

WHAT SHALL WE CALL EACH OTHER? PART TWO: THE ISSUE OF SELF-DESIGNATION IN THE JOHANNINE LETTERS AND REVELATION¹

Paul Trebilco

Summary

This paper discusses the ‘self-designations’ for their readers which were used by the Johannine Letters and Revelation. The key terms used in the Johannine Letters are ‘brother and sister’ and ‘children of God’ and in Revelation ‘saints’ and ‘servants’. It is argued that in the case of the Pastorals (drawing on our earlier discussion in Part One) and the Johannine Letters these designations are also being used by the readers, whereas the ‘world-shaping’ nature of John’s work means that we cannot say that the key terms that he adopts in order to refer to his readers were currently being used by them. Following these discussions, conclusions are reached with regard to early Christian communities and how they perceived their identity.

I. Insider Terms Designating Members of the Group in the Johannine Letters

1. Terms Probably Used Only by the Author of the Readers

The author of the Johannine Letters regularly addresses readers as *τεκνία* (little children),² or less frequently *παιδία* (children).³ These two terms of endearment, which are *only* used as terms of address, may be more indicative of the relationship of the author to the readers,

¹ This paper completes the publication the Tyndale New Testament Lecture for July 2001. ‘What Shall We Call Each Other? Part One: The issue of self-designation in the Pastoral Epistles’ was published in the previous issue: *Tyndale Bulletin* 53.2 (2002) 239–58.

² See 1 Jn. 2:1, 12, 28; 3:7, 18; 4:4; 5:21.

³ See 1 Jn. 2:14, 18. In 1 Jn. 3:7 there is debate about the reading, which is either *τεκνία* or *παιδία*.

whom he considers his spiritual children and over whom he wishes to assert his authority, rather than an indication of a term that the readers would have used more generally of one another to designate other members of the group.⁴ Thus, these two terms indicate how the author designates other members of the group; but they cannot be seen as ‘insider language’ of anyone else in the community.

Another term⁵ which is used exclusively by the author to address his readers is ‘beloved’ (ἀγαπητοί), which is used ten times in the Letters.⁶ 1 John 4:7, 9–11 is interesting in this regard:

Beloved (ἀγαπητοί), let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. ... God’s love was revealed among us in this way: God sent his only Son into the world so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins. *Beloved* (ἀγαπητοί), since God loved us so much, we also ought to love one another.

This passage explains why the author used the term ‘beloved’. He sees his readers as ‘beloved’ because God loves them, as has been shown by God sending his Son.⁷ But is the term used as a self-designation by members of the group? Did they address one another as ‘Beloved’, or identify themselves as ‘the Beloved’? We cannot really tell. Clearly for the author, as a response to God’s love, they ‘ought to love one another’ (1 Jn. 4:11, but also repeatedly

⁴ See R. Schnackenburg, *The Johannine Epistles. Introduction and Commentary* (New York: Crossroad, 1992), 110. R.E. Brown, *The Epistles of John. Translated with Introduction, Notes and Commentary* (AB; Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1982), 214, notes that this language need not mean that the author was an old man.

⁵ Brown (*The Epistles of John*, 444) notes ‘The normal Johannine epistolary greetings are “Little Children,” when the author is speaking as a tradition-bearer, and “Beloved,” when he is seeking to approach his audience on a more egalitarian plane.’

⁶ See 1 Jn. 2:7; 3:2, 21; 4:1, 7, 11; 3 Jn. 1, 2, 5, 11. It is not used in the Gospel of John or Rev. It is used as a term of address occasionally by Paul; see for example 1 Cor. 10:14; 15:58; 2 Cor. 7:1; 12:19; Phil. 2:12; 4:1; Col. 1:7; 4:7, 9, 14; Phm. 1, 16. Brown (*The Epistles of John*, 254) notes: ‘Another usage of *agapetos* in the Greek OT is as an adjective to describe God’s beloved people (Je. 6:26; 31 [38]:20; Ps. 60:7[5]; 108:7[6]; 127:2). This covenant designation is carried over to the NT epistles where Christians are “God’s beloved who are called saints” (Rom. 1:7).’

⁷ We can suggest then that this term of address arises directly from the author’s theology. Brown (*The Epistles of John*, 264) also suggests ‘granted the emphasis in 1 John on *agape*, “love,” ... the author surely intends the title to have a theological connotation for a community whose model figure was “the disciple whom Jesus loved”.’

emphasised in the letters)⁸ and so *become* ‘beloved’ of one another. Given this emphasis on God’s love and on loving one another in the letters, we can suggest that the author thought ‘beloved’ was a term of address that *should* be used by one member of the group to another. But whether it was actually used by members of the group as an insider self-designation or not is another matter. That the author *only* uses it as a plural address (‘Beloved ...’) suggests caution in this regard.⁹

2. ‘*Brother and Sister*’: ἀδελφός

There are two more likely candidates for terms the group would have used as ‘insider’ self-designations. Firstly, ἀδελφός (‘brother’ or ‘sister’)¹⁰ is again a key term for another member of the community, being used 16 times in this way.¹¹ Note 1 John 2:9–11: ‘Whoever says “I am in the light,” while hating a *brother or sister* (τὸν ἀδελφὸν αὐτοῦ μισῶν), is still in the darkness. Whoever loves a *brother or sister* (τὸν ἀδελφὸν αὐτοῦ) lives in the light ...’ Also noteworthy is 1 John 3:13–18:

‘Do not be astonished, *brothers and sisters* (ἀδελφοί), that the world hates you. We know that we have passed from death to life because we love one another. Whoever does not love abides in death. All who hate a *brother or sister* (τὸν ἀδελφὸν αὐτοῦ) are murderers, and you know that murderers do not have eternal life abiding in them. We know love by this, that he laid down his life for us—and we ought to lay down our lives for one another. How does God’s love abide in anyone who has the world’s goods and sees a *brother or sister* (τὸν ἀδελφὸν αὐτοῦ) in need and yet refuses help? Little children (τεκνία), let us love, not in word or speech, but in truth and action.’

We see here an interesting switch from discussion of loving ‘ὁ ἀδελφός’ in 3:13–17 to the author addressing readers as ‘little children’ in 3:18. It seems that one member of the group can be designated as ‘brother or sister’ of another, but the author addresses

⁸ 1 Jn. 3:11; 4:7, 11, 12; 2 Jn. 5; see also 1 Jn. 2:10; 3:10, 14, 18, 23; 4:19, 21; 5:2 which all emphasize loving the ‘brother or sister’ or a similar idea.

⁹ We do not read for example, ‘You should love a beloved brother’ or ‘If you love a beloved ...’

¹⁰ We cannot be certain that ἀδελφός is being used inclusively in the Johannine Letters, and it is beyond the scope of this paper to discuss this in detail. We will follow the usage of the NRSV in translations.

¹¹ All the occurrences are 1 Jn. 2:9, 10, 11; 3:10, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17; 4:20 (2×), 21; 5:16; 3 Jn. 3, 5, 10. The term is used twice in 1 Jn. 3:12 to refer to Cain murdering his brother Abel.

all the readers as ‘little children’. This suggests that ἀδελφός is a term used by the members of the community of each other, whilst, as we have suggested, τεκνία is more restricted in its usage, being confined to the language the author uses to address the community, rather than a term individuals would use of each other.

But who is ὁ ἀδελφός here? It is clear from the Letters that the term refers to other Christians of the group addressed rather than to Christians in general, or to outsiders.¹² We note for example 1 John 3:10–11:

‘The children of God and the children of the devil are revealed in this way: all who do not do what is right are not from God, nor are *those who do not love their brother or sister* (ὁ μὴ ἀγαπῶν τὸν ἀδελφὸν αὐτοῦ). For this is the message you have heard from the beginning, *that we should love one another.*’

Here, ‘to love their brother or sister’ and ‘to love one another’ are clearly in parallel, showing that ‘ἀδελφός’ and ‘one another’—i.e. the community members, are equivalent.¹³ Thus we can agree with Brown when he calls ‘ἀδελφός’ ‘a term of inner-Johannine affection’,¹⁴ which refers to fellow Johannine community members, either male or female.¹⁵

So the term is not used for non-Christians, but rather it is used as an insider self-designation for ‘those who belong’ to ‘our group’. It is particularly not to be used of the secessionists, since they ‘have gone out from us’ but in any case they ‘were not of us’ (1 Jn. 2:19).

The usage in 3 John 5 is also particularly significant: ‘Beloved (ἀγαπητέ), you do faithfully whatever you do for the *brothers and sisters*, even though they are strangers to you (εἰς τοὺς ἀδελφοὺς καὶ τοῦτο ξένους); they have testified to your love before the church. You will do well to send them on in a manner worthy of God.’ These ‘brothers and sisters’ are clearly unknown to the readers. They are

¹² See G. Strecker, *The Johannine Letters. A Commentary on 1, 2, and 3 John* (Hermeneia; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996), 107; Brown, *The Epistles of John*, 269–73; J. Lieu, ‘Authority to Become Children of God’ *NT* 23 (1981), 210–28, here p. 227.

¹³ See Brown, *The Epistles of John*, 441. For the command to ‘love one another’ (ἀλλήλους) see 1 Jn. 3:23; 4:7, 11, 12, and for ‘loving the brother’ see for example 1 Jn. 4:20–21.

¹⁴ See Brown, *The Epistles of John*, 270 and on the term see 269–73. For a similar, but slightly different attitude see from Qumran 1QS 1:3–4, 9–10; CD 2:15; 6:20–21; 1 QH 14:9–11.

¹⁵ We note then that the primary concern is love for the insider. It is because ἀδελφός has this meaning of insider that the author regards hating ‘one’s brother’ as a contradiction to the light (1 Jn. 2:9b, 11a); see Brown, *The Epistles of John*, 273.

only ‘brothers and sisters’ because of the faith they share and that they were part of the same wider movement.¹⁶ Clearly, ἀδελφός was a term used of a ‘fellow Christian’ even if they did not belong to one’s own immediate group.¹⁷ Rather they were a ‘brother or sister’, not because of personal knowledge, but because of mutual belonging to a wider group. ἀδελφός then, is here a designation of a ‘Christian’ who is part of a wider group, rather than just a term for a member of ‘my immediate community’. Clearly, ἀδελφός was an important ‘insider’ self-designation in the community addressed in the letters.

Why do the Johannine Letters use the term ἀδελφός so often? We have already noted that the term is common in the Pauline tradition; in fact it is widely used throughout the NT, being found over 200 times for ‘coreligionists’ and is used in every work except Titus and Jude.¹⁸ Accordingly, its use in the Johannine Letters may simply be part of this wider phenomenon. However, there are factors which are more intrinsic to the Johannine writings at work here too. Firstly, the use of ἀδελφός probably reflects the love commands of John’s Gospel (e.g. 13:34, 15:12, 17)¹⁹ where the command to love is expressed as loving ‘one another’.²⁰ Secondly, in the Gospel of John, ἀδελφός is generally used for physical relatives (e.g. Jn. 7:3) but in two instances—20:17 and 21:23, both after the resurrection—it is used for followers of Jesus. These two instances show the development of ‘ἀδελφός’ language for ‘Christians’. It is likely that this usage would influence readers of John’s Gospel, and it is clear that we should include the readers of the Johannine Letters in this group.

Thirdly, in the Letters, ‘ἀδελφός’ is used 5 times with ἀγαπάω, ‘to love,’ 5 times with μισέω, ‘to hate,’ (e.g. 1 Jn. 2:9: ‘The one who hates his brother or sister, is in the darkness still ...’) and once in the expression ‘to lay down one’s life for’ (1 John 3:16). Hence Brown notes that two-thirds of the significant uses of ἀδελφός in the Johannine Letters concern love or hate for one’s ‘brother or sister’.²¹

¹⁶ Note the ‘brothers’ of 3 Jn. 5 are contrasted with τῶν ἔθνικῶν (literally ‘the Gentiles’) in 3 Jn. 7.

¹⁷ For a very help definition of a ‘group’ see J.H. Elliott, *What Is Social-Scientific Criticism?* (Guides to Biblical Scholarship, New Testament Series; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993), 130.

¹⁸ See Brown, *The Epistles of John*, 269.

¹⁹ It is very likely that the readers of 1 John are familiar with John’s Gospel; see Brown 1982, 32–35.

²⁰ Brown (*The Epistles of John*, 271) sees these commands as confined to fellow Johannine Christians.

²¹ Brown, *The Epistles of John*, 269. ἀδελφός is used with ἀγαπάω in 1 Jn. 2:10; 3:10, 14; 4:20, 21; with μισέω in 1 Jn. 2:9, 11; 3:13, 15; 4:20.

We can suggest then that the use of ἀδελφός reflects the experiences of the group addressed. It seems likely that the experience of love of the brother or sister in the group addressed has reinforced the use of the term ‘ἀδελφός’, but that the experience of schism (1 Jn. 2:19–20) has meant that the addressees also know what it is to be hated by one who claims to be a ‘brother or sister’.²² The experiences of the group have thus probably reinforced and increased the frequency of use of ‘ἀδελφός’ language, whether those experiences are of love from a group member or of hatred from one who was, or claimed to be, a group member, but now showed (according to the author) that they were no longer a ‘brother or sister’ by their actions. We can also note that this evidence suggests that ‘ἀδελφός’ language points primarily to the sense of mutual belonging, rather than to a sense of equality.

3. ‘Children of God’: τέκνα θεοῦ

A second candidate for a term that was used to designate other members of the group when speaking strictly within the group is τέκνα θεοῦ—‘children of God’. We have noted that the author uses τεκνία and παιδία to address readers directly. However, he uses the phrase τέκνα θεοῦ (‘children of God’) four times in 1 John in such a way as to suggest that it was a self-designation for Christians.²³

In 1 John 3:1–2 we read: ‘see what love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God (ἵνα τέκνα θεοῦ κληθῶμεν); and that is what are. The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him. Beloved, we are children of God now (ἀγαπητοί, νῦν τέκνα θεοῦ ἐσμεν); what we will be has not yet been

²² According to John, the secessionists hated the author and his adherents. Brown (*The Epistles of John*, 273) notes ‘the primary concern is love for the insider. That explains why in 2:9b the author regards hating one’s *brother* as an insuperable contradiction to the light (also 2:11a). It is a heinous offense by the secessionists who are misleading some of the author’s adherents on this score ... [The secessionists] would not support the needy among the author’s adherents (1 John 3:17); and they had withdrawn from fellowship (2:19) and were persuading others to do so (2 Jn. 10). Such secession would have been the supreme example of hatred of one’s brothers, for it destroyed fraternal relations.’ Schnackenburg (*The Johannine Epistles*, 112) also notes ‘Everything points to the fact that the opponents’ hatred was directed toward the orthodox Christians, especially their leaders.’

²³ 1 Jn. 3:1, 2, 10; 5:2. On the background to the term see R.A. Culpepper, ‘The Pivot of John’s Prologue’ *NTS* 27 (1980–81), 1–31, here pp. 17–25. John uses the phrase ‘children of the devil’ once (1 Jn. 3:10). A similar distinction is found in John’s Gospel which uses children of God or children of Abraham (1:12; 11:52; 8:39) with τέκνα but Jesus addresses his disciples as τεκνία or παιδία (13:33; 21:5). 2 and 3 John use only τέκνα, of members of the community. Jesus is of course υἱός.

revealed.’ In 1 John 3:10 we read: ‘The children of God (τὰ τέκνα τοῦ θεοῦ) and the children of the devil are revealed in this way: all who do not do what is right are not from God, nor are those who do not love their brothers and sisters.’ Further in 1 John 5:2 we read: ‘By this we know that we love the children of God (τὰ τέκνα τοῦ θεοῦ), when we love God and obey his commandments.’ These three passages seem to indicate that ‘children of God’ was a self-designation that was used by the group.²⁴ This is particularly likely, given that in 1 John 3:1, the author writes ‘see what love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God’.²⁵

But why was ‘children of God’ used as a self-designation? One reason may have been because of its use in John 1:12 and 11:52 (where τέκνα [τοῦ] θεοῦ is used).²⁶ But there is also a second explanation that arises from the language of the Letters themselves. An emphasis found in the Letters which is related to being called ‘children of God’ is the discussion of being ‘born of God’.²⁷ This is found, for example, in 1 John 4:7, which reads: ‘Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God (ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ γεγέννηται) and knows God.’ Note also 1 John 5:1: ‘Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God (ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ γεγέννηται).’ Identical or similar expressions are found in 1 John 2:29; 3:9 (twice); 5:4 and 5:18 (once with reference to the ‘Christian’ and once with reference to Jesus). It is clear then that members of the community regarded themselves as having been ‘born of God’.

Although a specific self-designation does not seem to have been developed from this language or from the verb γεννάω, there does seem to have been a clear link between the concepts of being ‘born of

²⁴ S. Pancaro, “‘People of God’ in St John’s Gospel?”, *NTS* 16 (1969–70) 114–29, here p. 127 notes it is used in the Epistles of ‘all those who believe’; Culpepper (‘The Pivot of John’s Prologue’, 25) notes that ‘1 John provides some initial evidence that the Johannine community claimed the designation τέκνα θεοῦ for itself.’

²⁵ Note that the Johannine Letters can use the opposite of this language and speak of the ‘children of the devil’ (1 Jn. 3:10) and of the one who commits sin as ‘of the devil’ (1 Jn. 3:8). For the author, it is not just being ‘children’ that matters, but rather the question is ‘children of whom?’

²⁶ Although we should note that ‘children of God’ is only used in these two passages in John’s Gospel. See further Pancaro, “‘People of God’”, 126–29; Culpepper, ‘The Pivot of John’s Prologue’, 26–31.

²⁷ On this expression see J. Lieu, *The Theology of the Johannine Epistles* (Cambridge: CUP, 1991), 33–38; Schnackenburg, *The Johannine Epistles*, 162–69.

God' and being a 'child of God'.²⁸ This is evident in the conjunction of both ideas in 1 John 3:9–10 and 5:1–2. Note the former verses (1 Jn. 3:9–10): 'Those who have been born of God (παῖς ὁ γεγεννημένος ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ) do not sin, because God's seed abides in them; they cannot sin, because they have been born of God (ὅτι ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ γεγέννηται). The children of God (τὰ τέκνα τοῦ θεοῦ) and the children of the devil are revealed in this way: all who do not do what is right are not from God, nor are those who do not love their brothers and sisters.' These verses suggest that the notion of 'being born of God' may have undergirded and supported the concept of being 'children of God';²⁹ that is, the readers were children of God because they had been born of God. Thus, belief in being born of God may have facilitated the use of 'children of God' as a self-designation. Certainly, the emphasis on 'being born of God' in the letters reinforces the likelihood (evident from 1 Jn. 3:1–2, 10 and 5:2), that 'the children of God' was used as a self-designation by the members of the community, since both ideas are clearly of great significance for the community.³⁰

4. *The Use of Other Terms*

τέκνα is also used in 2 John 1, 4, 13 as a designation of members of the local church, and in 3 John 4 we have the use of the term to speak

²⁸ Strecker (*The Johannine Letters*, 83) writes: 'Although the notion and the concept of being "born of God" is to be distinguished, both in terminology and in the history of tradition, from being "children of God" (τέκνα θεοῦ) the latter spectrum of ideas can here be identified with the former (3:9–10; 5:1–2).' Brown (*The Epistles of John*, 388–89) notes: 'John's language of begetting by God makes more realistic the imagery of "children of God" than if he spoke of adoption; it also brings the status of the Christian children close to that of Jesus, God's Son.' See also Lieu, *Theology of the Johannine Epistles*, 34.

²⁹ Whilst we cannot be sure which concept developed first, we note that the idea of being 'children of God' is common in the OT and is found elsewhere in the NT, whilst the idea of being 'begotten by God' is rare in the OT and limited to the Johannine literature in the NT; see Brown, *The Epistles of John*, 384–5. This suggests that the Johannine authors developed the idea of being born of God to support the (much more common and already accepted) idea of being children of God. Thus, Brown (*The Epistles of John*, 390) suggests 'the Johannine writers developed the language of divine begetting to explain the origin of divine sonship/childhood.'

³⁰ The use of the title 'children of God' is in keeping with the general theocentricity of the letters; see Lieu, 'Authority', 220–21. Lieu ('Authority', 220) notes that 'for 1 John the believer's relationship is primarily with God. Although 1 John does acknowledge the believer's relationship with the Son (i 3; ii 12, 24, 27f; iii 6), the dominant characteristic of the believer's religious experience is its theocentricity.' Note also that Christians are often said to be 'of God' (ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ; 3:10; 4:4, 6; 5:19) or 'of the Father' (2:16).

of members of the community as the author's own children. For example in 2 John 1 we read: 'The elder to the elect lady and her children (καὶ τοῖς τέκνοις αὐτῆς)'. Given that 'the elect lady' is almost certainly a symbolic designation for the church, her 'children' are members of that church.³¹ Perhaps this usage grew out of the use of 'children of God' as a self-designation.

'The friends' is also a term designating other believers in 3 John 15: 'Peace to you. The friends (οἱ φίλοι) send you their greetings. Greet the friends (τοὺς φίλους) there, each by name.'³² Although a reference to greeting friends by name is not unusual in contemporary letters, the usage found here has probably developed out the reference to 'friends' in John 11:11 and especially 15:13–15.³³

There are other terms which are used less often as self-designations. 'Church' (ἐκκλησία) is used only in 3 John 6, 9, 10. In 2 John 1 we read: 'The elder to the elect lady and her children ...' 'The elect lady and her children' is almost certainly a reference to a Johannine community in a town some distance away from the author.³⁴ Perhaps 'the elect' was another way the group could refer to itself.³⁵ We note that the author's opponents also receive a 'label'—they are 'anti-Christ' (1 Jn. 2:18, 22; 4:3; 2 Jn. 7).

³¹ Brown (*The Epistles of John*, 654) notes 'The objection that a woman addressed in II John cannot herself represent a church and still have children who are members of that church does not respect the plasticity of symbols.'

³² Some manuscripts have altered this to ἀδελφοί, clearly on the basis of the use of this latter term in the letters.

³³ See Brown, *The Epistles of John*, 726; cf. D. Rensberger, *1 John, 2 John, 3 John* (Abingdon NT Commentaries; Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1997), 164. On 'friendship' in John's Gospel see J.G. van der Watt, *Family of the King. Dynamics of Metaphor in the Gospel According to John* (Biblical Interpretation Series 47; Leiden: Brill, 2000), 362–6. In general see K.O. Sandnes, "'I have called you Friends' An Aspect of the Christian Fellowship within the Context of the Antique Family", in G.A. Jónsson (ed.), *The New Testament in Its Hellenistic Context. Proceedings of a Nordic Conference of New Testament Scholars, held in Skálholt, (Reykjavík: Gudfræðistofnun Háskóla Íslands, 1996)*, 95–111.

³⁴ See Brown (*The Epistles of John*, 652–5) who discusses and rejects other options. He notes (p. 652) that 'my Lady' is addressed in v. 5 and in vv. 6, 8, 10, 12 she is addressed in the second person plural, although in v. 13 the singular is used again. Brown (p. 652) notes 'The fluctuation is easier to understand if a collectivity is involved.'

³⁵ In 1 Jn. 2:13 'children' is probably a designation for the whole community, and 'fathers and young men' are forms of address which divide the whole community into two groups; see Brown, *The Epistles of John*, 297–300.

5. *Conclusions*

The two most prominent self-designations then are ἀδελφός and τέκνα θεοῦ. Again we can note that it is interesting that whilst ‘ἀδελφός’ as a self-designation reflects what we might call ‘horizontal’ identity and refers to a distinctive kind of community, by contrast, ‘τέκνα θεοῦ’ reflects the idea that identity is related to a special ‘rebirth’ actualised by God and relates to a particular religious experience, and so points to ‘vertical’ identity. Whilst ‘οἱ πιστοί’ in the Pastorals related the ‘Christians’ to God, and thus could be seen as vertical, it also clearly relates to a human activity. By contrast, ‘τέκνα θεοῦ’ solely refers to a special relationship with God. The two self-designations can again thus be seen to be complementary, rather than in any sense ‘competitors’.

But again we need to ask, are these terms for self-designation simply the preferred terms of the authors concerned, reflecting only their perceptions? Or do we have grounds for suggesting that the Johannine Letters reflect the self-designations used by the addressees?

We have argued that τέκνια, παιδιά and ἀγαπητοί indicate how the author designates other members of the group and cannot be seen as ‘insider language’ of anyone else in the community. But with regard to ἀδελφός and τέκνα θεοῦ, we can argue that these are self-designations that would be used by the readers. Again we can note that the whole communication strategy of the author is dependent on the readers identifying with a self-designation. For example in 1 John when the author writes ‘see what love the Father has given *us*, that *we* should be *called* children of God’ (1 Jn. 3:1), if the readers do not agree that ‘they should be called children of God’, or that ‘children of God’ was an appropriate self-designation, then there is a considerable failure of communication on the part of the author. His whole point here turns on the reader agreeing that they can be called ‘children of God’. This at least suggests that ‘children of God’ was a self-designation the readers would have owned and that they would have seen themselves as caught up in the designation.

We note again the significance of the genre of the Johannine Letters. 2 and 3 John are genuine letters, and even though the genre of 1 John is debated, it seems likely that its genre is closest to that of a letter.³⁶ Again we note that in writing a letter, we can suggest that an

³⁶ On the genre of 1 John see Brown, *The Epistles of John*, 86–92.

author would try to use terms with which readers would identify.³⁷ Otherwise there would be a failure of communication. We have good grounds then for suggesting that the readers of the letters would have used ‘brother and sister’, and ‘children of God’ as self-designations.

II. Insider Terms Designating Members of the Group in Revelation

1. ‘The Saints’: οἱ ἅγιοι

One of the most prominent terms designating ‘Christians’ in the text of Revelation is ‘οἱ ἅγιοι’, ‘the saints’, which occurs thirteen times in all.³⁸ Thus for example in Revelation 8:3–4 we read: ‘Another angel with a golden censer came and stood at the altar; he was given a great quantity of incense to offer with the prayers of all the saints (τῶν ἁγίων πάντων) on the golden altar that is before the throne. And the smoke of the incense, with the prayers of the saints (τῶν ἁγίων), rose before God from the hand of the angel.’³⁹

It could be argued that ‘the saints’ here are a group of particularly pious ‘Christians’. However, that John means to refer to all ‘Christians’, including those who are alive on earth, with the designation ‘saints’ is shown by Revelation 13:10: ‘Here is a call for the endurance and faith of the saints (τῶν ἁγίων)’. Revelation 14:12 is very similar: ‘Here is a call for the endurance of the saints (τῶν ἁγίων), those who keep the commandments of God and hold fast to the faith of Jesus.’ In these two passages, the narrator addresses the audience directly; clearly in 14:12 he is calling *all* his readers to keep the commandments and to hold fast to the faith of Jesus; similarly he

³⁷ It is possible that an author could introduce new ‘self-designations’ but we have noted above that would expect this to be indicated by justification, explanation or elaboration of the self-designation by the author, none of which are found here.

³⁸ This term is found only once in the Pastorals (1 Tim. 5:10) and not at all in the Johannine Letters. In Rev. it is found in 5:8; 8:3, 4; 11:18; 13:7, 10; 14:12; 16:6; 17:6; 18:20, 24; 19:8; 20:9; see also 22:11. It is used of Christ in 3:7; God in 4:8; 6:10; angels in 14:10; people in 20:6 and Jerusalem in 11:2; 21:2, 10; 22:19. It is found in Acts in 9:13, 32, 41; 26:10; Rom. 8:27; 12:13; 15:26; 16:2, 15; 1 Cor. 6:1–2; 14:33; 2 Cor. 1:1; 13:12; Eph. 1:15; 3:18; 4:12; 5:3; 6:18; Phil. 4:22; Col. 1:4; 1 Tim. 5:10; Phm. 5, 7; Heb. 6:10; 13:24; Jude 3; Ignatius, *Smyrna* 1:2.

³⁹ The prayers of ‘the saints’ are also mentioned in Rev. 5:8 (‘and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints (τῶν ἁγίων).’)

is calling all his audience to endure, and thus it seems most likely that he labels them all as ‘the saints’.⁴⁰

Another helpful example is found in Revelation 19:7–8. Here the marriage of the Lamb is spoken of; the text goes on “... and his bride has made herself ready; to her it has been granted to be clothed with fine linen, bright and pure”—for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints.’ Elsewhere in Revelation it is clear that the bride is the church, and thus all Christians;⁴¹ here it is clearly implied that the bride and ‘the saints’ are synonymous. Again, then, ‘the saints’ is a designation for all Christians.⁴²

However, at times the author can speak of ‘the saints’ alongside another group. We note the following passages. Firstly, Revelation 16:6: ‘because they shed the blood of saints and prophets ..’ Secondly, Revelation 17:6: ‘And I saw that the woman was drunk with the blood of the saints (τῶν ἁγίων) and the blood of the witnesses (τῶν μαρτύρων) to Jesus.’ Thirdly, Revelation 18:20: ‘rejoice over her, O heaven, you saints and apostles and prophets! For God has given judgment for you against her.’ Finally, Revelation 18:24: ‘And in you was found the blood of prophets and of saints, and of all who have been slaughtered on earth.’ All these passages seem to be linked, in that they describe the people of God and their suffering.⁴³

In these passages, does the author speak of a small group of (particularly holy) ‘saints’ and other small groups of ‘prophets’ or ‘witnesses’ or ‘apostles’? Given the passages discussed first of all in this section, in which we argued that ‘the saints’ is a label for *all* ‘Christians’, it seems more likely that in this second group of passages the author speaks of ‘the saints’ as all Christians, but also speaks of a

⁴⁰ Other passages where all Christians are labelled as ‘the saints’ are 13:7: ‘Also it [the beast] was allowed to make war on the saints (τῶν ἁγίων) and to conquer them’ and 20:9: ‘They [the nations] marched up over the breadth of the earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city.’ There is a textual issue in 22:21, where some texts omit: ‘the saints’

⁴¹ See Rev. 21:9, where the bride is clearly the New Jerusalem; see also Rev. 22:17.

⁴² D.A. McIlraith, “‘for the Fine Linen Is the Righteous Deeds of the Saints’: Works and Wife in Revelation 19:8”, *CBQ* 61 (1999) 512–29, here p. 526 notes that 19:8b helps us interpret who the wife (or Bride of 19:7) is and what the wedding garment is: ‘The wife [of 19:7] is identified with the “saints,” all who respond positively to Christ and continue “overcoming.” ... It implies that the wife is the entirety of all the redeemed.’ This clearly implies that ‘the saints’ are also ‘all the redeemed’.

⁴³ Note also that within this broader section of chapters 16–19 the Lamb’s followers are described in 17:14 as ‘called and chosen and faithful’ and are referred to as ‘my people’ in 18:4 and ‘his servants’ in 19:2, 5.

smaller group of leaders (that is, prophets, or witnesses, or apostles), who could be included within ‘the saints’, but at this point in the narrative are distinguished from the mass of ‘saints’.⁴⁴

Can we discern why John’s preferred title for ‘Christians’ is ‘saints’? Aune suggests the term ‘is derived from Jewish tradition, where it can refer to both the people of God and angels’.⁴⁵ But why has John chosen to use ‘saints’ as a way of designating ‘Christians’? I think the designation ‘saints’ resonated with a number of other features of John’s theology.

Firstly, the most obvious reason is the influence of Daniel 7 on John. The general influence of Daniel 7, with its vision of the one like a Son of Man, on the author of Revelation has been clearly demonstrated.⁴⁶ A prominent dimension of Daniel 7 is its use of the phrase ‘the saints of the Most High’. Note Daniel 7:18: ‘But the saints of the Most High (ἅγιοι ὑψίστου) shall receive the kingdom and possess the kingdom forever—forever and ever.’⁴⁷ It is clear in Revelation that John has interpreted Jesus as the ‘one like a Son of Man’ of Daniel 7:13. Along with this has come the identification of

⁴⁴ This is the view of D.E. Aune; for example he translates 16:6 as ‘because they poured out the blood of God’s people and the prophets’, *Revelation 6–16* (WBC; Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1998), 886; see also Aune, *Revelation 17–22* (WBC; Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1998), 937, 1007, 1010. F.J. Murphy notes with regard to 16:6 that ‘The designation of the martyrs as “saints and prophets” corresponds to how the seer speaks of the churches in general. The only office he mentions is that of prophet, and all Christians qualify as “saints”.’ *Fallen Is Babylon: The Revelation to John* (The NT in Context; Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 1998), 339. Cf. G.K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation. A Commentary on the Greek Text* (NIGTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans; Carlisle: Paternoster, 1999), 616–17, 818 who thinks that ‘saints’ and ‘prophets’ are equated here and that, on the basis of 11:3–12 all Christians can be called ‘prophets’; see also A. Satake, *Die Gemeindeordnung in Der Johannesapokalypse* (WMANT 21; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1966), 49. However, although John affirms the prophetic witness of the church in 11:3–12, he seems to reserve the word ‘prophet’ for particular people and nowhere uses it unambiguously of all Christians. Perhaps the prophets, witnesses, or apostles are distinguished from the rest of ‘God’s people’ because these are the people who particularly suffer. This is supported by the theme of the rejection and death of the prophets; see Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, 886–87.

⁴⁵ D.E. Aune, *Revelation 1–5* (WBC; Dallas, Texas: Word Books, 1997), 359. He refers to Ps. 34:10 (MT), but goes on to note that ‘In early Jewish literature, ‘holy ones’ is often used of righteous Jews (1 Enoch 38:4, 5; 41:2; 43:4; 48:1; 50:1; 51:2; 58:3, 5; 62:8; 65:12; 99:16; 100:5; 1QM 6:6; 10:10; 12:1b; 16:10. Perhaps even more commonly, however, ἅγιοι or its equivalent is frequently used in early Jewish literature of angels’.

⁴⁶ See G.K. Beale, *The Use of Daniel in Jewish Apocalyptic Literature and in the Revelation of John* (Lanham: University Press of America, 1984).

⁴⁷ See also Dn. 7:21–22, 25, 27.

‘the saints of the Most High’ with the people of God in Revelation.⁴⁸ This ‘fits’ John’s understanding of the present and future of the people of God, since in Daniel 7 the small horn of the fourth beast makes war against ‘the saints’ (7:21) and the saints are given into his power for three and a half ‘times’ (7:25), but the saints are also said to receive judgment in their favour (7:22) and to gain the Kingdom (7:22, 27). Broadly speaking, this is the future John sees for God’s people, and so we can understand why he calls them ‘saints’.

A second and related point is that by using the title οἱ ἅγιοι John can underline the continuity between the ‘people of God’ in the OT and the ‘new people of God’ redeemed by the Lamb. Since this title is regularly associated with God’s people in the OT, by using it of the ‘new people’ John can strongly evoke this sense of continuity. Our next two points indicate why John wishes to underline *this* particular element of continuity.

A third reason why John uses the title ‘saints’ is probably the prominence of cultic categories in Revelation. Thus, for example, the throne room vision of Revelation 4–5, shows how crucial cultic imagery is for John.⁴⁹ We may suggest that calling the people of God ‘saints’ is another dimension of this use of cultic category in Revelation.

Fourthly, and related to the second point, is probably the importance the author ascribes to God being ‘Holy’. We note for example Revelation 4:8: ‘Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty, who was and is and is to come!’⁵⁰ Pattemore describes their appeal to their sovereign as ‘holy’ as ‘the grounds for their own identity as saints’.⁵¹

⁴⁸ As S.W. Pattemore notes: ‘Whether the “holy ones” in Daniel 7 are to be taken as human, as angelic or other heavenly beings, or as both, is a matter of ongoing discussion. But once again for our purposes here, the question is not how did the author of Daniel or his audience understand them, but how would John and his audience have done so. In Revelation ἅγιος used substantively always refers to the people of God.’ ‘The People of God in the Apocalypse: A Relevance-Theoretic Study’ (PhD Thesis, University of Otago, New Zealand, 2000), 222–3.

⁴⁹ There are also strong cultic links for example in Rev. 7:9–10 (palm branches) and note the occurrence of altars (6:9, 8:3, 5; 9:13; 11:1; 14:18; 16:7) and incense (8:3).

⁵⁰ See also Rev. 6:10—the only other passage.

⁵¹ Pattemore, ‘The People of God’, 185. Note also that Rev. 18:4 with its call to ‘Come out of her, my people’ expresses the idea of ‘separateness’ and thus of strong boundaries for God’s people which is closely related to the concept of God’s holiness.

Finally, we can suggest that Exodus 19:6 has been influential in leading the author to describe ‘Christians’ as ‘saints’. Exodus 19:6 has clearly been influential in Revelation 1:6 and 5:10, for in these two texts John applies phrases drawn from Exodus 19:6 to describe the new multi-ethnic people of God as a kingdom and priests.⁵² But the LXX of Exodus 19:6 also uses the phrase ‘a holy nation’ (ἕθνος ἅγιον). Perhaps John has also been influenced to speak of the new people of God as ‘saints’ by the description in Exodus of God’s people as a ‘holy nation’.

2. ‘Slave or Servant’: δοῦλος

A second label used in Revelation is δοῦλος, which is used fourteen times by John, three times literally,⁵³ and eleven times metaphorically. Probably on seven of these latter occasions John uses the title ‘slave’ or servant’ (δοῦλος) for all Christians, though we will note that at times the exact referent is debatable.⁵⁴ Revelation 19:5 reads: ‘Praise our God, all you his servants (πάντες οἱ δοῦλοι αὐτοῦ), all who fear him, small and great.’⁵⁵ Note 22:3–4, which is part of the vision of the New Jerusalem: ‘Nothing accursed will be found there any more. But the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and his servants (οἱ δοῦλοι αὐτοῦ) will worship him; they will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads.’ In context, this passage clearly refers to all ‘Christians’ who will worship God and the Lamb in the New Jerusalem.⁵⁶ Note also Revelation 7:3: ‘Do not damage the earth or the sea or the trees, until we have marked the servants of our God

⁵² See Aune (*Revelation 1–5*, 47–8) for a discussion of the way John has understood the text of Ex. 19:6 as referring to two distinct privileges—kingdom and priests—rather than the one privilege reflected in the MT and LXX.

⁵³ Rev. 6:15; 13:16; 19:18.

⁵⁴ Aune (*Revelation 1–5*, 13) notes: ‘These metaphorical uses of δοῦλος refer to Moses (15:3), to John himself (1:1 [second time]), to prophets (10:7; 11:18), but most frequently to Christians generally (1:1 [2×]; 2:20; 7:3; 19:2, 5; 22:3, 6 ...), though at least two of the references in the last category may refer to Christian prophets (1:1 [first time]; 22:6; see Charles, 1:6), though the fact that the revelation is intended for those who hear it read aloud suggests that ‘servants’ may rather mean *all* Christians.’ The term also refers to angels in 19:10 and 22:9. In the NT the term servant is used of Christians generally in 1 Cor. 7:22; Gal. 1:10; Eph. 6:6; Col. 4:12 and 1 Pet. 2:16.

⁵⁵ There is a textual issue here, relating to whether or not καί should be in the text. The translation could be as given, or if the καί is included, it would read: ‘Praise our God, all you his servants, and all who fear him, small and great.’

⁵⁶ Given this context, it seems likely that in 22:6 ‘servants’ refers to all Christians (‘for the Lord, the God of the spirits of the prophets, has sent his angel to show his servants what must soon take place’).

(τοὺς δούλους τοῦ θεοῦ ἡμῶν) with a seal on their foreheads.’ It is most likely that this is a reference to all ‘Christians’ still living on earth, for nothing in the context suggests to the reader that the reference should be limited in any way.⁵⁷ Revelation 2:20 also seems to refer in a generic way to ‘Christians’: ‘you tolerate that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophet and is teaching and beguiling my servants (δούλους) to practice fornication’.

However, in other passages, ‘servant’ seems to be a title given to a prophet. This is clearest in 10:7: ‘... as he announced to his servants the prophets (τοὺς ἑαυτοῦ δούλους τοὺς προφήτας).’ Note also the related word in 22:9: ‘You must not do that! I am a fellow servant (σύνδουλος) with you and your brothers (ἀδελφῶν) the prophets, and with those who keep the words of this book.’⁵⁸ What seems to have occurred is that ‘servant’ has become an honorific title for those who particularly ‘serve’ God as trusted representatives. In keeping with the title ‘servants’ becoming in some sense an honorific title, is 15:3, where we read: ‘And they sing the song of Moses, the servant of God.’⁵⁹ In some other passages it is somewhat problematic to ascertain the exact referent of δοῦλος.⁶⁰ But clearly John’s predominant usage is that δοῦλος refers to ‘Christians’ in general.

⁵⁷ See Pattemore, ‘The People of God’, 237.

⁵⁸ Note also 19:10: ‘You must not do that! I am a fellow servant (σύνδουλος) with you and your brothers (ἀδελφῶν) who hold the testimony of Jesus. For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.’ Here ‘servant’ seems to refer to a prophet. ‘servant’ in 11:18 may also refer to prophets. Aune (*Revelation 1–5*, 18) notes that the phrase ‘my/thy servants the prophets’ is frequently found in the OT and occurs occasionally in the Pseudepigrapha and the Dead Sea Scrolls.

⁵⁹ Pattemore (‘The People of God’, 189–90 n. 100) suggests: ‘The background of usage of δοῦλος in the LXX, particularly in passages describing the period of the kings and later, reflects both a broad sense in which all God’s people are described as his δούλοι, as people who acknowledge his rule as king (e.g. 2 Ch. 6:3; Ezr. 5:11; Ne. 1:6; Ps. 33:23; Is. 42:19; Dn. 3:26 Th.), and a narrower sense in which a prominent individual is described as δοῦλος κυρίου or δοῦλος θεοῦ (e.g. David, 2 Sa. 3:18; Elijah, 1 Ki. 18:36; Moses, 2 Ki. 18:12). Where prophets are intended they are specifically mentioned as such (e.g. 2 Ki. 17:13; 21:10; Ezr. 9:11; Am. 3:7; Zc. 1:6). NT usage more strongly reflects the singular case (e.g. Rom. 1:1; Gal. 1:10; 2 Tim. 2:24) and, outside of Revelation, never refers to prophets.’

⁶⁰ Note 1:1: ‘The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show his servants (δούλοις) what must soon take place; he made it known by sending his angel to his servant (τῷ δούλῳ αὐτοῦ) John.’ Here it seems most likely that the first usage of δοῦλος refers to all ‘Christians’, and the second gives the label of δοῦλος to John, who as a prophet is a particular type of servant. (See Pattemore, ‘The People of God’, 189 n. 100 who argues that the first occurrence refers to the whole of John’s audience; see also R.J. Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy. Studies on the Book of Revelation* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1993), 85–86.) Note also 19:2 ‘for his [God’s] judgements are true and just; he has judged the great whore who corrupted the earth with her fornication, and he has avenged on her the

Why did John use the term ‘servants’ of Christians? Like the people of God of the OT, the new people of God can be called God’s ‘servants’.⁶¹ Thus, John is again making the continuity clearly between the people of Israel and the new multi-ethnic people of God. But why does John use this particular title of the many that applied to Israel, and not others?

Perhaps the prominence of the title ‘servant’ should also be connected with the strong emphasis on worshipping God alone and not the beast. The slave–master relationship was an exclusive one and John may wish to emphasize that the Christian ‘servant’ can only serve God and not the beast. As Pattemore notes the term ‘servants’ identifies the audience as a whole ‘as those who owe allegiance to God as king’.⁶² We also note that the term ‘servant’ is used in some passages that refer to the worship of God or refer to the sealing of the servants of God, the latter being an indication of ownership and security.⁶³ The term thus underlines the exclusivity of the relationship

blood of his servants.’ Here ‘servants’ could be a label for all Christians. However, since John does not seem to anticipate that all Christians will die at the hands of Rome, it seems more likely that ‘his servants’ is here an honorific title used, as the context suggests, of those who have been martyred. I suggest that the same usage is found in Rev. 6:9–11. Rev. 6:9 speaks of ‘the souls of those who had been slaughtered for the word of God and for the testimony they had given.’ In Rev. 6:11 we read that these people ‘were each given a white robe and told to rest a little longer, until the number would be complete both of their fellow servants (οἱ σύνδουλοι αὐτῶν) and of their brothers and sisters who were soon to be killed as they themselves had been killed.’ In context σύνδουλος seems to refer to martyrs, but as Pattemore (‘The People of God’, 190 n. 100) notes ‘the two subsequent [to 6:11] co-occurrences of σύνδουλοι and ἀδελφοί (19:10; 22:9) specifically imply that the angel shares a relationship with not only prophets, but also with all who hold the testimony of Jesus, or who obey the prophetic words of the book.’ But, in any case, that the term can be used particularly of martyrs does not mean that it cannot also be used of all Christians. Perhaps in these passages John wishes to connect the concepts of Christians as ‘servants’ and their role as suffering witnesses. Finally, in 11:18 we read: ‘The nations raged, but your wrath has come, and the time for judging the dead, for rewarding your servants, the prophets and saints and those who fear your name, both small and great ...’ Here, we can take ‘servants’ with ‘prophets’ (‘your servants the prophets, and saints ...’) or with ‘the prophets and saints’ (‘your servants, namely, the prophets and the saints’); see Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, 645; cf. Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 616–17.

⁶¹ See for example 2 Ch. 6:3; Ezr. 5:11; Ne. 1:6; Ps. 33:23; Is. 42:19; 48:20; Dn. 3:26 Th; Josephus, *Ant.* 11.90, 101; Philo, *Mig.* 45; cf. *Mut.* 46. On the usage of *doulos* in the NT see I.A.H. Combes, *The Metaphor of Slavery in the Writings of the Early Church from the New Testament to the Beginning of the Fifth Century* (JSNTSS 156; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), 49–94.

⁶² Pattemore, ‘The People of God’, 236.

⁶³ See 19:5; 22:3–4 re worship and 7:3 re the sealing of ‘the servants of God’. That sealing indicates ownership and security is argued by Pattemore, ‘The People

between God and God's people, which John wishes to emphasize. It also reflects the contest for ownership—God or the Beast—which we see in Revelation.

3. *The Use of Other Terms*

We find a number of other terms used to designate 'Christians' in Revelation. The term 'ἀδελφός' is used five times in total. On two occasions it refers to 'Christian' in general, as in 1:9 ('I John, your brother') and 12:10 ('for the accuser of our brothers (τῶν ἀδελφῶν ἡμῶν) has been thrown down'). On the other three occasions, 'ἀδελφός' is used of a smaller group such as the martyrs, or the prophets.⁶⁴ The title 'υἱός' is used once of a Christian, in 21:7, and 'children' (τὰ τέκνα αὐτῆς) is used of the followers of Jezebel in 2:23.⁶⁵ As an honorific, Antipas can be called 'my witness, my faithful one (ὁ μάρτυς μου ὁ πιστός μου)' (2:13), but this does not seem to be a general label.⁶⁶

We have a number of other collective designations used of 'Christians'. The name which occurs most often is 'church' (ἐκκλησία) although this is only found once (in 22:16) outside of chapters 1–3.⁶⁷ Another corporate expression for 'Christians' is found in 1:6: 'and made us to be a kingdom, priests serving his God and Father ...'⁶⁸ Note also 5:9–10: 'for you were slaughtered and by your blood you ransomed for God from every tribe and language and people and nation; you have made them to be a kingdom and priests serving our God, and they will reign on earth.' (5:9–10).⁶⁹ The designation 'people' is used twice of 'Christians', in Revelation 18:4: 'Come out of her, my people (ὁ λαός μου) ...' and 21:3: 'see, the home of God is among mortals. He will dwell with them as their God; they will be his people.'⁷⁰

of God', 236. The service to God which these servants perform is described in detail in 7:14–17, esp v. 15.

⁶⁴ For martyrs see 6:11 and prophets as 'brothers' see 19:10; 22:9.

⁶⁵ See also 12:4–5 of the male child brought forth by the woman. Note the use of σπέρμα in 12:17.

⁶⁶ Compare the almost identical way Jesus is described in 1:5, 3:14; 19:11. See also 11:2: 'And I will grant my two witnesses ...' Compare also 17:14: 'and those with him [the Lamb] are called and chosen and faithful.'

⁶⁷ See 1:4, 11, 20; 2:1, 7, 8, 11, 12, 17, 18, 23, 29; 3:1, 6, 7, 13, 14, 22; 22:16.

⁶⁸ See also 1:9, which uses 'kingdom'. Note also 20:6 'they will be priests of God and of Christ'.

⁶⁹ Note lit. 'ransomed for God from every'; NRSV supplies 'saints'

⁷⁰ Elsewhere it is used in the phrase 'from every tribe and tongue and people and nation' (5:9; see also 7:9; 10:11; 11:9; 13:7; 14:6; 17:15). A number of images are

It is interesting to note that John has a name for a group which he opposes: the Nicolaitans (2:15).⁷¹ Similarly, John objects to the use of the name ‘Jew’ by people he clearly opposes in Smyrna and Philadelphia. In both cases groups call themselves ‘Jews’, but in John’s view they should not use this self-designation but are rather ‘the synagogue of Satan’ (2:9; 3:9). Clearly then ‘Jews’ is a contested label, with John probably claiming that the Christian community is the true bearer of the title ‘Jew’.⁷²

4. Conclusions

We have noted above that both the Pastorals and the Johannine Letters have a horizontal and a vertical self-designation—that is one that reflects the community, the other that reflects the relationship with God. It is interesting that the two terms in Revelation—saints and servants—both relate to the vertical dimension. This perhaps reflects the concentration in Revelation on the relationship of the readers to God, and polemic in the book against any relationship with idolatry.

But in all of this, are we seeing simply John’s understanding of what Christians should call themselves? Or do we have grounds for suggesting that Revelation reflects the self-designations used by a particular community (the ‘John of Revelation community’) or perhaps self-designations used by the various communities addressed in Asia Minor?

We have argued that the Pastorals and the Johannine Letters do reflect the terms of self-designation used by their readers. However, here we need to confront a fundamental difference between Revelation and our other documents—the Pastorals and the Johannine Letters. We have noted that the Pastorals and the Johannine Letters can best be seen as genuine letters and that the author of a letter would try to use terms with which readers would be familiar, unless there are clear indications to the contrary. But the situation is different with Revelation. Although it has features of the letter genre, it is also a

also used to describe ‘Christians’ corporately. For example, note the ‘seven golden lampstands’ of 1:12, which are clearly an image of the seven churches (1:20; see also 11:4). However, such imagery does not suggest any form of current self-designation.

⁷¹ The names ‘Balaam’ and ‘Jezebel’ are also nicknames developed by John, or someone else who opposed these two people and their followers.

⁷² We note also the emphasis on ‘names’ in 2:17; 3:4–5, 12–13; 14:1, but these are different from what we have been calling self-designations.

prophecy and an apocalypse.⁷³ Further, the communication situation is somewhat different in Revelation from that which prevails in the Pastorals and the Johannine Letters. For in writing Revelation John is seeking to create and portray a different worldview from that which many of his readers currently hold. On the basis of this new worldview, John hopes his readers will be able to see their (real) world in a different light. He is attempting to shape a new imaginative world.⁷⁴ The fundamental problem for John is that his readers (or many of them) have adopted a worldview to which John is fundamentally opposed.

Hence because of the genre and the communication situation of Revelation, it is much harder to infer from the text what terms the readers themselves would have used as self-designations. Rather, the key terms of ‘saints’ and ‘servants’ may well have been chosen by John as part of the shaping of an alternative world view for his readers. Thus, in John’s view, readers *should* see themselves as ‘the holy ones’ consecrated to God and ‘servants’ dedicated to God alone, but currently some readers are involved in idolatry (2:14, 20) and so are far from ‘holy’. John also fears that some are so involved in the life of the Graeco-Roman city that they need to ‘Come out of her, my people’ (18:4) and so they are far from being ‘servants’ dedicated exclusively to God. The readers may in due course come to see themselves in these titles (John certainly hopes so), but this may well involve a good deal of the ‘repentance’ that John regularly calls for (Rev. 2:5; 16, 22; 3:3, 19). Certainly we cannot say that these self-designations are the readers’ ‘self-designations of first choice’. Rather, the readers may have quite different terms they would prefer and are currently using.

Thus, the ‘world-shaping’ nature of Revelation means that in this case we cannot read so easily from the text to ‘how it was among the readers’ with regard to self-designations. Although John hopes that

⁷³ For a discussion of the genre of Revelation see Aune, *Revelation 1–5*, lxx–xc.

⁷⁴ This is most obvious in the repeated calls for repentance in Rev. 2–3 (eg 2:5, 16; 22; 3:3, 19), but it is also clear that in Rev. 4–22 John is seeking to transform the understanding of many of his readers (eg 14:12). See also R.J. Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation* (Cambridge: CUP, 1993), 17–22; for example p. 17: ‘Revelation provides a set of Christian counter-images which impress on its readers a different vision of the world: how it looks from the heaven to which John is caught up in chapter 4. The visual power of the book effects a kind of purging of the Christian imagination, refurbishing it with alternative visions of how the world is and will be.’ For the way in which John constructed an alternative view with regard to space and time, see S.J. Friesen, *Imperial Cults and the Apocalypse of John. Reading Revelation in the Ruins* (New York, Oxford: OUP, 2001), 152–66.

the readers will come to recognize themselves in the titles ‘saints’,⁷⁵ and ‘servants’ it is not at all clear that they will do so, or that they will all do so.

To whom is John writing in Ephesus (and elsewhere) then? John could be writing to his own group, which saw themselves as ‘saints’ and ‘servants’. Or John could be writing to a wider group, and would not necessarily be reflecting their current self-designations, but would rather be seeking to shape their whole perception of the world, one element of which is the terms they are prepared to recognise as appropriate for themselves. We have argued that the ‘world-view shaping’ nature of Revelation is such that we cannot go from John’s preferred self-designations to those of the readers. The self-designations cannot be used as evidence for ‘John’s own community therefore’. Although the matter needs much more discussion,⁷⁶ this does not provide evidence here for a John of Revelation community.

III. General Conclusion to Parts One and Two

The different labels or self-designations used by the respective authors in each document or groups of documents present an interesting window on to the theology of the documents themselves. We have also attempted to present a case for why particular labels were used, and to argue for the logical or theological connections between particular points the author makes and the terms of self-designation used. We have often been able to note a consistency between the use of a term and the wider structure of thought of an author.

With regard to terms for self-designation, it is noteworthy that our documents probably only give us ‘insider language’, which we have suggested is language that would be used to designate other members of the group when speaking strictly within the group. It is clear, for example, that saying ‘I am a brother or sister’ would have meant little to a ‘pagan’ (to use another label!).⁷⁷ This probably reflects the genre of our documents—they are all written to Christian communities. Were any of the other self-designations that we have discussed used

⁷⁵ This is most obvious for example in Rev. 5:8; 8:3–4; 13:10 (where the author addresses ‘the saints’ directly), 14:12 (again a direct address to the saints) and 22:21, where we read ‘The grace of the Lord Jesus be with all the saints.’

⁷⁶ See my forthcoming book, *The Early Christians in Ephesus*.

⁷⁷ Although we have noted above that Lucian was aware of the use of the term by Christians, but this was after the NT period.

as ‘out-facing language’, that is, terms that were used to designate members of the group when addressing outsiders, or which represented the group to the outside world? Perhaps ‘the believers’ or ‘children of God’ could have been used in this way eventually, but this is far from obvious.⁷⁸ In any case, in our documents they are used as ‘insider language’.

We note that no one self-designation is predominant in our documents, although ‘brothers and sisters’ comes closest to this. It is also interesting to note the plurality of terms of self-designation in each document, and across the documents. As befits a young movement, no one label or self-designation has been settled upon. We have also noted that in the Pastorals and the Johannine Letters we have one predominant ‘horizontal’ self-designation, and one predominant ‘vertical’ self-designation. Thus the two self-designations in each case can be seen as complementary.

What can we say about the addressees of the Pastorals and the Johannine Letters? We have argued that in both these sets of documents we are not simply seeing the preferred terms for self-designation of the authors concerned. Rather, we have argued that the terms we have discussed would have been used for self-designation by the readers of these documents. The difference between these self-designations argues that these documents were written to different communities and testifies to the differences between these communities. We can suggest that the addressees of the Pastorals and the Johannine Letters perceived their identity in somewhat different terms then. These different self-designations (particularly ‘the believers’ and ‘children of God’) reflect somewhat different self-images, and different ways of designating or recognising the ‘specialness’ or ‘difference’ that the readers perceived to be at the heart of their movement as ‘Christians’—‘difference’ from non-Christians, but perhaps also from some other Christians. We can suggest that the readers of these documents would give different answers to the question, ‘What is distinctive about you?’ The readers of the Pastorals might have said ‘We are the believing ones’ and might go on to talk about believing in God and in certain key points,

⁷⁸ C.K. Barrett notes that of the early Christians: ‘They might call themselves μαθηταί ... , or πιστεύοντες, or, in relation to one another, ἀδελφοί. These words were useless to outsiders unless it was made clear whose disciples they were, in whom they believed, in whose family they were brothers.’ *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles* (ICC; Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1994, 1998), 556–57.

which they may wish to define credally. By contrast, the readers of the Johannine Letters might have answered the question by speaking of their relationship to God as ‘children of God’. We see different views then about what is most significant to them.⁷⁹

However, the linguistic evidence discussed here cannot, *by itself*, show that these documents were written to different social communities. Clearly, different documents to the same community *could* use different linguistic self-designations. Therefore wider arguments are required to show that these documents are to different social communities, arguments which I have attempted to provide elsewhere.⁸⁰ But certainly the evidence provided here does tentatively suggest that the Pastorals and the Johannine Letters were written to different communities, and it seems most likely that they are communities in Ephesus.

However, we have argued that in Revelation, John is hoping that readers will come to see themselves in the text, and thus identify themselves as ‘saints’ or ‘servants’. Given the nature of Revelation as a ‘world-shaping’ document, we cannot say that the readers would currently be using these as terms of self-designation. We have not found evidence here for a ‘John of Revelation’ community then.

⁷⁹ Note that we also see different ways of distinguishing the ‘other’ and so of drawing boundaries. The Pastorals speak of ‘unbelievers’ or *apistoi* (see 1 Tim. 5:8; Tit. 1:15). The Johannine Letters speak the one who commits sin as ‘of the devil’ (1 Jn. 3:8) and of ‘children of the devil’ (1 Jn. 3:10), and of ‘antichrist’ (1 Jn. 2:18, 22; 4:3). These ways of distinguishing the ‘other’ are clearly related to the way they distinguished themselves.

⁸⁰ See again my forthcoming book of *The Early Christians in Ephesus*.