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Identity and Congruence: The Ethics of Integrity in the Johannine Epistles (Chapter in Biblical Ethics and Application)

Paul N. Anderson
George Fox University, panderso@georgefox.edu

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Ruben Zimmermann and
Stephan Joubert

Ruben Zimmermann, born 1968; Professor for New Testament Studies and Ethics at the Protestant Faculty of the Johannes Gutenberg-University, Mainz; co-founder and -leader of the Mainz Research-Center of 'Ethics in Antiquity and Christianity' (*e/αc*), chair of the Mainz Graduate School 'Time and Ethics' and elected advanced career scholar in the "Enhancing Life-Project" (Chicago); Research Associate of the University of the Free State (Bloemfontein, SA).

Stephan Joubert, born 1958; 1986–90 Minister in the Dutch Reformed Church; 1990–97 Assistant Professor in Biblical Studies, University of Pretoria; 1997–2002 Professor in New Testament Studies, University of Pretoria; 2005–09 Extraordinary Professor in New Testament Studies, University of Pretoria; since 2011 Research Fellow, Radboud University, The Netherland; since 2013 Extraordinary Professor, Contemporary Ecclesiology, University of the Free State, South Africa.

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Identity and Congruence

The Ethics of Integrity in the Johannine Epistles

*Paul N. Anderson**

If the Johannine eagle soared above the earth, it did so with talons bared for the fight; and the last writings that were left show the eaglets tearing at each other for the possession of the nest. There are moments of tranquil contemplation and inspiring penetration in the Johannine writings, but they also reflect a deep involvement in Christian history. Like Jesus, the word transmitted to the Johannine community lived in the flesh.[1]

The author of 1 John acknowledges several centrifugal threats within the Johannine situation needing to be addressed. Some have seceded from the fellowship, refusing to acknowledge Jesus as the Messiah-Christ; some face temptations to participate in idolatry, likely in response to Domitian's advancing the imperial cult; questionable teachers are about, refusing to acknowledge Jesus's coming in the flesh; hospitality is denied Johannine believers, effected by Diotrephes, a leader in a local Christian community. These and other issues are addressed by the Johannine Elder, who exercises *aletheic* influence, appealing to the truth and its implications regarding personal identity, theological investments, and resulting ethical consequences.[2] If one really loves the Father, one cannot abandon the Son; if one is truly dedicated to Christ as Lord, one cannot worship Caesar or participate in local idolatrous festivities; if one really embraces the sacrifice of Jesus, one cannot neglect the way of the cross; if one truly loves the self-sacrificing Christ, one cannot be a lover of primacy. Ultimately, if one really loves the unseen God, how can one *not* love one's brothers and sisters within the community of

* This paper was first presented in the Authority and Influence in Ancient Texts Section at the International SBL Meetings in Saint Andrews, July 2013.

[1] With these words, Raymond Brown describes the multiple tensions within the Johannine situation between three and six decades following the life and ministry of Jesus: *The Community of the Beloved Disciple: The Life, Loves, and Hates of an Individual Church in New Testament Times* (New York: Paulist, 1979). Thus, the Elder and the Johannine leaders seek to hold communities together in the face of tensions and divisions; exploring how that was so is the focus of the present essay.

[2] Note, therefore, the ways the Johannine Elder seeks to move his community into the discerning of truth corporately; that venture also applies personally. Paul N. Anderson, "Discernment-Oriented Leadership in the Johannine Situation – Abiding in the Truth versus Lesser Alternatives," in *Rethinking the Ethics of John: "Implicit Ethics" in the Johannine Writings* (ed. J. G. van der Watt and R. Zimmermann; WUNT 291, Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2012), 290–318.

faith, whom one has seen? By appealing to his audiences' sense of identity, the Johannine Elder thus calls for congruence between perceived and experienced realities, leading to loving corporate unity as a factor of personal integrity and its centripetal implications.

Issues of authority and influence in ancient texts are especially pertinent when seeking to interpret meaningfully the Johannine Epistles. Here we have three letters: the first as a general epistle, the second two claiming to be written by the Johannine Elder, addressed to three types of audiences within a larger Johannine situation. A circular is crafted so as to be read among several churches (1 John); an epistle is addressed to a church leader and her community (2 John); and a personal letter is written to an individual named Gaius (3 John). Within that larger situation, the emerging Christian movement can be seen to be experiencing tensions from without and pressures from within. Externally, "the world" sounds its sirens of influence, apparently leading some to fall into death-producing moral error and idolatry. Internally, some members of the community are claiming to be "without sin" – at least in some particulars – likely reflecting disagreement over what is sinful and what is not.[3] Some have split off from the Johannine community, while others threaten to visit, accompanied by false teachings. Within this late first-century Gentile mission, community maintenance was always a struggle, especially when such centrifugal tensions overran centripetal bonds, and when abiding in the teaching of Jesus was itself under debate.

As a means of quelling these *centrifugal* tendencies – pulling people away from corporate unity, the Johannine Elder exercises his limited authority in ways *centripetal* – drawing people back toward the center in the name of corporate unity.[4] Whereas the Fourth Evangelist may have commanded apostolic authority as a function of his proximity to Jesus, the Elder appears to have had less personal clout. He thus resorts to external means of authorization, not emphasizing *abiding in Jesus*, as does the evangelist (John 15:1–8), but calling for *abiding in the teaching about Jesus*, which his community has heard from the beginning (1 John 1:1–3; 2 John 9). In so doing, the Elder borrows from the tradition about Jesus as a means of holding his community together. He re-crafts the familiar love commandment of Jesus featured in John's story of Jesus (John 13:34–35) in ways designed to fit his dialectical situation (1 John 4:7–8). Thus, the "new commandment" of the Lord is now become "the old commandment" that has been heard from the beginning. Just as Jesus prays that his followers will be one in the great prayer of John 17, the Elder seeks to effect that unity by means of his centripetal written appeals.

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[3] Paul N. Anderson, "Commentary on 1–3 John," in *The Baker Illustrated Bible Commentary* (ed. G. Burge; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2012), 290–318.

[4] I am using the terms centrifugal and centripetal as general ways of describing sociological means of exerting influence toward group solidarity versus divisive and fragmenting forces faced by any religious community.

Apparently, however, his efforts are only partially successful, as divisions and dissention continue. And yet, in his connecting the love of the brethren to the identity of those who claim to love God, his influence wields an impact upon later generations extending over two millennia. In so doing, the Johannine Elder employs cognitive-rhetorical appeals for congruence and integrity, bearing implications for personal identity and group solidarity. This essay will suggest how such an appeal developed and operated in its original settings, sketching associative implications for later generations.

I. The Dialectical Johannine Situation and Centrifugal Tensions

Especially since the formative works of J. Louis Martyn and Raymond E. Brown, the character of the Johannine situation has been a primary interest of Johannine scholars.[5] Even between these two colleagues at Union Theological Seminary, however, differences were significant. While Martyn saw the dialogue as primarily singular, involving tensions with the local synagogue from which Johannine

[5] Paul N. Anderson, "Beyond the Shade of the Oak Tree: Recent Growth in Johannine Studies," *Expository Times* 119.8 (2008): 365–73. Studies that catapulted interest in the history of the Johannine situation into the forefront of Johannine and New Testament studies over the last half century include: J. Louis Martyn, *History and Theology in the Fourth Gospel* (3d ed.; NTL; 1968, Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2003) and Brown, *Beloved Disciple*. See also C. Kingsley Barrett, *The Gospel of John and Judaism* (London: SPCK, 1986); Anthony J. Blasi, *A Sociology of Johannine Christianity* (Lewiston, New York: Mellen, 1996); Gary Burge, *The Anointed Community: The Holy Spirit in the Johannine Tradition* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987); Richard J. Cassidy, *John's Gospel in New Perspective: Christology and the Realities of Roman Power* (3d ed.; Johannine Monograph Series 3; Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2015); R. Alan Culpepper, *The Johannine School: An Evaluation of the Johannine-School Hypothesis Based on an Investigation of the Nature of Ancient Schools* (SBLDS 26; Missoula: Scholars, 1975); Kåre Sigvald Fuglseth, *Johannine Sectarianism in Perspective: A Sociological, Historical, and Comparative Analysis of the Temple and Social Relationships in the Gospel of John, Philo, and Qumran* (SupNovT 119; Leiden: Brill, 2005); David J. Hawkin, *The Johannine World: Reflections on the Theology of the Fourth Gospel and Contemporary Society* (Albany: State University of New York, 1996); John Painter, *The Quest for the Messiah: The History, Literature and Theology of the Johannine Community* (2d rev. and enl. ed.; London: T & T Clark, 2006); John Painter, R. Alan Culpepper and Fernando F. Segovia, eds., *Word, Theology, and Community in John: Festschrift Robert Kysar* (St. Louis: Chalice, 2002); Norman R. Petersen, *The Gospel of John and the Sociology of Light: Language and Characterization in the Fourth Gospel* (Valley Forge: Trinity Press International, 1993); Adele Reinhartz, *Befriending the Beloved Disciple: A Jewish Reading of the Gospel of John* (London: Continuum, 2002); David Rensberger, *Johannine Faith and Liberating Community* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1988); D. Moody Smith, *Johannine Christianity: Essays on its Setting, Sources, and Theology* (Columbia: University of South Carolina, 1984); Wayne A. Meeks, "The Man from Heaven in Johannine Sectarianism," *JBL* 91 (1972): 44–72; John Ashton, ed., *The Interpretation of John* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986; repr. 2d ed.; Studies in NT Interpretation; Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1997), 169–205; Urban C. von Wahlde, "The Terms for Religious Authorities in the Fourth Gospel: A Key to Literary Strata?" *JBL* 98 (1979): 231–53; Urban C. von Wahlde, *The Gospel and Letters of John* (3 vols.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010).

community members had been ejected (apparently echoed in John 9:22; 12:42; 16:2), Brown inferred a variety of crises over several decades, illuminated by the Johannine Epistles and other writings in addition to the Gospel. Both inferred several stages in the development of Johannine Christianity, although Brown did more with building on a Palestinian phase of the tradition and with sketching the post-Johannine contribution into second-century Christianity.[6] Nonetheless, a multiplicity of perspectives abound on the character and history Johannine Christianity, and multiple dialogues – intramural and extramural – must be considered in seeking to ascertain the issues at stake within the writing of the Epistles.

A concise overview of the scholarly literature on Johannine Christianity, the Community of the Beloved Disciple, and inferred the socio-religious historical settings of the Johannine writings provides a backdrop for a synthesized overall theory. Moving from later to earlier in the Johannine situation after its relocation within a Gentile mission setting, four discernible crises are readily identified.[7] Harnack, Käsemann, and Barrett[8] have inferred that a leading dialectical issue involved the likes of primacy-loving Diotrephes on the way to Ignatian monepiscopal structures of hierarchical Leadership (3 John 9–10). Borgen, Brown, and Meeks[9] infer Docetists in the Johannine situation – I see these as Gentile-Christian traveling ministers labeled as "Antichrists" by the Johannine Elder (1 John 4:1–3; 2 John 7). Cassidy, Carter, and Thatcher[10] have noted the Roman backdrop, especially raising tensions under the reign of Domitian (1 John 5:21). Martyn,

[6] Martyn inferred (wrongly, I think) the Johannine evangelist's building upon an existing Signs Gospel (as developed more fully by his doctoral student, Robert T. Fortna), which the evangelist co-opted into his narrative. When the stylistic, contextual, and theological evidence for such a source is tested, however, the evidence is not only insufficient; it is non-indicative. Cf. Paul N. Anderson, *The Christology of the Fourth Gospel: Its Unity and Disunity in the Light of John 6* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010).

[7] Following Brown and others, unless a superior setting is identified over and against Ephesus as the overwhelmingly unanimous second-century location of Johannine Christianity, an Asia Minor context is plausibly embraced. Alternative contexts, such as Alexandria or trans-Jordan are interesting, but not overwhelmingly compelling. Raymond E. Brown, *An Introduction to the Gospel of John: Edited, Updated, Introduced, and Concluded by Francis J. Moloney* (ABRL; New York: Doubleday, 2003).

[8] Adolf von Harnack, "Über den dritten Johannesbrief," in *TUGAL* 15.3 (1897): 3–27; Ernst Käsemann, *The Testament of Jesus: A Study of the Gospel of John in the Light of Chapter 17* (trans. G. Krodel; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1968; repr. The Johannine Monograph Series 6, Eugene: Wipf & Stock, est. 2017); C. Kingsley Barrett, "Johanneisches Christentum," in *Die Anfänge des Christentums* (ed. J. Becker; Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1987), 255–78.

[9] Peder Borgen, *Bread from Heaven: An Exegetical Study of the Concept of Manna in the Gospel of John and the Writings of Philo* (SupNovT 10; Leiden: Brill, 1965 and 1981; repr. Johannine Monograph Series 4, Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2017); Raymond E. Brown, *The Community of the Beloved Disciple* (London: Chapman, 1979); Meeks, "Man From Heaven".

[10] Cassidy, *John's Gospel*; Warren Carter, *John and Empire: Initial Explorations* (London: T & T Clark, 2010); Tom Thatcher, *Greater than Caesar: Christology and Empire in the Fourth Gospel* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2009).

Rensberger, and Brown infer dialogues with leaders in the local synagogue over the identity of Jesus (1 John 2:18–25).[11] While this particular thesis has drawn strong objections from such scholars as Kimelman, Katz, and Reinhartz[12] arguing correctly that synagogue expulsion was not broadly practiced, in my view their critiques is only partially compelling, as proximity between Jewish and Jesus-adhering communities would have exacerbated tensions rather than alleviating them.[13]

Dialectical-situation tensions, however, can also discerned within the Galilean and Palestine-grounded setting of the Johannine tradition's development, even before a move to a diaspora setting was effected during the Roman invasion of Palestine (66–73 CE), probably around 70 CE. Inferring Johannine engagements with local or regional Baptist-adherents are Brown, Lindars, and Fortna (John 1:19–34; 3:22–30).[14] Noting north-south dialectical engagements between Galilee and Judea are the views of Charlesworth, Freyne, and Von Wahlde.[15] Given that tensions may also be inferred between the Markan and Johannine valuations of Jesus' signs and their perspectives on the delay of the *Parousia*, as well as tensions between Matthean and Johannine understandings of ecclesial leadership (a set of Johannine-synoptic dialogues running for the beginnings of gospel traditions through their finalizations), and at least seven crises over seven decades can be inferred within the Johannine situation in longitudinal perspective.[16]

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[11] Martyn, *History and Theology*; Rensberger, *Johannine Faith;* Brown, *Beloved Disciple*. And Brown, of course, is building on and leading into his magisterial three-volume commentary on the Gospel and Letters of John: *The Gospel according to John* (2 vols.; Anchor Bible Commentary 29–29A; Garden City: Doubleday, 1966–70); *The Epistles of John* (Anchor Bible Commentary 30; Garden City: Doubleday, 1982).

[12] Reuven Kimelman, "*Birkat Ha-Minim* and the Lack of Evidence for an Anti-Christian Prayer in Late Antiquity," in *Aspects of Judaism in the Greco-Roman World* (ed. E. P. Sanders et al.; vol. 2 of *Jewish and Christian Self-Definition*, ed. E. P. Sanders et al.; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1981), 226–44; Reinhartz, *Beloved Disciple*; Steven T. Katz, "Issues in the Separation of Judaism and Christianity after 70 CE: A Reconsideration," *JBL* 103 (1984): 43–76.

[13] Moody Smith and others remained unconvinced that the Brown-Martyn hypothesis regarding the Johannine situation had been overturned by its critics, though refined and qualified. D. Moody Smith, *The Fourth Gospel in Four Dimensions: Judaism and Jesus, the Gospels and Scripture* (Columbia: University of South Carolina, 2008).

[14] Brown, *Beloved Disciple*; Barnabas Lindars, *The Gospel of John* (NCB Commentary; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972); Robert T. Fortna, *The Fourth Gospel and its Predecessor: From Narrative Source to Present Gospel* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988).

[15] James H. Charlesworth, "The Priority of John? Reflections on the Essenes and the First Edition of John," in *Für und Wider die Priorität des Johannesevangeliums* (ed. P. Hofrichter; Theologische Texte und Studien 9; Hildesheim: Georg Olms, 2002), 73–114; Sean Freyne, *Jesus, A Jewish Galilean: A New Reading of the Jesus Story* (London: T & T Clark, 2004); Von Wahlde, *John*.

[16] See my larger treatments of the dialectical Johannine situation: Paul N. Anderson, "The Community that Raymond Brown Left Behind – Reflections on the Johannine Dialectical Situation," in *Communities in Dispute: Current Scholarship on the Johannine Epistle:; The McAfee Symposium on the Johannine Epistles* (ed. R. A. Culpepper and P. N. Anderson; Atlanta: SBL,

Some of the scholars mentioned above (especially Brown) thus infer more than one partner in dialogue within the larger Johannine dialectical situation, but others (such as Martyn and Barrett) argue for one primary crisis over and against others. The latter approach, however, is problematic, as very few social movements enjoy the luxury of having only one struggle over several generations and across at least two cultural settings. Over a 70-year span, moving from Palestine to one of the Gentile churches, and transitioning from a primary Johannine community to a multiplicity of Christian communities, it is highly implausible to limit the Johannine setting to a singular dialogical partner alone. Rather, what we probably have is a series of largely sequential but somewhat overlapping crises taking place over three major phases: Palestine (30–70 CE), Asia Minor I (70–85 CE), and Asia Minor II (85–100 CE), with at least two primary crises presenting themselves within each of these phases.[17] A larger set of dialogues between other gospel traditions can also be inferred, spanning all three phases, comprising a seventh set of critical engagements involving intertraditional and intratraditional dialogue regarding alternative memories of Jesus and his ministry.[18] However, it is primarily crises 3 through 6 that involve the Johannine Epistles, and these are also corroborated by the letters of Ignatius, Revelation, and the Pliny-Trajan correspondence.[19]

Again, for the purposes of this study, it is especially crises 3–6 that were operative in the writing of the Johannine Epistles, and crises 3–5 that lay behind the writing of 1 and 2 John. Therefore, several types of centrifugal tensions are observable, intramurally and extramurally. Extramurally, Johannine Christianity in Asia Minor (or elsewhere within the Gentile mission) faced pressures from (a) Jewish communities seeking to discipline perceived ditheism, calling for adherence to Moses and Jewish monotheism over and against beliefs in the Messiah from Nazareth. Therefore, the *Birkat ha-Minim* functioned to discipline Jesus adherents in post-70 CE Judaism, while still welcoming them within the

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2013), 47–94; Paul N. Anderson, "Bakhtin's Dialogism and the Corrective Rhetoric of the Johannine Misunderstanding Dialogue: Exposing Seven Crises in the Johannine Situation," in *Bakhtin and Genre Theory in Biblical Studies* (ed. R. Boer; Semeia Studies 63; Atlanta: SBL, 2007), 290–318; Paul N. Anderson, "The *Sitz im Leben* of the Johannine Bread of Life Discourse and Its Evolving Context," in *Critical Readings of John 6* (ed. R. A. Culpepper; BINS 22; Leiden: Brill, 1997) 1–59.

[17] Such an overview is outlined in several places, including Paul N. Anderson, *The Fourth Gospel and the Quest for Jesus: Modern Foundations Reconsidered* (London: T & T Clark, 2006), 196–99; and Paul N. Anderson, *The Riddles of the Fourth Gospel: An Introduction to John* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2011), 134–41.

[18] Such a theory is developed in several places, especially Anderson, Paul N. Anderson, "Interfluential, Formative, and Dialectical – A Theory of John's Relation to the Synoptics," in *Für und Wider die Priorität des Johannesevangeliums* (ed. P. Hofrichter; Theologische Texte und Studien 9; Hildesheim: Georg Olms, 2002), 19–58; and Anderson, *Quest for Jesus*, 101–126.

[19] Anderson, *Christology*, 119–40, 246–49.

community of faith if they were willing to embrace the *Shema* and keep their adherence to Jesus on a more Ebionite level of adherence. (b) The fact of rising Roman pressure to show outward loyalty to Domitian (81–96 CE) by performing emperor laud and / or participating in empire-related festivals was especially intense for Gentile believers or those who had become distanced from the Jewish synagogue. As they could no longer claim a dispensation excusing them from required emperor worship, they were especially vulnerable to Roman expectations of imperial compliance, lest they be punished, and possibly capitally so. (c) Therefore, traveling Gentile ministers with docetizing tendencies exacerbated the second set of tensions, as they legitimated assimilation with "the world" on the basis that because Jesus did not suffer, his disciples need not do so in later generations.[20] In support of such interests, they likely preached a gospel of cheap grace, claiming to be "without sin" in following pagan practices (1 John 1:5–10). These tendencies the Johannine Elder addresses directly by means of labeling the first and third threats "Antichrists" (1 John 2:18–25; 4:1–3) and warning his audience to "love not the world" and to stay away from idols (1 John 2:15–17; 5:21).

As a result, these tensions likely manifested themselves intramurally in the following ways. (a) Defectors to the synagogue, yielding to Jewish appeals regarding the way of Moses and the blessings of Abraham, likely challenged Jesus-adherents with the attractions of religious certainty and a more established faith community. (b) Gentile believers likely argued that some empire-affirming practices were not sinful, especially if Roman representatives advocated public displays of loyalty, whether or not subjects were committed personally. (c) Traveling teachers and ministers, in bringing a message of redemption through grace rather than works, a generation or so after Paul's ministry, were likely received by some as propounding cheap grace and easy discipleship over and against the way of the cross. Gentile believers thus resisted some appeals to become more Jewish in the religious sense, and they sought to legitimate assimilation, not only regarding matters imperial, but also matters of pagan custom and sexual license. In addressing the intramural effects of the dialectical situation, the Johannine Elder seeks to influence his community by exhorting them to love one another as a factor of their affirmed identity as lovers of God.

[20] C. Kingsley Barrett, "Jews and Judaizers in the Epistles of Ignatius," in his *Essays on John* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1982), 133–58; Udo Schnelle, *Antidocetic Christology in the Gospel of John: An Investigation of the Place of the Fourth Gospel in the Johannine School* (trans. L. A. Maloney; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992); Michael D. Goulder, "Ignatius' 'Docetists'," *Vigiliae Christianae* 53.1 (1999): 16–30. Cf. Anderson, *Christology,* 119–27, and "Bread of Life Discourse," 24–58.

II. The Elder's Appeals to Authority as a Means of Bolstering His Influence

While advances have been made in identifying and analyzing the rhetorical strategies of the Johannine Gospel over the last three decades with considerable notoriety, similar analyses have also been performed upon the Johannine Epistles.[21] As a means of bolstering his influence, the Johannine Elder appeals to several forms of authority, both positive and negative.

First, the Elder appropriates the authority of Jesus' teachings, embracing as a foundation for his appeals the love commandments of Jesus. Building on the "new commandment" of Jesus in the first edition of the Johannine Gospel (John 13:34–35),[22] the Johannine Elder reminds his audiences of "an old commandment that you have heard from the beginning" (1 John 2:7; 2 John 5): *love one another*. Nor is this command exclusively a Johannine theme, as Paul also exhorts his audience in Thessalonica to love one another (1 Thess 4:9); therefore, its familiarity may have resided within the Pauline mission as well as the Johannine tradition. Distinctive within the Johannine appeal, though, is the command to love one another (1 John 2:7; 2:11, 14, 16, 23; 4:7–12; 2 John 5) as a means of exerting centripetal influence, thereby countering centrifugal tensions. Ostensibly, if community members and others within the Elder's audience (especially if 1 John was a circular, read among local churches in Asia Minor) were to be more faithful in loving one another, there would be fewer divisions and defections,

[21] Pivotal was R. Alan Culpepper's analysis of the rhetorical character of the Johannine narrative (1983), which led to important analyses of John's symbolism and analyses of Johannine literary features; cf. Craig R. Koester, *Symbolism in the Fourth Gospel: Meaning, Mystery, Community* (2d ed.; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003) and Fernando F. Segovia, ed., *What is John? Volume II: Literary and Social Readings of the Fourth Gospel* (SBL Symposium Series 7; Atlanta: Scholars, 1998). Additionally, rhetorical analyses of the Johannine Epistles include the works by Duane Watson, "1 John 2:12–14 as distributio, conduplicatio, and expolitio," *JSNT* 35 (1989): 97–110; and Duane Watson, "A Rhetorical Analysis of 2 John according to Greco-Roman Convention," *NTS* 35 (1989): 104–30. See also R. Alan Culpepper and Paul N. Anderson, eds., *Communities in Dispute: Current Scholarship on the Johannine Epistles: The McAfee Symposium on the Johannine Epistles* (ECL 13; Atlanta: SBL, 2014).

[22] In my theory of Johannine composition, agreeing overall with the two-edition theory of Lindars, *John*, who is also followed by John Ashton, *Understanding the Fourth Gospel* (2d ed.; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), the later material added to John's earlier edition by the editor, after the death of the Beloved Disciple, included John's prologue (John 1:1–18), chapters 6, 15–17, and 21, and references to the Beloved Disciple and "eyewitness" (esp. John 19:34–35). John's first edition (around 80–85 CE) would thus have been the second gospel narrative, and it shows evidence of being an augmentation of (and modest correction to) Mark. The Johannine Epistles (written by the Elder between 85 and 95 CE) followed during a time when the Beloved Disciple continued to preach and teach (and perhaps to write), and following his death, the Elder finalized his gospel narrative and sent it out among the churches as the testimony of the Beloved Disciple, whose testimony is true (ca. 100 CE). Cf. "The Dialogical Autonomy of the Fourth Gospel: A Plausible Theory," in Anderson, *Riddles*, 125–55.

and less dissention and disagreement, among believers within the Johannine situation.

The fact that the Elder reports schisms having happened and calls for denying hospitality to traveling ministers shows that communities within the Johannine situation indeed were fractured and fracturing. This makes Jesus' prayer in John 17 that his disciples would be one acutely relevant to the Johannine situation at the time of the Fourth Gospel's finalization. It could also be that if the author of the Epistles is someone other than the Johannine evangelist, he might have possessed less personal authority that one of the twelve or an apostolic figure – whoever the Beloved Disciple may have been.[23] If the Beloved Disciple possessed personal, achieved authority as an apostolic caliphate, or a patriarch within the early church, the Elder seems anxious to attain positional, ascribed authority by his associations and his rhetorical appeals. Especially if the robustness of the Beloved Disciple's authority were in decline, the need for leadership within the succeeding generation to assert itself must have been acute. Such is what the Johannine Epistles reflect, as their author seeks to establish his own authority as a means of exerting centripetal and unifying influence.

As such, the Elder's attempts to establish his authority are several. First, *he stands alongside other eyewitnesses* in claiming to have had first-hand contact with the ministry of Jesus. Whether this is a direct claim to historical encounter with the ministry of Jesus or a claim to have encountered the spiritual presence of the risen Christ is debated, but the writer of the Epistle stands with the authority of first-generation followers of Jesus as a basis for his later authority. Of course, it is not impossible that witnesses to Jesus' ministry beyond the apostolic twelve would have been known to later communities (cf. Acts 1:22–26 and the selection of a 12th disciple between Justus and Matthias as those who had been with Jesus "from the beginning"), but whatever the case, the Elder appears to be claiming such as a basis for his personal authority. Indeed, if he were also the final compiler of the Johannine Gospel, such an editor appeals directly to eyewitness testimony (John 19:35; 21:24) as a valuing of the community's own claims to authority (John 1:14; 1 John 1:1–4). The function of such a claim, of course, is to connect his ethical and theological appeals to the first generation of apostolic leaders, thus bolstering his own authority.

A second claim to authority *appeals to protology* – abiding in the teaching about Jesus – that which has been heard from the beginning (ἀπ᾽ ἀρχῆς). Not only is the Elder's message faithful to that which was delivered from the beginning (1 John 1:1; 2:7) but impending crises are instigated by the devil, who has

[23] At this point the extensive second-century reporting of "two Johns at Ephesus", distinguishing them as the Disciple and the Elder, fits the phenomenology of the author of the Epistles and the final editor of the Gospel as being the latter. Not only did he appeal to the authority of the evangelist, the eyewitness, the Beloved Disciple, and the teaching about Jesus (2 John 9), but he also seems to derive some of his authority from his association with such (1 John 1:1–4).

been sinning from the beginning (1 John 3:8). It is his work that Christ has come to destroy – as the One who was in the beginning (1 John 2:13–14). His command of love has been known from the beginning (1 John 3:11; 2 John 5–6) and community members are exhorted to abide in the Father and the Son, so that what they have heard from the beginning will abide in them (1 John 2:24). Part of what we see here is the rhetorical basis for the community's hymnic expression of belief in Christ as the preexistent one (John 1:1–18), which is here sketched as an emerging conviction.[24]

A third claim to authority *appropriates eschatology* – the fullness of time in which what has been predicted in the past is actualized in the present. The last hour is indeed present, as the predicted adversaries are now on the scene (1 John 2:18; 4:3), so no one should be surprised at the impending crises at hand. The truth in which the community abides is conveyed by the Spirit (1 John 3:24), and the means by which the spirits are tested are one's christological beliefs, applied especially to the traveling ministers in question (1 John 4:2). The authentic message is distinguished by the love of believers rather than love of the world, adhering to the Elder's message (1 John 3:10; 4:6), and the Spirit of Truth by which believers overcome the world affirms that Jesus indeed has come in the flesh – affirmed by the water, the blood, and the Spirit – these three agree (1 John 4:3; 5:5–8; cf. also John 19:34–35). Indeed, God's truth is being revealed eschatologically, as darkness gives way to light (1 John 2:8), and would-be-followers of the Son are called to embrace the revelation, which liberates from sin and the bondage of the world (1 John 3:5, 8; 4:9). Those who abide in Christ have been given the Spirit, and they have received an anointing that is from God (1 John 2:20, 27; 4:13). Impending eschatology also extends to ultimate eschatology, as faithfulness in the present bears promise of future reward: when God's fullness is finally revealed, his followers will be like him, for they shall see him as he is (1 John 2:28; 3:2) and will stand with him at the end of time.

A fourth means of establishing authority involves *creating a dualistic dichotomy*, forcing people to choose between two incompatible options, one positive and the other negative.[25] Parallel to the sketching of "the two ways" in the *Didache*,

[24] Note the similarities between the prologues of the Gospel of John and the first Epistle of John: Jan G. van der Watt, *An Introduction to the Johannine Gospel and Letters* (London: T & T Clark, 2008), 6–9. Thus, in my view, the Johannine Christ-hymn reflects: (a) an embrace of the narrative's story of Jesus (as does 1 John 1:1–4); (b) the rendering of the Jewish agency motif in cross-cultural, Hellenistic-friendly form (connecting Deut 18:15–22 with Gen 1 and Prov 8:22–30); and (c) being added to the Gospel by the compiler for circulation among the churches (as was Rev 1:1–8 and chs. 2–3). Paul N. Anderson, "The Johannine *Logos*-Hymn: A Cross-Cultural Celebration of God's Creative-Redemptive Work," in *Creation Stories in Dialogue: The Bible, Science, and Folk Traditions. Radboud Prestige Lecture Series by Alan Culpepper* (ed. R. A. Culpepper and J. G. van der Watt; BINS 139; Leiden: Brill, 2016), 219–42.

[25] Anderson, *Christology*, 194–220. Indeed, Qumranic dualism functions in this way, calling for adherents of righteousness to side with the children of light versus the children of darkness. In Qumran as well as in the Johannine situation, such rhetoric reflects not a debate between

the Johannine Elder's ethical dualism thus calls for a rejection of one and the embracing of the other: light over darkness (1 John 1:5–7; 2:8–11), life over death (1 John 1:1–2; 2:25; 3:14–16; 5:11–21), love versus hatred (1 John 2:9–11; 3:13–18; 4:19–21), and the good and the righteous one versus the evil and the evil one (1 John 2:1, 13–14, 29; 3:7, 12; 5:18–19; 2 John 1:11; 3 John 1:11) including that which is considered sin and lawlessness (1 John 1:7–2:2; 3:4–9; 5:16–18). This is bolstered by the claim to be in the truth versus those who are liars and deceivers (1 John 1:6–8; 2:4, 8, 21–22, 26–27; 3:7, 18–19; 4:1, 6; 5:6, 10, 20; 2 John 1–4; 3 John 1–4, 8, 10, 12). The ultimate form of dualism is to claim to be on the side of God the Father and his Son Jesus Christ (1 John 1:2–7; 2:1, 5, 14–17, 22–24; 3:1, 8–10, 20–23; 4:1–16, 20–21; 5:1–20; 2 John 3–4, 7–9; 3 John 6–7, 11) versus aligning oneself with the devil, Satan, or the evil one (1 John 2:13–14; 3:8–12; 5:18–19). And, of course, the aligning of oneself with the former over the latter leads to the positive outcomes listed above, over and against the negative ones.

A fifth means of establishing authority employed by the Elder *involves the use of antimonious invective*. Who, after all, would want to be associated with "the party of Cain," who killed his brother (1 John 3:12; see also Jude 1:11)? Not only is truth preferable to deception, but those who promulgate such are "liars" (1 John 1:6; 2:4, 22; 4:20) and "deceivers" (1 John 2:26; 3:7; 2 John 7), false prophets influenced by a spirit of deception (1 John 4:1–6). Turning the tables a bit, those who do not acknowledge their sin make God a liar (1 John 1:10), those who do not believe in the Son have made him a liar (1 John 5:10), and those who say they have no sin deceive especially themselves (1 John 1:8). The most egregious slam against the Elder's perceived adversaries within the Christ-centered context, of course, is thus to label them as "Antichrists" (*antichristoi*) involving two distinctive crises. The first antichristic threat is *schismatic*, involving former community members that refuse to openly affirm Jesus as the Christ (1 John 2:18–25). If these were Jewish associates returning to the synagogue and its monotheistic securities, the Elder warns them that if they deny the Son, they will forfeit the Father – ostensibly, their vested interest. The second antichristic threat is not schismatic, but *invasion*ist, likely involving Gentile-Christian traveling ministers with docetizing tendencies (1 John 4:1–3; 2 John 7). While an incarnation-denying Christology might not have been their lead suit, a non-suffering Jesus likely legitimated their ethical teaching, which probably involved perceived worldly assimilation (thus, "sin") in the Elder's view.

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the religious and the irreligious; it reflects an intra-religious contention, perhaps even among members of the larger Jewish family. Explanatory dualism at work in the Johannine Gospel, appropriating Plato's Allegory of the Cave (*Republic* VII, 8) in explaining why not all responded to the light (they loved darkness, threatened by the exposure of the platforms / works as being rooted in creaturely rather than divine origin, John 3:18–21), is also at work in the Epistles (*Ibid*, 197; Anderson, *Riddles*, 187–90). Those who have departed must never have been "a part" of us, so laments the Elder (1 John 2:19; Anderson, "Bread of Life Discourse").

From the above analysis, the Elder's extensive endeavors to achieve authority imply his personal lack of ascribed authority. This makes it highly unlikely that the Elder was the Beloved Disciple, or someone who possessed unquestioned apostolic authority. Even if he had been among the eyewitness followers of Jesus, he emphasizes a second-order experience – abiding in the teaching *about* Jesus – a very different approach as that taken by the Johannine evangelist (John 15:1–8). In seeking to motivate his audience to choose one direction over others, he yokes his authority to the central values of the community, both seeking to further their establishment while also appropriating their authority toward his personal appeals. If disagreement ensues regarding such an approach, however, or if members of the audience are alienated as a factor of one's polemical approach, this manner of leadership can result in estrangement and division – apparently already at work in the Johannine situation. Nonetheless, the Elder clearly seeks to further the values and stances that have been delivered already in the teaching and writing of the Beloved Disciple, whose ministry and influence the Elder seeks to further.

III. The Elder's Appeal to Identity and its Centripetal Implications

The Johannine Elder's rhetorical strategy of asserting the righteous authority of his position in the interest of winning his audience over to his perspective probably had mixed results. The polarizing construction of such categories of right and wrong probably influenced some to change their minds and their actions, being won over by the Elder's rhetoric. However, resistance against the Elder might also have evoked pejorative rhetoric against him and his cause, within the second generation of the larger Pauline mission. Some might have challenged his views on sin and sinlessness, while others might have simply disagreed that a particular set of behaviors was sinful. This would have been especially true of Gentile believers who might not have been convinced that they should withdraw from "the world" in ways that Jewish Christians were insisting they should do. Still others might have withdrawn from Christian communities and returned to local synagogues, feeling the Elder was too liberal in his stance toward Jewish monotheism, questioning the Elder's high christological movements. It could even be that in his calling for denying hospitality to docetizing ministers, such a stance was then applied reactively to traveling ministers from his own sector of Christianity by Diotrephes and his kin. More compelling, however, in his attempt to influence his audiences, was his appeal to identity as a means of creating changes in perspective, attitude, and behavior.[26]

[26] Note the cognitive-critical appeal to integrity and its therapeutic effects by O. H. Mowrer and others: O. Hobart Mowrer, *Psychology of Language and Learning* (New York: Springer, 1980);

The first feature of the Elder's appeal to identity is *his construction of if-then syllogisms*: if *x* is the case, then *y* must follow. After the prologue to the first Epistle, the Elder begins with a threefold set of syllogisms.

- *If* we say we have fellowship with God but walk in darkness, these are incompatible; but *if* we walk in the light as he is in the light, we share fellowship with one another and receive the cleansing power of the Son's blood (1 John 1:6–7).
- *If* we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us; but *if* we confess our sins, we receive forgiveness and cleansing from all unrighteousness (1 John 1:8–9).
- And, *if* we say we have not sinned, we make God a liar, and his word is not in us (1 John 1:10).

This threefold if-then construction at the beginning of the circular is matched by a similar construction at the end – dealing also with the same topic: sin.

- *If* we ask anything according to his will, we have confidence that he hears us (1 John 5:14).
- *If* we know he hears us, we know we will be granted what we ask for (1 John 5:15).
- And, *if* you see a brother or sister committing a sin that is not a death-producing one, God will restore that person to life according to your prayers (1 John 5:16).

The Elder then goes on to explain that some sins are death producing, while others are not, and that while the world lies under the power of the evil one, the Son gives understanding to know him who is true (1 John 5:17–20). In these syllogisms, the Elder appeals to congruence between the premise and its consequent. If people are really honest, they must admit they are sinful; if people really pray for those under the sway of sin, they should pray for them that they might be delivered from its entrapment.

Another set of three-fold syllogisms used by the Elder points out the incongruity of adversaries within his contextual audience.

- *The one who claims* to know Christ but does not obey his commandments lies and has no authenticity (1 John 2:4).
- *The one who claims* to abide in Christ ought to walk as he walked (1 John 2:6).
- *The one who claims* to be in the light while hating his brother or sister remains in darkness (1 John 2:9).

These claims to relationship with Christ are incompatible with actions that do not bespeak his teaching and example. In a seeming contradiction, the Elder devises

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Judith S. Beck, *Cognitive Behavior Therapy: Basics and Beyond* (2d ed.; New York: Guilford, 2011); Edwin Bixenstine, *O. H. Mowrer's Theory of Integrity Revisited* (London: Routledge, 2005).

a second strategy; *he applies this obverse aspect of congruity in the opposite direction*. While he has stated that those who claim not to have sinned are deceived (1 John 1:8, 10), the latter asserts that those who have been born of God do not sin because the seed of God abides in them; further, they *cannot sin* because they have been born of God (1 John 3:6, 9). Thus, those who are born of God do not sin, as they enjoy divine protection (1 John 5:18). Mistaken here is the view that members of his audience are Gnostic perfectionists, claiming to have reached sinless perfection. Rather, the acute issues appear to have involved disagreement over what is sinful and what is not; therefore, the Elder writes that people might not sin, and yet, if they do, Christ is their advocate before the Father (1 John 2:1). That being the case, arguing that believers "cannot sin" refers not to perfectionism but to integrity. If one is truly a child of God, one cannot violate that identity by one's defiant actions. In these ways, the Elder challenges the incongruity of adversaries' claims and actions while also affirming continuity between those who have been born of God and their power over sin.

A third appeal to identity employed by the Johannine Elder involves *continuity between the past and the present*. What the Elder has heard, seen, and touched from the beginning he proclaims, in order that his audience might enjoy fellowship and be fulfilled in joy (1 John 1:1–4). He then affirms continuity between what his audience has heard and known from the beginning, inviting them to abide in that enduring truth despite the changing times – the commandment to love one another (1 John 2:7; 3:11; 2 John 5–6). Faithfulness to the teaching they have heard about Christ involves abiding in the Father and the Son – the message they had heard from the beginning, which abides in them, and in which they are to abide (1 John 2:24). Children, young adults, and fathers have known the One who was from the beginning, and by remaining in him they are empowered to overcome the world (1 John 2:12–17). To remain in the teaching is also to abide in the Father and the Son (1 John 1:3; 2:24; 4:14; 2 John 3, 9), and thereby the word and God's anointing, Spirit, seed and truth abide in those who believe (1 John 2:14, 27; 3:9, 24; 4:13; 2 John 2). Continuity with God's saving actions in the past not only impacts the present, but it also bears promise for the future. To abide in Christ now is to stand with confidence in the day of his returning (1 John 2:28).

A fourth appeal to identity *carries the love commandment further*. Not only is the command to love one another that which was received from the beginning, but it also carries direct implications for the character and behavior of all who claim to be lovers of God. If one claims to love God, whom one has not seen, how can one not love one's brothers and sisters, whom one has seen (1 John 4:20)? No one who hates the brothers or sisters can claim to love God, and such a person remains in darkness rather than light (1 John 2:9–10; 3:15–17). Further, no one who abides in him sins, and no one who sins has either seen or known him (1 John 3:6; 3 John 11), so the rhetorical appeal continues. As God is love

and the source of love, all who claim to abide in him should display the character of his being, which is love (1 John 4:7–16). After all, it is God who has first loved believers, calling for a reciprocal returning of the same love they have received to one another (1 John 4:10–11). Thus, the Elder's overall appeal for his audience to love one another flows as a direct implication of God's love, expressed in his Son's laying down his life for the world, which calls for those who love him, then, to be willing to lay down their lives for one another (1 John 3:16). To receive love authentically is thus to be transformed into its character, which his evidenced by one's actions and being.

A fifth feature of the Elder's appeal to identity *calls for ethical integrity between being and doing*. Anyone who claims to abide in Christ and to embrace the love of God ought to walk as Christ walked, as a child of the light (1 John 1:6–7; 2:6). This involves walking in the truth, and that, of course, involves keeping the commandments to love one another (2 John 4–6; 3 John 3–4). After all, to hate one another is to walk in darkness (1 John 2:11). While the particulars are vague as to what walking in the light rather than darkness might involve (besides, of course, choosing the aforementioned positive values over the negative ones), some clues remain. To love brothers and sisters is to live in the light, minimizing the likelihood of stumbling (1 John 2:9–10), to lay down one's life for one another – especially when the other is in need (1 John 3:15–18), to alleviate fear (1 John 4:18–21), and to correct the brother or sister in danger of sinning out of love and concern for their wellbeing (1 John 5:16–17). In addition to general appeals to "love not the world" (1 John 2:15–17), the Elder calls for his audience to stay away from idols (1 John 5:21), and in some ways, that last word may serve as the first word in terms of ethical exhortation.

By first advocating identification with Christ and his way of love, the Elder then appeals to the personal identity of members of his audience as followers of Jesus and lovers of God. In doing so, he furthers a leadership strategy more likely to be successful and enduring over the long term. While issuing threats and promises can motivate effectively over the short term, long-term effectiveness is more conducive to identity formation and appeals to integrity. Having bolstered his audience's commitment to Christ and his way of love, and having affirmed the love of God as a gift to the world, the Elder effectively calls for believers to abide in that love and to walk in it attitudinally and ethically. Building on the message that had been embraced from the beginning, he calls for continuity with the authentic tradition they had received, instilling also anticipation of final accountability at the end of the age. Bearing down on several particular issues, the Elder calls for staying away from idolatry and death-producing sins. He then calls for embracing Jesus as the Christ and Son of God, who also came in the flesh – contrary to variant teachings of schismatics and false teachers alike. This leads to abiding in the teaching they had received from the beginning – the faith that overcomes the world. A weakness, however, with making a general appeal

to "love one another" is that it may fail to address specific issues at stake, leading to acute problems' failing to be addressed directly in timely and effective ways.

IV. Congruence – A Cognitive-Critical Impact upon Personal Well Being

In appealing to the integrity of the individual in his calling for group solidarity, the effect of the Elder's exhortation not only bolsters group solidarity, but it also leads to an enhanced sense of personal congruence and wellbeing. In the psychological work of Carl Rogers, anxiety is understood to be a factor of incongruence – the lack of unity between one's perceived self and one's experienced self.[27] For instance, if one sees oneself as a generous person, but it is revealed that one does not share with those around them in actual deeds of charity while also being aware of real needs that one could foreseeably meet, this disparity creates a sense of inward anxiety. And, this is also proper. The cognitive dissonance between how one thinks of oneself and what one actually does functions so as to facilitate movement in one direction or another – perhaps in both.

On the perceptual side, one might simply adjust one's self-perception. "Well, I wish I were more generous, but with my indebtedness and financial constraints in view, or perhaps with other obligations commanding a higher priority, I suppose I'm not able to give as much as I'd like to." Conversely, if one is moved by the material needs of others and is willing to contribute sacrificially as a means of addressing those needs, one might find a way modify one's behavior and to give more than one had been doing. In that sense, the anxiety evoked by cognitive incongruity between one's perceived and experienced selves motivates either an adjusted self-perception or a change in behavior as a means of maintaining personal congruity and integrity. The Elder's goal, of course, is to effect changes in actual behaviors, calling for greater demonstrations of love for one another. Thus, his heightening cognitive dissonance within the experience of his audience members motivates intended behavioral change.

On this matter, some scholars have asserted that the Johannine love commands mark a sharp departure from the teachings of the Jesus of history, who exhorted his followers to love God, to love one's neighbors, and even to love one's enemies (Mark 12:28–34; Matt 22:34–40; 5:43–48; Luke 6:27–36; 10:25–28). To some scholars, emphasizing love for one another – within community – is held to be incestuous and inward looking rather than altruistic and outward looking. Hence, according to some historical Jesus scholars, from Lessing to the Jesus

[27] Carl Rogers, *Client-Centered Therapy: Its Current Practice, Implications, and Theory* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1951) and *On Becoming a Person: A Therapist's View of Psychotherapy* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1961).

Seminar, the Johannine appeal to love one another (John 13:34–35) demonstrates how far the Johannine tradition has moved from the Jesus of history, holding merely to the Christ of faith – a concoction originating in the imagination of the Johannine leadership rather than historical memory of the teachings of Jesus.[28] Such a judgment, however, could not be further from the truth.

First of all, the Johannine Elder *roots his exhortations in historical memory*, just as the thrust of the Johannine tradition claims to be rooted in the same. Not only is the witness of the Beloved Disciple heralded as representing the historical memory of the one who leaned against the breast of Jesus (John 21:20–24), but so is that of the eyewitness at the cross, who attested the water and blood flowing from Jesus's side (John 19:34–35). Likewise, the Elder claims to have had first-hand contact with what has been seen and heard from the beginning concerning the word of life (1 John 1:1–3 – a claim echoed by John the Apostle in Acts 4:19–20),[29] and the three elements of the Johannine Comma – the Spirit, the water, and the blood (1 John 5:6–8) – challenge docetizing tendencies to escape the way of the cross and costly discipleship. Given that the physical suffering and death of Jesus are appealed to by the Johannine leadership in calling for behavioral change in the later Johannine situation, the love-oriented teaching of Jesus of Nazareth cannot be far from their understanding of what is needed in the later Johannine situation.

A second feature to mention is the fact that the Johannine Elder *assumes members of his audience claim to love God*. While a direct link with the first priority of the Law according to the Synoptic Jesus can only be inferred, the content is identical to the teaching of the prophet from Nazareth. In other words, the teaching of Jesus is assumed within the Johannine audience, and community members apparently even claim to be following his commandments in their lives. Thus, not far from seeking to love God are the calls to love one's neighbors and enemies, and such values are assumed within the Johannine ethos. After all, the Johannine Jesus is remembered as gathering sheep that are not of "this fold," and when Greeks come to Jesus, he declares that his mission is complete (John 10:1–18; 12:20–26). Thus, the exhortation of the Elder is to care for the alimental needs of others. If one does not care for the food, clothing, and shelter needs of one's neighbors, simply wishing them well cannot be considered enough (1 John

[28] As Lessing described the distance between the Jesus of history and the presentation of Jesus in the Gospels – especially in the Gospel of John – as an "ugly broad ditch," the testament of love in John may be valued in terms of its ethical appeal but supposedly not as a reflection of the teachings of Jesus. Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, "On the Proof of the Spirit and of Power," *Lessing's Theological Writings* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1956), 51–55.

[29] This composite statement represents a hitherto overlooked first-century clue to John's apostolic authorship, given that Peter is associated with the first statement (v. 19: we must obey God rather than humans) in Acts 5:29 and 11:17, and that the second statement (v. 20: we cannot help but speak about what we have seen and heard) is echoed in 1 John 1:3 and John 3:32 (Anderson, *Christology*, 274–77).

3:16–18). In that sense, the Johannine tradition furthers greater specificity in terms of loving one's neighbors than do the Synoptics. As a result, love of God and neighbor are clearly understood to be standards embraced by authentic believers, and this is what motivates the Elder to extend the admonition further. One cannot claim to love God and neighbor faithfully if one is not also willing to love one's brothers and sisters within the community of faith. Such is totally incongruous with one's values. Therefore, the command to love one another is not a departure from the double priority of Jesus; it asserts that loving God and neighbor are not enough if one is not also demonstrating loving consideration for one's next of kin within the divine family.[30]

A third issue relates to the question of *what might be involved if the Elder's audience is to love one another versus lesser alternatives*. On one hand, it could simply refer to meeting the physical, social, and emotional needs of others within the community. If people are hungry, feed them. If people need clothing, clothe them. If people need shelter, grant them hospitality. Thus, the essential admonition of the Matthean Jesus to care for prisoners, the destitute, and the naked is also asserted by the Johannine Elder (Matt 25:31–46). Likewise, the charitable admonition of James to care for the poor is also affirmed in Johannine terms (Jas 2:1–25). On the other hand, the love commands within the Johannine community could also be seen as exhortations to be empathic and thoughtful regarding one another, showing loving consideration in terms of attitude and community ethos. Therefore, the Johannine love commands, far from reflecting sectarian self-indulgence within a closed community, actually bolster the addressing of social and physical needs of neighbors and associates by drawing them into community and caring for their social, physical, and spiritual needs.[31]

Three other implications of the love command are thus here extended. First, if one really loves the community, one *should not split off from the community* and forsake the fellowship of believers, as the first antichrisitc threat is reported to have done with some poignance (1 John 2:18–25). More specifically, if love of the Father within a Jewish monotheistic sense has motivated some former members of the Johannine fellowship to abandon the community and to rejoin family and friends within the local synagogue, that love of God might also be challenged if it is accompanied by secession from one's former brothers and sisters in the fledgling community of Jesus adherents. If one loves the Father, one must also

[30] Therefore, the familial imagery of the Johannine Gospel is extended to the community needs reflected in the Johannine Epistles. Cf. Jan G. van der Watt, *Family of the King: Dynamics of Metaphor in the Gospel According to John* (BINS 47; Leuven: Brill, 2000); Jan G. van der Watt and Ruben Zimmermann, eds., *Rethinking the Ethics of John: "Implicit Ethics" in the Johannine Writings* (WUNT 291; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2012); von Wahlde, *John*.

[31] Jan G. van der Watt, "On Ethics in 1 John," and William R. G. Loader, "The Significance of 2:15–17 in Understanding Ethics in 1 John," in *Communities in Dispute: Current Scholarship on the Johannine Epistles: The McAfee Symposium on the Johannine Epistles* (ed. R. A. Culpepper and P. N. Anderson; Atlanta: SBL, 2014), 197–222 and 223–36.

love the Son and those committed to loving both. To do otherwise is to forfeit the Father's love as well as to deny one's love of God.

A second further thrust of the Johannine love command is targeted toward the second antichristic threat – Gentile believers traveling in ministry and teaching doctrines of assimilation with culture, legitimated by cheap grace and a non-suffering Jesus (1 John 4:1–3). It calls for *solidarity with Christ and his community* even in the face of suffering, if required by the truth.[32] The existential appeal of Docetism was not that it offered a novel christological set of beliefs; the attraction of many a theological tenet is its implications. The implications of a doctrine are often more significant than the contents of the doctrine, themselves. This was the thrust of Ignatius' letters to churches in Asia Minor; the false teachings of the Judaizers and the Docetists must be resisted by the appeal to stay together as a community in Christ, and followers of Jesus are called to be faithful to the truth even if it involved the way of the cross. Such was the destiny of Ignatius, and he called for all believers in the region to be willing to suffer for the faith if required by the truth. In that sense, the love of the world – its lusts, its enticements, its idolatrous appeals – amounted to death-producing sins according to the Elder.[33]

A third appeal to loving identity is extended to Diotrephes and his kin over the character of Christian leadership, *calling for hospitality and graciousness among Christian leaders*. It ought not to be self-enhancing as the loving of primacy suggests. As Matthew adds the word πρῶτος (first) to the calling of Peter and the Twelve (Matt 10:2), and thus the reference to Diotrephes as φιλοπρότερον (loving to be first) involves a clear reference to primacy. As a means of holding Christian communities together and challenging the divisive effects of both Judaizers and Docetizing traveling ministers, Ignatius calls for the appointing of a single bishop in every church – one who will hold the community together in unity with Christ. Apparently, Diotrephes is one of these monepiscopal leaders, but rather than exemplifying Matthean graciousness (Matt 18:21–35), he appropriates Matthean hierarchy (Matt 16:17–19) in ways that are exclusionary from a Johannine point of view. As a result, the Elder is willing to speak with Diotrephes directly and to bring the concern to "the church," from which he is deriving his authority (Antioch?) in compliance with Matthew 18:15–17. Nonetheless, the Elder appeals to love as the center of the concern. Diotrephes ought to love fellow believers rather than positional primacy, and this larger concern explains why he then compiles and circulates the witness of the Beloved Disciple, whose "testimony is true" (John 19:35; 21:24; 3 John 12). In showing Peter as returning the keys of the Kingdom to Jesus (John 6:68–69), the Holy Spirit as available to all believers (John 14–16), the priesthood of every believer (John 20:21–23), and

[32] This is what it means to ingest the flesh and blood of the Son of Man; it is an invitation to the nourishment availed by Jesus on the cross for the life of the world (John 6:51–58; cf. the parallel meaning in Mark 10:38–39). Anderson, *Christology*, 110–36. 170–93.

[33] Anderson, "Bread of Life Discourse", "Antichristic Errors", and "Antichristic Crises".

the love-oriented character of pastoral leadership (John 21:15–17) the final compiler of the Johannine witness of Jesus's last will and testament for the church is declared. It involves loving the community and being willing to give up one's life for one's friends rather than clinging to primacy or positional status. Such is the character of loving service for all leaders to emulate, as exemplified by the Lord.

V. Conclusion: Centrifugal Forces and Centripetal Appeals

While the particulars of the Johannine situation are somewhat elusive, several features of the Elder's appeal to love one another can be noted. First, the community has undergone several centrifugal crises, including an antichristic schism, whereby former community members have forsaken their belief in Jesus as the Christ – perhaps in seeking to preserve their loyalty to Jewish monotheism and the religious security of the synagogue. Second, community members are called to love not the world and its enticements, but they are exhorted to stay away from idols and their associated practices – perhaps even with considerable disagreement as to what constituted "sin" and what did not. Third, a second antichristic threat is impending, but this time involving false prophets and divisive teachers, who run ahead with their message, and who deny that Jesus came in the flesh – perhaps teaching aspects of assimilation with pagan culture, rationalized by a non-suffering Jesus. Fourth, tensions appear to have emerged even among fellow Christian groups, as Diotrephes has forbidden Johannine traveling ministers to come to his church and has even excommunicated his own church members who take them in – leading the Elder to commend the extending of hospitality to others, despite its being withheld from Johannine believers.

As a means of holding his community together, the Elder calls for his audience to love one another in the same way that they had received love from God, abiding also in the love of Christ and its corollary implications. While the Elder's attempt to establish his authority may have been both effective and polarizing, his appeal to identity and integrity likely bore greater long-term results. Finally, though, the inability to address pressing issues directly probably led to additional misunderstandings and divisions, and yet overall, the appeal to love one another appears to have provided an at least partially effective means of exerting centripetal influence upon a centrifugal situation and its impending tensions. To forsake the Jewish standards of worshiping God alone, as represented by his Son Jesus Christ, and to give in to emperor-worship appeals and the festivities of Artemis worship and local culture, amounted not only to a rejection of the Father's love; it also involved a betrayal of brothers and sisters in the community of faith, if one's example were to lead others to commit death-producing sins.

Therefore, the specific implications of loving one another within the Johannine situation involved at least four direct appeals. First, authentic believers

should care for the physical and social needs of community members. Second, authentic believers should not abandon the community as the schismatics have done. Third, authentic believers should maintain the Jewish values of the Johannine leadership and not participate in the festivities of pagan culture – even if bolstered by the imperial presence of Roman occupation with its economic and societal incentives. Fourth, authentic believers should exemplify loving aspects of leadership and hospitality, even if these are denied by others.

As Raymond Brown described several decades ago, in a context involving both the Johannine eagle soaring over the landscape and the eaglets tearing at one another in the nest, the Johannine Word is sounded in flesh-becoming ways. Just as the Jesus of the Gospel is remembered as calling for responding to the Father's love with the injunction to love one another, so the Johannine Elder admonishes the faithful to embody that same love within community if the world is to receive in faith its corporate witness. In so doing, the Elder appeals to the self-conception of community members, calling for integrity with one's love-oriented values, restoring congruence as believers live into the values they have embraced. In that sense, to love one another not only contributes to group solidarity and harmony; it also engenders personal wellbeing and wholeness in addressing believers' truth- and love-oriented identity and its implications.