

CHAPTER 1

IS 'LOVE' REALLY LÓVE?

1. 1 INTRODUCTION.

The most significant emotive and motivational force in the world is *love*, but, despite this significance it may also be a / the most misunderstood. So many opinions are available as to what it means or conveys and influential and dominating persona each has some different contribution to make as regards interpretation of love in the biblical context. It would seem that in the ranks of those who should have the clearest understanding of love as depicted in the Bible the problem may be the most prevalent - and with consequent results as regards understanding in the rank and file of lay people.

The problem is sketched out below with due reference to some of the different views whereafter the methodology for the exegetical part of this study is set out. Specific recognition is given to the value of social-scientific / cultural-historical data as hermeneutical tool and consequently some space is devoted to a condensed description of certain social facets as regards the definitive effect it could have had in first century New Testament societies. Applicable information drawn from this is applied to *agápé* in a critical *cum* explanatory manner.

The grammatical-historical exegesis of a few excerpts from the New Testament material ascribed to John, the so-called 'Apostle of Love', is done in combination with insights available from the social-scientific fields of biblical criticism. While the value of this data as a highly useful exegetical tool is realised by many, just as many may also reject it – a negative disposition that could stem from ignorance, a variety of prejudices, fundamentalist obstinacy, traditionalist bias et cetera.

In the question whether 'love' is really *lóve* it is a sure thing that in the social context where people (have to) live together it must remain the value whereby

their relations are defined and qualified, but love is an abstract concept of which the qualities are difficult to define in precise terminology (Funderburk 1975, 989). In time a prolific amount and multitudinous variety of material on love has been produced in various forms of the arts like poetry, music and prose - the collective endeavour at expressing some understanding of love - and yet the last word is not an immediate prospect.

Love has also received ample, even *much* attention in Theology and Church circles, and stands as one of the central Christian values. Even though, as Mathews (1971, 52 quoted below) points out, it is not emphasised in neither creed nor confession a religio-ethical (or vice versa) tenor characterises probably the larger mass of the written material about (non erotic) love. Stauffer's referral (in Kittel 1968, 25) to this aspect of love gives a good indication of the extreme importance of love when he calls it the '...inalienable constituent of humanity'. This *constituent* concurs with Malina's statement (1993c, 110-111) that love as depicted in the Bible is the value of *group attachment* or *bonding* – a type of '...social glue that keeps groups together'. It would, indeed, appear that bringing and / or keeping people and their 'things' together is probably the most prominent facet of love's functionality and man's duty to a fellow as described in agapic terms; a love grounded in God himself of whom the simple but sublime statement is made in the first Johannine Epistle: '...*God is love*' (I Jn 5: 8, 14). 'Simple' as it may seem, love in its broadest meaning is both complex and powerful - vide Grosheide and Van Itterzon (1959, 446) when they call it:

Het meest uiteenlopende [notie] vanaf sexuele hartstocht tot mystieke overgawe aan God... *As such loves encompasses* '...de mens in zijn totaliteit vanaf de hoogste tot de laagste regionen van zijn menszijn, vanaf zijn geestelijke existentie tot aan zijn natuurlijk driftleven...' (*the most dissimilar [notions] from sexual ardour to mystical surrender to God... that encompass ...man in his totality, from the lowest to the highest spheres of being human, from spiritual existence to natural passion...* – freely translated)

1.2 PERSPECTIVES ON LOVE.

1.2.1 Secular perspective.

There are many perspectives on love that can be described as neither ethical nor religious, but wherein the power of love is retained. The fields of entertainment, for instance, music, film and television could be termed 'secular' whereby a more or less similar picture is presented of another complex and powerful emotive force, also called love. This is the common fare from which the majority probably gain their 'understanding' of love – which is then super-imposed on the biblical concept. Van der Watt's observation (1997, 557) is as correct as could be, namely, that someone who has not heard of love as depicted in the Bible but has been exposed to the variety of so-called soap opera television programmes would attach totally different connotations to love than for instance someone who has grown up in church (and not even that would automatically 'immunise' that someone's knowledge or understanding). Ironic as it may be, the introduction to a sermon on *Agapé love is what you need* from Larry Lariscy on I John 3: 11-24 precisely serves to prove Van der Watt correct – secular perspectives had to be appropriated to introduce the particular audience to the religious / spiritual message. Lariscy relied heavily on the entertainment field for the introduction to his topic:

Love is a frequent theme in our culture. Songs, movies, television and radio shows all over the country look at various aspects of love. I do not know from personal experience but have a strong suspicion that all over the world, love is a dominant theme. We hear songs such as "I need somebody to love," "Love takes two" "Lovin' you," "Love is a many splendored thing," "She loved me like a rock"...' Clearly it is an important subject to all people.

(Lariscy 1/8/2000, 1)

1.2.2 The religious realm of love.

There is no denying the place and importance of 'love' in the world and in the non-secular (as an euphemism for 'religious' or 'spiritual') environment love is present in all the great variety of religions. In the Judaeo-Christian religious realm love is especially well substantiated and from the abundant mentioning of, or allusions to love in the biblical documents it is depicted not as a lofty ideal, but as the basic 'ingredient' in the real, everyday life-experience of people who profess to 'belong' to God. Love, then, is not a *something* that crops up or has to be 'exhibited' now and again to maintain a proper façade, but it should be the powerful

essence of (specifically) the lives of believing people, figuring prominently in all that they are and do and whereby who / what they are, namely ‘...sons of God...’ (Matthew 5: 41) or ‘...children of God...’ (John 1: 12) is actualised. In the social realm of life and especially so among people in the community of faith in Jesus Christ, love has to be real and active - thereby the only real proof that God is love is rendered (compare also Stauffer 1974, 53), wherefore, also, love is the only true manner or way in which or whereby the identity of a Christian is revealed. As such, love is not to be found in a bowing to a (different) set of religious laws or new cultic commands, but a singular ‘law of love’ (Van der Watt 1997, 566). Robertson’s condensation (1957, 25), that in the Christian faith the final law in which all other law is fulfilled is the law of love, expresses this indispensability. Jackson (1999, 23) similarly draws the indelible biblical connection between love for / towards God and corresponding love toward the neighbour and, referring to I John 4: 20, he consequently states that the claim to be able to love the neighbour without knowing or loving God, is, from a biblical point of view, as suspect as the claim to be able to know or love God without loving the neighbour.

Despite the almost ‘common’ facts as regards the ideal of the perpetual presence of real love among devout people, a common lack of *regard* (not even mentioning *love*) of fellow men and women that manifests itself in various forms even among *devout* people is, sadly, not uncommon. Brown (1984, 120) has to observe, then, that all the Church’s concern for outsiders as Christian witness is mostly unconvincing simply because outsiders do not ‘see’ mutual love among Christians. The confusion evoked thereby and the resultant aggravation non-Christians could feel about these discrepancies may stem from the incessant bickering that quite commonly smudge the Christian mirror in which the ‘outsiders’ are supposed to see themselves in: moderates often have to bear the (even) violent vituperation of ultra-conservatives; conservatives cringe under the contempt of liberals. Indeed, all the conduct of this ilk among people who can (and should) actually act exactly the opposite exposes the / their dire need of the wisdom inherent in the secular adage that love and charity must begin at home (, 120).

Differences, no, even rifts, like these, give more than enough occasion to put the critical question whether and how much understanding there really is and / or what belief/s are entertained about love among (present) believers. If, and when answers should come forth, it would seem that a vague understanding or muddled ideas exist about this prominent entity in the Christian religious realm where their understanding is drawn from the Bible. This lack or vagueness stem mostly from or is exacerbated by the a-hermeneutical and undiscerning manner in which the contents of Scripture is strung together as if the same things about everything were said by everybody. In modern computer parlance it can be described quite ‘graphically’: one merely has to highlight / select, cut and paste all the bits and pieces together and, *voilà*, a uniform and virtually unassailable dogma, ‘...because the Bible says so...’, about whatever someone would have stands created (and of ‘*agápé-love*’ it may quite possibly be said that it has received more than its fair share of treatment in these terms). Some proponents of grammatical-historical hermeneutic hold this cut-and-paste methodology as legitimate – it is the / their views on the way Scripture ‘interprets’ Scripture.

This (present) vagueness may, furthermore, stem from the astounding fact that love, as the core of what God is and desires (actually, demands,) his children to exercise (to ‘be’), seems to have been relegated an obscure place in the back row in the theology of the Church:

There is not a creed or a confession that emphasizes it [love]. The belief in God the Father became a belief in the first and unbegotten Person of a metaphysical Trinity. Belief in his love has been replaced by an appeal to God’s mercy in the name of Christ who died for sinners. The belief in the triumph of a kingdom of love and righteousness has been replaced by an expectation of joy in heaven or torture in hell.

(Mathews 1971, 52)

The inability, then, to do even remotely correctly what is supposed, no, rather, intended by and in love as depicted in the Scriptures, is the only possible outcome from such a de-emphasising, especially if, respectively, the purpose and nature of the Bible, in what it conveys to the respective audiences of the two Testaments, are considered. I would not deem it reductionist to designate (in an overall sense) the Old Testament as God’s intense involvement and immutable

committedness to his Covenant people wherein his perpetual love is unmistakably demonstrated. Unequivocally this would pre-suppose the demand directed to His people to exercise the same in the vertical (toward God) and horizontal (toward each other) planes. Similarly, the New Testament can hardly be considered as 'popular' literary matter for a general (non-believing) reading public, but the documents were given for Christian consumption, no matter whether the audiences were Jew or Gentile (Aune 1989, 59), and to guide them in being Christians, living up to their name and living out the love of God as demonstrated in / by Christ in their committedness to God, towards each other and, in a Pauline turn of phrase, also those that are (still) outside. While all this has much to do with *religion*, it was also inextricably embedded in everyday life.

1.2.3 Love in religion and religion embedded in kinship.

Malina (1986b, 93) clearly indicates that the early Christian groups or factions functioned along the lines of kinship-involvement wherein religion was securely and indelibly part of. Since love is the cardinal 'ingredient' in strong group loyalty for the maintenance of solidarity, it would of necessity had to have figured in the conduct and behaviour of Christians among themselves, in their family relationships, their communities and toward the world they lived in. Van der Watt (1997, 567) connects love and inter-personal relations directly in his statement that kinship and intra-personal relations are indeed described by the term 'love'.

1.2.4 Present day notions about love.

The experience of reality in their cultural cognition would everywhere and always facilitate Bible reading people's holding of certain specific notions about the subject of (biblical / as depicted in the Bible) love. So, for instance, Christians in South Africa who are members of the (Afrikaans) Reformed Churches regularly and frequently hear the superior imperative on love proclaimed - God and neighbour (and, occasionally, even 'the enemy') shall be loved. Whether these proclamations (which may be understood as part of a 'standard' liturgical procedure by many church-going people in South Africa) come to the pew from either the Decalogue or the New Testament epitome of God's Commandments in Matthew 22, Christian men and women, whether Gentile or Jew, are urged on to

be *loving* persons. But, is ‘love’ understood? *What* is understood about *love*? Does love, consequently, ‘happen’? The importance of understanding rightly cannot be overstressed – a correct understanding has not merely academic value, but it is, especially, necessary for communicating the Gospel (Van der Watt 1997, 557).

1.2.4.1 The ‘vertical’ aspect of love.

Devotedness to God, which may be styled the ‘vertical’ aspect of love, appears to be generally and exclusively singled out for acclamation – love is viewed as ‘something religious’ or even someone *being religious*. Often, or even mostly, this ‘vertical’ understanding is held at the expense of the ‘horizontal’ aspect of love to the neighbour / one’s own people (compare Post 1990, 191). This dichotomising of what must remain a unity can never be right as Lemcio (1988, 46) points out in his quotation of Simeon the Just who said: “on three things the World [or Age] stands: on the Torah, on the [Temple] service, and on deeds of lovingkindness.” These three fundamentals of religion are defined as revelation, worship and sympathy – Gods Word to man, man’s response to God and man’s love to his fellow men (Herford as quoted by Lemcio - [, 46]).

1.2.4.2 The ‘horizontal’ aspect.

Love (not the erotic) between, among or for other people seems to be regarded as ‘secular’ by the religious enthusiasts for the vertical aspect. As such it is made out to be, or made to appear to stem from shallow, emotionally charged philanthropical ‘feelings’ with little or no regard for what the Bible has to say on this. This implication / accusation is not entirely devoid of truth and a telling example of quasi-philanthropy that results from these feelings is related by Pilch (Pilch & Malina 1993, 9) from the mainstream American cultural stance towards altruism: it is demonstrated by people engaging in an impersonal form of generosity that operates on, or through a highly organised context wherein, for instance, groups of people go on a bus trip two hundred or more miles *away* from their hometown and the / their needy to convene with others to ‘hold hands across America’ and where they pledge money to help the distant (in other countries) and (to them) invisible poor. Ironically, the needy people right on their doorstep and in plain

view every day of the week, month in and month out, whose circumstances are probably just as dire and who are just as needful of their generous efforts, seem to remain unobserved or just plain ignored and therefore out of reach of their 'altruism'.

While the applicability of an 'American' instance to a South African scenario may be legitimately criticised, it is by far and away not irrelevant because squalor and opulence are not alien to the South African scene. Sometimes the two extremes exist beside and in full view of each other, much to the chagrin of property owners on the 'good' side because of the negative effect that the visibility of poverty on the 'bad' side has on the viability of property value on the 'good' side.

But why would it be that giving away money to invisible people is preferred to helping those you can see? Does it, perhaps, lie in the lure of a bus-trip? Robertson (1957, 26) presents Niebuhr's criticism of *philanthropical* 'forms' of (biblical?) love in his equation of love with a high form of (biblical?) justice and as such it seems to coincide with what was said by Robertson. In relation to the above it invites some contemplation as regards the reasons why philanthropy is shown:

Christian businessmen are more frequently characterized by a spirit of philanthropy than by a spirit of justice in assessing the claims of economic groups. Love in the form of philanthropy is, in fact, on a lower level than a high form of justice. For philanthropy is given to those who make no claims against us, who do not challenge our goodness or disinterestedness. An act of philanthropy may thus be an expression of both power and moral complacency. An act of justice on the other hand requires the humble recognition that the claim that another makes against us may be legitimate.

The genuine charitableness of this kind of philanthropy may be seriously questioned as, indeed, Barclay (1975d, 119) points out: when someone is doling out even most or all of his earthly possessions in the performing of a grim duty then he does not do so from love, but contempt. There is nothing more humiliating for people on the receiving end because it amounts to '...throwing scraps of charity as to a dog ...[it] is not charity at all – it is pride and pride is always cruel for it knows no love' (, 118-9).

1.2.4.3 Moral / ethical aspect/s.

The moral and ethical aspects appear to be understood as an inseparable part of love in both its theological and ethical guises. Elwell (1988, 1357) posits love as the first and last word in Christian theology and ethics wherein the inherent justness in love is a given. While the temporal and materialistic must surely figure – it does so very prominently in the whole of the biblical context – love also has other pertinent and prominent dimensions. H W Thompson's equation of love-justice / justice-love (1970, 121-122) specifically brings the teaching of Jesus to bear on, inter alia, the facet of forgiveness. His poignant (in the positive sense) statements are well worth quoting in full to maintain the sense thereof:

Neither the theistic legalism of the Mosaic tradition nor the stern rigors of the Prophetic preaching, nor the reasonable legal power and organization of the Romans had succeeded in bringing justice. Jesus saw and declared in vivid stories and memorable statements the necessity of love as pre-requisite and part of justice. Social processes and structures were external and empty forms which became a mockery of justice without the inner acknowledgements of brotherhood and commitment to forgiving love. He went so far as to say that the ultimate power of the Divine Father to bring salvation to the individual and justice to society depends on man's willingness to forgive those who wronged him. As Paul puts it, the sounding brass of the trumpets of power or the clinking cymbals of piety come to nothing without the effective power of love. The political processes of fair trials, punishment of offenders, restraint of the lawless, are all outward aspects of justice, and the works of Caesar are worthy of support. But they cannot achieve a just social stability, much less the mutual fulfillment of human values or potentialities, without the inner dynamic of love – the profound affirmation and motivating acceptance of universal inter-dependence.

1.2.5 Answers for today in questions about yesterday.

The imperatives to love in the Bible were given in definite and defineable terms and situations to the ancient audiences and those imperatives were unmistakably bound up in its relatedness to their everyday lives. The same imperatives are taken by and for application to present day Christian believers to observe love in a totally different world and cultural atmosphere, therefore it is inextricably bound up in the very actual question in the present for theologian and Bible reader alike: what was historically meant by 'love' and (as regards this study) the understanding thereof by the audiences / addressees of the New Testament documents? Our need to know remains the same in order to comply meaningfully with the Bi-

ble. In no way could, or would it suggest a, or any, form of primitivism, that is the belief that earlier periods or cultures were better than the present one and that the past traditions are to be imitated (Deist 1992, 201). Whether love is posited in statements that God loves or that He sheds His love abroad in men's hearts, whether as a time-spanning imperative that men are to love God, the neighbour and self as it was directed to the first historic reader of the biblical texts, love remains as in Rauschenbusch's definition (quoted in Stone 1999, 17) '...the social instinct, the power of special coherence, the *sine qua non* of human society'.

Rauschenbusch's definition (in Stone 1999, 17) brings about vital, juxtaposed questions about what should or must be accomplished in and by the present day Church collectively and the Christian believer individually through love. Harrelson (1951, 177) advances some pointed questions in this regard when he asks how, and whether God's *agápé* affects the organised structures of community life; what does it do to the laws of the land; how and to what extent can it become or should it be the rule of life in a modern day (Western) community which has no real ties with the (Mediterranean-Greek-Roman-Judaeo-Christian) Covenant community of yore (parentheses mine – P.R.). These questions beg relevant answers that may be enacted in our everyday lives since it could well be a moot question as to what extent people in our day and age comprehend the profound meaning ensconced in the facts, imperatives and / or exhortations on love from the ancient past when we are confronted thereby from either pulpit or Bible page.

1.2.5.1 'Our understanding' of ancient concepts.

Often, or, mostly, the way in which we understand the historical / biblical is beset with difficulties despite all the best efforts to state or convey the opposite. These difficulties in comprehension especially concern somebody embedded in, and enculturated in Western ways of thinking and doing. We are Westerners and our understanding of biblical data would be specifically hampered, even severely inhibited, by cultural differences. Kraft (1988, 126) points out the unescapable and plainly understandable fact that we are all deeply and thoroughly immersed in and influenced by our culture (and the effect that it has on all that we read and

write), so that *we need to discover* how God in His interaction with human beings related to the culture/s in which they (not he) were / are immersed.

These relations were recorded in the Bible and the motivation for the present study, to discover the meaning of love conveyed in a specific community, lies in the consequence that God's interaction within their culture with the ancient writers of the biblical documents and their audiences is not simply identical to our culture/s and therefore comprehensively and straightforwardly 'accessible' by the present day (Western) reader. Even further removed from fact would be any assumption that people in our day possess a time transcending, naïve, instinctive or even some special 'spiritual' / mystical / pietistical understanding that corresponds exactly with that of the ancients' while the present, and our being enculturated in our perception of reality and life around us, is most certainly the scenario within which we understand what we read or hear. It is therefore imperative and indispensable that we have to become acquainted with the Bible people's comprehension within their cultural 'world' in order to understand when we read 'their' documents. Ramm's unequivocal statement (1990, 5) rightly serves the case in point: 'Until we can recreate and understand the cultural patterns of the various biblical periods we will be handicapped in our understanding of the fuller meaning of Scripture'. The definite need for adequate hermeneutical work to research the wide scope of instances that may be implicated by such a handicap may indeed encompass most of the antique society/ies wherein the field of relationships between (for instance) marriage partners (and not forgetting concubines) and (their) children, marriage customs, economic practices, military and legal systems and social groupings et cetera figure (Ramm 1990, 5-6).

Not all hermeneutic approaches serve the quest for a better / fuller understanding of biblical data as referred to by Ramm and I would heartily concur with Stanton (1996, 379) who advocates the correct critical paradigm that one and all hermeneutic approaches (amongst others a social-scientific interpretation) should be subject to rigorous scrutiny, but, simultaneously, it has to be maintained that the necessity of considering the historical-cultural aspects for understanding the Bible cannot, ever, be excluded from responsible exegeses in its function as the singularly significant hermeneutical paradigm whereby serious theology may be

practised. The following observation, then, does not imply that theology per se is not regarded as serious or that the seriousness of theology is not quite realised, quite the contrary, nor would or does the observation constitute any form of attack, but it would appear that some ultra-fundamentalist perspectives on, and the congruent ways of interpreting Scripture incline those adherents to denigrate the very real need to know (or even to just acknowledge) and implement the (basic) historical-cultural aspects in exegesis. Consideration of the reality of everyday life in (for instance) the first century within which the New Testament documents were written (and, which reality, to a large extent, was enunciated in those documents) seems to be viewed as ‘merely humanistic information’ and therefore is / has to be regarded as irrelevant for sound exegesis and even derogated as unnecessary inquisitiveness or unwarrantable critical treatment of the biblical text. The valuable results of scholarly work on ancient and contemporary Mediterranean culture, social structure, politics, economics, social interaction and social ambivalence in biblical times are regarded as the product of overly historical-critical aptitudes and therefore to be dismissed as unacceptable and / or useless in ‘spiritual’ biblical exegeses. Obviously this negative aptitude is not very bright and it does nothing for the exegesis of that which is held very dearly, namely the Bible.

1.2.5.2 *Doing things ‘by the book’.*

The way in which biblical exegesis ‘has always been done’ is regarded as the traditionally correct and therefore only way. The inclination to turn a deaf ear and a blind eye on anything that sounds even remotely ‘new-fangled’ (American / old cowboy slang to describe something one would be wont to disagree with out of sheer principle or reject outright) appears to be followed blindly. The possibility that the trains of thought alluded to above may stem from, or may at least be closely aligned with the *Received View*, has more going for, than against it. Bruce Malina (1998, 217) explains this ‘label’ as it is used in the philosophy of science as a characterisation of the prescribed way of asking questions and arriving at answers in a given academic discipline. The Received View represents a dogmatic and powerful orthodoxy, dictating criteria whereby the validity of contributions to any field either receive a thumbs up rating as ‘convincing’ or turned

down as the opposite (, 217). Malina's (justifiably incisive) observations on the sort of 'exegesis' of the Bible that emerges from, or by virtue of the Received View, must of necessity then be considered. The meaning of words in the Bible in the confusion of ideology with theology is often 'theologised' in exegesis (Malina 1998, 218); verses or passages of Scripture are isolated from the Bible books in which they were written in a specific cultural context (from which sound grammatical-historical exegesis can be done) and / or endlessly strung together, dogmatically implying (as some would even insist) that the New Testament authors knew each other's work so well as if they were at work around the same table, simultaneously compiling the documents that were eventually collected in the canon (, 218). If, indeed, in the (relatively rare) event where historical-cultural aspects should receive recognition in exegesis at all, it amounts to no more than a going-through-the-motions lip-service that is done unwittingly and indiscriminately or without regard for the specialised meaning that the terms convey in relation to life in the first century. For clear exegesis and sound doctrine this cannot and, indeed, does not spell any good.

The negative and inescapable result that unawareness of, or nonchalance as regards the cultural systems that were in place in the New Testament world, where the documents (as the field for this study) were penned, may have on theology per se remains difficult to envisage. One of the definite results which can be pointed out though (Malina 1998, 218), is that scholars adopting the Received View are currently producing some of the best *nineteenth century* (!) commentaries ever written – and thereby, mostly, they are perpetuating what has been said many times over. Eugene Botha (1987a, b) airs almost the exact criticism as regards the treatment afforded to words in works of lexicographical nature and one of the conclusions he reaches is essentially identical to Malina's, namely that the sources we have available today amount to little more than new editions of, or rearrangements of old work dating back as far as the 1800's. It is, on the one hand, disappointing to realise and galling to have to admit that the Received View still wields sway despite the available results from brilliant contemporary research and even technological advances, but, on the other hand, one can only be enthused by the sound theological and sensible exegetical work done in keeping with

the results of research current to our times whereby new, exciting meaning of the Scriptures is revealed and whereby, indeed, spiritual fervour is stimulated. The a-scientific, received view stance (which, in reality, is a-hermeneutical) smacks of the sort of fundamentalism that seems to thrive on the absolutising of 'canonised' traditionalisms whereby anything that does not fit in with these views is resisted stoically, dogmatically. The sad truth about and serious warning against this sort of practice is enunciated in the very apt quotation (anon) scribbled on a scrap of paper by a dear colleague once when we were occupied with a situation similar to some of those referred to by Malina above:

Something in us always stagnates when we

- *Disregard the present*
- *Fear the future or*
- *Canonise the past.*

1.2.5.3 The prohibitive effect/s of fundamentalism on understanding.

In an interesting and highly relevant study Backeberg (2002) singled out fundamentalism as a significant phenomenon in (modern) theology. He sees it, among others, as *religious* wherein he gives a good account of the tendencies sketched above. The obvious is stated, namely that modern theology is, and operates from a hermeneutically informed paradigm from the first to the last, but fundamentalists, whether they are North American (or South African) Protestants, ultra-orthodox Judaists in Jerusalem or Shi'ite Muslims in Iran, all choose to live with a form of faith '*...in spite of interpretation*' (2002, 10) of their respective religious canons whereby sound exegesis of precisely the documents they wish to ensconce is ignored. Strangely enough and exacerbating the inamenability, it would appear that an increase in religious fervour (in whatever faith) is often accompanied by a congruent callousness towards people (dare one use the euphemism lovelessness or, simply, state the reality of hate?), both in the religious realm and socially as may concern the needs they experience and suffer in the stark reality of life. In contrast then, one and all that would know the precepts of the Bible in order to live a meaningful Christian life in obedience to, for instance, the imperatives to love God, the neighbour and self, need to ask vital questions on a clear as possi-

ble understanding of the Scriptures: Is love really love? The dire need for sensible answers that would guide in the actualising of love among fellows in faith and even others who do not think nor are the same, will not go away and therefore we need to know what love is and what it is not.

1.2.5.4 The need for cross-cultural historic knowledge.

Since it is a not uncommon phenomenon and even a common occurrence that people, even within the same or a similar cultural setting or the religious scenario/s within such a cultural setting, do not always or maybe even most of the time similarly comprehend abstract concepts (like ‘*agápé*’) in ancient documents (such as the Bible) from a different culture (such as where the biblical documents came into existence), a need for cross-cultural knowledge may become acute in order to *begin* to understand. The probability of not comprehending fully (or not at all) may in all likelihood even escalate when *comprehension* of a homonymous but not homologous concept such as ‘love’ is confronted by, and amidst, the realities of everyday life - the *word* (love) sounds similar, but differs quite widely in *meaning* (of love) when applied to what the Bible is generally understood to convey. From the theological and ethical perspectives, for both the theological kerygma and an applicability to a sincere and genuinely religious (dare one specify ‘Christian’?) life-style in accordance with the kerygma, it should therefore then be deemed of great importance to get to, or at least make an honest effort at (a better) understanding of the ‘ambiguous subject’ (Elwell 1988, 1357; Lutzer 1972, 23) of ‘biblical love’.

1.2.5.5 Question/s begging answers.

Relative to the need to know what the historical audiences in their social system (Malina 1982, 232) could have understood what love is (in the first century biblical usage from the social / *usus loquendic* sense of the word), the significant present day question for anyone, be it theologian, pastor, Christian or non-Christian Bible reader, logically presents itself whether ‘love’ as we purport to understand it, is, or corresponds with *lóve* as it was proclaimed to, primarily understood by and ‘done’ or attempted or supposed to be done by the first Christians in their social relations of everyday life. As regards such relations, individuals (the ‘self’)

not only had to ‘mesh’ as Christian believers with their fellow believers with whom they formed a dyadic part (compare Dyadism: Neyrey [1993a, 49p.] and Group-orientation [1993b, 88p.]) of the faith communities – their respective ‘in-group’/ microcosm of Christians, but also, primarily, with society (Malina 1998, 74) as the world in which they experienced life.

These relations figured prominently and were operational within a specific social-cultural setting that was inherently *religious*. Kloppenborg and Wilson (1996, 7) enunciate the definitive aspect that **religion was a socially inter-related entity inextricably bound up with all aspects of life**. Even though this aspect has become a commonplace but highly important one among informed people in contemporary theology, it would seem that it is still not considered, more specifically, perhaps, by Received View traditionalists. It has to be realised that the ancients, with the exceptions one could expect, unquestioningly accepted religious beliefs and practices as part and parcel of their everyday life and social environment. Religion was not regarded as but *a* component of human experience, but as *the* most essential part of life. Religion was embedded in their politics and / or kinship relations (Malina 1986b, 94) and based on honour towards the human and non-human controllers of human existence (Malina 1993c, 31, 110). Religious *meaning* was then, consequently, expressed in terms that functioned normally in the socio-cultural semantic substance that it had in everyday life. This would, no less, also apply to the *agápé* concept.

As regards *meaning*, Terry’s clear statement (1979, 100) on the basic fact that no new language was developed (or, for that matter, needed to be developed) and adopted for the authors of the biblical documents is then expressly relevant. Those authors expressed what they had to in the language of their and their readers’ day – their meaning/s had everyday words (although some would stress the idea that the usage of language in the biblical documents encompassed some deeper ‘spiritual’ meaning – see below). The fact that the biblical writings were put together in everyday language and not some spiritual lingo available only to a select few initiates must remain in full and constant view and be seriously considered in all biblical exegesis.

The bulk of New Testament vocabulary is derived from *Koine* Greek with reference to the *usus loquendi* of its time. Some leeway could be left to a *possibility* that a certain ‘depth of meaning’ may have been added in some contexts to words used in the New Testament. Ramm (1990, 94) neither defends nor refutes or negates Deismann’s notion that a special or ‘ecclesiastical’ Greek may have been used, but states that the New Testament adds new depth and connotations (even specific denotations) to such words as *faith, love, mercy, redemption, salvation* et cetera and the abstract concepts that are presented and represented in such words.

Malina and Rohrbaugh give a good indication of how language could have been used in specific circumstances in their social-scientific work on the Fourth Gospel (1998). Their explanation of the high probability that an antilanguage was used in the Fourth Gospel (1998, 7p.) indicates the / an alternate (religious) reality experienced by John’s audience and whereby their experience of (their social) reality was verbalised, but that does not transmute ordinary language into unintelligible gibberish. (Antilanguage is explained below – please refer page 129p.) What is necessary then, as regards exegesis of the Johannine text, is that notice has to be taken of those factors, which, in effect, could boil down to a certain ‘depth of meaning’ in John, otherwise exegesis of the meaning and usage of words by the Johannine author is bound to fall short - with serious consequences for dogmatics, systematic theology, theological ethics and, maybe especially, preaching the Gospel. This facet is treated in some depth below and one should, indeed, ponder this...

The *possibility* referred to above should not be summarily disavowed or nonchalantly dismissed and therefore one cannot but approach it prudently as Botha (1987) correctly cautions, as the (perceived) ‘depth’ in many or most occurrences may in fact be no more than a synthetic construct stemming from the way the biblical texts are treated by lexicographers and word-study authors who may indeed have been influenced by the Received View (as the definite product of the Enlightenment – Malina 1998, 218). In his semantic-lexicographical study on the meaning of words in the New Testament Botha (1987a, 227) also points out the

disturbing possibility that the lexical meaning of words and theological concepts are sometimes grossly confused (and ‘ordinary’ words may become endowed with ‘special’ [theological?] meaning). How much of such confusion or confusedness have, or may have been assimilated in commentaries and the like (and ‘distributed’ from pulpits worldwide to how many audiences over time) will be well nigh impossible to ascertain, but Botha’s findings sound a serious alarm that needs to be heeded. As regards theological study, the responsibility on students’ part increase manifold to discern and ascertain whether their authors are (‘lexicographically’ speaking) ‘doing the right thing’.

For the present study the possibility sketched above has to be borne in mind as regards added depth of meaning to words and concepts used in the New Testament. One should also be aware of the (very real) possibility that a desired (religious or traditional) meaning may be read dogmatically / according to the Received View into texts. While the socio-linguistic aspect consequently has to be considered in any effort at trying to understand how the / their ‘world works’ relative to our understanding of how our’s works, the one that we have been socialised and enculturated in (Malina 1998, 10), it would stand to reason that a cautious stance has to be adopted toward any desire or belief that ‘depth of meaning’ (must) have been added to words and concepts as used by the *ecclesiastical writers*. Therefore, then, an accurate grammatical-historical gauging of words and concepts under scrutiny must be done and duly elaborated on insofar as that may be possible.

1.2.6 ‘What’s love got to do with it?’

During the course of research one could not help but become acutely aware of the immensity of the work of theological and ethical nature or a combination thereof that has been done on love. A deep appreciation has to be extended for one and all that endeavoured meaningfully in this direction. Under the awareness that in the present study one may end up merely taking coal to Newcastle (or, nearer home in South Africa, taking oranges to the Sundays-River valley in the Eastern Cape or Citrusdal in the Western Cape), the definite challenge therefore presented itself to attempt at finding **whether / if and what social implication/s love**

held for the first historical readers of the biblical documents (in context of this study, John) and to what extent it could have been relevant for Christians in their every day life among themselves as well as in the world they lived in. John's Christian community's situation was selected for a closer look, as love appears to have played a particular and prominent role among them as may be gleaned from these documents. Much of what is known or said about love in our day probably could be relayed to the Fourth Gospel or John's Epistles – as Van der Watt (1997, 558) points out that *αγαπω* / *αγαπη* and *φιλεω* / *φιλια* actually appear some seventy times in the Gospel alone. The term was used in a wide semantic context in the Gospel wherefore the context of usage would have to be strictly considered (, 558). Bearing the fact in mind that the particular readership / audience, like us, did not (yet at the time of their hearing the content of what was addressed to them) find themselves 'removed to heaven' (compare Lohse 1975, 133), but were committed to living their lives as Christians in the world of their time where they had to cope with their particular internal problems and persecutions from outside, this study is then, to the greater extent thereof, directed on the *social* facet and understanding of love in their experience. What has to be borne in mind, though, is the probability (even fact,) as Malina and Rohrbaugh (1998) convincingly show, that their situation may not simply have been along the lines and according to your 'everyday / standard' first century cultural perception, wherefore John's turn of phrase must be ascertained and discerned before, or in order to apply it correctly because it may even differ in some or most respects as regards other New Testament writings.

1.2.7 Focus.

Of necessity the depth of the revelational use and content of the word as directed via Scripture has to be brought to the fore. A pre-requisite would then, logically, have to be a (very brief) survey over a broad span of time regarding the *meaning* that was attached to the concept – whether 'love' is *love*. The clear realisation that the socio-cultural aspects of community life in the first century influenced in a very direct way the common, everyday language whereby the New Testament or 'Christian' thought was conveyed in the biblical documents as indicated above, necessitates that it should be considered continuously and brought into

conjunction with the grammatical-historical paradigm – as Zuck quotes Sproul (1991, 78) on such a necessity:

Unless we maintain that the Bible fell down from heaven on a parachute, inscribed by a celestial pen in a peculiar heavenly language uniquely suited as a vehicle for a divine revelation, or that the Bible was dictated directly and immediately by God without reference to any local custom, style or perspective, we are going to have to face the cultural gap. That is, the Bible reflects the culture of its day.

The basic, primary focus in this study then is on the New Testament writings of one ‘John’, therefore a *theological* study, but, also, not exclusively so as the considerations touched upon above necessitate that ample use be made continuously of information available from historical-cultural data available from social-scientific research. The study, therefore, also has a metatheoretical flavour, albeit more or less specifically restricted to the bearing that the use of words / terms / expressions in their semantic function(s) had on inter-personal relations and ethical aspects as regards those relations in the New Testament narratives.

The possibility to conduct the present study along the (almost customary) line of examination and discussion of the terminology of / on a subject (compare Silva 1983, 22) was seriously considered, but it was realised that even a concerted and concentrated study of relevant terms may end up as little more than a taxonomy of ‘love-terminology’ – stocking Newcastle with coal and maybe also / even perpetuating something of, or along the lines of the Received View by merely repeating what others had to say, but (merely) arrange it differently.

The primary object, then, was an interpretation of *agápé* within the social world and circumstances of the particular audience and (hopefully) putting to meaningful use the enlightening material developed in social-scientific research. Bengt Holmberg (1990, 3) presents this necessity concisely when he presents his understanding of the introduction of sociology in New Testament studies, namely as a sincere effort at understanding Christianity more fully as it really was – a flesh and blood reality: ‘If we want to understand its “soul,” what it means, we must find the “body” it lived as. Craffert envisages the same in his reference of Scroggs (1991, 124 footnote 3):

...the sociology of early Christianity is no attempt to limit reductionistically the reality of Christianity to social dynamic; rather it should be seen as an effort to guard against a reductionism from the other extreme, a limitation of the reality of Christianity to an inner-spiritual, or cognitive-objective system. In short, sociology wants to put body and soul together again.

Of necessity some description of the social facets wherein *agápé* may have been functional has then to be given as a preliminary to interpretation / determining the *meaning* possibly conveyed to the ancient audiences, and utilising the terminology used by social-scientific exegetes to acquaint someone not familiar with the subject. Terminology as description, serving as a historical-cultural link, can as such, therefore, not be bypassed or regarded as irrelevant or meaningless (and summarily written off) in a study of this nature, to the contrary, terminology has to be meaningfully considered and surveyed as may be found necessary. Rather, ascertaining the *meaning* (in / by means of a social-scientific assisted exegesis) conveyed by particular / relevant terms in the situational context (Van Staden & Van Aarde 1991, 55) has to be of primary concern as an attempt at spelling out the rules of the game in order to account for the whole enterprise of understanding and interpretation (De Villiers 1991, 146).

As regards *meaning*, Malina (1986a, 3) precisely and correctively points out that any (so-called) 'objective' isolation of (biblical) words, terms, idiomatic expressions and 'text-segments' not only from the relevant document but also the contextual social-cultural fabric of meaning of which it forms an inextricable part, causes a tear in such fabric as understanding (and therefore interpretation) is embedded in a / the communities in which words, terms et cetera are used (De Villiers 1991, 149).

Wording is not, simply, meaning (Malina & Rohrbaugh 1998, 3) and Bible students who would ascribe a modern, Western, meaning to the words used in these ancient languages only succeed in 'speaking' English, Spanish, Afrikaans or whatever in Greek, Aramaic or Hebrew. Inevitably, such an exercise cannot have any other outcome than a misunderstanding of words, concepts et cetera in the biblical documents being studied (and, concomitantly, a transmission of the very same misunderstanding to audiences). In the context of this study, then, the

following statement as regards the understanding of ‘biblical’ concepts like love, faith, righteousness et cetera is expressively relevant: ‘Words such as *love, world, believe* and the like are presumed to have the same meanings as those U.S. persons ascribe to them’ (, 3) (or, for that matter, anywhere else where a Western-European cultural paradigm is in vogue – P. R.) (italisation original).

From Malina’s observations (1996, 27) about ‘decontextualized’ literacy and modern day reading wherein a written work takes on meaning from, and in the world of the reader, most of the Bible reading in our day may (or should) actually be described as *decontextualised*: the Bible is read in Western-European cultural terms and thought-patterns. Contrarily, then, in order to understand the *meaning* of a biblical concept, the social Mediterranean-Jewish-Greek-Roman ‘fabric’ into which it was interwoven and contextually formed part of, needs to be spread out and the concept viewed holistically / in the particular context where it originated.

An attempt at such a viewing follows in subsequent chapters, but prior to that, it would be necessary to try and ‘place’ the subject under discussion in its present context. A (necessarily very) brief overview of the multifarious ways of thinking about love as it may affect our understanding follows below.

1.2.8 Overview on the concept ‘Love’.

1.2.8.1 The traditional-cum-theological view.

A / the traditional (or should it rather be termed the ‘Received’?) view always has to figure in theological study, as it would seem (and I prefer to believe) that tradition mostly holds a benevolent standard of comparison and a check on our thinking about God and His Word. However, as it could (and does) happen, when tradition is afforded a superiority which effectively short circuits progress of heuristics or the broadening in insight and understanding that come about by new methods of research or new knowledge obtained, then benevolence as such not only stands severely compromised, but tradition may actually transmute into something malignant. The Gospel narratives render stark evidence that a tradition, wrongly applied, presents a serious hurdle – no less than Jesus and Jesus no less

had to contend with it in His proclamation of the Kingdom of God that was at hand.

Bearing the positive role in mind that tradition normally fulfills, it would be no less appropriate in this study to give primary consideration to the traditional understanding of love as a *biblical* concept. By *traditional* a formal reference is then implied, albeit not rigidly so, since the layman's understanding also has to be taken in consideration. The consideration duly given to the traditional is not mere lip-service, but it is done in the hope that the traditional view may be (somewhat) affirmed insofar as it can be linked to, or ascertain the correspondence it may hold with the first century understanding of love (as depicted in the New Testament documents) as well as (hopefully,) paving a way to suggesting a meaningful rethinking that may result in augmenting or suitably redirecting our understanding of it, should it become apparent.

In lieu of the profuse amount and variety of available material, a choice or selection had to be made and Calvin, Brunner, Heyns and Pop's views are presented very briefly on *agápé* without critical discussion or comparison. The selection was not dictated by specific criteria or preferences.

- **John Calvin** certainly ranks as one of Protestantism's prominent figures. His view/s on *agápé* would render valuable insight on what the (Protestant) Church traditionally understands about the nature of love and / or how it should be effective. Calvin (1949a, 58) designates the love-command in Matthew twenty-two as the '...abridgement of the Law...' whereby the will of God is clearly conveyed that he desires *love*. Worship and honour are not relegated by love because obedience and obedience, true reverence and godly living, cannot realise apart, or be meaningful divorced from love (a, 58). Especially relevant is Calvin's statement that God disdains the forced (religious) duties or services of men, while free and willing worship, flowing from love, truly constitutes reverence (a, 58).

In his commentary on John (1949b, 186) Calvin denotes the *love* as referred to in John 3: 16 as the *mercy* with which God was moved towards unworthy people,

even his enemies, before he reconciled them to himself. Love stands in direct relation to God's wonderful goodness (b, 186) whereby he exercised benevolence toward men who in fact deserved to be hated. Paul infers the same by informing the Ephesians and Romans respectively that '...the Father *chose us in him before the creation of the world*, (Eph. i.4;), and hath showed that he is gracious to us, (Rom. v.10)' (b, 186) (italisation original). The sublimity, even transcendence, of (God's) love is unmistakably clear when it is considered that '...we are at the same time the enemies and the friends of God, until, atonement having been made for our sins, we are restored to favour with God' (b, 186).

Calvin's commentary on First Corinthians (1948) contains much about the *nature* of love as the rule, the regulating principle of all the Christian's actions (1948, 419). His statement that even the most excellent religious behaviour or human morality amount to nothing more than noise or show when it is motivated by self-interest or aggrandisement instead of love, is especially notable. In the specific context under discussion of love, then, it is laid down as the governing principle for relations among the Corinthian believers therefore the social aspects can hardly be ignored. Paul's view/s about love is then seen as the end of the law and bond of perfection whereby the second Table of the Law is complied with (, 419).

Penn (Calvin 1948, 419-20, footnote 2) criticises the translation of *αγάπη* as *charitas* in the Latin, leading Wiclif to render love as *charity* in English (because he '...only knew the Latin Scripture...'). It would appear that love is almost matter-of-factly regarded as a synonym for charity or vice versa, therefore, in the relatedness it has toward relationships among believers, sparing this facet a brief thought may prove worth the while. Love and charity seems to be equated in English – as the circumscription of charity by Marckwardt et al shows (1969, 224): '1 Liberality to the poor...4 Readiness to overlook faults; tolerance, leniency. 5 Spiritual benevolence, Christian love.' Indeed, charity then resembles overall the meaning that love has in first Corinthians thirteen.

In summing up Calvin it could be said, then, that he views the ‘presence’ of love with believers as not being ‘religious’ but reverence to God is replicated in Christian conduct and behaviour in the Christian community, even treating those who do not deserve love, even ourselves, in the same sublime, transcendent way God treated us.

- **Emil Brunner**, hailing from the same city as Calvin but much nearer to our time, states in connection with God’s covenantal veracity towards *community* with man (not *union* as in mysticism), that ‘God’s Nature is *Agapē* and *Agapē* is the will to community’ (1966, 215). True reciprocity is evoked by the pure goodwill of God’s love: ‘His love desires to awaken responsive love in man, the “obedience of faith” – υπακοή πίστεως.’

True communion between God and man can only be expressed in the words: Let us love Him, for He has first loved us’ (1966, 216). The coming of Jesus, therefore, not only paves the way for the founding or formation of a community, He is the way. He does not abrogate God’s Law as it was given in the Old Testament for the orderly and God honouring functioning of His Covenant community, but, by the summing up (as in Matthew 22), Jesus summons to absolute love whereby he simplified the law to an incredible extent – stressing and enhancing the one element that matters in every commandment for God’s community (, 278). No externalistic and legalistic cultic observances can satisfy the demand of God, but what matters is the inner attitude, the relation of the heart to God and neighbour – that is what the commandments mean (, 278). The Rule within the Kingdom of God was ushered in by Jesus (, 279) and was not something that he merely proclaimed, but which was inseparably part of, or connected to his Person.

When John repeats Jesus as saying that the person who has seen him, has seen the Father (John 14: 9 and also 12: 45) and that God is Love (I John 4: 10), the incomprehensible unity of God’s holiness and love, giving him the right to promulgate a commandment and demand obedience (for instance, to love), stands revealed – we human beings can know who God is (Brunner 1966, 280) and are enabled to commune with Him. Even though man is not, and can never be, an

equal partner to God, he must be a real partner to God who rules in what Brunner calls ‘...the freedom of obedience’ (, 216). It would stand clearly to reason that *communion* is not something engaged in by believers solely with God - as is sometimes conveyed by purveyors of quietism or pietism - but also and definitely *communally*, amongst, and toward each other by the people of a particular in-group, a *community*.

Jesus was the embodiment of fulfilling the Law by fulfilling the meaning, which is *agápé* (Brunner 1966, 282). Jesus gave the clearest example of this generous, serving love in the feet-washing (, 284), even taking it to furthest extent by giving his very Life as atonement for everything that separates men from God – taking away the sin of the world (John 1: 29). He fulfilled God’s commandment of love as set out in John 15: 10, 12, 13 (KJV):

If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love; even as I have kept my Father’s commandments, and abide in his love... This is my commandment, That ye love one another, as I have loved you. Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.

In the terrible, dehumanising and, socially speaking, utterly degrading death meted out for criminals, he paid a price *for* a community that also underlies the conditions and the tenets for communion *within* the community is reflected in the “work” of Jesus (Brunner 1996, 283): ‘... the highest point ... is that which, from the human point of view, is its lowest point: the death of a criminal on the gallows.’ God, the Reconciler (, 290), restores to communion with Himself, and, subsequently, communion among those reconciled – of which the telling statement in I John 1: 7 gives clear and ample indication that people ‘...in the light...’ are in communion with Christ and fellow Christians while the blood of Jesus continues to cleanse from sin which separates believers from Jesus and each other.

Brunner, apparently, lays a very strong *religious* foundation in the stress he puts on the obedience of faith, but simultaneously, in turn, the very obedience relates to simple, but sublime service to fellows in faith – as Jesus demonstrated in the washing of the disciples’ feet and the giving of his life.

- **Johan Heyns**, noted scholar and prominent church leader, has rendered valuable input in the South African and international theological scene. In the introduction of his subject *Dogmatiek* to theological students he furnishes a wealth of (contemporary, theological) insight on biblical love and explains the exalted nature of *agápé*.

As regards the feasibility of a life of love he states that, due to the proliferation of dogmatic material (which may very well include most or all that appeared on 'love' as well - P.R.), theologians have to re-evaluate and give an account of their doctrinal position (1978, 1). Heyns himself does this in an admirable way as regards *agápé*, equating (God's) love with (his) kindness (, 71), stating that God loves simply because he loves ('*Hy het lief omdat Hy liefhet*') and making it clear that love (if love may be thus personified) has as its goal the good, the wellbeing of the object thereof.

In his discussion of the difference/s between *erôs* and *agápé* (, 136) Heyns depicts love as *giving* and *doing* instead of *asking* and *taking*, of *servicing* instead of *wanting or expecting to be served*.

The aspects of forgiveness and mercifulness / compassion are especially meaningful, which, as such, does not by any chance or measure may be taken to mean that love could be, or act from a mere sentimentality that simply condones or puts up with any and all. Love is, and embodies the 'yes' of approval but also, very clearly and definitely, the 'no' of judgment as well as the '*it's all right*' of forgiving – whereby no condonation for the wrong committed is implied. Also, especially, notable his thoughts are on the character and deportment of the church as a community and fellowship that rests on love.

Heyns is critically outspoken on enmity and covert menace among members of such a fellowship - as he conveys in the following statement (freely translated): 'If love expels all fear (I Jn 4: 18) and if the church is a community that is built on this love, then it must be impossible that anybody that forms part of such a community can be an enemy that bodes ill toward another!' (, 369).

Heyns gives meaning to justice in love: wrong must be punished and how else but by meting out retribution to the wrongdoer, but the hand of reconciliation is extended. Enmity in the ranks of a community where *agápé* from God is experienced is an anomaly.

- **F J Pop** (1965) declares that only one love (*agápé*) matters in the Bible – as God is óne, so is love (1965, 300) and it does not matter whether it refers to love of God (Romans 8: 39) or Christ (John 15: 9) or man’s love for God (Deuteronomy 6: 5, Romans 8: 28) to name just a few instances or references to the same love. This love is from God (I John 4: 7) (, 301) and is mediated by the Spirit as an eschatological gift whereby it is unmistakably signified that the eschaton has commenced – the very fact of the numerous biblical exhortations towards love among mankind must be seen in eschatological light (, 301):

...zo is ook de liefde als vrucht van de Geest een van de eschata, die zich reeds hier en nu vertonen als werkzame werkelijkheid. Zij behoort tot de krachten der toekomstige aion, die reeds nu gesmaakt worden ...De talrijke vermaningen tot liefhebben zal men daarom moeten zien in eschatologisch licht...dat de toekomst reeds begonnen is... (*...so also is love as fruit of the Spirit one of the eschata which displays itself as an active reality in the here and now. It belongs to the future aeon that is already now experienced... The numerous exhortations to love must be seen in an eschatological light... that the future has begun...* (free translation).

Pop makes a very relevant statement about the reality of love (1965, 301): it is always more than merely a religious persuasion – love is real only where and when it finds expression in, or is enacted in a deed of love. When love is ‘done’, where the love of God is extended, something happens irresistibly - love ís, comes into its own. It must be unmistakably clear that love does not come automatically, but to lóve requires the ineluctable choice to do so (, 302), a choice which would in many instances equal doling out all one has, even to giving up life in martyrdom irrespective whether such an instance would be real or not.

Pop brings the reality of God’s presence to bear in his view that eschatology, in greater or lesser extent, is realised in the doing of love (not thereby negating the futuristic) in the present. Of specific import is his view that there does not exist

different kinds of love, like transcendently divine and / versus merely human love, but love is from Gód.

1.2.8.2 Summary.

In concluding and summarising the theological cum traditional view it may be briefly said that in (a) theological / traditional understanding of love the *origin / sustaining source* of love is posited with God – man is not able to love God or fellow sans being empowered to do so by God, wherefore, love comes from God only. No true worship or communion is possible without love of God – which, in such an instance, would amount to mere legalistic religious observance or cultic externalisation.

Similarly, communion among members of a community in their everyday affairs rests on the same premise wherein justice in dispensing retribution for the wrongs done must even reflect the tenets of love. Most specifically illwill among, and toward fellow members of a (religious) community would be starkly out of place. Reciprocity is a given in relations where the rule of love is respected – not one person, ever, may only be a receiver, but the initiative to show (extend) love always lays with each and every member. Love is not merely nominal and it does not ‘happen’ as if by itself, but when love is done in the re-enactment of the choice/s Christ made, something irresistibly happens and serves as irrefutable witness of the presence of God’s domain.

1.2.8.3 A ‘popular’ view on love.

A differentiation between traditional and popular perspectives on anything theological could very well appear to be an artificial construct that would not stand up to arguments on the credibility thereof. What could, therefore, at most be differentiated between as regards love may be ‘non-evangelical’ and ‘evangelical’ or vice versa, and, vice versa, such a differentiation would not in any way presuppose a certain popularity or non-popularity of any one perspective.

The contributors selected for their view/s have virtually nothing in common and presentation of the following (in alphabetical order) is interspersed with referen-

ces to others. The same ‘liberty’ was not used to the same extent in the above presentation.

- **Melvin Dieter** (Dieter, Hoekema, Horton, McQuilkin & Walvoord 1987) presents a well-defined and thorough perspective on the Wesleyan view on sanctification wherein he specifically brings the subject of love to bear. Wesley’s understanding of sanctification proceeds on a continuum between Law and Love (, 25 – 28) – in fulfilling the “...royal law of love...” (, 25) as given by Christ in the Sermon on the Mount, holiness comes into effect in a progressive movement from the new birth to entire sanctification and perfection in love (, 27).

Wesley saw the Ten Commandments renewed, even replicated in the Sermon on the Mount, whence the Sermon became the heart of his understanding of the moral intent also as regards the sanctifying purity and spirituality described in/ by the Ten Commandments in a life of practical holiness (Dieter et al 1987, 26). Love, in Wesley’s view, constitutes the final goal of the plan of salvation, ‘...the end of all the command-ments of God ... from the beginning of the world to the consummation of all things’ (, 27). Love is not an aesthetic value or a ‘something’ that can exist without action of a moral being (, 27), therefore the essence of sanctification in the Christian believer is love in action (, 27) wherein true Christianity lies - having the mind of Christ and doing accordingly. Real (Christian) freedom, then, is not freedom from guilt or the release from the pangs of hell, but to love with the love of God himself, shed abroad by the indwelling Holy Spirit (, 27). Love is not merely emotionally felt but ethically done – operative within a spiritually unified body of believers that would bring glory to Jesus himself (, 32). The social facet of love’s workings, then, promoting group-solidarity and loyalty among Christians, is part and parcel of (biblical) holiness.

Wesley’s doctrine of entire sanctification / Christian perfection / “Theology of Love” has been under attack and derogated as an impossible perfectionist ideal – ‘...attractive but unrealizable in this world of imperfection and sin’ (Dieter et al 1987, 29). It is clearly pointed out, though, that Wesleyans did not glean their understanding of the biblical theme of sanctification by a system of logical de-

duction from certain proof-texts or propositions, but the sincere attempt to see and understand Scripture holistically (, 30). Christ's summation of God's Law of love is the basic hermeneutical agenda for understanding God's purpose in all his work of redemption in Christ Jesus (, 30) whereby the ethical elements and concomitant behaviour are demonstrated.

In summarising Wesley's view on love in continuum with God's Law, it may be said that a hermeneutic of love as regards holy living *cum* sanctification presents an almost startling simplicity – which, for the purveyors of a dogmatising use of the Bible wherein everything has to be proof-texted, may be too straightforward. Judged against Paul's exhortation to the Corinthians (I Corinthians 13), while they were intent on pursuing spiritual gifts, to pursue the most excellent gift of love whereby no less than Christ's conduct as regards *agápé* may be emulated among them, Wesley's view on *agápé* makes a lot of sense.

- **Harrelson** (1951, 169) summarises Nygren's views on *agápé* and he concludes that it is *God's* love for man, and nothing else. This could serve as an example for the belief and consequent proclamation (that, in a certain sense, should also be referred to as *popular*, since it enjoys quite common, wide and frequent usage) that the so-called *agápé-love* is virtually and exclusively a *theological* concept. The belief that *agápé* existed, or exists solely with God and that man is largely a passive receiver and conductor of God's love to others, is waylaid to some extent in Green, McKnight and Marshall (1992, 492) by the statement that Jesus brought *a new emphasis* on love (compare John 3: 16) in the world (compare Ramm's 'depth' [1990, 94] referred to above).

As such, it seems clear that love is viewed as not solely with or from God - as if it has only been revealed and brought to the notice of humans via the biblical documents – but *agápé* was *newly emphasised* by Jesus' whole demeanour and his accompanying proclamation of *God's* love. In the New Testament God's love and care for all of creation and especially man (Matt. 6: 25-34) can be taken from the address "Father" which brings the intimate language of the family with all its overtones of love and care into understanding of the deity (Green, McKnight &

Marshall 1992, 492), but, quite commonly and frequently, it is sentimentalised (Elwell 1988, 1357) to the point of familiarity and, consequently, popularity, when God is thought about, referred to or addressed as 'Daddy'. Could it, perhaps mistakenly, be thought of to be done or associated with the same manner of Jesus' addressing God as *Abba*? His 'intimate' way of addressing God as *Abba* was an unmistakable indication of his special, even unique, relation with God (Borg 1995, 37). Borg points out that this form of address was contrary to the formal, traditional terms of addressing deity in *Judaism* of the first century (, 38) and, while it is likely that the intimate term of address expressed and reflected Jesus' relation to, and experience of God, it would as such have had a shocking impact on his audience which, not unlikely, may have been his reason for using the well known form of address that Aramaic toddlers used for their fathers (, 37) and whereby his relationship to God was emphasised. It needs to be pointed out though, that Paul unequivocally states that Christians, in, or by the Spirit, also call God 'Abba' (Romans 8: 15). Pilch (Pilch & Malina 1993, 130) points out the faultiness of sentimentality / 'intimacy' or familiarity as regards the biblical 'Abba / Father' reference/s to God (when used by people who have not even a remotely identical relationship with God). It serves as a poignant illustration of the lack of understanding in popular belief about the *fatherhood of God* and, jointly, also the love of God as depicted in the New Testament. It also serves to expose the (possible) ignorance about the fact that theological-ethical precepts were expressed in the Bible in culturally significant terms. The same lack of understanding and / or ignorance may plausibly be surmised as far as implications of love for relationships between first century families or Christian group members are concerned.

In summarising Harrelson, then, it may be said that he appears to stand in contrast with Pop who posits that love is from God, but there is no difference between the love that God has and the love with man. Of special import is the emphasis Jesus brought to love.

- **John MacArthur jr.** is generally held as a noted North American theologian in Evangelical and even not-so-Evangelical circles. In his usual fashion he brings a good measure of balance into play by the positing of love as a *self-giving that is more concerned with giving than receiving* (1994, 329). This must certainly rank as one of (if not) the most commendable aptitudes that the church of today in the many diverse denominations and forms that it exists in, (and, no less, Christians individually) is in the same dire need of as the Pauline Christian group at Corinth.

The aphorism ascribed to Jesus in Acts 20: 35, that *it is more blessed to give than to receive* (KJV), would indicate this virtuous unselfishness of *agápé*, although love is not directly referred to. Instead, it appears most often as if there exists some kind of euphoria that is quite commonly attached to love in a theological / religious sense among believers (instead of realising the stark realities of life and rising to the occasion/s that those realities bring to life). (Burke 2000) quotes Pope Paul's 'righthand man', Cardinal Biffi, in a statement he made as regards the seriousness and the utmost importance of love in the Church (which, in the context of this study, especially, is quite apt) when he says that the Gospel contains a lot more 'tough love' than merely 'feel-good-theology'. MacArthur's negative statement, that few people have any idea of what love in the biblical sense of the word is, that it seems even to be thought of in quasi-erotic terms such as nice feelings, warm affection, romance and desire, not only concurs with Biffi's perspective, but also gives clear indication of the remoteness of such ideas from reality and incongruence as regards what the New Testament really has to say about *agápé*.

MacArthur regards all the 'I love you' declarations as referring to a personal attitude which almost always means 'I love me and I want you' – mostly a selfish aim with little or no regard for the other and as such a radical opposite of, or departure from *agápé* (1994, 329).

This *self-giving* corresponds more or less with what is frequently being enunciated, among others of the same ilk, in the sweeping statement that '...love gives without expecting anything in return'. At face value it may seem as if this advan-

ces the same idea that MacArthur puts forward, but in effect it does not. Such a 'free' *un-conditional* love is more than once refuted in Scripture – as Leon Morris' reference (in Green, McKnight & Marshall 1992, 493) to John 14: 23 may serve as a case in point: God loves them that love his Son. Although this statement must be understood in the immediate context of the sustained, scornful rejection of Jesus by the Jerusalem temple-Ioudaioi (compare the clear demarcation made by Malina & Rohrbaugh [1998, 88] between the *Jewish* people and the *Ioudaioi* ('Jews') that are specifically and repeatedly referred to in typical [almost polemical] Johannine fashion as the grouping that so bitterly opposed Jesus), there is a definite reciprocity at work in this instance where God's love is not detached or isolated from the 'condition' that the Son be received (compare John 1: 12). Dean van Druff [sa, 1] takes issue in the same vein against the popular (but religious) view that God's love is summarily *un-conditional*. He points out that much of the currently popular religious 'understanding' of love (may have) originated quite recently and, moreover, in a dubious 'cradle':

Scripture clearly teaches that God's love (*phileo, agápe, aheb, ahabah*, etc.) is unfailing, undeserved, and unilateral (completely one-sided in initiation). But is God's love without condition - I.E.: UN-conditional? On this we should consider...

- 1) Where did this idea come from?
- 2) Is it consistent with Scripture? ...

On 1), you will not have to look back very far, as this is uniquely an American, "modern" doctrine. It is never once mentioned in Scripture, nor do any of the church fathers use the phrase. In fact, my best efforts point to the 1960's drug culture as the first time the words *un-conditional* and *love* were put together in any language. (... my own research points to the LSD culture of the 1960s as the first use.) What the flowerchildren originally meant by *unconditional love* had to do with "love the one you are with" in the sexual revolution sense. But the phrase did not last long even among the hippies because it is inherently contradictory: to love is to care deeply about the *condition* of the one loved. But "under the influence" a lot of things made sense that didn't later. After the drugs wore off, psychology flirted with the pop-phrase in the 1970's in the "transactional analysis" fad, but this was ephemeral and quickly dropped from view. Just about then a few susceptible Christian teachers stepped in and took the baton, and the rest is history.

MacArthur's stressing of the unselfishness of love serves to point out the faultiness of modern ideas (most likely brought about by our media) that love has almost exclusively to do with *mé* on the receiving end. A note should be made on Van Druff's issue with the views on so-called *un-conditional* love. The conclusion that these views stem from a very recent and religious view necessitates serious reflection as regards the ardent promotion of this very popular idea on *agápé*.

- **Stone** (1999) selects and treats in succession some twentieth-century interpretations of *agápé* in Christian ethics. These lead him to conclude that *agápé* is ultimate, universal, and particular with broad consequences. Despite the irrefutable value that *agápé* holds for present day theological-ethical considerations Stone, precisely, renders clear proof of the many, even diverse, (modern and post-modern) views on this single biblical concept, which, in turn, lead to the pressing, unavoidable question of how (and, indeed, whether) the individual author / scholar got to this final conclusion about a / the biblical concept. Stone's emphasising of the different views of *agápé* gives a good insight on what may represent (contemporary) popular understanding in the respective guises thereof, but, simultaneously, also gives an idea of the confusion dragged along in its respective wakes by the many 'versions' of *agápé*:

Walter Rauschenbusch: *Agápé* is the power that unites human society.

Ernst Troeltsch: *Agápé* as personal-social theism produces charity and social harmony.

Reinhold Niebuhr: *Agápé* is a transcendent requirement that is relevant to all immanent situations.

Anders Nygren: God's grace is best recognized when our inadequate human love is not equated with God's *agápé*.

Gene Outka: Equal regard for the other and justice as equality are expressions of *agápé*.

Paul Ramsey: *Agápé* is expressed through other moral norms and non-distinctive Christian moral insights.

Sallie McFague: The meaning of *agápé* is determinative for theology and shapes the meanings of *eros* and *philia*, and the three together are metaphors for the Trinity.

Beverly Harrison: *Agápé* as radical love contains mutuality, anger and friendship more completely than heretofore emphasized.

Mohandas Ghandi and Martin Luther King Jr.: *Agápé* is expressed in different religious traditions and societies as a means of social change as well as religious reality.

(Stone 1999, 28)

A summing up of Stone (and, therefore, all the others he refers to) can lead to one conclusion: while some make very good sense, there are many different and diverse views about the one value that is singularly stressed in the New (and Old) Testament on which unanimous views / understanding and a (rather) uniform methodology of practicing / exhibition / doing should exist.

1.2.8.4 Summary.

Love is the essence of God's relations with and requirements of man – the clear and unequivocal living out of what God works in someone saved by grace. Oftentimes it is put forward as an exclusively theological concept, whence the frequent references to '*agápé*-love' as a heavenly value exhibited only by God. Religious man's need, then, in order to become more religious, is to receive (more) '*agápé*-love' from God. However, it is also accepted that Jesus brought new emphases on the *doing of love* as it was understood in antiquity. His unique relatedness to God as expressed in his addressing God as *Abba*, seems to be misunderstood and misappropriated, leading to the sentimentalisation of the Fatherhood of God and resulting in thinking of, and / or referring to God in familial and familiar terms such as 'Daddy'.

Jesus' aphorism in the Acts that it is more blessed to give than to receive is taken to mean and therefore proclaimed that '*agápé*-love' never infers and cannot entail any form of reciprocity, therefore a sort of un-conditional love. This young dog-

ma apparently originated in the 60's of the previous century among the so-called hippie-movement from where it was taken up, 'theologised', passed along and perpetuated in contemporary preaching.

From a scholarly (albeit not necessarily theological perspective) love is variously looked upon as the uniting force in society that produces charity and social harmony, promoting equal regard and justice. As such it does not stem from, nor has it to exhibit strict Christian moral insights in serving as a means to effect social change as well as religious reality. It is almost impossible to reconcile all the popular views and ways of understanding with the one value that enjoys special prominence with God as depicted in the New Testament.

1.2.9 Word studies and lexicographical detail / particularities.

A few varied (but sometimes convergent) views on 'love' have been presented. For the sake of completeness some lexicographical information may be regarded as *de rigueur*, as, no doubt, the quoted scholars surely must have made ample use of the ancient Bible languages. The large quantity and variety of material that is available would, as stated above, serve well in compiling an extended taxonomy of 'love-terminology', but the obverse is that the almost bewildering quantity also complicates and even significantly inhibits a sensible choice of what to include or leave out. A fairly wide selection could be covered and an attempt was made in this section of the present study at a semblance of order by utilising the 'impartiality' of an alphabetical presentation.

The task was entered into with some trepidation, on the one hand in the awareness that these works, in most cases, represent known scholars who have come to be regarded very highly and criticism may seem superfluous, and on the other that the lexical meaning of words and their theological usage are sometimes greatly confused as Botha (1987b, 17) critically points out. Should this unfavourable situation be combined with the profusion of contextual data whereby the lexical entry on a specific word is inflated and sometimes enhanced but with al-

most nil value for the (better) understanding of the particular word, the task becomes a tedious one.

1.2.9.1 A timeous word of caution.

In the critical observation/s that Botha (1987 a, b) puts forth on the confusion of meaning and theological use of words a cautionary note is sounded. *Pisteúô* is used as particular example (among other references) by Botha (1987a, 17) (in this instance referring to TDNT) to point out how lexical entries may be loaded (even bloated) with vast amounts of theological discussion wherein words are assumed to convey a variety of nuances and ‘deeper theological meaning’. While this is simply not true, linguistically speaking, it complicates and even prohibits meaningful use of lexica.

The confusion of the lexical meaning of words with theological issues, coupled to the profusion of and confusing manner in which data is presented in lexica is not an imaginary issue and if *pisteúô* and *pistis* could, and as it has fallen prey to this usage as Botha convincingly points out, it would be neither presumptuous nor unnecessarily apprehensive to surmise that the same lot may befall or has befallen *agápaô* and *agápé* on numerous occasions especially as it is a prominent (Bible) word with a high frequency of usage in an unrestricted variety of contexts.

Botha’s findings did not alleviate the task of presenting a condensed overview on lexicographical particularities on love, but duly served to create an awareness of and forewarn that the *how* of approaching and reading, using and interpreting sources on, for instance, the original languages, is not a cut-and-dried matter. As regards ‘love’ a (continually) cautious approach would then be particularly proper, since *agápé* has been and is popularly proclaimed, as was shown above, as an (almost) exclusive biblical-*cum*-theological word conveying an almost strict theological concept.

Over and above the possibilities to belabour the meaning of the word with extended theological inferences and conclusions and (maybe even) interesting encyclopedic particulars, a resultant (and expectable) spin-off to anticipate is that the

word may be classed in the category Botha refers to in connection with the work of Turner on *Christian words*, namely that words in the New Testament are assumed to carry some special theological or ecclesiastical meaning simply because they were used in the *biblical* documents (1987b, 226).

1.2.9.2 Lexicographical study.

Well-known and well-worn lexica were sampled to try and ascertain the meaning that was conveyed by *agápé* in its antique *usus loquendi*. Although this part of the study takes up considerable space it is necessary to point out that some, if not all of these names are influential and as such they dominate interpretation to a significant extent – in some cases greater, lesser in others. Some of them would even come close to being regarded as definitive, beyond criticism, almost (quasi-) canonical. Taken together, they render more than enough proof of the different, even diverging views taken on ‘biblical’ love. In time these views have been propagated from how many pulpits to how many audiences in how many places where the Bible is read.

- **Bauer’s lexicon (translated by Arndt and Gingrich, 1968, 4-6)** is a widely known lexicon of a very high standing. It has enjoyed (and still does) an excellent reputation but, despite its obvious excellence, it also renders stark proof of how (one felt almost compelled to add ‘notoriously’) difficult the use of lexicons can be. Bauer’s entries on *αγαπαω αγαπη* and *αγαπητος* are arranged under numeral divisions with Greek and Roman alphabetical subdivisions. The text is loaded with Scripture references where these words are used (a feature which may prove to be very useful in some instances) but in the end it renders relatively little on meaning. The profuse and bewildering amount of extra-biblical historical data enhances the quantitative aspect but also clutters up the material and eventually proves to be inaccessible for probably most but the proficient text-critical scholar. In the end the positive information gleaned from all this was that an unquestioned example of the use of *agápé* from a pagan source was not available for a long time (which, in my opinion, may have given rise to the views in which *agápé* was, and is being held as an exclusively or specifically biblical-*cum*-theological concept), but that this deficit has since been cancelled out (Bauer 1968, 5).

The verb refers to affection by humans for other persons and supernatural beings (Bauer 1968, 4) (Jesus in this instance); conversely the love of supernatural beings for humans - ‘God’s love to men...’ and also ‘...Jesus’ love for men...’ (, 4). A physical enactment of *agápé* is alluded in Jesus’ ‘feeling’: ηγαπησεν αυτον (Mk 10:21) is given as ‘J. became fond of him (caressed him is also poss.)...’ (italicisation original); also the love of supernatural beings for super-natural beings (for instance God’s for Jesus) (, 4). The noun αγαπη is given as ‘human love’ without indication of whom the object of love may be (, 5) or, conversely, an expressly mentioned (impersonal) object such as the truth (της αληθειας in 2 Thess 2: 10); or, personal, human beings (for instance the reference in Eph 1: 15 τους αγιους); or, love of, or toward God or Christ (, 5). Love as expressed by God or Christ toward men or as a descriptive of the relationship between God-Christ / Christ-God (, 6) is specifically an example of the profusion of biblical and extra-biblical references. It is finally stated that *agápé* describes brotherliness and the fostering of brotherly love in Christian communion (not in the sacramental sense of the word), namely that it was also applied to the love-feast enjoyed by Christians as a common meal enjoyed in connection with their church services (, 6).

In summing up Bauer it may be said some of the ideas noted above seem to be borne out, namely that *agápé* was seen as a value between humans but also with divine nature. It also served as a descriptive for a meal shared by members of a faith community.

Bauer’s entries on αγαπαω, αγαπη and αγαπητος is reproduced below (pages 41 – 43.

- **Hoehner** (1984, 656-659) points out that *agápé* is the most common word for love in the New Testament while *phileó* is the most common word for love in pre-biblical Greek (, 657). *Agápé* is contrasted with *erós* (a word that does not appear in the New Testament) - *erós* being characteristic of love for a worthy object and the desire to possess while *agápé* in contrast is not a love of the worthy and it does not foster a desire to possess. *Agápé*, then, is a love that gives irrespective of merit (, 657), nowhere better demonstrated than in God's love for sinners who deserved nothing but his wrath, but instead being reprieved by, or through the propitiation of Christ. This love is the secure base for exhorting believers to extend the same toward others. The *meaning* of love as fruit of the Holy Spirit is expounded by the characteristics joy, peace, patience and kindness (Galatians 5: 22). This is perfectly accorded in I Corinthians thirteen where the description of love is generally done in the verb form of the noun used in Galatians five (, 658).

Hoehner (1984, 658) distinguishes between 'neighbour' and 'fellow believer' as regards the deep concern and love to be extended particularly towards fellows in faith. Love of family is also enunciated and especially the husband's obligation to love his wife is emphasised while, strangely enough, an imperative for wives to love their husbands appears only once as does a command for parents to love their children – especially young wives (Tit. 2: 4). A command for children to love their parents does not appear, although the imperative directed to children to honour and obey (as an expression / evidence of love) are oft repeated (, 659). As regards men and husbands, neglect of family by a believer is considered worse than conduct expected from unbelievers, I Tim. 5: 8 (, 659).

Love for enemies is also commanded for believers to observe and as such it is demonstrated in behaviour virtually opposite / in spite of what was meted out to someone, for instance blessing on the one who curses, praying for those who mistreat you, extending charity towards those who emit hostility (Hoehner 1984, 659). This incomprehensibility of / about love is nowhere better demonstrated than in the perfect kindness of God himself who sends sun and rain on evil men even as he does for the just (, 659).

In summing up Hoehner one can say he puts definite stress on the absence of meritoriousness where love for another comes to bear – love is greater and transcends the wrongs done to you. God's way of doing is the perfect example of the sublimity and fathomless properties of love.

- **Kittel (TDNT)** (1975, 21-55) treats the subject of love very comprehensively under the entries *αγαπαω, αγαπαυν, αγαπητος, αγαπη* (excluding *φιλω, φιλια, φιλος* which is treated separately under its own entries and just as voluminously) wherein the vast amount of material is logically arranged under appropriate headings. The subject is extensively covered by different contributors and ranges from the profane to the religious in the Old Testament (Quell); the words for love in pre-Biblical Greek; in Hellenistic and Rabbinic Judaism; by Jesus and in the Apostolic Period (with subdivisions for Paul, James and John) and the Post-Apostolic period (Stauffer).

Since part of the objective of this study has to do with the social usage / understanding of the love-concept, some focus was out of necessity directed also on *pre-biblical* usage.

Stauffer (in Kittel 1975, 35) states that the words *εραυν, φιλειν* and *αγαπαυν* are used in pre-biblical Greek to denote love and the variety of experience that may be found therein. It appears that (sometimes sensual) intoxication and religious enthusiasm, even daemonism, had a certain prominence. Erotic concepts are spiritualised to serve as images and symbols for supra-sensual encounters. Plato considered *erôs* as ecstasy whereby man is transported beyond rationality (, 35), while Aristotle seems to have moved in quite another direction by styling *erôs* as the original principle inwardly holding the world together (, 36); *φιλειν / φιλια* signifies the love of the gods for men, or love of men for friends so that love, ultimately, '...embraces everything that bears a human countenance...' (, 36). The verb *αγαπαυν* has an uncertain etymological origin with a weak and variable meaning, bearing no semblance to the power and magic of *εραυν*, and nothing (or precious little) of the warmth of *φιλειν* (Kittel 1975, 36). It often carries the meaning to be merely satisfied with something, to receive or to greet, sometimes to

honour – which, as such, mostly has to do with an external attitude. Where the inward is concerned, it was used to express a desiring of something or the seeking out of someone (, 36) inferring *choice* (compare *erôs* above) and the word often denoted friendship (sometimes sympathy) among equals. *ἀγαπᾶν* also meant to prefer, or to set one good or aim above another (36), therefore differing from *εἶρω* as a *general* love of the world that seeks (self-gratifying?) satisfaction wherever it can, while *ἀγαπᾶν* makes distinctions, choosing and keeping to its object. This (positive?) facet of *ἀγαπᾶν* would suggest a strong trait of loyalty, attachment to a person or group, which, as such, would not be alien to the general mien of love in the New Testament (compare Malina & Rohrbaugh 1998, 87; Pilch & Malina 1993, 110-111).

The verb may have been used for the preference of God for a particular person (Kittel 1975, 36), while *εἶρω*, in its highest sense, is used of the upward impulsion of man and of his love for the divine (, 37). Due to the imprecise, even weak meaning that *ἀγαπᾶν* generally carried, it often served as (merely) a synonym for *εἶρω* or *φιλεῖν* while the substantive *ἀγάπη* is almost completely lacking in pre-Biblical Greek (, 37).

Judaism presents quite another perspective wherein the love of God for Israel is not impulse, but will; the love for God and neighbour (Deut 6:5; Lev 19:18) is not intoxication but act (Kittel 1975, 38), differing radically from the eroticism that may be ascribed to the concept of love figuring among Greeks and in the fertility cults of nations surrounding Israel (, 38). The very strong exclusivism attached to the Jew's understanding of love contrasts sharply from the Greek's, as depicted by *erôs*, a universal, generous love that is unbound and, especially, non-selective (, 38). Love in the Old Testament is characterised by jealous zeal, holding the object with force and passion, allowing no breach of loyalty and being '...strong as death with [a] jealousy that is hard as hell' (, 38). Small wonder, then, that Israel's infatuation and repeated whoring after false gods is conveyed as adultery whereby Yahweh is constantly dishonoured / shamed.

The same exclusivity exhibits itself in the principle of love for the neighbour – choosing, making distinctions, preferring one to another, with a preparedness to overlook (Kittel 1975, 38) *where one's own people are concerned*. That is not to say, however, that even an enemy's need must be denied or assistance refused when in difficulty (, 39), in other words, social responsibility is not shirked or negated. *Αγάπη* is correctly seen as coming into its own right as an expression of common decency, where '...the whole group of words associated with *αγαπών* is given a new meaning by the Greek translation of the Old Testament' (, 39).

In Hellenistic Judaism *αγάπη* constitutes a relationship characterised by faithfulness between God and man (Kittel 1975, 39) where the love *of* God includes love *for* God (, 39-40). Closely connected to love for God is love of one's neighbour – a favourite theme in Judaism (, 40) – being rooted in God himself. Consequently the only logical conclusion about the origin of hatred (non-love, absence of love) would be that it is inspired by the devil (, 40).

In Rabbinic Judaism the relationship between God and man and, especially, between God and the people of God, is determined by love (Kittel 1975, 41). The merciful and steadfast love of God for Israel is compared to the love of a king who after a short time graciously seeks out his repudiated but favourite wife, always ready to pardon (, 41). Israel is obligated to love God, keeping God's commandment, as conveyed in Torah. This is the clear and logical obligation, bearing with it the incentive to suffer persecution, counting '...sufferings as the correction of the man who loves God, and must be understood as loving chastisements', whereby the good-pleasure of God is earned and sins atoned for, procuring '...a pledge of participation in the coming world of God' (, 41). According to tradition (, 42) r. Akiba believed that the love with all one's soul as required by the *Sch'ma* could, ideally, only end in martyrdom and an exemplar of long-suffering virtuousness in the face of persecution is sketched out by Wünsche (as quoted by Kittel - footnote 108, p. 42):

Concerning those who are humiliated without humiliating others, who listens to insults without replying, who fulfil the commandments of love and rejoice in chastisement, the Scripture says that those who love Him are as the sun rising in its glory.

The perimeters within which ‘neighbour’ seems to be placed within Judaism, that someone may lay claim to neighbourly love, appear to have confined and absolutised love among the people of God for the people of God. For the most part the perimeters do not extend beyond the borders of Israel and the full proselytes belonging to Israel (Kittel 1975, 42-43). The ‘love’ referred to may then be defined as the attitude which the members of the people of God owe one another which, as such, also encompass Hillel’s beautifully simple and precise summing up of the Golden Rule: “Do not do to thy neighbour what is hateful to thee. This is the whole Law. All else is explanation” (, 43).

The Rabbinic stance on love between / toward God and man, whereby the basic principle of the threefold relationship of God, man and man (as conveyed in Matthew 22) is set forward, enlightens the intertwined, inextricable relationship between the ‘vertical’ and the ‘horizontal’ aspects of love as referred to above. This love is neither an exclusive (vertical) love between God and man or man and God, nor an exclusive (horizontal) love between man and man, not the ‘two loves’ juxtaposed alongside each other, but both, together, simultaneously (Kittel 1975, 43). Man’s agapic actions toward others (and specifically those in need, hence in a *social* capacity) is seen to be an imperative toward emulation of God in his mercifulness: “As the Holy One ... clothes the naked, visit the sick, comfort the sorrowful and bury the dead, so do thou clothe ... visit ... comfort ... bury...” (, 43).

Jesus’ summary of the Old Testament’s sayings on love is clearcut and equally simple: αγαπησεις τον θεον, αγαπησεις τον πλησιον (Kittel 1975, 44) (Mark 12: 28, Matt 22: 40). This is the central, exclusive tenet that all other commands lead up to and all righteousness, in the sense of people’s dealings with others, must be measured (even interpreted – P.R.) against (, 44). As such, it would for certain encompass the perpetual personal fighting against the forces that beset all men namely mammon and vainglory, and which Jesus constantly denounced (, 45). In the first century agrarian environment and a societal perception of the limited availability of goods these negatives would have been all the more relevant. In the New Demand, as the entry designates the love-command (, 44), love of pres-

tige is rejected – love of God and praise of men (, 45) remain incompatible - the latter which must inevitably lead to fear of persecution and / or reticence in witnessing.

Love for God stands in perfect correlation to (Jewish) sobriety (as recognised by Jesus) (Kittel 1975, 45) and, while this love is not taken up in an ‘extravagant’ universal love of humanity, Jesus once and for all frees neighbourly love from the exclusiveness of restricting it to be shown only to compatriots (, 45). In his demand to love even one’s enemy, Jesus consciously opposed Jewish tradition when he laid down the tenets whereby the attitudes of the new people of God are constituted (, 46). To a certain (even large) extent, Jesus’ demands to love may be described as radical, although some isolated parallels may be drawn to the rabbinic world. What is clear cut and definite, however, is that Jesus does not present an idealistic and sentimental illusion, but states the seemingly impossible demands to love the unlovable (or those deemed as such) as the normal form of behaviour. The realisation of this new situation is only possible in relation to Jesus – he brings forgiveness of sin and in the blessed experience of having been forgiven, love is released in all its power for them that heed his call for mercy and reconciliation with others (, 47). This is in perfect keeping with the love of God which is a pardoning love, paving the way for men to enter into a relationship with Jesus from whence hatred and violence can be renounced and sacrifice in the face of opposition (, 48) be deemed the only way to go – like Jesus himself went and did, dying with a prayer for those who felt only hostility (, 48).

The apostles promote the ‘...new situation...’ created by the loving work of God in Jesus (Kittel 1975, 49). Paul’s elaboration of the world-changing events in Jesus leads to the significant statement that the *αγαπη* of God is shed abroad in men’s hearts, lending decisive reality to existence. The divine love has but one goal, the new man (, 50), presupposing both the possibility and the necessity of human action, as God’s will includes human volition, finding its purest fulfillment in its fullest exercise (, 50). The goal of love, although indissolubly intertwined with the will of God, is not solely directed to response to God (, 50) but the man who is called to obedience to God’s will, ‘...should place his life in love

and freedom in the service of his neighbour' (, 50). Thus Paul takes up the command from Jesus that the neighbour must be loved, but works it out in terms of organisation where the exclusive neighbourly love that was confined to a readiness to help compatriots, now extends to all of the new people of God (, 51) in Christ. The welfare of the Christian brotherhood is the guiding principle of agapaic conduct that stands under the sign of the cross, the *imitatio Christi* for the good of the Church. Even the most unassuming work done in love is to be identified with Jesus, wherein the work of God and of man is being united (, 51).

James' imperatives translate a life of faith to visible and tangible action, putting the truths of love into practical commands whereby immediate duties are fulfilled to neighbours - such as not withholding labourers' rights. Professing faith sans doing what faith implores the faithful to do, is exposed for what it is in James' imperatives for example to treat rich and poor on par (Kittel 1975, 52) and thereby identifying the egalitarian tenure extended to one and all by love in God's kingdom.

John particularly stress the principle of love for the present, accentuating the fact that all love is concentrated in the Son, Jesus being the Mediator of the love of God (Kittel 1975, 52). Of particular immediacy is John's emphasis on the love of the Son for those that the Father has given Him, that love being released through his death even unto salvation for the world (, 53). Love for the brethren overshadows the love for God, albeit this love not being something apart or distinct from love of God, but in fact the purest manifestation of love having its origin in God and example in Christ (, 53). The close relationship among brethren is typified by a profuse use of *αγαπητε* and *αγαπητοι*, and abiding in (t)his love is the law of life for the fellowship in Christ (, 53).

In Revelation the imperatives fall on remaining loyal to (love) God, even to death (, 53). In lieu of the sad possibilities that the love of some or many may wax cold, the passionate call to cling fast to God finds expression in a theology of martyrdom (, 53).

In Post-Apostolic Christendom ἀγάπη and ἀγαπᾶν became the basic terms for expressing God's attitude and action towards man (Kittel 1975, 54). Jesus is singled out as the ἀγαπητός with the Church also elected by God on whom to bestow his good-pleasure (, 54). Ἀγάπη and ἀγαπᾶν come to denote Christian piety in the *imitatio Dei* of God's φιλάνθρωπια (, 54) while, on the other hand, love of God demands scorn and hatred for the world which may result in martyrdom, the ultimate and extreme expression of piety cum love cum devotedness to God. Asceticism also comes into play, ἀγαπᾶν becoming a term denoting discipline and even abstemiousness (, 54). Ἀγάπη and its derivatives however still remain the most common expression of brotherly love in the widest sense, eventually gaining the status of a terminus technicus applied to denote the fraternal love-feast, hence a strongly social usage of the word. Ἀγαπᾶν in the Greek sense of the word denoted respect and sympathy between equals, while the Christian ἀγάπη expressed a consciousness of unworthiness before God but, being loved by God, it finds out that ἀγάπη gives instead of harbouring the desire to receive (, 55).

Summing up Kittel is difficult due to the sheer quantity, but it may be said that quite a few indicators of congruence with scholars quoted above can be pointed out, for instance the *choice* inherent in the verb ἀγαπᾶν as opposed to the noun ἀγάπη (compare Bauer 1968, 5) where the object of love is not necessarily indicated. The preference indicated by or inherent in the verb whereby a trait of loyalty especially towards one's own could be pointed out is a positive facet - the almost logical outcome of which would be integrity / love towards others albeit in reserved / non-extravagant fashion. Jesus, then, brings a new dispensation in *agápé*, perpetuated and expounded by the New Testament writers for it to realise in the present age, more specifically so in John where love for the brethren is, in fact, the purest manifestation of and proof for love towards God.

- **Louw and Nida** (1988) treat *agápé* concisely in critical and readable style under the sub-domain of love, affection and compassion in the semantic field of attitudes and emotions. The meaning of love, or to love (ἀγάπη / ἀγαπάω) is given simply as sincere appreciation and high regard or sincerity resulting in con-

comitant behaviour: η αγαπη τω πλησιον κακον ουκ εργαζεται is unequivocally spelled out in the simple but sublime tenet: ‘a person who loves doesn’t do evil to his neighbor Rom 13.10’ (, 294). The ‘theologising’ of *agápé* referred to above is duly criticised especially with regard to John 21: 15-17: that *agápé* represents a so-called ‘God-love’ while *filia* merely, or at most, may have a bearing on a kindred feeling / affinity or friendship (the entry is quoted verbatim below - please refer to page 165).

It is clear then that αγαπη / αγαπαω means not to ‘talk’ love but to actively demonstrate / do love – ‘...let us show our love, but not by just word and talk, but by means of action - 1 Jn 3.18’ (Louw & Nida 1988, 294). The verb pertains to liking or to love something on the basis of a high regard for its value or importance - compare Jn 12: 43: ‘they loved the approval of men rather than the approval of God’ (, 300).

Louw and Nida’s entry is clear and uncluttered by much detail, wherefore the condensed statement about love’s sincere appreciation for another resulting in concomitant behavior just about says it all. Of special importance is the correct criticism on the theologising of *agápé* and stressing the need of doing rather than talking ‘love’.

- **Moulton and Milligan** (1950, 1-2) exercised commendable brevity (even to the extent that a summing up may be unnecessary) as may be gathered from the relatively small space taken up by their entries on *agápaó*, *agápé* and *agápétos*, but they also render precious little on the meaning of the words. In the end this massive work comprising sevenhundred and five pages each measuring a few millimetres short (in length) of an A4 format appears to be of little or no use to get at the meaning of the words of the New Testament (at least as regards the entry on αγαπη). The only semi-meaningful pieces of information available from M & M, then, is that concerning the verb, it was ‘...emphatically a case of where the needs

of a new subject take up a rather colourless word and indefinitely enrich it' (Moulton & Milligan 1950, 2). As regards *αγάπη* it is mentioned that '...it would be going too far to say that this important Biblical word was born in the bosom of revealed religion...' and that 'The history of this word is so crucial for the orientation of the Biblical Greek vocabulary that we must be pursue it some detail' (, 2). Late Christian papyri narrow *αγάπη* down '...like our "charity" ...' and it originated from the verb (, 2).

- **Spicq** (1994, 14-15) neither correlates nor refutes the notion that *agápé* is virtually and exclusively a theological term, but alludes to the probability of an absolute religious / theological connotation when it is stated that '...the noun *agápé* is unknown before its usage in the LXX. When it is attested before the Christian era it appears almost exclusively in Hellenic Judaism, and in each case it has a religious meaning.' It is further concluded that the noun, derived from the verb *agápaō*, was proper to Koine and, considering the theological density that it had in the LXX, it could not have existed outside pagan language, although this probability was not attested before the first century A.D. (, 18). *Agápé* was also popular and commonly used as a name for females, although it seems to have been used largely among social higher classes (Spicq 1994, 19). No information on meaning is tendered.

- **Vine** designates the verb *agapaō* and the corresponding noun *agápé* as "the characteristic word of Christianity" (1979 III, 20). The opinion that *agápé* is an ambiguous concept appears to be supported: '...since the Spirit of revelation has used it to express ideas previously unknown, enquiry into its use, whether in Greek literature or in the Septuagint, throws but little light upon its distinctive meaning in the N.T....' (, 20). *Agápé* describes the attitude of God towards his Son, man and those believing on Him (Vine 1979 III, 20) in conjunction with God's will for believers to exercise the same toward one another and all men regardless whether they are fellow believers (, 21) and generally the function or manner in which love works is described. Insofar as the verb is used of God it '...expresses the deep and constant love and interest of a perfect Being towards entirely unworthy objects, producing a reverential love in them towards the Giver,

and a practical love towards those who are partakers of the same, and a desire to help others to seek the Giver' (, 21).

- **Zodhiates** (1992, 876) contends that *agapaô* is used of God's love toward men and vice versa and further, concerning *agápé*, that the word is not found in classical Greek, but only in revealed religion (, 876). Referring to I Corinthians 13, he advances the popular translation *charity* meaning '...benevolent love' wherein the benevolence is shown by the person bestowing love in doing what s/he deems best and not what the recipient desires. For this view Zodhiates quotes John 3: 16 stating that God '...gave not what man wanted, but what man needed as God perceived his need, namely his Son who brought forgiveness to man (, 876). For someone to show love to God s/he must first appropriate God's *agápé*, for only God has such an unselfish love (, 876).

1.2.9.3 Conclusion: lexicographical particulars.

It would appear that, despite the prominent ethical-theological-religious importance and the predominantly preceptive content that Scripture conveys about love, it remains an ambiguous subject. Not much of real value (irrespective of the range and voluminous size of entries) is said about the meaning the word conveyed in its *usus loquendi* in the (majority of) sources that are supposed to be the most informative. This is a serious shortfall especially for them (us) that make regular use of it.

There is no denying the individual or the contributory effort and expense that must have gone into the consulted works, but for the greater part the lexicographical study on this pivotal value in and for life as a Christian rendered little positive result. The general impression that was gained is that it seems to be assumed or believed that users would or should instinctively know what 'love' in the historical sense and use of the word or concept in its biblical context means. It would not be conjecture to surmise that these assumptions or beliefs render quite palpable evidence of the ethnocentric and anachronistical ways of thinking that is quite common to the majority of even scholars of note - among whom all, or the majority of those quoted above must surely count. This tendency coincides

broadly with the manner in which 'love' is proclaimed to present day audiences who need to hear and grasp what God's precepts are for virtuous life in his service. The assumption that the modern day church audience has, may be expected to have, or is regarded as having the fullest grasp of what the biblical imperatives to love or to hate mean, is almost a mirror image of the same expected or assumed knowledge imposed on the lexicon user - as referred to above. These assumptions could very well stem from the common ethnocentric fallacy (and a very dominant one, at that,) that 'our' understanding dovetails (so perfectly!) with that of the ancients (and especially on matters religious in the Christian realm). Eugene Botha's wry statement (1996, 253) on popular (present day) beliefs about the congruence between ancient Christians and the present day (European, South African et cetera) Church illustrates the irony of such an assumption: 'This group in Jerusalem believed basically as we do today, and were indeed budding Trinitarians.'

The (disturbing in its effect) congruence that was observed among the (consulted) lexicographers, as if the available content was rehashed in a differently arranged form or in greater or lesser volume from time to time, emphasises the present (and pertinent) need for a thorough and updated lexicon based on the newest research on the New Testament wherein the dire absence of sound historical and cultural input can be addressed.

1.3 CONCLUSION.

The *meaning* of biblical concepts may sometimes prove to be quite elusive for people who read the hallowed Book in a culture so different from where it was penned in the first place. The possible (and available) remedy / remedies for this very real problem is simply (or not so simply) to exercise hermeneutical integrity by admitting that we, from our present situation, simply do not know everything, wherefore we have to make use of the results of research that was done on the world of the bible in the bible.

In this chapter a cursory look was taken at (some) theological-traditional and popular views on love as well as lexicographical particulars to sketch a scenario for the plain fact that there does not exist a simple / clear understanding of love - the

question whether ‘love’ is really *lóve* does not seem as if it can be answered adequately in a simplistic or straightforward manner.

In both the theological and ethical fields *agápé* appears to be endowed with many meanings and the sources from which clear answers should be obtainable are not very helpful even and despite the voluminous lexicographical entries available for reference. Serious doubts could be expressed as regards both the traditional and popular forms of ‘love’ that have been proclaimed over time. The present state of affairs reflects the datedness of available sources and, dare one say, quite probably also (in most cases) the hermeneutics prescribed by a Received View perspective. Is ‘love’, then, as it was interpreted so far, really *lóve* as described in the New Testament? While, doubtlessly, useful material is available, precisely the datedness of most sources presents the need for replacement.

In the next chapter the hermeneutical approach from a grammatical-historical paradigm with the imperatives for the usage of social-scientific data is spelled out. The description of some of this data, which, to a greater or lesser degree, has some bearing on the subject under discussion, follows in chapter three. This description (which is not nearly as detailed as it could be done from available data) has a definite bearing on the subject of the study but it is also meant to be informative to a certain extent and, hopefully, serve as heuristic lure / invitation to personally develop knowledge of this essential source for accurate, responsible grammatical-historical exegesis as regards contemporary value, both for then and now.

Chapter four concentrates on the exegesis of selected passages and while much may be presented here also what may have been said already, it is hoped that it may present something for someone from another perspective even if only to serve as an illustration of the need to consider the social-historical data’s value for a more comprehensive exegesis than that we have grown accustomed to.

In chapter five the findings in the preceding work are wrapped up and some suggestions presented for the road forward.

CHAPTER 2

METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS:

UNDERSTANDING ‘UNDERSTANDING’.

Given the fact that the New Testament documents are first-century works rooted in a specific time and place, it would be rather silly to expect the authors of those documents to envision readers two thousand years removed.

Bruce Malina 1998, 20.

2.1 HERMENEUTICAL APPROACH.

The Bible, accepted by many as Christendom’s complete canon of sacred documents, has been translated to most of the many spoken and written languages all over the world. Translating to the rest of the rich variety of languages and dialects spoken the world over is a dynamic, ongoing endeavour whereby the Bible has been made available to peoples sometimes very far removed, in more respects than just distance, from the geographic regions where those documents were penned. As far as an accurate reading or complete understanding of the Bible by people far removed from where it was written is then concerned, the above quotation from Malina remains as relevant and applicable to the modern man-in-the-street-reader as it is to the authors of those ancient texts. And all the more so, because ‘the world’, ‘experience’, ‘reality’ or whichever term or designation may be applied in an effort to describe real life within which communities exist and function are *socially constructed* (Joubert 1992, 55). The basic world view and the daily experience of life of any one person or group or community are shaped within a specific *social world* and their reality finds expression in, or is verbalised in the language which describes institutions, values and norms, customs and rituals autogenous to that world - what Joubert (, 55) aptly calls an ‘own verbal repertoire’. In plain language this simply boils down to the fact that there has not come into being and there does not exist an overarching and ‘neutral’ reality independent of human perception which is valid, relevant, binding and accessible to

everybody (, 55) and has been so through all the passage of time. Any claim therefore by anybody from our environment to completely understand the meaning of what was written two thousand plus years ago to people in a completely different world, simply because their reality and ours is 'identical', would then be just as silly as the scenario sketched by Malina above. And that is precisely the sort of claim that is sometimes, even frequently, made as regards understanding of the 'message' of the Bible in our times!

In every hermeneutic activity concentrating on discovering what *meaning* (Malina 1998, 19) the ancient biblical documents were meant to convey to its original audience/s, the 'gaps' that may impair (or even block) understanding have to be constantly kept in mind and carefully considered. Joubert (1992, 56) points out that the sum-total of values, norms, inter-personal behaviour, attitudes and language unite or bind people in a specific cultural group. Their lives are organised and built on their cultural foundations and mutually expressed, communicated or elucidated in verbal or non-verbal means. If allowances are not made for factors such as language as a cultural specific entity, the differing of values and norms among cultures, inter-personal contact within specifically structured social strata and roles et cetera, then the transmission of *meaning* in the process of inter-cultural communication may be greatly encumbered. Suffice to say then that a negation of the cultural-historical distance between 'us' and 'them' may cause a reading or studying of the New Testament (for instance in the purpose of this study) to degenerate into an anachronistical and ethnocentric (and, therefore, quite nonsensical) activity. Interpreting the biblical textual premiss from 'my' understanding as influenced by 'our' assumptions, issues, customs and, more specifically, 'theological tradition', would indeed render any such 'exegesis' an exercise in futility (, 56).

The fact that someone in South Africa is (so fortunate to be) literate and has available, for instance, a New Testament in Afrikaans, English, Xhosa or Zulu, or any one of the written languages used in this part of the world, cannot simplistically be taken as an axiom of, or to convey any idea that such a reader also has a clear and full grasp of the meaning entailed in what s/he is reading and the resul-

tant applicability for meaningful religion. Not only have the documents that came into being in the cultural region around the Mediterranean Sea or the immediate vicinity thereof, say, 50-100 A.D, (probably) no linguistic relations to any of the local languages or dialects thereof, but the contents are culturally foreign reading matter to users of said languages.

Fair proof of the relative foreignness may be found in the self same documents of the New Testament, for instance Acts 8: 27-35: a person from that age and, compared to the modern day (say, South African) reader, topographically situated almost on the doorstep (compared to the average Western, say, South African reader) where it was written, needed someone to expound to him the meaning of what and about whom he was reading. This little scenario from the Acts should bring about an awareness of the basic fact that the 'simple' act of reading the New Testament (or the Old) in our world is far removed from being simple - as Malina (1998, xi) convincingly points out in his argument on reading theory perspectives that focus on New Testament interpretation.

The following discussion on reading and / or hearing and understanding in biblical times and today is an effort at mapping out a possible approach to exegesis of New Testament text-segments (in John) that deal with, or have *αγαπη* as theme in order to try and spread out the fabric of meaning as it was referred to above.

2.1.1 Reading in high and low-context audiences.

Reading a document by, respectively, a first century Mediterranean and a twenty-first century South African person, have virtually nothing in common. Modern readers' understanding is largely determined by the 'baggage' of (quasi-) understanding brought into the(ir) reading of texts. Experimental psychologists exposed this most common methodological defect – a defect which is exhibited in reading in general - and which must be identified from the outset about understanding and resultant exegesis. This load of quasi-understanding may be significantly greater or more than what a reader may glean from the text (Malina 1998, xiii). In, and for, certain scenarios one may almost feel compelled to 'admit to' such a deficiency, as this may hold especially true as far as ancient documents such as

(and even most specifically) the Bible are concerned, where modern people (probably, for the larger part European, Canadian, North American, South African et cetera) read it from the (European / Western) religious perspective/s in which they were enculturated. Those perspectives may be so strongly influenced by (their) denominational doctrine/s or traditional exegetical approach/es to, or a religious stance on certain events, parables or typology, even eschatology, along with accumulated (religious and secular) knowledge from a cultural background or social institution, that it permeates the 'hermeneutics' from / by which exegesis is done by preacher (sometimes despite theological training) and lay people's 'understanding'.

Reading, exegeses and 'understanding' of this kind have a most disconcerting effect on exegesis of the text of the Bible so that, concomitantly, preaching may eventually become

....uneventful, bland, routine, and entirely unremarkable...when preachers ...draw from texts what they had already decided to say; congregations sometimes look to biblical readings only to affirm the community-identity and life-style which they already enjoy. The biblical writings, in such a situation, become assimilated into the function of creeds: they become primarily institutional mechanisms to ensure continuity of corporate belief and identity.

(Thiselton 1992, 8)

2.1.1.1 Reading 'into' instead of 'from' a document forms or shapes much of the 'understanding' of what someone reads – a relevant example (in the context of this study) from, or within a situation as sketched by Thiselton above may be drawn from the frequent, even ponderous, emphases and exhortations on believers towards an *individualistic Christian experience cum spirituality* or 'spirituous performance' as a believer, or the (personal) piety of the Christian. It needs to be clearly stated that by this referral the personal faith of the Christian believer or his / her pious, singular and serious devotedness to God or exhortations to that effect are not even remotely understated or, worse, denigrated. The example is stated because (a post-modernistic) emphasis on, or singling out the / an individual in his / her being a Christian not only differs from, but even stands diametrically opposed not only to the principles of the first century group-oriented Jesus-movement/s (compare Botha 1996, 263) and the people who were part of those

movements, but more specifically the fact that Mediterranean people were dyadically and not monadically inclined. As the *church* (in the manner of how the Jesus-movement is referred to today) manifested itself initially and was referred to or described by evangelist and apostle alike in the respective biblical documents, the above mentioned emphases and exhortations may actually fit to the proverbial *t* the categories of being *religiously* anachronistic and / or ethnocentric – virtually, then, a reading *into* and not understanding *from*.

Botha's views on of group attachment and -consciousness (1996, 263) would bear out the fallaciousness of stressing the individualistic when he defines a group as

...a plurality of individuals who are in contact with one another, who take one another into account and who are aware of some significant commonality...
an essential feature of a group is that its members have something in common and that they believe what they have in common makes a difference.

As far as love, the supreme characteristic of God which has to be replicated in His children, is then concerned, it is irrefutably clear that *agápé* figured among and towards group-members (Malina & Rohrbaugh 1998, 87) and that in / by that group-activity the *individuality* of persons was fully realised - a person was 'someone', a real person, *only within a community* or group and not on his / her own. Any notion of stark **individualism** (refer chapter 3) is foreign to, and not supported in the New Testament and it may well prove that 'understanding' of this sort as far as being an exemplary Christian is concerned, is read into the text and not (exegetically) gleaned from it. Instead then of promoting what is meant to be accomplished in the lives of Christians within their religious community / group, exegeses of that ilk is a (modern?) misrepresentation of, and convolution of biblical teaching whereby it only succeeds in obscuring from an audience what the will of God actually entails for his children within the church.

The very real problem of 'reading into a text ideas that are foreign to it' (from whatever traditional source it has been handed on or religious / dogmatic / paradigm that determines understanding – P.R.) as Deist (1992, 80) defines *eisegesis*, is as prevalent as ever. Eisegesis has long been a plague that imposed on serious

exegeses that was done from secure hermeneutical bases and ‘exegesis’, which, obversely, is being done from whatever perspective defines the expositors view, led and leads to much conflict (Zuck 1995, 28-29). In present times the philosophical tendency that “...the meaning of a text is what it means to me” as E.D. Hirsch discusses it in his *Validity in Interpretation* quoted by Virkler (1989, 23), although it has a bearing on poetry, seems to have progressively and with growing tenacity attached itself also to the interpretation of the biblical texts.

This philosophy has been gaining acceptance since the 1920’s and reflects the simplistic assumption that the ancient biblical texts are complete in every detail for reading and understanding by readers in our day and age. This is closely aligned to reading into, instead of from such documents, as Virkler’s cogent summary (1989, 23-24) of the phenomenon gives a good insight as to the uncritical, non-discerning nature thereof. Virkler refers to T S Eliot’s contention that “...the best poetry is impersonal, objective and autonomous; that it leads an after-life of its own, totally cut off from the life of its author” (, 23). Gradually, as Hirsch (quoted in Virkler [, 24]) points out, the ‘...study of “what a text says” became the study of “what it says to an individual critic” (or, in the context of this study, ‘Bible reader’ – P.R.).

This sort of treatment of the text effectively bans the author (and, no less, the first historical reader/s) from the text in its historic *sitz im leben* from which nothing else but serious impairment of determinable meaning flows, thereby demolishing the *meaning* intended by God and human author. Virkler (1989, 24) drives this negative state of affairs home by his quotation from Hirsch:

To banish the original author as the determiner of meaning was to reject the only compelling normative principle that could lend validity to an interpretation ... For if the meaning of a text is not the author’s, then no interpretation can possibly correspond to the meaning of the text, since the text can have no determinate or determinable meaning.

It has to be recognised that anything from this scope will have dire consequences on the meaning of the biblical text of which the inspiration by the Holy Spirit is a central credal aspect among conservative and / or Evangelical theologians and

Christians alike – as Ramm (1990, 93) confirms it as the foundation of Protestant hermeneutics and exegesis. However extreme such an inference may seem, one-sided or individualistic interpretation of the sort referred to above may even effectively negate a confession of the Spirit's inspiration. Virkler's summary that God's Word can have as many meanings as it does readers (1989, 24), indicates the unrestrained high-handedness, in whatever guise it may manifest itself, with which the biblical text is sometimes treated.

2.1.1.2 The completeness of the biblical texts for the original audience's understanding would easily stand as a given – the final 'products' of what was eventually compiled and written down from oral traditions were as adequate as they were meant to be. Obversely, to the larger and / or actual extent, this may very definitely not be the case for the modern reader especially in the Western regions of our world. In ancient reading scenarios it was not required from authors to render minutely detailed documents in the sense that modern readers require complete to-the-last-character documents with the proverbial dotted i's and crossed t's, since those authors wrote for high-context audiences (Malina 1998, 24-26) who were not foreign to them or for whom they were outlandish. Those 'high-context' documents were read by readers and heard by audiences for whom there was no need to have everything spelled out for them because they were socialised into shared views of perceiving and believing (, 25) with their authors. The unavoidable result is simply that those texts will in many instances prove to be 'sketchy' for reading in the present if modern readers do not consider the nature of the documents and their origin.

A word or two about the biblical documents and their historic origin (to which will be referred again) may be in order at this stage. Botha (1996) gives some idea about the development of 'the Church' (which is in itself an anachronistical reference to early Christianity as it only became such an official 'body' very much later) wherein the writings were produced that we know or refer to as the New Testament or, as Botha also refers to it, as 'Second Testament' (, 255). The idealised and popularly propagated beliefs and perceptions resulting in absolute truth claims about the nature of the church and the Christian faith (, 268) in the

beginnings of the Christian movement are presented quite in keeping with how the writings of the New Testament are being 'read' to present a view or views which converge with today's common (popular?) belief. The actual facts may indeed vary or differ significantly from the traditionally held ideas and prove to be disparaging when the disparity between the idealistic and the realistic is identified.

While this subject is of such a nature that it can be elaborated on or belaboured at great length, for the sake of brevity it should be pointed out that the 'ideal' picture of a homogeneous Christian movement that was *inaugurated* on the first post-resurrection Pentecost with no dogmatic disputes between individuals or among the apostles as a group and others working in unison from a unified trinitarian belief and a clearcut theology and Christology in a Church making giant inroads in the non-believing world, winning converts by their thousands, is simply not above the serious, historically verifiable challenges that may be brought against it (Botha 1996, 268). To exacerbate (positively) it should be said that it neither does justice to the facts regarding the development of early Christianity nor does it do anything for making existential sense in bringing home to the present Church the actual vitality (, 268) that the Gospel of Jesus holds for meaningful living in our time as the earliest Christian groups gleaned meaning for their time.

The belief that the Bible writes pure history (compare Deist 1978, 7) is popularly presented as an absolute truth claim wherein the erroneous assumption of textual completeness even for the present is also embraced (compare Malina & Rohrbaugh 1998, 17). The statement above about the 'sketchiness' may in such an instance then well be viewed as negatively critical of, or even derogatorily directed towards the Bible and that there no longer exists a belief in the authority and reliability of the Word as such. Although presumptuous and invalid, such one-sided views are neither to be treated with the deserved contempt nor brushed aside casually, but rather serve to emphasise the need to clarify the most elementary (but also the most fundamental) question in hermeneutics, namely what the Bible is and not only how it should be understood (Deist 1978, 7-8). It should also serve as a positive cue for sustained academic research of the historical-cultural milieu

of the Bible whereby the 'sketchiness' can be eradicated for a proper understanding of that which the Bible conveys to the glory of God in the lives of people who serve him.

In his article on what religion entailed in the world of the apostle Paul, Malina (1986, 92) points out that the Bible is regarded as an explicitly 'religious' book simply and chiefly because it is the book of the church. This may invariably lead to the Bible being read from exclusive or positivistic viewpoints engendered by the religious knowledge accumulated in growing up in church (and one could / should almost as a matter of fact add the phrase 'and the 'biblical' words like *love* should be 'understood' from our knowledge about religion'). As regards then the origin of the New Testament documents, Botha (1996, 252-53) legitimately points out that the period between the death of Jesus and the production of the Gospels is a rather neglected field of study. He puts the critical question whether the 'church' was dominated / characterised by unity or diversity – which as a matter of course must affect exegesis - since we base our assumptions of the Church (and the literature that came into being in the ranks thereof) on documents dating from a time significantly removed from the earliest stages of the young movement (, 252).

At the (almost certain) risk of being repudiated if an opinion should be expressed that fallacies sprouting from this hermeneutical shortcoming are not even to be put past people that are trained in theology, one cannot but consider and seriously heed the facts as shown above that in antiquity religion as such operated on a wide cultural front. It would, therefore, stand to reason that the biblical data must be read through a much wider scope and not confine the understanding of 'biblical' precepts as laid down in our times by people who, theoretically speaking, have no knowledge of, or give no thought to the fact that religion was embedded in kinship and / or politics, even the religion of the people of God, Israel. God's intense involvement with and immutable commitment to his Covenant people found expression in, and was described in common, everyday terms involving and depicting their daily lives, kinship relations, economic, social and political activities. A clear and telling example of this situation is to be found in the

simple facts that Israel's (and, similarly New Testament Christian believers') religious relationships were expressed meaningfully in patron-client contractual terminology (Malina 1993, 103). A most relevant facet in context of this study is that the obligations owed to Jesus in terms of the dyadic contract are not to be paid back to him, but to others also in a dyadic relationship to him – in short, Christians must love their fellow Christians (, 103) because they are partakers in the love of Jesus.

The books of the New Testament were written in a first century world, intended for first century people in specific circumstances who knew and understood the socio-cultural-financial-political language of their time. The content of the documents was meant to strengthen them in their lives as Christian believers in (at that time) probably a very hostile environment. The categorising in twenty-first century free-standing religious 'thought' of what the Bible (according to us) 'must have' conveyed to the historical audiences needs to be revised to include safe margins for thorough historical interpretation. The insistence by some (as if they have inside information from some higher, 'noumenological' source) that the inspired writers instinctively (inspiredly?) knew or would have known that their writings were intended to be read twenty plus centuries later as Scripture / Word of God holds no water and would, also, amount to the same silliness quoted from Malina above.

The assumption *by* moderns about the comprehensiveness *cum* completeness of biblical texts *for* moderns may stem from the fact that modern readers are so attuned to detail and accustomed to the requirement that any and all information in written form should minutely and entirely spell out everything, even to the extent that unnecessary and, hence, useless, reading matter (Malina 1998, 25) may be a quite common phenomenon in many publications, that the same notion about writings in general is just as commonly (and anachronistically) superimposed on ancient documents. The Bible may well be a very prominent example of being imposed upon in this way and if one should consider the possible effects of the many discrepancies that could corrupt understanding, a rethink on hermeneutics in general and, as regards the subject of this study, a re-evaluation of all the notions

that exist about 'love' may be necessary. The New Testament documents (for instance the Epistles) were ancient, high-context historical-religious documents, written and compiled in a first century religio-socio-cultural context for specific and determinable group-centred scenarios. In the hands of modern low-context readers enculturated in a completely different setting, with a post-enlightenment worldview and habituated to a *Received* way of understanding and consequently believing, 'understanding' based singly on accumulated religious and secular contemporary knowledge may well produce disastrous results.

2.1.1.3 Reading, understanding and interpreting ancient high-context documents is neither straightforward nor simple and, where such ancient, historical documents are concerned, a term like understanding (hence the inverted commas in the chapter title above) may even acquire a dubious meaning especially when readers project a revelationist-positivistic image of noumenological 'gnosis' from God's eye-view (as referred to above). In the sincere effort to understand Scripture as well as may be possible, the same grammatical-historical-critical hermeneutical paradigm that was advocated by the ancient exegetes at Antioch was preferred - the meaning of the text for its original audience / reader / addressee/s was the only real meaning that any author / compiler could have intended and the only one to be hermeneutically ascertained (Deist & Burden 1980, 79). I would adopt this stance for the present study. The favoring of this hermeneutical point of departure seems to have good sense inherent, since the widely varying biblical statements about, and exhortations to love, or prohibitions to not love, were, as stated above, directed to people historically (very) far removed in a significant number of aspects from (arguably) the largest part of the Bible reading public of our day.

Insofar as, in this instance, South African believers may be concerned, it would, in fact, then not be an overstatement to refer to the breaches between 'us' and 'them' as gaps as both Ramm (1990) and Zuck (1994) chose to call it. Three prominent gaps that definitely need to be bridged for the non-Near Eastern Bible reader are listed as follows: Cultural (Zuck 1994, 76-97), Grammatical (, 98-122) and Literary (, 123-142). It should go without saying that only a sound hermeneutical

treatment of the text with due consideration of the aspects and effect/s of the socio-cultural world within which it is to be understood, will suffice, since our perspectives and understanding are affected from our standpoints and cultural cognition. The realisation that language relates to its social context (De Villiers 1991, 153) determines the grammatical-historical departure and, therefore, full recognition is given to the hermeneutical relevance and essential value of cultural-historical detail available from social-scientific research. It is therefore appropriately implemented in exegesis whereby it is hoped that not only the *what*, and *how* aspects about *agápé* may be addressed but also (and, especially,) the *why* question supplied with a meaningful answer (Craffert 1991, 127) even for our day and age. Preliminarily I would venture to place the nature of the exegetical task for this study in the niche Carolyn Osiek (as referred to by Craffert - 134) defines as ‘... the application of social science theory to New Testament texts....’

2.2 DELIMITATION OF FIELD / MATERIAL FOR EXEGESIS.

The love-concept abounds in the Bible and an attempt at saying everything about all of it would, of necessity, evolve into a lifework. Even paring this kind of work down to a certain author or group of documents would simply amount to biting off much more than one can chew. Since *agápé* is specifically prominent in John’s community’s situation and much of what is being said and believed about love in our day may well to a greater or lesser extent be relayed to John, these documents were selected for a closer look at ‘love’. Of necessity the exegesis had to be confined to the Fourth Gospel (and relatively few passages from it) for the simple reason that the Johannine corpus and the great number of references to love, in whatever form, mode or time, make it impossible to afford everything the same comprehensive treatment. The exegesis is preceded by some scrutiny of the aspects of the ‘world’ of the New Testament.

CHAPTER 3

THE NEW TESTAMENT WORLD.

3.1 INTRODUCTION.

The concept of *agápé* is highly prominent in John – one may almost put it on a par with *life / eternal life* and *faith* – and in order to fully grasp the cognitive field/s of the audience to whom this document was addressed in their specific circumstances, some notice has to be taken of the sort of community / world in which this community functioned – wherein, concomitantly, the meaning of *agápé* was relevant.

This foray / limited excursion into the first century world is necessary because it is not improbable that Bible readers (many who later become pastors and / or Bible scholars whose attention should be engrossed in the Bible and the wonderful world it represents) in the Western half of the world may never migrate in their reading to the other side of the world where the Bible was written. Culturally spoken, they never progress beyond what they grew up with, even as regards (and despite their) theological study. To teach the Bible at whatever level they may have to, they acquire the necessary competence in the languages of the Bible but, should they fail to make the / an acquaintance with the ‘world’ within which those languages were used (spoken / written), they may at best become competent in using words in a translating manner – thinking in Afrikaans, English or whatever language and, for instance in Greek, letting their fingers do the walking through Liddell & Scott or Thayer (or maybe even Louw & Nida) to find the Greek equivalents to express *their* thinking. It may be likened to writing Afrikaans or English and merely have your computer transcribe your text to a particular font: **I kan cange mu font aVI please !!** (I kan c[h]ange my font as I please!!).

The ludicrousness and faultiness of such a method speaks for itself and yet, what is generally being done with the Bible very often amounts to just that – a metho-

dology that is beset with anachronism and ethnocentrism. So, in order to at least make an effort at finding out what the words that belong to the $\alpha\gamma\alpha\pi$ -stem could have meant to the people who read / heard 'John', a somewhat limited foray has to be undertaken into the 'world' of the New Testament.

This 'world' in the regions surrounding the Mediterranean Sea was shaped over approximately two millennia and refers to the overarching culture within which the Bible originated for ancient audiences. This cultural system, which was probably established some nine centuries prior to the writing of the oldest Old Testament document, is generally known and referred to as *Mediterranean Culture* - as it is still prevalent in the whole region stretching from and including Spain in the West, Southern Europe, the Near East, Palestine, Arabia, Egypt and North Africa. These particulars, however, would not imply that one and all in the Mediterranean region thought and acted similarly and quite contrarily it has then also to be said that numerous *local* differences exist but, in the end, as Esler (1990, 22) sums up, '...certain cultural patterns recur across the many nationalities, languages and religious groupings of the region.'

Consideration and usage of the cultural backdrop of the 'world' of the Bible can hardly be overemphasised for responsible exegesis, and Van Leeuwen's remark (2001, 33) concludes nicely what has been said about this thus far: 'For us moderns to understand the Bible, we have to learn a lot about the world *of* the Bible and the world *in* the Bible; otherwise it just doesn't make sense' (italicisation original). Tate's summary (1991, 9) elaborates fittingly when he says: 'A text is the product of an author and an author is a product of an age.' Tate advances what he calls a *fundamental truth*: the fact that authors use language to formulate their texts and literature is the linguistic expression of the symbolic world of a given culture (, 12), *meaning* is expressed in word, *meaning/s have word/s*. The compelling need to bear this in mind remains at a constant in lieu of the inescapable fact that the New Testament documents (and, no less, the Old Testament's) are the products of a culture very different from what we know (Esler 1990, 22).

Ignorance about, or ignoring the necessity (despite knowledge that it is, indeed, essential) to consider the historical-cultural factor may cause or compound negative effects on exegeses. A major obstacle in the way of (our) understanding of biblical data may especially be (our) 'familiarity' with the New Testament text (Esler 1990, 22). As such, it may give rise to and stand closely related to the two archenemies of responsible and valid exegesis namely *ethnocentrism* (assuming that the values of another society is the same as ours) and *anachronism* (assuming that another society, remote in time, mirrors our cultural perspectives and beliefs). A generalised, ignorant reading of the biblical documents invariably results from these hermeneutical faults whereby the dominant fact is mostly disregarded that the New Testament documents were written from a post-resurrection and post-pentecostal paradigm and perspective for certain early Christian communities and or individuals who were, as regards the exigence for the larger number of Gospels and Epistles addressed to them, engrossed in and struggling with a particular problem or set of problems. The fact that the authors of canonical texts structured their rhetoric in a specific way to promote the outcome for a particular text (, 11) must rule out generalisations of whatever kind by modern readers (like the popular 'cut and paste' method to apply biblical statements, imperatives and the like from the Old and New Testament to modern scenario's as if it were written precisely for such use and without sparing a thought that ultimately it might have little to nothing to do with whatever it is being applied to). I harbour no doubts as regards the perennial applicability of what both the Old and New Testament have to say on the lives of believers, but the undiscerning sentence approach and haphazard 'usage' of the Bible content (and even referring to it as 'interpreting Scripture with Scripture') in this regard is appalling.

As regards *love* in our context Van der Watt (1997, 557) points out that it can mean anything ranging from sex to a 'spiritual feeling' of connectedness (with [a] deity). In the Bible *agápé* is the common denominator for 'love' in a variety of contexts also – wherefore the need to ascertain the / a particular meaning intended by an author is clearly stressed. In order, then, not to fall foul of hermeneutical integrity by unlawfully imposing a redundance of meaning/s where the word

or an allusion to the concept appears, the context must be seen as determinative of, or as the reference of the use of the word (, 558).

It would seem that love predominantly denotes positive aspects in human relationships, the absence of love, hate, logically, denoting opposites. As was shown above, the concept of *agápé* was and is being generally and popularly theologised probably because the *concept* and the range of meanings denoting the noble conduct that were deduced from *agápé* figure prominently in the biblical documents. These references can therefore not else but be understood in a Judaeo-Christian religious *cum* theological sense (refer Malina's statement [1993d, 73] as regards the Semitic origins of the biblical authors). Even though the Judaeo-Christian strain of religious-cultural thought may be stressed where the Bible is concerned, it would not only be contentious to infer but surely not viable to argue that people who did not *believe* in a Judaeo-Christian way (to the extent that such 'non-believers' may even be labelled as infidels) had no inkling of love or that the love we read about in the Bible was completely alien to the daily lives of those 'infidels'. It simply renders fair proof of the (anachronistical and / or ethnocentric) 'theologising' of love.

To gain some insight in or to try and understand the range or scope of meaning embodied in *agápé* necessitates a look at *the world in which* (compare Van Leeuwen above) *this concept figured*; put differently, to attempt ascertaining **how**, and **what** the historical audiences would have understood of *love* within their culture and the world they lived in. Their understanding cannot be isolated from what they understood about themselves and others with whom they shared space and time, therefore, as was indicated above, the objective in this study is not to concentrate on describing the first century social environment, but to focus on understanding and meaning within that environment. Of necessity this would not rule out description altogether and for the sake of clarity some description of the social-cultural aspects within which life and love could have been meaningful was deemed necessary.

The prominent differences (other than the physical, industrial et cetera) between the ancient and our world cannot be ignored. Since there is so much that can (and should) be said, a modicum of brevity and direction had to be adhered to so that the particularities that may bear a relation to love were confined to individual or personal facets, dyadism and group-orientation, morality (honour and shame precepts), limited good and patronage and the Evil Eye. The sources selected for this facet of the present study come from the ranks of scholars who should be credited with pioneering, or, at the very least, rendering most valuable inputs in social-scientific research – amongst others (in alphabetical order) Marcus Borg, Philip Esler, Bruce Malina, Jerome Neyrey, John Pilch and Richard Rohrbaugh. On a personal note it must be said that these insights immensely extended my own understanding of what the New Testament conveys about:

3.1.1 First century agrarian / peasant communities.

‘Agrarian’ does not refer to agriculture per se since the agrarian world was not a world of farmers and farming but the term refers to societies where agriculture was practiced on a much larger scale than the small-scale hoe-agriculture predating it (Rohrbaugh 1993a, 4). Even though this ancient form of mass agriculture, with the relatively large economic plusses that it brought about compared to hoe-agriculture, made the world a marginally better place, *limited good* (see below) continued to characterise and dominate agrarian peasant communities and the majority, probably as high as ninety-eight percent (Malina 1993c, 93), had to eke out a (sometimes very) meagre livelihood.

The first century world as depicted in the New Testament was, compared to our industrialised one, a widely differing agrarian world (Rohrbaugh 1993, 5) where basic tooling, undeveloped (by modern standards) industrial production, limited travelling conveyance, primitive medicine and food shortage was the rule. Gilmour (quoted in Domeris 1993, 293) summed up the situation prevalent for agrarians in Mediterranean societies in his statement that they were

...all undercapitalised agrarian civilisations...characterised by sharp social stratification and both a relative and absolute scarcity of natural resources ...There is little social mobility. Power is highly concentrated in a few hands, and the bureaucratic functions of the state are poorly developed. The

conditions are of course ideal for the development of patron-client ties and a dependency ideology.

Gilmour refers to modern societies where little change from earlier times can be discerned. As regards ancient times it may then be said that the agrarian world of the first century was literally ages and worlds apart from the mass production directed and industrialised, mechanised, diesel, gas, petroleum and other exotics-fuelled, electrically powered and electronically dominated, transistorised, micro-chipped, micro-switched, remote controlled, liquid crystal-displayed, communication satellite linked, e-mail and cellular telephone connected, television camera-covered, television-screen mesmerised, café, restaurant, supermarket, shopping mall, hospital, clinic and surgery, pharmacy and dispensary health-serviced, jet-setted and luxuriously conveyed, tourist attractive, celluloid film and digital camera flashing, sightseeing, 'cool' and 'cute' world where hearts and other 'body parts' are transplanted, space flight, space 'walks' and even a walk on the moon is considered old hat, divorce statistics present a steeper rise than annual inflation rates, a modern plague transmitted by homo- and heterosexuals is decimating away at the lives of millions and morality has declined faster than condoms are promoted and dished out as school and university campus fare - to name just a few of the 'ordinary' things that make up the everyday world we are accustomed to living in. I daresay that some of even the most basic appliances and commodities available in our day would have received a 'divine' rating in the first century.

Rohrbaugh's list (1993a, 5-7) of life-controlling and / or affecting circumstances in agrarian societies clearly illustrates that even on the physical / temporal plane almost nothing in common with the world as we know it today existed. Some of the more prominent facets in the list are as follows:

- ninety percent of agrarian populace was rural; in industrial societies the same percentage is urban
- ninety plus percent was engaged in 'primary' industry (farming, extracting raw materials) while the figure in 1993 for the United States was four point nine percent
- two to three percent were literate while the exact opposite is probably true for our time

- *c.* 100 B C E life expectancy in Rome was twenty years at birth. If infancy was survived it could double – compared to our time it represents about half of expectations in the industrial world
- ownership of one to two thirds of arable land was ensconced within one to three percent of the populace
- widows and orphans were an extremely widespread phenomenon since more than half of all families were broken by the death of one or both parents in the child-bearing and –rearing years
- the family was the unit of production and consumption. In industrial societies the productive capacity exceeds even the most advanced agrarian set-up more than hundredfold.
- Political intrigue and violent upheavals that were accompanied by civil war and the enslavement of thousands of people erupted regularly. If statistics from the Roman imperial house could be taken as an indication of the perilousness of the times, the figures make for startling reading: Of 79 emperors thirtyone were murdered, six driven to suicide and four deposed by force.

Suffice to say, then, that life was extremely hard. Rohrbaugh (1993b, 137) gives the barest subsistence levels in Palestine during Roman times as 1800-2400 calories per person per day as compared to the minimum 2500-2800 that people in modern industrial societies are able to enjoy. Daily intake consisted mostly of grain and as much as one quarter of the total consisted of alcohol and the number of mouths to feed determined the availability and quantity of food for the rest of a family.

These were the realities of life, small wonder then that the terms ‘peasant’ and ‘agrarian’ are quite commonly regarded as a referral to inferior and / or pauperised people who lived in crippling circumstances. While the difficulties did not affect everybody, there can be no denying that a general situation of (in many cases severely) limited good reigned the lives of the majority non-elite (and, no less, sometimes even the minority elite) in the first century world.

The term 'peasant' does not denote a social status or occupational feature (Malina 1993c, 90) but a village or group of villages socially bound up with (a) pre-industrialised city/ies (Rohrbaugh 1993, 137). A village or group of villages functioned in a symbiotic relationship with the / their city from where control (political, administrative, religious, financial and as regards social trends) was exercised (Malina 1993, 112). Peasants were the ordinary people, the '*plattelanders*' (country folk) who found themselves in a restricted situation of being under the influence or control of others – like that of a beggar and king, small-holder and large landowner, prophet and scribe and the term *agrarian* is generally descriptive of a *societal mentality* into which people regardless of occupation or status have been enculturated in (Malina 1993c, 90).

Considering the more or less unbridgeable disparities between the contemporary worlds of the first historical audiences of the New Testament documents and today's, especially insofar as the most basic necessities of life go, the prevalence of having to live perilously close to or even below the breadline by probably the larger percentage of first century people is something many (if not most) of the bible reading people in our time may find themselves unable to comprehend or associate with. The desperate (and virtually lifelong) plight of staying alive those people had to face, even and while it is not completely alien to many in our time and our country, probably have no comparison in our times. In those societies the belief (based on the bare facts of their experience) existed that all goods are limited and in short supply and, aggravatingly, already distributed (Rohrbaugh 1993a, 8). At least, insofar as supply (in the majority of instances) may be affected, the modern situation mostly does not mirror those times and although the biblical truism concerning the perpetual presence and existence of the poor would indicate a timeless status quo, life in the twenty-first century bears little if any resemblance to life c. 100 CE.

3.1.2 Person, people, community.

T E Laswell (quoted in Esler 1990, 128) describes a **society** as consisting of a population aggregate whose members have a particular relationship to one another and their particular ways of believing, behaving and thinking make up the culture

of that particular society. The social constructs existing within a culture aid the comprehension by which people give meaning to their experience of, or their grasp of 'the world' and perceiving of reality as a typifying of their particular life-situation. Reality is, however, not absolute. Joubert (1992, 55 - as referred above) states that there has not by some intervention of whatever nature come into being anything that may be called a neutral or absolute 'reality' whereby all other 'reality' may be measured or judged over the span of time from creation to Kingdom come (and that anyone or group alone may eventually have access to, or possess a full grasp of such a 'reality'). People or communities approach the reality of their life-situation from a basic worldview existing in their time and this worldview and their lives in that world find meaningful expression in the societal values, norms, customs, symbols and rituals that they espouse. The verbal *repertoire* in which the story of their life is told is *meaningful* for the users of that specific repertoire (, 55) as well as the code/s of conduct or value systems spelled out in and by the repertoire whereby implicit and explicit *values*, norms, views, roles, inter-personal conduct, language and patterns of behaviour in certain scenarios are covered. Different views and opinions as to what values are and what they do seem to exist and a plethora of definitions have been offered from economical, social, philosophical and psychological perspectives (Joubert 1992, 57), but Ro-keach's definition of value (as quoted in Joubert) is generally favoured by researchers:

...an enduring belief that a specific mode of conduct or end-state of existence is personally or socially preferable to an opposite or converse mode of conduct or end-state of existence. A value system is an enduring organization of beliefs concerning preferable modes of conduct or end-states of existence along a continuum of relative importance.

(Joubert 1992, 57)

Values entail basic approaches whereby certain behavioral traits and modes are regulated and evaluated / judged and adhered to by groups and individuals as members of a group in terms of the acceptability and practicability thereof. As a matter of fact it could be stated that (like an absolute 'reality') a single set of values to which all people all over the world adhered to through the ages could not and does not exist and therefore notice must be taken of cultural values among

people other than ourselves. In the context of this study the values pertaining to the New Testament world whereby *meaning* was given to life in the Levant need to be seriously taken notice of and considered insofar as *meaning and applicability* for our times may be gleaned from what was written to the original reader / hearer.

3.1.2.1 First century Mediterranean cultural orientation.

The observation above as regards the overarching Mediterranean culture needs some reiteration. Despite the fact that this particular cultural system largely dominated the region, it would be an oversimplification to refer to a ‘Mediterranean’ culture as if it were a homogeneous regional phenomenon. Subcultures were not uncommon (for instance the Hebrew / Jewish), but on a high level of abstraction and generalisation it must also be admitted that many, specific, similarities were shared by the majority (and sometimes all) of the ethnical-cultural groupings around the Mediterranean Sea. In the end it would then not only be permissible to refer to a ‘typical first century Mediterranean culture’ (Joubert 1992, 57) but also to consider and involve in exegesis what has become known about this culture. The valuable results of in-depth *cultural* studies that were done in recent years in the Mediterranean by scholars involved in *theological* disciplines have then to be considered in the basic, first level historical-cultural, facet of grammatical-historical hermeneutics in order to lend veracity to this form of exegesis.

- ***Individualism*** is the first and foremost cultural aspect of our time to which ‘our’ understanding of *agápé* may relate to since the social matrix within which our exegesis of the Bible takes place is provided thereby. The critical hermeneutical question posed by Van der Watt (1997, 558) whether the model of the antique Mediterranean family, as for instance used by John, can be directly transferred to, or simplistically used for a modern congregation, needs serious contemplation. Considering the individualistic paradigm in vogue in our times, can or should ‘love’ still be taken as an imperative for interpersonal relations whereby the basic identity of God’s children is revealed? Roughly put *individualism* means that the individual person’s aspirations or goals have precedence over

group ideals or goals (Malina 1998, 74). This is radically different from the very idea of love as Schrage (in Van der Watt 1997, 567) puts it as regards love in John: 'love is not an emotion or an effect, not a theory or an idea, but simply living for others'. As regards the wellbeing of people or groups in the Bible, individualism would have been the nemesis of group-orientation (Neyrey 1993b, 90). Consequently, individualism would not only encumber, but also effectively torpedo any real demonstration of *agápé* as the social glue by which people are cemented in a group and many instances could possibly be referred to where individualistic conduct has had a severely detrimental effect in a congregation (and not only as regards that of a pastor or someone in another position of leadership).

The social ethos in our times is dominated by an individualism, which, as such, has forced an entry into and occupies a dominant place in the theologies of our time. Many, if not most, of the modern societies must be described as being individualistic (compare Borg 1995, 60; Esler 1990, 24; Malina 1998, 37; Van Leeuwen 2001, 31). Van Leeuwen's referral (from an American viewpoint) to the '...individual self, one of America's greatest idols' (2001, 31) gives fair indication of the esteem rendered to individuals. Esler (1990, 29) indicates one of the main traits of individualism, as we know it, namely the tendency for persons to assess themselves on the basis of intrinsic worth contrary to what the world may think. Malina (1998, 75) sees this as happening notwithstanding the push of pervasive social pressures in the direction of conformity along with individualism's prioritising the goals of single persons rather than favouring group goals.

Some idea of the scope of the permeation and dominance of individualism may be gleaned from Borg (1995, 60; 68) who indicates that individualism affects '...everything from love and marriage to work, from politics and justice to religion.' As Van Leeuwen, so Borg naturally refers to a situation prevalent in North America, but it would not be conjectural to surmise that individualism may also dominate in Canada, it is to be found among Europeans and no less in South Africa, here even among people that are traditionally not so inclined and then further afield. Malina (1998, 78) refers to Triandis who found that in 1990 seventy percent of the world's population was (still) collectivistic, but anthropological

studies done at the time were showing that individualism was gaining or already had a strong foothold among people who were traditionally hunter-gatherers.

A definition of individualism developed by Clifford Geertz gives a view on what the psychological self-awareness inherent with twenty first century people entails. Geertz (quoted in Malina 1998, 37) styles the (modern) 'individual' as

...[a] bounded, unique, more or less integrated motivational and cognitive universe, a dynamic center of awareness, emotion, judgment and action organized into a distinctive whole and set contrastively both against other such wholes and against its social and natural background.

Geertz' definition of the individual concurs with the dominant qualities present in modern individualism: people maintaining their being separate and exercising personal independence wherein they act with only individual (their own) interests at heart (Marckwardt et al 1970/I, 645). Any one and all inclinations of this kind would be out of touch and sync with the New Testament's indications on personal relations as borne out by Wilson (Kloppenborg & Wilson 1996, 14). Wilson is correct in criticising certain views that are held on individualism in the Hellenistic-Roman period of man's history. Considering the bulk of the findings of the most recent New Testament research whereby virtually a total absence of individualism is indicated, it is difficult to accept that the first century could be styled as '...an era of individualism...' and Wilson is correct in stating that it is a '...suspiciously modern concept to start with and one that could at any rate account for only a very limited portion of ancient evidence at best' (, 14).

As regards **ethical considerations** in the New Testament, it stood diametrically removed from (modern) individualism wherein precious little concern exists for others. Deutsch's statement (1982, 18) that a concern for other people's needs is nothing but the logical and necessary consequence of the central love-commandment has, as such, a direct bearing on Jesus. His ethics were need-directed as the precedence of another person's need is brought to the fore in a particular scenario: in a question regarding morally correct and adequate conduct, what one must do to inherit eternal life, it was put by someone who for all practical purposes did not have any physical or temporal need to be alleviated (a 'rich young man') and

moreover he did not have other people or their well-being in mind ('what must I do...'). According to the traditional understanding 'eternal life' is almost automatically and exclusively regarded as referring to the hereafter in heaven in one and all of its occurrences in the Bible, so that the question-bearer's sole motive is, in this instance also, invariably interpreted soteriologically in a teleological way – he wanted to know how to get to heaven when he dies. Since he was from his youth habitually doing all the 'right' things exactly to this end, his question may be regarded to imply a disenchantment of / with 'traditional' religiousness or, in the light of Jesus' answer, his real need was exposed namely a lack of quality of life. *Eternal life* certainly cannot be separated from the implied time- (or rather time transcending / eternal) element, but simultaneously that is not the exclusive meaning the term has. Therefore, then, this man's life could mean something (to himself and definitely also to those in need of what he had too much of anyway) if he directed attention away from himself instead to concentrate on people around him: what were their needs? (Deutsch 1982, 19).

The scenario depicts Jesus as the Source or communicator of eternal life - the Gospel narratives elucidate Jesus' activity as fundamentally need-centered and he himself dispels any notion that his was an all-embracing, 'blanket' mission to all people, therefore he enunciates (as in Luke 5: 31): 'Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick' (Deutsch 1982, 19). Even a cursory reading of the Gospels would clearly convey that *compassion* towards those in need figured predominantly in Jesus' activities and human needs took moral precedence over religious institutions, principles, values and mandates. Jesus' compassion even transcended the purity rules concerning Sabbath observances, 'untouchable' (unclean) people, forbidden associations et cetera whereby he compromised his social position and, consequently, evoked the wrath of the Pharisees who claimed to be the protectors of Torah (Malina & Neyrey 1988, 26). Deviance as regards religious / ritual and purity observances carried precisely such a consequence even to the extent that a transgressor would be labeled a 'witch' (, 10, 19).

Marcus Borg's excellent chapter on *Jesus, Compassion and Politics* (1995, 46-68) renders overwhelming proof that love without compassion is a misnomer – being *religious* sans being *compassionate* is nothing else but hypocrisy because compassion is to be the central quality in the life of someone faithful to God, the compassionate One. The witchcraft accusations against Jesus in the gospels mostly appear in the context of sick care - of healing and / or sickening, of demon possession and expulsion – a curious occurrence in Mediterranean regions according to Murdock (Malina & Neyrey 1988, 25). In terms of being compassionate over and above religiosity, Jesus' accusers then actually become the accused (, 26): 'Their hypocrisy, moreover, in concealing this inner corruption was considered their chief sin. They claimed to teach and practice a reformed Torah ... but they only "preach and do not practice" ...[t]hey were, therefore, deceivers whose external appearance "whitewashed" the death within, whose external show of piety covered up their actual faithlessness.' If, indeed, 'to be compassionate' is what is meant by the somewhat more abstract command 'to love' (Borg 1995, 49) then it would appear that Jesus was the perfect embodiment of *agápé*.

Individualism, then, and *compassion* (as perhaps one of the dominant aspects of love) have little or nothing in common as Malina (1998, 75) shows in his description of the attributes of individualism: distance (or distancing) from in-groups, emotional detachment and competition wherein little (if any) concern is shown for others, resulting in an extreme lack of attention to the views and opinions of others along with (sometimes) little concern for family and relatives, but a (sometimes even fanatic) tendency toward individual achievement through competition with other individualists.

In any scenario of this kind there seems to be almost zero traces of love as individualists tend to be highly pragmatic - *success* depends upon ability and the outcome of success is achievement (Malina 1998, 75-6) even (mostly?) to the detriment of others. Judged against the weight set by group-integrity and boundedness or loyalty to a / your group in the first century where individuals should always seek the good of the neighbour (Neyrey 1993b, 89), such individualistic conduct or self-realisation to proudly promote one's own interests would have

been selfish and loveless in the extreme and grossly offensive to the group. It would have been viewed and understood as being ‘puffed up’ when the group’s norms and needs were disregarded (, 90). This is not to say that group-orientation does not exist or is not valued in the West or in modern society / societies, but is definitely considered a second-order value (, 91) and always subordinate to individualism.

When it is compared specifically against the qualities of *agápé* in I Corinthians thirteen (KJV) that love ‘... vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, does not behave unseemly, doth not seeketh her own...’ (η αγαπη ου περπερευεται, ου φυσιου–ται, ουκ ασχημονει, ου ζητει τα εαυτης...) these references have an unmistakable bearing on individualistic behaviour and / or conduct of whatever sort. In this regard Louw and Nida (1988, 431) clearly points out the pride and excess inherent in individualism where the verb *περπερευομαι* gives irrefutable indication of non-committedness to group solidarity and / or interests. Similarly, *φυσιομαι* indicates a certain negative or indifferent disposition towards harmonious group relations as I Corinthians four and verse six indicates: ...μη εις υπερ του ενος φυσιουσθε κατα του ετερου... Louw and Nida’s circumscription gives ample proof of this: that ‘... none (of you) should be proud of one person and despise another’ (literally ‘...one person against another’) (, 765). This is no less true of the rest of the admonition not to act shamefully in seeking one’s own interest as Louw and Nida also show that *ασχημονεω* denotes behaviour in defiance of moral and social standards with the resultant disgrace, shame and embarrassment (, 759). The shameful conduct of one of the members of the Corinthian group concerning his father’s wife (I Corinthians 5) and the equally shameful, puffed up conduct of the rest of the group by their apparent condoning instead of condemnation comes to mind, but the bearing that ‘being puffed up’ has in the particular context of not seeking the interests of the group is too clear to be missed.

- *Dyadism*, the group-orientatedness or –embeddedness of the Mediterranean dyadic personality differs radically from the individualism prevalent in modern, monadic societies. The psychological and individualistic frame/s of reference whereby first-century Mediterranean people are perceived by, and as though they were

twenty-first century South Africans, Americans or whoever are thoroughly ethnocentric and anachronistic.

Dyadism was historically the (only) cultural orientation in vogue for possibly all or the larger part of the world where the books of the Bible were written and as such it is dominantly reflected in the biblical documents. The people who populate the Bible pages were embedded in some or other dyadic relationship wherein their sense of self was determined by and dependent upon the perceptions and evaluations of (their) others – put differently, first century people thought differently about who a person might be and what might be the range of human behaviour expected from members of society (Neyrey 1991, 68).

Essentially all dyadic relations were externally oriented and based on honour / shame (Esler 1990, 129) instead of driven by guilt or the yearning for success, which must be attained even, or usually, to the detriment of someone else. Neyrey (1993a, 49) then unmistakably gives *dyadism* as an *individual's relationship to someone or something else*. The Mediterranean societies of biblical times were collectivistic or collectivity-oriented (Malina 1993d, 67) and dyadic persons are characterised by deep group-embeddedness or strong group-orientation wherein the dyadic personality continually needs another person/s in order to know who s/he is (, 67). Persons were not individually known or valued because they were somehow unique, but in terms of who their dyadic reference/s were so that *honour* may be continually checked, affirmed or challenged (Neyrey 1993a, 51). Neyrey's synonym for dyadism, 'other-directed orientation' (, 52), coincides well with dyadism and from what has been said about the disinterestedness in the opinions and views of others, even what they may think about *mé*, the individualist, unmistakably shows the direct opposites so prevalent in individualism's contrast to dyadism. In order then to understand New Testament persons it is important not to consider them from an individualistic viewpoint (Neyrey 1991, 72) nor as individuals not committed to anybody else, but as group-oriented personalities. Esler (1990, 29) points out the following about this strong dyadic orientation:

Persons [were] not oriented towards themselves as individuals, but towards the groups to which they belong' and '[everyone] finds a place in society by being embedded in one or more groups, such as the family ... craft associations, religious cults ... military units.

It stands clear to reason then that grouping of whatever sort, whether one's family, people, clan, nation, funerary association, artisan guild, philosophical school et cetera occupied a prominent, central place in the thoughts and conduct of people. Someone was a 'self' only in being related familiarly or dyadically to other 'selves'.

On the other hand it is exactly the very strong group-centredness that fostered division, competition and worse and the fundamental division was to be found between kin (*dikoi*) and non-kin / 'strangers' (*xenoi*) where even a non-related family living next door could have been or was considered to be *xenoi*. Fierce competitiveness marked all social interaction with non-kin for the honour of the family, the primary seat of honour (Esler 1990, 31).

Preindustrial agrarian / peasant people occupied distinct social positions on a horizontal plane with others sharing the same status in social rank, as well as vertically with people above and below them (Malina 1993d, 67). The way in which they thought and acted in their societies did not bear even a remote resemblance to the modern ways of thinking and acting along or according to the existing behavioral lines often permeated by egoism (stemming from individualism).

As regards group-formation as alluded to above, Wilson (Kloppenborg & Wilson 1996, 13) indicates that groupings and associations of people proliferated in the Hellenistic-Roman era and while membership of associations seems to have been confined largely to the lower classes (, 10) and some associations preserved and even reinforced the social distinctions among its members (for example different rules for slaves and citizens), others dispelled any individualistic nuances and all members were in principle treated as equals (, 11). The Christian communities in general consisted of people of varying status and wealth (Corry 1999, 183) and generally an attempt was made to be inclusive / egalitarian and to dissolve the

standard social distinctions such as slave / free, male / female but the hierarchical structures of society tended to be reflected still (Kloppenborg & Wilson 1996, 11). However, no matter to which level of social loftiness a person may have been elevated or to which meagre position someone was relegated, s/he still formed part of a group and the group was indelibly part and parcel of a society where the individual received his / her status from the group (Corry 1999, 185).

The social stratification and levels of the early Christians have been debated over a fair spread of time and in the context of the present study some space should also be afforded this facet. Osiek (1992, 31) indicates four categories in ancient societies: urban elites, urban non-elites, villagers and a marginal class consisting of beggars and slaves. Corry (1999, 182) indicates two sharply divided sectors in Graeco-Roman society: the *humiliores* (lower classes) and the *honestiores* (the upper classes). The possession of land or property seems to have formed the bias between the two classes (, 183) with the power of property in the hands of the small percentage of *honestiores*. The members of this elite group were the only ones with the income and leisure for advanced education and, as such, were the bearers of a society's traditions and standards; controlling religious institutions, tax structures and legal systems. They were, literally, in power and, as the controlling group, new movements generally began with the urban elite and gradually worked their way down the social scale into the urban non-elite group (Osiek 1992, 31). Christianity, however, begins with the villager class and within the first generation after the death of Jesus it has effectively worked its way into the urban non-elite group where it continued until the third century (, 31).

Meeks (1983, 51-55) cites Celsus (a second century pagan author who regarded Christianity as serious enough to criticise it) on the social position of early Christians. Celsus seems to have been intent on denigrating the Christians and the early apologists had to respond frequently to the jeers of people who shared or promoted Celsus' views about Christianity. One of Celsus' allegations was that educated people were not admitted into the Christian groups because the religion was attractive only to the lowest social classes (, 51) (or would Celsus have preferred classless?). He was convinced that Christianity has always been as he described it

(whereby, however minute, he describes some ethnocentricity on his part) and he based his opinions on the fact that even Jesus himself was only capable of winning a few disciples from the motley ranks of 'tax-collectors and sailors' (, 51).

A Heidelberg professor in New Testament, Adolf Deismann, broke important new ground by implementing the information gleaned from newly discovered ancient documents and artifacts containing inscriptions to open the way to understanding the vocabulary and grammar of the New Testament, but more importantly, also to reconstruct the social setting of the New Testament. He was likewise convinced that the spread of early Christianity was restricted to the unlettered masses (Meeks 1983, 51-2), but from renewed studies it emerged that '...the educational level and therefore probably the social level of Paul and at least some members of his congregations was a good bit higher than has commonly been assumed' (, 52).

From prosopographic evidence it has been concluded and confirmed that a fair cross-section of society is reflected in the ranks of Christian groups (Meeks 1983, 73) ranging from the *familia caesaris* (as Meeks refers to members of this elite grouping as '...among the few upwardly mobile people in the Roman Empire'), wealthy freedmen, artisans and traders and even wealthy women; Jew and gentile together in their synagogues (, 73). No doubt, considering the fact that limited goods limited the agrarian 'world', the other end of the spectrum, the limited ones, may have been more markedly represented. Nonetheless, whatever a person's social status were, what counted was his / her dyadic 'connectedness' and honour by honouring the mutual 'other-directed-orientation' in society (refer Neyrey above). One of the telling demonstrations of the stark differences between dyadism and individualism is the fact that a word for 'person' does not exist in the Hebrew, Greek and Latin vocabularies (Malina 1998, 35). Individuals are referred to in terms of gender, role or membership of a group / family - people are classified in stereotypes (Esler 1990, 30). First-century people were essentially and mostly group-bound and collectivistically inclined (Malina 1993d, 36), while the opposite goes for individuals in post-modern industrial societies.

The definite significance of these differing inclinations in a discussion of *agápé*, where it stands primarily as indicative of, and focused on strong and healthy group-relations (while the individual is not disregarded - as the parable of the good Samaritan demonstrates) must not only be acknowledged but need to be continuously observed in exegesis. Western societies in our day and age are generally characterised by weak group-bound relations and many even consider themselves not to have, or bound by any group relations at all.

The copious differences from ancient dyadism would render any and all discussion of, or exegesis of first century texts from the perspectives of modern individualism erroneous. Since individualism is a feature of modern, Western culture, individualism as such is totally absent from the New Testament (Esler 1990, 24) wherefore it may, for instance, be sincerely questioned whether any exegesis/es touching on the individuality of biblical characters (see below) is legitimate or defensible. It would seem that individualism played virtually no role in ancient Mediterranean communities, although, on the other hand, Tate (1991, 41) states that in connection with certain developments in Hellenism, a need for *individual salvation* became paramount and, as a result, ‘...both religious and philosophical expression in the hellenistic period placed increased importance upon the individual and the salvation of the individual from the control of a universe governed by Chance [*tyché*] or Fate [*heimarmenē*]’.

Dyadic personalities knew themselves and therefore also identified others in relation to the families and or group/s they belonged to in their society and not in terms of ‘human nature’ or individual excellence, which, at best, remains an abstract, variable philosophical idea (Van Leeuwen 2001, 31) or a product of the ‘...introspective conscience of the West’ (Stendahl quoted in Esler 1990, 30). The ‘character studies’ depicting biblical persona (Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Joseph, Moses, Gideon, John, Paul, Peter et cetera) as outstanding individual religious icons whose exemplary conduct and spiritual prowess as God-believers or first century Christians who should be arduously striven after could well be found to have no biblical foundation when viewed against the established dyadic relations of their times. As such it amounts to post-biblical (modern day anachronis-

tical) development (not exegesis!) of biblical data presented in popular forms of preaching known as topical sermonizing or topical preaching (Virkler 1989, 235). To infer this kind of knowledge on the authors of the biblical documents on the simplistic assumption that they must have thought the same as us and therefore they must have been quite correct in imposing our sort of psychological thinking on the characters they described, would indeed, as Malina (1993d, 73) puts it, be a highly questionable and obviously anachronistic enterprise. First century persons did not know each other very well in the way we (think we) know people psychologically, individually, intimately and personally (, 71) because they cared little about psychological development, relations and introspective analyses (, 72) and, indeed, those aspects and facets have no place in the Bible. The mentioning of this detail is not essentially critical, but the sort of handling of the biblical content referred to above is legitimately criticised thereby.

How, then, did dyadic, group-oriented personalities perceive the makeup of human beings? On a high level of abstraction it can be said that the cultures in the New Testament / Mediterranean world exhibited similarities over a wide arc but in spite of the many shared similarities, at a lower level of abstraction it may also be safely said that there were notable differences among the subcultures (Malina 1993d, 73). As regards the biblical data (and, within the scope of this study, the New Testament), definite recognition will have to be given to the fact that Christianity came into being and emerged from the Hebrew subculture. The manner in which human personality was perceived and its workings in individual human beings described was one of the differences in cultural understanding (, 73). The Greek and Roman philosophers understood humans in terms of body and soul, intellect, will and conscience along with conflicting virtues and vices and the impact it may have had on the immortal soul or some deity dwelling in a person (, 73). These ideas and the corresponding terminology are not reflected in the Bible since the biblical authors were largely of Semitic origin. In the Semitic thought the interaction between a person and those others / things / world outside him / her was understood in a metaphorical way. The parts of the human organic whole were described metaphorically as acting in unison, for instance the heart for thinking, loving, hating, feeling et cetera; the eyes being the ports through which

information entered the heart; ears collecting the speech of those around; mouth for communicative conversation and hands and feet for doing and moving (, 73-4). Man was understood to consist of three zones of interaction: eyes-heart representing the innermost; reacting in expression through language (mouth-ears) or doing (hands-feet). Human behaviour is centered round these three zones of interaction and was described in corresponding terms from Genesis to Revelation (, 74).

Knowing the innermost was God's domain and only God knew what went on in men's hearts (compare Luke's significant statement about Jesus in this regard – 5: 22; 9: 47) and for men to also know was not important, since it would not have had anything to do with human relations anyway (Malina 1993d, 72). What was considered of grave importance however was the 'fruit' that came from the heart as it was expressed by what was said or done, thereby the quality of the 'tree' was revealed (, 72). If one looks at the defiling 'product' ('trees' bearing such 'fruit'), it is not difficult to imagine that any one of the components of the 'stuff' that could come from a member of a closely knit dyadic group (evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts, covetousness, deceit, lasciviousness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness - Mark 7: 21-22 KJV), had the potential to wreak havoc and devastation not only to the well-being of a family, group, association or community, but especially to public perception of and the honour rating *of the group* as well as the individual falling foul of the community's *suneidesis / conscientia*. No great imagination is required to understand such behaviour as indicative of a heart (and therefore a life) devoid of love.

The differences between individualism (as is prevalent in Western societies) and dyadism (as the definitive characterisation of first century Mediterranean world) can then be summed up as follows (Joubert 1992, 61 – italics mine, P. R.)

Individualism	Dyadism
Personal success <i>determines</i> quality of life	Honourable conduct (to satisfy group demands) <i>is quality</i> of life

Acquisition of wealth/material gain is of <i>primary</i> , utmost urgency	Maintenance of group honour or steering clear of shame is <i>crucial</i>
All people/individuals are <i>equal</i> , society is <i>horizontally</i> structured	Society is <i>hierarchically fixed</i> , <i>vertically</i> structured
<i>Gender equality</i> is advocated	<i>Male dominated</i> society
Prosperity <i>belongs to</i> the prosperous person / <i>individual</i>	Prosperity is for the <i>welfare of the group</i>

- ***Dyadic relations and social status*** of members of society were described over a wide arc. The **place** where someone dwelled or hailed from was considered important (Neyrey 1993a, 50-52; Neyrey 1991, 74) - so Simon from Cyrene; Naaman a Syrian (Neyrey 1993a, 50); also Jesus – compare Nathanael’s scepticism about someone from Nazareth, John 1: 46. **Nationality / ethnicity** also figured strongly: compare Jesus, a Jew, speaking to a Samaritan woman (John 4: 9) as did **clan**: compare Mary’s relatedness to, or bonds with the house of David - Luke 1: 27); Paul’s boast of being a Benjaminite (Phil. 3: 5) (, 50). In this respect one’s **genealogy** whereby exact pedigree is established is also of great importance (, 50) (compare Jesus’ genealogy in Matthew 1 and Luke 4). The most important is one’s **family** (, 50), your closest in-group, and numerous instances can be quoted on this, some of the best known probably involving some of Jesus’ disciples like James and John, the ‘...sons of Zebedee...’ ‘...James the Lord’s brother...’ (Galatians 1: 19); ‘Simon bar Jonah’. Neyrey and Malina (1991, 74) present the adage of someone being ‘...a chip off the old block’, another way of saying ‘like father like son, like mother like daughter’ since children were expected to replicate their parents. **Schools** or specific individuals / **teachers** also served to distinguish dyadic status, for instance Paul having been a student of Gamaliel (Acts 22: 3) (Neyrey 1993a, 50).

- ***Identity, group-conscience and conduct*** form an inseparable part of dyadism and exert a prominence in dyadic morality and group relations. Over and above the family as the primary unit there existed a plethora of factions, groups et cetera as Kloppenborg and Wilson’s work on voluntary associations in the Graeco-Roman world (1996) renders a wealth of insight on different facets of this pheno-

menon in antiquity. The personal identity and individual conscience (*suneidesis*) (and therefore compliant, concomitant behaviour) is embedded in the group – sharing each other's evaluations, learning one's duties from collective description (for instance I Corinthians 8: 7-13) (Neyrey 1993a, 51).

Osiek (1992, 28) puts forward the clear and telling contrast between a dyadic person and a modern (individualistic) Westerner: whereas the former would understand (and explain) conscience as the coherence of the public image with his / her personal self-image, the latter may see development of conscience as the ability to withstand outside forces and acting in accordance with one's *own* sense of right and wrong – with nary a thought about *social* pressure. Esler (1990, 30) quotes Malina (1981; 1993d, 63) on 'conscience' or 'with-knowledge' – that is knowledge shared with others, individualised (common) knowledge whereby someone is enabled to act within socially agreed 'lines' in their (general or group-specific) world which is clearly and extensively drawn and ordered (Neyrey 1993b, 88). The moral norms for society are set by and for the group, thus the responsibility for morality, stability, security and harmony rests with the group: the good of the whole has priority over the good of the individual (Osiek 1992, 29).

Tradition, then, plays a superior role in conveying what is expected and proper – that which was handed down by former members of the group is presumed normative and valid and any form of flaunting was open to severe criticism, since the group holds the past in great esteem (Neyrey 1993b, 89). The Pharisees roundly criticised Jesus precisely for not hewing to the traditions of the elders (Mark 7: 3-5) (, 89). Reverence to tradition causes one to act genuinely / honourably in accordance, thereby maintaining the publicly perceived ego-image of the person who acts honourably by heeding the agreed-upon codes of behaviour. Joubert (1992, 58) points out that sensitivity and the fear for the moral judgement of society as an external authority may be seen as the reason for the existence of the 'shame' culture prevalent in the Mediterranean. The constant fear of being shunned in / by society expediated the behavioral forms wherefore everybody exerted themselves to toe the / their line/s.

A worst scenario would have been when one's group was implicated by individual misconduct whereby one and all were exposed to shame. The positive and negative aspects wherein for instance Paul reiterates the meaning and the do's and don't's exemplified in *agápé* (I Corinthians 13) represents the core value/s from which all social and personal values were to derive value. The virtuous life of a just person, resting on the bedrock of piety toward God and justice toward all men, corresponds generally with the biblical depiction of love. These virtues stand central in a life shared with fellow men and represented the ideal in and amongst members of Christian in-groups. Paul's injunction (I Corinthians 10: 24) always to seek the good of the neighbour is clear indication that individualistic objectives and the promoting of personal interests were offensive to the group and in fact boiled down to a lack of love (Neyrey 1993b, 90).

Agápé, then, figures very prominently in group-orientation scenarios and, although it is indicated above as a fairly foreign word in non-biblical literature predating the Septuagint, its particular appearance in the Bible cannot be taken simplistically and reductionistically that *agápé* and what it stood for was or must have been unknown outside Christian or Judaeo-Christian communities. Paul's instruction *cum* exhortation to the Galatians (5: 16-21) not to fulfil '...the lust of the flesh...' embodied the traditional vices (Neyrey 1993a, 51) that plagued ancient communities as they still do to this day even in our societies. Plain logic dictates and would then legitimise an hypothesis that the agapic conduct set out in contrast to the list of vices (Galatians 5: 22-23) embodies the virtues (, 51) conducive to upholding commonly held social values and to serve as a counter-measure against anything whereby family-, group- or community-solidarity may have been compromised. **Walking in the Spirit is tantamount to fulfilling the commandment to love.**

The validity of Jesus' statement that people even outside John's community of believers would be obliged to believe in him when they witnessed the unity among the believers brought about by his and God's love (John 17: 23 also 13: 35) would be severely compromised if *agápé* was and would have been held as 'belonging' exclusively to Jews or Christians in their communities. The con-

cept/s embodied in *agápé* could therefore not have been unknown in ancient societies and even in times contemporaneous with the Christian era: non-Christians would then quite simply not have been able to recognise something alien to them. The obvious, then, that people not only knew what *agápé* was, but that it was socially practised by and among decent people, held true even for societies and groupings far removed from those that figure in the Bible. Clearly, then, ***agápé* was a core value not exclusive to Jewry and / or Christianity and community life where love was absent would have been and remains something inconceivable - even as it is today.**

The world has always been a hostile environment wherein decency does not come about all by itself and if anybody was to entertain the idea that we live in an ideal kind of world of serene communion and beatitude (Berkouwer 1971, 12), that person is, as it was expressed by an old preacher once, so heavenly minded that s/he is of no earthly use. Irrespective then of whether love as the value of group attachment or –bonding (Malina 1993c, 110) was accompanied by feelings of affection or not, it was indispensable for honest relations engaging people in decent life situations as opposed to the sinfulness exhibited by disregarding the values and integrity expedient to group solidarity and harmony.

‘Sin’ is a serious disposition and a direct opposition to *agápé*, and, while it denotes being ‘loosed off’ from where someone needed to be or belong, simultaneously it is suggestive of and in reality consists in a loss of freedom, being bound to or fettered by something that impairs decent living or being in the right relation to others. The negative, destructive entity called ‘sin’ is, dogmatically, something highly enigmatic – Berkouwer (1971, 13) refers to Bavinck who sees evil (and, resultantly, sin) as the greatest enigma in life, second only to the origin of being. While not related to creaturely reality, sin is directly related to the disruption and eventually destruction of the reality of men (, 13).

From a social perspective ‘sin’ is the detrimental state of affairs when someone acts at loggerheads with the accepted status quo in the group or community whereby alienation or a threat to unity to a lesser or larger degree could develop. Ma-

lina (1993d, 71) gives a good explanation of the ‘driving force’ in ancient communities as regards sin: *αμαρτια* crops up when something is amiss in the functioning of the social body in which the *αμαρτωλος* is embedded, whereby even an entire group may be stigmatised (compare Osiek above). The moral norms found in the New Testament undoubtedly had relevance for individual conduct, but, significantly, ‘...in all such moral descriptions and listings, the individual is not the main concern’ (, 71) (my emphasis – P R). Sin and shame walked hand in hand as may be proved by Israel’s repeated defeats when they espoused other gods / religions, thereby disobeying their God and reaping His displeasure (Plevnik 1993, 98-99) and thereby becoming separated / being loosed off from God.

The most serious concern among the followers of Jesus was to keep the specific group socially and corporately intact and this is clearly reflected in the New Testament writings as Malina (1993d, 71) then correctly states that in the ‘... Christian communities the main problem was to keep the Christian group, the individual church, in harmony and unity, in sound state...’ (I Corinthians 12 and Romans 12: 3-21). As regards an individual person, then, for the advantage of a / the group, an individual was expendable and might even have been rather ruthlessly ejected – as it is described in the Christian excommunication procedures (I Corinthians 5: 5, 13 and Romans 16: 17) (Neyrey 1991, 77) (refer also to Malina & Neyrey’s treatment of the negative labelling of, trial, social degradation and expulsion of ‘deviants’- 1988, 81-91). The socially accepted ‘lines’ of conduct or boundaries within which correct behaviour was defined would, as a matter of course, have had the consent and blessing of the community or group whose lines or boundaries it were, wherefore I would propose to paraphrase ‘sin’ in such a community or group as **‘knowingly transgressing a norm as bounded by mutual agreement’**.

Group-consciousness (and the concomitant individual conscience) moves and acts in direct relation to *honour and shame* (as was also shown above) - the pivotal life values in Mediterranean culture. As such the people presented in the Bible as a whole (Malina 1993d, 63) are directly influenced by, and were mutually bound by honour and shame precepts to act according to their dyadic references

and / or status. The disciples of Jesus, for instance, no matter whence they came or what their respective social positions were, became brothers and sisters of his 'family' / fictive kin, whereby a new identity as members of the body of Christ (I Corinthians 12: 12), adopted offspring of God (Galatians 4: 4-6) and citizens of God's kingdom (Philippians 3: 20) were assumed (, 51).

The designation 'sons of God' for all who received Jesus, who believed in his name (John 1: 12), is of special significance in this regard. Malina and Rohrbaugh (1998, 32) state that a name was much more than a personal label: in a collectivistic society (as opposed to an individualistic one) a family member's name represented the entire family into which s/he was embedded along with that family's honour and social standing in their community. Furthermore, people that are 'born of God' and designated 'children / sons of God' acquired a new mode of existence along with the lofty honour status (, 32) pertaining to such an existence and the dyadic responsibility to do such honour proud by exhibiting the supreme quality of '...eternal life...' constantly being received from their heavenly Father (John 10: 29-31; 21: 31) (, 286).

- ***Honour and shame*** were the pivotal values in directing a person's behaviour within the collectivistically inclined Mediterranean culture and, concomitantly, the system of patronage (see below) stands in direct reference to the value system of honour and shame (Corry 1999, 185). Both the Old and New Testaments render such an overwhelming incidence of honour / shame references that it is impossible to ignore and, even more so as regards understanding firstcentury Mediterranean persons / personality, a proper and detailed understanding of these pivotal values is imperative.

Honour in the Graeco-Roman / first century Mediterranean world revolved around the status of an individual in the eyes of his / her relevant group (Corry 1999, 185). Even though the individual is mentioned here, the group was always more important than the individual – in the end it was the group that mattered as an individual received his / her status from the group (, 185). Our societies differ markedly and a misleading phenomenon is observed by Domeris (1993, 283) na-

mely that the difference between the Middle East and the (say Western) visitor is sufficient to awaken a sense of strangeness, an awareness that s/he finds her / himself in another world, but, when one reads the Bible this strangeness falls away, the sense of distance is lost simply because our *familiarity* with the text lets us (anachronistically en ethnocentrically) *recreate the biblical stories and characters in the garb of our time, investing them with our sets of values and culture*. This may be true particularly as regards honour and shame, which, consequently, may also directly affect a value as complex as *agápé* and its inextricability from honour and shame communities.

In their social and / or cultural guise values determine behavioral norm/s as Pilch and Malina (1993, xiii) point out in their description of a “value” as ‘...some general quality and direction of life that human beings are expected to embody in their behavior’ (compare also Rokeach quoted above: ‘...A value system is an enduring organization of beliefs concerning preferable modes of conduct or end-states of existence along a continuum of relative importance’). Man creates and utilises social institutions (Pilch & Malina 1993, xv) to realise values and an institution marks out the general boundaries of real life situations and the scenarios where values come into effect, where their purpose and ‘directionality’ is ratified and their quality/ies demonstrated (, xv). Dyadism as referred to above is a means value by which someone’s honour can be checked, affirmed or challenged (, 51), which means that people are clearly classified, identified and ordered in a world that has a place for everyone and everything, and everyone / everything in their place.

Individual honour was something to be claimed and jealously guarded by a person; collective honour was safeguarded by a head figure: the person at the top of a social subset, for instance the father of a family; emperor for the empire (Osiek 1992, 27). People thought of themselves and others in a stereotypical way (Malina 1993d, 51) where role and status combined to confine people to social strata and the expected forms of behaviour pertaining to such a stratus and status – to be diligently sensitive toward one’s own honour in acting in accordance with a person’s social standing (which would count as positive shame) (Osiek 1992, 27).

Meeks' statement (as quoted in Domeris 1993, 287) in this regard is then particularly appropriate: '...what was fair, what was expected, what was honourable depended on one's place in the social pyramid'. In a Mediterranean personality honour '...is the value of a person in his own eyes, but also in the eyes of his society. It is his estimation of his own worth, his *claim* to pride, but it is also the acknowledgement of that claim, his excellence recognised by society, his *right* to pride' (Julian Pitt-Rivers as quoted by Domeris, 291; also Osiek 1992, 27).

Wealth, as was shown above, was not the Alpha and Omega as regards life, or, in Carolyn Osiek's words: '...honour is the greatest social value, to be preferred over wealth and even life itself' (1992, 27). Neyrey (1995, 139) quotes Seneca on this:

The things which we actually need are free for all, or else cheap; nature craves only bread and water. No one is poor according to this standard; when a man has limited his desires within these bounds, he can challenge the happiness of Jove himself.

Virtue, on the other hand, was highly valued and virtue lay in maintaining a station in life and any possible increase in *honour* and not material possessions. The maintenance of or increase in honour figured within the parameters laid down in *agonistic* societies – a term derived from the Greek *αγων*: a race involving competition and struggle (Louw & Nida 1988, 528) or contest between / among equals (Malina 1993d, 37). As such all social interactions outside the family, circle of friends or own group were regarded as contests for honour, the contestants facing wins, ties or losses (, 37) and wherein a contestant could act conciliatory by giving in to his opponent, or aggressively in the struggle for supremacy or, alternately, acting defensively by ignoring a challenge altogether (, 129).

Honourable conduct, irrespective of the severity of the contest, and *agápé* did not oppose or cancel out each other even in the (contentious for us) event where someone could lie (Malina 1993d, 43). In the realisation that this aspect could well make hackles rise in defence of uncompromised truthfulness across the board that therefore needs to be indignantly denounced on the grounds that truth and lying could and would not have shared common ground especially in the reli-

gious / biblical / Christian context, it should be pointed out that truth was regarded as something that belonged only to someone who has the right to truth. Lying was constituted in *denying truth from someone who has a right to it* (, 43). The Pauline imperatives to Christians in this regard, to *speak truthfully to each other* (Ephesians 5: 25); *not to lie to each other* (Colossians 3: 9) come to mind – as such Christians lying to brethren (who as a matter of course had an unequivocal right to truth) would constitute indecent, dishonourable and loveless conduct ('sin') resulting in being shamed and putting each other to shame, and as committing an infringement of what love is not to do. Louw and Nida's rendering of the verb ἀσχημονεω (1988, 759) from I Corinthians 13: 5, that love '...doth not behave itself unseemly...' (ASV) as '...to act in defiance of social and moral standards, with resulting disgrace, embarrassment, and shame...' complement Christians' tenure to truth from each other.

- **Limited good** refers to the limited availability of virtually all goods – material and non-material - a prevailing, grinding reality of ancient peasant life and culture (Esler 1990, 35). Everything, from land and food to honour and power (and even truth?! – as above) were regarded as finite in quantity and always in short supply - diametrically different from what modern people, regardless of their buying power or lack thereof, are used to, for instance, in South Africa. The limitedness of goods in antiquity, then, simply, meant that a person could only increase his or her supply at the direct expense of another, resulting in an honourable striving to maintain your station in life instead of moving on and 'getting ahead' (, 35) by whatever form of accumulation (whereby someone ran the definite risk of being regarded a shameless person).

Oakman (1993, 153) effectively contrasts the modern and the ancient when he states that modern economies are 'productive' in the sense that it is centered on human wants that have to be gratified as quickly as possible. This 'must-have mentality' was tellingly illustrated in the catchy line used in an advertisement some time ago of a, then current, popular model in the product line-up of a well-known quality motor vehicle manufacturer: 'I want it because I want it'. The

means to sheer self-indulgence available to a great number of people enunciated in this seemingly innocent advertisement stand in stark contrast with the way people thought and acted in biblical times where a very limited few could even contemplate immediate personal gratification through acquisition (, 153). The zero-sum nature of ancient economies entailed the simple belief that increase in one part unavoidably leads to decrease in another – an inevitable occurrence of fate where hard work, intelligent planning and diligence in execution played a seemingly diminutive role (, 74).

In a world where life was / is hard, a *subsistence* or *limited good* society is virtually a given and wherein altruism forms a certain and immutable part of the society. Altruism is the value whereby those with any kind of surplus (food, clothes, rarely money) are urged to give to them who have little or nothing (Pilch 1993, 7). In a subsistence society nearly all that is produced is also consumed, resulting in almost always sharing with specific ‘others’ - mostly the members of your own kinship-group or ethnic compatriot such as the neighbour whom one is to love as oneself in Leviticus 19:8 (, 8). Even though those ‘others’ with whom one could afford to share a surplus with in the form of alms were mostly / always your own kin or ethnic group, *agápé* in ancient altruism and *love* of the fellow man today does not amount to the same (, 7-8).

An obtuseness to notice or acknowledge need or reluctance to share where one was made aware of need may then well construe ‘greed’ which, in Jesus’ parlance of compassion, is tantamount to foolishness (compare Luke 12: 13-21 - Pilch 1993, 8) and, logically, shamefulness. Pilch is then correct in summarising altruism as a means value whereby honour is maintained, even increased in the approval in and of the respect of one’s community, also augmenting one’s self-respect.

- ***Patronage and patron-client relationships***: Limited good societies invariably spawn patron-client relationships like those that existed through time - as indeed it

is reflected in the Old Testament and also the New Testament's ample vocabulary of grace (Malina 1993b, 84). The term *patronage* derives from the Greek *πατηρ* and Latin *pater* word for father (Malina 1993e, 133) – and of course it should not be taken to mean that one and all usage of the word 'father' in the Bible indicates patronage, even as 'father' never always indicates biological fatherhood. Patronage relationships were / are based on the inequality of persons and power (Esler 1990, 35) that is to be found almost everywhere. Malina (1993e, 134) states that those institutionalised relationships between people of unequal power statuses were and are highly exploitive – 'better' families sometimes exerted their power in harsh, hierarchical and impersonal fashion, seeking to maximise their gains without considering the losses it might incur to people of lesser fortune. Generally, though, a patron-client relationship provided an acceptable way for both a member of the non-elite and his patron to act honourably as regards the acquiring and distributing of goods. The patrons were expected to provide the necessary resources for their clients (Corry 1999, 185) while the client, in turn obtains social, economical, religious and political resources (Malina 1993e, 134). While the patron gains a loyal client by whom his honour rating and, concomitantly, his standing in the community would also increase (for instance by setting up an inscription in a public place, arranging a public procession or reserving the best place at a meal) s/he had a responsibility towards the client/s.

Patron-client relationships, despite the fact that it does not imply direct kinship, may be compared to a father and his loving, grateful children (Malina 1993e, 134) a relationship which, furthermore, meant an enduring loyalty regardless of the conduct of kin, son or daughter (, 136). This loyalty pre-supposed support in any event of a threat by evil or to the honour from outside – within a kinship group the basic meaning of 'justice' or righteousness may be taken as enduring loyalty, to do what is right in God's eye, to do as God would have done. Louw and Nida's entry on *δικαιος* (1988, 744) gives a good account of this loyalty: '...pertaining to being in accordance with what God requires – 'righteous, just: *Ἰωσηφ δε ο ανηρ αυτης, δικαιος ων* 'Joseph, her husband, was a righteous man' Mt 1.19.'

- *The Evil Eye* occupied a prominent place in the belief in Mediterranean culture – as Pieter Botha (2003, 21) concisely points out the fact that magic formed an inherent part of the antique worldview, even specifically of that of the people populating the Bible pages. They did not only accept that ‘...there may be some such thing as magic or spirits, demons and powers...’ but the realisation of the paranormal (a term which, in fact, might have been an anachronism in the first century) formed part of their perception of, and experience of reality (, 21) and, therefore, for them the paranormal also tied in with things temporal.

Although this belief seems to never have spread to the Western hemisphere, it was as rampant and widespread in ancient times (Weber 1975 II, 420) as it still is in modern Mediterranean belief (Esler 1990, 19). While the damage inflicted by someone with an evil eye may not or may have been intentional, the possible harmfulness ascribed to persons with an evil eye included harming or even killing living beings by just looking at someone (Weber 1975 II, 420) - more than enough reason to greatly fear someone suspected of having an evil eye. If it is considered that the evil eye (with witchcraft in close attendance) was recognised as the prime cause of illness in the very region where the New Testament was penned (Derrett 1995, 65) then the belief cannot be lightly passed over.

The Jews’ awareness of evil eye beliefs remains to this day, especially as regards their children, and the Yiddish expression *kein ayin ra* (‘let there be no Evil Eye’) is uttered as an apotropaic (Derrett 1995, 66). Attention, therefore, to children by, for instance, paying a compliment, is deemed highly inappropriate or downright unwelcome and, in order to not have one’s motivations questioned, a blessing such as ‘God bless XXX’ is extended as a matter of course (Weber 1975 II, 421). Defensive methods against someone suspected of having evil intentions also included the wearing of amulets, repetition of oaths or making obscene gestures. Derrett (1995, 66) lists, among others, the Phallus as effective against the Evil Eye. As regards amulets, Esler (1990, 20) refers to Julius Pollux’s *Onomasticon* (7.108) where the *baskanion* is listed as an apotropaic device, although, quite contrarily, amulets also served to convey a curse and not merely to ward of misfortune. In this regard Craffert (2002, 17) mentions the great numbers of tablets and

amulets inscribed with a curse and dating from biblical times that have been unearthed so far in those regions. Certain colours (blue and red) are regarded as an effective apotropaic, even an object as highly unlikely as a plastic hand (sometimes seen dangling from a car's rearview mirror), the so-called hand of Fatimah (Esler 1990, 20). Malina and Seeman (1993, 56) also list devices such as tattoos, seals, signet rings and incantations. The purple tassels sown to the hem of a person's cloak (Luke 8: 44) served the same purpose (, 56).

As regards apotropaic gestures Esler (1990, 19) recounts an experience a friend of his and one of his colleagues had in Turkey: near Ephesus they came upon an old man and a young girl, presumably the old man's granddaughter. After asking for directions they moved on and the friend commented to his companion on a sign the old man made with one of his hands when they approached them. He closed the thumb and two middle fingers so that his hand looked like a pair of horns and he moved his hand up and down – to ward off the evil eye (presumably from the girl).

Strangers are regarded as a primary source of the evil eye (witness the almost perpetual xenophobia among Mediterraneans) as are cross-eyed persons (Esler 1990, 19) and even someone with a continuous browline (note the connection with the eyes once more) is regarded as (potentially) harmful.

Happenstance does not exist in the minds of people who hold a 'magical' world-view – each and every happening is part of a chain of occurrences with a definite primordium and person or being as the definite initiator (Botha 2003, 21). Botha's illustration of a shepherd losing one of his flock is particularly apt: it would not have been viewed as a coincidence of a predator coming upon an untended animal, but a deficiency in the supernatural protection of the herdsman due to some wrongdoing or sin on his part or, more likely, some envious opponent manipulating the carnivore with the help of his / her god(s) / demons / spirits (, 21)! The Evil Eye, indeed, was supposed to have caused evils, illness and mishaps to cattle, crops and even susceptible members of a family (Derrett 1995, 67). It would seem that envy lies at the bottom of it all. Derrett points out that a stemma

of the word-cluster *bask*- has witchcraft as its centre, eventually bifurcating into being jealous, envious, malignancy, to begrudge or to be miserly (, 66).

Weber (1975 II, 421) is of the opinion that the Evil Eye does not seem to refer to magical power generally but, as indicated above, regarded mostly in terms of stinginess or enviousness of somebody else's property as the referral to Deuteronomy 15: 9 shows, '...thine eye be evil against...' (KJV) which might equally well (or better) be translated '...you are selfish toward...' which clearly infers temporal possessions and the refusal to share with others who had less (, 421). This, in turn, connects the Evil Eye to the concept of limited good treated immediately above as indeed Weber (, 421) refers to the context of Proverbs 28: 22 as descriptive of someone who '...hastens after wealth...' which, in any subsistence society, would be tantamount to a hoarding at the expense of those in need or harbouring a definite evil design towards obtaining something another might possess. Louw and Nida (1988, 291) gives the verb ζηλωω '...to set one's heart on something that belongs to someone else – 'to covet' such as in James 4:2 where the evils of covetousness and killing each other for gain are brought to the fore: φονευετε και... ζηλουτε και ου δυνασθε επιτυξειν: you kill and covet, but you cannot have what you want'.

A possession frequently lusted after (and not specifically in an immoral sexual sense) was another's wife as Louw and Nida's treatment of επιθυμειω shows: '...to strongly desire to have what belongs to someone else and / or to engage in an activity which is morally wrong – 'to covet, to lust, evil desires, lust, desire...' such as in Matthew 5: 28: ο βλεπων γυναικα προς το επιθυμησαι αυτην: 'anyone who looks at a woman lustfully' constituted adultery in the sense that the honour of the woman's husband is outraged (Malina 1993d, 46) where *honour* is, as such, a limited good (, 34).

The ignorance among people in the western hemisphere as regards the Evil Eye is demonstrated by Esler (1990, 20) where he shows that it may even (have) affected / affects translation of the Bible. For a case in point he refers to Galatians 3: 1 where Paul asks the Galatians: 'O foolish Galatians, *tis humas ebaskanen* – where

the correct translation would be ‘who cast the evil eye upon you?’ instead of ‘... who hath bewitched you...’ (KJV Thompson 1964, 199). Esler (1990, 20) points out that *baskanein* would be the correct technical term for affecting someone with the Evil Eye. Derrett (1995,67) points out a connection between the New Testament *ophthalmos poneros* and the Septuagint where the Hebrew ‘*ayin hara*’ or ‘*ayin ra*’ is rendered *ophthalmos poneros*. Specific references to the Evil Eye, οφθαλμος πονηρος (compare Matthew 6: 23 and also 20: 15) unmistakably conveys the idea of envy in regard to the temporal. In the latter a workman is accused of having / manifesting the Evil Eye, having a mean outlook precluding generosity, whereby he dares criticising the generosity of an employer that treated him fairly (, 68).

Louw and Nida (1988, 545) point out the lovelessness / hatefulness of anything even remotely connected to the Evil Eye when they render the meaning of βασκαίνω as: ‘to bewitch a person, frequently by use of the evil eye and with evil intent – ‘to bewitch, to practice magic on.’ Contrary to Weber’s statement (1975 II, 420) above they point out that βασκαίνω differs from μαγεύω ‘to practice magic’ in that the former (βασκαίνω) involves the use of so-called ‘black magic’.

Jealousy constitutes a positive propensity in that it refers to attachment to and a concern for what is one’s own to ward off the envious and their evil machinations – jealousy, then, is not to be confused with envy and its synonyms (Malina & Seeman 1993, 56). The issue of enviousness and the Evil Eye, however, seems to centre largely on and presupposes the perception of limited good. One and every disruption of the social equilibrium can only have severely detrimental outcomes on the survival of the community or group – whereby, clearly, a definite absence of love (as group-solidarity or loyalty) is demonstrated and, therefore, the only way to a social cure for this ailment lay in tackling the root cause. Derrett (1995, 70) sees the teaching to ‘... ‘Love thy neighbour as thyself’ (Matt. 22: 39) or, more relevantly, ‘Love your enemies’...’ (Matt. 5: 44) as the means whereby the prime cause of eliminating such negative, detrimental and potentially harmful deviate conduct may be attained. Derrett’s statement on the positive ‘cure’ for envy is worth repeating verbatim:

As soon as one identifies with a person of whom one is, or may be, jealous, the prime cause of jealousy ceases.. makes the teaching of loving the neighbour and dispersing of guilt through forgiveness by the offended party especially relevant and commendable. (Derrett 1995, 70)

3.2 SUMMARY.

It may be concluded that the agrarian 'world' of the New Testament where *agápé* was proclaimed as the greatest gift to seek, and given as an imperative from God to be practiced in both vertical and horizontal relations, bears relatively little resemblance to (at least as may pertain to the developed parts of our country) what today's Bible reader could possibly know about that world from 'our' world and our experience of reality. Indeed, in a word, as Craffert (1991, 123) quotes Meeks and Malina respectively, it may be said

If we do not see their world, we cannot claim to understand early Christianity...', wherefore we, as modern day readers ('receivers') of the biblical text from the pen of ancient authors ('senders'), need to '...share some social scenario; otherwise the result is noise, or *putting words into the mouth of the sender*: in other words, the result is a distorted message' (italics mine whereby the common *eisegesis* is implicated – P. R.).

The social-cultural facets touched upon in this chapter will (as necessary) be brought to bear on the reality and necessity of love in ancient society as it stands enunciated for Christian communities in the instances selected for exegesis in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 4

AGÁPÉ IN JOHN.

4.1 INTRODUCTION.

Various beliefs and, resultantly, truth claims, exist about the origin and spread of the Christian 'Church' and almost invariably the corpus of Christian religious documents, the New Testament, is referred as authority for those beliefs and claims. For the greater part those claims and beliefs appear to represent projections of the perceptions or ideals about *what* or *how* the present *Church* should be (refer Botha below as regards the anachronistic use of the term). However, what is sadly lacking for probably most of the time, is that the crucial historical fact in this regard is omitted, or at least, does not seem to figure, namely that the beginnings of the Christian movement in approximately the first third of the first century CE occurred significantly earlier than the origin of the majority of the New Testament documents (Botha 1996, 252). The significance of this omission - as regards the completed Gospels, Acts, Pauline letters and documents produced by the Church Fathers late in the last third of the first century - becomes apparent when the scriptural evidence is weighed. These documents, in actual fact, often render a picture (quite radically) removed from what is taught (as is thought) had happened earlier on.

Brown (1984, 15) maps out a possible sequence of occurrences in his suggestion that the second one-third of the first century should be termed "Apostolic Age" and the last one-third designated "Sub-Apostolic Period". Stretching from around 66 -100 the latter is understood as the period during which most of the New Testament documents could have been written. The truth claims referred to above purport to state the way things 'happened' and, therefore, have gained popular belief, but, contrarily, as Botha (1996, 268) points out, if the results of recent historical research should be injudiciously used, it may (and will) have shattering effects on the general belief of ordinary believers as regards the origins and early history of the 'church'. The definite realisation, therefore, should dawn that absolute truth claims of yore about the nature of the early forms of Christianity

can no longer be regarded in simplistic black and white fashion as matters of indisputable ‘historical fact’.

But, and a prominent and most significant *bút* at that, despite the inviability of many of these claims about the early church as well as differing results of historical investigation (whereby many truth claims et cetera are proven incorrect or even false), that could not as Botha (1996, 268) clearly points out, be considered an *a priori* which should or could render the vibrance and vitality of the Christian faith ineffective for existential sense in our day – simply because **the origins of the Church is not the crux but the Founder**. He was the embodiment of God’s unbreakable loyalty (‘love’) towards Israel, and, eventually, to all of mankind. In the end the definitive *a priori*, conversely, remains the non-negotiability of an enduring *agápé*, the *raison d’etre* for God’s involvement with Israel through all of time.

The canonical New Testament documents are regarded as a vital part of God’s involvement with the Christian movement – literature stemming from a situation within, or the attempted remedies for a set of circumstances involving a body or group of Christian believers. The Gospels would serve the case in point: Aune (1989, 59) views it as literature wherein various strategies were used to persuade the intended audience/s that the crucified and risen Jesus is the Messiah, and therefore it served a (Christian) propagandatory purpose. Botha (1996, 253) similarly comments on the propagandatory nature of the Gospels which, as such, would preclude that they were written as, or meant to faithfully represent history in a pure, accurate historical factuality, but were instead directed at persuading people about Jesus or to refute opponents of the faith.

As regards the Epistles the possibility may be ventured that, at the time of writing, the integrity of Christian groupings may have been in danger of being jeopardised in various ways by people or factors from outside as well as internally. The latter would have been the more insidious, wherefore the maintenance of the group and its solidarity by defending its faith against the attack/s levelled at it or addressing the causes of internal dissension would then have been of prime im-

portance. Whichever way, then, *agápé* would also have had to figure to a significant degree in *the documents' raison d'être*.

4.1.1 The group as context for *agápé*.

The culture of the Mediterranean world, the inalienable backdrop for the Christian movement, functioned along the lines of groups and group formations (Botha 1996, 263) wherefore it may be stated that the formation of Jewish-Christian sects or gentile Christian faith communities was in perfect accord with cultural lore. While the Church was not, as such, a cultural 'body', it was definitely the product of dynamic religio-cultural processes in keeping with the significance and the place occupied by religion in Mediterranean culture.

For the purposes of this study the features of some of the different forms of grouping, as the social unit/s within which *agápé* could (and would) have figured, need to be traced. Pre-supposing inter-personal relations in the context of an association or group of some kind, the nature of Christian groups has to be specifically looked at amidst other forms of groups and group formation. Malina and Rohrbaugh's definition of love (*agápé*) (1998, 87), that it acted primarily as the 'social glue' whereby group-relations / loyalty among members were maintained, offers a sensible point of departure.

4.1.2 First century groups and associated phenomena.

4.1.2.1 *Voluntary associations* were to be found in a myriad of *collegia* (Latin) and *secta, factiones, thiasoi, koinonia, eranoi* et cetera (Greek) existed (amongst other groupings) in the first century and, as Kloppenborg and Wilson (1996, 17) point out, the formation of groups or associations of whatever nature is a phenomenon probably as old as man. In time the requirements for membership, rules for entry and standards of behaviour became commonplace, even if quite varied (, 9). Formal organisation was a recognisable aspect within group formation and at one end of the scale the rules of behaviour meant little more than the regulation of communal activities, but, at the other extreme, it could have extended to a comprehensive ethical vision of life as a whole – which may have been the case for synagogues, ekklesiae or philosophical schools (, 9).

Membership of some groupings (synagogue, family cult, trade guild) was considered more or less obligatory while others may be designated *voluntary associations* (Kloppenborg & Wilson 1996, 17). Those associations were Hellenistic phenomena occurring mainly in urban centres among the urban poor (, 17) where, it would appear, the voluntary associations represented a cultural institution playing significant roles in mediating social exchange integral to Roman and Hellenistic society (, 17). The need for these associations, despite the fact that they were social phenomena, is most likely to be found in their *religious* role and function in a society where *piety* was fully embedded in virtually all dimensions of ancient culture (, 18). As regards *piety* Kloppenborg and Wilson's indication about *religion* in antiquity (1996, 7) referred to above should be reiterated: religion was an inextricable part of all aspects of life – religious beliefs and practices were accepted part and parcel of everyday routine even though not everybody or all groups were what one could refer to as 'devout'. Louw and Nida (1988, 532) circumscribe the term ευσεβης and its derivatives ευσεβως, θεοσεβης, ιεροπρεπης, θρησκος as '...pertaining to being devoted to a proper expression of religious beliefs 'devout, pious, religious'. Their concluding remark (, 532) is of special importance (emphasis mine, P R):

In a number of languages the concept of 'living a godly life' may be best expressed as 'to live as God would have one live' or 'to live like one should who believes in God' or 'to always do what God requires'. In some languages, however, the only equivalent is 'to live a good life' or 'to live always doing good to others'. The shift from the focus upon religious belief to good living or being good to others results from the fact that in some religious systems there is little or no connection between religious beliefs and moral behavior.

4.1.2.2 *Christianity as 'group'* is generally referred to in the general, descriptive term *Church* that comes to mind almost automatically when first century Christianity in its respective faith community or group form is referred to. The term 'church', however, would, as Botha (1996, 257) points out, prove to be *an anachronism when we apply it from our context* to the first Christian groupings as this designation only became appropriate when some of the larger groups of the Jewish sect carrying the name 'Christians' gained imperial favour (c. 400 CE) and became a state religion. As regards groups and group formation Malina

(1995, 96) points out the general meaning of a *group* as ‘...any collection of persons who come together for some purpose....’ Botha’s presentation (1996, 263) (also referred to above) of Olmstead and Hare’s definition would suitably augment the *meaning* of a group as

...a plurality of individuals who are in contact with one another, who take one another into account and who are aware of some significant commonality
 ...(A)n essential feature of a group is that its members have something in common and that they believe what they have in common makes a difference.

In the identification of a coalition / alliance, which description also fits the early Christian movements as Botha (1966, 264) indicates, the following features are prominent:

- centrality of focus in the form of a single central ego (leader)
- a clearly defined goal apart from mutual affection or interest
- internal specialisation apart from the possession of a leader
- clear recruitment principles
- density and interactional content
- behavioural norms (common identity)
- the presence of rival or competing units in the environment.

4.1.2.3 *Cliques, gangs, factions* and action-sets, sects and new religions also have their own subsets of distinctions (Botha 1996, 264-266). Some of those features may also pertain to Christianity as, for instance, the initial Jesus group is easily recognised as a **gang** - based on the leader-centeredness thereof (, 264). The group that formed around the Baptist and many (if not the majority) of the New Testament audiences that came into existence under the influence of strong leaders may be similarly described (, 264). The features of the **sect** (, 266) as it may progress into the formation of a new religion are particularly illuminating: Botha (, 266) defines a sect as a faction:

- which shows real distance from the ‘parent body’ (for instance, Christianity from the Jewish origin)

- which lays a claim to the sole possession of true doctrine – not rejecting thereby the teaching of the parent body in toto, but espousing a set of different emphases, adding some, and omitting other elements
- which invokes as authority the superior revelation of a charismatic leader and which may well progress into reinterpretation of sacred writings.

An evaluation of Christianity against these features would make it difficult to conclude otherwise than to accede to the fact that Christianity started out as a sect. A **new religion** might have its origin in a sect and usually only when a sect becomes institutionalised with a claim to some permanence apart from a parent body, can it be afforded the denomination ‘religion’. Christianity, then, was correctly viewed as a Jewish sect and not as a new religion for close on four centuries whereafter it became the official state religion under Constantine (Botha 1996, 266) and only then a complete dissociation from Judaism could have realised – a separate new religion was recognised.

4.1.2.4 The shape and nature of early Christianity, given the sectarian origins and strategies of the early Christian groups (Elliot 1995, 76), may have had a definite and serious significance for just as significant a number of people. Even though Brown (1984, 21) uses the term ‘church’ he is correct in his regard of the first groups of believers as *faith communities*. Within the world of groups and group-formation of which it became part and wherein the New Testament documents were penned, those *communities* held a certain, even a special, significance for the membership: for many of them it could have been the only ‘family’ they had left and their communal nature would preclude a ‘formal’ body of believers. The reason for many people being without family is to be relayed to the high mortality rate during those times where the life expectancy of men barely reached forty years of age (Rohrbaugh 1993a, 5) and many women did not even reach age twenty due to birth complications and with disease taking a heavy toll.

Brown (1984, 21) alludes to a *formal* ‘church’ as regards the strong insistence of the author of the so-called Pastoral Epistles as regards the appointment of church officials and a church structure. The notion that normally accompanies the view

on formal congregations as regards a singular and uniform creed (compare Botha 1996, 259) is refuted by Brown (1984, 22-23) where he states the likelihood that different churches situated within the same location (for example, Ephesus) may even have had different theologies. A scenario of any number of house groups ('churches') with a member count of twenty to thirty (, 23) in a large city is not incompatible with New Testament data, as may be deduced from Louw and Nida (1988, 126) who give the meaning of *ἐκκλησία* as:

...a congregation of Christians implying interacting membership – 'congregation, church – τη ἐκκλησία του θεου τη ουση εν Κορινθω... 'to the church of God which is in Corinth, 1 Cor 1.2...' One thing that has to be definitely noted is the indication as regards membership of a group, organisation or the like, stated in the usage of the term *ἐκκλησία*: 'The term *ἐκκλησία* was in common usage for several hundred years before the Christian era and was used to refer to an assembly of persons constituted by well-defined membership.

The common usage of the / this well-worn term, *ekklesia*, may, indeed, support instead of repudiate Brown's suggestion (1984, 23) that different traditions (for example Pauline, Johannine, Petrine, apostolic or ultra-conservative Jewish-Christian) may have existed side by side, even in the same location, and he advances convincing arguments (, 23-24) on these possibilities which, necessarily, have to be borne in mind insofar as *agápé* as group-consciousness and –loyalty may have been concerned among Christians in antiquity. Given, also, the religious role and function of association and the pious insistence that formed an inherent part of it (compare Kloppenborg & Wilson 1996, 18 as referred to above also), *agápé* would have been especially important as Jews and Christians made exclusive demands on the loyalty of their members as regards both their deity and their group (, 10).

4.1.2.5 *The household* was the most basic locus of organisation in the Mediterranean world (and, consequently, also that of the New Testament) (Kloppenborg & Wilson 1996, 22) where honour, the pivotal, definitive value of life, was embedded in the men of a family / household. The same locus held true for religion and little doubt should exist that the Christian movement had small beginnings which, for a considerable period of time, could have functioned in the form of re-

latively small (house) groups (Botha 1996, 262). Considering the possibility that associations functioning as fictive families may have provided the only 'kin' or dyadic association that were sometimes left to a fair number of people, the exclusive demands referred to above may have placed a lot of strain on the members. Consequently, then, keeping the / one's 'family' intact would have been of prime importance and serious members would have done their best not to compromise their status quo.

Structure and orderliness of the group hung together – each facet presupposing the other as would befit a pietistic, religiously inclined society. On the importance of structure in the *church* Brown (1984, 34) (for which he refers to I Timothy 3: 15) states that, since the church is 'the household of God', the comparison is heightened because the churches normally met in a house, the leaders (presbyter-bishops) were to be like **fathers** taking responsibility for a home. Since households normally existed not only in the immediate members of a family, but also extended to the inclusion of the slaves, freedmen, hired and other labourers who may have served a house (Aune 1989, 60) a quite formidable task seems to have been at hand for the leader/s. If the head of the house had been influential enough to have been, or acted as a patron, a significant number of other people and their houses may have been included as well. The authoritarian sway that a patron held over his house meant that his 'conversion' to Christianity (or whatever faith / religion) often (or rather, mostly,) involved all those connected to that particular household (, 60).

The inevitable effect this could have had on, for instance, Christianity, was that, while someone could have become an 'insider' in a social sense by, or through the obligatory group-conversion, s/he may still have remained an 'outsider' in terms of individual or personal faith (Aune 1989, 60) and commitment. This, in itself, could and would not have spelled any good for the integrity of any one of the Christian communities, and much less for the undivided *agápé* that mostly characterised genuine followers of Jesus.

Brown (1984, 84) particularly stress ‘...*the relation of the individual Christian to Jesus Christ...*’ in his treatment of the heritage of the Beloved Disciple in the Gospel of John wherein he states that “John” did not anticipate (or advocate) individualism as it was propagated in American frontier preaching much later on (refer also to *individualism* treated above in c.3) as it was put forward in the slogan that someone has ‘received’ Jesus as his or her ‘personal Saviour’ (, 84). In the Gospel, however, the fact that in Christ God saved *a people* (, 85) is enunciated in different symbolisms stressing the fact that the *life of God* that Jesus gives is sustained only in remaining in the vine, not leaving the flock (, 87). The principle of Christian dyadic alliance is clear: one was part of the community only in being ‘part’ of Jesus. Clear illustrations of the reciprocal facets of *agápé* are to be found in those relationships, and I would suggest that **dyadic alliances would not have realised apart from, or without *agápé* – love was the foundation of / for dyadic alliances.**

4.1.2.6 *Reasons for associating with others* mostly had to do with finding solutions or benefits. Based on contemporary voluntary associations in the US, groups and the activities they engross in are described by Malina (1995, 109) as ‘...seeking to promote the common interest of the membership, affiliation being noncoercive’. While the common collective interest of the membership remains more or less identical, noncoerciveness, however, would have been quite out of place as regards Mediterranean voluntary associations, as ‘...no-one really volunteers in the Mediterranean’ (, 109) but joined under the pressure of finding solutions in the search for benefits for their primary kin group (and not individualistic benefit) – for instance, consider how lepers or other stigmatised / marginalised persons joined together, enunciated in the (sometimes derogatory) saying ‘birds of a feather flock together’.

Furthermore, members were not free to come and go as they pleased and changing loyalties at will, would have been difficult. Groups existed as collective selves and not individualistic selves and the outcome of a breakdown in *agápé* towards the group with the individual could only result in dissolving or a loss of members and, therefore, inevitably, loss of honour (Malina 1995, 109) and a stig-

matisation of the group, but, inevitably, also for the maverick member. The Christian associations existed primarily to serve the need of members in the realm of the social, informational and supportive facets, maintaining strong intragroup foci (Malina 1995, 109) forming part and parcel of dyadic alliances. As such, *the reform of society* was not a goal for these associations because the coming of Jesus with power was their immediate hope, rendering them apolitical and striving to avoid stigmatisation of the group by adopting socially accepted life-styles. Internal discipline led to eviction of deviants, correcting faults or defects in the individual (, 109) with the focus on group solidarity. As regards eviction of deviant members, that would not have had resulted in a loss of honour as would defection of members, for the disciplinary action would have been toward the good of the majority. The oracle of the high priest Caiaphas in regard to Jesus' death (John 11: 49-50) may be seen in this light (Malina & Rohrbaugh 1998, 202).

4.1.2.7 '*Philosophy*' as *Christian identity* is a viable thesis. Christianity is understood and purported to be specifically religiously inclined, wherefore its identity needs to be stated as regards its place in a world of grouping, groups and associations. Kloppenborg and Wilson's description of a philosophy (1996, 31p.) and, among others, philosophies' preoccupation with practical ethics (references of which abounds in the New Testament) that led to the variety of synonyms for "philosophical school" could serve as overwhelming substantiation for the thesis that Christendom may be classed as a philosophy (, 46p) (see also Culpepper's nine characteristics of a 'school' below).

- Names and designations identifying a philosophy abound in addition to the rather 'common' *hairesis* and *secta* and designations like *agógé* (way), *hodos* (path, road), *askésis* (discipline) and, simply, *bios* (life). In these designations it was plainly indicated that philosophy consisted as much in a person's actions as in one's beliefs (Kloppenborg & Wilson 1996, 33). As regards *hairesis* (, 4) it should be pointed out that the term signified an identifiable group or school of thought within a larger matrix. The pejorative sense in which a *heresy*, an erroneous tendency that re-

present a maverick / deviant movement, has come to be regarded, sprouts from a later and mainly a Christian and Jewish usage.

- School' characteristics lend identity to the Johannine group as Sloyan (1991, 47) points out in his reference to Alan Culpepper's conclusive work. Culpepper has found that most of the schools examined shared *nine* characteristics. As will be seen, these characteristics have a frequent and ample reference in the language of the Gospel and epistles of John and also as regards the leadership. Sloyan's rendition (, 47) of Culpepper's findings is quoted verbatim:
 - (1) It was a "fellowship" of "disciples" ("brothers", "friends"), first of Jesus, then students taught about Jesus by the "beloved disciple."
 - (2) This 'beloved disciple' led and guided the Johannine community, going back to its beginnings.
 - (3) The founder's traditions and teachings were reckoned the true interpretations of the words and deeds of Jesus and the meaning of the scriptures; as collected by the evangelist they could be called a "writing."
 - (4) Members of the community were disciples or students of the founder, the Beloved Disciple (see "we," 21:24).
 - (5) Teaching, learning, studying (the scriptures), and writing were common activities in the community, which
 - (6) observed a communal meal, and had
 - (7) rules or practices regulating admission and retention of membership.
 - (8) The community kept some distance from society ("the world") in a progressive withdrawal (I Jn 2:19; and see Jn 15:18; 16:2; 17:9).
 - (9) It also developed organizational means of ensuring its perpetuity, from the death of the Beloved Disciple onward.
- Joining a philosophy (refer #7 immediately above) often involved what may be called a genuine *conversion* – a radical break with one's previous life-style and the resolute adoption of a new *path*; the almost 'evangelical' fervor that drove many philosophers of the day gave rise to characterising

the joining of a philosophy in terms such as *epistrophé*, *conversio*, *metanoia*. It would appear, then, that these terms were not from the outset religious terms per se, but since the bedrock for philosophical social values (Kloppenborg & Wilson 1996, 33) entailed piety towards the gods (*pietas*, *eusebeia*) and justice or philanthropy towards men (*ta dikaia*, *dikaiosyné*, *instititia*) they indicate a radical change in someone's group-affiliations where religion is not absent.

- Truth, the congruence between what one says and does, is the only safeguard against any philosopher's biggest pitfall, namely *hypocrisy*. Such congruence is perfectly illustrated by, for instance, Luke's Jesus who is mighty in *word* and *deed* (Kloppenborg & Wilson 1996, 50) and Jesus' powerful ethical thrust is not onesided – he is portrayed as the embodiment of what he preaches even if he has to go against the religio-cultural grain of the people he is part of. The appropriation of philosophy was, by virtue of their eschatological preoccupations, more problematic for some of the early strains of Christianity. Jesus, however, was viewed as a supreme teacher of wisdom and the young 'church' put great emphases on radical conversion and moral exhortation (, 55) both of which could not have realised without, and therefore would have presupposed *agápé*.

4.1.3 *Agápé* in its Johannine guise.

The New Testament documents which may well be considered the most prominent as regards *agápé* could / may certainly be John's. Johannine material would then lend itself to test a hypothesis on love. The selection of scripture portions to propound the test were done on the strength of the 'popularity' thereof on the one hand, but also a definite meaningfulness in context of this study. Although this author's (or, authors',) perspectives on, and use of the love-concept were treated exclusively, limited comparative excursions in particular to Paul and Luke-Acts were made as were deemed / found necessary.

4.1.3.1 *The heritage of the Beloved Disciple.*

The Fourth Gospel and Epistles of John may be regarded as the heritage of the iconic figure popularly known and generally referred to as the Beloved Disciple (Brown 1984, 84). Second century tradition held that John (, 84), the younger son of Zebedee (Barclay 1975b, 15) was the Beloved Disciple (hereafter referred to as BD) (also referred to as the ‘Disciple of Love’) and, therefore, the author of the Fourth Gospel. This Zebedee, apparently, was a well-to-do Galilean fisherman (Pheiffer, Vos & Rea 1975, 1836) since it is attested of him that he had hired servants – as referred to in Mark 1:20 as ‘...των μισθιωτων αυτου...’ to whom the οι του Ζεβεδαιου in John 21: 3 would also point: ‘...those of Zebedee...’ - his μισθοι / hired, paid workers. This phrase is invariably (mis) translated as ‘...the sons of Zebedee...’ where, of course, John (not the Baptist) would be / could have been present. It is common knowledge that no mention whatsoever is made of this ‘John’ in the Fourth Gospel and this solitary mentioning where John, the son of Zebedee, *could* have been present, is the only referral to the person who has been credited with authorship of the Fourth Gospel. As regards internal corroborative evidence for the ascribed authorship of this John, the Fourth Gospel is totally lacking.

Sloyan (1991) presents a thorough overview on what has been said about the Johannine works wherein he refers to the tradition (1991, 3-5) that a certain “John” wrote a gospel. This tradition seems to enjoy continued acceptance (even in more recent times) by esteemed scholars such as Hoskyns, Dodd and Barrett among others. Schnackenburg seems to be of the opinion that John’s disciples (and, consequently, the writer of the Fourth Gospel) would have been accustomed to describing their master as “the disciple whom Jesus loved” (Sloyan 1991, 25) and that they must have substituted John’s “I” with this reverential title in the early, oral stages of the gospel’s composition (, 25). Brown (1984, 84), however, is convinced that the identity of the BD as well as the evangelist’s remains unknown (although he regards John the best candidate for BD) despite the weight of the traditional belief that Zebedee’s fisherman-son penned the gospel or, at least as regards the basics, was the author.

4.1.3.2 Loyalty and sincerity toward Jesus.

The Gospel was written to foster and promote an enduring belief (...ἵνα πιστευ-
ητε... και ἵνα πιστευοντες...) in Jesus, the Christ, whereby the Johannine com-
munity could sustain their life (... ζων εχητε...) (John 20: 31). An uncomprom-
ised loyalty (love) towards the founder, Jesus, was the basic pre-requisite and
the sincerity figured by the BD in his loyalty towards Jesus may be regarded as of
pivotal value for much of what was said about *agápé* in the Fourth Gospel (even
if other references to *agápé* had no direct reference to the BD as such). He was
held up for the audience / readerhip as the ideal follower of Jesus:

- ✓ His ‘nearness’ to Jesus had him recline at table with Jesus in a coveted place (albeit not the place of the guest of honour, as this place was proba-
bly occupied by Judas at this particular occasion – compare Malina &
Rohrbaugh’s informative diagram [1998, 220] on the customary place-
ment of guests at a banquet), enabled the BD to lean against Jesus’ breast
where inside information from Jesus himself about who would betray and
hand him over to the synagogue Jews was entrusted to him;
- ✓ He was the only male disciple of Jesus to be present at the crucifixion
where Jesus accepted him as the only person to entrust the care of his mo-
ther to (Brown 1984, 92) - thereby channeling the way to himself not
through his mother, but the BD (Malina & Rohrbaugh 1998, 273);
- ✓ He remained with Jesus until his death, literally following / accompanying
him εις τον θανατον (‘into death’) - Peter declared himself willing, but,
eventually, failed to carry out his gallant intentions;
- ✓ He alone witnessed the peculiar occurrence reported only in the Fourth
Gospel, namely the piercing of the side of Jesus by the soldier’s lance;
- ✓ At the empty tomb he ‘...(alone) believes without seeing the risen Jesus
...’ (Brown 1984, 92) that Jesus rose from death;
- ✓ Only he recognised the resurrected Jesus on the shores of Galilee when
the others apparently could, or did not.

This one ‘...real...’ person (Brown 1984, 93) (in the sense that he was not a rhe-
toric ‘foil’ in the Gospel narrative) embodied the idealism that was enunciated for
the Johannine Christian community and which would have characterised discip-

les of Jesus – a discipleship which rested on and was determined by a loyal / loving relationship and not by function or office (, 93). The strong and dominant agapic theme found throughout the Gospel repeatedly refers to *accept* (John 1: 12), *remain / abide* (15: 4, 5, 6, 7, 10) and continue *believing in* Jesus (20: 31), alternatively, to *love* and continue to love him (by remaining with John's community). The BD, then, was totally different from the *Ioudaioi*, as a referral to the cultic leadership, who, according to the gospel narrative, constantly harangued Jesus by their derisive innuendo of demon possession and libelous name-calling and of which 'Samaritan' would have been the pinnacle of injuriously negative challenges. They were the models of scorn and rejection of Jesus. To crown it all, the *summus* guest at table with Jesus (compare Malina & Rohrbaugh 1998, 220) eventually turned out to be the synagogue agent working in cahoots with the *Ioudaioi*.

As regards the role of the 'Jews' in the Fourth Gospel Brown (1984, 102) points out that the Jewish Temple worship came in for some sharp criticism in John (which could have had a bearing only on the form of worship then in vogue, as it is doubtful whether John can be dated pre-70 with the temple still intact). It would seem, in fact, that the (temple)form of worship was losing significance - the report of the conversion of Samaritans (John 4) whereby they were also brought into the religious fold is particularly relevant – and the Johannine Christians may have been particularly troublesome in the eyes of Jews who did not believe in Jesus (, 103). These people may have been the Johannine community's chief source of trouble and, while the typical Johannine terminology for Jesus's opponents, the 'Jews', would not have been appropriate on the lips of Jesus in his lifetime (, 103), the reports on the repeated conflicts between him and them would strengthen the view that the Fourth Gospel narrates on two levels, the level of Jesus' life and of the community's (, 104). The possibility that narration of the treatment Jesus experienced from the 'Jews' served as a metaphor for what was doled out to the community should not be summarily dismissed.

4.1.3.3 Identity of the BD.

The identity of the BD has, like similar Bible difficulties, been shrouded in secrecy. His anonymity, like other persons in John whose names were omitted, seems to serve a rhetorical heightening of their typical function (Malina & Rohrbaugh 1998, 226). Despite the enigma of who this excelling person could have been, his identity may be considered as crucial to a fair extent as regards an exposé of *agápé* in the Gospel (at least), as he was completely different from Jesus' own people. His attitude and conduct was the model of love and loyalty as the Gospel story shows and quite a few 'candidates' for this honorific title have been suggested in time, amongst others no less than Judas Iscariot himself (most probably the *summus* guest at table with Jesus in John 13); Lazarus of Bethany, the only person of whom it is mentioned in the Gospel that Jesus loved him (Malina & Rohrbaugh 1998, 200). The fact that he was mentioned specifically as one of the group reclining with Jesus at a dinner at Bethany (compare John 12: 2) may point to another, consequent occasion where he may also have been present and a candidate for being the disciple who rested on the bosom of Jesus (John 13: 23) just as Jesus is '...in the bosom of the Father...' (John 1:18) (, 226). For nigh on, or more than twenty centuries, though, John, younger son of Zebedee, has been acclaimed as this exemplary figure of whom it is claimed that, more than his fellow disciples, he loved Jesus and who, in turn, by virtue of his love for Jesus, was (apparently) loved (more than the others) by Jesus. Tradition credited John with the writing of the Fourth Gospel, even though, due to his great age at the probable time of writing (c. 90-100 CE), it probably would have had to realise with the help of an amanuensis.

Over the same period of time Thomas Didymus has been and is still negatively singled out by tradition as the 'doubting one' and widely regarded as the epitome of unbelief, even to the extent that his name is a synonym for doubt in the derogatory proverb probably in existence everywhere this Gospel is read. While Thomas, probably, is doomed to remain the despicable doubter, John's undisputedly accepted status (by many) as the Beloved Disciple is coupled to his steeped-in-and-acclaimed-by-tradition-authorship of the Fourth Gospel. This tradition is held as so solidly entrenched that even the barest suggestion of any other author

faces a scant possibility of being considered, even much less of acceptance. And yet, as John Charlesworth indicates in his monumental work (*The Beloved Disciple*, 1995), the identity of the BD – who most probably would not have been John of Zebedee – stands clearly verified in the Fourth Gospel itself. Charlesworth's treatment of the identity of the Beloved Disciple is attested by the Gospel-text itself of which some detail, albeit very condensed, is given below.

- The Gospel's detailing of different persons' attitude and conduct draws a clear picture of a / the specific person labeled 'beloved'. So, for instance, individual members of the disciple-group like Judas Iscariot, Simon Peter and Thomas are mentioned where they appear in various scenarios either separately or together. Statistics of the Gospel content reveal that, aside from Jesus, the most mentioned persons are (in ascending order) Judas and Thomas. The latter is first mentioned by name in chapter eleven where he exhorts the rest of the twelve to accompany Jesus to Judea (John 11: 17). This conduct appears to some as 'fatalistic': Thomas, despite their previous experience (as the others called into remembrance – v. 8), even while he appears to be convinced that death awaits them there, is willing to follow Jesus into death. This conduct speaks of a certainty, an *awareness* of whom he would be following into death and, as such, is quite alien to that of a doubter – thereby enunciating the reason why the Gospel was written in the words of John 20:31 '...ὅνα πιστευητε.

The caricature of a doubter into which Thomas has been so solidly cast by received view tradition prohibits alternative views on this disciple, as Morris (1971, 544-5) clearly demonstrates: on the one hand he has to accede that Thomas exhibits a '...curious ... leadership and courage....' On the other hand, however, he relegates Thomas to the 'traditional' caricature of being the doubting pessimist even to the extent that his noble exhortation to the others to join in following Jesus even into death is seen as befitting of his doubting: '...it is a gloomy saying and one not marked by any abundance of faith'.

When viewing this scenario through a lens smudged by the traditional received view one is bound to 'see' Thomas exhibiting doubt and pessimism but when his conduct is looked at objectively through an exegetical lens cleared from the centuries old assertions, Thomas, in the role ascribed to him in this instance, clearly emerges as the only disciple who was bound to Jesus by bonds of exceptional loyalty, willing to remain with him even at pain of death. His conduct, then, compared with Peter's, is the direct opposite: Thomas' words and deeds were congruent.

- The only male disciple, who, in the rendition of the finalising events of the gospel story, was reported present at the cross and, consequently, witnessing Jesus' death, was also the only one who could actually have witnessed the wounding of the lifeless body. Logically, he could and would therefore have been the only person who knew the exact nature and extent of the injuries. The prominent point can hardly be missed here: this one disciple enacted the loyalty of love to follow Jesus even 'into' death – as it happened when Thomas exhorted the group to do when the news of Lazarus' moribund state reached them.
- One of the focal points in the narrative on the occasion of Jesus' first descent to the disciple-group gathered behind closed doors, where he showed them his hands and side, was intent on informing the Gospel's readership of Thomas' absence (John 20: 24) (without giving an account of his whereabouts, wherefore it is the *absence* that is stressed). And yet, when he and the others met afterwards (where- or whenever that might have occurred prior to Jesus' second descent – the gospel states neither time nor place) and they inform him of Jesus' appearance to them, Thomas exhibits certain and definite knowledge of Jesus' wounds - before anyone was able to report on anything about what they saw, he cuts their conversation short by his oft dramatised 'words of doubt' that he will never believe unless ...

- A precise knowledge about the mark of the nails in Jesus' hands wherein a *finger* may be put and the size of the wound in his side, big enough for plunging a *hand* into, would have been highly unlikely to have existed with someone who was *absent* from where it all happened. Indeed, one would be hard pressed to disclaim the firsthand knowledge that Thomas lets on to his fellow disciples, a knowledge which, when considered open-mindedly and unbiased by the traditionalised caricature of unbelief ascribed to this man, would lead one to identify him as the person who witnessed it all in the flesh (no pun intended). So, only by conjecture and a complete disregard for the textual content of the Gospel would anyone get by in suggesting that Thomas 'must have heard' about Jesus' wounds from someone else (maybe the women?) who might have been present at the crucifixion or 'maybe' one of the disciples themselves on another occasion (which, for some strange reason, is not disclosed in the Gospel).

- A specific clue from the crucifixion scene lies in the fact that the piercing of Jesus' side was something that could be considered quite alien to normal procedure in this form of Roman capital punishment. Only the Fourth Gospel contains this information wherein it is mentioned as a distinct rhetorical clue as regards the certain identification of the BD. The pricking ($\nu\upsilon\sigma\sigma\epsilon\iota\nu$) of a body on the battlefield was the proper 'test' to ascertain whether a slain opponent was feigning death, but the piercing in this particular instance was quite senseless and unnecessary (not to mention the complete absence of honourable martial conduct displayed thereby) because the detachment on duty at this occasion was fully aware that he had died (John 19: 33). Even though the same verb ($\nu\upsilon\sigma\sigma\omega$) that describes the pricking applied in battle is used here, the force with which the jab was administered is evidenced by the fact that the thorax cavity was opened and, probably, the pericardial sac punctured whence the reported emergence of water and blood.

- The BD was the only eyewitness who could testify firsthand to the veracity of these unsettling occurrences taking place at the cross, but, in-

explicitly so for someone so unbelieving, Thomas exhibits definite, accurate knowledge, identical to that which only the BD would have had, and, at that, without having seen Jesus at his first descent – the prominent fact that the evangelist took pains to point out.

- To crown it all, Jesus' macarism on believing without seeing, corresponding with the intended purpose of the Gospel as stated in John 20: 31, was addressed to Thomas. This also, again according to tradition, is mostly regarded in a negative sense: Jesus is seen as severely rebuking Thomas on his lack of faith while, instead, he issued a positive statement (which actually reinforces Thomas' witness regarding the risen Jesus). The probability then needs to be recognised that Thomas acts as a foil for the evangelist to get the great significance of enduring faith across to his readership within their particular situation and the only reasonable and logical conclusion one could draw from these particulars would be that Thomas might very probably have been the BD. As such, then, he would also have been the verifying witness behind the Fourth Gospel tradition.

The BD's exemplary, loyal conduct is extolled to elicit but one reaction from the audience: ... ινα πιστευητε οτι Ιησους ο χριστος ο υιος του θεου, και ινα πιστευοντες ζων εχητε εν τω ονοματι αυτου (John 20: 31). By a sustained believing 'in' Jesus - in John's antilanguage to accept / eat his flesh and drink his blood / be born from above / listen to his voice and follow him / remain in him as a branch in the vine – a person had *life*, not existence; nothing less than eternal life, the very life of God in / by Jesus' name. Nothing of this could and would have realised without the *agápe* of which the gospel narrative abounds and which, undeniably, had been clearly exhibited by the BD. He, in fact, was living proof that the quality of eternal life, life from God, the eternal One, would prevail and endure even as Jesus himself triumphed over death.

4.1.4 Hypothesis.

In the previous chapter a selection of cultural-social facets from the Mediterranean world were described which would have been peculiar to your normal, every-

day Graeco-Roman community and which would have been characteristic also of Palestine. The purpose of description was, on the one hand, to offer some concise introduction (at least as regards the particular / selected facets) for someone who has none or very little acquaintance with the cultural background of the New Testament. On the other hand, these facets were selected in lieu of the import they had in relations pertaining to life in general within that cultural setting – the first century stage where the human drama of life was being played out day after day and about which something was preserved in writing for people in the twenty-first century. Hopefully, something of what the first audiences could have understood and may have gleaned from what was written to them for their situation may also be deposited with us insofar as applicability to our lives as Christian believers in our day and age would go.

An hypothesis drawn from the cultural ‘world’ in which the New Testament came into being was suggested above, namely that *agápé* was, primarily, the *social glue* whereby group-relations and / or loyalty among members of the group was cemented and, as was pointed out, also in the loyalty indispensable for following of a founder / leader (of which the BD was an excellent example as regards his commitment to Jesus) as, in fact, *agápé* may have provided the foundation upon which all dyadic relationships were built. The hypothesis should now be stated and exegetically tested as regards applicable socio-cultural perspectives from the selection treated in the previous chapter and for this purpose some of the better known Johannine pericopes or text-segments related to ‘love’ were singled out. A fair amount of space above was afforded the BD (who, eventually, figure in a relatively small capacity in the exegetical part of the study) for the relevance towards loyalty / love that was enunciated in his conduct as it comes to the fore in the second part of the gospel account.

The methodology followed by Bruce Malina and Richard Rohrbaugh in their social-science commentary on the Gospel of John (1998) wherein they brought the theological / Christological and cultural data in John together was followed more or less. This source was, therefore, used extensively for the same purpose regarding the investigation on *agápé*.

4.1.4.1 Language as used by the Johannine author/s.

Present readers should not simplistically regard John's language as identical to one and all of the other New Testament authors'. The very fact that the New Testament authors wrote Greek would not, per se, have to mean that all of them had the same thing to say, or had to say the same thing, or, in fact, did so in their usage of the language. The Johannine author's use of language was probably in the special way people with alternative perceptions of reality, an antisociety, use or apply language (Malina & Rohrbaugh 1998, 10). 'Antilanguage' (, 7) is the term used to describe the way language is used within an *alternative* community within the normal society (, 7). The simplest way of stating the (apparently) problematic concept of antilanguage would be to say that no other New Testament author presents Jesus as 'John' does (, 10).

An *antisociety* is a group / body / community that is set up within another / dominant / existing society as a conscious alternative to that bigger society and, as Malina and Rohrbaugh (1998, 7) point out, had to hold their own against that bigger / dominant society in the form of active or passive symbiosis or active hostility, sometimes even destruction. The physical circumstances of the Johannine community, like others' in the New Testament, have been shrouded in uncertainty, but a / the possibility should not be excluded that, as followers of Jesus, they may well have experienced the same sort of hostile treatment and rejection from their synagogue that Jesus received from the tender mercies of the Jerusalem Ioudaioi (Rousseau 2000, 140) and, judging by the internal evidence rendered by the Gospel itself (for instance 15: 20; 16: 2-3), their situation in society could, indeed then, have been precarious and very far from ideal indeed. The possibility that they might have been regarded (and labeled) as deviant persons, even to the radical extent of having been declared non-persons (Malina & Rohrbaugh 1998, 10), would have been real. This kind of treatment would have been meted out by the synagogue (vide John 16: 2) and, concomitantly, excommunication would then also have been the only logical outcome - as they were, indeed, experiencing it - as is alluded in John 16: 2.

Two possible outcomes could have stemmed from these experiences, one: individual members of the community could have contemplated (and, eventually, exercised) the option to break their bonds with the faith community – returning to the fold of the synagogue in the case of Jewish persons or a former faith as regards the non-Jew or, two: the community itself could, in toto, have become an antisociety: ‘...antilanguage and its generating alternate society derive from individuals who have experienced such socially sanctioned depersonalization’ (Malina & Rohrbaugh 1998, 10). They may have started out as just another Christian grouping formed around and very closely knit to the person of the BD and, judging from the liberal use of familial terminology, the community may have functioned as fictive kin for its members as was the case with many such communities (Kloppenborg & Wilson 1996, 13). The strong presence of and insistence on the maintenance of *agápé* among the members of such a community should, almost as a matter of course, be expected as an a priori for sustaining the bonding qualities inherent with *agápé* among members as well as towards the leader or the leadership.

Over and above the synagogue as a, or *the* source of their problems, the faith community could also have been at loggerheads with the dominant society they were still part of over faith in Jesus as Israel’s Messiah (and whence they emerged as a particular philosophical / religious group – compare philosophy above) (Malina & Rohrbaugh 1998, 10). These larger groups include ” the (this) world” “the Judeans” (, 10) and, maybe, even other competing religious groups like John the Baptist’s followers who do not as yet believe in Jesus, or ‘crypto-Christians’ and Christians from the house of Israel and other Christians from the apostolic churches. These four categories were singled out by Brown (referred to by Malina & Rohrbaugh 1998, 10) against whom John’s antilanguage was a form of resistance (, 10) whereby inner solidarity of the BD’s alternate society / group was maintained in the face of pressure from the larger society from where and out of which the (Johannine) group members stemmed (, 11). To a large extent they were still embedded within the society – the others being a society of ‘Judeans’ and ‘the / this world’ (, 15). Within these parameters, then, the use of antilanguage as a manner of opposition to the norms of established language makes

sense in John (Malina & Rohrbaugh 1998, 14-15). Examples of expression in antilanguage in John would, for instance, be the much vaunted coupling of the preposition εἰς to believing ‘into’ Jesus (for example John 1: 12; 3: 16) (and from which, logically, would flow the imperative to remain ‘in’ the vine – John 15); to (begin to) follow Jesus is to be ‘born anew’ or ‘from above’ (John 1: 13; 3: 3, 5); Jesus’ death is described as being lifted up (John 12: 32, 34) and *seeing* Jesus is an alternative, antilanguage expression to enunciate acceptance / belief (, 8).

Reading John afresh, then, should not only presuppose the anticipation or possibility of antilanguage, but also approached with the willingness to set aside deep seated traditionalisms for the sake of independent exegeses wherein the Johanne document is accepted for what is: the Gospel described in an autoptic way for a specific audience within a / their unique setting. This gospel is distinct from the Synoptics and therefore not to be read from an, or any hermeneutical paradigm stipulated or prescribed by synoptic exegesis, or read through spectacles tinted in (or, rather, tainted by?) synoptic hues.

4.2 EXEGESIS.

Having concluded that John’s Gospel has to be read on its own as behoves exegesis done from a grammatical-historical paradigm, the text-segments in John 3: 16; 13: 34-35 and 21: 15-17 can now be viewed separately.

4.2.1 John 3:16

The translated version of this verse of Scripture reads: ‘*For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him might not perish, but have everlasting life*’ (Thompson 1972, 99 – Authorised Version).

The original (from Aland et al 1988, 253) reads: οὕτως γὰρ ἠγάπησεν ὁ θεὸς τὸν κόσμον, ὥστε τὸν υἱὸν τὸν μονογενῆ ἔδωκεν ἵνα πᾶς ὁ πιστεύων εἰς αὐτὸν μὴ ἀποληται ἀλλ’ ἐχὼ ζωὴν αἰώνιον

A literal / expanded translation wherein the form, mode and aspect of verbs are taken in consideration would render the following: ‘for this reason then God *lo-*

ved (active, indicative, aorist) the world so that the son the only he *gave* (active, indicative, aorist) in order that every man *believing* (active, present participle: believing continuously) in him might *continue to have* (active, present participle: have continuously) life eternal'

The words in John 3: 16 have the rare distinction of being regarded worldwide as the bestknown of Scripture. Testimony for the popularity of this text-segment from John can be seen at sports venues where giant banners emblazoned with **John 3:16**'s are displayed; according to the Afrikaans and English Bible distributed by the Gideons to hotels, hospitals, doctors' and dentist's rooms et cetera in South Africa this verse has been translated in some one thousand two-hundred languages while the particular bible-edition referred to has John 3: 16 in no less than twenty-three languages. I also remember a telling instance where this verse was 'advertised' worldwide at a gala occasion in the American entertainment calendar: in the nineties a young American gent, Billy-Ray Cyrus, scored a so-called single hit with a catchy little song about his 'Achy breaky heart'. He was nominated for an award and when he went on stage at the ceremony the front of his white t-shirt shouted from underneath his unbuttoned jacket: **John 3: 16!** At the time I was rather impressed with this unabashed display of beliefs...

The main thrust in traditional exegesis for this verse of Scripture extolls God's grace and beneficence in sending Jesus to earth for the salvation of all of mankind. John 3:16 may well, in these perspectives, be regarded the *piece de resistance* in a worldwide Christmas sentimentality for the inclusion of all of mankind in God's saving grace. I have always accepted and continue to firmly believe that God's grace was, undoubtedly, extended in Jesus to all of mankind, but John 3: 16 is not the infallible proof-text to get the excellency of the Good News across as regards the universal range of salvation made known in the gospel message. The following grammatical-historical indicators as regards the context would bear it out:

- **The Jewish atmosphere of the conversation** within which these words were uttered dominates the context wherein the verse renders its mea-

ning. The participants in the conversation are one *Nicodemus, a Jewish ruler*: an *αρχων* – a well-to-do person, a member of the urban elite (Malina & Rohrbaugh 1998, 81) and *Jesus, the Jews' Messiah* who was approached by Nicodemus during the night to speak to about what he (Jesus) was doing. The mentioning of *νυκτος* could merely be a casual indication of the time chosen by Nicodemus for this conversation, but, then, it should be asked, why mention it at all? It may have been meant as a clue to Nicodemus' reluctance to be seen with Jesus (as it is mostly hinted at with a reference/s to John 7: 13, 12:42), but more probably it was in keeping with *Jewish scholarly custom* (, 81), as their scribal discussions took place at night. Nicodemus' approach by addressing Jesus in a honorific way would have been starkly out of place for an elite Jerusalemite to address a Galilean villager (the title *ῥαββι* was not your casual form of address, especially not protocol in vogue for persons from a peasant background) therefore the possibility of a scholarly discussion should not be summarily dismissed, the more so if it should also be judged overall from the general tenor of Nicodemus' side of the conversation.

Nicodemus' use of the plural *οιδομεν* may well refer to the others of his / the Pharisee group or the 'Jews' seeking a sign. His reason for coming to speak to Jesus is stated: it is about the *σημεια* (v.2 and also John 2: 18, 23-24), but since Nicodemus seems to have regarded *Jesus as a didaskalos of Israel* (v. 10) the probability referred to above, that the reason for his visit stemmed from inquisitiveness – to sit with him in some kind of informal colloquium doctum - could well have meant that he was accompanied by a body of his students, wherefore the plural simply explains the presence of the others.

➤ **The conversation** centered on becoming a partaker of the *kingdom of God by new birth* - a subject and theme which specifically and exclusively encompassed *Israel, the people of God*. Within the God-Jew context of the kingdom-of-God-concept the inaccessibility of these domains sans believing that Jesus is the one sent from God to provide entrance, as expressed in Jesus' oath (*αμην, αμην...*) in John 3: 3 (also, probably, one of the more 'famous' text-segments in John), has a resounding meaning. The non-negotiability of personal faith as a prerequisite in the means provided by the *God of Israel* to be / have a

part in God's kingdom means that nationality, being someone of Jewish descent, does not automatically guarantee being included in God's kingdom and provision. Partaking in God's domain, enjoying God's patronage, experiencing new life by faith in the Son of Man (Malina & Rohrbaugh 1998, 83) has but one precondition: to be born anew (*ανωθεν* - from above / once more), thereby acquiring a new birth status and, consequently, honour rating (, 81). In another (also) 'famous' text-segment, John 1: 12, the same idea is put forward, namely the acceptance / receiving of Jesus whereby *the power to be a child of God*, living up to the name, is enunciated. God is his children's dyad and ideally they are expected to emulate their dyad's (the Father's) behaviour – 'like father, like son / like mother, like daughter'. The words in John 3: 3 may probably not lag far behind v. 16 as regards prominence – as may be witnessed by the irreplaceable status and prominence afforded to rebirth / regeneration in the *Ordo Salutis* of many churches.

✓ **As regards personal / individual faith** Jesus reminds Nicodemus of a very prominent occasion in the Jews' national history, namely the time the people of God spent in the wilderness. The chain of the events Jesus refers to occurred in the fall of 1407 B.C. during the last year of Israel's journey when they rounded the Northern end of Edom (Payne 1975, 407) when the nation '...spoke against God, and against Moses ...' (Numbers 21: 5). Afterwards they had to confess their sin and the bronze serpent was erected on God's word (v. 8) for their rescue. The gist of their grouching centered on the grievance that God did not provide as they would have preferred, for in the same breath that they speak of their perceived lack, they also claim that their preferences are not succumbed to by their Provider. Their accusation of '...there is no bread, neither is there any water...' is proven false by their admission '...and our soul loatheth this light bread' (v. 5). They suffered the consequences of their discontent - God had to retaliate on their slighting of his goodness – but, in his unbreakable loyalty, undiminishing *agápe*, He provided for them an outcome and the shining, brazen snake, symboling the source of their calamity, was also the remedy upon which they had to look up to for healing and, consequently, new *life*. Jesus' reminder about Nehushtan, the bronze 'something' (Payne 1975, 407) that was brandished ('lifted up') for all to see and which served as a healing /

remedy for snake bites suffered by the wilderness generation, serves then as a prolepsis on his own public display in the crucifixion by the Ioudaioi who had eventually managed to have him 'lifted up' in / toward death (as he indicated in John 12 as regards the 'death' of the ear of corn). The stress on the spatial facet of receiving life ('being born') from above (compare John 1: 12 to be children and verse 13 of being born from God) is enunciated in 3: 5 where *spirit* and *water* stand as an unmistakable metaphor for Jesus' dying on the cross. As regards the spirit, he literally 'gave / handed the spirit over' (παρεδωκεν) when he died. Louw and Nida (1988, 266) indicates that the idiom in John 19: 30 infers a willing or voluntary act (which would not be completely out of place in a cross-reference to John 10: 18) and the *water* has a bearing on the fluid emerging from Jesus' side after being pierced by the soldier's lance. Being born anew then, entering eternal life, is possible only by Jesus' death where he breathed out the spirit from on high, being lifted up on the cross and the flood from his side flowed down, that is, from above.

✓ **The national situation of Israel** can hardly be described as flourishing at Jesus' time. For close on four centuries the nation has found itself under various (and sometimes inhuman) rulers from Persian, Greek and Roman stock. When Jesus commenced his public 'career' the country was under Roman rule exercised by client rulers in the person of Herod's sons; the majority of the people of the land may have been living on the verge of or in destitution; the spiritual leadership under Sadducee elites, apparently, was quite corrupt and their religion institutionalised in legalism. The only word that could describe their national plight was *sin*. They were fettered by circumstances prohibiting them from serving their God in truth. Exactly for this reason God gave Jesus - the outstanding fact that was proclaimed by Jesus' harbinger, John the Baptist, who announced Jesus as coming from the Father in grace and truth (John 1: 14) and identifying Jesus as the lamb of God taking away the sin of the *world* (John 1: 29, 31). The same loyal love displayed by God even in the face of being dishonoured by his people in the desert now comes to the fore in the giving of everything God could have given: *For God so loved the world...*

4.2.1.1 *The divine initiative is stated that God loved... (...ἠγάπησεν ὁ θεός...)* – and it is very fitting that the first mentioning of *agápé* in the Fourth Gospel occurs in the statement that Gód loved. This occurrence does not indicate, however, that *agápé* is an exclusively divine value to be found only in God, but the blessed assurance is given that God is not ignorant of Israel's plight or absent (or even idle) in a Deist sense.

Who, or what, it may be asked, is *GOD*? The language of the Bible speaks about God in absolutist terms of a final analysis, the pinnacle of hierarchical principles (Vorster 2003, 9) whereby and from which we may or have to understand that there is none other but, and no-one higher than God, the Absolute, the Highest in honour. And yet, as Deist, Botha and Veldsman (1995, 117) point out in more or less the same context, not even in the word **GOD** everything about and all of the 'godness' of God has been finally said in the Bible, there remains as yet an unfathomable quality of which myriads will confess that not even half have been told.

The Numinous, the Sacred, evoking awe and reverence, the 'Other' *pan-en-theistic* Reality *in whom we live and have our being* (Acts 17: 28), in which we experience the reality of existence, has to have a Name. Religious traditions therefore do not speak abstractly about the Sacred, but name it instead, and in the world different names exist for what people from different faiths believe the name of their Sacred should be. The sacred names Allah, Atman, Brahman, Great Spirit, God, the Tao, Yahweh (Borg 1995, 33) are known far and wide, in some places better, lesser in others. Although, as Borg points out critically (, 33) these names do not and cannot mean the same thing, it is a certain demonstration of man's propensity, even *need*, to express the certainty of what is communicated to and experienced as very real – the impulse to name something as sacred flows out of the experience of the sacred (, 33). In the Jewish-Christian tradition, as it is expressed in the Bible, the name for the Indescribable Sacred is *God* (, 33). The ability to name the Sacred does not mean that man has finally, neatly 'defined' the sacred in the Name as Vorster (2003) points out, consequently man at his level best can only (try to) theorise about 'God'. Language is the medium whereby theory is expressed and when John, for instance, states that '...God is love' (I

John 4: 8), it could only follow from the fact that God acted in love - an enunciation of the essence of God's activity stemming from his very being. Within the parameters of this study Henry's indication (1975, 748) fits the bill in that modern theory expounds (inter alia) *love* as the core of divine being, which, as such, would neither subordinate God's righteousness nor his justice (, 748).

God never acts contrary to his being, so that, consequently, at a certain point in time (Paul refers to this 'time' as *το πληρωμα του χρονου* - 'the fulness of the time' - compare Galatians 4: 4), God acted magnanimously towards his / the Israelite people who experienced a definite and certain need which only he could address from the resources under his control (Malina & Rohrbaugh 1998, 118). The initiative of all salvation lies with God (Barclay 1975b, 137) and the main-spring of God's being is love (, 137) whence this act of love stemmed. From God's love stemmed his mercy (Calvin 1949b, 186) when he exercised benevolence even to men who deserved to be hated (, 186). When this 'act' is translated from John's language, used for the specific understanding of / by his community, into language for our understanding, it boils down to the plain fact that God acted faithful and true to his being and his covenant with his people as Israel's Benefactor, as a *patron*, a Father. Patrons act from, among other motivations, 'friendship' (Malina & Rohrbaugh 1998, 118), that is, benevolence and support stemming from an *unbreakable attachment* - which is, for the most part, the meaning of *love* (, 87). God's faithful and unchanging, stable attachment to his people, Israel, is witnessed for in the fact that he sent his only Son (Malina 1993d, 112). The grace of Love is enunciated in the theological vocabulary of grace in the Bible, all about the gracious favours from '...our Father who art in heaven...' (, 102).

The act of God's love is expressed in the aorist: *ηγαπησεν*, whereby the purposefulness, even finality, is singularly expressed. The author of the catholic letter to the Hebrews stress this act by saying that in time God has spoken in various ways and fashions, but in these last days he spoke by the Son (Hebrews 1: 1, 2) (...*ελαλησεν εν υιω*...). The 'giving' of the Son in John 3: 16 is similarly expressed in the aorist (*εδωκεν*) whereby the love expressed in *ηγαπησεν* is not

only complemented, but the (obvious) finality in these eschatological occurrences is also stated (compare Paul's statement in I Corinthians 10: 11 as regards the ends of the times that have come: ...εις ους τα τελη των αιωνιων κατηντηκεν).

4.2.1.2 *The nature and recipient of love* is spelled out plainly in what was done - God so loved ...that he gave to the world: '...ηγαπησεν ο θεος τον κοσμον ωστε εδωκεν...' The benevolence radiated from this act of giving is perhaps the singularly prominent facet on which the majority of scholars are unanimous (compare Heyns, MacArthur, above).

The excellence of God's agapic deed in giving the son is foundational in John 3: 16. The 'giving' and 'sending' of the Son are synonymous – the repeated references to, or stating that Jesus was 'sent' (forty three times – Malina & Rohrbaugh 1998, 118) is typical of patronage language (, 86, 118). Possibly, in keeping with John's use of antilanguage, these references are 'astonishingly' (, 118) common in John as compared to Matthew (twice), once in Mark, Luke (four times) and also once in Paul (, 118).

The concept of **patronage** as referred to above must be elaborated on. Halvor Moxnes (1993, 242) refers to Blok who points out that a wide range of apparent different social relationships can in fact be understood from the single analytical construct *patronage*, amongst others, father-son; God-man; landlord-tenant et cetera. As such patron-client relations are '...based on a strong element of inequality and difference in power...' and the '...basic structure of the relationship is an exchange of different and very unequal resources' (, 242). Eisenstadt and Roniger (as referred to by Moxnes 1993, 248) summarised the characteristics of patron-client relations (and in the particular interest of this study the following were singled out):

- There is a strong element of solidarity in the relations between patron and client, linked to personal honor and obligations (reciprocity from the client for instance – P. R.)

- There may be a spiritual attachment, however ambivalent, between patron and clients
- Patron-client relations are seemingly binding and long range ideally of life long endurance. However, such relations between individuals are in principle entered into voluntarily, and can be abandoned voluntarily
- Patron-client relations are based on a very strong element of inequality and difference in power. A patron has a monopoly on certain positions and resources that are of vital importance for his client.

Taken from the top, the solidarity between God (or from God) and Israel needs no elaboration. God's unwavering, steadfast love for his errant people is a dominant theme in and throughout the Old Testament and this very verse of the Fourth Gospel is a clear reiteration of God's honourableness as regards his people. The relation God-Jewish people is spiritual rather than temporal while, as regards God's enduring faithfulness to Israel, the life-long / forever time aspect is outstanding. Contrarily, the unreliability, even fickleness, as regards Israel's side of (past) relations is no secret. Lastly, the difference in power and the powerlessness of the recipients of God's grace speaks for itself. What God wanted and had to do for 'the world' they could not have gone without.

The popular (contemporary to our times) idea about God's *agápé* (as was pointed out above) is one of (a) God always giving freely and abundantly and not requiring any reciprocal duty from the receiver/s, never expecting anything in return (compare Dean Van Druff's 'UN-conditional love' above). Viewed against the background of patronage in the ancient Mediterranean regions, God's 'charis', his readiness to be a patron ('heavenly Father') is shown despite the fact that God is / was never under any obligation to simply 'give-in' (Malina 1993b, 85). The theological premise, that God takes the initiative in 'giving grace' is the indication that God seeks the goodwill and openness (, 85) of the person / people who is in need of his favour. This does not mean God is standing hat in hand, anxious for some favourable reaction, but from his goodwill God is anxious for men not to forfeit his grace – it is exactly to these ends that God gives-in: that men shall reciprocate.

The acts of ‘giving’ and ‘giving-in’ are distinctive (compare Malina 1993b, 85) and this distinction has to be pointed out briefly. It would seem that ‘giving’ pertains to a balanced reciprocity, an equality between giver and receiver where social equals do not owe each other anything, while ‘giving-in’ has to do with the reciprocity inherent in social inequality (, 85). Reciprocity never presumes the lack of / no obligations from the receiver to the giver, in fact, it pre-supposes the exact opposite as the primary feature of the patron–client system was reciprocity (Corry 1999, 184): God’s giving-in always comes with an obligation on the receiver/s (Malina 1993b, 85) to reciprocate in some or other form. In John 3: 16 the reciprocation amounts to receiving / believing on God’s only Son, the Saviour from God, the one who takes away their sin (John 1: 29) and in so doing continue to live in harmony and accord with God’s Word made flesh whereby this reciprocal ‘return’ would fittingly express honour and loyalty (Corry 1999, 184). As regards an accord with the Word of God Deist, Botha and Veldsman’s concise statement (1995, 18) as regards the role of the Bible (the ‘Word of God’) in our daily lives is enlightening: Faithful people refer to the Bible as God’s Word because they experience God’s power in the changing of their lives when they live according to what the Bible says; because the Word is / sets the standard for the lives of the faithful (, 19).

As regards description of God’s dealings with his people in social terms, neither the goodness of God’s grace nor the greatness of *agápé* as shown by God, the heavenly Patron, who has the right to expect and demand reciprocity, are minimised in the very least by being described in social terms – fact is that God maintained his relationship with his covenant / chosen people – he ‘gave in’ again, this time with the ultimate gift: τον υιον τον μονογενη. The coming of Jesus / Jesus being ‘sent’ by God in the world (to God’s covenant people) is not tied to a specific time in John – the prologue to the Fourth Gospel simply states that the Word became flesh (John 1: 14) – an occasion or series of occasions which transcend the nativity narratives in the synoptic gospels of Matthew and Luke. The Johanne description, then, has to do with the Word became flesh and his descending from above and returning to the Father. In the Baptist’s introduction of Jesus to

Israel (John 1: 29-31) he identifies a certain need that Jesus was to address: to take away the sin of the world. As will be shown, the Johannine author's use of the term 'world' is not simply a referral to humanity in the universal sense, but, depending on the context in which 'world' is referred to, in John it can mean one of three possibilities namely *the physical world*, *Israel* as God's chosen humanity and *Judeans* (Malina & Rohrbaugh 1998, 246). The physical world is referred to in John 14: 30; 17: 5, 21: 25; Israel in John 1: 29; 3: 16,17; 4: 42; 6: 33, 51; 7: 4; 8: 12; 9: 5; 12: 19, 46, 47; 14: 17, 19, 22, 31; 16: 28, 33; 17: 6, 9, 14, 15, 16, 21, 23, 25; 18: 20 and Judeans 7: 7; 14: 27, 31; 15: 18, 19; 16:20. As regards Judeans, the Judean temple authorities were the source of Jesus' persecution and, likewise, John's community may have experienced the same from the Jewish synagogue/s where they may have been members. Malina and Rohrbaugh's emphatic dictum on **cosmos** (, 246) needs to be stressed here: 'What "world" never refers to in John is all human beings, the whole human race'. Again I must point out that God's salvific providence for all of mankind is not in dispute here (or anywhere in this study, for that matter,) but the dogmatic misappropriation of a (the most prominent!) bible verse and, resultantly, a convolution of the meaning of love is criticised.

The precept, the reason for Jesus' commission stated in John 1: 29, to take away the sin of the 'world', is reiterated in 3: 17: he did not come to condemn but to save the 'world'. These and other references to the 'world' are universally as well-known, accepted and proclaimed as 3: 16 is appropriated as the 'textual proof' / proof-text of Jesus' saviourship of all of mankind. But, is that the 'Gospel truth' in the context of the Fourth Gospel? A good look would reveal that these instances fall in the same category as John 3: 16 because the references to the 'world' in John do not indicate mankind in general / universally (as indicated above), but mostly refers to God's people in Israel. So, for instance, in John 18: 20 Jesus' (and, consequently, John's) usage of the term 'world' as regards his coming to the people of Israel is unmistakably qualified, in other words, the τὰ ἅπαντα in John 1: 11 is clearly identified when he says: 'I spake openly to the world; I ever taught in their synagogue, and in the temple, whither the Jews always resort, and in secret I said nothing' (KJV Thompson 1972, 119) (my emphases – P R). The

secure foothold that Christendom has in European and American societies quite positively results in Christendom being regarded as a European religion – whence the popular, but undiscerning application of Jesus’ use of *cosmos* in John as referring to / meaning the *universe*. This can prove to be disastrous which, in fact, it is, and results in an ignoring / sidetracking of the grammatical-historical *meaning* of love. The majority of the occurrences of *cosmos* in John make it impossible to understand anything else than God’s exclusive concern with the / his Israelite people (refer also the numerous references to the ‘world’ in John 17). The ‘world’ as referred to in John, then, has almost exclusively to do with Judeans / the people of God (Malina & Rohrbaugh 1998, 246).

Inextricably intertwined with God’s gift to the world is the exclusively Israelite role of a **Messiah**. Jesus was ‘sent’ by God, the heavenly Patron, to God’s own (Israel / the ‘world’) whose religious leaders refused to acknowledge him and John’s account of the repeated, antagonistic ways the *Ioudaioi* assailed Jesus (and, as described, even attempted to assassinate him even though it failed) makes it difficult to accept that John would have been alternating in the usage of ‘world’ by referring to the Judeans in one place and the rest of humankind in another, especially as the contexts in which ‘world’ is mostly used make little or no provision for a universal reference. The happenings narrated in John took place within the borders of the land of the Jews – the Jewish people constituted the ‘world’ in John.

The negative facet, that ‘...his own...’ rejected God’s gracious gift and thereby, in reality, rejected no less than God’s patronage / God himself, magnifies the incomparable quality and the incomprehensible graciousness and endurance of *God’s way of doing agápé* (‘the love of God’) shown by God to ‘the world’. *Agápé* was not something that came to mankind from heaven, but God gives meaning to agápé, as it has to be and must function among men, wherefore it would be correct to speak about ‘God’s love’. Despite the negative challenges by the world (the people of God), God’s giving of the Son was not overturned. In all the excellence thereof, God’s love was, then, *merciful* love (rendered ‘steadfast love’ in the New Testament). This value was dominant in governing human inter-

actions in Mediterranean social relations as John Pilch (1993b, 161p.) shows that the Hebrew *hesed* ('lovingkindness' in KJV and ASV) (, 161) renders almost strictly the meaning of an enduring loyalty – 'Because kinship is one of the major social institutions in this culture, and family-centeredness a major value, steadfast love draws its meaning primarily from interactions in this social context' (, 161). As the Mediterranean world was conflict-ridden in competitive power plays, no certainty would have been likely to have had existed about anything or, for that matter, anyone, outside a person's family circle. The only certain and reliable source of support was *family* (, 162). God shows himself as the supremely faithful *Father* who gave, even and despite the reprehensible, repeated rejection endured by the 'Gift' and if one should engage in some conjecture from a 'noumenological' vantage point, it could even be said that God gave his son irrespective of what he foreknew would happen.

Considering the fact that the Gospel narrative continuously 'operated' on more than one level, that of Jesus' experience and the Johannine community's, the realisation of God's immutable goodness and faithfulness had to have an encouraging and comforting effect on the audience of the Gospel: If not even, and despite, the ingrate disregard of the 'world' caused God to change, how much more the members of the Johannine community had a permanent reason to continue to believe in God's only (*μονογενής*) Agent who gives life.

The land of the Jews was fully part of the Mediterranean cultural heritage wherefor no distinction as regards the ideal the trustworthiness / loyalty / love of the family is to be made. Pilch (1993b, 162) reiterates a quite relevant (albeit negative) example from the Old Testament as regards God's people: Hosea reports God's complaint that '...there is no faithfulness or loyalty, and no knowledge of God in the land... Swearing, lying, murder and adultery break out' (Hosea 4:1 as translated by Pilch, 162). Cursing another, wishing evil on him / her, looking at someone darkly (maybe even with an evil eye), withholding truth from a fellow, taking another person's life and his honour (the primary meaning of adultery being the dishonouring of the married male) indeed presents a sad picture of the breakdown in group-solidarity and the consequences thereof among Israel - where everybody

thinks about himself only, in fact, exhibiting an individualism totally anomalous within the national (Jewish) sub-culture and wider (Mediterranean) cultural lore of the day. God's righteous desire, contrarily, is not a religious show (for example, sacrifice at the temple) but a true and enduring loyalty towards each other, unfazed even in the face of ingrateful rejection – of which John 3: 16 may be just about the most telling example. Coming from, no less, than God himself, God's gift was not received by the intended recipients therefore their state of sinfulness, of being loosened off / separated from their God (and, therefore, 'lost') and fettered by many bonds, remained.

Given the reason/s for Jesus' quest for social reform among God's people (and, undoubtedly, no less, a deep and genuine spiritual rebirth without which, undeniably so, any social reform would have been impossible anyway) as stated by the Fourth Evangelist, namely that Jesus was the Lamb of God who takes away the Jews' sin, the obvious would be that there existed a situation of *sin* with the Jews. Sin always indicates separation, being loosened off from someone (compare Isaiah 59: 2v.) and, consequently, 'lost', as Israel was separated from their God (for the umpteenth time) and the seriousness of this separation was so dire that God sent the ultimate Redeemer, no less than his only son, to remedy the situation as illustrated by Luke in the parable of the vineyard (Luke 20: 9 – 16 – KJV). Israel's national situation was sinful (being fettered / bounded / not free) and, consequently, shameful – despite their being able to practice their national religion and some rudiments of political freedom under client kings employed by the Romans, they were in bondage. Their claims to honour, that is their special relationship to the Lord GOD (Isaiah 43: 1-7), were not borne out by evidence that God was on their side (Psalm 44: 1-8) (Plevnik 1993, 97) and, for all practical reasons, their defeat proved God's abandonment and, resultantly, their sin. 'Sin', as was pointed out above, is a serious disposition and a direct opposition to *agápé*, it is suggestive of and in reality consists in a loss of freedom, being bound to or fettered by something that impairs decent living or being in the right relation to others. This was Israel's experience in both their national situation and their religious state of affairs at the time of Jesus.

4.2.1.3 *The embodiment of love was in the only son.* The original *τον υιον τον μονογενη* (Aland et al 1988, 253); *τον υιον αυτου τον μονογενη* (Textus Receptus 1985, 174) was for the greater part in the history of the Church translated as and proclaimed as the ‘*only begotten son...*’ as may be seen in KJV and ASV; in Dutch it is given as ‘*...eeniggeboren Zoon...*’ (Dutch Staten Vertalen 1900, 980) and in the first Afrikaans translation 1933 / 1953 ‘*...eniggebore Seun...*’ More recent translations (correctly) give the Greek as ‘*...only son...*’ (NRSV, RSV, BBE) and the 1983 Afrikaans ‘New’ translation ‘*...enigste seun*’. An elaboration on the correctness of ‘only’ versus ‘only begotten’ is not necessary in this study. Louw and Nida (1988, 591) (specifically as regards John 3: 16) give the meaning of *μονογενης* simply as ‘*...pertaining to what is unique in the sense of being the only one of the same kind or class – ‘unique, only’ (my accentuation – P R).* Israel’s God has no other mediator between him and his people: the *μονογενης υιος* is the sole embodiment of God’s merciful dealings with his people, chronicled in John.

Israel’s very grave national situation (John 1: 29) constituted a serious need of a **saviour**. God is powerful and able to save – as he has done so many times in Israel’s past - and his willingness to bestow grace once more is demonstrated in ‘giving’ his only Son to act as Broker on God’s behalf. Jesus, then, was indeed God’s gift-with-strings-attached (Malina 1993b, 85) to the ‘world’, the physical ‘embodiment’ of God’s *agápé*. God’s gift in the son had to be honoured by his people in a fitting way and the Fourth Gospel is the ‘story’ of the grace of God extended to his people, the bestowal of his charismata in the son, and the reception he received from them, especially the Judean temple authorities. *Charisma*, a gift, holds a certain spiritual mystique in our minds – as Marckwardt et al (1970, 224) give the *theological* meaning as ‘A gift or power bestowed by the Holy Spirit for use in the propagation of the truth or the edification of the church and its adherents’. The term also serves to describe the ‘charm’ inherent with individual charismatic people and upon which they depend to exercise control over large masses of people (, 224). The ‘theological’ meaning of the word is not criticised and neither is the ‘secular’, but it would be simplistic to limit the range of this word to something with either a theological import or with a reference to gif-

ted people in our day and age. The *usus loquendi* shows that it was a widely used term in patronage language indicating a gift to which the expectancy was attached that the receiver will recompense in some or other (equivalent) way. The word speaks of favoritism, a very strong, even dominant aspect in patronage (Malina 1993b, 84) and, expectantly so, Malina indicates the meaning to pertain to a gift given by a patron in a powerful position, but it is a ‘favor-with-strings-attached’ (, 85). It is not given in a thoughtless way – certain and definite reciprocation was *de rigueur*.

From a social-scientific perspective God’s patronage towards Israel is clear as it was axiomatic that God is the ultimate benefactor and patron of all (Moxnes 1993, 257) (universally and not only Israel). Jesus, then, was the agent / broker sent from God as the singular *μεσιτης* who mediates access to the patron and in proclaiming the kingdom. Jesus presented himself to the Jews in this capacity (Malina 1993e, 136) as their mediator. The role of Jesus’ mediatorship / brokerage is clear from I Timothy 2: 5 as Louw and Nida (1988, 503) directly refer to it in their explanation of *μεσιτης* as:

... a person who acts as a mediator in bringing about reconciliation – ‘mediator, one who reconciles: εις και μεσιτης θεου και ανθρωπων, ανθρωπος Χριστος Ιησους – ‘there is one mediator between God and people, the man Jesus Christ’ 1 Tm 2.5. A mediator may be spoken of in a number of different ways, often idiomatically, for example, ‘one who stands in the middle,’ ‘one who speaks to both,’ ‘one who cuts palavers,’ or ‘one who causes arguments to cease.’ It is also possible, however, to regard *μεσιτης* as being related to the process of causing agreement between the parties in question.

As regards Jesus being God’s celestial mediator / broker the Fourth Gospel makes it clear that the son of man came from *above* (3: 13), that is, from God, and he is able to ascend again (Malina & Rohrbaugh 1998, 84-5) because of his descent (from ‘above’). The Fourth Gospel, in fact, is a record of Jesus’ descending and ascending and the implications are clear: only someone from the sky regions (from ‘above’) will be able to return because that is where he came from (, 85). When the Baptist, then, announced that Jesus was the celestial Lamb of God who takes away ‘...the sin of the world...’ (Israel’s sin) (John 1: 29) he was not referring exclusively to what Isaiah (Isaiah 53) wrote about the suffering of the Ebed-

Yahweh (viewed and proclaimed by many as an exclusively Messianic prophecy and therefore, almost as a matter of fact, the only meaning conveyed by John 1: 29), but more probably to describe from whence Jesus came as well as his brokerage in God's service (compare also Malina & Rohrbaugh's treatment of the subject 'Lamb of God' in John 1: 29-34 – 1998, 50-52).

4.2.1.4 *The response to love* is given in reciprocal terms common to patronage language, honouring thereby what was conveyed de rigueur, as no response would indicate a sheer equality (as pointed out above) between the giver and receiver (Malina 1993b, 85). The fitting response is clear: '...πας ο πιστευων εις αυτον...' - '...whosoever *believeth* in him....' The continual acceptance / continuing to believe God's Agent / Broker is given as the fitting and required reaction to God's merciful outreach to 'the world'. It is especially significant that the response is indicated as a continuance (πιστευων being a pres. participle). The verb λαμβανω (John 1: 12) likewise spells out clearly what has to be done. Alert of the possibility of a totality transfer or stepping in an unlawful redundancy fallacy-trap, two meanings of the verb (λαμβάνω) were acquired from Louw and Nida (1988), the first being '...to receive or accept an object or benefit for which the initiative rests with the giver, but the focus of attention in the transfer is upon the receiver – 'to receive, receiving, to accept' (, 572); the second is given as:

...come to believe something and to act in accordance with such a belief – 'to accept, to receive, to come to believe.' ο αθετων εμε και μη λαμβανων τα ρηματα μου εχει τον κρινοντα αυτον... `whoever rejects me and does not accept my message has one who will judge him' Jn 12.48.

(Louw & Nida 1988, 372)

Both of these meanings fit the context in John 3: 16 as the first enunciates both the giving and the receiving, respectively, from God and by 'his own', while the second stress believing, corroborated by a / the relevant verse from John.

From the witness of John 1: 11 it is clear that there was a definite initiative present in the coming / sending of the Word to his own people (τὰ ἴδια - whereby the coming of the Word can hardly be mistaken as intended for all of mankind). John 1: 11-12 has to do with the fitting and ideal reciprocal response by the intended receivers (or, rather, beneficiaries) – namely, the grateful acceptance of the Word by the ‘world’, the people of God in Israel. In v. 11 the Patron / Broker’s initiative is enunciated, whereas the acceptance of the Word-became-flesh shifts to the (intended) audience of the Gospel – what will their response be? As regards *reaction* on the part of the intended beneficiaries, this is where the relevance of John 1: 12 comes into its own. As such, although not verbatim, John 1: 11-12 has a direct bearing on 3: 16 as regards the ideal response.

Faith, to accept, to come to believe, as Louw and Nida (1988, 372) render λαμβάνω, likewise had a strong social import as it referred inter alia to the value of reliability, of honouring, within the field of interpersonal relations, and, like *agápé*, also may be regarded as the social glue that binds one person to the other (Malina 1993a, 67). This acceptance was socially manifested in external behaviour of loyalty, commitment and solidarity (, 68) with close ties to a personal and group attachment simply known and referred to as ‘love’ and the ‘companion’ value of personal and group allegiance or trust known as ‘hope’ (, 68). Acceptance enunciated love, loyalty and commitment, therefore the obverse, rejection, logically, spoke of hate / non-love, untrustworthiness, seeking your own good above that of your others. This kind of behaviour was totally out of keeping with group-solidarity, fittingly enunciated by Paul in another, also highly group-centered and love-directed situation in First Corinthians thirteen, as not behaving unseemly, seeking the own things (‘...ἡ ἀγαπή...οὐκ ἀσχημονεῖ, οὐ ζητεῖ τὰ ἑαυτοῦς...’) (I Cor. 13: 5).

The relevance and importance of faith occupied centre stage in the Fourth Gospel. The initial, ingressive, coming-to-believe-in Christ was of utmost importance, best described in the idiom of John 3: 3, but in the end the enduring, progressive perseverance in faith / to remain faithful, (and, thereby, to honour and

act honourably) was the singularly most important paradigm for writing the Gospel – to remain faithful was both the hub and periphery of the author's reason for writing. Even though the reader-audience most probably also included non-Jews, the enduring of their faith in Jesus (as the Christ, the son of God) was the specific tenet the author had or wanted to get across and he exploited the (negative) response from the Jerusalemite Jews to the hilt, for whoever in his / her right mind would have been keen to be compared to or identified with people who, due to their murderous actions and slanderous motives, even though they professed faith in Jesus, were unmasked as having the devil for their patron along with an eagerness to comply with their patron's murderous and defamatory wishes? The logical opposite, to continue believing in Jesus, was to be the preferred course of action.

4.2.1.5 *The purpose of love* was for every believer not to perish / to be retained within the security of faith in Jesus, fittingly expressed as eternal life: '...ἵνα παύσῃ οἱ πιστευόντων... μὴ ἀποληταί, ἀλλ' ἐχὴ ζωὴν αἰώνιον...' (Aland et al 1988, 253).

The continuance of belief is set out in the purpose clause introduced by ἵνα: ἵνα πιστευόντων: nom sg. pres. act. part. > πιστεύω (Persbacher 1994, 329) in the only son and in so doing, also continuing to have - ἐχῆ: 3 pers. sg. pres. act. subj. > ἐχῶ (, 186). The continuance of eternal life is stressed by the use of the Present Participle as well as subjunctive: Wenham (1970, 162) states in this regard: 'The Aorist is generally used unless there is reason to stress the continuity or repetition of the action, when the present will be used.' Retention / continuance of eternal life is set off against / contrasted with the negative possibility of losing life, of perishing: μὴ ἀποληταί being a third person second aorist Med. Subjunctive > ἀπολλύμι (Persbacher 1994, 46). Ἀπολλύμι is a terribly negative word as Abbott-Smith (1968, 52) indicates the specific application of the deponent in John 3: 16: 'to perish ... of persons ... Metaph. of loss of eternal life, Jo 3: 16' (my emphasis – P R). Losing something (here eternal life) points in only one direction: turning away from Christ (as a possible alternative course of action for members of the Johannine community) would have only one outcome: losing the life inherent only in him and which he himself gave continuously (compare John

10: 28-30 where Jesus states: *καγω διδωμι αυτοις ζωνν αιωνιον...* with special reference to the verb: 1P. Sing. Indicative Active Present).

Life is a very prominent concept in John (if all the occurrences in the Gospel alone should be any indication: some fifty five instances – Dodd 1978, 144). As was shown the ‘Jewishness’ of the Fourth Gospel is a factor that must be constantly reckoned with, wherefore Dodd’s statement as regards ‘life’ in the Old Testament has to be considered, namely that there is generally no idea of immortality and *life* refers to ‘...earthly life and well-being...’ (, 144). This is not to say that the Age to come (, 147) was disavowed but for his audience’s situation ‘John’ was stressing another and highly significant and relevant doctrine namely that eternal life / life is life in Christ which does not begin in the future after death of the body, but is vibrantly and vitally relevant for the present (, 149) – which, actually, is quite logical: if *eternal* does not include the present it does not ‘qualify’ as eternal. The raising of Lazarus (John 11) especially renders a fitting account of the enjoyment of eternal life in the present (Dodd 1978, 147- 149) even as Jesus clearly spells it out in John 10: 28v that he gives (*διδωμι*) (wherefore his sheep receives) eternal life in the present. Taken as a metaphor, *eternal* can present only one possible meaning, namely as a referral to *God*. In relation to the statement in the prologue as regards whence the Logos came and what his descent is and that all life came by and exist in him, that he is **Life** and all who believe in him *are* children of God, people who partake of the very life of the(ir) Father because they have been born of him (John 1: 11-13; 3: 3, 5 et cetera) the quality of life in the present is spelled out undeniably.

The very life of Christ and the quality it has inherent for life in the present, eternal life, was present in the Johannine community and a turning away from the community was tantamount to leaving Christ, not *remaining* in him. It meant the forfeiture of this life and as such appears to indicate a disregard of the very essence of life in Christ in the present. One can only lose what you have and turning away from Christ Jesus (as he was present in the Johannine community) would amount to a physical existence but severed from the Source of spiritual life. The congruence with the dry branches of the vine that were pruned off (John

15) seems clear to me. Although it might find favour with the proponents of the ‘falling away’ doctrine (compare Hunt *sa*) it is fallacious to ground doctrine in allegory – and the vine-allegory was not given to propound the falling away of believers but constituted another clear exhortation to remain with the community.

The dominant theme of Life, like faith and love, in the Fourth Gospel (Malina & Rohrbaugh 1998, 41) is depicted with Jesus constantly engaged in the act of giving life. It begins with his changing of water into wine and ends with his dying. The first and last *semeia*, respectively, serve as good examples: water is an inert liquid but wine is a ‘living’ liquid with ‘spirit’ – Jesus gave ‘spirit’ to the water; Lazarus was *really* dead: in ancient Jewish lore it was believed that someone could return / be brought back to life within three days after death by the intervention of a ‘saviour from death’ when s/he united spirit and body once more (compare the Synoptics where Jesus acted as a saviour within this time-frame by raising, for instance, Jairus’s daughter and the widow from Nain’s son) but of a τεταρταίος (literally ‘fourth-day-man’) like Lazarus, the people believed and clearly understood that it would have been impossible for such a person to be brought back to life. However, despite what their culturally shaped beliefs had them accept, this τεταρταίος emerges from the tomb on Jesus’ call and, even though still swathed in graveclothes, he had a new lease on life. Ironically, the fact that Lazarus had this lease precisely served as the reason appropriated by Jesus’ enemies to kill him also.

Jesus’ giving life presents a stark and unmistakable contrast to his religious opponents whose attempts to take life / kill him (John 5: 18; 7: 1, 19, 25; 8: 37, 40, 44) (and Lazarus) clearly identify their patron, the one whose wishes they were doing. Their apparent victory, taking Jesus’ life, in the end only serves an expedient purpose whereby, being raised on the cross, he gives to ‘the world’ his spirit ‘from above’ (πνευμα – ‘wind’ – compare John 3: 5) and the water of new life from his side while he was lifted up on the cross (therefore, also from ‘above’), the elements from which men are born ἀνωθεν that they might have life continuously (ἵνα... ἐχητε John 20:31) in his name (Malina & Rohrbaugh 1998, 41). The purpose of Jesus’ crucifixion in John, then, stands prominently and unmis-

kably enunciated: he did not die because God ‘wanted’ him dead as a propitiation for sin, but, in dutiful obedience to the commandment of the Father (John 10: 18), he laid down his life in order to take it up again – an almighty deed which no man could ever hope to imitate or achieve on his own - **Jesus died to rise again!**

A proper look at ἀποληταί is necessary. The consequently implied negative outcome of not accepting / believing in the μονογενής υἱός coming from the Father is enunciated in a deponent verb whereby personal / individual responsibility is stated as clearly as the responsibility to go on believing was stated; imperative as it had been for someone, an individual, to look at the bronze serpent in order to have been healed / to stay alive, so it is here: not to stop believing and forfeit the continuance of eternal life. The onus was strictly personal – God’s love was immutable as God himself is immutable and the excellence of true *agápé* was indelibly demonstrated in Jesus. The only true and correct reciprocation was to continue / remain in His love (John 15: 9b). Whoever turned away brought the logical consequences upon themselves of ‘losing’ life. Two deductions may be taken from remaining with Jesus / the community or leaving it: Life may be seen as ‘connected’ and death as ‘severed’, therefore the purpose of the Gospel, John 20: 31, becomes all the more clear – the membership of the community was exhorted to remain ‘connected’ to life in Jesus as it was present in the community. Severing ties with the Johannine community unavoidably meant ‘death’, ‘drying out’ simply because no person had life in him / herself (John 6: 53).

The theological / dogmatic ‘use’ of John 3: 16 whereby the *commencement / beginning* of eternal life, being ‘born again’ in the turn of speech of John 3: 3, is over-familiar. The present participle *believing* (πιστευῶν) and the present subjunctive *having* (εχῆ) emphatically state another fact about eternal life as Jesus is reported to have said – he referred not to a beginning, but the *continuance* in faith and thereby *having life*. Likewise, the aorist deponent subjunctive ἀποληταί, while it would not exclude such a reference, in the context of the Gospel’s premise (20: 31) it does not appear to indicate a futuristic perishing, but a voluntary act of unbelief with an unescapable, tragic outcome in the present: life from Jesus

is cut off. As such, John 3: 16 is juxtaposed with 20: 31, but also in close and constant relation to the $\mu\epsilon\nu\omega$ imperatives in John 15 (especially v.4, 6).

The use in John 3: 16 of the aorist for the negative and the present for the positive, respectively, is significant: a ceasing / cutting off and losing as opposed to a continuance and gain. For members of the Johannine community who might have contemplated leaving the community it should have held a definite and certain incentive against doing that.

The meaning conveyed in John 3: 16 for the individual is unmistakable, perhaps even more so because individualism was uncommon to Mediterranean group-centered persons. Brown (1984, 84) specifically states that the ecclesiology of the BD's heritage is '...distinguished by its emphasis on *the relation of the individual Christian to Jesus Christ*' (italicisation original). Malina and Rohrbaugh's emphasis (1998, 12) on the prolific and emphatic use of the singular *you* in John (sixty times as opposed to eighteen in Matthew, ten in Mark and twenty six in Luke) also underscores the interpersonal dimension demonstrated by Jesus in his conversation with individuals (perhaps this is the reason why John holds a special appeal for individualistically oriented persons such as us moderns [, 12]).

Why then the strong emphasis on the individual? The probability should not be ruled out that this feature might have been specifically directed to individuals who were leaving or intent on leaving the Johannine community. The disheartening situation narrated in John six, where the majority of Jesus' disciples were turning away, may provide a not improbable scenario for the writing of the Gospel as set out in John 20: 31. This scenario is probably referred to in the situation alluded to in the first Epistle of John where members were leaving the community, in other words, not continuing to believe on the name of the Son of God (I John 5: 13 – KJV) (Thompson 1972, 251) and, consequently, they did not continue having life. They are denigrated for not having been true members in the first place (I John 1: 19 – refer Brown 1984, 116). Despite calling someone a 'brother' that person's leaving the community is seen as nothing less than a '...sin unto death...' (I John 5: 16) (Thompson 1972, 251) and, as pointed out below, siding with the Iscariot.

So, in the end, what has *agápé* got to do with it? *Everything*, I would suggest. Remaining (μενειν in the John 15 imperatives) with the Johannine group as the / their colloquialism for Jesus would not only have been a clear and unequivocal demonstration of love *cum* loyalty for Jesus, but also, even especially, would have indicated and promoted love and loyalty among the members whereby their social standing could have improved, even if they only honoured fellow members thereby. But, alas, judging from the general tenor of the Epistles written approximately a decade later than the Fourth Gospel (Brown 1984, 110), an internal split could not be averted and, as a result, the Epistles focus on a secession from within the community (, 110), eventually leading to the expulsion of some members (, 116). The seriousness of this situation necessitated apocalyptic language whereby the departure of former members had them branded as ‘Antichrists’ (I John 2: 18-19). The next step, the formation of a different religion or theology / Christology (, 116) was unavoidable.

4.2.1.6 Summary: In the context of the Fourth Gospel the statement in John 3: 16 unequivocally depicts the quality of *agápe* in God’s unfailing loyalty toward his people, Israel. Despite their sinful disposition, figured forth by their national circumstances separating them from God in more ways than one as well as the legalistic practice of a religion that scarcely honoured him, God did not change towards them. Heyns’ words describes it perfectly: God loves because he loves and ηγαπησεν is the perfect choice of word and concomitantly the aorist renders the ideal verbal aspect to enunciate God’s immutable commitment.

In John’s peculiar alternate language expression Israel is designated ‘world’ – a term also reserved in some contexts in the Fourth Gospel for the antagonistic Judean religious leaders who constantly opposed Jesus. This designation would, of necessity, show that they were no less a part of Israel and, in the whole, despite their shameful conduct as regards the only Son, God did not love them less. The sending / giving of the Son as unique Jewish μεστης, the heavenly Patron’s sole Agent in executing God’s gracious intervention in the national (sinful) situation of his people has profound theological meaning in their national history. The defi-

nite social implications inherent to God showing his love in sending the Son as Agent of his mercy to bring Israel back once more into the fold of his reign and provision stand out clearly. *Agápe*'s inherent, transcendent quality is heightened against the decor of the Gospel's narration on the callousness and ingrate reaction generally displayed by the religious leaders (also designated 'Jews' / *Ioudaioi* in John). Viewed against the grace and truth in / with which God's Agent came to God's people, the Jews' conduct stands in stark contrast: grace and truth are reciprocated by murderousness and deceit, exemplified by the *Ioudaioi*, the religious leaders. Despite the loftiness of their office and the fervour with which they practiced their religious observances they were clients of the father of lies and, in the end, mere stooges of the epitome of evil, the devil himself (John 8: 44).

This verse of Scripture is, almost with no exception, appropriated as a proof-text to substantiate God's agapistic deed in his showing his universal salvific grace in Christ Jesus. No doubt exists as regards God's salvific grace extended to all of mankind (as revealed elsewhere in the New Testament) but this appropriation is not substantiated and borne out by the original of John 3: 16. Instead, the continuity and continuation of faith, the logical outcome stemming from believing in God's Agent of salvation (in John's alternate turn of phrase called a second birth / birth from above into the kingdom of God – 3: 3, also a birth from water and spirit, 3: 5) and resultantly, the experiencing of eternal life as supreme quality in the present (despite their probable dire circumstances), is enunciated over and against the certain perishing which is not stated directly in verse sixteen, but is made unmistakably clear in the following verse. In context of the purpose of the Gospel, spelled out in John 20: 30-31, John's audience is exhorted to continue in their faith. The rationale in the Gospel is clear: If God did not give up on / let go of (his) people who did not deserve his love, how much more would he never stop loving them who received the Son, and who, in truth, became sons of God (John 1: 12)? So, while continuance in faith is enunciated already at this early stage in the Gospel, the dire possibility of a spiritual (even social) 'death' has also to be stated.

4.2.2 John 13:34-35

A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all *men* know that ye are my disciples, if ye love one another (Thompson 1972, 114).

Εντολήν καινήν διδωμι υμιν, ινα αγαπατε αλληλους, καθως ηγαπησα υμας ινα και υμεις αγαπατε αλληλους. Εν τουτω γνωσονται παντες οτι εμοι μαθηται εστε, εαν αγαπηνη εχητε εν αλληλοις (Aland et al 1988, 296).

The passage 13: 1 – 17: 26 is a narration on Jesus' last meal (popularly referred to as the 'Last Supper') and conversation with his friends during the time of the Passover in Jerusalem (Malina & Rohrbaugh 1998, 315). The significance of the meal in establishing status boundaries and authority roles (Corry 1999, 185) must not be overlooked and this narrative contains much on the confirmation of roles and relationships among participants (, 186). The time and date of the crucifixion according to the Synoptics differ from John's who indicates the day before the Passover (John 13: 1: Προ δε της εορτης του πασχα and 13: 29; 18: 28; 19: 14), but, on the other hand, John 19: 14's reference to the crucifixion about the *sixth hour* has a bearing on the time when the Passover lambs were being slaughtered in the temple. These differences have been the subject of a prolific amount of literature (Barclay 1975c, 292), which does not, necessarily, have a bearing on this study, except for the inference that Jesus should be seen as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world (, 292). As regards the subject of love and Jesus' death, the combination is referred to in John 15: 13.

In the course of the whole passage the love theme is predominant, mentioned repeatedly with different foci - no less than sixteen times to be exact: 13: 34, 35; 14: 15, 21, 23, 24, 31; 15:9, 10, 12, 13, 17; 16: 27; 17: 23, 24, 26 – with some of the references a verbatim or an almost verbatim repetition of a former. The structural centrepiece of the passage (Malina & Rohrbaugh 1998, 217) is the new command from Jesus for the disciples to love one another as he loved them – an imperative first uttered by Jesus in the verses under discussion and reiterated throughout the conversation, stressing love of Jesus, love for Jesus, keeping his commandments out of love for him, love of the Father et cetera.

4.2.2.1 *The setting:* Jesus' commemoration of Passover with his disciple group was distinguished early on in the narrative by a highly symbolical act when he washed the disciples' feet, including the one who sold him out. The *agápé*-sayings were uttered during the conversation of which the verses under discussion (13: 34-35) were the first.

Passover, like the occurrence in Jewish lore referred to in John 3: 14, is also an exclusive Jewish event. Torah legislation prescribed in the book of Leviticus on sacrifice and pilgrimage presumes an Israelite population in Judea. The Passover is a high and holy occasion in the lore of God's people wherein they commemorate their redemption from Egypt and, as such, an excellent occasion in Judaism for strengthening national solidarity - in other words love for fellow Israelites. On the eve of his death, Passover also occasioned the perfect setting for Jesus to exhort the disciples to love one another as fellows in Christian faith (although the designation 'Christian' would have been an anachronism at this point in time, it should have been more or less correct at the time of writing for the readership / audience though).

The supposed joyful meal had had a rather bumpy start – as Luke's account of the situation would indicate – because Jesus' companions were arguing amongst themselves about individual precedence and prestige (Luke 22: 24). As love supposes close relationship, affinity (Van der Watt 1997, 558), even congeniality, it would appear that such pleasantries were probably lacking and Barclay (1975c, 138) posits the probability that this very argument among them may have motivated Jesus to act as he did during the meal, or, in fact, was forced to do if any progress was to be made. At every meal someone directed the proceedings (Corry 1999, 188) and it would not be conjectural to accept Jesus as the presiding person, therefore, it would appear that he took the lead. It seems as if there was nobody available to attend to the footwashing and custom demanded that the disciples should then have tended to the physical needs of their teacher, but, probably, they were stymied by competitive pride into a recalcitrance to do anything of this kind (, 139). Their refusal to honour each other resulted in ignoring even their Master.

Even though the text does not contain inferences of enviousness among the disciples that would warrant a discussion on the presence among them of the Evil Eye, such a possibility should not be summarily dispelled as the Synoptics report other occasion/s when the disciples also discussed the same question - which one of them was the greatest. It would seem, then, that this topic may have been a prominent one among them, albeit not strange or out of place as Plevnik (1993, 101) indicates by placing this kind of discussion in typical Mediterranean fashion.

The ongoing discussion may have been coming to a head at this occasion though. John does not give a similar indication of what may be gleaned from Luke 9: 46, but an obtuseness as regards a basic courtesy they should have afforded each other (and especially their Master) seems to be hinted at, as it appears that they commenced supper without the necessary ablution (compare John 13: 4). A critical discussion on the KJV translation of 13: 2, ‘...and supper being ended...’ is not within the scope of this study, but these words actually conflict with v. 4, ‘He riseth from supper...’ – preparing to do the washing. From v. 2 it would appear that the Iscariot was present for quite some time into the duration of the meal and what is outstanding is the plain fact that Jesus tended to his feet also, probably first. The necessity of washing feet had to be complied with as travelling was dirty work (Malina & Rohrbaugh 1998, 219 –220) and the menial task was usually assigned to a slave or the lowest status servant in the household (, 219). As it would appear, the (neutral) place where they gathered probably did not offer the amenities usually associated with / available in, for instance, a private dwelling.

I would not venture to classify Luke’s (or the other Synoptics’) narrative/s on the disciples’ discussion of their precedence over each other under a strict / exclusive honour / shame heading and, *cito cito*, super-impose Lucan particulars on John thirteen, but more than one allusion to honour may be found in the narrative. Jesus’ actions, for example, of stooping to execute this lowly task was out of keeping with custom and would have been severely demeaning on himself in any other setting (where he would have been deemed to act contrary to his status and

position and, therefore, dishonouring, even defiling himself) where he was associating himself with the not so honourable / lesser part (compare I Corinthians 12: 23-24) of his disciples' bodies. Malina and Neyrey (1991, 35) point out that the physical body symbolised a sort of personalised 'map' of the social body where, for instance, the head represents the head of a household or the polis and honour is displayed in 'honourable' body parts. Other, 'lowly' parts symbolise less or no honour and associating with those parts meant a loss of honour. Contrarily, though, Jesus' demeaning himself in the executing of this task takes on another symbolical, noble meaning in John's antilanguage. As regards the physical it appears negative, but symbolically Jesus' actions were matters of honour indeed (John 13: 14-16) (Malina & Rohrbaugh 1998, 220-221) where the / his group is concerned.

Honour is primarily a group value (Plevnik 1993, 96), which, as such, includes values such as strength, courage, daring, valor, generosity and wisdom (, 96). These values are lived in the small groupings of people where everybody knows everybody else, where all are equal in honour and individuals exist by virtue of / through the / their group (, 96). The primary kinship rule, loyalty, would be perfectly realised in these values where, in Paul's exhortation to the Romans (12: 10 – KJV Thompson 1964, 170) they were to '...prefer...' one another in honour (προηγούμενοι nom. pl. masc. part. pres < προηγέομαι, Bagster 1971, 343-344) – literally to honour each other with eagerness (so Louw & Nida 1988, 663) or (, 690) '... to honor one another to an exceptional degree' where προηγέομαι in Romans 12: 10 serves primarily to indicate the degree of showing honour (, 690). The present, as usual, denotes the ongoing, usual behaviour behaved among brethren and not, merely, an occasional exhibition where intent actually lies with boosting their own, individual, image.

Setting aside conjecture (as the text gives no indication) about the why's and wherefore's of the foot-washing after the supper got under way, it would appear that this particular action from Jesus was not only intent on a common, customary and very necessary practice but should be interpreted on another, symbolic level (Malina & Rohrbaugh 1998, 219). Jesus' action upsets the normal honour ex-

pectations and the ordinary, customary, is transcended by the antilanguage and symbolic behaviour of the Johannine society – the values of this antisociety are radically different than those of society in general (, 221) and this footwashing becomes a prophetic action symbolising forgiveness (, 220).

4.2.2.2 *The newness of the commandment* to love each other may be open to some questioning: as it is an old and hallowed imperative among Jews that God and fellow Israelite shall be loved, why then did Jesus call this a *new* commandment? The answer probably lies in the context of this final gathering of Jesus and his core disciples where this command is more focused than previously. Up till then the disciples' relation to Jesus was repeatedly emphasised (Malina & Rohrbaugh 1998, 219) but now Jesus redirects their focus on their relations with one another (, 219). Jesus' death is looming therefore the focus has to shift, because before long he would not be with them anymore and all they would have is the / their group. Jesus, however, despite not being there, would not be lost in oblivion but remain the defining 'factor' in their relations. Sharyn Dowd (1989, 69) sums it up unamendably:

In the Fourth Gospel, *meno*, to stay, to abide, signifies the basic experience of Johannine spirituality; it indicates that deep relationship of intimate connectedness between the disciples and the risen Lord that John compares to the relationship between a vine and its branches. To stay or abide in Jesus is to be joined in life-giving union to Jesus - to live and breathe and relate to others out of one's relationship to the Risen Christ.

True to the form of Mediterranean groups wherein the focus is directed on the ego of a leader (refer page 111) (as is clearly exhibited by the disciples' grouping around Jesus) the group was not closely bound. The closest would have been the family members (brothers or other family members in the group) and the loosely knit relations, generally speaking, may seem strange from a modern (anachronistic) perspective - which would certainly also be an idealistic one, as regards popular beliefs about the spiritual unity of the disciples. However, they were not bound to each other for the simple reason that they were engaged in a one-to-one dyadic relationship ('contract') to Jesus and not to each other. Malina's explanation of this kind of 'contractual relationship' (1993d, 102-103) brings to the fore the simple fact that their squabbling and challenging each other with, for instan-

ce, bragging / assertiveness about position, was normal. The newness of Jesus' command then lies in the imperative to love each other in the same way they were supposed to have loved him up to now. He has already set the tone for their social acceptance of each other: instead of arguing who were the greatest among them they should serve each other. Jesus illustrates this imperative superbly by his own actions in the footwashing where the menial, even onerous and demeaning task assumed new meaning and unequivocally spelled out the (even physical) parameters for their acceptance of each other.

Bearing the fact in mind that these men were Jews, steeped in Jewish purity customs (irrespective even of their 'secular' backgrounds like tax collector, fisherman, political zealot et cetera) and for whom their personal space were 'sacred', they would have been quite concerned with 'dirt' – which, as Malina (1993d, 153) points out, is *something out of place* (like matter, people, maybe even some forms of behaviour). Permitting a slave or a lowly servant, who is but a possession, a convenience (like Ονησιμος) to enter your personal space to wash your feet was normal, but doing the same for another of the same social class as yourself would have amounted to impurity by letting his 'dirt' come on you or vice versa.

Furthermore, the activity ascribed in the Jewish understanding of the hands-feet facet of man's being, his deeds and walk, the washing of their feet in the symbolic way Jesus just did was tantamount to washing away the effects of that person's actions – symbolising forgiveness of 'trespasses' or 'transgressions' or, in another 'foot' metaphor, 'offences' against him (Malina & Rohrbaugh 1998, 223). Jesus' actions therefore symbolised taking away not only the past, but also the future, for 'offence' against him on their part certainly followed, as was duly to be seen in the absence of the disciple majority at the crucifixion (where only the BD is reported present) and Peter's denial (John 18: 26v), in turn, is transcended by Judas' betrayal of Jesus only in the enormity thereof. This symbolism of forgiveness as regards all of them, Judas included, holds tremendous meaning – Jesus' washing of his feet with the others' indicates the granting of the same forgiveness he was granting them and exhorting them to do also. This is in perfect

accord with what he came to do in the first place – to take away sin – and after the resurrection he lays the very same duty, the obligation to take away / remove sin, on them. At his first post-resurrection appearance (John 20: 23) Jesus sends out the disciples even as the Father sent him and he commands them to ‘take away’ sin by the power of his Spirit given to them by his breathing on them.

Jesus’ exhortation to love each other was not a ‘spiritual thing’ which, eventually, would extend to all men, nor did he advocate some ‘emotional’ feeling, but was focused on the fostering of sincere, interpersonal attachment to each other (Malina & Rohrbaugh 1998, 28) in their specific social sphere where loyalty and concomitant honourable behaviour towards each other was of the highest importance. In first-century society a universal, social commitment to all people simply did not exist (like the popularly vaunted ‘brotherhood of all men’), but social loyalty (as alternative, strong kinship term for ‘love’) was to blood and kin (Malina & Neyrey 1991, 37). Jesus’ disciples became ‘kin’ by virtue of their *attachment to him*, wherefore *attachment to each other* would be the reciprocal proof of their attachment to Jesus. This *kinship* is especially relevant as the references to love in John have a direct bearing on the social unit of family – love is the bonding ‘agent’ within the Gospel where inter-personal relations are described with kinship in the forefront. The disciple-group, therefore, was to be responsible for providing the blueprint for love in the Christian faith communities - of which many became virtually the only family some of the members had left – their new, fictive kin. John’s community may be a telling example of this social unit and Judas’ behaviour the archetype of sinning against the group by selling out the ‘head’ to the temple-authorities who were out to ‘get’ him. Remaining (*μενω*) in Jesus (John 15) then clearly and unequivocally assumed the meaning of not leaving the Johannine community – **love / loyalty / bondedness among the disciples was the irrefutable witness of who Jesus was.**

4.2.2.3 *The standard for and outcome of mutual love* is set by Jesus in the structural centrepiece of his conversation with his disciples, the command which is reiterated more than once, namely ‘...καθως ηγαπασα υμας... εν τουτω γνωσονται παντες οτι εμοι μαθηται εστε...’ Jesus’ act of washing their feet was the supreme

example of total acceptance *of* another person and, in turn, also acceptance of the other *by* the the person whose feet were being washed (compare Simon Peter, John 13: 6, 8 and Jesus' corrective retort v. 8 on his refusal). If the disciples should adhere to this excellent standard of acceptance of each other (instead of each one individualistically arguing their perceived importance over the others), the collective honour of the group would be socially realised.

Outsiders, as expressed in the hyperbole πάντες ('...all men...'), would recognise them as disciples of Jesus, the 'head' who was the embodiment of the mode of conduct and honour rating of the voluntary group (Malina & Neyrey 1991, 40). Real *agápe* among members of any group would not only greatly enhance the honour of the group but also and specifically that of the head, whereby other aspects in the semantic field of honour such as repute, to honour, spread the fame of, find acceptable et cetera (, 46) may also be promoted. Consequently, it should be asked what relevant *meaning* Jesus' imperative would have had, or was meant to convey to the reader-audience of the Gospel. As may regard the honour, fame and acceptability / acceptance of Jesus, it was to be promoted because, from a Christian perspective, any rejection of Jesus amounts to nothing less than dishonouring God (Malina & Neyrey 1991, 59) – aptly put in I John 2: 23 (Thompson 1964, 249): 'Whosoever denieth the Son, the same hath not the Father....'

While it is sure to implicate anybody who left the Johannine community, it may also have a bearing on the facet of proclaiming and consequent reception of the Gospel, which may be regarded as inherently a part of *agápé*. Proclaiming / witnessing to the excellence of a patron or his agent is part and parcel of the Mediterranean patronage system and by their unity, exemplifying the excellence and unity between the heavenly Father and the Son he sent, they would have rendered this witness. In its (present) guise the facet of being a witness for Jesus (compare Acts 1: 8) is almost invariably religiously classed as 'spiritual' / evangelistic but what meaning could it have held for Johannine Christians? To really love a fellow disciple / fellow Christian has its positive social outcomes. For the Johannine Christians these outcomes would have been very important – the social marginalisation and even stigmatisation they were most probably experiencing

(Malina & Rohrbaugh 1998, 237) could have been alleviated to some extent, although it may be doubted, judged by the strong oppositional language in John 15: 22-25 whereby the magnitude of the breach between the Johannine community and the surrounding / dominant society is indicated (, 238).

4.2.2.4 Summary: it is clear that the scene for the narrative in the upper room was set by the footwashing event and, as such, Jesus' action is the symbolic blueprint for the actualising of the disciples' unreserved acceptance of each other – a precondition without which love, group-solidarity and social kinship loyalty is virtually bound to fail miserably. Their love for each other would not only be a powerful witness of who they were: people engaged in a totally new dyadic relationship to God in Jesus, but also lend veracity to the honorific denomination of being called 'children of God' and disciples of the Agent of God's mercy who was rejected by the Judean temple authorities, whereby God himself, no less, was rejected.

The pressing question confronting one and all of the disciples (and, concomitantly, the audience of the Gospel) was simply whether they loved Jesus enough to emulate the excellent example of perfect acceptance and association with each other he demonstrated to them as symbolised in washing their fellows' feet? Would they, eventually, become so unified in real love for each other, as the new commandment rang, that the people in their world would have to admit that they *were* Jesus' hands and feet?

4.2.3 John 21: 15-17.

So when they had dined, Jesus said to Simon Peter, Simon, *son* of Jonas, lovest thou me more than these? He saith unto him, Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I love thee. He saith unto him, Feed my lambs.

He saith unto him again the second time, Simon *son* of Jona, lovest thou me? He saith unto him, Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I love thee. He saith unto him, Feed my sheep.

He saith unto him the third time, Simon *son* of Jonas, lovest thou me? Peter was grieved because he said unto him the third time, Lovest thou me? And he said unto him, Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee. Jesus said unto him, Feed my sheep...

(KJV NT: Thompson 1964, 122).

Οτε ουν ηρισθησαν λεγει τω Σιμωνι Πετρω ο Ιησους Σιμων Ιωαννου, αγαπας με πλεον τουτων; λεγει αυτω ναι, κυριε, συ οιδας οτι φιλω σε. λεγει αυτω: βοσκε τα αρνια μου. λεγει αυτω παλιν δευτερον Σιμων Ιωαννου, αγαπας με; λεγει αυτω ναι κυριε, συ οιδας οτι φιλω σε. λεγει αυτω ποιμαινε τα προβατια μου.

λεγει αυτω το τριτον Σιμων Ιωαννου, φιλεις με; ελυπηθη ο Πετρος οτι ειπεν αυτω το τριτον: φιλεις με; και λεγει αυτω: Κυριε, παντα συ οιδας, συ γνωσκεις οτι φιλω σε. λεγει αυτω [ο Ιησους]: βοσκε τα προβατια μου.

(Aland et al 1987, 318-319)

John 21: 15-17 affords a popular and excellent base for sermons on the greatness of the privilege and the gravity of the pastoral care of the church entrusted to ministers of religion. In my church I have sat through many a sermon on these verses wherein Jesus' imperatives to Peter, to tend to great and small in the Church, were elucidated and applied to a newly ordained pastor and the ministry in general and colleagues present were also reminded of their primary task. Probably, just as often, one was also treated to an exposition on the inferiority of φιλω / φιλια, the earthly, human, weak form and quality of mere 'friendship-love' as compared to the excellence of αγαπω / αγαπη, the divinely transcendent, heavenly, dynamic 'God-love' inherent only with God and received by men in the graceful outpouring of the Holy Spirit in our hearts at regeneration. Most often the sermon was applied to pastors who were also exhorted to seek the fullness of the Spirit in order not to find oneself in a plight similar to Peter's where his 'inability' to confess / profess αγαπη for Jesus is taken / given, then, as textual and, therefore, virtual proof that he, as yet, did not receive the Holy Spirit or was not filled with the Spirit.

These applications of the text may have a lot, but not everything, in its favour. A prime negative aspect that must firstly be dispelled is the faultiness referred to above, namely the pitting of αγαπη against and φιλω or vice versa. Louw and Nida set the issue straight in their critical and clear statement:

Though some persons have tried to assign certain significant differences of meaning between *αγαπαω*, *αγαπη* and *φιλεω* / *φιλια*, it does not seem possible to insist upon a contrast of meaning in any and all contexts. For example, the usage in Jn 21.15-17 seems to reflect simply a rhetorical alternation designed to avoid undue repetition. There is, however, one significant clue to possible meaningful differences in at least some contexts, namely, the fact that people are never commanded to love one another with *φιλεω* or *φιλια*, but only with *αγαπαω* and *αγαπη*. Though the meanings of these terms overlap considerably in many contexts, there are probably some significant differences in certain contexts; that is to say, *φιλεω* and *φιλια* are likely to focus upon love or affection based upon inter-personal association, while *αγαπαω* and *αγαπη* focus upon love and affection based on deep appreciation and high regard. On the basis of this type of distinction, one can understand some of the reasons for the use of *αγαπαω* and *αγαπη* in commands to Christians to love one another. It would, however, be quite wrong to assume that *φιλεω* and *φιλια* refer only to human love, while *αγαπαω* and *αγαπη* refer to divine love. Both sets of terms are used for the total range of loving relations between people, between people and God, and between God and Jesus Christ.

(Louw & Nida 1988, 294)

As regards the positive, there is indeed much to be gleaned from the conversation between the risen Christ and the leader of the disciple corps:

4.2.3.1 What's in a name? The last chapter (twenty one) of the Fourth Gospel has generally, and over a considerable period of time, been accepted as an addendum by New Testament scholars. The third descent from the Father and appearance of the risen Jesus to his disciples is recorded here and represents the tying up of loose ends (Carson, Moo & Morris 1997, 138; Malina & Rohrbaugh 1998, 290) where Jesus has to, on the one hand, confront Peter and, on the other, commit the care of the church to the disciples. Apart from Jesus a few disciples are specifically mentioned by name. Malina and Rohrbaugh (1998, 226) indicate John's specific use or omission of names: an un-named person represents a function – anonymity heightens that person's function while, contrarily so, named persons are representative - for instance Nicodemus may be taken as representative of official Pharisaism; Caiaphas, again, for the chief priests, et cetera (, 226). Peter is prominently named here and, as such, can be taken as the representative of the disciple-group even though only a few of them could possibly have been where this occurrence took place. Consequently and logically, then, it

would follow that the mammoth responsibility of caring for the 'church' was not laid solely on him, but Jesus' imperatives would be as relevant for and as applicable to the rest of the disciple corps.

4.2.3.2 The removal of shame: The disciples' conduct after Jesus' arrest leaves little to be desired as they, apparently, scattered. The only disciple who did not abandon Jesus was the BD who, as was indicated above, followed Jesus into his (Jesus') death. Even though Peter's denial is singled out in the passion narrative and the circumstances experienced by the disciples individually would have differed, the absence of the rest of 'the twelve' during the mock trial is conspicuous. So, if Peter could be taken as representative of the disciple group here, would it be conjecture to assume that the mentioning of his name at the trial proceedings indicates (implicates?) the others also?

The probability that the repeated question whether Peter loved Jesus has a direct bearing on his three denials of Jesus on the night of his arrest is not to be denied (so Barclay 1975c, 286; Malina & Rohrbaugh 1998, 290). The questioning would also fit in perfectly with setting things straight and tying up the loose ends of the Johannine Gospel story (Malina & Rohrbaugh 1998, 291). Peter (and, no less, the others) shamed / dishonoured Jesus by their disloyalty and, resultantly, Jesus was obliged to demand (and get) satisfaction in the matter (, 290). Plevnik (1993, 101) shows that Jesus demanded loyalty from his disciples both towards himself and his message, as his opponents would attempt to ridicule, discredit and thereby dishonour him and the Gospel in every possible way. Peter, then, played into their hands by his denial even, if merely, it involved a slave girl. And satisfaction Jesus certainly got (albeit, I prefer to believe, not vindictively motivated) as Peter was saddened ('grieved' - ελυπηθη, 3 pers. sing. ind. pass. aor. I > λυπεω: given by Louw and Nida [1988, 318], inter alia, as 'sorrowful'), which would typify the correct attitude of contrition towards a satisfactory conclusion of the matter.

Whatever degree of a genuine (and, therefore, positive) shame, and resultantly, sadness, may have been felt in the peaceful confrontation with Jesus as regards

his past conduct, the joy of the honour of responsibility expected by Jesus should have surpassed it. Jesus' trusting Peter with this sweeping responsibility illustrates love's tenet not to remember the wrong/s (compare I Corinthians 13: 5: Η αγάπη ... ου λογίζεται το κακον It. 'Love does not keep a record of the evil thing') and, in effect, Paul's exhortation to the Romans, μη νικω υπο του κακου, αλλα νικα εν τω αγαθω το κακον (Romans 12: 21 'Be not overcome with evil, but overcome evil with good') is not only shown as feasible, but love's 'natural' reaction to the wrongs received.

4.2.3.3 *The nature of the task* is clearly stated: the shepherding of Jesus' flock is entrusted to Peter (and, as indicated above, consequently, the others also). The flock would, in Johannine idiom, refer to, for instance, everyone who received Jesus (John 1: 12) or remained in him (John 15). Jesus the good shepherd commits his disciples to act as shepherds in his commissioning of the leader of the disciple corps. Shepherding a flock was not the most honourable occupation anybody could have desired for the simple reason that shepherds were not regarded as honourable men. The long periods they spent away from home and leaving their womenfolk alone brought negative consequences on these men: their women were suspected of all kinds of sexual mischief because, even if only temporarily for the duration of the menfolk's sojourn away from home, they were not tied up in the honour of their husbands' supervision. But, despite the lowly status ascribed to tending sheep, big and small, it is the semantic field within which the disciples' vocation is put on a par with Jesus' brokerage of God's favour to his people.

The conversation between Jesus and Peter (once again – compare John 6) takes place in the setting of and circumstances surrounding a meal. Corry (1999, 189) indicates that meals were the ideal opportunities where status was displayed and honour/s bestowed. Probably, at the conclusion of the meal prepared / dispensed by Jesus (compare John 21: 10, 12, 13) (the same theme appears also in the Synoptics – compare Matt. 24: 45v; Luke 12: 41v), the honour of caring for Christian believers is conferred on Peter and the others. The fare, once again, was a combination of fish and bread, harking back to John 6 where Jesus assumed the lowly

role usually associated with women to whom the task of nurturing, of serving up food was relegated (Moxnes 1993, 259). Sitting at table and being served constituted a greatness / superiority over the servant, an established matter of course in the order of status and honour in Mediterranean society (, 259). Jesus, however, presents a paradox when he enters the picture as ο δῶκων - the serving / servant man, even stating that he did not come to be served, but to serve to the ultimate extent of giving his very life as a ransom (Mark 10: 45), whereby he represents a totally new concept of leadership and patronage / brokerage wherein greatness is associated with the act of serving, rather than being served (Moxnes 1993, 259). This more than once discussed topic about greatness that occupied the minds of the disciples, who was the greatest among them, now comes to a head and Jesus confers upon Peter and the disciples one and the same honour: 'look after my belongings'. One cannot help but to refer to the great and lovely act of lowly service where Jesus washed their feet at the beginning of the passion narrative and wherein the stage was set for the ultimate conclusion of Jesus' love, the crucifixion (compare John 15: 13).

The nature of the conversation between Jesus and Peter would, indeed, seem to concur with Corry's observation as regards the bestowal of honour: Peter receives a brokerage from Jesus (and, as indicated, so probably also the others). God is the ultimate benefactor (Patron / Father) of all (Moxnes 1993, 257) but he expects an exclusive relationship between himself and the Jews as his clients. Jesus was God's broker who gave access to the benefactions of God (, 258) by proclaiming the kingdom. The company he keeps exposes him to criticism and a variety of accusations (which appear in both the Synoptics and John). The problem lies with the fact that Jesus does not represent the center (Jewish elites and establishment) but comes from 'outside' (, 258) and associates with the people on the periphery of society, the marginalised - the tax collectors, harlots and sinners (, 259), even the economically and politically powerless (the 'poor in spirit') and social outcasts, the sick and physically maimed. Jesus was the agent / broker of salvation who came from God (John 3: 16 and also 1: 29, the 'lamb of God' who takes away the sin of the world) and occupied himself with the needy. In John 5: 21-23 Jesus' brokerage is classically stated:

For as the Father raiseth up the dead, and quickeneth *them*; even so the Son quickeneth whom he will. For the Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment unto the Son; That all *men* should honour the Son, even as the honour the Father. He that honoureth not the Son honoureth not the Father which hath sent him.

God's favour was extended to his people and now, in turn, the disciples are commissioned to act as brokers towards Jesus' flock of which the Johannine community formed part.

4.2.3.4 Service grounded in love: The single, specific qualification required for filling the vocation of caring for Jesus' flock was love. Love / loyalty towards the owner would guarantee the wellbeing of what was entrusted to the shepherd. A telling example as regards the required loyalty may be drawn from Luke's rendition of the parable of the house steward (οικονομος) in Luke 12: 41v. This gent did not have it in his heart to honour the responsibility of looking after his lord's people, (and the concomitant honour he would receive for a task executed to perfection), which was his lord's main concern. After a while, apparently because the lord tarried, he began maltreating the very people he was supposed to take care of (v. 45), eating and drinking to excess and thereby squandering the food meant for all of them by favouring only himself. Much can be said about this ill-mannered, even deviant behaviour in the limited good society they found themselves in, but the lovelessness and disloyal conduct of this man is plainly to be seen in his sin of abandoning the wellbeing of the / his own group. Thereby he also turned his back on himself, for the wellbeing of the group was the surety for the wellbeing of the individual. The wellbeing of his flock was so crucial for Jesus that Peter had to give a threefold surety to care for everyone who belonged to the community of believers under his care.

4.2.3.5 Jesus' threefold commission for Peter makes it clear that the duty of serving and not the privilege of being served sets the new parameters of honour in the domain of God's rule. The integrity of the servant is constituted in, or by his love *cum* loyalty for his lord and the wellbeing of the flock is the single prominent concern – although Peter was questioned as to whether he loved Jesus, in the

end his love for Jesus was to be directed towards, even spent on, Jesus' lambs and sheep. The spiritual wellbeing of the 'church' under his / their care was not divorced from Christendom's social situation – love has to be intent to facilitate both.

4.2.3.6 Summary: The questions regarding love and concomitant imperatives to Peter were, essentially, directed to the disciple corps (even though, as was pointed out, they probably were not present at the time). Thereby their shame of lovelessness / disloyalty and abandonment of Jesus was taken away and replaced by Jesus' faith in them as regards care for believers and whereby they would emulate his loving care. Care, in the sense of serving, is not to be regarded as shameful for men, but within an atmosphere of love servitude amounts to honourableness for no less than a brokerage of God's love and favour is commissioned to the disciples. This responsibility has to be dispensed in the sincerity of love for the Patron – 'Do you love me? – Look after my sheep, then, and love them as you love me...'

4.3 CONCLUSION.

John's first mention of love is that God never stopped loving his people despite even their sinful state, wherefore he gave the Son to change their situation. In Jesus' fellowship with his disciples he set the perfect example of how fellows in the same group must conduct themselves towards each other and lastly love is imperative for stewards in Jesus' service for the faithful nurturing of others who also belong to him. Love has come full circle – from John 3: 16, the very first mentioning of *agápé* in the Fourth Gospel whereby it is stated that God loved, right through to the last chapter where faithful service is required in looking after them that belong to Jesus' flock, it is clear that *agápé* in John is not a universal free-for-all, unconditional, esoteric and objective heavenly 'entity' but an exclusively directed, unchanging, self-sacrificing, powerful force that works in the world among people. *Agápé* remains *agápé* irrespective of the doer - whether it is God or man. **Love in John is something very real and finds expression in down to earth, social conduct in everyday human affairs.**

In the next (and last) chapter a summary of the work done will be presented as an enunciation of the reality of love in everyday life in the Gospel of John. I will also present some critical remarks with regard to the shortages, even lacunae of social-scientific / historical-cultural sources for use by pastors.

CHAPTER 5.

CONCLUSION:

CAN ‘AGÁPÉ-LOVE’ REALLY BE REAL?

5.1 IS ‘LOVE’ REALLY LÓVE?

The paradigm for the present study was stated more or less in a critical question whether *agápé* as depicted in the New Testament is really *lóve* – in other words, is there, especially in our age, a clear understanding of this prominent biblical concept in lieu of the fact that it seems as if love had been relegated a back row in theology in preference to a dogma of a future and eternal joy in heaven or torture in hell? (Mathews 1971, 52). Inevitably, if love is not recognised, no, rather, *honoured*, the effect it was meant for and which it has to have among people during their stay on earth has to diminish, even disappear. It is indeed an astounding possibility that love probably does not figure quite as prominently as it must / should in many instances in the Church and among Christians, but, nevertheless, it simply remains true that no worship or communion or true and faithful life as a Christian is possible without love. Only when love is ‘done’, when love ‘happens’ whether in / by the church, among Christians in their everyday lives or towards those that are still outside (as Paul refers to people without Christ) an irrefutable witness is rendered of God’s presence and the veracity of Jesus’ Messiahship. Substantiation that God is not remote or ‘away’ in a pan-deistic sense, but dynamically present in the pan-en-theistic sense can only be given in / by the sure witness of *agápé*, wherefore the simple action remains to prove that so-called ‘biblical’ / ‘*agápé*-love’ can really be real. The other, maybe the downside of the matter, is the question whether it can be proved ...

5.2 FINDINGS, OBSERVATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS.

5.2.1 Theological and popular views.

In chapter one the different perspectives on so-called ‘biblical / God-love / *agápe*-love’ were investigated and it was found that, on the one hand, there is some common ground, but on the other also more than enough divergencies. A

prominent stance, that forced religiousness does not enjoy God's favour because only love can bring forth true reverence, is especially relevant. Some perspectives focus on the notion that *agápé* is to be regarded as strictly theological, *it* is a something only with God and man can only receive *it* from God who mediates *it* by the Spirit only as an eschatological gift. There is no doubt that love truly comes to fruition when it is done as God prefers. The unworthiness of receivers enunciates God's *mercy* and irresistible goodness – which is also true, and, likewise, where love is 'done' by the Spirit in / through the believer, something irresistibly happens because it is an emulation of God. Just as true is the fact that love becomes real when it is enacted in a deed and only deeds of sincerity would could / would qualify as agapistic. Love lets a person 'walk in the light' with definite (although not exclusive) reference to religiosity whereby the cultic behaviour / religious conduct comes to the fore. It is the inner attitude that satisfies God's demands, both as regards God and neighbour. It is impossible for man to be an equal 'partner' with God, but man must be a *real* partner – thereby the strong bearing that love also has on charity can come to fruition, as charity may / should be seen as synonymous to love – as it found expression in English. Furthermore the compassion present in love has to realise especially among members of the community of faith, which, as such, does not convey the condonement of wrong by forgiveness but does not shirk the responsibility to mete out just retribution where justice, in loyalty to and defense of those who were wronged, has to have its way. Love, in all the wonderful mercifulness that characterises it, is never unjust especially as regards those who are to be protected and assisted.

A definite congruence between the theological and popular views was found in the notion that so-called *agápé*-love is regarded as strictly a theological concept – *agápé* is something alien to man and without God's merciful dealings with men there can be no love. God's fatherhood of the believer would, then, also 'acquire' for everyone the sentimental privilege to call God 'Daddy' – if Jesus could, so may we also – so it is said.

The view that God is forever the graceful Giver, dispensing love and everything else in a totally unconditional way, expecting nothing in return as man, anyway,

cannot reciprocate fittingly, was disclosed as of probably very recent origin. The so-called un-conditional facet of God-love appears then to be a quite young dogma that may probably have originated among young Americans in the sixties hippie-era from where it was ‘theologised’ and carried over into the Christian message. *Agápé*, so-called ‘God-love’ (as opposed to and contrasted to *filia*, mere ‘human love’), is then, as the result, defined as giving without expecting anything in return and, so it is said, since Christians are God’s children, that defines the way in which love is to be practiced: everyone always dispensing love but not to expect anything in return as it is more blessed to give than to receive. The kind of euphoria that is thus ascribed to love should of course, ideally also make everyone a constant receiver of ‘feel-good-*agápé*’, but, in reality, that does not happen because real love is tough – it is much easier (and oh, so go-o-o-od for the ego) to be outwardly ‘religious’ than to ‘do’ love from the very heart and to show real love to people in places where nobody ever notices it.

To conclude it should be said then that no one could really be blamed for not really understanding in our time what love is or is supposed to (let one) do because as many preachers there are, so many sermons you hear and to boot one and all get their message from the same Bible. One could, indeed, be sceptical as regards the prospects of getting a clear answer to the question whether ‘biblical’ love can really be real.

5.2.2 Lexicographical particulars.

As regards this facet of the study it was found that the historical facts about the *αγαπ*-stemmed words generally indicate that it was an obscure group of words in antiquity and with a weak and variable meaning, mostly indicating some external attitude; where the inward is concerned, the verb denoted choice or preference, even strict exclusivity, as regards one’s own (an aspect that came through strongly in the exegesis of John 3: 16). The now virtually ‘famous’ New Testament noun *agápé* was completely unknown in classical Greek, it may not even have existed (as was actually attested in the first century C E) and it was only through its usage in the Septuagint that anything became of *αγαπη* at all. Both the verb

αγαπαω and noun αγαπη have since become ‘characteristic’ words in Christianity: Christianity is the religion wherein *love* should have pride of place.

With regard to lexicographical material we can conclude that the available sources for general usage are relatively old. Even though these works explain usage and (consequently some indications of) meaning et cetera of words in a ‘Bible’ language, in this case the New Testament’s, the sources undisputably reflect the perspectives of the era in which it originated, the theological ‘heydays’ (if there can be such a thing!) of a previous age and the overarching, concurrent (theological) emphases current therein. Voluminous entries on love embellished with row upon row of text-critical and extra-biblical data in theological dictionaries contain much over a wide front but nevertheless do little to dispel the ambiguity of the subject. Opinions aplenty are on offer as regards usage of the concept of love in the Old and New Testament but in the end not much of specific or definite value is said – one lexicographer stated conclusively that there is but little light upon its distinctive meaning in the New Testament. The clearest statement about (and therefore indicating what should be done through / in / by love is to be found in probably the most recent lexicon that is based on semantic domains – αγαπη is sincere appreciation and high regard and results in congruent behaviour: in love there is no malevolence towards those loved. This is the simple, unembellished meaning of love in its biblical usage whether it is stated of God or man whereby unwavering loyalty in relations are stated, reaffirmed and strengthened and the shallow sentimentality (and the equally shallow emotionalism that often accompanies it) that is popularly touted as virtually part and parcel of ‘true agape-love’ is simply not substantiated.

The lexicon based on semantics of New Testament Greek is, compared to the other works consulted in this study, much newer and the contents of better value in respect of its indication of the usage and meaning of words. Although Louw and Nida’s work is very valuable, apart from it there is, overall, a definite shortcoming as regards the wealth of able scholarly work that has been done since Louw and Nida (which has turned fifteen already!) on probably the most important perspective for serious exegesis, namely a definitive view on the cultural

world of everyday life in Biblical times of both Testaments. Everything that made that world ‘tick’ need to be clearly spelled out and comprehensively reflected in lexicographical sources that should be available for the basic and indispensable first level treatment of the biblical language/s for thorough and responsible exegesis. The available sources from scholars (referred to above) in these fields mostly treat a certain cultural aspect or fills an explanatory gap, but clear statement of the *usus loquendic* meaning of words and concepts in the socio-cultural usage of, for instance, the Greek used in the first century, is not available. I am convinced that, despite (sometimes legitimate) criticism, the use of the indispensable tool available in social-scientific data for a joint-application in grammatical-historical exegesis is the way to follow if one would let the New Testament have its say, to let it ‘speak’ in our time. Instead of conducting ‘theological’ or ‘doctrinal’ or ‘denominational’ or even ‘credal’ conversations from a pulpit with the content of the conversation being determined and dominated by whatever denominational / traditional paradigm / dogmatic-theological or credo-based stance to arrive at a foregone, Received View-conclusion, the Word of God can hereby come into its own right.

5.2.3 Observations based on exegesis.

The bestknown verse of Scripture, John 3: 16, does not say what has for ages been proclaimed that it says. In the course of many centuries, maybe a millennium or more, God has been praised for his ‘unconditional’ love for and towards all of humanity in the giving of the Son to the world so that everyone who commences to believe in him (‘receive’ him as personal Saviour in a John 1: 12 fashion) / come to faith / become a Christian is saved from an eternal perishing away from God in Hades, and, therefore, has eternal life. This neverending (but for this life apparently dormant) futuristic life, which commences when someone dies and goes to heaven, is like an object – a *something* to receive and therefore *hâve*. The reason for God’s love is to dispense this *life*. This, more or less, appears to be the most common understanding and belief in the meaning of / message on John 3: 16 and wherein the interpretation of the terms *world*, *believe*, *perish* or *eternal life* is especially relevant.

A normal grammatical-historical exegesis of the text wherein the usage of the words of the original language is taken seriously does not support these views. In the context of the text, the first and foremost document in the Bible where these words have and transmit their meaning, and the exigence for the writing of the Gospel, John 3: 16 presents both a reassuring statement and serious warning to believers in the Johannine community. They are exhorted to remain with the community (that is, alternatively expressed, to continue to believe in the only Son) because only by this ongoing faith can eternal life be continually received. A branch that is no longer part of the vine cannot receive the lifegiving and fruit-bearing sap from the vine. Although the futuristic and eternal aspect should and cannot, ever, be denied, the 'life' referred to here has probably more to do with their immediate circumstances where an unbroken tie with Christ renders a life of quality despite whatever circumstances they may have experienced in their society.

This bestknown 'soteriological' adage then quite rightly states the sublimity of God's immutability as regards his righteousness and love and the qualities of love, but the Johannine statement on this has been taken from its textual context, that is, the text / document in which it has its specific meaning, and relegated to the function it now fills. The most basic exegetical work, parsing the wording and defining the syntax of the original in context with the text of which it is indelibly a part, clearly seems to have been ignored for goodness knows how long. With some fancy exegetical footwork these words can, doubtlessly, be applied to the proclamation of a universal soteriology, but in its context I find it hard, no, rather, impossible to reconcile it with what it is made to say – John 3: 16 is not the proof-text per excellence for universal salvation. It has been dealt with in some detail above, but the following statements *cum* questions need to be reiterated on what could be considered the real meaning of John 3: 16:

- The persistence in understanding 'world' as referring to the universe / all of mankind both in the immediate and total context of the Fourth Gospel renders proof of the (forced?) dogmatic use that the Bible is often subjected to in the unhermeneutical sentence approach where text-segments are taken from their context and made to say whatever needs to be said. It is

virtually impossible to accept that this pertinent and prominent fact as regards 'world' has not been noticed. Malina and Rohrbaugh's fresh and exegetically correct interpretation (1998, 86) of the term 'world' in John has not received the recognition it deserves. It would appear, on the one hand, as if the 'old hat' view of *cosmos* as referring to universal mankind has been passed along from commentator to commentator in an offhand, unhermeneutical manner, but on the other, an almost sinister possibility also pokes out its head: as if the real meaning that the coming of Jesus, initially, was for the people of God exclusively, is suppressed. The virtual total silence that exists on the true grammatical meaning spelled out clearly and unequivocally in the original wording of this widely known text makes it difficult to believe the contrary. In a plain and ordinary exegesis wherein the normal hermeneutical questions were merely taken seriously, namely who wrote to whom and why; what is written, what did it mean / convey to the audience in the context of the particular document and their circumstances and how applicable was it, or was it applied to their situation, the meaning of *world*, as referring to the nation Israel, is as prominent as can be. As regards the traditional / Received View interpretation of this well-known text-segment my consequent research in equally well-known (and I would presume fairly to quite popular) exegetical sources only served to prove that the traditional interpretation (and, certainly proclamation by all who make use of those sources) of a worldwide / universal soteriological / evangelistic purpose is common to all and it has been like that over a very long period (compare [chronologically] Henry 1721, 888; Guthrie, Mottyer, Stibbs & Wiseman 1970, 937; Burns 1974, 111; Barclay 1975b, 137-138; Guthrie 1975, 636; Hastings 1976, 191-192; Lange 1976, 133-134; Dodd 1978, 197, 371). Barclay (1975b, 137) even stipulates about the *world*: 'It tells us of the width of the love of God. It was *the world* that God so loved. It was not a nation...' (my emphasis – P R) from which it would seem that the directedness of Jesus' mission, that he came for the people of God, has not gone completely unnoticed, but was / is not considered as binding for exegesis and, therefore, simply seems to be denied. It needs, then, to be asked whether the Gospel would

be rendered irrelevant / powerless for the rest of the world if God visited only his people (the Jews) in their sinful state? Their sin remained (John 9: 41) as result of their rejection of God's Grace and it was exactly their rejection of God's agapistic outreach to *them* that eventually, also, availed salvation to mankind (as it is so clearly stated elsewhere in the New Testament). Since the Jews' rejection of God's ultimate Gift did not cause God to withhold his Grace to all peoples, there has therefore never existed a need to preserve a silence on or convolute what was actually written in the Fourth Gospel as regards God's integrity as he demonstrated it in true and unchanging love for his people.

- The individual / respective aspect of the verbs *believe*, *have* and *perish* likewise tells a radically different story. As regards the former two, both are present active verbs which cannot and does not indicate the beginning of (Christian) faith / acquiring of eternal life and / or, merely, indicate the continuance of eternal life *after* becoming a Jesus-follower, but exactly the opposite: *remaining* faithful and thereby *having* life. When it is read in conjunction with John 20: 31, the tenet for the Gospel in the first place, the serious injunction issued by these verbs to remain faithful can not slip by unnoticed. As regards the aorist for the negative verb, if it was meant to convey what is said that it does, namely to indicate an eternal perishing, it is specifically the *wrong* choice because the (neverending, continuous) present would be the logical choice to carry across the terrible and terrifying meaning of an eternity without / away from God.
- *Eternal life* seems to be often (even mostly) simplistically regarded as an everlasting but as yet unknown form of existence / 'life' that only commences at death. While this as yet unknown facet of eternal life is not in dispute the exclusivistic beliefs and concurrent proclamation as such must be criticised in the question whether the Johannine author(s) was merely employing some fatalistic and escapist mode of rhetoric in encouraging his audience to 'hang in there' to the end – all in the hope that they may soon die to enter eternity and so inherit 'eternal life'? As was shown, 'John' was doing the exact opposite by exhorting his audience that a life of supreme quality, as was given by only Jesus and as it was present in

John's community was to be *lived in the present despite whatever circumstances*. This life realises in total relatedness to the *agápé* among them, a love that they had to give to sustain each other – no Life without Love.

The new commandment to love each other was directed to the new situation Jesus' disciples had to face after his death. Their disposition towards Jesus was, as should be expected, initially based on a one-to-one dyadic relationship with him and not with each other. All this was to undergo a drastic change, as henceforth they would have each other as their dyad. Their total acceptance of each other is demonstrated by Jesus in a physical and highly symbolical act of self-renunciation whereby the 'blueprint' for genuine and honest *agápé* among the group is laid: to honour the other members of the group each one had to emulate Jesus in the example he set. The *agápé* among them would, then, not only constitute the quality of their life in society, but also render the sure witness of their dyadic identity, of whom they belong to, namely that they were children of God. Thereby they would also testify who Jesus was - the simple tenets to be reached for relations that do no harm and work together in the goal to unite.

Serving Jesus in looking after his 'herd' requires love as sole and specific qualification. Jesus' searching questions as regards Peter's love for him had, on the one hand, the purpose of setting in order Peter's (and, logically, also the others') disloyal / loveless conduct of denial and abandonment in his darkest hour, but on the other hand, the only qualification was thereby stated for serving them that belong to Jesus. Jesus' public activity, overall, seems to have been directed to the people on society's periphery, the marginalised and ostracised – as the frequent accusation that was levelled at him rang that he befriended the harlots and toll-gatherers. Even though not all of them could, probably, be classed as such, the majority of the *sheep* and *lambs* in early Christendom may have been the economically poor, the politically powerless and the socially dishonoured. As followers of Jesus they really needed someone who would look after and look out for them. The disciples were to act as brokers of God's favour to these people and thereby perpetuate Jesus' work of love among them – an association with those

with whom society would not have anything to do. This could never have realised without a true and unwavering love for the ‘owner’ otherwise the ‘sheep’ would be ravaged - as may be expected from a hireling who has no real concern for them. Thereby *agápé* would also complete its full circle: God ‘doing’ / initiating *agápé* in his unchanging loyalty towards his people by giving his Son as the ultimate Broker for their salvation / removal of their sin; Jesus here appointing his disciples to continue the agapistic care of **his followers**. Jesus’ shepherding task has now been transferred – they should love as he loved, even to the extent of laying down life. God’s way of doing love, to really love, was to be perpetuated and to serve as proof that ‘love’ can really be love.

5.3 FINAL CONCLUDING REMARKS.

The paradigm for this study was stated in the (quite probable) problem of an inadequate or even a complete misunderstanding of the concept of love – whether ‘love’ (as we purport to understand it) is really the love of which there is so much in the Bible. This lack is not uncommon - judged by the way in which even devout Christians sometimes treat fellow brethren it would indeed seem that the meaning of love has not fully registered despite the degree and zeal of cultic observances. The ‘vertical’ aspect of religion is regarded as the alpha and omega while the ‘horizontal’ sometimes (often?) does not seem to matter much, if anything at all. A variety of probable reasons for this mis- / non-understanding were stated and the one I would reiterate here is the undiscerning, even nonchalant way in which the contents of Scripture is treated – that the sentences in the documents can / should be taken from their context and strung together to say whatever needs to be said - as if it was, in fact, given / inspired for such a purpose.

The methodological premiss for the exegetical facet in chapter two was stated in the paradigm that the selected text-segments / portions will be treated on a grammatical-historical basis with the joint-usage of some social-historical / social-scientific data – of which a brief overview was done in chapter three and applied in chapter four where the concept of *agápé* in the selected text-segments of John’s Gospel came under scrutiny. These findings will now be elaborated on.

The Johannine record of the enactment of 'biblical love' begins with God's initiation of removing his people's (the Jews') *sin* - a plight consisting in the breach / and /or breaking down of relations, of their being bound / fettered by circumstances that were, in reality, unsurmountable. One only has to look at the national, political and financial circumstances of the people of Israel in the first century to realise what the real state of their *religious* situation was - *sin* reigned. Their sinful plight did not affect God - he did not change toward them - and once again, quite probably for the last time, he gave-in again, this time by the sending of the Son (compare Luke 20: 13v.). The exemplary loyalty inherent with *agápé* stands supremely demonstrated and shows that love is really real and God, no less, has given witness thereof.

The graceful outpouring of love in the Son, however, appears to have been negatively received (actually rejected outright) by the religious leadership. Although the ordinary people seem to have responded positively to some extent, eventually, despite having seen (and eaten!) much that should have evoked a firm faith with them, they turn away, leaving only twelve men to remain with Jesus - of whom one finally also turns out to be the direct opposite of love, because he sold Jesus out to the religious leadership.

Just prior to being killed Jesus demonstrated love 'in action' by washing the feet of his disciples, including his traitor's. He commands his disciples to love each other to the same extent - as he set the clear and easily understandable example and thereby showing that love can be real among men - if a Master can bend to wash the feet of his disciples in the demonstration of real love, then surely they can *love* each other?

After conquering death Jesus is seen by the disciples. At a meal (apparently prepared and served by Jesus) and during a conversation with the leader of the (remaining) disciple corps, Jesus brings some unresolved issues in order - Peter's (and, consequently, the rest's) loyalty is challenged. The challenge, though, is not in the normal agonistic mode of a challenge-and-riposte exchange and is not negative to take honour away, but has a highly positive outcome envisaged, na-

mely to restore the disciples' honour by trusting them with a responsibility that they could never have lived up to without the one specific requirement, namely love. The situation here does not present the question whether love can be real, but the utmost necessity is stated that love has to be real.

God's love in John 3: 16 was as real as can be, it was clearly and specifically directed to God's own people, the Jews: Jesus came to take away their sin. His exhortation in John 13 was for his disciples to love each other and Peter's commission in the last chapter was directed specifically to the caring for Jesus' sheep – the reality of love is stated and it is to be perpetuated to Jesus' followers in reciprocal love for Jesus.

A careful reading of John's Gospel would produce the finding that *agápé* has a definite facet of exclusivity – of which John 3: 16 gives more than ample proof. This perspective on this known text-segment is, to my knowledge, not common although, albeit fairly recently, it has been stressed by very able scholars in a genuine grammatical-historical fashion, interpreting 'Scripture with Scripture'. One may indeed hope that the value of sincere grammatical-historical exegesis may be noticed again and the usefulness of social-historic data as a hermeneutical 'tool' realised.

The exclusivity inherent in *agápé*, as John 3: 16 clearly enunciates, does not, however, compromise the reality of love or the imperative/s for love to be real among present day Christians nor does it foreclose the conclusion that for responsible exegesis of Johannine documents it cannot be used as a springboard for dogmatic or ethical material wherein the universality or all-inclusivity of *agápé* has to be proved.

Agápé in John means love for specific people and the highest regard and responsibility where the reality of love is to be lived out towards those people. Nowhere is this better demonstrated than in God's unchanging love for his errant people, Jesus' disregard of, or for his own social position and his attitude of trust

in leaving the people who believe in him in the care of someone who loves him. It can be stated simply: **Love can really be real where real love is.**

The subject of *agápé* (so-called *biblical love*) was chosen to probe for meaning with full recognition of the value of insights available from social-scientific sources to ascertain whether love as depicted in John exhibits a social dimension. This was done from a very moderate stance on the data obtained from these materials, and a cautious attempt at application of social-scientific theory (as referred to above with recognition to Carolyn Osiek) to the exegesis of a small selection of textual material from John. This was done after a cursory overview on a small selection of comment and lexicographical work from the overwhelming amount of available material on the subject of love and a much-condensed excerpt of data from social-scientific sources on the cultural world of the New Testament.

The concept and the word 'love' has in time been so bandied about in different religious scenarios, probably more so in our times, with the result that the meaning of love as depicted in different contexts in the Bible, despite the mass of academic / scholarly and theological-ethical work that has been done on it, is often blurred, confused or convoluted by differences in theological thought or dogmatic paradigmata so that the reality of and the need for love to be real often seems to be plowed under. It does not matter from whichever perspective one looks at this situation, it can never be favourable because the prominent place that love must always occupy in modern theology and ethics necessitates the opposite. Therefore, in order to apply the biblical concept of love correctly the hermeneutics whereby correct meaning may be ascertained need to stay abreast with contemporary theological research.

Much about and in the Bible (in its many translations and also as regards *agápé*) that has come into being from certain confessional stances, which has almost been canonised by tradition and cyclically perpetuated over long periods of time, may have to be put right. My findings as regards the real social dimension of love, God reaching out to his people in their social situation, Jesus exhorting his

disciples (and, in turn, John his audience) to love each other here on earth, the care of Jesus' herd from the paradigm of love for him, is complemented by the exclusivity of love (which cannot be taken as proof that love is not real) and should serve to highlight the strong preferentiality and integrity in loyalty inherent with real, true *agápé*.

While this study would possibly not constitute the type of work whereby 'things can be put right' it may be instrumental to remind every user of grammatical-historical hermeneutics that working in a consistent manner with the text is the only way whereby legitimate and responsible exegesis can be done. The availability of historical-cultural data from social-scientific sources proved to be a most valuable asset that helped to see the historical-cultural facets in selected text-segments from another and broader perspective. Thereby results were obtained which, to say the least, were eye opening (to me, that is) and which, in my opinion, should demonstrate the usefulness of data from these sources. To my knowledge the data from these sources has been and is being used over a wide *academic* front and valuable studies that reveal the content of the Bible from the perspectives and understanding that share common ground with the first historical audience/s regularly see the light in theological publications (such as Neotestamentica, HTS, Scriptura et cetera). The moot but serious question, however, remains whether, and how many of our colleagues who serve congregations in the responsibility of preaching the Word ever set eyes on those publications. The knowledge about, the highly relevant material for and availability of such literature for contemporary exegesis are then lacunae that definitely need to be seriously addressed from the ranks of academics.

Based on the results of the present investigation and their implications many questions come to the fore as regards the thoroughness and credibility, even reliability of available sources on dogmatics and systematic theologies, not forgetting ethics. Especially as regards love, the central rationale in theological ethics, it would appear that an undiscerning and conglomerative use of biblical material to get a position on something / point of view across is not totally alien to the methodology of some. Concomitantly this may, on the one hand, infer a rather mud-

dled understanding or, contrarily, the supposition that the subject is so wellknown from instinctive or naïve knowledge we have on par with the ancient audiences of the New Testament documents that it needs no elaboration. The implication of this knowledge would be that, although we are twenty centuries away in time and development, a continent far removed in place, culture and the usage of another language and a space-age further in world-view, our understanding of first century literary products lets us read and understand the Bible as if it was written right here in the Western / European regions during the first half of the previous century. The untenability of these notions should speak for itself and yet...

Doing things by the Received-View book still see a dogmatic theologising of the meaning of the words and concepts of the Bible despite invaluable scholarly work whereby exegeses in keeping with contemporary research would unlock a wealth of enlightening, even new, understanding of the very Book we hold in such high regard. Somehow the disregarding of the present for fear of the future is (still) perpetuated in the canonising of the past whereby strict 'religious' or 'theological' or 'christological' meaning is read *into* texts that came into existence within and for a very earthly, social purpose. The everyday lives of Christian believers in their respective faith communities and societies where they had to cope with the problems and realities of life peculiar to their situation were being strengthened by what was written to them - in context of this study, love really had to be real.

Despite the irreplaceable, pivotal role played by hermeneutics and despite the significant development of, and advances that have been made as regards the hermeneutical utilisation of socio-cultural detail in grammatical and historical-criticism of the bible, many prefer to keep on mining the traditional exegetical faces that were developed literally centuries ago – whereby the present is disregarded for fear of the future and a stodgy deference of a canonised past. Especially among fundamentalistically inclined traditionalists the cache of information that lets the Bible virtually come to life - the same life it probably held for the first historical audiences – is denigrated as (theological) pyrites ('fool's gold' – a by-product of the real thing). This unscientific attitude puts a handicap on the pro-

gress and betterment of the understanding of our most precious possession and concomitant adjustment of theology and ethics, which in turn would have positive outcomes on the spirituality of the church by the ministry of her well informed pastors and, resultantly, a better informed membership.

It is no secret that churches experience fluxional situations for which the outmodedness of a liturgy or stagnancy of the sermon material is mostly blamed, especially among the younger (and progressively better informed) membership. Sharyn Dowd's statement about the tests that have to be met in the presentation of contemporary New Testament theology (1989, 70) may / should be applied to New Testament theology for 'general consumption' also. These tests, namely, 1) it should be true to the experience to which the New Testament bears witness and (2) it must make sense to contemporary hearers, are fair to both the New Testament and its (contemporary) readers. If something fails to be philosophically coherent, if it is not *thinkable* (, 70) (and, moreover, workable / achievable) there remains little to believe - and here I do not point a finger at, or mean to imply that the things described in the Bible which defy rational explanation such as the miracles Jesus performed et cetera come under criticism, instead, the ethical content is referred to, for instance, the New Testament imperatives on love.

Maybe, if it had been done correctly from the outset, love would have been much more real today – as real and tenable as it was in John's description.

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