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General Editor
D. A. CARSON

The Letters
of
JOHN

COLIN G. KRUSE

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*Affectionately dedicated to my grandchildren
and their wonderful parents*

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Series Preface

Commentaries have specific aims, and this series is no exception. Designed for serious pastors and teachers of the Bible, the Pillar commentaries seek above all to make clear the text of Scripture as we have it. The scholars writing these volumes interact with the most important, informed contemporary debate, but avoid getting mired in undue technical detail. Their ideal is a blend of rigorous exegesis and exposition, with an eye alert both to biblical theology and the contemporary relevance of the Bible, without confusing the commentary and the sermon.

The rationale for this approach is that the vision of “objective scholarship” (a vain chimera) may actually be profane. God stands over against us; we do not stand in judgment of him. When God speaks to us through his Word, those who profess to know him must respond in an appropriate way, and that is certainly different from a stance in which the scholar projects an image of autonomous distance. Yet this is no surreptitious appeal for uncontrolled subjectivity. The writers of this series aim for an evenhanded openness to the text that is the best kind of “objectivity” of all.

If the text is God’s Word, it is appropriate that we respond with reverence, a certain fear, a holy joy, a questing obedience. These values should be reflected in the way Christians write. With these values in place, the Pillar commentaries will be warmly welcomed not only by pastors, teachers, and students, but by general readers as well.

* * * * *

This commentary on the Letters of John admirably meets the series’ goals. In several discerning books, Colin Kruse has displayed an enviable

SERIES PREFACE

ability to assimilate complex debates and evenhandedly evaluate them, always taking people back to the text. These skills are on display in this commentary. The Letters of John, superficially simple, are in reality a minefield of complexities that have generated difficult debates among Christians who have studied them. Dr. Kruse is sure-footed and reasoned, clear and remarkably concise without being simplistic or condescending. His use of both primary and secondary sources is always pertinent and restrained, and he never lets the reader lose sight of the text he is studying. I hope Dr. Kruse's commentary achieves the wide circulation it deserves.

D. A. CARSON

Author's Preface

Some years ago I wrote a manuscript for a small book on the major themes of the Letters of John. However, it never saw the light of day because the series for which it was intended was cancelled by the publishers. Some time afterwards I wrote to Wm. B. Eerdmans Jr. to ask whether he might be interested in publishing the material. In reply he said Eerdmans would be happy to look at the manuscript, but also asked whether I would like to write a full commentary on the Letters of John instead. So it was that I began work on this commentary, work to which I devoted most of my discretionary time over the last four years.

I am grateful to Eerdmans Publishing Company for including my work in their Pillar New Testament Commentary series. I am particularly grateful to Professor Don Carson, the General Editor of the series, for his encouragement and for his helpful and very prompt comments on the manuscript. I also want to thank Milton Essenburg for his specialised editorial work on the manuscript.

The Council of the Bible College of Victoria gave me study leave in the first half of 1996, during which time I began serious work on the preparation of the commentary. I want to express my gratitude to members of the Council for releasing me from my normal duties for that time. Several months of my study leave were spent in Tyndale House, Cambridge, where once again my wife, Rosemary, and I enjoyed the friendship and encouragement of the Warden, Bruce Winter, and his wife, Lyn Winter, as well as that of other researchers resident in Tyndale House at that time.

The writing of this commentary on the Letters of John has given me a greater understanding of the crisis of secession which formed the historical context of the letters. I have also been encouraged by the reassurance offered to the readers, and reminded of the importance of holding

AUTHOR'S PREFACE

on to the gospel of Christ which has come down to us from the beginning. In addition, I have been challenged to implement in my own life the commandment of Christ that we love one another, the commandment which was handed down from the beginning alongside the gospel itself. My hope is that, by the grace of God, this commentary might help others to benefit in similar ways.

COLIN G. KRUSE

Abbreviations

PERIODICALS, REFERENCE WORKS, AND SERIALS

AB	Anchor Bible
AUSS	<i>Andrews University Seminary Studies</i>
BAG	W. Bauer, W. F. Arndt, and F. W. Gingrich, <i>Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament</i>
<i>Bib</i>	<i>Biblica</i>
<i>BibNotiz</i>	<i>Biblische Notizen</i>
<i>BJRL</i>	<i>Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library of Manchester</i>
<i>BSac</i>	<i>Bibliotheca Sacra</i>
<i>BT</i>	<i>The Bible Translator</i>
<i>BTB</i>	<i>Biblical Theology Bulletin</i>
<i>BZ</i>	<i>Biblische Zeitschrift</i>
<i>CBQ</i>	<i>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</i>
EKKNT	Evangelisch-katholischer Kommentar zum Neuen Testament
<i>EvQ</i>	<i>Evangelical Quarterly</i>
<i>ExpTim</i>	<i>Expository Times</i>
<i>Int</i>	<i>Interpretation</i>
<i>JBL</i>	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
<i>JSNT</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of the New Testament</i>
<i>JSNTSup</i>	JSNT Supplement Series
<i>JTS</i>	<i>Journal of Theological Studies</i>
<i>Jub.</i>	<i>Jubilees</i>
MM	J. H. Moulton and G. Milligan, <i>The Vocabulary of the Greek Testament</i>
<i>Neot</i>	<i>Neotestamentica</i>

ABBREVIATIONS

NICNT	New International Commentary on the New Testament
NIV	New International Version
<i>NotesTrans</i>	<i>Notes on Translation</i>
<i>NovT</i>	<i>Novum Testamentum</i>
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version
NTS	<i>New Testament Studies</i>
OTP	J. H. Charlesworth (ed.), <i>Old Testament Pseudepigrapha</i>
RB	<i>Revue biblique</i>
REB	Revised English Bible
<i>ResQ</i>	<i>Restoration Quarterly</i>
<i>RevExp</i>	<i>Review and Expositor</i>
<i>RevScRel</i>	<i>Revue des sciences religieuses</i>
SBL	Society of Biblical Literature
SBLDS	SBL Dissertation Series
<i>SJT</i>	<i>Scottish Journal of Theology</i>
SNTSMS	Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series
TU	Texte und Untersuchungen
<i>TynBul</i>	<i>Tyndale Bulletin</i>
TZ	<i>Theologische Zeitschrift</i>
WBC	Word Biblical Commentary
WTJ	<i>Westminster Theological Journal</i>
ZNW	<i>Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft</i>
ZTK	<i>Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche</i>

DEAD SEA SCROLLS, AND PSEUDEPIGRAPHICAL AND EARLY PATRISTIC WORKS

1QH	<i>Thanksgiving Hymns</i>
1QS	<i>Rule of the Community</i>
<i>As. Mos.</i>	<i>Assumption of Moses</i>
<i>Did.</i>	<i>Didache</i>
<i>Hist. Eccl.</i>	<i>Eusebius, Historia Ecclesiastica</i>
<i>Ign. Eph.</i>	<i>Ignatius, Letter to the Ephesians</i>
<i>Ign. Magn.</i>	<i>Ignatius, Letter to the Magnesians</i>
<i>Ign. Smyrn.</i>	<i>Ignatius, Letter to the Smyrnaeans</i>
<i>Ign. Trall.</i>	<i>Ignatius, Letter to the Trallians</i>
<i>Pol. Phil.</i>	<i>Polycarp, Letter to the Philippians</i>
<i>T. Dan</i>	<i>Testament of Dan</i>
<i>T. Gad</i>	<i>Testament of Gad</i>
<i>T. Naph.</i>	<i>Testament of Naphtali</i>

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Introduction

INTRODUCTORY MATTERS RELATED TO 1, 2, AND 3 JOHN

The Letters of John provide readers with a cameo of life in one part of the early church. They represent an unhappy time in the life of the Christian communities involved; a time of dispute between believers involving both theological and behavioural concerns. The letters reflect only one side of this dispute, but the side which represented the truth of the matter as far as the later church was concerned.

The three letters appear to be interrelated, all dealing with one aspect or another of this dispute, and a suggested scenario depicting its progress is provided below. In the response these letters make to the dispute they also provide significant input on a number of key theological themes. These include such matters as the bases of Christian assurance, the role of the Spirit in the Christian community, Christian perfection, the meaning of *koinōnia*, the atonement, and Christology. These letters will repay readers for their careful study with a greater appreciation of these matters.

A Scenario

Anyone seeking to make sense of the Letters of John really needs to have a working hypothesis concerning the events which lie behind them. Such a hypothesis involves historical reconstruction, and this in turn will have to be based on certain assumptions about literary matters. However, to some extent the literary assumptions depend on decisions made in the historical reconstruction. The interpreter has no alternative but to work

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in a circle, while continually checking historical decisions against the literary assumptions and vice versa. What is offered below is one reconstruction of events, which depends on a number of literary assumptions and is only as good as they are.

The following scenario proceeds on the assumption that there is a very close relationship between the Fourth Gospel and the three letters of John. If they are not all written by the same person, then the person(s) who wrote the letters had been deeply immersed in the thought of the Gospel and used its language. The following reconstruction of events assumes that an early form of the Fourth Gospel had been completed before the writing of the letters, and that the Beloved Disciple, an eyewitness of most of the events described in the Gospel, was responsible for producing that early form. The Gospel deals primarily with the ministry of Jesus and reflects the conflict between Jesus and some of his Jewish contemporaries. At a secondary level, the way the story of Jesus is written may reflect something of the experience of the Christian community of which the Beloved Disciple was a member when he wrote his Gospel. This community consisted of a number of churches, probably located in and around Ephesus in the Roman province of Asia.

Sometime after the writing of this early form of the Gospel, difficulties arose within this community. Some of the members had taken on board certain beliefs about the person and work of Christ that were unacceptable to the author¹ of the letters and those associated with him. These new beliefs involved a denial that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of God, come in the flesh (1 John 4:2-3), and that his death was necessary for the forgiveness of sins (1 John 5:6-7). A sharp disagreement arose which resulted in the secession of those who embraced these new views (1 John 2:19).

The secessionists (as we shall call them hereafter) were not content to keep their new beliefs to themselves. Instead they organised a group of itinerant preachers who circulated among the churches and propagated their beliefs with a view to winning people over to their understanding of things (1 John 2:26; 4:1-3; 2 John 7). This created confusion among the believers who remained loyal to the gospel as it had been proclaimed at the beginning, the gospel that had come down from the eyewitnesses. As a result of the confusion, these believers began to question whether they really knew God, whether they really were experiencing eternal life, and

1. The singular expression 'author' is used here without prejudging the question whether all three letters were written by the same person. This is done to avoid what would otherwise be rather cumbersome expressions. The question of the authorship of the letters is discussed below.

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whether they were really in the truth. The author of 1 John wrote to bolster the assurance of such people by providing them with criteria they could use to evaluate the claims being made by the secessionists and with which they could reassure themselves that they were in the truth (1 John 1:5–2:2; 2:3–11; 3:7–10, 14–15; 4:4–6, 7–8, 13–15; 5:13, 18–20). This letter appears to have been sent as a circular letter to the churches affected by the mission of the secessionists.

As a follow-up to this circular letter two other letters were written. The first, 2 John, was sent to one of the churches involved (to the ‘chosen lady and her children’) to warn the members about the itinerant teachers who represented the secessionists and were peddling their new and heretical teaching, trying to deceive people (2 John 7–8). The elder, who wrote 2 John, urged his readers not to aid and abet these teachers by providing them with hospitality. To do so would be to participate in their ‘wicked work’ (2 John 10–11).

However, it was not just those who represented the secessionist teaching who were itinerating among these churches. There were also people of good standing who had gone from the elder’s church ‘for the sake of the Name’ (3 John 7). These people needed to receive hospitality in Christian homes as they travelled about. The second of the follow-up letters, 3 John, was written by the elder to an individual named Gaius. He was commended for providing hospitality to travelling preachers of good standing (3 John 5–6), and informed of the actions of another person, named Diotrephes, who lived in the same town but refused to provide this hospitality, and who was at loggerheads with the elder (3 John 9–10). It is not absolutely clear whether his refusal was based on doctrinal reasons (e.g., he agreed with the secessionists against the elder) or personal conflict (e.g., a rejection of the elder’s authority).

Sometime during or after the writing of the Letters of John, the Beloved Disciple died (John 21:23). It was then that later editors revised and added to the Fourth Gospel, and issued it in the form we know it today, complete with assurances about the trustworthiness of the testimony of the Beloved Disciple (John 19:35; 21:24).

We do not know what happened to the secessionist movement — whether it developed into the sort of second-century Gnosticism we know through the writings of Irenaeus, or whether it simply died out. We do know that the position adopted by the writer(s) of the Letters of John won the day insofar as it was these letters which found their way into the NT canon.

This scenario involves a number of assumptions about the relationship between the Fourth Gospel and the Letters of John, and about the interrelationship between the three letters of John themselves. We will dis-

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cuss these matters below, but before we do so we need to make some comments about the Johannine community.

The Johannine Community

When we study any book of the NT, it is helpful to be able to place it somewhere along the trajectory of the development of early Christianity. Early Christianity was anything but a homogeneous entity. It developed in different ways in different places under the influence and guidance of different personalities. The most obvious examples of this diversity is to be found in the distinctions between the Jerusalem/Judean churches and the churches created through the Pauline mission. Scholars talk about a third major stream within early Christianity, namely Johannine Christianity. The existence and characteristics of this stream are deduced from those writings within the NT that are associated with it, namely the Fourth Gospel, the three letters of John, and (less clearly) Revelation.

When we read the Letters of John, it becomes clear that a number of loosely related churches were operating in fellowship with the author(s) of these letters. 1 John itself appears to be a circular letter (because it lacks any specific address or greetings) sent to a number of churches to warn them of the danger represented by the secessionists. 2 John is addressed to 'the chosen lady and her children', almost certainly a designation for a church and its members, a church different from the one of which the elder who wrote this letter was a member. 3 John is addressed to Gaius, who is informed that the elder wrote to the church (in the town where Gaius lived) but that a certain Diotrephes, a leading figure in that church, had rejected the elder's requests. From this information we may deduce that there were a number of churches, which were in communication with one another. We may, then, justifiably speak of a Johannine community, by which we mean a group of churches in fellowship with the author(s) of 1, 2, and 3 John. However, in recent times the expression 'the Johannine community' has come to be imbued with much more clearly defined and particular connotations.

Based on the contents of the three letters, the way the readers are addressed, the language used, and the concepts involved, many scholars have concluded that these churches shared a common adherence to the sort of Christianity which is reflected in the Fourth Gospel. Such churches are believed to make up what is referred to as the Johannine community. This general approach has given rise to some highly sophisticated theories, including the idea that the Fourth Gospel reflects the ex-

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periences of this community, and the widely held view that the Fourth Gospel was written specifically for this community.

However, the assumptions upon which these theories rest have been questioned in recent times, in particular the assumption that Gospels were written for particular communities. The Gospels, it is argued, were not written with particular communities in mind, especially not the community of which their authors were members, but were intended for a much wider readership.² This is not the place to go into a detailed discussion of these things. Suffice it to say that the case made against the view that the Gospels were written for specific communities is quite compelling. It remains to be seen whether this challenge to the scholarly consensus wins the day. In the meantime it is unwise simply to assume that the Fourth Gospel was written just for the Johannine community, or that the group of churches to which 1, 2, and 3 John were written formed a 'hermetically sealed' group quite distinct from other early Christian communities. In the commentary which follows, where reference is made to the Johannine community, the author's community, or the like, what is meant is simply that group of loosely related churches operating in fellowship with one another and with the author(s) of 1, 2, and 3 John.

1, 2, and 3 John and the Fourth Gospel

Anyone reading the Gospel of John and the Letters of John can hardly help recognising the similarities of language and concepts that exist between them. When one seeks parallels in the NT to words and ideas found in the letters, these are nearly always found in the Gospel. There are many examples of this,³ but most striking of all are the similarities between the prologue of the Fourth Gospel and the opening section of 1 John. Also, the purpose of both the Fourth Gospel and 1 John has to do with faith in Christ and receiving eternal life (John 20:31/1 John 5:13).

2. See Richard Bauckham, ed., *The Gospels for All Christians: Rethinking the Gospel Audiences* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1998).

3. Compare, e.g., the following: the word of life from the beginning — 1 John 1:1-2/John 1:1-4; the light — 1 John 1:5-7/John 1:6-9; the Paraclete — 1 John 2:1/John 14:16, 26; 15:26; 16:7; the new commandment — 1 John 2:7/John 13:34; the love of fellow believers and the world's hatred — 1 John 3:13/John 15:9-25; passing from death to life — 1 John 3:14/John 5:24; Jesus lays down his life for us — 1 John 3:16/John 10:11, 15, 17, 18; 15:12-14; God's command to believe in Jesus Christ — 1 John 3:23/John 6:29; no one has ever seen God — 1 John 4:12/John 1:18; the 'Saviour of the world' — 1 John 4:14/John 4:42; being born of God — 1 John 5:1/John 1:12-13; water and blood — 1 John 5:6/John 19:34; eternal life — 1 John 5:13/John 3:16; the love commandment — 2 John 5-6/John 13:34.

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These many similarities have led several recent scholars to conclude that the one who wrote the Gospel in its original form is also responsible for the writing of 1 John, and perhaps 2 John and 3 John,⁴ though some scholars deny this,⁵ and others leave the question open.⁶

Even though there is a close relationship between the Gospel and the letters in respect to language and ideas, their historical backgrounds differ substantially. As noted above, the background to the Gospel is the conflict between Jesus and some of his unbelieving Jewish contemporaries (recorded possibly for its significance for Christians who now found themselves in conflict with members of local synagogues). The background to the letters, however, is a conflict in the Christian community, a conflict between continuing members of the author's community and the secessionists. It is not surprising, then, that when the language and concepts of the Fourth Gospel are taken up and used in the letters they are given a different spin in order to serve the purposes of the letters. One notable example of this is the way in which the word *paraklētos* is used. In the NT it is found only in the Gospel and Letters of John, but it is applied differently in each case. In the Gospel *paraklētos* denotes the Holy Spirit about whom Jesus gives teaching to prepare his disciples for their encounter with a hostile world after his departure. The *paraklētos* replaces Jesus and has a role vis-à-vis the world (which he convinces of sin, righteousness, and judgement) in the one case, and vis-à-vis believers (whom he guides and teaches) in the other. In the letters *paraklētos* denotes, not the Holy Spirit, but Jesus himself.⁷ In the letters the *paraklētos* has a role, not vis-à-vis the world and believers, but vis-à-vis the Father on behalf of believers (if believers sin, he acts as their sponsor/advocate [*paraklētos*] in the presence of the Father). The author introduces this teaching in order to distinguish his views about sin from those of the secessionists.

4. So, e.g., Brooke Foss Westcott, *The Epistles of St John* (Cambridge and London: Macmillan, 1886) xxx-xxxii, xliii-xlvi; I. Howard Marshall, *The Epistles of John* (NICNT, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978) 42-48; and Gary M. Burge, *The Letters of John* (NIV Application Commentary, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996) 38-40.

5. So, e.g., Raymond E. Brown, *The Epistles of John* (AB 30, New York: Doubleday, 1982) 30; Rudolf Bultmann, *The Johannine Epistles* (Hermeneia, Philadelphia: Fortress, 1973) 1; Rudolf Schnackenburg, *The Johannine Epistles* (Tunbridge Wells, Kent: Burns & Oates, 1992) 40-41.

6. So, e.g., Burge, *The Letters of John*, 38-40; Marianne Meye Thompson, *1-3 John* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1992) 20-21.

7. I am grateful to Don Carson, who pointed out to me that the Fourth Gospel includes a hint that Jesus himself is a *paraklētos*, insofar as it describes the Holy Spirit as 'another *paraklētos*'. Therefore, those who had read the Fourth Gospel would not be surprised to find Jesus described as *paraklētos* in 1 John 2:1.

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What all this means for interpreters of the letters is that they find themselves referring again and again to the Gospel to seek elucidation concerning words and ideas found in the letters; but when they do so they must be careful, for often there is not a one-to-one equivalence of usage. Nevertheless, the Gospel remains a most important source of comparison for the exegesis of the letters.

The Interrelationship of 1, 2, and 3 John

There are many similarities between 1 John and 2 John. First, in 1 John the author deals with the same historical situation as that reflected in 2 John. He speaks of those who 'went out from us' and do not acknowledge 'Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh' (1 John 2:19, 22-23; cf. 2 John 7). Second, he brands these false teachers as antichrists, as does the elder in 2 John (1 John 2:18, 22; cf. 2 John 7). Third, he stresses the great importance of the love command, which was received at the beginning along with the gospel, just as the elder does in 2 John (1 John 3:11, 23; 4:7, 21; 5:1-4a; cf. 2 John 4-6). Fourth, the author of 1 John, like the elder, finds his joy in seeing his children walking in the truth of the gospel (1 John 1:3-4; cf. 2 John 4).

There are also striking similarities of language, content, and style between 2 John and 3 John, and these indicate that the same elder was responsible for writing both letters: in both of them he expresses joy that the 'children' are 'walking in the truth' (2 John 4; 3 John 4); in both the addressees (the 'chosen lady' and Gaius respectively) are described as those whom the elder loves 'in the truth' (2 John 1; 3 John 1); and both conclude with virtually identical statements (2 John 12: 'I have much to write to you, but I do not want to use paper and ink. Instead, I hope to visit you and talk with you face to face'; 3 John 13-14a: 'I have much to write you, but I do not want to do so with pen and ink. I hope to see you soon, and we will talk face to face').

Because of the close connections between 1 John and 2 John, and between 2 John and 3 John, there is a *prima facie* case for saying that the three letters were written by the same person, at about the same time, and in response to various aspects of the same crisis. But there are also a number of dissimilarities between the letters, which have caused some scholars to conclude that different authors were responsible for the writing of the first and last two letters. It is possible, however, to account for these in terms of variations in style adopted by the same author in different letters. The working hypothesis adopted in this commentary is that the three letters were written by the same author. He did not append his

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name to 1 John, and called himself simply the elder in 2 and 3 John.⁸ In this commentary the writer of 1 John will be denoted simply as 'the author', and the writer of 2 John and 3 John will be referred to as 'the elder'. This is in line with the desire for anonymity on the part of the author of 1 John, and the chosen self-designation of the author in 2 John and 3 John.

It is very difficult, perhaps even impossible, to determine the order of writing of the three letters. As indicated in the scenario above, the hypothesis adopted in this commentary is that 1 John was written first as a circular letter to address theological issues that were causing problems in various local churches, and was followed by the writing of 2 John and 3 John to one of these churches and an individual respectively.

1, 2, and 3 John and the NT Canon

Brown provides a full discussion of this matter,⁹ which does not need repeating here; only a brief summary is necessary. He points out that no unambiguous citations from the letters of John are found before A.D. 175. Brown lists the possible echoes from the early period, and concludes:

By the mid-second century ideas, themes, and even slogans of the Johannine Epistles (or, at least, of I John) were being cited in other Christian works. But no one of the proposed similarities consists of a verbatim citation, so that it is still very difficult to be certain that any of the mentioned authors had the text of a Johannine Epistle before him. Nevertheless, the likelihood that I John was available to Polycarp is increased by the information of Eusebius (*Hist.* 3.39.17) that Papias, who was a contemporary of Polycarp (3.36.1-2), "made use of testimonies from the First Epistle of John."¹⁰

It is only late in the second century that undeniable citations from the letters of John appear in Christian writings. The earliest of these are found in the works of Irenaeus (cf. *Against Heresies* 1.16.3; 3.16.5, 8), which cite 1 and 2 John. Among other writings including citations are

8. Other reconstructions are possible. Georg Strecker, 'Die Anfänge der johanneischen Schule', *NTS* 32 (1986) 31-47, e.g., suggests that 2 John was the first of the three letters to be written, and it was sent by the elder to deal with the threat to one of the Johannine churches posed by the coming of the secessionists, and 3 John documents reactions to missionaries whom the elder himself sent out to propagate the truth. 1 John and the Fourth Gospel were written later by other members of what he calls the Johannine school.

9. Brown, *The Epistles of John*, 5-13.

10. Brown, *The Epistles of John*, 9.

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the Muratorian Fragment, which cites from 1 John and mentions two letters of John, most likely 1 and 2 John. Tertullian (d. A.D. 215) cites 1 John many times, and Clement of Alexandria (d. ca. A.D. 220) refers to 1 John and calls it 'the greater epistle', indicating that he knew of at least one other. However, it is not until the mid-third century that the first attestation of 3 John is found. Eusebius (*Hist. Eccl.* 6.25.10) says that Origen (d. A.D. 253) knew both 2 and 3 John, adding that 'all do not consider them genuine'. Early in the fourth century Eusebius of Caesarea included 1 John among the 'acknowledged books', but notes that 2 and 3 John, while accepted by most, were still listed as disputed books. It was not until late in the fourth century that all three letters of John came to be accepted, and that was on the assumption that all three were written by the apostle John. Brown suggests that 1 John gained acceptance earlier because it was associated with the Fourth Gospel and believed to have been written by the apostle John. Later 2 and 3 John were accepted because the author's self-designation as the elder was regarded as evidence of modesty on the part of the author, who was really the apostle John.¹¹

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Authorship

Internal Evidence. While 1 John lacks the usual opening A to B greeting formula, and accordingly there is no clear indication as to who wrote it, nevertheless we can say certain things about the author: (i) he writes as an individual, something which his repeated self-references in the first person singular indicate (2:1, 7, 8, 12, 13, 14, 21, 26; 5:13); (ii) his language and thought bear very striking resemblance to that of the Fourth Gospel, suggesting that he either wrote the Gospel as well or was deeply influenced by its language and concepts; (iii) he writes as an eyewitness of Jesus Christ, introducing himself, along with others, as one who has heard, seen with his eyes, looked at, and touched with his hands the incarnate Word of life (1:1-5).

Most scholars recognise, rightly, that the language used by the author in his claim to have seen, heard, and touched the Word of life is the language of sense perception. However, this is not always the case. Bultmann, for example, says: 'The question of the we' can be answered

11. Brown, *The Epistles of John*, 9-13.

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'by recognising the paradox that an historical event can be, or in this case really is, at the same time an eschatological event. The "we" therefore are the "eschatological" contemporaries of Jesus'.¹² But, as Kügler points out, the strength of the expressions used in the claim to be an actual eyewitness is such that any such 'spiritual' interpretation as that suggested by Bultmann is ruled out.¹³

Schnackenburg takes a different approach, suggesting that, if the author is not himself an eyewitness, he was a pupil of the fourth evangelist, or at least a member of the circle of people who gathered around him.¹⁴ Brown believes that the author speaks as a representative of a 'Johannine School' who shares a 'vicarious participation in the contact of the Beloved Disciple with Jesus'.¹⁵ These suggestions, like Bultmann's, are susceptible to the same criticism that they do not take sufficient account of the strength of the author's claim to testify as an eyewitness; to say he was a pupil of an eyewitness or a member of a 'Johannine School' does not do justice to the language.¹⁶

Kügler argues that the way forward is to recognise in 1 John both an actual and an implied author and actual and implied readers. The actual author is not an eyewitness, but the implied author is. The implied readers have all knowledge and have no need to be taught anything. The actual readers, however, need instruction to prevent them from being taken in by the antichrists. The actual author employs literary fiction in order to gain a hearing from his actual readers, which he could not expect to receive otherwise.¹⁷ Kügler's approach does take full cognisance of the strength of the eyewitness language, but the question remains whether 1 John displays solid evidence that the author has adopted such a literary fictional approach, and whether there were any contemporary precedents for this sort of literary communication in the ancient world. Early Christians appear to have been unwilling to accept pseudepigraphical writings into the New Testament canon.¹⁸

Klauck contends that, while there is sufficient proof for a metaphorical use of the verb 'to touch' (*psēlaphaō*) in 1 John 1:1, nevertheless the de-

12. Bultmann, *The Johannine Epistles*, 10.

13. Joachim Kügler, 'Die Belehrung der Unbelehrbaren: Zur Funktion des Traditionsarguments in 1 Joh', *BZ* n.s. 32 (1988) 249.

14. Schnackenburg, *The Johannine Epistles*, 38, 41.

15. Brown, *The Epistles of John*, 163; cf. Georg Strecker, *The Johannine Letters* (Hermeneia, Philadelphia: Fortress, 1996) xxxv-xlii.

16. So Kügler, 'Belehrung', 249-50.

17. Kügler, 'Belehrung', 250-54.

18. Cf. D. A. Carson, 'Pseudonymity and Pseudepigraphy', in *Dictionary of New Testament Background*, ed. Craig A. Evans and Stanley E. Porter (forthcoming).

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ciding factor in interpretation must always be the immediate context, and in this case that speaks against any metaphorical interpretation and demands a literal one.¹⁹ However, Klauck rejects the idea that this must lead to the adoption of a conservative solution to the question of authorship, one which would ascribe it to a genuine disciple of Jesus.²⁰ Instead, he argues that the author is the voice of the 'Johannine tradition', which is grounded on the witness of the beloved disciple.²¹ However, the claim to be the voice of 'Johannine tradition' is a far cry from the claim to be an actual eyewitness, which is what the text taken at face value implies.

In the end, it seems better to take with the utmost seriousness the claims of the author to be one of a number of the original eyewitnesses of the incarnate Christ, despite the problems that raises — for example, trying to account for a number of elderly people, all of whom had been with Jesus during his earthly ministry, who were still alive when the author wrote this letter. But this is not an insurmountable problem because we could say that the author identified himself with others who had been eyewitnesses at the beginning of his letter, even though they were no longer living. It is clear from later self-references in the singular that they are not associated with him in the writing of the letter itself (see 'A Note on the Use of First Person Forms', p. 61). If we are prepared to accept that the author was an eyewitness, then there exists a prima facie case for identifying the author of 1 John with the author of (the original version of) the Fourth Gospel, because of the striking similarities of language and concepts, which were noted above.²²

External Evidence. Early Christian tradition ascribes 1 John to the apostle John. A number of the relevant texts are reproduced below. Irenaeus (d. A.D. 202), Dionysius of Alexandria (d. ca. A.D. 265), and Tertullian (d. after A.D. 220) all ascribe the authorship of the Fourth Gospel and 1 John unequivocally to John the disciple and apostle of the Lord:

The Gospel, therefore, knew no other son of man but Him who was of Mary, who also suffered; and no Christ who flew away from Jesus before the passion; but Him who was born it knew as Jesus Christ the Son of God, and that this same suffered and rose again, as John, the disciple of the Lord, verifies, saying: "But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and believing ye might

19. Hans-Josef Klauck, *Der erste Johannesbrief* (EKKNT, Zürich and Braunschweig: Benziger, 1991) 63.

20. Klauck, *Der erste Johannesbrief*, 75.

21. Klauck, *Der erste Johannesbrief*, 75-77.

22. See pp. 5-6.

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have eternal life in His name," — foreseeing these blasphemous systems which divide the Lord, as far as lies in their power, saying that He was formed of two different substances. For this reason also he has thus testified to us in his Epistle: "Little children, it is the last time; and as ye have heard that Antichrist doth come, now have many antichrists appeared; whereby we know that it is the last time. They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us: but [they departed], that it might be made manifest that they are not of us. Know ye, therefore, that every lie is from without, and is not of the truth. Who is a liar, but he that denieth that Jesus is the Christ? This is Antichrist". (Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 3.16.5)

These are they against whom the Lord has cautioned us beforehand; and His disciple, in his Epistle already mentioned, commands us to avoid them, when he says: "For many deceivers are entered into the world, who confess not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh. This is a deceiver and an antichrist. Take heed to them, that ye lose not what ye have wrought". (Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 3.16.8)

I do not, therefore, deny that he [the author of Revelation] was called John and that this was the writing of one John, and I agree that it was the work, also, of some holy and inspired man. But I would not easily agree that this was the apostle, the son of Zebedee, the brother of James, who is the author of the gospel, and the general (catholic) epistle that bears his name. But I conjecture, both from the general tenor of both, and the form and complexion of the composition, and the execution of the whole book, that it is not from him. For the evangelist never prefixed his name, never proclaims himself, either in the gospel or in his epistle. (Dionysius of Alexandria, cited in Eusebius, *Hist. Eccl.* 7.25.6ff.)

There is a certain emphatic saying by John: "No man hath seen God at any time"; meaning, of course, at any previous time. . . . But the very same apostles testify that they had both seen and "handled" Christ. . . . Let us, in short, examine who it is whom the apostles saw. "That," says John, "which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the Word of Life". (Tertullian, *Adversus Praxeas* 15).

To whom would He [Christ] have rather made known the veiled import of His own language, than to him to whom He disclosed the likeness of His own glory — Peter, John, and James, and afterwards to Paul, to whom He granted participation in (the joys of) Paradise too, prior to his martyrdom? Or do they write differently from what they think — teachers using deceit, not truth? . . . John, in fact, exhorts us to lay down

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our lives even for our brethren, affirming that there is no fear in love: "For perfect love casteth out fear, since fear has punishment; and he who fears is not perfect in love." . . . And if he teaches that we must die for the brethren how much more for the Lord, — he being sufficiently prepared, by his own Revelation too, for giving such advise! For indeed the Spirit had sent the injunction to the angel of the church in Smyrna: "Behold, the devil shall cast some of you into prison, that ye may be tried ten days. . . . "But the fearful," says John — and then come the others — "will have their part in the lake of fire and brimstone." Thus fear, which, as stated in his epistle, love drives out, has punishment. (Tertullian, *Scorpiace* 12)

Also relevant are the fragments of Papias (born probably between A.D. 60-70, and who published his *Exposition of Oracles of the Lord* late in life, ca. A.D. 130-40), cited by Eusebius. In these, reference is made to the apostle John as one of the 'elders', but also to what appears to be another 'elder John'. In Eusebius's own comments about Papias's statement, he says that this other 'elder John' was probably the author of Revelation. From this we might infer that he thought that the apostle John was the author of 1 John:

But I will not scruple also to give a place for you along with my interpretations to everything that I learnt carefully and remembered carefully in time past from the Elders, guaranteeing its truth. For, unlike the many, I did not take pleasure in those who have very much to say, but in those who teach the truth; nor in those who relate foreign commandments, but in those (who record) such as were given from the Lord to the Faith, and are derived from the Truth itself. And again, on any occasion when a person came (in my way) who had been a follower of the Elders, I would inquire about the discourses of the Elders — what was said by Andrew, or by Peter, or by Philip, or by Thomas or James, or by John or Matthew or any other of the Lord's disciples, and what Aristion and the Elder John, the disciples of the Lord, say. For I did not think that I could get so much profit from the contents of books as from the utterances of a living and abiding voice. (Papias, cited by Eusebius, *Hist. Eccl.* 3.39).

Here it is worth while to observe that he twice enumerates the name of John. The first he mentions in connexion with Peter and James and Matthew and the rest of the Apostles, evidently meaning the Evangelist, but the other John he mentions after an interval and classes with others outside the number of the Apostles, placing Aristion before him, and he distinctly calls him an Elder. So that he hereby makes it quite evident that their statement is true who say that there were two persons of that

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name in Asia, and that there are two tombs in Ephesus, each of which even now is called (the tomb) of John. And it is important to notice this; for it is probable that it was the second, if one will not admit that it was the first, who saw the Revelation which is ascribed by name to John. . . . (Eusebius, *Hist. Eccl.* 3.39)

The same Papias fragment is also cited by Jerome:

Papias, the pupil of John, bishop of Hierapolis in Asia, wrote five volumes which he entitled *Expositions of the words of our Lord*, in which, when he had asserted in his preface that he did not follow various opinions but had the apostles for authority, he said, "I considered what Andrew and Peter said, what Philip, what Thomas, what James, what John, what Matthew or any one else among the disciples of our Lord, what also Aristion and the elder John, disciples of the Lord, had said, not so much that I have their books to read, as that their living voice is heard until the present day in the authors themselves." It appears through this catalogue of names that the John who is placed among the disciples is not the same as the elder John whom he places after Aristion in his enumeration. This we say moreover because of the opinion mentioned above, where we record that it is declared by many that the last two epistles of John are the work not of the apostle but of the presbyter. (Jerome, *Lives of Illustrious Men*, 13).

Here again reference is made to two Johns, the apostle and the elder, and Jerome notes the widespread belief in his time that 2 and 3 John were written by the elder John, and not the apostle. From this it may be inferred that Jerome believed that 1 John was written by the apostle.

What is clear from these citations is that early Christian tradition is unanimous in ascribing 1 John to John, the disciple and apostle of the Lord. This corresponds with the internal evidence, which, taken at face value, indicates that the author was an eyewitness of the Word of life. Although there is, as we have seen above, a reluctance on the part of modern scholars to accept this testimony, it does seem to be the fairest way to read the evidence.

Addressees

Because 1 John lacks the normal opening greeting, it contains no designation of those to whom the letter is addressed. However, a careful reading of the letter does allow us to say something about the readers, and the

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way the author thought and felt about them. The readers appear to have been members of a number of churches in fellowship with the church of which the author was a member. They were encountering people who had seceded from the author's church and were propagating an aberrant form of the gospel (2:18-27).

The author's precise relationship with his readers is not easy to determine. His concern, he says, is 'that you also may have fellowship with us' (1:3). On the surface it might appear that the readers are those whom the author regards as not yet in fellowship with him. However, in the light of later statements in the letter, it is better to say that he regards them as those whose fellowship with him is under threat. The readers have already heard the message of the gospel, including its fundamental demand to love their brothers and sisters in Christ (2:7, 24; 3:11). This message has already impacted their lives (2:8). They already know the truth of the gospel (2:21), that Christ appeared to take away sins (3:5), and they have already received an anointing from God (2:20).

The author has an affectionate regard for his readers, addressing them repeatedly as his 'dear friends' (*agapētoi*, 2:7; 3:2, 21; 4:1, 7, 11). On one occasion he addresses them as 'brothers' (*adelphoi*, 3:13). More often calls them his 'children' (*teknia* or *paidia*, 2:1, 12, 18, 28; 3:7, 18; 4:4; 5:21), indicating that he relates to them as their senior in the Lord. In one place he addresses them all as 'children', then variously as 'fathers' and 'young men' (2:12-14), indicating the various levels of Christian maturity that existed among his readers. Both the author and his readers live as aliens in the world of unbelieving humanity, a world under the control of the evil one (5:19). The world does not 'know' them just as it did not 'know' Christ (3:1), and it is hostile towards them (3:13). The world and its values are opposed to God, and the author urges his readers to resist its vain attractions (2:15-17).

Opponents

Our working hypothesis, based upon what I hope is responsible mirror reading of 1 John, is that certain people had seceded from the author's community (2:19) because they held different views concerning the person and work of Christ (4:1-3) and Christians' obligations to keep God's commands (2:4), namely to believe in his Son, Jesus Christ, and love one another (3:23). Though they had seceded, they nevertheless continued to try to influence those remaining in the author's community to accept their heretical teachings (2:26). Some of the secessionists appear to have undertaken an itinerant ministry among the churches (2:18-19, 26). The

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effect of their teaching upon the members of these churches was to undermine confidence in the message of the gospel as originally received, so that the author found it necessary to bolster their assurance (5:13). The secessionists' insistence that they had a special anointing of the Spirit (which had led them to go beyond the primitive Christian gospel) made those remaining in the author's community wonder whether they lacked that anointing (2:20, 27) and therefore also lacked the spiritual insight which the secessionists claimed to have.²³

The Teaching of the Secessionists. The actual teaching of the secessionists can be inferred from the Letters of John by a judicious mirror reading of the text. In the first place, the author responds to the secessionists' claims to know God when he says, 'If we claim to have fellowship with him yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live by the truth' (1:6); 'The man who says, "I know him," but does not do what he commands is a liar, and the truth is not in him' (2:4); 'Whoever claims to live in him must walk as Jesus did' (2:6); 'Anyone who claims to be in the light but hates his brother is still in the darkness' (2:9). It is clear that the author regarded these claims as spurious because the behaviour of the secessionists belied their claims.

In the second place, the author refers to claims to sinlessness made by the secessionists when he writes: 'If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us' (1:8); 'If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word has no place in our lives' (1:10).

In the third place, the author deals with the secessionists' teaching when he speaks of errors relating to the person of Christ: 'Who is the liar? It is the man who denies that Jesus is the Christ. Such a man is the antichrist — he denies the Father and the Son. No one who denies the Son

23. In recent times some scholars have argued that the interpretation of 1 John with the secessionist challenge in mind is unnecessary. Judith Lieu, *The Theology of the Johannine Epistles* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991) 16, while recognising that a schism has occurred, argues that the purpose of the letter is not so much to deal with the effects of the schism as 'to engender a debate within the framework of the author's or community's theology'. Terry Griffith, 'A Non-polemical Reading of 1 John: Sin, Christology and the Limits of Johannine Christianity', *TynBul* 49 (1998) 275, believes that a return of some Jewish Christians to Judaism is sufficient to account for the rhetoric of 1 John, and that the author's aim is pastoral, i.e., 'to secure the boundaries of the community against further losses'. However, the author's reference to those 'who went out from us' (2:19) and his view that they are antichrists (2:18), together with his reference to false prophets who 'have gone out into the world' (4:1) and his identifying them with the spirit of antichrist (4:3), do seem to indicate that the author had a polemic purpose in writing.

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has the Father; whoever acknowledges the Son has the Father also' (2:22-23); 'Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world. This is how you can recognise the Spirit of God: Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, but every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you have heard is coming and even now is already in the world' (4:1-3); 'We accept man's testimony, but God's testimony is greater because it is the testimony of God, which he has given about his Son. Anyone who believes in the Son of God has this testimony in his heart. Anyone who does not believe God has made him out to be a liar, because he has not believed the testimony God has given about his Son' (5:9-10). From these texts it is apparent that the secessionists denied that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, come in the flesh.

In the fourth place, the author appears to be refuting secessionist teaching when he says, 'This is the one who came by water and blood — Jesus Christ. He did not come by water only, but by water and blood. And it is the Spirit who testifies, because the Spirit is the truth' (5:6). The secessionists denied that Jesus came by blood, that is, the importance of Jesus' atoning death (see commentary *ad loc.*).

In the fifth place, the author refers to the secessionists' behaviour when he speaks of those who do not show love to fellow believers: 'But whoever hates his brother is in the darkness and walks around in the darkness; he does not know where he is going, because the darkness has blinded him' (2:11); 'Anyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life in him' (3:15); 'Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love' (4:8); 'If anyone says, "I love God," yet hates his brother, he is a liar. For anyone who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he has not seen' (4:20). The secessionists' relationship with the believers remaining in the author's community was not marked by the love which Christ himself enjoined upon his disciples.

Finally, the author also seems to be referring to the secessionists' behaviour when he speaks of those who go on sinning and do not 'do right': 'No one who lives in him keeps on sinning. No one who continues to sin has either seen him or known him' (3:6); 'He who does what is sinful is of the devil, because the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil's work' (3:8); 'This is how we know who the children of God are and who the children of the devil are: Anyone who does not do what is right is not a child of God; nor is anyone who does not love his brother' (3:10). While the secessionists claimed 'to have no sin', the author clearly implies that their behaviour

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was marked by wrongdoing. He implies that they continued in sin and did not do what is right.

If what has been outlined above is a responsible reading of the text of 1 John, and does represent what the secessionists stood for, the next question is how the secessionists came to adopt such aberrant teaching and behaviour. One possibility is that this teaching was self-generating within the Christian community, and the other that the secessionists embraced the teaching of other early Christian heretics. We will now deal with each of these possibilities in turn.

The Secessionists and the Author's Community. A number of scholars have sought to explain the teaching of the secessionists in terms of the experiences of the author's community itself, or the ways different members of the community interpreted the Fourth Gospel, or a combination of the two.

Painter suggests that the author's community was originally made up of two distinct groups: 'those who had been through the struggle with the synagogue and those who had entered the community after the breach with Judaism'. The latter did not understand the Gospel of John tradition against the background of the struggle with Judaism but rather against their own Gentile background, which included the mystery religions and their initiatory rites. They believed that the divine *sperma* had descended upon the human Jesus at his baptism, but in such a way that the human Jesus was to be distinguished from the divine Christ. Hence they could deny that Jesus was the Christ come in the flesh. They believed that through their baptismal initiation they, too, had received the divine *sperma* and been born of God, thus sharing the divine nature and enjoying immunity from sin. What was important for them was their own experience of God, or their *koinōnia* with him, and human relationships were deemed less significant. 'Love' for God, not love for one another, was the crucial matter.²⁴ It was these people who in the end seceded from the author's community.

Brown argues that the division between the secessionists and the author's community resulted from different readings of the Fourth Gospel. From the secessionists' point of view those remaining with the author of 1 John were revisionists. They were harking back to a primitive form of Christology instead of embracing the christological implications of the Fourth Gospel. For his part the author of 1 John regarded the secessionists as innovators, people who had distorted the tradition that had been handed down from the beginning and enshrined in the Fourth Gos-

24. John Painter, 'The "Opponents" in 1 John', *NTS* 32 (1986) 48-49, 66-67.

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pel. Ironically, both groups appealed to the Fourth Gospel in support of their respective positions. According to Brown, the secessionists did not deny the incarnation but rather that Christ's being in the flesh was salvific.²⁵

Smalley argues that three different groupings of Christians may be distinguished within the author's community. First, there were those who were committed to the apostolic teaching as it had come down from the beginning. These gathered around the author of 1 John. Second, there were those from a Jewish background who had made some sort of commitment to Jesus but were not prepared to regard him as the Messiah. These people held the law in high regard and probably developed into Ebionites. Third, there were those of a pagan Hellenistic background (possibly some Hellenistic Jews were also associated with this group) who had been influenced by dualistic (Gnostic) ideas. These people found it difficult to accept the full humanity of Christ and probably developed into Docetics. All of these groups continued in the author's community, despite the inner tensions that resulted from their different emphases. However, for some this tension became too great, and they eventually seceded from the community. These secessionists, Smalley says, were probably spearheaded by those of a docetic frame of mind.²⁶

Klauck argues, in the light of such texts as 2:15-17 (the reference to boasting of what one has) and 3:17 (the reference to having material possessions and closing one's heart to those in need), that the secessionists were much better off financially and materially than those believers who remained in the author's community. The secessionists were the ones who provided meeting places for the church and hospitality for itinerant missionaries.²⁷ They were people for whom the experience of the Spirit received through baptism was of great importance, and through this experience they achieved sinlessness. For these people the most important christological event was Jesus' baptism, when the Spirit descended and remained upon him. Accordingly, they deemphasised Jesus' incarnation and death on the cross. These beliefs, both about their own experience and the significance of Christ, they derived from their reading of the Fourth Gospel.²⁸

The exact influences which led the secessionists to formulate their understanding of Christianity, whether it was the influence of their background in mystery religions (Painter), their particular interpretation of

25. Brown, *The Epistles of John*, 67-68, 505.

26. Stephen S. Smalley, *1, 2, 3 John* (WBC 51, Waco, TX: Word, 1984) xxiii-xxv.

27. Hans-Josef Klauck, 'Internal Opponents: The Treatment of the Secessionists in the First Epistle of John', *Concilium* 200 (1988) 56-57.

28. Klauck, 'Internal Opponents', 57-58.

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the Fourth Gospel (Brown), a pagan Hellenistic background involving dualistic ideas, or their experience of the Spirit (Klauck), will continue to be debated. But it does seem clear that, whatever the influences that affected them were, they all led to a deemphasising of the incarnation and vicarious death of Christ and a concomitant deemphasising of the commands of Christ, especially the command to love one another.

The Secessionists and Early Christian Heretics. It would be very helpful to know whether the opponents reflected in 1 John can be identified with, or had been influenced by, any of the early heretical teachers mentioned by extracanonical writers. The relevant texts are reproduced below, so that readers can make their own judgements. Irenaeus (A.D. 120-202), bishop of Lyons, in his magnum opus *Against Heresies*, provides firsthand information concerning several heretical teachings which assailed the church in the second century. Among other things, he recounts Polycarp's story about John the disciple of the Lord meeting Cerinthus in the bath-house in Ephesus, and provides a description of Cerinthus's teaching:

There are also those who heard from him [Polycarp] that John, the disciple of the Lord, going to bathe at Ephesus, and perceiving Cerinthus within, rushed out of the bath-house without bathing, exclaiming, "Let us fly, lest even the bath-house fall down, because Cerinthus, the enemy of the truth, is within." (*Against Heresies* 3.3.4)

Cerinthus, again, a man who was educated in the wisdom of the Egyptians, taught that the world was not made by the primary God, but by a certain Power far separated from him, and at a distance from that Principality who is supreme over the universe, and ignorant of him who is above all. He represented Jesus as having not been born of a virgin, but as being the son of Joseph and Mary according to the ordinary course of human generation, while he nevertheless was more righteous, prudent, and wise than other men. Moreover, after his baptism, Christ descended upon him in the form of a dove from the Supreme Ruler, and that then he proclaimed the unknown Father, and performed miracles. But at last Christ departed from Jesus, and that then Jesus suffered and rose again, while Christ remained impassible, inasmuch as he was a spiritual being. (*Against Heresies* 1.26.1)

John, the disciple of the Lord, preaches this faith, and seeks by the proclamation of the Gospel, to remove that error which by Cerinthus had been disseminated among men, and a long time previously by those termed Nicolaitans, who are an offset of that "knowledge" falsely so called, that he might confound them, and persuade them that there is

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but one God, who made all things by His Word; and not, as they allege, that the Creator was one, but the Father of the Lord another; and that the Son of the Creator was, forsooth, one, but the Christ from above another, who also continued impassible, descending upon Jesus, the Son of the Creator, and flew back again into His Pleroma; and that Monogenes was the beginning, but Logos was the true son of Monogenes; and that this creation to which we belong was not made by the primary God, but by some power lying far below Him, and shut off from communion with the things invisible and ineffable. The disciple of the Lord therefore desiring to put an end to all such doctrines, and to establish the rule of truth in the Church, that there is one Almighty God, who made all things by His Word, both visible and invisible; showing at the same time, that by the Word, through whom God made the creation, He also bestowed salvation on men included in the creation; thus commended His teaching in the Gospel: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by Him, and without Him was nothing made. What was made was life in Him, and the life was the light of men. And the light shineth in darkness, and the darkness comprehended it not." "All things," he says, "were made by Him"; therefore in "all things" this creation of ours is [included], for we cannot concede to these men that [the words] "all things" are spoken in reference to those within their Pleroma. For if their Pleroma do indeed contain these, this creation, as being such, is not outside, as I have demonstrated in the preceding book; but if they are outside the Pleroma, which indeed appeared impossible, it follows, in that case, that their Pleroma cannot be "all things": therefore this vast creation is not outside [the Pleroma]. (*Against Heresies* 3.11.1)

While it might be attractive to identify the opponents of 1 John with Cerinthus and his followers, seeing that there is evidence that the disciple of the Lord did know of him and repudiate his teaching, nevertheless this identification is highly unlikely. There is no evidence that Cerinthus and his followers were ever members of the community to which the author of 1 John belonged. Also, there is much in the description of the error of Cerinthus provided by Irenaeus that is not reflected in the author's rebuttal of the teaching of the secessionists in 1 John (e.g., distinguishing the Creator from the Father of the Lord, the Son of the Creator from the Christ, etc.).

When we turn to the writings of Ignatius, and references there to his docetic opponents, we find something much closer to the teaching rejected in 1 John.

Ignatius, bishop of Antioch (d. A.D. 107), wrote a number of letters

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while on his way from Antioch to martyrdom in Rome in the very early part of the second century. These letters, therefore, were written at a time shortly after the writing of 1 John. The salient references in the epistles of Ignatius are reproduced below. Ignatius insists upon the real humanity of Jesus Christ, that he truly suffered death upon the cross, and that he rose bodily from the dead. He warns his readers against those who deny these things and fail in their duty to show love to those in need. The relevant passages are:

For I have observed that you are established in immoveable faith . . . being fully persuaded as touching our Lord, that he is in truth of the family of David according to the flesh, God's son by the will and power of God, truly born of a virgin, baptized by John that "all righteousness might be fulfilled by Him", truly nailed to a tree in the flesh for our sakes under Pontius Pilate and Herod the tetrarch. (Ign. *Smyrn.* 1:1-2)

For he suffered all these things for us that we might attain salvation, and he truly suffered, even as he truly raised himself, not, as some unbelievers say, that his Passion was merely in semblance, — but it is they who are merely in semblance, and even according to their opinions it shall be to them, and they shall be without bodies and phantasmal. (Ign. *Smyrn.* 2:1)

For I know and believe that he was in the flesh even after the resurrection. And when he came to those with Peter He said to them: "Take, handle me and see that I am not a phantom without a body." And they immediately touched him and believed, being mingled both with his flesh and spirit. Therefore they despised even death, and were proved to be above death. And after his Resurrection he ate with them and drank with them as a being of flesh, though he was united in spirit to the Father. (Ign. *Smyrn.* 3:1-3)

Now I warn you of these things, beloved, knowing that you also are so minded. But I guard you in advance against beasts in the form of men, whom you must not only not receive, but if it is possible not even meet, but only pray for them, if perchance they may repent, difficult though that be, — but Jesus Christ who is our true life has the power over this. For if it is merely in semblance that these things were done by our Lord I am also a prisoner in semblance. And why have I given myself up to death, to fire, to the sword, to wild beasts? (Ign. *Smyrn.* 4:1-2)

There are some who ignorantly deny him, but rather were denied by him, being advocates of death rather than of the truth. These are they whom neither the prophecies nor the law of Moses persuaded, nor the

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gospel even until now, nor our own individual sufferings. For they have the same opinion concerning us. For what does anyone profit me, if he praise me but blaspheme my Lord, and do not confess that he was clothed in flesh? But he who says this has denied him absolutely and is clothed with a corpse. Now I have not thought right to put into writing their unbelieving names; but would that I might not even remember them, until they repent concerning the Passion, which is our resurrection. (Ign. *Smyrn.* 5:1-3)

Let no one be deceived; even things in heaven and the glory of the angels, and the rulers visible and invisible, even for them there is a judgment if they do not believe on the blood of Christ. "He that receiveth let him receive." Let not office exalt anyone, for faith and love is everything, and nothing has been preferred to them. But mark those who have strange opinions concerning the grace of Jesus Christ which has come to us, and see how contrary they are to the mind of God. For love they have no care, none for the widow, none for the orphan, none for the distressed, none for the afflicted, none for the prisoner, or for him released from prison, none for the hungry or thirsty. They abstain from Eucharist and prayer, because they do not confess that the Eucharist is the flesh of our Saviour Jesus Christ who suffered for our sins, which the Father raised up by his goodness. (Ign. *Smyrn.* 6:1-7:1)

Be deaf therefore when anyone speaks to you apart from Jesus Christ, who was of the family of David, and of Mary, who was truly born, both ate and drank, was truly persecuted under Pontius Pilate, was truly crucified and died in the sight of those in heaven and on earth and under the earth; who also was truly raised from the dead, his Father raised him up, as in the same manner his Father shall raise up in Christ Jesus us who believe in him, without whom we have no true life. (Ign. *Trall.* 9:1-2)

But if, as some affirm who are without God, — that is, are unbelievers, — his suffering was only a semblance (but it is they who are merely a semblance), why am I a prisoner, and why also do I even long to fight with the beasts? In that case I am dying in vain. Then indeed am I lying concerning the Lord. (Ign. *Trall.* 10:1)

These letters reflect the heretical teaching of people who deny the real humanity of Jesus Christ, claim that he 'suffered only in semblance', and therefore deny that he suffered for our sins. They do not show practical love for the needy. All these matters have their parallel in the teaching and behaviour of the secessionists as it is reflected in 1 John, and it is therefore very tempting to identify the secessionists with the docetic op-

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ponents of Ignatius. Schnackenburg notes the close similarities between the false teaching of the secessionists and that of Ignatius's docetic opponents, but stops short of saying that the secessionists are to be identified with Ignatius's opponents. The differences are too great, he says, to make that identification. Ignatius's heretics were real docetics who reduced the existence of Jesus to mere semblance, and there is no evidence that the secessionists did this. In addition, Ignatius's heretics had strong affinities with Judaism, as the citation which follows indicates,²⁹ and there is no hint in 1 John that the secessionists had such affinities:

For this cause let us be his disciples, let us learn to lead Christian lives. For whoever is called by any name other than this is not of God. Put aside then the evil leaven, which has grown old and sour, and turn to the new leaven, which is Jesus Christ. Be salted in him, that none among you may be corrupted, since by your savour you shall be tested. It is monstrous to talk of Jesus Christ and to practise Judaism. For Christianity did not base its faith on Judaism, but Judaism on Christianity, and every tongue believing on God was brought together in it. (Ign. *Magn.* 10:1-3)

A third but less attractive possibility is that the secessionist teaching may be identified with that of the second-century Gnostics, Basilides and Valentinus. Irenaeus provides testimony to their teaching:

Basilides again, that he may appear to have discovered something more sublime and plausible [than the doctrines of Saturninus], gives an immense development to his doctrines. He sets forth that Nous was first born of the unborn father, that from him, again, was born Logos, from Logos Phronesis, from Phronesis Sophia and Dynamis, and from Dynamis and Sophia the powers, and principalities, and angels, whom he also calls the *first*; and that by them the first heaven was made. Then other powers, being formed by emanation from these, created another heaven similar to the first; and in like manner, when others, again, had been formed by emanation from them, corresponding exactly to those above them, these, too, framed another third heaven; and then from this third, in downward order, there was a fourth succession of descendants; and so on, after the same fashion, they declare that more and more principalities and angels were formed, and three hundred and sixty-five heavens. Wherefore the year contains the same number of days in conformity with the number of the heavens. Those angels who occupy the lowest heaven, that, namely, which is visible to us, formed

29. Schnackenburg, *The Johannine Epistles*, 21-23.