RECONCEIVING TEXTS AS *SPEECH ACTS*. AN ANALYSIS OF THE FIRST EPISTLE OF JOHN

Dietmar Neufeld
Faculty of Religious Studies

McGill University
Montréal, Québec.

March 1991

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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RÉSUMÉ

Dans ce mémoire, il est soutenu que lorsque le langage d'un texte est considéré comme étant essentiellement descriptif et propositionnel, signifiant, en apparence, les antécédents à son monde, soit réels ou hypothétiques, alors le sens est réduit au lien des relations historiques. Une reconsidération méthodologique cherche donc à reconcevoir le texte de I Jean comme étant une fonction du langage, c'est à dire un évènement communicatif résumant une série de *speech acts* qui constituent la subjectivité à la fois de l'auteur et du lecteur/auditeur et qui font des déclarations de vérité au sujet du monde et au sujet de Dieu bien qu'à peine sous forme propositionnelle. Dans cette ré-évaluation, l'observation fondamentale de J. L. Austin est importante, à savoir que les séquence linguistiques, plutôt que de décrire des actions, sont elles-mêmes des actions lorsqu'une circonstance appropiée et une convention linguistique délimitent les *speech acts* possible, au sein de certaines circonstances *speech acts*. De plus, la conclusion significative de Jacques Derrida que l'acte d'écrire est constitutif du sujet d'écriture est liée avec la théorie de Donald Evans concernant le caractère *self-involving* du langage religieux dans lequel les *speech acts* du *commissive, expressive, representative* et *directive* et ce qu'ils impliquent jouent un rôle primordial pour rendre l'intention et l'attitude explicites.

ABSTRACT

This dissertation reexamines the assumption that regards the *language of a text* to be primarily discursive and propositional, signifying the antecedents to its real world, whether real or hypothetical. It will be argued that such an assumption reduces the *meaning* of the text to the nexus of its historical relationships. A methodological reconsideration sets out to reconceive the text of I John as a function of language, i.e., a communicative event encapsulating a series of *speech acts* which constitute the subjectivity of both writer and reader/hearer and which make truth claims about the world and about God though scarcely in propositional form. Important to this re-evaluation is J. L. Austin's fundamental observation that linguistic sequences rather than describing actions, are themselves action where an *appropriate circumstance* and *linguistic convention* delimit the potential speech acts possible within the limits of certain speech act circumstances. In addition, Jacques Derrida's significant conclusion that the act of writing is constitutive of the writing subject is linked with Donald Evan's realization of the self-involving character of religious language in which speech acts of the *commissive*, *expressive*, *representative*, and *directive* types and their implicature play a primary role in making explicit *intention* and *attitude*.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Special acknowledgement and gratitude must be expressed to my adviser Frederik Wisse, for his interest, insightful observations, and willingness to allow me the latitude in developing the thrust and conclusions of the dissertation. George Johnston and Robert Culley expressed interest in the project and were a great encouragement during the various stages of its writing. Special mention must be made of Brian J. Walsh who read and made helpful suggestions on the section concerning the nature of language and speech acts. Thanks is also due to my fellow graduate students whose friendship, questions, suggestions, and criticisms have been immeasurably helpful. Nevertheless, without the loving encouragement and support of Viola, my wife, and our four children, Jordana, Jessalyn, Jemina and Joshua, who all bore the brunt of Dad's ceaseless hours at the computer, this work would not have been possible; to them my debt and gratitude is greatest.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

A. PREAMBLE

This dissertation addresses anew the perennial problems that are raised when historical facts about the author, his community and social milieu in ancient texts remain obscured in the mist of the past. To cut through this mist and particularly to *get at the events which precipitated the writing* various methods and hypotheses have been advanced by scholars. In particular, during the last 150 years of New Testament exegesis, the historical critical method has had a profound influence on the way *texts* and *language* are viewed, on the kind of questions brought to bear on the material, the type of questions requiring resolution, and on the solutions proposed for the enigmas that the literary features of the texts present. However, the historical-critical method suffers from several limitations. To take the subject of the present study, the anonymous writing known as I John, the exclusively historical approach tends to produce a variety of communal images that confuse by their variety and flux the puzzling literary and theological elements that the scholar seeks to clarify.

Since the beginnings of the historical-critical study of the New Testament, "I John has had a kind of continual seductive appeal for the investigator."[1] The writing continues to generate interest because it would seem to allow one to track a linear development from the probably earlier Gospel of John (FG) to the First Epistle of John to shed light on the history, tradition and theology of Johannine Christianity. The linear movement from the FG to the Epistle also promises to shed light on the nature of the

[1] Robert Kysar, "The Fourth Gospel. A Report on Recent Research," Aufstieg und Niedergang der Römischen Welt II 25.3 (1985) 2390.

theological controversy in which the author was embroiled, the identity of the opponents, and exactly what it was the opponents erroneously confessed. While it is universally agreed that I John is a polemical document, its anonymous and enigmatic character has resulted in numerous theses and counter-theses about its historical genesis without much resolution. Present day scholarship generally isolates three important sets of problems related, first, to historical questions concerning the nature of the controversy, the antagonists, and the date and location of I John in the history of Johannine Christianity; second, to theological questions regarding the author's Christological views and of the opponents who were perverting these views; third, to literary-critical issues about the relationship between I John and the Fourth Gospel, the authorship, the order of composition, the integrity of the text of I John, and its literary form.

These problems have been explained from the perspective of a particular critical approach that is historically informed. A method driven primarily by historical interests tends to resolve the problems in a text by posing specific historical solutions that are based on certain assumptions about *text* and *language*. Such a method assumes that the language of the text (what has been written) signifies *ideas* and *facts* that are peculiar to the world and time of its authorship. In order to extract *truth* and *meaning* from the text the critic must re-establish the links between the language of the text and the referents peculiar to the time of its composition. It is assumed that by reconstructing the extra-textual historical milieu (which provides the referential context) the original *meaning* and the *intention* of the author may be recovered.

The attempt to isolate authorial intention, therefore, tends to focus on the question of *meaning* in its Sitz im Leben, that is, questions relating to the factors during the time of the author which caused him to express himself in the way he did. The *key* to the meaning the author intended is kept captive by its historical setting and it is the task of the critic to unlock the secrets of the past in order to recover *meaning*. In the attempt to unlock the secrets of I John's past, the history of exegesis of I John has focused critical

inquiry primarily on the task of re-constructing the extra-textual historical milieu. Johannine studies of today generally conclude that the *meaning* and *intention* of the author are best understood by relating them to the history of the Johannine community and the theological constraints of a Johannine form of Christianity which in some way was in conflict with a group(s) not in agreement with the author's theological tradition.

I shall analyze the implicit assumptions that drive the historical critical paradigm, by exploring the interpretative conclusions reached by six representative scholars in Johannine studies. It will be shown that the conclusions are based on the questionable assumption that an analysis of the polemical language of the passages will reveal the author's *concrete historical context*. The historical situation which prompted the author to respond in writing was a conflict between the author and a group(s) which opposed him on important theological and ethical issues. In such a view, the semantic horizon of I John is located in the conflict between the author and the antagonists. This study will show, however, that the identities of the author and his opponents remain a mystery and that the *textual mound* refuses to yield specific historical strata, this despite the best efforts to reconstruct the historical situation that prompted the author of I John to write. The historical circumstance that might have provided the incentive to write ultimately eludes us. Without the benefit of clear historical clues to guide the activity of reconstruction, the historical circumstance of the document is virtually impossible to reconstruct. As this study will show, the conclusions reached by these representative scholars tend to be inconsistent and show very little consensus about the makeup of the community, its theology, and the nature of the controversy reflected in its polemical language. The question will be raised whether an historical approach is unwarranted for a writing that reveals very little if anything about its social/historical context. In the case of I John at least, the almost complete lack of clues about its historical genesis suggests that the historical critical method can at best have only a secondary claim. The writing's non-specific character and concomitant lack of clues about its genesis indicate that the clues to its meaning ought perhaps to be sought elsewhere. This study develops an alternative approach

which, it is hoped, will give an adequate account of the perceived problems, and which will do justice to the 'text' of I John without first having to speculate about the author's historical situation before establishing the meaning of the text. Edgar V. McKnight insists that "the meaning and significance of the text is not limited to those meanings that conventional historical criticism is designed to recover. *Meaning* should not be reduced to the nexus of historical relationships. Text is not simply a historical source."[2] As a result, writes McKnight, "the conventional historical approaches as such are no longer completely satisfying because the questioning and answering of the text within such approaches do not exhaust the potential of the text for meaning."[3] Walter Wink notes the exegetical limitations imposed on the text by a critical methodology which "reduces *truth* to facticity," and declares bluntly that "historical biblical criticism is bankrupt."[4] Increasingly it has been recognized that the insights gained and conclusions reached by the historical critical method, though often legitimate, are limited in their scope, especially in an anonymous writing, and might be profitably supplemented by a literary critical approach.[5]

In this study it will be contended that to get at what is going on in the text may also, and probably more appropriately, be done from a primarily literary perspective. It should be noted that while both methods are sometimes perceived to have mutually exclusive methodological assumptions

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[2] E. V. McKnight, Post-Modern use of the Bible: The Emergence of Reader- Oriented Criticism (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1988) 85.

[3] Ibid., 85.

[4] Walter Wink, The Bible in Human Transformation: Toward a New Paradigm for Biblical Study (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1973) 2 and 1.

[5] E. V. McKnight ventures into a radical reader response approach to the text because the meanings that historical criticism is capable of discerning have become less and less satisfying. He points out, however, that seeking relationships strictly within the text is no excuse to avoid the challenge of historical and literary criticism (Post-Modern use of the Bible: The Emergence of Reader-Oriented Criticism, 14).

more voices are now calling for the blending of the two.[6] The results deduced by the respective approaches do not need to be regarded as contradictory but indeed complementary, each reflecting different facets of what can be known about a work. By way of the different strategies utilized *to get at what really happened*, both methods bring to a reader several possible explanations of the enigmatic literary phenomena of I John. My application of a particular literary approach does not question the validity of other methods as such, only the usefulness of their application to I John. My aim is to demonstrate how speech-act theory can be productive, especially in the case of an anonymous text, rather than questioning the validity of other approaches.

B. TOPIC

In the history of the exegesis of I John, a number of passages are thought to be indicative of the purpose of I John. These have been thoroughly examined for what they might reveal about the author, his community, and the antagonists. These same passages have been chosen to be the focus of the present study. They may be broken into two convenient categories involving either matters of doctrine or ethics.[7] The nature and purpose of the prologue (incipit 1:1 - 4), the frequent language of confession and denial in reference to Christ (2:22 - 23, 26; 4:1 - 4, 16; 5:6) and the warnings about the ἀντίχριστοι (2:18 - 21) are generally regarded as statements of a doctrinal type which call into question the beliefs of the opponents. The so-called *boasts/slogans* (1:6, 8, 10; 2:4, 6, 9; 4:20) are thought to reflect error of an ethical nature.

The present study reconceives *text* and *meaning* as something more than the sum total of its enabling conditions by examining these key passages

[6] For a good introduction to the different literary methods now employed in New Testament criticism, see William A. Beardslee, "Recent Literary Criticism," in The New Testament and its Modern Interpreters, eds., Eldon Jay Epp and George W. MacRae (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1989) 175-198.

[7] See for example, Rodney A. Whitacre, Johannine Polemic: The Role of Tradition and Theology, SBL Dissertation Series 67 (Chico, California: Scholars Press, 1982) 122.

from the perspective of a modified version of J. L. Austin's *speech act theory*. Austin's fundamental observation is that all linguistic sequences, rather than describing actions, are themselves action.[8] This theory opens the possibility of an approach to language and text unencumbered with metaphysical and essentialist concerns.[9] In addition, the constituting character of I John's language is clarified by using D. Evans's theory of religious discourse as self-involving and encapsulating a series of speech acts which in their implicature play a primary role in making explicit the *intention* and *attitude* of the author. Without going into the complexity of the method at this point, this study argues that the author of I John in the act of writing employs a series of self-involving speech acts which constitute his subject and that of the readers. The author uses these speech acts to create a literary world where the cash value of the Christological statements is seen in corresponding ethical conduct and proper confession. Through the use of a series of creative antitheses expressed in the context of several apocalyptic speech-act circumstances the author makes explicit the outer boundaries of actions that constitute proper confession and ethical behaviour. The author of I John is not simply a passive and faithful witness to the orthodox traditions of Johannine Christianity in reaction to the antagonists, but newly expresses his ideas about Jesus and ethics in the categories relevant to his time and culture. His writing, rather than merely reflecting a response to antagonists perverting the truth, makes and shapes a world with definite ethical responsibilities, which his readers are invited to enter. In the course of this study, it will be shown that the author's purpose is to produce in the hearers/readers a related life stance and attitude which will lead to belief, imaginative perception and effective involvement in the states of affairs to which the author has committed himself, so that it will ultimately engender fellowship with him and his Christological and ethical orientation.

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[8] J. J. Austin, How to do Things with Words, eds., J. O. Urmson and Marina Sbisà (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1975) 3, 12-13.

[9] Hugh C. White, ed., "Speech Act Theory and Narrative Hermeneutics," Semeia 41 (1988) 53.

C. ORGANIZATION OF STUDY

The second chapter points out how a perspective dominated by historical concerns has contributed towards the view that the language of I John functions chiefly as polemic which is best explained in the context of the social and theological constraints of a Johannine Christianity. This view takes the language of the text to be primarily discursive and to refer ostensibly to its enabling conditions, i.e., the text is a result of the circumstances which occasioned its composition, and therefore descriptive of its historical reality (the world behind the text).[10] The third chapter develops a method whereby *text* is reconceived as encapsulating a series of *speech acts* in which its language constitutes the subjectivity of both writer and reader/hearer. Here *text* is perceived as a function of language, i.e., as a communicative event in which the linguistic context of the utterances is made clear by the literary conventions and speech-act circumstances which produced them (the world before/in front of the text).[11] The fourth chapter applies the speech act method of analysis to each of the passages to show what impact such an approach has upon their *meaning*. Finally, chapter five summarizes the results of our study.

C. LIMITS OF THE STUDY

My analysis of the passages will be intensive rather than extensive. It is not intended to be a detailed survey of all the issues pertinent to a comprehensive study of the Johannine letters. I shall simply point out how these passages have contributed to a particular understanding of I John, rather than to provide an overview of the history of research. My purpose is chiefly to demonstrate that the assumptions about the nature and function of

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[10] Phrases such as "the world behind the text" or "the world in front of the text" have been taken from Paul Ricoeur, "Biblical Hermeneutics," Semeia 4 (1975) 27-148, esp. 82. See further, Gary Comstock, "Truth or Meaning: Ricoeur versus Frei on Biblical Narrative," The Journal of Religion 66 (1986) 117-140.

[11] Bernard C. Lategan and Willem S. Vorster, Text and Reality: Aspects of Reference in Biblical Texts (Atlanta, Georgia: Scholars Press, 1985).

language made by commentators serve to delimit exegesis and tend to be predictable variations on a theme. The primary intention here is neither to critique this method nor to question the conclusions proposed. Nevertheless, because a lack of appreciable consensus continues to exist, there is room for offering an alternative *reading* of the pertinent passages.

It is not within our scope to propose any new solutions to the difficult, much discussed, and still unresolved problems regarding the identity of the author, the literary relation of the Epistle to the FG, its precise *Sitz im Leben*, i.e., the social and cultural context of the Johannine community, or the identity and beliefs of the opponents. While the issue of *the function of language and text* might possibly cast some new light on such questions, speech act theory is more interested in what the language of a text does, and therefore tends to circumscribe such problems, without, however, denying their relevance. For the purpose of this study, *meaning* will be addressed at the level of the various kinds of speech acts operative in the text. Accordingly, I shall not attempt to proffer solutions to the unresolved historical issues in I John, although I shall in the end have something to say about them.

My assessment of I John is limited to those passages pointed out earlier (the incipit 1:1-4; the 'slogans' of the opponents 1:6, 8, 10; 2:4, 6, 9; 4:16; the antichrist 2:18-24; the confessions/denials 4:1-4; 5:6), that have been generally perceived to be the most significant for determining I John's raison d'être. While a long history of distinguished scholarship in this field offers a wide variety of solutions to the problems raised by the texts, only a limited number of representative works will be considered here. Accordingly, in the next chapter I shall sample briefly the work of R. Bultmann, A. E. Brooke, C. H. Dodd, as representatives of an earlier approach to the various issues raised by the passages. For a more contemporary analysis of the passages I shall depend mainly on the insights of R. E. Brown, S. S. Smalley, and K. Grayston.

CHAPTER TWO

AN HISTORICAL OVERVIEW OF THE INCIPIT (1:1-4); THE BOASTS OF THE OPPONENTS (1:6, 8, 10: 2:4, 6, 9; 4:20); THE ANTICHRISTS (2:18-24); THE CONFESSIONS AND DENIALS (4:1-4; 5:6)

The purpose of this chapter will be to examine the exegetical results obtained by a method which views I John as a cultural artifact that is to be understood within the temporally limited context of its genesis. The present study will show that each of the commentators in our consideration, tends to view I John as a cultural artifact and will therefore probe its passages to establish a circumstance of origin as a clue to meaning. Such a view assumes that the primary aim of literary analysis is to reconstruct the thought of the author or the reality to which the text refers. In the case of I John, the circumstance of origin is hard to reconstruct because the historical clues thought to be encoded in the language of the passages are notoriously difficult to interpret. To ease the difficulty, commentators take the language of the passages to be primarily polemical.[1] The polemical language is thought to reveal that a *conflict with the antagonists* and their erroneous Christological and ethical views prompted a respected authority figure within the Johannine community to write. The present study will show that in spite of the certainty that a controversy precipitated the writing, there is no consensus about the identity of the opposition, their views, and precisely what they falsely confessed. This lack of consensus is reflected in the wide range of solutions that have been offered to explain the nature of the opposition facing the author. The inability to identify the historical setting of the controversy with certainty is due in large part to the historical inaccessibility of I John. The nature of I John, such as its anonymity, its lack of historical clues, and its general apocalyptic language, in spite of its polemical intent,

[1] See Introduction, 1-5; Chapter three, 85-118.

obscures rather than reveals the context of its origins. I John simply does not lend itself well to establish the historical referent as a clue to meaning. This raises the question whether it was a clue in its original setting. Is there any reason to believe that the original readers knew more than we about the historical circumstance of its composition? The general character of the letter might indicate that they perhaps sought to understand the meaning of the passages apart from their social context. This suggests that a method designed to recover *meaning* by reconstructing the historical context in a text not primarily historical does not have a primary claim on the passages. In the analysis of the passages, particular attention will be paid to the different historical reconstructions offered to elucidate the nature of the controversy. The wide range of opinions offered to explain the controversy encoded in the polemical language of the document will show that reconstructing the historical referent as a clue to meaning does not work well in I John because the clues to its origins are obscured in the mist of the past.

A. THE INCIPIT (1:1 - 4):

The prologue of I John reads:

> Ὃ ἦν ἀπ᾽ ἀρχῆς, ὃ ἀκηκόαμεν, ὃ ἑωράκαμεν τοῖς ὀφθαλμοῖς ἡμῶν, ὃ ἐθεασάμεθα καὶ αἱ χεῖρες ἡμῶν ἐψηλάφησαν περὶ τοῦ λόγου τῆς ζωῆς - καὶ ἡ ζωὴ ἐφανερώθη, καὶ ἑωράκαμεν καὶ μαρτυροῦμεν καὶ ἀπαγγέλλομεν ὑμῖν τὴν ζωὴν τὴν αἰώνιον ἥτις ἦν πρὸς τὸν πατέρα καὶ ἐφανερώθη ἡμῖν - ὃ ἑωράκαμεν καὶ ἀκηκόαμεν, ἀπαγγέλλομεν καὶ ὑμῖν, ἵνα καὶ ὑμεῖς κοινωνίαν ἔχητε μεθ᾽ ἡμῶν. καὶ ἡ κοινωνία δὲ ἡ ἡμετέρα μετὰ τοῦ πατρὸς καὶ μετὰ τοῦ υἱοῦ αὐτοῦ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ. καὶ ταῦτα γράφομεν ἡμεῖς ἵνα ἡ χαρὰ ἡμῶν ᾖ πεπληρωμένη.

Houlden observes that as a literary piece the *incipit* borders on incoherence, and has an undeniable crudity of expression which never rises to literary eminence.[2] The *incipit's* incoherence is directly related to its

[2] J. L. Houlden, Johannine Epistles, Black's New Testament Commentaries (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1973) 45. See also R. E. Brown, The Epistles of St. John, The Anchor Bible (Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1982) 152. C. H. Dodd observed that "the sentence is not good Greek, and it is only by paraphrase that it can be rendered into good English" (The Johannine Epistles, The Moffat New Testament Commentary, [London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1946] 2). I. H. Marshall, The Epistles of John, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans, 1978) 99. S. S. Smalley pointed out that while the difficult grammar

complicated Greek. Commentators emphasize the difficulty this presents when trying to determine the meaning of these opening statements. It may be observed, for example, that the quite long sentence beginning in v. 1 and ending with v. 4 has two parenthetical interruptions; the first, at v. 2 beginning with, "καὶ ἡ ζωὴ ἐφανερώθη...," which explicates "περὶ τοῦ λόγου τῆς ζωῆς;" and second, the parenthetical insertion περὶ τοῦ λόγου τῆς ζωῆς. It may also be noted that the main verb ἀπαγγέλλομεν does not appear until v. 3, leaving the relative clauses in an awkward position. Furthermore, determining the meaning of the ambiguous remark περὶ τοῦ λόγου τῆς ζωῆς is difficult. The neuter relative pronoun ὃ introduces four relative clauses, and although it is the object of the verb ἀπαγγέλλομεν, a great deal of uncertainty exists about its personal or impersonal characteristics. The parenthetical v. 2 suggests that the object of seeing, hearing, looking, and touching was the life or the word. Ἡ ζωή, however, is a feminine noun whereas ὁ λόγος is a masculine noun. Furthermore, the curious alternation of tenses between the aorist and perfect has led commentators to wonder whether it is simply a stylistic feature or carries some meaning.[3] And finally, the first person plural of the verbal forms and the pronouns raises the question of the identity of the *we*.[4] Although the awkward grammatical features of the *incipit* make the task of reconstructing its historical occasion difficult, a variety of historical solutions are nonetheless proposed to explain

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obscured the meaning of the text, it nonetheless constituted an impressive introduction constructed with dramatic sensitivity (1, 2, 3 John, Word Biblical Commentary [Waco Texas: Word Books, 1984] 4).

[3] Rudolf Schnackenburg suggested for example, that in the prologue three convergent viewpoints find expression in the verb tenses: a backward glance at the unique salvation event which has appeared as a temporal event encompassing human apprehension (aorist); the knowledge of the witnesses, consituting an expression of unsurpassing faith, that they have seen with their eyes and their hands have touched (perfect); the future generation was in mind, which too must be brought to belief in order for it to experience fellowship with God (present) (Die Johannesbriefe, Herders Theologischer Kommentar zum Neuen Testament [Freiburg/Basel/Wien: Herder, 1975] 49).

[4] The 'we' motif appears in 7 verbs and 4 pronouns in the first four verses. Throughout I John the first person plural appears in 51 of the 105 verses. The first person singular is quite rare in I John (2:1, 7, 8, 12 - 14, 21, 26: 5:13, 16) and in all but one instance (5:16) is confined to the verb γράφω.

these features and their bearing upon its meaning.

1. *R. BULTMANN*

It is important to point out that a series of assumptions undergirded Bultmann's attempt to deal with the problems in the *incipit*.[5] First, Bultmann notes the complicated Greek of the *incipit* and the resulting discontinuity of thought in the work and its lack of over-all unity, and seeks to remedy the situation by positing the existence of a source(s) and a later ecclesiastical redactor,[6] who "reworked the text of I John to bring it into conformity with ecclesiastical tradition."[7] Bultmann enlarged von Dobschütz's notion of *source* and *editor* by separating the *source* from editorial emendations based on the theological differences perceived between the two. The thesis was designed to explain the obvious theological disagreements found in the attitude toward sin and sinlessness and the shifts in theological perspective in the eschatological passages.

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[5] Rudolf Bultmann, The Johannine Epistles, Trans. R. Philip O'Hara with Lane C. McGaughy and Robert W. Funk (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1973, original German ed. 1967).

[6] D. Moody Smith observes that Bultmann's view about an earlier version of the Epistle which was subjected to a redactional process has found wide support. This redaction, however, occurred within the Johannine circle or school and was not extrinsic to the piece in which the work of "a ...censor representing an external ecclesiastical orthodoxy" made changes to bring into line with theological convention (D. Moody Smith, "Johannine Studies," in The New Testament and its Modern Interpreters, eds. Eldon Jay Epp and George W. MacRae [Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: Fortress Press and Atlanta, Georgia: Scholars Press, 1989] 271-296). See also, D. Moody Smith, "Johannine Christianity: Some Reflections on its Character and Delineation," New Testament Studies (21 (1975) 222-48. R. E. Brown, The Community of the Beloved Disciple (Paramus, New Jersey: Paulist, 1979).

[7] R. Bultmann, The Johannine Epistles, 2. The ecclesiastical redactor composed 5:14-21, and made other strategic interpolations in 1:9d; 2:28; 2:15-17, and 5:7-9. In large part Bultmann depends on the conclusions reached by von Dobschütz who had observed that the writer of I John was using two different styles in his teaching. One style had a contrastive quality characterized by the laying down of theses and antitheses, and the other had an admonitory quality to it. Von Dobschütz went on to suggest that the first style derived from a source and the second from the editor of I John [E. von Dobschutz, "Johanneische Studien I," Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft 8 (1907), pp. 1 - 8].

Second, it was also clear to Bultmann that the purpose of the document was to combat a gnostic *Irrlehre* (false teaching) characterized by a Christology which denied that Jesus Christ had come in the flesh (' Ιησοῦν Χριστὸν ἐν σαρκὶ ἐληλυθότα 4:2). Bultmann held that the intellectual home of the Fourth Gospel (FG) and the Epistle lies in the setting of an oriental Gnosticism which, although most clearly expressed in the literature of mid-second century Gnosticism, existed in a pre-literary form prior to the advent of Christianity.[8]

Third, to give an account of the peculiarly Johannine language and ideas of the *incipit* of I John, Bultmann suggested that the style and content of the prologue of the FG had decisively influenced the language and ideas of I John. He writes, "the relationship between I John and the Gospel rests on the fact that the author of I John had the Gospel before him and was decisively influenced by its language and ideas. He used it, however, *not slavishly, but rather in line with the church tradition in which he lived.*[9] While for some commentators the interrelationship helped to explain the theology and content of the writing and constituted enough evidence to propose identical authors for both works, Bultmann disagreed. He insisted that although the language and content of the two writings were similar, each writing was nevertheless directed against separate fronts and therefore authored by at least two different persons. In the FG the language of opposition to the world disclosed the existence of Jews who were non-Christian, whereas in I John the polemical language indicated the existence

[8] Bultmann claimed that pre-Christian gnosticism had taken hold in early Judaism and that as a result early Christianity expressed itself in Gnostic modes of thought. The FG then became a storm centre of debate over a pre-Christian gnosticism (The Gospel of John, Trans. G. R. Beasley-Murray [Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1971, German orig. 1964] 7 - 9). False teachers, decisively influenced by gnostic thought who claimed to represent the Christian faith, have arisen within the Christian community (The Johannine Epistles, 11, 20 -21). Using Mandaean MSS, Bultmann reconstructed a hypothetical pre-Christian Gnostic Redeemer myth influential in the FG. The thesis has been shown to be untenable (C. Colpe, Die religionsgeschichtliche Schule. Darstellung und Kritik ihres Bildes vom gnostischen Erlosermythos, FRLANT, n.s., 60 [Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1961]).

[9] Bultmann, The Johannine Epistles, 1. Italics indicate Bultmann's use of Ernst Haenchen's "Neure Literatur zu den Johannesbriefen," Theologische Rundschau 26 (1960) 1-43, 267-91.

of false teachers who had once been members of the Christian community and who still claimed to represent the genuine faith. Bultmann traced what appeared to be an earlier theological expression in the FG to its later development in the Epistle, and therefore concluded that the Epistle came from a time later than the FG.

With these fundamental assertions in mind, Bultmann insisted that the expression ὅ ἦν ἀπ ἀρχῆς meant nothing more than what the writer of the FG would have meant with ἐν ἀρχῇ ἦν ὁ λόγος.[10] Moreover, he argued that the phrase ἀπαγγέλλομεν καὶ ὑμῖν grammatically supported the proemium, although the structure of the proemium was complicated by the parenthetical insertion of μαρτυροῦμεν καὶ ἀπαγγέλλομεν of v. 2.[11] Bultmann regarded the four relative clauses of v. 1 to be the objects of the verb ἀπαγγέλλομεν and combined them to signify the content of the ἀγγελία. He found the neuter form of the four relative clauses to be puzzling. He solved the problem by suggesting that the neuters referred to the subject matter of the ἀγγελία, as implied in the phrase περὶ τοῦ λόγου τῆς ζωῆς. The phrase μετὰ τοῦ πατρὸς καὶ μετὰ τοῦ υἱοῦ αὐτοῦ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ (v. 3) confirmed this understanding for Bultmann because it implied that the subject matter and the person were identical. Earlier on the author had mentioned the subject matter only and had alluded to the person, now, claimed Bultmann, the person of that subject matter was mentioned by name explicitly: Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ.[12] While the person and the subject matter were uniquely identical, there was still a peculiar difference. The historical event was at the same time the eschatological event realized in the proclamation. Hence, in I John it is ἀπ' ἀρχῆς and not ἐν ἀρχῇ as in John 1:1.[13]

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[10] R. Bultmann, The Johannine Epistles, 11.

[11] V. 2 is seen to be a redactional insertion because it disrupts the structure of the proemium.

[12] For Bultmann the verbs ἀπαγγέλλειν and μαρτυρεῖν denote Christian proclamation, that is, bearing or communicating a message of ultimate importance, and the Christian message respectively. In both instances they refer directly to the act of declaring itself and the act of bearing witness to something. Thus, the content of what has been declared and the message of what has been witnessed becomes important (The Johannine Epistles, 11).

[13] Ibid., 9.

The phrase ἡ ζωὴ ἐφανερώθη named the subject matter as ζωὴ αἰώνιος and denoted salvation towards which people strive. According to Bultmann, ἡ ζωή referred both to the subject matter and to the historical event in which the subject matter had its origin. The four sensory verbs all pointed to the event, which was the historical appearance of the λόγος (John 1:1). Bultmann insisted that in I John the λόγος was not to be taken to refer to the preexistent λόγος of the FG, but rather to be taken to refer to its appearance. which was the object of what has been heard/seen/touched, etc. Hence, said Bultmann, "what is spoken of here is not the preexistent *logos*, but its *manifestation*, its *incarnation*, which is the object of ἀκηκόαμεν, etc., and thus the origin of the ἀγγελία."[14]

Bultmann specifically linked the ἀγγελία with the historical ἐφανερώθη and the sensory verbs. This raised the question about the identity of the *we*. He argued that since the verbs denote sense perception they cannot therefore be taken to signify spiritual perception as in Acts 17:27. The sensory verbs give the impression that the *we* were the ears and eyes of the witnesses to the historical Jesus. Bultmann pointed out that the ἐψηλάφησαν could in this context refer only to the incarnated Christ, i.e., the historical figure of Jesus, and not to the resurrected Jesus. The perception of the resurrected Jesus was open only to a believer's eyes, i.e., those who perceived the appearance of the ζωή. Bultmann observed, however, that the writing was quite late so that it was scarcely possible that a large group of original eye/ear witnesses were still alive. The first person plural of sensory verbs could not be referring to the contemporaries of Jesus. Bultmann dealt with the problem by making a distinction between contemporaneity with the historical event and contemporaneity with the eschatological event. The *we* were really the eschatological contemporaries of Jesus. They were the tradition bearers conscious of a solidarity with succeeding generations, whose task it was to pass on what they had seen, heard, and touched concerning the

[14] Ibid., 9.

word of life.[15] As one in the company of the *we*, the author wrote to those who called themselves believers "but who severed the present eschatological revelation from the historical (ἐφανερώθηναι),...therefore in opposition to the gnosticizing Christians against whom the whole letter is directed."[16] They denied that the Son of God had come in the flesh (I John 2:7; 4:2) and yet still claimed Christian status.

The *we* of ἐθεασάμεθα (v. 1), claimed Bultmann, represented the persons in each of the communities on whom the task of proclamation (ἀπαγέλλειν) and testifying (μαρτυρεῖν) fell. The *we* of γράφομεν (1:4) identified them as the tradition bearers who were in a legitimate position to proclaim the message and to bear witness to it. Nevertheless, Bultmann made a distinction between the *we* and the *you*. The first person singular of the verbs γράφω-ἔγραψα, he thought, denoted the self-conscious awareness of the author's personal authority, which arose because he was a representative of the bearers of tradition. The profound consciousness of authority drove him to refer to the group as τεκνία (2:12;3:7; 4:4), or as παιδία (2:18), or as ἀγαπητοί (2:7; 3:2, 21). The *you* signified the congregation. While the *we* functioned authoritatively for the *you*, the *we* and the *you* stood in the same continuity of tradition (2:24; 3:11). Vv. 1 and 2 stated the object of the Christian proclamation, which was once more taken up in v. 3a ὃ ἑωράκαμεν καὶ ἀκηκόαμεν. V. 3 took up the proclamation and it did so by stating the aim of the entire epistle: ἵνα καὶ ὑμεῖς κοινωνίαν ἔχητε μεθ' ἡμῶν. Κοινωνία was emphasized with a view to "the threatening cleavage between true believers and the heretics."[17] Fellowship was therefore the union of common faith (doctrinal harmony) which was brought about by proclamation. Indeed, fellowship with the Father and the Son was possible only by virtue of the legitimate tradition. Thus, defending the

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[15] It was possible that Ireneaus wrote in the sense of I John 1:1 - 3: "and, again, we would not be able to know unless we had seen our master and had heard his voice with our own ears...." (Adv. haer. V.1:1).

[16] R. Bultmann, The Johannine Epistles, 11.

[17] Ibid., 12.

community against an incursion of incipient Gnosticism, the author wrote with personal authority and as representative of the *bearers of tradition*. He was concerned not only with right confession (ὁμολογέω) but with the devastating impact of false teaching on the fellowship and life of the community. The false teachers arrogantly assumed their higher spiritual status and neglected love for God and for the brethren and thereby jeopardized *fellowship* and the *tradition*. In such a context of theological and ecclesiastical debate the author set forth his views, which affirmed that the eschatological event came to full expression in history μετὰ τοῦ υἱοῦ αὐτοῦ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ.

2. A. E. BROOKE

While Bultmann claimed that the writer of the Epistle had the FG before him, Brooke drew a more cautious connection between the two writings. The author may have had a reader's acquaintance with "a compact body of teaching like that which we find in the Fourth Gospel."[18] It would appear that the Epistle was written to help those who had not adequately grasped the teaching of the Gospel, or as Brooke put it, "a body of teaching like it,"[19] and thus it had not translated into appropriate action and conduct.[20] Brooke's approach rested heavily on linguistic arguments derived from an exhaustive study of the vocabulary, style, and content of the Epistle compared to the Gospel. That is why, suggested Brooke, the writer continually indicated to his readers that what he wrote was not new but known to them: Ἀγαπητοί, οὐκ ἐντολὴν καινὴν γράφω ὑμῖν ἀλλ' ἐντολὴν παλαιὰν ἣν εἴχετε ἀπ' ἀρχῆς 2:7). That the author of I John had an acquaintance with a body of literature like that found in the Fourth Gospel,

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[18] A. E. Brooke, The Johannine Epistles, xxvii.

[19] Ibid., xxvii.

[20] Kenneth Grayston charged that Brooke's treatment of the evidence concerning whether the Gospel was earlier than the Epistle was confused and indecisive and resulted in a frail argument and a feeble conclusion. Grayston argued the priority of I John (The Johannine Epistles, 11).

helped Brooke to elucidate some aspects of the Epistle, but he insisted that an explanation of its aim and purpose was to be sought elsewhere.

Brooke observed that although the views of the opponents were visible in I John's polemical sections, the real aim of the Epistle was not primarily polemical. The real intention of the writer was to edify and to teach his children what it meant to have true faith and life as Christians. His readers were *mature* Christians who had lost the zeal for their new-found faith and had succumbed to worldly allurements. Some of the leaders had even left the community, and many others were being tempted by the seductions of the world. Open to religious elements and speculations foreign to the *faith*, they were easily deceived and thus could no longer discriminate between the essentials and the nonessentials of the *faith*. As a result, they were no longer certain about their position as Christians. On at least nine occasions the writer offered his readers tests, introduced by ἐν τούτῳ γινώσκομεν (2:3, 5,; 3:16, 19, 24; 4:2, 6, 13; 5:2), whereby they might assure themselves about the fundamentals of the Christian faith. Clearly, argued Brooke, the tests were not mentioned only for the purpose of setting out true knowledge in opposition to the "false 'gnosis' of his gnostic opponents."[21] The tests were given to reinforce those whose belief in the faith had grown cold and had been replaced by doubt in the face of the enthusiasm and certainty of the early days. Thus, although the author was also an "orthodox theologian," he was first and foremost a pastor who exhorted his flock to keep on the path from whence they came.[22] Indeed, claimed Brooke, "those methods of exegesis are unscientific which lay too exclusive stress on the doctrine which it teaches or the heresy which it seeks to refute."[23] The author's primary objective was to exhort and to edify.

Nevertheless, the author never entirely lost sight of the opponents and their views, hence the polemical tone of the writing. Brooke took the

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[21] Ibid., xxviii.

[22] Ibid., xxx.

[23] Ibid., xxx.

point of view that no one opponent was being singled out in I John because the exact nature and character of the false teaching denounced was quite unclear and a matter of controversy. Therefore, moving with caution in his reconstruction, since "the bricks which have been supplied to us are few,"[24] Brooke set out to show that a variety of teachings are reflected in the Epistle.

The different errors mirrored in the Epistle have their source, Brooke suggested, in Judaism, Gnosticism, Docetism, and Cerinthianism with its indifference to ethics. For Brooke, Judaism could not be the primary culprit, because a phrase such as "ἐξ ἡμῶν ἐξῆλθαν ἀλλ' οὐκ ἦσαν ἐξ ἡμῶν εἰ γὰρ ἐξ ἡμῶν ἦσαν, μεμενήκεισαν ἂν μεθ' ἡμῶν" (2:19) pointed to Christian secessionists. The Jews, however, were not necessarily excluded. The strong insistence by the author that Jesus was the Messiah implied that the Jews presented a prominent threat to the community. The Jewish war and the destruction of the Temple exacerbated the already tense relations between the Christians and the Jews.[25] What was worse, after the war and the Temple's destruction Christians were quick to point out that the fate of Jerusalem was God's punishment on the nation for their rejection of the Christ. Brooke pointed out that Jewish Christians faced the bitterest of opposition from their countrymen, and some of them were quite possibly impelled to defect. Brooke turned to the evidence from the FG,[26] where a controversy with the Jews had determined the Evangelist's subject matter and manner of presentation. This dispute between Christians in the Johannine community and members in the local synagogue in one way or another had not been entirely resolved. Confronted with the vestiges of an

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[24] Ibid., xli.

[25] It is generally accepted that the Jewish War of 70 CE and the Bar Cochba revolt of 132 C.E. had a negative impact on Jewish-Christian relations (Stephen Wilson, "The Jewish War, The Bar Cochba Revolt and the Jewish-Christian schism" [paper presented at the SBL annual meeting in Anaheim, California. Abstract of paper in Abstracts [Scholars Press, 1989] 91).

[26] The adversaries in the FG were Jews who challenged and subsequently denied that Jesus was the Messiah (7:25 - 27; 9:22; 10:24). They also contended that Jesus blasphemed when he claimed that he was the son of the God (10:36; 19:7).

earlier conflict, the writer of the Epistle was forced to deal with those who appeared to deny the Messianic nature of Christ.[27]

Brooke was convinced that the Epistle also shows a response to Gnostic ideas and that the menace they presented was imminent, "if not actually present among members of the community."[28] The essence of the author's ἀγγελία was captured by the statement "ὅτι ὁ Θεὸς φῶς ἐστιν"(1:5),

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[27] A dialogue with the synagogue has received its clearest expression in the work of J. L. Martyn. His thesis stated that the FG gospel was essentially a simultaneous drama taking place on two different levels historically. On one level was a conflict of Johannine Christians with local synagogue members and on the other, was a conflict of Jesus with his adversaries. Several protagonists occupied centre stage in this drama: namely, Jesus and Christians of the author's day, and both Jewish leaders of Jesus' day and Jewish leaders of the writer's day. Those who were "excluded from the synagogue" (9:22; 12:42; and 16:2) were Christians during the writer's time who were forced out of the synagogue by virtue of the enforcement of the Birkat ha-Minim. The result was that two communities were locked in a struggle. It was this dramatic conflict that provided a plausible option for understanding the concrete Sitz im Leben of the FG (J. Louis Martyn, The Gospel of John in Christian History [New York: Paulist Press, 1978]). John Painter assumed that the Gospel of John tradition (which included I John in its orbit) was shaped by the conflict with the synagogue, and that its themes and emphases were a rejoinder to the Jewish rejection of Jesus as Messiah ("The 'Opponents' in I John," New Testament Studies 32 [1986] 48-71). See, A. Wurm, "Die Irrlehrer im ersten Johannesbrief," Biblische Studien VIII, I (Freiburg, 1904). J. C. O'Neill defended the thesis that the opponents were Jews who rejected that Ἰησοῦς ἐστιν ὁ Χριστός. He said "these words must refer to the denial that Jesus is the Son of God." While it was quite possible that the parallel confessions in (4:15; 5:5; cf. 2:23; 3:23; 5:11f; 5:13; 5:20) belonged to a wider setting than Judaism provided, "we should be careful not to deny the plain meaning of the text simply because of a too rigid view of what terms Judaism could or could not have asserted" (The Puzzle of I John, 6). Stephen S. Smalley described the situation behind the letters in terms of a composite community in which friction between two groups made life difficult for the author. A Hellenistic Christian group had moved to an Ebionite Christology, and a Jewish Christian group who found it difficult to accept the *Messiahship* of Jesus (1, 2, 3 John, xxiii). J. Blank also found a Jewish Christian component in the false teaching and saw an evolution which began in early Jewish Christianity and ended up in the second century gnostic systems with Cerinthus (Die Irrlehrer des Ersten Johannesbriefes Kairos NF 26 [1984] 166 - 193). Many since then have pointed out the enormous difficulties advocates of this view face. The statements about sinlessness (1:8, 10; 3:6, 9), keeping the commandments (2:4) and acting justly (3:7 - 8; 5:18) made it unlikely that the opponents were Jews. The absence of quotations from the OT scriptures, apart from the mention of Cain (3:12), also brings into question the thesis concerning Jewish opponents. To counter these objections a "lapsed Jew" hypothesis (Jews who had converted but had lapsed) has been proposed, with a minority following. Most now accept that the opponents were Christians who professed a Christology different from the author's.

[28] A. E. Brooke, The Epistles of John, xliii - xliv.

and its negative reiteration may well be aimed at those who claimed that the Father was unknowable or was known only to the *illuminati*. The author countered the intellectual claims of the *illuminati* by insisting that the duty to love brought with it inescapable ethical obligations. The confession of "' Ιησοῦν Χριστὸν ἐν σαρκὶ ἐληλυθότα (4:2)" countered the Gnostic doctrine "of the impossibility of any real and complete union between the spiritual seed and that which is flesh."[29]

In this connection Brooke also explored the question whether a docetic heresy precipitated the struggle in I John. The matter for him was complicated because the term 'docetic' had both a wider and a narrower signification. Its wider sense included all teachings which denied the reality of Jesus' humanity, and its narrower sense was limited specifically to the teaching which stated that although Jesus had a body of flesh and blood, it was in appearance only. Brooke noted the usage of the expression in the writings of Polycarp[30] and Ignatius, and suggested that the language of the Epistles "does not necessarily presuppose the more precise Docetism."[31] He found very little evidence in the Epistles which pointed to the stricter Docetism exhibited in the writings of the early Church Fathers. Analyzing the evidence for the principal views of Cerinthus, he concluded that it could not be conclusively proven that it was Cerinthus who was at the root of the problem, although views similar to those of Cerinthus appeared specifically to occupy the attention of the author. For example, a Cerinthian type of opponent seemed to have combined Gnostic and Judaizing tendencies which the author considered the most dangerous. As we shall see, the question of

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[29] Ibid., xliv.

[30] Apparent echoes of the language of I John appear in Polycarp's writing. Irenaeus confirmed that Polycarp was acquainted with John (Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, V.20.6). Parallel passages are adduced as evidence for Polycarp's knowledge of I John (*Epistle to the Philippians* 7:1-2 parallels I John 4:2-3; 3:8; 2:24.

[31] A. E. Brooke came to this conclusion after comparing the so-called docetic language of I John with the language that Ignatius used to describe the docetics (The Epistles of St. John, xiv).

what role a Cerinthian type of Docetism had in the composition of the Epistle continues to be important but controversial.[32]

Errors in doctrine and ethical indifference also occupied the attention of the author, maintained Brooke. The author was writing to those who had made it evident by their improper conduct that they had not rightly appropriated the teachings. A recent withdrawal of members from the community and their *Irrlehre* were what probably occasioned the composition of I John. The members who had withdrawn from fellowship (ἐξῆλθαν) had left many sympathizers within the community unable to make a choice between two types of teaching, viz., that which they had heard from the beginning, or that which they had heard from the secessionists. The errors in conduct the author specifically encountered in the community were not related to the grosser moral failures intimated by ἡ ἐπιθυμία τῆς σαρκός, but were those committed by the natural person as yet untouched by the spirit of God. Many may have claimed knowledge of God, fellowship with God, and love for God without regard for the ethical implications of their beliefs. Brooke suggested that the words, ὁ λέγων ὅτι, "Εγνωκα αὐτὸν καὶ τὰς ἐντολάς αὐτοῦ μὴ τηρῶν, ψεύστης ἐστὶν (2:4), were definitely directed against the so-called false teachers, even if the author did not have them in

[32] Rodney A. Whitacre, Johannine Polemic: The Role of Tradition and Theology, 126 - 131. Kurt Wengst, Häresie und Orthodoxie im Spiegel des ersten Johannesbriefes, 24-34). In Die Ketzergeschichte des Urchristentums (1884), Adolf Hilgenfeld gathered bits of information on Cerinthus, ("Der Gnostizismus, Gnosis und Gnostizismus," *Wege der Forschung*, [Reproduced by Kurt Rudolf, Darmstadt 1975] 174-230). Stephen S. Smalley invoked a "gnosticizing terminology" in which the opposition reflected in the Epistle was similar to a Docetic orientation. The problems were present in nuce from the beginning of the community between two groups of believers, and as tensions developed between the two groups one part of the community moved in the direction of a Docetic Christology and an indifference toward right conduct and the other moved to an expression of Ebionite Christology (1, 2, 3 John, xxiii). B. F. Westcott claimed that there was no evidence in the Epistle for those who held to an Ebionite Christology, but that it clearly dealt with Docetic thought which was specifically Cerinthian (The Epistles of John, New introduction by F. F. Bruce [Marcham Books, 1966, first ed. 1883] xxxiv). C. Haas, M. de Jonge and J L. Swellengrebel held that the false teachings combined and merged with a system of thought usually called *gnostic*, in which the opponents drew a sharp distinction between the divine Christ and the man Jesus (A Translator's Handbook on the Letters of John [United Bible Societies, 1972] 15). Kenneth Grayston saw the opponents in I John as closely associated with Cerinthus without being explicitly Gnostic (The Johannine Epistles).

mind in 1:6, 8, 10. All of these things, along with the emphasis of ἀληθῶς (2:5), seemed to indicate clearly to Brooke that some within the community were making grandiose Christological assertions without recognizing the obligation to live responsibly. It would appear that their special failure lay in not admitting that they had an obligation to "love the brethren" (2:7). By negelcting to "love the brethren," they deliberately chose not to acknowledge their responsibility to the rest of the community. That is why the author mentioned the ἡ ἐντολὴ ἡ παλαιά (v. 7), implicitly hearkening back to the Old Testament to remind the community that love for God obligated them to love their brethren. Moreover, claimed Brooke, they also lived under an inappropriate understanding of the moral precepts of the Old Testament and were therefore incapable of keeping the more exacting standards of the λογοῦ αὐτοῦ (1:1). No specific *moral failures* are listed, but the general tenor of the writing indicates that persons previously within the community were upsetting the equilibrium of the group by tempting its members to join in *Irrlehre* which led to inappropriate conduct.[33]

The specific historical circumstance of an author embroiled in a series of conflicts with a variety of opponents, where at the same time he wished to encourage his community, for Brooke, provide the determinative clues that help to explain the *incipit*.[34] With its Christological focus, the *incipit* declares to those who deny the historical appearance of Jesus that the life giving word of God has been made manifest in the person of Jesus. The

[33] Positing the existence of more than one opponent facing the author is still favoured today, although Brooke's conclusion about numerous opponents confronting the author is no longer accepted. John Painter distinguished between two groups of opponents, some of whom dispensed with Christ, while others allowed Christ the role of a heavenly redeemer (John: Witness and Theologian [London: SPCK, 1975] 101 - 27).

[34] Brooke's entire exposition of I John rested on certain theological premises which of necessity found their vindication in his exegetical effort. His Christological assumptions projected upon the work clearly circumscribed what the author of I John could mean in any given statement. Brooke, therefore, did not permit the originator of the work to make Christological statements that would lie outside the range of what was theologically acceptable to the interpreter. Anything which fell outside the allowable doctrinal continuum of the author or of the exegete found its explanation either as a reaction to the position the opponents held, or as an appeal to the special needs of the community.

parenthetical περὶ τοῦ λόγου τῆς ζωῆς was the controlling factor which brought to completion what was from the beginning and therefore constituted the revelation of life which the author announced. The declaration was nothing new but had been there ἀπ' ἀρχῆς. Indeed, revelation began with creation, continued in the history of the nations and the people and culminated in the earthly life of Jesus. According to Brooke, the parenthetical insertion, "concerning the word of life," was not primarily a reference to the pre-existent Christ or to the "eternal pre-existent nature of the personal word,"[35] although there was little doubt that thoughts of pre-existence must also have been in the writer's mind.

The whole of God's revelation as it gradually unfolded through the course of history was the focus of the ἀγγελία. The author did his part by revealing that element of eternal reality that underlay the phenomena apparent to sense perception and therefore needed explanation. The anarthrous ἀρχῆς denoted "character according to a person's apprehension, rather than a definite point in time"[36]and therefore called to mind the ἀρχῆς in the prologue of the FG and Genesis. Accordingly, the 'beginning' here excluded the possibility of it simply being an allusion to the beginning of the Christian dispensation. As it pointed back to the beginning of creation, the author's utterances became part of a process of teaching which began with the words of God, "let there be light." The intention of the author was thus to explain to his readers exactly what has been revealed in Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ was defined as an existence that had not come into being, but was from eternity. Jesus Christ transcended all that was transitory, but nonetheless entered the world of reality. "In Christ, writes Brooke, the writer claims to have found this eternal reality, which transcends the limits of the sensible and material."[37] Thus, the author deliberately links ὁ λόγος τῆς

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[35] A. E. Brooke, The Epistles of John, 1.

[36] Ibid., 2. Brooke pointed out that ἀπ' ἀρχῆς was used a total of eight times in the Epistle and in each instance it must be interpreted on its own terms, that is, as it was used in its context (1:1; 2:7, 13, 14, 24; 3:8, 11). Brooke holds that in I John 1:1 ἀπ' ἀρχῆς hearkens back to ἐν ἀρχῇ of Genesis and the Gospel of John.

[37] Ibid., 1, 2.

ζωῆς with ὃ ἦν ἀπ' ἀρχῆς to indicate that the λόγος represented a timeless precreational "entity transcending all that is transitory, the ground of what is temporal and finite".[38]

"Ο ἀκηκόαμεν referred to revelation fully made in time and space so that it became intelligible to finite understanding. *Hearing* also included the whole nature of God and his revelation to the world from the beginning. According to Brooke, ὃ ἑωράκαμεν τοῖς ὀφθαλμοῖς could only be interpreted naturally as the writer claiming to have been an actual eyewitness of the earthly life of Jesus Christ. Here the τοῖς ὀφθαλμοῖς alluded to the personal experience of the author. While not impossible that the verbs of seeing were used metaphorically to denote spiritual vision, the completeness of which could best be described by the metaphor of sense perception, this said Brooke, was unlikely since it would be a forced interpretation of the words.[39] The words αἱ χεῖρες ἡμῶν ἐψηλάφησαν could be explained in no other way except by supposing that there had been actual contact. To illustrate the actual meaning of the same verb (ψηλαφήσατε), Brooke pointed to the incident of the post-resurrection appearance of Jesus to the ten in Jerusalem (Luke 24:39). Brooke explained the *handling* mentioned in the text as the author carefully gathering evidence and building a strong case concerning his testimony, namely, that it went beyond merely that which was *heard* and *seen*. It no doubt indicated the closeness of his encounter with the Lord, and made certain that what he gave witness to was accurate and true. Brooke's desire to interpret the sensory verbs literally, as words emphasizing the *eyewitness role* of the author and his orthodoxy lent itself well to the

[38] A. E. Brooke, The Johannine Epistles, 1.

[39] It seems odd that Brooke was quite willing to attribute a metaphorical interpretation of what had been heard; that is, 'hearing' fathomed as intelligent understanding of that which had been revealed in time and space, and yet unwilling to assign this same interpretation to what had been seen. It is just as likely that "what had been seen with the eyes" more naturally emphasized what Brooke has referred to as the "human powers of perception" (A. E. Brooke, The Johannine Epistles, 2).

notion of apostolic succession and the assumption that the author's aspiration was to unite his community with the Apostolic church.[40]

The meaning of the genitival construction περί τοῦ λόγου τῆς ζωῆς was quite unclear to Brooke. He aligned himself with Westcott's translation of the phrase as "the revelation of life."[41] Brooke pointed to a rule that when ὁ λόγος is followed by a genitive, the genitival construction expressed the contents of the message. Where τῆς ζωῆς was added to a noun as a qualifying genitive it generally denoted a life-giving quality. Brooke maintained that the two meanings were not mutually exclusive and therefore the message which announced life also gave life. The περί circumscribed the message concerning the word of life and indicated that the writer had something to say to his community about the revelation which was from the beginning. The message which announced the word and was life itself had been set off parenthetically for the purpose of revealing its profound import. The emphatic word was ἐφανερώθη (v. 2). The word of life had been made manifest to the "writer and his circle"[42] in conditions which thus enabled them to apprehend its nature and declare it. In v. 3 the author resumed with what had been seen and heard, but now the order was different from v. 1. Brooke wondered whether the new order was not meant to throw additional light on the earthly life of the incarnate *logos*. If it were a subtle reference to the earthly appearance of the incarnate *logos*, then what was seen had precedence over what was heard, and was therefore different from what was revealed from the beginning where hearing would take precedence over seeing.[43]

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[40] George Johnston does not accept a literal reading of the sensory verbs, but he does advocate the thought that the incipit served as a reminder that "the church as an Apostolic company actually handled, saw, and heard the divine Logos who is the creative mediator of life" ("I, II, III John," Peake's Commentary on the Bible, eds. M. Black and H. H. Rowley [London and New York: Thomas Nelson and Sons Limited, 1962] 1035 - 40).

[41] B. F. Westcott, The Epistles of St. John. The Greek Text with Notes, 7.

[42] A. E. Brooke, The Johannine Epistles, 6.

[43] Ibid., 9.

Brooke considered that the true explanation of the *incipit* lay in the context of what appeared to be the author's attempt to edify his readers in the face of his many opponents. The author defined the content of the message (ἀγγελία) he declared, to encourage his community and to protect them from the erroneous ideas of the deceivers. It was the incarnate logos which revealed plainly the mystery of that which was from the beginning concerning the word of life. The infinite had transcended time and space and had been made manifest to human temporal sensibilities, enabling them to comprehend it and declare it.[44] Hence, the entire purpose of the prologue was to declare (ἀπαγγέλλομεν) the message with a decided focus on its theological content. Coupled with what had been declared and its content was the act of bearing witness (μαρτυροῦμεν). Μαρτύρειν was the act of attesting to someone who was both the ἀγγελία, which was life-giving, and the life, which was the ἀγγελία. Bearing witness to the incarnate-logos would not have been adequate without also having been privy to the profound unveiling of that which was manifested in Jesus Christ the Son of God, namely, the word of life. The ἀγγελία, which was the life giving word of life made manifest, was to be declared in order that fellowship might be consolidated: "that you might have fellowship with us...and..μετὰ τοῦ πατρὸς καὶ μετὰ τοῦ υἱοῦ αὐτοῦ ' Ιησοῦ Χριστοῦ" (v. 3). According to the author this constituted the basis for proper fellowship and excluded those who denied that Jesus had come in flesh and consequently those who were indifferent about right conduct.

3. *C. H. DODD*

A somewhat different approach and explanation of the *incipit* is represented by the work of Dodd.[45] Dodd's exegesis of the opening verses of

[44] Ibid., 6. Brooke was quick to point out that the word of life was never used to express the being of the logos or the pre-existent Christ.

[45] C. H. Dodd, The Johannine Epistles, The Moffatt New Testament Commentary (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1946).

I John is based on the subtle distinction he developed between *didaché* and *kerygma*. The *didaché* represented the commandments of Christ that called the believer to ethical responsibility. The *kerygma* represented the content of the gospel of Christ. The content of the *kerygma* signified the gracious activity of God toward humankind. *Didaché* typically referred to ethical issues, whereas *Kerygma* represented the significant doctrinal matters taken up in the Epistle. Dodd maintained that *didaché* may be summed up in the commandment "love one another," and the *kerygma* may be summed up in the confession, "Jesus Christ come in flesh."

As Christian groups proliferated and spread to different centres and came into contact with the vocabulary and conceptual structures of Hellenistic culture it became necessary to adapt the *kerygma* and *didaché* to the prevailing climate. "Enthusiastic but ill-informed converts" to Christianity were reinterpreting the faith in the light of a prevalent Gnostic ideology,[46] necessitating the expansion of the *kerygma* so as to preclude erroneous interpretations. Dodd held that the FG's utilization of Gnostic language and imagery was a brilliant response to a contemporary cultural climate.[47] Nevertheless, in many of the responses to the culture of the day errors in interpretation and understanding of the *kerygma* became common. Concomitant with this development came a perversion of the *didaché*, which inevitably resulted in a morality at odds with the *kerygma*.[48] In this climate the author of I John set about freely reinterpreting and applying the

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[46] C. H. Dodd, The Johannine Epistles, xvii.

[47] The question of how the Gospel of John and the Epistle related to each other has been the subject of debate for centuries. Dodd did not spend a great deal of time on the question of authorship since our knowledge about who wrote I John, whether it was an individual or entire school, was inadequate. It was best not to view I John as the product of a mind inferior to the Gospel writer's, for it had to be allowed to speak for itself. Dodd suggested that perhaps the simplest solution was to view the author of the Epistle as a disciple of the Evangelist and a student of his work. He was not a mere imitator but had caught something of the style and manner of the Gospel writer.

[48] The most notorious of these initial groups and the threat they posed were the Gnostics. Dodd was quick to point out that the primary focus of the writing of I John was not the correction of error of a Gnostic kind, but that its purpose was primarily to set out the fundamentals of the Christian faith.

fundamentals of the faith to the new situation. According to Dodd, the Epistle represented an early stage in the process whereby a host of competing sects vied to be heard concerning their unique interpretations of the tenets of Christianity. In particular, as the early Church Fathers were quick to point out, a virulent form of Christian heresy was threatening the very bedrock of orthodoxy. The so-called Gnostics were groups of Christian teachers who had gone wrong and were perverting the apostolic teaching. Not only were they teachers but also false prophets (ψευδοπροφῆται 4:1), who at one time had prestige and status within the community. As their new teachings, however, did not take hold in the church, they seceded and continued missionary activity in the pagan world where they achieved considerable success to the chagrin of the orthodox teachers.[49] The turn of events gave the early community quite a shock because this was one of the first secessions based on doctrinal grounds. Respected and influential teachers, who had been members of the community were now divisive forces and created a dangerous situation. The fellowship of the church was in danger of being destroyed because a doctrinal unity based on belief and teaching was being undermined. To counter this dangerous development, the author writes as a pastor with the intention to recall the fundamental loyalties to which all believers had been called in the primitive *kerygma*. Dodd maintained that the author wrote as one who wished to inspire and to edify those under his charge and therefore exhibited very little inclination in developing doctrine. "His interest in building up Christian dogma is limited...he is not interested in precise theological definition."[50]

Basic to Dodd's understanding of I John was the distinction he developed between the *kerygma* and the *didaché*. The grammatical and theological questions raised by the text invariably received their explanation in the context of the teaching traditions of the early church. The author faced a gnostic environment hostile to his teaching, and in response, he creatively brought to new expression the significance of Jesus Christ, all the

[49] This view was derived from what the author stated in I John 2:18-19, 4:1-6.

[50] C. H. Dodd, The Johannine Epistles, xliii.

while being conscious of his dependence upon the received tradition of the early church. Dodd pointed out that the task of defining the error of the false teachers was difficult, however, because all that the author of the Epistle revealed directly was that the former teachers denied the reality of the incarnation. The error was perceived to be docetic in character, because as Dodd pointed out, the *Gnostic* was "bound to find some way to avoid the scandalous idea that the Son of God, the Revealer, the intermediary between the Divine and the human, suffered the degradation of direct contact with matter, the embodiment of all evil; and above all he was bound to deny that the Divine could suffer."[51] There were those who accepted that Jesus the Son of God had come, but in his coming had merely assumed the temporary garb of humanity. Hence, the writer restated the truth that Jesus had come in the flesh (4:2). Indeed, because of the importance of the incarnation in the flesh, the author was compelled to stress emphatically the evidence available to the senses (I John 1:1 - 3).

The other beliefs of the false prophets, maintained Dodd, were accessible only by inference. The author, for example, attacked the use of such statements as "born of God," "we are in the light," "we have no sin," "we dwell in God," and "we know God" by those unworthy to utter them.[52] Not only were the false prophets neglectful of doctrinal matters, but also improper in their ethical conduct. The writer based the Christian ethic entirely on obedience to the command of love for God and humanity. According to Dodd, Christian charity and love had only an insignificant part to play in the ideals of Gnosticism because of its focus on individualism and neglect of social obligation. The author, however, did not spend all his time specifically refuting Gnostic error. A *Gnostic setting* provided him with an opportunity to bring to creative expression his understanding of the apostolic *kerygma* and *didaché*, and ultimately determined the occasion of the Epistle's composition.

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[51] Ibid., xix.

[52] Dodd did point out that while these same statements could not be found in the Gnostic literature, they were nevertheless analogous to Gnostic language. When taken together they described quite accurately the type of Gnostic piety with which our writer had to contend.

Dodd set out the characteristics of the Apostolic *kerygma* and *didaché* to illustrate how the author of I John gave creative expression to many of its most significant features.[53] Citing the data of Mark and comparing it to the Pauline Epistles he suggested that early apostolic preaching was thoroughly eschatological.[54] Its focus was to be found in the culminating act of history through the appearance of Jesus Christ. In him the Kingdom of God came upon all mankind in order to judge and to bring to redemption his newly constituted people. The new community of the church, "the new Israel of God," consequently enjoyed the "life of the age to come" in the present. It awaited the final consummation when Christ would be manifested as the final judge and redeemer to bring to a close the present historical process.[55]

A central feature of the earliest *kerygma* along with its announcement of the death of Jesus was its emphasis on his resurrection. In the Epistle, however, there is no mention of the resurrection [56] Dodd explained the silence by positing that the early *kerygma* distinguished between two slightly differing conceptions of the resurrection. One conception viewed the actual resurrection and the post-resurrectional appearances of Christ as providing fundamental evidence for the Christian faith.[57] Another viewed the resurrection to be a reference to the risen Christ

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[53] The distinction between *kerygma* and *didaché* lefts its mark on the Epistle in which the theological elements expounded the implications of *kerygma*, and the ethical sections clarified the implications of *didaché* (The Johannine Epistles, xxi).

[54] Much of Dodd's understanding of how I John fit into the *kerygmatic tradition* was based on a carefully worked out position in which the FG's contact with the synoptics came through an oral tradition independent of the synoptic gospels but made up of materials similar to some of what eventually made its way into the three gospels.

[55] C. H. Dodd, The Johannine Epistles, xxviii.

[56] Dodd drew attention to the book of Hebrews and its resemblance to I John in this regard (The Johannine Epistles, xxxiii).

[57] Dodd cited Acts 10:40 - 41 and 13:30 - 31 as evidence for the understanding.

exalted at the right hand of God.[58] If the author of I John was preoccupied with the "thought of Christ's eternal power and glory in the heavenly places, then the fact of his resurrection might be taken to imply this larger and more inclusive truth."[59] Moreover, early preaching also closed with the frequent reminder of the certainty of the Lord's return. The author of I John, however, knew nothing of such a hope. Instead, he held to the belief that the judgment day was imminent. With the end pending and indeterminate, it served to imprint indelibly on the reader the urgency of being morally responsible. Jesus himself would appear, for as the author stated, "we shall see him as he is" (I John 3:2), befitting the over-all perspective of the writing with its constant reminders to be ethically responsible; "for we cannot see him unless we are like him" (I John 3:2). A final matter fundamental to early apostolic preaching was the testimony that the *church* was a covenant community bound together in the unity of love. While the term ἐκκλησία did not appear in I John, according to Dodd the author was acutely aware of the church as a covenant community even though in not as well developed a form as in the Pauline understanding.

In addition, the early *kerygma* proclaimed in the Synoptics and in the Pauline writings, maintained Dodd, in one way or another found their similar expression in I John. The kerygmatic preaching recorded in I John aligned itself with the teaching tradition of/about Jesus from these other sources. Early on the apostles had interpreted the death of Jesus through the Isaianic conception of the suffering servant. The author of I John kept that tradition alive when he wrote that "the blood of Jesus cleanses us from every sin" (1:7). Moreover, the *kerygma* as represented by the language of confession and denial (2:22, 23, 28; 4:23) alluded to such sayings as recorded in Mark 8:37-8,

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[58] Dodd was able to maintain the distinction because of the difference he perceived between Paul and the synoptic writer's description of the resurrection as a physical event and the author's of the FG depiction of the event as the exaltation of Christ. He cited Acts 2:32 - 36 and 3:13 - 21 as examples of passages which emphasized the exaltation of Christ.

[59] Dodd noted that the earliest kerygmatic expression of the exaltation looked back to Psalm 110:2; Acts 2:34 - 35; Romans 8:34; I Peter 3:22; Mark 12:35 - 37, etc. (The Johannine Epistles, xxxiii).

Matt. 10:32-3 and Luke 9:26; 12:8-9. These sayings therefore validated what the epistolary writer proposed through the confessional assertions. The author of I John gave evidence of his acquaintance with the beatitudes in one form or another.[60] For example, the use of the light/dark imagery in I John 1:5-6 and I John 2:9-11 captures the essence of Matthew 6:22-3 and Luke 11:34-6 where *light* and *dark* are key words. The author's use of the *world* terminology in John 2:15-17 was implicit in Luke 12:29-30. The proliferation of evidence in I John for the writer's dependence upon the early *kerygma*, according to Dodd, justified the claim that the teaching of the author more or less adhered to the primitive *kerygma*. Indeed, the author's avowal to be a primary eyewitness reinforced the authenticity of his *kerygma* (1 John 1:1-4) and gave the work its catholic outlook and appeal. The author's primary intention, therefore, was not the refutation of heretical error as was commonly assumed, but was to be found in the declaration of the "word of life." The declaration of the "word of life" encapsulated both the gospel (*kerygma*) and the commandments (*didaché*) as delivered by the Apostles. It was thus firmly linked with the received tradition from the beginning.

With these fundamental issues in mind, Dodd's consideration of the *incipit* began by noting that the prologue of the FG stressed the importance of the λόγος in its pre-existent status and in its incarnational manifestation, whereas the prologue of I John stressed the importance of the ζωή in its appearance and its existence with the Father (v. 2). Dodd raised the question whether λόγος should be understood in the technical sense as it was used in the prologue of the FG. Dodd argued that to take the *logos* in the technical sense of the FG would require linking it with the relative clauses preceding it. This would have necessitated for the entire clause to have been constructed to agree grammatically with the masculine noun λόγος. Since the author has not done this, however, another way must be sought out of the

[60] Dodd pointed out that the author may have had access to an oral tradition, which in one way or another echoed the language of the Synoptics and the sayings of Jesus. See the following examples: he compared 1 John 2:17 with Matt. 7:21; I John 3:1-3 with Matt. 5: 8-9; I John 4:1 with Matt 24:2;, I John 2:18 with Matt. 24:24; I John 3:7 with Mark 13:5; I John 3:7 with Matt. 5:48, etc. (C. H. Dodd, The Johannine Epistles, xl - xli).

grammatical conundrum. After considering various alternative proposals he opted for understanding λόγος as the theme of the Gospel. The clause concerning the word of life, while not in grammatical agreement with what preceded it, *prima facie* indicated the theme of the announcement, and the clauses which included the sensory verbs stated the contents of the announcement.[61] The addition of the relative clauses, while not changing the fundamental structure of the sentence "that which we have heard concerning the word of life", enlarged the meaning significantly. By thus distinguishing the theme of the announcement, namely, "the word of life" from the contents of the announcement expressed in the neuter relative clauses, Dodd avoided the awkward necessity of linking the neuter relative pronouns with the masculine noun λόγος.[62] The author was concerned about advancing the life giving word of God as it was from the beginning, i.e., what had always been true about it. 'Απ ἀρχῆς metaphorically represented the truth of God in the eternal gospel manifested in the incarnate Christ which was neither an innovation nor an afterthought subject to perversion. It was not necessary for Dodd therefore to determine whether "what was from the beginning" signified an absolute beginning or the beginning of the preaching of the Gospel.[63] I John was merely the perpetuation of the *kerygmatic* tradition

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[61] C. H. Dodd, The Johannine Epistles, 3.

[62] J. M. Lieu agreed with Dodd's grammatical solution. She held that because of the loose grammatical connection between "that (neuter) which was from the beginning" and "concerning the word (masculine) of life (feminine)" it could be taken to have similar semantic content as the personalized logos of the FG. It was the life-giving Word of God embodied in Christ which encapsulated the Gospel. It must, however, be understood as explicating the Gospel message itself. Lieu took *the word of Life* to refer to the Gospel message and not to the incarnation (The Second and Third Epistles of John, 174). See further an important article by Hans Conzelmann in which he drew attention to the significant shift of emphasis in the use of ἀρχῆς in I John from that of the Gospel. In the Gospel it refers to the pre-existent λόγος, but in I John it refers to the beginning of the churchly tradition ("Was von Anfang war," Neutestamentliche Studien für R. Bultmann [Beiheft ZNU 21; Berlin: Töpelmann, 1954] 194-201). It was the life giving Word of God embodied in Christ which encapsulated the Gospel.

[63] R. Alan Culpepper pointed out that the neuter relative pronoun, "that which was..." implied that the author was here thinking more about the message of life than about Jesus himself and therefore calling to mind the earliest preaching of the church. He also contended that ὅστ' ἀρχῆς echoed both the prologue of the FG and Genesis and therefore evoked early "foundations of the Christian gospel' in the Johannine community (I John, II John, III John, Knox Preaching Guides, ed. by John H. Hayes [Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1985] 7).

which from the beginning had its roots in God. The author was proclaiming the tradition to his community.[64]

Dodd also insisted that what had been attested to concerning the theme of the Gospel was immediately available to the senses and was not subject to "some airy speculation or fabricated fable."[65] The author meant to reinforce that *life* was not some abstract notion, but indeed, was a reality disclosed to humanity in the incarnate Christ. His appearance on earth had been attested to by eyewitnesses who announced the availability of eternal life in the incarnate Christ. It was he in whom life had existed from all eternity and it was this life which was made accessible to human knowledge. It was clear to Dodd that the author, faced with novel doctrines of a speculative cast, wished to call to mind "the unchanging apostolic Gospel, which is the word of God."[66] It was an appeal to the primitive Gospel and an insistence upon the historical reality of the incarnation which comprised the recurring theme of the writing and indeed provided the basis for fellowship.

The purpose of the writing was captured by the statement "so that you may share our fellowship." Dodd argued that the allusions to *fellowship* in the New Testament were captured by a variety of expressions and images, such as, "joint heirs" (Rom. 7:17; Eph. 3:6) "in the Gospel" (I Cor 9:23), "in

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[64] Although for J. M. Lieu ὅστ' ἀρχῆς pointed in a different direction, she nevertheless affirmed that it probably did not refer to an absolute beginning. 'Απ' ἀρχῆς recalled the beginning of the church's life, whether a Christian church or a particular Johannine community and its experience. The proclamation of the life giving word, therefore, did not occur in reaction to gnostically inclined heretics who were perverting the primitive apostolic kerygma, but in response to a tradition as developed within the language and theology of the Johannine community. The writer was not merely passing on what was part of the primitive kerygma, but was dealing with the "consequences of his own tradition of thought and seeking to show the invalidity of those consequences while upholding the theology which gave birth to them" (The Second and Third Epistles of John, 75). See also J. M. Lieu, "Authority to Become Children of God: A Study of I John," Novum Testamentum XXIII, 3 (1981) 210 - 228. J. M. Lieu admitted, however, that the author of I John had a more kerygmatic understanding of the tradition, than does, for example, the author of II John (The Second and Third Epistles of John, 174).

[65] C. H. Dodd, The Johannine Epistles, 5.

[66] Ibid., 6.

faith" (Philemon 6), "in suffering" (Phil. 3:10), in the metaphors of the 'branch' and the 'vine' (John 15:1-6) and in the analogy of the human body (I Cor. 12). 'Fellowship' thus was a rich concept about which the community was knowledgable. It was the author's desire to promote fellowship in the face of what appeared to be disruptive tendencies (false teachings/bitter antagonisms) which threatened "a dissolution of partnership in the common faith and a breach of the common bond of charity."[67] Nothing else but a return to the Gospel (*kerygma*) and the commandment to love one another (*didaché*) would restore the threatened fellowship of the church "with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ." *Koinonia* was based in the "word of life," that is, in the Gospel which "proclaims the facts of Christ's coming, and the commandment which declares what that coming means in terms of personal relations among men and women."[68]

The intriguing problem of identifying the sense in which the personal pronoun *we* was used by the author in light of the opening verses led Dodd to make to a distinction between those who directly experienced the historical facts of the Gospel and the readers who obviously had not.[69] Not infrequently the *we* of the sensory verbs was taken to denote those who were direct eyewitnesses of the event of the earthly Jesus. According to Dodd καὶ αἱ χεῖρες ἡμῶν ἐψηλάφησαν in no uncertain terms implied personal acquaintance with the historical Jesus and therefore must not be reduced to mean simply a knowledge of the Christian message. The writer identified himself as one of a group of eyewitnesses who had actually seen and heard

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[67] Ibid., 8.

[68] Ibid., 8.

[69] As did, for example, C. Haas, M. De Jonge and J. L. Swellengrebel, who took the first person plural of the prologue (1:1-4) to have exclusive force: "they refer to John and the eyewitnesses, and do not include the persons he is addressing" (A Translator's Handbook of the Letters of John, 20).

the ministry of Jesus.[70] Nevertheless, Dodd acknowledged that in the Epistle the *we* could not be interpreted consistently to designate someone with *eyewitness* status. In some instances the first person plural was used in an epistolary sense, and at other times it was used to denote a community to which the author belonged. The first personal plural thus included the writer and the reader in one class. Dodd confirmed that this form of speech was not uncommon to the homilies of the period and would have constituted an acceptable use. At other times the author used the *we* to mean all Christians, in which case the contrast was not *you* but the *world*. For example, the author freely used *we* when he was contemplating hypothetical ethical and religious situations significant for all Christians (1:6, 8, 10).

While it was difficult to determine the precise sense in which the personal pronouns were to be taken when used in the same context (2:18-21; 4:4-6), Dodd proposed an interpretation based on the distinction he made between the *kerygma* and the *didachié*. For a variety of reasons neither the epistolary *we* (meaning *I*) nor the true plural of the *we* (meaning *my colleagues and I*) made sense in 2:18-21 and 4:4-6. Accordingly, here the first person plural really referred to the Church proclaiming the Gospel in solidarity with those who preceded her (the eyewitnesses).[71] Indeed, the author quite consciously assumed the mantel of orthodoxy and spoke for all those who had rightly understood the gospel from the beginning, including

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[70] See further, I. Howard Marshall, The Epistles of John, 105 - 107. John R. W. Stott, stated for example, that the "author's message is supremely concerned with the historical, audible, visible, tangible manifestation of the Eternal. He could hardly have conveyed his message more forcefully. He was vouching for his message from his own personal experience" (The Epistles of John, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, gen. ed., R. V. G. Tasker [Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1964] 26; 61-63).

[71] Ibid., 12-13. To support his claim regarding the author's sense of corporate solidarity with the events of the past, Dodd alluded to the 'I' of the Psalms, to Amos 2:10 and Joshua 24:7. He also referred to Tacitus, *Agricola*, 45. Others have mentioned Matthew 23:35; Galatians 1:23; *Epistula Polycarpi*, 9; *Mishnah Pesahim* 10:5b.

those who had actually seen, heard and touched.[72] Johannine theologizing upon the concept of *seeing* and *hearing* rested in the belief that both tradition and community were based in the historical event of Jesus. Reliance upon tradition and the community provided the basis upon which the author had the acknowledged right to make theological and ethical pronouncements. Here the author was defending the community against the threat of division and false doctrine by appealing to the beliefs that had been part of the group's foundation.

Fundamental to Dodd's interpretation of the *incipit* of I John is the assumption that both the *kerygma* and the *didaché* are firmly grounded in a variety of historical traditions which gave expression to them. The essential Christological and ethical components of the *kerygma* and the *didaché* for the author of I John defined the substance of the message he declared to his community. As one who was standing in solidarity with the tradition of the past, the author was in the position to correct those who were perverting the unchanging apostolic Gospel with their novel doctrines of a speculative cast. What sets Dodd's approach apart from both Bultmann and Brooke is the radically different historical circumstance he proposes to explain the theological and grammatical peculiarities of the prologue of I John. In turning to the work of Stephen S. Smalley we shall be confronted with yet another reconstruction of the events that precipitated the writing.

4. *STEPHEN. S. SMALLEY*

Even though nothing can be known about the identity of the author of I John, Smalley surmises that a *presbyter* was responsible for II and III John and that someone close to him composed I John.[73] In addition, the

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[72] J. L. Houlden, The Johannine Epistles, 52 - 53. S. S. Smalley, 1, 2, 3 John, 8. D. Moody Smith Jr., in a study of the character and delineation of Johannine Christianity, proposed that the *we* did not explicitly identify the apostolic eye-witnesses, "but a community which understood itself as heir of a tradition based upon some historical witness to Jesus" (D. Moody Smith Jr., "Johannine Christianity: Some Reflections on its Character and Delineation," 222-248).

[73] Stephen S. Smalley, 1, 2, 3, John, Word Biblical Commentary (Waco, Texas: Word Books, 1984).

persons responsible for the three letters were probably "leading and ordained Johannine Christians."[74] It was also quite apparent to Smalley that the inspiration behind the tradition and distinctive theology of the group of writings came from John the Apostle, the Beloved Disciple himself.[75] If the tradition derives from the FG, then according to Smalley, the initial problems reflected in this writing had their origin in the teaching of the FG.[76] The Johannine community was composed of a Jewish Christian group with Ebionite proclivities which had difficulty accepting Jesus as the Messiah, and a Hellenistic Christian group influenced by beliefs "enshrined in Hellenistic systems of salvation...dependent on a gnostic background" which had difficulty accepting the humanity of Jesus (docetic).[77] The writer of the FG therefore addressed Johannine Christians who thought of Jesus as less then God, to remind them of his divinity, and those who thought of Jesus as less than human, to remind them of his humanity. In the Johannine letters the issue had polarized "so that those with a *low Christology* had moved toward an Ebionite position, and those whose Christology was *high* had become more clearly gnostic (docetic) by inclination; secession from the community had begun."[78]

The writer was thus addressing a community made up of a number of house churches split between Johannine Christians who had accepted the Gospel of Jesus (the apostolic *kerygma*), heretically inclined members from a Jewish background who did not accept Jesus' Messiahship, and heterodox followers from a Hellenistic background who were docetically inclined. A fourth group of false teachers known as the *secessionists* clashed with the writer on matters concerning belief and behaviour. The appeal that the author made to the FG, suggested that the mistaken views held by the

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[74] Ibid., xxii.

[75] Ibid., xxii.

[76] Stephen S. Smalley, John: Evangelist and Interpreter, 122-49.

[77] Ibid., xxiii.

[78] Ibid., xxiii.

members in the Johannine community stemmed from a distortion of the teaching of the FG.[79] Smalley, however, did not accept Brown's position that I John was a deliberately patterned commentary on the FG. I John was instead a *paper* intended to expound Johannine teaching and theology preserved in the tradition of the FG for the benefit of the heterodox members of the community who had misinterpreted some of its Christological tenets. In Smalley's estimation the derivative literary relationship of the Epistle to the FG helped to explain the semantic shift of some significant terms in the Epistle, e.g., ('beginning', 'word', 'world', 'spirit of truth'). The purpose of the Epistle was primarily to exhort the faithful and secondarily to correct and refute inadequate Christological and ethical views.

Despite the grammatical difficulties of the prologue and the consequent obscurity of meaning, according to Smalley the stress in the opening verses fell on περὶ τοῦ λόγου τῆς ζωῆς. The effect of the Greek phrasing was to underscore the object of what was being proclaimed, namely, ὁ λόγος concerning Jesus.[80] Smalley was uncertain about the extent to which the writer of the preface of I John had modelled it after the prologue of the FG. Consequently he was uncertain whether λόγος should be

[79] Ibid., xxvi. Falsely claiming sinlessness (1:8, 10) may have been derived from John 8:31-47. "Catch phrases" taken directly from the FG contributed to this distortion; e.g., "to know God", "to abide in Jesus", "to walk in the light". To the ex-Jews who on the basis of John 14:28 found it easy to exaggerate the humanity of Jesus, he stressed the pre-existence of Jesus (I John 2:13-14, 20, 28-29; 3:2, 3, 5, 7; 5:20b). For the ex-pagan members empasizing the divinity of Jesus on the basis of John 10:25-38, the author stressed the manifestly real life and death of Jesus (I John 2:6; 4:2, 9, 17; 1:7b-99; 2:2, 12; 3:5, 8. 16; 4:10). Disregard for proper conduct arose because some of the Jewish opponents had interpreted the love command (John 13:34-35; 14:15; 15:10, 12, 17) legalistically. The Hellenistic members within the community had insisted that the love command was not important (John 13:34) except to those sympathetic to their point of view theologically. The author corrected an exaggerated accent on the death of Christ as glorified exaltation (John 3:14; 7:39; 8:28; 12:32, 34; 17:5) by drawing attention to the sacrificial death of Jesus.

[80] Hence, the impact of the verse was not so much on the act of proclaiming as on the object of what was being proclaimed.

interpreted in its light.[81] Smalley pointed to the ambiguous genitive of τῆς ζωῆς and suggested that neither a personalized λόγος nor ζωή as content of the word needed to be exclusively in focus here.[82] It is possible that the writer quite intentionally remained ambivalent "for the life-giving word of the gospel is essentially a proclamation about Jesus who is the living word of God."[83]

Smalley dealt with the problem of the relation of the parenthetical insertion with the relative clauses by suggesting that the relative neuter pronouns were in apposition to the masculine ὁ λόγος. Smalley took the neuter formulations as running parallel with the insertion to mean that the writer was declaring what had been seen, heard, and felt concerning the word of life. The ὅ in the phrase ὃ ἦν ἀπ' ἀρχῆς must be similarly interpreted in an impersonal way ("that which was", not "he who was").[84] Therefore, while the author may have had the pre-existence of Jesus in the back of his mind, at the forefront was the message about Jesus. The stress in the opening verse, then, was upon the beginning of the proclamation of the word of Jesus (ὁ λόγος) in which the ἀπ' ἀρχῆς became temporal and local, stressing the beginning of the gospel "in terms of both its content (the ministry of Jesus) and its proclamation (the witness of the disciples)."[85] The anarthrous ἀρχή

[81] If λόγος was linked to the prologue of the FG it was understood to denote the pre-incarnate Jesus, in which case the background was both Jewish and Greek. Others stress that λόγος here signified the message, of which Jesus was the centre. In I John it was the ζωή which had been made manifest and not the λόγος.

[82] Concerning the genitive τῆς ζωῆς three possibilities have been generally delineated: (a) a qualifying genitive, namely, "the life giving word" (Brooke and Dodd); (b) an epexegetical genitive, namely, "about the word which is life"; (c) an objective genitive, namely, "the revelation about life" (Smalley, Brooke, Stott).

[83] Smalley argues that ζῶη was not to be regarded as a personal name equivalent to Jesus (vv. 1, 2). Life expressed one aspect of his being (1, 2, 3 John, 6).

[84] Smalley observes that the clause at the start of v. 3 resumed the structure and language of the first two verses indicating that the neuter formulations were identical in meaning. The neuter pronoun in v. 3 confirmed that the neuter pronoun in the phrase ὃ ἦν ἀπ' ἀρχῆς should be taken in an impersonal connotation.

[85] Ibid., 7.

confirmed that a personal reference to the word, however, need not necessarily be excluded from an interpretation of the *incipit*.[86] While he was not referring to creation itself, the writer was asserting that the revelation of which he spoke was in some sense contemporaneous with creation, i.e., it was the pre-existent word from eternity.[87] Smalley suggested that this might have been a deliberate attempt by the author to present a *high Christology* in order to counter the *low Christology* of his ex-Jewish readers, "just as he is elsewhere resisting the "high Christology" of his ex-pagan church members."[88] As such the life-giving word about Jesus and the word of God disclosed in Jesus became coterminous in the sensory verbs. In a typically Johannine fashion the author spoke about the word of revelation from eternity which was gradually disclosed and personally experienced in the concrete reality of historical existence. The sensory verbs combined to stress the conjunction of revelation which was from eternity and its experience historically by those fortunate enough to see and believe.[89] Therefore, while Smalley did not exclude a possible reference to *eyewitnesses*, he preferred understanding the verbs as denoting the church standing in solidarity with those who were historically the eyewitnesses. The author, as one among many who had seen and heard, spoke for all members of the community who were champions of the gospel. He contradicted those who heretically espoused false views about the person of Jesus, by "recalling his readers to the fundamentals of the Christian faith and identifying himself with those who believe as he does."[90] In theological terms the incipit forcefully reminded the readers who were

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[86] Smalley suggested such usage would have derived from John 1:1 and Genesis (LXX).

[87] It was observed that ὅπ' ἀρχῆς in the Epistle was different from ἐν ἀρχῇ of the FG and therefore a one to one correspondance was not be sought.

[88] Stephen S. Smalley, 1, 2, 3, John, 7.

[89] The verbs of hearing and seeing were especially significant since they represented ideas close to the concept of *faith* in the FG. ὃ ἐθεασάμεθα καὶ χεῖρες ἡμῶν ἐψηλάφησαν was taken together with the previous pair to denote the incarnate word made visible to *sight* and *faith*.

[90] Stephen S. Smalley, 1, 2, 3, John, 8.

distorting the truth that the life had been revealed and that it was πρὸς τὸν πατέρα.[91]

Ultimately, the purpose of the writing was set forth in the statement ἵνα καὶ ὑμεῖς κοινωνίαν ἔχητε μεθ' ἡμῶν. It was written to a congregation which was divided perhaps because of different estimations concerning the person of Jesus. To the champions of orthodox belief[92] the writer asserted that they (*you*) have fellowship not only with *us* but also with the Father and his Son Jesus Christ (v. 3) which was both "Christian and Apostolic".[93] Fellowship was based on the common knowledge of God in the incarnation and life of Jesus in which the Father and Son were depicted as one in being and function. Smalley observed that here again the contrasting but complementary foci on the person of Jesus were introduced in opposition to those who were asserting false views about either his humanity or divinity. The prologue declared in uncompromising terms the life-giving word about Jesus to a congregation which was disintegrating because of doctrinal disputes concerning exaggerated estimates of the person of Jesus. Consequently, a balanced Christology was set forth to counterbalance views tending toward either a *low* or a *high* side.

Smalley's entire exegetical enterprise rested on two fundamental assumptions. First, that I John, although inferior in its expressions to the FG, nevertheless corrected several serious Christological distortions arising from a misunderstanding of the Christological thrust of the FG. Second, that the erroneous Christological formulations were due in part to a Jewish Christian group inclined to an Ebionite position, and a Hellenistic Christian group inclined to a Docetic position.

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[91] It was a reminder to the Jewish opponents who over-stressed the humanity of Jesus that he was also divine, and to the Gnostic opponents who over emphasized the divinity of Jesus that he had been historically revealed.

[92] Stephen S. Smalley, 1, 2, 3, John, 12.

[93] Ibid., 12.

5. *R. E. BROWN*

Brown embarked on an ambitious and difficult task of assessing the disposition of the author's Community, its members, and its adversaries.[94] In a comprehensive treatment he attempted to determine whether the adversaries were a well defined group, what their theological position was, and whether they could be identified with a group(s) known to have existed. After a brief discussion of the advocates of multiple groups of opponents, he concluded that the Epistle furnished very little evidence for assuming the presence of a variety of adversaries and that the trouble in the community could be easily explained if only one well-defined group was the target of the author's polemic.[95] Brown also considered the *Jewish-group thesis* that is frequently put forward to explain the source and nature of the Christological confessions. He acknowledged that while there was little doubt that the opponents in the FG were Jews who denied Jesus as the Messiah, he rejected the *Jewish-group thesis* as inadequate for an explanation of the confessions and denials. He did so on the basis of I John 2:19 which clearly indicated that the adversaries had once been part of the community but had now left.[96] In all likelihood they were not Jews but Christians who had once been members of the Johannine community, and were now tending toward either a *high* or *low* estimation of the person of Jesus and therefore at variance with the author's Christological confession. Brown's assessment of the pertinent passages led him to conclude that the enemies were Johannine Christians

[94] R. E. Brown, The Epistles of John, The Anchor Bible (Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Company, 1982).

[95] Brown stated that "it seems an appropriate occasion to apply "Ockham's razor": Postulated entities should not be multiplied without necessity" (Brown, The Epistles of John, 50). Fernando F. Segovia remarked that "a two-front opposition is quite unnecessary and should no longer be a viable option with respect to I John; all of the opponents' positions may be quite satisfactorily explained in terms of one single front" (Recent Research in the Johannine Letters," Religious Studies Review 13, 2 [April 1987] 136).

[96] Brown rejected the "Jewish adversary" theory on several grounds: (1) Jews did not claim sinlessness, did keep the commandments, and did act justly; (2) lack of OT quotation; (3) 2:19 suggests secessionists and not Jewish opponents: they would not have been described as ἐξ ἡμῶν ἐξῆλθαν (2:19); (4) no suggestion of converted Jews who had lapsed.

who held to the high Christology espoused in the FG. An exaggerated emphasis in the FG on Jesus' preexistence led eventually to a neglect of his humanity. Such a distortion therefore necessitated the author's appeal to what had been from the beginning and to his insistence that Jesus had come in the flesh (4:1-3) as he had also come ἐν τῷ ὕδατι καὶ ἐν τῷ αἵματι (5:5-6).

Some commentators have claimed that moral error was the primary difficulty addressed in the Epistle.[97] Based on the author's statements about those who walk in darkness (1:6), who claim sinlessness (1:8, 10), who do not keep the commandments (2:4), who do not walk as Christ walked (2:6), who hate the brother (2:9), who practice lawlessness (3:4), the adversaries are perceived either to be antinomian or libertine in their orientation.[98] Grayston remarked that "to imagine they were gnostic antinomians with an obsessive theory about the irrelevance of behaviour in the flesh was to create a prurient fantasy."[99] Brown also refuted such a position on the grounds that the adversaries did not consciously live immorally (1:6; 2:4; 2:6; 3:9-10; 4:20) and that the author did not resort to cataloging the vices of his opponents despite the widespread use of such lists in Antiquity (Gal. 5:19-21; I Cor 6:9-11; II Cor 12:20). It was possible that some Johannine Christians were morally indifferent, but this, Brown thought, was probably a direct result of a Christology which was salvifically impotent because an emphasis on the humanity of Jesus effectively nullified his death. It was against a wrong view of the being and function of Jesus that the author railed, because false views

[97] C. H. Talbert suggested that some of the Gnostic opponents combined eschatological skepticism with an ethical libertinism (Vigiliae Christianae 20 [1966] 141-45). Antinomian teaching is reported in Irenaeus, Adversus Haereses 1. 1-12, and in Clement of Alexandria, Stromateis 3. 5. Pointing to Τεκνία, μηδεὶς πλανάτω ὑμᾶς (3:7) Houlden emphasizes that the deceit was not only doctrinal but ethical; thus it indicates some form of libertinism as part of a gnostic creed (J. L. Houlden, The Johannine Epistles, 94-95). S. S. Smalley understood 2:3, 6, 22, 28; 3:4, 7; 4:2 to represent the views of those who undervalued obedience and right conduct for Christian living (an antinomian and libertine inclination) (1, 2, 3 John, 43, 52, 112, 132, 154, 166, 269).

[98] J. Bogart, Orthodox and Heretical Perfectionism in the Johannine Community as evident in the First Epistle of John, 124, 129.

[99] Kenneth Grayston, The Johannine Epistles, 25.

inevitably translated into moral neglect. The author's demand for love of the brethren found its best explanation in the context of a high Christology of the opponents, for had the earthly life of Jesus been properly appropriated they would have continued to love those loyal to the author, i.e., the brethren (2:9-11) and would not have left the community.

Brown next embarked on a rather extensive comparison of opponents who espoused a high Christology with known heresies described in the anti-Gnostic literature of the early Church Fathers. He noted that many commentators assumed that Ignatius of Antioch (c. 110 CE) was aware of the Johannine writings and that therefore the opponents berated in his works would have had characteristics similar to those of the Epistle's antagonists.[100] Ignatius appeared to direct his attack against those who were docetically inclined, although Jewish Christians were certainly also in view.[101] While some maintained that the two groups represented one and the same opponent,[102] Brown argued that Ignatius was fighting along two fronts, "and that both his adversaries were heterodox, but on opposite extremes."[103] This supported his contention that the Johannine community was embattled along two fronts; during the earlier FG period Jewish Christians were criticized for holding a low Christology, whereas during the later period of the Epistles the secessionists were reproached for an excessively high estimation of the

[100] Unwilling to accept Ignatius' direct knowledge of the Johannine writings, Brown suggested rather that Ignatius was aware of the "Johannine ambience" (The Community of the Beloved Disciple, 156).

[101] In the *Letter to the Philadelphians* 6:1 and the *Letter to the Magnesians* 8:1; 10:2-3 Ignatius appeared to be directing his comments to those who were Jewish Christians. In contrast, the *Letter to the Smyrnaeans* 1-3 and the *Letter to the Trallians* 9-10 seems to be directed against those tending toward docetism.

[102] C. K. Barrett, "Jews and Judaizers in the Epistles of Ignatius," in Jews, Greeks and Christians, ed. by R. Hamerton-Kelly and R. Scroggs (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1976) 220-44.

[103] R. E. Brown, The Community of the Beloved Disciple, 155. S. S. Smalley accepted the double nature of the heresy being combatted in Ignatius' letters (1, 2, 3 John, xxiii; xxiv; 60; 113). R. Schnackenburg drew attention to both groups in the Ignatian letters and wrote that the elements of Judaism attacked "findet sich in den Johannesbriefen keine Spur" (Die Johannesbriefe) 22.

person of Christ. Along with Schnackenburg,[104] Brooke,[105] and Marshall,[106] Brown concluded that the precise language that Ignatius employed to criticize the views of those who denied the humanity of Jesus was not to be found in the Epistles.[107]

Brown recognized that mid-second century *gnostic systems* could not be utilized to elucidate early forms of *gnosis*, but that its antecedents were nonetheless unmistakably present in Christian literature.[108] In light of this, the term *proto-gnostic* was applied as a descriptive label for what was thought accurately to represent an early form of incipient Gnosticism.[109] Brown

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[104] After assessing the docetic views attacked in the letters of Ignatius, Schnackenburg contended that the full docetism in view in the letters "fehlt in I Joh: eine ausgesprochen 'doketische' Christologie wird nicht erkennbar" (Die Johannesbriefe, 22).

[105] A. E. Brooke stated that the "language of the Johannine Epistles does not necessarily presuppose the more precise docetism" exemplified by the language that Ignatius employed to criticize his opponents (The Johannine Epistles, xlv.

[106] I. H. Marshall aligned himself with Schnackenburg's assessment of the Docetics in the letters of Ignatius (The Epistles of John) 21.

[107] Commentators turned to the following letters of Ignatius for his views concerning the Docetics: *Letter to the Smyrnaeans* 1-3; 5:2; 6:2; *Letter to the Magnesians* 11; *Letter to the Trallians* 9f. In addition Polycarp vii, and Turtullian, *De Carni Christi*, xxiv, *Adversus Valentinianos* 4:1 are cited for their views. See also Kenneth Grayston (The Johannine Epistles, 21-2).

[108] Bultmann contended that gnostic thought existed prior to the advent of Christianity in the works of Philo of Alexandria, in speculations of late Judaism, e.g., the wisdom myth, and in the Qumran writings (The Gospel of John, trans. by G. R. Beasely-Murray [Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1971] 8, 9).

[109] Brown argued that the terms *gnostic* and *proto-gnostic* were far too imprecise to be of any use in shedding light on the specific character of the opposition in I John. Flemming Fleinert-Jensen added that the meaning of the term *gnostic* was too diffuse prior to 150 CE and thus was better left out of any description concerning the antagonists in I John Commentaire de la Première Épître de Jean, Lire la Bible, 56 (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1982). Smalley preferred the terms "gnostic tendencies" or "pre-gnosticism" (1, 2, 3 John, xxv). Kenneth Grayston accepted the term *gnosticism* as descriptive of estimates of the nature of Jesus relating to knowing God and being begotten of God, but it was a *soft* gnosis rather than the *hard* gnosticism of the mid-second century (The Johannine Epistles, 26). Robert Kysar held that the dissenters were "separatists who held positions which anticipated the emergence of gnostic Christianity" possibly expressed in some of the literature of the library from Nag Hammadi (I, II, III John, Augsburg Commentary on the New Testament [Minneapolis, Minnesota: Augsburg Publishing House, 1986] 16-20). J. L. Houlden suggested that in I John we meet a stage in teaching which represented a rearguard action against "Gnostic type tendencies" in the interpretation of the FG, which failed "because of the attractiveness at that

scoured the anti-gnostic literature of the Church Fathers and the documents of the Nag Hammadi library for possible parallel expressions and ideas[110] that might elucidate the views of the adversaries in I John.[111] After reviewing the material Brown concluded that the late date of the documents and the similar gnostic sounding language in the FG helped little to clarify the nature of the Gnostic threat.[112] Moreover, the standard polemic of the passages revealed little about relations between groups, so that the *gnostic*

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period of the 'Gnostic style' of thought and life" and because the "Johannine guardians" were insufficient for the task (The Johannine Epistles, 14, 19). I. H. Marshall pointed out that even though the seeds of gnostic thought were in the New Testament and that the false teachers in I John were forerunners of the developed Gnostic sects of the second century, it was nevertheless misleading to label it *gnosticism*. He preferred the terms "incipient or pre-gnosticism" (The Epistles of John, 14, 15).

[110] Brown suggests that the following Nag Hammadi treatises are often cited because they furnish some possible examples of similarities to the gnostic sounding language of I John; e.g., *The Paraphrase of Shem*; *The Gospel of Truth* (I 26:19-35); *The Gospel of Mary* (BG 8502, I 7:10); *Discourse on the Eighth and Ninth* (VI 62:30-63); *Hypostasis of the Archons* (II 96:35-97:4); *Gospel of Truth* (I 43:10); *The Second Treatise of the Great Seth* (VII 49:10-59; *The Apocalypse of Peter* (VII 81:3-14); *Apocryphon of James* (11:4-6); which reads "I intercede on your behalf with the Father, and he will forgive you much," is seen to echo I John 2:1-2. See also Pheme Perkins, *The Gnostic Dialogue*, 150). The treatise, *The Acts of the Holy Apostle Thomas* (New Testament Apocrypha II.518) reads "whose human body we handled even with our hands, and his appearance we saw transfigured with our eyes," cites I John 1:1. *The Gospel of Truth* (I 30:25-35) is seen to represent another parallel to I John 1:1, "For when they had seen him and had heard him, he granted them to taste him and to smell him and to touch the beloved son."

[111] Klaus Wengst carefully searched the anti-gnostic literature of the early church fathers and conveniently listed all possible gnostic similarities to I John (Häresie und Orthodoxie im Spiegel des ersten Johannesbriefes, 15-34). See also Klaus Wengst, Der erste, zweite und dritte Brief des Johannes, Ökumenischer Taschenbuch-Kommentar zum Neuen Testament 16 (Gerd Mohn:Gütersloher Verlaghaus, 1963) 25-7.

[112] It has been shown that the FG was a favorite among Gnostic exegetes (Elaine Pagels, The Johannine Gospel in Gnostic Exegesis). Andrew K. Helmbold, The Nag Hammadi Gnostic Texts and the Bible (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1967). R. Mcl. Wilson, "Nag Hammadi and the New Testament," New Testament Studies 28 (1982) 289-302. Pheme Perkins, "Logos Christologies in the Nag Hammadi Codices," Vigiliae Christianae 35 (1981) 379-396. J. L. Houlden drew attention to the popularity of the FG among the Valentinian Gnostics, and that it was only because of Irenaeus and the Muratorian Canon that it "comes into any wide acceptance in indubitably orthodox circles" (The Johannine Epistles, 11-20, esp. 11). E. Käsemann regarded the FG as tending clearly and frequently in the direction of gnostic thought (Testament of Jesus [London: 1968]).

hypothesis created more difficulties than it solved. Brown also pointed to the statements of I John (1:6, 8, 10; 2:4, 6, 9: 4:20) thought to reflect gnostic elements, and argued that they did not appear to be false or objectionable to the author since in several places he affirmed them as much as he opposed them.[113] Brown admitted that it was quite possible for both the author and his enemies to have uttered the same claims, but the understanding of the latter lay closer to gnosticism than did the author's. The author was therefore not explicitly contradicting Gnostic ideas, but because the implications for conduct in each was different he roundly criticized those who hypocritically asserted one thing and yet lived another. Brown argued that eventually the adversaries in the Johannine community became *Gnostics* and "catalyzed the development of the early Gnostic systems."[114] Briefly discussing Cerinthus,[115] the candidate most frequently identified as representative of an early Gnosticism,[116] Brown concluded that the late

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[113] A. E. Culpepper observed of I John 2:4, 6, 9 that the "claims are not in themselves false or objectionable." Indeed, it was quite possible for the author to have made these same claims himself (1 John 2 John 3 John, 24). R. E. Brown remarked that the author "rarely rejects their claims outright; rather he criticizes the way the implications of those claims are understood" (1:6; 2:6 5:18; 3:9-10) (The Epistles of John, 63-64). Contrary to other commentators, Smalley took 2:4, 6, 9 to be "positive assurances which may be adopted by the true believer (1, 2, 3, John, 46). C. Haas accepted the statements as the "propositions of the false teachers given in direct discourse" (A Translator's Handbook on the Letters of John, 45).

[114] R. E. Brown, The Epistles of John, 65.

[115] Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses* 1:23-28; 3:3.4; 1:26.1: *Epistula Apostolorum* I.1-6 (New Testament Apocrypha, ed. by Edgar Hennecke and Wilhelm Schneemelcher [Philadelphia:The Westminster Press, 1963] 191-227).

[116] A. E. Brooke, The Johannine Epistles, xlv-xlix. Klaus Wengst, "Probleme der Johannesbriefe," 3753-3772. J. L. Houlden, The Johannine Epistles, 36, 37, 126. Klaus Wengst, Häresie und Orthodoxie im Spiegel des ersten Johannesbriefes, 24-38. S. S. Smalley, while accepting that Cerinthus was Gnostic and Docetic in his theological inclination, also asserted that he was a Jew with Ebionite leanings as described by Irenaeus' (*Adversus Haereses* 1:22) (1, 2, 3 John, xxv). I. H. Marshall listed the various reasons why the Cerinthian thesis has become less popular: (1) noted features of Cerinthus' teaching were absent in the Epistle, e.g., no reference to a superior God and the inferior creator of the cosmos; no reference to Jesus being the son of an inferior creator-god; (2) some of the heretics' teachings in the first Epistle were not to found in the work of Cerinthus (The Epistles of John, 17, 18). After assessing the views of Cerinthus, Schnackenburg concluded that the evidence was wanting and therefore not to be found in the Epistle (Die Johannesbriefe 19-23. Judith M. Lieu suggested that in the desire to define precisely the views of the enemies, too much weight has been placed on second century information, including the reports about the views of Cerinthus ("Authority to Become Children of God," 210-228). Klaus Wengst said that "allerdings kann man die im I Joh bekämpften Gegner nicht einfach mit Kerinth und seinen Anhängern identifizieren." But

evidence and the disparity of views between the dissidents of I John and Cerinthus militated against any precise identification with him.

He insisted therefore that the situation underlying I John was the result of a schism brought about by disparate interpretations of Christology,[117] and of ethics derived from the FG. It was quite apparent to Brown that the author devoted more time to condemning attitudes related to moral behaviour, sin, and the violation of the love command, than he spent correcting secessionist Christology. While the author appeared to quote the slogans of the secessionists (1:6, 8, 10; 2:4, 6, 9; 4:20), Brown asserted that they are perfectly defensible in light of the theology of the FG (I John 2:4, 6, 9; cf., FG 17:22, 23, 26; 14:7; 3:21; 8:12). The dispute therefore did not lie in the claims made but in the "failure to draw *proper* behavioral implications from the claims..."[118] Brown also maintained that "every idea of the secessionists can be plausibly explained as derivative from the Johannine

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the opponents in I John did nonetheless already exhibit the theological tendencies laid out in the work of Cerinthus. Therefore, "stehen sie zwischen dem JohEv und Kerinth auf einer Linie, die von dem dieses Evangelium tragenden Traditionskreis über Kerinth in die christliche Gnosis führt." The opponents based their Christological views on the FG which also agreed with the Christology of Cerinthus. Cerinthus himself probably relied on the FG for these same views, in which case it was not so much that he was a model of their views as that they are forerunners of his (Der erste, zweite und dritte Brief des Johannes, 26). Relying on Irenaeus (*Adversus Haereses* 3.11.1; 3.11.7) Kenneth Grayston provided a handy summary of Cerinthus' views (The Johannine Epistles, 14, 15).

[117] A uniquely high estimation of the divinity of Jesus expressed in the claim of pre-existence in the FG and its rejection by the Jews led to the expulsion of Christian Jews from the synagogue. The high Christology "theologically was the cornerstone of Johannine soteriology" (R. E. Brown, The Epistles of John, 74). Inevitably the tradition of the FG was perverted by the secessionists who negated the importance of Jesus in his earthly career, and who refused to acknowledge that Jesus had come in the flesh and in the blood (5:6). While one is hard pressed to squeeze a sophisticated Docetism out of such texts as John 1:14; 19:34; 20:27, a subtle secessionist position could be derived from the passages by their refusal to acknowledge that his "being in the flesh was essential to the picture of Jesus as the Christ, the son of God" (Brown, 77). Ultimately the salvific importance of the coming of Jesus was denied. Brown claimed that the Epistolary author's attempt to get back to the asumptions of the FG may be most clearly seen in his attempt to defend the human career of Jesus against the secessionists who negated the importance of Jesus' earthly career.

[118] R. E. Brown, The Epistles of John, 80; italics mine.

tradition preserved in the GJohn."[119] The dissidents were *innovators* or *progressives* perverting ὃ ἦν ἀπ' ἀρχῆς, namely, the tradition from the beginning. A series of serious Christological aberrations due to a misreading of the FG eventuated in a secession from the Johannine Community. Brown suggested that the Christological views of the secessionists were the result of distortions based on a misreading of the FG: John gave a portrait of Jesus which relativized his humanity, and certain elements in the Gospel lessened the salvific import of the public ministry of Jesus. This eventually led to the stress that the human existence of Jesus, while real, was not important salvifically. To correct these misreadings, I John was written as a patterned commentary on the FG in order to "preserve an interpretation for insiders rather than to convince outsiders."[120]

Brown's designation of I John as a patterned commentary helped him to explain the literary nature of I John. He argued that since the many genre classifications posed by a variety of scholars[121] helped little to clarify the nature of I John, it would be better to describe instead its basic function. I John was a non-systematic patterned commentary of the FG which attempted to expound ideas distorted by the dissidents within the Johannine community.[122] The exposition was not directed specifically to the antagonists

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[119] Ibid., 72.

[120] Ibid., 91.

[121] A "universal religious tractate" (Hans Windisch, Die Katholischen Briefe, Handbuch zum Neuen Testament [Tübingen: Mohr, 1911] 136); "informal tract or homily" (C. H. Dodd, The Johannine Epistles, xxi); "instructional tract" (Pheme Perkins, The Johannine Epistles [Wilmington Delaware: Michael Glazier, Inc., 1979] xvi); "enchiridion" (Kenneth Grayston, The Johannine Epistles, 4); "a written sermon or pastoral address" (I. H. Marshall, The Epistles of John, 14); "anthology of sermons" (R. Kysar, I, II, III John, 16); "manifesto - a public declarations of intentions" (A. Culpepper, 1 John, 2 John, 3 John, 4); "paper" (S. S. Smalley, 1, 2, 3 John, xxxiii); "letter-like" on the basis of the 13 reminders by the author that "he writes" and of the 12 times in which the object is 'you' (Klaus Wengst, "Probleme der Johannesbriefe," 3761).

[122] Shifting the emphasis from *genre* to *function* has found some support, but whether the designation *commentary* is to be its primary function has been questioned (F. Segovia, "Recent Research in the Johannine Letters," 133). S. S. Smalley questioned whether I John should be regarded "as some kind of deliberately patterned comment on the FG" because presumably it would "have echoed the text of the FG more explicitely" (1, 2, 3 John, xxvii).

but to those within the community susceptible to their stimulus and influence and therefore in danger of being deceived.[123] The writer of I John "deliberately wore the mantle of the evangelist." The author imitated the prologue of the FG and reused FG polemic, once directed externally but now redirected toward the secessionists,[124] and corrected the false beliefs of the secessionists. These factors helped Brown to explain I John's basic function within the development of the Johannine community.

While elsewhere in the New Testament the ongoing teaching was the responsibility of firmly entrenched groups of *presbuteroi* who preserved the apostolic teaching and protected the flock, in the FG, claimed Brown, the matter was dealt with in an entirely different manner. It was the *paraklete*, par excellence, who was the teacher and who guided the believers in the way that they should go (John 15:26-27). Brown noted, however, that the *we* of the prologue of I John denoted a group of authoritative teachers. This would appear to contradict the role of the Holy Spirit in its teaching function. Brown held that the *we* need not necessarily imply such an association, but that the *we* could refer to witnesses still loyal to the author charged with the task of preserving the tradition that stemmed from the beloved disciple. The *we* in this instance then "consists of the tradition-bearers and interpreters who stand in special relationship to the Beloved Disciple in their attempt to preserve his witness."[125] The Beloved disciple, the redactor of the FG, and the author of the Epistle(s) make up the Johannine School: "their authority is not as teachers but as witnesses who are vehicles of the paraklete, the only teacher."[126]

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[123] Brown pointed out that the evidence indicated that the secessionists were quite successful in their attempts to win adherents; the incipient gnosticism of the secessionists catalyzed the development of later, well developed gnostic systems (The Epistles of John, 104-115).

[124] For example, the polemical arsenal would have used the dualistic language of the FG: love/hate; light/darkness; truth/falsehood; from above/from below; of God/of the Devil, etc.

[125] Ibid., 95.

[126] Ibid., 96.

Brown exhaustively analyzed the many grammatical and interpretive conundrums of I John 1:1-4, and concluded that the epistolary *incipit* was a deliberate reconsideration of the prologue of the FG. The *what* clauses successfully defended against the views of those who would emasculate Jesus of his humanity. By reiterating "what was from the beginning" expressed in a series of evocative sensory verbs, the author disclosed the person and ministry of Jesus as he had revealed himself to his followers. In this lay the message of life, for he who had been eternal with the Father had now been made manifest by him. As a representative of the *we* and therefore of the Johannine school, the author sought to preserve the actual eyewitness experience stemming from the Beloved Disciple by proclaiming it to the Johannine Christians and thereby drawing them into fellowship with him and protecting them from the dangerous seductions of the dissidents. Brown understood ἀπ' ἀρχῆς to signify the "beginning of the ministry when Jesus first set up a relationship with his disciples. Intra-Johannine conflict erupted because the tradition of the FG was being distorted by members once in fellowship with the community. In the Gospel of John the pre-incarnate status of Jesus needed emphasis in the light of his humanity, especially among those who had seen Jesus live and die, in I John an over-emphasis of his divinity by those who had never seen or heard the historical Jesus, necessitated the stress on Ἰησοῦν Χριστὸν ἐν σαρκὶ ἐληλυθότα (I John 4:2). The author's stress on what was from the beginning in parallel with "what we have heard...seen...looked at...felt," corrected the misperception that the human career of Jesus was not "salvifically significant."[127]

Brown placed his interpretative schema firmly into the context of the theological constraints of a developing Johannine Community. Though he allowed for some form of *gnostic influence*, he did not consider the early stages of that influence to be important to understanding the literary phenomena of I John. Instead, the notion of *secession* by those within the community who had misinterpreted certain key theological ideas about Jesus in the FG became the occasion for I John's composition. The author of I

[127] R. E. Brown, The Community of the Beloved Disciple, 113.

John was compelled to respond to these distorted theological issues because they were becoming a threat to the continued security and unity of the community. In Brown's view, I John functioned as patterned commentary on the FG to correct the issues distorted by the secessionists for those still within the community. In such a view, the language of the text functioned primarily to disclose the theology and the identity of the Johannine community.

6. *K. GRAYSTON*

Grayston suggests that I John resembled an *instruction booklet* that was designed to recall the tradition during perplexing times.[128] The tradition was upheld by guardians and consisted chiefly of the love commandment and a focus on Jesus, the son of God. Their purpose was to invite the community into fellowship with them and to secure the tradition from the false interpretations of dissidents who had withdrawn from it. Grayston discussed a variety of opinions regarding the relation of I John to the Gospel.[129] He contended that while the writer "regarded the Gospel as a fixed authority" he shaped its teaching to speak to his situation but in the process also perverted it partly because of his inferior writing ability. Grayston took the view that I John betrayed the hand of more than one author: one who composed the initial statement and another who expanded it.[130] He suggested, however, that the question of single or multiple authorship was no longer a helpful one but must be recast in the light of where the Epistle stood vis-à-vis the Gospel and its development and influence on the Johannine community. Placing it

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[128] Kenneth Grayston, The Johannine Epistles, The New Century Bible Commentary (William. B. Eerdmans, 1984) 4.

[129] Dionysius of Alexandria early on noted the literary/linguistic relation of I John to the FG (Eusebius, Ecclesiastical History VII. 25.18-21). W. F. Howard, "The Common Authorship of the Johannine Gospel and the Epistles," Journal of Theological Studies 48 (1947) 12-25. W. G. Wilson, "An Examination of the Linguistic Evidence Adduced against the Unity of Authorship of the First Epistle of John and the Fourth Gospel," Journal of Theological Studies 49 (1948) 147-56. There is now general agreement that arguments based on sylistic and linguistic similarities and difference are inconclusive on the authorship question. See further, I. H. Marshall, The Johannine Epistles, 31-42. C. H. Dodd, The Johannine Epistles, xlvii-lvi.

[130] 2:1-2 and 2:12-14 have been interpolated by a writer with a pastoral concern.

somewhere within the process of the origins, growth and development of Johannine Christianity allowed for a more flexible estimation of its chronological relationship to the FG. The numerous passages in I John closely paralleling the Gospel frequently yielded the common impression that the FG was presupposed in the Epistle. But, asked Grayston, "did the writer of the Epistle draw them from the Gospel that he already knew, or did the Gospel writer incorporate them lucidly in his more extensive work?"[131] He maintained that the many difficulties encountered when the FG is accorded priority may be overcome when the order was reversed. A number of the passages in the Epistle, he claimed, resembled trial runs for concepts subsequently developed in the FG.[132] He cited the *incipit* of I John as one example of an attempt at a statement which later became the basis of the FG's poetically embellished prologue.[133]

Grayston begins assessing the errors of the dissidents by turning to Irenaeus's description of the views of Cerinthus. He conveniently lists his teachings and the absence in I John of some of his most important propositions.[134] Grayston registered some reservation about the extent to

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[131] Kenneth Grayston delineated three assumptions which reinforced the priority of the FG: (1) the FG was a foundation document, the Epistle its successor; (2) the Christological views opposed in the Epistle were gnostically advanced beyond what was seen in the Gospel; (3) the Epistle's interest in ecclesiology was not evident on the FG (The Johannine Epistles, 11).

[132] The assumption that the FG was presupposed in the Epistle necessitated explaining several important issues: (1) why did the Epistle reproduce ideas belonging to an earlier period of Christianity? That is, why was its Christology less well advanced than that of the FG? (2) Why did the role of the Spirit-Paraklete not appear in the Epistle? Its absence in the Epistle probably indicated that the author was ignorant about the role of the Spirit.

[133] Grayston listed the other passages where he felt the priority of the Epistle could be safely assumed: (a) the teaching about the spirit 2:20, 25; 3:23; (b) Cain 3:12-13; (c) speech and deeds 3:18; (d) believing in the name of the son of him 3:23; (e) the world 4:14; (f) about judgement 4:17; (g) 5:20-21.

[134] Several important elements of Cerinthus's teaching were absent: (a) the world was created by a demiurge separate and remote from the supreme power; (b) the inferior power was unaware of the God who was over all; (c) Jesus was the product of the union of Joseph and Mary and therefore not born of a virgin. From this Grayston concluded that the antagonists were not far along the way to Cerinthus (The Johannine Epistles, 15-6).

which the Christological problem may be attributed to him.[135] Since the Epistle contributed to the composition of the FG it could no longer be assumed that the adversaries were Johannine Christians distorting the Christology of the FG. Ultimately the solution to the problem for Grayston did not lie in comparing the dissidents' views with either Cerinthus or Ignatius of Antioch, but by "noticing where the emphases fall in the Epistle," by asking what views are being contested[136] and comparing them to the teaching of the author who "set them out in recognizable and memorable form."[137] Grayston boiled it down to three basic disputes: (1) how to rightfully appropriate knowledge of God and participation in him which both author and opponent claimed, but in different ways; (2) agreement that community members could not sin, but disagreement about how sinlessness was to be achieved, with the author appealing to the expiatory work of Christ while the opponents appealed to the spirit; and (3) the refusal to acknowledge Jesus as the son of God. For Grayston the opposition was to be characterized as an enthusiastic group which stressed knowledge of God and sinlessness but contested how each might be obtained and which adamantly refused to acknowledge certain claims about Jesus of Nazareth. Nevertheless, given the similarity of views between the author and his opponents, both were *gnostic* in orientation, but it was at the most a "soft gnosis" and not the "hard gnosticism" of the second century."[138]

In light of the distinction between the writer and readers exemplified by the *we* and *you* in the opening lines of the *incipit*, Grayston made a

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[135] Wengst, in his study of the Cerinthian impact upon the views of the dissidents in I John, noted the absence of his cosmology and concluded that Cerinthus was not a model of their views but that Johannine Christians who had distorted the FG tradition were forerunners of his ("Probleme der Johannesbriefe," 3760).

[136] Grayston listed the chief indications as following: 1:3. 6. 8. 10; 2:3-4, 6, 9, 18, 22, 19, 20, 23, 28; 3:2, 9-10, 17; 4:1, 2-3, 5, 12, 14, 17; 5:6. Using these indicators he established the false views the author was contesting (The Johannine Epistles, 16-8).

[137] Ibid., 22-7. The central convictions of the author were: 2:10, 22, 29; 3:3, 6-8, 9, 10, 14, 24; 4:7, 21; 5:1, 4, 10, 12, 18

[138] Ibid., 26.

contrast between the *we* and the *you*. Presumably the author was part of a Christian group which was claiming to have an original experience, and in their desire to promote fellowship, the author, as their representative, addressed the readers to disclose to them what they possessed. In this way, the clumsy grammar could be explained on the ground that vv. 1-4 represented "a piece of committee drafting expanded in successive stages to cover additional points, and was insufficiently rewritten."[139] The first stage included a simple statement about their primal experience and its proclamation (vv. 1a,; 3ab; 3c). Subsequently a debate about how to preserve eternal life (5:11, 12; 5:13, 16, 20) necessitated a second expansion which was the addition of περὶ τοῦ λόγου τῆς ζωῆς (vv. 1a; 3ab; 1f; 3c). A third expansion by the addition of the modifying relative clauses (1a, b, c, d, e, f, 3c) countered the belief that because God had been seen by non-physical perception, such an experience absolved them of responsibility to those whom they could see (4:12, 20). The last stage balanced the contention of possessing an original experience with the thought of divine initiative: the life was made manifest (v. 2) and it was this to which they gave testimony.

While "Ο ἦν ἀπ' ἀρχῆς recalled the creative word of God and the pre-existent logos of the prologue of the FG,[140] here it referred rather to the earliest convictions about Christ in the Christian community that were set out to counter novel beliefs (2:7; 3:11; 2:18; 4:3; 2:24).[141] Grayston wondered then what strong motive would have prompted the addition of a series of sensory verbs to an originally uncluttered introduction. Grayston thought it to be quite unlikely that the neuter relative formulations signified in some way those who had seen, heard and touched Jesus after his resurrection, and held that the sensory verbs were added in order to ground the "earliest convictions" in the objective life of Christians in opposition to those who

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[139] Ibid., 35.

[140] See his discussion (The Johannine Epistles, 40-5).

[141] If "that which was from the beginning" signified the pre-existent Christ, then the lack of grammatical agreement between the neuter formulations of the modifying clauses and the "word of life" is difficult to explain.

enthusiastically relativized the convictions.[142] Against a *gnosis* which spiritualized access to the true Jesus, the *we* firmly asserted what they had seen, heard and touched. In keeping with the drift of his argument, Grayston took "the word of life" as a descriptive genitive meaning the "life-giving instruction."[143] The *word* dwelling in the community was the means whereby sin could be recognized and the evil one overcome. In it was also encapsulated the commandment of love. The author concluded with a statement of purpose, "that you might have fellowship with us," that is, an invitation to share in the word of life.

7. *CONCLUSIONS*

In summary, this overview of the *incipit* and its interpreters shows first that the ungrammatical prologue, the *logos*, the sensory verbs, the parenthetical word of life, and the similarity of I John's *incipit* with the prologue of the FG are thought to need explanation. Second, it is agreed that the resolution to these problems is best achieved by establishing an historical referent as a clue to the meaning of these issues. Third, the discussion of the meaning of the *incipit* is thus primarily directed by an attempt to answer certain historical questions. Here it is thought that the clumsy grammar of the *incipit* and its obscure meaning can be best explained in light of the author's attempt to set the beliefs of his enemies straight. In so doing, the author frequently over/understates his case and in the passion of the moment writes less eloquently than his greater literary partner, the author of the FG.

The grammatical tangle of the *incipit*, the ambiguous parenthetical ὁ λόγος τῆς ζωῆς, the term *logos*, and the sensory verbs, are given a coherent explanation by positing the existence of various historical revisions of Christological concepts that affected the Johannine community theologically.

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[142] Grayston pointed to Col. 2:21, *Gospel of Thomas*, logion 17 and *Gospel of Truth* 30:25 for confirmation (The Johannine Epistles, 39).

[143] Ibid., 40.

During the intervening period of the completion of the FG and the composition of the Epistles, Christological errors had begun to creep into the community. Some followers of such errors had already seceded, but continued to be a threat to the community's adherents because of their false claims. In such a threatening environment the author was compelled to rehearse the tradition from the beginning and to stress that the life had been made manifest, thus countering various false conceptions about the person of Jesus. As we shall see later, by reading the context-specific language of 2:18-24 and 4:1-4 back into the *incipit* (1:1-4), the language of the *incipit* is perceived to function polemically, in a way best explained in the context of a community in conflict with those who had seceded because of theological differences. Therefore, despite the non-specific and universal character of the *incipit* it anticipated the fundamental Christological error of the opponents.

What precisely the historical occasion was that triggered the author of I John to write finds considerably less agreement because the data required to reconstruct accurately the origins of I John are lacking. The historical referent that is encoded in the language of the *incipit* is almost impossible to reconstruct. The inability to reconstruct the "crisis event" that precipitated I John forces the commentator to make a choice between a number of "historical options" that best explain the problems isolated in the *incipit* and determine its meaning. As we have shown, however, there is neither consensus about the historical event that motivated the author to write, nor agreement about the nature of the Christological error.

In the analysis of the next section, as we shall see, 1:6, 8, 10; 2:4, 6, 9 are perceived to represent the actual slogans that the opponents employed to oppose the theological views of the author. While it is generally accepted that the statements represent the views of the opponents, what exactly they confessed and denied continues to be the subject of debate.

B. SLOGANS OF THE 'OPPONENTS' (1:6, 8, 10; 2:4, 6, 9; 4:20):

The six verses of I John 1:6, 8, 10, and 2:4, 6, 9 have long been recognized for their formulaic and antithetical structure. Noting the intriguing form of the verses, Painter concludes that the 'form' of these series of verses makes recognizable the 'boasts' of the opponents.[144] Here, perhaps more than anywhere else in the writing, is given the clearest indication of the quality of the erroneous views held by the adversaries and criticized by the author. By reformulating the 'slogans' of the opponents in such a memorable form, the author recaptures what appear to be "real statements made by people in the church to which John was writing, and that they reflect the outlook of the people who were causing trouble in the church."[145] The discussion has therefore tended to focus on the identity of the author's opponents, on their social setting within Johannine Christianity, and on the character of their theological confession.

Commentators assume that the evidence for these historical foci can be adduced from the series of verses on the basis of their peculiar formulaic and antithetical structure. Verses 6, 8 and 10 begin with the formula ἐὰν εἴπωμεν, and the antithesis is stated in each of three verses which commence with the conditional particle ἐάν (1:7, 9; 2:1). Chapter 2:4, 6, 9 begin with the formula, employing three masculine singular present participles ὁ λέγων. The adversative force of the verses is noted by what follows in the use of the indefinite relative ὃς δ΄ ἄν (2:5). The indefinite relative has been considered to have a force similar to the previous adversative ἐὰν δέ (1:7). Generally,

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144 J. Painter, "The Opponents in I John," 51.

145 I. H. Marshall, The Epistles of John, 110. R. A. Culpepper writes "since the three disapproved conditions each begin with the phrase "if we say...," it is reasonable to assume that some in the elder's community were actually making the assertions" (1 John, 2 John, 3 John, 12-3). R. E. Brown writes that the "substance of the 'boast' is a statement harmonious with secessionist theology...." (The Epistles of John, 197). R. Bultmann holds that 1:6-2:17 is a Source that the author employs, and that the text "of the Source, is commented upon and expanded by the author and by the ecclesiastical redactor...." (The Johannine Epistles, 17). S. S. Smalley suggests that the ideas expressed in these series of verses "were characteristic of the sessionists, who had withdrawn from the community, and defected into the world (1, 2, 3, John, 21).

the particle ἐάν with the subjunctive of the aorist (εἴπωμεν) is taken to be *exceptional* rather than conditional or hypothetical".[146] In such a view, the language introduces something which in its context may be expected to occur, and thus should be rendered to mean *whenever*.[147] The conditional structure of the sentences, therefore, is seen to reflect a possible contingency.[148] Furthermore, it is observed that in the context of the writing the *we* of the verb εἴπωμεν has inclusive force and disclosed the opinions of the false teachers "who had [has] found adherents among those whom the author was addressing".[149] The force of the stylized opening ὁ λέγων of 2:4, 6, and 9 may be taken to parallel the previous three statements, but that the form of the expression is more direct and individualized.[150] The ὅτι after the ὁ

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[146] See C. Haas, M. de Jonge, J.L. Swellengrebel, A Translator's Handbook on the Letters of John, 33. Stephen Langdon, "History of the use of ἐάν for ἄν in Relative Clauses," American Journal of Philology 23 (1903) 447 - 451. Lars Rydbeck, Über den Gebrauch der Partikel ἄν: Ἐάν „ statt "ἄν post relativa, in Fachprosa, Vermeintliche Volkssprache und Neues Testament (Uppsala, 1967) 119 - 147.

[147] A Translator's Handbook on the Letters of John, 33. R. E. Brown pointed out that these conditionals were not merely possible contingencies; rather, they were *exceptional* and were therefore equivalent to *whenever* (The Epistles of John, 197). See also John Painter, "The 'Opponents' in I John," 48 - 71.

[148] A. E. Brooke observed that it was quite unlikely that the author would have "wasted his weapons on purely hypothetical situations" (The Johannine Epistles, 13). R. E. Brown indicated that the language here did not merely display possible contingencies but "reflected the language of jurisprudence". The substance of the statement was really a boast harmonious with secessionist theology. These *boasts* were the result of the separation and therefore reflected the thoughts of the adversaries. The author collected the lapidary statements and employed them to rebut their views (The Epistles of John, 197). R. Alan Culpepper held that the statements did not represent "hypothetical situations or remote possibilities", but embodied serious claims of influential members of the community (1 John, 2 John, 3 John, 13).

[149] The inclusive force of the first person plural pronoun held true in all the occurrences throughout 1:5 - 2:11 (A Translator's Handbook on the Letters of John, 33).

[150] A. E. Brooke, The Johannine Epistles, 32. B. F. Westcott took the three participles as signifying *directness* in contrast to the comprehensive form cited before ἐὰν εἴπωμεν (1:6, 8, 10). The former implied that the nature of the danger was immediate and threatening while in the latter it was diffuse (The Epistles of St. John: The Greek Text With Notes, 46 - 47). R. E. Brown urged that this distinction could not be maintained on the grounds that the Greek participle could be translated as a conditional. Interestingly enough, however, Brown also exploited the stylistic variation to suit his purposes when he suggested that ἐὰν εἴπωμεν more loosely represented the position of the opponents rephrased by the author, whereas ὁ λέγων might "here approach being exact quotations from the secessionists" (The Epistles of John, 252 - 253).

λέγων (v. 4), while introducing indirect discourse, requires a rendering of what follows in direct discourse.[151] Each of the statements introduces the propositions of the adversaries.

Grammatically the force of the expressions is taken to reveal an immediate and threatening circumstance that the author was compelled to address. Furthermore, the form of the expressions in their stylistic variations captures, more or less accurately, the *boasts* or *slogans* the opponents would have employed to suit their purposes.[152] In his conflict with the antagonists, the author recaptures the essence of their boasts and reformulates them in the language that they would have used to articulate their beliefs. The stylized form and the antithetical structure of the utterances, not only warn the congregation of the subversive character of their denial, but also reveal to them the life-giving character of the author's confession. The expressions signify positively the views which the opponents held and, negatively, the misperceptions which the author attempted to rebut. Through the author's criticism the readers had access to what was known of the views of their "implacable opponent," the antagonists.[153] The semantic horizon of the utterances was therefore located in the conflict between the author and his adversaries, and accordingly the meaning of the antithetical declarations must be sought there.

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[151] Some scribes of the Byzantine textual tradition omitted ὅτι from 2:4, no doubt to bring it in line with 2:6, 9 where it was absent.

[152] R. E. Brown pointed out that the first set of three statements loosely represented what the opponents believed, whereas the second set of three expressions quoted more or less precisely the slogans of the opponents (The Epistles of John, 252). J. Painter considered the differing introductory formulae as nothing more than stylistic variations which did not indicate different levels of accuracy in quotation ("The Opponents in I John," 54). Duane Watson observed that the author of I John had a penchant for groupings of three: for example, the three claims of the secessionists in 1:6, 8, 10 and again in 2:4, 6, 9; the three things the world has to offer (2:16): Watson pointed out that the tendency to group in threes was also evident in I John 2:12 - 14 and did not necessarily indicate a number of separate groups being addressed ("I John 2:12-14 as Distributio, Conduplicatio, and Expolitio: A Rhetorical Understanding," Journal for the Study of the New Testament 35 [1989] 99).

[153] J. Painter, "The 'Opponents' in I John," 50.

Bultmann accounted for the either/or character of the sayings, apart from 4:20, by positing the existence of a source amplified and annotated by an author and a later ecclesiastical redactor.[154] Ultimately what was refuted in them boiled down to a distortion of truth by gnostically inclined members who formulated a Christology which set aside the historical Jesus. The subversive implications of wrong confession for the character and life of the community is the focus of the three-line antithetical sayings. The heretical teachers had assumed a spiritual arrogance which in its disregard for the fundamentals threatened to destroy the fellowship of the community, i.e., they continued to walk in darkness (1:6), continued to claim sinlessness (1:8, 10), continued to disobey his commandments (2:4), and continued to hate the brother (2:9, 10). In the face of the Gnostic aberrations of the truth the author proclaimed his Christological convictions affirming that the eschatological event had occurred fully in history in the person of Jesus Christ, the one come in the flesh (4:2). The believer was therefore under obligation to live out completely its implications. While a variety of source theories have called attention to the antithetical structure of the statements, today, rather than being the result of a *source corrected by an ecclesiastical redactor* they are conjectured to be the consequence of the dissidents' specious *boasts* which the author was compelled to contradict or challenge.[155]

Accordingly, for Dodd the clue to the meaning of the antithetical utterances lay in taking them as allusions to certain "maxims used as watchwords by heretical teachers."[156] The opponents arrogantly claimed to possess superior enlightenment, and speciously asserted to have fellowship with Him while walking in darkness, to have no sin, to have knowledge of Him, and to walk in the light while hating the brother. The author's task was to expose the fallacy inherent in their use which obfuscated their true implication and which "led the church away from the simplicity of the

[154] R. Bultmann, The Johannine Epistles, 17.

[155] See R. E. Brown for a helpful review of the various source theories (The Epistles of John, 36-46).

[156] C. H. Dodd, The Johannine Epistles, 18.

Gospel."[157] Brooke labelled the seven statements as "false pleas put forward by men to excuse their love of darkness" in which the form of the sentence implied a real and pressing danger.[158] Christological misapprehension, possibly because of the impact of a mélange of Jewish and Gnostic ideas, led to conduct which in fact belied their very claims. Grayston took the clauses to represent *destructive statements* of the enemies, in which the conditional formulae did not simply warn the community "against thoughts that may occur to them, but the author introduced them to repudiate views actually expressed by a dissident section of the community."[159] Smalley similarly accepted the series of antithetical statements as citations of *slogans* by the author which in some way had become heretical catchwords among the Johannine secessionists.[160] The first three sayings (1:6, 8, 10) were variations on a single theme by those gnostically inclined who upheld a separation from sin and claimed that "sin did not affect them."[161] The second set of claims (2:4, 6, 9) represented three variations on a single theme about true knowledge of God and could have been uttered by any true believer, but which were distorted by members of the Johannine church. An erroneous interpretation of the FG's Christology led them to utilize the claims without acknowledging their specific ethical application.[162] Brown believed the seven conditional clauses represented the *boasts* of the secessionists where the first three claims expressed what were "secessionist-inspired *utterances* but rephrased in the author's wording" and the last four (2:4, 6, 9; 4:20) expressed what were "the exact quotations from the secessionists."[163] In each case the substance of the *boasts* betrayed wrong thinking in harmony with secessionist theology.

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[157] Ibid., 18.

[158] A. E. Brooke, The Johannine Epistles, 13-39, 126.

[159] Kenneth Grayston, The Johannine Epistles, 45.

[160] S. S. Smalley, 1, 2, 3 John, 20, 21, 46-7.

[161] Ibid., 21.

[162] Ibid., 46-7.

[163] R. E. Brown, The Epistles of John, 196-8; 253; 533 (italics mine).

Particularly evident from this brief overview is the extent to which each of the commentators is committed to the assumption that the language of the text functions principally to display an historical event which clarified the theological thrust of the utterances. Each of them takes the antithetical statements as representative of the antagonist's views expressed as lapidary slogans cleverly reformulated by the author. The one-sided emphases of the statements not only signify the secessionist's erroneous theology and ethical behaviour, but also reveal what must have been the author's theological position. The conflict between two protagonists was what occasioned the formulation of the antithetical statements both in style and substance and set the polemical tone of the entire writing. It is also clear from this overview that while consensus exists that antagonists were posing problems for the author, virtually no consensus exists about their precise identity or the nature of their false ethical confessions. To seek clarity on the issue, however, commentators turn to I John 2:18-24, 26. In this subunit the hidden polemic of the text is finally made explicit by the introduction of the *antichrists*, whose spirit epitomized the *false teachers* and inspired their specious denials.

C. THE ANTICHRISTS (2:18-24, 26):

As we have shown, the historically opaque language of the *incipit* and of the antithetical slogans obscure both the identity and error of the antagonists. In this subunit the term *antichrist* and the record of an explicit denial uttered by it, reveal the perverse character of the controversy and its theological substance. This supposed clarity is nevertheless beset by a number of difficulties that conceal the exact thrust of the passage. For example, because the designation ἀντίχριστος is peculiar to the Epistles,[164] the origin of the term remains uncertain. This uncertainty has given way to the present consensus that the Johannine antichrist was one type of the diabolical, apocalyptic being expected in the last days before the end. The antichrist

[164] Brown points out that in the Apostolic Fathers the term is found only in Polycarp, *Philip* 7:1, suggesting perhaps that the Johannine community "coined the term 'AntiChrist' for a concept designated less vividly elsewhere" (The Epistles of John, 333).

would materialize and initiate an assault on the truth of God and his people. According to the author of I John, the spirit of the antichrist is now manifest in the false teachers and their erroneous confessions. They deny that Jesus come in the flesh is the Christ (2:22; 4:2), refuse to confess the essential unity of Father and Son (2:23), and erroneously accept that Jesus had come by water but not by blood (5:6). In light of this, commentators assume that the language of the passage represents a polemical restatement of the views of the dissidents. Confronted by these false Christological views, the author of I John responds to the error promulgated by the false teachers in the strongest possible terms. Not only does he set out to correct their falsehoods, but he labels them the antichrists. In the spirit of the *antichrist* these false teachers had seceded from the community but continued to wreak doctrinal havoc within it (2:19).

1. *R. BULTMANN*

I John 2:18-27 constituted for Bultmann a self-contained unit that, he thought, was originally part of an earlier rough draft in which the author finally directly confronted the false teachers. Once part of the community, the teachers were now the ἀντίχριστοι who had left but continued to create disturbances within it. Τίς ἐστιν ὁ ψεύστης εἰ... (v. 22) did not set out to define the error but was designed to historicize the figure of the antichrist.[165] The false denial indicated that the danger was close at hand and real. The hour was at hand, because those who committed the terrible sacrilege of denying that the Father and the Son were one (1:2f; 5:5) were now (νῦν) here. Bultmann argued that because the false teachers were ultimately rooted in the dualism of Gnosticism, they promulgated a heresy which denied that Christ was identical with the historical, earthly Jesus; they "asserted an exclusive antithesis between God and the sensible world."[166] The doctrinal

[165] While the term ἀντίχριστος appeared only in the Johannine Epistles (2:18, 22; 4:3; II John 7), the designation was taken from Jewish Apocalyptic and reinterpreted in a Johannine fashion (R. Bultmann, The Johannine Epistles, 35-6).

[166] Bultmann remarked that the question of the type of gnosticism reflected here was secondary and therefore it was not necessary to seek it in the disciples of Cerinthus, the docetics, or the Jewish heretics (The Johannine Epistles, 38-9).

consequences that the false teachers deduced from the dichotomous relation between Father and Son threatened to destroy the community's basis for fellowship and unity. To counter the threat posed by the false teachers, the author emphasized the importance of fellowship (1:6), keeping the commandments (2:3) and brotherly love (2:9-11). In v. 23 the author drew from a source in order to drive home the point of v. 22, namely, that the Father and Son were an essential unity and anyone who denied this denied both the Father and the Son; indeed anyone who did so was deceiving himself and others (περὶ τῶν πλανών των ὑμᾶς v.26).

2. *A. E. BROOKE*

Brooke also advocated a depersonalized understanding of the ἀντίχριστος historicized in the false teachers. The false teachers promoted error in the spirit of the ἀντίχριστοι.[167] They had once been part of the community but now actively promoted a separation of Jesus from the Christ and denied the essential unity of the Father and Son. On these theological grounds they had seceded from the community. Brooke underlined the importance of ὁ ἀρνούμενος because it signified the fundamental error as a Christological one. While the views of Cerinthus or of the Docetics might have been the reason for the polemical language, the author exhibited little interest in the details of the systems and instead dealt "with the general tendencies of certain types of teaching" which had obviously gone awry.[168] These teachings were threatening to subvert the essential doctrine which was from the beginning, and therefore were eroding the very basis of *koinonia.*

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[167] Noting that the term ἀντίχριστος first occurred in the Epistle (2:18, 22; 4:3; II John 7) and that it was absent from the extant literature (Old Testament, Intertestamental, Rabbinic and New Testament), Brooke alerted the reader to the difficulty this presented in determining its meaning. He conveniently summarized the work of W. Bousset, Der Antichrist (Gottingen, 1895), thereby concluding that while there was no evidence that the author was influenced by the Babylonian legend of Tiâmat, the sea monster, and Marduk and its later development in Judaism, the writer nevertheless appeared to point to a popular legend which probably lay at the foundation of Apostolic preaching (The Johannine Epistles, 69-79). See also the excursus, "Zur Vorgeschichte 'der Anti-Christ"-Erwartung," in Rudolf Schnackenburg, Die Johannesbriefe, 145-149

[168] A. E. Brooke, The Johannine Epistles, 59.

Vv. 23 and 26 were repetitive reassurances for those who knew the truth and a warning for those who practiced deceit.

3. *C. H. DODD*

Dodd based his position on a study of Jewish Apocalyptic, and advocated the view that the author had "rationalized the myth" of the ἀντίχριστος.[169] It was therefore fruitless to isolate a single deadly antichrist. "There is in fact no single antichrist. There are many antichrists. For wherever doctrines are taught that subvert the essential truths of the Gospel, there is Antichrist, and the false teachers are themselves in this sense antichrists."[170] The appearance of the antichrist also coincided with the rise of the false prophets who were inspired by the spirit of error. The lie of the false teachers was in particular their denial that Jesus was the Christ, which in effect also disowned the essential unity of Father and Son (2:22-3). Although the confession was Docetic in character, the false teachers had once belonged to the community so that the solution to the false confessions must be sought in the *kerygma* of the early church. The theme of confession and denial runs as a constant thread through the writings of the New Testament (John 12:44-5; 14:6-9; Matt. 11:27; cf. Luke 10:22; Matt. 10:32-3; Rev. 3:5; Rom 10:9-10, etc.). The author immersed himself in the tradition which incorporated the teaching of Jesus to refute successfully the deadly error. He also urged his readers to hold fast to the fundamentals of the gospel which they had learned from the beginning (1:1).

4. *R. E. BROWN*

Brown draws on Jewish Apocalyptic to give an extensive treatement of the origin of the term *antichrist*, and concludes that in I John the term

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[169] For a detailed discussion see Dodd's, The Johannine Epistles, 48-54.

[170] Ibid., 49.

personified the false teachers.[171] The FG, however, did not contain a prediction about the *antichrist* upon which the later Epistolary author supposedly commented. But the epistolary author's reference to "what had been from the beginning" showed that he was going beyond the tradition of the FG "to the pre-Gospel apocalyptic tradition in early Christianity about personified future evil."[172] The false teachers, claimed Brown, placed an exaggerated emphasis on 'Jesus' in "Jesus is the Christ" which weakened the human content of the formula. It probably derived from the secessionists who had subverted the teaching of the FG (2:22, 23; 3:23; 4:15; 5:1, 5:13; 20:31). In v. 23 the doctrinal misunderstanding concerned the person of the Father and Son and their essential unity. Brown observed that despite the absence of the construction τὸν πατέρα ἔχει in the FG, it probably represented common Johannine vocabulary for entering the new covenant properly understood.[173]

5. *S. S. SMALLEY*

Smalley accepted the anarthrous ἀντίχριστος (2:18) as an indication that its current use had become a titular designation probably derived from a

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[171] The designation 'ἀντίχριστος' is difficult to understand because it appears only in the Epistles. The term, though coined by the author, was thought to have its origins in ancient near east water monster mythologies (Tiâmat/Marduk), which suggested Brown, found their convergence in various Jewish Old Testament myths (Isaiah 51:9; Psalms 74:13-14; 89:11; Job 26:12; Job 40:25-41:26). It was also possible that the author might have had in mind the evil powers personified in the evil angel or satan who continued to deceive human beings and to hinder the work of the apostles (Job 1:16; Ephesians 2:2; II Corinthians 6:15; I Thessalonians 2:18; Ephesians 6:12). Legends about Antiochus Epiphanes IV who had arrogated to himself the power of the gods and who perpetrated the abomination of desolation (Daniel 8;13; 11:31; 12:11; Matthew 24:15) gave rise to the idea of evil embodied in a human (Ezekiel 38:1; 39:1,6). The idea of a *false prophet* who would arise to mislead the people by signs and wonders (Deuteronomy 13:2-6; 18:20), suggested Brown, was personified in a "figure who in the last days would lead people estray by signs and wonders" (*Didache* 16:3-4). These expectations were combined in a variety of ways by Christians to signify expectations of future evil (Revelation 12; 13:11-18; 19:11-21; II Thessalonians 2:1-12). It is possible that a combination of these expectations informed what the author meant when he coined the term *antichrist* (The Epistles of John, 332-36).

[172] Ibid., 336. According to Brown the early christian apocalytic tradition was quite possibly contained in the Synoptic Apocalypse and Revelation.

[173] R. E.Brown, The Epistles of John, 354.

Jewish Apocalyptic background.[174] They were the opponents of Jesus, who by propagating false views about Him were also opposing the writer. They were the "heretical secessionists from his community"[175] who confessed an erroneous Christology which endangered the entire community. Smalley suggested that the mention of the liar who denied that Jesus was the Christ was either a reference to the ex-pagan Docetic who refused to acknowledge the real humanity of Christ, or the ex-Jewish heretic who denied that Jesus was the Christ. The false Christology inevitably led them to disown the Father and the Son, as confirmed in v. 23 where the author spells out its terrible consequences: those who disown the Son do not possess the Father.

6. *K. GRAYSTON*

Grayston did not accept the identification of the antichrist with a well known and dreaded figure because the term lacked the definite article. He took it to refer loosely to anyone who opposed Christ.[176] A number of crucial references implied that the concept of *antichrist* was part of a community tradition and that it had been fulfilled by many antichrists who had left the community (I John 4:1 'false prophets'; 2:26 'deceivers'). For example, the author asserted that they would have remained had they not been antichrists, but instead they had gone into the world as false prophets (4:1-5). They were the deceivers because they claimed to be anointed by the holy one, and they denied that Jesus was the Christ (5:23). On the basis of these statements, Grayston concluded, that the antichrists were really dissident members of the community "who were dissatisfied with the original teaching and inspired with a new confidence in their own anointing."[177] Thus

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[174] Smalley's view is si nilar to Westcott's, who said that the "absence of the article shows that it had become current as a techincal proper name" (B. F. Westcott, The First Epistle of John, 70). Codex Alexandrinus inserted a definite article in 2:18 probably because it appeared in 2:22.

[175] S. S. Smalley, 1, 2, 3 John, 99.

[176] K. Grayston, The Johannine Epistles, 76.

[177] Ibid., 79.

inspired, the dissident's failed to confess that Jesus was the Christ and to confess that the Father and Son were one.

7. *CONCLUSIONS*

As our analysis shows, each of the representative scholars assumes that the language of the passages is descriptive of contemporary opponents. The language of the passages therefore presupposes an *historical circumstance* that the author describes in apocalyptic terms to add gravity to an already serious situation. The author confronted that situation and utilized the term *antichrist* to label the false teachers for what they were in the strongest possible terms. It is clear from this overview that commentators are unable to determine the nature of the false Christological confession that asserted that 'Ιησοῦς οὐκ ἔστιν ὁ Χριστός. They are unable to do so because it is virtually impossible to determine with any precision the historical situation that may have prompted such a denial. Hence, to seek further clarity about what might have precipitated the Christological conflict, commentators turn to 4:1-4, 16; 5:6.

D. THE CONFESSIONS AND DENIALS (4:1-4, 16; 5:6):

In a similar fashion to the previous section, 4:1-4, 16 and 5:6 are thought to pick up the theme of conflict and false teaching. It is not all that clear what 'controversy' might have precipitated the statement μὴ παντὶ πνεύματι πιστεύετε ἀλλὰ δοκιμάζετε τὰ πνεύματα...(4:1)[178] Moreover,

[178] Pheme Perkins takes the *spirits* to signify the distinction made between the two spirits: error and truth (The Johannine Epistles, 49). R. Bultmann attributes the warning about *spirits* to groups of people who might be inspired in their spirit by either the spirit of truth or the spirit of error (The Johannine Epistles, 61). R. E. Brown understands τὰ πνεύματι to denote both the Holy Spirit and the Evil Spirit (The Epistles of John, 486). K. Grayston points to parallels in ancient Jewish tradition (Jeremiah 28; Deuteronomy 13:1-5) and in Jewish writings (*Test. Jud.* 20:1; *Test. Asher* 1:5; 1QS 3:18-21), and suggested that the plural *spirits* was to destinguish between false and true prophets (The Johannine Epistles, 118). A. E. Brooke omits the textual varient τὰ πνεύματα but suggested that the παντὶ πνεύματι signified the inspired utterances of both the false prophets or the true prophets (The Epistles of John, 107). I. H. Marshall understands the singular *spirit* to mean either "utterance inspired by a spirit" or "person inspired by a spirit," preferring the latter because it was possible for the individual spirit of the prophet to be inspired either by God or Satan (The First Epistle of John, 204). C. H. Dodd takes *spirit* to be a reference to inspired prophetic utterances in which *spirits* warned about the danger of false inspiration exemplified by the false prophets (The Johannine

not only has the ambiguous phrase οὗτός ἐστιν ὁ ἐλθὼν δι' ὕδατος καὶ αἵματος (5:6) caused a host of emendations by later copyists,[179] but in addition, the inability to determine precisely what the *water* and *blood* would have meant to the early reader continues to be a problem.[180] While a number of important terms warrant a careful analysis (τὰ πνεύματα; ὕδατι καὶ ἐν τῷ αἵματι),[181] my purpose in this chapter is simply to demonstrate how the *meaning* of the passages is intimately tied to a careful study of the nature of the conflict detected in them. In the previous section, the antichrists epitomized the false prophets who had literally refused to

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Epistles, 97-9). R. Kysar holds that τὰ πνεύματι referred to a multitude of spiritual beings residing in the world some of which were evil and some good (I, II III John, 90). S. S. Smalley advocates that the *spirit* "signifies a human person who is inspired by the spirit of truth or the spirit of error" (1, 2, 3 John, 218). On the strength of the Qumran document *Manual of Discipline* 3:13-4:26, R. A. Culpepper takes *spirits* to signify a world populated by various kinds of evil beings and demons which were present in each person. One's conduct revealed which spirit dominated (1 John, 2 John, 3 John, 78).

[179] In 5:6 "came by water and blood" is read by both the Alexandrian and Western text types (B Ψ 1739* syrP Tertullian). Copyists who might have recalled Jn 3:5 (ἐξ ὕδατος καὶ πνεύματος) introduced πνεύματος. See Bruce M. Metzger, A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament [United Bible Societies, 1971] 715-16).

[180] R. A. Culpepper understood *water* and *blood* to stress the importance of Jesus' death and the reality of his incarnation (1 John 2 John 3 John, 100-3). B. F. Westcott took *water* and *blood* to signify the two sacrements: baptism and eucharist (The First Epsitle of St. John, 180-83), also held by O. Cullmann (Early Christian Worship, Tr. A. S. Todd and J. B. Torrance [SBT 10. London: SCM Press, 1953] 110). R. R. Williams took the reference in the Augustinian sense influenced by John 19:34-5 in which the spear thrust of the soldier confirmed the death of Jesus: the flow of *water* and *blood* however was ultimately symbolized in the water of baptism and the wine of the eucharist (The Letters of John and James, The Cambridge Bible Commentary [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1965] 55-6). By far most modern commentators take the *water* and *blood* to refer to the terminal points of Jesus' life: his baptism by John the Baptist and his crucifixion. Disagreement exists, however, about why the author emphasized the two aspects. Generally it is thought that the need to resist a gnostic/docetic heresy, perhaps Cerinthian, was what occasioned 5:6 (I. H. Marshall, The First Epistle of John, 231-33). Others disagree, however, and argue that an unbalanced reading of the FG led the secessionists, even though they believed the human existence of Jesus to be real, to de-emphasize the salvific importance of his life and death (R. E. Brown, The Epistles of John, 109-123). S. S. Smalley accepted Brown's reading and suggested that it supported his contention of two heresies in the Johannine Community: the Greek view that Jesus was not fully human (hence, the stress on his baptism (water) and death (blood), and the Jewish view that Jesus was not divine (thus the emphasis that it was Jesus Christ who had experienced these things) (1, 2, 3 John, 279).

[181] See discussion in chapter six, 185-209.

acknowledge that Jesus was the Christ. In this section, the spirit of deceit epitomizes the false prophets who literally deny that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh (4:1,2). The author sets out the outrageous implications of their denials and confessions in the setting of the competing spirits, viz., the spirit of truth and the spirit of deceit (4:6).

According to Bultmann "they deny that the Christ, whom they also revere as the bringer of salvation, has appeared in the historical Jesus."[182] Docetism probably lay at the root of the heretical doctrine. Moreover, the point was underscored in a new form in 5:6: "This is he who came by water and blood, Jesus Christ, not with the water only but with water and the blood." Bultmann stressed that here the author was obviously compelled to contradict the gnostic notion which held that the heavenly Christ descended upon Jesus at his baptism, and then withdrew again before his death.[183] Brooke linked the term *antichrist* (2:18) with the term *false prophets* (4:1) to underscore what appeared to be the emphasis of the author of I John. The terms were meant to characterize the opponents in the worst possible way. They refused to confess that Jesus Christ had come in the flesh, and therefore they deserved to be labelled in terms that clearly described the nature of the evil in opposition to God. While Brooke registered some reservation about linking the views of the false prophets with Docetism, the error combated here by the author certainly resembled it. Brooke noted the many interpretations suggested for 5:6,[184] and took the phrase δι' ὕδατος καὶ αἵματος to signify the Baptism of Jesus and his death upon the cross. It was precisely formulated to counter the erroneous opinion that separated the historical Jesus from the heavenly Christ. Dodd held that both 4:1-4 and 5:5 were meant to counter the views of the false prophets who had distorted the early *kerygma* of the incarnate Jesus by reinterpreting it in the light of Gnosticism. In keeping with the theme of the secessionists and their questionable rereading of the FG material, Brown argued that 4:1-4 did not

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[182] R. Bultmann, The Johannine Epistles, 62.

[183] Ibid., 80.

[184] A. E. Brooke, The Johannine Epistles, 131-37.

imply the denial of the incarnation or the physical flesh of Christ. It inferred, rather, the denial that "what Jesus was or did in the flesh was related to his being the Christ, i.e., salvific."[185] In a similar fashion, despite the great difficulty of interpreting 5:6, Brown asserted that it referred neither to the Docetists nor the Cerinthians but to the secessionists who had associated the work of salvation with the coming of the divine Son which they in some way also related to the Baptist. The Baptist later baptized Jesus with water, after which the spirit descended upon him (John 1:31). On this basis it was possible for the secessionists to claim that Jesus was the Christ through his coming in the water; that is, in John's water baptism the salvific import of his action became clear. The writer of I John urged, however, that it was the death of Jesus which was important, that is, the water and blood which flowed from his side signified his true salvific coming. Smalley discussed the various interpretations given of 4:2. One interpretation stressed the *advent* of his coming, namely, truly *he has* come in the flesh, and another stressed the *manner* of his coming, namely, he has come *in the Flesh* Smalley sided with those who denied Docetic influence,[186] and suggested that the force of the verse denoted either those who exaggerated his humanity (Hellenistic Christians) or those who denied his pre-existence (Jewish Christians). Grayston refused to accept a Docetic explanation of "has come in the flesh" and contended that the distinction was instead between "accepting Jesus as both Christ and Son of God and discarding Jesus for the benefits of the spirit" (I Cor. 12:3; 3:18; Heb. 10:29).[187] The *water* was symbolic of cleansing and renewal, which the dissidents had grasped but they had overlooked the significance of the *blood* typifying "violence, suffering and sacrifice," without which the benefit of the water could not be had.[188]

E. CONCLUSIONS.

[185] R. E. Brown, The Epistles of John, 505.

[186] Some suggested that the teaching under attack was not Docetism per se, but an assault upon the Christian faith by Jewish sectaries who refused to acknowledge Jesus as Messiah (J. C. O'Neill, The Puzzle of I John, 48).

[187] K. Grayston, The Johannine Epistles, 122.

[188] Ibid., 136-7.

AN HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

In the foregoing review of what has been perhaps the most influential method, we have seen how a focus on historical questions pertaining to the social and cultural setting of the author and his text tended to produce historical solutions to the theological and grammatical queries raised by it. The consistent application of a method of text analysis historically oriented has led to varied and often inconclusive results. As we have attempted to show in our analysis there is very little consensus about the historical situation that precipitated the writing with the result that a variety of possible "historical scenarios" has been offered. Since the meaning of the passages is dependent upon the reconstructed historical context, the lack of consensus about what historically occasioned the passages, has also led to the ascription of a variety of meanings to the passages. This is particularly evident in the discussion about the identity of the opponents and their beliefs.

The historical critical method applied rests on two *a priori* assumptions. First, that the language of the text *functions* to establish "historical reality;" an historical reality that is encoded in the polemical character of its language.[189] Because the historical situation of I John is assumed to be a specific, real controversy its language has been taken to function principally as polemical. Today I John is usually placed in the Johannine community and the polemical setting is defined within the context of the social and theological constraints of a Johannine form of Christianity. The lapidary slogans (1:6, 8, 10; 2:4, 6, 9), the language of confession and denial (4:1-4; 5:6), the use of apocalyptic language to describe the antagonists (2:18-24) as antichrists, the references to competing spirits, and false prophets, are the outstanding features that are taken to be proof that an authority figure in the Johannine Community is refuting opponents. This assessment of I John as primarily a polemical writing, however, does not account for the fact that there is no direct reference to the schismatics

[189] Willem S. Vorster, "Meaning and Reference. The Parables of Jesus in Mark 4," in Text and Reality. Aspects of Reference in Biblical Texts, eds., Bernard C. Lategan and Willem S. Vorster (Atlanta, Georgia: Scholars Press, 1985) 55.

(αντίχριστοι) in the first one quarter of the letter. Furthermore, even if I John can be presumed to be a polemical tract, it cannot be expected that the position of the opponents has been fairly represented. Brown indicated that it is not at all certain that all the ideas and attitudes opposed by the author were held by the antagonists.[190] Painter remarked that the process of reconstructing the views of the opponents on the basis of the author's polemical statements against them was fraught with hazards "because the position of the opponents was [is] accessible only through the criticism of our author...."[191] Whitacre also recognized the notorious difficulties encountered in the attempt to reconstruct the position of the opponents from a controversy document, "for all we have is the author's own evaluation of the situation and thus all we can really study with the slightest objectivity is that evaluation."[192] Despite these problems, most commentators believe that the statements of the passages capture the *boasts* of the opponents more or less accurately. As our analysis has shown, however, it is not at all that clear whether these statements reflect secessionist theology because the author has given no hints that he is refuting opponents at this point in the text. Furthermore, the lack of consensus on the identification of the antagonists and their heretical beliefs indicates that one cannot establish the historical referent of I John with any degree of certainty, and thus it cannot serve well as a clue for meaning.

The second assumption is that the *meaning* of the text is dependent on reconstructing the social and cultural occasion which gave rise to them. It is assumed by historicists that encoded in the act of writing is a permanent record of the people, events and ideas of the author's day, recoverable without other access to the historical situation.[193] In such a view the

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[190] R. E. Brown, The Epistles of John, 48.

[191] J. Painter, "The 'Opponents' in I John," 49.

[192] Rodney A. Whitacre commented that "fortunately, this problem is not too severe in I John since it is evident that there is a false teaching being combatted (e.g. 2:21-26; 3:7) and most of those passages which are considered to be allusions to this teaching seem only thinly veiled" (Johannine Polemic: The Role of Tradition and Theology, 122).

[193] See discussion in chapter four, 118-147.

language of the text is seen to flow directly from the facts and ideas unique to the time and world of its composition. Inseparably linked as the text is with the referents to which it points, its *meaning* and *intention* become accessible to the exegetes only by reconstructing the extra-textual historical milieu.[194] The author's immediate milieu is his encounter with the antagonists who disagreed with his confession, and he with theirs, and clearly brings to light the urgent nature of the danger which confronted him and his community. The emphases of the principal r ges betray the beliefs of the dissidents and reveal that the author's primary purpose is to refute and to correct these beliefs. The views of the heretically inclined members are identified as incipient Gnostics distorting the *kerygma* (Dodd), Jewish or Hellenistic Christians denying Jesus' Messiahship on the one hand, and on the other denying his humanity (Smalley), forerunners of Cerinthus who are Docetic in character (Brooke; Bultmann), or secessionists corrupting the Christology of the FG corrected by the Epistolary author (Brown). Once the opponents have been identified, the Christological and ethical statements of the author of I John are explained in a context which presupposes a Christological error in need of correction. Since the the human nature of Jesus, in one form or another, is under attack, the author faithfully passes on the received tradition, i.e., what was from the beginning. Commentators assume that the meaning of each of the Christological statements is inseparably linked with the historical conditions of their utterance. As we have shown, however, each of the historical scenarios proposed to explain the Christological statements is sufficiently different to render quite dissimilar meaning and emphases. This suggests that the meaning of the text of I John should not be based upon the circumstances of its origin when those circumstances cannot be known, but should be sought elsewhere.

Furthermore, I John's anonymity compounds the difficult task of applying these two assumptions to an analysis of I John. If the historical circumstances of a text's composition are clearly stated they may provide

[194] J. Painter held that the "presence of the opponents pervaded the whole book." Therefore, "because the meaning of the book was bound up with that situation some attempt must be made to reconstruct it if I John was to understood" *properly* (italics mine) ("The 'Opponents' in I John," 48-71, esp. 50.

significant clues as to its meaning, but if this is not the case it becomes all but impossible to access the meaning of a text in terms of its historical circumstance. Most commentators recognize the anonymity of I John and the difficulty this presents in trying to reconstruct its historical context but nevertheless continue with the reconstructive activity. Westcott observed that I John had "no address, no subscription, no name is contained in it of person or place; there is no direct trace of the author, no indication of any special destination."[195] Kümmel noted that the ordinary features of a letter were missing in this writing - it contained no names - it contained no concrete associations. The instances in which the author addresses certain readers (2:1, 7; 4:4) do not prove that he had a specific congregation in mind. The polemic against the antichrists does not in any way suggest a concrete situation. Rather, "I John *seems* to be a tractate intended for the whole of Christianity, a kind of manifesto. Indeed, I John is not to be understood as being in any way a writing intended for specific readers."[196] Brown circumvented the issue of I John's catholicity by suggesting that the writing enunciated truth of ultimate concern, which despite its catholicity, was nevertheless written with a certain community in mind for the purpose of reinforcing those who were loyal to the author. It was the author's intention to warn about the dangers of the secessionists who were attempting to win adherents.[197] Grayston, though noting the universal character of I John, still regarded it as written communication "deliberately composed for a particular Christian group."[198] Smalley took I John to be a *paper* designed to aid the discussion of important Christological and ethical issues within the Johannine Community.[199] Hengel acknowledged the catholicity of I John, but advocated that it must be understood in a special way. Even though I John "was written in a quite particular critical situation and is therefore addressed

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[195] B. F. Westcott, The Epistles of St. John, 23.

[196] W. G. Kümmel, Introduction to the New Testament, Trans. by Howard Clark Kee (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1973) 437 (italics mine).

[197] R. E. Brown, The Community of the Beloved Disciple, 99.

[198] K. Grayston, The Johannine Epistles, 3.

[199] S. S. Smalley, 1, 2, 3 John, xxxiii.

to a limited group of recipients, it is however, composed in such a way that it could speak to any Christian of its time...."[200] Each of these observations in some way recognizes the difficulties involved in determining the meaning of the passages in a writing whose history is shrouded in the mist of the past. Yet, in spite of this historical uncertainty, opponents, hypothetical sources, and community circumstances continue to be produced of a wide variety. A method that is designed to recover a certain kind of meaning by reconstructing an historical circumstance as a clue to meaning is virtually useless for a text which does not appear to be primarily historical.

Our analysis has attempted to show the problems that I John's anonymity presents to those who attempt to recreate its historical context.[201] These problems are especially evident in those attempts which seek to develop a community portrait on the assumption that the FG and the Epistles represent the documents of the Johannine community. These documents give evidence for the Johannine Community from its earliest beginnings, possibly with the Beloved Disciple as its head and spiritual leader, to its latest manifestation in the Epistles. The communty's growth is frequently rocky and fraught with danger as it passes through the various phases of its social and Christological development from the FG to the Epistles. A variety of forces threatened to destroy its *koinonia*. A stress on a pre-existent Christology in the FG led to debates with the Jews, and ultimately the expulsion of Johannine Christians from the synagogue. An emphasis on a pre-existent Christology, however, eventually led to the denial of the full humanity of Christ and to the secession mentioned in the Epistles. The historical phases through which the community evolved has received considerable attention. Here again, however, the lack of historical evidence

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[200] M. Hengel, The Johannine Question (Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1989) 50.

[201] I. H. Marshall contended that despite its missing epistolary features it must not be regarded as a "catholic epistle" because it bears "every mark of being addressed to a specific situation in some church or group of churches known to the author" (The Epistles of John, 14). Pheme Perkins said that the author "is writing to a specific group of communities, 'churches', all of which belong to the Johannine tradition." Because the author does not explain the views which he opposes, but simply alludes to them or "parodies some of his opponent's favorite expressions," we are left with many questions. (The Johannine Epistles, xiv). See further, Judith M. Lieu, The Second and Third Epistles of John, 168, 207.

about the the stages of the community's development has resulted in a number of different hypothetical reconstructions. For instance, Brown proposes a six stage history of Johannine Christianity.[202] Barnabas Linders advocates a distinct five stage development of the community's history.[203] J. L. Martyn finds three distinct stages in the history of the community.[204]

On the basis of his study of ancient schools, Culpepper developed the *Johannine school* hypothesis and concluded that it adequately explained the similar ideas, terminology and language of the FG and the Epistles. In his opinion, the hypothesis also accounted for what appeared to be a theological progression of ideas about the person of Jesus from an emphasis on his exalted divine nature in the FG to a focus on his human nature in the first Epistle, perhaps to counter some form of Gnostic thought that denied Jesus' humanity. While not questioning the possible existence of a school, it is not all that clear that the *common language pool* of ideas and terminology of the FG and the Epistles, provide enough data for delineating the specific tenets of a developing Johannine Christianity.[205] None of these elements requires the supposition that conflict with the opponents was the occasion of I John's composition, nor does the peculiarly Johannine theological parlance require the positing of a complex Johannine community history. All that can be said is that the author of I John, if not identical with the author of the FG, was familiar with and influenced by its language, ideas, and unique turn of phrase. Perhaps all that the so-called works within the Johannine orbit tell

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[202] R. E. Brown, The Community of the Beloved Disciple, 93-144. See also, The Gospel According to John, Anchor Bible Series, 2 vol [New York; Doubleday, 1966 and 1971. In addition, R. E. Brown analyzed the contributions of J. L. Martyn, Georg Richter, Oscar Cullmann, Marie-Emile Boismard and Wolfgang Langbrandtner (The Community of the Beloved Disciple, 171-82). See also John Ashton, ed., The Interpretation of John, Issues in Religion and Theology 9 (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986).

[203] B. Lindars, The Gospel of John, NCB (London: Oliphants) 1972.

[204] J. L. Martyn, "Glimpses into the History of the Johannine Community," L' Évangile de Jean. Sources, rédaction, théologie. Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Theogicarum Lovaniensium 44. Ed. by M. de Jonge (Leuven: Duculot, 1977) 150-75.

[205] R. Alan Culpepper, The Johannine School, SBL Dissertation Series (Missoula, Montana: Scholars Press, 1975).

us with certainty is that the Johannine idiom was pervasive enough to be accessible to a number of writers who deliberately employed it because it represented an acceptable means of expression.[206] We do know with confidence that the language milieu of I John is similar to the FG's, and that for whatever reason, the author gives expression to his understanding of Christology and its impact upon ethics in a peculiarly Johannine way.[207]

Usually some form of *proto-gnostic* challenge is also assumed as a foil against which the author's apparent attempt to correct a denigration of the human aspect of the person of Jesus makes sense. The alleged *Gnostic terminology* found in the writing along with a characteristically Johannine idiom (Smith points out that quite a number of the Nag Hammadi texts are replete with Johannine language),[208] are frequently seen to provide two decisive indicators of its historical genesis. The secession in I John was due to a secessionist theology which stressed Christ's divinity at the expense of his humanity. Here commentators remain divided because some will argue that secessionist theology is the result of the impact of some form of Gnostic thought, and others will argue that secessionist theology provides the catalyst for later gnostic thought.[209] The newly discovered Gnostic documents confirm that the FG was the Gnostic's favorite Gospel for depicting Jesus as

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[206] Pheme Perkins isolates the *Gospel of Truth*, the *Testimony of Truth*, IX 3 33, 19-21; the *Apocalypse of Peter* VII 3, 70, 10-15; the *Apocryphon of James* I 2, 11, 4-6; I 2, 9,24-10; *Thomas the Contender* II 7 139, 31-140 (The Johannine Epistles, 10, 19, 22-4). D. M. Smith notes the profuse use of Johannine language in many of the Nag Hammadi writings but suggests that how to account for this state of affairs is still a matter of debate (The New Testament and its Modern Interpreters, 283).

[207] Polycarp, Bishop of Smyrna, echoed the language of I John, and so this has been adduced as evidence for the early existence of the Epistle. Dodd suggested that many of the allusions to the Epistle in the writings of Polycarp "might be due simply to acquaintance with 'Johannine' ways of thought and speech;" this, then, may equally apply to the writer of I John (C. H. Dodd, The Johannine Epistles, xi).

[208] D. Moody Smith, "Johannine Studies," 275.

[209] Judith M. Lieu points out that "the redirection towards internal opposition of language originally aimed outward has long been seen as a mark of I John and as central to its interpretation" ("Blindness in the Johannine Tradition," New Testament Studies 34 [January 1988] 83-95).

superhuman, preexistent, and offering release from the earthly realm.[210] The possibility that a Gnostic threat was the problem addressed in the Epistle continues to find cautious support.[211]

The Gnostic hypothesis, however, remains a debated issue. Vorster maintained that it is methodologically incorrect to label the false teaching of I John as *gnostic*. He suggested that the false teaching in I John was called *gnostic* not because it has been proven to be *gnostic*, but because anything which did not fit what was "normal orthodoxy" tends to be labelled *gnostic*. Vorster continues by pointing out that a more fruitful study of I John would be to recognize that the Christology of primitive Christianity was the articulation of the significance of Jesus in the categories and language of the time and culture. This made possible a wide variety of expressions.[212] Hengel cautioned that "the definition of the terms 'Gnosis' and 'Gnostics' were unsettled with a wide range of variations, *so that* we should be *careful* about using the perplexing label 'Gnosis' or 'Gnostics' too hastily."[213] Lieu

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[210] Pheme Perkins has drawn attention to the pervasive influence of the FG on the form and content of the Gnostic writings (The Gnostic Dialogue). Elaine Pagels, The Gnostic Gospels (New York: Random House, 1979). Scholars have pointed out the extent to which several of the the Nag Hammadi documents have without a doubt been influenced by the conceptual world of the writer of the FG (e.g., The literary form of *The Dialogue of the Saviour* resembles Jesus' farewell discourse in John 14 - 17; Perkins argues that *Apocryphon of James* 11: 5 - 6 depends upon I John 1:1; *Gospel of Truth* I 30:27 - 32; *Acts of Thomas*). See further, R. Mcl. Wilson, "Nag Hammadi and the New Testament," New Testament Studies 28 [1982] 289 - 302). Pheme Perkins, "Logos Christologies in the Nag Hammadi Codices," Vigiliae Christianae 35 [1981] 379 - 396).

[211] Elaine Pagels, The Johannine Gospel in Gnostic Exegesis: Heracleon's Commentary on John SBLMS 17 (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1973). See also, Fernando F. Segovia, "Recent Research in the Johannine Letters," Religious Studies Review 13 (April 1987), 132-139. Edwin M. Yamauchi, Pre-Christian Gnosticism: A Survey of the Proposed Evidences (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1973). Stephen S. Smalley uses the term 'gnosticism' but points out that it should be accurately understood as a reference to 'pre-gnosticism', since what was known as gnosticism in the second century was still quite unsystematized in the first century (1, 2, 3 John, xxiv-xxxii). Pheme Perkins, The Gnostic Dialogue: The Early Church and the Crisis of Gnosticism (New York: Paulist Press, 1980). See further a helpful discussion in Jaroslav Pelikan, The Emergence of the Catholic Tradition, vol. 1 (Chicago/London: The University Of Chicago Press, 1971) 81-97.

[212] W. S. Vorster, "Heterodoxy in I John," Neotestamentica 9 (1975) 87-97

[213] M. Hengel, The Johannine Question, 9.

also claimed that it is difficult to sustain the argument that erroneous Gnostic/Docetic ideas had made inroads into the community and had subverted its Christology. She urges that not enough attention has been directed to the observation that I John does not explicitly address the constituent elements of a Gnostic/Docetic system of thought.[214] Moreover, Gnostic thought is enormously difficult to define because of its multi-faceted expression, its fuller mid-second Century CE development, and the free utilization of the term *gnosis* by orthodox Christians (John 17:3; I John 2:3). Furthermore, knowledge of Gnostic thought is derived only indirectly from attacks by second and third century Christian writers.[215] Earlier depictions of the opponents depended on the descriptions of Gnostic groups offered by writers in the second and third centuries CE and presupposed a late date for the Epistle's composition.[216]

There is very little doubt that the author of I John was concerned about certain matters ethical and theological, but whether his concern arose in response to danger or whether one should seek the object of his concern as

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[214] Judith M. Lieu, "Authority to Become Children of God: A Study of I John," 212.

[215] The discovery of the Nag Hammadi documents in 1945 has greatly enriched our knowledge of the movement and its conceptual structures (J. M. Robinson, The Nag Hammadi Library, ed. [New York:Harper and Row, Publishers, 1977]). Elaine Pagel's monogragh has shown the extent to which the Gnostics made use of the FG (Elaine Pagels, The Johannine Gospel in Gnostic Exegesis).

[216] Irenaeus mentions the Christology of Cerinthus in *Adv. haer.* I 26, 1; III 3, 4. Cerinthus has been most widely identified as the likely opponent in I John. A. E. Brooke understands the teaching of the enemies reflected in I John to be Docetic but similar to that of Cerinthus (The Johannine Epistles, xxviii-lii). Bultmann suggests either Cerinthianism or Docetism (The Johannine Epistles, 44). R. Schnackenburg denies any reference to Cerinthus and uses the term 'Docetism' with caution (Die Johannesbriefe, 15 - 23). Klaus Wengst holds that the "Verfasser des I Joh nicht nur gegen eine Front kämpft, wie heute allgemein angenommen wird" and that the primary opponent is Cerinthus (Häresie und Orthodoxie im Spiegel des ersten Johannesbriefes [Gerd Mohn: Gutersloher Verlaghaus, 1976] 24 - 38). Klaus Wengst, "Probleme der Johannesbriefe," Aufstieg und Niedergang der Römischen Welt, II 25.2 [Berlin/New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1988] 3753 - 3772). Johannes Beutler, "Die Johannesbriefe in der neuesten Literatur (1978 - 1985)" II 25.2 [Berlin/New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1988] 3773 - 3790). Generally, the following passages are adduced as evidence for describing Docetic Christology: Jerome, *Dial. adv. Lucifer*, sect. 23; Ignatius, *Ad Trall.*, 9, 10, *Ad Smyrn.*, 2, *Ad Ephes.*, 7; Polycarp, *Ad Phil.*, c. 7; Eusebius *H. E.* 3.28 records the encounter between the Apostle John and Cerinthus in an Ephesian bath house.

residing in a specific community assailed by various opponents who threatened the ethical and theological outlook of its members, is open to re-assessment. It simply cannot be known with any certainty who the author was, the circumstances under which he wrote and to whom. The work is anonymous and remains opaque historically despite the persistent probing of New Testament exegetes. Because it is anonymous and universal in outlook, it would seem profitable to attempt seeking the meaning of the text in ways other than by elaborating the historical circumstances of its composition.

CHAPTER THREE

RECONCEIVING 'TEXT' AS SPEECH ACTS

A. INTRODUCTION

The purpose of the previous chapter was to examine the interpretative results obtained by a method which viewed the passages as part of a cultural document and artifact understood within the temporally limited context of its origins. In such a view, the meaning of the passages was limited to the nexus of I John's historical relationships, viz., to those meanings that the respective approach was designed to recover. The insights gained by such an approach are therefore likely to be limited, as indeed demonstrated by the foregoing analysis. For this reason and a variety of others, a number of New Testament scholars have voiced the opinion that the historical approach that has dominated the New Testament critical enterprise for the past 150 years is no longer completely satisfying.[1] E. S. Fiorenza, for example, has remarked that in the past ten to fifteen years New Testament scholars have sought to balance the predominantly historical

[1] The literature produced in this field is enormous. The following are a select sample of the application of literary criticism to the New Testament. E. V. McKnight, The Bible and the Reader: An Introduction to Literary Criticism, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985). Norman R. Petersen, Literary Criticism for New Testament Critics, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1978). William A. Beardslee, Literary Criticism of the New Testament, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1969). L. J. White, "Historical and Literary Criticism: A Theological Response," Biblical Theology Bulletin 13 (1983) 28-31. A number of literary approaches have been applied. See for example, R. A. Culpepper, Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel, A Study in Literary Design, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983). Daniel Patte, "Speech Act Theory and Biblical Exegesis," Semeia, ed. by Hugh C. White 41 (1988) 85-102. G. R. O'Day, "Narrative Mode and Theological Claim: A Study in the Fourth Gospel," Journal of Biblical Literature 105 (1986) 652-673. Leland Ryken, "Literary Criticism and the Bible: Some Fallacies," in Literary Interpretations of Biblical Narratives, ed. by K. R. R. Gros Louis, J. S. Ackerman, and T. S. Warshaw (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1974) 24-40. Timothy Polk, The Prophetic Persona (Sheffield, England: JSOT, 1984); Jeffrey Lloyd Staley, The Print's First Kiss: A Rhetorical Investigation of the Implied Reader in the Fourth Gospel, (Atlanta, Georgia: Scholars Press, 1985). E. V. McKnight, ed., "Reader Perspectives on the New Testament," Semeia 48 (1989). Hugh C. White, ed., "Speech Act Theory and Biblical Criticism," Semeia 41 (1988).

orientation of research with the methodological insights derived from various schools of literary criticism.[2] Thus, the potential contribution of literary theories to the interpretation of texts, and for providing solutions to old and perplexing problems found within certain biblical texts have received more attention today than in the past.[3]

The purpose of the present study is to develop a speech-act method of analysis that would help overcome the limitations of an historical-critical method. Of particular interest to the present study is the question of the function of language in written discourse. Practitioners of the historical critical method tend to view the way language functions in a text from a particular perspective. As was pointed out in chapter two, the language of the text is thought to signify the intentions of the author (sender), and to refer to its enabling conditions whether real or hypothetical. Its literary devices and special figures of speech, though noted and frequently expanded upon, take a secondary place to the primary task of explicating and clarifying the text in terms of supposed antecedents in its real world.[4] It is assumed that because all literary discourse arises out of and addresses particular situations, that context must of necessity be known in order to understand the true thrust of the author and the meaning of the text. In the case of I John, the situation was assumed by many to be a crisis in the context of the Johannine community, and for exegetes that crisis not only became part of the *supposed background* but also the principal subject matter to be addressed. It is thought that since the meaning of the book is bound up with the circumstances of its production, "some attempt must be made to

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[2] E.S. Fiorenza, "Rhetorical Situation and Historical Reconstruction in I Corinthians," New Testament Studies 33 (1987) 386 - 403. For a sustained critique of historical criticism and its results, and for an insightful analysis of the 'rules' that apply to historical criticism and the 'meaning' it is designed to recover, and the 'rules' that apply to reader-response criticism and the meaning it is designed to recover, see E. V. McKnight, Post-Modern use of the Bible. The Emergence of Reader-Oriented Criticism, 48-85.

[3] See the recent survey by William A. Beardslee, "Recent Literary Criticism," in The New Testament and its Modern Interpreters, 175-198.

[4] See for example, Edgar V. McKnight, Meaning In Texts: The Historical Shaping of Narrative Hermeneutics (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1978).

reconstruct it if I John is to be understood."[5] The assumption therefore transfers the search for meaning to the *Sitz im Leben* of the text's historical production. Martin J. Buss writes that "these concerns can be, and to a large extent have been, pursued on the assumption that *writing* [speech] is a reflection of the author or of the referent, so that the primary aim of textual analysis is to reconstruct either the thought of the author or the reality to which the text, more or less accurately, refers."[6] The *language of the text* is perceived either to represent the views of the author, or to represent the world behind the text which gave rise to it.[7] Hans Frei writes that

> "the historian of the Biblical text is interested in that to which the text refers or the conditions that substitute for such a reference. In short, he is interested not in the text as such but in some reconstructive context to which the text 'really' refers and renders it intelligible...and where the clue to meaning then is no longer the text itself but its reconstruction from its context, intentional or cultural, or else its aid in reconstructing that context, which in circular fashion then serves to explain the text itself."[8]

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[5] J. Painter, "The Opponents in I John," 50.

[6] Martin J. Buss, "Potential and Actual Interactions between Speech Act Theory and Biblical Studies," Semeia 41 (1988) 125 (italics mine).

[7] See for example Hans Frei's The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative: A Study in Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century Hermeneutics, (New Haven Conn: Yale University Press, 1974) 256, 244, 263. Students of Biblical hermeneutics are deeply indebted to Frei for his masterful reconstruction of the fate of what he calls the 'realistic' reading of the Bible. He documents the shift from a precritical consensus in which the literal meaning of the books of Genesis and Exodus in the Old Testament, and the synoptics in the New Testament was taken to be none other than their true historical meaning. With the advent and influence of deism, historical criticism of the Bible, and Hume's explication of the nature of historical claims, the veracity of the texts was called into question. Frei suggests that the combination of these influential movements had the result of saddling Biblical hermeneutics with the troublesome problem of the distinction between the meaning of the text (what it says), and its referent (what it is about). Frei then goes on to chronicle the various attempts which have been made to bridge this dichotomy between meaning and reference: the literalistic reading of fundamentalism (the text gives an accurate account of what happened); the mythological interpretation of D.F. Strauss (the text points toward a mythic consciousness and is set in sacred archetypes), and the rationalistic interpretation of Kant (the text reveals the universal process of turning from bondage to moral freedom).

[8] Ibid., 135, 160. Bernard C. Lategan writes, "the historical approach with all its variations was mainly interested in the source and circumstances of origin, believing that these aspects hold the key to the understanding of the text" ("Reference: Reception, Redescription, Reality," Text and Reality: Aspects of Reference in Biblical Texts [Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985] 67-8).

Language in this view is seen primarily to be discursive or propositional.[9] The *language of the text* is regarded as signifying ideas and facts that were peculiar to the world and time of its authorship, and its truth and meaning can only be established through re-establishing the connection between the language of the text and those referents.[10] A. C. Thiselton has remarked that herein lies the assumption "that the basic kind of language use to be investigated...is the declarative proposition or statement."[11] The exegetical implication of such referentialism and propositionalism "is a persistent pre-occupation with descriptive assertions or 'propositions' which tend to flatten out other language uses, reducing it all to the level of discursive units of information."[12] While some language is propositional and "referential insofar as it refers to a particular state of affairs, to insist however, that true knowledge can be conveyed only in propositions is to place a straight jacket on language."[13]

Such *straight jacketing* is evident in the *community-analysis* approach proposed by Brown. While he deals seriously with the meaning of the text, the community analysis approach represents but one example of how an historical interest coupled with viewing the language of the text as a primary source for the historical situation it presupposes has dominated the analysis of I John.[14] R. A. Culpepper maintains that "in the majority of studies John's

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[9] The 'proposition' is thought to be a definitive characteristic of all discourse wherein the proposition "is a picture of reality, that is, a description of some possible state of affairs" (J. B. Thompson, Critical Hermeneutics: A Study in the Thought of Paul Ricoeur and Jürgen Habermas [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981] 15.

[10] Hugh C. White, "The Value of Speech Act Theory for Old Testament Hermeneutics," 50.

[11] A. C. Thiselton, "Semantics and New Testament Interpretation," in New Testament Interpretation: Essays on Principles and Methods, ed. by I. H. Marshall (Exeter:Paternoster, 1977) 76.

[12] A. C. Thiselton, "Semantics and New Testament Interpretation," 76, 79.

[13] B. J. Walsh, "Anthony Thiselton's Contribution to Biblical Hermeneutics," Christian Scholars Review 14/3 (1985) 225-6.

[14] See R. E. Brown, The Community of the Beloved Disciple, 93-144.

Gospel and the Epistles have been used as a source for evidence of the process by which it was composed, the theology of the author [evangelist], or the character and circumstances of the Johannine Community."[15] Another example of exegesis which tends to flatten out other language uses is seen in those studies which attempt to reconstruct the views of the opponents,[16] or those which try to reconstruct the development of a "Johannine Christianity" by describing the course of the book's formation via the perceived development of the author's theology or of the group of which he was a part.[17] Timothy Polk has written that the "hermeneutical bias of the approach is to treat *the language of the text and its inherent* meaning as reference, and to read any given passage primarily in terms of its historical referentiality, whether by asking what it tells us historically about the author, his school or community, or by asking where the passage fits in the chronological and sociological scheme of its composition."[18]

The metaphor of 'window' is frequently utilized to describe how the language of the text functions in its denotative aspect.[19] The text of I John provides a "window of opportunity" through "which the critic can catch 'glimpses' of the history of the Johannine Community."[20] An approach

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[15] R. A. Culpepper, Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel, 3.

[16] John Painter, "The 'Opponents' in I John," 48-71.

[17] Rudolf Schnackenburg has a section in his commentary entitled, "literary Criticism of the Gospel of St. John". He, however, is primarily concerned with the data which indicate a complex composition history involving the author, sources, rearrangements and displacements, and redaction (The Gospel According to St. John, 44-58).

[18] Timothy Polk, The Prophetic Persona: Jeremiah and the Language of the Self, JSOT 32 (Sheffield, England: JSOT Press, 1984) 46 (italics mine). This tendency to confuse the world of the text with the real world has been labelled by Umberto Eco as the "referential fallacy" [A Theory of Semiotics (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1976) 58-66].

[19] The metaphors of 'window' and 'mirror' come from Murray Krieger, A Window to Criticism [Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1964] 3-4) as cited by Norman R. Petersen, Literary Criticism for New Testament Critics, 19, 20-21. See also M. H. Abrams, The Mirror and the Lamp. Romantic Theory and the Critical Tradition (New York: Oxford University Press, 1953).

[20] R. Alan Culpepper, Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel, 3.

dominated by historical concerns, writes N. Petersen, remains "bound to the genetic sequence of stages in textual formation by construing texts as windows opening on the preliterary history of their parts...."[21] If, however, the so-called 'window of language' is historically opaque because of the text's anonymity or because the author has apparently failed to clarify what he meant, it becomes increasingly difficult to establish the antecedent meaning of the text without recourse to complex hypothetical reconstructions of the historical situation.[22]

Recently there has been a considerable redirection of attention towards viewing the text as a function of language and the effect 'the text as it stands' has on the reader.[23] Language and its use in both spoken and written discourse is "one way among many through which human beings produce meaning, communicate, and exist in a meaningful universe."[24] While it has been known that it is impossible to have human life without language (because communication and perception in both spoken and written discourse function within the framework of linguistically explained concepts), a renewed appreciation of the dialectical relationship between the writing subject and language has had a radical impact on how texts are

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[21] N. Petersen, Literary Criticism for New Testament Critics, 19.

[22] J. Terence Forestell in his review of R. E. Brown's The Epistles of John points to the hypothetical character of the historical situation he envisions being addressed (The Catholic Biblical Quarterly 45 (1983) 679-81). See also Bernard C. Lategan, "Some Unresolved Methodological Issues in New Testament Hermeneutics," in Text and Reality: Aspects of Reference in Biblical Texts, ed. by Bernard C. Lategan and Willem S. Vorster (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985) 3-25. W. S. Vorster, "Meaning and Reference: The Parables of Jesus in Mark 4," in Text and Reality: Aspects of Reference in Biblical Texts, ed. by Bernard C. Lategan and Willem S. Vorster (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985) 27-65.

[23] Literary critics in the late 70s coined the term 'reader response criticism'. Some general studies in the field are the following: Jane B. Tompkins, ed., Reader Response Criticism: From Formalism to Post-Structuralism, (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1980); Steven Mailloux, Interpretive Conventions: The Reader in the Study of American Fiction, (Ithica, New York: Cornell University Press, 1982); Other more specialized studies are: Roger Fowler, "Who is the Reader of Mark's Gospel," in SBL Seminar Papers (Chico, California: Scholars Press, 1983) 31-53; Jack Dean Kingsbury, "Reflections on 'The Reader' in Matthew's Gospel," New Testament Studies, 34 (July, 1988) 442-460.

[24] D. Patte, "Applications of Speech Act Theory," Semeia 41 (1988) 89.

viewed. The insight de-emphasizes the need to discover the historical antecedents of the 'text's' production, and rather, it emphasizes perceiving 'texts' as representative of one aspect of embodied communication.[25]

Viewing language as a practical medium through which humanity participates in the world, including the creating and receiving of written discourse, has had a profound effect in the way texts are perceived and what they are able 'to give up' in terms of meaning. It has also led to establishing a connection between linguistic activity (speech) and the 'text' as written discourse.[26] *Text as written discourse* refers both to the act of writing and to what has been written or inscribed, and therefore, 'text' may be understood as a communicative event or act between the writer and his audience. This effects a shift away from primarily stressing language in its referential function and the clues it may contain historically, to looking "at the *language of the* text for what it says in itself by means of the patterning or shaping - the informing - of its content, *and as a means to affect audiences.*"[27] By taking the over-all shape and pattern of the *text* to be[28] more than a mere artifact and

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[25] Martin J. Buss, "Potential and Actual Interactions between Speech Act Theory and Biblical Studies," Semeia 41 (1988) 126.

[26] In no way do I intend to reduce the phenomena of language to a series of simple formulae. While positivistic accounts have not given sufficient attention to the place of language in social life, post- Wittgenstinians have been accused of over-emphasizing the role of language as a constituent of social life. See J.B. Thompson's Critical Hermeneutics: A Study in the thought of Paul Ricoeur and Jürgen Habermas (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981) 1-6. I realize that language is not the only modality of social life. For the purposes of this dissertation, however, I shall view language as socio-communicative event and therefore constituent of social reality where written texts are but one example of a specialized form of socio-communicative interaction.

[27] As written by Dan O. Via in his forward to N. R. Petersen's Literary Criticism for New Testament Critics, 5 (italics mine). See also, M. L. Pratt, Toward a Speech Act Theory of Literary Discourse (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1977).

[28] It should be pointed out that notions of what constitutes the 'text' also vary. 'Text' in the Derridean sense refers to the act of writing where at the root of the writing process is the primal encounter with language: 'text' is understood as the final objective product ever open to careful scrutiny and willing to yield its secrets: 'text' as an existential encounter between the word and the interpreter in das Sprachereignis, etc. See for example, Paul Ricoeur, "What is Text? Explanation and Understanding," in Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences, ed., John B. Thompson (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981) 145- 164.

by reconceiving the *text* as an act of communication between a writer and an audience with "meaning effect," one effectuates a significant shift towards perceiving text as "speech acts." J. T. Kearns argues that because 'texts' are the product of the rules of language that make up the constituent-linguistic reality of both written and spoken discourse, written texts are speech-acts.[29] In his discussion of language as one medium through which human beings produce meaning in both spoken and written discourse, and of the application of speech act theory to Biblical texts, Patte writes bluntly that "texts are to be viewed as speech acts."[30] Ricouer suggests that the text, once inscripturated, becomes autonomous and remains so both in regard to the author and the audience. He defines 'text' as "written discourse,"[31] or as something said to someone about something. Though it is "discourse fixed in writing,"[32] he insists that the text assumes a life of its own and thereby formalizes and intensifies the characteristics which it displays in speaking.[33] Both spoken and written discourse are products of a creative dialectical interaction between the subject and its language milieu. In such a view, the *language of the text* is more than the sum total of its enabling conditions but is

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[29] J. T. Kearns in his assessment of 'text' argues that written texts are speech acts - that sentences within are speech acts, including the person writing a letter and the person writing a book (Using Language: The Structure of Speech Acts [Albany, New York: State University of New York Press, 1984] 45-49.

[30] Daniel Patte, "Applications of Speech Act Theory," 89.

[31] Paul Ricoeur, "The Model of the Text: Meaningful Action considered as Text," in Hermeneutics and Human Sciences, ed., and trans., by John B. Thompson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981) 201ff. The acts of inscripturation effectively distance the text from the circumstances of speech. Ricouer encapsulates the characteristics in the key notion of *distanciation*. These are divided in four principle forms: (a) the surpassing of the event of saying by the meaning of what is said; (b) the relation between the inscribed expression and the original speaker; (c) the relation between the inscribed expression and the original audience; (e) the emancipation of the text from the limits of ostensive reference.

[32] Paul Ricoeur, Hermeneutics and Human Sciences, 145.

[33] Paul Ricoeur, Interpretation Theory: Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning (Fort Worth: Texas Christian University Press, 1976) 30. Ricoeur is attempting to explain that when the text is exteriorized in the act of writing, it becomes semantically autonomous. That is, the specific connection of speech with a hearer is lost, whereas the audience of a written text is potentially universal. The implications of textual autonomy is that what the text means now matters more than what the author may have meant when he wrote the text.

a communicative act where its various features serve to create affective patterns of meaning on both author and reader.

The clearer connection that this approach establishes between *text* and the nature of language has led New Testament scholars to focus on the Biblical text from the perspective of *text as language*.[34] A variety of theoretical literary constructs exist which aid in the analysis of the *text itself* in terms of its over-all pattern of meaning and effect.[35] For the purpose of this study, the attempt to understand the *text as language* encapsulating a communicative event will take shape through a careful development and adaptation of some of the principles that speech-act theorists have provided. I would like to propose that a modified version of J. L. Austin's speech-act theory will help establish the 'meaning' of the passages in I John without that 'meaning' being subject to the constraints of an historically assured minimum. Increasingly in the last decade it has been pointed out that speech-act theory offers exciting new possibilities for the study of language and literature "and might include satisfying new approaches to old and perplexing problems."[36] Only recently, several contributors have offered a number of programmatic essays dedicated to the discussion and application of speech act theory to biblical criticism.[37] Hugh C. White, in particular, has pointed out that "speech act theory has opened the possibility of a functional

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[34] R. C. Culley, "Exploring New Directions," in The Hebrew Bible and its Modern Interpreters, ed., by Douglas A. Knight and Gene M. Tucker (Philadelphia. Pennsylvania: Fortress Press, 1987) 168.

[35] M. Sternberg, The Poetics of Biblical Narrative: Idealogical Literature and the Drama of Reading (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986) 15. Sternberg discusses at length a distinction he makes between "historically oriented analysis" and "discourse oriented analysis." While the exegete and interpreter of the text cannot neglect the questions of authorship, date of composition, the cultural milieu, the theology, and the language systems within which a particular text was composed and found expression, neither can the 'text' itself be neglected in this reconstructive activity. He has suggested that "discourse oriented analysis" sets out to understand not the realities behind the text but the *text itself* as a pattern of meaning and effect.

[36] Susan S. Lanser, The Narrative Act: Point of View in Prose Fiction (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981) 283.

[37] Hugh C. White, ed., "Speech Act Theory and Biblical Criticism," Semeia 41 (1988) 1 - 178.

approach to language less encumbered with ontological presuppositions which tie the meaning of the text to the social and historical conditions of its production."[38] Various aspects of Austin's theory will be developed and tested in this study in the context of I John to discern how the language of a series of troublesome passages might function. It is hoped that such an analysis might cast new light on the character of the writing itself. The methodological development of a speech act exegesis will remain strictly within the confines of Austin's speech-act theory, but I shall expand it as necessary to include the notion of the constituting character of the act of writing (Derrida) and to incorporate the self-involving nature of certain types of speech acts (Evans).[39]

B: SPEECH ACT THEORY

1. J. L. AUSTIN:

The stress on the diverse and active character of language found its expression in the work of J. L. Austin. In How to do Things with Words, he

[38] This pertains to the notion that words mean what they refer to, i.e., the language the writer employs points to the circumstances that occasioned its production (Hugh C. White, "Introduction: Speech Act Theory and Literary Criticism," Semeia, ed. by Hugh C. White, 41 [1988] 2). Martin J. Buss observes that textual analysis has been pursued on the assumption that "writing (speech) is a reflection of the referent, so that the primary aim of textual analysis is to reconstruct the reality to which the text... refers" ("Potential and Actual Interactions Between Speech Act Theory and Biblical Studies," Semeia, ed. by H. C. White, 41 [1988] 125).

[39] J. L. Austin, How to do things with Words, ed. by J. O. Urmson and Marina Sbisà (New York: Oxford University Press, 1962). The insights of Austin have been instrumental in the attempt to solve some of the larger questions raised by literary theorists. For example, literary scholars have emphasized different aspects of Austin's thought in an attempt to differentiate literature from non-literature, to distinguish serious discourse from a work of fiction, and to deal with the referential status of illocutionary force of discourse, where illocutionary force of an utterance is not bound to the circumstances of its utterance in the same way that natural communication is bound. See also Michael Hancher, "Beyond a Speech-Act Theory of Literary Discourse," Modern Language Notes 82 (1977) 1081-1098. Richard Ohmann, "Speech Acts and the Definition of Literature," Philosophy and Rhetoric 4 (1971) 1-19. Moreover, Austin's theories were further developed by a number of Biblical scholars who then subsequently applied them to portions of the Biblical text. See, for example, Donald D. Evans, The Logic of Self-Involvement (New York, New York: Herder and Herder, 1969). Timothy Polk, The Prophetic Persona: Jeremiah and the Language of the Self. Hugh C. White, ed., "Speech Act Theory and Literary Criticism," 1-24.

pointed to a type of language use which had been largely ignored by philosophers. Highly critical of the traditional philosophical preoccupation with the descriptive function of language, he focused his attention on the multiplicity of functions that language performed. In order to develop a comprehensive theory of language and its multiple functions, Austin introduced the concept of *speech act*. A speech act was an utterance that did something rather than merely said something. To aid the analysis of a speech act and what it did Austin divided it into three constituent elements, the *locutionary act*, the *illocutionary act*, and the *perlocutionary act*. The locutionary act is the act *of* saying something, the illocutionary act is the act *in* saying something, and the perlocutionary act is the act performed *by* saying something.[40] According to Austin all utterances were the product of an *illocutionary act*, that is, "the performance of an act *in* saying something as opposed to the performance of an act *of* saying something".[41] Austin also noted that the varying functions that language was able to perform were due in part to a variety of speech acts in which the utterer could engage. These different functions or speech acts came under what he designated as *illocutionary force*.[42] The illocutionary force of a speech act represented the attempt on the part of the writer to accomplish some purpose, such as, promising, informing, warning, putting forward as hypothesis, arguing, predicting, etc. For instance, the statement, "if anyone were to say that we do not have sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us" (1:8), can be uttered as a warning, prediction, or an hypothetical remark, that is, as different speech acts with different illocutionary forces. Furthermore, the attempt to accomplish some purpose in a speech act may also have a result. This Austin designated as the perlocutionary force. A speech act with the illocutionary force of a warning, e.g., "get out of the building," may effect a response of alarm. The perlocutionary force of a speech act referred to the production of consequential effects on feelings, thoughts, or actions of the

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[40] J. L. Austin, How to do things with Words, 109.

[41] Ibid., 99 - 100. Austin coined the term 'illocutionary'.

[42] Ibid., 100.

readers. Austin suggested that it "may be done with design, intention, or purpose of producing them".[43]

For instance, the following statement, "It's cold in here," is an utterance act which corresponds to the locutionary act, that is, the act *of* saying something (structured linguistic units: words, phrases, sentences, etc.) Depending on the context, the utterance, "It's cold in here," might however be construed as a statement, a command, a warning, or a promise, that is, the act *in* saying something, namely the force of the illocutionary act with any one of the following assumptions: (a) that I am simply making a statement (b) that I am making a request which implies that he should do something (c) that i am threatening him with some unspoken consequences if he does not do something about it (d) that I am expressing an intended willful act of my own, e.g., to close the window (e) that I am requesting information. The assertion, "It's cold in here," may also be a perlocutionary act, namely, the speech act that aims at effect (persuade, convince, frighten, enlighten, etc.).

In his analysis of language Austin discovered that various expressions, when uttered, *do something* and therefore are not used merely to report or to describe a state of affairs. Various utterances did not so much describe anything, he maintained, as form "a part of doing an action."[44] Based on this fundamental observation Austin concluded that all linguistic sequences, rather than describing actions, were themselves action.[45] The ideal example of this characteristic for him was the promise. For example, "I do" uttered in the context of a marriage ceremony, was not reporting or describing the ceremony but actually participating in it. It was not merely an outer expression of an inner spiritual reality, but rather in its very utterance

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[43] Ibid., 100 - 108.

[44] J. L. Austin, How to do Things With Words, 5.

[45] J. L. Austin, How to do Things With Words, 12. See also Daniel Patte, "Speech Act Theory and Biblical Exegesis," Semeia, ed. by Hugh C. White, 41 (1988) 85-102.

an occurrence occurred which coincided with the act.[46] In saying "I do" the person is doing something, namely, marrying, "rather than reporting something, namely, that the person is marrying".[47] Other examples of such words were *testify, conjecture, declare my intention, state, maintain, claim, postulate*, etc., all of which, suggested Austin, coincided with the act.[48] While still entailing some sort of historical state of affairs, the "validity of the utterance, however, did not depend on its legitimate reference to a non-verbal object or state."[49] It is true that each of the words entails different kinds of acts so that the identification of the type of act performed, or the kind of language game being played is indispensable to an adequate hermeneutic. For example, "I do" means one thing at a wedding, another at a baptism and quite another when a policeman says, "Who owns this car?". Three different kinds of games are being played by means of a single speech act, viz., legal, religious, and ethical, respectively. Later in this study we will examine the possibility that the writer of I John perhaps engages in a series of speech acts in the context of the language game of *confession*, which may explain the writing's apparently polemical language and obscure theological expressions.

While Austin began his discussion of language in light of a distinction between what he called the 'constative', that is, descriptive statements whose primary business was to refer, describe and state, and 'performative', that is, statements which in their utterance did something rather than merely said something, he concluded by rejecting this

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[46] J. L. Austin, "Performative Utterances," in The Philosophy of Language, ed. by A. P. Martinich (New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985) 115 - 124.

[47] Ibid., 116.

[48] Ibid., 162 - 163.

[49] So Hugh C. White, "Introduction: Speech Act Theory and Literary Criticism," 2. See also J. L. Austin, "Performative Utterances," 117.

distinction.[50] Austin admitted that constatives were accountable to the real or objective world, but he concluded in his book that constatives were also "doings," and that "what we have to study is not the sentence" in its pure unattached form but the "issuing of an utterance in a situation by a human being."[51] The constative actually communicated effectively only when the force of the utterance was made clear. For example, the exclamation "Fire!" could be taken to mean; "Quick, get out of the building!"; "Call the fire department"; "Fire them one and all"; "Fire the clay pots in the kiln"; "Shoot your guns!" etc. For Austin, all description was performance because all description was perspectival and therefore 'formed' or 'performed' that which was described. How the exclamation was to be taken was determined by the particular speech act used in its utterance. Description was always active, never passive; always constructive in being descriptive and therefore performative. As Austin was later to define clearly, utterances are *appropriate* or *inappropriate* relative to the conditions of the utterance rather than *true* or *false* in relation to a reality that underlies all conditions.[52] Performative language, he said, was related to these conditions of appropriateness and inappropriateness where the circumstance of the utterance made clear whether it had been successfully performed. In the utterance of something, certain conditions must be true in order for a performative to be successful.

The concept of rule occupied a significant place in Austins's writings about speech acts. Austin, for example, distinguished between two

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[50] According to the rules of analytic philosophy, the question "was it true or false" was applied to constatives by analytic philosophers. The acts of referring, describing, and stating were determined to be true or false on the basis of how accurately they represented the reality which underlay the conditions of their utterance. The categories of 'true' or 'false' were understood to be absolute judgments, made independently of any particular circumstance. Austin rejected the 'true' and 'false' categories as applied to the constative in favour of the categories of 'felicity' and 'infelicity', which determined whether constatives were appropriate or inappropriate relative to the conditions of their utterance. See, Austin, How to do Things with Words, 12-24; 133-147.

[51] J. L. Austin, How to do Things With Words, 138.

[52] Ibid., 25-38. Stanley Fish, Is There a Text in this Class? (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1980) 198.

fundamental categories of rules under the general condition which he termed the *doctrine of the infelicities*.[53] The truth of an illocutionary act was more "dependent upon the presence of certain conditions in the social context of its utterance."[54] In place of what he called the 'fetish' of the true/false dichotomy central to the verification principle, Austin therefore spoke of *contextual felicity conditions*.[55] The condition of infelicity referred to the possibility of things that could go wrong on the occasion of an utterance. Austin spoke of rules whose violation resulted in "misfires," that is, failure to come off at all, and rules, the violation of which led only to "abuses,"[56] that is, some possible uncertainty regarding their meaning or effect.[57] In his article, "Performative Utterances," Austin made the point that performative utterances are neither true nor false, but may fail to come off in special ways, i.e., the various ways in which these utterances may be unsatisfactory. He calls this condition an infelicity, i.e., the utterance is *unhappy* - if certain rules, transparently simple rules, are broken. Austin then isolated two rules: one, that the *convention* invoked must *exist* and be *accepted*, and two, that the *circumstances* in which we purport to invoke this procedure must be appropriate for its invocation.[58] Austin defined *convention* "as the existence of an accepted conventional procedure having a certain effect, that procedure to include the uttering of certain words by certain persons in

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[53] J. L. Austin, How to do Things With Words, 14.

[54] Hugh C. White, "Introduction: Speech Act Theory and Literary Criticism," 3. See J. L. Austin, "Performative Utterances," 122-24. Austin writes "the performative is 'happy' or 'unhappy' as opposed to 'true' or 'false'" (How to do Things With Words, 133).

[55] Ibid., 12-24. See also, Hugh C. White, "Introduction: Speech Act Theory and Literary Criticism," 3.

[56] J. L. Austin lists a series of failures which are the result of performative speech acts having gone wrong; e.g., *misfire* - is an act purported but void - uttering "I do" when already married; *insincerity* - is an act purported but insincere - uttering "I congratulate you" when not believing the credit was due; *abuse* - is an act purported but hollow - uttering "I promise that..." which commits the speaker to a future course of action he has no intention of keeping ("Performative Utterances," in The Philosophy of Language, 115 - 123).

[57] J. L. Austin, How to do Things With Words, 14, 16.

[58] See, "Performative Utterances," 115-124. See also, How to do Things with Words, 26-34.

circumstances appropriate for the invocation of the particular procedure invoked."[59] And, *circumstance* was defined as a situation where the "circumstances in a given case must be appropriate for the invocation of the particular procedure invoked."[60] With these concepts defined and in place, Austin was no longer forced to seek the meaning of an utterance through its correspondence to nonverbal objects.

The performance of a speech act must conform to particular *circumstances* and *convention* in order to be *happy*. For example, no existing accepted convention would permit uttering "I do" when already married except perhaps where polygamy was allowed. Similarly, anyone who declares ἐν τῷ φωτὶ εἶμι (2:9) while hating his brother cannot succeed in convincing his hearers, because there is no established convention which would permit such a claim to be successful. The avowal "I am in the light, but I hate my brother" would be successful, in light of Austin's theory, only if it could be clearly demonstrated that an appropriate *convention* existed which would have permitted such a contradictory speech act. Moreover, a person's utterance of a marriage vow is infelicitous if already married because a circumstance which would permit its felicitous utterance does not exist. Similarly, to utter the claim, ὁτι κοινωνίαν ἔχομεν μετ' αὐτοῦ (1:6), would be invalidated if 'we' were found to be walking in the darkness.[61] Therefore, as will be shown later, unless the appropriate circumstance and conventions can be isolated in the literature of the heretics and heresiologists where the invocation of such a procedure was accepted, it is unlikely that the opponents would have employed mutually conflicting 'slogans' or 'boasts' of the type recorded by the author.[62]

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[59] J. L. Austin, How to do Things with Words, 14 - 15; 26.

[60] Ibid., 34.

[61] See chapter five, 149-164.

[62] Even though the development of these concepts diverged from the views of Wittgenstein, and though many others since then have been critical of his distinctions, his acknowledgement of the concept of rule accords well with the observation of the indispensable role of social convention (J. B. Thompson, Critical Hermeneutics, 21).

It is true that the marriage formula, with its precise social function and its complex conditions, is part of a clear social horizon which determines whether it has been successful in its uptake. The statements in I John, although arising from some social context, cannot be determined to be successful or unsuccessful on the basis of that social context. As will be shown later each of the so-called slogans in I John (1:6, 8, 10; 2:4, 6, 9; 4:20) may perhaps be analyzed from the perspective of the rules of *convention* and *appropriate circumstance* without knowledge of the historical circumstance of their composition. Would a convention and an appropriate circumstance have existed that would have permitted the use of such a mutually contradictory slogan as ' Ἐὰν εἴπωμεν ὅτι κοινωνίαν ἔχομεν μετ' αὐτοῦ καὶ ἐν τῷ σκότει περιπατῶμεν, ψευδόμεθα καὶ οὐ ποιοῦμεν τὴν ἀλήθειαν (1:6)? Is the utterance to be taken as a *boast* which is descriptive of the views of the opponents, and therefore *exceptional*, or is it to be taken as a homiletic device by which the author engages the audience, committing them to an ethical or theological stance common to them both? Is it a postulate that the author advances for argument's sake that is hypothetically subject to certain conditions in its utterance? Austin pointed out that the meaning of a descriptive statement depended upon the nature of the speech act which produced it. In the case of the antithetical sayings of I John, isolating a potential speech act circumstance in the context of a particular language game may help determine whether they are to be taken literally as *slogans* or *boasts* referring to the opponents who produced them (the historical context), or hypothetically, as advancing propositions with significant religious and ethical implications (the immediate literary context).

Austin insisted that in the enactment of speech acts by invoking the proper procedures publicly known and agreed upon, the 'intentions' and 'attitudes' are made available to everyone. Moreover, anyone who invokes these procedures also takes responsibility for having the intention because he knows that they will be recognized as such. Were it otherwise the consequences would be disastrous. For example, S. Fish states that were "intention solely a matter of disposition in relation to which words were

merely a report, then formulas like "I am sorry" and "thank you" would not be accepted as expressions of regret and gratitude unless it were proven, by some independent text, that the speakers were actually so disposed."[63] Indeed, the things which are done with words would never get done. Furthermore, if the actor were not responsible for the conventional acts performed, then everyone would perpetually be at the mercy of those who make promises, or give permission but have absolutely no intention of keeping them. In this instance, the things which are done with words would have no status in law.[64] This point becomes especially important in the discussion about the self-involving character of certain types of religious speech acts and what they imply about the subject.

C. ILLOCUTIONARY FORCE AND THE CONSTITUTIVE FUNCTION OF "RELIGIOUS LANGUAGE"

While Austin's theory yields significant insights into the function of language to achieve some kind of effect upon audiences, it does not yield a *speech act method of exegesis* which would deal adequately with the particular passages in I John under consideration. The reason for this is that the speech acts in I John operate on a deeper constitutive level and go beyond the social contexts which remain the horizon for Austin. While S. Fish can interpret actions of the characters in Shakespeare's Coriolanus successfully using the constitutive rules governing the political process in that society, the rules governing the various speech acts evident in I John are not sufficient to get at what is going on in it.[65]

In some narrative texts in which the subjects are given (e.g., Coriolanus), the governing semantic horizon is usually established by utilizing *referential language* in which the speech acts function on a social

[63] S. Fish, Is There a Text in this Class?, 204.

[64] Ibid., 204.

[65] Stanley Fish, "How to do things with Austin and Searle: Speech Act Theory and Literary Criticism," in Is There a text in this Class? 197-245.

level and the conventions of illocutionary force serve to establish relations between the subjects. In certain non-narrative texts, such as I John, *non-referential* speech acts with varying illocutionary forces serve rather to constitute subjectivity, that is, the governing semantic horizon is determined by the self-involving character of the illocutionary force of the speech act. In texts where *non-referential* speech acts are predominant, the meaning of the passages escapes the closed system of conceptual semantics. Historical critical studies of I John, for example, have taken for granted that the semantic horizon of the text is to be located in the conflict between the author and his opponents. A mirror reading of certain texts provides evidence for reconstructing the supposed views of the opponents as expressed in their *boasts* (1:6, 8, 10; 2: 4, 6, 9; 4:20), and in their *denials* (2:22, 23; 4:2, 3; 5:6). If we accept the presupposition of the existence of opponents, then we may accept that the speech acts of the author as represented in the reformulated lapidary boasts of his opponents operate at a social level which serve to define the relation between the author and his opponents. This assumes of course that the *boasts* represent the *actual speech acts* of the opponents. The author's writing then would be fundamentally description, interpretation, and analysis. If, however, one does not assume the *opponent theory*, then the semantic horizon of the text lies elsewhere. The illocutionary force of the speech acts in which our author engages lies at a deeper self-involving level, where meaning points not so much to the reconstructed historical realities of the text, as to the illocutionary force of the word creating the subjectivity of the person of faith. As we shall attempt to demonstrate, I John seems to fall into this latter category. A method of speech act exegesis which would effectively analyze such a text must also take into account the self constituting character of the written word. Here I shall consider briefly Derrida's debate with Austin and the work of Evans.

1. *J. DERRIDA*

Whereas Austin tends to posit a self outside of language, which in varying degrees, makes language subordinate to the intentionality of the subject, others seek to explore the various ways in which language functions

in the subject. Illocutionary force stems from the constitutive function of language itself independent of either rules or intentionality. Such a view, particularly reflected in the work of Derrida, has necessitated opening the question of the relation of language to the subject. Derrida dealt with this relationship by locating the problem of the subject and language in the act of writing. Derrida's purpose, of course, was to overturn the speaking/writing polarity that privileged speech. He insisted that writing had been assigned an exterior, marginal place, and speaking had been more highly valued because of its immediate and more vital connection "with the purity of thought in which the presence of being and truth become manifest."[66] Derrida insisted that an erroneous privileging of speech's primacy and of its immediacy of revealed intention led to the fallacy of viewing inscription "as that which was [is] also most readily depictable." This ultimately led him to centre his attack upon writing as the communication of intended meaning, and to state that "writing, communication, if one insists upon maintaining the word, is not the means of transport of sense, the exchange of intentions and meanings, the discourse and communication of consciousness."[67] Derrida overturned this logocentrism by elevating the denigrated pole of the speaking/writing polarity beyond writing simply signifying the immediately 'presencing' external act of writing, and argued that writing constitutes human subjectivity itself because it functions in the radical absence of the sender, the receiver, and the context of its production. By making the point of contact between writing and subjectivity the central feature of writing, he gave language the power of communicating without the presence of the subject long after the author and intended readers were dead and the intended context all but forgotten or unknown.[68] What is important for our purpose in this discussion is not Derrida's insistence that language is autonomous and independent of

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[66] See Hugh C. White's assessment of Derrida on this matter ("Introduction: Speech Act Theory and Literary Criticism," 17).

[67] J. Derrida, "Signature Event Context," Glyph I, eds., Samuel Weber and Henry Sussman (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1977) 178, 194. See also, J. R. Searle, "Reiterating the Differences: A Reply to Derrida," Glyph 1 (John Hopkins University Press, 1977) 199.

[68] See Derrida, "Signature Event Context," 177.

the subject or that illocutionary force stems from the constitutive function of language itself, but that language and the act of writing dialectically interact to constitute the writing subject.

In Derrida's rather lengthy discussion of Austin's philosophy he developed his unique view of how writing continues to 'mean' in the radical absence of its sender or its receiver. The Derridean notion of writing was basically brought to the fore by what he coined *iterability*.[69] He writes that "my communication must be repeatable - *iterable* - in the absolute absence of the receiver or of any empirically determinable collectivity of receivers."[70] *Iterable* referred to the repeatable codes and conventions shared by both parties to a speech act which operate without reference to the intentionality of the speaker/author; it was these repeatable codes which everyone recognized and which were separated from the intentionality of its author and from its objects of reference which were intrinsically constitutive of the speech act itself. It was also this process which allowed written utterances to continue to speak long after the author was gone. By pressing beyond a particular text and what had been inscribed to the contact between the author and the act of writing, Derrida uncovered a way in which language functioned in the constitution of subjectivity. Rather than the conventions of language (contextual rules) constituting subjectivity, Derrida revealed a way of speaking about the constitutive function of language through its primary effect upon the subject "who is *ab origine* in language."[71]

I fully recognize that Derrida's deliberately "adventurous strategy" may well deconstruct the very thing I am attempting.[72] Derrida does away

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[69] See Jacques Derrida, "LIMITED INC a b c...," Glyph 2 (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1977) 179-186. See further, J. R. Searle, "Reiterating the Differences: A Reply to Derrida," Glyph 1 (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1977) 198-208.

[70] J. Derrida, "Signature Event Context," 179-80.

[71] Hugh C. White, "Introduction: Speech Act Theory and Literary Criticism," 18.

[72] Jacques Derrida, "*Différance*," in Margins of Philosophy, trans. w/additional notes by Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982) 22.

with the immediate presence of intentionality, which in Austin's view is made clear by the conventions operative in language, and transfers it to the iterable codes which operate without reference to the author and are intrinsically constitutive of the speech act itself. Nevertheless, for our purpose it is perhaps possible to reject Derrida's playful strategies and to accept his significant conclusion that develops writing into a very broad concept (along the lines of Austin's notion of illocutionary force) that can account for the constitutive character of subjectivity 'presenced' in writing.[73]

While Derrida's larger program of deconstructing the often implicit metaphysical polarities of Western consciousness leads him ultimately to overturn Austin's notion of speech acts, intentionality and conventionality, which might at first glance appear to contradict the rule governing elements of speech acts, his insight is nevertheless valuable because it permits us to perceive *text as language* and at the same to recognize the *act of writing as constitutive*. The significant debate between speech act theorists and Derrida regarding intentionality, conventions and the constitutive function of language has demonstrated that speech acts should be considered as operating on two levels; at a social level, e.g., in some narrative texts where the illocutionary force establishes relations between subjects whose existence is given, and at a deeper constituting level, e.g., in certain non-narrative texts where the illocutionary force constitutes subjectivity. For our purpose and because of my interest in *speech act circumstance* and *convention* and *implicature*, the iterability of writing must move beyond simply the repeatability of linguistic elements to the repeatability of the 'rules' which govern any linguistic system whether spoken or written. John Searle writes that any "rule governed element in any system of representation at all must be repeatable, otherwise the rules would have no scope of application."[74]

[73] Hugh C. White, "Introduction: Speech Act Theory and Literary Criticism," 17-20.

[74] J. R. Searle, "Reiterating the Differences," 199.

2. *D. EVANS*

Clearly, promising possibilities exist of formulating a speech act oriented method of textual analysis on the basis of Austin's notion of "appropriate circumstance and convention" and Derrida's theory that language constitutes a subject in the act of writing.[75] But to make such an analysis particularly relevant to the texts under consideration here it is necessary to supplement the theories of Austin and Derrida with several key concepts of Donald Evans regarding the self-involving character of certain speech acts predominant in religious discourse.[76]

Evans's proposal involves the development of a *new logic of self-involvement* on the basis of Austin's theory of performative language. Austin had pointed out that the act in speaking served to make explicit *what act it is in which the author is engaged.*[77] While Austin gathered together general families of related and overlapping speech acts, and then classified them to form five very broad classes according to their illocutionary force,[78] it was Evans who developed a way of understanding the self-involving character of language, especially as it applied to religious discourse. Evans was particularly interested in "the way in which language was the expression of the person who indwelt it and who was disclosed in terms of its use."[79]

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[75] This is not to suggest that it was the intention of Derrida to develop a method for textual exegesis. His primary purpose was to critique the writing/speech duality, in which writing has been denigrated, or moved to a secondary position. He suggested that writing was seen to be secondary to speech because speech was immediate and vital, and that therefore, the primary function of speech was 'logocentric'. See Jacques Derrida, "Signature Event Context," Glyph, 194-97.

[76] See for example, Donald D. Evans, The Logic of Self-Involvement: A Philosophical Study of Everyday Language and Special Reference to the Christian Use of Language about God as Creator (New York: Herder and Herder, 1969).

[77] J. L. Austin, "Performative Utterances," 121.

[78] J. L. Austin, How to do Things With Words, 151 - 164. He labelled the classes as the following: verdictives, exercitives, commissives, behabitives, and expositives.

[79] As quoted by Royce Gordon Gruenler, New Approaches to Jesus and the Gospels: A Phenomenological Study of Synoptic Christology (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1982) 38.

According to Evans, language involved the user in more than mere assent to a fact, i.e., for him, religious language was not merely propositional; it was primarily a self-involving activity.[80]

When I express an utterance, claims Evans, I imply that I have certain intentions or attitudes (if these attitudes or intentions are absent in my utterance, e.g., I commend someone whom I regard with a great deal of contempt, then my utterance is insincere, or 'infelicitous', to use Austin's term). The self involving character of language in everyday discourse is often expressed with correlative human action. For example, if the Prime Minister of Canada appoints me Governor General of the country, and I accept this new status by saying, "The Prime Minister has appointed me Governor General," I commit myself to future conduct in accordance with the status and the role. While my utterance may provide the listener with evidence so that he can make an inductive inference to my state of mind, generally "it is a matter of linguistic convention that certain performatives carry certain implications concerning the speaker's attitude or intention."[81] Speech acts with the illocutionary force of an *expressive*, *commissive*, *representative*, and *directive* require special consideration along these lines because of their importance in revealing the self-involving character of Biblical language. Implications of *intention*, suggested Evans, are most prominent in those performatives Austin called *commissives*. Implications of *attitude* are most prominent in *expressives*.[82] Religious language with an *expressive* or *commissive* illocutionary force tends to be self-involving because it deals with commitments to do or not to do something and with implications of attitude and action. This language is thus self-involving and therefore intended to capture and communicate or respond to an experience.

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[80] Donald Evans, The Logic of Self-Involvment, 11.

[81] Ibid., 29.

[82] J. L. Austin called these 'behabitives', which Searle renamed 'expressives'. According to Austin, "behabitives have to do with attitudes and social behaviour" (How to do Things With Words, 152).

Evans maintains that performatives are important in religious language because in talk about God the words of human beings do something. Because of the implicative character of the *commissive* and *expressive*, remarks Evans, "it is probably true that most human language concerning God is *expressive* or *commissive*," since they most explicitly convey feelings, attitudes, emotions, and commitments, e.g., praise, thanksgiving, confession, prayer, etc., "and ...this does not automatically eliminate the relevance of facts - factual presuppositions, and sometimes, factual content."[83] Indeed, for both commissives and expressives it is quite possible to isolate abstractable elements that have factual content. While both may have abstractable factual content, they are different from what Austin called *constative* because the speaker implies an intention or an attitude towards the thing about which he is speaking. Commissives are distinguished from other performatives by this element of commitment to some course of action. Commissives, however, also involve commitments that are not merely verbal; they make future commitments that are non-verbal, e.g., a commitment to 'how' it has been stated in written discourse and its implications, especially in certain clearly circumscribed speech act circumstances set forth by the author of I John. For example, if the statement, ἐὰν εἴπωμεν ὅτι κοινωνίαν ἔχομεν μετ' αὐτοῦ καὶ ἐν τῷ σκότει περιπατῶμεν...(1:6) is taken to be an expression of a speech act with an illocutionary force of the commissive, then it implies a commitment to *how* it has been stated and its dire consequences if someone were to make such a specious claim. The implied attitude most prominent in *expressives*, maintains Evans, is *belief*, i.e., it is a representation of the way things are perceived to be and thought accurately to reflect a state of affairs.[84] Expressives also relate the speaker to another person in the context of human behaviour and social relations. "The speaker," says Evans, "implies that he has certain attitudes in relation to the person he addresses, or towards what he is talking about."[85]

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[83] Ibid., 35.

[84] The definition is taken from Nira Reiss, Speech Act Taxonomy as Tool of Ethnographic Description (Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 1985) 24.

[85] Donald D. Evans, The Logic of Self-Involvement, 34

Speech acts in religious discourse, however, are not limited to these two but include the *representative* and the *directive*. The *representative* is closely associated with the *commissive*. The point of the *representative* is to commit the speaker to something being the case[86] and is used when "expounding views, when conducting arguments and when clarifying points" (e.g., suggest, put forward as a hypothesis, claim, maintain, etc.).[87] The *representative* also implies the author's desire to engage the reader in a consideration of *how* he has written it and its implications for ethical behaviour; for instance, the author of I John creates a compelling literary state of an apocalyptic last hour and its antichrists (2:18-24) by which he engages the readers to consider carefully the ethical consequences implied by such a state. By the use of a speech act with the force of a *directive*, the author implies his desire that something be the case, whether a certain course of action or the consequences of certain ideas. The point of the *directive* consists in the attempt by the author to get the readers to do something in accordance with his desire. For instance, when the author proclaims (ἀπαγγέλλομεν) what has been seen, heard and touched concerning the word of life (1:1, 3) it is his desire that the readers accept this state of affairs concerning the word of life, so that they might experience vicariously this same seeing, hearing, and touching.

Some may raise the objection that the only explicit performative verbs to be found in I John are *proclaim* (1:3) or *confess* (e.g., I John 4:1-4). Furthermore, none of the explicit performative verbs associated with the

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[86] Th. Ballmer and W. Brennenstuhl propose that the speech act categories of the 'representative' and the 'commissive' are characterized by the verb 'commit', "which demonstrates that the difference between the two classes cannot be very essential." The commissive commits the writer to some future course of action, and the representative (Austin's 'expositive') commits the writer to something being the case (Th. Ballmer and W. Brennenstuhl, Speech Act Classification [Heidelberg/New York: Springer-Verlag, 1981] 56-57). Austin also pointed out that the commissives include declarations or announcements of intention similar to 'verdictives' whose point is to consider something about which it is hard to be certain.

[87] J. L. Austin, How to do Things with Words, 161.

commissive, *expressive*, *representative*, and *directive* is found in the text of I John. Evans holds, however, that a performative need not be self-labelling and thus perfectly explicit.[88] It is possible to 'acknowledge', 'promise', 'covenant', 'undertake', 'thank', 'praise', and 'confess', without using these explicit self-labelling verbs because frequently in written discourse an explicit performative verb is not used. Non-explicit performatives abound in written discourse. He states, "once we grant that utterances have a performative force even though they do not contain an explicit performative, it is reasonable to say that every utterance is a performative."[89] Indeed, Austin was led to the same conclusion in his analysis of language when he concluded that every utterance has performative force. For Austin the concept of the illocutionary act ultimately displaced the distinction between the constative and the performative.[90]

3. *SUMMARY*

Summarizing the discussion thus far, speech act theory underscores that the propositional content of each of the passages defined historically should not be viewed as encapsulating the totality of meaning possible for them, but that in attempting to determine meaning one must also account for their illocutionary force. Derrida's conclusion that the act of writing is constitutive of the writing subject will be appropriated and linked with Evans's theory of the self-involving character of religious language. It will be shown how speech acts with the illocutionary force of a *commissive*, an *expressive*, a *representative*, and a *directive* and their implicature play a primary role in making explicit *intention* and *attitude*. Austin's two conditions of *an appropriate circumstance* and *linguistic convention* will be utilized to help determine the kinds of speech acts possible within the limits of certain

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[88] Donald Evans, The Logic of Self-Involvement, 44.

[89] Ibid., 45.

[90] J. L. Austin, How to Do Things with Words, 133-164.

speech circumstances.[91] These insights, it will be argued open a new way of analyzing and setting out the performative aspects of the language of I John.

D. LANGUAGE GAME/GENRE AND CONVENTION

In addition to the concepts outlined above we must consider one last significant issue related to a proper speech act analysis of the text. The question of I John's genre[92] has been broached and defined from the perspective of the epistolary conventions of antiquity. Although still an open question in the study of I John, it is a given fact that genre as well as convention play an important role in Biblical interpretation.[93] Stanley K. Stowers lists I John as a New Testament example of paraenetic writing modelled after Greco-Roman rhetoric.[94] Stowers points out the importance of exhortation (*exhortatio*) and dissuasion (*dissuasio*) in paraenetic writings of the Greco-Roman culture and within the New Testament. The rhetoric of exhortation, he maintains, "attempts to persuade and to move the audience to conform to a *model of behaviour* and to elicit corresponding habits of behaviour,"[95] and is frequently expressed in an antithetical manner. In the Greco-Roman tradition, the means were employed either explicitly or

[91] It is true that for Austin these conventions specified a set of conditions, the fulfillment of which define an utterance as successfully performed for a speech act of that type.

[92] See chapter two, note 121.

[93] See for example, Thomas Kent, Interpretation and Genre: The Role of Generic Reception in the Study of Narrative Texts (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 1986).

[94] Stanley K. Stowers defines paraenesis as the exhortation to continue in a certain way of life. It includes moral exhortation in a general sense and moral exhortation "that has a confirming and traditional character." He lists Hebrews, James, I Peter, I and II John along with others as letters of this type. The question of I John's genre has been broached and defined from the perspective of the epistolary conventions of antiquity. See for example, Stanley K. Stowers, Letter Writing in Greco-Roman Antiquity, Gen. ed. Wayne Meeks, Library of Christian Classics (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1986) 92-96; David. E. Aune, ed. Greco-Roman Literature and the New Testament (Atlanta, Georgia: Scholars Press, 1988); Abraham J. Malherbe, The Cynic Epistles (Missoula, Montana: Scholars Press, 1977); Abraham J. Malherbe, Ancient Epistolary Theorists, SBL 19 (Atlanta Georgia: Scholars Press, 1988).

[95] Italics mine.

implicitly to urge the reader to consider and to imitate the way of life presented.[96] If we take this as our starting point, is it not possible to classify the genre of I John as *instruction* of a type which uses the language game of *confession* to establish its over-all force? The various speech acts within the language game of confession make explicit the intentions and attitudes of the author thereby, revealing his religious and ethical orientation. Through a series of antithetical speech act circumstances, in the limits of which certain potentially felicitous speech acts are possible, the author makes clear his theological and ethical orientation in order thereby to engender *maximal reception* in his readers and to force a guided course of action.

Religious language of a confessional type includes several formal components, of which the following aspects are important: it is language that comprises acknowledgement/confession; and it is language that speaks/tells or makes known (confesses) a faith in God, that is, confession not defined according to a strict adherence to formal statements of theological propositions but rather represented by a special kind of religious and ethical stance while not devoid of factual content. We shall see later that factual content is part of the various conditions to which the illocutionary point is subject. The *act of confession*, then, is not the formal delineation of theological beliefs (although it may include that), but it is instrumental to the formation of the self and sets in motion the over-all communicative design of I John. Using the language of confession is essential to the exercise and development of the capacities for believing, feeling, thought, and action, for these capacities give definition and substance to the self. Speech acts with the force of the *expressive, commissive, representative*, and the *directive*, used in the context of the language game of 'confession', constitute the subject of the author of I John. Moreover, confessional language not only constitutes the subjectivity of the author, but it also intends to make truth claims about the world and about God, though scarcely in propositional form. In the

[96] See Abraham J. Malherbe, Moral Exhortation: A Greco-Roman Sourcebook, ed. by Wayne Meeks (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1986) 23. Stowers maintains that frequently exhortation was reinforced by including "examples of the author's own behaviour that may be set forth for imitation" (Stanley K. Stowers, Letter Writing in Greco-Roman Antiquity, 95).

experience of reading and hearing the truth claims about the world and about God, the readers are themselves invited to 'confess' in agreement with the author's language game. In doing so, their selves too are given definition and substance. They exemplify what it means to fellowship and walk in the light of one in whom there is no darkness at all (1:5).

E. CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this chapter was to develop a method of speech act exegesis that would permit the determination of the meaning of the passages apart from their historical occasion. Where there is no compelling reason to expect a peculiar historical situation that would illuminate I John's genesis and therefore its meaning, I have sought to develop a method which is designed to recover meaning by taking the passages as performative utterances. Utilizing Austin's insight that all linguistic sequences do something and must conform to an acceptable convention and an appropriate circumstance, I have argued that the polemical language of the passages in our consideration does not signify the views of opponents, but rather signifies the views of an author by which he inspires the audience to commit themselves to important ethical and theological issues common to them both. I have also insisted throughout the present study that the historical circumstance of I John cannot be known with any degree of confidence. For Austin, the successful uptake of speech acts was dependent upon a complex system of social circumstances. These, however, are not available in I John. In order to move from speech acts and the social horizon that determine their use and meaning to the use of speech acts in written discourse where the social context may no longer be known, I turned briefly to Derrida. Here I concluded that the act of writing included speech acts that were constitutive of the writing subject. Unable to determine the kinds of constituting speech acts operative in the passages on the basis of this conclusion, I linked it with the various kinds of religious speech acts used in written discourse and their implications as delineated by Evans. I was thus able to conclude that the passages we have been considering may be analyzed for their meaning separate from the historical context. The truth of

the passages rests upon the illocutionary force of the word which founds the subjectivity of the person of faith.

In spite of its anonymity and general nature, studies of I John have sought the identity of the author and have determined the meaning of the respective texts by an approach interested primarily in reconstructing the text's historical antecedents. In contrast to this approach, I have argued that the writing's anonymity prevents historical certitude about its genesis and that it consequently inhibits the determination of the meaning of the texts. In an anonymous writing whether the author was specifically addressing a community and its adversaries is probably irrelevant since it cannot be known with certainty. The historical critical approach is designed to recover meaning on the basis of its ability to reconstruct accurately the historical conditions which gave rise to the passages. The historical circumstances of I John's composition, however, cannot be known with any certainty. Therefore, the current complex reconstructions of the development and growth of the Johannine community can at best claim only probability. Since the meaning of the texts rests upon such a tentative basis, this in turn casts into question the methodological premises of historical critical studies and the interpretative conclusions reached by such an approach. This present study has argued that a speech act approach is more appropriate to a determination of the meaning of a text like I John. I have suggested that determining the meaning of the texts only from an historical perspective does not consider the object or intention of the authorial literary persona created, including the quality of self as it emerges in the self-involving speech acts of I John. The approach proposed attempts to take seriously the anonymity of I John, since written acts with the respective illocutionary forces delineated constitute the subject of the author without the necessity of identifying him or his historical milieu. I have argued that it is possible to establish the meaning of the passages by delineating the various speech acts performed in the language game of confession. These speech acts, performed in the context of specific literary speech act circumstances, give definition and substance to the self of the author and the reader.

RECONCEIVING 'TEXT' AS SPEECH ACTS

Commentators have long been puzzled about the recurrent first person singular form of address in I John and its referent. The solution to the problem has frequently been sought in the attempt to define the composition of either particular groups or individuals within the Johannine community [97] The undergirding assumption which lies at the heart ot this view is found in the way in which the verb γράφω is understood. Γράφω is defined as a linguistic activity whereby the author ostensively refers to several constituent groups within the Johannine community, simultaneously encouraging and warning them. The focus is upon the physical evidence left by the act of inscription, namely, what has been written. The primary task of the exegete then falls upon the activity of determining the author's identity on the basis of what has been written, i.e., the characters and symbols which have been left on the writing surface and what they signify, rather than looking to the *act in writing* as that which constitutes the writing subject and as that which takes part in or brings about an effective involvement of the reader in significant ways. Writing as a performative reveals the author as a being who in the act of writing (not in what has been written) commits himself to the abstractable factual content of what has been written, thereby assuming a certain life stance, and thereby also expressing an attitude toward what has been written.

Since neither the author, the groups nor the historical context can be reconstructed with any reasonable degree of confidence, the approach I am proposing establishes the meaning of the text by analyzing the way the self-involving character of its language constitutes the subject of both the author and the readers. This type of language is essential to the exercise and development of the capacities for feeling, thought and action, for it is these components which create self-definition and substance. The *message form* implicated by the speech act is such that *how* (intention and attitude implicature) something is said, is also part of *what* is said. These elements are fundamental to the meaning of anything written, and indeed are an integral part of the act of writing. E. D. Hirsch writes that "it is important to

[97] See discussion in chapter two, 8-84.

emphasize the huge and unencompassable areas of meaning - including emotional and attitudinal meanings - that language actually does represent."[98] It is hoped that by reconceiving the text as a communicative act that incorporates several constituting speech acts we will avoid the misconception that to be understood, the theological significance of the text must be reduced to an historically assured minimum, i.e., the *text* must be regarded primarily as a source for fuller historical reconstruction. Using the speech act analysis approach relieves the text of that reconstructional burden.

I have also insisted that a hearing or reading of the text will force a redescription of the hearers'/readers' religious and ethical orientation. The experience of hearing (and reading) a text that resonates with such rhetorical impact will produce in the hearers/readers a related life stance and attitude which will lead to belief, imagination and effective involvement in the states of affairs to which the author has committed himself. In other words, it invites the addressees to join the author in contemplating what has been written, evaluating it, and then responding to it.

I have attempted to demonstrate here that the act in writing constitutes subjectivity and is homologous to Austin's illocutionary act (the act performed *in* saying something), and that the act *of* inscription (homologous to Austin's locutionary act) becomes the communicative transaction (text as language or the written medium). From this point of view, the various religious speech acts are, as Evans suggests, primarily four, namely the *expressive*, the *commissive*, the *representative*, and the *directive*. Working on these assumptions it should be possible to isolate the illocutionary force of the Word upon which is founded the subjectivity of the person of faith. Through the course of this study I shall endeavour to show the extent to which the author uses a series of speech acts with the illocutionary force of the commissive. expressive, representative, and directive to make plain his religious and ethical orientation. I hope further to show how each of these functions implies that the author has committed

[98] E. D. Hirsch, The Validity of Interpretation (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1967) 31.

himself to the manner of his statement, that he has expressed 'belief' in what he perceived to be an accurate reflection of the way things were, and that he has committed himself to convincing the reader to accept 'how' it has been written. As will be made clear later, by creatively utilizing a number of antitheses the author deliberately sets forth a series of competing speech acts, within the limits of which it is potentially possible to engage in a number of infelicitous speech acts with dire ethical consequences. This series of competing speech act circumstances are homiletical devices by which the author engages the readers, committing them to an ethical or theological stance common to them both. The author's purpose appears to be to create fellowship with him and his religious and ethical orientation (1:3; 2:19). This fellowship is fostered through the reader's agreement (ὁμολογέω) with the constituent elements of the author's various literary portraits (speech act circumstances) and their implications, which elicit a proper confession (ὁμολογέω) that coheres with the author's perception of a state of affairs.

All of the methodological considerations and pertinent remarks regarding the workings of speech act theory will serve as a guide for the analysis of the *incipit* (1:1-4), the so-called slogans of the 'opponents' (1: 6, 8, 10; 2:4, 6, 9; 4:20), the antichrists (2:18-24), and the confessions and denials (4:1-4, 16; 5:6).

CHAPTER FOUR

A SPEECH ACT ANALYSIS OF THE THE INCIPIT (I JOHN 1:1-4)

We may now undertake to seek a solution to each of the four passages under consideration by means of a speech act analysis. Each section will commence with a brief discussion of the most crucial problems of the text so that the solution proposed for them by a speech act approach may be readily seen. A speech act analysis of the *incipit*, the *boasts of the antagonists*, the *antichrists*, and the *confessions and denials* will reveal that these passages of I John all represent a series of speech act circumstances by which the author makes known his views about Christ and ethics.

1. INTRODUCTION:

The obvious grammatical peculiarities of the *incipit* and its consequent obscurity of meaning, its similarity in content and linguistic style with the preface of the FG, and its theological implications have called for explanation, as noted in the introduction.[1] Comparisons with the prologue of the FG (John 1:1-18) tend to focus discussion on the identity of the author's precise referent, on his social and cultural setting, and on the theological character of the controversy. The various solutions proposed stress that the theme of the opening lines is the announcement concerning ὁ λόγος τῆς ζωῆς (v. 1). The grammar of the prologue makes it difficult to determine the antecedent of the announcement and the antecedent of the relative clauses. Consequently, there has been much dispute whether the stress is primarily on the gospel message (an impersonalized λόγος) or on the λόγος of God, namely, the pre-existent word (a personalized λόγος). The masculine ὁ λόγος and the feminine ἡ ζωή cannot be the direct objects of the neuter

[1] See chapter one, 1-8.

relative pronouns on grammatical grounds.[2] Some translations, however, attempt to smooth out the grammatical relationship between the prepositional phrase and the verb 'ἀπαγγέλω' (1:3) by suggesting that the four verbs of sense and their content (ὁ λόγος τῆς ζωῆς) are parallel. What the writer has heard, seen, and touched concerning the word of life is what he declares. Dodd and Bultmann both suggest that the prepositional phrase encapsulates the theme of the announcement and the relative clauses state the contents.[3] Most commentators, however, regard the prepositional phrase as summing up the relative clauses and furnishing a second object to the verb ἀπαγγέλλομεν (v. 3).[4] The phrase then defines the area of concern with what has been heard, seen and felt, namely, the word of life.[5] The prepositional phrase is judged to be an *ungrammatical interlude*, which is introduced for clarification but is not meant to be the object of the verbs. Brown agrees with this reading and understands the prepositional phrase "as resumptive and as analytic of the 'what' statements that precede it, as the author stops to reflect that he is really talking about the life giving word."[6] Hence, one approach will tend to smooth the relationship between the prepositional phrase and the ὅ statements,[7] and the other will tend to accept

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[2] C. Haas, M. de Jonge and J. L. Swellengrebel hold that the grammatical incongruity serves a purpose because "it suggests that the situation and qualities of the Word cannot clearly and unequivocally be described in human language" (A Translator's Handbook of the Bible, 22). J. L. Houlden claims that the confusing opening is the result of trying to come to terms "with the disturbing phenomena of sharp doctrinal conflict, division and heresy. The incoherence of the opening of I John is symbolic of the bewildering and perplexing nature of the challenge" (The First Epistle of John, 48). I. H. Marshall says that the slightly awkward parenthetical insertion calls attention to its importance: "the life that God gives to men was revealed historically in Jesus" (The First Epistle of John, 103).

[3] C. H. Dodd says "that prima facie the clause "concerning the word of life" indicates the *theme* of the announcement, and the clauses "that which was from the beginning our hands felt" state the *contents* of the announcement" (The Johannine Epistles, 3). See also R. Bultmann, The Johannine Epistles, 8.

[4] C. Haas, A Translator's Handbook to the Bible, 21, 29. J. L. Houlden, The Johannine Epistles, 50. R. Schnackenburg, Die Johannesbriefe, 60f.

[5] J. L. Houlden, The First Epistle of John, 50.

[6] R. E. Brown, The Epistles of John, 164.

[7] In the interest of smoothness the Moffatt translation has disguised the cumbrous grammar of the incipit (C. H. Dodd, The Johannine Epistles, 1).

that ὁ λόγος τῆς ζωῆς represents an ungrammatical interlude during which the author pauses to ponder the significance of his statements. The underlying assumption, that the prepositional phrase captures the content or the essence of this ungrammatical interlude, is generally not questioned. The over-all accent of the *incipit*, despite its awkward construction, "falls on the *nature* of the *object* which is proclaimed rather than on the *activity* of proclaiming it."[8] According to Marshall the purpose of the author is to remind the reader of the *character* of the message rather than to draw attention to the *act of proclaiming* it.[9] Houlden, noting the *incipit's* grammatical incoherence, its different perspective, and its "muddier and shallower theology" than the FG's, insists that this passage is not primarily concerned with establishing the person and work of Christ, the λόγος. Its primary intention appears to be to establish the "authenticity of witness to Christ. It is an assertion of credentials, made on the basis of an appeal to the past."[10] Differences in emphases notwithstanding, each approach attempts to define the specific theological content of the phrase within the context of controversy, which naturally leads to a discussion of the meaning of λόγος and ζωή.

Discussion is split along two main lines. Frequently λόγος is taken as a *terminus technicus* in the same sense it is utilized in the FG.[11] Ὁ λόγος is personalized and described as the *precreating Word* present with God.

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[8] I. H. Marshall, The First Epistle of John, 100. See also S. S. Smalley, 1, 2, 3 John, 5.

[9] Ibid., 100. See also S. S. Smalley, 1, 2, 3 John, 5.

[10] Houlden maintains that this places I John in the class of many other writings with similar early attempts to establish criteria for authority in the face of rising doctrinal disputes within the community, e.g., *Acts of the Apostles*, and the *Pastoral Epistles* (The Johannine Epistles, 47).

[11] R. Bultmann, The Epistles of John, 8 note 5. Commenting on Moffatt's translation, C. H. Dodd notes that λόγος is retained untranslated because it is to be taken in the sense of the FG. Dodd ultimately argues that the λόγος refers to the Gospel message (The First Epistle of John, 1). R. Schnackenburg says that there "kann kein Zweifel sein, das derselbe Logos wie in Joh 1 gemeint ist" (Die Johannesbriefe, 60-61). C. Haas prefers to interpret λόγος along the lines of the prologue of the FG (A Translator's Handbook on the Letters of John, 22-23). See also J. E. Weir, "The Identity of the Logos in the First Epistle of John," Expository Times 86 (1974/75) 118-20.

Brown, however, points out that without knowledge of the prologue of the FG, λόγος in I John would not be taken personally.[12] It is customary today to understand λόγος in an impersonal sense signifying a *word* or a *message*, with the proviso that the former must also have been in the back of the author's mind.[13] The genitive τοῦ λογοῦ τῆς ζωῆς creates an additional difficulty.[14] Some understand it as an epexegetical or an appositive genitive.[15] The two adjacent nouns, λόγος and ζωή, have the same referent and stand in the same syntactical relationship to the rest of the sentence. Ζωή provides additional explanation of λόγος; i.e., "about the word which is life," or "the word who is life." The clause ὃ ἦν ἀπ' ἀρχῆς is translated to read, "who was from the beginning." The explanation is favoured by those who wish to personify the word because the prologue of the Gospel of John states, "ὃ γέγονεν. ἐν αὐτῷ ζωὴ ἦν..." (1:3). Others favour understanding the "word of life" as a descriptive genitive in an adjectival sense, i.e., life-giving word. The Word has the power to give life because it has divine life in itself. Still others prefer a third choice by taking it as an objective genitive: *life* serves as the content of the *word* or *message* proclaimed. Whichever of the three grammatical alternatives is preferred, any defensible interpretation will depend on more than grammar and usage. Therefore, Brown cautions about being too precise regarding the implications of the genitive, and

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[12] R. E. Brown remarks that while the Gospel prologue cannot be ignored, it should not lead to the conclusion that the author of I John understood and employed the concept of λόγος in a similar fashion. The other references to λόγος (1:10; 2:5, 7, 14: 3:18) do not involve personification. Indeed, responds Brown, "he may be attempting to shift the emphasis to confute adversaries who are drawing their theology from a one-sided interpretation of the Gospel of John prologue; he may wish to remind his audience of the centrality of the proclamation of the gospel during Jesus' lifetime - the word proclaimed by the Word" (The Epistles of John, 164).

[13] S. S. Smalley believes that the two interpretations of λόγος "need not be opposed to each other (1, 2, 3 John, 6). A. E. Brooke, the Johannine Epistles, 5-6. R. Kysar says that λόγος intentionally recalls to mind the prologue of the FG even though the sense of the word is message (I, II, III John, 32).

[14] J. C. Coetzee, "Life in St. John's Writings and the Qumran Scrolls," Neotestamentica 6 (1972) 48-66. R. E. Brown, The Gospel According to John, 505-508.

[15] F. Blass and A. Debrunner, A Greek Grammar of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature, trans. by R. W. Funk (Chicago/London: The University of Chicago Press, 1961) § 167.

proposes that the one case can express all three ideas.

In the desire to delineate the meaning of the difficult prepositional phrase, historical critics focus attention on the character and content of the message proclaimed. The prepositional phrase, however, is not self-explanatory so that the meaning of the message is difficult to decipher. In order to ease the difficulty of trying to determine the content and meaning of the ἀγγελία, it is set into the context of a community under the influence of those propagating a false Christology. By placing the phrase into the larger social context of a particular community thought to be in a Christological conflict with the antagonists, the content of the message (ἀγγελία) is described in light of what ought to have been said to the antagonists.[16] It is assumed that by establishing a direct or indirect dependence of the Epistle's *incipit* on the prologue of the FG in the context of the social and theological constraints of Johannine Christianity permits the exegete to give a fuller explanation of ὁ λόγος τῆς ζωῆς (1:1). Moreover, by drawing attention to the polemical language in 2:18-22 and to what appears to be a defense of an orthodox Christology against heretical inroads (4:1-4, 16; 5:6) it is suggested that the Epistle gives evidence of a later development of Johannine thought possibly as a corrective to misreadings of the FG's Christology. In such a context, the author of I John clearly sets out to proclaim the historical manifestation of the life giving word of God to counterbalance an erroneous stress on his divinity. It is his desire to call to the readers' minds the fundamentals of the faith which give answer to heresy and provide tests whereby the "profession of Christian commitment may be judged" against those who subvert the faith and who consequently deceive themselves and the community (1:8, 10).[17]

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[16] Without being absolutely certain about the historical context the preface presupposes, it is possible to allow the message to stand as it is without a priori assuming that the author's message needed revision in light of the polemic in which he was engaged? J. M. Lieu draws attention to the "obvious danger of reconstructing the views of the heretics from the language and silences of the Epistle and then using that reconstruction to explain both the language and the silences" (The Second and Third Epistles of John, 6).

[17] S. S. Smalley, 1, 2, 3 John, 43. ἐν τούτῳ γινώσκομεν occurs a total of 12 times in the Epistle (2:3, 5c; 3:10, 16, 19, 24; 4:2, 9, 10, 13, 17; 5:2). See also R. Law, The Tests of Life, A Study of the First Epistle of St. John (Edinburgh: T. @ T. Clark, 1909) 209-10. A. E. Brooke says that the author now "points out the signs of Christian life" (The Epistles of St. John, 29). I. H. Marshall designates them as tests (The First Epistle of John, 123). See R. E. Browns

The meaning of the *incipit* is therefore directly tied to a particular historical circumstance that compelled the author to write. He wrote to strengthen a community under attack by those subverting the faith and to correct their erroneous Christological and ethical understanding. Painter insists that it is important for the reader to realize "that the presence of the opponents pervades the whole book...that presence was more obvious to the original readers for whom the schism of the opponents was a recent painful, traumatic experience."[18] Moreover, continues Painter, "because the meaning of the book is bound up with that situation some attempt must be made to reconstruct it if I John is to be understood."[19] This view suggests that the author had a specific community in mind and that he intended to protect them from the errors of the antagonists when he wrote the *incipit*.[20]

Walter J. Ong has argued, however, that it is fatuous to think that an author will try to imagine his readers individually even when writing from within a clearly defined community. It may be that at certain times during writing he envisions or imagines himself writing to real persons, but he cannot possibly think of all his readers in their particularities. He may have in mind the real social, economic and psychological state of the possible readers, but generally he will not single out an individual or community, unless he specifically suggests he is doing so. It is the reading audience which fires his imagination, which consists of many nameless, faceless real persons he hopes will read his document.[21] After assessing the literary character of I

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discussion (The Epistles of John, 248-50).

[18] J. Painter holds that the meaning of the book is bound up with the historical situation, so that an attempt must be made to reconstruct it in order for I John to be understood ("The 'Opponents' in I John," 49-50).

[19] Ibid., 50.

[20] Walter Wink, The Bible in Human Transformation: Toward a New Paradigm for Biblical Study (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1973).

[21] Walter J. Ong, "The Writer's Audience is a Fiction," in Interfaces of the Word (Ithica and London: Cornell University Press, 53-81).

John, Kümmel concluded that "I John is not to be understood as being in any way a writing intended for specific readers."[22] The general character of the ἀγγελία of the *incipit* militates against any attempts to reconstruct the social context which prompted its genesis.[23]

The *incipit* commences with a sweeping nonspecific proclamation bearing testimony to what has been heard, seen, and touched without identifying its author, its audience, its adversaries, or its connection with anything written previously. The non-specific appeal of the preface of I John and the fact that the author does not specifically and consistently polemicize against a group(s) of opponents calls into question viewing I John as a polemical document. Rather, the character of the *incipit's* universal appeal determines how the entire work is to be read and therefore cautions against seeking the identity of the opponents and their views. Rather than to judge the language of the *incipit* to function primarily as a polemic on the basis of the later abstruse statements about the 'antichrists' (2:18) and the 'false prophets' (4:1), I will argue that its language functions to constitute the subjectivity of both writer and reader/hearer. The evocative but ambiguous language of the preface invites the reader to consider the complete work, including the apparently context-specific passages (1:6, 8, 10; 2:4, 6, 9 - the so-called boasts; 2:18-21 - the ἀντίχριστοι; 4:1-4, 16; 5:6 - the language of confession and denial), from such a viewpoint. The imprecise language of the *incipit*, its allusions to the word of life and the profusion of sensory verbs

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[22] W. G. Kümmel, Introduction to the New Testament, 437.

[23] In his discussion of the possibility of identifying the author's historical contexts in written works, Werner H. Kelber asks whether "written works are tailor made for a historically identifiable community so that its social setting would be mirrored in the text?" He argues that while hearers and their world belong to the oral environment and its hermeneutical context, inseparably with the linguistic meaning of the linguistic work, such an aid to understanding disappears in the case of the written. Because social contextuality has ceased to be an immediate participant in the liguisticality of the text, it can be derived from it only with extreme caution. He insists that it does not deny that texts are culturally conditioned and related to history. "But," he argues, "reconstructions of precise communal histories based on texts erroneously assumes an unbroken continuity in the function of contextuality from the oral to the written medium" (The Oral and Written Gospel: The Hermeneutics of Speaking and Writing in the Synoptic Tradition, Mark, Paul and Q [Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983] 115-116).

shift the focus from the character of the message proclaimed to the act of proclaiming it. Julius Schniewind, in his study of the cluster of words associated with ἀγγελία, says that in its linguistic use "the word can signify the act of declaring no less than what is declared, though the latter is more frequent."[24]

The preface of I John analyzed from the perspective of the *act of writing* and the self-involving speech acts, will show that the act of declaring not what is declared is the major focus. I will show that it is possible to determine the *concrete linguistic context* of the *incipit* through the use and development of Austin's concept of language as *performative*, viz., speech acts and the conventions that govern their use. The linguistic context of the statements of the *incipit* is made clear by a series of self-involving speech acts and the conventions that determine their felicity or infelicity. The series of self-involving speech acts used in the act of writing the preface (in contrast to what has been written), reveal his intentions and attitude. The literary portrait created by the enactment of these self-involving speech acts reveals what the author's attitudes are towards what he has written and reveals that he intends to make truth claims about the world and about God, though scarcely in the form of theological or ethical propositions.[25] The speech acts of the *incipit* suggest that the act of proclamation requires that both the writer and readers do something about it, i.e., to commit themselves to the *manner* in which it has been stated, which makes plain *what* has been stated. It is "only through the performatory use of religious utterances" that the

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[24] Julius Schniewind cites Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, 7, 247 and *Jewish Wars*, 4, 230, 232 as examples of the former use (Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, ed. by Gerhard Kittel, vol 1 [Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company 1964] 56-73, esp. 59). In hellenistic literature ἀγγελία signifies both the substance and the conveyance thereof. See further, Henry George Liddell and Robert Scott, A Greek-English Lexicon (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1968), ἀγγελία, 7; ἀναγγελία, 100; ἀπαγγέλλω, 173.

[25] Wolfgang Iser writes that the "time has surely come to cut the thread altogether and replace ontological arguments with functional arguments, for what is important to readers, critics and authors alike, is what literature *does* and not what it *means*" (The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response [Baltimore: John Hopkins University, 1978].

preface of I John along with the so-called boasts and the language of confession and denial acquire propositional force.[26]

In the analysis which is to follow, the statements of the *incipit* will be taken as religious speech acts with the illocutionary force of an *expressive* and a *commissive*, by which the author conveys to the readers his attitude to and belief in the truths he articulates. An essential condition for the speech act of the expressive to come off properly is 'belief'.[27] The force of the statements of the *incipit* may be taken as an expression that conveys the attitude of 'belief'. In the act of writing the series of opening affirmations the author makes plain that he *believes* them to portray accurately his perception of the way things are under certain conditions as specified by the speech act circumstance the *incipit* represents. For the act of writing with the illocutionary force of the expressive to come off properly, the writer of I John had to believe that the reality of what he describes and the manner of his description, accurately represent what he perceives to be true about what was from the beginning, and its relation to what has been seen, heard, and touched concerning the word of life. The linguistic speech act circumstance of an unspecified beginning reflects what the author believes accurately represents the limits within which it is possible to confess felicitously that the word of life has appeared.

An essential condition for a speech act with the force of a *commissive* to succeed is commitment. Such a speech act commits the writer to a course of action, including announcements of intention, which are not necessarily promises.[28] The explicit performative verbs μαρτυρέω and ἀπαγγέλω and the series of evocative sensory verbs, in combination with the speech acts of

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[26] George A. Lindbeck, The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age [Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1984] 66). See also Edgar V. McKnight who makes a distinction between empirical statements which are true and depend on evidence and are something we know or do not know, and statements that claim truthfulness and depend on our acceptance of them; they are statements we acknowledge or fail to acknowledge (Post Modern use of the Bible: The Emergence of Reader-Oriented Criticism, 265).

[27] See n. 84, chapter three, 110.

[28] See chapter three, 95-102.

the 'expressive' and 'commissive', make plain the course of action upon which the author is embarked and his commitment to it. He does not only testify to what has been heard, seen and touched as an observer who clinically declares the objective facts about the word of life. The act of testifying obligates him to live out both its religious and ethical implications. Otherwise his act would be infelicitous. The constitutive character of the commissive speech act implies his commitment to follow through on the ethical and religious consequences of his written acts. In other words, in the utterance of these statements the author is obligated to stand by his words. Rather than employing theologically persuasive arguments to convince his readers of the truth of his perception of reality, the author engages in a sequence of speech acts which convey to his readers a commitment to and belief in his perception of a state of affairs. In the end the author not only convinces the readers to accept his perspective, but it also leads them to the requisite changes needed to live in conformity with the author's ethical and theological orientation, i.e., the readers thereby have been convinced (the perlocutionary act).

B. SPEECH ACT ANALYSIS OF I JOHN 1:1-4

A sequence of neuter relative pronouns and a rush of sensory verbs followed by a parenthetical statement not in grammatical accord with what precedes or follows it may create interpretative difficulties. However, despite its grammatical tangle the *incipit* is constructed with dramatic sensitivity evoking a pleasant aural response for the purpose perhaps of stimulating thought and action.[29] It continues by repeating "we have seen" and by testifying and proclaiming life eternal, following once more with "what we have seen and have heard," and then concluding with a second use of ἀπαγγέλω and the invitation to fellowship. The repetition of the evocative

[29] S. S. Smalley states that despite the incipit's obscurity of meaning it nevertheless "constitutes an impressive introduction to the work, ...constructed with dramatic sensitivity" (1, 2, 3 John, 4).

sensory verbs serves to create a scene of dramatic immediacy and urgency. The series of sensory verbs and the two principle verbs μαρτύρεω and ἀπαγγέλω, and the speech acts they represent, furnish the associative link between the disparate thoughts articulated in the *incipit*. While each idea represented is important, the over-all impression created and its effect on the reader in the end becomes the significant feature of the preface. It is this total impression that provides the primary stimulus to effect change and determines how the entire work is to be read. Because of the cumbrous grammar the entire preface is a loosely adjoining series of statements which in their individual parts make very little sense, but when read and heard (1:1) for the over-all impressionistic effect, the speech act verbs and their illocutionary forces function to create an eloquent and effective introduction founding the subjectivity of the writing subject.[30] In the act of writing the author is a witness to the power of the word and its constituting character and is therefore not in a position to treat it primarily as propositional truth.[31]

In keeping with the over-all impact and communicative design of the *incipit* the author appropriately commences with ὃ ἦν ἀπ' ἀρχῆς.[32] The

[30] Pheme Perkins states in this connection that "associative links between words and thoughts, not logical syllogisms, provide the movement from one sentence to the next. The net effect of the whole, then, is of a spiral motion of return to a slightly different formulation of what we began with; not of the direct forward march of analytic argument" (The Johannine Epistles, xxi).

[31] Paul J. Achtemeier, "*Omne Verbum Sonat*: The New Testament and the Oral Environment of Late Western Antiquity," Journal of Biblical Literature 109/1 (1990) 3-27.

[32] Under the influence of the prologue of the FG, commentators have observed that the copulative verb is timeless or umlimited in duration and therefore refers to the pre-incarnational existence of Jesus. If the earthly Jesus had been in the author's mind he would have utilized the verb γίνομαι and not εἰμί, following John 1:14 ὁ λόγος σὰρξ ἐγένετο. Confirmation is sought in John 8:58 in which the two verbs are contrasted with πρὶν Ἀβραὰμ γενέσθαι ἐγὼ εἰμί. For others ἀρχή rather than the copulative becomes the key. It appears some 55 times in the New Testament, 10 times in I John and II John always governed by the preposition ἀπό. A variety of interpretations have been advanced: (1) it is linked with the phrase Ἐν ἀρχῇ of the FG and Genesis 1:1 defining the pre-incarnational career of Jesus; (2) John 8:44, which states that the devil was ἀνθρωποκτόνος ἦν ἀπ' ἀρχῆς, is linked with I John 1:1 and 3:8 to denote the beginning of Old Testament salvation history, undergirded by references to Genesis 2:17; 3:4, 19 and to the story of Cain and Abel (Genesis 4:8-9); (3) Jesus is described as the beginning; he is the alpha and omega (Rev. 3:14); (4) it is meant to refer to the incarnation of Jesus or to his conception; (5) it could signify the beginning of the earthly career of Jesus after undergoing John the Baptist's baptism (6) it could signify the beginning of Christian preaching to those who had never been actual eyewitnesses to the earthly career of Jesus (Acts 11:15; Luke 24:47). (7) it refers to the beginning of the community not the world's

subtle ambiguity of 'απ' ἀρχῆς is not restricted to the opening clause but appears throughout the writing and in II John.[33] In five instances the verb ἀκούω is linked with ἀπ' ἀρχῆς (1:1; 2:24 [twice]; 3:11; II John 6), in two cases γινώσκω occurs with it (2:13, 14), in two places the verb ἔχω is used with ἀπ' ἀρχῆς (2:7; II John 5), and in one instance it is utilized to indicate that the διάβολος sinned ἀπ' ἀρχῆς (3:8). In none of its appearances does the author bother to clarify what the prepositional phrase means. Its meaning is generally described in one of two ways. If commentators take λόγος in an impersonal sense, ἀρχῆς is interpreted in a purely temporal and local sense descriptive of the content of the gospel exemplified in the ministry of Jesus. If it is taken in a personal sense, ἀρχῆς is understood to denote Christian revelation coeval with creation, possibly an allusion to the pre-existent Word in eternity prior to creation itself. The former view suggests that the writer intends to signal his intention to set out the original teachings in opposition to the new beliefs proving to be attractive to the community. The greater weight of modern opinion identifies ἀρχή with any number of *beginnings*: the beginning of gospel preaching; the beginning of Jesus' association with his disciples; the beginning of Jesus' earthly career with his incarnation; the beginning of Jesus' preaching career with his baptism; beginning as the temporal point at which the readers come to faith, etc. The interpretative possibilities, however, load the prepositional phrase with specific sets of meaning it quite possibly was not intended to have. Although the writer may have had some historical notions about a *beginning* in mind, he does not develop a connection between them and the word of life. Paradoxically, it is not possible to literally *hear* what was from the beginning (1:1; 2:24; 3:11; II John 6 - ἀκούω appears 14 times), to *know* what was from the beginning (2:13, 14 - γινώσκω appears 25 times), or to *have*

(J. M. Lieu, The Second and Third Epistles of John, 181).

[33] For a helpful schematic detailing the distribution of the most frequent themes in I John (Edward Malastesta, Interiority and Covenant [Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1978] 91).

what was from the beginning (2:7; II John 5 - ἔχω appears 28 times)[34] except through a source who claims to have it. Since ἀπ' ἀρχῆς is not explicitly defined, it might be best to take it as a literary device which in the context of the act of writing, and its differing illocutionary forces reveal the author's concern to identify his ἀγγελία with the respectability of the well established without necessarily attempting to recall specific theological fundamentals of the Johannine tradition concerning the gospel message. Julian Hill has cogently argued that the meaning of ἀρχῆς probably derived from a series of Old Testament prophetic texts.[35] Its meaning adduced from the prophetic tradition is "from of old" and would have been familiar to the readers.[36] Whatever may have been in the author's mind, his refusal specifically to define it and the parallelism between it and the *what* clauses of seeing, hearing and touching confirmed his testimonial and proclamation as something from of old and therefore worthy of attention.[37] It is a message trustworthy and reliable. His ἀγγελία is trustworthy and not novel because it is from of old; according to him it has a well established pedigree: it is from the beginning and therefore eminently worthy of consideration.[38]

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[34] Hermann Hanse notes that ἔχω appears most frequently in the Johannine writings and that "I John has the highest percentage of any book." Invariably it is defined in a static sense of possessing something, e.g., salvation, τὴν ἀγάπην τοῦ Θεοῦ ἔχειν (John 5:42), τὴν εἰρήνην ἔχειν (John 16:33), τὴν χαρὰν ἔχειν (John 17:13), τὸ φῶς ἔχειν (John 8:12; 12:35, 36), ἐντολὴν παλαιὰν ἣν εἴχετε ἀπ' ἀρχῆς (1 John 2:7) (Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, ed. by Gerhard Kittel [Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1964] 816-832.

[35] The LXX offers several actual examples of the phrase ἀπ' ἀρχῆς: Isa 43:13; Mic 5:2; Hab 1:12 (Julian Hill, "Little Children, keep yourselves from idols": I John 5:21 Reconsidered," The Catholic Biblical Quarterly 51 [April, 1989] 285-310.

[36] Julian Hill, "Little Children, 307. See also A. A. T. Ehrhardt, The Beginning (Manchaster: Manchester University Press, 1968).

[37] On the importance of the *antiquity* of the Christian message and its credibility in early Christianity, see Jaroslav Pelikan, The Emergence of the Catholic Tradition (100-660), vol 1 (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1971) 27-41.

[38] I. H. Marshall suggests that the heretics may have mistakenly assumed that they could reject the writer's commands because of his talk about "new commands." They were novel rules to be ignored. Hence the author emphasizes that the commandments of Christ which they should obey are not new, but old (The First Epistle of John, 128-9). Note, however, that the 'antiquity' of the message was extremely important also in Greco-Roman writings as, a hedge against 'novelty'. Jaroslav Pelikan writes, "antiquity was widely regarded in pagan thought as lending authority to a system of thought or belief," thus causing Christian writers to insist that Christianity was not a novelty, for the Old Testament "was of greater antiquity than

The meaning of ἀπ' ἀρχῆς in the *incipit* is subtly enhanced by its appearance in a number of other places in I John, where it is used in conjunction with what has been had, known, and heard from the beginning. The author insists that what he writes to them is new and yet old because they have had it from the beginning (2:7, 8; II John 5), they have known it from the beginning (I John 2:13, 14) and they have heard it from the beginning (1:1; 2:24; 3:11; II John 6). He urges that the commandment he writes is not new but old because you have had it from the beginning, and moreover, that the old commandment is the word (λόγος) which you have heard (2:7). Here in I John 2:7 it is the old commandment that is the word that is heard. Although the word that is heard is linked with ἡ ἐντολὴ ἡ παλαιά, it is of interest to note that the verb ἀκούω appears once more with ὁ λόγος and ἀπ' ἀρχῆς, no doubt to recall not only the *incipit*, but the many other aural reminders which punctuate the writing (1:1, 3, 5; 2:7, 18, 24; 3:11; 4:3). Hearing ἀπ' ἀρχῆς repeated in a number of different contexts would have had a cumulative rhetorical impact upon the listeners making what they had already heard earlier new but still reliable and trustworthy. What is heard from the beginning is not novel but new; new because the author gives new expression to it, and new because every time the word of life is heard, it is heard anew and has a renewed impact upon both author and reader;[39] old because they have already heard it from the beginning. What they hear is a trustworthy word deserving of their attention. To maximize the rhetorical aural impact, the author repeats once more (πάλιν) that it is a new commandment which he writes to them which is true in him and in you (2:8). Presumably the commandment that he writes to them is captured by the assertions that follow. He writes that the darkness is fleeing and the true light is already shining (2:8). He who hates his brother is in the darkness (2:9); the one loving the brother remains in the light (2:10; 4:20). The commandment which they had from the beginning was not a passive

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the Greek writers" (The Emergence of the Christian Tradition (100-600) [Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1971] 27-41, esp., 34-5).

[39] Marshall states it is 'new' and remains 'new' "in that it remains true and is continually being realized and actualized in the life of Jesus and his followers in the new age (The First Epistle

possession once described and now recapitulated to remind and correct the recalcitrant secessionists who had subverted the truth. Moreover, the assertion about the commandment from the beginning was not set out simply to remind the readers of a static possession descriptive of the ἐντολή they had once received from the beginning. It was rather a call to the readers dynamically to participate in a λόγος ὃν ἠκούσατε that constituted the character not only of the author but of his readers.

In the interconnected pattern of meaning between words and phrases and their over-all rhetorical impact upon the hearer, it is not so important that we try to isolate an old commandment and a new commandment, for no doubt, if this had been important to the author he would have clarified what the respective commandments were. Instead, the author quite simply tells them that the old commandment is the word which they have heard, but that it is nevertheless a new commandment which he writes to them. The *incipit* reinforces that what was from the beginning is that which they have heard concerning the word of life; this word of life has been made manifest for it has been seen, heard and touched, and therefore it is the word which constitutes the basis for fellowship.[40] The many references to the activity of hearing suggests that the readers would have made a variety of aural connections that would have given the writing an aural consistency that it otherwise appears to lack in its written form.

Judging by the number of times the verb ἀκούω appears in I John, it is perhaps an important indicator to the way the work is to be taken. The rhetorical aural effect of what was heard would have allowed the readers to make a variety of important connections with what was heard from the beginning concerning the word of life. For instance, in I John 3:11 the ἀγγελία which they have heard (ἠκούσατε) from the beginning (ἀπ' ἀρχῆς) is that they are to love one another. In I John 1:5 the ἀγγελία which they

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of John, 129).

[40] Notably, the verb ἀκούω is linked with ἀπ' ἀρχῆς and appears twice in the context of the ἀντίχριστοι (2:18, 24) and once more in the confessional language of I John 4:3, suggesting that if the impressionistic character of the preface is taken seriously, the label ἀντίχριστοι need not imply context specific language and that it ought not to be applied as a label for

have heard is that God is light and in him there is no darkness at all (in the verses following this message has important ethical implications). In I John 2:18 they hear that the antichrists have come, and in 2:24 they hear ἀπ' ἀρχῆς that they are to remain in the son and in the father. And finally, in 4:3 the readers are once more reminded about what they have already heard, viz., the antichrist has come. The verb thus performs an important function in the *incipit's* over all impressionistic impact upon the readers/hearers and prepares them for the other things they are about to hear. Only hearing makes what was from the beginning accessible to the readers. Hearing is indispensable to the involvement of the reader, more so than seeing and touching, which are limited in scope. In his discussion concerning the shift from orality to typography, W. J. Ong claims that sight isolates and touch delimits, whereas hearing incorporates. Sight situates the observer outside what he views, sound pours into the hearer. Sight covers one direction at a time: to look at something the viewer must move the eyes from one object to the next, but hearing envelopes the hearer. Hearing unifies and brings harmony.[41] What was from the beginning cannot be recaptured and described in order to be seen and touched, but it can be heard and thus be used to recall the λόγος which is life. In its rhetorical aural setting, therefore, 'ακούειν the word is not simply a recounting of what was heard from the beginning in defense of an orthodox Christology or directed toward the heretics but an act in which external hearing becomes true hearing leading to action and ethical behaviour (ὃς ἔχει ὦτα ἀκούειν ἀκουέτω - Mk 4:9).[42]

Most likely, therefore, what had been heard, seen and touched was not directed against Gnostics who denied the reality of Christ,[43] but when taken as the sum of expressions with the force of an expressive and representative, the sequence of verbs coupled with ἀπ' ἀρχῆς summoned full

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heretical groups within the Johannine community.

[41] W. J. Ong, Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word (London/New York: Methuen Press, 1982) 72.

[42] See further Paul J. Achtemeier, *Omne verbum sonat*, 3-19.

[43] Pheme Perkins argues that this approach flounders on the fact that the gnostics never deny

sensory involvement in the ὁ λόγος τῆς ζωῆς. It appears to be much less a negative statement directed toward the heretics inclined to undervalue the significance of ethical behaviour, than a positive utterance to which the author is committed and through which he wishes to engage the reader in thoughtful action; αὕτη ἐστὶν ἡ ἀγγελία ἣν ἠκούσατε ἀπ' ἀρχῆς, ἵνα ἀγαπῶμεν ἀλλήλους (3:11).[44] Through the utilization of a sequence of sensory verbs the author expresses his attitude towards what has been written, namely belief, and he commits himself to the religious and ethical implications of full sensory participation in the life and its manifestation. By it he strengthens the encouragement to κοινωνία with him and μετὰ τοῦ πατρὸς και μετὰ τοῦ υἱοῦ αὐτοῦ ' Ιησοῦ Χριστοῦ 1:3). It is an invitation calling the readers to enter into the vicarious experience of hearing, seeing and touching what was from the beginning.[45] Indeed, it has far-reaching ethical and theological consequences the author will forcefully spell out later on in the writing.

Attention has been drawn to the alternation of verb tenses between the perfect and the aorist. Robert Kysar maintains that the "variation in the tenses of the verbs in the Greek seems to be little more than artistic style, and sophisticated differences are fruitlessly sought therein."[46] I also take the tense variations of the verbs to be no more than a stylistic feature of the prologue of I John without theological significance.[47] A more difficult problem to overcome is the identity of the person or persons to whom the first person plural in the verbs and the personal pronouns refer. The rather

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that Jesus has a body which can be seen and touched (The Johannine Epistles, 10).

[44] Gerhard Kittel, "ἀκούω," Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, 216-225.

[45] Robert Kysar understands that the verbs metaphorically signify the author's personal experience of the gospel message in the tradition of the church. While it is true that the author may be writing as an authoritative figure as the voice of the community correcting error, it may be just as plausible to argue that in setting forth his views he exhibits greater interest in expressing an interactive setting between himself and his readers through the illocutionary acts in which he engages (I, II, III John, 32).

[46] R. Kysar, I, II, III John, 32.

[47] S. S. Smalley, 1, 2, 3 John, 7. A. E. Brooke suggests that the facts of the reception of the message are presented in such a way as to emphasize their character under different aspects of

striking occurrence of the first person plural continues in verses 2-4 (7 verbs, 4 pronouns), and indeed appears in 51 of the 105 verses of I John. A number of attempts to identify and explain the *we* motif of I John have been ventured.[48] Much has been made of the possibility that the unknown author, perhaps the elder mentioned in II John, was an authority figure within the Johannine community who, via the history of tradition, could be traced back to the early witnesses of Jesus.[49] Efforts to trace developing theological responses between the earlier FG and the later Epistle have contributed to the notion of a Johannine community where an authority figure was responsible for recording the community's tradition and history. This person with Johannine credentials saw it as his task to deal with either the consequences of his own teaching having gone amok,[50] or attending to the errors of those who had developed erroneous views from the FG. Yet tracking a straight development through the FG to the Epistle does not necessarily reveal the history, tradition and theology of Johannine Christianity. Nor need such a linear development suggest that the figure of authority simply repeated the community's history, even if it could be shown that I John was in the FG's orbit historically and theologically. Lieu argues that the author of I John, even if dependent on the FG, need not have fully understood or followed it assiduously "nor deny that where he differs, rather than showing a development from the Gospel he may be continuing the original thought of the community or developing an independent reflection

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the verb tenses (The Epistle of St. John, 4).

[48] The explanations offered fall into two main categories with several variations in each: A. the 'we' is not a genuine plural and designates the author: (1) it is a plural of majesty or authority - the author speaks as one with authority (2) it is an editorial 'we' and therefore a writing convention. B. the 'we' is a genuine plural and involves more than one person (1) the 'we' represents the author and his readers but does not call attention to a group (2) the 'we' refers to the author and a particular group distinct from 'audience' or 'readers' (3) the 'we' designates a group of eyewitnesses (4) the 'we' represents the Johannine school.

[49] See discussion in chapter two, 9-83. Carefully analysing the broad second century witness to the Johannine corpus, Martin Hengel concludes that the FG and the Epistles are "not the expression of a community with many voices, but above all the voice of a towering theologian, the founder and head of the Johannine school" (The Johannine Question, ix). He was John, the teacher and disciple of the Lord, who "must have attained an extremely great age and therefore was known as the 'elder' (the elder mentioned in II John) in the school and in the communities connected with it" (The Johannine Question, 80).

on it."[51] Nor need it necessarily imply a figure of authority within the Johannine orbit who speaks as part of a chain of tradition bearers.[52] To create a composite of the Johannine community and its author(s) on the basis of its received documents is hazardous business.

Blass, Debrunner and Funk label the *we* as a literary plural (*pluralis sociativus*), and point out that the use of ἡμεῖς instead of ἐγώ and the first person plural of the verb instead of the first person singular is common among Greek authors. With the use of the *pluralis sociativus* "the writer (or speaker) thereby brings the reader (or hearer) into association with his own action."[53] Taking the *we* as a literary plural makes good sense and underscores the notion of independent theological reflection written in a Johannine idiom widely prevalent. The writer deliberately engages in certain written acts because he wishes to secure a reading audience for his views. In his desire to exert influence and exercise his authority via the written word he engages in acts of writing that draw his readers into association with his religious and ethical views. There is very little doubt that the issue of authority lies at the heart of the document. In I John, however,it is not that the writer already possesses an authority which needs only to be asserted; the writing, I would suggest, reflects more the need to establish authority. A functional view of language perceives the text of I John as representing more than the polemic of an authority figure engaged in a Christological debate that threatened to destroy the harmony of his community. Rather, the speech acts the author uses indicate his desire to establish his authority by writing in such a manner as to commit the readers to his theological and ethical orientation. It is for this reason he also employs a sequence of verbs of sensation in the first person plural. The experience of *hearing* or *reading* them permits his readers to participate vicariously in what has from the beginning been seen, heard, and touched concerning the word of life. Such a

[51] Ibid., 167. She argues, of course, that I John's theology is distinct precisely because it is pointing away from the FG to an earlier community stance behind it.

[52] R. E. Brown, The Epistles of John, 161.

[53] F. Blass and A. Debrunner, A Greek Grammar of the New Testament and other Early Christian Literature, § 146/280.

strategy increases the likelihood that the readers would respond positively to an unknown author who is trying to convince them of his Christological views. Thus, it would seem that the striking use of the language of intimacy and the frequent use of the first person plural represent the author's attempt to engage his audience to consider carefully the ethical and theological implications of what he has written. These literary devices along with the speech acts the author uses in the *incipit* consolidate the sense of solidarity with the past, fortify the bond of κοινωνία, and increase the likelihood that the readers will accept his point of view.[54]

The *incipit* commences with a grammatically obscure long sentence, punctuated, however, with a series of significant verbs that add force to the author's vicarious sensory experience of that which was from the beginning concerning the word of life. Μαρτυρέω is an explicit performative with the force of a representative and ἀπαγγέλω is another with the force of a directive. The point of the directive is to convey to the readers the author's perception of a state of affairs in which the attempt is made to get them to do something.[55] The primary verbs μαρτυρέω and ἀπαγγέλω are conspicuous speech acts that do not so much describe the character of the object proclaimed and witnessed as signify what the author is doing. In saying "we proclaim" and "we testify" the author is effectuating something, viz., establishing his commitment to and belief in what is testified and proclaimed, rather than simply reporting the content of what is being proclaimed and testified. The two performative verbs in the context of the *incipit* do not merely describe ὁ λὸγος τῆς ζωῆς but constitute the subject of the author as one committed to the word of life and its implications ethically and as one

[54] Both secular and religious literature offer examples of authors who use verbs of sensation to describe events in which they only participated vicariously. For example, in *Agricola* 45, Tacitus identifies himself with 'we' in an event in which he was not involved historically. In the generally accepted pseudonymous II Peter the writer identifies himself with Peter at the transfiguration. Polycarp exhibits the tendency to identify his audiences with important New Testament witnesses and events, e.g., Paul. In the *Adversus Haereses* 5.1.1, Irenaeus's use of the 'we' links him and his readers directly with the person of Jesus. Gregory Nazianzen (*Oration* 39.14) suggests that "we ran with the star, and adored with the Magi."

[55] J. L. Austin, How to do Things with Words, 155-156; 161-162. See also Th. Ballmer and W. Brennestuhl, Speech Act Classification, 56.

committed to get the reader/hearer to respond in an appropriate manner to a particular linguistic state of affairs concerning the word of life. The preface represents a literary state of affairs in the world of the author's utterance which persuasively discloses to the author's readers his perception of what he believes accurately represents the way things are concerning the word of life. The readers are told that the life has appeared, that it is life eternal, and that it provides the basis for fellowship. By expressing his belief in the context of a linguistic framework, the author attempts to convince the readers that his perception of a religious reality with theological and ethical consequences is worthy of their consideration.[56] Speech acts with the illocutionary force of the directive,[57] and of the representative make plain the self-involving character of the act in writing and imply that the author's primary concern is not to refute false teaching but to set forth his views which have significant religious and theological implications.[58]

An essential condition required for an act of writing with the force of a representative to succeed is that the one who performs it must commit himself to the manner of his presentation. If the author were not committed to a state of affairs about the undefined grandeur of that which was from the beginning - however he chooses to define it - the illocutionary act would fail. Commitment is one of a series of contextual felicity conditions in which a violation of any one condition would void what has been performed. For example, if in testifying to ὃ ἦν ἀπ' ἀρχῆς it were shown that the author was not committed to what the beginning entails in relation to what has been seen, heard, and touched concerning the word of life, his act would be infelicitous. What to make of the utterance and its meaning remains obscure, but his commitment to the manner of his presentation and its over-all impact upon the reader clarify the force of this assertion. In the act of

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[56] See n. 84, p. 108.

[57] Austin's label for the 'directive' is 'exercitive' (How to do things with Words, 155).

[58] I am in agreement with those who insist that corrective polemic is not the only purpose the author has in mind. It is also his intention to edify and to encourage his readers. A. E. Brooke writes for example that it is "at least as important to remember that his primary objects are to exhort and to edify" (The Epistles of St. John, xxx).

testifying the author commits himself to a beginning in which God has made manifest his greatest act - the word of life. If the author had no intention of committing himself to the linguistic reality of what he attests to and its implications, it would be subject to an *abuse* - an act purported but hollow. As we shall see, the sequence of sensory verbs that the author uses along with μαρτυρέω serve to confirm the sincerity of his utterance act.

The author's status as a vicarious participant in what he describes is strengthened by the verb μαρτυρέω (1:2). He assumes the literary persona of an eyewitness who testifies on behalf of another (καί μαρτυροῦμεν). The writer adds additional force to what he has written concerning the word of life by implying his status as an eyewitness to an event of momentous proportions. Not only is the message from of old, which he proclaims and testifies, eminently credible and worthy of consideration, but so is his status as witness. What the author bears witness to concerning the word of life confirms his commitment to and belief in what he feels accurately represents a certain state of affairs in the world of his utterance. His capacity as a witness thereby increases the degree of strength of the 'representative' and the 'expressive' and lends greater credibility to his series of statements. In using the word μαρτυροῦμεν he is not describing the constituent theological elements of what is being attested to but actually participating in the word concerning life. He is doing something, namely testifying, rather than reporting his status as eyewitness and what he attests to. The act of testifying implies that the author was familiar and personally acquainted with the facts represented by his testimony. But whether that familiarity and personal acquaintance with the word concerning the life made manifest came about because of the author's first hand encounter with the historical Jesus or because he stood in a long Johannine line of tradition bearers is open to question. Familiar with the Johannine ideas and characteristic ways of expression, the author gives unique testimony to a message he considers to be important in the capacity of one committed to its implications for life and fellowship. This testimony to the word of life is expressed not only in the *incipit* but in the rest of the writing through a series of confessions about Jesus, namely, that Jesus is the Christ (2:22) and that he has come in the flesh (4:2). Moreover, the testimony of the author reveals not only his views about

Christ, but it reveals that these views also have a direct impact upon ethics (1:6, 8, 10; 2:4, 6, 9). By assuming the persona of a reliable witness the author informs the readers of his commitment to and attitude towards Jesus Christ and what impact that commitment has on conduct. Indeed, were his confessions and conduct to betray his status as a trustworthy witness to be unreliable his readers in the end would reject his testimony.

It is interesting to note that the ambiguity of the content of the message in contrast to the emphatic certainty of the role of the messenger points to a tension that plays itself out in the context of the writing. The soundness of the message is dependent upon the integrity of the messenger, hence the author's stress upon the act of testifying and declaring, the constant reiteration γράπομεν ἡμεῖς (1:4) and γράπω ὑμῖν (2:1, 7, 12, 13, etc.), and the use of a series of highly evocative sensory verbs. The matter is of some urgency to the author so that he creates a literary circumstance where he sets himself up as reliable witness to what he has heard (ἀκηκόαμεν), seen (ἑωράκαμεν), and touched (ἐψηλάφησαν) concerning the word of life. The author suggests that his credentials are of such a nature that he legitimately stands heir to a tradition from of old that puts him in a position to attest to its power to constitute fellowship.

The parenthetical insertion about the word of life after the series of sensory verbs points to the other side of the tension however. The integrity of the messenger is dependent upon the soundness of his message, hence the confessional statements of an ethical nature expressed as antitheses (1:6, 8, 10; 2:4, 6, 9; 4:20), the confessions that assert that Jesus is the Christ (2:22) and that Jesus has come in the flesh (4:2), and the stress upon the word of life in the opening verses. While the relative neuter pronouns are grammatically unrelated to the word of life, they are related to it at the level of their impressionistic impact. It appears obvious that whatever ὁ λόγος τῆς ζωῆς meant to the writer, it nevertheless constituted an important literary feature of the text. Given that it is possible for neuter relative pronouns to emphasize a general quality of importance, whether it is a person or a thing, the author uses them impressively to set the message about ἡ ζωή into a living and dynamic context able to constitute the basis of

fellowship. His act of testifying is based on the life made manifest but it also makes manifest the word of life to his readers/hearers. It is ἡ ζωὴ eternal which was from the father (1:2) to which the author attests so that he and his audience can have fellowship with each other and with the Father and with his son Jesus Christ (1:3). In a manner of speaking, the author places himself in a scene from antiquity, where both the message and the messenger are given the stamp of approval. He then attempts to draw his audience into that same scene by effectively using four highly evocative sensory verbs. Thereby the readers are included in the author's description of reality and claim to truth. Implied in this act is the assurance that the readers too can be witnesses of what has been heard, seen and touched if they are willing to accept the author's testimonial about the word of life.

In v. 4 the author once more includes the reader by explaining that ταῦτα γράφομεν ἡμεῖς[59] in order that ἡ χαρὰ ἡμῶν may be fulfilled.[60] Brown is convinced that the plural refers to the "Johannine school of tradition bearers as distinguished from the Johannine community." He suggests that understanding it in this way is not weakened even though all the other instances of the verb occur in the first person singular. Brown argues that "by using the emphatic 'we' the writer indicates that he does not wish to speak simply in his own name, as he normally does...but at the start he wants to make it clear that what he writes bears more than personal authorization - it is community tradition from the community tradition bearers."[61] The plurals need not necessarily signify an author writing on behalf of a *community* from the perspective of the *community of tradition bearers* to

[59] The ἡμεῖς is replaced by ὑμίν in Codex Alexandrinus, the Byzantine tradition, the Vulgate, the Syriac, and main coptic versions. Metzger supports the former reading on grounds of the quality of support by the Alexandrian text and one Old Latin manuscript. Moreover, copyists were likely to alter γράφομεν ἡμεῖς to γράφομεν ὑμίν.

[60] This is the only occurence of γράφω in the first person plural. All the other instances are first person singular occurences (2:1, 8, 12, 13, 14, 21, 26; 5:13). Brooke points out that this need not be a claim to apostolic authority, but that perhaps the writer was a surviving eyewitness of the Jesus event (The Johannine Epistles, 9).

[61] R. E. Brown, The Epistles of John, 171-2.

address problems and correct errors within that community.[62] The opening and closing words of the prologue are meant to inform the readers concerning the writer's perception, description, commitment and belief in what he has written. He informs the readers as one who bears witness, not literally as an eyewitness, about matters on which he is a good authority. The challenge to the readers is that once they have been reconstituted by the recreating power of the word, they too must adhere to the stringent ethical requirements of his utterances. Herein lies κοινωνία[63] where the author's joy is fulfilled because he has been successful in convincing them.[64]

The varying illocutionary forces of the speech acts within the *incipit* lend a subtle nuance to the text's effect upon the reader and the intention of the author. The text's impact on the reader and the author's intention are made even clearer by the author's use of the verb ἀπαγγέλω. The *incipit* represents a literary state where what was from the beginning provides the author an opportunity to testify to what he has heard, seen, and touched concerning the word of life. The author adds to the image of the witness in such a literary state by clearly indicating that the witness also makes declarations of great importance. The verb *declare* represents a speech act with the force of a *directive*. This speech act serves to cast additional light on the manner in which the author engaged the readers in a description of a world with theological overtones into which he desired to draw them. The

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[62] Ibid., 161.

[63] κοινωνίαν occurs only four times in the Johannine writings all within I John 1:3-7. It is a difficult term to translate, although generally understood to signify a unity derived from common theological heritage. S. S. Smalley says that "it is a fellowship which we have with the Father, with the church and with God," (1, 2, 3 John, 13). A. E. Brooke writes that "koinonia is always used of active participation, where the result depends on co-operation of the receiver as well as on the action of the giver" (The Epistles of St. John, 8). I. H. Marshall writes that the fellowship "which the author enjoys includes the Father and the Son...here the thought of union with God is uppermost" (The First Epistle of John, 104). See J. Y. Campbell, "Koinonia and its Cognates in the New Testament," Journal of Biblical Literature 51 (1932) 352-80. F. Hauck, "Koinos," Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, 3, 789-809.

[64] Paul on occasion stresses the fulfillment of his joy as complete if indeed he has managed to convince successfully his adherents (Philippians 2:2). See Pheme Perkins, "Koinonia in I John 1:3-7: The Social Context of Division in the Johannine Letters," The Catholic Biblical Quarterly 45 (October, 1983) 631-41.

illocutionary point of the directive is to bring about a change in the world view of the reader. An essential condition required for the directive to come off properly, i.e., to be felicitous, is that the writer must believe that his statement will bring about the corresponding change in world view in the reader. Not only does he *desire* that his utterances will be accepted by the reader, but he must also believe that the world of his utterance will bring about the requisite change in the reader's world, without which his utterance is infelicitous, i.e., subject to insincerity - an act purported but insincere. The world view of the reader is to change so that it may match the propositional content of the directive solely by virtue of the successful performance of the speech act.[65]

Significantly, ἀπαγγέλω and μαρτυρέω are linked; ἀπαγγέλω is subsequently repeated along with ὃ ἑωράκαμεν καὶ ἀκηκόαμεν (1:3). Brown has noted that the FG combines proclamation with seeing and hearing, suggesting it to be characteristically Johannine (3:11; 3:32; 8:26; 8:38; 15:15). In the FG seeing/hearing is different from the situation in the Epistle. The bearers of tradition in the FG testify and proclaim the act of God in the career of Jesus specifically to counter the adversaries whose views the readers find attractive. Brown writes that the proclamation "is a warning that public adherence to the Johannine Gospel is not sufficient unless it is to the gospel that the *we* heard from Jesus."[66] The verb ἀπαγγέλω represents more likely the views of a singular figure who writes in a deliberately Johannine idiom in order to inform and to convince an audience of his views of *the act*

[65] Although the writer of I John cannot be identified, does the language of the first person plural and the language of affectionate address imply anything concerning the institution of which the writer may have been a part? The style of writing, through the use of the first person plural and the use of the diminutive, τεκνία and παιδία may imply either that the author belonged to a institution which conferred upon him the 'right' to make these authoritative declarations, or that he was anonymous writer to an unidentified audience using a style which implies 'authority' and 'intimacy'.

[66] R. E. Brown, The Epistles of John, 186.

of God in the career of Jesus.[67] This the author achieves by deliberately utilizing the self-involving speech act of proclamation. The act of proclamation combined with sensory perception and testimony (1:2, 3) links his act with what was from the beginning to make plain the author's desire to convince the readers to accept that the word of life has been made manifest and that it is the basis for fellowship. To ensure that the readers do not misunderstand the force of his assertions, the author creates a compelling speech act circumstance that serves to reorient the readers such that their acts of proclamation and testifying will cohere with his assessment of the word of life. The consequences of such a misunderstanding are severe, because unless they accept that the word of life has been made manifest and proclaim it accordingly they cannot have fellowship with the Father and with his son Jesus Christ. It appears that *koinonia* here is based on the reader's agreement with the author's views, so that to prevent its rupture the author uses a series of sensory verbs that vicariously help the readers to enter into the experience of testifying and proclaiming the life which is the word and the word which is the life. The experience of proclaiming the life giving word which is also the word of life re-constitutes the religious and ethical orientation of both writer and reader, and indeed, prepares them for fellowship with the Father and his son Jesus Christ (1:3).

It is therefore unlikely that the language of the prologue of I John is to be taken to signify the false claims or confessions of the antagonists. Most likely, the language of the *incipit* is to be taken to reflect the activity of *proclamation* and *testifying* that constitute the literary persona of the author as believing in and committed to the implications about the word of life in the limits of a particular speech act circumstance. What from of old can be vicariously heard, seen and touched concerning the word of life, make up the constituent theological elements of what can be proclaimed and attested to.

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[67] I tend to agree with Martin Hengel's assessment that the FG and the Epistles are the product of a singular "towering theologian," and not the product "of hypothetical sources, authors, redactors, and even communities" (The Johannine Question, 24). Hengel argues, of course, that this singular author was the head of the Johannine School, and that he was connected with "John of Ephesus but that this was not John the apostle the son of Zebedee, but an enigmatic figure who was given the honorific title "the disciple of the Lord in Papias and in the tradition of Asia Minor" (The Johannine Question, 74).

The speech acts which the two verbs represent along with the sensory verbs, delimit the *claims* and the *confessions* possible under certain conditions. It is almost as if the author engages in a play on words whereby his proclamation stipulates what cannot be claimed without drastic ethical consequences, and whereby his testimony specifies the theological constraints within which proper confession can occur. Acceptance of and participation in the linguistic state of affairs is what is at stake here, in which the speech acts and the conventions that produced them make clear the nature of κοινωνία. According to the author, fellowship is the result of understanding that what he proclaims to his readers derives from his perception about the word which is life, viz., Jesus Christ. It is not simply a passive recitation of orthodox Christological formulae or listing the constituent elements of proper conduct. Κοινωνία rests in the reader's acceptance of the linguistic state delineated by the respective speech acts where what is proclaimed and testified stays within its boundaries. By reading or hearing the work, the readers share in the re-constituting character of the word which is life, where they cannot but confess in conformity with the author's acknowledged Christology. According to the author, a proper Christological confession ensures proper conduct.

In an interesting and persuasive fashion the author of I John brings about this match of the world-to-the-words by skillfully bringing a past event into present reality in which both the author and his readers can now share. He describes the event not in a factual and distanced way but in such a manner that he and the readers join in experiencing what he proclaims and testifies as if it still exists. By committing himself to bringing about the reality he describes and by including the reader among those who can also have a part in bringing about this reality, he challenges and persuades the readers to initiate a change in the way their world has been viewed.

C. CONCLUSIONS

In language which is reminiscent of the Prologue of John and perhaps of Genesis 1, the readers are introduced to the undefined grandeur of what was from the beginning. Dissecting the *incipit* into its component parts does not take into account the over-all effect the words have in their relationship to

one another.[68] Brown writes that the "author may have had no interest in the coherence achieved by following classical rules, and his own style may have been more intelligible than 'good Greek' to readers familiar with the Johannine religious idiom."[69] Setting aside grammatical convention, the author of I John writes an impressive introduction with dramatic sensitivity which in its over-all impact captures the essence of its theological import.[70] Indeed, it can be said that it is only through the performatory import of the act in writing and its total impact that his statements acquire propositional force.

The writer is not interested in merely describing what he understands to be true theologically, nor simply in repeating what is old (ἡ παλαιά - 2:7,8), which they had already heard ἀπ' ἀρχῆς. He proclaims to them the life eternal, which being from the Father has been made manifest among them. He wants to move the reader beyond the existing state of affairs so that he can bring about a change in their religious world view and consequent ethical behaviour. The proclamation is cloaked in the garb of an acceptable theological idiom, possibly, though not necessarily, stemming from the so-called Johannine community. His proclamation, though not clearly specifying what he means theologically, is nevertheless made clear by the various speech acts in which he engages. The combination of the *commissive, representative, expressive,* and *directive*, framed in the context of bearing witness to what has been heard, seen and touched concerning the word of life do not represent the abstract theological propositions of an author reflecting on the error of his opponents, but serve to create a world view wherein the cash value of *theology* is seen in the ethical conduct of the reader in the *kosmos*. Indeed in v. 3 he uses the sensory verbs of seeing and hearing once

[68] Neither the relative pronoun, the copulative, nor ἀρχή should be understood as capturing the essence of what the writer intended. The connotation of *the beginning* includes the word of life but because of the difficulty of the genitival construction and its lack of grammatical concordance with the neuter relative pronouns, the exact meaning cannot be pinned down.

[69] Brown of course makes this statement in the context of his understanding of the origins and growth of the Johannine tradition reflected in the first Epistle's attempt to correct secessionist theology gone awry because of a misreading of the FG (The Epistles of John, 152).

[70] S. S. Smalley, 1, 2, 3 John, 4.

more in the context of the directive. The transformation of the world view of the reader through the acceptance of what has been stated by someone who is committed to bringing about this change and by someone who believes in the expressed proposition will result in a common *koinonia* with the writer and with the Father and his Son, Jesus Christ. *Koinonia* results, however, not because of theological unanimity, but because of the transformative and seductive *new world* into which the readers have been drawn and which summons them to the *light* of responsible action (καὶ ἔστιν αὕτη ἡ ἀγγελία ἣν ἀκηκόαμεν ἀπ' αὐτοῦ καὶ ἀναγγέλλομεν ὑμῖν ὅτι ὁ Θεὸς φῶς ἐστιν καὶ σκοτία ἐν αὐτῷ οὐκ ἔστιν οὐδεμία (1:5).

Therefore, the readers are urged to embrace what has been described not because it has been presented in a clear and logical manner appealing to the cognitive senses, but precisely because the writer has convinced them that he is a reliable witness who can be trusted. By means of the *pluralis sociativus* the writer identifies himself with his readers and mutually invites them to consider what he has said as true because he believes it. By carefully choosing four sensory verbs he invites the reader to experience with him a newly constituted world in which the cash value of the statement concerning the word of life is seen in the readers' ethical response. It is less a message about *life* than about the power of life transmitted by the word.

CHAPTER FIVE

A SPEECH ACT ANALYSIS OF THE THE SLOGANS OF THE 'OPPONENTS' (I John 1:6,8 10; 2:4, 6, 9; 4:20).

1. INTRODUCTION.

John Painter takes note of the *intriguing antithetical form* of 1:6, 8, 10; 2:4, 6, 9, and 4:20, and concludes that the *form* of these series of verses makes recognizable the *boasts* of the opponents.[71] These so-called *slogans* utilized by the opponents in I John continue to intrigue Johannine scholars. It is thought that here more than anywhere else in the writing the author gives the clearest indication of the quality of the erroneous views held by the adversaries. The author reformulates the lapidary 'slogans' of the opponents to recapture what appear to be "real statements made by people in the church...who were causing trouble in the church."[72] The discussion has therefore tended to focus on the identity of the author's opponents, on their social setting within Johannine Christianity, and on the character of their theological confession. On the basis of these historical foci commentators take the particle ἐάν with the subjunctive of the aorist (εἴπωμεν) to be

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[71] John Painter labels them 'boasts' ("The 'Opponents' in I John," 48-71).

[72] I. H. Marshall, The Epistles of John, 110. R. A. Culpepper writes "since the three disapproved conditions each begin with the phrase "if we say...," it is reasonable to assume that some in the elder's community were actually making the assertions" (1 John, 2 John, 3 John, 12-3). R. E. Brown writes that the "substance of the 'boast' is a statement harmonious with secessionist theology...." (The Epistles of John, 197). R. Bultmann holds that 1:6-2:17 is a Source that the author employs, and that the text "of the Source, is commented upon and expanded by the author and by the ecclesiastical redactor...." (The Johannine Epistles, 17). S. S. Smalley suggests that the ideas expressed in these series of verses "were characteristic of the sessionists, who had withdrawn from the community, and defected into the world (1, 2, 3, John, 21).

"*exceptional* rather than conditional or hypothetical."[73] It is thought that the language introduces something which in the present situation is expected to occur, and should be rendered to mean *whenever*.[74] The conditional structure of the sentences is, therefore, seen to reflect a possible contingency.[75] In such a view, the *we* of the verb εἴπωμεν has inclusive force and discloses the opinions of the false teachers "who have found adherents among those whom the author is addressing."[76] Similarly, the stylized opening ὁ λέγων of 2:4, 6, and 9 is taken to parallel the previous three statements. It is pointed out, however, that the form of the expression is more direct and individualized.[77] The ὅτι after the ὁ λέγων (v. 4), while introducing indirect discourse,

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[73] See C. Haas, M. de Jonge, J.L. Swellengrebel, A Translator's Handbook on the Letters of John, 33. Stephen Langdon, "History of the use of ἐάν for ἄν in Relative Clauses," American Journal of Philology 23 (1903) 447 - 451. Lars Rydbeck, "Über den Gebrauch der Partikel ἄν:' Εάν „ statt "ἄν post relativa," in Fachprosa, Vermeintliche Volkssprache und Neues Testament (Uppsala, 1967) 119 - 147.

[74] C. Haas, A Translator's Handbook on the Letters of John, 33. R. E. Brown points out that these conditionals are not merely possible contingencies; rather, they are 'exceptional' and are therefore equivalent to 'whenever' (The Epistles of John, 197). See also J. Painter, "The 'Opponents' in I John," 48 - 71.

[75] A. E. Brooke observes that it is quite unlikely that the author would have "wasted his weapons on purely hypothetical situations" (The Epistles of St. John, 13). R. E. Brown indicates that the language here does not merely display possible contingencies but "reflects the language of jurisprudence." The substance of the statement is really a boast in line with secessionist theology. These 'boasts' are the result of the separation and reflect the thoughts of the adversaries. The author collects these lapidary statements and employs them to rebut their views (The Epistles of John, 197). R. Alan Culpepper holds that these statements do not represent "hypothetical situations or remote possibilities," but embody serious claims of influential members of the community (1 John, 2 John, 3 John, 13).

[76] The inclusive force of the first person plural pronoun holds true in all the occurrences throughout 1:5 - 2:11 (C. Haas, A Translator's Handbook on the Letters of John, 33).

[77] A. E. Brooke, The Epistles of St. John, 32. B. F. Westcott takes these three participles as signifying 'directness' in contrast to the comprehensive form cited before ἐὰν εἴπωμεν (1:6, 8, 10). The former implies that the nature of the danger is immediate and threatening, while in the latter it is diffuse (The Epistles of St. John: The Greek Text With Notes, 46 - 47). Brown also exploits the stylistic variation to suit his purposes by suggesting that ἐὰν εἴπωμεν more loosely represents the position of the opponents rephrased by the author, whereas ὁ λέγων may "here approach being exact quotations from the secessionists" (The Epistles of John, 252 - 253).

requires a rendering of what follows in direct discourse.[78] Haas translates ὁ λέγων ὅτι (2:4, 6, 9) to read, "when/if a person says," and remarks that it "introduces the proposition of the false teachers, which is given in direct discourse."[79] Ostensibly each statement introduces the specious *boasts* of the adversaries.

A grammatical analysis of the expressions is thought to reveal an immediate and threatening circumstance that the author is compelled to address. Furthermore, the form of the statements in their stylistic variations is seen to reflect, more or less accurately, the *boasts* or *slogans* the antagonists would have exploited to suit their objectives, namely, to reject the author's Christological and ethical confession.[80] Painter writes that "the boasts provide particularly valuable information concerning the position of the opponents."[81] The stylized form of the utterances signifies the language and ideas utilized by the adversaries to articulate their beliefs that reveals both positively the views of the opponents, and negatively the misperceptions which the author attempts to rebut. In such a view, the identity of the adversaries and their *boasts* is made accessible to the readers through the

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[78] The scribes of the Byzantine textual tradition omit ὅτι from 2:4, no doubt to bring it into line with 2:6, 9 where it is absent.

[79] C. Haas, M. de Jonge and J. J. Swellengrebel, A Translator's Handbook on the Letters of John, 22.

[80] See J. Painter, "The 'Opponents' in I John," 53. R. E. Brown points out that the first set of three statements loosely represents what the opponents believed, whereas the second set of three expressions quotes more or less precisely the slogans of the opponents (The Epistles of John, 252). J. Painter considers the differing introductory formulae as nothing more than stylistic variations which do not indicate different levels of accuracy in quotation ("The Opponents in I John," 54). Duane Watson observes that the author of I John has a penchant for groupings of three: for example, the three claims of the secessionists in 1:6, 8, 10 and again in 2:4, 6, 9; the three things the world has to offer (2:16); Watson points out that this tendency to group in threes is also evident in I John 2:12 - 14 and does not necessarily indicate a number of separate groups being addressed ("I John 2:12-14 as Distributio, Conduplicatio, and Expolitio: A Rhetorical Understanding," Journal for the Study of the New Testament 35 [1989] 99).

[81] J. Painter, "The 'Opponents' in I John," 51.

criticism of the author, "their implacable opponent."[82] The author deliberately takes up a variety of erroneous emphases, reformulates them and uses them to counter the false views of the opponents. The analysis of the statements from such a perspective assumes that the semantic horizon of the antithetical sayings is located in the conflict between the author and his adversaries.

Several different reconstructions of the nature of the error that prompted the composition of the sayings have been offered. One approach posits that the statements came from a source(s) with Gnostic characteristics which the author was utilizing and correcting when composing I John,[83] and the other assumes that the author "was reporting the views of the contemporary adversaries and then contradicting or challenging them."[84] While it is customary to view the language of I John as reflecting a polemical setting, now invariably understood within the context of the social and theological constraints of a "Johannine Christianity,"[85] widespread disagreement continues to exist about the precise identification and delineation of the opposition reflected in it.[86] The lack of consensus about

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[82] Ibid., 50.

[83] See chapter two, 9-84.

[84] See chapter two, R. Bultmann, 12-17.

[85] D. M. Smith Jr. points out that there is an emerging consensus "on the existence of a concrete and well-defined social reality behind the Johannine literature" ("Johannine Studies," in The New Testament and its Modern Interpreters, 285). See also D. M. Smith Jr., "Johannine Christianity: Some Reflections on its Character and Delineation," 222 - 48. Robert Kysar, "The Fourth Gospel: A Report on Recent Research," Aufstieg und Niedergang der Römischen Welt, ed. by Temporini and W. Haase (II 25.3 (1985) 2391 - 2480. Georg Strecker, "Die Anfänge der Johanneischen Schule," New Testament Studies 32 (1980) 31 - 47.

[86] Fernando F. Segovia, "Recent Research in the Johannine Letters," Religious Studies Review 13, 2 (April 1987) 135. The question of the circumstance that catalyzed the theological division has been an important one. The attempt to explain secessionist theology is usually done in one of several ways: a) by proposing some sort of internal/external influence which came via a number of sources, such as, gnosticism or docetism, which is invariably linked to some form of Cerinthianism; b) by proposing that it was the result of a group which had been admitted into the Johannine community, such as, an influx of pagans and Gentiles (J. Painter, John: Witness and Theologian, 115); a Greek speaking Jewish group whose ideas contained a mélange of Hellenistic philosophical religion (John Bogart, Orthodox and Heretical Perfectionism); an influx of wandering charistmatics (J. M. Lieu, The Second and Third Epistles of John: History and Background, 129 - 132), c) by proposing that I John represents a re-interpretation of the Gospel of John - the outsiders were offspring of Johannine thought itself, who

the nature of the conflict reflected in the *slogans* indicates the difficulties of a view that assumes that the aim of literary analysis is to reconstruct either the thought of the author or the conflict to which the slogans refer.[87] One important reason for this lack of consensus is that the pre-history of the antithetical utterances cannot be known with any degree of confidence. Vorster rightly points out that it is impossible to reconstruct the precise historical setting from which the *sayings* [writing] originated, "even though there is apparently quite a lot to be said about the supposed historical situation".[88] In the case of the *slogan-like utterances* we have been considering, the *occasion* that prompted their composition can only be hypothetically reconstructed and not proven because there is nothing in them to indicate with any certainty the circumstance of their composition.[89] Since the extra-textual historical milieu of the antithetical slogans cannot be known with any degree of certainty, they beg to be interpreted from a different perspective. The issue here is whether the statements beginning with ἐὰν εἴπωμεν or ὁ λέγων need a source theory or specific historical setting to determine their meaning.

In the analysis of the *incipit*, I demonstrated that when the text is reconceived as a communicative event made up of speech acts and the literary conventions that produced them, it helps to clarify the literary

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justified their position through an appeal to the Johannine gospel (R. E. Brown, The Epistles of John, 103 - 115; 178 - 180).

[87] See chapter two section B, 60-65.

[88] W. S. Vorster, "Heterodoxy in I John," in "Essays on the General Epistles of the New Testament," 87 (italics mine).

[89] J. M. Lieu states in this connection that "there is an obvious danger of reconstructing the views of the heretics from the language and the silences of the Epistles and then using that reconstruction to explain both the language and the silences" (The Second and Third Epistles of John, 6). Stanley Fish has indicated the difficulties encountered when moving from 'text' to 'brute fact' (Is There a Text in this Class? 68 - 96).

context of their utterance.[90] The unit of analysis is not simply the free-standing antithetical statement but an utterance produced in a particular speech act circumstance by and for intentional beings. For the purpose of the present study, the antithetical sayings of I John will be located in the context of a literary speech act circumstance and language game that the author uses to formulate a series of evocative propositions that advance his views with significant religious and ethical implications. The approach proposed attempts to take seriously the anonymity of the writing, since written acts with the force of the *commissive/expressive*, and *representative* constitute the subject of the author without the necessity of identifying him or the historical milieu within which he wrote, and it allows for the treatment of the seven antithetical statements as performatives of a general kind. Consequently, they indicate nothing more than a series of hypothetical statements articulated by the author for the purpose of indicating the limits within which certain felicitous claims can be made. This interpretative strategy suggests that the meaning and significance of the antithetical sayings are not limited to those *meanings* that conventional historical criticism is designed to recover. This study will demonstrate that when the *slogans* are reconceived as a communicative event comprised of a series of speech acts, there is little need to reconstruct the occasion that brought about their production.

2. A SPEECH ACT ANALYSIS (I John 1:6, 8, 10; 2:4, 6, 9; 4:20).

The series of utterances will be taken as hypothetical speech acts formulated as 'boasts', rather than as 'boasts' which are descriptive of the views of the opponents, and therefore 'exceptional'. The author deliberately formulates them as hypothetical speech acts in order to make clear to his reading audience what, in his opinion, constitutes a felicitous speech act under certain conditions. For example, the claim ὅτι κοινωνίαν ἔχομεν μετ' αὐτοῦ (1:6), would be invalidated if 'we' were found to be walking in

[90] As noted in chapter three, J. L. Austin outlines a way which makes it possible to escape the limits of a method which *a priori* assumes that the clues to the ideas and facts peculiar to the world of an author are embedded in the language of his text, 116-124.

the darkness.[91] The assertion is infelicitous, i.e., the act which *we* purported to perform is void, without effect, indeed, such a person lies and does not live according to the truth. In other words, the circumstance in which the writer or the reader purports to invoke the claim of fellowship must be appropriate for it to be felicitous. "Walking in darkness" is incongruent with the assertion "I have fellowship with him," although the advocates of an *opponent theory* suggest that a particular circumstance perhaps made it possible for someone to boast "I have fellowship with him but I walk in darkness."[92] Even if it were granted that such a circumstance existed which permitted a contradictory declaration of this sort, Austin would argue that the convention invoked must be appropriate and be accepted in order for such a speech act to come off properly.[93] Anyone who declares ἐν τῷ φωτὶ εἶμι while hating his brother cannot succeed in convincing his hearers, because no convention that we know of permitted such a claim.[94] The avowal "I am in the light, but I hate

[91] It has been pointed out that the noun κοινωνία occurs only four times in the Johannine writings, all in 1:3 - 7. R. E. Brown takes the noun to have an ecclesiastical tone which the author uses in his criticism of the views of the opponents. They would not have accepted the Johannine understanding of the term, "which involved adhesion to the interpretation of what was seen and heard as proclaimed by the Johannine school (The Epistles of John, 186 - 87). The claim is characteristic of the secessionists who had withdrawn from the community and "defected into the world". They had false views of man's nature: they claimed fellowship while walking in the darkness; they claimed sinlessness. They were inclined to gnostic views (S. S. Smalley, 1, 2, 3 John, 20 - 21). It is probable that this statement, "we have fellowship with him," represents a real claim by someone within the church the writer was addressing (I. Howard Marshall, The Epistles of John, 110).

[92] Pheme Perkins observes that this passage hints that the opponents were also making claims to κοινωνία. She argues that the language of κοινωνία probably derives from the missionary expansion of the Johannine community. This is reflected in III John ("Κοινωνία in I John 1:3 - 7: The Social Context of Division in the Johannine Letters," 637).

[93] See chapter three, 95-102.

[94] It has been suggested that a convention may have existed which made it possible for persons gnostically inclined to assert "I am in the light and I hate my brother." J. Painter considers it likely that the opponents "had a different view of κοινωνία with God, and a different view of being in the light" ("The 'Opponents' in I John," 61). Only in such a situation is it possible to have the appropriate circumstance and the convention in which to make such a contradictory claim. The difficulty, however, of separating the views of the opponents from the author's on the basis of his polemical statements vitiates such an approach and shifts the burden of proof to those who assume I John's polemical setting. See S. S. Smalley, 1, 2, 3 John, 60. R. Alan Culpepper, 1 John, 2 John, 3 John, 24. R. E. Brown poses a circumstance which arose because of the experiences of the Johannine Community "wherein relations with the 'Jews' and the secessionists moved quickly to hostility". This made it possible for members to invoke such a contradictory claim. In a circumstance like that a convention may have

my brother" is successful only when an appropriate circumstance and convention both exist that permit such a contradictory speech act. In a search for parallel statements to confirm the *boasts* of the author's opponents, Ignatius of Antioch's letter to the Smyrnaeans 6:2 is often cited as proof of at least something similar to what the antagonists may have used. Yet, while Ignatius writes bluntly περὶ ἀγάπης οὐ μέλει αὐτοῖς (for love they have no care), nowhere does he mention that the enemies invoked such mutually contradictory claims.[95] Therefore, unless the appropriate circumstance and conventions are found to have existed where the invocation of such a procedure was accepted, then it is quite unlikely that the opponents employed mutually conflicting *slogans* or *boasts* of the type recorded by the author.[96]

Since neither a circumstance nor convention is known to have existed that made possible a literal invocation of the claim to " have fellowship with him while walking in the darkness" (1:6), it is unlikely that these statements simply signify what the false teachers were doing already, but make plain what anyone might be doing if in fact they proceeded on their erroneous course. In issuing the series of boasts the author is not refuting or reporting what disreputable conduct it is in which the opponents are engaged by quoting their slogans, as if someone were already claiming to be in the light while at the same time hating his brother (2:9), but he is making clear or showing the inevitable ethical and religious consequence if indeed someone were to make this boast. In effect he is saying that "if the readers who speak

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existed which allowed for asserting such a claim while selectively hating a 'brother'. Brown insists that 'brother' here means a fellow Johannine Christian (The Epistles of John, 269). I. Howard Marshall understands the situation as one where "...John's opponents claimed to be in the light, and yet hated the brother..." (The Epistles of John, 131). A. E. Brooke says that "the writer puts before his readers the cases of typical individuals..." (The Johannine Epistles, 38).

[95] See further, William R. Schoedel, Ignatius of Antioch: A Commentary on the Letters of Ignatius of Antioch, Hermenia (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985).

[96] Using Ignatius's statement, S. S. Smalley proposes that such people might have been in mind here. He admits earlier in his commentary that it is quite probable that no heretic would have said as much. In practice, however, their conduct negated the claim (1, 2, 3 John, 21, 60).

like this and act like that, persevere in their behaviour," then this will follow. To claim, "I have known him, (ἔγνωκα αὐτόν...)" while not intending to keep his commands (τὰς ἐντολὰς αὐτοῦ 2:4)[97], makes it subject to a misfire (purported but void). The inevitable result: "he is a liar and the truth is not in him."

Earlier in the study it was pointed out that the act *of* writing also serves to make explicit *what act it is in which the author is engaged.*[98] The author formulates the slogans with the illocutionary forces of the *commissive, expressive,* and *representative* types to make explicit how he intends that his utterances should be taken. The *commissive* implies that he is committed to the negative ethical implications that are inherently part of the antithetical form of the utterances. The *expressive* implies that he believes that each of the antithetical utterances represents accurately a state of affairs under certain conditions. The *representative* implies that he desires to engage his reading audience in a consideration of the religious and ethical implications of the slogans. Antithetical statements with such illocutionary forces are the acts in writing by which the author, rather than reporting something, attempts creatively to bring about a state of affairs that is descriptive of his own religious and ethical stance. The focus of the act in writing is not on *what* has been inscribed, but on *how* it reveals attitudes and beliefs made accessible through the rules that govern written speech acts. The attitudes and beliefs revealed by the illocutionary forces of these slogans suggest that the author is setting forth his views with significant religious and ethical implications. To make his ethical and religious views known and to provoke a response from his reading audience, the author deliberately formulates the statements to resemble hypothetical speech acts. These speech acts function as rhetorical devices by which the author engages the audience, committing them to an ethical stance common to them both. It is thus possible to conclude that the

[97] No one can be certain to whom the pronoun αὐτόν refers: is it God? Christ? God in Christ? C. H. Dodd opts for Christ (The Johannine Epistles, 31). On the basis of the parallelism between 2:3a and 2:5b, R. E. Brown opts for a reference to God (The Epistles of John, 253).

[98] See chapter three, 95-102.

antithetical statements do not signify the lapidary slogans of the false teachers that the author cleverly reformulates as accusations. They signify rather the evocative stance of the author in an attempt to persuade the readers/hearers of his ethical and religious outlook.

The author employs a number effective strategies to try to persuade an audience, perhaps unknown to him, to accept his views on conduct and theology. The author appropriately expresses himself in a series of memorable utterances. Each of the propositional implications of what he holds to be true about *fellowship* (1:6), *sin* (1:8, 10), *knowing* (2:4), *remaining* (2:6), and *light* (2:9) is demonstrated over against a *speech act circumstance* which either validates or invalidates them if certain conditions obtain. The author commits himself not only to *what* he has stated, but also to the *manner* in which he has expressed it. He therefore phrases the statements as hypothetical speech acts that in their antithesis convey clearly what he considers to be ethically possible in the circumstance of their utterance. In other words, each of the statements may be taken as an expression constitutive of what the author believes will define the religious and ethical convictions of those who belong to his *koinonia*. For instance, only those who walk in the realm of light can claim to have fellowship with him (1:6). Those who walk in the realm of darkness cannot claim to have fellowship with him, because the act would be infelicitous. Each of the memorable utterances represents a literary speech act through which the author presents significant religious and ethical truths.

The *slogan like speech acts* evoke knowledge of significant ethical and theological issues and the recognition that it is impossible to make certain claims without dire consequences. Verses 6, 8, 10 each begins with ἐὰν εἴπωμεν (If we ever maintain...), and chapter 2:4, 6, 9 each commences with ὁ λέγων (anyone who claims...). In the act of writing a number of effective conditions are laid out for consideration: e.g., "If we ever maintain that we have fellowship with him and we continue to walk in the darkness..." (v. 6), "if we ever maintain that we have no sin..." (v. 8), and, "if we ever maintain that we have not sinned..." (v. 10). In I John 2:4, 6, 9 the subject

matter changes somewhat and ὁ λέγων is substituted for the formulaic ἐὰν εἴπωμεν: e.g., "Anyone who claims that I know him and does not keep his commandments..." (v. 4), "anyone who claims to be in him, ought..." (v. 6), and, "anyone who claims to be in the light and yet hates his brother..." (v. 9). Each of the assertions is phrased in such a way as to force the reader to make a choice between two options. V. 6 compels the reader to consider the issues of *fellowship* and *darkness*. Since they have already been told that God is light (1:5) and that they have fellowship with God and his son Jesus Christ, it is not possible to claim to have fellowship with him while walking in the darkness. I John 2:9 forces the reader to consider the issues of *light* and *hate*. Since God is both light (1:5) and love (4:8), it is not possible to claim to be in the light while hating a brother. I John 2:4 and 6 compel the reader to consider the issues of *knowing* and *abiding*. Since knowledge and abiding are both based on obedience to the commandments, it is not possible to claim either to know him or to abide in him while not keeping the commandments. I John 1:8 and 10 force upon the reader a consideration of the issue of *sin*, and whether it is possible ever to claim sinlessness. The implication of vv. 8 and 10 is clearly that to boast sinlessness is inconceivable. Yet in I John 3:6, 9 and 5:18 the author insists that under certain circumstances a state of sinlessness is conceivable: everyone who remains in him does not sin (v. 6), indeed, he cannot (δύνασθαι) sin because of being begotten by God.[99] These two positions may be explained by taking them as each representing different speech act circumstances. The author begins by reinforcing what he thinks about sin and its pervasiveness; those who sin practice lawlessness because sin is lawlessness (3:4). Since the evil one has sinned from the beginning (3:8) those who practice sin come from him. The author insists that the one doing sin ἐκ τοῦ διαβόλου ἐστίν (3:8), and the one not doing sin ἐκ τοῦ Θεοῦ ἐστίν (3:9). Ἐν τούτῳ φανερά ἐστιν, maintains the author, τὰ τέκνα τοῦ Θεοῦ καὶ τὰ τέκνα τοῦ διαβόλου (3:10). The son of God,

[99] In I John 3:9 the expressions ὁ γεγεννημένος ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ/ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ γεγέννηται are used in relation to ἁμαρτίαν οὐ ποιεῖ. This expression is then intensified and stated absolutely as οὐ δύναται ἁμαρτάνειν. The categorical way in which this is stated poses a problem in relation to the equally absolute statements of 1:8 and 10, namely, that it is impossible to claim sinlessness.

however, was made manifest (ἐφανερώθη) in order that he might destroy the works of the devil (3:8). One has appeared (ἐφανερῶθη) who takes away sin (3:5), and not only that, in him there is no sin (3:5). Moreover, maintains the author, if the Christian abides in him, i.e., in one who is sinless, then it follows logically that the one who abides in one who is sinless, οὐχ ἁμαρτάνει (3:6); indeed, if they have been born of God they cannot sin. Thus, the author creates a potential speech act circumstance in which claiming sinlessness may be a reality. Nevertheless, while an *appropriate circumstance* has been created that might hypothetically permit such a claim, the convention that a reader/writer might invoke in such a circumstance does not exist. To claim, "I am sinless because I abide in him," or "I cannot sin because I am born of God," does not guarantee sinlessness, because the reality of human sinfulness does not allow for such a convention to exist; i.e., the act would be infelicitous, purported but void, thus reinforcing what has already been maintained in I John 1:8, 10. Even if someone in all sincerity claimed "I do not sin because I abide in Him," or "I cannot sin because I am born of God," can escape the reality of human sinfulness. Human sinfulness clearly sets the limits of what can be claimed about sinlessness. The author makes that explicit in I John 1:8, 10. Since the antithetical slogans do not have either an *appropriate circumstance* or *convention* they cannot be successfully used. The readers are therefore forced to conclude that the boasts are inconceivable under the conditions delineated. Only those who are ἐκ τοῦ διαβόλου (3:8) may successfully boast sinlessness.

To prevent any misunderstanding about what this might mean the author explicitly spells out the dire implications of *these infelicitous boasts.* The consequences provide further incentive for the reader to exercise prudent judgment in their speech. For instance:

> Claiming fellowship while walking in darkness means ψευδόμεθα καὶ οὐ ποιοῦμεν τὴν ἀλήθειαν (1:6).
>
> Claiming to have no sin means ἑαυτοὺς πλανῶμεν καὶ ἡ ἀλήθεια οὐκ ἔστιν ἐν ἡμῖν (1:8).
>
> Claiming that we have not sinned means ψεύστην ποιοῦμεν αὐτόν...(1:10).

Anyone saying that he knows him while not keeping the commandments shows that ψεύστης ἐστὶν καὶ ἐν τούτῳ ἡ ἀλήθεια οὐκ ἔστιν (2:4).
Anyone saying that he is in him ought καθὼς ἐκεῖνος περιεπάτησεν καὶ αὐτὸς οὕτως περιπατεῖν (2:6).
Anyone saying that he is in the light while hating a brother shows that he ἐν τῇ σκοτίᾳ ἐστὶν ἕως ἄρτι (2:9, 10).
Anyone saying that he loves God and hates his brother shows that ψεύστης ἐστὶν (4:20).

The implications of each of these slogan like speech acts are such that they stand as a perpetual reminder not to engage in them. Indeed, according to the author, these claims can be felicitous only if the claimant thinks himself to be in darkness, a liar, and one in whom truth does not reside. Presumably none of the readers would desire the label *liar* applied to them. This, in turn, would discourage them from engaging in the mutually contradictory speech acts the author lists.

This approach might help to clarify the observation by some that the claims of 2:4, 6, and 9 are not in themselves false or objectionable.[100] Brown notes that, curiously, the author rarely rejects the claims of the adversaries outright; "rather he criticizes the way they understand the implications of those claims. The implication is that both he and his opponents claimed to know God, to be in union with him, to be begotten by him, and to be free of sin."[101] Although a simple misconstrual of important religious and ethical ideals by the author's antagonists might be in view here, the illocutionary forces of the antithetical slogans reveal them to be the views of the author and not the opponents. Moreover, the illocutionary forces also reveal that it

[100] R. Alan Culpepper observes that these claims could have been made by the Elder, since there is nothing in them which is objectionable. Nevertheless, he then continues to maintain that these are allusions to the claims of the opponents: they made the claims, but their lives showed that they were not speaking the truth (I John, 2 John, 3 John 24). Rodney A. Whitacre notes that in these verses there is "nothing wrong with the claims themselves...indeed, they are Johannine claims" (Johannine Polemic, 134).

[101] R. E. Brown holds that the author criticizes the opponents because they failed to draw the proper ethical conclusions "from the status of divine childhood (The Epistles of John, 64).

is the author's desire to dissuade his readers from holding to erroneous Christological ideas that lead to unethical behaviour. The author hopes to turn the readers from false ethical and Christological views by persuading them to accept his views. Simply stating, however, that they ought to do so is not an effective means to convince them especially among those who do not know the author's identity. He therefore sets out his views through an extensive pattern of antitheses that he hopes will make clear the required conduct of those who have been convinced to accept his ethical and theological orientation. The antithetical character of each of the statements reveals two speech act circumstances that show, on the one hand, what constitutes proper conduct in the realm of light, and on the other, what constitutes improper conduct in the realm of darkness. Since it is impossible to reject the dire consequences of the one speech act circumstance, the readers are convinced to adhere to a Christology and an ethical orientation which coheres with the author's.

The attempt to persuade the audience is further reinforced by the use of the first person plural of the verb εἴπωμεν. Brown assumes that "...the 'we' refers to the Johannine community which is left after the secessionists have gone and that the substance of the 'boast' is a statement harmonious with secessionist theology."[102] While several explanations of the identity of the 'we' have been offered, I will take the first person plural in the sense of a *pluralis sociativus*. This use of the plural is widespread among Greek authors, and "the author thereby brings the reader into close association with his own action."[103] With the use of the *pluralis sociativus* the author strengthens the bond between himself and the readers. This bond of fellowship increases the likelihood that the author will be successful in his attempt to sweep the audience along into a consideration of his perception of reality.

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[102] R. E. Brown, The Epistles of John, 197.

[103] F. Blass and A. Debrunner, A Greek Grammar of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature, 280.

THE SLOGANS OF THE OPPONENTS

In a continuing bid to persuade an audience to accept his views, the author also implies that he is willing to live by the ethical consequences of what he has written. The antithetical slogans graphically capture the essence of his ethical and religious orientation whereby he alerts the readers how he intends to live in God's revealing light. Not only is the author understood to state a belief in the content of the proposition, he is also implicated, by extension, as one willing to follow through on the ethical import of his conditionals. In the act of writing the author shows that he has undertaken to behave in a certain way. He has thrown before his readers a series of conditional ethical and religious possibilities which are really evaluative of his own life. In effect, by stating what he does in the way he does, he expresses his outlook on life and reinforces it by conveying to his readers his commitment to perform what he speaks within the limits of a specific speech act circumstance. For example, the author has just declared that God is light in whom there is no darkness at all (1:5), so that if he claims to have fellowship with God he cannot therefore also walk in darkness, etc. The speech act circumstance of *light* and its realm totally excludes the darkness and its sphere and therefore delimits the potential speech acts and the consequent ethical acts they imply. The author uses the metaphor of *light* to represent a mutually exclusive speech act circumstance that clearly describes how he intends to live his life in that realm.

Having marshaled a catena of antithetical speech acts the author makes explicit the boasts potentially possible in each contrasting situation. It might be safely concluded that if the readers have understood the force of his statements with their carefully crafted nexus of diametrically opposing elements, they cannot but accept the author's views unless they wish to be out of fellowship with the him and μετὰ τοῦ πατρὸς καὶ μετὰ τοῦ υἱοῦ ' Ιησοῦ Χριστοῦ (1:3). *Koinonia* is not the result of the author's successful encounter with the opponents, but the result of the author having convinced the readers to accept his ethical and theological orientation. Thereby the readers are drawn into the illuminating nature of God's light that reveals to them the constituent elements of responsible conduct (καὶ ἔστιν αὕτη ἡ ἀγγελία ἣν ἀκηκόαμεν ἀπ' αὐτοῦ καὶ ἀναγγέλλομεν ὑμῖν, ὅτι ὁ Θεὸς φῶς ἐστιν καὶ σκοτία ἐν αὐτῷ οὐκ ἔστιν οὐδεμία -1:5).

3. *CONCLUSIONS.*

Historical critics seek the point of the so-called antithetical utterances in I John by reconstructing the occasion that gave rise to them. This approach mistakenly assumes that the slogans represent the thoughts of the author expressed in the heat of controversy. The language of these boasts, however, need not be taken as a formal delineation of theological beliefs in response to a threat (although it may include that). Our speech act analysis shows that these slogans may be taken as hypothetical speech acts that make plain the attitudes and beliefs of the author. The force of the slogans revealed what the author believed it was possible to utter in the context of a given speech act circumstance. He deliberately formulated them as antithetical slogans to show the readers that it is impossible to utter any one of them unless they wish to be negatively labelled. In this way the author was able not only to present his views about ethics and theology but also to persuade the readers to accept them.

Thus it could be said that the slogans enabled the author to make the world rather than simply mirror it. They enabled him to bring about states of affairs rather than simply report on them and finally correct them.[104] The power of the written word enabled him to constitute and give shape to the thinking of the readers rather than simply to serve them by correcting erroneous Christological ideas. The communicative end of I John is to invite the reader to join in a consideration of truths of the deepest import in which the re-creative power of the word constitutes the thinking of the reader.

[104] Stanley Fish, Is There a Text in This Class? 244.

CHAPTER SIX

A SPEECH ACT ANALYSIS OF THE ANTICHRISTS (I JOHN 2:18-24)

1. INTRODUCTION:

Brown is convinced that in this subunit it finally becomes clear that a Christological controversy motivated the author to respond. He writes,

> "hitherto the author's attacks on boasts and claims (implicitly against the secessionists) have concerned walking in darkness, not keeping the commandments, not loving one's brother, and pretending to be sinless - ethical issues that gave the lie to perfectionist attitudes of knowing God, being in communion with him and abiding in Him (1:5-2:11). Only in this subunit does it at last become clear that a Christological issue sparked the secession."[105]

The urgent language of 2:18-22 announces the arrival of crisis. "Children, the last hour is here!" "'Hour' is a destiny-laden turning point...[where] John warns that the final judgment is at hand when Christ will appear."[106] They had heard that the antichrist was coming, and even now many antichrists have arisen; indeed from this they know that it is the last hour (2:18). It is commonly assumed that in this passage the author turns his attention directly to the antagonists who are creating disturbances within the community. They have caught the author's attention because they deny that Jesus is the Christ.

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[105] R. E. Brown, The Epistles of John, 368. See also R. A. Culpepper who remarks "that in this section more than any other, the elder writes specifically about the opposing movement, which had divided the community. The division is the first recorded schism in the history of the church - the beginning of a tragic but seemingly inescapable by-product of Christian *koinonia*." In this section the author lays bare the nature of the deception about which the elder warns the faithful throughout the writing (1 John, 2 John, 3 John, 42).

[106] George Johnston, "I, II, III, John," Peake's Commentary on the Bible, ed. by M. Black and H. H. Rowley (London: Thomas Nelson and Sons Ltd, 1962) 1037.

Indeed, so convinced is he about the error of their confession that he labels the apostates, in the strongest possible terms, *antichrists*. The author indicates in no uncertain terms that they had once been members of the community, but that they had seceded because they could no longer confess that Jesus is the Christ. As the author puts it, "Τίς ἐστιν ὁ ψεύστης εἰ μή ὁ ἀρνούμενος ὅτι ' Ιησοῦς οὐκ ἔστιν ὁ Χριστός; οὗτός ἐστιν ὁ ἀντίχριστος, ὁ ἀρνούμενος τὸν πατέρα καί τὸν υἱον (2:22). πᾶς ὁ ἀρνούμενος τὸν υἱὸν οὐδὲ τὸν πατέρα ἔχει, ὁ ὁμολογῆν τὸν υἱὸν καὶ τὸν πατέρα ἔχει" (3:23). Kysar notes that this section "informs us how seriously our author views the schism, and demonstrates the manner in which the readers are encouraged not to lose their confidence as a result of the crisis."[107]

As in the previous sections, so in this one, the language is taken to function polemically. It is thought that the polemic indisputably signifies a specific historical circumstance. Whereas earlier the historical occasion that prompted the author to write was only implicitly visible in the language, in this passage it becomes explicit. The urgent character of the language reflects an immediate and serious danger within the community threatening to destroy it. Within an eschatological framework the author discusses the exigency and uncertainty effectuated by the action and the erroneous ideas of the separatists. He epitomizes the opposing force and its rebellion in the final days with an historicized figure which stands at variance to God. The argument then goes that the appearance of such a figure has been expected because it is something about which they have heard. Many such figures are now present, and thus the last hour is here. ἐξ ἡμῶν ἐξῆλθαν implies that they departed from the community of their own accord and were not expelled, and οὐκ ἦσαν ἐξ ἡμῶν implies that they were never part of the community because they had never truly embraced the gospel of the author. Indeed, their behaviour makes plain (φανερωθῶσιν) their identity: all of them are not of us. Vv. 22 and 23 explicitly define the lie as a Christological one clearly revealing the wide theological gulf between the secessionists and the community. While it is commonly assumed that for the first time in I John the content of the heretic's error is made plain, it is difficult to

[107] R. Kysar. I, II, III John, 58.

determine the sense in which the words ὁ ἀρνούμενος ὅτι ' Ιησοῦς οὐκ ἔστιν ὁ χριστός reflect what the adversaries meant in their denial. The proliferation of attempts to describe what exactly they denied is clear evidence of this difficulty. Whitacre observes that all the perplexities of reconstructing the situation come to the fore in trying to determine what was affirmed and denied in this phrase.[108]

Bultmann links 2:22, 4:2 and 5:6 and suggests that this points to a denial that the Christ is identical with the earthly, historical Jesus and therefore the doctrine of the heretics is undeniably rooted in the dualism of Gnosticism.[109] According to Dodd certain schools of Gnosticism adhered to a Docetic understanding of the nature of Christ and it may well have been this direction that affected the thinking of some of the members of the community. Brooke tends to accept the presence of a Cerinthian influence which drew a distinction between the human Jesus from the higher being, but he does not think Cerinthus is necessarily seen as the antichrist.[110] It was the heretical views of Cerinthus and his influence which led some Johannine Christians to deny that Jesus is the Christ, essentially repudiating the humanity of Jesus in his incarnation.[111] Smalley takes the phrase to "reflect the form of the denial in direct speech: the heretic said, "Jesus is not the Christ."[112] Smalley does not accept that Cerinthus had a determinative influence on the secessionists thinking, and instead opts for identifying the Christological error attacked in I John with the Jewish/Gnostic heresy opposed by Ignatius (c. 107 CE).[113] Haas prefers to reword the rhetorical

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[108] Rodney A. Whitacre, Johannine Polemic: The Role of Tradition and Theology, 125.

[109] R. Bultmann, The Johannine Epistles, 38.

[110] A. E. Brooke, The Epistles of St. John, 58.

[111] I. H. Marshall, The Epistles of John, 17-18; 157-58. See also Klaus Wengst, Häresie und Orthodoxie im Spiegel des ersten Johannesbriefes, 24-34. Also Klaus Wengst, Der erste, zweite und dritte Brief des Johannes, 101-118.

[112] S. S. Smalley, 1, 2, 3, John, 111.

[113] Smalley cites *Smyrn.* 1-3, 5; *Magn.* 11; *Trall.* 9 for possible references to the dual nature of the error he detects in I John (113).

question of v. 22 as a real question followed by an answer in which what is subsequently denied becomes an actual public utterance by the heretics. For the antagonists espousing a *gnostic philosophy* the proposition that *Jesus is the Christ* would have been unacceptable since it was impossible for someone to be both human and divine.[114] Grayston argues that both the author and the opposition represent a different side of a 'soft' Gnosticism where the opposition prefers inspiration (2:20) and where the author favours tradition (1:1). Both parties comprehended the affiliation of the human to the divine in terms of knowing God (2:3, 4, 13, 14) and being born (3:9) of God. It was inappropriate for the enthusiasts to confess Jesus as the Christ, because they felt that through the baptism of the spirit they had the same direct access to God.[115] In essence they denied that Jesus possessed what they possess, namely, an anointing from the Holy one (2:20). Against the profession, the author assures his readers that they too possess an anointing and that Jesus is the anointed one (2:20, 22). For Brown v. 22 exemplifies how far the opponents in I John have departed from the high pre-existent Christology of the FG. It is not that they have rejected the incarnational theology of the FG but they have moved well beyond it, ceasing to attach any salvific significance to the earthly career of Jesus or the manner of his death. Their denial of Jesus as the *incarnate* Word in his life and death, argues Brown, is "tantamount to a denial of the Fatherhood of God" (2:22-23).[116]

It is apparent from this brief overview that difference of opinion persists regarding the precise identification and delineation of the opponent's position. One view defines the nature of the controversy as the result of a high Christology with a *gnosticizing docetism* (Brooke, Dodd, Smalley). Another, defines it as the result of a denial of an incarnational Christology due to a misconstrual of the force of the FG's Christological statements (Brown). Still another, defines the nature of the controversy as the result of a low Christology of a *spirit-filled Jesus* against those claiming *anointing* for

[114] C. Haas, A Translator's Handbook on the Letters of John, 67-8.

[115] Kenneth Grayston, The Johannine Epistles, 76-93.

[116] R. E. Brown, The Epistles of John, 368-71.

themselves only (Grayston). In the former position it is sometimes proposed that the denial of v. 22 represents an actual public utterance proudly articulated by the antagonists, namely, "Jesus is not the Christ" (Haas; Smalley), and in the latter the author draws certain implications from their teaching and behaviour because they would not have explicitly made such a denial. Both positions assume, however, that the phrase denotes the specious teachings of the opponents which the author considered to be a denial of Jesus as the Christ. These erroneous teachings therefore had to be countered for the sake of the tradition and the community.

Bultmann says that v. 22 is not intended to define the *liar*, but it is designed to "provide a basis for the historicization of the figure of the antichrist effected in 2:18." The application of the term *antichrist* to a particular group of false teachers and their heretical teachings requires its historicization.[117] Though the language of the passage appears specifically to be directed against the false teachers and the particularity of their denial, its lack of specificity defies easy explanation. The two enigmatic terms ἀντίχριστος and ἐσχάτη ὥρα ἐστίν, while possibly indicating an eschatological concern of a final wickedness in opposition to God, are nonetheless unique to the writer and non-specific. The author mentions it but then does not develop any further eschatological implications of the separation, nor does he develop any additional dire consequences of the false confession.[118] Furthermore, apart from the two passages referring to the ἀντίχριστος, those who have supposedly withdrawn from the community are not mentioned again. Nowhere does the author take the time to make plain what the opponents actually denied or affirmed. Therefore, to recognize the teaching of the adversaries on the basis of an allusion of false teaching where

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[117] Bultmann, The Johannine Epistles, 38.

[118] Some would point to 5:16 as indicating a consequence for false confession. See I. H. Marshall, The First Epistle of John, 248-51. R. E. Brown writes "the sin unto death is a sin by nonbrothers, i.e., those who do not believe in the name of God's son (The Epistles of John, 617). A. E. Brooke, The Johannine Epistles, 146. R. Bultmann places 5:16 into the hands of the redactor in which "he thinks first of the apostacy from the true faith, and thus of heretical doctrine" (The Johannine Epistles, 87).

the allusion is not explicitly defined creates problems indeed.[119] Why the members in the Johannine community could not see the error in the enemies' confessions, if it were so blatant, is puzzling. It seems highly unlikely that the community would have had difficulty recognizing the error manifest in an explicit public utterance which denied that Jesus was the Christ or, for that matter, that it would have been incapable of distinguishing the *false implications* from the right ones in the subtle teaching and behaviour of the opponents. Whitacre remarks that "it seems improbable that a group of Christians would say "Jesus is not the Christ" (though perhaps this is not impossible), and even less likely that the rest of the community would have difficulty recognizing this as an error."[120]

So far, interest has focused on the object behind the text, namely, the historical state of affairs, the identity of the author and/or school involved, the identity of the author's opponents, and the theological development traced through the various texts of the Johannine tradition. Commentators assume that the author was writing to a specific community and was addressing issues raised by the opponents. The catholic non-specific character of I John, however, casts into question looking for a description of a specific group of apostates. If the author is trying to combat heresy in a specific congregation it is inexplicable why he neither specifies his addressees nor his opponents. Moreover, if the heresy is Christological, it is inexplicable why the author does not consistently deal with the nature of that error. The general character of the denial in I John 2:22 suggests that the author was writing to the church at large to warn them that the final eschatological hour had arrived. In spite of this, commentators have chosen to ignore the lack of evidence, insisting instead that the author is dealing with a specific situation and community. What purpose could the polemic have without a particular audience in view? In the attempts to do justice to this question the

[119] R. Alan Culpepper explains the lack of factual information by assuming that the community would have been familiar with the details, which would make full disclosure unnecessary (1 John, 2 John, 3 John, 45).

[120] Rodney A. Whitacre continues by saying that "an error in teaching was nonetheless a problem in the community albeit "probably more subtle" (Johannine Polemic, 125, especially note 233, 216).

commentators have assumed that the primary aim of critical analysis is to reconstruct the thought of the author or the reality to which the polemic refers. This assumption overlooks the one obvious solution that views the passage to be a speech act circumstance with specific illocutionary forces that the author uses to make significant Christological assertions. Thus the polemic is not a response to a particular event but the means by which the author conveys his Christological views.

In such a view, the author expresses himself in eschatological language of immediate urgency, παιδία, ἐσχάτη ὥρα ἐστίν, where the opponents, though real within an *apocalyptic speech act circumstance*, are not required to be historical. The author likely refers to the historical reality of false teachers, but is not referring to one, specific historical situation. The general language of this section and the earlier part of I John suggest a phenomenon which is present or might be present in many places. The conclusion, "this is the last hour" also makes best sense if the reference is general rather than specific. The author draws on Jewish and early Christian literature to coin a new word and a new phrase to describe in general terms a time during which antichrists and false prophets arise as enemies of God, who in their denial promulgate a deception of a most reprehensible kind.[121] It is noteworthy that the sensory verb ἀκούω, so prominent in the *incipit*, is once more linked with ἀπ' ἀρχῆς (2:24) and the ἀντίχριστοι (2:18), suggesting that if the over-all impression of the preface of I John is taken seriously then the term ἀντίχριστοι ought not to be taken as signifying particular historical figures who had once been part of the community. It is not required to take vv. 22-23 to represent the public denials of specific opponents or to represent the outcome of their teaching which stands in opposition to the author's position. A speech act analysis will show that it is unlikely that anyone who was in any way associated with the Johannine community, including the secessionists, would have denied, either publicly or through the implications of their teaching, what the author supposedly accused them of.

[121] The term 'antichrist' appears both in the singular and in the plural: the singular generally designates the enemy of Christ who will come at the end of time, whereas the plural signifies the false teachers encountered in the present situation of the community.

2. SPEECH ACT ANALYSIS OF I JOHN 2:18-24, 26.

A cluster of terms taken to imply intimate and direct knowledge of the addressees by an authority figure are liberally scattered throughout the writing.[122] So here, the author commences with an intimate outburst, "little children." The term παιδίον is generally perceived to imply intimate familiarity "as that of a fatherly teacher to pupils who are childlike in their understanding, and in need of instruction."[123] Though it is customary to view it as a term of address signifying first hand knowledge of those within the community,[124] it need imply no more than a greeting that includes all Christians.[125] It is a greeting that has a "caritative or endearing force, setting up an affectionate relationship between the speaker and his audience"[126] by someone unknown to it. In the over-all communicative design of I John, the affectionate greeting becomes an effective literary strategy designed to close the gap between readers and author to evoke a certain response in them. In its literary context, παιδία becomes a speech act with the illocutionary force of the commissive by which the author commits himself deliberately to bring his reading audience into association with himself and his ideas.[127] It is a commitment, however, not arising out of a sense of obligation to those

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[122] τεκνίον is the diminuative of τέκνον, appears seven times in I John (2:1, 12, 28; 3:7, 18; 4:4; 5:21) and is taken as a direct address by an author familiar with his spiritual children in need of instruction. Ἀγαπήτος is a plural address in I John (2:7; 3:2, 21; 4:1, 7, 11) generally seen to signify a titular of those beloved of God obligated to love one another. Likewise παιδίον (2:14, 18) is taken as a direct address "meaning that the author speaks as a member of the Johannine School preserving a tradition "from the beginning" imitating Jesus' affectionate address for his disciples at the last supper..." (R. E. Brown, The Epistles of John, 214).

[123] S. S. Smalley, 1, 2, 3 John, 95.

[124] R. E. Brown writes "that the plurals of τέκνιον and παιδίον are used as direct address for the readers who are clearly Christians of the author's own community" (The Epistles of John, 214).

[125] So R. Kysar, I, II, III John, 59.

[126] So R. E. Brown, The Epistles of John, 214. He, of course, sets this statement in the context of an elder teacher familiar with the members of his community.

[127] I. H. Marshall says that the term illustrates a relationship of a fatherly teacher "for those who are still like children in their understanding and need his instruction" (The Epistles of John, 148).

entrusted to his care because they belong to his community, but a commitment which in the utterance of "little children" implies the author's desire for affiliation with them in the significant literary state of affairs he is about to create. The affectionate greeting with such a force, not only draws the readers into association with the author and his literary state of affairs, but it increases the possibility that they will accept the author's religious and eschatological orientation. He thereby fortifies their mutual bond of fellowship and indeed prepares them for the solemn and ominous character of what follows: ἐσχάτη ὥρα ἐστίν.

The phrase ἐσχάτη ὥρα ἐστίν is anarthrous, which suggests to Westcott that the reference is to the general character of the period under consideration, namely, "a final hour."[128] The phrase ἐσχάτη ὥρα ἐστίν reveals very little about the situation it presupposes, though frequently its eschatological distinctiveness is taken to characterize a period during which antichrists will arise to deceive the faithful. This final eschatological manifestation of evil has been historicized to represent the false teachers creating theological havoc within the community.[129] If in the act of writing, however, ἐσχάτη ὥρα ἐστίν were perceived to be a literary speech act with the force of an *expressive*, it would disclose that the author believes that the last hour is here and that the eschatological false prophets have arrived. As a speech act circumstance, it makes little sense to try to historicize a general eschatological period to refer to specific enemies within a particular community. According to speech act theory, this final period of opposition to God functions as a speech act circumstance which clearly specifies what the enemies of God will deny. The denial that Jesus is the Christ in turn reveals

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[128] See B. F. Westcott, The Epistles of St John, 69. Most other commentators take in the sense of "the last hour", namely, John was thinking about the final stage in the last days (I Tim 4:1; II Tim 3:1; Jam 5:3; I Pet 1:5; Jude 18). See R. Schnackenburg, Die Johannesbriefe, 141-44. A. E. Brooke, The Epistles of St. John, 51. C. Haas, A Translator's Handbook on the Letters of John, 62.

[129] R. Alan Culpepper in his description of the different characters in the FG says of Judas that he "represents the humanization of the cosmic forces of evil...Like the later members of the Johannine community, Judas went out into the world and its darkness...He is a model of the many 'antichrists' (who were once within the community - I John 2:18-19) (Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel, 124-25).

who they really are. Thus, even though the enemies of God are present everywhere, it is not difficult for Christians everywhere to recognize them. In a speech act context, *Jesus is not the Christ* functions as a slogan to help the church at large to recognize those involved in falsehood.

Not only are the false teachers shown to be who they really are, but what they speak stands in fundamental opposition to the word of life (1:1-4). The author has already made it clear, that what was from the beginning made manifest the activity of God in Jesus Christ; the last hour, however, made manifest the activity of the evil one (3:7f) in the antichrist. In the context of an apocalyptic speech act circumstance, the phrase ἐσχάτη ὥρα ἐστίν therefore has a similar rhetorical, aural function to that of ἀπ' ἀρχῆς. Hearing it calls the reader back to a beginning, a beginning different, of course, from the one depicted in the *incipit*. Nevertheless, its generic quality and non-specificity harks back to ἀπ' ἀρχῆς where what was testified and proclaimed from of old evokes full sensory participation in the message concerning the word of life. In this passage it is no longer what is *heard* (ἀπ' ἀρχῆς), as from of old creating *koinonia*, but what is *heard* concerning the coming of the antichrist in the context of a "ἐσχάτη ὥρα"; indeed, as you have heard (ἀκούω) many antichrists have now come, threatening the very base of fellowship. What was heard from the beginning concerning the word of life created fellowship, but what was heard in the last hour concerning the coming of the antichrist and its denial destroyed fellowship. The denial that could potentially be made in such literary circumstance thus also functions to determine the contours of fellowship, i.e., those who are with us and those who are not. In a speech act setting, the references to *with us* and to *those who are not* specify two groups of people and where they belong: those who have heard the word of life and confess in accordance with it are with us, and those who do not, are not with us.

Given this situation, it is not required to take "for if they were of us, they would have remained with us," to signify those who had seceded from a specific community (2:19). The ambiguous ἐξ ἡμῶν has been taken literally to denote both origin and membership within the group upon which the whole notion of secession rests. The elliptical expression ἀλλ' ἵνα

φανερωθῶσιν ὅτι οὐκ εἰσὶν πάντες ἐξ ἡμῶν is clarified with the addition of a verb (either ἐξῆλθαν or τοῦτο ἐγένετο) after the *but*, revealing by the secession of the antichrists that they were never part of the community.[130] While such a rupture is historically conceivable, in the context of a speech act circumstance, 2:19 signifies the potential disruption of fellowship that any community might experience. It creates unnecessary difficulties to take the negative assertion to imply the existence of false teachers who were claiming to belong to the community. Instead, the language of immediacy vividly portrays the antichrists as having gone out, pointing out at the same time that in reality they were not of us, for if they had been of us, they would have remained with us (2:19). Whether they remain with us, and therefore deserve the affectionate appellation παιδία, is dependent on whether they will confess that Jesus is the Christ. If, however, they deny that Jesus is the Christ, they deserve to be called liars (2:22) and antichrists (2:22). These are the children of the last hour who fellowship with the antichrist, the antithesis to life and light. It follows then that anyone who denies that Jesus is the Christ is the antichrist and cannot therefore have a part in their *koinonia*. The act of writing captures and continues the same trend of describing a last hour as if now present, the antichrists as if now here already, and what was from the beginning as if now actually heard, seen and touched. V. 19 is simply the logical outflow of the time of the last hour and those who belong to it and therefore clearly shows where they *cannot* belong. This suggests that the eschatological false prophets, the antichrists and demonic enemies of God who were to appear in the last days are stock apocalyptic images that are meant to warn Christians everywhere of a very real danger. The dangers are that the last hour is now here, that the enemies of God have arrived, that they deny that Jesus is the Christ, and that they have no part in their fellowship.

To impress upon the audience their need to be vigilant, the author creates a situation which is so realistic in its depiction that it deters them from denying that Jesus is the Christ. Anyone who denies that Jesus is the Christ demonstrates where they belong and therefore reveals that they

[130] R. E. Brown, The Epistles of John, 340.

cannot have fellowship with us. Indeed, once the author has committed himself to the implications of a last hour exemplified by hostile forces in opposition to God he cannot fail to declare negatively their exclusion from his company without being subject to an infelicity. It is further encouragement for the readers to commit themselves to the author's literary state of affairs, which in its constituting character would place them in conformity with the conditions necessary to remain with him. In doing so the reader must also be in agreement with the negative assessment of what it means to be *in* or *out* of the author's literary state of affairs. To disagree with the author's assessment would guarantee an infelicitous act that displays that in reality they too were not of us, for if they had been of us they would have remained with us (2:19). In I John 1:1-4 that author had established that the basis of *koinonia* was to be founded on the word of life, but in this passage the basis of fellowship was destroyed because of the denial that Jesus is not the Christ. In the *incipit*, what was heard from the beginning concerned the word of life. In this passage, what is heard in the last hour concerns the appearance of the antichrists who, in their denial that Jesus is the Christ, are the antithesis to the word of life. Whereas on the one hand, the author's *proclamation* created koinonia, their *denial* on the other potentially threatened its very essence. In the literary state of affairs it is no longer the life made *manifest* (ἡ ζωὴ ἀφανερώθη - 1:2) but the antichrists made *manifest*. The author effects a compelling depiction of a last hour which in its unfolding drama places on centre stage the attitudes that epitomize the antichrist's evil nature and erroneous denials. Anyone who denies that Jesus is the Christ fits that description and therefore cannot have *koinonia* with us or with the Father and his Son Jesus Christ (1:3).

The author heightens the sense of peril associated with a last hour and the rupture of fellowship it implies by saying that "the antichrists have *now* come." The νῦν has been taken as a definite temporal designation to refer to a recent event within the community which culminated in a secession. The antichrists are the eschatological figures epitomizing evil in opposition to God but they need not personify actual "false teachers" *now* wreaking havoc in the community because of their specious denials. The term is part of the literary portrait of the last hour and functions to convey

the urgency of the author's belief where the *now* is to be linked with an undefined eschatological time in order to intensify the solemnity of his utterances. In such a view, *now* and *last hour* are over coded expressions designed to create an impression of reality in a similar fashion to the *incipit's* ἀπ' ἀρχῆς.[131] Απ ἀρχῆς and ἐσχάτη ὥρα ἐστίν both clarify the nature of the opposition that is evident in the metaphor of 'light' and 'dark' and the speech act circumstances they represent. Each of the expressions creates a powerful image; one of the grandeur of an undefined beginning during which the word of life was made manifest (the light already shines), another of the terror of an undefined last hour during which the antichrists appeared (the darkness blinds the eyes -2:11). Thus the terms *now* and *last hour* stand as a warning to the church at large to be vigilant because the enemies of the last days have arrived to destroy fellowship.

In speech act terms, the depiction of a last hour characterized by a manifestation of evil, is the only possible circumstance where the demonic powers can exist and deny that Jesus is the Christ. The portrait captures the exigency he believes would be the case if some one were to deny that Jesus is the Christ. While not actually indicating the last hour or even that events in his day appear to epitomize the imminent termination of all things because of the appearance of the antichrists, it nevertheless discloses what the author believes would be the last hour if certain conditions obtain. According to the author, the last hour is the only *appropriate circumstance* within which a *convention* exists that would permit someone to deny "that Jesus is the Christ." The denial is framed within a context of an eschatological last hour to inform Christians everywhere that the enemies of the last days would be those who engage in lies that challenge the fundamentals of what the author holds true. The implications, if such a denial were actually made by anyone, are horrendous. Those who claim that Jesus is not the Christ, says the author, imply that they are the children of the last hour, that they are liars in whom the truth does not reside, and that they are the antichrist. These

[131] The term over coded comes from E. V. McKnight, Post-Modern use of the Bible: The Emergence of Reader-Oriented Criticism, 222-23. For a discussion of the incipit see chapter four section A, 118-148.

consequences increase the prospect that they will *assert* that the last hour is here and thereby decrease the prospect that they will deny ὅτι Ἰησοῦς οὐκ ἔστιν ὁ Χριστός (2:22). The author warns the audience that to disagree with his assessment would potentially brand them as the antichrist. Since none of the readers would want to be labelled an antichrist it deters them from speaking in a way that would betray their true allegiance.

The ambiguous καὶ ὑμεῖς χρῖσμα ἔχετε ἀπὸ τοῦ ἁγίου καὶ οἴδατε πάντες (2:20) is generally taken to refer to the genuine believers in the community who had managed to keep the faith in contrast to the antagonists who had compromised theirs. The force of the conjunction καί is taken as an adversative in which the writer is suggesting that those who had not seceded from the community were privileged with a special gift which allowed the orthodox to detect the "doctrinal errors of the heretics, not only by observing the act of schism itself, but *also* by drawing upon their own spiritual insight and sensitivity."[132] The allusive term χρῖσμα[133] is unique to I John and this uniqueness has resulted in a variety of interpretations.[134] Commentators

[132] S. S. Smalley, 1, 2, 3, John, 105.

[133] This rare word occurs twice in I John (2:20, 27). Copyists often substituted for this word one more common or familiar: Codex Sianiticus uses πνεῦμα in 2:27; Vaticanus uses *charisma* in 2:27. See M. de Jonge, "The Word 'Anointed' in the Time of Jesus," Novum Testamentum 8 (1966) 132-42. I. H. Marshall points out that χρίσμα is quite possibly a clever pun on the word 'antichrist' and both are connected to 'Christ', all derived from the Greek verb χρίω (The Epistles of John, 153).

[134] Some take it in a figurative sense (Schnackenburg, Die Johannesbiefe, 151-53; E. Malasta holds τὸ χρῖσμα to mean the word of God interiorized and assimilated by the believer under the action of the Holy Spirit." The fault of the adversaries is that they failed to remain "docile and receptive both to the Apostolic preaching and to the action of the Spirit" (Interiority and Covenant, 204). Others understand 'anointing' in a physical sense, either with oil, probably an allusion to baptism (so Bultmann, where anointing played an important role in Gnosticism; the author gives new meaning "to the sacrament of anointing" (The Johannine Epistles, 37). He writes elsewhere that "in using this designation 'unction' John apparently has adopted a term of some Gnostic mystery cult, against which he turns the barbs of his remarks in their own language" (Theology of the New Testament, 88); or with the Holy Spirit, which according to Westcott is the "characteristic endowment" of believers (B. F. Westcott, The Epistles of St. John, 73). A. E. Brooke notes that words ending in -μα can denote the action of the verb, i.e, the act of anointing rather than the object of anointing, namely, an oil or the Holy Spirit. Whether physical or figurative, concludes Brown, "it is likely the author was referring to an *anointing with the Holy Spirit*, the gift from Christ which constituted one as Christian...probably connected with entry into the community" (The Epistles of John, 348).

remain divided about a final resolution to the questions. Despite the grammatical obscurity of the term in 2:20, in 2:27 "the anointing" is identified as the word of God where, in addition, the author reminds the readers that the anointing remains in him and that his anointing teaches him. *Anointing* appears to refer metaphorically to the word taught, perhaps impressed upon the readers by the Holy Spirit.[135] Since a last hour is the only circumstance within which someone could deny that Jesus is the Christ, combining it with what the holy one teaches the readers, ensures that they cannot be deceived by the evil one (2:26; 4:1-4). Indeed, armed with this knowledge they are in the position to be able to distinguish between the spirit of truth and the spirit of evil (4:4). Therefore, to deny that Jesus is the Christ (2:22), to claim to have fellowship with him while walking in the darkness (1:6), to claim to have no sin (1:8), or to claim to be in the light while hating the brother (2:9), indicates that the readers do not have the anointing (teaching) from the holy one. So once again, a speech act reading would suggest that the phrase simply sets apart two groups of people where what they confess and know stems from two different sources. It does not require that the phrase refer to a specific group of people in order to understand its meaning.

Frequently ἀπὸ τοῦ ἁγίου (2:20)[136] is understood to point to the possibility of someone within John's community appealing to the teaching of the FG on the paraclete, to support their claims that they possess right knowledge about the gospel of Jesus. There is no hint of this in the wording, and, as pointed out before, it runs counter to the non-specific appeal of I John. The statement comes from the author to assure the church at large that what he has taught them about a last hour and the antichrists does not

[135] Held to by R. Bultmann, The Johannine Epistles, 36; R. E. Brown, The Epistles of John, 348; S. S. Smalley, 1, 2, 3, John, 107.

[136] Two interpretations are possible: (1) the "holy one" as a reference to God. See C. H. Dodd, The Johannine Epistles, 53; J. L. Houlden, The Johannine Epistles, 79; (2) the "holy one" as a reference to Jesus. See S. S. Smalley, 1, 2, 3 John, 108; R. Bultmann, The Epistles of John, 37; R. E. Brown, The Epistles of John, 348; I. H. Marshall writes that it is virtually certain "to be a reference to Jesus, the Holy one of God (Mk 1:24; Jn 6:69; cf. Acts 3:14) (The Epistles of John, 155).

come from him only but also from the holy one.[137] In his desire to convince them that his ideas about ethics and Christology are perfectly legitimate, the author appeals to the holy one for additional support. Indeed, he reminds his readers that he is writing to them not because they do not know the truth but because they know it already (2:21), and because they know that every lie is not of the truth.[138] Presumably what they already know comes from the holy one and is simply being reinforced by what the authors writes to them. Instead of writing to inform the readers of things that they do not know the author writes to inform them of things that they already know. But why write to them when they already know the truth, or when the commandment is old? Commentators generally take v. 21 to signify the author's attempt to reassure and to encourage the community members that they have not yet fallen prey to the errors of the separatists. In its rhetorical, aural speech act setting, however, v. 21 would stimulate the reader to recall what the author has earlier written to them about a new commandment which nevertheless is old because they have had it from the beginning, i.e., an old commandment which is ὁ λόγος ὃν ἠκούσατε (2:7). Is he perhaps not also harking back to ἀπ' ἀρχῆς (1:1) and 2:7, 8 to remind them that what they know is from of old, and therefore trustworthy?[139] In this passage, what he writes to them is trustworthy because it comes from the holy one. Is he perhaps not recalling ἐσχάτη ὥρα to remind them of the only circumstance where it is possible for

[137] In some respects R. A. Culpepper supports this notion, though, of course, within the constraints of a Johannine Christianity. He writes that "neither the theology nor the polity of the Johannine Church would allow the elder to claim authority to dispense or dictate truth to the community" (1 John, 2 John, 3 John, 48)

[138] The oddity of the statement has been noted: ἔγραψα followed by three ὅτι clauses. Would the author not be compelled to write because they do *not* know rather than writing because they know it? Three interpretations have been proposed: (1) all three ὅτι's should be translated as 'because'; this is favoured by A. E. Brooke, The Epistles of St. John, 57. See also S. S. Smalley, 1, 2, 3 John, 109; (2) the first two are translated as 'because' and the last as 'that'; this is favoured by C. H. Dodd, The Johannine Epistles, 54; (3) all three are translated as 'that'; this is favoured by R. Bultmann, the Johannine Epistles, 38. R. E. Brown accepts this last interpretation as grammatically the most simple where the author "is writing to reassure them that he recognizes that they know the truth and to remind them of the incompatibility of the antichrist's lie with the truth" (The Epistles of John, 350).

[139] One cannot but help recall the words πιστὸς ὁ λόγος (I Tim 1:15; 3.1; 4:9; II Tim 2:11; Titus 3:8).

ὁ ψεύστης to exist? What they know is the truth because it is impossible for a lie to co-exist with the truth. In the context of I John, the truth and the lie fit the many other contrasting terms, e.g., light/dark, life/death, etc., that function to depict graphically the exclusive speech act spheres the author describes. Since what comes from the holy one is incompatible with the lies of the antichrist, the readers can be assured that what the author writes to them is true because what they know from the holy one confirms it to be the truth.

Indirectly, by appealing to what they themselves already know through the holy one, he indicates to his readers that they are in a position to recognize that his speech acts are not infelicitous, for what they know confirms them as felicitous and therefore reliable. The act in writing with the force of a *commissive* and *expressive* implies his commitment to and belief in what he says by how he says it, and therefore confirms that what he writes is not a lie but the truth (2:21). In his graphic portrayal of a last hour and its antichrists, the author makes absolutely plain the limits of his own confessions and denials and confirms by his portrayal that what he says is the truth (2:8). In such a literary context, it is impossible for him to commit himself to or believe in a lie unless he desires to engage in infelicitous speech acts. If they were found to be infelicitous then he too would be subject to a charge of promulgating a lie which, of course, would have no part in the truth (2:21). The readers could equally well apply the searching question "who is the liar?" to the author. Ultimately, if, by his own standards, he were discovered to be a liar, he would be the antichrist. Similarly, the writer's rhetorical expectation is that the readers must commit themselves to the image of a last hour and its Christological and ethical implications.

The main purpose of 2:18-24 is to alert the reader to the dangerous theological and ethical consequences inherent in rejecting the apocalyptic speech circumstance the author delineates. For the readers to reject it would imply that they do not have fellowship with the author, that they walk in darkness, and that they lie and that the truth is not in them; in other words, they would epitomize the evil which has appeared in the antichrists. To prevent such an occurrence, the author reminds and encourages his audience

that they cannot be part of a last hour as antichrists if indeed they have been re-constituted by a successful *uptake* of his speech acts and the compelling literary state those acts create. He reminds the readers that they have been taught by the holy one so that they all have knowledge (2:20). By taking into account what the holy one has taught them, and by affiliating with the author's literary portrait of an apocalyptic last hour and its connection with what was from the beginning concerning the word of life, the readers are encouraged to enlarge their knowledge about what constitutes a proper confession concerning Jesus Christ.

The portrait of an apocalyptic last hour strongly reminds the readers that the word of life proclaimed is in stark contrast to the denial that Jesus is the Christ. The word of life has been made manifest, it is the truth, it is life eternal that stems from God the Father, in whom there is no darkness at all (1:5), and it is that which provides the basis for fellowship. In plain contrast to this image is the one about a last hour. The children of light are warned about everything that stands in direct opposition to God: it is the antichrist, the antithesis to the light and life. To prevent any misunderstanding about what this entails, the author makes explicit the antithesis between light/life and darkness by listing a variety of confessions and denials (speech acts). In this passage the denial that Jesus is the Christ contradicts the word of life that has been made manifest by God the Father. The claim "that Jesus is not the Christ" functions as a slogan that in its literary context makes plain the antithetical character of the two realms. Because of the serious consequences of such a claim and to prevent its occurrence the author creates a literary circumstance of utmost gravity. In his description of a time which stands at variance to the purpose of God, symbolized by the catch slogan "Jesus is not the Christ," he piles up image after image to drive home its terrible implications. He describes it as an apocalyptic last hour during which the antichrists have appeared. These antichrists cannot be from our ranks because they would not really have belonged to us. Had they really belonged to us, they would have remained with us. They are liars who deny that Jesus is the Christ. Their lies are alien to the truth because they also deny the Father and the Son. In such a literary context the readers are clearly given the type of confession that, in its utterance, would indicate

where they stand. Only within the eschatological limits of a last hour can a denial of such magnitude presumably take place.

Historical critics argue that the enemies of the author publicly denied that Jesus is the Christ without being able to indicate with certainty what actually it was that they denied and under what circumstance. This study, however, has shown that unless the one who uttered such a denial also saw himself to be the antichrist, the denial would be infelicitous. To deny that "Jesus is the Christ" while not perceiving oneself to be an epitomization of the evil of a last hour guarantees the failure of the speech act. In the literary context of I John, it is therefore unlikely that anyone who was in any way associated with the Johannine community, including the secessionists, would have denied, either publicly or through the implications of their teachings, what the author supposedly accused them of. Indeed, it appears that the author uses the circumstance of a last hour to prevent erroneous confessions and to assert positively that Jesus is the Christ rather than simply to respond to the Christological error of a particular community by reporting it and finally correcting it.

3. CONCLUSIONS

Historical critical studies have examined the various passages of I John as evidence for the events which gave rise to them, and have examined the teachings of the author of I John in light of the hypothetical historical context. In contrast, the interpretative strategy proposed and implemented in the present study has attempted to demonstrate that the meaning and the significance of a text are not limited to those meanings that conventional historical criticism is designed to recover. This section has demonstrated that the author creates a powerful speech act circumstance and the requisite speech act (denial), which forcefully reminds the reader that a last hour is the only appropriate circumstance within which such an utterance can conceivably take place. Hence, it is possible to propose that the language of denial and of confession does not simply signify what the antichrists were

already denying, as if they existed by virtue of being historicized in the propagation of false teaching by the secessionists. But that language makes plain what anyone might be doing who in fact they denies that Jesus is the Christ. In the process of setting out Christian truth the author uses the circumstance of a time in which apostates deny both that Jesus is the Christ and that the Father and the Son are one (2:22, 23). In a roundabout way he brings his readers into association with himself through a mutual consideration of the speech act circumstance he creates. In a way vv. 22 and 23 become benchmarks to indicate whether the reader will find himself affiliated with the author or whether he will indeed become one with the antichrist. The language therefore perpetuates the theme of *koinonia* mentioned in the *incipit* (1:3) which is not so much predicated on *right theological confession* as it is on the readers' acceptance of the author's depiction of a last hour and its Christological consequences.[140]

This passage is often used as evidence for the views of the Gnostics. Yet there is no evidence that the Gnostics would deny that Jesus is the Christ, let alone deny the Father and the Son. In spite of this, commentators have chosen to ignore this, asserting that I John 2:22 reflects the author's concern that an over emphasis on the divine nature of Jesus has supplanted his humanity. It seems odd that he did not clarify such a significant issue if this desire was uppermost in his mind. Since there is no hint of this in the wording, more likely, the author did not allude to a Christological error, but to all the errorists who by definition deny Christ. I John is a warning to both Christians and enemies everywhere that to deny Jesus as Christ is tantamount to the antichrist. The author of I John is not denouncing a group of enemies connected with specific controversies within the church. He takes them to be the eschatological false prophets who in their speech make clear that the last hour has now arrived.

[140] It is possible to broaden the analysis and suggest that perhaps the same thing is going on in II Peter and Jude, possibly even in I Corinthians 12:3 where Paul declares "διὸ γνωρίζω ὑμῖν ὅτι οὐδεὶς ἐν πνεύματι Θεοῦ λαλῶν λέγει, Ἀνάθεμα Ἰησοῦς, καὶ οὐδεὶς δύναται εἰπεῖν, Κύριος Ἰησοῦς, εἰ μὴ ἐν πνεύματι ἁγίῳ."

Perhaps I John represents an early transitional type of writing in its role in the history of heresiology. Failure to enter into a speech act circumstance would eventually lead to charges of heresy complete with the use of stock eschatological phrases warning Christians about the coming antichrists and their false professions. In his discussion about the nature and development of heresy in the early church, Jaroslav Pelikan maintained that the "primitive church was not characterized by an explicit unity of doctrine...but what did characterize primitive Christianity was a unity of life...."[141] Therefore, early forms of heresy were perceived to be a "deviation from that unity; and as the unity came to be transposed into the language of creed and dogma from that of testimony and proclamation, heresy was seen as an aberration from the truth of sound doctrine."[142] The author of I John appears to be much more interested in the unity of *koinonia* that is created by his proclamation and testimony to what has been heard, seen and touched than in a defense of right doctrine against those subverting it. Once more, what appears to be the author's purpose throughout the writing has been confirmed, namely, to engender fellowship with him (1:3; 2:19). The reader's agreement (ὁμολωγέω) with the constituent elements of the author's speech act circumstance and its consequences, ultimately moves them into conformity with his religious and theological orientation.

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[141] Jaroslav Pelikan, The Emergence of the Catholic Tradition (100-600) vol 1 (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1971) 70.

[142] Ibid., 70.

CHAPTER SEVEN

A SPEECH ACT ANALYSIS OF THE CONFESSIONS AND DENIALS (I JOHN 4:1-4, 16; 5:6)

1. INTRODUCTION:

Bultmann writes concerning 4:1-4 that it "sets in bold relief the decisive contrast between God and 'world', truth and delusion, and thus true faith and false teaching."[143] Perkins believes that in 4:2 the author "returns to direct attack on his opponents by again invoking the ominous language of apocalyptic preaching."[144] The author's impulse to invoke such language comes from the threat provided by the erroneous Christological views of the heretics. In his assessment of the passage, Brown holds that secessionist deceivers, who had been seduced by the Evil Spirit, were "denying that what Jesus was or did in the flesh was related to his being the Christ. i.e., was salvific."[145] Brown admits, however, that defining the nature of the heretic's Christological confession is challenging because of a number of textual and interpretative problems in the text. The critical difficulties in this section are the meaning of the term πνεῦμα and the associated testing of the spirits (4:1) and the confession in v. 2. The ambiguous term πνεῦμα,[146] in its singular

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[143] R. Bultmann, The Johannine Epistles, 64.

[144] Pheme Perkins, The Johannine Epistles, 49.

[145] R. E. Brown, The Epistles of John, 505.

[146] Any number of New Testament usages could be reflected here. For example: (1) "air, wind or spirit": see further, "πνεῦμα", E. Schweizer, Theological Dictionary of the New Testament VII, ed. by Gerhard Kittel; (2) the Holy Spirit which is God's spirit poured upon Jesus and later upon his followers; (3) human spirits under supernatural influence; (4) incorporeal beings such as good spirits and angels, or evil spirits/demons; (5) the human soul departed from the body to the realm of the spirit world; (6) the spirit of insight as the higher faculty of human nature. See further, C. Haas, A Translator's Handbook on the Letters of John, 99-100. See also R. E. Brown, The Epistles of John, 486. The antithesis between the two spirits occurs in the Qumran texts. See R. Schnackenburg, Die Johannesbriefe, 209-15 esp. excursus 9.

usage is followed by its plural. If πνεῦμα is taken to personify every person then it creates difficulties for the following line, which reads ἀλλὰ δοκιμάζετε τὰ πνεύματα... Brown understands πνεῦμα primarily as a reference to the Holy Spirit as well as the Evil Spirit both of which embody themselves in human behaviour, "and specifically manifest themselves in true and false confessions of faith...a true confession comes from the Spirit of God; an erroneous confession indicates...the presence of the wicked Spirit of deceit."[147] Smalley takes the term πνεῦμα to "signify a human person who is inspired by the spirit of truth or the spirit of error."[148] The plural πνεύματα indicates that the spirit of truth and error can operate in any number of people at the same time in any one period. Marshall understands πνεῦμα to refer either to an "utterance inspired by a spirit" or to a "person inspired by a spirit" in which case the church cannot simply believe all utterances as inspired but must carefully test the inspired utterances of individuals to see if they originate from God.[149] For Bultmann πνεῦμα signifies the existence of "the spirit of error" manifest in "several seductive powers...operative in a plurality of deceivers."[150] The phenomenon of inspired prophetic utterances, suggests Dodd, was still being experienced by members of the Johannine Community. He turns to Paul (I Cor 14:1-5) and I Cor 12:3) as an example of the kind of activity the author had in mind. The danger being addressed here is uncontrolled false inspiration threatening to corrupt the members of the community.[151] In similar fashion Grayston holds that πνεῦμα means "an apparently inspired utterance which may or may not come from God, spoken

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[147] R. E. Brown turns to the literature of Ignatius of Antioch, *Ephesians* 17:1 and *Philadelphians* 6:2 for examples of how notions of the Prince of this world are equated with Satan who then enters into people to inspire them to evil. He suggests as well that this links closely with the worldview of the Dead Sea Scrolls, e.g., *Damascus Document* (CD) 2:11-12, 18; *Manual of Disciple* (1QS) 3:17-21. Moreover, he points to *T. Judah* 20:1-2; *T. Levi* 3:3; *T. Judah* 19:4; *T. Simeon* 2:7; to New Testament literature, *Ephesians* 2:2-3; *I Timothy* 4:1; and to a later document, *Shepherd of Hermas* (*Man* 6.2.1) (The Epistles of John, 486).

[148] S. S. Smalley, 1, 2, 3 John, 218.

[149] I. H. Marshall, The Epistles of John, 204.

[150] R. Bultmann, The Johannine Epistles, 61

[151] C. H. Dodd, The Johannine Epistles, 97-9.

by persons who seem to be or claim to be prophets."[152] The term recalls old Jewish tradition about the need to be able to distinguish between genuine and false prophets (Deuteronomy 13:1-5), and early Christian tradition about false teachers in the community (Matt 7:15; II Pet 2:1). It also appears to recall the Farewell Discourse and its reference to the Spirit of truth, perhaps exemplified by the *Paraclete* (Jn 16:13; 14:17; 15:26) and confirmed by verbal parallels in Jewish writings.[153] While members of the community were endowed with the gift of the spirit of knowledge, writes Brooke, not all spiritual activities could be "traced back to the Spirit of God as their source."[154] Just as in the days of Paul in Corinth, spiritual phenomena must be verified, for not every expression of the spirit could be accepted as true.[155]

Thus, πνεῦμα is primarily held to refer to *inspiration* motivated either by a spirit of truth, perhaps from the Holy Spirit, or motivated by a spirit of error, perhaps from the Evil Spirit. The utterances motivated by both spirits are inspired and therefore they must be tested to determine their respective source. Moreover, the term is personified to signify the *false prophets* whose inspired claims must be tested to "see if the spirit they reflect belongs to God."[156] The negative imperative of v. 1a is to guard against "naive credulity" whereas the positive imperative of v. 1b is to inculcate "prudent judgment."[157] The purpose of circumspect discernment is to test whether or not the spirits are of God; "εἰ ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ ἐστιν" (v. 1b). The reason for the urgent challenge to exercise prudent judgment is that πολλοὶ ψευδοπροφῆται ἐξεληλύθασιν εἰς τὸν κόσμον (4:1c) and that the

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[152] K. Grayston, The Johannine Epistles, 118-19.

[153] *Test. Jud.* 20:1; *Test. Asher* 1:5; *1QS* 3:18-21; *1QS* 3:6-9.

[154] C. H. Dodd, The Epistles of St. John, 106.

[155] R. E. Brown thinks it quite unlikely that "testing the spirits' has anything to do with Paul's idea of discerning the good spirits from the wrong (I Cor 12:4ff) - here John is speaking about the manifestation of two spirits: the Holy Spirit versus the Evil Spirit (The Epistles of John, 503).

[156] R. E. Brown, The Community of the Beloved Disciple, 138.

[157] Edward Malatesta, Interiority and Covenant, 284.

antichrists about which they have heard have come (...τοῦ ἀντιχρίστου, ὃ ἀκηκόατε ὅτι ἔρχεται... 4:3c). Whereas earlier the antichrists had gone out from us (2:19), in this section the author informs his readers that false prophets had gone out into the world (4:1). Commentators assume that the author had in mind a group who had at one time been part of the community but had defected into the world and "subjected themselves to the spirit at work in the [world]."[158] Continuing to claim, however, that they had χρῖσμα from the holy one (2:20), and thinking to be inspired by the spirit they persisted in their teaching (4:1) deceiving and misleading many of the members of the community. In such a critical situation the author sets forth a test that will reveal the impostors. The proper judgment of the spirits is contingent on an external criterion, for what is ultimately of divine or of evil origin can be recognized by what is confessed (ἐν τούτῳ γινώσκετε τὸ πνεῦμα τοῦ Θεοῦ - 4:2).

The confession that the author records in v. 2 is what "will separate the Secessionists from his own adherents and thus constitute a criterion of the Spirits:" "Jesus Christ come in the flesh."[159] It is assumed that the way the confession is formulated is the author's response to a confession deemed to be false. But the obscurity of the Greek of v. 2 makes it difficult to distinguish between the author's confession and that of the antagonists. In order to clarify the obscurity and to get at what the heretics may have confessed, commentators have translated the phrase πᾶν πνεῦμα ὃ ὁμολογεῖ Ἰησοῦν Χριστὸν ἐν σαρκὶ ἐληλυθότα in various ways.[160] For example, Brown,[161] Brooke,[162] and Grayston[163] each interpret the phrase to read

[158] R. A. Culpepper, 1 John, 2 John, 3 John, 79.

[159] R. E. Brown, The Epistles of John, 505.

[160] In the expression ἐν σαρκὶ ἐληλυθότα codex Vaticanus reads a perfect infinitive θεναι whereas Sinaiticus, Alexandrinus and Ephraemi Rescriptus read a perfect participle of the verb ἔρχομαι. Most commentators prefer the latter reading even though the infinitive is an improvement of the awkward Greek of the perfect participle.

[161] R. E. Brown, The Epistles of John, 491.

[162] A. E. Brooke, The Epistles of St. John, 108-9.

[163] K. Grayston, The Johannine Epistles, 120.

"every spirit which confesses Jesus Christ come in the flesh...." Bultmann[164] and Marshall[165] translate it as "every spirit which confesses Jesus Christ as having come in the flesh...." Others, such as Houlden[166] and Malatesta,[167] interpret the phrase to read, "every spirit which acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh...." And finally Dodd,[168] Stott[169] and Smalley[170] suggest that a double accusative is grammatically the focus here and therefore they read it as "every spirit which confesses Jesus as the Christ incarnate...."[171] The different translations reflect varying emphases respectively stressing the *fact* of his coming, i.e., his advent; the *manner* of his coming, i.e., in the flesh, and the *mode* of his coming, i.e., into the flesh. Despite these various attempts to clarify the obscure Greek, what the adversaries may have acknowledged, that the author judged to be false, is not clear. This has led commentators to wonder about the nature of the secessionists slogan which the author corrected to achieve the present wording.[172]

Bultmann writes that "they deny that the Christ, whom they also revere as the bringer of salvation, has appeared in the historical Jesus...and it therefore appears to be a question of Docetism in the case of the heretical

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[164] R. E. Bultmann, The Johannine Epistles, 61.

[165] I. H. Marshall, The Johannine Epistles, 203.

[166] J. L. Houlden, The Johannine Epistles, 104.

[167] E. Malatesta, Interiority and Covenant, 283.

[168] C. H. Dodd, The Johannine Epistles, 96.

[169] J. R. W. Stott, The Epistles of John, 155-56.

[170] S. S. Smalley does not see ὁμολογεῖν as having a double accusative but he does suggest that the simplest reading of the phrase ' Ιησοῦν Χριστὸν ἐν σαρκὶ ἐληλυθότα is "Jesus Christ, incarnate" (1, 2, 3, John, 222).

[171] On the double accusative see Blass, Debrunner and Funk, A Greek Grammar of the New Testament, § 416[3]

[172] See J. Painter, "The 'Opponents' in I John," 48-71.

doctrine."[173] Dodd proposes that forerunners of a second century *Gnosticism*[174] appeared as genuine inspired prophets but refused to confess the reality of the incarnation. Because "simple-minded believers were impressed by them and therefore wavered in their convictions, the author proposes to test their teaching. By that test their teaching, however powerfully 'inspired', was condemned."[175] Smalley, Schnackenburg, Kysar, and Culpepper all deem the teaching under attack not the result of a Docetic heresy, but a consequence of the refusal to confess the incarnation of Jesus.[176] Smalley writes that "here is the heart of the orthodox acknowledgement about Jesus...which guards against two possible heretical opinions about Jesus: that he was only divine or merely human."[177] In a careful assessment of the passage, Brown concludes that the text gives very little support to those who would argue that the secessionists denied the incarnation. The issue for Brown is not that the "secessionists were denying the incarnation or the physical reality of Jesus' humanity; they were denying that what Jesus was or did in the flesh was related to his being the Christ, i.e., was salvific."[178] Similarly, Grayston insists that it is misleading to think that the dissidents would have denied the incarnation or to think that the assertion is an attack on a Docetic Christology.[179] Grayston proffers another

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[173] R. Bultmann, The Johannine Epistles, 62.

[174] Pheme Perkins holds that Gnostic evidence does not confirm the type of Docetism typically adduced for this passage (The Johannine Epistles, 52).

[175] C. H. Dodd, The Johannine Epistles, 99. A. E. Brooke suggests there is nothing in the Epistles which compels the supposition that Docetism was at the root of the problem. Some within the Johannine community were denying the reality of the incarnation.

[176] S. S. Smalley, 1, 2, 3 John, 222. R. Schnackenburg, Die drei Johannesbriefe, 15-23. R. Kysar, I, II, III John, 91. R. A. Culpepper, 1 John, 2 John, 3 John, 80.

[177] S. S. Smalley, 1, 2, 3, John, 223.

[178] R. E. Brown, The Epistles of John, 505. See further, R. E. Brown, The Community of the Beloved Disciple, 111-23.

[179] Grayston points to Polycarp's (*Ephesians*, 7) negative formulation, "For everyone who shall not confess Jesus Christ having come in the flesh is antichrist, and whoever shall not confess the testimony of the cross is of the devil" as an unreliable testimony, which nonetheless perhaps shows that Johannine language could be adapted to fight a Cerinthian view of Jesus. He does not think, however, that such is the case here (The Johannine Epistles, 120-21).

solution, arguing that "the implied contrast is not between a Christ who came in the flesh and a Christ who was present in appearance only, but between accepting Jesus as both Christ and Son of God and discarding Jesus for the benefits of the Spirit."[180] The paucity of explicit references to the incarnation in the Johannine corpus leads Minear to contend that the phrase Ἰησοῦν Χριστὸν ἐν σαρκὶ ἐληλυθότα is not a reference to the brute fact of the incarnation or even equivalent to "in human form." It refers rather to a mode of existence in which "the coming of Christ in the Flesh" is one way of saying that within the authentic Christian fellowship, their abides or dwells Christ's life, his truth, his love, his anointing, his word, his spirit and his commands."[181] Ultimately, because every believer has experienced the actuality of the indwelling of Christ, the author is able to link Christology with ethical demands. In her analysis of the assertion of 4:2, Perkins concludes that it is impossible to reconstruct the Christology of the opponents on the basis of this so-called Christological slogan. In her opinion, setting out a proper Christology is not the primary concern of the author, but confronted with problems of soteriology where the "confidence of Christians in salvation and forgiveness based on the atoning death of Jesus has been shaken (1:7; 2:2; 3:5; 4:10; 5:6),"[182] he reassures these Christians that their salvation is still intact because Jesus Christ has come in the flesh.

Commentators note the many themes that 4:1-4 has in common with an earlier unit (2:18-24),[183] and assume that 4:1-4 continues the polemic of 2:18-24. The author expands the theme of two Spirits as a test by which it is possible to distinguish the true from the false on the basis of an external

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[180] Ibid., 121.

[181] Paul S. Minear points out that σάρξ is not a distinctly Johannine word. It appears twelve times in the Gospel, of which eight have a christological reference out which only two are directly relevant to the doctrine of the incarnation - John 1:14 perhaps the most explicit. In I John only three references are found - the most explicit being 4:2 ("The Idea of Incarnation in First John," 291-302).

[182] Pheme Perkins, The Johannine Epistles, 52.

[183] The common themes are, the antichrists, lying/deceit, the Christological confessions, the false prophets, the spirits, etc.

confession. It is mistakenly assumed that the false prophets (4:1) are the secessionist deceivers (2:19; 4:1) who went out from the community and defected into the world. They deny that Jesus has come in the flesh while still claiming to be inspired by the spirit of truth. To counteract these false prophets and to make evident to the community what they really are, the author formulates a confession which they presumably would not utter. Commentators believe that the confession is a reflection of the author's Christological stance by which he attempts to reformulate and correct the specious error it presupposes.

Hengel has pointed to the richness of the spiritual climate in Palestine during the first century C.E., which permitted the Christological thought of the FG and the Epistles to develop and connect idiosyncratically, "to result in an impressive multiform unity derived from 'different Christologies'."[184] Not to recognize this rich heritage which gave expression to the author's Christology will produce, in the words of Hengel, "a wealth of hypothetical sources, authors, redactors, opponents, and communities" for the Johannine writings.[185] In such a rich heritage the author I John gives expression to a Christology within a specific speech act circumstance by which he attempts to convince the readers of his views. Surely the author would have bothered to spell out more systematically the Christological connotations of the phrase if it reflected the error of a particular community. The author, however, neither refers to the opponents explicitly nor clarifies what they denied. Since he does not do so, it creates an unnecessary complication to assume automatically that on the basis of what the author has said its opposite must also be true. The shift in v. 3b to confessing Jesus shows that the emphasis is on confessing Jesus and not on the participial phrase "having come in the flesh." If the emphasis were on the latter it would need to read: "that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh" and would have been repeated in v. 3. The force of the participial is that of a relative clause, i.e., "who has come in the flesh." This would normally refer to the historical

184 M. Hengel, The Johannine Question, 104.

185 Ibid., 24.

reality/actuality of Jesus Christ, i.e., that he lived among us. If it is a reference to the Docetic heresy it would need to give more context. For example, docetists might say that Christ came into the flesh of Jesus, but was not identical with it. I am not aware that any one ever claimed that Christ had not been, in some way, in the flesh. The denial is in v. 3, which lacks the qualifying participle, is not in the formulation of the proper confession in v. 2. The false spirit is recognized by denying Jesus, which is not a Christological error but a fundamental rejection/apostacy characteristic of antichrists. In his study, Minear concluded that "in the flesh" is not equivalent to "as a man' or "in human form" and that "has come" does not refer directly to Jesus' birth as Mary's son [186] A speech act analysis will show that the confession is an external criterion which in its utterance clarifies what stems from the spirit and what does not. In such a view, it is not required to take I John 4:2 to be the utterance of the false prophets who had recently seceded from a particular community. The statement is a functional slogan which makes plain the kind of confession possible within the limits of a certain speech act circumstance. In its literary context the confession functions to help the reader to make a distinction between what stems from the spirit of truth and what stems from the spirit of deceit. Minear writes that

> the issue of immediate concern to the author was not the historical problem, as raised by the Docetists, as to whether Jesus of Nazareth had been a real man, or had only seemed to be human. Rather, the immediate issue was how to determine which spirits in the author's situation were or were not from God.[187]

The confession has an affective component such that we "cannot merely say what it means; we must see what it does."[188]

2. SPEECH ACT ANALYSIS (4:1-6; 5:6).

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[186] Paul S. Minear, "The Idea of Incarnation in First John," 292.

[187] Ibid., 297.

[188] See T. Polk, "Paradigms, Parables amd *Meshalim*," Catholic Biblical Quarterly 45 (1983) 564-83.

CONFESSIONS AND DENIAL

About to create another speech act circumstance similar to the one in 2:18-24 requiring a cooperative reader for its successful uptake, the author appropriately begins the section with ἀγαπητοί (4:1).[189] Whereas, earlier he had intimately addressed his readers as παιδία (2:18), now his readers are intimately addressed ἀγαπητοί (4:1). As in the previous section with its solemn delineation of a circumstance with dire apocalyptic consequences where it is potentially possible to deny that Jesus is the Christ, so here the author once again describes another situation where a speech act which will ultimately make a distinction between two competing spirits. In 2:18-22 a denial, if felicitous, would imply that the articulator is part of a last hour and a child of the antichrist and not his little child, and in 4:1-4 a confession if felicitous would imply that the articulator is affiliated with one of two competing spirits: either the spirit of truth (4:6) or the spirit of deceit (4:6). The type of confession, says the author, will reveal the readers' affiliation to be with either the false prophets or with his beloved son. The children of the antichrist (4:1, 3) cannot be his *beloved*.

Whatever the readers' allegiance to a community might have been, the author is committed to involve them in a significant speech act circumstance. In the context of this circumstance the author formulates an important confession. To secure agreement on such a crucial confession, it is of paramount importance for the author to draw the readers into association with himself and the speech act circumstance he delineates. As he has done on numerous occasions throughout the writing so here again the vocative 'ἀγαπητοί' (also τεκνία - 4:4) prepares the readers to consider the plausibility of a situation of two competing spirits where the confession that "Jesus Christ in the flesh has come" clearly signifies that they are from God (ἐκ τοῦ Θεοῦ ἐστιν - 4:2). In addition, the endearing term and the compelling situation the author creates, suggest that it is his desire to convince the readers that they ought to confess in agreement with his confession. *Koinonia* of confession is important to the author, so that he

[189] "Beloved" is a plural address occuring in (I John 2:7; 3:2, 21; 4:1, 7, 11) which, suggests Brown, because of the emphasis on ἀγάπη, surely indicates the author's intention that the title is "to have a theological connotation for a community whose model figure was the "disciple whom Jesus loved" (The Epistles of John, 264).

places it into a speech act circumstance that by its very nature compels compliance with his view. Indeed, the author's strategy appears to be reinforced in 4:6b where he sets up a situation which depicts two groups of people: those who agree with him and those who do not (ὁ γινώσκων τὸν Θεὸν ἀκούει ἡμῶν, ὃς οὐκ ἔστιν ἐκ τοῦ Θεοῦ οὐκ ἀκούει ἡμῶν (4:6b).[190] Quite simply, says the author, those who confess in agreement with us, know God and hear us, and those who do not confess in agreement with us, are not from God and do not hear us.

Because the author is attempting to convince the church at large, he expands the speech act circumstance of a last hour by adding to it the competing spirits. He insists that not every spirit is to be believed. Rather, he says, "test the spirits εἰ ἐκ τοῦ Θεοῦ ἐστιν" (4:1). The term πνεύματα has been interpreted in a variety of ways, but I would concur with the commentators who have understood the *spirits* to signify both the Holy Spirit and the Evil Spirit. I do not think it necessary to view the statement as indicating the actual physical presence of persons proclaiming false confessions in opposition to the author's, i.e., false prophets who have gone into the world (4:2) or the antichrist who has gone out from us and is now already ἐν τῷ κόσμῳ (2:18, 19; 4:3).[191] In order to persuade his audience that the last days have arrived, along with the spirits, the apocalyptic speech act circumstance helps the readers to test the spirits. A true confession originates from the spirit of truth (τὸ πνεῦμα τῆς ἀληθείας), whereas a false confession derives from the spirit of error (τὸ πνεῦμα τῆς πλάνης - 4:6). Not every spirit is to be believed, he says. Rather the spirits are to be tested, for not every spirit ἀκούει ἡμῶν (4:6) and therefore confesses in agreement with us.

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[190] Dodd understands ἡμῶν to refer to the church at large (The Johannine Epistles, 100) whereas Brown views it as a reference to the Johannine Community (The Epistles of John, 509). I should like to suggest that the 'us' represents the author in his attempt to affiliate with the reader in order to convince them of the plausibility of his linguistic state of affairs.

[191] Bultmann, for example, says that the ψευδοπροφῆται recall the false prophets prophesied for the endtime (Mk 13:22; Matt 24:11, 24) and that the author "therefore historicizes the prophesied eschatological phenomenon in the same way as the prophecy of the antichrist in 2:18...." (The Johannine Epistles, 62).

In 2:18-22 the author created an image of a last hour with its portrayal of the antichrists who deny that Jesus is the Christ. In 4:1-4 he mentions that the antichrist (4:3) and the false prophets (4:1) both make erroneous confessions but this time do so permeated by a spirit of deceit (2:22; 4:6c). The confession or denial ultimately makes clear whether it comes from ἐκ τοῦ Θεοῦ or ἐκ τοῦ Θεοῦ οὐκ ἔστιν and whether it comes from τὸ πνεῦμα τῆς ἀληθείας or τὸ πνεῦμα τῆς πλάνης. If anyone were to persist making these boasts it would associate them with the one "now in the world already" (νῦν ἐν τῷ κόσμῳ ἐστὶν ἤδη - 1:6, 8, 10; 2:4, 6, 9; 4:20). It thus becomes impossible for Christians to make these boasts because what they utter would be infelicitous. Moreover, the ramifications of such a speech act are so drastic it would have deterred Christians from making it.

The author also adds a note of urgent reality to his depiction by claiming that false prophets have gone out into the world. The term is mistakenly taken to signify the antagonists who have literally defected into the world.[192] In such a view, the term refers to those who have seceded from the community because of doctrinal incompatibility with it. In its literary context, the term *false prophets* is simply an extension of the speech act circumstance of the two competing spirits, where its likely meaning is that they are now 'around', i.e., they might show up in any place. The 'world' is simply a neutral designation meaning nothing more than their appearance on earth.[193] The apocalyptic term "false prophets" represents a somber warning that they are present everywhere and they deny Jesus. The author warns those who may be tempted to utter a profession at variance with his that such

[192] The false prophets are those who have defected into the world, and according to Smalley, "are undoubtedly the heretical members of John's congregation who have spearheaded a secession from the community." (S. S. Smalley, 1, 2, 3, John, 220). They have defected into the world - the 'world' is usually taken as the place of the heretic's subsequent activity - which John appears to be resisting in an earlier section (2:11-17). See also R. Schnackenburg, Die drei Johannesbriefe, 218-20. Brown, however, disagrees and suggests that the 'world' designates the place where the enemies of Jesus belong - thus they are a "parody of Jesus who is the truth: he "went out from the father and came into the world" (John 16:28; cf. 8:42; 13:3) (The Epistles of John, 491).

[193] R. Bultmann, The Johannine Epistles, 62.

an utterance has serious consequences. It would imply that they are possessed by the spirit of deceit characteristic of the false prophets. They cannot therefore have fellowship with him and with God and his Son Jesus Christ. Only a proper confession in conformity with the author's will permit *koinonia.*

The author has committed himself to the implications of the speech act circumstance he creates, and is therefore in a position to assert boldly that "ἐν τούτῳ γινώσκετε τὸ πνεῦμα τοῦ Θεοῦ" (4:2). A spirit which comes from God and one which does not can ostensibly be known by what it utters. Quite simply, says the author, "πᾶν πνεῦμα ὁ ὁμολογεῖ ᾽Ιησοῦν Χριστὸν ἐν σαρκὶ ἐληλυθότα ἐκ τοῦ Θεοῦ ἐστιν." A spirit which does not not confess that "Jesus Christ has come in the flesh "ἐκ τοῦ Θεοῦ οὐκ ἔστιν (4:3) He confidently exclaims that a counterfeit spirit can be identified by what it confesses. The author therefore makes explicit the only type of confession that is proper to the πνεῦμα τοῦ Θεοῦ. He formulates it in a memorable way so that every time the confession is uttered, it reminds the readers that they do not speak the things of the spirit of deceit, but the things of the spirit of truth (4:5).

While the purpose of the confession appears to be plain enough, what it means is, however, much more difficult. As we have pointed out, what the autnor could have meant with "Jesus Christ having come in the flesh" has been the subject of much debate. Most often the phrase is thought to disclose the attempt by the author to correct an aberrant Christology, possibly as the result of misreading the exalted Christology of the FG, or possibly as the result of a gnostic/docetic view that denied Christ's humanity. Hengel comments that the "deceivers are jeopardizing the basic confession, the identity of the man Jesus with the Messiah and Son of God, and therefore threatening the gift of salvation, eternal life."[194] While the confession may have something to do with a distorted view of the incarnation, what it ultimately means escapes us. The grammatical ambiguity of the phrase, the absence of any elaboration by the author, and the lack of references to the

[194] M. Hengel, The Johannine Question, 58.

incarnation in the Epistle[195] weaken the claim that a specific Christological controversy lies in the background. There can be little doubt that for the author this confession has important Christological implications, but rather than clarifying the content of what is to be declared, the confession demonstrates *how* one is able to tell the difference between two types of spirits by what they utter.

Frequently throughout the writing the author has expressed his thought through an extensive pattern of antithetical statements (1:6, 8, 10; 2:4, 6, 9; 4:20). They serve to reinforce what is possible in one speech act circumstance and not in another. So also in 4:1-4 the seriousness of the circumstance of the competing spirits and the importance of being able to discriminate between them is illustrated by a series of antitheses. In 4: 1 and 2a the contrast lies between the false spirits and the false prophets and the spirit of God. In v. 3 the author contrasts the spirit which confesses Jesus with the antichrist. The confession clearly sets apart, claims the author, those who are from God (ἐκ τοῦ Θεοῦ) and those who are not from God (ἐκ τοῦ Θεοῦ οὐκ ἔστιν). Every spirit that does not confess what is appropriate betrays that it is not from God and therefore not in (ἐν) you. Every spirit that does not listen (ἀκούει - 4:6b) to us, is not from God (4:6) but is τὸ πνεῦμα τῆς πλάνης (4:6c). Using this series of contrasts, the author sets up a compelling circumstance which clearly discriminates between the kind of speech acts (confessions/denials) possible in each. After his analysis of 4:1-7, Minear concludes that the "medley of merging antitheses" increasingly demonstrate to the reader the exclusive nature of the two realms and the people who inhabit them"; e.g., Spirit of God - false prophets; Christ - antichrist; from God - not from God; he who is in you - he who is in the world; he who listens to us - he who does not listen to us; spirit of truth - spirit of error, etc.[196]

The image of the competing spirits and the consequence of a false denial are so compelling that the author declares that the readers know the

[195] So Paul S. Minear, "The Idea of Incarnation in First John," 291.

[196] Paul S. Minear, "The Idea of Incarnation in First John," 293.

spirit of God (4:2). In light of this knowledge, the author is confident that no one would entertain a felicitous denial in conformity with the πνεῦμα τῆς πλάνης (4:6c). The two spirits are mutually exclusive, and therefore the confessions that they utter are mutually contradictory. The author makes it increasingly difficult for anyone to be in disagreement with him, for unless they wish to engage in a felicitous confessional act which would brand them as false prophets or antichrists, they are impelled to agree with him. The entire literary circumstance and its implications function as a deterrent to erroneous confessions of the sort that would be made by the false prophets. In the limits of the literary circumstance lie the only *confessions* potentially possible. The readers are therefore in the position to discriminate between the two spirits.[197]

In addition to the functional character of 4:2, the explanation of the meaning of the confession is to be sought by connecting it with the antithetical statements and Christological assertions scattered throughout the writing (1:7; 2:22, 23; 3:23; 4:2, 14, 15; 5:1, 5, 6, 10, 13). For instance, the contrast drawn between 'light' and 'dark' in 1:7, reveals that the blood of Jesus cleanses from all sin (1:7). According to the author, cleansing is required because of sin, and sin is characteristic of those who walk in the dark. It is only he who is without sin (3:4) and has come in flesh, who is in the position not only to cleanse from every sin but to forgive sin (3:4). Thus, it is preposterous to claim to have no sin, for in doing so we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us (1:8, 10). The blood of Jesus cleanses from all sin to release the believers from the bondage of darkness so that they might walk in the light as he is in the light (1:7). The notion of purification by blood in I John and its linkage with the realm of light is suggestive because it recalls what it means to be in the light. To remain in him means we ought to walk as he walked, viz., in the light (2:6). The one loving the brother remains in the light (2:10). Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Christ...remains in the

[197] Pheme Perkins elucidates a a legal liturgical context in which the 'confession' constituted a formal oath taken before the community by the initiates. "Testing the Spirits" might then have legal overtones: "a person might be asked to "take an oath" in the presence of the community" (The Johannine Epistles, 52-3).

son and remains in the Father (2:22, 24), whoever confesses that Jesus Christ, who has come in the flesh, shows that he has the spirit of truth.

The sheer variety of fluctuating Christological statements the author uses, confirms the highly functional character of his Christological confessions:

> ὁ ἀρνούμενος ὅτι ' Ιησοῦς οὐκ ἔστιν ὁ Χριστός...(2:22).
> ὁ ὁμολογῶν τὸν υἱὸν καὶ τὸν πατέρα ἔχει...(2:23).
> πιστεύσωμεν τῷ ὀνόματι τοῦ υἱοῦ αὐτοῦ ' Ιησοῦ Χριστοῦ...(3:23).
> ὃ ὁμολογεῖ ' Ιησοῦν Χριστὸν ἐν σαρκὶ ἐληλυθότα...(4:2).
> μαρτυροῦμεν ὅτι ὁ πατὴρ ἀπέσταλκεν τὸν υἱὸν σωτῆρα κόσμου...(4:14)
> ὃς ἐὰν ὁμολογήσῃ ὅτι ' Ιησοῦς ἐστιν ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ Θεοῦ...(4:15).
> ὁ πιστεύων ὅτι ' Ιησοῦς ἐστιν ὁ Χριστός...(5:1).
> ὁ πιστεύων ὅτι ' Ιησοῦς ἐστιν ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ Θεοῦ...(5:5).
> ὁ πιστεύων εἰς τὸν υἱὸν τοῦ Θεοῦ...(5:10).
> ' Ιησοῦς Χριστός, οὐκ ἐν τῷ ὕδατι μόνον ἀλλ' ἐν τῷ ὕδατι καὶ ἐν τῷ αἵματι...(5:6)
> τοῖς πιστεύουσιν εἰς τὸ ὄνομα τοῦ υἱοῦ τοῦ Θεοῦ...(5:13).

None of the statements is elaborated. They function as catch slogans to make explicit the antithetical character of the two realms. Notably each of them appears in a literary context which coheres with the author's perception of what it is possible to believe, confess and deny in the circumstances he creates. The one believing that Jesus is the Christ (5:1) cannot at the same time deny that Jesus is the Christ (2:22). The one believing in the son of God (5:10) cannot at the same time deny the father (2:22, 23). The one confessing that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh (4:2) cannot at the same time deny that the father has sent the son as salvation of the world (4:14). Significantly, each of the Christological slogans is prefaced by a verb which indicates the action of believing, confessing or denying. The focus is not on the content of what is believed, confessed or denied, although the substantive content of each statement is nonetheless significant. Here perhaps lies the explanation of the author's failure to elaborate in greater detail the *theological content* of

the Christological statements. Given the dynamics of heterodoxy it would appear that in early heresiological works a persuasive rhetoric was more important than a systematic presentation of a sophisticated Christology, although the latter becomes increasingly important in later heresiological writings. While each of the Christological slogans displays the significance of Jesus in the categories of the time and culture of the author, the sheer variety of expressions and their imprecision suggest that their importance lies in the over-all impression they create. *Right confession* in the context of orthodoxy versus heresy takes a secondary place to the author's primary intention to convince the readers to confess, deny, and believe what he himself confesses, believes, and denies.

Although beset with a variety of textual problems,[198] v. 3 reinforces this perception because now the author formulates a confessional act of a type that would be uttered by someone under the influence of τὸ πνεῦμα τῆς πλάνης.[199] Every spirit that does not confess *Jesus*, he says, is not from God. Not only that, but such a spirit is of the antichrist "which you have heard that he is coming." Because the author appears to be more interested in drawing

[198] The Greek construction was a problem for early copyists of the text. Some, rather than reading ὃ μὴ ὁμολογεῖ have instead the verb λύει that means 'looses', or "annuls", perhaps indicating a separation of Jesus from Christ. This reading is supported by some Greek patristic and Latin evidence. Moreover, in the Byzantine tradition the words of 4:2 "come in flesh" is added after 'Jesus'. Codex Sinaiticus adds "Lord come in flesh." M. Hengel prefers the reading ὁ λύει τὸν Ἰησοῦν instead of ὃ μὴ ὁμολογεῖ (4:3) because the latter reading found its way in from II John 7, whereas the former reading has a parallel in I John 3:8: "To destroy the works of the devil" (The Johannine Question, 57). For a detailed discussion see R. E. Brown who prefers λύει as the original reading (The Epistles of John, 496). See also Bultmann who prefers λύει (The Johannine Epistles, 62-3). Further on the matter see R. Schnackenburg, Die drei Johannesbriefe, 222 and F. Blass, DeBrunner and R. W. Funk who hold that ὃ μὴ ὁμολογεῖ is a spurious reading for ὃ λύει, A Greek Grammar of the New Testament and other early Christian Literature, § 428 (4). A. E. Brooke rejects λύει on the ground that it was probably introduced to defend an orthodox Christology against such second century heretics as Cerinthus, Docetists, and Gnostics, who made a separation between Spiritual Christ and the Jesus of the flesh (The Epistles of St. John, 111-14).

[199] 4:3 has been taken to signify a contrast "between the orthodox church members, and the heretical secessionists who have defected into the world to which they actually belong" (S. S. Smalley, 1, 2, 3, John, 226). I would suggest that the purpose of the antithesis is to contrast two realms mutually contradictory in their confessions and to consider what would happen if anyone were to engage in a particular kind of profession. What is possible in one state is impossible in the other, which guarantees the unlikelihood of an infelicitous confession.

out the contrasting features and implications of the two confessions, he does not bother to elucidate the theological implications of what it means not to confess *Jesus*.[200] The confession that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh could only be made by those who know God, who can discriminate between the spirits, and who hear ἡμῶν. The author once more reminds the reader that those who "do not confess Jesus" cannot be from God, because such a confession commits them with the antichrist (4:3). The antichrist has come and it is someone about whom they have already been informed (4:3). Hearing it again reinforces what has already been stated in 2:18 about the last hour and the antichrists. They deny that Jesus is the Christ.

To underscore the notion that victory is the outcome of a confession which coheres with the spirit of truth the author refers again to the two indwelling spirits. He maintains that the ὁ ἐν ὑμῖν is greater than the ὁ ἐν τῷ κόσμῳ (4:4). The first pronoun is interpreted variously to signify 'God',[201] "God in Christ",[202] "the Spirit of truth which belongs to God,"[203] or "God as Father, Son and Spirit."[204] The second pronoun is taken to refer to the spirit of deceit in the world personified by the false prophets and the antichrist. Given that throughout this section the contrast has been between the competing spirits, it is probable that the first pronoun refers to the Spirit which belongs to God, namely, the spirit of truth. Whether Jesus, God, or the spirit of truth is meant in the expression "greater is the one in you" is irrelevant, because it could be all three. The spirit of truth which, according to the author, is greater than the one in the world, originates ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ (4:2) and is also ἐν ὑμίν (4·4). Conversely, the spirit of deceit does not

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[200] I think it quite unnecessary to take the phrase καὶ τοῦτὸ ἐστιν τὸ τοῦ ἀντιχρίστου to mean, "this (not acknowledging Jesus Christ, incarnate) is (the spirit) from the antichrist"; in which case πνεῦμα needs to be supplied after τό" (S. S. Smalley, 1, 2, 3 John, 224).

[201] So C. Haas (A Translator's Handbook to the Bible, 104).

[202] So B. F. Westcott (The Epistles of St. John, 144-45).

[203] So R. E. Brown (The Epistles of John, 498). See R. Alan Culpepper, 1 John, 2 John, 3 John, 81. R. Kysar states that the pronoun refers either to 'God' or the 'Divine Spirit' (I, II, III John, 92).

[204] So S. S. Smalley (1, 2, 3 John, 227). See also Edward Malatesta, Interiority and Covenant, 287-89.

originate ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ (4:2) and is therefore ἐν τῷ κόσμῳ (4:4). Moreover, the false spirits in the world stand in conflict to what is stated in 4:14. For the son has appeared in the world, and he opposes the false prophets who have gone out into the world. This accentuates the seriousness of the opposing spirits and heightens the importance of being able to discriminate between them. By recognizing the greater spirit of God the reader can guard against the spirit of the world, and thus against speaking of the world (ἐκ τοῦ κόσμου λαλοῦσιν - 4:5) and what the world would want to hear (ὁ κόσμος αὐτῶν ἀκουέι - 4:5).

V. 6a, "ἡμεῖς ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ ἐσμεν," confirms what the reader already knows if he has understood v. 2 (ἐν τούτῳ γινώσκετε τὸ πνεῦμα τοῦ θεοῦ) and its connection with what can be confessed given the circumstance.[205] The unanimity spoken of in 4:6 is not based upon theological harmony achieved by detecting error and properly correcting it. Rather it is based upon understanding (γινώσκων - 4:6b c; 4:2). Thus v. 6b is a parallel and synonymous expression for fellowship echoing and recalling the *incipit* and the rupture of fellowship mentioned in 2:19. The one who acknowledges that "Jesus is the Christ" (2:22; 5:1) knows God because only these confessions emanate from the spirit of God (4:2). It reminds the reader of what has been heard from the beginning concerning the word of life and its manifestation (1:1; 2:24) in opposition to what has been heard concerning the antichrists and their appearance (2:18) in the world (4:3).

What at first appears to be a profusion of disconnected thoughts is really an amalgam of merging antitheses which in their over-all impression create a compelling portrait of what is acceptable and worthy of the reader's assent, or what is unacceptable and deserving of his censure. But in addition, it reveals the only confessions, within the constraints of this writing, that comply with the author's assessment of *koinonia*. The author suggests

[205] ἡμεῖς is taken to signify (1) a nondistinctive use where the author is indistinct from the members in the community, or (2) a distinctive use where the 'we' refers to the Johannine tradition-bearers, namely, authority figures who address the members as 'you'. Brown inclines to the former but also points out that choosing between them is difficult (The Epistles of John, 498-99).

that *koinonia* is the result of a common confession, not just any confession, but one that is circumscribed by a particular speech act circumstance. It is an implicit call for allegiance to his own confessional stance. If someone "hears us," says the author, he will adhere to what constitutes a felicitous confession indicating that he is of us and therefore from God (ἐξ ἡμῶν =ἐκ τοῦ Θεοῦ - 2:19; 4:6). If not, his confession will indicate that he is not of us and therefore not from God (οὐκ ἐξ ἡμῶν =οὐκ ἐκ τοῦ Θεοῦ - 2:19; 4:6). The author maintains that the readers can distinguish (γινώσκομεν) those imbued by the spirit of truth from those infused by the spirit of deceit on the basis of whether or not they have listened to us (ἀκούει ἡμῶν). In the final analysis fidelity to the author becomes a decisive criterion which distinguishes the spirit of truth from the spirit of error (4:6c). It can safely be concluded that if the readers have understood the force of the author's argument, they cannot but accept his point of view.

The same thing, more or less, might be said about the enigmatic statement recorded in I John 5:6.[206] "By water and the blood" is frequently seen to be analogous to "in the flesh" and both statements are understood to counteract a gnostic/docetic denial of the human nature of Jesus. Minear argues, however, that "although this line of reasoning is plausible, it is far from convincing."[207] Rather than seeking to specify and restrict its semantic range to a specific polemical situation signifying a formulaic slogan corrected and rephrased by the author, it perhaps signifies no more than what might be appropriately believed within a clearly circumscribed speech act circumstance. To believe (πιστεύων) anything otherwise would constitute an infelicitous act incongruent with confessing Christ.

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[206] We have pointed out that the statement has been interpreted in a variety of ways: (1) as reflecting a formula employed by the secessionists with a docetist leanings, (2) as reflecting a Cerinthian type of heresy, (3) as reflecting an over-emphasis on the teaching of the FG which led heretically inclined members of the Johannine community to stress that though Jesus was human, his humanity was not salvifically significant. A further problem has to do with what exactly the manifestation of Jesus Christ in 'water' and in 'blood' could have meant. Again, a variety of solutions are proposed: (1) it refers to the sacraments of baptism and the eucharist, (2) it refers to the incarnation, (3) it refers to the baptism and death of Jesus, and (4) it refers to the death of Jesus.

[207] Paul S. Minear, "The Idea of the Incarnation in First John," 301.

In 5:5 believing ὅτι ' Ιησους ἐστιν ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ Θεοῦ is the constituent element in overcoming τὸν κόσμον (5:5). In 5:4 the author resorts to the already familiar polarity of ἐκ τοῦ Θεοῦ and τὸν κόσμον to describe the arena within which felicitous confession and belief conquer those who have gone out into the world (5:19). 5:1 reiterated that Jesus is the Christ who is born ἐκ τοῦ Θεοῦ, echoing perhaps, the earlier contrast made between what was from God (ἐκ τοῦ Θεοῦ - 4:3) and what was not from God (ἐκ τοῦ Θεοῦ οὐκ ἔστιν - 4:3). Not to believe (πιστεύετε) every spirit (4:1) and confessing that "Jesus Christ came in flesh" seems to parallel believing (πιστεύων) that "Jesus is the Christ" (5:1). Indeed, even though he has been made manifest among us (1:2) and was sent εἰς τὸν κόσμον (4:9), he is not ἐκ τοῦ κόσμου (4:4). It recalls the same contrasting features of the previous section where the external criteria of *confession* and *fidelity* to him made obvious which spirit was present in the reader.

While v. 6 is difficult, it functions as a further constituent element of *believing* and *confessing* fixed within the appropriate boundaries. Having just said that "the one believing that Jesus is the son of God, overcomes the world," the author maintains that this (οὐτός) one is the one "who has come through (διά) water and blood, Jesus Christ, not in (ἐν) water only but in (ἐν) water and in blood." This may perhaps be taken to indicate that "this one" has ultimately conquered the world in contrast to the false prophets who also have gone out into the world but have been overcome by it. To believe that the "one come in water and in blood" has vanquished the world promises that the reader who also originates ἐκ τοῦ Θεοῦ (4:3) and has γεγεννημένον ἐξ αὐτοῦ (5:1), can conquer the world (5:5).

The precise meaning of *water* and *blood* in 5:6 remains a puzzle, although the terms perhaps parallel such statements as ἐφανερώθη ἡμῖν (1:2), τὸ αἷμα ' Ιησοῦ τοῦ υἱοῦ αὐτοῦ καθαρίζει ἡμᾶς ἀπὸ πάσης ἁμαρτίας...(1:7), ' Ιησοῦν Χριστὸν ἐν σαρκὶ ἐληλυθότα...(4:2) τὸν υἱὸν αὐτοῦ τὸν μονογενῆ ἀπέσταλκεν ὁ Θεὸς εἰς τὸν κόσμον... (4:9), and ὁ πατὴρ ἀπέσταλκεν τὸν υἱὸν σωτῆρα τοῦ κόσμου...(4:14). All of the statements are meant to emphasize what Jesus' coming into the world

accomplished. The FG's use of *water* and *blood* in John 19:34 probably coheres with the writer's poetic outburst that λόγος became flesh, dwelt among us (John 1:14) and accomplished great deeds (signs) during his stay. In the context of I John, 'water' and 'blood' appear primarily to stress the consequences of the fact that Christ was sent into the world, namely, that the ..αἷμα Ἰησοῦ τοῦ υἱοῦ αὐτοῦ καθαρίζει ἡμᾶς ἀπὸ πάσης ἁμαρτίας (1:7) and that αὐτὸς ἱλασμός ἐστιν περὶ τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν ἡμῶν, οὐ περὶ ἡμετέρων δὲ μόνον ἀλλὰ καὶ περὶ ὅλου τοῦ κόσμου (2:2; 1:9). A debate about the *manner* of Jesus' coming appears to find only a secondary emphasis. It need not be denied that the mode of his coming is important to the author, but whether aberrant conceptions concerning the person of Jesus were the driving force behind these expressions is open to question. It is noteworthy that the only other mention of *blood* in I John (1:7) refers primarily to its cleansing mankind from sin (2:2). So in 5:6, the one come in *blood* may simply echo the earlier idea, namely, the one who is come in *water* and *blood* cleanses mankind from all sins. This alerts the reader that his coming and its consequences is what has ultimately conquered the world. To believe that the one come in *water* and in *blood* is the son of God who conquers the world is another one of the author's benchmarks that clearly mark the boundaries of the two opposing realms of *light* and *dark*; *truth* and *deceit*.

To make the distinction between the two realms as sharp as possible in the world of his utterance, the author refers to the context of the last dark hour of history with its antichrists, false prophets, and spirits of deceit. These manifestations of the last hour epitomize everything that stands in opposition to the work of God in whom there is no darkness at all. The impact of such a graphic image on the readers would prevent them from engaging in infelicitous confessions and denials. To believe "that Jesus is the son of God and that he came by 'water' and 'blood'" (5:5,6) has a similar functional role as the confessions mentioned earlier. Once the readers have accepted the manner of his description in which felicitous believing can occur, the consequences of Jesus' coming can help them overcome the world. The one coming by 'water' and 'blood' to cleanse the sins of the world, decisively defeated by this act the enemies of God in the world. Thus, *water* and *blood*

are terms that signify what the mode of Christ's coming has accomplished, namely, the victory over the powers of darkness.

3. CONCLUSIONS.

By taking the anonymity of the text seriously and reconceiving it as a communicative event made up of a sequence of self-involving speech acts, this study points out that the author has committed himself to what he has stated. A series of parallel antitheses create a pattern of competing speech act circumstances within which felicitous believing, confessing and denying might occur. The speech act circumstance of an apocalyptic last hour (2:18-22) and its attendant denials complemented by the spirit of deceit in the world (4:6, 4) stands in stark contrast to the circumstance and its attendant confessions, namely, confessing "Jesus Christ" and believing that "Jesus is the son of God." This world is the sphere inhabited by the false prophets, the antichrists, and the spirit of deceit, and it is the realm into which the Father has sent the Son (4:14). The external criteria of confessing, believing and fidelity to the author make plain (ἐκ τούτο γινώσκομεν) whether the reader is ἐκ τοῦ Θεοῦ or τοῦ Θεοῦ οὐκ ἔστιν, whether he is ἐκ τοῦ κόσμου or ἐκ τοῦ κόσμου οὐκ ἔστιν, whether he ἀκούει ἡμῶν or οὐκ ἀκούει ἡμῶν, and whether he is infused by τὸ πνεῦμα τῆς ἀληθείας or τὸ πνεῦμα τῆς πλάνης. The cluster of merging antitheses dynamically depicts two contrasting spheres made up of two types of people who in their confessing, denying and believing make plain to which sphere they belong. Not to agree with the author's perceived state implies capitulation to the world, whereas to acknowledge it implies conquering it and the evil one (5:5; 2:13, 14). On the one hand, the world is the realm into which the false prophets have gone (4:1) and in which the antichrist has been *manifested* (2:19). On the other hand, it is the sphere where the word of life was *manifested* (1:2) and into which the son of God has been *sent* as salvation of the world (4:14). He came in *water* and in *blood*, and the *blood* of Jesus cleanses us from all sins and the sins of the whole world (1:7; 2:2). This is what has overcome the world (αὕτη ἐστίν ἡ νίκη ἡ νικήσασα τὸν κόσμον - 5:4).

Thus, even though the writing may appear to be a random sequence of disconnected thoughts, its meaning is made clear through a sustained pattern of interconnected and parallel expressions, which illustrate two antithetical realms. So convincing are the literary portraits the author creates and so dire are the consequences that it would have been very difficult for the reader to reject or contradict it. No one would want to risk to be branded an *antichrist* or a *false prophet* or be perceived as ἐκ τοῦ διαβόλου (3:7). The author has therefore created a circumstance which essentially makes it virtually impossible for anyone to disagree with him unless they choose to reject *in toto* what he has written.

CHAPTER EIGHT

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS.

The difference between the method - and conclusions- of the traditional approaches and those of the present study is evident in the different interpretations of what the author was trying to achieve. Historical critical studies have tended to locate the illocutionary force of I John in the Christological teaching of the author expressed polemically against the erroneous views of the opponents. The antithetical slogans are therefore frequently taken to be reformulated *boasts* that represent the false teaching of the secessionists. It is taken for granted that the *antichrists* are a specific group of secessionists. Furthermore, the confessions and denials are thought to capture graphically the erroneous essence of their teaching. Most commentators have assumed that the author utilized the confessions and denials with important denotive meaning in mind, i.e., their formulation constituted and pointed to a significant Christological controversy in the early Johannine community. On the *a priori* assumption that the language of the confessions and denials conveys Christological information in the context of a polemical situation, their meaning has been sought through a reconstruction of the theological controversy behind it, i.e., the context which the writer must have had in mind but failed to specify. To clarify the content of the confessions and denials, explanations have been sought by positing the existence of various sources and redactors, or by positing a literary relationship to the FG via the Johannine school hypothesis, thus focusing discussion on the identity of the author's precise referent. Today's studies of the Epistles usually place I John into the context of some form of developing Johannine Christianity. In such a view, the Christological confessions of the author of I John react to a one-sided development of the theology of the FG. A misreading of the FG's exalted Christology resulted in a series of serious Christological misunderstandings which the author of I John was compelled to correct. The *high Christology* of the FG was emphasized by the

secessionists to such an extent that it deemphasized the humanity of Jesus. Moreover, the one-sided emphasis on realized eschatology and sinlessness had led to moral failure and to the mistaken idea that sin was no longer possible. The author of the Epistle corrected these ideas by appealing to other themes in the FG, and by a careful assessment of the person and work of Jesus.[1]

The present study contends that the historical critical approach does not take seriously enough the fact that the language of I John, does not merely describe a theological state of affairs but intends to do something. Confining the significance of the *incipit*, the boasts, the confessions, and denials to the constraints of a community's theological expression, fails to take into consideration the importance of the power of language to constitute the character of the author and to effect a change in the reader's religious and ethical orientation. Moreover, not taking the anonymity of the writing seriously commits us to increasingly complex community-development theories to explain the writing's peculiarities. If we cannot with any reasonable degree of certainty identify the context of the author or reconstruct the *opponents' views*, then it becomes necessary to try to understand the text from another perspective.

Even though the present study does not focus on the identity of the author and offers nothing relevant to the identity of the historical author, this study does present some indirect clues to his identity. The literary authorial persona portrayed by the various self-involving speech acts utilized in the act of writing, suggests that the author's purpose is to inform the church at large that the enemies of the last days have arrived. I John is a tract to the church at large that deals with the eschatological false prophets and the antichrists who were to appear in the last days. A speech act analysis reveals that the intent of this message is to warn Christians everywhere to be vigilant and to convince them to accept his views. The constituting character of the act of writing shows that the author attempts to convince the readers to accept his

[1] J. M. Lieu, The Second and Third Epistles of John, 207-8.

views through a series of speech act circumstances. The enemies of the last hour in these circumstances are characterized using stock phrases taken from the eschatological false prophets in Jewish and Early Christian literature. In such a literary context, the speech acts of the false prophets reveal to the readers what confessions and denials the author *believes* are potentially possible within the limits of the circumstances he defines. These speech act circumstances were made ever sharper by a series of antitheses to a point where it became almost impossible to engage in a confession not in agreement with the author's theological and ethical views. Going against the author would place the reader at risk of being grouped with the antichrists and the false prophets.

In I John the power of the written word does not lie in carefully argued theological propositions, but in the combination of speech acts and their implication of commitment to and belief in the literary circumstances he creates, and the author's desire to convince the readers. The speech acts constitute the author as a believing and committed persona. Specific uses in I John of the speech acts of the *directive, representative, commissive* and *expressive* kind serve to shift the critical task away from attempts to establish the historical referent, to an understanding of language which stresses its constitutive and self-involving character.[2] I John is a *communicative event* worded with dramatic sensitivity revealing the author's religious and ethical stance, and written for effect in order to bring about a change of world view in the reader. By deliberately employing a self-involving style of language which constitutes the self, the author alerts readers about his life stance. In the act of writing the author makes commitments of a non-verbal kind which imply that he is willing to live by the ethical consequences of his speech acts. The author commits himself to a future course of action with the intended perlocutionary result of convincing the hearer that the statements are expressive of his religious and ethical stance. The self-involving speech acts show that *the manner* in which the author has described the speech act

[2] S. Fish says that propositional language is a term used to designate a kind of language that merely presents or mirrors facts independently of any consideration of value, interest, perspective, purpose, effect, etc. (Is There a Text in this Class?, 97).

circumstances accurately reflect his perception of reality. The author makes explicit the types of confessions and denials potentially possible by creating a pattern of competing speech act circumstances within which felicitous believing, confessing and denying may occur. In each contrasting situation lies the possibility of engaging oneself in a series of either felicitous or infelicitous speech acts with corresponding positive or negative consequences. Thus it is impossible to claim to have fellowship with God while walking in darkness, or to claim to be in the light while hating the brother, etc. Each of such speech acts is infelicitous because it does not cohere with the author's perceived state of what would constitute felicitous confession. From this, it can be concluded that if the readers have understood the force of the author's statements with their carefully crafted nexus of diametrically opposing elements, they cannot but acquiesce or they will no longer remain in fellowship with the Father and his son Jesus Christ (1:3). The author also deliberately engages in a style of writing which suggests intimacy and authority. He is able to bring the readers into association with himself, thus he is in a better position to convince them of the truth of his claims and admonitions. By bringing the readers into association with himself the author summons them to proper conduct in the world (2:1-17). They are invited to join in a consideration of truths of the deepest import which a purely discursive language can scarcely hope to bring about.

I have emphasized that I John represents an instructional type of writing which uses language of a confessional nature. It is language that not only constitutes the subjectivity of the author but also makes truth claims about the world and about God. The author is therefore in the position to make the world rather than simply mirror it. In order to give shape to a world and thereby to redescribe reality, the writer employs the language of confession that expresses attitudes and feelings towards what has been written. As such, it is action language that serves to instruct in a way of life which leads to understanding. The readers are invited to join the author in contemplating the religious and ethical implications of his literary circumstances, evaluating them, and responding to them positively. The

manner of their ethical response would indicate whether they have 'heard' and properly evaluated what the author has attempted to tell them.

In the conflict between orthodoxy and heresy it is often thought that the author of I John appeals to the tradition handed down from the beginning in order to reinforce an early form of theological and Christological orthodoxy. Orthodox belief merely needed affirmation and defense against those subverting the truth through the novelty of their teaching. According to this view the author is merely a passive receptor and a reactionary reporter of the community's tradition. However, given the heterodox character of the pre-orthodox period in which I John was composed, it would appear that the author of I John is constituting rather than simply confirming and defending a traditional belief. The words of the text do not say descriptively what the author or his community confessed theologically, but rather they enact what the author believes and what he thinks ought to be believed. I John does not refer to, or render an account of, or offer a theory on, or speak discursively about the Christology of the Johannine community. Rather, the words express a person's belief, and by actualizing the human capacity for belief, the words actualize the self who speaks them.

Finally, as we have seen in each of our expositions, the sensory verbs of the *incipit* encourage the readers to experience vicariously ὁ λογὸς τῆς ζωῆς. The readers are informed that the last hour (2:18-22) is here and that the eschatological false prophets have arrived. The false prophets and their felonious utterances stand in stark antithesis to those who confess that "Jesus is the Christ." Those who believe that "Jesus is the son of God" confirm that they are one of us, that they are imbued by the spirit of truth, and that they have overcome the world. The world is the sphere inhabited by the false prophets, the antichrists, and the spirit of deceit - and - ironically the realm into which the Father has sent the Son. All of these images compel the readers to consider carefully the author's claims about the *world* and *God* and what constitutes felicitous confession and conduct in each. The language encourages the readers to reconsider their own state unless they wish to be

out of fellowship with the author and the dire consequences it entails. The consequences are such that the readers cannot but accept the author's religious and theological orientation. This acceptance not only elicits proper confession (ὁμολωγέω) but ultimately brings about ἡ κοινωνία..μετὰ τοῦ πατρὸς καὶ μετὰ τοῦ υἱοῦ αὐτοῦ ' Ιησοῦ Χριστοῦ (1:3). *Koinonia* is not achieved because of a successful encounter with the opponents, but because the readers have been exposed to the *light* which challenges them to live in congruence with what that light reveals about Christology and ethics: for ὁ Θεὸς φῶς ἐστιν καὶ σκοτία ἐν αὐτῷ οὐκ ἔστιν οὐδεμία (1:5).

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