he wrote. *Against Heresies* is an invaluable, and unusually amusing, document for our understanding both of early Christianity and the forces against which it had to contend. Harold notes that the fact that Gnostic influences can recur is because the Church in other ages has some characteristics that made Gnosticism a threat in the second century. For this reason, *Against Heresies* is worthwhile reading for Christians in every age.

4.2.2 Church characteristics and Gnostic influences

There were three strains of religious life among early Christians that proved receptive to Gnosticism: (a) asceticism (b) charismatic tendencies, and (c) a speculative, philosophical mood.⁹³ Ascetically inclined Christians interpreted their obligations to the Law of Moses in terms of self-denial and resistance to all the appetites of the flesh. They naturally tended to dualism, with its doctrine that the flesh is evil. The charismatic element in the Early Church disliked congregational discipline and the restriction of the concept of revelation to the written Scripture, and hence was receptive to the suggestion that other revelations had been secretly transmitted by Jesus to the most spiritual of his followers. Those

⁹² Brown, H.O.J., 2007. *Heresies: heresy and orthodoxy in the history of the Church*, p.55

⁹³ Brown, H.O.J., 2007. *Heresies: heresy and orthodoxy in the history of the Church*, p.55

who were inclined to speculate on the relationship of the One to the many through the Logos found that orthodox Christianity did not give much scope to their fancies; Gnosticism offered far more.

The Gnostic tendency that was so much a part of the intellectual world of Hellenism discovered that it could not successfully compete with Christianity; it began to try to absorb it. The church historian Reinhold Seeberg puts it thus:

The success of Christ had tempted Simon to try to compete with him. This became less and less possible as time went on. It was impossible to impede the victorious advance of Christ, but it was not possible against him, they could try it with him. Christ was irresistible in both West and East, but faith in the ancient wisdom of the East was also strong, together with the drive to solve all the puzzles of existence with sacred revelation. So this old Oriental system placed itself in the “service” of Christ.

However, Christians did not always recognize that, while the historic reality of Jesus Christ was paramount for them, it was the imagery that appealed to the Gnostics. The non-Christian product of Hellenistic culture who found it difficult to accept the folly of the cross when the Gospel was presented as the story of things happening on the earth under a very mortal Roman procurator could readily digest the Gospel if it was presented as the myth of a Saviour descending to save pure spirits imprisoned in vile bodies.

4.2.3 Johannine community and the characteristics of heretical teachings

The author of Johannine literature fought on a single front. Even though there might be different groups among the many antichrists (I Jn. 2:18) or false prophets, they were united in their denial of the Church’s Christological confession (I Jn. 2:22; 4: 2-3). “Antichrists” and false prophets” are only different terms arising from particular perspectives, depending on whether it is eschatological (last hour, antichrist) or pneumatic (distinguishing of spirits). The heretics represent both Christological error and a false ethic I Jn. 1:5-2:11; to be

inferred also from I Jn. 3:4-24; 4:20-5:3. The doctrinal heresy and the ethical indifference spring from the same source and form a unified un-Christian stance. The religious and ethical deviation under attack shows a Gnostic tendency.

We shall proceed to identify the nature or characteristics of this Gnostic tendency. Here, the issue involves the question of the type of *gnosis* which threatened the community. Was it a form of Docetism? Or was it some other type of Gnosticism unknown to us? Was it a Christ prophecy gone wild, a pneumatic Christianity belonging to the “Gnostic pneumatic movement” which can be traced back to the conflicts at Corinth? In the first place, the combination of pneumatic disturbances in the life of the community (1 Corinthians 12-14) with a dangerous view of the antichrist expressing themselves in doctrinal formulas (hence the creedal formulas which 1 John holds up against them) is highly dubious. Gnostic ideas developed into fanaticism by denying the simple way of salvation by faith. The message of the Gnostics must therefore have been delivered in a pseudo-prophetic and charismatic mode. But the source of such fanaticism is generally different. Charismatic movements are characterized by undisciplined and falsely interpreted spiritual manifestations of a practical kind. With Gnosticism, on the other hand, we find a perverted intellectual attitude. In fact, one might call it a false religious or charismatic enthusiasm threatening the common life of Christian community and its discipline, of which there is not a trace in 1 John. The Johannine epistles actually combated false doctrine and its practical consequences.

4.3 The Christological error (I Jn. 4:1-3)

Although the entire Johannine Epistles deal with the person and nature of Christ in diverse ways, the actual controversy on the humanity and divinity of Christ came to light as one of the major areas of difference between the teaching of these groups of persons and that of the apostles. According to Howard Marshall, “the coming of the antichrist with their false Christological confession was the bone of contest between the author and his opponents”.⁹⁴ The renewed

⁹⁴ Howard M.I., 1978, *The Epistle of John*, Michigan: Grand Rapids, P. 204

warning against the heretical teachers which seems to begin here again may have risen from the authors foresight that the battle against the heretics was far from being over. He appealed to the historical Jesus whose humanity and divinity were in unity. This problem, which the author confronted from the beginning of his writing, is premised on spiritual claims. The fact that the author calls for test of all spirits to validate those from God underscored the claims of both parties to spiritual approval. The sober admonitions combined with this “do not believe every spirit” serve as a caution against blindly believing that all things attributed to the spirit are free from error. The Christological error in this passage is of the Docetic group. “The true corporeality of the incarnate One is emphasized by the crass term flesh”⁹⁵ (Cf. Jn. 1:14).

The litmus test for those who are from God was the affirmation that Jesus came in the flesh, which the Docetics denied. The author, therefore, hinted that those who deny His coming in the flesh are not of God: **ἐν τούτῳ γινώσκετε τὸ πνεῦμα τοῦ θεοῦ. πᾶν πνεῦμα ὃ ὁμολογεῖ Ἰησοῦν Χριστὸν ἐν σαρκὶ ἐληλυθότα ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ ἐστίν, καὶ πᾶν πνεῦμα ὃ μὴ ὁμολογεῖ τὸν Ἰησοῦν ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ ἐστίν. καὶ τοῦτό ἐστίν τὸ τοῦ ἀντιχρίστου, ὅτι ἔρχεται, καὶ νῦν ἐν τῷ κόσμῳ ἐστίν ἤδη** (I Jn. 4:2-3). The charge, “test the spirits, as in I Thess. 5:21, as well as the methodology used to design the spirits, mainly watching out for how they confess or speak about Jesus, as in I Cor. 2:3, have a noticeable echo in the code of conduct handed down by St. Paul to the communities where he preached Christ for extraordinary manifestation of spiritual charisma. It may not be wrong to suggest that such situations, with grave implications for the faith, were common in the Johannine community, as visible in his first epistle. While the Corinthians were pagans inspired by demons, as suggested by Rudolf, the Johannine community were faced by heretical teachers whose understanding of Christ is a caricature of the historical Jesus. In the view of the author of the Johannine Epistles, these heretics were under the influence of some spirits which claimed to be from God yet they denied the humanity of Christ (I Jn. 4:4). This is shown by the distinction drawn between the two groups, those that confess Christ and they

⁹⁵ Schnackenburg R., 2012, *The Johannine Epistles*, New York: Reprint, P. 201.

that denied Him. It means that these heretical teachers did not need Jesus Christ as the redeemer from sins and the mediator of life. Rudolf asserts that “they believed they were able to reach the Father and attain salvation by another way”.⁹⁶

From the foregoing, it is clear that these groups of heretics were Docetics who believed that Jesus was a spirit and not a human. This was a major challenge to the victory on the cross which Jesus underwent to obtain salvation for humanity. If He was not human, the whole stories of His life in Galilee, His pains on the cross and so on were mere invention of the disciples. Whatever might have motivated these teachings, it will not be illegitimate to assert that these teachers were seeking recognition through claims to spiritual knowledge that was peculiar to them.

4.4 The Docetic claim to perfection (II Jn. Vs 7a)

The Gnostic teachings are passively referred to today as many of their writings are either lost in antiquity or abandoned; they are not available for perusal in the present age. However, there are few references in biblical writing; and Church fathers, like Tertullian and Ireaneus, wrote about them. We can deduce that a lot transpired in their times and season. The Gnostic understanding of the person of Christ was questionable. The first accusation raised by the author of the Johannine Epistles is the fact that these freelance evangelists were deceivers. The concept of freedom from sin might have held sway in the teaching of the successionists and the writer of the Johannine epistles had to address it adequately **ἐὰν εἴπωμεν** – if we say, presupposes that there existed a claim that the author was addressing. A clear understanding flows from 1 Jn. 1:6 and the indifference of moral to spiritual communion as propounded by these beliefs negated the principles of fellowship with God. Self- deception and the presence of sin is glaringly visible and the writer of John is more emphatic. **ὅτι ἁμαρτιαν οὐκ εχομεν οτι** originally was the neuter of **ὅστις**, which was often used with other words as a casual particle, as visible in Mt. 2:18 and Acts 1:17 as, for that, because, seeing that. In the above usage in 1 Jn. 1:8, that sin **ὅτι ἁμαρτιαν**, being

⁹⁶ Schnackenburg, R., 2012. *The Johannine Epistles*, New York: Reprint, p. 201.

the accusative singular feminine of the word **ἁμαρτία**, which could be translated as error, offence or sin has various applications in biblical writing. While, in some cases, it could be used as the cause of sin, as in Rom. 7:7, proneness to sin (Rom. 7:17). It can also be used as a guilt subject, sin offering or an expiatory victim, as in II Cor. 5:21, where Jesus was made to be sin for us so as to enable us to enjoy the righteousness of God.

The claim to be without sin, as evident in the above verse, suggests that this was a maxim that the heretical teachers employed to sway the Johannine community away from the truth which they had earlier believed. According to C.H. Dodd, “We are sinless, we know him, we are in him, this is the kind of language used by those who claimed superior enlightenment, and were leading the church away from the simplicity of the Gospel”.⁹⁷

It is important to note that **ἁμαρτιαν ἔχειν** is only used in this epistle and the gospel and this again affirms the authorship of both writings as one. While the word has a definite sense of usage in the gospel different from the cause it pursues in the epistle, it is clear that the events or situation being addressed are not the same. Brooke avers that the Johannine author is actually saying that the successionist group takes no responsibility for their physical actions since they know the saviour through their knowledge which is peculiar to them.⁹⁸ The writer here exposes the fallacy underlying the claim, as it is merely **πλανῶμεν** -- deceit. Those who hold such view are just deceiving themselves and the truth is never in them. **Καὶ ἡ ἀλήθεια οὐκ ἔστιν ἐν ἡμῖν ἀλήθεια** here does not refer to the daily truth told to one another in speech amongst brethren but to Jesus who is the truth, the way and the life (Jn. 14:6).

This deceptive tendencies are commonly employed and the vulnerable flock in the Johannine congregation might have been feed with such teaching and the Johannine corpus was to meet up the challenges and help to expose the weakness of such concepts.

⁹⁷ Dodd, C.H., 2004. *The Johannine Epistles in the Moffatt New Testament commentary*, London: Impression. p. 18

⁹⁸ Brooke, A., 1994. *A critical and exegetical commentary on the Johannine Epistles*, New York: University press, p. 58.

This false plea undermines the power of sin, as it is merely a passing incident which has no consequence on the one who committed it because of his knowledge of God and His Christ, which others are not privileged to. It is evident that the reality of sin is overwhelming by the daily experiences of man but many wilfully refuse to accept responsibility which end time will later affirm. This concept of perfection was an easy way to live a wild life since lifestyle and character no longer determine anything but the knowledge of God. It must be made abundantly clear that this knowledge does not place any responsibility on the one who possesses it. Rather, it offers a salvation without commitment or obligations. Ambiguity must be avoided, as the Christian who believes God also falls into sin but, through confession, renew his fellowship with God which may have been interrupted by sin.

The claim to perfection does not only grant the adherents of this concept the chance to live the way they like. It was a challenge on the existing principles of faith and life which the Johannine community might have cherished and held for a time. This “easier” way was likely to attract a large followership, which the Johannine congregations were likely to combat.

It is likely that this set of people were within the Christian fold, but have some experiences which propel them to believe that they have moved beyond the elementary stages of orthodox theology to a new realm of private revelations, that restored to them the perfection that existed in man at Creation, with God declaring that all He created was good.

2 Jn. Vs 7a states that “for many deceivers have gone out into the world”.

It is urgent to walk according to the old commandment (which also includes the true confession as 1 John 3: 23) for many deceivers have gone out into the world (cf. 1 John 2:18, 26: 4:1). The interpretation of vs. 6b in the RSV does not make the connection easily intelligible, since the deceivers are not here actually accused of lovelessness. Probably, not the exodus of the schismatics from the church (1 John 2:19), but the emergency of false prophets in the world generally is pointed out. False gospels offer themselves, and it is a day of

confusion. The believer, therefore, should walk in truth and follow the original message from the Father himself.

Two individuals, the Syrian Saturnilus, or Saturninus, and the Egyptian Basilides, were active during the first quarter of the second century, adapted the idea of Christ - not the history of the man Jesus - to the Gnostic panorama of the universe. From John 1:18, Saturnilus took the assertion that the Father is unseen (and therefore unknown); he created a world of angels and archangels, principalities and powers (cf., Eph. 1:21, 6:12), seven of which made the world and man. Man was originally a creeping thing, until the supreme power breathed into him the "spark of life." Mankind is then divided into two races, a good, spiritual race, and an evil, earthy race (cf. the references to the children of light and the children of this world, for instance Eph. 5:8). The Father sent his only begotten, the incorporeal Christ, to destroy the evil race and save those who have the spark of life; he was a man in appearance only. Salvation comes through belief in this Gnostic Christ and an otherworldly, that is, ascetic pattern of life, including abstinence from marriage and procreation. Belief in Christ is in effect the knowledge (Gnosis) of all the complex relationships between the Father, the spiritual beings, and the world.

4.5 The understanding of the person of Christ by the heretics (II Jn. Vs 7b)

While the teaching of the heretics ranged from physical living to spiritual belief that gave a new concept to existing beliefs, one of the greatest challenges it posed was their understanding of the person of Christ. The Johannine corpus addressed a lot of issues that were confronting the community at the time of composition. The Christology of the heretics raised a lot of issues. Was the Christ conceived by Mary the Virgin without intercourse? Is the incarnation theology propounded by the Church tenable? Many suppositions might have led to the response of the writer of the Johannine Epistles which, in every way, manifest a later date than the gospel.

The nature of the Christology in dispute between the opponents and the author was a concern to many scholars as the idea of full Gnosticism might not

have been fully developed in the first century. This concept might not be totally acceptable as Paul and Jude mentioned that Gnostic movements were already visible in their congregation and they needed to be properly checked. Jude went on to encourage his admirers to hold on to the faith earlier delivered to the saints once and for all Jude Vs 3. A Docetic concept of Christ has been suggested by Howard as the Christology that John condemns.⁹⁹ These groups of teachers held that Jesus was an ordinary man who received the Christ at Baptism and the same left him at the wake of crucifixion.¹⁰⁰ This idea might have risen from the concept of the immortality of God. Since Jesus died on the cross, it seems difficult to them to accept that he actually was very God.

A further trace of this will account for a theory of phantasmal body of Christ which will divorce the divinity from the humanity, and therefore the historical Jesus life and teaching are greatly in doubt. Rudolf was of the view that these teachers delivered their message with goal and forging ahead with doctrinal formulas that propagated under a pneumatic movement. This popular teaching about Jesus will be suitable to Jews who did not believe that Jesus is the Messiah as death was not likely to conquer the deliverer and therefore they can easily put up with it. The earlier message received by the believers was the coexistence of the divine and human nature of the Christ in one man--- Jesus. It is evident that direct allusions of both natures combined in him were not the focus of the apostles in their writings until the wind of these teaching started to blow against the group. The writer of the Johannine epistle declared, “οἱ μὴ ὁμολοσοῦντες Ἰησοῦν Χριστὸν ἐρχόμενον ἐν σαρκί – Those who do not believe Jesus Christ coming in the flesh.” This statement puts to test the authenticity of the incarnation, which is both historical and truthful in all its ramifications in the teaching received earlier about Jesus. The author used ἐρχόμενον instead of the usual ἐληλυθότα – this alone sealed the claim and has made it timeless. In the teaching of the opponent of the Johannine writer, the incarnation was a mere incident that brought about a

⁹⁹ Howard, M.I., 1984. The Epistles of John in *The New International Commentary on the New Testament*, Michigan: Eerdman press, p.52.

¹⁰⁰ Howard, M.I., 1984. The Epistles of John in *The New International Commentary on the New Testament*, Michigan: Eerdman press, p.52.

temporary or partial connection between the logos and human nature.¹⁰¹ The earlier assertion of Christ coming in the flesh where the logos was made man (Jn. 1:14) did not only support a singular authorship, but also greatly enlighten the current contemporary scholarship of the unity of belief in the community. No doubt, this appearance in the flesh cannot be assigned a *parousia* class of the glorious second coming which the community of believers await. Robert Kysar opines that the understanding of Christ person by these teachers, as revealed by the author, confirms that the deceivers are Docetic or holds a Docetic Christology.¹⁰²

What exactly could have led to the belief and various assertions? It was probably difficult for many people to understand how the divine and human natures of Jesus interrelated. The unwritten belief that the apostles propagated amongst Jews and Gentiles alike is that God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit were all strictly one being in three hypostases. This concept agitated the reasoning of the Docetists. They believe that Jesus' physical body was an illusion since Jesus is divine and he will not take up matter which is evil and a creation of a demigod. This same belief holds on the crucifixion. The entire victory of the Cross as believed by the Orthodox faithful was questioned. The Docetists believe that Jesus was eternal hence the temporary body is an illusion. This view was later received into the Qur'an "They did not kill him and they did not crucify him, but it was made to seem so to them" (Qur'an 4:157).

The above assertion led the heretics to false ethics which assumes that whatever they do with the body is of no consequence since their secret knowledge will greatly assist their spirit being in escaping from the *Soma* which is matter and sinful. The ethical indifference of this group grant a hollow hope of perfection through knowledge which does not demand any act of righteousness from those who are privileged to have it. This teaching stands opposite to the earlier catechism or manuals of faith that was handed over to the community and its

¹⁰¹ Brooke A.E., *Op Cit.* p. 175.

¹⁰² Kysar, R., 1986. *Augsburg commentary on The New Testament, I, II & III John.* Augsburg Publishing House, p. 129.

influence can be destructive hence the authors of the Johannine epistles wrote to guide his congregation against accepting this unfamiliar doctrine.

The interpretation of the person of Christ poses two major challenges to the community. The first is the doctrinal problem which is Christological; the second is the moral issues of lack of love. These fundamental issues struck at the heart of Christian belief and somehow divided the fold. The heretics affirmed that the son was created ex-nihilo. They derived the sonship of the son, the fatherhood of the Father and the essential communion between the Father and the Son. The misconception of the heretics might have proceeded from their interpretation of a portion of Isaiah 1:2, which states that God has begotten children and raised them up; but they dropped the said children rejecting God. The writer of the Johannine corpus clearly declares that Jesus is the only begotten Son of God – Jn 1:18; 3:18.

Post-apostolic Christology has been described as a response to unorthodox teachings that were infiltrating the Church. The strong allusion to Jesus' spirituality at the expense of his human nature remains a puzzle for that generation. The writings of John were a response to some of these claims. According to G.L. Bray, "There is some evidence that even in the New Testament times, there were those who believed that Jesus was a kind of angel, who had seemed to be a man on earth but who in fact was not truly human".¹⁰³

Arianism was one major task that the Church struggled with. Arius, a teacher and priest taught that "Jesus Christ was a heavenly being, intermediate between God and man, but nevertheless a creature. He insisted that if Christ were not a creature it would have been impossible for him to suffer and die on the Cross on our behalf..."¹⁰⁴ 2 Jn. Vs 7b talks about "men who do not confess Jesus Christ coming in the flesh."

For the deceivers will not acknowledge the coming of Jesus Christ in the flesh. The elder has in view the Docetic denial of Christ's humanity and passion, which meant a failure to grasp the full love of the Father and the true basis for our

¹⁰³ Bray, G.L., Ed.1985 *Christology in New Dictionary of Theology* . England: S.B. Ferguson & Co. Publisher.

¹⁰⁴ Bray, G.L., Ed.1985 *Christology in New Dictionary of Theology* . England: S.B. Ferguson & Co. Publisher.

quickening fellowship with the son. Such a one is the deceiver and the antichrist. So, 1 John 2:22 describes him as “the liar” and “the antichrist.”¹⁰⁵

Gnosticism required something ordinary philosophy could not give it, namely, a knowledge superior to that of the schools and the philosophers. This religious dimension required revelation, and this is what Gnosticism borrowed or stole from Judaism via Christianity.¹⁰⁶ Gnosticism presented itself as a supernaturally revealed, divinely guaranteed wisdom. The impart of Jesus on those who knew him or heard about him spread the conviction that absolute, ultimate truth could be known and, in fact, had been revealed through an individual human being. Jesus called himself “the way, the truth and the life” (John 14:6). The Gnostics borrowed from the Christians; using it as a starting point, they erected on it an elaborate and fanciful structure of doctrines and ideas for which there was no guarantee other than their own imagination. This, indeed, many modern writers also do, and thus deserve to be compared to Gnosticism.

The Christological tendency to eliminate the Lord’s humanity was a factor to be reckoned with from apostolic times onwards, known as Docetism. It holds that Christ’s manhood, and hence His suffering was unreal and phantasmal. Clearly, its ultimate roots were Greeco-Oriental assumptions about divine impassibility and the inherent impurity of matter. Docetism was not a simple heresy on its own; it was an attitude which infested a number of heresies, particularly Marcionism and Gnosticism.¹⁰⁷ On Christian soil, the Gnostic impulse sought to preserve several Christian ideas and terms while giving up the specific dependence of Christianity on the history of the Jews and, in the New Testament, of Jesus and his disciples. The facts of biblical history were replaced with an elaborate *gnosis* about the origin and development of divine, spiritual beings, the so-called aeons, and ultimately of the material world.

4.6 The deceitful teachings of the Gnostics (II Jn. Vs 7c)

¹⁰⁵ Bray, G.L., Ed.1985 *Christology in New Dictionary of Theology* . England: S.B. Ferguson & Co. Publisher.

¹⁰⁶ Brown, H.O.J.. 2007. *Heresies: heresy and orthodoxy in the history of the Church*. U.S.A: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc. p.47

¹⁰⁷ Brown. H.O.J., 2007 *Heresies: heresy and orthodoxy in the history of the Church*. p.49

A concise documentation of all the teachings of the Gnostics has very little source to draw from, as their works have got lost in antiquity. The Johannine account “**οτι πολλοι εξηλθον** --- because many deceivers went forth- clearly shows that some members of the community had left the fold with wrong teachings and were following the wrong way. This will account for why he earlier called on them to walk in the way of Christ that they were familiar with from the beginning. The deceivers, as described by the author, refused to acknowledge the truth and authenticity of the incarnation. The historical fact and its consequence, which the author wishes to stress in the person of Jesus from the first epistle, is fully explained in this second epistle, that is specific to a trusted hand or congregation. To deceive, in plain terms, means to subvert or obstruct the truth about a matter. The Johannine writer says the deceivers went forth. This presupposes that they were going to engage themselves in the work of deceiving the people of God who have come to faith through the ministry of those who believe the good news as earlier released to them.

The teaching of this group includes the denial of the Christological confession of the Orthodox community which the author addresses.¹⁰⁸ A saviour with a phantasmal body will not only jeopardize the incarnation belief but also the death on the cross, which is the crux of the matter. Ignatius also contended that in his letter to the Smyrneans that the fleshly state of Jesus accounted for his pains and agony on the cross, as the *sarkophoros* part of him passed through real pains on the cross. The denial of the death of Christ on the Cross has its own consequences for the faith they profess in Jesus. Howard observes that the importance of this obscure theological debate in the fact that the death of Jesus, as claimed by the Johannine community, has nothing to do with our salvation. John vividly contends that it is only in the death of Jesus that God’s love for humanity is displayed in human salvation from sin.¹⁰⁹

In the view of the Johannine writing, “God is love and those who believe in him must love one another” (1 John 4:7), but these set of erroneous teachers did

¹⁰⁸ See Schnackenburg R., *The Johannine Epistles: a Commentary*. p. 284

¹⁰⁹ See Howard M.I. *The Epistles of John*. pp. 232 – 233.

not seems to pursue love and John declared that they were just deceiving themselves (1 Jn. 1:8). The claim to perfection seems to be the major deceit being contended here. John felt that believers should admit that they sinned and God's grace has granted them the forgiveness of sin. The implication of claiming perfection is the closure of the door of forgiveness and mercy from above. If they have no sin, it will be needless for God to forgive.

Another deceit in this claim is the negation of human effort to appropriate grace with faith in the salvific work of God through his beloved son. Bultmann argues that the indicative form so used in this passage includes the imperative, for the promise of divine grace does not exclude the need of human response and efforts.¹¹⁰ These heretics seem to be Docetic in the view of many scholars, as their teachings cleverly shade Christ from whatever form of suffering. To them, Christ only seems to suffer, either because He ingeniously and miraculously substituted someone else to bear the pain, or because the occurrence on Calvary was a visual deception. This view might have propelled Saturnilus in about A.D 125 to teach that Christ is the chief of the Aeons, but was never born, without human body, without form and only apparently seen as man.¹¹¹ In further pursuit of the concept that the demiurge is the Creator of matter and not the Highest God who is ocean of love, they taught that the virgin birth account was a mere invention of those who wished to honour Mary and that the Christ of God is by no means a matter component. Tertullian, in his polemic against Marcion, later marshalled this view. They believe that Christ suddenly appeared in Capernaum in the fifteenth year of Tiberias as the appearance of Melchizedek to Abraham – Gen. 14:18-20.

The Christological doctrine propagated by these people is quite different from the depiction of the man introduced as the Saviour of the world to the Johannine community. The implication is that a distorted concept of the person of Christ was about to be registered in the heart of the people who believed in the earlier "Kerygma" that was proclaimed to them. The word *πλάνοι* – *planoi*- so used to describe the deceiver who had gone into the world to deny the coming of

¹¹⁰ Bultmann R.K. 1973 *The Johannine Epistles: a commentary on the Johannine Epistles*, Philadelphia, p. 41

¹¹¹ Irenaeus, (Adv. Haer. XXIV, 11).

Jesus Christ in the flesh. The appearance of Christ in this passage may not necessarily mean the *parousia* or his final coming, but the first advent in which Mary delivered her baby at Bethlehem (1 Jn. 4:2; Jn. 1:14). The continuation of this faulty belief constitutes the total deceit that is going to be evident in the final assault of evil in the last days. The author saw that their denial of the incarnation was also a mark of lack of love for the Saviour.¹¹²

It is clear that a detailed analysis of the deceit was not given by John in this writing; neither did he, in any way, suggest that their ways were acceptable to the well-being of the community. The teaching of this group on the nature of the historical Jesus, as revealed from the Johannine writing, strongly suggests that the divinity of the Messiah was not the major issue but his human nature. An agreement with this concept will further portray Jesus as celestial spirit that invaded our world, without necessarily participating in the events that led to human salvation.

The implications and reality of this teaching is the distinctive character of the Christian religion which will be fatally obscured. The speculations of these heretics were brilliant and thought provoking, but the author presses further for the need to possess God and accept the reality of the humanity and divinity of Jesus as the Church has received it from the very beginning. If it is accepted, as propounded, by C.H. Dodd, that “The heresy is that of denying the reality of the incarnation; denying, that is to say, that the eternal Christ, the Son of God, ever really lived a human life in history,”¹¹³ then they may have deceived the whole world from believing the entire history of human salvation.

D.A. Carson describes the world of the Johannine corpus as a Gnostic religious cosmos that was overtaken with esoteric teaching and replete with the dualism that Gnosticism typically espoused.¹¹⁴ Any believer in the resurrection of Jesus will decline the concept of Jesus initiating his betrayer by Judas Iscariot, as the Gospel of Judas supposed. The idea of “sacrificing the man that clothe him”¹¹⁵

¹¹² Brooke, A.E. *A critical and exegetical commentary on the Johannine Epistle*. p. 174.

¹¹³ See Dodd C.H.. *The Johannine Epistles*. p.149

¹¹⁴ Carson D.A. 1994. *New Bible Commentary*, 4th Edition. England: University Press, p. 49.

¹¹⁵ Carson D.A. 1994. *New Bible Commentary*, 4th Edition. England: University Press, p. 49.

is devoid of any substantive connection with first-century Palestine or historical references, and promoting a Jesus who sounds like a condescending, smart-mouthed alien rather than the Messiah who weeps over Jerusalem and goes to the cross at Golgotha, outside the city gates to give his life as a ransom for many. The diversity of opinion and methodology of communicating the salvific message of the cross of Christ was not just theologically formulated for the ordering of society. Rather, it had its historical facts that left indelible marks on the immediate environment and finally penetrated the whole universe. Therefore, the claim to private teachings that contradicts the events that were witnessed by the apostles and their successors troubled the minds of the believers. Ideas that were in direct opposition to the life and teachings of the Messiah were, therefore, considered as unorthodox and unreliable. 2 Jn. Vs 7c states that “there is the Deceiver! There is the Antichrist!”

The Gnostic movement and Christian Gnosticism present us with the first example of an effort that will be made over and over again in the history of civilization-- the effort to adopt the figure of Christ and pay him honour, while freeing oneself of all ties both to that distinctive, peculiar, and somewhat exasperating people, the Jews; and to what seems like the tawdry history of a little-known rabbi and a motley band of undistinguished disciples in a corner of the mighty Roman empire.

It is apparent that the New Testament itself makes much use of a number of concepts that were familiar elements of Hellenistic religious and philosophical thought in the first century. The idea of logos as Mediator between the Absolute and the world of multiplicity and the concept of God as light are two examples. Because of this, it was common, especially during the nineteenth century, to think that even the New Testament itself, particularly the writings of John, had borrowed heavily from Hellenistic thought and had grafted its ideas onto the simple, Semitic message of Jesus. In this era, it was common to attribute a late, post-- apostolic date to the Gospel of John, a view that has been greatly revised by modern New Testament scholarship. In the twentieth century, particularly since the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls, it has become apparent that these ideas

were not specifically Hellenistic, but were part of the Semitic intellectual and religious outlook as well. Consequently, their presence in the Gospel of John, for example, is no evidence for the claim either that John is a late, pseudonymous Gospel or that the Gospel borrows heavily from Hellenistic ideas.

What seems to be the case is that, when the Gnostic movement encountered Christianity, several of its major teachers adopted and adapted a number of basic New Testament ideas to Gnostic mentality and then sought to propagate the resulting synthesis among Christians and non-Christians alike. Because Christians naturally were interested in a fuller explanation of the mystery of the universe and existence than the simple Gospel offered, and because their own thinkers had not yet produced much in the way of a comprehensive theology, Gnosticism represented a real threat to Christianity. Orthodox writers found that they not only had to try to counter its false doctrines, but had to provide an alternative explanation for at least some of the cosmic mysteries with which it dealt-- the origin of the universe, the origin and nature of evil, and the meaning of personal salvation. In any era in which Christian thinkers fail to do this, or do an inadequate job of it, Gnosticism will almost inevitably arise in some variety of reincarnation; the most dramatic example being Christian Science, which not merely offers a “gnosis” that it holds superior to mere knowledge of the bible, but also revives a number of specifically Gnostic ideas.

Gnosticism involved (1) a complicated cosmology based on ancient Near Eastern ideas, not biblical ones; (2) Hellenistic patterns of speculative thought; and (3) the acceptance of Jesus as the Saviour of the world. It involved a speculative element, a religious-mystical element, and even a practical, ascetic element. Fundamentally, it “transformed all ethical problems into cosmological ones.” Its shift of ethical interest away from the sphere of personal conduct-- where individuals had to decide whether or not to obey God-- to the realm of the cosmological is paralleled by the tendency of many modern theologians to neglect the ethics of personal conduct and to treat all problems as political ones-- over which the individual seldom has much influence¹¹⁶.

¹¹⁶ See Carson D.A. 1994 *New Bible commentary*, p.49

In removing the accent from faith and placing it on a special kind of knowledge, Gnosticism was transforming the spirit of the Gospel as well as its content. An emphasis on knowledge as the means to salvation is inimical to the Gospel concept of receiving the kingdom like a little child (Matt. 18:3), and humility ceases to be a virtue. While many, if not all, of the Gnostic schools did stress a high level of personal behaviour, especially ascetic self-denial, the reason behind it was not a desire to obey God but the desire to keep the soul free for its spiritual quest by keeping bodily appetites under control.¹¹⁷

4.7 The Gnostics' concept of the Trinity (II Jn. Vs 9)

The Trinitarian controversy has remained a fertile research ground, as scholars delve into various concepts and phenomena to explain the unity, equality and oneness of the Godhead. While the word Trinity is not plainly used in the biblical writings, a critical study will surely bring to surface the hidden reality of the doctrine of Trinity, as the Johannine Corpus express confidence in the concept. The teaching which the believers or Johannine community had heard from the beginning was the oneness of the Father and the Son (Jn. 1:1-3).

The death of Christ Jesus on the cross was a great challenge to the reasoning faculty of the Gnostics who felt that the concept of death will surely nullify the claim to eternity and immutability of God as God can never die. The Trinitarian controversy was not fully in contest as evident in the parlance of history; however, there is no reason to doubt its genesis in the period of the Apostles. The apostles educated their generation on the link between God the Father and the Son, as the Jews were bent on rejecting Jesus as the Son of God in whom their salvation depend. While it is true that the apostles gave due regard to Jesus as the Messiah, the Johannine theology of the person of Christ and God the Father as contained in the Gospel according to John and the Epistles remained a veritable tool in the hands of early Church Fathers to combat heretics. This includes the Arian controversy, which Albarasins, Gregory and Augustine vigorously contend with. In patristic theology, much was credited to Johannine

¹¹⁷ See Carson D.A. 1994 *New Bible commentary*, pp.48-49

Corpus, as Athanasius profusely cited from Jn. 1:3; 10:30, 16:6 and other passages.

It might not be illegitimate to assert that there might have been a crisis of superiority and inferiority of the relationship between God the Father and the Son. The dogmatic defence of the Son of God in the person of Jesus Christ as being consubstantial with God the Father and therefore divine like the Father might have been a situation that John addressed in his writing indirectly as he explained the possession of the Son as that of God the Father. The continuous reference of Church Fathers to Johannine writings in the Nicea Council from 321 to 325 A.D and Constantinople Council of 381 A.D all testify to the assertion that the Trinitarian controversy might have been a hidden crisis that rocked the ship of the Church from a very early or nascent period of her existence. John, in writing his second epistle warned about the appearance of the imposters who probably claimed to have advanced in wisdom and secret knowledge more than the existing knowledge of God through Jesus, the Son.

John might deliberately be saying that the claim to a special revelation from the Father outside the Son is needless, as: “whoever continues in the teaching has both the Father and the Son” (2 Jn. 2:9). While the beginning of the verse sounds a negative note of those not believing the teaching of the Son have not the Father as they run ahead with false hope, he concludes that a positive result is accepting the Son as equal to the Father. This verse, which has a multi-dimensional implication that is calling faith to demonstration as the right relationship with God,¹¹⁸ a true doctrine of life of faith, was revealing the equality of the Father and the Son, which might have been overlooked by the false teachers. The equality of the Son to the Father as professed by the Nicene Creed, which resulted from the Nicea Council, formed a strong base here. **ὁ μένων ἐν τῇ διδαχῇ, οὗτος καὶ τὸν πατέρα καὶ τὸν υἱὸν ἔχει.** The admonition to remain in the teaching of Christ means to remain in God. There is a presupposition that those who run ahead with various claims of revelations from God the Father see those of the Johannine community still living and holding to the teachings of Jesus as being infants or in elementary stage. John

¹¹⁸ See Carson D.A. 1994 *New Bible commentary*, pp.48-49

challenged them that their claims were unfounded, as there could be no break between the Father and the Son. John was actually saving his congregation from being misguided, as Paul admonished Timothy in 1 Tim. 3 and gave a doctrinal foundation of the equality of the Son of the Father in faith and practice (Titus 2:1).

As C.D. Dodd rightly observes, “the heretics no doubt spoke of their doctrine with some pride as advanced”.¹¹⁹ He notes that the brilliant ideas may lack fellowship as required and points out that “the writer has incautiously expressed himself in terms which might seem to stigmatize any kind of advance as disloyalty to the faith, and so to condemn Christian theology to lasting sterility”.¹²⁰ John should be understood as saying that any advance that refuses to recognize the supremacy of the life and teaching of Jesus as the final revelation of God’s salvific plan (Heb. 1:1), thereby seeing Jesus as inferior to the Father, has lost focus and that the equality of the Son to the Father as being divine is not negotiable as “any one who has the Son already has the Father with him. One agrees with Howard that, “it is impossible to separate the Father from the Son in Christian experience”.¹²¹ First, it is established that the Son is the only way to the Father (Jn. 14:6, 1 Jn. 2:22). We here contend that the advancement of the heretics might be more than just introducing a new way of teaching. It might have included a claim to secret revelations, which the Johannine community are considered ignorant of. Hence, the writer expressly declares that those who have the Son has the Father also and both are one. If they be truly one, then they misunderstood the relationship and fellowship which existed between the Father and the Son.

2 Jn. Vs 9 states that, if anyone is so "progressive" that he does not remain rooted in the teaching of Christ, he likewise does not possess God. Conversely, anyone who remains rooted in the teaching possesses both the Father and the Son.

Gnosticism clashed with biblical Christianity at many points, but two deserve special mention: the doctrine of Creation and the doctrine of Christ. Gnosticism totally denied Creation. In the first place, the supreme Deity, as

¹¹⁹ Dodd C.H. “*The Johannine Epistles*”. p. 149.

¹²⁰ See Dodd C.H. “*The Johannine Epistle*.” p. 150.

¹²¹ See Howard M.I. “*The Epistles of John*, p. 73.

Gnosticism conceived it, was altogether too exalted to be capable of having anything to do with base matter; in consequence, an act of creation as such was impossible. The Bible also sees the world God has created as radically different from him. This difference, however, is not primarily that the world is evil while God is good; in fact, biblical doctrine teaches that the world was created *good*, although it has been corrupted by the Fall of Man. For biblical thought, the world is radically distinct from God because he is the creator; it is his creation. Gnosticism not only opposed the idea that God could have been involved in an act of creating a material world, but it also denied that the material world is meaningful in itself. There is no creation order, as Christian theology teaches. The material world, if not totally illusory, is meaningless, and no true wisdom can be gleaned by studying it. Presumably, if Gnosticism had triumphed, it could not have produced experimental natural science as Christianity did, for the simple reason that it looked on the material world as meaningless.

While Gnosticism repudiated creation, it accepted Christ, although it gave him a drastically different interpretation from that of developing orthodox theology. Christianity might conceivably have accepted a Gnostic Christology, for the Christ of orthodoxy also has a cosmic dimension. If it had done so, it would have lost its roots in history, for the Christ of Gnosticism was not the real, human Jesus of Nazareth and did not die under Pontius Pilate.¹²²

4.8 Deviation from the Apostolic teaching (II Jn. Vs 10a)

The teaching of the apostles were basically centred on what they heard from the beginning and, perhaps witnessed during the ministry of Jesus (1 Jn. 1:1; Lk. 24:48; Jn. 1:14). It is important to state that the teachings of the apostles were not different from the Kingdom of God which calls for repentance from old sins which Jesus proclaimed (Mt. 4:17; Acts 3:19). The entire message of the apostles was rooted in the life and teaching of Jesus Christ. The Coming (*ἔρχεται πρὸς ὑμᾶς*) of these itinerant evangelists with their message which contradicted the

¹²² See Howard M.I. *The Epistles of John*. p.50

message of the apostles and that of Jesus Christ as proclaimed by the apostles is evident from the ninth verse of this letter, “Any one who runs ahead and does not continue in the teachings of Christ does not have God...” The ‘advance’ message preached by these heretics is not specified in the letter. However, it could be deduced from the writings of John that these itinerant preachers were claiming autonomous fellowship with the Father without any recourse to Jesus Christ who remain the way, the truth and the life; no one comes to the Father except through Him – Jn. 14:6. Howard avers that:

People who reject the truth about the Christ no longer have God. No doubt they claimed that they did have God, but the elder’s point is that anybody who fails to have a proper understanding of Jesus Christ cannot have a true relationship with God.¹²³

The apostles taught that the hope for final deliverance by the Messiah as prophesied by the ancient prophets was fulfilled in the person of Jesus of Nazareth who was crucified by them (Acts 3:17-23). The deviation of these heretics from the orthodox teaching which built faith on Jesus did not only have the negative effect of causing disunity within the fold, but it also endangered the salvation of its adherents who were in the community. Heb. 6:4 says, “for those who do not believe were condemned already and those who believed and later fell away from the faith may face worse situations”. The restoration to faith of those who deviated from the original message of salvation in Jesus alone is difficult because they were crucifying the Son of God a second time and putting Jesus to public disgrace.

There is a link between this verse and the one preceding it. There has been an existing teaching in which the disciples were to remain **μένων ἐν τῇ διδασκῆ**. It is difficult to believe that the teaching being referred to by the author above in II Jn 2:9 is that which were done by the apostles alone. The references to the Father and the Son were pointers to the fellowship that one can enter into through the Son in the presence of the Father. In Jn. 18:19, the High Priest declared that Jesus actually had his teaching, “**Ὁ οὖν ἀρχιερεὺς ἠρώτησεν τὸν Ἰησοῦν περὶ τῶν**

¹²³ See Howard M.I. *The Epistles of John*. p.73.

μαθητῶν αὐτοῦ καὶ περὶ τῆς διδασχῆς αὐτοῦ.” The above reference cannot be jettisoned as a figment of imagination, as Jesus has earlier said in Jn. 7:16 “...ἡ ἐμὴ διδασχῆ οὐκ ἔστιν ἐμὴ ἀλλὰ τοῦ πέμψαντός με. His teaching were actually of the one that sent him. Jesus’ use of the nominative singular feminine of διδασχῆ Jn. 18:19 explain the strong emphasis of the content of the apostolic teaching which was most likely to be built on the teachings of Jesus which they had heard from the beginning (1 Jn. 1:1). The διδασχῆς, which is a genitive singular feminine, refers to the teaching of Jesus which the apostles preached amongst the people. While there existed the understanding that John was trying to encourage his hearer on the faith they had confessed in the person of Jesus, there is every reason to believe that salvage wolves were all around the flock and they were trying to devour them with strange teachings which were incompatible with the earlier teachings that they were used to and the faith they cherished. This faith is built on Jesus Christ as the only way and sure means of fellowship with the Father.

The Johannine Epistles open an unrivalled window unto at least one part of the New Testament Church that was confronted with a message that was deficient of the earlier Christology which the apostles upheld. It should not be considered a speculative ideology to suggest that the Johannine community was threatened with the wind of strange teaching that was gaining ground amongst the flock of Christ in some areas which the writer of the Johannine epistle wish to guide against. It is obvious that, “The false doctrines which were going about were undermining the message of salvation in Jesus Christ which is the main foundations of the Christian life”.¹²⁴ Those who went about with the message were considered missionaries and they enjoyed the hospitality of the brethren. These groups of person might have gone out as after the pattern laid out in Mk. 16:15. The appeal made by these persons might have been receiving acceptance in some quarters. This mission seemed successful, as suggested in I Jn. 4:5, hence the need to warn believers against their activities and give them any form of

¹²⁴ See Dodd C.H., *The Johannine Epistle*, p. 146.

assistance. The identification of these groups was a herculean task as all professed to be called by God into the work of ministry in the Church of God.

One of the surest parameters for the community to use in assessing their authenticity is the content of their message. No definite form of teaching is pinned down as their whole message. However, John set standards for weighing the teachings. The ambiguity in describing the teaching makes it difficult to say that they were totally Gnostics or particularly Docetists as many scholars have upheld. While the message from the earlier verses revealed that the heresy is that of denying the reality of the incarnation. In other words, the eternal Christ was never human and, therefore, the historical Jesus was only existing in that capacity in the minds of the apostles. This was news, as it tended to undermine the death and resurrection of Jesus, which was a major doctrinal issue at stake between the Jews and the Christians of that age. Furthermore, John asserts that they had a teaching which was contrary to that of the Lord Jesus himself, which the apostles taught from the time of Jesus to that of their age.

The warning in this verse may not necessarily mean that these groups of persons might not have visited but the writer had to urgently put a formula in place to check the influx of freelance evangelist who might take advantage of the brethren's hospitality to spread erroneous impressions amongst the people. The writer knew that the recipients of this letter were generous and would receive all those who came in the name of the Lord. The use of the word **εἰ τις ἔρχεται** clarifies the supposed confusion that the author was refusing hospitality to all strangers, "if any one," as seen above, is a condition. Anybody who come with the unfounded doctrine of higher knowledge, which did not correspond with the early teachings as handed down by the Lord Jesus and His apostles were only posers that must be avoided.

The Johannine writings suggest that love should be total and unconditional. How can we reconcile the paradox that is manifesting in this verse of the epistle? Was it a later insertion to combat a group of teachers whose doctrine and practices were unwholesome to existing norms? First, the love of God for the world made Him to send His begotten Son (Jn. 3:16), yet those who

did not believe in Him are condemned already (Jn. 3:17). The love which the Johannine corpus x-rays and canvases does not open the gates for falsehood. The writer understood that the flock were in danger of being misled and the only way out was for him to guide himself and the flock which God committed to him from the devouring wolves (Acts 2:28-32), who might not spare the flock.

The deviations from the teaching of Christ, which the apostles had expanded upon, were never an issue for compromise. The various persecutions the Church was passing through in early days were bearable, as they came from outside the fold. Now that these itinerant evangelists were coming with an “advanced” experience message which attached some secret knowledge that created stratification among them, there was great danger. Paul had earlier preached the equality of brethren in the faith, “No Jew nor Gentile”. God gave every blessing to all who believed. The appearance of these men with a new “message” that proceeded from an advanced concept (II Jn. vs. 9) negated the grace of salvation and Jesus’ sacrificial death. Those who ran ahead with the corrupted image of the Messiah as not being human but divine only put to jeopardy the entire message of the Cross. Similarly, those who claimed that he was human and only received adoption as the Son of God at His baptism surely denied his divinity and virgin birth.

This deviation from the known teaching, to which the teachers were witnesses, would confuse the minds of the hearers who would be at a crossroads on which of the claims was authentic. This would make the disciples to lose what they had been labouring for from the beginning (II Jn. vs. 8).

Whether it was to build confidence in themselves as spiritual people or to actually prove that the disciples of Christ did not know the secrets of their master is not stated in the letter. However, it could be deduced that the apostle or writer of these letters was suspicious of a strange teaching that might likely affect the congregation that had been known to him for some time. He took the responsibility of explaining to the people to be careful with whatever they heard as, some could come with another gospel, as Paul would say in confronting a similar group that had troubled the Galatians’ church (Gal. 1:6). The **εἰς ἕτερον**

εὐαγγέλιον of Paul could be the teaching that was running round the globe and the writer of the Johannine Epistles wanted to safeguard the community against such error. We must not lose sight of the nature of organisation that governed the early Church and how brotherly love could be abused. 2 Jn. Vs 10a states that, “if anyone comes to you, and did not bring this teaching, do not receive him into your home or greet him.”

Gnosticism is essentially a religious philosophy; what is most important is to understand the relationships of the deity, the aeons, the world, and ourselves. It has a cosmic vision extending endlessly back before history. Harold argues that Irenaeus, the Christian apologist, was not indifferent to the cosmic implications of Christian faith, but his interest centred on the course of events in the real history of this world: God’s dealing with man is conditioned not by cosmic processes involving the aeons of the pleroma, but by what man himself does in his human history.¹²⁵ According to Irenaeus, man was created good, and became corrupted by the voluntary act of sinning, that is, disobeying God. Man as created is both free and mortal: the soul is an immortal substance but lacks form unless it is embodied. He sees the human race as united in Adam, the first man; through the sin of Adam, the whole human race has become sinful and prey of death.¹²⁶

Irenaeus is probably best known to us for his attacks on Gnosticism, a mortal blow to that curious amalgam of religion and philosophy (although as we shall see, the Gnostic impulse emerges time and time again in the history of Christian thought). It was his opposition to Gnosticism that created in Irenaeus the distinctive combination of biblical authority and traditional interpretation and practical piety that was the hallmark of the Early church. The apostolic tradition, according to Irenaeus, led us back to the presentation of those who wrote the Scriptures, the Apostles, whose testimony is totally free of all untruths.

It is against this background of his assault on Gnosticism, his reliance on tradition, and the dominant place he assigned to Scripture that we should examine the Christology of Irenaeus. He had a well-developed understanding of the deity of

¹²⁵ See Dodd C.H., *The Johannine Epistle*, p.79

¹²⁶ See Dodd C.H., *The Johannine Epistle*, p.79

Christ superimposed on the less fully articulated understanding of God. Gnostics, such as Valentinus, proceeded from what they thought was a detailed and reliable *gnosis* of the “unknown God” (for which self-contradictory claims; Irenaeus did not fail to ridicule them). This *gnosis* explained the innermost life of the deity, the *pleroma*, and the *aeons* before the world began. It then produced a Christologically defective, docetic view of the man who had lived among men and women as the Messiah. It claimed to know all about divine reality; but Gnosticism produced a doctrine of Christ that failed to deal with its reality, the fact that he really was born, suffered, died, and arose from the dead to life again as a man, not a disembodied spirit or Docetic phantom.¹²⁷

Irenaeus did not claim to know the inner nature of the godhead: instead, he dealt with the testimony of Scripture and the church concerning the person and work of Christ, and produced an impressive, consistent, believable Christology; one that stands up well against the most critical questioning of later ages. Where Irenaeus was not comprehensive was in the doctrine of God: his presentation of the Trinity remains rudimentary. The Gnostics trivialized Christ by comparison with their fantastic *pleroma* of *aeons*. Irenaeus fully recognized him as a real man and, at the same time, confessed him to be God. If monotheism was to be preserved. This obviously calls for an explanation of how Christ can be God and at the same time distinct from the Father, without implying two Gods. The full Christology of Irenaeus required the doctrine of the Trinity as the only alternative to ditheism or polytheism.

According to Rudolf, because the salvation of his readers was in danger (v.8), the elder now delivered a series of concrete instructions that were probably the reason for writing the letters. He was afraid that the itinerant heretical teachers might turn up and receive an unsuspecting welcome. By “anyone who comes,” he therefore meant not just ordinary travellers but, as the continuation of the letter shows, people who championed the “lie” (cf. 2 Cor. 11: 4). Ignatius of Antioch had similar reports of itinerant preachers and called them bad names (Ignatius, *Eph.* 7.1; 8.1; 9.1; *Smyrn.* 4.1; 5.1; 7.2). He too issued sharp warning to his flock,

¹²⁷ Dodd See C.H., *The Johannine Epistle*, p.81

similar to those in 2 John (cf. also Jude 23). Later the precautions multiplied concerning such itinerant brethren. Everywhere, the ancient church insisted on strict avoidance of heretical teachers. The refusal of hospitality is frequently urged upon the churches. This is especially striking in view of the high regard for hospitality in the early church.

But the enemies of the faith are more insidious than personal opponents. That is why the need for forgiveness (Matt. 5:23-25) and love of the enemy (Matt. 5:44-48) must not be undermined. Faced by refusal to accept the good news of the kingdom of God, Jesus ordered his disciples to break off fellowship (Matt. 10:14; Luke 10:10f.). Just as Paul called down destruction upon those who destroy God's temple, that is, the Christian Church (1Cor. 3:17); just as the author of Jude brought all his guns to bear against the heretical teachers of his time, so too did the elder show his combative side, which sprang from his responsibility for his churches.

The recipients should not even greet the heretics. In Jewish eyes, a greeting is something more than a mere formality. The greeting of peace is equivalent to a blessing (cf. Jn. 10:13, Luke 10:6). The Greek greeting (*chairein*) is by comparison colourless. That is why the author feels obliged to give his Greek readers a reason for the prohibition. People enter into fellowship with those they greet. They associate themselves with their evil deeds. They share responsibility for their aberrations (cf. 1 Tim. 5:22). For Christians to greet their enemies would seem not only to be consenting to their previous malefactions, but also to be sanctioning their future misdeeds. These "evil deeds" included not only immoral acts in general (John 3:19) but specifically the spreading of lies directed against Christ. In John 8:41, Jesus rebuked his unbelieving adversaries for doing their "father's" that is, the devils' desires. This radical view, which sees everything in black and white, is retained in 1 John 3:8, 10. The elder made no clear-cut decision between moral and religious conduct. He was quite certain that their deeds were evil. There is every excuse for this judgment; for we know from 1 John that heresy combines both Christological and moral "lies." This prohibition of greeting is a consequence and practical application of that basic

separation from sin arising from the community's sense of faith. It must not, however, be detached from its historical context and applied indiscriminately to entirely different situations.¹²⁸

4.9 Division of the fold by Gnostic teachers (II Jn. Vs 10b)

The multi-dimensional problem that faced the early Church raged for quite a time. We could deduce that the various claims and movements, whether charismatic or evangelical, all left behind a scar that seemed indelible on the nascent church. The Gnostic teachers who were being expected to evade the congregation that received the Second Epistle of John might have left the Church as at the time of writing First John.¹²⁹ This concept could only be accepted if both epistles were written to the same Church. Although many scholars are of the view that the second letter of John was written to an individual, it is comfortable to assert that the content and conclusion are audible enough to believe that it was an allegory and personification of the community (II Jn. Vs. 4).

The Church has been engulfed in crisis owing to the activities of the false teachers whom John struggled to stop as they were just appearing. These groups of teachers seemed to be advocating an understanding or interpretation of Christianity that is different from the earlier views that were propagated by John and his colleagues in the faith.¹³⁰ Our postulation is based on the fact that the Johannine corpus is a complete work of one author that addressed different situations and congregations with individuals on matters of faith. The situation that provoked the warning to steer clear from false teachers seemed to have worsened and a schismatic group might have seceded from the Church that the writer addressed (1 Jn. 4:1-6). Those who seceded might be going about spreading the false teaching or establishing their own congregations, but we are told nothing about their full activities. John only stated that they had left the fold, and this might have led to doubts in the minds of the members and caused uncertainty in them whether their stand and viewpoint was authentic or not.

¹²⁸ Cf. Schnackenburg R. pp.287-288

¹²⁹ See Howard M.I., *The Epistle of John*, p. 10.

¹³⁰ See Howard M.I., *The Epistle of John*, p. 14

The congregations of the early Church might not have been fully organised under leadership of specific hierarchy as it is today and it seems clear that believers were well disposed to hospitality of guest preachers who were roving evangelists, running with the gospel message to convert heathen nations and also strengthen the faith. The expectation of the second advent of the Messiah, that is the *Parousia*, might have filled the Church (I Jn. 2:18) and the experiences of the Church were both positive and negative. The congregation had been together and probably received good news from other Christian congregations until a set of people broke away from them. C.H. Dodd rightly asserts that, “The false teachers, we learn, had been members of the Church, and had withdrawn from it...”¹³¹

“ἐξ ἡμῶν ἐξῆλθαν, from us they went out.” The ἐξῆλθαν reveals that they had been members of this congregation or community of believers. They all congregated together and had drawn their originality from the central body of the believers before they left. They were never sanctioned or driven away from the community. Rather, they left on their own volition; and thenceforth, they ceased to belong to the group to which they were formerly known as brethren.¹³² John’s account did not fully explain why they left the community in plain terms, but it is inferable that there had been a line of argument that some of these false teachers did not believe that Jesus came in the flesh (1 Jn. 2:18-24) and their leaving had divided the group. The leaving here is not the same as coming out of slavery as in the exodus from Egypt; but it was a breaking away from the main fold to which they once belonged.

Howard asserts that, “This people have gone out of their midst. This can only mean that they had once been members or adherents of the Church, but had now departed from it, presumably to set up their own group”.¹³³ The fact that John said these persons were with them yet were not, puts off the true fellowship and calls for a critical examination of our congregation. Is it possible for people to belong to an organization yet are not truly members of the same? Can John’s

¹³¹ Cf. Dodd C.H., *The Johannine Epistles*, p. 52.

¹³² See Brooke A., *A critical and exegetical commentary in the Johannine Epistles*, p. 53

¹³³ Cf. Howard M.I., *The Epistles of John*, p. 151

assertion explain the later understanding of the visible and invisible Church where empirical figure may not correspond with heavenly records? Bultmann argues that, “the statement permits recognition of the distinction between the empirical and the true congregation; false members are therefore to be found in the empirical congregation. The sentence is thus also an admonition to critical examination and certainly to self-examination as well”.¹³⁴

The movement out of the Church calls for concern. Was their exodus based on administrative problem? John has not said so. Rather, from the very beginning of the epistle, he stresses that they denied the sonship of Jesus Christ to the Father. This denial might have proceeded from their conception of the humanity of Christ or his divinity and further complicated the death of the Messiah on the cross, which ordinarily defied their understanding of the immortality of God. Their external membership notwithstanding, *ἀλλά* has not fully conferred citizenship of the community on them. John’s strong belief might have stemmed from the relationship of the slave and the true son of a family. The slave may not remain in the family forever, but the son does. There is the use of *μεινήμενοι* “they would have remained”. Remaining in this sense of usage by John sounds special. The pluperfect active indicative third person plural used by the author is to further assert that they were not true disciples, since they left the community with strange belief that were incompatible with what was being propagated from the beginning. It will be right to state that the issue at stake was not just superiority or inferiority complexes of the personality holding different opinions of their position as Church heads. The issue that John is dealing with is that of the person of Christ which is the pivot on which the Church stood.

As these persons or group severed relationship with the community, they were likely regrouping in their own way and this had divided the community which once lived as one. This division cannot be associated to growth as seen in some congregations where the need to establish a new branch can make some people relocate to a new congregation. It was a total parting of ways with

¹³⁴ Bultmann R.K. 1973 *The Johannine epistles: a Commentary on the Johannine Epistles*, Philadelphia, p. 37

doctrinal differences, which came with penalty of being cut off from the fold as John reveals. 2Jn. vs 10b states that “who does not bring this teaching”

“The antichrists were not of us... went out, that it might be plain that they all are not of us.” The antichrists once were Christ’s; but they went out. The greatest danger to Christianity often lies not in its declared enemies but in its false friends. Why do Christians “go out”? Is it because of petty jealousies in church life; because of bitter doctrinal differences or because of weariness or boredom in living the Christian life? More often, Christians “go out” because they have never really grasped the truth and power of the life Christ can bring men to live. To say, as some people had said, that communism and its leaders were the idea and the embodiment of the antichrist is a distorted religious judgments and an oversimplified historical judgment.

It is noteworthy that, while some believed, others denied Christ-- but while there are many antichrists and liars (II Jn. vs. 8), the antichrist, the liar, is he who denies that Jesus is the Christ, he who denies the Father and the Son. No one who denies the Son has the Father. He who confesses the Son has the Father also. These words express the great Christological thesis of the epistles-- everything depends on whether men believe in Jesus Christ. On some issues, there can be honest difference in opinion; but on the fundamental issue, the full meaning of Jesus as the Christ and as the Son of God (also as the Saviour of the world (vs. 2; 4: 10, 14) and our Advocate (vs. 1), there can be no compromise. The choice is between nothing less than truth or falsehood, and it determines man’s entire “interpretation of life and of the world”

The antichrist signifies “one who opposes Christ by assuming the guise of Christ.” Antichrists employ the name and use the means of religion to propagate the antithesis of religion. The faith is ever imperilled by those who undermine Christian truths with corruption of Christian dogmas. The fact that the schismatic antichrists went out is a proof that nominal membership in the church is insufficient to preserve men in the truth. The epitaph *they went out* describes many modern Christians whose faith has lapsed because their original commitment was exacted too cheaply and whose original loyalties were

established too weakly. One can compare the costly demand Jesus imposed on those who would follow him with the easy going, conventional way many churches receive people into membership. Attention and energy might be better directed toward establishing and confirming believers in the faith than spending on movements of mass evangelism. Earnestness of commitment is more important than numerical church membership.

But schism is not always evil. Secession can be part of the divine purpose of “making plain” (vs. 19) who genuinely constitutes the church. The so –called religious tolerance ceases to be a virtue when it sacrifices solidarity in the truth for nominal fellowship. There is a legitimate conservatism that must hold to the truth which is “from the beginning,” that has no alternative but to expose the error of those who, in the name of a false emancipation or false progress, deny the truth. It is important to note that the antichrists were not irreligious atheists; they were theists, but not Christians.

Christology is the heart of theology, and Christian thought is faithful to the gospel only when it first addresses itself to the ancient question: “but who do you say I am? (Matt. 16:15). “The Christological debates of nineteen centuries are a monument to the uniqueness of him whom Christians know as the Incarnate Son of God.” Significantly, the dominant doctrine in the greatest of all Christian confessions, the Nicene Creed of A.D 325, is the Incarnation. The confessional formula, “Jesus is the Christ,” is a verbal epitome of the doctrine of the Incarnation and, in answer to the Docetists, signifies the unity of the divine Christ with the human Jesus.

4.10 The consequences of the heretical teachings upon the community

In this section, we shall explore the nature of and the basic characteristics of the Johannine community; the situation of the church in the Johannine epistles and then the consequences of heretical teachings on the community.

To unravel the nature of the Johannine community from the story of Jesus’ ministry in the fourth Gospel, J.L. Martyn came up with a method of investigation by using the dialogues between Jesus and “the Jews” to determine the relationship

between the Johannine community and the synagogue.¹³⁵ Raymond Brown argues that the Johannine community originated among the Jews who believed that Jesus had fulfilled a well-known Jewish expectation of a messiah or of a prophet like Moses. It is clearly spelt out in John 1:35-50 where the first disciples were Jews who accepted Jesus under titles known to us from Old Testament scripture like Christ that is Greek word for “messiah”, Saviour, Son of God, Son of Man, Son of David and so on.¹³⁶

In a little while, within the Johannine community there developed a higher Christology that went beyond Jewish expectations by describing Jesus as pre-existent divine saviour who had lived with God in Heaven before he became man.¹³⁷ This higher Christology was clearly exemplified in John 4, where there is a description of new converts in Samaria who recognized Jesus as the saviour of the world. In Jn 5:18 and Jn 8:48, there are accusations that Jesus is making himself equal to God. This high Christology led to friction between the Johannine community and the synagogue and ultimately to its expulsion (Jn. 9:22; Jn. 10:31-33; Jn. 16:2). And so we find a community increasingly conformed to its own image of Jesus, for he too had been rejected by “his own” (Jn. 1:11). This estranged community, like Jesus, found itself in the world but not of it (Jn. 17:16).

Martyn argues at the end of his study of pre-gospel history that there were at least four groups in the Johannine religious purview,¹³⁸ namely: (1) the synagogue of “the Jews,” (2) Crypto-Christians (Christian Jews) within the synagogue, (3) Various communities of Jewish Christians who had been expelled from the synagogue, and (4) the Johannine community of Jewish Christians, in particular. He observes that the situation before the gospel was written was more

¹³⁵ Martyn, J.L., *history and theology in the Fourth Gospel*. New York: Harper & Row, 1968, as cited by Raymond Brown “Other sheep not of this Fold”: The Johannine Perspective on Christian diversity in the late first century *Journal of Biblical Literature*, Vol. 97, No. 1 (Mar., 1978) pp.5-22

¹³⁶ Martyn, J.L., *History and theology in the fourth Gospel*. New York: Harper & Row, 1968, as cited by Raymond Brown “Other sheep not of this fold”: The Johannine Perspective on Christian Diversity in the Late First Century *Journal of Biblical Literature*, Vol. 97, No. 1 (Mar., 1978) pp.5-22.

¹³⁷ Raymond B. 1978“Other Sheep not of this fold”: The Johannine Perspective on Christian Diversity in the late first century: *Journal of Biblical Literature*, Vol. 97, No. 1 (March), p.7

¹³⁸ Raymond B. 1978“Other sheep not of this fold”: the Johannine perspective on Christian diversity in the late first century” *Journal of Biblical Literature*, Vol. 97, No. 1 (March), p.8

complicated and that, at the end of the century, if we include the witness of the Johannine Epistles, we can detect no less than six groups, as analysed below:¹³⁹

1. **THE JEWS:** Those within the synagogues who did not believe in Jesus and had decided that anybody who acknowledged Jesus as Messiah would be put out of the synagogue. The main points in their dispute with the Johannine Christians in the group involved: (a) claims about the oneness of Jesus with the Father-- the Johannine Jesus “was speaking of God as his own Father, thus making himself God’s equal,” (b) claims that understanding Jesus as God’s presence on earth deprived the temple and the Jewish feasts of their significance. They exposed the Johannine Christians to death by persecution and thought that thus they were serving God.
2. **THE CRYPTO-CHRISTIANS:** Christian Jews who had remained within the synagogues by refusing to admit publicly that they believed in Jesus. “They preferred by far the praise of men to the glory of God.” Presumably, they thought they could retain their private faith in Jesus without breaking from their Jewish heritage. But in the eyes of the Johannine Christians in the group, they preferred to be known as disciples of Moses rather than disciples of Jesus. For practical purposes they could be thought of along with the Jews in the first group above.
3. **THE JEWISH CHRISTIANS:** Christians who had left the synagogues but whose faith in Jesus was inadequate by Johannine standards. They might have regarded themselves as heirs to a kind of Christianity which had existed at Jerusalem under James the brother of the Lord. Presumably, their low Christology based on miraculous signs was pathway between that of groups 2 and 4. They did not accept Jesus’ divinity. They did not understand the Eucharist as the true flesh and blood of Jesus.
4. **SECESSIONIST JOHANNINE CHRISTIANS:** following the high Christology of the Johannine corpus to what they considered its logical

¹³⁹ I am indebted to Raymond Brown on the analysis of the six groups in Johannine community highlighted on this work. Cf., Raymond Brown 1978“Other sheep not of this fold”: The Johannine Perspective on Christian Diversity in the late first century “ *Journal of Biblical Literature*, Vol. 97, No. 1 (March)

conclusion, they thought that the one who had come down from heaven and did not belong to this world was not fully human. It was of no salvific import that he had truly “come in the flesh” and had really died. In turn, they relativized the importance of earthly life for Christians and decisiveness of moral behaviour. They interpreted the freedom brought by Jesus as freedom from the guilt of sin. In a dispute with members of other groups, they had withdrawn and broken *koinonia*, leaving them open to the charge of not loving the brethren. They defended their views as the work of the Holy Spirit.

5. THE JOHANNINE CHRISTIANS: Although now of mixed Jewish and Gentile stock, in earlier history, they originated among various types of Jewish converts (perhaps followers of John the Baptist mixed anti-temple Jewish Christians who had evangelized Samaria). In conflict with “the Jews” in the first group, they had developed very high Christology. Not only had they been separated from the synagogues over the charge that they were ditheists, but also they had no *koinonia* with Jewish Christians of low Christology in groups 2 and 3. They retained *koinonia* with Christians who confessed Jesus as Son of God in group 4, although, for them, true unity could be based only on Christology of the pre-existence of Jesus and his oneness with the Father. The priority they placed on unity with Jesus relativized for them the importance of church office and structure; and sacraments were seen as continuations of the actions of Jesus.
6. CHRISTIANS OF APOSTOLIC CHURCHES: Quite separate from the synagogues were mixed communities of Jews and Gentiles who regarded themselves as heirs of the Christianity of Peter and the twelve. Theirs was moderately high Christology, confessing Jesus as the Messiah born at Bethlehem of Davidic descent and thus Son of God from conception, but without a clear insight into his coming from above in terms of pre-existence before creation. In their ecclesiology Jesus may have been seen

as the founding father and institutor of the sacraments; but the church now has a life of its own with pastors who carry on apostolic teaching and care.

Having identified the characteristics and uniqueness of the Johannine Community, we shall critically examine the situation of the Church in the Johannine Epistles.

4.10.1 The situation of the Church in the Johannine Epistles

Ruth B. Edwards¹⁴⁰ asserts that John was especially valued in antiquity for its 'orthodox' Christology. Yet curiously, it contains no systematic exposition of doctrine: doctrinal beliefs are assumed rather than argued. The author deals with them as they arise, in no discernible order, but as suits his rhetorical purpose. Many scholars have seen this purpose as polemical-- to attack false teachers or dissidents. R.A Whitacre sees 1 John as continuing, at a different level, a polemical stance found already in the Gospel.¹⁴¹ P. Bonnard goes so far as to call all three Johannines 'fundamentally polemical from beginning to end'.¹⁴² Numerous attempts have been made to identify the 'opponents' in question: charismatics, Jews, Cerinthians, Docetists and Gnostics have all been suggested. Scholars have assiduously sought to delineate their errant ethics and Christology by careful analysis of the text; some have postulated more than one group of adversaries. Elaborated hypotheses have been put forward about the history of the Johannine community and the fate of the various groups.

First John (2:19) speaks of a group that had withdrawn from the community: "It was from our ranks that they went out." Thus, the withdrawal of some members from the community divided the community into two groups, that is, the Johannine Christians and the Secessionist Johannine Christians. The fundamental problem of the Church in the Johannine Epistles was the Christological question.

¹⁴⁰ Edwards R.B. 1996, *The Johannine Epistle: New Testament guides*. England: Sheffield Academic Press,p.57

¹⁴¹ Whitacre R.A. 1982 *Johannine Polemic* Chico: Scholars press as cited by Ruth Edward in *The Johannine Epistle: New Testament guides* p.57

¹⁴² Bonnard P. 1983 *Les Epitre Johanniques*. Geneva: Labor et Fides, p.14

The Christology of these Secessionists seems to have been so high that it did not matter for them that Jesus was the Christ that came in the flesh (1 John 4:2). A plausible case can be made, that these Secessionists were not formal Docetists but adherents of Johannine theology who had carried out some aspects of the high Christology of the Fourth Gospel to the highest degree.¹⁴³ If Jesus was not of this world (John 17:16), they might argue, what significance did his earthly actions, including his death,¹⁴⁴ really have? The only important reality would be that the pre-existent Word of God had come into the world to enlighten his own who were not of the flesh but begotten from above (John 3:3-7); like Jesus, they were not of this world (17:16) but were destined to join him in the other worldly mansions he was preparing for them (14:2-3). Presumably, they emphasized that eternal life consisted in knowing the one whom God had sent (17:3), but not in being cleansed by his blood (1 John 1:7). The indifference to sin ascribed to the Secessionists (1 John 1:18, 10) is explicable as a derivative from their high Christology.

From our analyses above, one can identify in the First Epistle the existence of two groups of Johannine Christians, each drawing on the kind of Johannine theology known to us in the Johannine corpus, but interpreting it very differently. Opposed as he is to the Secessionist Christology and ethics, the author of 1 John still cannot silence or demolish his opponents by appealing to the authority of a church teaching office, as would have been the case in Pastorals. True to Johannine traditions, he makes appeal to a teaching Spirit abiding in the Christian through anointing by Christ, a principle that relativizes all human teachers (1 John 2:20, 27). If the Secessionists replied that what they taught flowed from an anointing with the Spirit, the author of the epistle is not free to reject that idea in principle but must demand a testing of the spirit (4:2). In other words, Johannine ecclesiology did not supply an authoritarian solution to such a division within the community.

¹⁴³ Raymond B. "Other Sheep Not of This Fold": The Johannine Perspective on Christian Diversity in the Late First Century *Journal of Biblical Literature*, Vol. 97, No. 1 (Mar., 1978), p.21

¹⁴⁴ Raymond B. "Other Sheep Not of This Fold": The Johannine Perspective on Christian Diversity in the Late First Century *Journal of Biblical Literature*, Vol. 97, No. 1 (Mar., 1978), p.21

It was in the Secessionists, perhaps the larger group, that the sectarian tendencies of the Johannine tradition came to fruition. Ultimately, they became a Gnostic sect, breaking *koinonia* with the Apostolic Churches (or having it broken); for it was probably their extremely high Christology and spirit-dominated ecclesiology, presented as an interpretation of the Fourth Gospel, which made that gospel so readily acceptable to second-century Gnostics.¹⁴⁵

A smaller group of Johannine Christians, represented by the author of the First Epistle, seems to have kept *koinonia* with the Christians of the Apostolic Churches by sufficiently correcting Secessionist (mis)interpretations of the gospel, so that other Christians saw no contradiction between its pre-existence Christology and soteriology based on Jesus' ministry and death. It is argued that it was through this branch of Johannine Christians that the gospel found acceptance among second-century traditionalists, such as Irenaeus. The very experience of the secession and the alienation of a large (if not the larger) group of their confreres might well have made these Johannine Christians more amenable to the authoritative structures of the Apostolic Christians--- they had found to their bitter experience that, to preserve their Christology from "left-wing" extremism, they needed to make a compromise with "right-wing" ecclesiology.¹⁴⁶

We can deduce the consequences of the heretical teaching on the community on the following grounds: Christology, Ethics, Eschatology and *Pneumatology*.

In terms of *Christology*, the secessionists denied that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of God, and that he came in the flesh; hence, they possessed *docetizing* inclinations, also denying the value of the Eucharist. In terms of *ethics*, the secessionists claimed intimacy with God to the point of being sinless; they did not put much emphasis on keeping the commandments of Jesus, and thus did not practise, sufficiently, brotherly love. Therefore, they walk not in the light but in

¹⁴⁵ Raymond, B. Other sheep not of this fold: the Johannine perspective on christian diversity in the late first century *Journal of Biblical Literature*, Vol. 97, No. 1 (Mar., 1978), p.21

¹⁴⁶ Raymond ,B. other sheep not of this fold: the Johannine perspective on Christian diversity in the late first century *Journal of Biblical Literature*, Vol. 97, No. 1 (Mar., 1978), p.23

darkness. In terms of *eschatology*, while the secessionists probably embraced the Evangelist's realized eschatology, the Presbyter appeals to earlier futuristic themes to challenge their beliefs and actions; realized eschatology implies ethical faithfulness. Their errors were alluded to in earlier warning against false christs and prophets (Mk. 13:22) and lawlessness (2Thess. 2:8), and they were challenged by promises of future rewards and accountability; the last hour, warning of antichrists to come is, indeed, at hand. In terms of *pneumatology*, the secessionists have distorted the Gospel's teaching on the pneumatic ministry of the *Paraclete* by forgetting that the teaching work of the Holy Spirit is actually tied to that of the first advocate---Jesus Christ. While guidance by the spirit should conform to abiding in the teaching about Christ (shared from the beginning), their popular success in the world indicates not gospel faithfulness but worldly compromise. They escape the world's hatred because they have sided with the Prince of this World.

4.10.2 Hostilities within the Johannine community

For better understanding of the hostilities, we enumerated the aforementioned six groups identified by Raymond Brown. The Johannine Christians were not the only Christians hostile to the synagogue and its leaders (Group 1: "The Jews"), even though the bitterness attested in John may be more acute than in other NT works. The sectarian element in the Johannine picture would be the peculiar sense of estrangement from one's own people (1:11). As for the attitude of the Johannine Christians toward the Crypto-Christian (Group 2), and the Jewish Christian (Group 3), they were not the only NT Christians to condemn other Christians as false. But, more than others, John's community might have moved toward clearly excluding their opponents from Christian fellowship, for example, by counting the Crypto-Christians as aligned with "the Jews" (12:42-43) and by claiming that the Jewish Christians who were associated with the brothers of the Lord followed Jesus no longer and did not really believe in him (6:66;7:5).

The Johannine Jesus is a stranger who is not understood by his own people and not even of this world. The beloved disciple, the hero of the community, is singled out as the peculiar object of Jesus' love and is the only male disciple never to have abandoned Jesus. Implicitly then, the Johannine Christians are those who understood Jesus best, for, like him, they are rejected, persecuted, and not of this world. Their Christology is more profound, and they can be sure that they have the truth because they are guided by the *Paraclete*.

Nevertheless, despite all these tendencies toward sectarianism, Raymond Brown observes that the Johannine attitude toward the Apostolic Christians (Group 6 – probably the “larger church”) proves that the Johannine community, as reflected in the Fourth Gospel, had not really become a sect. They had not followed their exclusivistic tendencies to the point of breaking *koinonia* with these Christians whose characteristics are found in many NT works of the late first-century. If we can judge from the presence of Simon Peter and the other named disciples at the Last Supper, the Johannine Christians looked on the Apostolic Christians as belonging to Jesus' own (13:1) to whom they were bound by the commandment: “As I have loved you, so must you love one another” (13:34).¹⁴⁷ Their hopes for the future may be expressed by 10:1, “I have other sheep, too, that do not belong to this fold. These also must I lead, and they will listen to my voice. Then there will be one sheep herd, one shepherd.” Even more probable is the suggestion that, at the Last Supper (where Simon Peter and the beloved disciple are both present), “That they all may be one” (17:20-21), he is praying for the oneness of the Apostolic and the Johannine Christians. However, the admonition by the elder to his community to keep off from the secessionists strongly challenges Raymond's view. We are of the opinion that there was a parting of company from the community by the secessionists.

¹⁴⁷ Cf. Raymond, B. Other sheep not of this fold: the Johannine perspective on Christian diversity in the late first century *Journal of Biblical Literature*, Vol. 97, No. 1 (Mar., 1978)

4.11 Conclusion

From our findings, we realised that the hostilities within the Johannine Christians were on doctrinal bases of different groups, which is traceable to the following concepts: Christology, ethics, eschatology and *Pneumatology*. In terms of *Christology*, the secessionists denied that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of God, and that he came in the flesh; hence, they possessed *docetizing* inclinations, also denying the value of the Eucharist. In terms of *ethics*, the secessionists claimed intimacy with God to the point of being sinless, did not put much emphasis on keeping the commandments of Jesus, and thus did not practise, sufficiently, brotherly love. Therefore, they walk not in the light but in darkness. In terms of *eschatology*, while the secessionists probably embraced the Evangelist's realized eschatology, the Presbyter appeals to earlier futuristic themes to challenge their beliefs and actions; realized eschatology implies ethical faithfulness.

Raymond Brown avers that the long hesitation of early Christianity to produce a comprehensive theology made it possible for Gnosticism to present its synthesis between the Gospel of Christ and its own *gnosis* first. As a result, Christian theology had to be developed in reaction to Gnosticism. This inevitably led the first theologians to choose their points of concentration in reaction to false doctrines, rather than in a fully logical and systematic exposition of the Gospel as proclaimed in the New Testaments.

One of the very earliest significant doctrinal works of Christianity was the direct result not of any desire to produce a comprehensive theology; it grew out of the necessity to deal with a dangerous and persistent heresy. The fact that *Against Heresies* is so comprehensive is due, in no small measure, to the fact that the heresy against which it speaks was not limited to a particular point or doctrine,

but was an alternative vision of religious reality spanning a wide range of doctrines.¹⁴⁸

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¹⁴⁸ Brown, H.O.J., 2007 *Heresies: heresy and orthodoxy in the history of the Church*, U.S.A: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc. p. 42.

CHAPTER FIVE
JOHN'S LEADERSHIP TACTICS IN DEALING WITH HERETICS:
AN EXEGESIS

5.1 Introduction

It is apparent that not only the Early Church, but also the New Testament itself reflected doctrinal tensions. The epistle to Romans, for example, argues at length against the works of righteousness, and Galatians takes a stand against the influence of legalism in one early congregation. Colossians and 1 John appear to reflect a struggle against ideas that will later be known as Gnostic and Docetic.¹⁴⁸ Both of these tendencies - to legalism, on the one hand, to a kind of Gnosis, on the other - were definitely present in the Early Church and will recur at intervals throughout the history of the Church. While legalism and a kind of Gnosticism affected Christianity virtually from the beginning, it was not part of its heritage, but part of the human religious consciousness with which Christianity had to come to terms.

In this chapter, we shall attempt to explore John's leadership tactics in dealing with heretics. However, it is pertinent to highlight historical foundation, principles and objectives of this heretical movement in order to have a meaningful grasp of John leadership approach in managing this heretical movement. Theologians like Irenaeus, Tertullian and Hippolytus treated it simply as a Christian heresy, an aberration brought about by the adulteration of sound apostolic doctrine with pagan philosophy or even astrology and Greek mystery religions and charged the Simon Magus mentioned in *Act 8* with having originated it. Earlier scholars tended to accept the main part of this thesis. A. Harnack describes Gnosticism as "extreme Hellenization of Christianity". It is true that the Gnostic systems with which we are best acquainted were patently Christian in intention. There were others (for example, those represented by the

¹⁴⁸ Brown, H.O.J., 2007 *Heresies: heresy and orthodoxy in the history of the Church*. U.S.A: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc. p.38

‘Book of Baruch,’ cited by Hippolytus and by the *Apocalypse of Adam*) in which the Christian features were quite superficial.¹⁴⁹

Further, there seems to have been a Jewish Gnosticism ante-dating the Christian. In most Gnostic systems, Jewish, more correctly heterodox Jewish, ingredients, were prominent. Some of the later New Testament documents also combat what appear to be Gnostic influences. Therefore Gnosticism is better regarded as a movement or, more precisely, tendency which human creations erroneously wanted to use to describe God. The product became syncretism; as it drew upon Jewish, pagan and Oriental sources, and brought a distinctive attitude and certain characteristic ideas to the solution of the problem of evil and human destiny.¹⁵⁰

This fundamental human religious concept, which is called Gnosticism, involved an overvaluing of knowledge with respect to faith. The naïve way to understand the Christian Gospel is to see it as a simple message, one that can be simply stated and relatively easily grasped, although it can be believed and accepted only by those who received the gift of faith.¹⁵¹ For some of the more sophisticated, the idea of a message that cannot only be grasped but can even be preached by the simple is offensive; they feel that a proper religion must offer something more, an intellectual challenge that puts it above the reach of the simple - minded. The Gnostics asserted that over and above the simple Gospel, which is all that ordinary spirits can understand, there is a secret, higher knowledge reserved for elite. It is natural enough for people to ask more questions than the Gospel answered; the Gnostic movement attempted to give the answers, and it did so by drawing on religious sources alien to Christianity and amalgamating them with elements of the Gospel.¹⁵²

¹⁴⁹ Kelly, J.N.D., 1978. *Early Christian doctrines*. USA: HarperSan Francisco Publishers, p.22.

¹⁵⁰ Kelly, J.N.D., 1978. *Early Christian doctrines*. p.23.

¹⁵¹ Rudolf, Schnackenburg argues that fellowship with God is based on faith in the Father through the Jesus Christ. Cf., Rudolf Schnackenburg 1992 *The Johannine Epistles* Great Britain: BURNS & OATES, pp.18-19

¹⁵² Cf. Brown, H.O.J., 2007. *Heresies: heresy and orthodoxy in the history of the Church*, p.39

The Gnostic movement, as a theological problem, by contrast, produced one theological problem after another.¹⁵³ It has infrequently gone by that name since the early centuries, but Gnosticism has continued to reproduce itself within Christianity and reappeared from time to time in new guises. The movement called Gnosticism was a widespread religious phenomenon of the Hellenistic world at the beginning of the Christian era. It influenced a number of religions. Its Christian manifestation is designated as “Gnosticism,” while the larger phenomenon is called the “Gnostic movement.”

Gnosticism was a response to the widespread desire to understand the mystery of being: it offered detailed, secret knowledge of the whole order of reality, claiming to know and to be able to explain things of which, ordinarily, simple Christian faith was entirely ignorant. It divided mankind into various classes, and reserved its secret wisdom for those who were recognized as belonging to the highest, most spiritual class of the religious elite. Thus, it naturally appealed to many who felt that they were above mingling with the common herd of ordinary Christians who were content with the simple Gospel. Gnosticism and the Gnostic movement generally were essentially dualistic. In other words, they viewed reality as a constant interplay between two fundamental principles, such as spirit and matter, soul and body, good and evil. Gnosticism denied the biblical doctrine of the Creation, because the fundamentally spiritual power, which we call God, cannot be the source of that which is radically opposed to it, the base material world.¹⁵⁴

Christians felt threatened by both Gnosticism and Manichaeism partly, because both were mythological. These opponents knew an elaborate mythological cosmology toward which Christianity was either agnostic or openly hostile. Again, the Gnostic, like the Manicheans, knew that they were essentially a part of God, a divine spark, and that nothing he did in the evil world made much difference. Moreover, the Gnostic use of the allegorical method meant that Gnostics could claim to have the true explanations of difficult passages in the

¹⁵³ Cf. Brown, H. O.J., 2007. *Heresies: heresy and orthodoxy in the history of the Church*, p.39

¹⁵⁴ Brown, H.O.J., 2007. *Heresies: heresy and orthodoxy in the history of the Church*, p.41

Christians Bible. Only when Christian theology had developed to the point where it was able to beat the Gnostics on their own speculative ground did the threat come to an end. Suppression of Gnosticism by the state was a very effective factor.¹⁵⁵

5.1.1 Johannine Epistles and Gnostic Movement

The Johannine writings in the New Testament included a number of themes that are categorically hostile to Gnostic speculations, of which the most important is the affirmation that the Word *was made* flesh (John 1: 14), an atrocity in Gnostic eyes. This writer demanded from the community to walk in truth, which implied that some members of the community were not walking in the truth, and the whole purpose of the epistles of John could be summed up now in an appeal to all the members of Johannine community: I beg you, lady... that we love one another. This appeal to ‘a love’ that will override disaffection and schism is the chief practical aim of both I and II John.¹⁵⁶ It is enforced here also by insistence that the commandment of love is both an old commandment from the beginning (cf. 1 John 2:7; 3:11 and John 13: 34) and one that is the sum of all Christian instructions.

The author of 1John defended the incarnation against the false prophets of his own day. He had a profound theological grasp of its significance. Through the incarnation, and only through it, the eternal-divine (“what was from the beginning”), the invisible, becomes visible, tangible, revealed, and capable of being imparted in such a way that those who were hitherto condemned to darkness and to the world of death can have fellowship in the divine Being and partake of eternal life. In this way, Johannine theology shifts the emphasis from the event of Golgotha, which was central to Paul (Rom. 3:24-25; 1 Cor. 1:23; 2:2; 2 Cor. 5:14, 19, 21; Gal. 3:13; Col.1:20; 2:14-15) to the incarnation of the Son of God (John 1:14; 3:16; 1 John 4:9). This is true even though the death of Jesus on the cross is still important as the assurance of divine love and of God’s atoning

¹⁵⁵ Brown, H.O.J., 2007 *Heresies: heresy and orthodoxy in the history of the Church*, p.56

¹⁵⁶ Nolan, B. Harom *et al* Eds. 1993. *The Interpreter’s Bible*. USA: Abingdon Press, p. 304

purpose (1 John 2:2; 3:16; 4:9). Already in the sending of the Son into the world, (1 John 4:9, 14), in the coming of the light into darkness (John 12: 46-47), salvation is assured, even though the “coming by blood” (1 John 5:6) remains integral to the saving act. While Paul gives a strong Christological accent to the incarnation (Phil. 2:6-7), that is, to its soteriological significance in ending the reign of terror of the demonic powers (Gal.4:4), in Johannine thought, it acquired a soteriological character from the very outset.

Schnackenburg asserts that the epistles of John were actually combating false doctrine and its practical consequences. To understand the basic Christological tenets of the heretics, we must first look at the confessional formulas that were brought to bear against heretics,¹⁵⁷ namely:

- (a) 2:22; 5:1 “Jesus is the Christ”
- (b) 4:15; 5:5 “Jesus is the Son of ”; cf. the same title in 2:23; 3:23; 5:13 as well as 5:11-12,20
- (c) 4:2 “Jesus Christ... comes in the flesh”; cf.2John 7 “Jesus Christ... (coming) in the flesh”
- (d) 5:6 “This is the one that came by water and blood, Jesus Christ,” etc.

These creedal formulas do not, by themselves, give a clear picture of the heresy under attack. They only provided evidences of certain tensions. There seemed to be an emphasis on the idea of messiahship. On the other hand, it looks as though there was a need to ward off a Docetic misunderstanding either of the incarnation itself or of the crucifixion. The title Christ would have an entirely different meaning in each case. In the first case, it would mean the one who brings salvation though, also, in the second instance it means a heavenly, pre-existent spiritual being and (cf. Cerinthus and his idea of a *Christus spiritualis*). Between these two poles, however, we find a frequent use of the title Son of God coupled with each of the other three statements.¹⁵⁸ To complete this picture, we must add the positive statements of Christological faith. Even if these were not directed emphatically against the heretics, they do, taken as a whole, create a picture of the

¹⁵⁷ Rudolf ,Schnackenburg. 1992. *The Johannine Epistles*. Great Britain: Burns & Oates, pp.18-19

¹⁵⁸ Rudolf, Schnackenburg . 1992 *The Johannine Epistles*. pp.18-19.

faith in its light and shade which ought to protect the church against these dangerous influences. The most important of these, allowing for certain schematization, are as follows:

- a) The emphasis on pre-existence in the phrase “what was from the beginning”(I Jn. 1:1); “him who is from the beginning “ (I Jn. 2:13a, 14b)
- b) The presentation of the great salvation event in terms of incarnation (Jn. 1:2, “was revealed”; 3:8a; cf. 4:9)
- c) The emphasis on the atoning death of Jesus through the shedding of his blood for us (or for our sins) (1:7, “blood”; 2:2; 4 :10, “ atoning sacrifice”; 4:14, “ the Savior of the world”; 3:8b, “ to destroy the works of the devil”; 3:16, “for us”; 2:12, “forgiveness of sins”: on account of his name)
- d) The confession of the unique sonship and divinity of Jesus (4:9, “only”; 2:22, 23, 24: 4:14; 5:12; 2 John 9, “ the Son,” used absolutely; 5:20, “ the true God and eternal life”; 1:1 “ the word of Life”).¹⁵⁹

It was imperative for the author to combine. Because the Son of God (*logos*) is pre-existent, “from the beginning,” he is, therefore, a divine being and Son of God in a completely exclusive and unique sense (cf. John 1:1). If the anti-heretical statements under (a) appear to be referring to one another of the point under (b), it must be understood that the heretics were denying all the crucial affirmation about Jesus Christ. In each case, the author called attention to one point or another. Christology is ultimately linked to soteriology. The eternal, pre-existent Son of God has appeared in order to impart the life of God. For this purpose, it is necessary for him to liberate us by his atoning death in which he shed his blood for our sins. This led to the following points:

- a) The incarnation formula: 4:2; cf. 1:2; 3:8
- b) The identity formulas: Jesus is (truly) the Christ, or the Son of God: 2:22; 5:1;- 4:15, 5:15
- c) The soteriological statements: 5:6; cf. the reference under (b,c). All three groups, which, in some places, are closely connected (cf. 5:5-6) form a totality:

¹⁵⁹ S. Rudolf, 1992. *The Johannine Epistles* Great Britain: Burns & Oates, Pp.18-19.

- (i) The incarnation of the pre-existent One is the presupposition of real redemption. Only so does the Son of God truly come to us. Only so does the life of God actually appear among us and become a tangible reality. Only so do the Logos assume the flesh in which he would accomplish the bloody work of atonement.
- (ii) No statement which denied the historic personality of Jesus or his pre-existence and divinity or his death for our salvation can do it justice.
- (iii) The denial of the fact that the blood of Jesus takes away sins destroys the whole picture of faith in him, since this saving purpose, indissolubly bound up with his coming (I Jn. 3:8; I Jn. 4:9, 14), is also given with the incarnation. From this, it follows that the heretics rejected any figure of salvation in the Christian sense. They specifically denied that Jesus had this significance. It is not at all clear what positive traits they ascribed to him as a historical person. Did they view him as the bearer of the Spirit? Did he become Son at his baptism (5:6)? Or did they regard him as a prototype of the true Gnostic, without emphasizing his moral qualities? (cf. 2:6, 29; 3:3, 7).

The Gnostics were poles apart from the historic event and will have no truck with a historic mediator. The Gnostics believed they can achieve salvation by an immediate knowledge and vision of God. The true believers in Christ, however, see quite a different pathway to salvation before them, and it is the only way. They cannot directly achieve the life of God or have communion with God, but only in and with the Son of God who came in the flesh in human history (I Jn. 5:11-12; cf. John 6:57). It is he, therefore, who is himself “the Way” and that in an absolute sense (John 14:6). In contrast to one trying to lay hold of God immediately as the Gnostics preach, Christian faith proclaims the eternal and divine-- made flesh in a unique and final human form.

Both the historicity and, in particular, the form of the incarnation are characteristic of the great salvation event which God effected for the deliverance of humankind in Christ Jesus. This was recognized by the author of 1 John in his

controversy with the Gnostic heresy. Its historicity is emphasized in the course of the letter by such phrase as “sending” (I Jn. 4:9, 10, and 14) or “having come” (I Jn. 4:2; 5:6, 20a). For the incarnation, he uses the formula “come in the flesh” (I Jn. 4:2). His favourite term is the brief “was revealed” (I Jn. 1:2; 3:5, 8; 4:9). But the opening sentences of his letter are intended to put clearly before the readers at the outset what is meant by the historic self-revelation of God in Christ for faith, in opposition to the heresy of the false Gnosis.

The phrase “was from the beginning” at the very outset must be regarded as intentionally general and a mysterious belief in its formulation. Its purpose is to suggest the depths that lead into the abyss of God. The phrase “from the beginning,” frequently used in 1John, refers, for the most part, to the doctrine proclaimed at the beginning (I Jn. 2:7, 24; 3:11) and is intended to move the readers to remain faithful to that doctrine as against the teachers of heresy, who appeared only later. But there is a more profound, substantial reason for this early Christian principle of tradition. The message proclaimed “from the beginning” also include the personal bearer of an archetypal Being (“him who is from the beginning,” I Jn. 2:13-14). And the recipients of the letter must remain faithful not only to the doctrine (I Jn. 2:24), but also to the one who revealed it (I Jn. 2:27; 3:6). The very first word of the letter prepares the ground for this important demand. It refers not to the beginning of the proclamation but to the personal bearer of the archetypal Being. This is proved by the “was” and by the use of the phrase “concerning the word of life.” The author at once directs our attention to the fact of its being made accessible in the incarnate Logos of life to the experience of faith.¹⁶⁰

The Johannine heretics, however, reject the incarnation for general reasons of Christology and soteriology. Again, the Gnostics seem to deny redemption in the blood of Jesus more on the ground of principle, that is, because they reject the whole Christian doctrine of salvation, including sin and atonement. In the subsequent section, we shall attempt to highlight basic Christian leadership tactics or qualities advocated by the author in addressing the heretics.

¹⁶⁰ See Schnackenburg Rudolf, 1992 *The Johannine Epistles*, p.57

5.2 Watchfulness in communal life (II Jn . Vs 8a)

The author admonished the Christian community that “Look out yourselves that you do not lose what we have worked for.” According to Rudolf Schnackenburg, “Be on your guard” or “Look out yourself” is here an eschatological admonition.¹⁶¹ The Greek word **Βλέπετε ἑαυτούς** - See yourselves - as also contained in the teaching of Jesus as found in the Markan narratives of the great persecution, as in Mk. 13:9 - **Βλέπετε δέ ὑμεῖς ἑαυτούς**, all revealed the call for personal awareness and responsibility to guard oneself from these groups.

While Jesus’ call was a warning against likely persecution, John’s call was for the believers to make effort on their own to identify the lifestyle of those they mingle with as evil communication can corrupt good manners (1 Cor. 15:33) and finally lead to losing of what they have gained. The use of this aorist indicative active with the reflexive pronoun establish John’s conviction of everyone’s duty to fight the unorthodox movement. John opened the eyes of the people to the fact that these persons were on their way coming, but the only way to overcome them is the way they watch out so that the enemies will not surreptitiously creep into their midst. The call to watch out was to fortify the believers against succumbing to this movement.

John knew that the flock can be ravaged by these wolves that were coming with strange teaching. Therefore, he alerted the community to watch. Jesus has also told all believers to watch and pray so as to avoid trouble. Believers should not pray blindly, but they should always watch before going into any adventure with people. This will further help them to know those who are coming with wrong motives. The promise of a full reward (at the end) is reminiscent of Jewish thinking. II Jn. v. 9, in a genuine Johannine way, is focused on our present fellowship with God. This motivation may be due to the eschatological perspective. The metaphor in II Jn. v. 8 is taken from strenuous physical labour. The readers should not lose what they have worked so hard for (cf. The phrase “will by no means lose the reward,” Mark 9: 41, Matt. 10:42). In John 6:27-29, “to work” is used metaphorically for the will to believe. The import of being

¹⁶¹ See Schnackenburg Rudolf, 1992 *The Johannine Epistles* p.57, p.285

watchful in communal life strengthened the will to strive for the full reward, that is, fellowship with God through Jesus Christ.

These wrong motives will lead to a fall which can bring about losing all that they had laboured for in the journey of faith. Although Rudolf Schnackenburg opines that the “Look to yourselves” in this verse as “an eschatological admonition,” the need to actually hold on to what they believe is a call to be on guard in the immediate situation. The scripture recommends watchfulness against the enemy. Ezekiel has warned that the watchman must be faithful at his duty post so as to warn and alert the people of any invader who might be approaching the city so as to save them from all forms of attack, Ezek. 33:1-20.

Likewise, the author of this epistle called on his followers to watch so that they would not be overtaken unknowingly by these religious teachers whose mission was only to attack and destroy what they had laboured for from the beginning. While prophet Ezekiel’s warning was directed to the prophets or the watchmen, the admonition of the author of the Johannine Epistle saw the believers as the watchmen for their own souls and the very people to respond to the same. Howard view that “the elder is expressing his fear that his missionary and pastoral work would have been a failure since his readers have turned aside from the truth which he and his colleagues committed to them” is extreme. The author may have only expressed in clear terms the likely consequences of wrong decisions if the heretics were given a foothold in their environment. If they refused to look to themselves, they could lose fellowship with God and the brethren who already had hope and faith in them. If the community failed to watch, they were likely going to embrace distorted Christology and thereby have a warped understanding of Jesus. This would not only mislead them, but will also doctrinally create a barrier on their understanding of the true person of Christ.

5.3 Rekindling the hope of eternal life (II Jn. Vs. 8b)

The author stresses that: “you must receive your reward in full”. II John vs. 8 involves the use of a metaphor that is shown by the second half of the verse, where the statement is reversed and put positively. “To receive a full reward” is a phrase that occurs frequently in Judaism.¹⁶² It is already found in Ruth 2:12. No doubt, what is really meant is fellowship with the Son and the Father (cf. II Jn. v. 9b) the grace and bliss that come from possessing salvation. The full reward then is the eternal life promised to believers (cf. 1 John 2: 25; also John 6:27).¹⁶³

The message of the Kingdom of God that was already at hand was a call to righteousness which will be rewarded. The wrong teaching was not only going to deplete the community in number, but it will cost them eternal reward. The Greek word **μισθὸν πλήρη ἀπολάβητε** does not only warn the believers of the presence of the anti-Christ movement, but also reminds them that there is a great reward they have been labouring for, and they can lose it if they fail to continue in the faith they received and practised from the beginning. Neil Alexander, commenting on this reward, says: “Thus it could deprive them of all they had striven for in the Christian life”.¹⁶⁴ Jesus had taught the issue of reward and eternal life to his disciples earlier – Jn. 4:36. **ὁ θερίζων μισθὸν λαμβάνει καὶ συνάξει καρπὸν εἰς ζωὴν αἰώνιον**. The joy of a woman can only be full when she sees her baby alive after the travail of childbirth – Jn. 16:21-22. John reminded his audience that there is eternal life which they were going to enjoy after this wicked world and, therefore, they must not drift away from the faith. This singular hope summed up the entire message of the Kingdom of God and call to repentance – Matt. 4:17. John brought to memory what they have been labouring for as a reminder that should keep the community focused and, by so doing, they would remain in the fold.

The earthly knowledge which attracts some feelings of superiority by the heretics who claimed to possess it was ensnaring the disciples with confusing ideology of the person and nature of Christ who has promised a kingdom. Rather than focusing on the present alone, the elder quickly reminded them of the likely consequences that may follow their embracing a strange doctrine and thereby

¹⁶² See Schnackenburg Rudolf, 1992 *The Johannine Epistles* p.57.

¹⁶³ See Schnackenburg Rudolf, 1992 *The Johannine Epistles*, p285

¹⁶⁴ Alexander N., *The Epistles of John*, in Torch Bible Commentaries, 1962, p. 155

losing the reward. As part of the fulfilment of eschatological discourse of Jesus as in Mt. 24:13, only those who endure to the end will truly be saved on the last day as they alone shall enjoy eternal life. John called for restraint and endurance in sound faith which they had received from the beginning. Like James also emphasizes, the farmer has an expectation of harvest (James 5:7-8). This keeps him going as he works tirelessly with the understanding that when harvest comes, there will be joy. He guides against whatever will make him lose the harvest or have a poor harvest. John employed this methodology to keep his followers focused on what they received from the beginning. The soul has no substitute or equal price when compared with earthly fame. John reminded them that eternal bliss awaits all who remain faithful till the end.

The Greek word **ἀπολάβητε**, which is a second person plural aorist active may not necessarily follow the root of the **ἀποκυλιω**, Mk. 16:3 and Lk; 24:2, rather, it express a rolling away of what was due or needed as recorded in Lk. 23:41. In this case, the postulation by some scholars that John included himself among those who will lose eternal life is laid to rest, as the aorist active second person plural used revealed. John was sure of his salvation and eternal reward and, in love for those whom he laboured to preach Christ, he strived to educate them of the dangers that would befall them if they turned their eyes to these deceivers and give their ears to such deceitful tricks of the devil. This method of captivating the community with the future hope of eternity will surely keep people under check as to know which way to follow in their Christian race.

The idea of fellowship with God is found in one form or another in every religion. Longing for nearness to God, together with awe and reverence for him, is one of the basic emotions of religion. It is the way they are combined and the ideas developed in the process that gives each religion its particular character. This is equally true of Hellenistic syncretism, itself the product of an age of exceptional religious vitality. Here, we must recognize what is peculiar to Christianity and especially to Johannine Christology.

The Christian's fellowship with God is an intimate mutual relationship. It is not solely a relationship of protection on God's side or of participation on the

human side. It may be represented as a mutual interpenetration and has more than merely moral quality. The way to fellowship with the Father is exclusively through the son (I Jn. 2:23; cf. 5:12, 20). This is the basic Christological principle. Fellowship with God is never a momentary thing. It is an experience that is not limited in time, as in mysticism or ecstasy, but is in its very nature a permanent possession (“to abide”; “to have God”), a gift of salvation, and is related to “eternal life.”¹⁶⁵

In the history of Judaism, the idea of the covenant is central, that is, the fellowship of the entire people of Israel with God. “I will be their God, and they shall be my people” (Lev. 26:11-12). Even after the covenant is impaired by Israel’s unfaithfulness and apostasy, that is, even after God’s judgment and punishment of his people, the great promise of the messianic age is renewed (Jer. 7:23; 11:4; 30:22; Ezek. 11:20; 36:28; 37:27; Zech. 8:8). This nearness to God is more than merely moral relationship. Because of the temple, it is represented as God’s indwelling in the midst of his people (Ezek. 37:27; cf. 40-45; Zech. 2:10-13). Notable is the expression “God with us” (Isa. 7:14; 8:8; cf. Rev. 2:3).

The Messiah, as the earthly representative of the heavenly God and King, the vice-regent of his kingdom, will be called “God is with us” (Isa. 7:14). But this “with us” (Isa. 8:8) is not the same as “in us” in the full Johannine sense. In contrast to the Jewish concept, John thought in individualistic terms. Later Judaism was much too concerned with the fulfilment of the works of the law and with notions of expiation and judgment to be attracted by a mystically oriented piety. Even if fringe groups inclined toward a mystical cult as a means of achieving the union of the soul with God, they remain a close circle, which does not change the overall picture, and they have no far-reaching influence beyond their own borders.

5.4 John’s tolerance in crisis (III Jn. Vs 9)

¹⁶⁵ Cf. Schnackenburg Rudolf, 1992 *The Johannine Epistles: a Commentary* p. 64.

The long- standing argument of the congregation and community to which the elder wrote is not our focus. However, it must be said that the relationship and tone of writing in the third epistle and that of the second does not fully support the view that both letters were written to one congregation. This presupposition arose from the fact that, while the second epistle suggests ostracizing the heretics, the third criticizes Diotrephes for not caring for the brethren and seeks such services in the person of Gaius.

There is likely to be misinterpretation of the person and authority of the elder whose position was not respected by the local leader – Diotrephes, yet the elder could not apportion immediate punishment as an apostle and superior leader in the Christian community. While it will be strange for any of the followers to disregard an apostle of the calibre of John, it may not be impossible for such occurrences in the early Church. Paul also experienced resistance by many who claimed to be Christians; they did not totally accept his authority.

The elder's words, “**Ἐγραψά τι τῇ ἐκκλησίᾳ**” “I wrote something to the Church” suggest that the author was a man of authority who expected his message to be obeyed. Some have argued that the author was referring to the second epistle. As earlier stated, the second epistle's content, which propagated avoidance mechanism as a check on heretics, cannot be the supposed letter which probably appealed for hospitality for itinerant evangelists who might have visited this Johannine congregation. It has been suggested by many scholars, like Rudolf, Howard and Ruth B. Edwards, that this letter might be among the lost work of the apostles. This view is most probable. If Diotrephes was the first recipient of a letter that he was never willing to comply with, he would simply suppress it and garbage it from public view. This view that the letter was lost is likely true because, in the third epistle, John never suggested that Diotrephes has sympathy for heretics. He only accused him of trying to take pre-eminence and disregard constituted authority.

The author, who commanded respect in this community, did not instruct Gaius to disrespect Diotrephes or take over the leadership of the Church in this situation. He only exhorted him to continue in his good works and never imitate

the administrative style of Diotrephes. The direct reference to Diotrephes suggests that the author wanted to reach this congregation after Diotrephes' hindrances. He wrote to Gaius who might also be a noble member of the Church. Although Diotrephes' affront on the elder was enough to ostracise him, he was never to be confronted by Gaius, as the elder did not mention it. What could have made Diotrephes to disregard the letter of an elder in the Church? The author of the Johannine Epistles said he loved to take leadership position in the Church. Has this Diotrephes' habit stopped in our local congregations? Many ministers have been opposed by resident lay ministers of the Church because the new leader did not pledge loyalty to their established autocracy that has long been established as a means of problem for church workers.

The language of III John suggests that the administration of the Church at that point in time was still strictly under the oversight of the apostles or their successors. Therefore, the idea of established local authority taking superior position does not arise. The personal ambition of Diotrephes over and against the course of the gospel might actually be the focus of the elder in this case; however, the elder maintained self-control over the situation by not encouraging any payback on Diotrephes by Gaius and the other members of the congregation. The disagreement that might have led to this ugly situation was not as a result of doctrinal differences but a case of personality clash. The appointed time for addressing such issue was not in the heat of the crisis and in the absence of the elder. He desired to be around personally to address the issue and make the Church of God progress.

In this verse, the author states that: "I did write something to the church; but Diotrephes, who likes to be the first among them, does not pay attention to us". Put differently, the author says that I have written something to the Church; but Diotrephes, who likes to put himself first, does not acknowledge our authority. So if I come, I will call attention to what he is doing in spreading false charges against us. And not content with those charges, he refused to welcome the friends, and even prevented those who wanted to do so and expelled them from the church. The second concern that moved the author followed closely on his

words of praise for Gaius. The author spent so much time and energy on this because there were opposing powers at work, trying to frustrate the elder's attempts to further the mission. The letter he mentions had been concerned with the welcome and assistance given to the itinerant missionaries. He describes Diotrephes – the name was not unusual to the elder, as a person marked by a desire to lord it over other people, combined with a lack of moral authority. He refused to accept the authority of the elder.

In attempting a profound analysis of virtue of tolerance in Johannine Christian community, it is important to make important clarifications as regards the central issues in 2 John and 3 John. The issues presented in 3 John centre on hospitality while that of 2 John centre on teaching. *The Interpreter's Bible* identifies schism as the crisis the Elder in 3 John was contending with. The word *schism* is derived from the Greek term for “tear” or “rent,” schism is the formal and wilful separation of a group from the unity of the Church and thus from ecclesiastical communion. Schism is to be distinguished from heresy in that the grounds for division may be non-doctrinal.¹⁶⁶

5.5 Communication: a veritable tool against heretics (III Jn. Vs 10)

3 Jn. Vs 10 states that “Therefore, if I come, I shall bring up what he is doing in spreading evil nonsense about us. And he is not content with that! He refuses to welcome the brothers himself, and furthermore he hinders those who wish to do so and expels them from the church.” This section explores the relevance of communication in addressing the problems of schism in the church. *The Interpreter's Bible*, claims that the noble character of Gaius pictured here offered high ideal for the churchman. Gaius, apparently a layman, followed the truth (III Jn. vss.3-4); his outward living corroborated his profession of faith, especially in his ministrations to strangers. Above all, he was loyal, and could be counted on. One commentator conjectured that Gaius was, perhaps, the one link that held that church in the Christian fold, that without his loyalty it might have

¹⁶⁶ Nolan B.H., et al (eds.), 1993, *The Interpreter's Bible* USA: Abingdon Press, p. 304

withdrawn from the apostolic communion and thus weakened the vital chain of the Christian churches in Asia Minor.¹⁶⁷

The multi-faceted crisis that rocked the Johannine community was not only christological misconception, but also of personality clash. The superiority complex that arouse the sub-consciousness of Diotrophes was a major challenge to the author of the Johannine epistles, and the elder sought every available opportunity to set the records right and present a better understanding of the situation that they had found themselves. He decided to communicate with those who were loyal to his leadership and state an action plan. The team that were loyal to the elder might have not heard the full story of what likely happened and blames might be apportioned wrongly. The elder's desire to visit the congregation was never in doubt. The Greek form says “**διὰ τοῦτο, ἐὰν ἔλθω, ὑπομνήσω** – Therefore, if I come, I will remind”. The **ὑπομνήσω** is a future active indicative first person singular from the **ὑπομνήσκω** which concerns remembering or reminding. While the use of this word in Jn. 14:26 was the Holy Spirit;s duty to bring to the believers' memory a remembrance of all that Jesus had said to them, John took up the responsibility of bringing to memory the works of Diotrephes.

The underlying strategy that seemed unexplored in this segment of the letter is the way the elder kept contact with the congregation. He was never discouraged that since Diotrephes had taken over the position of leadership, he would wait to see how far they would go. Instead, he sought another channel of communicating with this important congregation to put a check on the activities of Diotrephes and his cronies who might be doing everything to cut off every external influence or leadership over their congregation.

The leadership tactics of John were so profound in this regard. It is said that information is power but it remains weakened if not properly channelled. John kept his cool, but linked up through another source or means. The silence of many leaders in the Church and society has led to crisis that could have been nipped in the bud at their very early stage. Political and religious leaders should take a clue from the methodology of John by seeking for means to reach those

¹⁶⁷ See Nolan B.H., et al (eds.), 1993, *The Interpreter's Bible*, p. 310

who are misconstruing ideas and positions as an opportunity to carve a niche for themselves in the Church and society.

When agitations are left for too long, they open a window for negative associations and conspiracy. John watched for response from the various congregations and families that made up his community. He wrote a letter to Diotrephes (3 Jn. 9) and the content was never made public, and the elder found out that his letter might have been suppressed by Diotrephes whose character seemed to have been known to the writer of the epistle. John quickly took the next available option of communicating with other members of the same community who would defend the faith by caring for ministers of the gospel and put the congregation in the know of what was necessary to be done for those who gave their life and time to the course of the gospel.

Alan E. Brooke opines that the accusation or charges brought against Diotrephes were two major ones. “Two accusations are brought against Diotrephes: his boastful opposition to the elder and his friends, and his harsh action in the matter of the Missionaries”.¹⁶⁸ The elder succinctly declared that Diotrephes accusations against him were baseless. Brooke agrees with Oecumenius that the words used by John in defence of himself against the prating of Diotrephes were not found in any other part of the New Testament. The management of crisis can reduce tension or escalate issues with devastating consequences. The elder had powers to make pronouncements that could frustrate Diotrephes among members of that congregation, but he diplomatically took the part of peace by communicating his major concerns to Gaius who was well known to him and respected by the people. Communication is a tool that Church leaders must cherish and put to use at every available opportunity, to save the flock of Christ from any intruder and destructive elements.

While John originally addressed this letter to Gaius’ spirit, soul and body for his well-being, the concern for furthering the work and growth of the gospel was in view. Specifically these verses lay on the church the sacred obligation to support in every way, not merely with “good wishes,” the missionary outreach of

¹⁶⁸ Cf. Brooke A.E., *A critical and exegetical commentary on the Johannine Epistles*, p. 189.

the gospel. The highest sanctions are attached to this summons: such support is nothing less than God's service, and it united Christians as "allies" in the truth. The church must never hesitate to present the challenge of missions as fundamental to its purpose to save "the whole world" (1 John 2:2). The laity must understand that support of missions is correspondingly a first claim on their money and prayer and requires an intelligent comprehension of the world's need and of the gospel's truth. Appeals to support missions must consequently be pitched on the high plane of service to God and comradeship in working, even fighting, with the true motive for all missionary (and pastoral) work must be to set out for his (God's) sake, and to accept nothing from the heathen. Service offered in abandoned, joyful love of God and kept pure from worldly compromise, commercialism, flattery and patronage, alone is worthy of Christ.¹⁶⁹

5.6 Guidance through worthy representatives (III Jn. Vs 12)

3 Jn. Vs 12 states that "Demetrius gets a testimonial from all, *even* from the truth itself. And we give our testimonial as well, and you know that our testimony is true." The three forms of testimony to Demetrius' character cited by the elder must be taken together if they are to provide a reliable rule for commending people. Testimony from everyone is good up to a point, but even *consensus omnium* can be wrong. Testimony from a trusted, Christian friend is more reliable. Testimony from the truth itself, that is, the integrity of Christian character in which "the gospel exhibits itself in life crowns all else." Whenever the truth of the gospel really possesses a man, his character inevitably manifests it in the attitudes of faith and love by which he habitually lives. These tests rebuke the facile ease with which we indiscriminately use the prestige of the Christian church to endorse candidates for offices, commend people for employment or admission to schools and so on. The elder is called "the apostle of love," but his love was wise and discriminating. So let it be with us.¹⁷⁰

¹⁶⁹ See Nolan B.H., et al (eds.), 1993, *The Interpreter's Bible*, p. 310

¹⁷⁰ See Nolan B.H., et al (eds.), 1993, *The Interpreter's Bible*, p. 313

The current crisis of leadership in the whole world that has led to many nations fighting civil wars may be traced to unworthy representatives who now occupy seats of government and wedge the sword of national power against their supposed enemies. John had a special understanding of the importance of an ambassador. He looked into the life of the people and saw in Demetrius a quality that has gained approval from the human and the divine. The presentation of Demetrius by John in this epistle suggests that he was being commended. “**Δημητρίῳ μεμρτύρηται ὑπὸ πάντων καὶ ὑπὸ αὐτῆς τῆς ἀληθείας καὶ ἡμεῖς δὲ μαρτυροῦμεν**,” “To Demetrius, witness has been borne by all and by the truth itself, also we bear witness”.

It seems clear that connecting this Demetrius with the silversmith who opposed Apostle Paul in Acts 19:24 is unnecessary as many people could bear the same name; and linking the two may suggest that the supposed Church is in Ephesus, a town which could not have doubted the authority of the elder. This Demetrius in question might likely be the bearer of the epistle from the author to this congregation and there was need to tell the people about his faithfulness. We disagree with Brooke’s suggestion that Demetrius was a member of the Church of Gaius and Diotrephes. If this assertion was right, there would not have been any need to introduce him and call up three witnesses, to validate his genuineness. John applied the Jewish theory of establishing truth in the mouth of two or three witnesses. Some scholars, like Dom Chapman and Barlet have opined that Demetrius may have fallen under suspicion hence the need for a recommendation to the brethren. However, there was no mention of the heretical crisis that affected other Johannine churches in this letter.

The issues of the anti-Christ and their activities were never the focus of the elder; rather he was concerned mostly about hospitality to missionaries and disrespect for constituted authority by Diotrephes. It could be argued that John already knew the situation that other messengers might face if they were to deliver the letter to Gaius and the rest of the people. Hence, he had to send a man that had been attested as the most worthy of the team to appear before them. The people to whom he was going might be strangers to him but many witnesses had

borne witness to the fact that he was a reputable fellow and the “truth” itself bore testimony to it, while the author was also a personal witness. The fact that the letter was made public and accepted into scripture did not only affirm that it was delivered to the recipient but also revealed the integrity of Demetrius as a generally accepted personality.

The major problem of the Church in the contemporary society is lack of trusted representatives who will not be put off the track by materialism and poverty in the course of the gospel. Political leaders are accused of hoarding information and refusing to delegate authority to their subordinates while away, but it is now a common occurrence in religious space. This has so crumbled many denominations, as there are no trusted hands that can hold until the return of their shepherds.

The episode of the rebellion of Mesha – the king of Moab against Jehoram – king of Israel, cannot be fully understood when looked at ordinarily. Although the king of Israel consulted with his allies and even got support of Jehosaphat and the king of Edom, there was still fear of failure in his heart, as the desert environment was never friendly to the soldiers and their horses. The drought was a negative sign as thought by Jehoram. However, Jehosaphat refused to accept defeat from such sign. He preferred to listen to God rather than use human wisdom. He quickly made inquiry whether there was a prophet of God in the area. They might have seen some other fortune-tellers, but Jehosaphat was not satisfied by that. A servant of the king of Israel quickly mentioned the name of Elisha which might not be strange to all concerned. When they arrived the premises of Elisha, the welcome was cold because the king of Israel might not have been a worthy representative of his people before the Lord. The prophet accorded him a cold reception, but when he saw Jehosaphat – a worthy man, he said, “As the Lord of host lives, whom I serve, were it not that I have regard for Jehosaphat the king of Judah, I would neither look at you, nor see you” (2 Kgs. 3:14).

A worthy representative is well embraced. The integrity of our leaders is questionable; hence, issues are not easily resolved in churches and our society today. The leadership of the church must raise men of integrity as their

ambassadors to negotiate with those who are erring and possibly bring them back to the way of truth. Demetrius was well trusted and the elder testified about him to these brethren. Many people give false testimonies about people under their jurisdiction, but when they start to manifest their agenda, the Church suffers. We strongly opine that many of the crises affecting the generality of the Church are due to people who represent their denominations with unrevealed agenda. They do not see the growth of the body of Christ as a universal challenge; rather, they struggle to make their denominations superior to others. Such views were the ones expressed by Diotrephes but might have been laid to rest through the collective efforts of John the elder, Gaius and Demetrius.

5.7 John's reservation and self control in crisis (II Jn. Vss. 13-14)

3 Jn. Vss. 13-14 states that "I had much more that I should write you, but I do not wish to write it out with pen and ink". Rather, I hope to see you soon, and we can have a heart-to-heart talk. The elder knew when to end his letter. He had accomplished his purpose to encourage his readers to follow the truth, to walk in love, and to abide in the doctrine of Christ. Also the elder knew when not to write letters. Many matters, especially of a controversial nature, are better dealt with face to face. Note again the graciousness and charm of his concluding words to the Christian fellowship: "the children of your elect sister greet you."

The elder ended his communication with an expression of reservation. This might have been informed by the maturity of the author, who might not have wished to disgrace the said Diotrephes. However, he wished to conclude the letter like 2 John by saying that all other issues should be kept on hold until his arrival. Could it be that John considered the recipients immature to handle the issues if made known to them?

While great scholars like Howard Marshall, Rudolf Schnackenburg, Ruth Edwards and others view the imminent visit of the elder as stated here as a juridical tour in which he would discuss with Gaius and expose Diotrephes activities, they pay little attention to the maturity of the elder in restraining himself from saying things that could deepen the crisis and cause a permanent

breakaway or secession of this congregation from having fellowship with others and acting as a barrier to missionary activities. The administrative skill technically employed by John in handling the crisis in this local congregation was so profound that the flock of Christ was spared from savage wolves who would have taken advantage of the situation to foment more crisis. Those who exploited such situation were thoroughly disappointed by the wisdom of God at work through the elder. Many church leaders might have become disappointed by such attitude from a subordinate at a particular end. Due to impatience, orders that could cause irreparable damage to the body would be given. John showed his wisdom as he remained calm, with the understanding that when he arrived the scene, he would handle issues as expected. As he was trying to secure the flock from the clutches of Diotrephes, he never betrayed his emotions by prescribing the punishment that was due to those who were not supporting missionary work or those who poured all kinds of vituperation on his person. He politely pointed out the unfriendly attitude of Diotrephes.

As observed by most scholars, the similarity in 2 Jn. 12 and 3 Jn. 13 suggests that the authorship of both books is the same. The Greek rendering, “Πολλὰ εἶχον γράφαι σοι”, “Many things I had to write to you” (3 Jn. 13) is similar. The variance of γράφειν and γράφαι only affirms the originality of the text. These aorists used expressed in clear terms that the whole idea was being conveyed. The use of εὐθέως – “immediately” may suggest that the situation was worse than when 2 John was written; therefore, the presence of the elder was nonnegotiable. He, therefore, desired to commence his journey to the region as soon as possible to forestall all possible deterioration of the situation. Could it be said that a crisis was almost cropping up and the elder John wanted to nip it in the bud? We commend the maturity and wisdom displayed by John in piloting the affairs of a group that was being threatened by the wind of strange teachings and position-seekers who disregarded constituted authority.

Leaders of the Church and society must take a clue from the example laid down by John in these epistles. While it may not also be good to over-delay

issues, leaders must exercise self-control and exercise patience in handling crisis, as decisions made can cause colossal damage, if not properly handled.

5.8 Theology and politics in the History of Johannine community

The epistle brings to the fore theological differences between the elder and Diotrephes in the history of church polity. While the elder stressed promoting the need to imitate good, he reminded us that men need a living example more than verbal exhortation for noble living. Also, in the concluding verse, he says “peace be to you.” It is further argued that, in the deepest sense, peace is the gift of God to those who, through faith and love (the two fundamental themes of the Johannine epistles) live in the eternal life of God now. Such peace partakes of the ultimate reality and harmony of the universe, and derives from eternal life which is “from the beginning” (I John 1:1).

Diotrephes may be taken as a character study in evil, as Gaius in goodness. It is worth noting that, in the elder’s thought, all other defects in Diotrephes’ character are made to issue from his desire to put himself first. Selfishness was the root sin; and with Diotrephes it took the ugly form of ecclesiastical ambition and domination. Findlay asserts that Diotrephes was “one of the first experiments in Episcopacy,” he was not the last. The story of the church through the centuries is saddened by the spectacle of those who liked to put themselves first. Diotrephes’ selfish pride issued in outright insubordination (III Jn. vs. 9b) and provoked schism in the church (III Jn. vs. 10b).¹⁷¹

The main interest of 3 John for us lies not in its theology but in what it tells us about the history of church polity. The author allowed us a glimpse of the ongoing life of the church, the many things that were going on there and the way the spirit was at work, as well as the inadequacies and tensions current among human beings. It is closely related in language and theology to 1 and 2 John and offers a welcome supplement to the other two Johannine letters, in which it was

¹⁷¹ Nolan B.H., et al (eds.), 1993, *The Interpreter’s Bible* USA: Abingdon Press, pp. 304-306

more the theologian and father of the community who spoke. From the above analysis, it is clear that the virtue of tolerance played a very vital role in the ongoing life of the church.

Against this backdrop, Rudolf Schnackenburg argues that the elder in 3 John, is no other than the writer of 2 John. This self-appellation in such a friendly and fatherly letter heightened the certainty that the author was a notable outstanding person. The recipient of 3 John was apparently the centre of a circle of friends, an exemplary believer and a confidant, though not a church official. The sender called him his “beloved,” which was how Paul and the Christian community at large addressed one another among themselves. The author also added this as genuine and sincere nature of his love. He did not merely love Gaius for his loyalty to the faith (v. 3, “to the truth”) but also for his active fraternal behaviour (v. 6 “your love”). It was possible that Gaius owed his faith to the elder (v.4, “my children”).

According to *Interpreter's Bible*, the reason for Diotrephes' opposition is not clear. Explanation is sought in two directions: The first is that, in this period, a new type of church organization was emerging which gave predominant local control to single individuals rather than to board of elders or overseers. With this went an increasing local autonomy.¹⁷² The apostles had passed from the scene, and the second generation leaders of the wider church, appointed by the apostles and borrowing their authority, gave way more and more to the local leaders who, in some areas, soon took on the official status we associate with the term bishop. Diotrephes may represent this assertion of local authority and individual leadership. The process of decentralization and the emergence of local or native leadership is one with which we are familiar in the younger churches of the mission field. The second is that this opposition to the elder might have been motivated also or even primarily by theological differences. The evidences from the other two epistles under study and other sources show that the churches of Asia at that time were beset by a wide variety of doctrines, and especially by Gnostic errors. III John has no specific reference to the false teachings opposed in

¹⁷² Nolan B.H., et al (eds.), 1993, *The Interpreter's Bible* USA: Abingdon Press, p.311

I and II John; but the language used by the elder as he appealed to Gaius and commended Demetrius and the probabilities of the situation in the letters so closely related as II and III John are persuasive. Diotrephes' radical intransigence was due not only to local independency and personal assertion (cf. 1 Pet. 5:8), but also to theological partisanship. He does not acknowledge my authority. The elder's letter will have been suppressed by Diotrephes.¹⁷³ Could this authority include his teachings and personality? Whatever the situation was, there were problems that provokes the writing of this letters.

5.9 Syncretism, Judaism and Christianity

In the previous chapters, precisely chapters three and four, we saw an attempt to resist syncretism in Judaism and Christianity in its practices. It is against this backdrop, one can succinctly follow Adolf von Harnack view that purported Gnosticism as the attempt to secularise Christianity, in other words, as the attempt to integrate it into the contemporary, largely dualistic world of Hellenistic religion and philosophy. Christianity successfully resisted and produced early Christian theology.¹⁷⁴ The implications of secularisation of Christianity by Gnosticism would result in emphasising asceticism which was one possible corollary of the Gnostic contempt for matter;¹⁷⁵ on the other hand, Isidore, the son and disciple of Basilides, whose followers deduced that the spiritually perfect were free to be immoral,¹⁷⁶ could not find scriptural foundation for their claims. From the above analysis, we can deduce that immorality and contempt for matter was essentially the object of attack against syncretic practices within the Johannine community and heretical Gnostic movement.

Christianity, like Judaism, has always resolutely opposed the blending of religion; it was not even willing to accommodate Judaism out of which it sprang. Refereeing to the "Judaizing" tendency to emphasise the keeping of the law, this is exemplified in Paul's letter to Galatians saying that: "But though we, or an

¹⁷³ Nolan B.H. et al (eds.), 1993, *The Interpreter's Bible* USA: Abingdon Press, pp. 311-312

¹⁷⁴ Cf. Kelly J.N.D., 1978, *Early Christian Doctrines* USA: Harper San Francisco Publishers p. 22; See also, Harold O.J. Brown 2007 *Heresies: Heresy and Orthodoxy in the History of the Church* P.41.

¹⁷⁵ Cf. Kelly J.N.D., 1978 *Early Christian Doctrines*, p.25

¹⁷⁶ Cf. Kelly J.N.D., 1978 *Early Christian Doctrines*, p.25

angel from heaven, preach any other gospel... let him be accursed” (Gal. 1:8). How did Gnosticism, then, with its profoundly syncretistic character, succeed in becoming a threat? Harold Brown offers two reasons: first neither the canonical New Testament nor any generally recognized creed was yet in common circulation when the menace of Gnosticism arose; second, there was little persecution under the “good emperors” of the first half of the second century, and people could dabble in Christianity with a measure of impunity.¹⁷⁷

Finally, it was not so much that Christians toyed with Gnosticism as that the Hellenistic world was trying to integrate Christ into its thinking without being profoundly changed by him, and proposed Gnosticism to the church as a means to this end. Jesus and His first disciples made such an overwhelming impact on the Mediterranean world that it could not be ignored, but his message was so contrary to Hellenistic culture that it could not simply be accepted, and so the effort was made to adapt it to the culture.¹⁷⁸

5.10 Conclusion

From the above analysis, this work argues that the heretical movement in Johannine community represents both Christological error and a false ethic. The doctrinal heresy and the ethical indifference sprang from the same source and formed a unified un-Christian stance. The religious and ethical deviation under attack showed a Gnostic tendency which is mainly Docetic. This needs no further proof, given all the terminologies employed and the ideological perspective.

A careful reading of the Epistles will show that there were crises of misunderstanding of the person of Christ, ethical conflicts and personality clash. The author, therefore, focused on the heresy that he was combating throughout the letters. We must avoid isolating the Christological errors but must recognise in them the “first lie.”¹⁷⁹ They deny altogether the figure of Jesus Christ, the saviour, or, to put it differently, the meaning of Jesus Christ for redemption and salvation. That is, the common denominator for all the different statements about Jesus

¹⁷⁷ Cf. Brown H.O.J., 2007 *Heresies: heresy and orthodoxy in the history of the Church* P.56

¹⁷⁸ Cf. Brown H.O.J., 2007 *Heresies: heresy and orthodoxy in the history of the Church* P.56

¹⁷⁹ Schnackenburg Rudolf, 1992 *The Johannine Epistles* Great Britain: BURNS & OATES, p.66

Christ and also the connection between the “Christological error and moral error”. The opponents combated by the author proclaimed a way to salvation in which the fulfilment of the commandments and brotherly love (2:3-14; 3:1b, 6; 4:7f.), the cleansing of sin by the blood of Christ(1:7; 5:6; cf. 2:2; 3:5, 16; 4:10, 14) and finally Jesus Christ himself as mediator of salvation were irrelevant. In the incarnation, the profound orderliness of the Christian way of salvation contrasts with the “Gnostic” way, as 1 John combated it.

A full-dressed attack on the issues of Christology took place in the fourth century. This led to the convocation of a council with far-reaching decisions promulgated at Nicaea, that the Word shared the same divine nature as the Father, which focused attention upon them. Nevertheless, the all but universal Christian conviction in the preceding centuries had been that ‘Jesus is Lord’¹⁸⁰ and its import had been elaborated and deepened in the apostolic age. The New Testament writers generally regarded Christ as pre-existent; they tended to attribute to him a twofold order of being, ‘according to flesh’, that is, as man, and ‘according to the spirit, that is, God’¹⁸¹. This formula was deeply embedded in their thinking. F. Loofs justly labels it ‘the foundation dictum of all later Christological development’.¹⁸² This dictum contains all Christological problems.

The modern resurfacing of these concepts which traumatised the Johannine community needs the attention of ecclesiastical leadership, as innocent parishioners with little theological insight could be misled. We shall now progress to examining the situation of the Anglican Fasting and Praying Society in Ughelli Diocese.

¹⁸⁰ Rom. 10,9; Phil. 2, 11

¹⁸¹ Rom. 10,9; Phil. 2, 11

¹⁸² Friedrich L. 1905, *Nestoriana. Die Fragmente des Nestorius* Halle: Niemeyer .cited by Harold Brown 2007 *Heresies: heresy and orthodoxy in the history of the Church*, p160

CHAPTER SIX
HISTORY, NATURE AND HERETICAL TEACHINGS OF THE
ANGLICAN FASTING AND PRAYING SOCIETY IN ANGLICAN
DIOCESE OF UGHELLI

6.1 Introduction

The uniqueness of every research work and its gain can only be realised when a particular people benefit from it. The purpose of this research was to examine the Johannine epistles and the prevailing Christological heresies that were invoked at the time of their composition with their consequences on that world. Our findings shall be used to draw a synergy to solve the problem of the resurgence of Christological heresies and Soteriological conflicts that have plagued the contemporary church in the geographical area covered by the Anglican Diocese of Ughelli.

In this chapter, we shall give a brief history of Christianity in the Anglican Diocese of Ughelli, the establishment and growth of the Anglican Fasting and Praying Society and the activities of Evangelist Daniel Mimeyeraye in the group until his exit.

6.2 A brief history of the growth of Christianity in the Diocese of Ughelli

The history of Christianity in Ughelli dates back to 1680, with the advent of slave trade which the missionaries not only approved of, but also participated in. The resistance to Christianity among the Ughelli people was based on the grounds of the involvement of the missionaries in slave trade which presented the gospel in bad light to the natives of the land. They could not fathom the love in a “god” whose agents’ were involved in selling their children into captivity. The missionaries therefore, experienced total rejection and strong opposition from the Urhobo people who make up the Diocese of Ughelli as composed today. After several attempts marked with failures to bring Christianity to Ughelli, it was in the 19th century, the Yoruba people, with ex-slaves from Sierra-Leon known as “Saros,” came with British government officials and established churches at

Warri and Sapele. According to S.U. Erivwo, “these two centres played a major role in the spread of Christianity in the Urhobo hinterland.”¹⁸³

The Anglican community, like its counterparts, that is, the Johannine community, faced certain problems of religious or philosophical movement in their own soil. The traditional African religious current was the religious movement that was in existence before the advent of Anglicanism in Ughelli Diocese. The traditional religion, with its taboos and practices confronted the group for defiling existing laws. The church members ate all forbidden foods, cut down sacred trees and violated the sacred ground that only the priests of the various divinities were allowed to enter and nothing happened to them. S.U. Erivwo notes that the early Church was accepted because they defiled the traditional religion with impunity.

According to him: “It must be admitted that the persecutions were partly invited by the converts as a result of their attitude towards Urhobo indigenous religion. In many cases the Christians not only vocalized their disrespect for and division of the indigenous religion in songs but also actually carried out iconoclastic activities ... several traditional taboos (*tabu*) were broken forbidden forests (bad bushes) were cleared and converted to rubber plantations, sacred spots were desecrated. Indeed, as a result of the defiance of traditional taboo. Christians carried out these activities with impurity and ate prohibited items of food without any reprisal from the affected deities, the Church became popularly known all over Urhoboland as “Orogbegwa”.”¹⁸⁴

This bold expression of faith by the believers threatened the continuity of the traditional religion given that its dreaded phenomenon was desecrated without any punishment from the gods. The traditionalists had to fight for their gods. Some overzealous brethren who wanted to claim deeper knowledge of this new faith in the midst of the religious crisis between the traditional religion and Christianity exploited the opportunity. They emphasized the Church authority on reciting the

¹⁸³ Erivwo S.U., 2003, Christianity In Urhoboland: Past and Present in *The Urhobo People*, Onigu Otite, Ed. 2nd Ed, Shaneson C.I. Ltd., Ibadan.

¹⁸⁴ Erivwo S.U., 2003, Christianity In Urhoboland: Past and Present in *The Urhobo People*, Onigu Otite, Ed. 2nd Ed, Shaneson C.I. Ltd., Ibadan. p. 48.

catechism in the Yoruba language¹⁸⁵ not primarily for the promotion of the faith but to introduce schismatic ideas and heretical doctrines for personal advantages.

Oral tradition has it that Mr. Ebosa, one of the church leading agents, was caught in this error and he actually misled many from the doctrine of salvation by grace through faith in Christ Jesus by introducing some strange ways of life into the life of the Christians. He claimed some special revelations of hearing directly from God like Moses and the prophets of old. Oral tradition has it that he could make the doubting Thomas' believe as he claimed to hear from above and even speak back to God directly.

According to S.E. Arawore: 'In 1929 Mr. Ebosa who was the agent of the Church over the Ovwian River, had fallen from grace to grace with the Yoruba Mission, started to see visions and claiming to be a spiritualist. His mode of life changed, he grew beard hanging down, and he would not shave leaving his hair to curl over his head. He and his followers adopted fasting and prayers. They seduced men and women from the Church and many Church leaders erroneously joined them.'¹⁸⁶

The above account seems to be the beginning of strange teachings and claims to spiritual powers in the nascent Anglican Church. Catechist Agori-Iwe, who became the first Bishop of Anglican Diocese of Benin, being the only trained church worker and leader of the church, swung into action, combating this group with the Bible and sought support from both Church hierarchy in Lagos and government quarters to silence them. They were finally driven out to the riverine area of Escravos. These teachers continued till the death of Mr. Ebosa in 1947 in the riverine area, which is in Western Izon Diocese at present. Although Arawore claim that, "Ebosa out of the way, his followers started to return to the Church" is true. The very teaching that sent them away were not checked and properly addressed. The current wind of teaching from a "spirit-filled" group forbids

¹⁸⁵ The Bishop – Rt. Rev. James Johnson, according to S.U. Erivwo, requested that all converts must learn the Catechism in Yoruba before they could be baptised as members of the Anglican Church. The schismatic group saw it as colonization and exploited it to the defilement of the Church. Meanwhile, the Bishop was only trying to be sure that what they were been taught is the right thing hence the African language to which he is familiar (Yoruba) should be used.

¹⁸⁶ Arawore, S.E., 1981. *History of the church in Urhoboland*. Warri: Solig Prints, p. 41.

women under their menstrual circle from praying with other Christians; and conjugal relationship with one's spouse on the night before prayer meeting becomes a confessable sin that must be addressed before the adherent can join others to pray.

6.3 A concise history of Evang. Daniel Dikeji Mimeyeraye

Evang. Daniel Dikeji Mimeyeraye was born in Eyara village of the Ughievwen clan in Urhoboland of the Delta Province of Southern Protectorate of Nigeria in the year 1948 into the family of Puinini Mimeyeraye. He was the third child among five of the parent's children. According to his elder sister, Mrs. Esisio Omogu, his special position as the third child was divine.

The father of Evang. Daniel Mimeyeraye was a herbalist who worshipped a local deity called "Jodevwo" and was consulted by many people for spiritual assistance. The mother of Evang. Daniel Mimeyeraye, Mrs. Ketu Mimeyeraye, was brought to Mr. Puinini Mimeyeraye as a patient. The medication took a long time but she finally recovered from her illness in the compound of Mr. Puinini Mimeyeraye. This period of time gave the herbalist the opportunity to approach her for marriage. According to Esisio Omogu:

The family of our mother at Agbarho wholeheartedly gave our mother to our father in marriage after she was cured of her sickness with the understanding that he would allow her to remain a Christian, for she was a member of the Baptist Church. As a matter of fact, our mother delivered all of us in the Baptist Church before we converted to the Anglican Church in 1967.¹⁸⁷

Evang. Daniel Dikeji Mimeyeraye grew up in Eyara (his home town) and later migrated to Sapele to live with his uncle. While in Eyara, he attended the CMS Primary School in the community and sometimes ran into the school chapel to admire the church ornaments and furniture. While at Sapele, his uncle could not finance his education. He had to return home to the village just before the Christmas of 1966. At that time, the Eyara community were experiencing different disasters, ranging from death of children to strange sicknesses that

¹⁸⁷ Interview with Mrs. Esisio Omogu on the 4th of April, 2009 at Eyara Community, Delta State.

usually claimed lives. According to Canon Okorodudu,¹⁸⁸ it was this situation that motivated the community to send his father, Pa. Emmanuel Okorodudu Djogbe, of blessed memory, to Evang. Cornelius Adam Igbudu of Araya in Isokoland to come and pray to God to avert this evil. It was at that crusade that Mrs. Ketu Mimeyeraye and her children, with over 90% of the residents in the community converted to the Anglican Church. Evang. Mimeyeraye testified that God spoke to him to preach the gospel of the kingdom with Evang. Cornelius Adam Igbudu in a vision; hence, he left the Baptist Church for the Anglican. The father of Evang. Mimeyeraye lived and died an herbalist.

After the crusade in Eyara, Daniel Dikeji Mimeyeraye became very zealous for the Lord. He joined the Anglican Adam's Preaching Society (AAPS) and became very fervent in spirit. He followed Evangelist Adam Cornelius Igbudu to almost every crusade in Isoko, Urhobo and other places. The leadership of the AAPS did not rest on him after the death of Evangelist Adam Cornelius Igbudu but he had very large followership. Later, Evang. Mimeyeraye left for Warri to acquire a trade. He was trained as a proficient electronics repairer and was greatly blessed by God in this profession. He bought a Toyota Panel Van and inscribed on it "Radio Doctor," which popularized him. While in Warri, he was very prominent in the activities of Anglican Adam's Preaching Society (AAPS) at the St. Andrew's Cathedral, Okere-Warri. During that period, he became the assistant leader of the group from 1972-1984. The executive of the group were as follows:

- | | |
|---------------------------------|----------|
| Evang. Johnson Ivukiwhiaye- | – Leader |
| Evang. Daniel Dikeji Mimeyeraye | – Vice |
| Evang. Joshua Okorodudu | – Member |
| Evang. Daniel Diabeta | – Member |
| Evang. Samuel Ayayen | – Member |
| Evang. George Ejenavwo | – Member |

¹⁸⁸ Interview with Canon Jeremiah Okorodudu on the 14th January 2012 at All Saints' Cathedral, Ughelli, Delta State.

Evang. Government Amreakita – Member
Evang. James Omogosibo – Member
Evang. Matthew Okome – Secretary

There was, apart from the AAPS, a fasting and praying society formed by Evangelist Daniel Dikeji Mimeyeraye called Ukoko r'ruto (sanctification ministry) which started at No. 2, Egbe Street, off Odion Road on Friday 9th March 1984.

In the second quarter of the year 1984, election was held in AAPS and Evangelist D.D. Mimeyeraye became the leader of the AAPS, Warri Group as well as the leader of the fasting and praying society which met weekly on Fridays. In 1987, the AAPS and the fasting and praying society moved to St. James Church, Ekuruemu Street Ojagbogbe, Okuagba L/out, Warri. As reported by Very Rev. Prof. S.U. Erivwo:

It was a very rapid growing church as a result of Anglican Adam's Preaching Society (A.A.P.S.), an evangelistic group of St. James', which then led by a Lay-Reader, Mr. D.D. Mimeyeraye. In addition to the activities of the Anglican Adam's Preaching Society Mimeyeraye also founded a Friday fasting and praying groups, through which many souls were won, because the people of God fasted, prayed and proclaimed the gospel, signs and wonders inevitably followed.¹⁸⁹

Indeed the fasting-prayer meeting attracted a mammoth crowd from all walks of life weekly to St. James' Church, Warri. This group was later named Anglican Fasting and Praying Society (AFPS). It grew rapidly with zeal into the area of Ughelli, which was an Archdeaconry under the then Warri Diocese. This area of Ughelli grew to become a Diocese in 1998. Coincidentally, Evang. Daniel Dikeji Mimeyeraye hails from the present Ughelli Diocese. His teachings were accepted by the people as a man with an uncommon gift of the Holy Spirit. According to Evang. Johnson Ivukiwhiaye:

Mimeyeraye was given every support by the Anglican Church, especially the Ughelli people who saw him as their own. Because of the gift of God upon him, pride came into

¹⁸⁹ Erivwo S.U., 2001, *The pilgrimage*, Benin: Ambik Press, p. 190

him like Lucifer. As the prayer meeting was growing, he had no respect for elders and the clergy of the Church. He threw caution to the wind as he called the priest little Levite who should respect Moses. He saw himself as the Moses of the Church while the Bishop is his Aaron and the clergy a team of Levite.¹⁹⁰

The ministry established branches in many Anglican parishes in the current area called Ughelli Diocese. According to Evang. Mimeyeraye, God told him that all members of the group must keep the rules and regulations as dictated to him. This included the way women should conduct themselves while under their menstrual period:

A woman should not join people in prayers in the Church while under her menstrual circle as this is defilement to the church and a blockage to other people's prayers. Women and men must keep off from sex on the night preceding the prayer meeting as such "sinful act" will not be forgiven them until they confess their act to the leader who alone has power to do so.¹⁹¹

He further claimed that Jesus was a spiritual being and not human, in his interpretation of John 10:30. He continued in his teaching that the lifestyle of AFPS members may have no consequence on their salvation since they believe his teaching and God's grace will cover up for them. This teaching culminated in the naming of his Church "God's Grace Ministry."

These teachings provoked many couples who sought clearance from the Bishop whether it was sinful to marry. When Mimeyeraye was invited to substantiate his claims, he said that God told him directly to uphold these rules and asked the people whether it was not right to obey God? In a short interval, he came up with claims that God has given him all authority and has placed him above Jesus. According to him, God commanded Jesus Christ to vacate his throne for him to sit since he had done more work and spent more time in God's

¹⁹⁰ Interview with Evang. Johnson Ivukiwhiaye on 18th February, 2009 at Egini, Delta State, Nigeria.

¹⁹¹ Anglican Fasting and Praying Society (AFPS) Constitution, 1990, Article Three, P. 5.

vineyard than Jesus who spent only three years in his earthly ministry.¹⁹² Evang. Mimeyeraye claimed that, the “Anglican clergy were jealous of what God was doing through me and they decided to frustrate me, but God helped me to move on with the work. Today, they are regretting because God has made me the head and they will forever be under me”.¹⁹³

The controversy over these strange teachings ranged in the church and the Church authority set up a panel to investigate these claims. The Ven. Nidozi was made chairman and Canon Robinson Arhawho was secretary to the panel. They discovered that Evang. Daniel Mimeyeraye actually made these claims and refused to recount them as they were revealed to him by God. While the church was seeking a way out of this logjam, Evang. Daniel Mimeyeraye seceded from the Anglican Church to found his own ministry which he Christened “God’s Grace Ministry” in 2003. However, his teachings were already deep-rooted in the area of Ughelli where he hails from. The Fasting and Prayer meeting structure which he created and his teachings never left completely. Some of the group members who did not follow him continued with his teachings in the Anglican Church in Warri and Ughelli Dioceses. This led to a sanctimonious attitude by those who belonged to the group as they see themselves as people already saved while those who do not believe are on the part of everlasting damnation.

6.4 Evangelist Daniel Mimeyeraye’s Evangelical activities and achievements in the Anglican Diocese of Ughelli

The evangelical ministry of Evang. Daniel Mimeyeraye had great impact in the Anglican Diocese of Ughelli and beyond. From the headquarters of his ministry at St. James’ Ojabugbe, he opened up branches in Ughelli, Ovwian, Okwagbe, Aladja, Olomu, Edjekota and many other parishes in the Diocese. The fasting-prayer meeting met every Friday of the week. According to S.U. Erivwo, the number of converts won to the Anglican Church from 1983 to 1984 was over 5000. There were testimonies of women who married for over a period of 15

¹⁹² Interview with Very Rev. Prof. Erivwo S.U. on 19th February, 2009 at Ughelli, Delta State, Nigeria.

¹⁹³ Interview with Bishop Daniel Dikeji Miyerijesu on 13th March, 2010.

years without issues but gave birth after he prayed for them. No doubt, his evangelical campaign led to the establishment of some new parishes in the area. This included St. James' Church, Ojagugbe, which has grown to become an archdeaconry headquarters, in Warri Diocese of the Anglican Communion. Apart from this physical growth, there became spiritual reawakening in the life of the clergy in the area as people trooped to him for healing and other miracles. The emphasis on fasting and prayers as a tool for success and spiritual warfare was never in doubt in his teachings.

The unprecedented miracles attracted large followership and the then Bishop of Warri Diocese – Rt. Rev. John Dafiewhare, of blessed memory, gave him every needed support to exercise his spiritual gift. The people respected him greatly as the general leader of the group. They also confessed openly that he was more anointed than the priests who could not perform the miracles that he was performing. This situation might have provoked jealousy against the activities of Evang. Daniel Mimeyeraye.

The fasting and praying ministry lays emphasis on sanctification as a prerequisite requirement for heaven and all members were encouraged to contribute willingly to the finance of the group. This also boosts the finance of the church, as members started giving generously to the work of God in their various parishes in general and prayer ministry in particular. It was considered a great honour and opportunity for priest to work in the headquarters of his prayer ministry.

Evang. Daniel Mimeyeraye became a source of succour to many communities in Urhoboland. He was invited to different places to fell evil trees in the communities and offer prayers to ward off evil spirits from disturbing their environment. Some of the communities that benefited from his spiritual benevolence included Okparabe, Oviri-Olomu, Okwagbe, Owawha and Ekakpamre, to mention a few. The activities of Mimeyeraye brought growth to the Anglican Church numerically, financially and spiritually. The church enjoyed these benefits until it discovered that there were some strange teachings emanating from Evang. Mimeyeraye and they wanted to check it. This might have

infuriated the Evangelist who claimed to hear from God directly. He therefore, left the Church to found his own ministry which he named “God’s Grace Ministry.”

6.5 The teachings of Evangelist Daniel Mimeyeraye

A strong member of the Anglican Adam’s Preaching Society, and who later became a group leader,¹⁹⁴ Evang. Dikeji Daniel Mimeyeraye, rose to the rank of national Vice President.¹⁹⁵ Under this group, he nursed his personal fasting and prayer ministry from where he taught the people faith in God and how problems of life can be resolved through fasting and prayers. As he progressed with the activities of the group and growth came, there were reasons to standardise and consolidate his belief and teachings. According to him, a Christian personal experience is more convincing than whatever else life brings. Some of his teachings include the followings:

- (1) Women under their menstrual circle are defiled hence not allowed to pray with the group. Couple who have conjugal relationship in the night preceding the prayer meeting day must confess their act to him for prayers of forgiveness, as they have sinned against the temple of the Holy Spirit. This current wind of teaching from a “spirit-filled” group that forbids women under their menstrual circle from praying with other Christians and conjugal relationship with one’s spouse on the night before prayer meeting becoming a confessable sin that must be absolve before the adherent can join others to pray.
- (2) The Elevation of Personal Revelation above The Bible: The place and interpretation of private revelations in the Anglican Church has remained a major concern both for Clergy and Laity. While it is true that the Bible has all it takes for understanding the revelation of God to humanity, many individuals have declared God’s revelation of his love, his heavenly kingdom and even give directions to congregation in times of distress. The

¹⁹⁴ Eriwo S.U., 2001, *A story was told*, Benin: Ambik Press, p. 131.

¹⁹⁵ Eriwo S.U., 2001, *A story was told*, Benin: Ambik Press, p. 139.

salvific knowledge that a recipient deliver to his adherents through private or public revelation is quite distinct from belief and conceptual understanding with logical deductions.

- (3) Evang. Mimeyeraye's Elevation above all the Prophets and Jesus Christ: This centres on the present-day experiences as manifested by the various proclamations of Evang. Mimeyeraye where God frequently spoke to him on his elevation above every prophet of the Bible and those who refuse to accept him as the Bishop of the world will languish in hell. According to him, God usually orders Jesus Christ to get up from the throne for him to sit while Jesus remains standing, until he has finished his discussion with God the Father, that the Bible has no record of anyone who has sat upon the throne of Judgment, yet we must believe in this revelation or vision if we must make heaven.

According to Mimeyeraye, "God has spoken to me that I am greater than Moses, Elijah and the rest prophets who lived before me, whose life are recorded in the Bible. On the day He told Jesus to leave the throne for me to sit on, I was afraid and I said no Father, but he said that Jesus only worked for three years and lived for thirty years but you have worked for me (God) for over thirty years and your works are great than those of Jesus and that I am the one the people should look unto henceforth, but I said Father, they will not believe my story.

- (4) "Those I suspend cannot be restored by anyone to faith in God, however God has given me authority to restore all men to grace, and even those who were earlier separated from the Church, because I have laboured longer than Jesus".¹⁹⁶
- (5) Salvation for the Dead: According to him, his father who died as a priest of the local divinity of his community has been transferred from hell to heaven for the sake of his good works and his position in the house of God. The prerequisite requirement is the good work of the living which will, in turn, save the dead from their agony in hell. This "window of grace" that has been opened in the imagination and confessions of this

¹⁹⁶ Delta Rainbow Television, Warri.

group has afforded those living the opportunity to rescue their loved ones who may have ended up in eternal damnation. They will not only join their people, but also enjoy eternal bliss on the merits of their children or relations whose labour the Lord has considered for this honour.

- (6) According to Mimeyeraye, all members under the leadership of this group must first believe that they are a special class of people whose leader retains the potency to plead their petitions before the Father directly and therefore obeying his word is as reliable as obeying Scripture.

After his secession, he changed his title to Bishop of the whole world and his name to St. Dikeji Miyerijesu. According to him, this title ranks him higher than the Roman Catholic Pope and gave him the singular honour of having regular breakfast, lunch and dinner with God the Father and Jesus Christ.

From the above analysis of the characteristics of the teachings of this prayer-and-fasting group, his teaching shows doctrinal heresy and ethical indifference. The religious and ethical deviation under attack shows a Gnostic tendency. There is clear evidence that these heretical teachings represent Christological, Trinitarian and Ethical errors.

6.6 A critical analysis of Evang. Daniel Mimeyeraye's doctrine

It is important to clarify schism and heresy for better understanding of the origin, nature and activities of the new teachings within the church of Anglican in Ughelli Diocese, Nigeria. According to Aquinas, schism is a breaking away, a division which disrupts unity. In this case, this movement broke away; or rather it is a division which disrupts the unity among the Anglican Communion. As a sin, this group is the disruption of unity born of charity. It is the sin of cutting away from the unity of the faithful under the rule of the Vicar of Christ; it is the refusal to submit to the rule and jurisdiction of the sovereign pontiff. In this context, Vicar of Christ within the Anglican Church is the Bishop of Ughelli Diocese. Aquinas argued further that schism is a grave sin, but it is not so grave as heresy and unbelief.

Heresy cuts a person off from the unity of the faithful just as schism does; but heresy adds to this the evil of embracing false doctrine. The fasting and praying groups do not only cut themselves from the Anglican Communion, but they also have embraced false doctrine. The schismatics lose the right to exercise spiritual powers; they lose jurisdiction itself, and not merely its licit use. It is right and just that the schismatic, who sever themselves from the unity of the Church, should be punished by the Church with the penalty their action invites, namely excommunication.¹⁹⁷ The aforementioned group is schismatic and heretic. It is heretical because it embraces false doctrines.

Having shown the nature and characteristics of these erroneous teachings, we shall proceed to examining Prophecy, knowledge and belief to understand the Gnostic tendencies of the group. Given the syncretic nature of this teaching, there is a need to ascertain the different variants of heresies inherent in this movement and place it in proper perspective within the history of Christianity in an attempt to address the erroneous teaching.

6.7 Prophecy, knowledge and belief as held by the group

Prophecy is the certain foretelling of a future event by a person supernaturally moved to announce it. Prophecy consists primarily in the *knowledge* of future events; this knowledge is beyond the natural power of creatures to acquire, and is imparted by God to the prophet. Prophecy is the “expression in speech” of the divinely imparted prophetic knowledge. It takes its fullness and perfection from the “certainty of the message” prophetically made. This certainty will have its proof when the event prophesied comes to pass, but it is requisite for perfect prophecy to have a backing and guarantee at the time the prophets speaks. This backing and guarantee of certainty is usually afforded by the aid of miracles.¹⁹⁸

¹⁹⁷ Glenn P.J. 1993, *A tour of the Summa of St. Thomas Aquinas* Bangalore-India: Theological Publications, pp. 211-212

¹⁹⁸ Glenn P.J. 1993, *A tour of the Summa of St. Thomas Aquinas* Bangalore-India: Theological Publications, p. 291

The knowledge of a genuine prophet cannot be accounted for by any natural power in himself. This knowledge is from God. It is revealed knowledge, not acquired knowledge, and God is its cause. St. Peter says (11 Pet. 1:21): “Prophecy came not by the will of man...but the holy men of God spoke, inspired by the Holy Ghost.”

According to Kenny, authority in any religion initially is prophetic. Scripture is a record of prophetic utterances and is a way of extending the time span of a prophetic event that occurred at a specific time in history. Thus scripture becomes an authority in religion. A religion may stop with that, or there may be ongoing prophecy on the part of some leaders or among the people in general. Old Testament Judaism is noted for ongoing prophetic experience in many different forms. Its oral transmission and eventual commitment to scripture is another facet of prophesy. For a time, prophecy was deemed to have stopped, but scripture, whether deuterocanonical or purely apocryphal, was being produced right up to the New Testament.

For Christians, with special reference to Catholicism, Jesus is the final and complete prophet and revelation (Heb 1:1), but an explicative prophecy continues in an institutional way in the Pope and college of bishops. The Catholic Church stands out among all Christian churches for its “Magisterium”. This does not obscure the direct influence of the Spirit on all the faithful. Each of the baptized has a share of prophecy in a mystical communing with God through faith and understanding and by the witness of their lives. Certain others also have various charismatic forms of prophecy for the benefit of others. Other religious communities revolve around a scriptural record of prophecy which becomes the sole authority, although some also have a secondary scripture representing tradition. This is the case with Judaism from the New Testament times, when prophecy is deemed to have ceased.

Kenny further argues that, in “evangelical” tradition, religious experience generally does not touch on doctrine and, in spite of the right of private interpretation, the “plain sense” of Scripture as interpreted by the leader of a

denomination tends to become the imposed norm.¹⁹⁹ He highlights the issue of ongoing prophecy among any of the faithful. Another tendency emphasizes private experience of God or the “inner voice,” sometimes giving it greater authority than scripture. In Judaism, there is Hasidism, but this seems to be purely mystical, with no charismatic, much less doctrinal dimension. Pentecostalism recognizes Scripture but also the prophetic inspiration of the individual, which sometimes is given more authority than Scripture. In theory, it is egalitarian, but in practice certain “anointed” individuals arrogate to themselves more authority than any Pope or bishop claims in Christendom.²⁰⁰

According to Mbukanma, the word “know,” as different from belief, has the import of a direct and personal acquaintance (flesh and blood contact) with an objective reality.²⁰¹ The revelations of God to the prophets of Old were for direction and commissioning either of which was to correct the erring ones or to encourage them to continue to trust in the Lord.²⁰² While it is true that God will at, some time, build confidence in the recipient, like the case of Jeremiah and Ezekiel, it is doubtful that the receiver of private revelations and their messages are higher and more important than the word of the Lord, which was earlier revealed and canonized as Scripture. In most religious beliefs, revelation is the disclosure of divine initiatives, unravelling of secrets to the finite by divine enablement. The biblical affirmation of the reality of God through our environment and nature cannot fully express and guide humans into the deep truth of the knowledge of God as evident in the experience of Job (Job 42:5) “Jesus speaks in prayer of God’s revealing heavenly truths to his followers, who presumably would have otherwise remained ignorant of them” – Matt. 11:25-27.

¹⁹⁹ Kenny J., 2010, Authority in Pentecostalism: comparative theological perspectives” in *Creativity and Change in Nigerian Christianity*, David O. Ogungbile & Akintunde E. Akinade, Eds. Lagos: Malthouse Press Limited, p.76

²⁰⁰ Kenny J., 2010, “Authority in Pentecostalism: Comparative Theological Perspectives” in *Creativity and Change in Nigerian Christianity*. David O. Ogungbile & Akintunde E. Akinade, Eds. Lagos: Malthouse Press Limited, p.77

²⁰¹ Mbukanma J.O., 2004, *A Theology of Private Revelation*, Ibadan, p. 207

²⁰² Yarbrough R.W., 2000. Revelation in *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, England: Intervarsity Press, p.733

The revelations of God to humans are multidimensional, as the Scripture points out. The Divine being may grant a theophanic experience to an individual, as abundantly proven by the experiences of Hagar, (Gen. 16:7), Abraham (Gen. 18; 22:11-12), Jacob (Gen. 32:29-30), Moses (Exo. 3:2-6), Gideon (Judg. 6:11-14). These occurrences may be angelically guided and with specific directions about the future, or the need to purify the agent for a particular assignment. While the visible operation of the Trinity is witnessed regularly, the Father and the Spirit have not been physically driving with mortal, as seen in Scripture. It was the Son (Jesus) who came in the flesh and dwelt amongst men.

The suspension of natural laws and unexpected disasters at various times could also be revelatory acts of God to humanity. One of the most commonly claimed medium of God's revelation is by dreams. While the Elkists believe in soul travelling²⁰³ into the presence of God to actually make enquiry about the past and future, the Bible speaks of dreams and trances as medium of revelation by God to man (Heb. 1:1). The Old and New Testaments all speak about God's manifestation of himself to man through dreams. The experiences of Abimelech, Jacob, Joseph and Pharaoh (Gen. 20:3; Gen 37:5; Gen. 4:14) in the Old Testament God's instruction to Joseph and Mary, Paul and even Pilate's wife, in the New Testament all attest to these assertion (Matt. 1:20, 2:12-22; Acts 16:9-10; Matt. 27:19).

6.8 Evangelist Mimeyerae's doctrine Vis-à-Vis Ancient heresies

The dangers that confronts the Church today is the ability to properly discern a dream from God, as the Scriptures warn against false dreams or false revelations which might be deceptive and destructive to the faith once confessed by the people in God. The falsehood of the false prophets and exaltation of their revelation above the word of God is clearly seen in the work of Prophet Jeremiah. I have heard what the prophet say who prophesy lies in my name. They say 'I had a dream! I had a dream! How long will this continue in the hearts of these lying

²⁰³ Yarbrough, R.W., 2003, Revelation In *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, Leicester: Intervarsity Press, p. 737.

Prophet, who prophesy the delusions of their own minds? They think the dreams they tell one another will make my people forget my name, just as their father forgot my name through Baal worship. Let the prophets who has a dream tell his dream, but let the one who has my word speak it faithfully...(Jer. 23:25-28).

The self-glorification of some prophets by their claims to private revelation seems to have plagued the community of God's people from a very early stage and God, from the above quotation in Jeremiah, seems to have exalted his word above the dreams and prophecies of such men that run contrary to the word of God. A historical observation of various prophetic utterances and revelatory claims of the original recipient reveals that the experience leads the people to lower their innately high view of themselves and give God due regard. Although revelation attract the recipient to God, it is not God himself, as "Salvation is not by revelation per se; it is rather by God's promise enacted in Christ's justifying death and resurrection".²⁰⁴ The apocalyptic experiences of the apostles all pointing to the glory of God is revealed in Christ Jesus or a directive on coming events that He has provided a means of escape. Visible amongst biblical references are the account of John in the Book of Revelation, the experience of Peter in prison, the revelation to Paul on God's choice. The post-apostolic writers mainly saw Christ as the revelation of God's love. They used *apokalypso*, *apokalypsis* or *Gnōrizo*. This is seen in the writings of Clement of Rome, Ignatius, the Epistle to Diognetus and the shepherd of Hermas.

The truthfulness of the claims of recipients of private revelations is the litmus test set forth by Moses in the Old Testament which other biblical writers affirmed (Deut. 13:1-3, 18:20-22; Num. 16:28-30; cf. 2 Chron. 18, 27 and Jer. 28:9). This criterion applies to the New Testament which attests to the fulfilment of Old Testament prophecies. All recipients, of biblical revelations lower their innate high view of themselves and give God due regard. The current claims of exalting the recipient of revelation above the Christ who is part of the Trinity fails

²⁰⁴ In Philo, the Hellenistic, Gnostic, and Old Testament concepts merge with one another, and it is often hard to say which one is dominant. But Philo's starting point is the Old Testament, and his method is the allegorical interpretation of scripture.

to point out the doxological imperative that biblical revelation conveys. A conspicuous fact about these writings is that the idea of God's counsel and Jesus' person through revelations has lost its New Testament content and has been reduced chiefly to visionary and apocalyptic experiences which are mainly centred on the recipient rather than giving glory to God and His Christ, which is the nucleus of faith.

From our examination of the above concepts and critique of Evang. Mimeyeraye's doctrine, there is a clear evidence of Gnostic tendency. We shall now examine the Gnostic heresy and its implications for Christological and Trinitarian doctrines in Christendom.

6.8.1 Gnostic heresy

The Gnostic movement has two salient features that appeal to countless minds in every age, that is, the claim to present a secret lore, explaining otherwise incomprehensible mysteries, and the assertion that its secrets are accessible only to the elite, thus defining as elite all who take an active interest in them.²⁰⁵ In fact, even so gifted an intellectual as Paul himself warned against thinking that Christianity attracts many members of the worldly elite (1Cor. 1:26-27). Consequently, the tendency for intellectual Christians to glide over into one kind of Gnosticism or another, in which they think that intellectual attainment make them superior Christians, remains a perennial temptation.²⁰⁶

The revelatory knowledge of God outside of Jesus seems to be central to the Gnostic claims of salvation by knowledge and this will void the promise of God enacted in Christ's justifying death and resurrection. The place and purpose of revelation as revealed in Scripture and the current surge of private revelations with their attendant implications have brought to light the understanding of some persons whose self-determination for recognition has led to the birth of "Selfism" in the Church, in general, and the Anglican Church, in particular. There was the

²⁰⁵ Cf. Brown, H.O.J. 2007 *Heresies: heresy and orthodoxy in the history of the Church*. U.S.A: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc. p.44

²⁰⁶ Cf Brown H.O.J. 2007 *Heresies: heresy and orthodoxy in the history of the Church*. U.S.A: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc. p.44

consolidation of Anglican ecclesiology in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, when, in spite of the emergence of distinct traditions within the Anglican Communion, a prevalent consensus existed that the reformation was biblically noted and, therefore, traditions and personal experiences must be in conformity with Scripture. The supremacy of Scripture above all traditions and personal claims with varied conceptions of the infallibility of the Roman papacy is considered the strongest forces that agitated the minds of the English reformers. William Parkius observes that the infallibility of the Pope and adoration of mortal man with various images by the Roman Catholic Church has razed the foundation of faith.²⁰⁷

Selfism seeks to firmly establish the Gnostic concept of a superior knowledge of the unknown Father imparted to a few spiritual natures and unattainable by the average Christian. This thought does not only limit the knowledge of the Father to a privileged few, but further brings into the assembly the doctrine of infallibility of the exclusive few while the average Christian still struggles with the dilemma of sin.

6.8.2 Christological heresy

In one of his television broadcast, Mimeyraye said:

God spoke to me one afternoon that I am greater than Moses and Elijah and even Jesus Christ. For Jesus' ministry only lasted for three and half year while you have laboured in my vineyard for over eighteen years. Tell my children to believe else, they will end up in hell of fire. You are the demon destroyer and Bishop of the whole world. Mary the mother of Jesus will henceforth be your mother's househelp, and any one you desire to take from hell fire I will give to you because of your good works in my vineyard. Then I asked God, what of those who have died? God said, if I request it, they would be moved from this agony and taken straight to heaven.²⁰⁸

²⁰⁷ Perkins, W. Ed.1970, *The work of William Perkins*. I Breward, Appleford, London: Berks Sutton Courtenay Press, p. 519.

²⁰⁸ Delta Rainbow Television, Warri.

Furthermore, the appearance of Evangelist Mimeyeraye before God the Father and the vacation of the throne by Jesus in recognition of his supremacy to allow him sit and chat with the Father raise serious concern on whether Jesus still remains the head of the Church. This claim runs contrary to the biblical doctrine and tradition of the apostles which the early Church cherished. The name of Jesus that is highly esteemed above every other one (Phil. 2:9-11) and the throne upon which the Lamb sits, from where he proceeds to receive the seven seals from God for opening (Rev. 5:1-14), now being occupied by a mortal man in his private revelation.

In asserting himself, Evangelist Mimeyeraye runs contrary to the teaching of the Johannine epistles, which affirms, Jesus as the Christ, the Son of God and explains the uniqueness of Jesus' sonship to God in a way that other pious men are not (1 John 4:9). To understand the basic Christological tenets of the heretics, we must first look at the confessional formulas that are brought to bear against heretics.²⁰⁹ Even if these are not directed emphatically against the heretics, they do, taken as a whole, create a picture of the faith in its light and shade which ought to protect the church against these dangerous influences. The most important of this, allowing for certain schematization, are as follows:

- i) The emphasis on pre-existence in the phrase "what was from the beginning" (Jn. 1:1); "him who is from the beginning" (Jn. 2:13a, 14b)
- ii) The presentation of the great salvation event in terms of incarnation (Jn. 1:2, "was revealed"; 3:8a; cf. 4:9)
- iii) The emphasis on the atoning death of Jesus through the shedding of his blood for us (or for our sins) (Jn 1:7, "blood"; 2:2; 4:10, "atoning sacrifice"; 4:14, "the Saviour of the world"; 3:8b, "to destroy the works of the devil"; 3:16, "for us"; 2:12, "forgiveness of sins": on account of his name)

²⁰⁹ Schnackenburg R., 1992 *The Johannine Epistles* Great Britain: BURNS & OATES, Pp.18-19

- iv) The confession of the unique sonship and divinity of Jesus (Jn 4:9, “only”; 2:22, 23, 24: 4:14; 5:12; 2 John 9, “ the Son,” used absolutely; 5:20, “ the true God and eternal life”; 1:1 “ the word of Life”).²¹⁰

6.8.3 Trinitarian heresy

According to Tertullian, the connection of the Father in the Son, and of the Son in the Paraclete, produces three coherent persons, who are yet distinct one from another. These Three are one essence, not one person, as it is said, “I and the Father are one,” in respect of unity of substance, not singularity of number.²¹¹

Two heresies within the Church, Monarchianism and Arianism, were finally put down in a series of decisions that made trinitarianism synonymous with Christianity for over a millennium. It was to be fully two centuries before the church definitively settled on the declaration that the Christian faith necessarily and explicitly means faith in the Trinity. The monarchians, affirmed the oneness of God, but denied that the Son and the Holy Spirit are real persons, distinct from the Father. The Arians acknowledged the distinctness of the Son (and to an extent of the Spirit) vis-à-vis the father, but they did not acknowledge him to be fully God. In consequence, the willingness of the Arians to worship the Son and the Holy spirit even though they were not of the substance of the Father led to the charge that Arianism tended to polytheism and thus to paganism.²¹²

Orthodox Trinitarian doctrine is summarized in the definition “One essence [or nature, substance] in three Persons.” There is but one God, as the Jewish *Shema* (The prayer “Hear, O Israel...”) affirms (Deut.6:4), for there is only one divine essence. This essence subsists in three distinct subjects or persons.²¹³ Evangelist Mimeyeraye claim of being in union with the Trinity and perhaps making himself the fourth person being introduced to humanity has not

²¹⁰ Schnackenburg R., 1992 *The Johannine Epistles* Great Britain: BURNS & OATES, Pp.18-19

²¹¹ Cf. Brown, H.O.J. 2007. *Heresies: heresy and orthodoxy in the history of the Church* U.S.A: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc. p.145.

²¹² Cf. Brown H.O.J. 2007 *Heresies: heresy and orthodoxy in the history of the Church* U.S.A: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc. p.145

²¹³ Cf. Brown H.O.J. 2007 *Heresies: heresy and orthodoxy in the history of the Church* U.S.A: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc. p146.

only negated the biblical teaching of Jesus being exalted above all other men, but actually calls to question the place and authority of Jesus who has been known and preached as the Son of God and the second person of the Trinity

The above insistence of the recipient of this revelation of his supremacy to Jesus of Nazareth and personal encounter with the Father appears to refer, at its narrowest level, to the relevance of his person and place of authority within the Trinitarian hierarchy. Ultimately, the position of Jesus in the Church as revealed in Scripture and the interpretation of the same by the apostles and Church fathers through the ages negates this assertion and personal experiences that are being propagated.

The account recorded above has not only put to task the place of Jesus in the presence of the Father. It is equally an introduction of self-establishment through superior personal revelation of one's importance. This teaching and concept, which has filtered into the Church, gives the place of pre-eminence to the carrier of the message rather than the message itself.

This teaching has received some level of acceptance within the fold and it has, to a large extent, manifested in the response to our questionnaire. Out of the six hundred copies of the questionnaire distributed, two hundred and seventy-six respondents, which represents forty-six percent of the total respondents agreed. In the fourth question where the opinion of the respondents was sought on personal revelation validity and person above God's written word, only seventy-eight respondents (13%) responded affirmatively. This strongly reveals that many of the church members were in doubt over the claim of superiority above Jesus Christ and personal experiences being more reliable than Scripture.

The doctrine of "Selfism" seeks inclusivity into the repeated parallelism which effectively puts the Father and the Son on a level of equality. In trying to establish this, allusion to various revelations as God's sign of acceptance and approval, a personal claim to divine encounter was necessary. Since faith is said to come from hearing, the idea is inculcated daily into the hearts of those who care to listen and raise in them the belief that a man can share in his divine characteristic. The propagation of this concept has led to titles like, "Osu akpo

eje” leader of the whole world, “Demon Destroyer”, “Bishop of the whole world’ and so on. This concept raises the hope and faith of the people on the supernatural being, but not according to Scripture.

Again, the realization of the doctrine of “self” under the canopy of revelation has also brought to light the belief that those who refuse to accept the teaching and the teacher have blasphemed against God and his anointed servant. The word “Selfism,” describes the doctrine of self-importance manifesting itself in multidimensional phases. Jesus, in his teaching, held that every sin against the Father and the Son can be forgiven; however, sins against the Holy Spirit are unforgivable. The belief and idea propagated are that the Bishop of the whole world is labouring in the power of God the Father and his works and presence gives comfort to the followers, a duty performed by the Holy Spirit, he therefore, enjoys equal status. Having taken a cursory look at the various doctrinal flaws inherent among the prayer and fasting group led by Evangelist Mimeyeraye, it is evident that they run contrary to Christian doctrine.

6.9 Social and ethical implications of Evang. Daniel Mimeyeraye’s doctrinal flaws in Anglican Community, Ughelli Diocese

In relating prophesy and evil spirit, Aquinas argued that evil spirits are fallen angels: by their angelic intellect, they know things that man cannot naturally know, and they can reveal these things to man. But this revelation is neither divine nor supernatural. One who proclaims knowledge acquired from demons is not, in a strict sense, a prophet; at best, he is to be called “a false prophet.” Even such “a false prophet” may speak truth; indeed, he must offer some truth, or he would quickly be discredited, and could win no one to believe the essential falsity he wishes to propagate.²¹⁴

Evangelist Mimeyeraye, who claimed to be travelling to heaven and hell regularly, said that many people who are considered great while on earth are languishing in hell, but a window of deliverance has been opened by God for their salvation through his ministry. He also claimed that he had been praying to God

²¹⁴ Glenn P.J. 1993, *A Tour of the Summa of St. Thomas Aquinas* p.293

for years and working signs and wonders through the power of Almighty God. These doctrinal teaching encourages increase in social and moral evil on the grounds that there is no permanent punishment here and after one's existence. Thus, this doctrinal teaching promotes moral decadence and social evil. This teaching is at variance with the biblical story of Lazarus and the rich in the scripture.

According to Jesus, there was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and lived in luxury every day. At his gate laid a beggar named Lazarus, covered with sores and longing to eat what fell from the rich man's table. Even the dogs came and lick his sores. The time came when the beggar died and the angels carried him to Abraham's side. The rich man also died and was buried. In hell where he was in torment, he looked up and saw Abraham far away, with Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, because am in agony in this fire. But Abraham replied, 'son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, while Lazarus received bad things, but now he is comforted here and you are in agony. And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been fixed, so that those who want to go from here to you cannot, nor can anyone cross over from there to us (Lk. 16:19-26).

The account of the rich man and Lazarus suggests that death actually closes all doors of repentance against sinners or unbelievers who did not confess their faith in Jesus Christ while they were still journeying in their earthly pilgrimage. This parable emphasizes human actions and responsibility and encourages moral rectitude as against the doctrines of Evangelist Mimeyeraye.

6.10 Church administration and the problem of heretical teachings

According to Kenny, the institutional prophetic role of the magisterium is the distinguishing feature of Catholicism which other Christian bodies officially reject. Yet Pentecostalism or prayer and fasting groups bring it in by the back door, when it exalts the pastor to an infallible oracle of the Holy Spirit for any and all matters of faith and life.²¹⁵ Among the gift of the Holy Spirit, Catholic

²¹⁵ Kenny J., 2010 "Authority in Pentecostalism: Comparative Theological Perspectives" p.76

Theology places priority on those that assist the practice of the moral and theological virtues, which are the measure of the holiness of a person. These gifts are distinguished from those which are for the service of the community, such as tongues, prophecy, teaching, miracles and so on, which we may designate “charismatic” gifts, and have no bearing on the holiness or lack of it in a person.²¹⁶

In facing the challenge of the prayer and fasting group, The Anglican Church administration is emphasizing the need to stress clearly the necessity of seeking first the kingdom of God, which consists in the life of grace, drawing nourishment from instructions and the sacraments and bearing fruit in the practice of the virtues.²¹⁷ Then all else, the material needs, which we may legitimately pray for, will be added to us. The fact is that grace builds upon nature and does not destroy it. This principle is built upon orthodox Christology, which recognizes the two natures of Christ in one divine person. In practice, it means that human effort or hard work combines harmoniously with reliance on divine help, and neither should be stressed at the expense of the other.²¹⁸

6.11 Empirical information and data analysis

The Diocese of Ughelli, which comprised Ughelli North, Ughelli South, Udu, Part of Uvwie, Patani and Brurutu Local Government Areas of Delta State, was the distribution centre for the six hundred copies of the questionnaire that were administered to both members of the Fasting and Prayer Ministry and other members of the Church. These copies of the questionnaire were given to leaders of the prayer meeting and priests alike to distribute to parishioners and their cooperation in feeling and returning the same was very encouraging. The first part of the questionnaire elucidated information on the respondents, whose age range was 18 years and above. A total of three hundred and sixty-three females

²¹⁶ Cf. Matt. 24:24

²¹⁷ I am indebted to Joseph Kenny for this idea. Cf. Joseph Kenny 2010 Authority in Pentecostalism: comparative theological perspectives in *creativity an change in Nigerian Christianity* . David O. Ogungbile & Akintunde E. Akinade. Eds Lagos: Malthouse Press Limited.

²¹⁸ Kenny, J.2010/ Authority in Pentecostalism: comparative theological perspective in creating a change in Nigrian Christianity. David, O.O. and Akintuhde, E. A. Eds.

participated, while two hundred and thirty-seven males also responded. This brought the total to six hundred persons. The age frequency was from 18 years to 75 years, which covered the decision-making body of the Church in line with the constitution of Church of Nigeria (Anglican Communion) and the Diocese of Ughelli.

The table below shows the age of the respondents:

Table 1: Age of Respondent

AGE	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE	CUMULATIVE %
18 – 20	22	3.7	3.7
21 – 35	183	30.5	34.2
36 – 45	118	19.6	53.8
46 – 55	133	22.2	76.0
56 – 65	135	22.5	98.5
66 and above	9	1.5	100

Source: Field Survey (Questionnaire), 2010

The above data cut across the decision-making population of the church. These respondents were preferred as their decisions governed the church, which is Episcopally led.

The next area of investigation was the academic level of the respondents. The table below shows their academic status:

Table 2: Academic Qualification of the Respondents

EDUCATIONAL LEVEL	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE	CUMULATIVE %
PRIMARY SCHOOL LEAVER	26	4.3	4.3
SECONDARY SCHOOL LEAVER	138	23.0	27.3
NCE/OND HOLDER	106	17.7	45.0
HND/DEGREE	241	40.2	85.2
POSTGRADUATE DEGREE	87	14.5	99.7
BLANK	2	.3	100
TOTAL	600	100	100

Source: Field Survey (Questionnaire), 2010

The above figure reveals that more than fifty percent of the respondents held National Certificate of Education or National Diploma and above. This shows that they are educated persons who could read the Bible intelligently and consider the meaning of the same to a large extent.

We also considered the marital status of the respondent because some of the questions and teachings related to marriage. The table below is the result of the analysis of the marital status of the respondents:

Table 3: Marital Status of the Respondents

CLASS	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE	CUMULATIVE %
SPINSTER	98	16.3	16.3
BACHELOR	78	13.0	29.3
MARRIED	394	65.7	95.0
DIVORCED	3	0.5	95.5
WIDOW/WIDOWER	27	4.5	100
TOTAL	600	100	100

Source: Field Survey (Questionnaire), 2010

The above table shows that 65.7% of the respondents were married and still in marriage; hence, they could respond on their experiences and belief. The younger generation looking forward to marriage made up 29.3%, while widows and divorces were 55 of the total respondents.

It is also necessary to know the aspect of society which engaged the services of these respondents. This was to ascertain whether they were responsible people whose livelihood did not depend on charity from the group. The table below shows our finding.

Table 4: Occupation of the Respondents

OCCUPATION	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE	CUMULATIVE %
CIVIL SERVANT	128	21.3	21.3
TRADERS	216	36.0	57.3
FARMERS	108	18.0	75.3
APPLICANTS	114	19.0	94.3
OTHERS	34	5.7	100
TOTAL	600	100	100

Source: Field Survey (Questionnaire), 2010

The above table reveals that the majority of the respondents were traders, (36%); the civil servants made up 21.3%; the farmers' were 18.0%. Altogether, 75.3% of the total respondents were gainfully employed.

The first question in the questionnaire was on whether the Bible is a complete revelation of God to humanity. The responses of the respondents are shown below:

Table 5: The Bible as a Complete Revelation of God

GROUP	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE	CUMULATIVE %
AGREE	188	31.3	31.3
STRONGLY AGREE	391	65.2	96.5
DISAGREE	15	2.5	99.0
STRONGLY DISAGREE	6	1.0	100
NO RESPONSE	-	-	-
TOTAL	600	100	100

Source: Field Survey (Questionnaire), 2010

As shown in this table, 65.2% of the respondent strongly agreed that the Bible is a complete revelation of God to humanity and 31.3% also agreed to the same. However, 2.5% disagreed, while 1% strongly disagreed. The Anglican Communion holds that

“Holy Scripture contains all things necessary to salvation; so that whatever is not read therein, nor may be proved thereby is not to be required of any man, that it should be believed as an article of Faith, or be thought requisite or necessary to salvation. In the name of the Holy Scripture we do understand those canonical books of Old and New Testament of whose authority was never any doubt in the Church”...²¹⁹

The response to this first question is in line with our research question, which was coined from the theoretical framework, which states that, “The truth about God, Jesus and the Holy Spirit are all in the Bible, but those who wish to go astray seek for secrets and deeper revelations”. The fact that 3.5% of the respondents disagreed with the Bible being a complete revelation of God to humanity reveals how the teaching of the fasting and prayer ministry has affected the faith of the people.

The second question was on secret revelation makes us have a better understanding of God. Our findings from the respondents are as stated below:

²¹⁹ The Book of Common Prayer (Church of Nigeria – Anglican Communion), 2007, *Articles of Religion*, p. 483

Table 6: Secret Revelation as Key to Understanding God

GROUP	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE	CUMULATIVE %
AGREE	276	46.0	46.0
STRONGLY AGREE	197	32.8	78.8
DISAGREE	85	14.2	93.0
STRONGLY DISAGREE	42	7.0	100
NO RESPONSE	-	-	-
TOTAL	600	100	100

Source: Field Survey (Questionnaire), 2010

The above table reveals that 46.0% of the respondents agreed that secret revelation gives a better understanding of God and 32.8% strongly agreed to it. Those who disagreed and strongly disagreed with it were 21.2%. The influence of teaching on these respondents can no longer be doubted, as they saw personal revelation as a key to helping faith. While it is true that God still reveals himself to men, the final revelation and guide to all things remain the Scripture Bible. The teaching of Evang. Mimeyeraye that his personal revelations are superior to the word of God may have influenced some of these responses. On the claim that

The Bible is not the only source of revelation about God

Table 7: Human Revelation as Superior to God's Word

GROUP	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE	CUMULATIVE %
AGREE	88	14.7	14.7
STRONGLY AGREE	46	7.7	22.4
DISAGREE	167	27.8	50.2
STRONGLY DISAGREE	97	16.2	66.4
NO RESPONSE	202	33.6	100
TOTAL	600	100	100

Source: Field Survey (Questionnaire), 2010

The above table reveals that 14.7% of the respondents agreed that the Bible is not the only source of revelation from God, while 7.7% strongly agreed. But 27.8% disagreed that is, they believed that the Bible is the only source of revelation from God, while 16.2% strongly agreed with this claim. The shocking revelation from this question is the large number of respondents who did not respond; 33.6% of the respondents were not sure of the main source of revelation

from God. This may be as a result of different teachings, experiences and claims that have pervaded the community.

Individual revelation from God is more reliable than the Bible

The responses of the respondents to this are shown below in this table.

Table 8: Individual Experience is better than God’s Word

GROUP	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE	CUMULATIVE %
AGREE	78	13.0	13.0
STRONGLY AGREE	61	10.1	23.1
DISAGREE	238	39.7	62.8
STRONGLY DISAGREE	223	37.2	100
NO RESPONSE	-	-	-
TOTAL	600	100	100

Source: Field Survey (Questionnaire), 2010

The above table reveals that 39.7% of the respondents did not believe in personal revelation being more reliable than the word of God and 37.2% strongly disagreed with the idea. However, those who agreed and strongly agreed were 23.2%, which is large enough for concern. This group of respondents believed the teaching that personal revelation is more important than the Bible. Moses has actually warned that any prophet who leads away from the teaching of God as contained in the law must not be accepted.

However, the second research question on the fact that religious trust always blindfolds followers of religious leaders in the face of wrong teaching reveals a lot. This again calls for examination of this concept with the word of God as written in Scripture.

God’s revelations today are superior to those of the days of Jesus

This question on the above was designed to elucidate information on whether the messages the people are receiving from these teachers are truly equated with the teaching of Jesus. The table below shows their responses:

Table 9: Present Day Revelation is Superior to Jesus' Teaching

GROUP	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE	CUMULATIVE %
AGREE	40	6.7	6.7
STRONGLY AGREE	38	6.3	13.0
DISAGREE	252	42.0	55.0
STRONGLY DISAGREE	258	43.0	98.0
NO RESPONSE	12	2.0	100
TOTAL	600	100	100

Source: Field Survey (Questionnaire), 2010

The superiority of the revelation today above those of the days of Jesus is a major teaching emphasised by Mimeyeraye. Although 13% of the respondents believed this teaching, which runs contrary to Scripture and Anglican Dogmas, 85% of the respondents still agreed that the revelation of Jesus is superior to any later one.

This new teaching, which is already gaining ground, must be carefully examined, as many members of the Church are likely to fall victim of it if the leadership of the Church refuses to speak up and guide the flock. The fact that a number of respondents believed that personal revelation from God is higher than the Bible is a threat to the cherished values that the Church has been upholding before the advent of this teaching.

The doctrine of the Trinity can receive modification

This question was designed to inquire from the respondents whether they believe that a fourth person can be introduced into the doctrine of the Trinity of the Church which upholds that the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are three persons in one (God). It has been taught by the fasting and prayer meeting leaders that he usually meets God and his familiarity with the divine now makes him the fourth person.

Table 10: The Trinity can have a Fourth Person

GROUP	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE	CUMULATIVE %
AGREE	16	2.7	2.7
STRONGLY AGREE	35	5.8	8.5
DISAGREE	216	36.2	44.7
STRONGLY DISAGREE	330	55.0	99.7
NO RESPONSE	2	0.3	100.0
TOTAL	600	100	100

Source: Field Survey (Questionnaire), 2010

The Trinitarian argument was one issue that caused the convocation of many types of council by the Church and nobody has claimed equality with the divine. From the above table, however, some persons now believe that the doctrine of trinity can be modified. A total of 2.7% respondents agreed and 5.8% strongly agreed to this. However, 91.2% of the respondents which is the sum total of those who disagreed and strongly disagreed shows that many Anglicans in the study still retain the doctrine of the Church. However, a problem arises from the fact: some members of the Church believe that the age- tested doctrine of the trinity can be modified.

Righteous work can help a man be of equal stand with Jesus

The table below shows the response of those who filled the questionnaire.

Table 11: Our Personal Work makes us Equal with Jesus

GROUP	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE	CUMULATIVE %
AGREE	58	9.7	9.7
STRONGLY AGREE	12	2.0	11.7
DISAGREE	186	31.0	42.7
STRONGLY DISAGREE	344	57.3	100.0
NO RESPONSE	-	-	-
TOTAL	600	100	100

Source: Field Survey (Questionnaire), 2010

The above table shows that 57.3% of the respondents strongly disagreed that righteous work can make a man equal to Jesus. The Bible says that, “Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth...” (Phil. 2:9-11).

The fact that 9.7% of the respondents agreed that the righteous work of a man can make him equal to Jesus again affirms that teachings influence recipients and affect their reasoning. The people are being influenced gradually to believe some of these claims that may not be scripturally accepted.

The throne of Jesus can be vacated for righteous man

This question on this issue was to find out whether the Throne can be given to other individuals to sit upon like any chair in the house of any man. The table below is the result of our respondents' opinion:

Table 12: Any Man can Sit on Jesus' Throne

GROUP	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE	CUMULATIVE %
AGREE	22	3.7	3.7
STRONGLY AGREE	4	0.7	4.4
DISAGREE	160	26.6	31.0
STRONGLY DISAGREE	396	66.0	97.0
NO RESPONSE	18	3.0	100.0
TOTAL	600	100	100

Source: Field Survey (Questionnaire), 2010

A total of 66% of the respondents strongly disagreed with any opinion of someone else sharing the throne with Jesus under any guise and 26.6% argued that the throne cannot be given to others. However, 3% of the membership that responded to the questionnaire gave no answer. Such respondents need guidance, as they could be led to believe anything. Furthermore, 3.7% of the respondents believed that other persons who do righteous works can now sit upon the throne of Jesus and share equal rights as co-occupant of the throne of the Son of God.

The Revelation from the Holy Spirit is superior to the teachings of Jesus

The opinions of the respondents are as shown below:

Table 13: Spiritual Revelations are Superior to Jesus' Teaching

GROUP	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE	CUMULATIVE %
AGREE	66	11.0	11.0
STRONGLY AGREE	16	2.7	13.7
DISAGREE	326	54.3	68.0
STRONGLY DISAGREE	192	32.0	100.0
NO RESPONSE	-	-	-
TOTAL	600	100	100

Source: Field Survey (Questionnaire), 2010

The unity of the Trinity, which actually speaks of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, may not have been fully internalized in the heart of members, as 11% of the respondents believed that the modern-day revelation are superior to those ones revealed by Jesus in his teaching which the Church still upholds as sacred till today. The erroneous opinion has not received full acceptance, as 54.3% of the respondents disagreed and 32% strongly disagreed with the teaching. The Church has hope because the majority of the respondents have residue of the early teaching, which are Bible-based, while the new teaching is trying to infiltrate and possibly corrupt the earlier teaching.

Salvation is concealed in the secret revelatory power of God

The Gnostic teachers held to knowledge as the key to salvation as what they know will pave way for them to be saved. However, the new teaching is strongly gaining ground on the claim that God has spoken privately to them and salvation is guaranteed only through this medium.

The table below is a compilation of the respondents’ opinions as shown in the questionnaire:

Table 14: Salvation is Concealed in Secret Revelation

GROUP	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE	CUMULATIVE %
AGREE	170	28.3	28.3
STRONGLY AGREE	32	5.3	33.6
DISAGREE	182	30.4	64
STRONGLY DISAGREE	210	35.0	99.0
NO RESPONSE	6	1	100.0
TOTAL	600	100	100

Source: Field Survey (Questionnaire), 2010

The teaching on the greatness of secret revelation has influenced 28.3% of the respondents who agreed, while 5.3% strongly agreed. Those who disagreed and strongly disagreed made up 65.4% of the total respondents. Some of these people are also blind to the biblical teaching on the subject matter raised in these questions. They believe so much in the teaching of the prayer meeting that they can hardly verify these teachings with the word of God.

Dead people can be carried from hell to heaven due to their children's good works

The responses of the people are shown in this table below:

Table 15: The Dead can be Transferred from Hell to Heaven

GROUP	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE	CUMULATIVE %
AGREE	22	3.7	3.7
STRONGLY AGREE	4	0.7	4.4
DISAGREE	106	17.6	22.0
STRONGLY DISAGREE	465	77.5	99.5
NO RESPONSE	3	0.5	100.0
TOTAL	600	100	100

Source: Field Survey (Questionnaire), 2010

A total of 77.5% of the respondents objected to the idea of salvation for the dead through the works of their siblings, as they strongly disagreed with the concept, and 17.6% also disagreed which raised the sum total of those who opposed this idea to 95.1% of the respondents. However, those who agreed and strongly agreed were 4.4%. This concept, which is unbiblical, has been accepted by some members of the Church owing to the teaching they have received and private revelation which are unacceptable by the Church. The 0.5% who were undecided need guidance and teaching to strengthen them and put them in right perspective with the doctrine of the Church.

Unbelievers who died can be saved through the siblings' prayers

The result of the findings on this question is shown below:

Table 16: Salvation can be Obtained by the Labour of another Man

GROUP	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE	CUMULATIVE %
AGREE	12	2.0	2.0
STRONGLY AGREE	6	1.0	3.0
DISAGREE	160	26.7	29.7
STRONGLY DISAGREE	422	70.3	100
NO RESPONSE	-	-	-
TOTAL	600	100	100

Source: Field Survey (Questionnaire), 2010

Those who strongly disagreed are 70.3% while those who disagreed were 26.7%, making those who refused this idea 97%; while 3% of the respondents agreed. This is in direct opposite of Scripture. The Bible affirms that those who did not believe in the Son are condemned already and there is no salvation after death. However, this 3% who agreed with the concept were influenced by the teachings they received which has closed their conscience to Scripture. This is alien to all Christian teachings but is infiltrating the fold because many are investing cash and time into such ideas to redeem their loved ones from the pit of hell.

Table 17: Women Menstrual Circle can Hinder the Holy Spirit

GROUP	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE	CUMULATIVE %
AGREE	64	10.7	10.7
STRONGLY AGREE	28	4.7	15.4
DISAGREE	215	35.8	51.2
STRONGLY DISAGREE	290	48.3	99.5
NO RESPONSE	3	0.5	100
TOTAL	600	100	100

Source: Field Survey (Questionnaire), 2010

This concept of women being unclean during menstrual circle may have proceeded from the hygienic guidelines that Moses gave in the Torah (Lev. 15:19-24). Furthermore, the group teaches that when the woman with the issue of blood touched Jesus, power left Him (Mark 5:30); therefore, women under their menstrual circles can defile a man of God and thereby resist the Holy Spirit. Those who agreed and strongly agreed amount to 15.4% of the respondents. This is a very serious challenge for the Church, as many women even stop coming for Holy Communion because of their menstrual flow.

The Church still retained the majority, as 35.8% of the respondents disagreed and 48.3% strongly disagreed, which brought the total of those holding on to the faith as revealed in Scripture and upheld by the Church to 84.1% of the total respondents. The need to teach the right doctrine as seen in Scripture cannot be over-emphasised.

The unbelief of one person can permanently close the door of salvation to all his children

The response of the respondent is shown in the table below:

Table 18: Salvation is Corporate and not Individual

GROUP	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE	CUMULATIVE %
AGREE	26	4.3	4.3
STRONGLY AGREE	29	4.8	9.1
DISAGREE	160	26.7	35.8
STRONGLY DISAGREE	382	63.7	99.5
NO RESPONSE	3	0.5	100.0
TOTAL	600	100	100

Source: Field Survey (Questionnaire), 2010

A total of 9.1% of the respondents accepted this idea. This proceeds from the teaching that those who do not believe the revelation will be doomed and, when Achan sinned, his whole family perished. The biblical strong warning of only the soul that sins shall die (Ezek. 18:1-19) and children will no longer be punished for the sins of their parents has not been taken into consideration by this group of persons. The Church, however, has hope, as a total of 90.5% of the respondents rejected this idea. There is the strong need for the Church to intensify teaching as the erroneous ideas can easily mislead the people.

A man can be saved through his own works of righteousness without Jesus

The group leader believes that his good works in God's vineyard has secured his salvation and position of authority in the house of God. The responses of the people are as shown below:

Table 19: Human Works without Christ can Save Him

GROUP	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE	CUMULATIVE %
AGREE	30	5.0	5.0
STRONGLY AGREE	16	2.7	7.7
DISAGREE	186	31.0	38.7
STRONGLY DISAGREE	368	61.3	100
NO RESPONSE	-	-	-
TOTAL	600	100	100

Source: Field Survey (Questionnaire), 2010

A total of 7.7% of the respondents believed this concept, from their response. This is a great problem, as the salvific work of Jesus and his death on the cross become meaningless in the face of this teaching. However, the leader of this group has taught that faith in Jesus without good works cannot save, but good works can bring favour like the case of Cornelius in Acts 10. The ignorance in the concept is the lack of understanding of grace at work which points the recipient to Christ Jesus, as in the case of Cornelius. The Anglican Church believes that salvation is found in Jesus and Him alone.

A large number of the respondents disagreed and strongly disagreed (92.3%). Since this new wind of doctrine is spreading, it is necessary to actually streamline the teachings of this group with bias and guide the ignorant from missing the track.

The Immortal God can “wine and dine” with men

The views of the respondents are shown in the table below:

Table 20: God can Eat with Men

GROUP	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE	CUMULATIVE %
AGREE	104	17.3	17.3
STRONGLY AGREE	12	2.0	19.3
DISAGREE	166	27.7	47.0
STRONGLY DISAGREE	264	44.0	91.0
NO RESPONSE	54	9.0	100
TOTAL	600	100	100

Source: Field Survey (Questionnaire), 2010

The above table shows that 17.3% of the respondents agreed that man can dine with God, while 2% strongly agreed. This arose from the personal revelation of Evang. Mimeyeraye that he usually has lunch and dinner with God in his private trips to heaven. The majority of the believers can hardly accept such idea as God’s presence was not granted to mortal men on face-to-face basis. Even Moses could not look at God’s face (Exo. 33:19-20). Only Jesus, the Son of God could claim oneness with his father. A total of 71.7% of the respondent disagreed with this teaching, while 9% could not decide. This reveals the confusion that is already arising in the minds of the people who are involved in these issues.

Mortal man can visit and see the Almighty God face to face

This question was responded to by all the participants and their opinions are shown in the table below:

Table 21: Mortal Man can visit God Face to Face

GROUP	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE	CUMULATIVE %
AGREE	73	12.2	12.2
STRONGLY AGREE	22	3.7	15.9
DISAGREE	182	30.3	46.2
STRONGLY DISAGREE	323	53.8	100.0
NO RESPONSE	-	-	-
TOTAL	600	100	100

Source: Field Survey (Questionnaire), 2010

53.8% of the respondents disagreed strongly and 30.3% disagreed with it. However, 12.2% of the respondents agreed and 3.7% strongly agreed. A total of 15.9% of the respondents agreed that man can visit God and discuss with Him face-to-face. This concept is not unconnected with the teaching and testimony of the leader of the group that he visits God frequently and discusses with the Divine. This has caused division and disbelief among the members who feel that man cannot see God face-to-face and still live. The irony is that those who believe this see unbelieving brethren as those who will suffer in hell. The leader also claims that those who do not believe his claims will suffer on the last day at the judgement seat of God. The original teaching of the Anglican Church, which holds that God is invisible yet manifests his love through Christ in our daily life, was still retained by 84.1% of the respondents.

Mortal man can do more work of salvation than Jesus did

This question was to ascertain how much the people believe in the claims of this teacher that God said he has done more works than Jesus Christ.

The responses of the participants are as shown below:

Table 22: Men can do More Work of Salvation than Jesus Did

GROUP	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE	CUMULATIVE %
AGREE	18	3.0	3.0
STRONGLY AGREE	16	2.7	5.7
DISAGREE	212	35.5	41.0
STRONGLY DISAGREE	33.0	55.0	96.0
NO RESPONSE	24	4.0	100
TOTAL	600	100	100

Source: Field Survey (Questionnaire), 2010

Evang. Mimeyeraye said God told him that he has served more years than Jesus did and, therefore, his works are greater than those of Jesus. This has influenced 5.7% of the respondents who agreed and strongly agreed that man could do more work of salvation than Jesus did. The remaining 90.3% of the respondents refused this concept. One will quickly inquire whether it was the works of Jesus, which he did that saved us or his salvific death upon the cross at Calvary. The 4% that were undecided may be led astray if the Church does not give guidance.

Jesus' short time on earth could not allow him to complete the work of human salvation

The views of the respondents on this are presented below.

Table 23: Jesus did not Complete the Work of Salvation

GROUP	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE	CUMULATIVE %
AGREE	12	2.0	2.0
STRONGLY AGREE	4	0.7	2.7
DISAGREE	208	34.6	37.3
STRONGLY DISAGREE	376	62.7	100
NO RESPONSE	-	-	-
TOTAL	600	100	100

Source: Field Survey (Questionnaire), 2010

A total of 2.7% of the respondents believe that the work of salvation done by Jesus was not complete, as time did not allow Jesus to finish. Hence, the leader of the prayer meeting was empowered to finish the same. A total of 97.3% of the respondents believed that Jesus completed the work of human salvation. It

is clear that there is already a division amongst the fold and the people need to be taught the right doctrine of the Church as contained in the Bible.

Only those who are privileged to have secret revelation about Jesus will be saved

The question on this issue was well attended to by the respondents. Their views are shown in this table below:

Table 24: Secret Revelation is the Key to Salvation

GROUP	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE	CUMULATIVE %
AGREE	103	17.1	17.1
STRONGLY AGREE	30	5.0	22.1
DISAGREE	193	32.2	54.3
STRONGLY DISAGREE	274	45.7	100
NO RESPONSE	-	-	-
TOTAL	600	100	100

Source: Field Survey (Questionnaire), 2010

The above table reveals that a total of 133 respondents, which is 22.1% of the entire respondents, believed that secret revelation are prerequisites for salvation. This is a strong move to heresy, as salvation is dependent on grace through faith in Christ as taught by the Scripture and believed by the Church. A total of 77.9% of the respondents still held to the biblical teaching. However, this new teaching is infiltrating the ranks of the Church, as its propagators see themselves as superior to those whom are considered blind and therefore unsaved. The need to rise up and challenge with love some of these teachings seems inevitable if the Church must guide her members in the right direction.

Conjugal relationship can defile a couple

The Fasting Prayer Meeting has a teaching that there are periods that couple should enjoy intercourse and periods they should abstain from it. The responses of the participants are shown below:

Table 25: Marital Conjugal Relationship can Defile a Couple

GROUP	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE	CUMULATIVE %
AGREE	136	22.6	22.6
STRONGLY AGREE	63	10.5	33.1
DISAGREE	169	28.2	61.3
STRONGLY DISAGREE	232	38.2	100.0
NO RESPONSE	-	-	-
TOTAL	600	100	100

Source: Field Survey (Questionnaire), 2010

The biblical faith and teaching on marriage guarantee that sex within a marital union is holy and free of sin. The teaching of this fasting and prayer society says that if a man does not keep holy days without sex, no matter the bride-price he paid and vows he took in marriage, it is a sin. This teaching, took its root from the experience of David with Ahimelech at Nob (I Sam. 21:1-9). They claim that prayer is a spiritual warfare that must be done without sex. A total of 33.1% of the respondents accepted this concept, which is very unbiblical and un-Anglican.

Sexual relationships by couple on a religious night are sinful

Inquiry on the above became necessary as the group taught that any sexual intercourse on a night preceding the prayer meeting is sinful and must be confessed to the leader of the group or his representative who will absolve the couple of their sin.

The table below shows the responses of the people:

Table 26: Sexual Relationship by Couple is Sinful

GROUP	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE	CUMULATIVE %
AGREE	148	24.6	24.6
STRONGLY AGREE	57	9.5	34.1
DISAGREE	220	36.7	70.8
STRONGLY DISAGREE	175	29.2	100
NO RESPONSE	-	-	-
TOTAL	600	100	100

Source: Field Survey (Questionnaire), 2010

A total of 205 respondents, (34.1%) agreed to this concept, that sex within a marital union on a religious right is sinful and, therefore, couple must avoid it. This has not been the stand of the Anglican Church. In the marriage programme of the Church, “Marriage is given primarily that husband and wife may comfort and help each other, living faithfully together in need and in plenty, in sorrow and in joy. It is also given that with delight and temperedness, they may know each other in love, and through the joy of their bodily union, may strengthen the union of their hearts and lives...”²²⁰ This teaching from the introductory section of the marriage service is highly jeopardized by this teaching of the fasting and praying team. While it is true that some people disagreed, a dangerous phenomenon is being built already.

Sexual intercourse by couple at such time must be confessed as sin

The opinions of the respondents on this issue are shown in the table below:

Table 27: Married Couple must Confessed all Sexual Act as Sin

GROUP	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE	CUMULATIVE %
AGREE	118	19.7	19.7
STRONGLY AGREE	78	12.3	32.0
DISAGREE	220	36.7	68.7
STRONGLY DISAGREE	180	30.0	98.7
NO RESPONSE	8	1.3	100
TOTAL	600	100	100

Source: Field Survey (Questionnaire), 2010

Altogether, 32% of the respondents agreed that such conjugal relationship is sin and must be confessed as that could have its implications. By inference, if it is not confessed then it is recorded against them for the day of judgement. However, 66.7% of the respondent disagreed with the teaching. This underscores the need to guide the flock on which teaching is from God.

²²⁰ The Book of Common Prayer (Church of Nigeria – Anglican Communion), 2007, *The marriage service*, p. 191

Sexual intercourse by a couple can hinder God’s revelation to them

This question on this was responded to also and the result is shown in the table below:

Table 28: Sex by Couple can Hinder God from Answering Prayers

GROUP	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE	CUMULATIVE %
AGREE	60	10.0	10.0
STRONGLY AGREE	40	6.7	16.7
DISAGREE	253	42.1	58.8
STRONGLY DISAGREE	244	40.7	99.5
NO RESPONSE	3	0.5	100
TOTAL	600	100	100

Source: Field Survey (Questionnaire), 2010

One hundred respondents (16.7%) agreed that sex within marital union can actually hinder the revelation of God and thereby make one a hindrance to the move of the spirit. The Church still retained 82.8% of the adherents who did not believe in this teaching. However, 3 respondents (0.5%) did not respond to this issue. There arises the great need to enlighten the people on which way to follow as the right track on these issues, which affects life and faith generally.

Personal holiness draws us closer to God than general faith in Jesus

The views of the respondents are captured in this table:

Table 29: Personal Righteousness Bring us Closer to God than Faith in Jesus

GROUP	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE	CUMULATIVE %
AGREE	98	16.3	16.3
STRONGLY AGREE	104	17.3	33.6
DISAGREE	223	37.2	70.8
STRONGLY DISAGREE	175	29.2	100.0
NO RESPONSE	-	-	-
TOTAL	600	100	100

Source: Field Survey (Questionnaire), 2010

A total of 16.3% of the respondents agreed that personal holiness makes one closer to God than faith in Jesus Christ and 17.3% strongly agreed. However, 37.2% disagreed with this concept and 29.2% strongly opposed it. There is a clear indication that a lot of disorderliness and different beliefs are being propagated by this group, which the Church need to check and correct in love.

From the statistical analysis, the study identified that the heretical teachings infiltrated both the illiterate and literate members of the Diocese of Ughelli. About 23 % of the Christian community had already accepted these teachings as Christian truth.

6.12 Conclusion

Faith makes a Christian, but doctrine creates the church. It is possible for a church to be established without a clear doctrinal base, but it will not survive the test of time when confronted with sound biblical facts if its claims are unbiblical. Furthermore, a church would not arise at all unless clear and significant doctrines are present. According to Harold Brown, no one can be a Christian at all unless he accepts the truth of certain fundamental statements we usually call dogmas.

Christian doctrine is the attempt to spell out the significant concepts of the Gospel and place them in relationship to the individual and the world. The most familiar Christian doctrinal statement, the Apostles' Creed, begins with the words, "I believe in God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth." The specific statements about Jesus Christ that will follow are placed in the specific context of God, the Father and Maker of all. But the Apostles' Creed does not explain: it merely defines. Jesus is the Father's "only Son, our Lord, and Begotten of the Holy Spirit, conceived by the Virgin Mary..." What does it mean to say that a man born of woman is the Son of God? The Nicene Creed (325) attempts to explain it, and tells us that Jesus Christ is "of one substance with the Father." But then what was his relationship to mankind? That the Chalcedonian Creed (451) defines, "of one substance with us, according to the humanity, in all things like us, but sin." Unless a religious community holds certain specific and well-defined teachings, it will gradually dissolve, and, in any event, cannot be considered a Christian community.

The belief in "self" and the strength in superior revelation, to a great extent, reduce the salvific work done on the Cross by Jesus Christ who alone has been understood as the only means of salvation in the Christian Church. While it could be said that genuine faith may have existed in these groups, on the existence

of God and his Christ, the self-actualisation concept has, to a large extent, watered down the doctrine of salvation through Christ alone which the Church and sacred scripture have upheld from the beginning. At the early stage of this movement, some Church fathers (Priests) contended that the spiritual revival must be encouraged, as it was to strengthen the community of believers. They asserted that the “teaching of the group has never interfere with core doctrine of the Church which is faith in Jesus Christ as the only Son of God whose meritorious works has achieved salvation for humanity”.²²¹ Finally, God’s revelation was in the form of words, not of inexpressible religious illumination Jesus could repeat it, interpret it, and supplement it. It is this point, of course, that brought him into conflict with contemporary Jewish religion, which considered the Word of God complete and already perfect and regarded any attempt as amplification as blasphemous. It is the superior revelation beyond the prophets, Christ and sacred scripture, which Evangelist Mimeyeraye teaches, as deduced from his doctrine, that the Anglican Church consider heretical.

One of the conditions making possible such a crisis the most important was absence in the Church norms of faith universally acknowledged as binding. Then, again, many had embraced Christianity without grasping the spirit of the new religion.²²² Nearly all interpreted the Christian faith more or less according to their earlier philosophical or religious conceptions. For instance, the apologists within the Church used the philosophical logos doctrine. In this way arose numerous interpretations of Christian teaching and perversions of that teaching, some not at all in harmony with the generally received tradition. These discordant interpretations or perversions are the heretical movements of the second century, which is also in the twenty-first century Anglican Church in Nigeria. They vary in degree of departure from the generally accepted Christian tradition. Some, like the earlier Gnostics and even the greater Gnostic systems, at least in their esoteric teaching, show that their principal inspiration was other than Christian; others, as the Gnosticism of Marcion and the enthusiastic sect of the Montanists, seem to

²²¹ Eriwo S.U., In Warri Diocesan Synod Report, 1988, pp. 3.

²²² Cf. Ayer J.C., 1949 *A source book for ancient church history*. New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, p.75

have built largely upon exaggerated Christian tenets, contained in the New Testament, but not fully appreciated by the majority of Christians.

Consequently, with the thinking of Gnostics that intellectual attainment make them superior Christians, then it follows that the revelatory knowledge of God outside of Jesus seems to rest on the Gnostic claim of salvation by knowledge. This will void the promise of God enacted in Christ's justifying death and resurrection. The place and purpose of revelation as revealed in Scripture and the current surge of private revelations with their implications have brought to light the understanding of some people whose self-determination for recognition has led to the birth of "Selfism" in the Christian Church, in general, and the Anglican Church, in particular. "Selfism," with some Gnostic elements, goes beyond Gnosticism on the grounds that it claims superior revelation beyond all the prophets and Christ and sacred scripture. It voids the promise of God enacted in Christ's justifying death and resurrection.

CHAPTER SEVEN

SUMMARY, RECOMMENDATIONS AND GENERAL CONCLUSION

7.1 Introduction

In this chapter, we will attempt to document a summary of our findings from the Johannine epistles on Christological heresies, soteriological conflicts and ethical behaviours which rocked the Johannine community and their implications. We shall also outline our findings about the Ughelli community and draw a line of convergence and divergence between the two groups. This will help us to make our recommendations on the way forward for the contemporary Nigerian Christian society. We believe that this will stem the tide of interpersonal clashes and strange teachings in this time.

7.2 Findings

This research has thoroughly examined the Johannine epistles and discovered multidimensional problems that confronted the Johannine community. This ranged from theological issues to ethical conflicts. The Christological heresies and soteriological conflicts plagued the community with devastating consequences. The message of love propagated in the Johannine community seemed to have been impaired by this ugly trend. In the bid to stem this tide, the author of the Johannine epistles advocated avoidance mechanism, which places doubt on the mind of many scholars about the authenticity of the authorship of these epistles as being one. It is, however, clear that the author was reacting to a situation which almost consumed the community. In our opinion, his reaction is also a mark of love for the community that enemies were trying to invade.

We shall now examine the places of convergence and divergence in the Johannine community and that of the Anglican Fasting and Praying Society in Ughelli Diocese of the Church of Nigeria (Anglican Communion).

7.2.1 The areas of Convergence between the Johannine congregation and Ughelli Diocese

The following were identified as points of convergence between the Johannine community and the Diocese of Ughelli:

1. Johannine Community and Ughelli Community are Christian communities plagued by schismatic and heretical teachings.
2. Both communities speak of a group that had withdrawn from the community: “It was from their ranks that they went out.” Thus, the withdrawal of some members from the community divided the community into two groups.
3. Johannine Community and Ughelli Community had the Christological question as the fundamental problem. From our analyses, the Johannine and Ughelli Secessionists were both drawing from the same apostolic theology but interpreted it very differently.
4. A plausible case can be made that these Secessionists were not formal Docetists but adherents of some aspects of the Christology of the apostolic theology.
5. Johannine and Ughelli Secessionists as sects have followed their exclusivistic tendencies to the point of breaking *koinonia* with other Christians.
6. In terms of *ethics*, Johannine and Ughelli Secessionists claimed intimacy with God to the point of being sinless. They do not put much emphasis on keeping the commandments of Jesus.
7. Johannine Community and Ughelli Community have hierarchies.
8. In terms of *eschatology*, Johannine Community and Ughelli Community embraced the Evangelist’s realized eschatology, the hierarchies appeals to earlier futuristic themes to challenge their beliefs and actions; realized eschatology implies ethical faithfulness.
9. In terms of *pneumatology*, Johannine and Ughelli secessionists distorted the Gospel’s teaching on the pneumatic ministry of the *Paraclete* by forgetting that the teaching work of the Holy Spirit is actually tied to that

of the first advocate - Jesus Christ. While guidance by the spirit should conform to abiding in the teaching about Christ (shared from the beginning), their popular success in the world indicates not gospel faithfulness but worldly compromise. They escape the world's hatred because they have sided with the prince of this World.

10. In the Johannine Community and Ughelli Community, the Christological and ethical deviation under attack shows some form of Gnostic tendency and legalism.
11. The claim of salvation by the Johannine and Ughelli Secessionists voids the promise of God enacted in Christ's justifying death and resurrection.

7.2.2 Areas of divergence in the two groups

1. Johannine and Ughelli Secessionists emphasised a special kind of knowledge as prerequisite to salvation. But the leadership of Ughelli Secessionists claimed special privilege of granting others salvation unlike its counterpart.
2. In terms of *Christology*, the Johannine group and the leadership of Ughelli Secessionists denied that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of God, and that he came in the flesh but the Ughelli secessionists claim equality with Jesus as a spiritual being.
3. The leaders of Ughelli Secessionists claimed to be greater than every human being on earth and also that he communed with God and Jesus Christ, unlike the Johannine Secessionists.
4. Johannine Secessionists and the leadership of Ughelli Secessionists denied the human nature of Christ and the Johannine Secessionists were silent about the Trinity, while Trinitarian error was evident in Ughelli Secessionist group.
5. The leadership of Ughelli Secessionists placed special premium on revelation like the sacred scripture, while the Johannine Secessionist group was silent about it.

6. In terms of *ethics*, the Johannine and the leadership of Ughelli Secessionists did not put much emphasis on keeping the commandments of Jesus. But the leadership of Ughelli Secessionists claimed intimacy with God to the point of being sinless and emphasised the need of his members to keep to his commands.
7. In terms of *eschatology*, while the Johannine secessionists probably embraced the Evangelist's realized eschatology, the leadership of Ughelli Secessionists claimed to already enjoy communal living with God.
8. In terms of *pneumatology*, the Johannine Secessionists distorted the Gospel's teaching on the pneumatic ministry of the *Paraclete* by forgetting that the teaching work of the Holy Spirit is actually tied to that of the first advocate - Jesus Christ. While the leadership of Ughelli Secessionists was silent about the work of the Holy Spirit.

7.3 Recommendations

The following recommendations are imperative:

- (1) Traditionally, the Christian church has often been symbolized by an ark: those who board will survive the deluge²²³. Heresy not merely undermines one's intellectual understanding of Christian doctrine, but also threatens to sink the ark, and thus to make salvation impossible for everyone, not merely for the individual heretic. The Church authority must revive the catechetical ministry of the Church so as to arrest the ugly trend of heretical teaching that is spreading in the Church.
- (2) Leaders of the Church should always provide guidance to the people early enough to avoid all sorts of distractions and negative teachings that can make the people derail, through compliance with apostolic tradition, and ecumenical council decisions.

²²³ Brown, H.O.J., 2007. *Heresies: heresy and orthodoxy in the history of the Church*. U.S.A: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., p. 2

- (3) A monthly bulletin on sound biblical doctrines should be published by the Church to correct the various erroneous teachings that have spread amongst the people through the teaching of these evangelists.
- (4) A teaching guide should be produced for people to follow through the establishment of institutions like secondary schools and universities as well as radio and television stations on issues of revelations and claims, which have no empirical data for verification, and nip in the bud all excesses that can lead to negative interpretation of biblical facts.
- (5) The Church needs to establish schools based primarily on the Church's doctrine to educate all those who want to minister to her members and certify them mature for the work of evangelization to avoid transmitting an unwholesome doctrine which will in turn destroy the faith that has been built over the years.

7.4 General conclusion

Christology, according to Gerald O'Collins, is a systematic reflection on the person, being and doing of Jesus of Nazareth.²²³ Its fundamental question: who is Jesus, has from the earliest days of Christianity, been given a variety of answers. The primitive church used various titles chosen from the images that Jewish religious heritage offered to profess its faith in this man called Jesus. He was called: prophet, king, Lord, Son of God, Son of Man, word of God and even God. Each image that they employed seemed to capture just a shade of his person and, like a diamond with different facets, no image seemed adequate to describe him.

The fathers of the Church, reflecting on the faith that they had received from the apostles, struggled with the images and models that their predecessors had used to describe him. They found that the image of Jesus is infinitely adaptable. They built up an edifice of images describing Jesus as "true God" and "true man." The operating word to describe his relation with God was

²²³ Cf. Gerald, O.C., 1995. *Christology: a biblical, historical and systematic study of Jesus*, New York: Oxford University Press, p.1

homoousious (GK.), *Consubstantialem* (Latin), such that by 415, in Chalcedon, discussion about Jesus reached its peak and the dogmatic image which resulted became the determining factor in any Christological talk: Jesus Christ is true God and true man, one in being with the Father, having two natures, with no confusion between natures, no separation, no change and no division between the natures.

The Anglican Church in Ughelli Diocese emphasizes the need to stress clearly the necessity of seeking first the kingdom of God, which consists in the life of grace, drawing nourishment from instructions and the sacraments, that is, the Eucharist and bearing fruit in the practice of the virtues.²²⁴ Then all else, the material needs which we may legitimately pray for, will be added to us. The fact is that grace builds upon nature and does not destroy it. This principle is built upon orthodox Christology which recognizes the two natures of Christ in one divine person. In practice, it means that human effort or hard work combines harmoniously with reliance on divine help, and neither should be stressed at the expense of the other.²²⁵

One tendency concerning ongoing prophecy among any of the faithful is the emphasis on private experience of God or the “inner voice,” sometimes giving its greater authority than scripture. Pentecostalism recognizes scripture but also the prophetic inspiration of the individual, which sometimes is given more authority than scripture. In theory, it is egalitarian; but, in practice, certain “anointed” individuals arrogate to themselves more authority than any bishop. “Selfism” seeks to firmly establish superior revelation of the unknown Father imparted to a few but unattainable by the average Christian. This thought does not only limit the revelation of the Father to a privileged few, but further brings into the assembly the doctrine of infallibility of the exclusive few while the average Christian still struggles with the dilemma of sin. All these cumulate to what the

²²⁴ I am indebted to Joseph Kenny for this idea. Cf. Joseph Kenny 2010 Authority in Pentecostalism: comparative theological perspectives in *Creativity and Change in Nigerian Christianity* David O. Ogungbile & Akintunde E. Akinade. Eds. Lagos: Malthouse Press Limited.

²²⁵ I am indebted to Joseph Kenny for this idea. Cf. Joseph Kenny 2010 Authority in Pentecostalism: comparative theological perspectives in *creativity and change in Nigerian Christianity*. David O. Ogungbile & Akintunde E. Akinade, Eds. Lagos: Malthouse Press Limited.

church considers as false teaching. These false teachings encourage increase in social and moral evil on the grounds that there is no permanent punishment here and after one's existence.

A full-dress attack on the issues of Christology took place in the fourth century. It was the decision, promulgated at Nicaea, that the Word shared the same divine nature as the Father, which focused attention upon them. Nevertheless, the all but universal Christian conviction in the preceding centuries had been that Jesus is Lord²²⁷ and its import had been elaborated and deepened in the apostolic age. The New Testament writers generally regarded Christ as pre-existent; they tended to attribute to him a twofold order of being, "according to flesh", that is, as man, and 'according to the spirit, that is, God²²⁸'. This formula was deeply embedded in their thinking. F. Loofs justly labels it 'the foundation dictum of all later Christological development'.²²⁹ This dictum contained all Christological problems.

Finally, Mimeyeraye's teachings, representing the ideology of the Anglican Fasting and Praying Society, which are consistent with Christological heresies, are at variance with Jesus' divinity, Christian salvation and ethical standards. Consequently, the church should institute a teaching against heresies and administer sound theological training to her ministers in order to stem the tide of wrong doctrine and interpersonal clashes.

²²⁷ Rom. 10:9; Phil. 2, 11

²²⁸ Yarbrough, R.W. 2000. *Revelation: in New Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, , England: Oxford University Press p. 733.

²²⁹ Friedrich L., 1905 . *Nestoriana. Die Fragmente des Nestorius* Halle: Niemeyer .cited by Harold Brown, 2007. *Heresies: heresy and orthodoxy in the history of the Church* . p160

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2.	Erivwo S.U. (Very Rev.)	Vicar of St. James', Okumagba lay-out, where AFPS was founded	Ughelli	19/02/2009
3.	Esisio O. (Mrs.)	Founding member and elder sister of Evang. Daniel Mimeyeraye	Eyara	04/04/2009
4.	Ivukiwhiaye J. (Evang.)	Founding executive member of AFPS	Egini	18/02/2009
5.	Mimeyeraye D.D. (Bishop)	Founder of AFPS	Warri	13/03/2010
6.	Okome M. (Evang.)	Founding executive member (Secretary) of AFPS	Warri	04/03/2009
7.	Okorodudu J.(Rev. Canon)	Founding member and cousin of Bishop Daniel D. Miyerijesu	Ughelli	14/01/2012

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UNIVERSITY OF IBADAN

APPENDIX 1

Department of Religious Studies,
Faculty of Arts,
University of Ibadan,
Ibadan.
Date _____

RESEARCH QUESTIONNAIRE

Dear Sir/Ma,

This questionnaire is intended to obtain information on *Heretical Teachings in Johannine Epistles and their implications for the Anglican Diocese of Ughelli, Delta State, Nigeria*, a postgraduate studies being carried out in the Department of Religious Studies of the University of Ibadan, for a PhD degree. The information required is purely for academic purpose and will be treated confidentially. I, therefore, solicit for your co-operation by giving honest answers to the questions.

Thanks for your anticipated co-operation.

Yours faithfully,

Odutemu O. Cyril

A. Demographic Information

Instruction: Please tick (✓) as appropriate

1. Sex Male [] Female []
2. Age
 - a. 20 and below
 - b. 21 – 35 []
 - c. 36 – 45 []
 - d. 46- 55 []
 - e. 56 – 65 []
3. Academic Qualification
 - a. Primary school []
 - b. Secondary school []
 - c. NCE/OND []
 - d. HND/ degree []
 - e. Postgraduate []
4. Marital Status
 - a. Spinster []
 - b. Bachelor []
 - c. Married []
 - d. Divorced []
 - e. Widowed []
5. Occupation
 - a. Civil servant []
 - b. Trader []
 - c. Farmer []
 - d. Others (specify) _____

KEY: The following stands for

Agree: A

Disagree: D

Strongly Agree: SA

Strongly Disagree: SD

B. Revelation is more Important than the Bible

S/N	Statement	A	SA	D	SD
1	The Bible is a complete revelation of God to humanity.				
2	Secret revelations make us to have a better understanding of God.				
3	The Bible is not the only source of revelation about God.				
4	Individual revelation from God is more reliable than the Bible.				
5	God's revelations today are superior to those of the days of Jesus.				

C. Man can Share Equal Position with Jesus

S/N	Statement	A	SA	D	SD
6	The doctrine of the Trinity can receive modification.				
7	Righteous work can help a man be of equal stand with Jesus.				
8	The throne of Jesus can be vacated for righteous men.				
9	The revelations from the Holy Spirit are superior to the teachings of Jesus.				
10	Salvation is concealed in the secret revelatory power of God.				

D. Salvation can be Acquired by Good Works

S/N	Statement	A	SA	D	SD
11	Dead people can be carried from hell to heaven due to their children's good works.				
12	Unbelievers who died can be saved through their siblings' prayers.				
13	Women menstrual cycle can hinder the Holy Spirit.				

14	The unbelief of one person can permanently close the door of salvation to all his children.				
15	A man can be saved through his own works of righteousness without Jesus.				

E. God can Relate with Men Without Restrictions

S/N	Statement	A	SA	D	SD
16	The immortal God can dine and wine with men.				
17	Mortal man can visit and see the Almighty God face to face.				
18	Mortal man can do more work of salvation than Jesus did.				
19	Jesus' short time on earth could not allow him to complete the work of salvation.				
20	Only those who are privileged to have secret revelation about Jesus will be saved.				

F. Sexual Relationship in Marriage can Defile a Couple

S/N	Statement	A	SA	D	SD
21	Conjugal relationship can defile a couple.				
22	Sexual relationships by couple in religious nights are sinful.				
23	Sexual intercourse by couple at such times must be confessed as sins.				
24	Sexual intercourse by couple can hinder God's revelation to them.				
25	Personal holiness draws us closer to God than general faith in Jesus.				
26	Human unrighteousness will not hinder our salvation.				

APPENDIX 2

CIRCULAR (PASTORAL) LETTER FROM THE ARCHDEACON OF
WARRI ARCHDEACONRY TO FASTING PRAYER MEETINGS IN
THE ARCHDEACONRY

From: The Archdeacon's Office
Warri Archdeaconry
P. O. Box 1807
Warri.
28th April 1993

The Secretaries
Wednesday/Friday Fasting Prayer
Meeting
In Warri Archdeaconry
Anglican Communion

Dear brothers in the Lord,

We write on behalf of the Archdeacon and the entire clergy in Warri Archdeaconry to convey our prayerful wishes to you and the entire members of your Fasting Prayer Meeting. We are thankful to God for the way He has proved faithful and is using the prayers you offer to uphold His Church as He shows through signs and wonders in your midst that He is indeed, the same yesterday, today and forever. May Jesus' name be forever praised.

Our attention has been drawn to certain teachings, rules regulations and practices in your prayers meeting, which are at variance with the Christian tradition and faith, and which we are therefore duty bound to point out, and advise you to correct and desist from, so that your prayers and fasting may be more acceptable to the LORD of the Church.

1. WOMEN HAVING THEIR MENSTRUAL PERIOD:

We learnt that women having their menstrual period are not allowed to come into your prayer meeting because they are considered to be unclean. This is totally unchristian. The Christian fellowship does not exclude any of its members from meetings on the basis of women having their menstrual period - a fact which decorum or ethical behaviour demands, should be known only to her husband. Since women, having their menses are not excluded from the fellowship of the Church on Sundays, and are admitted to Holy Communion of Our Lord, they should not

be excluded from your prayer meeting either. After all, our Lord was touched by a woman who had the issue of blood for 12 years, and she was commended for her faith.

2. Refraining from normal sexual relationship with ones husband or wife a day before the fasting prayer meeting. Again, we have been informed that those who had normal sexual relationship with their spouses before they came to the fasting prayer meeting are fetched out and excluded from participating. They are said to have broken a rule of the fasting prayer meeting. This practice again has no New Testament basis. I Cor. 7:5, which we understand, is cited by the society to support the rule, is a clear misapplication of scripture. Paul was in that text advising couples who would voluntarily and mutually agree to abstain from sex for a period because they wanted to concentrate on prayer, He was not making a rule or regulation that was to be applied universally. The two persons - husband and wife have to agree; it is not to be imposed on them. Infact, we have heard of wives who were thoroughly beaten up by their husbands, because they refused to cohabit with them on account of this regulation imposed on them by the Fasting Prayer Meeting. If have sex relationship with your wife/husband is a sin/or wrong, at any one time, then it must be a sin/and wrong, at all times.

In order that the Fasting Prayer Meeting through which the good Lord is upbuilding His Church, may not be dragged to disrepute, do not continue to impose these unnecessary burdens on those who come for the prayers and fasting.

Be assured of our prayerful wishes, and may the good Lord continue to use you and the members of the fasting prayer meetings to edify His Church to the glory and praise of His Holy name. Amen.

Yours sincerely,

.....
Ven. Prof. S. U. Wriwo
Archdeacon

.....
F. O. Ejemrae (Revd)
Secretary
Clergy Staff Meeting
Warri Archdeaconry.

CC.

All Church in Warri
Archdeaconry.

- (1) The Chancellor
- (2) The Registrar
- (3) The Provost
- (4) All Archdeacons
(Warri Diocese)

The Bishop
Warri Diocese.

CIRCULAR LETTER FROM A.A.P.S. CARE TAKER COMMITTEE DATED
30TH AUGUST 1993.

The Caretaker Committee of the A.A.P.S.
Bisheps court,
Box 760,
Ughelli.
30th August, 1993.

TO:

The Provost,
Archdeacons,
Chairmen/Supts.
Priests,
Catechists,
Church Teachers.

Beloved,

RE-ORGANISATION OF THE A.A.P.S.

Greetings to you in the precious name of our Saviour and
Lord Jesus Christ.

EXPERIENCE WITH EVANG. D.D. MIMYERAYE (D.D.) SINCE
MY ARRIVAL AT ST. JAMES' ANGLICAN CHURCH, O/L. WARRI
IN AUGUST, 1989.

In the Name of the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

1. VESTRY MEETING: D.D. was unanimously elected in his absence as a member of the D.C.C.
 - On his return, his reaction was startling: He said he was not to be chosen or elected until Jesus comes: He is a life member.
2. A committee, called A Committee of friends planned to buy a car for D.D. when his panel van was stolen. The AAPS and Ukoiko Orufun committees learnt of it, and were unhappy that some people styled themselves as A committee of Friends. That committee was dissolved, and A.A.P.S. and Ukoiko Orufun formed a car launching committee, without informing me and the D.C.C. I heard about it and was unhappy and raised it at the D.C.C. The committee had to be enlarged to include two representatives of the D.C.C.
3. Fixing of date for launching for his car a week before the date of 1990 Harvest - without reference to the Vicar. I had to insist that the date be changed because of its likely effect on that year's Harvest.
4. A church member drew my attention to the way the invitation card was prepared, giving the impression that AMFPS is autonomous body from St. James', but happened to be sharing a common building with the church.
5. I summoned members of the committee chaired by Amrakata to ask why the invitation card was arranged that way. They apologised, and said the mistake would be corrected in the programme. But the programme repeated what was in the invitation card.

6. Whenever D.D. and his group plan to go to a town and travel away from St. James' Church, the Vicar is never informed. The Vicar comes to the service to see a scanty population.
7. I discovered that Omogoisibo and Umufia were carrying out Deliverance ministry in their homes: I thanked God for these gifts, and invited them to do so in the Church - so that it would be church based.

8. In deciding on what day to assign to them for the deliverance ministry in the church,

I took the following factors into account:

- (i) Monday - Baptismal class starts at 5p.m.
- (ii) Tuesday - Confirmation " " " "
- (iii) Wednesday - Communicant " " " "
- (iv) There is no class on Thursday. There is however AAPS Lecture, whose leader is D.D., starting at 6p.m.

After discussing with those involved in the Deliverance Ministry, we all agreed that Thursday provided more time for the Deliverance Ministry which could obviously end before 6p.m.

We then fixed Thursday for the Deliverance Ministry. When it was held the 1st Thursday, I learnt the following Friday that D.D. became so furious that he was shouting all over the place, that Ven. Prof. Eriwo must leave St. James' Church. He went shouting at Rev. L.A. Adjara, saying that anyone who knew Ven. Eriwo should go and tell him that he (S.U.E.) could not be in St. James' Church.

That Thursday, and throughout the following Friday Fasting Prayer Meeting, I was the target of D.D.

I did not know in what way I offended him. But it became clear to me that he did not want and support Deliverance Ministry. Whether this was out of fear that other persons were going to come into prominence also, or there is some deeper supernatural factor in him which revolts

against Deliverance Ministry, only the good Lord, unto whom all hearts are open, and from whom no secrets are hid, knows. (His Lordship may wish to call Moses Umufia and James Omogoisibo, both of whom are close Associates of D.D. to interrogate on this subject).

9. AN OWL INCIDENT: An owl flew into St. James' Church and flew straight into the altar veil on Monday 28 Sept. 1992. Those around tried to kill it, but in vain. They consider the incident ominous and sinister and sinister. I was informed. The following Sunday 4 Oct. 1992, I read the commination, and prayed that whatever power of darkness that was behind the owl episode be tormented, disgraced, and exposed.

10. In the course of a meeting, I summoned to discuss certain church matters, reference was made to the owl incident. D.D. said that an owl was an ordinary bird. He did not seem to attach any importance to the incident.

11. ST. JAMES' DISTRICT OCT. 1992 REVIVAL:

A revival was planned and held in the Church from 5th to 11th Oct. 1992. His lordship was invited to attend the Thanksgiving Service on Sunday 11th Oct. 1992. That was his very first visit to the Church after his consecration.

The generality of the population of the Church rejoiced at the revival, and some called for it at more regular and frequent intervals. B.D. Mimeyeraye was one of the main speakers (Programme attached).

12. Later, to my utter amazement, I learnt again that I became his target of attack at the Thursday AAPS lecture, and Friday Fasting Prayer Meeting, because of the revival we organised. I learnt that he was particularly offended when one of the invitees spoke about witches in the Church, who built a coven in it, and which coven the Preacher destroyed by prayer that day.

13. Mimeyeraye's behaviour after the Revival was very similar to what he said and did when deliverance ministry was established in the Church. Ven. Prof. S. U. Eriwo must leave, was his war cry.
14. I was so amazed that I had to call a number of members of the Church many of whom are his close associates, to a meeting where I asked him to tell me in what way I have offended him. I listed all that we had tried to do in the church generally and also the way he had been supported. (My write-up on that occasion is hereby attached. The meeting was on tape. The cassettes are available).
 After the revival, one Edward Omakoko, a District Layreader ran amok, went to Benin where he confessed to his brother Rev. M.I.K. Omakoko that the witches in St. James' had been planning to have Prof. Eriwo transferred from there, after the death of Eriwo's wife. (copy of the written confession is available).
15. RULES AND REGULATIONS OF FASTING PRAYER MEETING RELATING TO MENSTRUAL PERIOD AND SPOUSES HAVING COITION ON THURSDAY NIGHT.

The above issue was raised at the Warri Archdeaconry Clergy Staff Meeting, and it led to our circular letter of 28 April 1993. A copy is attached herewith. (It was this action that led to the most recent delegation led by D.D. Mimeyeraye to the Bishop on 8th June 1993 WITHOUT my knowledge).

16. MEETING OF 26 MAY 1993.

After our circular letter of 28 April 1993 to all fasting prayer meetings in Warri Archdeaconry, several members of the Church came to tell me that D.D. and his retinue were furious saying that this would be the end. There is to be explosion now. I was given the impression that they were out for a show down with me. When I later sensed that they might go to meet Prince J.O.C. Mosheshe,

Chief J.O. Igrude and Dr. J. O. Akpojaro, to solicit these people's support for the battle they were planning to wage against the church, I felt it expedient to send copies of the circular letter to these persons, so that they may know the content and action we took before the D.D.'s group would visit them.

17. They did visit Prince J.O.C. Mosheshe and expressed their anger and strong objection to the circular letter. After their departure J.O.C. Mosheshe telephoned me, and advised that I should hold a meeting with Mimayeraye and his group, as an Archdeacon of Warri Archdeaconry and as a father. I fixed the meeting for Wednesday 26 May 1993. I also invited Rev. E. B. Emamezi to attend.

The meeting was held. The minutes are attached herewith. It is also on tape. After detailed explanation to them on the two issues from scriptures, they appeared to have agreed to abide by the content of the circular letter. They however told us that it would be fair for them to first pass on this new development to their branches in other places before its implementation, and that they would SOON give me a feedback after they have done so.

Up till now, they did not come back. Instead, they led their delegation of 8 June 1993 to his Lordship in their determined effort to discredit me for exercising my pastoral and teaching ministry over them. (The Materials I used at the meeting of 26 May with them is attached herewith).

18. A.Y.F: The AYF held Youth Week last year, and the president of the youth, J. Eyawoho preached at the 11a.m. service. Mimayeraye was not present. Some sycophants went and reported to him that Eyawoho, the youth president attacked him and his ministry. Again, D.D. almost pulled down the heavens. He telephoned me

and said, I should give him preaching appointment the following Sunday so that he may retaliate. I laboured to explain to him over the phone that the report he heard was not correct. He was not convinced.

I learnt later that the President of the Youth had to meet him, presenting his case, and asking him to listen to the sermon itself, which, thank God, was taped.

19. NON ATTENDANCE OF D.C.C. MEETINGS:

In spite of the fact that he is every year appointed to membership of the D.C.C. by the Vicar, he never attends the meetings, except when he has an issue over which he wished to attack the administration of the church.

20. LAYREADERS RETREAT:

The St. James' District organised a retreat for all layreaders in the District on 13 June 1992. The D.C.C. ruled that all the Layreaders must attend it. D.D. Mimeyeraye did not attend it, perhaps because he felt that he had nothing to learn from it.

21. Again, at the Warri Archdeaconry level, A layreaders retreat was organised 30th April and 1st May 1993 for all the Layreaders at the City of God, Mosheshe Estate Effurun. (His lordship met us there on 1st May). D.D. did not attend, apparently for the same reason indicated in 20 above.

22. D.D. NIMEYERAYE AND TIME:

Since my arrival at St. James' in 1989, his utter disregard, and lack of consideration for other activities of the Church when it comes to the use of time has been a cause of concern and disturbance to us. We hold 3 services in the morning: 7-8-50; 11-2p.m. or so. If he is given a preaching appointment for the 7a.m. or the 9a.m. service, then the following service is bound to suffer. He will go on and on, and in spite of the red light which tells him to stop.

On Friday when the Fasting prayer meeting is on which starts at 8a.m., and is according to the programme, meant to end at 5p.m., the activities are never rounded up at 5p.m. most Fridays. This has led to no end of problems, especially when there is to be a service (funeral/farewell service) for a departed member of the District. I was so disturbed once, that after 6p.m. or so, we had to order that a corpse which had been waiting outside for the Fasting prayers to end, be brought in, for the funeral service to begin. When this happened, they were compelled to stay action, until after the funeral service, before they concluded the fasting prayer meeting activities of that day. I had hoped that, that action of that day would lead D.D. to wind up Friday Fasting prayer meetings activities early in future especially if a service about which he is usually informed ahead of time, is to take place that day. But it did not work out that way.

Besides, when the activities go so far into the nights, clients who travelled from distant places find it difficult to return, and some go to the Vicarage to ask the clergy for sleeping accommodation.

Furthermore, D.D. who was holding his healing ministry sections on Mondays, when I first arrived, later moved it to Wednesday. (None of these things happen with a prior information to, let alone permission, from me).

He regards the church as his personal property and fixes his programmes at will without consultation with the Vicar-in-charge.

I later learnt, that when this move happened, he reserved Monday for services he holds in his houses; services which are fully attended with all the paraphanelia of a service, including thanksoffering, collection, e. t. c. none of which goes to the account of the church. In fact, the Mimeyeraye Fasting Prayer meeting, as I have come to discover, is organised like a CULT, or at best a state

within a state.

23. THE EPISODE OF WEDNESDAY 28/4/93

I was going to the Conference room to take the Layreaders class; Rev. F. O. Ejemrae, was to take the communicant class at 5p.m. But D.D. was still continuing his healing ministry at about 5.15p.m. or so. Both Ejemrae and myself noticed this, and were upset. I was to walk straight to Minsyeraye to tell him to stop encroaching on time for other activities. The Secretary of Ukoke Orufun, Matthew Okons, who was coming for the layreaders class saw how annoyed I was, and restrained me from going there and that he would go and tell him to wind up.

It was when he finished and came up, that I told D.D. in the presence of his pinions and sycophants all that he had been doing, which did not show any regard for church authority, and time honoured activities of the church, like the communicant class. (A letter written to him in 1991 on this subject is attached).

I told him that I learnt, that it was because of his Friday Fasting Prayer Meeting that the communicant class was moved from the usual Friday to Wednesday. Indeed, I learnt much later, that it was first moved from Friday to Thursday, but that when he was infuriated because of AAPS lecture which he said it affected, it had to be moved again from Thursday to Wednesday. (Apparently, the same reason why he was so infuriated at me for fixing deliverance ministry on Thursday).

In the course of my speech, some of his pinions (sycophants) who wanted to comment on it, started saying "Osun...". I interjected and said he should NOT be called OSUN (Leader) in my presence, because he is not my Osun. This offended him greatly. Some members, including Pa. Okpedu Ejetoboh, and layreaders, said we should go to Conference Room and have the

matter properly discussed and settled which we did.

At the Conference Room, I repeated what I told him in the galary: and because he was so infuriated that I said he should not be called Osun, and asked if he was not Osun Iyerasiri, I had to explain further: Many people call him Osun, and not just Osun Iyerasiri, or Osun r' Ukoke Ozufuon; Clients wanting to visit him actually come to me to lead them to Osun, and when I ask which Osun, I am often told Osun ri Iaheshi nana, i.e (the leader of this Church). And such repeated statements had embarrassed me times without number.

The incident of that day was frankly discussed and concluded with a prayer which I said. But I suspected, and I am now being proved right, that the battle had just then begun.

24. ACCUSATION AGAINST MY CURATE, F. O. EJEMRAE; (REV'D).

The way D.D. and his committee wanted to try a priest under me, and the manner I intervened when I got to know are contained in the attached - Annex.

25. AFTERMATH: After the incident of Ejemrae, D.D. Mimsamaye went in the air again (Thursday AAPS lecture and Friday Fasting Prayer Meeting) to blast me and the priests, saying "ini rhara" little priests...

We understood that he openly compared his relationship to the priests with that of Moses vis-a-vis, Aaron, and that of our Lord Jesus Christ vis-a-vis, the Levitical priests of Judaism.

26. GOODFRIDAY SERVICE; SEVEN WORDS ON THE CROSS:

In the course of this service he was asked to comment on the 5th word spoken from the cross. He used that as an opportunity to censor and blast the priests. According to him, they were the ones who killed Jesus, they did not appreciate what Jesus did, he used an Urhobo proverb, that Jesus' good work was like rain falling on arid land - Osio ro rhore phiba Egbe (or gton). And he concluded that the priests are still the same today.

27. 7TH WORD:

I took the opportunity of commenting on the 7th word from the cross to correct that wrong impression given to the mammoth crowd of St. James', and told them that there was a world of difference between Levitical priesthood and the priests after the order of Melchizedec; and that we were in the priesthood of Jesus Christ, He being our High Priest.

28. On 20th June I was away on a mission to Ekuku-Agbor. On my return, the Rev. L. A. Adjara, for whom I left the church told me that because he asked a new convert who did not come forward until after new converts had made their promises, to wait until 11a.m. service. Because Adjara took this decision that was right, D.D. Mimeyeraye took Rev. L.A. Adjara, and scolded him and as if Adjara was his house boy. He said he and the priests in the church would clash. (Use their heads to knock each other). He was boasting, that after, the Bishop had summoned him and the Venerable, when they get there, the issue would be trashed out. In other words, he is equal to the Venerable.

This matter was later taken to the D.C.C. which met on 31st July, 1993. After both sides had been listen to, Mimeyeraye was told in clear terms (i) he was wrong in shouting on a priest and (ii) that he overstepped his bounds by claiming to know better how the priest should carry out his priestly functions.

But characteristically he never really accepted the blame.

29. In Dec. 1990, a delegation met me in my office, including Evang. S. U. Ayanyen, to say that D.D. Mimeyeraye was going to break away from the Anglican Church: land had been bought, name had been given to their new church, pulpit, lectern etc had been constructed, and they wanted me to intervene. I asked them, what they as members of his committee both in the AAPS & Ukoke Orufuon, had done.

They said nothing. I then said, before I intervene, they should themselves call him and discuss the matter in their committee, of which D.D. is chairman, and that when they fail to convince him, before they should come back to me, they went & later I learnt that he gave up the idea.

30. On 3rd Sept. 1993 I received a circular letter from the caretaker committee appointed by the Bishop for AAPS. In the letter addressed to the Provost, all Archdeacons, priests, catechists, and church Teachers, it was stated that in every station, for the time being, church workers should take up the leadership of the AAPS until the caretaker committee would appoint leaders for the AAPS the that station.

I called the AAPS Executive Committee of St. James' Group on 9th September 1993, read the letter to them and discussed it with them.

A number of them were unhappy saying that the letter should not have been sent to St. James' since the Group there had been intact all along. (Evang. D.D. Mmeyeraye did not attend that meeting).

On Thursday 16th Sept. 1993 I attended the AAPS lecture. Before I got there D.D. Mmeyeraye and his officers had been at the high table. I joined them, and later went and explained the circular letter to the audience.

I commended the St. James' Group for the unity they had maintained all along and for their loyalty to the Diocesan authority. I pointed out that the relevance of this letter to the group is minimal; that they were affected only because they are part of the same Body of AAPS, for when any organ of the body is sick, other parts are affected; but that in any case, I had that same day seen the Vice Chairman of the Care taker committee, Rev. Robinson Arhawe who said that in a place where there was no division, it would not be long before officers are

appointed for them.

I then read from Romans 12:1-8 and exhorted them to use their various important gifts for the growth of the Body.

Thereafter I prayed

Meanwhile, before I concluded, I could see that the whole audience was turbulent like a raging sea. When I look back I saw that Evang. D.D. Mimeyeraye himself was fuming in his seat.

I sat down, puzzled since I could not see anything I said which warranted the very hostile and negative reaction. Rev. M. O. Iyede, who was also present, got up to speak briefly. He asked if there was anyone there who would not vote for Evang. D. D. Mimeyeraye when the caretaker committee arrived; this suggestion infuriated Mimeyeraye the more, because he does not want to hear that somebody would elect or appoint him, since he considers himself appointed from heaven.

Later Evang. D.D. Mimeyeraye himself spoke, berating the church authority: He expected that since it was the constitution prepared by the Olugua faction of the AAPS, that was accepted at Synod, all the officers there have been left intact. Having dissolved the Executive committee at that level, which for him was bad enough, the church authority was now also dissolving the Executive committee at the Group level, where there was not division.

He said that someone who gave a plate of palm oil to two dogs wanted the two dogs to fight.

He asked the audience: When Daniel was thrown into the den of lions, what happened to those who threw him in?

The audience: They were eaten up by the lions.

Mimeyeraye: When they threw Shadrack, Meshack, and Abednego into the fiery furnace what happened to those who threw them in.

The audience: They were burnt by the flames.

Mimeyeraye: How many people did the observers see

in the fire,

The audience: Four

Wimeyeraye: Who was the fourth?

The audience: Jesus Christ

He then continued his tirade saying that if a boil is in a person's leg; it is that part i.e the leg, and not the eye that is operated upon.

He said, the priests have for long been wanting to take over leadership. Let them try. He asked the audience, "Is it only priests who worship God?".

The audience: replied: No-oo

At this point I took my bible and left them.

On Sunday 19th Sept. 1993, I preached at the 7a.m. service. My text was I Peter 1:15f. Be holy for he who called you is holy: I dilated on the demand of holiness, saintliness, saying that it is far from easy: It entails forgiving those who hate us, who despisefully abuse us. I referred to our Lord, praying for forgiveness for those who nailed him to the cross; and to David, pursued by Saul into the wilderness. When David had the opportunity to kill Saul he did not.

He and his followers, Abishai, took Saul's sword, and later asked Saul from a distance

Kidie me tobo ru?

Didi abe me rere? I Sam. 26:18

I pointed out that David fought Goliath and delivered Israel from slavery to the Philistines; when Saul was demented, he played on the Harp to sooth him and make him normal; yet Saul sought to pin David to the wall; and pursued him out of Israel to the wilderness. This unwarranted hatred led David to ask Saul "What have I done wrong? What guilt is on my hands?"

I applied David experience to my situation and asked the audience "What wrong have I done them? Why the

negative reaction to me?"

We came from the University, worshipping God with you; we never said, only the priests should worship God. In the process, my wife died. Later, persons from this same congregation confessed that they killed her with witchcraft. And later still, another person confessed that after her death, they had been struggling in the coven to get me transferred from St. James'. So I felt I should ask the question which David asked Saul,

"What wrong have I done?" And I added, only those involved need be disturbed by the question. ?

(Outline of the SERMON attached)

S. U. ERIVWO