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# THE CONSCIOUSNESS OF SIN IN I JOHN

Eugene J. COOPER

## A. INTRODUCTION

AGAINST the background of the well-known antitheses<sup>1</sup> of the Johannine Writings — for example, darkness and light — which form the basis for such Johannine themes as the “world”, the concepts of sin, such as *hamartia*, *anomia* and *adikia*<sup>2</sup> will be considered in the context of those passages which the exegetes emphasize as being the most important for understanding the Johannine concept of sin.<sup>3</sup>

One may be tempted to consider the Johannine antitheses as primitive and over-simplified manners of expression which are especially suited to the mentality of the early Christians, as the vocabulary of the times,<sup>4</sup> but which have no actual relevance today. But with his antitheses and vocabulary the author of the Fourth Gospel and the Johannine Epistles was emphasizing two important facts about the state of the Christian in the world : a) the radical difference between the state

<sup>1</sup> W. NAUCK, *Die Tradition und der Charakter des ersten Johannesbriefes*, in WUNT, vol. III (Tübingen, 1957), pp. 15-27.

<sup>2</sup> For the vocabulary for “sin” and the frequency of usage of the terms in the Johannine Writings v. W. GRUNDMANN, “Die Sünde im Neuen Testament,” in ThW, vol. I, pp. 305-320; W. GUTBROD, “*anomia*, *anomos*,” in ThW, vol. IV, pp. 1077-1080; N. LAZURE, *Les valeurs morales de la théologie johannique* (Paris, 1965), p. 287; K. H. RENGSTORF, “*hamartolos*, *anamartetos*,” in ThW, vol. I, pp. 320-339; G. SCHRENK, “*adikos adikia*, *adikeo*, *adikema*,” in ThW, vol. I, pp. 150-163; G. STÄHLIN, “Sprachgebrauch und Sprachgeschichte von *hamartano*, *hamartema* und *hamartia* vor und im Neuen Testament,” in ThW, vol. I, pp. 295-299.

<sup>3</sup> W. Grundmann indicates two key passages to be considered in order to understand what the Johannine Writings mean when they speak of “sin”: the passages 1 John 3, 4 and 1 John 5, 17. Cf. *ibid.*, p. 309. Cf. E. COOPER, “Understanding Sin in the New Testament,” in *Louvain Studies*, 1 (1967), pp. 298-311.

<sup>4</sup> For literature on the influences of milieu and systems of thought on Johannine theology and vocabulary v. R. SCHNACKENBURG, *Neutestamentliche Theologie* (2nd ed., München, 1965), pp. 107-109.

of man before and after the coming of Christ and b) the state of the redeemed Christian in the world, where the radical opposition between death and life, darkness and light, sin and Christ is still a fact of everyday life. The world, death and sin have been definitively overcome by Christ, yet still have power to lead man, even the Christian, away from Christ.

## B. SOME BASIC CONCEPTS NECESSARY FOR UNDERSTANDING SIN IN JOHANNINE THEOLOGY.

1. *The "world"*.<sup>5</sup> John<sup>6</sup> uses the term "world" in many senses, some of them positive, such as "the world of light". When the term "world" is spoken of here, however, it is not in the sense of "everybody" or of material creation or of the human race — all Johannine usages of the term — but in the morally negative and pejorative sense of: "that ensemble of men who reject God and whose leader is Satan."<sup>7</sup>

For John, the "world" is a state of being, a condition, and is used pejoratively in two senses which are closely related to Paul's use of the term *sarx*.<sup>8</sup> First of all, "world" refers to the state of darkness, sin and confusion which reigned from the first sin until the coming of Christ. The "world of darkness" represents the epoch of human history in which sin and the Evil One reigned, a time of waiting in darkness, a time of unfulfillment, until the Savior of the world should come. With the coming of Christ and his victory on the cross, the power of the Evil One and sin is definitively broken: "The darkness has passed away and the true light is now shining." (1 John 2, 8).<sup>9</sup> Secondly, "world" is employed by John in the sense of the conquered, yet ever active domain of sin and the Evil One. The "world" is the milieu in which the Christian is to work out his salvation. This milieu, although overcome by Christ's victory, still exercises hostility to God and attempts to so

<sup>5</sup> N. LAZURE, *op. cit.*, p. 306 *ann.* No. 52 and pp. 320ff.; C. LESQUIVIT, P. GRELOT, "monde," in X. LÉON-DUFOUR, J. DUPLACY, *et al.*, *Vocabulaire de théologie biblique* (Paris, 1962), cols. 643-650; Hugo RAHNER, *Symbole der Kirche* (Salzburg, 1964), pp. 287ff.; R. SCHNACKENBURG, *Die sittliche Botschaft des Neuen Testaments* (2nd ed., München, 1962), p. 250 and pp. 266-273.

<sup>6</sup> The name "John" will be employed from now on for the sake of convenience to indicate both the author of the fourth gospel and the author of the Johannine letters. For the question of authorship of these writings and the discussion on this question v. P. FEINE, J. BEHM, W. G. KÜMMEL, *Einleitung in das Neue Testament* (14th ed., Heidelberg, 1965), pp. 161-172 and 323-324; R. SCHNACKENBURG, *Neutestamentliche Theologie*, p. 107.

<sup>7</sup> "... l'ensemble des hommes qui se refusent à Dieu' et dont Satan est le chef...": St. LYONNET, "démon," in DSAM, vol. III (Paris, 1957), cols. 141-151 (149).

<sup>8</sup> For the parallelisms between John's "world" and Paul's "flesh" v. W. NAUCK, *op. cit.*, pp. 98-127. Cf. K. G. KUHN, "Peirasmos — hamartia — sarx im Neuen Testament und die damit zusammenhängenden Vorstellungen," in *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche*, 49 (1952), pp. 200-222.

<sup>9</sup> All biblical passages are according to the new translation of the Confraternity of Christian Doctrine: *The Holy Bible* (New York, 1961).

influence man, that he rejects God. To live only in the world and not to abide in Christ is to reject and deny Christ and to remain willingly in the domain in which Evil still influences.

"World" means here "the unbelieving cosmos which denies Christ and is his enemy" and the antithesis to the believing community.<sup>10</sup> World also means all those who freely choose to reject and refuse Christ and to live in the world of darkness. "World therefore means the domain of the Anti-Christ",<sup>11</sup> which has a tempting and seducing influence on the individual (John 2, 15ff.). The Christian is of God, the entire world is within the area of Evil's influence (John 5, 19). The world hates the Christian, for he is not of the world (John 15, 18ff.).<sup>12</sup>

2. *Choice between two "worlds": The situation since Christ's coming.* Christ has come and is the Savior of the world. He who recognizes Christ as the promised Redeemer and believes in him and is baptized in his name, is born of God (1 John 3, 9; 4, 7; etc.). The passage 1 John 5, 1 states it very clearly: "Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God." Those who believe and love "have passed from death to life" (1 John 3, 14).

The Christian has chosen between two worlds when he has chosen to leave the world of darkness and be born into the world of light through faith and baptism.<sup>13</sup> Yet his abiding in Christ is continually threatened by the world of darkness, which still has an influencing power, and into which the Christian can return by renouncing his belief in Christ, by the sin of unbelief. The conversion to Christ in faith and baptism should be definitive, but the experience of everyday life shows that the Christian still rejects Christ in many small and great ways. Therefore, the life of the Christian must be a constant, continuous choice for the world of light.

<sup>10</sup> "... der ungläubige, Christus verleugnende und Gott feindliche Kosmos...": R. SCHNACKENBURG, *Die sittliche Botschaft des Neuen Testaments*, p. 270.

<sup>11</sup> J. B. BAUER, "Sünde," in BThWB, vol. II, pp. 1294-1309 (1297-1301); G. FREI, "Der Teufel in Bibel und Glaubenslehre," in A. Rosenberg (ed.), *Macht und Wirklichkeit des Bösen* (München-Planegg, 1958), pp. 9-22 (19); St. LYONNET, "Satan," in X. LÉON-DUFOUR, J. DUPLACY, et al., *Vocabulaire de théologie biblique* (Paris, 1962), cols. 997-1000; G. von RAD, W. FOERSTER, "diaballo, diabolos," in ThW, vol. II, pp. 69-80; B. RIGAU, P. GRELOT, "Antichrist," in *Vocabulaire de théologie biblique*, cols. 51-54.

<sup>12</sup> N. LAZURE, *op. cit.*, p. 306 and pp. 320-326; R. SCHNACKENBURG, *Die sittliche Botschaft des Neuen Testaments*, pp. 272-273.

<sup>13</sup> W. Grundmann sees this choice best expressed by the Greek word *krisis*: "Durch die Sendung des Christus entsteht eine völlig neue Lage, die am besten durch das Wort *krisis* = Scheidung und Entscheidung bezeichnet wird... J 15, 22-24. Das Kommen des Christus bedeutet das Offenbarwerden der Sünde als Gotteshass. Vor ihm fällt die Entscheidung über die Menschen und vollzieht sich die Scheidung unter den Menschen... I 9, 41; vgl auch 8, 24... Wer dem Christus die Absage erteilt und jenem *ego eimi* keinen Glauben schenkt, der bleibt in seiner Sünde und stirbt in seiner Sünde, der ist ausgeschlossen von der Sendung des Christus. Alle Sünde der Menschheit ist dieser Sünde gegenüber Blindheit, ist *adikia*... *kai estin hamartia ou pros thanaton* 1 J 5, 17. Diese Sünde aber, die vor dem Christus entsteht, ist *hamartia pros thanaton* 1 J 5, 16. Das ist die *krisis*, die mit dem Christus in die Welt gekommen ist." : *Art. cit.*, pp. 309-310.

He must "walk in the light" (1 John 1, 5-7; etc.). He should "abide in Christ" (1 John 2, 24; 2, 28; 3, 6; 4, 16; etc.), by "walking in the truth" (2 John 1, 4; 3 John 1, 3-4), by "walking in his commandments" (2 John 1, 6) and "abiding in his doctrine" (2 John 1, 9), by "walking as he walked" (1 John 2, 6), but more explicitly: by a life of faith and love. For John, anything which is opposed to the true Christian life of faith and love is sin. All sin, from the smallest to the greatest, is in some way opposed to the proper Christian attitude of believing and loving: <sup>14</sup> "Not in word, neither with the tongue, but in deed and in truth" (1 John 3, 18), that is, in one's everyday life.

### C. TERMS FOR SIN AND VARIOUS TYPES OF SIN IN THE JOHANNINE WRITINGS.

1. *The usage of the term hamartia.*<sup>15</sup> In general for the whole of the New Testament and in particular for the Johannine Writings, the term *hamartia* can be used in three principal ways: a) to mean a single sinful action (1 John 1, 9; 2, 2, 12; 3, 4, 8; 4, 10; 5, 16f.);<sup>16</sup> b) to mean an "antigodly determination of human nature" (John 9, 41; 15, 22, 24; 19, 11; 1 John 1, 8);<sup>17</sup> c) to mean a "personal power", a "personification of sin".<sup>18</sup>

In other words, the term *hamartia* in the Johannine Writings can refer to single sinful actions, to a situation in which the world and mankind finds itself, by analogy, to a lasting inner disposition of the sinner, and to a diabolical power residing in the world. In this context, John's term "world" should be remembered. When he uses the term "world" he is referring to a condition, to a state of being which is opposed to Christ, to the light. The term "world" and the term "sin" are closely connected for John. "To be in the world" and "to be in sin" can be equated. Sin is characteristic of the world. Whereas for Paul sin is considered more as a cosmic power which can dominate the world and man, for John sin is a condition, a state of being in the world and in man.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>14</sup> N. LAZURE, *op. cit.*, pp. 285-328; R. SCHNACKENBURG, *Die sittliche Botschaft des Neuen Testaments*, pp. 247-280.

<sup>15</sup> W. GRUNDMANN, *art. cit.*, pp. 308-311; N. LAZURE, *ibid.*, p. 287; G. STÄHLIN, *art. cit.*, pp. 295-299.

<sup>16</sup> "a. *Als Einzeltat*... Johannes hat *hamartia* in dieser Bedeutung im Ev nur 8, 24 (2 mal); 34a; 9, 34 (= Anspielung auf Ps 51, 7), dagegen mehrfach im 1 Brief, der sich auch darin als der gemeinchristlichen Vorstellungswelt näherstehend zeigt als das Evangelium." : G. STÄHLIN, *ibid.*, p. 297.

<sup>17</sup> "Es ist eine völlige Begriffsverwandlung, wenn *hamartia* im NT zur Bezeichnung des *widergöttlichen Bestimmtheit des menschlichen Wesens* wird, besonders bei Johannes in den synonymen Formeln *echein hamartian* (9, 41; 15, 22, 24; 19, 11; 1 J 1, 8) und *hamartia en tini estin* (1 J 3, 5 vgl J 7, 18)." : *Ibid.*, pp. 297-298.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 298; "puissance satanique" : N. LAZURE, *op. cit.*, pp. 304ff.

<sup>19</sup> P. BENOIT, "Pauline and Johannine Theology," in *Cross Currents*, 16 (1965), pp. 339-353 (346-347).

2. *Sin as a fact of everyday life in the Christian community.*<sup>20</sup> On the basis of certain passages of the First Epistle of John and in the total context of this first letter, that of the situation of the Christian in the world,<sup>21</sup> one can speak here of "daily sins".<sup>22</sup> The term is used to describe that fact and aspect of the Christian situation in the world which is indicated in the following passages, the fact of sin as an everyday fact of Christian life: <sup>23</sup> The Christian himself sins (1 John 1, 8-10); his own heart condemns him of sin (1 John 3, 20); he sees his brother sinning (1 John 5, 16).<sup>24</sup> If these sins are "unavoidable",<sup>25</sup> they are also forgivable (1 John 1, 9), because the Christians have an "Advocate with the Father", who is a "propitiation for our sins" (1 John 2, 1-2). Christians can pray for forgiveness (1 John 5, 16) and be forgiven their sins, because Christ has overcome sin, has taken away the "sin of the world" (John 1, 29), and because they live in the Christian condition, in the Spirit of Christ, because of their belief that Christ is the Son of God (1 John 5, 4-5). The Christian can therefore be optimistic, even in the face of his sins, for the conqueror of the world has brought forgiveness of sins into the world. Yet the Christian has to take his sins seriously, for these "daily sins" are considered to be expressions of sin as an anti-godly determination of human nature. They are manifestations of and a participation in the power of sin in the world. As such they are related to and are an expression of the greater sin of unbelief.<sup>26</sup>

<sup>20</sup> R. SCHNACKENBURG, *Die Johannesbriefe*, in HThK, vol. XIII, fasc. 3 (3rd ed., Freiburg i. Br., 1963), p. 277; *id.*, *Die sittliche Botschaft des Neuen Testaments*, pp. 273-280.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. the section entitled "Le Chrétien impeccable et pécheur," in C. SPICQ, *Théologie morale du Nouveau Testament*, vol. I (Paris, 1965), pp. 175-199.

<sup>22</sup> The expression "daily sins" goes back to Augustine and is used, for example, to describe those sins which are mentioned in 1 John 1, 8 - 2, 2: "Es gibt Texte, in denen offenbar die 'täglichen', von keinem Christen vermeidbaren Sünden vorausgesetzt werden; in ihnen dürfte sich die vorangeschrittene Erfahrung eines in der Welt stehenden Christentums widerspiegeln. Dazu gehört schon der Abschnitt 1, 8 - 2, 2, der von einem gesunden christlichen Realismus zeugt." R. SCHNACKENBURG, *Die sittliche Botschaft des Neuen Testaments*, p. 278. Cf. *id.*, *Die Johannesbriefe*, p. 277.

The term "daily sins" has recently again come into widespread use to replace the term "venial sins", especially in Dutch-speaking countries, as "*dagelijkse zonden*". Cf. L. MONDEN, *La conscience du péché* (Paris, 1965), p. 47; P. SCHOONENBERG, "Zonde ten dode, doodzonde en dagelijkse zonde," in *Tijdschrift voor Theologie*, 1 (1961), pp. 181-193; E. COOPER, "A Newer Look at the Theology of Sin," in *Louvain Studies*, 3 (1971), pp. 259-307.

<sup>23</sup> "La réalité quotidienne du péché": I. de la POTTERIE, "Le péché c'est l'iniquité," in *Nouvelle Revue Théologique*, 78 (1956), pp. 785-797 (795). Cf. I. de la POTTERIE, "Le péché c'est l'iniquité," in I. de la Potterie, St. Lyonnet (eds.), *La vie selon l'Esprit* (Paris, 1965), pp. 65-83. Although this article by the same author appears under the same title as the article published in 1956, the 1965 edition is a revised and extended form. Since both articles, although different in content, appear under the same title, and since both will be used for this study, they will be cited as: I. de la Potterie (1956) and I. de la Potterie (1965).

<sup>24</sup> R. SCHNACKENBURG, *Die sittliche Botschaft des Neuen Testaments*, p. 274.

<sup>25</sup> "von keinem Christen vermeidbar": *Ibid.*, p. 278.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 254; I. de la POTTERIE (1956), *art. cit.*, p. 795.



3. *Some principal texts of usages of the terms for sin in the Johannine Writings.*<sup>27</sup>

a) *he hamartia estin he anomia* (1 John 3, 4) :<sup>28</sup> In the passage 1 John 3, 4 the two most frequently used terms for sin in the Septuagint appear : *hamartia* and *anomia*.<sup>29</sup> The term *anomia* has been translated in most commentaries on the Johannine Writings as "lawlessness".<sup>30</sup> Taking the commentary of Rudolf Schnackenburg as his point of departure,<sup>31</sup> Ignace de la Potterie attempts to arrive at a translation of the term *anomia* which better corresponds to the vocabulary of the New Testament epoch. He includes a consideration of the recently discovered writings at Qumran, the "Dead Sea Scrolls", in his search for a translation which better corresponds to the context of the First Epistle of John and to the whole of the Johannine literature.<sup>32</sup>

De la Potterie indicates three stages in the semantic evolution of the term *anomia* : a) The meaning "transgression of the law" or "illegality", found in the classic texts of Euripides and Demosthenes, which would best correspond to the above-mentioned translations of most commentaries ;<sup>33</sup> b) The stage of the Greek Bible, in which the term *anomia*, used to translate about twenty various Hebrew terms for sin, becomes a synonym for *hamartia*. At this stage, the original etymological connection of *anomia* with the term *nomos* ("law") seems to have disappeared, except for the retenance of this usage of *anomia* in the meaning of the term *hamartia* by some late Hellenistic Jewish and early Christian authors ; c) the stage of the New Testament which, although knowing of the first two usages, and except for the usages of the term *anomia* in quotations of passages from the Old Testament, uses *anomia* in a new sense and with a new nuance and emphasis : as an eschatological term to mean "a collective state of hostility and revolt of the

<sup>27</sup> *V. s. ann.* No. 3.

<sup>28</sup> W. GUTBROD, *art. cit.* ; N. LAZURE, *op. cit.*, pp. 307-309 ; W. NAUCK, *op. cit.*, p. 16 *ann.* No. 1 and pp. 98-127 ; I. de la POTTERIE (1956), *art. cit.* ; R. SCHNACKENBURG, *Die Johannesbriefe*, pp. 184-187 ; *id.*, *Die sittliche Botschaft des Neuen Testaments*, p. 254.

<sup>29</sup> I. de la POTTERIE (1956), *art. cit.*, p. 787.

<sup>30</sup> The translations of the Dutch authors are : "schennis der wet", "wetsverloochening", "onwettigheid", "wetsovertreding" ; of the French authors : "violation de la loi", "mépris de la loi", "illégalité" ; in German : "Gesetzlosigkeit", "Gesetzwidrigkeit" : *Ibid.*, p. 786. In addition, one finds the following translations for *anomia* : "Widerspruch gegen den göttlichen Willen" : W. GRUNDMANN, *art. cit.*, p. 308 ; "Empörung, Auflehnung gegen Gott" : W. GUTBROD, *art. cit.*, p. 1079 ; "Bosheit" : R. SCHNACKENBURG, *Die Johannesbriefe*, p. 184.

<sup>31</sup> *Die Johannesbriefe* (*V. s. ann.* No. 20).

<sup>32</sup> *Art. cit.* (1956 and 1965). For a summary of de la Potterie's argumentation v. R. BLOMME, *Widerspruch in Freiheit : Eine Analyse des heutigen Sündenbewußtseins und der Sünde* (Limburg, 1965), pp. 136-144. For a critique of de la Potterie's argumentation v. N. LAZURE, *op. cit.*, pp. 307-309.

<sup>33</sup> *V. s. ann.* No. 30.

forces of evil against the Kingdom of God at the last times . . . characterized by a satanical aspect".<sup>34</sup>

This conclusion is based above all on the whole context of the First Epistle, whose main theme is a contrast between the "children of God" and the "children of the devil" (1 John 3, 1-10). The Christians are "born of God" (1 John 2, 29 ; 3, 9 ; 4, 7 ; 5, 1, 4), have "fellowship with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ" (1 John 1, 3) and fellowship with one another (1 John 1, 7). They should therefore live accordingly, "walk just as he walked" (1 John 2, 6), which means to "abide in Christ" (1 John 2, 6. 24. 27. 28 ; 3, 6 ; 4, 15-16), to "practise the truth" (1 John 1, 5-10) and to "keep his commandments", especially of brotherly love (1 John 2, 3-11 ; 3, 16-18), of believing in the name of Jesus Christ and loving one another (1 John 3, 23-24) and in avoiding sin (1 John 3, 4-10).

Those who are "of the devil" (1 John 3, 8), "children of the devil" (1 John 3, 10) "walk in darkness" (1 John 1, 10 ; 2, 11), are "liars, and the truth is not in them" (1 John 2, 4), do not keep Christ's commandments (1 John 2, 4), hate their brothers (1 John 2, 9-11), see their brothers in need and close their heart to him (1 John 3, 17), commit sin (1 John 3, 4-10) and are in alliance with the Antichrist and the false teachers who "deny that Jesus is the Christ . . . denies the Father and the Son" (1 John 2, 22).

The criterion for distinguishing between the children of God and the children of the devil is *sin* :

Everyone who commits sin (*ten hamartian*) commits iniquity (*ten anomian*) also ; and sin is iniquity (*kai he hamartia estin he anomia*). And you know that he appears to take our sins away, and sin is not in him. No one who abides in him commits sin ; and no one who sins has seen him, or has known him.

Dear children, let no one lead you astray. He who does what is just is just, even as he is just. He who commits sin is of the devil, because the devil sins from the beginning. To this end the Son of God appeared, that he might destroy the works of the devil. Whoever is born of God does not commit sin, because his seed abides in him and he cannot sin, because he is born of God. In this the children of God and the children of the devil are made known. (1 John 3, 4-10)

The eschatological context is given in the passage against false teachers :

Dear children, it is the last hour ; and as you have heard that Antichrist is coming, so now many antichrists have arisen ; whence we know that it is the last hour . . . Who is the liar but he who denies that Jesus is the Christ ? He is the Antichrist who denies the Father and the Son. (1 John 2, 18. 22)

<sup>34</sup> "C'est essentiellement un terme eschatologique, qui désigne l'hostilité et la révolte des forces du mal contre le royaume de Dieu aux derniers temps ; cette hostilité se caractérise par son aspect satanique, par l'empire qu'exerce le démon." : I. de la POTTERIE (1956), *art. cit.*, p. 788.



Those who remain in darkness and walk in darkness, who do not keep the commandments, who are liars without the truth, who see their brother in need and close their hearts to him, who commit sin, are of the devil and manifest their allegiance to the Antichrist and their enmity to God.

Sins as single sinful actions are connected with sin as evil or iniquity in these passages. The exterior actions of faith and love as "keeping his commandments", on the one hand, and of sin on the other hand, are manifestations of the deep, interior attitude of either conscious sonship of God and living accordingly by "abiding in him" and "walking as he walked", or of allegiance to the devil and the power of sin and iniquity and the forces of Evil and the Antichrist which oppose God, the forces of the "world" which is hostile to God and the children of God. *Anomia* is therefore that "iniquity" which means an inner attitude of the sinner which is based on a life in darkness as a child of the devil, as manifested not only in sinful actions but also in the omission of the true characteristics of the Christian attitude of abiding in Christ through brotherly love and faith, in truth and justice. As alliance with the powers of the Antichrist, *anomia* is that wicked attitude of heart which denies and rejects Christ as the Son of God in unbelief which, for John, is the sin par excellence.

As a result of the consideration and study of the context of the First Epistle of John, the writings of Qumran<sup>35</sup> and the only four usages of the term *anomia* in the Synoptic Gospels (Matt. 7, 23 ; 13, 41 ; 24, 12 ; 23, 28),<sup>36</sup> de la Potterie concludes that : "In the majority of the writings of this epoch *anomia* is used to describe the state of hostility to God in the last times",<sup>37</sup> and that in this usage of the term the idea of "transgression of the law" is absent. *Anomia* as "iniquity" is here opposed to the plan of God and his will, usually described as "truth" (*aletheia*) and not as the "law" (*nomos*). Secondly, this usage of the term *anomia* emphasizes the eschatological and satanical aspects.<sup>38</sup> It is this usage, the third stage in the above-mentioned semantic development of the term, which de la Potterie applies to the text 1 John 3, 4. In doing so, he finds the support of W. Nauck and R. Schnackenburg.<sup>39</sup> N. Lazure can also accept de la Potterie's interpretation of the usage of *anomia* in 1 John 3, 4, but asks whether this must necessarily

<sup>35</sup> Cf. R. SCHNACKENBURG, *Die Johannesbriefe*, p. 187.

<sup>36</sup> Cf. "Sin and the Consciousness of Sin in the Synoptic Gospels", in E. COOPER, *Sin, the Consciousness of Sin and the Conscience* (Diss., Regensburg, 1970), pp. 27-42.

<sup>37</sup> "Il est donc absolument certain que dans le plus grand nombre de textes de cette époque, *anomia* sert à décrire l'état d'hostilité à Dieu aux derniers temps." I. de la POTTERIE (1956), *art. cit.*, p. 791.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>39</sup> "Beim Prädikat in 3, 4... wobei *anomia* in seiner Affinität zum satanisch-widergöttlichen Wesen der Endzeit zu fassen ist...": W. NAUCK, *op. cit.*, p. 16.

"Versteht man die Antithese in 3, 4 im Zusammenhang mit den anderen Antithesen des Abschnitts, ... ist der Hinweis auf das apokalyptisch-eschatologische Verständnis von *anomia* zutreffend." : *Ibid.*, p. 16 *ann. No. 1.*

Nauck refers here explicitly to R. Schnackenburg, who also applies this understanding of *anomia* to the passage 1 John 3, 4. : *Die Johannesbriefe*, p. 186.

exclude maintaining in addition the understanding of *anomia* as "transgression of the divine will". Lazure sees the two usages as reconcilable for this passage.<sup>40</sup>

In a later, revised edition of this same article<sup>41</sup> de la Potterie identifies *anomia* of 1 John 3, 4 with the sin of unbelief.<sup>42</sup> Therefore, in bringing to the mind of his readers the eschatological aspect of "iniquity" as rejection of the truth of Christ, John is attempting to make them realize the importance of their sins. The "daily sins" of the believers are to be clearly distinguished from the sin of unbelief,<sup>43</sup> but all sins are connected to the one great sin: the rejection of Christ, the Son of God, and his work of salvation. The First Epistle of John emphasizes: a) That the sin for John is refusal to believe, in its satanical, eschatological aspects; <sup>44</sup> b) That

<sup>40</sup> "Il est permis toutefois de se demander si cette explication (that of de la Potterie) est la seule qui s'impose en l'occurrence. Il nous semble que la signification eschatologique est conciliable avec le maintien pour *anomia* du sens de transgression de la volonté divine en usage dans le Nouveau Testament... C'est précisément en accomplissant une action contraire à cette volonté que le pécheur prend part à l'hostilité contre Dieu et se met sous l'emprise du diable ainsi que l'explicite I, 3, 8.

"Le péché est l'iniquité" peut donc à la fois signifier qu'il est une transgression de la volonté divine et qu'il constitue par là même un acte de révolte contre Dieu, une manifestation de l'hostilité eschatologique contre son plan de salut révélé en son Fils, une action faite sous l'impulsion d'une puissance diabolique." : *Op. cit.*, pp. 308-309.

<sup>41</sup> *V. s. ann.* No. 23.

<sup>42</sup> "Il ne peut guère être question que du péché-type des 'antichrists', qui rejettent le Christ, le Fils de Dieu: c'est le péché que le quatrième évangile avait déjà décrit comme le péché du monde: celui de ne pas croire en Jésus-Christ." : I. de la POTTERIE (1965), *art. cit.*, p. 78.

<sup>43</sup> "Il importe donc de distinguer ce péché fondamental, ce rejet de la vérité, des différents péchés que commettent les chrétiens, dont Jean parle en 1 Jn 1, 5 - 2, 2: c'est le péché fondamental qu'il appelle en 1 Jn 3, 4: l'iniquité." : *Ibid.*

"Ne croyons pourtant pas que les péchés des croyants eux-mêmes n'aient rien à voir avec ce péché fondamental des hérétiques. Jean, en effet, après avoir parlé du péché (v. 1: *ten hamartian*), passe immédiatement à la multiplicité des péchés (v. 5: *tas hamartias*), mais c'est pour revenir de nouveau un peu plus loin à la grande réalité du péché (v. 8a: *ten hamartian*); d'autre part, nous avons vu que c'est le pluriel 'les péchés' (v. 5), qui est mis en parallèle avec 'les œuvres du diable' (v. 8). On dirait donc que, pour saint Jean, tous les péchés participent plus ou moins au péché par excellence, qui est de ne pas croire au Christ; chaque péché, à des degrés divers, semble provenir d'un affaiblissement de la foi. Par là-même, dans une certaine mesure, tout péché constitue un rejet des grandes réalités du salut, une libre acceptation de la domination de Satan, un enfoncement dans les ténèbres; celui qui le commet, vit déjà sous l'influence perverse de Satan (1 Jn 5, 18-19), il devient fils du diable." : *Ibid.*, p. 80. Cf. I. de la POTTERIE (1956), *art. cit.*, p. 795; R. SCHNACKENBURG, *Die sittliche Botschaft des Neuen Testaments*, p. 254.

<sup>44</sup> "Deshalb nennt Johannes die Sünde schlechthin *anomia*: Gesetzlosigkeit, Gottlosigkeit (1 Joh 3, 4)..." : J. B. BAUER, *art. cit.*, p. 1301.

"Der Unglaube (ist) die Sünde schlechthin." : R. SCHNACKENBURG, *ibid.*, p. 253.

"... Unglaube (ist) die Sünde schlechthin..." : A. VÖGTLE, "Sünde im Neuen Testament," in *LThK*, vol. IX, cols. 1174-1177 (1177).

N. Lazure distinguishes between the gospel and the epistles of John. For the gospel, the greatest sin is that of unbelief: "Pour l'évangile de Jean, le péché par excellence est le manque de foi à l'égard de Jésus (8, 21, 24; 16, 8)." : *Op. cit.*, p. 301. For the first epistle, the greatest sin is that of hatred, in its extreme form of homicide: "En plus de se baser sur l'épître qui insiste sur le lien essentiel entre la mort et la haine et qui tient celle-ci pour le péché par excellence, notre explication reçoit confirmation d'un texte extra-biblique parallèle..." : *Ibid.*, p. 312.

all other sins are to be distinguished from but are all connected with and participate in the great sin of *anomia* of 1 John 3, 4.<sup>45</sup>

John's letter is therefore a warning to the believers not only to beware of false teachers and prophets of the Antichrist but a warning to avoid all sin. For every sin as sinful action (*hamartia*) is opposed to the Christian manner of living, to the state of being a child of God, and every sin is a manifestation of either the fact that the Christian is not yet fully perfect in living as Christ wants him to live, in truth, according to his commandments, or is a manifestation of the sinful attitude of heart of the children of the devil. Every sin is also a manifestation of the power of sin which characterizes the "world", the domain of the Antichrist and of the sinful powers which oppose God and which will rise up against him in the last hour, which, for John, is already present in the appearance of the false teachers and children of the devil. As such, John's letter is a warning to the believers to take every sin seriously, even those for which they can pray for forgiveness, for every sin (*hamartia*) participates in the great sin of "iniquity" (*anomia*) of the powers of the devil, which is in its essence total opposition to God and to the children of God in unbelief.

b) *he hamartia pros thanaton* : "the sin unto death" (1 John 5, 16) : <sup>46</sup> The exact nature of this sin remains a disputed question among the exegetes. W. Nauck and R. Schnackenburg see the distinction between the "sin unto death" and "the sin not unto death" in this passage as being the distinction between intentional, willed sin <sup>47</sup> and the unknowing transgression.<sup>48</sup> This distinction is derived from certain texts of the Old Testament.<sup>49</sup> These two exegetes understand the "sin unto death" of 1 John 5, 16 as a sin whose consequence is exclusion from the community of believers <sup>50</sup> and separation from God,<sup>51</sup> but not as a sin which is punished

<sup>45</sup> *V. s. ann.* No. 43. The sin of unbelief is not only at the root of all other sins, which participate to some degree in this great sin of rejection of Christ, but also leads to the sin of hatred : "Aus ihm (unbelief) entwickelt sich ein blinder Hass gegen den Gottgesandten, und er ruht nicht, bis dieser am Kreuz verblutet." : R. SCHNACKENBURG, *ibid.*, pp. 253-254.

"... cette incrédulité est aussi à la racine d'autres péchés : le désir de tuer le Christ (8, 37), la haine qu'on lui porte (15, 24-25), laquelle trouve son aboutissement dans le péché plus grand (19, 11) de la démarche pour obtenir sa mort." : N. LAZURE, *ibid.*, p. 301.

<sup>46</sup> N. LAZURE, *ibid.*, pp. 310-314 ; W. NAUCK, *op. cit.*, pp. 141-146 ; R. SCHNACKENBURG, *Die Johannesbriefe*, pp. 275-278.

<sup>47</sup> "Dies ist das Entscheidende : Die 'Sünde zum Tode' geschieht vorsätzlich, willentlich..." : W. NAUCK, *ibid.*, p. 144.

<sup>48</sup> "... bei der 'Sünde nicht zum Tode' handelt es sich um einen nicht-vorsätzlichen, unwissentlichen Fehltritt." : *Ibid.*

<sup>49</sup> "Schon das AT kennt geringere (nichtvorsätzliche) und schwerere (vorsätzliche) Sünden (vgl. Lv 4, 2ff ; 5, 1ff ; Nm 15, 22ff im Gegensatz zu Nm 15, 30f)." : R. SCHNACKENBURG, *Die Johannesbriefe*, p. 276. This distinction is also known in the writings of Qumran : Cf. W. NAUCK, *ibid.*

<sup>50</sup> "Der Todsünder hat keine Gemeinschaft mit den Gläubigen — nicht einmal Fürbitte soll für ihn eingelegt werden." : W. NAUCK, *ibid.*, p. 145.

<sup>51</sup> "Sünde zum Tod'... ist eine Tat, die Gott mit dem Ausschluss von seinem Lebensbereich strafen muss..." : R. SCHNACKENBURG, *Die Johannesbriefe*, p. 277.

with the death penalty, as indicated in some Old Testament texts.<sup>52</sup> N. Lazure interprets the "sin unto death" in its most literal sense: as the most extreme form of the sin of hatred, homicide.<sup>53</sup>

R. Schnackenburg and A. Vögtle represent the opinion that the "sin unto death" is not to be identified with the sin called *anomia*, nor with the "sin against the Holy Spirit" of Mark 3, 29 par.,<sup>54</sup> nor with apostasy, nor with the sins that were considered to be "serious" according to the mentality of the times.<sup>55</sup> But the exact nature of this sin, which appears in the Bible only in this text of the First Epistle of John, remains unknown.<sup>56</sup>

c) *adikia*:<sup>57</sup> The "sin of injustice"<sup>58</sup> is understood as the opposite of the practice of justice, that is, to follow the holiness of life demanded by God. Concretely, this means that manner of living which consists in walking as Christ walked (1 John 2, 6), in making oneself pure as he is pure (1 John 3, 3), in doing the will of God (1 John 2, 17).<sup>59</sup> *Adikia* is also seen as the opposite of *aletheia* ('truth') and in connection with the sin of *asebeia* ('impiousness, profanity').<sup>60</sup> *Adikia* can therefore be translated as "transgression of the divine will"<sup>61</sup> and means: "*die*

<sup>52</sup> "Todsünde" ist ursprünglich eine Schuld, die leibliche Todesstrafe nach sich zieht (vgl. Nm 18, 22; Is 22, 14) ...: *Ibid.*, p. 276.

<sup>53</sup> "Le péché à la mort est celui qui consiste à tuer, qui aboutit à commettre l'homicide. L'identification de ce péché est tout indiquée puisque pour l'épître celui qui hait son frère est un homicide (I, 3, 15: *anthropoktonos*, hapax johannique dans le Nouveau Testament). Par les mots *hamartia pros thanaton*, l'auteur a donc en vue la haine, ce péché qui pousse à tuer, qui aboutit à la mort." : *Op. cit.*, p. 312.

<sup>54</sup> R. SCHNACKENBURG, *Die sittliche Botschaft des Neuen Testaments*, p. 279.

<sup>55</sup> "Das schwer zu identifizierende Sündigen 'zum Tode' von 1 Jo 5, 16 ist nicht ohne weiteres mit der Apostasie gleichzusetzen, auch nicht sicher mit der verstockten und insofern unvergeblichen Zurückweisung der Gnade." : A. VÖGTLE, "Sünde wider den Heiligen Geist," in *LThK*, vol. IX, cols. 1187-1188 (1188).

<sup>56</sup> "So können wir nicht mehr sicher feststellen, woran der Verf. bei 'Sünde zum Tode' konkret denkt. Alles Herumraten, ob er an Glaubensabfall, Mord und Götzendienst (so Windisch) oder etwa an die Sünden des Todesweges Did 1-5 (so R. Seeberg) oder an Glaubensabfall bzw. grundsätzliche Verachtung der Gebote Gottes (so Poschmann) denke, ist zwecklos, da der Verf. die Kenntnis seiner Adressaten (sei es durch Belehrung oder eigenes Urteilsvermögen) voraussetzt. Daß speziell der Glaubensabfall zur bekämpften Irrlehre gemeint sei, ist nicht so sicher, wie neuere Exegeten (Bonsirven, Chaine, Charue u. a.) meinen." : R. SCHNACKENBURG, *Die Johannesbriefe*, p. 278.

<sup>57</sup> N. LAZURE, *op. cit.*, pp. 309-310; G. SCHRENK, *art. cit.*, pp. 150-163.

<sup>58</sup> "Injustice" : N. LAZURE, *ibid.*; "gottwidrige Ungerechtigkeit" : G. SCHRENK, *ibid.*, p. 156.

<sup>59</sup> N. LAZURE, *ibid.*

<sup>60</sup> "impiousness, profanity" : H. G. LIDDELL, R. SCOTT, *Greek-English Lexicon* (abridged, Oxford, 1958).

"Nach J 7, 18... ist die *adikia* da, wo man nicht Gottes Ehre, sondern seinen eigenen Ruhm sucht... Besonders ausdrücklich wird 1 J 1, 9 *adikia* mit *hamartia* als *gottwidrige Ungerechtigkeit* zusammengestellt. 1 J 5, 17 bekommen wir sogar eine dementsprechende Definition: *pasa adikia hamartia estin.*" : G. SCHRENK, *art. cit.*, pp. 156-157.

<sup>61</sup> N. LAZURE, *op. cit.*, p. 310.

"Als *adikia* ist sie (sin) Widerspruch gegen das Recht und darin zugleich Widerspruch gegen den göttlichen Willen: *anomia.*" : W. GRUNDMANN, *art. cit.*, p. 309.

*menschliche Unheiligkeit der göttlichen Heiligkeit und Barmherzigkeit (dikaios) gegenüber*".<sup>62</sup>

D. SUMMARY

The Christian as believer has chosen between the world of darkness and the world of light and is called upon to live according to his choice by abiding in Christ as a child of God. The "daily sins" of the Christian can find forgiveness in praying to God but must be taken seriously as participations in the "sin of the world" and "iniquity". But single sinful actions can also be manifestations of an attitude of heart which is opposed to the truth of God and which opposes and rejects the Son of God and the Father in the hostile unbelief of the Antichrist and the power of sin. The great sin for John is the sin of unbelief which manifests and participates in the diabolical opposition of the forces of Evil against God at the end of time. All other sins manifest to some degree a participation in this satanic, eschatological opposition to and rejection of Christ and his work of salvation.

For John, the coming of Christ and his message presents man with an either-or decision to which there is no third possibility: either the complete acceptance of Christ as the Son of God and the consequent "walking as he walked", "walking in the light", that is, living according to his commandments of faith and love; or damnation. Either man accepts Christ, his commandments and work of salvation and therefore "abides in him" during his whole life, or he refuses to believe that Christ is the Messiah, the Son of God, and rejects his person, message and works. Lack of faith, unbelief means the rejection of Christ, opposition to God's will and plan of salvation and alliance with the satanical power, manifested in *anomia*, which had kept the world in darkness before the light had come and which opposes the will of God and continues to oppose Christ until eschatological times. All sin, every sin already participates in *the* sin of final and absolute rejection in lack of faith. All sin is the result of free, personal decision, for man must decide either to remain in the darkness or to walk in the light (John 3, 19-21), to accept Christ or to reject him (John 15, 22). Every sin is to be taken seriously, for all sin is an expression of *the* sin of unbelief which has already been judged (John 3, 18) and will be punished in the last times (John 3, 36) which, for John, have already arrived. Whoever is "of this world", from "below", will die in his sins (John 8, 23-24).

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<sup>62</sup> R. SCHNACKENBURG, *Die Johannesbriefe*, p. 88.