

## ***Imitatio Christi* in the fourth gospel**

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### **ABSTRACT**

#### ***Imitatio Christi* in the fourth gospel**

*Imitatio Christi* is a concept which, although not referred to explicitly in the Fourth Gospel, is clearly spelled out in relation to the agency motif occurring in the Gospel. The disciples of Jesus have been appointed as his agents to continue his mission after his departure to his Father. In giving this message through to his readers, the Fourth Evangelist refers to Jesus' calling of his disciples, ἀκολουθεῖ μοι; pictures Jesus as ὑπόδειγμα; uses καθως (the particle of comparison) to compare the lives of the disciples with that of Jesus; points out the tasks the disciples had to perform after Jesus' ascension and, finally, indicates how Jesus dwells in his disciples through the Paraclete.

The words “change” and “renewal” are very much part of our daily language and life. We hear them daily in our work situation due to changes in politics and the rapid changes in technology and the sciences. We see change and renewal every day in nature. These words are used in counselling and we hear them from the pulpit on Sundays, when Christians are reminded of the change and newness of life, which should be the fruits of membership of God's family. Believers' lives must reflect the characteristics of God's family if they are to continue Jesus' divine mission of revelation and salvation. The image (the way of life) that is presented, which God's children must adopt, is that of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who was incarnated to perform God's will (4:34; 5:30; 6:38; 8:29), and to initiate a mission that would be continued by his disciples. The disciples, therefore, must imitate the life of Jesus (cf 13:20; 17:18; 20:21).

The questions that now arise are: What does such a life comprise? Can we maintain such a way of life? How could we live like Jesus, who is the Son of God and lived about 2000 years ago? How could we live sinless lives? How could we perform miracles? It is not possible today to live a wandering life as Jesus did? Not all of us are teachers and can draw people to us as Jesus did. Fortunately, the Fourth Evangelist helps us in this regard. He clearly spells out what is meant by imitating the life

of Christ (*imitatio Christi*)<sup>1</sup>, and has given his own particular emphasis on this feature of the tradition. According to him, in the mind of Jesus self, discipleship necessarily assumed a clearly recognizable pattern, the life of the disciple being a *semeion* of Jesus' own presence and activity through the Spirit. The Fourth Evangelist has given special emphasis to this theme. A disciple of Jesus is by definition, so to speak, the *imitator Filii*, following in the way of Jesus the *imitator Patris* (Tinsley 1960:126f). Throughout the Gospel Jesus is depicted as *imitator Dei*. This influences the role that Jesus believed his sonship must assume. What is implicit in the synoptic tradition is given special treatment in the Fourth Gospel. This is based on: Firstly, Jesus' disciples following him (ἀκολουθεῖν) (1:37-43; 8:12; Ch 10; 12:24-26; 13:36-38; and 21:15-23); Secondly, the bond between Jesus and his disciples is, expressed particularly in John 13:15, where Jesus is presented as the Exemplar for his disciples: “ὑπόδειγμα γὰρ ἔδωκα ὑμῖν ἵνα καθὼς ἐγὼ ἐποίησα ὑμῖν καὶ ὑμεῖς ποιῆτε”; Thirdly, it is described in the \*καθως' particle of comparison, where the lives of the disciples are compared to that of Jesus; Fourthly, the *imitatio Christi* is seen in the disciples' task. If they believed in him (14:12), loved him (14:15; 15:10; 21:23), and remained in him (15:4), they would be prepared, and would do the things Jesus

<sup>1</sup>The concept “imitating Christ” has been derived from the Greek word μιμέομαι. Although the word doesn't occur in the Fourth Gospel, the concept of ‘imitation’ does occur. While the imitation of God (*imitatio Dei*) by Jesus is most prominent and explicit, the imitation of Jesus (*imitatio Christi*) by his disciples is also emphasized. Because the lexeme μιμέομαι does not occur in the Fourth Gospel although the concept, is the Latin *imitatio Christi* used in order to refer to this concept and to discuss it in this article. De Boer (1962:13ff) gives a brief account of the Greek word μιμέομαι which is translated by Arndt and Gingrich (1957:523) as “imitate, following” and by Liddel and Scott (1974:447) as “to imitate, copy”. Μιμέομαι and two related forms (μιμητής and συμμιμητής) are found eight times in the *corpus Paulinum*, twice in the epistle to the Hebrews (6:12; 13:7), and once in the *corpus Johanneum* (III John 11). According to De Boer “it is clear that in these non-Pauline passages imitation has to do with bringing to expression in one's life something he has witnessed in another”. After a brief discussion of the Pauline usage of the word μιμέομαι and its related forms he stated that “it becomes evident that Paul was introducing no new idea or terminology when he chose to use it in his letters. He had well established Greek usage behind him, as well as the use of the term in the Greek writings which the Jewish community had produced. There was a breadth of content in the Greek word which cannot be subsumed under the idea of imitation in the sense of merely producing the same thing or a likeness. At its root the word carried the thought of bringing to expression, representation, and portrayal”. This also seems to be the idea of the Fourth Evangelist in his depiction of Jesus' disciples. In the Fourth Gospel the disciples are the representatives (agents) of Jesus as Jesus is that of the Father. The Fourth Evangelist also uses related words in the semantic domain of “portrayal” like “ὑπόδειγμα” and “καθως”.

had done; And fifthly, *imitatio Christi* is implicitly expressed in the references of the indwelling of Christ in his disciples through the Paraclete (14:17; 16:13-15; cf. 17:26). Jesus will continue and fulfil his mission through his disciples.

This essay will concentrate on how the five aspects mentioned above contribute to understanding the Johannine *imitatio Christi*. Although the five categories are distinguished, it should be noted that there is a certain degree of overlapping, with differences in respect of nuance.

## 1 JESUS CALLS HIS DISCIPLES TO 'ΑΚΟΛΟΥΘΕΙ ΜΟΙ

One of the ways in which Jesus is presented in the Fourth Gospel is as a Jewish rabbi who gathers a group of followers. According to Köstenberger (1998:130), it seems that the Fourth Evangelist has interwoven this aspect of Jesus' mission with the role of the Messianic shepherd. This is seen in Chapter 10, where “following” (ἀκολουθεῖν) and “shepherding” terminologies intersect (vv 3-5, 16; cf also v 27). Such an important connection is also found in 21:15-19, where Jesus calls one of his followers, Peter, to be a *shepherd*. The *Shepherd* expects his disciples to be *shepherds* too.

Another theme, also integrated into those passages, which deals with Jesus' calling of others to follow him in order to continue his mission (cf. 1:37-43; 8:12; 10:4,5,27; 12:26; 21:19-23),<sup>2</sup> can be seen in references to his followers' “bearing fruit”, that is, participating in the Messianic “harvest” (cf. 4:34-38 and ch 15). In these passages the emphasis is on Jesus' launching of the reaping of the eschatological Messianic harvest. The Fourth Evangelist weaves the references into a coherent picture of Jesus as the eschatological shepherd-teacher who calls his followers to participate in bringing in the eschatological Messianic harvest (Köstenberger 1998:131).

In 12:24, for instance, Jesus says that he “will bear much fruit” (πολὸν καρπὸν φέρει). This statement refers to the inclusion of Greeks (diaspora Jews and Gentile proselytes) into the realm of God's salvation and community. Similar terminology of “bearing much fruit” is used later to refer to the future mission of the disciples (cf φέρει καρπὸν πολὺν - 15:5; καρπὸν πολὺν φέρητε - 15:8; καρπὸν φέρητε - 15:16; - also cf ὁ θερίζων μισθὸν λαμβάνει καὶ συνάγει καρπὸν εἰς ζωὴν αἰώνιον - 4:36). From these passages it could be deduced that Jesus' followers will participate (as shepherds, like Jesus) in Jesus' fruitful

<sup>2</sup>At the beginning of the Fourth Gospel Jesus calls his followers to follow him (1:37-43), and at the conclusion of the Gospel Jesus calls one of his followers to be a shepherd (cf. 21:15-19). Note also the parallel references to the kinds of death Jesus and Peter would die in 12:33 and 21:19.

“gathering” activity, especially after his life-giving death (Köstenberger 1998:133). Thus, Jesus’ mission is presented by the Fourth Evangelist in terms of the eschatological Messianic shepherd-teacher, who calls his followers to participate in gathering the Messianic harvest.

## 2 JESUS THE ὑΠΟΔΕΙΓΜΑ FOR HIS DISCIPLES

After Jesus washing the feet of his disciples (13:4-12) Jesus informs them in v 15 that he has set them an example (ὑπόδειγμα)<sup>3</sup> and requests them to do the same<sup>4</sup>. In most cases this noun (ὑπόδειγμα) has been translated<sup>5</sup> as “example”, “pattern” or “model”. “Example” can refer to a person who demonstrates a quality (*Shorter Oxford English Dictionary*). “Pattern” refers to an example or model deserving imitation (*Shorter Oxford English Dictionary*), while “model” refers to a person who is proposed or adopted for imitation (*Shorter Oxford English Dictionary*). From these three brief definitions it seems that ὑπόδειγμα could refer to both a “person” or a “deed” to be imitated. In considering the immediate textual context (Ch 13), a closer understanding of the meaning of ὑπόδειγμα can be achieved. According to the context, both references are applicable to Jesus: he *is* (person) an example and *sets* (deed) an

<sup>3</sup> According to Tinsley (1960:132f), certain figures in the Gospel seem to be presented by the Fourth Evangelist as ideal disciples, exemplars of the *imitatio Christi*. He strengthens this statement by referring to visible exemplars of the imitation of Christ, perhaps already perceptible within the Synoptic tradition. The anointing at Bethany (Mk 14:3-9) presents the woman as a concrete illustration of Christian humility and devotion to the Lord. Tinsley then names and briefly discusses a few examples from the Fourth Gospel: Nicodemus, the man born blind, the Beloved disciple and Peter. He points out that the beloved disciple could be regarded as a model *imitator Christi*. He must succeed in the shepherding of the sheep (21:15-17) and, “Just as the Son is in the bosom (εἰς τὸν κόλπον τοῦ πατρὸς) of the Father (1:18), so the beloved disciple lies in the bosom (ἐν τῷ κόλπῳ τοῦ Ἰησοῦ) of Jesus (13:23). Tinsley argues that perhaps Peter is the *imitator Christi par excellence*. According to 21:18 he will suffer and die to glorify God in a manner very close to the suffering and death of his Lord. In the Lucan writings, as well as in the Fourth Gospel, the martyr is the norm for the *imitatio Christi*.

<sup>4</sup> “καθώς”, the particle of comparison, can also be interpreted in some cases as an example set by Jesus: his disciples had to follow his example (love, oneness). Due to the high occurrence frequency of this particle in the Fourth Gospel, it was decided to discuss it separately after the discussion of the ὑπόδειγμα aspect.

<sup>5</sup> Arndt and Gingrich (1957:851) translates “ὑπόδειγμα” in one sense as “example”, “model” and “pattern”, and in another as “copy” and “imitation”. Liddell and Scott (1974:738) translate it as “pattern”, “copy” and “example”. Although Louw and Nida (1988:592) also translate it as “example” and “model”, they describe it as “a model of behavior as an example to be imitated or to be avoided”. More translations are: “example” (Morris 1975:621; Hendriksen 1976:235) or “pattern” (Bultmann 1971:475; Sanders/Mastin 1975:309; Barrett 1978:443; Carson 1991:468). It is also translated as “model” by Bultmann (1971:475).

example. When Jesus informs his disciples that ὑπόδειγμα γὰρ ἔδωκα ὑμῖν ἵνα καθὼς ἐγὼ ἐποίησα ὑμῖν καὶ ὑμεῖς ποιῆτε, he is saying that they must follow in the footsteps of their master who is continuously the revelatory example<sup>6</sup>. This relationship between Jesus and his disciples (depicted as discipleship) implies that the disciple is subjected to the command of Jesus. The keeping of this command is only possible by virtue of the relationship between Jesus and the disciple (15:5-8). The disciple sees and experiences the content of true love in the way of life of his master (cf. Wendland 1975:112).

Although “ὑπόδειγμα” should be interpreted according to the immediate context, namely the “foot washing”, it also has wider implications. Jesus is the model and came to set an example for his disciples (ὑπόδειγμα), also about other aspects concerning their mission. This example is depicted throughout the Fourth Gospel by means of various motifs: the light/darkness motif (3:19-21); the shepherd motif (10:2-6, 11-18); the kernel of wheat motif (12:24-26); the footwashing motif (13:2-11) (cf. Van der Watt 1992:83); the love motif (13:34; 15:12); and the obedience motif (14:31; 15:10; Cf. 14:15,21,23,24). This will now be discussed briefly.

(a) *Light/darkness motif*: In the Prologue (1:4), the Logos (Jesus) is referred to as the *Light* of men (...ἡ ζωὴ ἣν τὸ φῶς τῶν ἀνθρώπων) and in 8:12 Jesus himself says Ἐγὼ εἰμι τὸ φῶς τοῦ κόσμου. The function of the Light was that τὸ φῶς ἐν τῇ σκοτίᾳ φαίνει (1:5), so that ὁ ἀκολουθῶν ἐμοὶ οὐ μὴ περιπατήσει ἐν τῇ σκοτίᾳ, ἀλλ' ἔξει τὸ φῶς τῆς ζωῆς (8:12). The soteriological and ethical implications of this φαίνει were that Jesus placed the world in a position to choose between light and darkness and to judge between what is right and what is wrong (cf also 3:19-21; 9:4f)<sup>7</sup>. Those who performed good deeds in obedience to God (ὁ δὲ ποιῶν τὴν ἀλήθειαν--3:21) ἔρχεται πρὸς τὸ φῶς, while those whose deeds were evil remained in darkness (3:19)<sup>8</sup>.

<sup>6</sup> In 13:36, Peter poses a question to Jesus: “Κύριε, ποῦ ὑπάγεις;” In replying to the question, Jesus hints at the prospect that Peter will eventually follow him. The use of the verb ἀκολουθῆσαι places it once more in the ethics of discipleship (cf also 12:26): Peter’s whole life is meant to be one modelled on the life of Jesus. This comprises service to Jesus (12:26), the denial of his own will, being attentive to the words of Jesus (13:36ff) and at the same time being open to being led where he does not wish to go (21:18) (Schnackenburg 1975:62). Thus, the goal of the life of a disciple is to follow the path mapped out by Jesus (Hartin 1991:8).

<sup>7</sup> Because of his close relationship with Jesus, a disciple will live by the truth (3:21), and because of his salvation (regeneration--3:3,5) such a person will live in the light. Basically both statements mean the same, and both have soteriological and Christological implications.

<sup>8</sup> Van der Watt (1992:85) correctly mentions that in Ch 9, especially in vv 35-41, the Fourth Evangelist also uses another antithetical image, namely “to see” *versus* “to be

The example Jesus sets his disciples is ἵνα ποιήσω τὸ θέλημα τοῦ πέμψαντός με (4:34; 6:38). Because they are Jesus' disciples, it is expected ἵνα (they) ποιήσω τὸ θέλημα τοῦ (Jesus) πέμψαντός με (them) - in this case it would be Jesus (17:18; 20:21). They are appointed, as Jesus was, to witness to the world, bringing to them the revelation of God and the salvation of mankind through Jesus. This will place the world in a position to choose between light and darkness. In chapters 16 and 17 the Fourth Evangelist, on the one hand, refers to those who have chosen the darkness as the world. As they hated Jesus, so will they hate his disciples (16:1ff; 17:14). In 17:20, the Fourth Evangelist refers to those who have, through the witness of the disciples, chosen the light. Just as Jesus' message and presence in this world created a schism, so also will that of his followers (cf. 20:22).

(b) *Shepherd motif*: The second motif is that of the shepherd. The sheep follow their shepherd unconditionally. The sheep listen to the voice of their shepherd: "He calls his sheep by name and leads them out" (10:3f). The sheep then follow the shepherd and identify fully with the shepherd and his deeds. Although this metaphor is not developed ethically by the Fourth Evangelist, his motifs and implication are clear (Van der Watt 1992:83ff).

(c) *Kernel and wheat motif*: In Chapter 12, where reference is made to the Greeks who seek to see Jesus (v 20), Jesus refers to the time of his glorification (v 23). Jesus, in the atmosphere of the Passover (12:1), explains the meaning and beneficial implications of his death. He uses the "kernel of wheat" motif to do this. The wheat *falls* to the ground and dies to produce many seeds. With this picture Jesus indicates what benefit his death would hold for people. Jesus, after explaining this image, applies it to his disciples (12:25f). Anyone who wishes to follow Jesus must be prepared to lay down his life for him. This involves a priority shift, that is, moving one's own interests to the periphery and the interests of Jesus to the centre, regardless of the cost. In dedicated self-sacrifice these disciples have to serve Jesus (12:26) and one another (13:14).

(d) *Foot-washing motif*: The most significant passage in which love is expressed in deeds (to serve), appears in 13:2-11, the scene of the foot-washing.

"Without doubt the life of Jesus was characterized as a life of service to the Father and humanity. But this life demonstrates a special type of service. When Jesus responds to the needs of others, he does so in such a way that his mission and his relationship with the

blind". A blind person cannot enjoy the shining of the light. To experience this he has to see. In order to see he has to accept Jesus, the Light (1:4f; 8:12), into his life.

Father emerge clearly. At the same time his life of service becomes an example for the life of service to which he calls his followers" (Hartin 1991:4).

After the washing, Jesus explains the significance of his actions to the disciples (13:12). It is true that he is their Lord and Teacher (v 13), but by washing their feet he had set them an *ὑπόδειγμα* (13:15) in an attempt to redefine the position and conduct of the disciples. If Jesus acts like this, how should his disciples act? This answer is given in 13:14: "εἰ οὖν ἐγὼ ἐνίψα ὑμῶν τοὺς πόδας ὁ κύριος καὶ ὁ διδάσκαλος, καὶ ὑμεῖς ὀφείλετε ἀλλήλων νίπτειν τοὺς πόδας". It is this serving attitude and act that bind the sender and the agent together (cf Schulz 1987:502; Furnish 1972:139), and characterize their mission to the world (see 13:16f, 20). The serving of one another in humility must become the hallmark of all disciples (Hartin 1991:5).

(e) *Love motif*. The love motif concerns the love of the disciples for one another (13:34; 15:12). Jesus said Ἐντολὴν καινὴν δίδωμι ὑμῖν, ἵνα ἀγαπᾶτε ἀλλήλους, καθὼς ἠγάπησα ὑμᾶς ἵνα καὶ ὑμεῖς ἀγαπᾶτε ἀλλήλους. The key to understanding the meaning of καινὴν lies in the particle καθὼς, which compares the love of the disciples to that of Jesus. Hartin (1991:8) is correct when he states that the emphasis that Jesus places on this commandment is that it is καινὴν. While this commandment is found among other Old Testament commandments (see Lev 19:18), its newness arises from the fact that the disciples must imitate Jesus' love. Disciples of Jesus must model their love on Jesus' self-sacrificing love for humanity. The self-sacrificing love of Jesus constructs the model, according to which disciples strive to lead their lives: this forms a love parallelism. Jesus' disciples are easily recognizable, not by what they believe, but by the mutual love they demonstrate, one for the other (13:35) (Hartin 1991:8).

(f) *Obedience motif*. From John 14:15,21,23 it is clear that obedience to the will of God is the consequence of the disciple's love for his master. Jesus stresses this fact in 15:9,10. When analyzing these verses, note how strikingly the two καθὼς-clauses are arranged chiasmically, with the admonition to abide in the love of Jesus in the middle.

<sup>9</sup> καθὼς ἠγάπησέν με ὁ πατήρ, καὶ γὰρ ὑμᾶς ἠγάπησα	A
μείνατε ἐν τῇ ἀγάπῃ τῇ ἐμῇ.	B
<sup>10</sup> ἐὰν τὰς ἐντολάς μου τηρήσητε,	C
μένειτε ἐν τῇ ἀγάπῃ μου,	B'
καθὼς ἐγὼ τὰς ἐντολάς τοῦ πατρός μου τηρήκα Ἀ'	
καὶ μένω αὐτοῦ ἐν τῇ ἀγάπῃ.	

This appeal is the real aim of the chiasm and gives depth to the admonition: *μείνατε ἐν ἐμοί*. This chiasm emphasizes obedience. Jesus uses his obedience as an example (*καθώς*) to call on his disciples to follow in his footsteps.

But we must bear in mind that Jesus' behaviour is actually the expression of the will of the Father (4:34; 6:38): *ὅτι καταβέβηκα ἀπὸ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ οὐχ ἵνα ποιῶ τὸ θέλημα τὸ ἐμὸν ἀλλὰ τὸ θέλημα τοῦ πέμψαντός με*. In this Gospel the emphasis is on the portrayal of Jesus as the perfectly obedient one. The Son does nothing on his own, but bases all his actions on what he has seen and heard from his Father (5:19f, 30; 8:28f, 38; 14:10; also cf 8:49,55; 12:49f; 15:10; 17:4). Therefore, Jesus can say "*ἀλλ' ἵνα γνῶ ὁ κόσμος ὅτι ἀγαπῶ τὸν πατέρα, καὶ καθὼς ἐνετείλατο μοι ὁ πατήρ, οὕτως ποιῶ. Ἐγείρεσθε, ἄγωμεν ἐντεῦθεν*" (14:31). In his unique sonship, which is expressed in perfect obedience and knowledge, Jesus is the one true *imitator Patris*.

The same obedience, as revealed by Jesus with regard to the will of the Father, is expected of the disciples (cf Du Rand 1981:364ff). Van der Watt (1992:86) indicates that when Jesus is truly obedient to the will of God, the will of God becomes his will. In the same way, when the believers are obedient to the will of Jesus, his will becomes their will and their will consequently become the same as the will of the Father. This is how the commands of Jesus should be seen (Schulz 1987:505). The following two phrases form a parallelism (equivalent in meaning) and a chiasm<sup>9</sup>, which helps to determine the meaning of *τὰς ἐντολὰς τοῦ πατρὸς μου*.

<p><i>ἵνα ποιήσω ..... τὸ θέλημα τοῦ πέμψαντός με</i>  <i>ἐγὼ τὰς ἐντολὰς τοῦ πατρὸς μου ..... τετήρηκα</i></p>
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If this argument is correct, it would mean that Jesus' commandments to his disciples relate to God's will for him. Then God's will for them would be the same as God's will for Jesus. *Ἐντολή* is not used here in an objective sense, but in the sense of a commission to be enforced. It refers to the commission that a father delegates to his son. When, in Chapter 15, Jesus commands his disciples to love one another, he expresses what he and the Father expect from believers. An analysis of Jesus' commandments to his disciples then appears as follows:

<sup>9</sup> This chiasm contributes to emphasize the "obedience" of Jesus, but especially to explain the meaning of "*τὰς ἐντολὰς... τετήρηκα*".

Here we see that obedience arises out of love and love out of obedience (cf Barrett 1978:476 for an opposite view). This implies that for Jesus obedience is an act of love, which results in love for one another. *Καθὼς* depicts a *quality* aspect which allocates a certain value to this love. This love of the disciples for one another must correspond with (imitate) the love Jesus had for his disciples.

The obedience motif then concerns the obeying of Jesus' commands by his disciples. Their obedience will prove their love for Jesus, just as Jesus' obedience to the Father's commands proved his love for the Father:

*ἐὰν τὰς ἐντολὰς μου τηρήσητε, μενεῖτε ἐν τῇ ἀγάπῃ μου, καθὼς ἐγὼ τὰς ἐντολὰς τοῦ πατρὸς μου τετήρηκα καὶ μένω αὐτοῦ ἐν τῇ ἀγάπῃ.*

### 3 THE DISCIPLES' NEW WAY OF LIFE ΚΑΘΩΣ THAT OF JESUS

The bond between Jesus and his disciples is expressed specifically in the *καθως*-particle<sup>10</sup> of comparison. This particle occurs frequently throughout the Fourth Gospel in connection with the subject: God-Jesus-disciples. "*Καθως*" here, describes the agreement between Father and Son (5:30; 8:28; 12:50; 14:31; 17:2; also cf 5:17-26), between Jesus and his disciples (13:15,34; 15:12; 17:14,16), and in analogies involving both relationships (6:57; 10:15; 14:20; 15:9,10; 17:11,18,21,22; 20:21; cf 17:23) (Radl 1991:226). As the Son lives *via* the Father (*διὰ τὸν πατέρα*), so his disciples live *via* Jesus (*δί' ἐμέ*) (6:57). As the Father knows the Son, and the Son the Father, so Jesus knows his sheep, and the sheep know their shepherd (10:14f). As the Son is in the Father, so his disciples are in Jesus (14:20). As the Father loves the Son, so sincere is the love of Jesus for his disciples (15:9f). The glory that the Father gave to his Son was given by Jesus to the disciples (17:22). Corresponding to these teachings are the words in 17:18: *as the Father sent the Son into the world, so Jesus sent his disciples into the world* (6:57; 17:18; 20:21).

This *καθως* concept focusses, according to the Fourth Gospel, on the following basic aspects concerning the *imitatio Christi*: dependence ([5:19 – 15:5]; 6:57; 15:15; [12:49; 14:10 – 17:8]); mission (13:20; 17:18; 20:21); knowledge (10:14,15); love in obedience ([15:9; 15:10;

<sup>10</sup> *Καθως* is used 31 times in the Fourth Gospel and only 28 times in the Synoptics. In the Fourth Gospel it is mostly used in a comparative sense. Linguistically and theologically it creates a thetical parallelism. In such a parallelism, that which is known, is used to elucidate the unknown.

13:34f; cf 15:12]; [5:20 – 14:12]; 17:23); unity (14:10f; 14:20; [14:10 – 15:4]; 10:30; 17:11,21-23); glory (15:8; 17:1-5; 22-24); obedience of Jesus' commands (15:10), and life (6:57).

From the above mentioned list only 17:18 will be discussed as an example owing to its fundamental importance, aiding our understanding of how the “καθώς”-particle of comparison contributes to the understanding of *imitatio Christi*. Both Jesus and his disciples were sent on a mission into the world. The difference is that Jesus, who himself was sent, sends them. According to Lenski (1961:1149), “Jesus ... carries the Father's mission to a certain point and then uses the disciples to carry it to completion. A certain part of the great work is thus graciously transferred to the disciples”. Lenski (1961:1149) is correct when he says that the particle καθώς (v 18) is inexact. But he wrongly interprets the parallel as relating to the persons indicated by the use of καγὼ. This is in fact, a parallel regarding manner and objective. The character and meaning of the disciples' mission lies in the choice and semantic meaning of ἀπέστειλα and the fact that the disciples' mission is not a “new” mission, but is part of Jesus' mission; it is the continuation of the mission of Jesus. Bultmann (1941:144) correctly refers to the ministry of the disciples as the continuation of the eschatological event which began in Jesus. In order to accomplish this, their mission must reflect the same character and objectives as the mission of Jesus. Therefore, Jesus compares their mission with his mission. Here the Fourth Evangelist regards the mission of the Son as almost completed, and the mission of the disciples as just beginning (Barrett 1978:510). From v 26 it is clear that Jesus himself continues his mission through his disciples.

The fact that we are dealing with the “agency” of Jesus, the continuation of Jesus' mission, in Chapter 17 as a whole, and in particular v 18, implies that “the agency concept” is now transferred to the disciples and made applicable to them. The parallel actually lies in the revelatory-salvic character of the mission of Jesus. Both are sent. Both have a mission, both missions are divine, both have a revelatory-salvific objective. Both perform this task under the guidance and power of the Spirit.

This correspondence is also marked by the fact that they are both to be ἀγιάζειν (17:17,19). This implies that the life of a disciple of Jesus must change and continuously be renewed according to the life of Jesus, if Jesus' mission is to be fulfilled.

#### 4 THE TASK OF THE DISCIPLES

Köstenberger (1998:169ff) gives an excellent analysis of the task of Jesus' disciples according to the Fourth Gospel. The Fourth Gospel refers to the task of Jesus in terms of “works” (ἔργον/ἔργα) or “signs” (σημεῖα/σημεῖον), which comprise the revelation of God and the

salvation of mankind. But the range for describing of the disciples' task is limited. Although the terms “signs” and “works” are never used to indicate the disciples' task, there is a reference to the disciples' “greater works”<sup>11</sup> in 14:12: ἀμὴν ἀμὴν λέγω ὑμῖν, ὁ πιστεύων εἰς ἐμὲ τὰ ἔργα ἃ ἐγὼ ποιῶ κακεῖνος ποιήσει καὶ μείζονα τούτων ποιήσει. The disciple then is said to perform the works of his master. The reference here of the “greater works” (μείζονα τούτων) can be taken to refer to the gap the followers of Jesus would fulfil between his ascension and return. Thus the work of Jesus, which was only foreshadowed in his “signs”, would continued through the disciples. This interpretation would put the work of the earthly Jesus in its entirety in perspective, considering it in a sense as foundational for the later, “greater” works<sup>12</sup> (Köstenberger 1998:171). In 13:16 the ministries of Jesus and his disciples are placed in relation to each other. Servant and master alike must serve humbly and both will be persecuted (15:20). Therefore, according to Köstenberger (1998:172), “it may be concluded that the comparative ‘greater’ in 14:12 relates to the work of Jesus and those of believers to each other with respect to an eschatological framework, that is, different phases in God's economy of salvation in which Jesus and his followers are operative”. Barrett (1978:460f) agrees with Köstenberger's view that the “greater works” depended upon Jesus' going back to his Father, since before the consummation of his work on the cross all that he did was necessarily incomplete. For him the work of the disciples come after the moment of fulfilment (cf 16:8-15). The works of the disciples are therefore greater, because the work of Jesus is now complete<sup>13</sup>. Schnackenburg (1988:72) concurs, noting that it is only after Jesus' glorification that the full fruit could be harvested (cf 12:24, 31-32; 17:2).

<sup>11</sup>There are also passages in the Fourth Gospel that characterize other tasks of the disciples: the disciples are sent to harvest (4:38), they are appointed to go and bear fruit (15:16), they must testify (15:27), and they are to forgive others their sins (20:23).

<sup>12</sup>In John 1:50 similar wording is used. The Fourth Evangelist narrates here the prophecy of Jesus to Nathanael that he would see “greater things (μείζω τούτων) than these”. What Nathanael will see is the greatness of the Son of Man. Thus, reference is here made to eschatological events relating the Son of Man (Köstenberger 1998:171). The “greater works” of the believer should be interpreted in its eschatological frame of reference, that is, as pointing to a new era based on Jesus' completed life work (17:4).

<sup>13</sup>Beasley-Murray (1987:255) sets the “greater works” in proper perspective: “The contrast accordingly is not between Jesus and his disciples in their respective ministries, but between Jesus with his disciples in the limited circumstances of his earthly ministry and the risen Christ with his disciples in the post-Easter situation. Then the limitations of the Incarnation will no longer apply, redemption will have been won

The Fourth Evangelist sums up the behaviour of Jesus' followers in two metaphors in 8:31-38. Van der Watt (1992:79) points out that in 8:31-38 the contrast between "slavery" and "the freedom" enjoyed as a member of a family is indicated. According to vv 32 and 34 this "freedom" relates directly with the actions of the person. Only the person who has been liberated by the Son (8:35) and consequently knows the truth (8:32) will be truly free from sin. The one who does not follow this direction indicated by Jesus, will remain enslaved by sin (8:34). The effect is thus clear: the person whose status (nature) had changed from being a slave to being a free man has changed his behaviour accordingly. A slave can only act according to the will of his master (which is sin). A free man acts in accordance with the conduct of the family into which he has been incorporated (cf 15:13-15). These actions are determined by the Father of the family.

This argument by the Fourth Evangelist continues in another metaphor in the same context. He refers to the kinship of a person. Nobody can hide his origin because it is seen in his deeds. Therefore, a child of Abraham will act like Abraham (8:39-41), a child of God will act like a child of God (8:42,47), and a child of Satan will act like Satan (8:44).

In conclusion we can say that in both these images Jesus relates the status of a person to his behaviour. Therefore, the life of a person who has been redeemed by Jesus will be like the life of Jesus, because that person acts like Jesus does, God has made him a disciple of Jesus<sup>14</sup>. What

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for the world, the kingdom of God opened for humanity, and the disciples equipped for a ministry in power to the nations".

<sup>14</sup> Van der Watt (1992:78ff) also refers to the "life" and "kingdom" motifs which help to elucidate the meaning of Johannine ethics. With regard to the "kingdom" motif Van der Watt refers to 18:36: ἀπεκρίθη Ἰησοῦς, Ἡ βασιλεία ἡ ἐμὴ οὐκ ἔστιν ἐκ τοῦ κόσμου τούτου εἰ ἐκ τοῦ κόσμου τούτου ἦν ἡ βασιλεία ἡ ἐμὴ, οἱ ὑπηρέται οἱ ἐμοὶ ἡγωνίζοντο [ἄν], ἵνα μὴ παραδοθῶ τοῖς Ἰουδαίοις νῦν δὲ ἡ βασιλεία ἡ ἐμὴ οὐκ ἔστιν ἐντεῦθεν. Basic to this statement lies the relation that exists between the king and his subjects. They identify themselves with him as their acts relate to those of their king. The "life" motif describes the new existence which a believer receives from God (Wendland 1975:110; Van der Watt 1986). In order to explain what this new life in Christ comprises the Fourth Evangelist uses an analogy. Jesus compares what happens in the heavenly world to what happens in the ordinary world everyday: things such as birth (3:5,8), eating (6:35), drinking (4:13f; 7:37f), light (8:12) etc. Jesus uses this to illustrate eternal things. Thus Jesus uses familiar things to explain the unfamiliar things. When a person has been reborn into a new life, he becomes part of God's world in which he can live forever. In this new reality such a person's bread and water are Jesus himself. God is his Father (1:13) which implies that he has been adopted into this godly family. Being part of this family the norms and rules of this family are also applicable to, and have to be obeyed by, him. These rules come from the Father himself and the child of God has

we have here is a persons-identification; the disciple identifies himself completely with the person and conduct of Jesus so that he, in his conduct, demonstrates (manifests) the identity of Jesus. Thus, the disciple of Jesus lives in a godly relationship dynamic<sup>15</sup> that comes with high demands because of this new reality. By living in this new reality the disciple must live in obedience within the parameters put forward by God's commandment (Van der Watt 1992:79). The union of the disciples with Jesus is achieved in their discipleship; and the radical meaning of μαθητῆς εἶναι has become clear as a reciprocal μέινετε ἐν ἐμοί (cf Bultmann 1941:415). Thus the loyalty that is demanded is not so much a continued being *for*, but a being *from* (Bultmann 1941:411f). This metaphor highlights ethical action in order to show that the source and origin of all action rest in being united with Christ.

## 5 CHRIST CONTINUES LIVING HIS LIFE THROUGH HIS DISCIPLES THROUGH Ὁ ΠΑΡΑΚΛΗΤΟΣ

When Jesus sends his disciples into the world as the Father has sent him into the world, he takes the position of God and the *disciples that of Jesus*. The work of these disciples would be, as already stated, to do the work (will) of him (Jesus) who sends them, to continue the Son's divine mission. This becomes possible for Jesus' disciples only through the gift of the Spirit (20:22) sent by the Father in the name of Jesus (14:26), and sent by Jesus himself<sup>16</sup>.

The Fourth Evangelist uses the Greek word *pneuma* to indicate the Spirit of God<sup>17</sup> and uses it in a dualistic sense. On the one hand, the use of πνεῦμα refers to the "presence" of God<sup>18</sup>, and on the other hand to the "activities" of God in the world. A close association exists between

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to act accordingly. Therefore Jesus can emphasize the oneness of his disciples in Ch 17 (17:11,21-23; Schulz 1987:490).

<sup>15</sup> This union with Christ is not viewed by the Fourth Evangelist as a static condition (Barrett 1978:474). Μένειν means that the believer holds on loyally to the decision once taken (Bultmann 1941:412).

<sup>16</sup> It is reiterated in the Fourth Gospel that the Spirit can only be given after Jesus has been glorified (7:39; 16:7).

<sup>17</sup> Only in 11:33 and 13:21 he refers to the human spirit.

<sup>18</sup> Brown (1967:126ff) indicates the close parallel between the portrayal of Jesus in the Fourth Gospel and that of the Spirit-Paraclete in connection with (i) the coming of the Paraclete, (ii) the identification of the Paraclete, (iii) the relation of the Paraclete to the disciples, and (iv) that of the Paraclete to the world. According to Brown this detailed parallelism between Jesus and the Paraclete is too exact to be coincidental. "As 'another Paraclete', the Paraclete is, as it were, another Jesus... Since the Paraclete can come only when Jesus departs, the Paraclete is the presence of Jesus...Elsewhere Jesus promises to dwell with his disciples (xiv.23); this promise is fulfilled in the Paraclete" (Brown 1967:128).

the two. The presence of the Spirit indicates the presence of the “power” and “character” of God in Jesus (and Jesus’ disciples). This is clear from 1:32,33, where John the Baptist witnesses to the descent of the Spirit on Jesus. The word “Spirit” then seems also to be associated with the divine presence that results in the new life of a disciple of Jesus. Through Christ this divine presence is given to his disciples (believers) (7:39; 20:22); and through this divine presence Jesus has to become visible in the lives of his disciples (13:35). Jesus said, “καὶ ὁ θεωρῶν ἐμὲ θεωρεῖ τὸν πέμψαντά με” (12:45); similarly the disciples must now show forth the presence of Jesus so that whoever sees the disciples will see Jesus who sent them (cf 13:35), and also hear and experience Jesus (and God) through the disciples. Throughout the ministry of Jesus, people could see the presence of God (cf Brown 1972:1036). The same idea is stated in 13:20: “ἀμὴν ἀμὴν λέγω ὑμῖν, ὁ λαμβάνων ἅν τινα πέμψω ἐμὲ λαμβάνει, ὁ δὲ ἐμὲ λαμβάνων λαμβάνει τὸν πέμψαντά με”.

The close association between the activities of God and the presence of God becomes clear in Chapter 4. Here we find an indication of how the presence of God in the Spirit produces new life. In verse 23 the Fourth Evangelist speaks of the transformation of the believers’ worship, while verse 24 explicitly states that the Spirit is the presence of God himself: “πνεῦμα ὁ θεός, καὶ τοὺς προσκυνοῦντας αὐτὸν ἐν πνεύματι καὶ ἀληθείᾳ δεῖ προσκυνεῖν”. In this passage the Spirit is used as the divine presence that transforms the life of the believer. This is an indication that the Spirit is linked with the revelation of God in Christ. The revelation makes a new sense of the presence of God possible, in the identity of Christ, which in turn transforms<sup>19</sup> human existence. Thus Jesus gives the Spirit to his followers so that this gift of divine presence occasions the perception of Jesus’ identity<sup>20</sup>, a radically new life and a new way of living (Kysar 1993:108).

<sup>19</sup> The transition from an “old life” to a “new life” accorded by the Spirit is presented as a birth from “ἀνωθεν” (3:5). This metaphor suggests the way in which the new life of a disciple of Jesus (believer) emerges as a result of being embraced by the presence of God in the identification of Jesus as the Messiah, the Son of God. Thus it is clear that the Fourth Gospel asserts that the Spirit severely reorients human life according to the life of Jesus.

<sup>20</sup> The response of Jesus is that his disciples will only understand the significance of what he has done, what they have heard and seen, after Jesus’ return to the Father. This all fits in with other incidents in the Fourth Gospel which are clearly stated in 2:22; 12:16; 13:28f; and 20:9. During the cleansing of the temple (2:22) and at the entry into Jerusalem (12:16) the Fourth Evangelist comments that “ταῦτα οὐκ ἔγνωσαν αὐτοῦ οἱ μαθηταὶ τὸ πρῶτον, ἀλλ’ ὅτε ἔδοξάσθη Ἰησοῦς τότε ἐμνήσθησαν ὅτι ταῦτα ἦν ἐπ’ αὐτῷ γεγραμμένα καὶ ταῦτα ἐποίησαν αὐτῷ”. Hartin (1991:5) interprets this as the indication of a depth in the action(s) of Jesus

In the Last Discourse the Fourth Evangelist uses another word to indicate the Spirit of God: παράκλητος. The Spirit of truth will be given by the Father as ἄλλον παράκλητον. In the New Testament the noun παράκλητος is peculiar to the Johannine literature. The Christian tradition has identified παράκλητος in the context of the Fourth Gospel as the Spirit (Brown 1967:113; Kysar 1993:108), who is the successor of Jesus. He will remain with the disciples for ever and be in them. “The gift of the Spirit is not a religious experience which the believers may keep to themselves. It is equipment for mission...” (Fuller 1978:183).

In the Last Discourse Jesus says that his departure will make it possible for the Paraclete to be sent to the disciples (16:7; cf also 14:26; 15:26). The sending of the Spirit-Paraclete is joined together with the post-Paschal sending of the disciples<sup>21</sup>. If they are to continue the mission of Jesus, it is because the Spirit-Paraclete whom they receive (ἐνεφύσησεν)<sup>22</sup> will continue the mission of Jesus (cf 15:26f). The gift

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that acquires meaning only after the resurrection of Jesus. Thus, from these texts, it is clear that Jesus’ disciples could not perceive his identity until after his resurrection and the bestowal of the Spirit on them.

<sup>21</sup> See Brown (1972:1038), Carson (1991:649ff) and Schnackenburg (1975:386) for a discussion on the relationship between the Johannine Pentecost on Easter night with the Pentecost in Acts 2, fifty days later. An aspect to be considered in this difference is the fact that, for the Fourth Evangelist, the entire process of Jesus’ glorification, crucifixion, resurrection ascension and pentecost is a single event (cf Cook 1967:8). The question here is not how to assimilate the Lukan and Johannine Pentecosts, but rather how the Fourth Gospel could end without referring to a Johannine Pentecost. Because the Spirit plays such a decisive role in the continuation of the mission of Jesus (discipleship) it could not be neglected at this stage of the Fourth Gospel. Because Jesus has commissioned his disciples here he has to refer to the Spirit. The fact that the Fourth Evangelist mentions the Spirit in this pericope must also be seen in a theological framework: (i) Firstly, it indicates the fulfilment of the testimony of the Baptist in 1:33, namely that Jesus will baptize with the Holy Spirit. (ii) Secondly, it is a fulfilment of the promise of Jesus made in the Last Discourse that he will send his disciples the Paraclete (15:16; 16:7). (iii) Thirdly, the receiving of the Spirit would enable the disciples of Jesus to understand the identity of Jesus (14:26; 16:13) at this stage, so that the Fourth Evangelist could write that after Jesus’ resurrection the disciples recalled what Jesus had said and believed (2:22). (iv) Fourthly, it is important for the Fourth Evangelist to refer to the descending of the Spirit in close relationship with the mission of the disciples. The Spirit will not only support the disciples in their mission, but the Fourth Evangelist’s connecting of the Spirit with the mission of the disciples theologically indicates that the disciples’ mission is the continuation of Jesus’ mission, due to the role and function of the Spirit. Thus the Johannine Pentecost is theologically dominated to such an extent that the historical event and assimilation with Acts 2 became irrelevant.

<sup>22</sup> “A term literally meaning ‘breathe’ may refer only to inhaling and exhaling of breath, while anything as striking as this action of Jesus would be expressed as ‘blowing upon’” (Newman & Nida 1980:615). The fact that the Spirit represents the

of the Spirit is the “ultimate climax of the personal relationship between Jesus and his disciples” (Dodd 1980:227).

In 14:16-18 Jesus teaches his disciples “καὶ γὰρ ἐρωτήσω τὸν πατέρα καὶ ἄλλον παράκλητον δώσει ὑμῖν ἵνα μεθ’ ὑμῶν εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα ᾧ, τὸ πνεῦμα τῆς ἀληθείας... ὑμεῖς γινώσκετε αὐτό, ὅτι παρ’ ὑμῖν μένει καὶ ἐν ὑμῖν ἔσται. Οὐκ ἀφήσω ὑμᾶς ὀρφανούς, ἔρχομαι πρὸς ὑμᾶς”, and in 14:28 he says “Ἵπάγω καὶ ἔρχομαι πρὸς ὑμᾶς”. These words indicate that Jesus links his return to his disciples with the gift of the Paraclete. From the five so-called Paraclete passages in the Last Discourse (14:16-17; 14:25,26; 15:26,27; 16:7-11; 16:12-15)<sup>23</sup> it seems that the παράκλητον is a continuation of the existence of Christ in the world, but in another mode. For the Fourth Evangelist the Spirit forms the bond between Jesus, the disciples and the church (Schnackenburg 1975:386). This close relationship between Jesus and the Spirit is further emphasized in 15:26: “ἐκεῖνος μαρτυρήσει περὶ ἐμοῦ”, and connects with it the mission of his disciples in v 27, “καὶ ὑμεῖς δὲ μαρτυρεῖτε, ὅτι ἀπ’ ἀρχῆς μετ’ ἐμοῦ ἔστε ”. From these verses it is clear that for the Fourth Evangelist there is a close relationship between the mission of Jesus’ disciples and work of the Spirit.

What happens here is that the Spirit takes the revelation once made about God through the person of Jesus and will now reveal it, through Jesus’ disciples, to the world. Differently stated, the disciples, who have to continue the revelatory-salvific programme of Jesus, can only continue with it through the enabling of the Spirit. Through the disciples the person and activities of Christ, God, and the Spirit must become sensible and visible. In effect the Spirit is the medium of divine revelation, the

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creative power of God at work in man is a familiar Old Testament concept. The Fourth Evangelist made use of this in his usage of ἐνεφύσησεν (20:22). John 20:22 is the only place in the New Testament where this verb ἐνεφύσησεν (to breathe) occurs. It recalls Gen 2:7: “And the LORD God formed man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living being”. The translators of the Septuagint rendered the Hebrew verb נָפַח (*naphach*) with the Greek verb ἐνεφύσησεν. The Fourth Evangelist’s intention is to emphasize that the church is the new creation of God and therefore tries to link it with the first creation for a parallel. As with the creation where man received the gift of life directly from God, so here the church receives the life-giving Spirit directly from the risen Christ (Cook 1967:8; Brown 1972:1037; cf Bernard 1963:677; Schnackenburg 1975:385f). Barrett (1978:570) is correct when he states that “breathing” means “that Jesus is personally communicating and committing himself to his disciples in the person of the Spirit”.

<sup>23</sup> The first passage (14:16,17) gives general information about the Spirit-Paraclete. In the following four passages, two deal with the activity of the Spirit in the community of the disciples (14:25,26; 16:12-15), and the other two (15:26,27; 16:7-11) emphasize the activity of the Spirit through the disciples against the world.

divine messenger of revelation. He speaks and bears evidence *through* the disciples (15:26f) of only that which he hears from the Son. He is also the medium of divine salvation.

In conclusion we can say that the Spirit-Paraclete keeps Jesus alive in his disciples. Through him, Jesus is invisibly present in his disciples. Therefore the mission of the disciples, as bearers of the Gospel, will be expressed in the deliberate imitation of Jesus’ way. If his ways imitated the ways of the Father, their lives as disciples were to imitate the life of Christ. Thus they would achieve sonship: love one another (13:35f), obey Jesus’ commands (14:15; 15:10), remain in Jesus (15:4) and bearing much fruit to glorify the Father (15:8). The way of discipleship must be the way of the Son of Man. As Paraclete, the Spirit shapes the pattern of the life of believers to that of the Lord to make them truly his disciples. Thus the Spirit transforms the lives of Jesus’ disciples, enables them to continue Jesus’ mission, and makes Jesus present and sensible in their lives.

## 6 CONCLUSION

The above convincingly proves that the concept *Imitatio Christi* does occur explicitly in the Fourth Gospel. This relates to the important theme of “Agency”, which implies that Jesus’ disciples must continue his mission. The disciples must represent the one (Jesus) who sent them -- they must speak the words and perform the deeds of their sender. The Fourth Evangelist succeeded in pointing out that when Jesus called his disciples, he called (ἀκολουθεῖν) them to imitate certain aspects of his life. For that reason he has set them an example (ὑπόδειγμα). Through the particle of comparison (καθως), frequently used by the Fourth Evangelist, he pointed out the areas in the Christian life where disciples of Jesus must follow the example of their master. This is strengthened and emphasized by the Fourth Evangelist’s reference to the “greater deeds” (μείζονα τούτων), which the disciples will perform as the fulfilment of the divine work Jesus started. In order to accomplish this, Jesus came to live in his disciples through the Paraclete to help them continue his divine mission.

The Johannine teaching on *imitatio Christi* is summed up clearly and convincingly in 1 John. In this epistle the *imitatio Christi* is the test for the authenticity of the Christian character. The “new commandment” actualizes in Jesus, and in his followers insofar as he is an *imitator Christi*: “... in this world we are like him” (1 John 4:17). The followers of Christ will know that they have come to know him if they obey his commands (1 John 2:3). As a result the love of God will be made complete in them. “Whoever claims to live in him must walk as Jesus did” (1 John 2:5f).

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