1986

Impeccability in 1 John: an Evaluation

Leon Eloy Wade
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IMPECCABILITY IN 1 JOHN: AN EVALUATION

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Andrews University
Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary

IMPECCABILITY IN 1 JOHN
AN EVALUATION

A Dissertation
Presented in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Philosophy

by
Leon Eloy Wade
August 1986
IMPECCABILITY IN 1 JOHN

AN EVALUATION

A dissertation presented
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree
Doctor of Philosophy

by
Leon Eloy Wade

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ABSTRACT

IMPECCABILITY IN 1 JOHN
AN EVALUATION

by

Leon Eloy Wade

Chairman: Ivan T. Blazen
Title: IMPECCABILITY IN 1 JOHN: AN EVALUATION
Name of researcher: Leon Eloy Wade
Name and degree of faculty adviser: Ivan T. Blazen, Ph.D.
Date completed: August 1986

The First Epistle of John confronts us with a dilemma which, since its inception, has challenged many students of the Bible. On one hand, the Christian must not deny his sinfulness—for which, however, there is a ready solution in the expiation wrought by Jesus Christ. On the other hand, the one who abides in God and is born of him does not sin and, indeed, cannot sin.

Many solutions, discussed and evaluated in chapter 1 have been attempted to harmonize this apparent contradiction. Though some are more satisfying than others, a common weakness exhibited among them all is a lack of
comprehensiveness which does not do justice to the categorical language of the epistle.

The background study of the document, examined in chapter 2, aims to discover the nature and character of the opponents reflected in the epistle, and their possible relationship to the statements of impeccability. A negative answer is found in that the problem of the epistle is not directly related to the opponents of the community. An examination of the structure of the document (chapter 3) confirms the finding that such statements are rather paraenetic in nature and addressed to the members of the writer's own community.

A more fruitful enterprise is found in the examination of the Johannine terminology for sin (chapter 4), where the concept of anomía provides a useful clarification for the categorical statement of impeccability in 1 John 3. Anomía--as a sin concept referring to opposition to God with eschatological overtones--becomes relevant. The last and major section of this study (chapter 5) is devoted to exegeting the three blocks of material related to the problematic statements of the document. As a result, it becomes apparent that four concepts should qualify the statements of impeccability: (1) The concept of anomía which epitomizes rejection of and apostasy from Christ. (2) The concept of "abiding." (3) The idea of "being born of God." (4) The "sin-unto-death" terminology. A multiple approach which combines
these concepts is a reasonable solution to the problem of why, at the same time, a Christian can and cannot sin.
With Profound Gratitude

to My Dear Wife

Ruth

and

My Beloved Children

Cloy

Saul

Ariadna

Carlos
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AB</td>
<td>Anchor Bible</td>
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<tr>
<td>AmpB</td>
<td>Amplified Bible</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ANF</td>
<td>The Ante-Nicene Fathers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AUSS</td>
<td>Andrews University Seminary Studies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bib</td>
<td>Biblica</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BSac</td>
<td>Bibliotheca Sacra</td>
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<tr>
<td>BT</td>
<td>The Bible Translator</td>
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<tr>
<td>BTB</td>
<td>Biblical Theology Bulletin</td>
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<tr>
<td>BVC</td>
<td>Bible et Vie Chrétienne</td>
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<td>BZ</td>
<td>Biblische Zeitschrift</td>
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<tr>
<td>CBQ</td>
<td>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CienTom</td>
<td>Ciencia Tomista</td>
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<tr>
<td>EvT</td>
<td>Evangelische Theologie</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ExpTim</td>
<td>Expository Times</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GNB</td>
<td>Good News Bible</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GeistLeb</td>
<td>Geist und Leben</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HTR</td>
<td>Harvard Theological Review</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IB</td>
<td>Interpreter's Bible</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ICC</td>
<td>The International Critical Commentary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IDB</td>
<td>Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ISBE</td>
<td>International Standard Bible Encyclopedia</td>
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<td>JBL</td>
<td>Journal of Biblical Literature</td>
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<tr>
<td>Abbreviation</td>
<td>Journal or Publication</td>
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<tr>
<td>JEH</td>
<td>Journal of Ecclesiastical History</td>
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<tr>
<td>JTS</td>
<td>Journal of Theological Studies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LavalTPh</td>
<td>Laval Théologique et Philosophique</td>
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<tr>
<td>LB</td>
<td>Living Bible</td>
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<tr>
<td>LCC</td>
<td>Library of Christian Classics</td>
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<tr>
<td>LCL</td>
<td>Loeb Classical Library</td>
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<tr>
<td>LQ</td>
<td>Lutheran Quarterly</td>
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<td>LumVie</td>
<td>Lumière et Vie</td>
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<tr>
<td>LuthChR</td>
<td>Lutheran Church Review</td>
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<td>MelScRel</td>
<td>Mélangues de Science Religieuse</td>
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<tr>
<td>NASB</td>
<td>New American Standard Bible</td>
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<tr>
<td>NBVME</td>
<td>New Berkeley Version in Modern English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NEB</td>
<td>New English Bible</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NICNT</td>
<td>New International Commentary, NT</td>
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<tr>
<td>NIDNTT</td>
<td>New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NIV</td>
<td>New International Version</td>
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<tr>
<td>NKZ</td>
<td>Neue kirchliche Zeitschrift</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NPNF</td>
<td>The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NRT</td>
<td>Nouvelle revue théologique</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NTS</td>
<td>New Testament Studies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PG</td>
<td>Patrologia graeca, Migne, ed.</td>
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<tr>
<td>PL</td>
<td>Patrologia latina, Migne, ed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RB</td>
<td>Revue biblique</td>
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<tr>
<td>RestQ</td>
<td>Restoration Quarterly</td>
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<td>RevExp</td>
<td>Review and Expositor</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
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<tr>
<td>RHPR</td>
<td>Revue de Histoire et de Philosophie</td>
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<td></td>
<td>religieuses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RivBib</td>
<td>Rivista Biblica</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SBLDS</td>
<td>Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ScE</td>
<td>Sciences eclesiastiques</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ScuolC</td>
<td>La Scuola Catholica</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SJT</td>
<td>Scottish Journal of Theology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SWJTh</td>
<td>Southwestern Journal of Theology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TDNT</td>
<td>Theological Dictionary of the New Testament</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TDOT</td>
<td>Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TNTC</td>
<td>Tyndale New Testament Commentary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TWOT</td>
<td>Theological Word Book of the Old Testament</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VC</td>
<td>Vigiliae Christianae</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VD</td>
<td>Verbum Domini</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WBC</td>
<td>Word Bible Commentary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WesleyThJ</td>
<td>Wesleyan Theological Journal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WTJ</td>
<td>Westminster Theological Journal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ZNW</td>
<td>Zeitschrift für neutestamentliche Wissenschaft</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ZTK</td>
<td>Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ZWT</td>
<td>Zeitschrift für wissenschaftliche Theologie</td>
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I wish to extend my sincere appreciation to several people who have assisted in the toil of this dissertation. First, to Dr. Ivan T. Blazen, who graciously consented to be my major academic advisor and whose perceptive insights and helpful suggestions in the preparation of this study were very valuable.

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I am also indebted to the University of Montemorelos, Mexico, and the Inter-American Division which
gave me generous financial support.

Finally, I want to especially express my gratitude to my dear family who sacrificed life, time, and studies on my behalf, and who, I know, join me in giving all glory to God.
INTRODUCTION

Statement of the Problem

The First Epistle of John has been one of the documents of the New Testament long meditated on and cherished by the Christian church. It has served as a source of inspiration and encouragement for many Christians from the very beginning. It was written in the language of the common people even though its concepts and ideas are usually considered profound and challenging.

Nevertheless, the document is not free from difficulties. Besides several textual problems, 1 John presents certain theological difficulties, among which is a concept of sin that has defied commentators and theologians alike. Besides a few scattered passages throughout the document, three blocks of material represent the major sources of the problem. These are 1:5-2:11, 2:28-3:10, and 5:13-21. We find in them that the Christian himself sins (1:8-10), and that his own heart condemns him of sin (3:20); that he can see his brother sinning (5:16), but also that he can have the assurance that his sin is forgivable (1:9) because he has an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ, who is the propitiation for his sin (2:1,2), and who has come not only to take away his sin
but also the sin of the world (see also John 1:29). A series of injunctions and warnings point to the same direction. One is warned against the possibility that the Christian could love the world (2:15) and could fear the day of judgment (4:17); therefore, he needs to purify himself (3:3) and abide in Christ so as not to shrink from him in shame at his coming (2:28). Christians are also admonished to love one another and not follow bad examples, such as Cain (3:11,12). Obviously the writer meant what he said in 1:8: "If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us."^1

The epistle also contains three sweeping denials of sin for those who have been born of God and abide in Christ. In 3:6 we read: "No one who abides in him sins; no one who sins has either seen him or known him." In 3:9 we are told: "No one born of God commits sin; for God's nature abides in him, and he cannot sin because he is born of God." And in 5:18 we read once more: "We know that anyone born of God does not sin, but he who was born of God keeps him, and the evil one does not touch him."

Here we encounter the obvious difficulty: the author seems to write both that a Christian does indeed sin and that a Christian cannot sin. The problem is compounded by the terminology used in 5:16-18 which distinguishes between "sin unto death" and "sin not unto

^1Unless otherwise indicated, Bible quotations are from the Revised Standard Version.
death." R. Bultmann considers that this passage actually destroys what he calls "the dialectical understanding of the Christian existence" (as he sees it presented in the epistle), and so he thinks he is justified in assigning this passage to a later redactor. 

As far as we know, the first Christian writer who gives evidence of sensing the difficulty of this dilemma was Tertullian. But it was St. Augustine almost two centuries later who put the matter in a pragmatic way:

For it is no slight question, how he saith in this epistle, "Whosoever is born of God, sinneth not," and how in the same epistle he hath said above, "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us." What shall the man do, who is pressed by both sayings out of the same epistle? If he shall confess himself a sinner, he fears lest it be said to him, then art thou not born of God; because it is written, "Whosoever is born of God, sinneth not." But if he shall say that he is just and that he hath no sin, he receives on the other side a blow from the same epistle, "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us." 

Since that time many scholars and theologians have had the same difficulty in understanding the meaning of

---


3 For a discussion of his views in this regard, see below, on p. 57.

4 St. Augustine, Ten Homilies on the First Epistle of St. John 5.1 (NPNF, 7:487). For the Augustinian solution to the problem, see below, p. 50.
the epistolary writer in this regard, especially when the
passages are studied contextually and compared with the
Christian experience as a whole. In an attempt to solve
the difficulty, many different suggestions have been
proposed. The majority of these proposals have been based
mainly on the following presuppositions: (1) The writer
did not regard his statements about sinlessness in the
passages quoted above as being incompatible with the
possibility and factuality of sin in the lives of his
readers. Though the propositions are contradictory, there
should be some kind of conciliation in the writer's
ideological world.¹ (2) One should not assume that the
author was so illogical that he could not see any con­
tradiction, especially in a short piece of writing like
this.² (3) Impeccability is not confirmed by Christian
experience and is generally denied on theoretical grounds
by many Christian theologians.³ Consequently, a large

¹R. Schnackenburg, Die Johannesbriefe, Herder
Theologischer Kommentar zum Neuen Testament, eds. A.
Wickenhauser and A. Vögtle, 2nd ed. (Freiburg: Herder,
1963), 13:285. Hereafter Schnackenburg's commentary on the
epistles will be cited as Schnackenburg, Johannesbriefe.

²R. E. Brown, The Epistles of John. Translation
with Introduction, Notes, and Commentary, Anchor Bible,
Hereafter Brown's commentary on the epistles will be cited as Brown, Epistles.

³Cf., for example, B. Warfield, Perfectionism, ed.
and enl. ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977), pp. 537-540;
H. K. LaRondelle, Perfection and Perfectionism, Andrews
University Monographs, Studies in Religion 3, 2nd ed.
number of solutions have been suggested in order to explain the existing contradiction or tension. These are discussed and examined in chapter 1.

**Objectives and Methodology**

The present study has six objectives in view. (1) First, the different suggestions for the solution of the apparent contradiction presented in 1 John are surveyed and evaluated. This is the content of chapter 1. The results of an exhaustive search of proposals assembled in four different approaches with several subdivisions are presented. (2) The historical background of the epistle is searched with the aim of clarifying the purpose of the document and the role and teaching of the opponents, so as to illuminate the historical context and the bearing it might have on the resolution of the problem. This appears in chapter 2. (3) An understanding of the literary structure of the epistle is provided with the purpose of establishing the interrelationship of the parts of the epistle as a basis for exegesis. This is the subject of chapter 3. (4) An investigation into the meaning of the Johannine terminology for sin, with a view to perceiving the meaning that it conveys in the document and its significance and contribution to the clarification of the problem under consideration, is treated next. This ground is covered in

chapter 4. (5) An exegesis of the three major passages (1:5-2:11; 2:28-3:10; 5:13-21) which contain the contradictory statements of the document is done in order to provide an exegetical basis for the understanding of the problem in light of the literary context. This is the subject of chapter 5, the major section of the present study. (6) Finally, and as a result of the preceding steps, the most suitable solution to the hamartiological problem of the epistle is attempted.

Limits of the Study

This investigation is circumscribed to the field of Biblical studies and does not attempt to deal with problems for systematic theology arising from the text. This limitation, however, does not mean a complete disregard for theological implications, but it is obvious that any substantial inclusion of theological considerations would take this investigation beyond its projected scope.
CHAPTER I

DESCRIPTION AND EVALUATION OF PROPOSED SOLUTIONS

Introduction

A general review of the copious literature written on the present subject reveals that many different and diverse solutions have been advanced in an attempt to solve or at least smooth the hamartiological difficulty of the epistle. In recent years Stott\(^1\) and Brown\(^2\) have enumerated seven different general approaches, Marshall has summed up the whole spectrum of solutions in four types,\(^3\) while others such as S. S. Smalley have tried to

\(^1\)J. R. W. Stott, *The Epistles of John, an Introduction and Commentary*, TNTC, vol. 19 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964), p. 130. His approaches, though not entitled this way, are as follows: (1) specific sins; (2) different conceptions of sin; (3) different natures in the believer; (4) ideal view; (5) relative realistic ideal; (6) willful and deliberate sin; (7) habitual sin. For a similar listing see also J. M. Boice, *The Epistles of John: An Expositional Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1979), pp. 107-109.

\(^2\)Brown, *Epistles*, pp. 413-415. His enumeration is as follows: (1) two different writers; (2) two different groups of adversaries; (3) specific kinds of sin; (4) special Christians; (5) habitual sin; (6) two different levels of thinking; (7) two different literary contexts.

\(^3\)I. H. Marshall, *The Epistles of John*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), p. 178. His grouping may be described as follows: (1) two types of Christians; (2)
condense the different views in three approaches. G. Segalla also summarized the various viewpoints under three subheadings. Following this possibility of arranging and grouping the many and varied solutions proposed thus far, I arrange them in four different approaches with the purpose of examining them as objectively as possible, and with a view to describing their positive value along with the objections that are usually raised against them.

The Redactional Approach

This redactional approach proposes the view that the epistle was written by at least two different writers. The original author wrote only a portion of the epistle that was later enlarged and augmented by a redactor. This additional material created the theological contradiction of the epistle and is said to be responsible for its internal conflicts. This approach to the problem was

particular type of sin; (3) habitual sin; (4) ideal view. Hereafter Marshall's commentary on the epistles will be cited as Marshall, Epistles.

1S. S. Smalley, 1, 2, 3 John, WBC, vol. 51 (Waco, TX: Word Books Publishers, 1984), p. 159. His three approaches are: (1) grammatical explanations; (2) theological explanations; (3) situational explanations.

2G. Segalla, "L'Impeccabilitá del Credente in I Giov. 2,29-3,10 alla Luce dell'Analisi Strutturale," RivistBib 29 (1981):331-341. He grouped the different solutions under the following subheadings: (1) The historico-critic solution; (2) The theological solution; (3) The solution of the structural analysis.
pioneered by the interesting studies of von Dobschütz.¹ These in turn were followed by the suggestions of H. Windisch² and the proposals of R. Bultmann,³ also supported by Preisker.⁴

As frequently happens with redactional theories, different views were held regarding what was the original source. Dobschütz was of the opinion that 2:28-3:12 was the original document, which the editor enlarged with additional material.⁵ Bultmann, on the contrary, later suggested that the original document was 1:1-2:27, or, at least, it was a first draft of it.⁶ For his part, Preisker postulated a second source to which the eschatological material of the epistle belonged.⁷

R. Bultmann has refined his theory in his book on the Johannine epistles. He recognizes that 3:7-9 belongs to the source and is not necessarily in contradiction with 1:8-10. He sees the solution in terms of "abiding" and the

⁵For an additional discussion of the redactional approach, see below, pp 139-144.
⁶Bultmann, Epistles, p. 2.
concept of "sinning" designated as anumìa. For him the real problem is introduced by 5:16-21, where, according to him, the dialectical understanding of the Christian existence, as presented by 1:5-10, is abandoned—an element which indicates the hand of a later redactor.¹ According to him, the conclusion of the letter is 5:13. Vss. 14-21 belong to a new redaction, since vs. 14 has no relationship with the preceding verse. Also these verses introduce some problems that are partly new and partly different from the rest of the letter, such as the limit imposed upon prayer and the distinction among sins, which show the hand of an ecclesiastical redactor. Moreover, he says that the style appears as non-Johannine, especially with the use of diánoia, ho alêthinós (vs. 20), and phuláxate heautá (vs. 21).² In respect to this, however, W. Nauck has shown that the situation of the Christian in the world and the author's position regarding sin are not seen in this pericope in a different way than in the rest of the document.³ Schnackenburg has also raised questions

¹See Bultmann, Epistles, pp. 86, 87.

²In this regard, see also R. Bultmann, "Die kirchliche Redaktion des ersten Johannesbriefes," in Exegetica (Tübingen: Mohr, 1967), pp. 381-391; this study was first published in W. Schmauck, In Memoriam Ernst Lohmeyer (Stuttgart: Evangelisches Verlag, 1951), pp. 189-201.

regarding the stylistic\(^1\) and theological modifications suggested by Bultmann which he considers to be risky, especially since those theological conceptions belong, without doubt, to the Johannine theology, that is, if the gospel is not subjected to the same treatment.\(^2\) At any rate, the easy solution suggested by this redactional hypothesis complicates the origin of 1 John since there is a re-elaboration of some parts of the document consisting of the author's elaborations of a first document, plus the additions of the ecclesiastical redactor. It is no wonder that a lack of confidence in that approach seems to prevail.\(^3\)

The redactional theory has been used to explain what has been considered as theological differences between the source and the editorial additions. It has been criticized as highly subjective when it decides what is authentically Johannine and what is not. Though the redactional theory is a possible way of explaining the two types of material existing in 1 John, it is not the only

\(^1\)In his commentary on the epistles (p. 23, n. 3), Bultmann seems to have set aside the stylistic criteria he had employed before, and now apparently relies more on the three-line antithetical parallelism to delimit the source. Some passages are no longer ascribed to the source, while more of 1 John is now attributed to the ecclesiastical redactor.

\(^2\)Schnackenburg, Johannesbriefe, p. 15.

one. It is, however, a tacit confession of the irreconcilability of the epistle's statements. It passes the problem on to the editor or ecclesiastical redactor.\(^1\)

**The Situational Approach**

Another way of explaining the theological tension of the epistle is by appealing to the Sitz im Leben of the document. This is a very important approach, since every explanation that takes the historical setting of a document into consideration deserves to be considered seriously. However, this approach emphasizes different aspects of the historical situation and may be subdivided into several views.

**Controversial Language**

The opinion of R. Law, who wrote a commentary on the First Epistle of John at the beginning of this century, stressed the controversial situation of the document. He believed that the most satisfactory explanation of the perplexing passages on sin in the epistle should be found in the obvious fact that it is written in view of a definite controversial situation and in a vehemently controversial strain, the absoluteness of its assertion being due to the fact that they are in reality unqualified contradictions of the tenets of unqualified falsity.\(^2\)


He saw the polemical element of the epistle explicitly stated in 3:7, "let no one deceive you." The false teaching, according to him, was "disseminating itself as a plague" and was promoted by those who pretended to be united with Christ without the necessity of doing righteousness. The writer replied to that with the strong assertion that "the very proof of any one's connection with Christ is his not sinning." Then the writer's language was not of "calm and measured statements, but of vehement polemic." It is unqualified language which is not theoretical but practical, "moulded by the exigencies of controversy." The actual case, however, is that the Christian, having to put off the old man, both can and does sin.

That there is an implicit controversy in the epistle is something that cannot be denied. But, besides the problem that it does not take away the contradiction,

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1This is identified with a type of Gnosticism which distinguished among material, physical, and spiritual men; Law, p. 226. Cf. also F. Hauck, Die Briefe des Jakobus, Petrus, Judas und Johannes (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1947), p. 136.

2Law, p. 225.

3Ibid.


this theory is based on the assumption that the heresy combatted in the epistle was a type of immoral Gnosticism such as that known from the writings of Irenaeus and Hippolytus, though the epistle does not furnish information that the opponents in 1 John were immoral. Moreover, it remains to be proved that the main emphasis of the epistle is polemical in order to warrant the explanation that controversy could blind the mind of the writer so as to ignore his contradictory language.

A similar—though slightly different—view is that held by H. C. Swandling. He contends that 3:6,9 are quotations of slogans taken from the opponents' claims and language which the writer of the epistle used for polemical purposes. He argues that without these verses, the passage appears perfectly orthodox. Not only does terminology such as \( \text{ginōskō}, \) \( \text{gennāō}, \) and \( \text{spērma} \) indicate a Gnostic environment, but the concept of sinless believer is foreign to Christian thought. So these verses were actual slogans used by the heretics which the writer quoted following "clearly recognizable techniques."

It is clearly to the detriment of this theory that there is not the slightest indication that our writer is

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1. See below, pp. 91-93.
3. Ibid., p. 208.
quoting any slogans in these verses. Quoting slogans without any indication is certainly very strange in a writer for whom even suppositions and conjectures are accompanied by expressions such as: "If any one says . . .," "He who says . . .," and "If we say . . . ."

Moreover, the weakness of the theory is also seen in 5:18, where we find precisely the same statement of 3:9, and, again, polemical purposes are totally out of view.

Two Different Groups of Adversaries

Also included in the situational approach is the suggestion that the author's statements were addressed to two different groups of adversaries. It is asserted that in 1:8-10 and 3:4-10, the author is writing from different points of view and confronting different problems. On the one hand, there were some who assumed that they were enlightened and therefore perfect in virtue. On the other, there was a different group of people who did not care whether they were virtuous or not, provided they were enlightened. The former were in view in 1:8-10, while the

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1Swandling's claim that the epistolary author frequently quotes his opponents (p. 207) is not clearly supported in the document. See below, pp. 89-105.

2It seems that Swandling detects this difficulty for his theory when he realizes that it would be valid only if it could also apply to 5:18 (p. 209). Certainly, the denial of the authenticity of the epilogue and its assignment to a redactor does not strengthen his position. In addition, his understanding of the textual variant "he keeps himself" raises more questions than it answers.
latter were attacked in 3:4-10. The writer was not thinking, at that moment, of those who were morally responsible, rather he was concentrating on establishing the fundamental difference between the children of God and the children of the devil.¹

The major problem with this view is that it is not perfectly clear that there were more than one group of opponents.² The recognition of two or more different sets of adversaries can hardly be deduced from the epistle itself.³

Two Types of Perfectionism

In the form that it is described here, this is the view of John Bogart. According to him, in the time


²I agree with J. Michl, Die katholischen Briefe, Regensburger Neues Testament, ed. O. Kuss, vol. 8, 2nd part (Regensburg: F. Pustet, 1968), pp. 252, 253, that there is a distinction between the paraenetical injunctions and the Christological discussions in the epistle (see below, pp. 147-154). But a differentiation among opponents' positions is not clear in the document.

epistle was written, there were two disparate types of perfectionism in the Johannine community. The heretical one, based on a thoroughly Gnostic theology and anthropology, was condemned in 1:8,10. The orthodox one, based on the Biblical view of God and man, was affirmed in 3:6,9. The author, then, confronted with the heretical position in his community, was forced or saw it convenient to introduce some modifications in his perfectionistic views which are reflected in his statements regarding the sinfulness of the Christian, the doctrine of Christ's expiation for sin, and a system of casuistry which distinguished between mortal and non-mortal sin. This weakened the orthodox perfectionism, so that in the long run, his community evolved a gradualist ethics and was brought into line with orthodox Christianity. This position also contends that the orthodox perfectionism was derived from the gospel of John which is said to contain a perfectionistic theology.

This view does not actually explain the contradiction of the epistle. It might account for the possible

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1See Bogart, pp. 143-145.

2This is also the view of R. E. Brown, The Community of the Beloved Disciple (New York: Paulist Press, 1979), pp. 106, 107, 123-127; see also idem, Epistles, pp. 71-86; idem, "The Relationship to the Fourth Gospel Shared by the Author of I John and by His Opponents," in Text and Interpretation, pp. 57-68, ed. E. Best and R. M. Wilson (Cambridge: University Press, 1979); Brown, however, sees both orthodox and heretical perfectionism derived from the gospel of John.
historical evolution of a given community, but fails to explain why the writer or later community redactors decided to keep the statements that reflected their previously held views even though they presented a conflict or contradiction. Besides, this opinion leaves us with the question whether it is demonstrable that the Johannine community was perfectionistic. One may also wonder whether that perfectionism could be derived from the gospel of John. Furthermore, it leaves us with the difficulty of how the writer would possibly have reconciled or merged orthodox perfectionism with gradualism.

The Grammatical Approach

Many commentators have found in the grammatical approach the most viable solution to the problem of impeccability and sinlessness in the epistle, since it provides an easy solution to this acute dilemma. It is argued that the present tense of the passages under consideration is the key to the understanding of the problem. The verbal aspect of the tense is stressed in order to show continued action. Accordingly, the sinlessness of the Christian is interpreted as referring to habitual sin and his impeccability as alluding to his continued orientation toward


2Ibid., p. 602.
The ruling principle of his life is opposition to sin. Consequently, those passages under discussion are translated: "No one who lives in him keeps on sinning" (3:6); "no one who is born of God will continue to sin . . . he cannot go on sinning" (3:9); "We know that any one born of God does not continue to sin" (5:18). This is, by far, the most common and frequent explanation among many writers, the usual interpretation among evangelical scholars, for many years the favorite of a number of scholars.

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of British authors,¹ and not uncommonly followed in a number of Greek grammars.² There are many other versions


and scholars that have followed a similar understanding.  

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It is unnecessary to say that this view is very attractive. It presents an easy solution to this acute problem with a certain degree of reasonableness. It is consistent with the NT understanding that the Christian does not live a sinful life, though through weakness he may fall into sin.\(^1\) It is true that there are some examples that can be quoted as emphasizing a distinction between the present tense and the aorist regarding the kind of action in view.\(^2\) It is also true that the main verbs in the passage under consideration are in the present tense: "Every one who commits sin [Gr. \(\text{pas ho poiôn tên hamartían}\)] is guilty of lawlessness [Gr. \(\text{tên anomían poieî}\)]" (3:4); "No one who abides in him sins [Gr. \(\text{pas ho en autô ménôn oux hamartáneî}\); no one who sins [Gr. \(\text{pas ho hamartánôn}\)] has either seen him or known him" (3:6); "No one born of God commits sin [Gr. \(\text{pas ho gegennēménos ek toû theoû hamartín ou poiêî}\) . . . ] and he cannot sin [Gr. \(\text{kal ou dûnatai hamartáneîn}\) because he is born of God" (3:9); "We know that any one born of God does not sin [Gr. \(\text{oux hamartáneî}\)]" (5:18). It is maintained that all this indicates a continuing action, so that the sin that the Christian does not commit is a habitual one;

\(^1\)See Marshall, Epistles, p. 180; Smalley, pp. 159.

\(^2\)See, for example, John 10:38: "That you may know [Gr. \(\text{gnôte}\)] and understand [Gr. \(\text{ginêskete}\)] that the Father is in me . . . "; also Heb 6:10: "For God is not so unjust as to overlook your work and the love which you showed for his sake in serving [Gr. \(\text{diakonêsantes}\)] the saints, as you still do [Gr. \(\text{diakonoûntes}\)."
he cannot continue to live a sinful life.

Another point in favor of this approach is the contrasting use of the aorist subjunctive in 2:1: "My little children, I am writing to you so that you may not sin [Gr. *hina mē hamartē*]; but if any one does sin [Gr. *kal eān tis hamartē*] . . . ." In this case, it is alleged that the use of the aorist indicates a particular kind of sin, an isolated act, which the Christian sometimes may commit, and for which the writer says there is solution and forgiveness. The main argument against this view, however, is the writer's inconsistency in his use of the present tense if continuous action is to be pressed. We have in 1:8: "If we say we have no sin [Gr. *hamartian ouk ēxomen*] . . . ," a statement in the present tense which is denied for the Christian existence in the same verse.¹ This objection can be softened if the expression "to have sin" is understood as meaning "to be guilty," a sense that some commentators attach to this expression on the basis of the Gospel of John.² Still, "guilt" is never dissociated from sin in the Biblical view, and the problem is only displaced to another position. In addition, criticism is raised due to the use of the perfect tense in 1:10: "If we say we have not sinned [Gr. *oux hemartēkamen*] . . . ," a tense that is said to continue to be true in the

¹See Dodd, p. 79.
²See below pp. 166-169.
present\textsuperscript{1} and which is denied also for the Christian. This, however, has not sufficient strength, since the perfect indicates results and not actions regarding the present. Also the reference of 5:16 to the brother who is seen "committing what is not a mortal sin [Gr. \textit{hamart\'anonta hamartian m\'e pr\'os th\'anaton}]," is a statement in the present tense, which is said to indicate continuous action. But this case cannot be alleged because the present refers rather to the action in process of being done and not to its continuity. So the main objection against this view is the inconsistency of the use of the present in 1:8. It is, then, doubtful that the readers could have grasped "so subtle a doctrine simply upon the basis of a precise distinction of tenses without further guidance."\textsuperscript{2}

Since it has been suggested that the present tense does not per sé include the idea of continuity of action\textsuperscript{3} --unless that idea is found either in the verbal root or in the context associated with it--\textsuperscript{4} some interpreters, without arguing from the verbal aspect of the present

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{1}Cf. Brown, \textit{Epistles}, pp. 414, 415.
  \item \textsuperscript{2}Dodd, p. 79.
  \item \textsuperscript{3}See M. Sánchez Ruipérez, \textit{Estructura del Sistema de Aspectos y Tiempos del Verbo Gr\'eico Antiguo}, Theses et Studia Philologica Salmanticensia \textit{7} (Salamanca: Colegio Triling\'ue de la Universidad, 1954), pp. 101-115.
\end{itemize}
tense, hold the habitual sense as the correct interpretation of these passages, basing their positions mainly in the concept of "abiding," the expression poiet hamartian and in the passage of John 8:34: "Every one who commits sin is a slave of sin."¹ So, looking for further

guidance, some have been led to support the habitual view more on the basis of the context that included terms and concepts which are associated with continuous action than on grammatical distinctions. One of those contextual elements that is said to support the habitual view is the expression ho poiōn tēn hamartían.\(^1\) This phrase is first encountered in John 8:34 where Jesus said: "Truly, truly, I say to you, every one who commits sin is a slave to sin." It is alleged that here the expression ho poiōn tēn hamartían indicates continued action, since "to be a slave" denotes a continuing state which should be the result of a continued action. The only other usage that has a bearing on this understanding is 1 John 3:8: "He who commits sin is of the devil; for the devil has sinned from the beginning." It is argued that since the devil has sinned from the beginning this indicates a sinful course of action, which is what he who sins also does.\(^2\) In

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\(^1\)This expression appears six times in the NT, three times in the Johannine literature (John 8:34; 1 John 3:4, 8), and also in 2 Cor 11:7; James 5:15, and 1 Pet 2:22. See also below, pp. 164, 165.

\(^2\)See Inman, pp. 141, 142; Dana, p. 195; Culler, p.
addition, there is an antithetic parallelism between ὁ ποιὸν τὸν ἁμαρτίαν and the phrase πᾶς ὁ ποιὸν τὸν δικαιοσύνην (2:29; 3:7,10). "To do righteousness" should mean "to practice righteousness," since it is not conceivable that any one who occasionally does right should be called "righteous as he is righteous" (3:7). Doing righteousness is the proper conduct of one who has been born of God, but doing sin is denied to him. Hence, "doing sin" must indicate a course of action as "doing righteousness" does. Moreover, the context also shows the persistent use of the verb μένω which, in itself, indicates continuity and which is opposed to sinning (3:6,9). Furthermore, there is the use of the perfect tense in relation to being born of God, which also stresses continuity (in the matter of result) from the past to the present, and which is presented in opposition to sinning as well (2:29; 3:9; 5:18). Finally, it has to be remembered that in chapter 1:6-2:6 there is an emphasis on "walking in light" versus "walking in darkness." This concept of "walking" has reference to a way of life, since, in the same context, sin in the Christian life is not denied.

It is evident that these arguments contain some elements of truth. But one is still left wondering whether this additional support is enough, especially if the whole

246; Galtier, p. 151; Harris, p. 355; Lowrie, pp. 110, 111; Macknight, p. 662; Patrick et al., p. 994; Shepherd, p. 347; G. Williams, p. 1013; Wordsworth, p. 115; etc.
argument is based upon that specific understanding of the text. It is not clear that the phrase ho poiēn tēn hamartían refers to the "practice of sin." A comparison between 3:6a and 9a shows that both statements are parallel. However, in 3:6a the regular verb hamartánei is used instead of hamartían ou poiei of vs. 9a, which might show that the latter is a synonym for the former. Moreover, John 8:34 does not necessarily speak of habitual sinning. The sin referred to is usually taken as alluding to an internal opposition to the will of God on the part of man. If this be true, it does not contemplate directly the practice of sin.¹ There is also the criticism that the habitual view weakens or destroys the argument of the author who is trying to oppose a false perfectionism and a heretical claim to sinlessness.² But this criticism depends on the assumption that these passages reflect a direct polemical situation, a view that is possible but not probable, according to the present study.³

In summary, the habitual view has to confront the inconsistency of the use of the present tense in the epistle; even the alleged contextual elements in support of it are not free from objections. It provides us,


³See below, pp. 80-105.
however, with an explanation of the problem which has a large following, though in my view it is doubtful that it represents a right understanding of the paradox of the epistle.

The Theological Approach

A majority of scholars have favored a theological approach to the problem of 1 John. This approach, however, has different ramifications and is capable of being studied from different viewpoints. For convenience, I have divided this approach into several subdivisions which, in some cases, have apparent interconnections among themselves.

Two Types of Christians

This opinion presupposes that in the writer's mind there are two types of Christians who correspond to two modes of divine begetting: Those who live up to their status as Christians and those who do not. The former are those who have a regenerated will and have developed the divine nature in themselves in such a way that they live above sin through a "superscience" and a supernaturally free gift; the latter are those who have not reached that point, but rather have carnal inclinations which lead them to fall into sin.¹ J. Bonsirven criticizes this theory as "excessive and tendentious," but retains its essential

¹Maximi Confessoris Quaestiones ad Thalassium 6 (PG, 90:279-282).
features when he says that the main difference among Christians comes from their moral dispositions, so that those who are truly children of God are those who purify themselves and partake of the divine nature; it is in the measure of this participation that they are impeccable. All Christians, according to him, have received at baptism the divine seed, but the majority have exterminated in themselves this principle and have committed grave sins; others have only opposed this principle which has resulted in committing light sins; very rare is the case of those who reach the plenitude of the Christian ideal of not sinning and behaving as truly born of God. In support of this, he quotes 1 Cor 2:6,13,15; 3:1,3, where Paul speaks of natural, carnal, and spiritual men.¹

This view has the advantage of considering the impeccability of the Christian as possible on the basis of both a divine element and a human endeavor. Evidences from the epistle can be cited in support of this. However, it has been objected to in that nowhere does the writer show that he has in mind a group of "superchristians." His language seems to be absolute and refers to what is true of everyone.² This is apparently revealed in the "everyone


who" idiom that is meant to include all Christians.\(^1\) Moreover, it is difficult to support that Paul, in speaking of "spiritual men" in 1 Cor 2 and 3, is thinking of sinless and impeccable Christians. He rather seems to be speaking of those who are able to understand spiritual things in opposition to those who are not. Impeccability is not the issue.

Two Different Standards for Sin

According to that opinion there might be two different standards for sin. The statement that the Christian cannot sin is due to the fact that sin in the believer is not so regarded by God. Though it is not put in this way, it amounts to saying that God uses a double standard of morality, one for believers and another for unbelievers.\(^2\) One might consider under this approach Zwingli's view that the Christian cannot sin in the sense that sin is not imputed to him. He states:

Those who understand and believe the mystery of the Gospel thus far are born of God: for blinded by human folly the mind cannot by itself attain to the deep counsel of divine grace. By this we learn that those who are born again of the Gospel do not sin: for 'whosoever is born of God sinneth not', and whosoever believes the Gospel is born of God. Hence it follows that those who are born again of the Gospel do not sin, that is, sin is not imputed to them to death and

\(^1\)Brown, Epistles, p. 415; see also Erdman, The General Epistles, p. 160; McClendon, p. 167.

\(^2\)See the comments on this view by Stott, p. 131; Boice, pp. 106, 107; Kotzé, p. 79; Patrick et al., p. 994.
perdition, for Christ has redeemed them at the price of his death.\(^1\)

It seems clear that Zwingli interpreted the expression "no one born of God commits sin" in the sense that the Christian is not a sinner, that is to say, he is not under condemnation of his sins because Christ died for him. He recognized that the Christian "cannot be entirely without sin." But he does not sin in the sense that Christ makes good his deficiencies.\(^2\) It is true that the epistolary author emphasizes the forgiveness of sin for the confessing and repenting Christian; it is also true that there is a contrasting opposition between the children of God and the children of the devil in the context. But the expression "no one born of God commits sin" can hardly have the meaning of "no one born of God has sins." This presents an emphasis which is not seen in the epistle. It is not imputation which is emphasized, but the act of sinning.

Two Different Natures in the Christian

The view that there are two different natures in the Christian proposes to understand the impeccability and sinfulness of the Christian in terms of a category mostly used by Paul. Although it is used as a single understanding of the problem of the epistle, it is frequently found


\(^2\)Ibid.
in combination with other views. It suggests that the writer has in mind the distinction between the "old man" and the "new man," by which he tries to show how utterly incompatible sin is with the life of the new man in the believer (Eph 4:22-24; Col 3:9,10; Rom 7:20; Gal 2:20). In the Christian there are two men, one begotten by God, the other by Adam. In essence, this view states that the new man cannot sin, and when the believer commits sin it is the work of the old man who does it. This "old nature" is gradually eradicated so that God's children labor under faults and sin daily. However, in his most inner nature he is in a decided opposition to it. The old man is


still active when the new man is already formed. The whole life of the Christian is a continual putting off of the old and putting on of the new man.\(^1\) Therefore, the sinning of the Christian is never a sinning in the full sense of the word; it is always an overpowering of his real personality by the might of evil, and hence only a sin of weakness.\(^2\)

It is undeniable that, according to the Biblical writers, the Christian possesses a dual nature which produces a conflict in his inner self. But it is doubtful that the writer means that in the present passage.\(^3\) The sharp contrast in this context is between the children of God and the children of the devil, not between two natures in the same person. That might be true in Paul's theology of sin, with which the writer has no quarrel, but it is not apparent in the Johannine writings. The nearest example of that idea in these writings is found in John 3:6: "That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that


\(^{3}\)Though it is true that the one born of God is said to have something from God dwelling in him (see 3:9).
which is born of the spirit is spirit." But even here, the meaning of "flesh" and "spirit" is different from Paul. In John, the emphasis is on the impossibility of man's power to attain the kingdom of God, not on the propensity of the "flesh" to sin.  

This view also has the weakness of distinguishing between a man and his deeds; it tends to separate man's nature from his person. This can be supported by neither the epistle nor by the Bible as a whole. Man's natures can be distinguished in their activities, but cannot be separated from his person.  

Community Perfectionism  

According to the view of community perfectionism, the sinlessness and impeccability of the Christian are understood in terms of the community: "The community in which the Spirit of God dwells can be said to possess perfection despite the transgressions of individuals."  


Essene community is seen as an example, since they saw their community as embodying the righteousness and perfection of God while enforcing an elaborate legislation on members who marred the holiness and purity of the community. Accordingly, the writer is not describing the spiritual condition of the individual but the condition of the community. This is indicated by the context which shows the contrast existing between the children of God and the children of the devil. The individual is said to be sinless because the community is holy and righteous. It is like Paul's practice of referring to his fellow Christians as "saints," which can be taken as a corporate designation.

And yet, this view does not do justice to the straightforward language of the epistle: "No one who abides in him sins . . . no one born of God commits sin . . . he cannot sin." To explain this as a corporate language of community perfection is unconvincing. Moreover, the suggestion that the writer was speaking of the individual when he recognized the sin of the Christian, and about the group when he spoke of sinlessness, confronts the difficulty that the author gives no hints of speaking to two such categories.

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1Ibid., pp. 42, 43.

2See Rom 1:7; 1 Cor 1:2; 2 Cor 1:2; Eph 1:1; Phil 1:1; Col 1:2; Phile 1:5.
Statements of Status

According to the idea of statement of status, mainly followed by modern commentators and related to other proposals—particularly to the previous one, the statements on status found in 3:1,2 provide the light for the understanding of 3:6,9: "See what love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are . . . Beloved, we are God's children now . . . ."

Since there is a freedom from sin attached to that state (3:9; 5:18), the writer is supposed to mean: "You really are God's children, and so you must do works worthy of God, and not sin which is the work of the devil." This does not mean complete absence of sin, because it says "it does not yet appear what we shall be." But, because of the transforming power of the divine seed in him, there is a growth in God's children which lasts until the final revelation, when "we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is" (3:2).

Though this view associates this passage with a polemical intention, it is clear that it contains

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2This view is not followed in the present study;
elements that cannot be rejected, such as the dualism of the children of God and the children of the devil, and the recognition of imperfection and growing of the Christian (3:2). As a whole, however, the proposal suffers from the same weakness as those suggestions that do not account for the categorical language of the passage: "No one born of God commits sin . . . he cannot sin . . . ."

Ethical Exhortation

The followers of the ethical exhortation view see the categorical statements "No one . . . commits sin . . . he cannot sin" as a moral exhortation that means "he ought not sin."¹

Though I have argued below that the passages under consideration belong to a paraenetic section,² 3:10 shows that the statements of impeccability intend to draw a distinction between the children of God and the children of the devil: "By this it may be seen who are the children of God, and who are the children of the devil: whoever


²See pp. 150-156.
does not do right is not of God, nor he who does not love his brother." He wants to establish a difference between them. The statements are, therefore, an argument and not an exhortation.¹ The writer is not simply urging his readers to become what they are not,² but stating the fundamental difference between them and the children of the devil.

Two Perspectives

The two perspectives view has some similarities with the previous one and is capable of several applications and developments. According to it, the statements on impeccability represent the ideal, while the pronouncements on sinfulness reflect the realistic,³ the pastoral dimension. When the writer was thinking in the gospel, he


²See, for example, J. L. Houlden, Review of Orthodox and Heretical Perfectionism in the Johannine Community as Evident in the First Epistle of John, by J. Bogart, in JTS 30 (1979):276, 277, who, in part, sees the statements as an aspiration on the part of the epistolary writer, as when somebody says: "'Boys of this school do not tell lies', meaning that 'they do, we wish they did not, and we urge them not to'"; see also idem, "Salvation Proclaimed II. I John 1:5-2:6: Belief and Growth," ExpTim 93 (1982):134; Bruce, p. 90 (held partially).

was able to write the former; when he was confronted with the facts of the Christian life, he wrote the latter.\(^1\) The epistolary author was writing from the ideal and eternal standpoint which, for him, is the real and actual.\(^2\) This motivated his idealistic statements of sinlessness and impeccability. It has been understood also "as the realization of the possibility given to the believer,"\(^3\) a possibility given to every believer which needs to be qualified.\(^4\) For some, this ideal that the writer is setting before his readers lies fully within their power; he is not talking about an impossible ideal.\(^5\) For others, it

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\(^1\) Houlden, Review, p. 276; see Barclay, Letters of John, pp. 95, 96 (as an alternative); Dodd, p. 80 (as a possibility).


\(^3\) Bultmann, Epistles, p. 52; Smalley, p. 172.

\(^4\) Marshall, Epistles, p. 182.

is something that will be wholly realized only in the world beyond.¹ 

The main problem with this interpretation is that it does not explain the straightforward language of the epistle. In simple verbs in the indicative mood it states a fact. Its language is realistic and its statements have the appearance of being categorical.² 

Another variation of this view is that which suggests that the contradictory statements of the epistle are due to the different nature of the passages under consideration. Chapter 1 is a kerygmatic passage where sin has an essential place as part of the promise of forgiveness in pastoral preaching. Chapter 3 has a theological and eschatological context with its contrast between the children of God and the children of the devil.³ However, the distinction between kerygmatic passages and eschatological ones is not discernible in the epistle.⁴


²Cf. Stott, pp. 132, 133; Burdick, p. 245; Smalley, p. 161.


⁴See below, pp. 148-154, where an attempt at a distinction between paraenetic and warning passages is made.
Moreover, the view does not explain why the writer did not see the contradiction. That might be the case in a long document written over an indefinite period of time, or different documents written under different circumstances. But it hardly seems possible in a short document like 1 John whose statements are separated only by a few paragraphs or verses.

Another view considers the problem as the opposition of two different viewpoints that originate in the confrontation of two different kinds of thoughts. Chapter 1 deals with the Gnostics' view (sinless despite sins), while chapter 3 focuses on the writer's point of view. The author is able to say that the Christian does not sin when he sees the difference between the children of God and the children of the devil. Those are two different worlds. In chapter 1 he sees the concrete situation of the individual, while in chapter 3 he refers to principles. The first one is a matter of fact; the second one is a matter of right. The former is historical; the latter, normative. The general objections mentioned above apply also to this view.

Eschatological and Dualistic Tension

Help has been looked for in the type of eschatology that Christianity inherited from Judaism. Neither the

OT nor the apocryphal writings provide clear examples of perfectionism like that of the epistle:¹ "No one who abides in him sins"; "No one born of God commits sin." The same thing can be said of the concepts of perfection among the Qumranians. For them perfection was a community endeavor, a legalistic effort rather than what seems to be an inner qualitative perfection in 1 John.²

However, it is in the dualism and eschatology of the apocalyptic literature where closer parallels have been found. It was believed that in the age to come the people of God should be sinless. We read in 1En 5:8:

And then wisdom shall be given to the elect. And they shall all live and not return again to sin, either by being wicked or through pride; but those who have wisdom shall be humble and not return again to sin.³

In Jub 5:12 we find: "And he made for all his works a new and righteous nature so that they might not sin in all their nature for ever, and so that they might all be

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¹The perfectionism of the epistle might be in line with OT concepts of covenantal and ritual purity (LaRon-delle, p. 234), but it is certainly different from the OT idea of perfection. Cf. Bogart, pp. 93-103. For a contrary view, see de la Potterie, "Impeccability," pp. 178-181; Kubo, pp. 48, 49.


righteous, each in his kind, always."\(^1\) 

And in his priesthood the nations shall be multiplied in knowledge on the earth, and they shall be illumined by the grace of the Lord, but Israel shall be diminished by her ignorance and darkened by her grief. In his priesthood sin shall cease and lawless men shall find rest in him.\(^2\)

It is argued that since it was the general assumption of primitive Christianity that the age to come had actually been inaugurated, the belief was natural that this concept was also fulfilled in the Christian church, and that the writer of 1 John, deeply influenced by popular eschatology, shared the belief that the Christian is sinless, at least by comparison with unbelievers.\(^3\)

There are serious doubts regarding the correctness of this view as a single explanation of the problem. To begin with, the quotations cited above are not completely clear as references to absolute perfection expected in the age to come. They rather seem to emphasize a kind of corporate sinlessness that is contraposed to community wickedness, and, as such, are in line with OT expectations regarding the perfection of God's people. The context of

\(^{1}\) Translation of O. S. Wintemute, in Charlesworth, 2:52-142.

\(^{2}\) Translation of H. C. Kee, in Charlesworth, 1:775-828.

1En 5:8,9 shows an antithetical description of the wicked and the elect. The former are accused of not being "long-suffering" and of having not done "the commandments of the Lord." They "have transgressed and spoken slanderously grave and harsh words" against God (vs. 4). They seem to be wicked members of the community, since they are differentiated from the "sinners": "And the sinners shall curse you continually--you together with the sinners" (vs. 6). To the "elect," on the contrary, "shall be light, joy, and peace, and they shall inherit the earth" (vs. 7). The kind of sin to which they will not return is wickedness, "pride." They, on the contrary, shall be humble; they shall not die through "plague or wrath," but rather complete the numbers of their days in peace, happiness, and gladness. All this suggests that neither sinlessness nor future rewards are absolute in this passage. Rather it shares the OT eschatology of the later prophets.

The passage of Jub 5:12 is very obscure. The context, however, speaks of the wicked antediluvians, descendants from the disobedient angels, who were wiped out from the earth by the word of God. Then comes the statement that God "made for all his works a new and righteous nature so that they might not sin . . . that they might all be righteous, each in his kind, always." This suggests that the reference is to the new generation of righteous men of whom Noah was the founder. If this is the case, as it seems, then there is no basis to take this
statement as a reference to sinless perfection. Again, community faithfulness as opposed to wickedness is rather the primary idea.

The same seems to be the case with TLevi 18:9, though the eschatological note is very strong. The last part of chap. 17 speaks about the last series of priests who will be "idolaters, adulterers, money lovers, arrogant, lawless, voluptuaries, pederasts, those who practice bestiality." The vengeance from the Lord will cause the priesthood to lapse, but then the Lord will raise up a new priest, who will bring peace, joy, gladness, knowledge of the Lord. He will be like a king and the glory of the Most High will be upon him. "In his priesthood sin shall cease and lawless men shall rest from their evil deeds, and righteous men shall find rest in him." He will open the gates of paradise and remove the sword that has threatened since Adam and will grant to the saints to eat of the tree of life. Beliar will be bound; his children will have the authority to trample on wicked spirits. All the saints shall be clothed in righteousness. It is clear that this is the closest example to an absolute sinlessness in the apocalyptic literature. But still, one is left wondering whether that is not rather a reference to a community perfectionism in contrast to a community which followed the corruption of previous high priests—a community which rejected the corruption of its days—and looked forward to a reign of peace and morality.
based on OT eschatology, but which lacks the reinterpretation of NT writers. It is not easy to see how the early Christians could have realized that the time of fulfillment had come, and then switched from a community conception of perfection to the apparently inner quality of impeccability alluded to in 1 John.

As a further development, one important element that needs to be taken into consideration is that the eschatological scheme of the apocalyptic literature, as well as that of the OT, is different from the scheme of the NT. In the NT a new element is introduced with Christ's ascension and the consequent delay of the parousia. With Christ's first coming, the kingdom of God has been established, Satan has been overthrown, judgment has already been issued, and the believer has passed from death to life. And yet the believer still has to fight against the forces of evil, the kingdom is not visibly established, and the Christian has to face a temporal death. The believer lives between the "times," between the

Cf. also PssSol 17:32-36, which speaks about the king, "the Son of David," who "will have the gentile nations serving him under his yoke; and he will glorify the Lord in (a place) prominent (above) the whole earth; and he will purge Jerusalem, (and make it) holy as it was even from the beginning, (for) nations to come from the end of the earth to see his glory; . . . He will be a righteous king . . . There will be no unrighteousness among them in his days, for all shall be holy and their king shall be the Lord Messiah" (translation of R. B. Wright, in Charlesworth, 2: 651-670). Here, again, it is difficult to escape the impression of a community righteousness over against the wickedness and depravity of a corrupt society.
"already" and the "not yet." This reinterpretation of the OT eschatological scheme has led some scholars to suggest that a realized eschatology is the clue to the hamartiological problems of 1 John. This means that the Christian is expected not to sin, but since he still lives in this sinful world, he in fact sins. As there is a tension in the eschatological scheme between the "already" and the "not yet," so it is with the Christian. He is no longer under the dominion of sin, but still sins. Sin is an accident in his life. He is a kind of child of two worlds. The line of demarcation of these two worlds passes through him. So he is said to sin, and not to sin.1

Undoubtedly, there is truth in this approach. It is widely recognized that the Johannine writings envisage this eschatological tension in their theological framework.2 But does that mean that this is the more appropriate solution to the problem under consideration?


It is true that in the epistle the Christian is said to sin and not to sin. But what does it mean that "he cannot sin"? The categorical language of the epistle is not easy to explain in this way. It seems that additional elements are necessary to account for the apparently unqualified language of the epistle.

The Concept of "Abiding"

The proponents of the concept of "abiding" see in the abundant use of the verb μένω in the epistle the clue to the understanding of the problem. This view goes back to St. Augustine who established in the West a line of interpretation that was characteristic of the Greek patristic tradition. It understands the sinlessness and impeccability of the Christian as being conditional on the part of man but unconditional on the part of God. That is to say, the Christian remains sinless as long as he abides in Christ: "No one who abides in him sins" (3:6a). It was in this regard that St. Augustine coined his famous phrase: "In quantum in ipso manet, in tantum non peccat."¹ This solution was also followed by Jerome, and

¹See Augustine Ten Homilies on the First Epistle of St. John 4.8 (NPNF, first series, 7:485; idem, A Treatise concerning the Correction of the Donatists 9.40 (NPNF, first series, 7:647; idem, On Man's Perfection in Righteousness 18 (NPNF, first series, 5:173); idem, Sermon on Selected Lessons of the New Testament 93.2 (NPNF, first series, 6:536); idem, A Treatise on the Merits, Forgiveness of Sins and the Baptism of Infants 2.10 (NPNF, first series, 5:48); idem, T: Consentius: Against Lying 40 (NPNF, first series, 3:500); idem, Against Two Letters of the Pelagians 3.4 (NPNF, first series, 5:403).
later repeated by the Venerable Bede.\(^1\) It is the only view that is based on an explicit statement made in the immediate context and in relation to the problem of the epistle. It has, naturally, been followed by many old and modern commentators, who have seen in it the most valuable and profitable approach to encounter the difficulty presented by the epistle. The approach has been used either as a single solution\(^2\) or as a primary element in

\(^1\)Jerome Against the Pelagians 1.13 (NPNF, second series, 6:454); idem, Against Jovinianus 2.1.2 (NPNF, second series, 6:388); Bede In Primam Epistolam S. Joannis 3 (PL, 93:100D); Martinus Legionensis Expositio Epistolae I. B. Joannis (PL, 209: 270B). It was probably supported also by M. Luther Lectures on Hebrews 10.26 (LCC, 16:200), who called it "a state of grace."

combination with other approaches and viewpoints already discussed.¹

A similar view is held by Balz, who sees the solution in terms of possibility. According to him, this possibility of living in opposition to sin comes from God; it is a gift of God. Not to sin is a possibility that man does not have in himself, but only in God.²

A variation of this view emphasizes the statement that says that "God's nature abides in him" (3:9b). It has been noted that the verb menō is used not only hortatorily, in the sense that the Christian should abide in


God, but also as indicating that something of God abides in him who is born of God. Sinlessness is not only related to the former but also to the latter. The "imperative" is associated with the "indicative." The dilemma of 1 John is resolved, then, by remembering that this divine principle that abides in the Christian and enables him to live sinlessly does not act magically; it requires the free cooperation of man, and this can fail.\(^1\) This is essentially the view of the Greek patristic interpretation which saw the seed of God as an internal force by which the one born of God ceased to be oriented toward sin, and became incapable of sinning.\(^2\)

This concept of "abiding" as a hermeneutical clue is also combined with the "eschatological view." Accordingly, the perfection that is not possible now, because of the fact that the Christian still lives in this imperfect world, will be perfectly realized in the world to come. However, the Christian can now enjoy impeccability and conquer sin provided he remains united to Christ and lets the word of God operate within him.\(^3\)


\(^2\)See Maximi Confessoris Quaestiones ad Thalassium 6 (PG, 90:280); Photius Ad Amphilochnium 8 (PG, 101:112); Dydimus Alexandrinus Enarratio in Epistolam I. S. Joannis 3.9 (PG, 39: 1791); Oecumenius Commentaire in Epistolam I. Joannis 7 (PG, 119:683).

\(^3\)De la Potterie, "Impeccability," p. 195; cf. N. Lazure, Les Valeurs Morales de la Théologie Johannique
In addition, another element has been introduced which combines this approach with the habitual view. Taking the Johannine dualism that distinguishes between "light" and "darkness," between the children of God and the children of the devil, and assuming that the line of demarcation passes across each Christian so that each moral act is a personal decision in favor of one or the other, an explanation is advanced through a category not found in the Johannine writings but which is said to be implicit in the scheme presented there. Not all the acts of the Christian affect the center of his person to the same degree. Therefore it is decisive on which side of the demarcation man puts his personal center, his "heart," in Biblical terminology. The Christian is basically in communion with God, and though he commits some sins he continues to find purification in the redeeming blood of Jesus. If, on the contrary, the center of his person is set on the side of the "world," even though he occasionally performs morally good acts, he is in the realm of the devil. In this way, he who abides in Christ may sin accidentally but not essentially, occasionally but not habitually.¹

Two main objections have been raised against this

¹Casabó, p. 412.
view. The first is regarding the expression of 3:9: "No one born of God commits sin," which is parallel to 3:6: "No one who abides in him sins." "Abiding" can be conditional; but can "being begotten," as a reference to a past experience, be conditional? The second one has to do with the expression of 3:6: "has not seen him or known him." Can this be said of the Christian? These objections, however, are not unsurmountable. The expression "to be born of" comes always from the perfect tense (3:9; 4:7; 5:18), which indicates a continuing result in the present. Considered this way, the author does not refer to the begetting from God as something only of the past, but rather as something that is always kept and maintained alive. Regarding the second objection, it can be answered by giving to the verbs "see" and "know" a metaphorical meaning, and interpreting them as, "no one who sins has truly had communion with him." There is some evidence in the epistle that to "see" and "know" God are the result of abiding in him (4:7,12). If this is the case, seeing and knowing might refer to a process and not to a single act of the past. Besides that, this expression comes also from

1Cf. Stott, p. 134.

2See Law, p. 224.

3With the possible exception of 5:18b where it is ambiguous whether the aorist refers to the Christian or to Christ. See below, pp. 266, 267.

4See below, p. 237.
perfect tenses which strengthens this possibility.

As a whole, this approach provides a coherent way of explaining the difficulty of the epistle, especially if it is combined with other approaches that explain why a Christian fails to abide continuously in Christ, and for that reason falls into sin. It has the advantage of using an explicit statement from the immediate context as the basis of its explanation, which is also a pervading theme in the whole epistle. However, as we shall note later, it is not comprehensive enough to cover other aspects of the problem.

Specific Sins

Some commentators believe that the writer was focusing on some particular sins when he said Christians do not or cannot sin. From the time of St. Augustine,¹ it has been suggested that since there is a frequent emphasis on love in the epistle, then the particular sin in the writer's mind would be to sin against love. It is stated in the epistle that "he who loves is born of God and knows God" (4:7); "he who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him" (4:16). There is an intrinsic relation between being born of God, abiding in him, and love. This could explain why the epistolary writer could see the violation of love as a negation of being born of God and

¹Augustine Ten Homilies 5.1,2 (NPNF, first series, 7:488); idem, A Treatise on the Grace of Christ, and on Original Sin 1.22 (NPNF, first series, 5:225).
abiding in him.\(^1\) But, in view of the statements of sinlessness in the epistle, that does not mean that violation of love is the only sin. In the context, the violation of love is only one problem in the broad issue of doing righteousness (2:29; 3:10). The strong language of the writer is not met by this partial statement. Besides, in the epistle there is continued exhortation to love one another, which has no use if the Christian cannot violate it.

There are other suggestions regarding particular sins such as: "impurity" or "adultercy";\(^2\) "deliberate" or "willful sin," based on OT distinctions between deliberate and undeliberate sin;\(^3\) "defiant lawlessness,"\(^4\) sinning

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\(^2\)See Belser, p. 78.


"totally and finally";¹ etc. Some have objected that there is nothing in the context of chap. 3 to support these distinctions.² Moreover, it is difficult to distinguish between voluntary and involuntary transgressions. It is also an inadequate solution since even saintly people committed deliberate sins (David, Peter).³

One view, however, that deserves careful consideration is that which suggests that the specific sin alluded to is the "sin unto death" of 5:16,17. Though it has been rephrased and reformulated, this view actually goes back to Tertullian. In a passage in which he argues that adultery and fornication are irremissible sins, he connects 3:9 with 5:16-18 and concludes that the statement "no one born of God commits sin" means "every one who hath been born of God sinneth not . . . the sin which is unto death."⁴ For Tertullian, "sin unto death" is a grave and destructive one which is incapable of pardon, such as murder, idolatry, fraud, apostasy, blasphemy, adultery and

²So Brown, Epistles, p. 415; Marshall, Epistles, p. 179.
³Marshall, Epistles, p. 179; Stott, p. 134.
⁴Tertullian On Modesty 19 (ANF, 4:97). As far as we know, Tertullian was the first to try to explain the contradiction of 1 John by appealing to the difference between "sin unto death" and "sin not unto death." Cf. A. Hilgenfeld, Das Evangelium und die Briefe Johannis (Halle: Schwetschke und Sohn, 1849), p. 339, who made the same correlation.
fornication. According to his argument, these are the sins that the one who is born of God does not commit. He says that when John admits and then denies that the child of God sins he was looking forward to the end of his letter where he would clarify his meaning.¹

In principle, this suggestion is very attractive, but as formulated by Tertullian in relation to a list of irremissible sins is subject to criticism, since nowhere does the writer indicate that he has that in mind.² Nevertheless, it is possible to identify the "sin unto death" with something that fits the grammatical and historical context of the epistle. Many writers have supported the idea that the "sin unto death" is the sin of unbelief or rejection of Christ, which is a major theme in the Johannine writings.³ This in turn has been connected with 3:6,9 and 5:18, with the result that the impec­cability of the Christian is seen in terms of the rejection of Christ. He who has been born of God cannot deny and reject Christ. De la Potterie has provided evidence that shows that the concept of anomía in 3:4 may be under-

¹This point is denied by Marshall (p. 179), who argues that it is unlikely that the readers of the epistle could be expected to anticipate the distinction made regarding "sin unto death" and "sin not unto death" at the end of the epistle. See, on the contrary, H. K. LaRon­delle, p. 236.

²See Brown, Epistles, p. 415; Marshall, Epistles, p. 179; Schnackenburg, Johannesbriefe, p. 284.

³See below the discussion of this subject, pp. 254-261.
stood in terms of the eschatological hostility against God. Others have connected this understanding with the impeccability alluded to as well as with the concept of the "sin unto death." The net result is the suggestion that the Christian does not commit the sin of anomía, the eschatological rebellion against God, a concept that implies hatred against Christ and his followers. The one who is born of God cannot reject Christ and join the ranks of the devil. He cannot commit apostasy from Christ. The "sin unto death" is the sin of unbelievers, not of believers. This, accordingly, explains the categorical statements that the one who is born of God "does not sin" and "cannot sin." It fits the Sitz im Leben of the epistle, since there are in it warnings against those who are called "antichrists" and "false prophets," who deny that Christ has come in the flesh.

But the view has some difficulties derived from the epistle itself. It has an underlying deterministic principle which is not wholly in harmony with the general tenor of the epistle. If the believer cannot commit the "sin unto death," and there is a ready solution for other


sins committed, what is the use of the constant admonitions and exhortations found in the epistle? Moreover, the antichrists and false prophets are said to have belonged, at least, to a Christian community, which shows that they might have been believers before (2:19). Of course, in this case, the writer hurries to add that the fact they left shows that they were not genuine members of the community. This indicates that the writer has taken into consideration other factors, different from external profession, which reveal who is a believer and who is not. This boils down to a permanent confession of Jesus Christ as come in the flesh. If a member of the community falls grossly and abandons Christ, he has passed from life to death and becomes a member of the family of the devil. But that is still his fault. Nobody is said to be predestined to be a son of the devil. And yet, the problem remains. It is at this point that a more comprehensive approach seems to be necessary.

**Summary**

After reviewing the main approaches and viewpoints advanced as attempts to explain the tension found in the epistle, we have reached the conclusion that none of them is completely satisfactory. Weaknesses and incongruities of many kinds can be detected in them. However, a multiple approach that takes up the strong points of several of the

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best proposals seems to be an adequate solution to the problem of sinlessness and impeccability of the epistle. This is presented in chapter 5 in connection with the exegesis of the passages under consideration.
CHAPTER II

THE BACKGROUND OF THE EPISTLE

The present chapter has the purpose of seeing in what ways, if any, the historical situation of the writing of the epistle is related to the problem of impeccability. As we have seen in chapter 1, several of the proposed solutions appeal to the historical situation of the community as a clue to the elucidation of the problem. So, it is mandatory to analyse it and see if the usual reconstruction of several items, frequently considered as introductory matters in the study of the document, can be substantiated by the evidence provided by the document itself. Moreover, since this study is mainly exegetical in nature, it is always indispensable to search the background of a given document as a supporting task in any hermeneutical endeavor.

Occasion and Purpose

The First Epistle of John is one of the most intriguing documents of the New Testament. It is usually called an epistle, but lacks the common stylistic features of a first-century letter. There is no mention of the person who wrote it, nor the persons to whom it was
written. It does not have either an epistolary introduction or a conclusion. Yet, it has all the signs of being addressed to a specific situation in a community well-known to the writer. That is the reason some would prefer to call it "a sermon," "a pastoral address," "a manifesto," "tractate," or "encyclical," etc.

In contrast, 2 and 3 John are personal letters. In both, the writer and the addressees are mentioned (2 John 1; 3 John 1), and their introduction and conclusion are typical of first-century correspondence. There is, however, a growing consensus of opinion in New Testament scholarship today that the three documents, at least, emanate from a common school or community. Though addressed to different circumstances, the documents seem to have the same general background.

The epistles, especially 1 and 2 John, reflect a polemical condition in the community. Some ex-members of

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2So Marshall, Epistles, p. 14; Houlden, Epistles, p. 14; see Brown's (Epistles, p. 90) refusal to offer a new name.


4Though under the title "elder," obviously a well-known figure in the community.

5See Brown, Epistles, p. 19; Marshall, Epistles, p. 31; Brooke, pp. lxxiii-lxxix; Dodd, p. lxvi; Schnackenburg, Johannesbriefe, p. 297; Houlden, Epistles, p. 1.
the church (2:19)\(^1\) were posing a threat to the members of the community and were considered as "antichrists" (2:18) by the writer. The expression "they went out from us" (2:19) is usually taken as referring to the writer's own church or community, so that the community was experiencing an acute crisis.\(^2\) But the statement could very well mean only that they had gone out from Christianity, and were causing problems to the author's community\(^3\) in trying to lead the members astray (2:26; 3:7; 2 John 7-10). In view of this danger, the writer was led to warn his fellow Christians against them, giving to the epistle its obvious apologetical and polemical tone.\(^4\)

This polemical motif is developed by the writer in various ways. Besides the passage of 2:18,19, where he speaks of those who had gone out as antichrists, he expressly says that they are liars who deny that Jesus is the Christ (2:22; 5:1). They are false prophets who do not acknowledge that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh (4:2; ...

\(^1\)When the epistle is not specified in the reference, 1 John is meant.


\(^4\)This emphasis is stressed by Law, p. 25; Bogart, p. 136; etc.
2 John 7). He warns his readers against those who do not acknowledge Jesus as the Son of God (2:23,24). There are positive affirmations that show that the writer never lost sight of the polemical issue even when he was giving pastoral advice to his members (4:15; 5:5,10,13). He said that one of his purposes in writing was to alert them regarding "those who would deceive you" (actually "are deceiving you"; 2:26). He advises them to test every spirit "to see whether they are of God" (4:1). When this is considered, however, we should be conscious of the danger of exaggerating the extent of the writer's polemical intention by resorting to the practice of "hunting down local heretics in every verse." The real purpose of the epistle goes beyond its polemical tone. There is sufficient evidence to show that the writer's primary intention was to reassure and strengthen his readers in the faith and doctrine they had accepted. In 5:13 we see this clearly: "I write this to

1Besides the specific polemical references cited above, there are a number of other references which are commonly taken as implicit polemical intentions on the part of the writer. We endeavor to show later that most of them are not primarily polemical, but rather paraenetical in nature, and that they show the pastoral concern on the part of the writer for his community members.


3See Lücke, pp. 60, 61; Stott, p. 41; Brown, Epistles, p. 47; Brooke, pp. xxvii-xxx; N. Alexander, p. 28; Lias, pp. 3, 4; Martin, p. 369; F. T. Gloag,
you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life." The similarity and contrast with the stated aim of the gospel of John can hardly be missed: "But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in his name" (John 20:31). The gospel was written for those who did not believe; the epistle for those who already believed. The gospel, at least in this verse, promised eternal life for its readers; the epistle assures its readers that they already have it. The activities of the false teachers form the background, but the writer's first concern is to establish them in the faith.

Several additional specific evidences clarify this intention. In the prologue, the writer stated, "We are writing this that our joy may be complete" (1:4). This joy is defined in terms of "fellowship" with one another and with the Father and the Son (vs. 3). In 2:1 the author said: "I am writing this to you so that you may not sin." Avoiding sin is seen in terms of recognition and confession, which brings pardon and purification from sin.


1Also a well-known feature of the gospel.
The writer evidently thought that these elements would enable his fellow Christians to avoid sin. In 2:21, the author's purpose is put in negative form: "I write to you, not because you do not know the truth, but because you know it, and know that no lie is of the truth." He has stated before, "you all know" (vs. 20). He wanted to assure his readers that they possessed the truth.

Again in 2:26 he stated, "I write this to you about those who would deceive you." The matter at stake was teaching, false teaching. He reminded his readers of his belief that they did not need anyone to teach them, because God's anointing had taught them what they needed (vs. 27). Westcott's understanding is right: "St. John's method is to confute error by the exposition of the truth realized in the life. His object is polemical only in so far as the clear unfolding of the essence of right teaching necessarily shews all error in its real character."

In addition to these explicit statements of purpose, the writer shows his concern for the edification of his children in implicit and different ways. On nine occasions he introduces elements of assurance by the expression "In this we know." As Brooke has indicated, these are "tests by which the readers may assure themselves about the truth of their Christian position."  

1Westcott, p. xxxix.

2See 2:3,5; 3:16,19,24; 4:2,6,13; 5:2.

3Brooke, p. xxviii.
Moreover, as is generally known, there is a strong emphasis on love in the epistle. Eighteen times the noun agape is mentioned, and twenty times the verb root. It is possible to see in this emphasis an allusion or attack upon the opponents of the Johannine community for their presumption and lack of love. Their act of abandoning the community could be seen as a lack of love for its members. However, the love motif in most cases can be better understood as the desire of the writer to see a better love relationship among the members of his community who either have been influenced by the theological position of the false prophets to the point of diminishing their love for each other, or have simply allowed their mutual love to get dim. Statements such as, "Do not love the world or the things of the world. If any one loves the world, love for the father is not in him" (2:15); "If any one has the world's goods and sees his brother in need yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him? (3:17); "Let us not love in word or speech but in deed and in truth" (3:18); "Beloved, let us love one another" (4:17); "Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another" (4:11) point to a problem. It would seem as though the community was experiencing a diminution in

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2 See below, p. 104, 105.
the standard of love held by the writer. Brooke's suggestion that, for this second generation of Christians, the "enthusiasm of the early days of faith is no longer theirs," and that "their Christianity had become largely traditional, half-hearted and nominal," fits well with this emphasis on love.

There is also a strong emphasis on obedience and on keeping God's commands. Fifteen times the word entolē is used in the epistle (plus fourteen times in 2 John), and the verbs terēō and poiēō, in reference to obedience, are used six and ten times, respectively. As is the case with the emphasis on love, this emphasis on obedience can be seen also in opposition to a supposed antinomianism and immorality on the part of the false teachers. The only two specific commands that the author mentioned (actually presented as one) are "to believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ, and to love one another" (3:23). The first

1Brooke, p. xxviii.

2The verb peripatēō is used several times in the epistle with the sense of obedience (1:6,7; 2:6,11); see also 2 John 4,6, where that verb is coupled with entolē. Cf. also 3 John 3,4; John 8:12; 12:35. This figurative sense of the verb is especially common in Paul (Eph 4:1; Col 1:10; 1 Thess 2:12; 2 Thess 4:12; etc.). Some have seen it as a Semitism, after the Heb. halak, but it is found among Greek writers; see W. Bauer, A Greek English Lexicon of the New Testament, p. 649.

3See below, pp. 91, 93.

4The writer seems to presuppose that the entire Christian message is the commandment of God; see 2:7.
one is clearly considered violated by the opponents.\textsuperscript{1} Regarding the second one, we have seen above that it probably refers to the community members who were not showing love to their fellow Christians. So, injunctions to obedience and keeping the commandments of God do not really have to do with antinomianism and licentiousness, but with the writer's concern and desire to strengthen the spirituality of his community. Again, Brooke's suggestion that the members of the author's community "found the moral obligations of their religion oppressive" seems to be correct.\textsuperscript{2}

Another emphasis in the epistle that illustrates the writer's pastoral concern is his stress on sin. Though this subject is discussed at length in chapters 4 and 5 of the present study, it is useful to mention here its relationship to the writer's primary purpose. The verb \textit{hamartānō} is used eight times in the epistle, and the corresponding noun \textit{hamartīa} fourteen times. This shows the importance of the subject for the writer. Since this has also been associated with the opponents, it has been concluded that they advocated a sinful behavior or were proponents of a certain type of perfectionism, or even ascetism. We try to show later that neither conception does justice to the intention of the writer. He tries to

\textsuperscript{1}See below, p. 81-89.

\textsuperscript{2}Brooke, p. xxviii.
elevate the spiritual condition of his fellow Christians, so that it might be in harmony with their profession (1:6-10; 2:1-6). At the same time, however, he tries to avoid the misunderstanding that this elevation means sinlessness. This is the reason he emphasizes confession, forgiveness, and the intercession of Christ who is an advocate with the Father (1:9; 2:1). They needed to be reminded that Christ is "the expiation for our sins" (2:2), and that "he appeared to take away sins" (3:5), and that "God . . . sent his Son to be the expiation for our sins" (4:10). They were in need of living up to the Christian standard, but were also reminded that there was a solution in the event of sin. In this way the writer shows his intention of exhortation and edification and indicates where his primary purpose lies.

Also an element that helps to clarify his pastoral concern is seen in the writer's urgent eschatological note: "The darkness is passing away and the true light is already shining" (2:8); "Dear children, it is the last hour" (2:18). He knows it is the last hour because "many antichrists have come" (2:18). The Second Coming is brought forth as an incentive for right living: "Abide in him so that when he appears we may have confidence and not shrink in shame before him at his coming" (2:28). He gives confidence to his readers when he says: "We know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is" (3:2).
Finally, the theme of eternal life is also important in this regard. As in the gospel of John,\(^1\) eternal life is already a present reality for the believer: "God gave us eternal life, and this life is in his Son" (5:11); "I write this to you . . . that you may know that you have eternal life" (5:13); "He who has the Son has life . . . ." (5:12; cf. 1:2). This life, however, is also a promise, " . . . this is what he promised us, eternal life" (2:25). The day of judgment might bring fear to some, but those who are characterized by love "have confidence for the day of judgment" (4:17). All this seems to indicate that, though a polemical motif exists, it is kept in the background, while the primary intention of the writer is to give assurance and comfort.

**Nature and Character of the Opponents**

As we saw above, there exists in 1 John a polemical element that we need to take into consideration. Two extreme views have been held in this regard. On one hand, the polemical character of the epistle has been considered the main and primary motivation to the point of asserting that the influence of controversial language "is traceable in almost every sentence."\(^2\) On the other hand, its polemical element has been played down and considered only a rhetorical opposition common to close-knit oral societies.

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\(^1\) See 3:16,36; etc.

where breaks in the communities, even though described as serious, have no permanency.¹

We prefer the middle ground. The polemical element is the background of the epistle, but it is necessary to exercise caution to avoid the danger of attributing to opponents something that the writer intended for Christians only as warning and advice, without any specific polemical purpose.²

Heretics in the New Testament

The Johannine epistles are not the only New Testament documents with a polemical tone. The letters to the Corinthians, Colossians, the Pastoral epistles, the seven letters of the book of Revelation, 2 Peter, and Jude all condemned heretical positions held in the early Christian church. The teachings condemned in those writings bear some similarities with those of 1 and 2 John.

The opponents of Paul in Corinth could have connections with later heresies. Some of them apparently denied the future resurrection (1 Cor 15), were indifferent to cases of immorality (1 Cor 6), and tended to emphasize spiritual illumination (1 Cor 12-14).³ The

¹Perkins, pp. xxi-xxiii.
²Marshall, Epistles, p. 15.
³Paul's opponents in Corinth have also been considered from different viewpoints. For a discussion of the different views see G. Friedrich, "Die Gegner des Paulus im 2. Korintherbrief," in Abraham unser Vater, eds. O. Betz, M. Hengel, and P. Schmidt (Leiden: E. J. Brill,
Colossian heresy had some Christological implications since Paul stressed a high Christology in opposing it (cf. 1:15-20; 2:8-10). The heretical view also involved worship of angels, philosophical speculations, and exclusivism mixed with Jewish elements.  

Although there is a variety of opinion regarding the identification of the heresy, a Jewish-Gnostic syncretism seems to fit the Colossian picture.

In the Pastoral Epistles we read of those who, desiring to be teachers, have wandered away into meaningless talk (1 Tim 1:6,7); there are also those who forbid people to marry and partake of certain foods (1 Tim 4:1-3).
3), and those whose teachings accord with Jewish speculations and myths (Titus 1:14). There is also the reference to "contradictions of what is falsely called knowledge" (1 Tim 6:20).

The letters to the churches in the book of Revelation also condemned some heretics\(^1\) who were at least geographically related to the Johannine epistles,\(^2\) and with respect to whom some commentators have found certain similarities to the opponents of 1 John. In the letters to Ephesus and Pergamum (Rev 2:6,14,15), we read of those who held to the teaching and practices of the Nicolaitans\(^3\) and


\(^3\)By the time of Irenaeus Against Heresies 3.11.1 (ANF, 1:426), the Nicolaitans were considered to be Gnostic. See also Hippolytus The Refutation of All Heresies 7.24 (ANF, 5:115). Also our discussion below, p. 119.
to the teaching of Balaam regarding eating food sacrificed to idols and the practice of sexual immorality. In the letter to Thyatira a woman called Jezebel, who called herself a prophetess, was also condemned for holding the same practices (Rev 2:20-23).

According to 2 Peter, false prophets were among the people of its day, and the author envisioned the time when false teachers would arise among the Christians. He said that "they will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them" (2 Pet 2:1).¹

Jude spoke of certain men who had "secretly slipped in among you." He refers to those who were "godless men, who change the grace of our God into license for immorality and deny Jesus Christ our Sovereign and Lord" (Jude 4 NIV). "They defile the flesh, reject authority, and revile the glorious ones" (vs. 8).²


²Different views have also been held regarding the heretics mentioned in Jude. For a discussion of the problem, see Guthrie, p. 912; C. Bigg, A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistles of St. Peter and St. Jude, ICC (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1901), p. 312.
The apostle Paul in his farewell discourse before the elders of the Ephesian church warned about those who, after his death, "will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them" (Acts 20:30).

It is clear that none of the groups characterized above are identical with the "false prophets" of the Johannine epistles. They do, however, present us with the information that even in New Testament times there were heretics of various kinds that held strange speculations and produced internal conflicts in Christian communities.

Number and Provenance of Opponents

Johannine scholarship today generally holds the view that there was a well-defined group of opponents,¹ which included some teachers and prophets who separated themselves from the community and formed, perhaps, a group of their own that was a constant threat to the original community by way of their missionary activities. Accordingly, it is held that this group probably had a more or less well-defined teaching that was based on supposed gnostizing elements of the gospel of John.²

The evidence from the epistle, however, does not favor the opinion that a specific group of adversaries is in view. It is true that the expression "they went out

¹See Brown, Epistles, p. 50.
²Cf. Houlden, Epistles, p. 11; Bogart, p. 135; Brown, Epistles, p. 69; etc.
from us" (2:19) could be interpreted as a secession from the writer's own community. That is not, however, the only possible meaning. The opponents are never mentioned in the epistle in specific and singular terms. They are rather described as "many" and characterized as "antichrists."

When the author reflected on the condition of the world in which they lived, he said: "Many false prophets have gone out into the world" (4:1). These are called "many deceivers" in 2 John 7. That is the reason why they must "test the spirits to see whether they are of God." It is difficult to see why the writer would resort to this general description and general test if the opponents were a well-known group of ex-Christians, ex-members of his own community. If this were the case, our writer would have been expected to address the problem in more specific terms (as in the case of Diotrephes in 3 John). It seems natural to assume that if he really wanted to give a sure warning (as we think he tried to do), he must have spoken with more specificity.

The writer, on the contrary, always resorts to general descriptions, as though he wanted to guard his readers from danger without fully knowing the specific forms the enemy might take. He therefore limited himself to a few basic principles that would reveal to his readers the true character of these enemies of the faith. The antichrists and false prophets are never mentioned by name, and there is no evidence in the epistle that the
writer knew them as a definite group, though he is aware of their basic teaching and their implications for Christianity.

Three statements in 1 John 2:19 refer to the provenance of the opponents. In 2:19, after mentioning the appearance of many antichrists, the writer says: "They went out from us, but they were not of us." As we saw above, this statement is usually interpreted in the sense that they left the Johannine community to form a community of their own, a rival community, which was more numerous, successful, and wealthier than the group of the writer. While this is possible, in light of the general way in which the author refers to the opponents, it is not probable. It is much more natural in this context to take "from us" not as a reference to the Johannine community specifically, but as a reference to Christians elsewhere as a part of the larger Christian community. In this

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1 He might have had a personal knowledge of some of them, but this is not clear from the epistle.


3 See above our discussion of the different heretical movements in the early church which shows that the Johannine community was not an isolated case. These secessionists might very well have traveled from place to
case, the false teachers had come from outside the Johannine community and were causing problems to this community, even leading some members to secede from it, as perhaps may be indicated in 1 John 4:5. Moreover, if the Johannine community itself suffered a secession of many antichrists, many false prophets, and many deceivers, this community must have been involved in such a disastrous spiritual schism that much more would have been required than only a general epistle of warning, assurance, and pastoral interest, in which the opponents are specifically dealt with only infrequently (see how the writer approaches a specific problem in the case of Diotrephes in 3 John 9-11; he promised a personal visit to correct the matter). It seems clear that if the totality of thought in 1 and 2 John involves a specific set of opponents, something much more drastic and to the point would have been necessary throughout the letters. But when one reads, for example, "if any one comes to you and does not bring this doctrine, do not receive him into the house or give him any greeting" (2 John 10), a different impression is obtained. Nothing dramatic seems to be happening in the community. There was not a schismatic condition in which

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2 Cf. Songer's description (p. 402) of the community condition as "quite critical," and demanding an
a good number of the influential members have left. Since
this does not seem to be the case, it suggests the
probability that the opponents in 1 and 2 John came from
outside the Johannine community, and that many of them had
been, at least nominally, members of Christian congrega-
tions elsewhere.

All this does not mean that there was no danger in
the community. There is evidence that these "antichrists"
were trying to disseminate their teaching in the community
(2:26). That is the reason the writer tried to warn them
(2:13,14), took time to strengthen their faith (2:27-29),
and gave some advice that would help them to remain safe.

Teaching of the Opponents

There is considerable difference of opinion
regarding the doctrinal positions held by the adversaries.
Obviously, nowhere in the document do we find a systematic
treatment of their teaching. The scant information must be
gleaned from a number of references scattered throughout
the epistle and must be submitted to careful interpreta-
tion in order to determine their validity.

In this kind of endeavor there is always the
danger of attributing to opponents what was actually said
in reference to others (the community members), and thus
distorting the image of the opponents' character and

exposure of the heretics, in a situation "of intense
struggle." See also Dodd, p. xix.
teaching. In order to avoid that danger, first we distin­
guish between explicit and implicit references in the
epistle. The explicit references have priority. Second,
all implicit references have to be carefully evaluated in
their proper context to determine whether or not they have
a bearing on the doctrinal position of the opponents. If
there is any doubt regarding their relationship, they
should not be considered as evidence.

Explicit Statements

The first explicit reference to the teaching of
the opponents is found in 2:22. After mentioning that many
antichrists had come, the writer said: "Who is the liar
but he who denies that Jesus is the Christ?" A question
arises regarding the meaning of the word "Christ." In a
Jewish context that would mean the "Messiah" and could
indicate that some were stating, "Jesus is not the
Messiah." There is evidence in the context, however, that
for the writer the term "Christ" meant more than just a
human Messiah. In vs. 23 he stated that "no one who denies
the Son has the Father." At the end of the epistle he
affirmed that Jesus Christ, God's Son, is "the true God
and eternal life" (5:20). There seems to be an equation

1As in the gospel of John. See 1:17,20,25,41; etc.

2See the same phenomenon in the gospel of John
where the evangelist affirmed that "Jesus is the Christ,
the Son of God," after stating that Thomas recognized him
as "my Lord and my God" (20:28,31).
between "Christ" and "Son of God," who is a divine being. Apparently the opponents were denying not Jesus' human Messiahship but rather his divine sonship. They claimed to have the Father, but denied the Son. For the writer, that was incongruous, since in rejecting the Son they were rejecting the Father. In 5:6-12 the writer returns to the same reasoning. God has borne witness regarding his Son; he who accepts his testimony believes in Jesus as Son of God. He who does not believe in him makes God a liar because he rejects God's testimony. It seems clear that by "the testimony of God" the writer is referring to Jesus' baptism where the gospel narrative says that a voice was heard from heaven declaring: "Thou art my beloved Son; with thee I am very pleased" (Luke 3:22; cf. Matt 3:13-17; Mark 1:9-11). Though the Johannine gospel does not have a narrative of Jesus' baptism, John the Baptist is depicted in it as stating: "He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain, this is he who baptizes with the holy Spirit. And I have seen and borne witness that this is the Son of God" (John 1:33,34). John the Baptist accepted God's


2A type of low Christology where Jesus was the Messiah, but not the Son of God in the sense of a "divine being," is mentioned as possible by W. Grundmann, "Chrišō, ktl.," TDNT (1974), 9:570; cf. also M. Goguel, The Birth of Christianity (London: Allen & Unwin, 1953), p. 139; Sander, pp. 159, 160.
declaration that Jesus was his Son. In the epistle the writer says that God's testimony is witnessed by three things: The Spirit (in the form of a dove), the water (since Jesus was recognized as God's Son in connection with his baptism), and the blood (since in the reality of his earthly life, he came to die for the sins of the world). For the writer, the denial of Jesus as the Christ involved his denial as the Son of God, since both elements were interrelated.¹

It is usually objected that the view that the opponents had a low Christological position is contradicted by the author's supposed description of them as "advanced," or as "progressives" (2 John 9), a depiction that is said to be more connected with a high Christology than with a low one.² However, the expression of vs. 9 is more closely related to a claim of an advanced or high knowledge in the teaching of Christ than to Christology. Since it is opposed to the expression "abide in the doctrine of Christ," it gives to the word προάγων, "running ahead," the sense of not remaining within the boundaries of authentic Christian teaching.³

¹Note also 5:1,5, where "Jesus the Christ" is also "Jesus the Son of God."

²Cf. Brown, Epistles, pp. 53, 54. See also Stott, p. 211; Marshall, Epistles, p. 73; Dodd, p. 149; Brooke, p. 177; N. Alexar, p. 152; Barclay, p. 167; etc., who consider the writer's use of "running ahead" as a sarcastic reference to their claim.

³See Lenski, p. 568; Bruce, p. 141; F. Mussner,
Another explicit reference to the teaching of the opponents is found in 4:2, where it is said that they denied that "Jesus Christ has come in the flesh" (the same is said with a small variation regarding the deceivers of 2 John 7).\(^1\) There are several understandings regarding the Greek syntax in this verse.\(^2\) It seems most natural to understand it as "every spirit that acknowledges\(^3\) (accepts) Jesus Christ\(^4\) as having come in the flesh is of God."\(^5\) It seems difficult to avoid the conclusion that the expression "having come in the flesh" refers somehow to the incarnation.\(^6\) We have also an additional clue in the


\(^1\) It uses the present participle of \(\text{éρχομαι}\) instead of the perfect tense of 4:2.

\(^2\) See Brown's discussion on pp. 492, 493.


\(^4\) Seven times in the epistle, besides the two quoted verses, the writer uses the term "Jesus Christ" as a single name. This means that the suggestion to take "Christ" as a predicate is unwarranted.


statement of vs. 3, "every spirit which does not confess\(^1\) Jesus is not of God." They seem to have had difficulties with the person of "Jesus." But in what sense? Probably in the sense in which it was related to Christ, as vs. 2 indicates. Since we do not have any other clue in the text, the historical background needs to be examined for additional evidences.

However, it is important to see whether this problem regarding "Jesus" in 4:2-3 has any relationship with the denial of Jesus' Messiahship and Sonship in 2:22-23. If the issue here is the same as in 2:22-23, that might indicate that the opponents were of Jewish origin. If the two passages are not speaking of the same problem, that might suggest that the writer was confronting either more than one group of opponents or a syncretistic position.

Theoretically, there is nothing to preclude the idea that both denials could have come from the same Jewish orientation, though from different presuppositions. On one hand, it is not difficult to see that the denial of Jesus as the Christ and Son of God could have come from ex-Jewish Christians. On the other hand, the negation of Jesus Christ as come in flesh could have originated among

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Jewish Christians with a more Hellenistic orientation and culture. Both would be Jewish in nature but stemming from different quarters. Both might have been Christian in form (2:19), and apparently of recent origin, since the writer associated them with the "Antichrist" and the "last hour" (2:18). This means that he could have had in mind one Jewish-ex-Christian front divided into two groups, each attacking a different aspect of the person of Christ. But this is not by any means clear.

There are two other passages in the epistle that are usually taken as explicitly polemic and that need careful evaluation. One is 4:15: "Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God." The passage to which this verse belongs (4:13-5:5) is clearly paraenetic, and as such focuses on the members of the community. The statement of vs. 15 is hypothetical and should be understood in terms of vs. 14 which says, "the Father has sent his Son as the savior of the world." The argument is simple: those who confess Jesus as Son and Savior abide in God and God in them. As a result they do not have fear of judgment, and they love God and their brothers. Since the opponents erred in this area of Christology, a Christological statement like this has necessarily inter-connections with polemics. But to say that it

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1For the distinction of paraenetical passages from polemical ones, see below, on pp. 150-156, our discussion on the structure of the epistle.
was directly phrased against the opponents is to miss completely the point the writer is trying to make. He wanted to encourage his readers to love their brothers and have confidence in God, since God is love and has shown us that by sending his Son as the savior of the world.

The same principle applies to the statement of 5:1: "Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ is a child of God." The statement belongs to the same paraenetic passage, and the writer is trying to show that as Christians they ought to love their brothers. In order to convey that clearly, he affirms that every one who believes that Jesus is the Christ (that is to say, the Christian) is a child of God. It is only natural, then, that he ought to love the other children of God, his fellow Christians. It is clear that among the community members there were at least some that had the tendency to despise their brothers, probably on account of humble origin or condition (3:17). Our writer insists that if they are Christians, they ought to keep God's commands (5:2,3), one of which is to believe in Jesus and to love one another. To say that they believe in Jesus as Christ, and at the same time despise those who belong to Christ, is incompatible with the love relationship that Christians ought to have with God.

In 5:5 we find the same statement with some variation: "Who is it that overcomes the world but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?" Our writer assures
his readers that it is not a burden to love one another. The worldly tendency in man is overcome when one accepts Jesus as the Son of God, which is, at the same time, an indication that one is born of God. Again, this statement is not primarily polemical since it is used to increase the diminished Christian love of the community.

There are other affirmations and statements in the epistle that need to be taken into consideration, since they have some bearing on the Christological position of the opponents. In 5:6,7 we find the enigmatic statement, "this is he who came by water and blood. Jesus Christ, not with the water only but with the water and the blood." As we saw above, this statement is usually considered an affirmation of the validity of the death of Christ over against those who denied it. It is not clear what the relationship of water and blood is.\(^1\) What seems to be clear is that there was no quarrel between the writer and the opponents regarding "water" (whatever that meant).\(^2\) The problem was that the opponents either played down the meaning of "blood" or rejected it altogether.\(^3\)

Since "blood" is usually associated with Jesus'

\(^1\)For the different theories regarding the linking of water and blood, see Brown, Epistles, pp. 577, 578; Marshall, Epistles, p. 233, n. 8; Brooke, p. 132; Stott, pp. 178, 179.


\(^3\)Cf. Brooke, p. 135.
death, it is apparent that the adversaries had difficulties with that. This would explain a certain emphasis in the epistle on the death of Jesus. In 1:7 he affirmed that "the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin"; Jesus Christ "is the expiation for our sins" (2:2); God "sent his Son to be the expiation for our sins" (4:10). The author evidently understood that the Christological position of the adversaries undermined the basic position of his Christianity regarding the atoning aspect of the death of Christ.

Implicit Statements

The process of reconstructing the teaching of the opponents in 1 John from the implicit statements of the document has become customary in Johannine studies. But the procedure is not only arduous but also misleading, since, as we stated above, we run the risk of attributing to the adversaries the content of paraenetic passages directed primarily to members of the community with a view to correcting some deficiencies found in them. Four types of passages are frequently regarded as having a polemical intention, and therefore being capable of reflecting either the doctrinal position or ethical behavior exhibited by the opponents. These are the following: (1) Some passages introduced by the formulas "if we say," "he who says," or "if anyone says";¹ (2) affirmations

introduced by the formula "In this we know," or a similar expression; \(^1\) (3) repeated statements showing the writer's intention of emphasis; \(^2\) (4) general allusions. \(^3\)

"If-We-Say," and similar clauses

These clauses are usually considered to be clear references to fundamental affirmations of the opponents. According to such clauses, the adversaries claimed to have fellowship with God, and yet walked in darkness (1:6). They not only claimed to be without sin (1:8), but considered themselves as having not sinned (1:10). They said that they knew God, and yet they did not do what he commanded (2:4). They claimed to live in him, yet they did not walk as Jesus walked (2:6). They claimed to be in the light, and yet by their hatred toward their brothers they showed that they were still in darkness (2:9). They said that they loved God, but by the same hatred showed that they were liars (4:20).

The statements of 2:4,6,9 are, however, not necessarily polemical in nature. The context may refer to lax Christians. Not only chap. 2 starts with the personal tone "my little children," but the stated purpose of what

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\(^1\) Cf. Songer, p. 402; J. A. T. Robinson, p. 56.

\(^2\) See Brown, Epistles, pp. 762, 763.

\(^3\) Ibid.; Bogart, pp. 123-125; Songer, p. 402.
follows is that "you may not sin" (2:1). The members of the community are in the writer's mind, not the opponents. The whole section (2:1-17) is clearly paraenetic in character and does not reflect the adversaries' opinions but the writer's pastoral concern for the spiritual growth of his congregation.¹

It is also dubious that the statements of 1:6,8,10 and 4:20 reflect a polemical purpose.² All of them are third-class conditions constructed with eAN plus the aorist subjunctive. Though the third-class condition may at times refer to reality,³ in most cases they convey the sense of potentiality.⁴ This usage with reference to the texts above serves the purpose of presenting a hypothetical assumption in the protasis in order to highlight the message of the apodosis.⁵ If this is the sense in the passages referred to, it would indicate that it is going

¹Many, however, consider them as polemical in nature. See, for example, Brown, Epistles, p. 81.


⁴For the description of the third-class condition, see Robertson, pp. 1019, 1020; Blass, p. 373; Dana, p. 290.

⁵The Johannine writings are fond of this hypothetical construction. See John 3:3,5; 4:48; 6:44,53; 7:51; 8:24; 12:24,47; 13:8; 15:4,6; 16:7; 20:25; 1 John 2:1,24,28, 29; 3:2; 4:20; 5:16; 3 John 10. Against the hypothetical function of the expression, see Hass, p. 33.
too far to argue, as certain interpreters do, that opponents are making these specific claims. If the writer were referring to some specific doctrinal or ethical conceptions of his opponents, the most natural thing for him would have been to use ἐi plus the present indicative, since the first-class condition makes an assumption of reality. The use of the aorist subjunctive in the third-class condition may well indicate the possibility of certain types of claims, but not necessarily their reality. The third-class condition seems somewhat out of place if the reference was to a concrete situation well-known to the writer. It is interesting to note that the writer uses the first person plural in these expressions. Certainly, if there was a particular group in his mind, it would have been clearer and more helpful to say "those who say," instead of utilizing the third-class condition.¹

This kind of condition does not at all seem to be the most effective way to speak in a critical and schismatic situation which some presume the epistle shows. Moreover, in 4:20 the indefinite pronoun tis is added which shows the generality and uncertainty of the construction as well as

¹It could be argued that the use of "we" is a rhetorical device on the part of the writer. But this can be valid only if the community was not experiencing an acute crisis, since it is hard to conceive of the writer as indulging in rhetoric while his community is in serious danger. Other NT writers who wrote against deviations of what they considered to be truth were direct and to the point when confronting them (2 Pet 2; Jude 4; Rev 2:6,14,15,20-24; 2 Tim 2:17,18; 3:1-9; etc.).
its hypothetical character. It is also interesting to observe that the false teachers are only alluded to in relation to Christological denials and not in connection with ethical injunctions. This suggests the possibility that ethical references were directed against lax Christians within the writer's community and not against opponents.¹

"In-This-We-Know" affirmations

There are eight different affirmations with this formula in the epistle.² They are usually considered as a series of tests which the readers "are to apply to themselves and use in judgment as to true and false Christians."³ In 3:16 we read, "By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us," a statement that some consider polemical in character.⁴ It actually belongs to a context where the author made an appeal to the members of his community to love one another. To strengthen that appeal he put forth the example of Jesus, who offered his life for them. His message is that they should love one another unselfishly and especially love those who are in need (3:17).


⁴Tuñí, p. 296.
The expression of 4:2, "By this you know the Spirit of God," is clearly polemical, since it is closely associated with the false prophets who denied Jesus as come in the flesh. It is a test to distinguish between the Spirit of God and the spirit of the antichrist.

We find in 2:3 a test to distinguish who is really the one who knows God. This is demonstrated by keeping God's commands. The same principle is applied to determine who is the one who is in him (vs. 5): he who walks as Jesus walked (vs. 6). From these passages it could be concluded that the opponents were antinomians or libertines. The evidence is not conclusive, however, since we do not find in the epistle further information that confirms this view. The opponents are never accused of any vices or immorality. Failure to keep the commandments can have both Christological and moral implications for the writer, since the commandments are summed up in believing "in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ," and in loving one another (vs. 23). It is this Christological connection that gives a polemical tone to the passage rather than the moral one. Yet, there is a great emphasis on obedience and keeping the commandments in the epistle

1 Law, pp. 33-35, and Cloag, p. 468, see in this emphasis on obedience and commandments the "moral indifference" of the opponents; Songer, p. 402, sees a worldly people; Roberts, p. 3, antinomianism, but not fleshly sins; Martin, p. 369, an "antinomian ethics."

2 Tuni, p. 299; Brown, Epistles, pp. 54, 55.

that seems to be more connected with lax Christians than with immoral opponents. It is obvious that the statement that serves as a test to distinguish the really true Christian from merely professed ones is also valid on a greater scale regarding false prophets. That does not mean, however, that the primary intention of the test was polemical. This passage, then, should not be used to describe the opponents as antinomians.

In 3:19, the test is applied in a personal manner. This has to do with "our hearts," and whether they condemn us or not. Since this is an interior test, it obviously has no polemical intention. The same is true cf vs. 24 and 4:13, where the Spirit is the internal demonstration that Christ dwells in us and we in him.

Finally, in 5:2 we find the test of love. Again, love and obedience are tied together. As was the case with obedience, the epistle also places great stress on love.¹ Does this have a polemical purpose? Were the opponents indifferent to love and charity? Some affirm it.² However, the majority of the statements make better sense and do justice to the context if the writer was trying to improve a lax love relationship among his readers, as we also saw in relation to other passages.

In general, we can say that the implicit

¹ See above, pp. 6, 7.
² So is the opinion of Law, p. 31; Roberts, p. 10; etc.
statements with the formula "In this we know" do not provide clear information regarding the teaching and behavior of the opponents, but rather confirm the view that they were directed to correct a spiritual laxity among the community members.

Different emphases in the epistles

One of the striking emphases of 1 John is seen in its use of the verb "to know," which is a well-known feature of the Johannine literature. The epistle uses the verb twenty-four times (also one occurrence in 2 John), and never the noun "knowledge."

Many scholars have seen this emphasis as an implicit polemic against the teaching of the opponents who are considered to have held a type of Gnosticism. It is commonly claimed that the Johannine usage of the verb "to know" was influenced by a Gnostic outlook. It has been suggested, however, that the writer only uses Gnostic terminology to face the opponents on their own ground.

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1See the following passages: 2:3,4,5,13,14,18,29; 3:1,6,16,19,20,24; 4:2,6,7,8,13,16; 5:2,20; 2 John 1. The gospel uses the same verb fifty-five times and is eight times larger than the epistle.


3Schmitz, p. 403.

4Whether this terminology was already Gnostic or
and that he seems to combat the adversaries with their own weapons without gnosticizing himself.\textsuperscript{1} Our writer stated in 5:20 that the Son of God came to bring understanding, so that we might know him who is true, a statement somewhat akin to the myth of the Gnostic redeemer, which seems to be a later development.\textsuperscript{2} For the writer, however, this redeemer is a historical person and he condemns those who deny this historicity as antichrists (4:1-4; 2 John 7).

In Gnosticism there is a fellowship made effective by mutual knowledge between God and his children. This implies the deification of man and his complete removal from the world and history.\textsuperscript{3} For the writer, however, this fellowship is revealed in a mutual love relationship (4:7-9), and in the keeping of God's commands (2:3). For the Gnostics sin was, at least, a matter of indifference. For the writer, on the contrary, sin and knowledge of God were mutually opposed (3:6). The language of the writer has, at


\textsuperscript{3} Schmitz, p. 404.
times, clear affinities with Gnostic terminology, but his concepts belong more to the Old Testament tradition than to the mythical speculations of Gnosticism.

It is interesting to observe that 1 John contains the only three occurrences of the word chrisma in the New Testament (2:20,27). The context in which they appear is polemical, and for that reason it has been suggested that its use is polemically intended, in which case the author would have been turning the vocabulary of his opponents against them. It is true that later Gnostic documents gave great significance to this word, but to import this significance into 1 John requires the assumption that a developed Gnostic theory of a later period was already present at the time 1 John was composed. At any rate, the writer meant something different by chrisma than the later Gnostic writers.


3Cf. Grant, A Historical Introduction to the New Testament, p. 233, who chooses Menander of Antioch's teaching on baptism as alluded to in 1 John and makes him contemporary with our author.

4It is interpreted by some as a symbol of the Holy
In connection with this chrísma it is stated in 2:20 that "you all know." The textual reading is divided between pántes and pánta. The decision is difficult. The adopted reading (pántes) was selected because the passage was seen as directed against those who claimed that esoteric knowledge was the possession of a few chosen ones. However, in vs. 27 we read that the same chrísma "teaches you about every thing." This furnishes a good parallel to the reading pánta and is a good evidence in favor of its authenticity. It might well be the case that the reading pánites was later introduced to have a ready proof against the Gnostic-esoteric knowledge as developed in the second century and later. This, apparently, is another case in which we are not completely sure that the writer had his opponents' teaching in view.


1 The reading pánites is classified "D" by the UBS Greek New Testament; see Aland et al., p. 816, n. 2.
2 Metzger, p. 710.
3 Cf. Grundmann, p. 572, n. 501, who accepts pánta instead of pánites, though for different reasons.
4 See Houlden's uncertainty on Epistles, p. 79.
General allusions

Besides the alleged implicit language of controversy in 1 John, there are a number of statements and expressions that, without being polemical, are said to reflect the vocabulary of the opponents. One of those is the use of the word *spérmα*, which we touch again in a later discussion.² In 3:9 it is stated that God's seed remains in the one who is born of God. The meaning of *spérmα* in this passage is unique in the New Testament, and common in Hellenistic Judaism and in the mystery religions.³ Our writer, however, goes beyond them in applying the term either to the Holy Spirit⁴ or in reference to a divine principle that produces spiritual life in the believer.⁵

We also have the statement in 1:5 that "God is light." Our writer is showing his readers that those who have fellowship with God "must walk in light" (vs. 7). These expressions were common in the religious vocabulary

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²See below, pp. 239, 240.


⁴Schulz, p. 545; F. Büchsel, "Gennáð ktl.," *TDNT* (1964), 1:671.

⁵See Brown, *Epistles*, pp. 410, 411; Demarest, p. 524. The later Gnostic references that associated "seed" with the Holy Spirit were probably derived from the Johannine writings. See *The Gospel of Philip* 125; *Exegesis of the Soul* 134.1; and probably the *Gospel of Truth* 43.14.
of his time, and certainly the most that can be said is that, if his opponents used the same terminology, both were drawing from the same common stock of expressions.\(^1\)

Another alleged point of contact of our author with his religious environment is found in his emphasis on being born of God.\(^2\) It is difficult to say, however, that he derived this idea from any other source than his Christian upbringing.\(^3\) Generation from God is a concept well-attested in the Old Testament and in Judaism,\(^4\) as well as in other New Testament writings. Does the writer use this expression polemically? Were the opponents claiming to be truly born of God over against the members of the Johannine community?\(^5\) The passage 2:29 where he mentions "that everyone who does right is born of him" is near the first explicit polemical section, and it could be considered part of, or at least connected with it. In vs. 28, however, there seems to be a transition of thought marked

\(^{1}\)On this see H. C. Hann, "Φῶς," NIDNTT (1975), 2:490-495; Also H. Conzelmann, "Φῶς κτλ.," TDNT (1964), 9:310-358.

\(^{2}\)Our writer uses the word "γεννάω" ten times and only in a transferred sense. The same word is used eighteen times in the gospel of John.


\(^{4}\)See F. Bühssel, "Γεννάω κτλ.," TDNT (1964), 1:671.

\(^{5}\)This is the opinion of Brown, Epistles, p. 54.
by *kal nun* which separates this new paraenetic section from the preceding polemical one before. If this is the case, the expression "born of him" is related to the writer's intention of assuring his readers of the Christian necessity for doing right, and not necessarily to his opposition to a false claim on the part of the adversaries.

In 3:9 we find the expression "no one born of God commits sin . . . he cannot sin because he is born of God." The passage belongs to this new paraenetic section mentioned above, but there is an expression in vs. 7 that could be considered polemical: "Let no one deceive you." Is this expression to be connected with 2:26, "those who deceive you," which is clearly polemical? Or is it a general expression directed to warn his readers not to confuse righteousness with lawlessness? Our writer poses a series of antitheses with the purpose of showing who are the children of God and who the children of the devil (vs. 10). Note the following: God--devil; no sin--sin; righteousness--lawlessness; he who does righteousness--he who does lawlessness; born of God--born of the devil; children of God--children of the devil; love for brethren--hate for brethren. It seems clear from the whole section that the writer wanted his readers to show by their works to whom they belonged. Since they were children of God (vss. 1,2), they must behave accordingly. It would be incongruous for Christians to behave otherwise. In this
way, the readers were encouraged to live up to the Christian standard, which meant to "abide in him" (2:28). In the last analysis, this principle could be used against any opponent of the community, but at this point, it seems to be directed against those in the community who might have been participating consciously or unconsciously in the "world" (2:15-17).

In another passage the writer combines the concept of being born of God with love: "Beloved, let us love one another; for love is of God, and he who loves is born of God and knows God" (4:7). This verse belongs to a section which is preceded by another that is clearly polemical (4:1-6). That is one of the reasons many interpreters associate the following section with a polemical motif. So, as we saw above, even the concept of loving one another is cast into a polemical mold. But this is not necessarily so. The statements regarding love are probably not polemical in the epistle. This does not mean that the opponents were more loving than the readers. It only means that the writer was trying to enhance a spiritual situation where love was diminishing among the Christians. He tried to show that since God is love and gave his Son as a demonstration of it, everyone coming from him ought to love. That is the reason he insisted that "we ought to love one another" (vs. 11). In the preceding section, which we recognize as clearly polemical, the writer mentioned that in order to recognize the false prophets, it
is necessary to see if they confess Jesus Christ as come in the flesh. He added that those who are from God "listen to us" (vs. 6). It is by these two tests that "we know the Spirit of truth and the spirit of error." In the next section, when he spoke of loving one another and being born of God, he did not say, "by this we know the Spirit of truth and the spirit of error." Of course, these tests could very well function for many antichrists of his day, but it was not his intention to put them as tests against false prophets. He rather used them to encourage his fellow Christians to grow in love.

It is this context of love that is important in understanding the statement of 5:1 that says, "Every one who believes that Jesus is the Christ is a child of God [Gr. "has been born of God"], and everyone who loves the parent loves the child." At the end of 4:21 the writer has declared: "He who loves God should love his brother also." It is clear from the context that "he who" refers to the Christian who has been encouraged to love his brothers as he claims to love God. In 5:1-5 the writer is saying that it is impossible that those who believe that Jesus is the Savior of the world, those who have been born of God and love God, can refuse to love their brothers who are also children of God. That is the reason the author insists on telling his readers to obey God's commands, because one of those commands is to "love one another" (3:11,23). What he
is doing in this section is repeating with stronger words what he wrote in 2:7-11.

We conclude that the expression "born of God" is not polemical in character, but rather directed to the members of his community with the purpose of showing the inconsistencies of some (at least) of the members who showed no love toward their brothers who probably were in need of material help (3:17,18).

Summary

We have seen that most of the implicit statements usually considered as evidences in describing either the character or the teaching of the opponents cannot with certainty refer to them. Therefore the only elements that can be used with validity in any attempt to identify the opponents of the epistle are those which are explicit statements regarding their positions. The use of any other statement is not only misleading, but is actually a hindrance in the process of identification.

Identity of the Opponents

The exact identity of the opponents denounced in the epistle has been much disputed, and it is still a matter of controversy. Different suggestions have been advanced ranging from Greek philosophy to specific names such as Menander of Antioch; from Judaizers to antinomians; from Christians to pagans.

As we noted above, one of the elements in
identifying the adversaries that produces the greatest difficulty is the failure to recognize which statements of the epistle apply to them and which do not. The mistake of attributing to opponents elements directed toward community members blurs the picture of the opponents and makes difficult the process of identification. Yet, it is a regular procedure among New Testament scholars to search the epistle for hints of polemical intention, and then to classify them to form a picture that afterward is compared with known heretical schools or movements in early Christianity. The result is that it is almost impossible to reconcile the known features of the heresies with the picture obtained by compiling polemical hints from the epistle.

We have been suggesting in the present study that only explicit statements and clear polemical elements should be taken into account to form a primary picture of the opponents. All other statements, allusions, and hints should be relegated to a secondary level, especially if it is clear that they belong to paraenetic sections and the context shows doubts regarding their polemical purpose. In this way, a basic frame is formed which should be the main guideline for identification.

Taking only explicit polemical references, the following outline emerges: (1) The opponents were former Christians, or claimed to be so (2:19). ¹ (2) They denied

¹Whether they still were claiming to be Christians
that Jesus was the Christ (2:22). (3) They denied that Jesus was the Son of God (2:23). (4) They did not accept that Jesus Christ had come in flesh (4:2; 2 John 7). (5) They did not accept Jesus (4:3). (6) They had problems with the statement that Jesus came "by blood" (5:6). This explicit information shows that the main threat for the Johannine community was a Christological issue. At least, that was the most important thing for the writer since the Christology of the opponents attacked the very heart of Christianity. Our question, then, is, Is it possible to identify the opponents of the epistle with this information? Is it possible to identify them with any known heretical person or movement in early Christianity? A survey of the main proposals seems necessary.

**Greek Philosophers**

Among those who have seen in the general character of the opponents close contacts with popular Greek philosophy is K. Weiss.¹ For him, the Johannine opponents were closer to Paul's opponents in Corinth than to other known groups in the early church. Though similarities can be found with Paul's adversaries,² it is interesting that the epistolary writer does not say. The reader is reminded again that in the present study, the concepts of "heretics," "heresy" and "Christian" are applied from the perspective of the epistle.


Paul did not argue against his opponents as the writer of 1 John did against his. This might show that the opposition was different. One is left wondering about philosophical concepts that could fit in the terminology of "the Christ," "the Son of God," etc., and if the people holding such ideas could have been Christians after all.  

Gnosticism

By far the most common identification of the heresy combatted in 1 John has been with Gnosticism. Frequently, however, this term is used with lack of precision, and confusion and misunderstanding arise. It is also common to try to find in the epistle the characteristics of the Christian Gnosticism of the second century and later, an endeavor that leads to misinterpretation of the literary context of the epistle.

1See Marshall's comments on Epistles, pp. 20, 21.

It is recognized as a standard opinion today that the origin, sources, and development of Gnosticism are very complex and obscure. The problem is compounded by the loose terminology used in reference to it: "Gnosticism," "Gnosis," "Pre-Gnosticism," "Proto-Gnosticism," etc. To solve this problem, a general agreement was reached in the final session of the Messina Colloquium in which by "Gnosticism" is intended the clearly defined and fully developed second-century systems that show common basic characteristics. "Gnosis" is restricted to a broader phenomenon in which knowledge of the divine mysteries is reserved for an elite, with no close relationship to Gnosticism. "Pre-Gnosticism" refers to certain phenomena or thematic elements which existed separately prior to their being assembled into Gnosticism, and which, in themselves, do not constitute Gnosticism, such as the the writings of Philo, the Dead Sea Scrolls, and various parts of the New Testament. "Proto-Gnosticism" is applied when the essence of Gnosticism is already found in earlier systems, as is believed to be the case with the Indo-Iranian religion, Platonism, Orphism.


2For reports of the Messina Colloquium see G. W. McRae, "Gnosis in Messina," CBQ 28 (1966): 322-333; Wilson, Gnosis, pp. 22, 23, 39-50; see also Yamauchi, pp. 18, 19.
etc.\footnote{There are other scholars, however, who have refused to accept such terminological distinctions.} It is this "Pre-Gnosticism," also called sometimes "incipient Gnosticism," with which the opponents in the epistle are usually identified.\footnote{Since this phenomenon was diverse and showed many influences, there have been different suggestions regarding the specific identification of them.}

Cerinthianism


\footnote{Cf. Stott, pp. 48, 49; W. Alexander, pp. 49, 50; Westcott, p. 183; Law, pp. 36-38; Windisch, p. 127; Ross, etc.}
According to Irenaeus, Cerinthus was a certain man of Asia who taught that the world was not made by the primary God, but by a certain power separated from him. He also taught that Jesus, though more righteous, prudent, and wise than other men, was not born of a virgin but rather according to the ordinary course of human generation. He claimed that Jesus and Christ were not identical, but at the time of Jesus' baptism Christ descended upon him in the form of a dove, enabling him to proclaim the unknown Father and to perform miracles. Before the time of the crucifixion, however, Christ departed from Jesus, leaving him to suffer, die, and rise again, while Christ, being a spiritual being, remained impassible.

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1Irenaeus 1.26 (ANF, 1:351, 352). After the discovery of the Nag Hammadi library, the description of heretics by Irenaeus is taken more seriously. See Wilson, Gnosis, p. 16; K. Wengst, Häresie und Orthodoxie im Spiegel des ersten Johannesbriefes (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus Gerd Mohn, 1976), pp. 35, 36; Martin, p. 370; Filson, p. 270; Packenham, p. 175; Ramsay, pp. 37, 38; B. S. Easton, The Epistles of John, ed. F. C. Eiselen et al. (Nashville: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1929), p. 1350.

2To this basic description of Cerinthus' teaching, later heresiarchs added further sometimes seemingly contradictory information. Hippolytus 7.23; 10.19 (ANF, 5:115, 116, 147), added that Cerinthus was educated in Egypt. Theodoret Haereticarum Fabularum Compendium 2.3.
When we take only the explicit information that the epistolary writer gives concerning the antichrists and false prophets of his day, it is remarkable how precisely the description fits Irenaeus' portrait of the teachings of Cerinthus. The opponents in 1 John were, or claimed to be, Christians. Apparently Cerinthus also was a Christian, since he built upon Christian ideas and conceptions. The adversaries denied Jesus as the Christ and Son of God,

(PG, 83:535-556), presents Cerinthus as having had his philosophical training in Egypt, but went to Asia to teach his heresy (see also Irenaeus 1.26.1 (ANF, 1:351, 352); Epiphanius Adversus Haereses 1.2.28.1 (PG, 41:373D). Pseudo-Tertullian Against All Heresies 3 (ANF, 3:651), states that Cerinthus taught that the world was created by angels who were also responsible for giving the law. Besides, it also said that the Ebionites were the successors of Cerinthus. Dionysius Bar Salibi In Apocalypsim Iohannis, C.S.C.O., in Scriptores Syri, 2. 20; ed. I. Sedlacek (Rome: E. K. L., 1910), p. 1, line 30, reports that Gaius of Rome attributed the book of Revelation to Cerinthus. He also said that Cerinthus taught the necessity of circumcision, observance of sabbaths, and prohibited eating and drinking certain things. Epiphanius 1.2.28.2 (PG, 41:374C) and Philastrius Liber de Haeresibus 36 (PL, 12:1152-1154), represent him as the ringleader of the Judaizing opponents of the apostles in the Acts and epistles to the Corinthians and Galatians. According to Eusebius Church History 3.28.1-5; 7.25.1-3 (NPNF, second series, 1:160, 309, respectively) Gaius of Rome and Dionysius of Alexandria considered Cerinthus a millenarian, as did also Theodoret 2.3 (PG, 83:390C) and Augustine De Haeresibus ad Quodvutdeum 1.8 (PL, 42:27). Epiphanius 1.2.30.14; 1.2.28.2-8 (PG, 41:430C, 379-387, respectively), reported that Cerinthus identified Christ with the Holy Spirit, and also made Cerinthus a Judaizer. For a summary of Cerinthus' teaching according to Patristic evidence, see J. B. Lightfoot, The Apostolic Fathers, 2 vols. (London: Macmillan and Co., 1890); 2:381-388; G. Bardy, "Cœrinthe," RB 30 (1921):344-373; Brooke, p. 46; and Brown, Epistles, p. 766.

Especially if this term means more than just "Messiah," as some recognize. See Grundmann, "Christ ktl." (1974), pp. 570, 571.
something that Cerinthus obviously did, since for him Jesus and the Christ were different beings. The antichrists did not accept that Jesus Christ had come in the flesh and did not accept Jesus;¹ Cerinthus denied the incarnation since, for him, Jesus was a common human being and not identical with Christ. The opponents had difficulties with the acceptance of Jesus Christ as having come by blood. Cerinthus attributed suffering and death only to Jesus, not to Christ.

Besides this doctrinal correlation, it is also important to note the historical link that Irenaeus and others made between the Johannine community and Cerinthianism. Irenaeus reports the tradition that the gospel of John was written against this type of heresy,² and there is also the well-known story, attributed to Polycarp, of the encounter of John with Cerinthus in a bath of Ephesus.³ Whatever value we might attribute to these traditions, it is at least clear that the Johannine community, according to early traditions, was, in one way or another, under the influence of Cerinthianism.

Some New Testament scholars, however, deny any

¹In this case, the variant reading Ἰδει of 4:3 is also interesting since the opponents would be "annulling" Jesus, that is to say, switching the emphasis from Jesus to Christ.

²Irenaeus 3.11.1 (ANF, 1:426).

³Id. 3.3.4 (ANF, 1:416). Also recorded in Eusebius 3.28.6; 4.14.6 (PNPF, 1:161, 187, respectively).
reference to Cerinthianism in the epistle. This is mostly because of the common tendency of using a great number of implicit statements along with the explicit ones, to form a picture of the opponents which no longer conforms to the characteristics and features of Cerinthianism.¹

Docetism

The opponents of 1 John have also been identified with a heresy called "Docetism,"² a word that doubtless comes from the Greek dokeîn referring to appearance or representation of something not existing in reality.³ According to the Docetists, Christ did not have a true body during his earthly existence, but only a corporeal appearance. The heresy could have had its origin in the current first-century opinion that material in itself was evil,⁴ or in the scandal caused by the bodily weaknesses

¹See, for example, Chaine, pp. 121, 122; Marshall, Epistles, p. 18; Schnackenburg, Johannesbriefe, p. 19; Grayston, Epistles, p. 15; Houlden, Review, p. 277; Songer, p. 404; Kümmel, p. 310. Cf. also Bogart, p. 140, where he vacillates between Cerinthus and Valentinus, because of the lack of information regarding Cerinthus' perfectionism which he attributes to the opponents in the epistle on the basis of 1:8,10.


⁴Among the early adversaries of Docetism we find Polycarp of Smyrna Philippians 7.1 (LCC, 1:134); Ignatius of Antioch Smyrneans 1-3, 7.1; Trallians 9-10 (LCC, 1:112, 113, 100, respectively); Irenaeus 4.18-23; 5.1.2 (ANF, 1:445-458; 526-528, respectively); Serapion of Antioch,
exhibited by Christ while on earth, especially his shameful death on the cross. However, the origins of Docetism are obscure.\footnote{Irenaeus seems to include Saturninus of Antioch, a follower of Menander of the same place, among the early Docetists.\footnote{He described this heretic as holding the following: 1. The belief in an unknown Father, a common conception of other Gnostics. 2. The concept that the world was not made by that unknown Father but by seven angels (archons).}}

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1. The belief in an unknown Father, a common conception of other Gnostics.
2. The concept that the world was not made by that unknown Father but by seven angels (archons).

\footnote{According to Eusebius, 6.12.6 (NPNF, 1:258); Tertullian Against Marcion 3.19 (ANF, 3:336, 337); Against Valentinians 27 (ANF, 3:516); On the Flesh of Christ 1-5 (ANF, 3:521-526).}

\footnote{Hippolytus 6.14; 8.1-8 (ANF, 5:80, 117-122), ascribed this heresy to Simon Magus and later treated it as a separate sect. According to Clement of Alexandria Stromata 3.13 (ANF, 2:398), Julius Cassianus was the author of the sect. Thomas Ittigius, De Haeresiarchis aevi Apostolici et Apostolico Proximi, seu primi et secundi a Christo nato seculi 2. 10. 193 (1690 A.D.), as quoted by J. H. Blunt, Dictionary of Sects, Heresies, Ecclesiastical Parties, and School of Religious Thought (Philadelphia: Lippincott & Co., 1874), p. 126, n. 1, stated that Cassianus renewed it but he did not originate it. Jerome Commentator in Epistolam ad Galatas 6.8, and Commentator in Epistolam ad Titum 1.686B (PL, 26:460A, 590B, respectively), made Tatian the author of the Encratite phase of Docetism; and Jerome The Dialogue against Luciferians 23 (NPNF, second series, 6:332), said that the Lord's body was declared to be a phantom while the apostles were still in the world and the blood of Christ still fresh in Judea.}

\footnote{Epiphanius (1.2.24.2,3; 1.3.41.1; PG, 41:311, 691, respectively) includes also Cerdo and Basilides among the Docetists. Tertullian Against Marcion 3.8.9 (ANF, 3:327, 328), said Marcion was a Docetist. Some, however, considered him as adopting the Cerinthian view; see Blunt, p. 518.}
3. Man has a spark of life which when he dies returns to those things of the same nature.

4. The savior was without birth, without body and figure; he was only supposedly a man.

5. Two kinds of men were created: good and wicked.

6. Marriage and generation were Satanic.

7. Abstention from animal food.

8. The God of the Jews was one of those angels who created the world, and whom Christ came to destroy.

9. Some prophecies were uttered by angels and some by Satan, the enemy of the god of the Jews.

With certain accommodations, Docetism could explain the explicit description of the opponents in 1 John. They apparently were Christians and had problems...
with the incarnation, suffering, and death of Christ. But as far as we know, they did not deny that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of God, unless that denial was in the sense of denying his corporality. However, the epistolary writer was "concerned not just with the reality of the flesh of Jesus, but with the relation between the human 'Jesus' and the divine 'Son' or 'Christ'."¹ The Docetists seem to have been motivated by a "high" Christology, united with a contempt against the material. They did not precisely fit into the picture of 1 John, though similarities can be found.²

Basilides

The system of Basilides (c.120-145) has also been considered as reflected in 1 John. He was a second-century Gnostic teacher and founder of a Gnostic school in Alexandria. Of his life, little is known with certainty.³

¹Bogart, pp. 123-125; Songer, p. 402.
²Confusion sometimes arises because of the double definition of Docetism. The wider meaning refers to all teaching that denies the reality of the incarnation; the narrower one, to the conception of Christ's body as phantasmal and apparent. See Brooke, p. xlv.
³Jerome Lives of Illustrious 21 (NPNF, second
Epiphanius said that he was a fellow pupil of Saturninus under Menander in Antioch. Both Irenaeus and Hippolytus described his teaching, which was mostly philosophical in character. According to Irenaeus, he began with a system of emanations from the unknown Father down to 365 groups of angels, each of whom created a heaven, the last one being responsible for creating our world. The chief of these angels was the god of the Jews. According to Basilides, Christ was the "Gnous," the first emanation of the unknown Father, who appeared as a man. He did not suffer death, but Simon of Cyrene was crucified in his place, while, Christ, standing by, laughed at them. He was incorporeal and transfigured himself as he pleased. Basilides believed that we should not confess the crucified one, because he who does it, shows thereby that he is still a slave. He taught that to eat meat offered to idols and the practice of lust were a matter of indifference. He considered himself no longer a Jew and yet not

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1Epiphanius 1.2.23.1 (PG, 41:293C).
2Irenaeus 1.24.3-7 (ANF, 1:349, 350).
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a Christian. Irenaeus also said that he practiced magical arts.

It is with the Christological aspect of his teaching that we are concerned. It is not completely clear from Irenaeus what the relationship between Jesus and Christ was in the teaching of Basilides. He seemed to have held a separation between Jesus and Christ akin to Cerinthianism and other Gnostic systems. In this case, he would have points of contact with the opponents of the epistle. It is doubtful, however, that Basilides could be described as an ex-Christian, since Irenaeus said he did not claim to be one. Some Christians could have been influenced by the same world of thoughts current in Basilides' time and earlier, and that might have been responsible for the Christological positions of the opponents in 1 John.

Nicolaitans

There are some commentators who identify at least some of the opponents of 1 John with the sect called Nicolaitans. Since in the epistle there are no traces of licentiousness and prostitution on the part of the opponents, it would appear unnecessary to take this sect into consideration, were it not for the fact that it is explicitly condemned in the book of Revelation

1Hippolytus 10.10 (ANF, 5:144).

2Cf. Macknight, p. 651. For a full description of the heresy and its origin, see Blunt, p. 371-373.
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(2:6,14,15). This shows that at least some churches of Asia Minor were attacked by extremist heretical movements which were not totally disconnected from the philosophical speculations of the time. The implications for Christology of the Nicolaitan stance we, however, do not know.

Jewish Opponents

The clear statement of the epistle that the opponents "went out from us" (2:19) rules out the possibility that we have here a controversy between the synagogue and the church. ¹ It does not eliminate, however, the possibility that they were Jewish Christians who had gone back to Judaism. They would have been depicted as having gone out from Christianity. They would now be denying that Jesus was the Christ, and Son of God. It is not clear how they could reject "Jesus Christ as come in the flesh," unless this expression meant something more than the historical person of Jesus.² The dual name "Jesus Christ" also presents a difficulty in this expression


²For the interpretation of "come in flesh" as referring to the historical career of Jesus, see above, pp. 84, 85.
since the denial would affect "Christ," not "Jesus," and even so, that would involve the concept of the Christ as more than a human being, which is not a standard belief in Judaism. Furthermore, the expression that Jesus Christ came "not with water only but with the water and the blood" is not easy to explain either on the Jewish hypothesis. Coming from Jewish Christians who repented of their Christianity, it would involve, at least, the recognition that Jesus Christ came by water only. But what is the meaning of that for a Jew? The recognition of what? So, the reference to Jewish Christians who returned to Judaism does not fit the picture of the explicit statements of the epistle.

It has been suggested also that the Ebionites fit the picture of the epistolary opponents. According to Irenaeus, they held a Christology similar to that of Cerinthus and Carpocrates. How close that similarity was, we do not know precisely, but Hippolytus said that they believed that Jesus "was a man in a like sense with all" (the rest of the human family), and he was named the

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1Cf. Goguel, The Birth of Christianity, p. 139. For a description of the origin and nature of this sect, see Irenaeus 1.26 (ANF, 1:351, 352); Justin Dialogue with Trypho 47; 48 (ANF, 1:218, 219; Tertullian The Prescription against the Heretics 33 (ANF, 3:259); Ps. Tertullian Against All Heresies 3 (ANF, 3:651); Hippolytus 7.22 (ANF, 5:114); Epiphanius 1.2.29,30 (PG, 41:387-471). They are also mentioned in Eusebius 3.27 (NPNF, 1:158-160); Origen Contra Celsus 5.65 (ANF, 4:571); Theodoret 2.1 (PG, 83:387); Philastrius 37 (PL, 12:1154, 1155).
It is clear that there were different varieties of Ebionism and Christian Judaizers. They could have been regarded as Christians, though the statement that they "went out from us" would have to be forced somewhat. The statement that they denied that Jesus was the Christ does not apply to them, unless "Christ" is taken in the sense of a divine being. The same is the case with the expression that Jesus was the "Son of God." Such an expression would fit them only if it meant divine Son. As we saw above, both meanings are possible in the Johannine writings, so the difficulties are not serious. A more serious objection comes from the negation regarding Jesus Christ as "come in the flesh," and also that he came only by "water," and not by "blood." Both of these expressions would hardly fit the Ebionite recognition of Jesus as man and Messiah.

Jewish-Christian-Gnostic Syncretism

The above description of Jewish opponents, in which some characteristics fit and others do not, has raised the possibility that the adversaries in 1 John were characterized by a syncretistic mixture of Christian, Jewish, and Proto-Gnostic components. It has been noted

1Hippolytus 7.22 (ANF, 5:114).
2See Blunt, pp. 138-140.
3See above, pp. 81-83.
4See Harrison, p. 417; Moody, pp. 14, 15; Dodd, p.
that Irenaeus classified the Ebionites with the Gnostics,\(^1\) and that Cerinthus was considered a Judaizer by later writers,\(^2\) that the writings of Qumran show similarities with Proto-Gnosticism,\(^3\) that the epistle contains many Jewish categories,\(^4\) and that many Gnostic sects had combinations of Jewish-Christian ideas and beliefs. In a similar vein, it has been argued that Ignatius of Antioch combatted a kind of Jewish-Docetic influence\(^5\) among the churches of Asia Minor, which is also valid for the Johannine churches.

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\(^1\) That is the inference drawn from Irenaeus 1.14-16 (ANF, 1:349-352).


\(^3\) Brown, Epistles, pp. 118-144.


\(^5\) There are different opinions regarding the heretics in the Ignatian letters. On one hand, it is claimed that there was only one group with a Jewish-Docetic tendency. For this, see, T. Zahn, Ignatius von Antiochen (Gotha: Perthes, 1873), 356-399; J. Weiss, pp. 764, 765; C. K. Barrett, "Jews and Judaizers in the Epistles of Ignatius," in Jews, Greeks and Christians, ed. R. Hamerton-Kelly and R. Scroggs (Leiden: Brill, 1976), pp. 239-244; E. Molland, "The Heretics Combatted by
It is not difficult to see how Hellenistic Jews, who adhered to a strict monotheism, and at the same time were confronted with the phenomenon of Jesus' life and works, could have used current Proto-Gnostic ideas to preserve their monotheism by denying either the reality of the incarnation (Docetism) or the divinity of Jesus (Cerinthianism).

When we apply the explicit characteristics of the opponents depicted in 1 John to persons with a background in Hellenistic-Jewish-Christian syncretism, the following picture emerges: Such persons could have been described as ex-Christians if they had abandoned the Christian communities; on the basis of their monotheism they could have denied that Jesus was the Christ in the Johannine sense of a divine being and divine Sonship; they could have denied

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Jesus Christ as come in the flesh in dependence on Hellenistic categories, but with the same end of protecting their monotheism; and finally they could have rejected the idea that Jesus Christ came by blood (a suffering God), on the basis of Jewish and Hellenistic presuppositions alike.

Summary

The First Epistle of John is a document addressed to a specific situation in a community which was well-known to the writer. Two main purposes seem to have motivated the writing of the document. The first is paraenetical in character and shows the interest of the writer in the spiritual growth of his community members. The second is polemical in nature and reflects the warnings on the part of the writer against the danger generated by some whom he calls "antichrists" and "false prophets." However, there is no conclusive internal evidence which indicates that the main thrust of the epistle is polemical. Rather, there are evidences that indicate that the main purpose was hortatory and paraenetical in character, with the warning against the false teaching in the background.

The identification of the "heretics" of the epistle is difficult since there is not enough information from the document itself to allow it. To resort to implicit statements as evidences to that end tends to blur the picture of the opponents and makes the identification
impossible. Consequently, only explicit statements should be taken into consideration. This evidence favors the identification of the opponents with a type of Jewish-Christian-Gnostic syncretism. This, however, does not preclude their identification with Cerinthianism which, apparently, had many syncretistic features and fits well with the explicit statements of the epistle regarding the false teaching addressed in it. It seems to the present writer that this type of opponent is better reflected in the testimony of the epistle.
CHAPTER III

STRUCTURE OF THE EPISTLE

Introduction

The present chapter tries to reach an understanding of the basic literary structure of the epistle with the purpose of seeing, if possible, how the epistle was composed, and how this can relate to the solution of the problem under consideration.

However, one of the most debated problems of the epistle is found in the study of its structure. Bruce's statement that "attempts to trace a consecutive argument throughout 1 John have never succeeded,"¹ and Bultmann's conviction that "none of the attempts to demonstrate unity and a sequence of thought is satisfactory"² show the despair of many students concerning the epistle. Almost a century earlier, Westcott had declared that

It is extremely difficult to determine with certainty the structure of the epistle. No single arrangement is able to take account of the complex development of thought which it offers, and of the many connections which exist between its different parts.³

¹Bruce, p. 29.
²Bultmann, Epistles, p. 2.
³Westcott, Epistles, p. xlvi.

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More recently Brooke thought that "perhaps the attempts to analyse the epistle should be abandoned as useless."¹

And yet determining a structure of any book of the Bible is a necessary step for understanding it, and an indispensable tool in its exegesis. For this reason, many students of 1 John have attempted different approaches in order to clarify the possible flow of the argument or pattern of thought in the document. These approaches range from simple outlines of paragraph demarcation to sophisticated procedures that try to uncover hidden patterns.² The basic principle, however, is the acknowledgment that any document produced by the human mind--educated or not--must have at least a basic structure and some kind of psychological development. It is this principle that gives encouragement to any attempt and makes the whole enterprise worthwhile.

**Rearrangement Theories**

Four general approaches are usually followed in the process of trying to find a structure in the epistle.

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¹Brooke, p. xxxiii.

The first one is a procedure that consists in rearranging the text so that the different passages that deal with the same subject are brought together, forming in that way a more logical structure. Besides the fact that there is no objective evidence for this procedure, as Marshall has stated, it destroys the catch-word connection in the epistle and the close association of ideas found in 4:21 and 5:1.

Redactional Theory

The second approach explains the diverse nature of the material by suggesting an assembly of different materials. It is assumed that behind 1 John lies a shorter document which the writer took and enlarged by commenting on its main ideas in accordance with his purposes. This approach was pioneered by the studies of E. von Dobschütz, who considered that in the passage of 2:28-3:10 exist four antithetical and parallel pairs of statements which begin with the expressions, "everyone who" (2:29; 3:4,6,9,10), and "he who" (3:7), which were filled with other

1See, for example, K. Tomoi, "The Plan of the First Epistle of John," ExpTim 52 (1940-41):117-119. He suggests placing 4:1-6 between 4:21 and 5:1 to join together the teaching on love in 3:11-24 and 4:7-21, as well as the teaching on true confession of Jesus in 4:1-6 and 5:1-12. C. C. Oke, "The Plan of the First Epistle of John," ExpTim 51 (1939-1940):347-350, proposed also to place 2:13c-17 after 5:18-21 in order to bring the theme of righteousness under one unit, and 2:12-13b after 1:10 to avoid the lack of relationship to what precedes.

2Marshall, Epistles, p. 28.
materials, that, although in some way interrelated, were of different form and content.\(^1\) He suggested that the passage 2:28-3:12 was the original document, since, according to him, a different and more Hellenistic style follows, which belongs to the editor of 1 John.\(^2\)

By far the most important and influential redactional study of 1 John is that of R. Bultmann.\(^3\) For him, the main source consisted of a series of aphorisms that could be detected by the way they begin. According to Bultmann, they have three different forms: "He who . . .," "everyone who . . .," and "if . . ." A later redactor inserted some hortatory material, which is recognized by the expression "by this we know," and which has the purpose of correcting a more extreme type of Gnosticism. Bultmann made some later modifications and refinements to this theory\(^4\) and suggested that an ecclesiastical redactor was responsible for some conventional church formulas, such as the epilogue (5:14-21), sections on eschatology


\(^2\)Ibid., p. 10.


(2:28; 3:2; 4:17), and the references to Jesus' blood and his sacrificial death (1:7; 2:2; 4:10), all in order to bring the document into conformity with ecclesiastical tradition.\(^1\) He also suggested later that 1:1-2:27 could have been the original work, or the first draft of it.\(^2\)

This completed the picture of three stages: (i) the Vorlage, (2) the homiletical additions by the author, and (3) the editorial comments by the ecclesiastical reductor. Regarding the appendix, 5:14-21, he based his conclusions on the following considerations: (1) 5:13 is the original ending since it has all the appearances of being a conclusion; (2) the appendix is an imitation of the basic style of the rest of the epistle; (3) the present conclusion takes up a new theme: intercession for a sinner; (4) the concept of two types of sin is alien to the writer's thought; (5) the dialectical understanding of the Christian existence as presented in 1:5-10 is abandoned in 5:16-21.\(^3\)

In this respect, it is clear that Bultmann is applying his redactional theory of the fourth gospel to the epistle,\(^4\) making subjective judgments as to what is authentic Johannine and what is not. This redactional hypothesis was based on the presupposition that there is a

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\(^1\) Bultmann, *Epistles*, p. 2.  
\(^2\) Ibid.  
\(^4\) Ibid., p. 189.
theological difference between the original source and the editorial additions. It was designed to account for what the proponents considered to be theological contradictions (for example, sinfulness versus sinlessness), and changes of theological perspectives (as for instance, the eschatological passages over against those which emphasize present conditions).

It is obvious that NT scholarship is indebted to Bultmann for his careful scrutiny of 1 John that has produced fresh thinking in Johannine studies. But, as was the case with other suggestions of Bultmann, a debate ensued and scholars aligned themselves in favor of or against the theory. It was accepted by some and rejected by others. F. B. Bühnel responds to Bultmann's theory by stating that the separation of the epistle into two elements was unjustifiable since there are parallels in Jewish writings to the combination of aphoristic and homiletic materials as well as antithetic formulations.

H. Braun and W. Nauck, though accepting the

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theory in principle, raised questions as to Bultmann's original position that the source was pre-Christian and pagan in origin; and Schnackenburg\(^1\) stated that the double nature of the material in 1 John originated, not from a duality of source, but from a duality of purpose since the author had both to warn and to encourage his readers. Among others who have rejected the two-source theory are E. Käsemann,\(^2\) who suggested instead two kinds of tradition that the writer used in conformity with his purpose; O. A. Piper,\(^3\) who claims that 1 John employed traditional teaching; E. Haenchen,\(^4\) who considered that the criteria used to distinguish between source and redactor are ineffective; and Houlden, who prefers "to see a man caught in an unresolved dichotomy of thought and purpose rather than the use of two sources."\(^5\)

Dobschütz's antitheses, which, according to him, reflect the "genre" of divine law found in the Old Testament and in the Qumran documents, and whose pattern was employed in Christian baptismal instruction. Though he accepted the use of sources, he assigned it to the same author who used it as the basis of his later additions.


\(^5\)Houlden, Epistles, p. 29.
Analogy with Other Writings

The third approach that endeavors to find a solution to the structural problem of the epistle is represented by those scholars who try to outline the document on the basis of an analogy with other works. J. C. O'Neill has tried to demonstrate that the epistle was composed of self-contained paragraphs which were put together, not by a continuous argument, but as attempts to present, in Christian guise, a collection of twelve separate prophetic admonitions which existed in poetic form, and which had a distinct pre-Christian theology. According to O'Neill, the author of 1 John belonged to a sectarian movement the majority of whose members had become Christians by confessing Jesus was the Messiah. The rest of the members, who refused to follow their brethren into the Christian movement, are the opponents of 1 John. According to O'Neill, the redactor expanded his source in the interest of a defined Christian theology which takes account of the straining of loyalties which must have occurred if Jews, faithful to their own sect and its theology, had yet decided to accept Jesus as the fulfillment of their hopes.¹

To these twelve documents, O'Neill finds parallels in the Qumran writings, and especially in the Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs. He is of the opinion that the documents

were preserved because the Christian editor considered them as authoritative and believed that they had reached their fulfillment in Jesus the Messiah.\(^1\)

As Houlden has well stated, this theory is to be commended for several reasons: (1) it has the merit of providing a connection with a fairly well-known Christian practice of commenting and adding upon existing Jewish documents; (2) it also provides evidence that shows that the theological background of the epistle is Jewish; and finally, (3) it endeavors to place the document among those early Christian writings that attempted "to fix the boundary with Judaism and define the relationship between the synagogue and the church."\(^2\)

O'Neill's theory has been criticized as conjectural, and as showing disregard for the fact that the gospel of John also has many parallels of vocabulary and theology which O'Neill said came from sources.\(^3\) His analysis of the poetic elements is largely subjective, since the verses are understood as free rhythm rather than following prosodical rules.\(^4\) Moreover, O'Neill's

\(^1\)Ibid., p. 65.


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perspective seems to be defective, since he apparently considers the recipients of the letter as the minority group, which in turn appears as the opponents of the editor. Paradoxically, he identifies the addressees with the adversaries who are clearly considered in the epistle as different.¹ This casts doubt on his whole scheme and makes his theory improbable.

Another attempt to find an external pattern to disclose the structure of the epistle is the thesis of P. J. Thompson.² This author has seen in Psalm 119 a four-part division into which 1 John may be divided: (1) the way (1:1-21); (2) dangers (2:22-3:17); (3) safeguards (3:18-4:21); (4) the end (5:1-21). Brown's verdict, that the procedure is highly imaginative³ and will convince few, seems correct.⁴

Others have tried to find a pattern similar to the book of Revelation, which is usually related to Johannine writings. That of A. Olivier, which sees the book of Revelation, the gospel of John, and 1 John as formed by a

¹See I. de la Potterie, Review, p. 139.


³The 22 lines of Hebrew parallelism that Thompson finds in the prologue of the gospel of John are made to correspond to 22 sets of six in 1 John. This is, in turn, compared with the 22 stanzas of 8 lines each that Psalm 119 has.

⁴Brown, Epistles, p. 122.
series of three-line strophes constructed around key words, has little to commend it.\(^1\) Also E. Lohmeyer has suggested a close resemblance.\(^2\) Following the pattern of the Apocalypse with its divisions of sevens, Lohmeyer found seven sections in 1 John, and seven subdivisions in each section. Through a complicated series of inclusions, he tried to establish a chiastic structure in which parts 1, 2, 3 match parts 5, 6, 7, and part 4 (2:18-3:24), standing in the middle, is the chiastic climax.\(^3\) As Brown has pointed out, the main objection to this view is that, in contrast to the book of Revelation, there is no explicit reference to a pattern of seven in 1 John. It also disrupts the flow of thought in some of the units.\(^4\)

F. O. Francis has compared the opening and closing sections of James and 1 John, and, on that basis, has reached the conclusion that each opening has a thematic statement which announces the primary issue, that is later developed in the body of the writing. In 1 John, this


\(^3\)The seven divisions of the epistles, according to him, are: (1) 1:1-4; (2) 1:5-2:6; (3) 2:7-17; (4) 2:18-3:24; (5) 4:1-21; (6) 5:1-12; (7) 5:13-21; see pp. 254, 255).

primary issue is life, which is articulated as Christian fellowship and developed in the body of the document in two stages: a preliminary delineation of the message (1:5-2:29), and an amplification of the issue (3:1-5:12). This scheme raises again the question as to whether it is possible to trace a single theme in 1 John. Francis' subdivisions show, once more, that that is hardly the case.

There are others who have seen in the gospel of John a clue to the structure of the epistle. Similarities between the fourth gospel and 1 John have long been noted. But the suggestion that its structure furnishes a clue for the understanding of the structure of the epistle is recent. A. Feuillet suggested that the two main


2Already in the middle of the third century, Dionysius of Alexandria pointed out some of them in his attempt to show the dissimilarities of the gospel with the book of Revelation. See Eusebius Church History 7.25.8-18 (NPNF, second series, 1:309, 310).

divisions he detected in the gospel of John correspond to two main divisions in the epistle. So, for him, the epistle should be divided into two major parts, with several subdivisions as follows: Prologue (1:1-4). (1) The demands of the fellowship with God who is light (1:5-2:28 or 29). (2) The demands of the fellowship with God who is love\(^1\) or The conduct of the authentic children of God (3:1 or 2:29-5:12). The Epilogue and the Additional note (5:13-21).\(^2\) According to Feuillet, not only the Prologue and the Epilogue, but the two main divisions of the gospel correspond to the arrangement of the epistle. He even suggests that chap. 21 of John, which is usually considered an editorial addition, is parallel to 1 John 5:14-21, which he also considers an addition. It is obvious that Feuillet has made a good contribution in showing the various similarities between the gospel and the Epistle. But the parallels he finds in the body of the gospel with the corresponding body of the epistle will always be subject to one's particular arrangement of the gospel of John. Though he has been able to make a case for the prologue and the epilogue, it is in the body parallels

\(^1\)There is a mistake in the English translation or printing which has "Light" instead of "Love."

\(^2\)The subdivisions suggested by him are as follows: The first part contains four subdivisions (1:5-2:2; 2:3-11; 2:12-17; and 2:18-28), of which the first three are moral demands and the last one is an intellectual demand. The second part has six subdivisions (3:1-10; 3:11-18; 3:19-24; 4:1-6; 4:7-21; 5:1-12) divided into two sets which correspond, as in the pattern \(A'B'C'\).
that correspondence is not always certain and clear. For example, the second part of the epistle is compared only to the farewell discourses, but not to the whole second part of the gospel. Moreover, the ABC, A'B'C' pattern that he accepted for the farewell discourses of the gospel has caused him, in our opinion, to misjudge the content of some of the epistolary units.¹ The Johannine vocabulary, style, and modes of thinking that 1 John shares with the gospel should not be used to find a similar structure between two documents that have different purposes and perspectives. For a writer, trying to develop the same structure in two different documents which were addressed to different readers with a different background, involves a sophisticated procedure which is not apparent in either document. That might be the reason why Brown, while accepting the theory in general, cautiously states that, though the body of 1 John can be divided into two parts, influenced by the gospel of John, it is not the result of a meticulous study by the epistolary author. He further says,

I do not think that the author carefully structured the two parts of his writing into the precise thought or numerical patterns mentioned above, patterns that reflect more the interpreter's genius than the author's intention.²

¹For example, 3:1-10 and 3:19-24 are not entirely parallel to 4:1-6 and 5:1-12, respectively.

²Brown, Epistles, p. 128.
The fourth approach is that most commonly used by the majority of commentators, who are persuaded that 1 John has some kind of logical development, scheme, or arrangement based on thought patterns. Motivated by observation of the well-known Pauline feature of combining doctrinal sections with paraenetic ones, some scholars have tried to find the same arrangement in 1 John. T. von Häring suggested a tripartite division, with each division containing an ethical and a Christological thesis.\(^1\) These two types of theses alternate in the first two parts, but are intentionally intermingled in the third. J. E. Belser detected six main divisions with exhortations and warnings intermixed.\(^2\) J. Michl also finds six main divisions in the epistle, which alternate between paraenetic and doctrinal content.\(^3\) We may understand also Feuillet's twofold division in terms of "light" and "love," as stressing this

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\(^1\) Theodor von Häring, "Gedankengang und Grundgedanke des ersten Johannesbriefes," in Theologische Abhandlungen (Freiburg: Mohr, 1892), pp. 173-200. His analysis is as follows: Prologue (1:1-4); (1) 1:5-2:27; (2) 2:28-4:6; (3) 4:7-5:12; Conclusion (5:13-21). This outline was followed, with a small variation, by Brooke in his commentary (p. xxxiv).


\(^3\) J. Michl, p. 203. His main divisions are as follows: Prologue (1:1-4); (1) 1:5-2:17; (2) 2:18-27; (3) 2:28-3:24; (4) 4:1-6; (5) 4:7-5:4; (6) 5:5-12; Epilogue (5:13-21). Divisions 1, 3, 5 are paraenetic while 2, 4, 6 are doctrinal.
doctrinal-paraenetical aspect of the epistle.\(^1\) G. Giurisato argues in similar terms in favor of a two-part division besides the prologue and the epilogue,\(^2\) but the artificiality of his approach is evident, since a discernible logic is missing.

Some have tried various other arrangements. Nagl, for example, believing that the concept of God may serve as a basis for a structure, suggested the following outline: (1) God as light (1:5-2:28). (2) God as justice (2:29-4:6). (3) God as love (4:7-5:19).\(^3\) The problem with this approach is that it is not apparent in the epistle that a concept of God can provide a structure for it. What the writer says about God is always said in relation to Christ.\(^4\) So, Christ or Jesus would be a better approach for outlining the document. D. Ezell has provided us with an outline of the epistle also based on three parts, in

\(^1\)See above, pp. 139-141.

\(^2\)G. Giurisato, "Struttura della prima lettera di Giovanni," RivBib 21 (1973):361-381. According to him, the plan of the letter is as follows: Prologue (1:1-4); Part One, The Commandments and Sin (1:5-2:6), Love (2:7-17), Faith (2:18-28), Justice and Sin (2:29-3:10); Part Two, Love (3:11-22), The Commandments: Faith and Love (3:23-5:4), Faith (5:5-17); Epilogue (5:18-21). He argues that each pericope contains three elements identified as kerygmatic, paraenetic, and casuistic; that each pericope is defined by an inclusio; that Parts One and Two are set off also by an inclusio; and that pericope 3:23-5:4 is composed of three members, each of which contains the three elements mentioned above.


\(^4\)Cf. Brown, Epistles, p. 121.
addition to the prologue: (1) Light (1:5-2:29). (2) Sonship (3:1-4:6). (3) Life (4:7-5:21), but his divisions are not natural, and the structure seems to be imposed upon the text. Another who has tried to show the organic unity of the epistle is S. S. Smalley. He suggests the concept of living as the controlling idea under which the two main parts of the epistle can be grouped. Some of his subdivisions show, however, that such a controlling idea is unable to explain all the units of the epistle.

R. Law produced one of the most interesting and insightful studies on 1 John. His famous outline has become very influential on later commentators of the epistle. He was of the opinion that 1 John has an artistic and articulated structure, which he characterized as spiral, and which resembles music more than logic. He

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3Law, The Tests of Life: A Study of the First Epistle of John, pp. 1-24. The three divisions of his outline, which he called "cycles," are as follows: (1) The Christian life, as fellowship with God, conditioned and tested by walking in the light (1:5-2:28). (2) The
found three connecting themes in the epistle: righteousness, love, and belief. These themes were tied together to form a unity, and had the purpose of providing criteria for distinguishing truth from error. In fact, 1 John was directed against the secessionists who claimed to have righteousness, love, and faith, but who did not show a righteous behavior, love for the brethren, and faith in Jesus as the Christ come in the flesh.

One can find the tests in the first two divisions of Law's scheme, though, sometimes, they seem contrived and forced. But where this scheme breaks down is in the third cycle. The tripartite grouping of righteousness, love, and belief falls apart, requiring a twofold division instead, since it is very hard to find the test of righteousness.

Others, based on Law's outline, came up with different structures. Lenski found seven different circles; Stott, who, though finding three tests—moral, social, and doctrinal—includes other sections and a Christian life, as that of divine sonship, approved by the (2:29-4:6). (3) Closer correlation of righteousness, love, and belief (4:7-5:21).


series of digressions;¹ E. Malatesta, who made a detailed outline, divided the epistle into three major sections, in which the first is considered in terms of light, the second in terms of God's righteousness, and the third in terms of love. The scheme breaks down again in section three where the first element is missing;² Jones has also submitted an outline very similar to those of Law and Malatesta, dividing the epistle into three major units, with three courses of thought unified by a continuous series of tests, and a presiding metaphor;³ and Burdick, who, though accepting the three-cycle division of Law, switched from three to two tests, following Härning's outlining.⁴


⁴Burdick, The Letters of John the Apostle, pp. 85-92. His outline is as follows: (1) First Cycle: The
Still other commentators prefer to point only to breaks in the flow of thought and satisfy themselves with paragraph demarcation, indicating with it that there is no conscious structural arrangement in the document showing an organic unit. In this category we should probably place, among others, Westcott, who considered that it was "extremely difficult to determine with certainty the structure of the epistle";¹ Marshall,² who considers that the paragraphs in the epistle are joined by association of ideas rather than by a logical plan; Schnackenburg, who warns against attempts to trace too neat a scheme in the


epistle;\(^1\) and Dodd, who made a simple yet arbitrary division of the epistle.\(^2\) Also very general, although focusing on opposition in the community, is the analysis of H. Balz;\(^3\) and C. Haas et al. also prefer to divide the epistle in a very general way into three parts.\(^4\) Bruce, who, though distinguishing three main courses of thought (1:5-2:27; 2:28-4:6; 4:7-5:12) containing two main themes, ethical and Christological, refuses to elaborate a consecutive argument throughout the epistle;\(^5\) and Houlden,^{\text{Schnackenburg, Johannesbriefe, pp. vii, viii. His outline is the following: Preface (1:1-4). (1) Fellowship with God as walking in the light and its realization in the world (1:5-2:17). (2) The present situation of the Christian Church (2:18-3:24). (3) The separation of those who belong to God from the "world" by true faith in Christ and love (4:1-5:12). Conclusion (5:13-21).}}


who, while accepting the spiral nature of the epistle and its similarity to the gospel of John in its structure, makes no attempt to trace an organic unity in his commentary.1

This review shows that everyone who has attempted an analysis of 1 John has come up with something different. This is enough to tell us that the epistle does not lend itself to an obvious, clear, and logical outline. It is apparent that the writer's mind did not work with the precision of a sophisticated and educated modern mind. His mind was so absorbed with a few leading ideas that he tried to drive them home wherever he could and with whatever connection he found. In judging the structure of this document, it should be remembered that it was an occasional writing with specific purposes in mind, and that these purposes must have had something to do with the way those leading ideas were expressed.

As we saw in chapter 2,2 the writer of 1 John had two main purposes in mind when he wrote this document. The


2See above, pp. 61-71.
main one is clearly expressed in 5:13: "I write this to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life." It is probable that the readers of the epistle already knew that, but that somehow they were also in need of being reminded of it. This is why our author had to encourage them to "abide in him" (2:27,28), and to assure them that they "are of God" (4:4,6). The second purpose has to do with the warnings he gave regarding the danger of the teaching of false prophets, whom he called "antichrists" (4:1,2). In our view, the only analyses that commend themselves are those which take into consideration the internal evidence provided by the epistle itself. And, in order to develop a structural analysis, one must work with the expressed intention of the document.

Reading the epistle with these two purposes in view, one can see hortatory and warning materials. Apart from the prologue (1:1-4) and the epilogue (5:13-21), natural breaks in the flow of thought can be detected at the following points: 1:5-2:17; 2:18-27; 2:28-3:24; 4:1-6; 4:7-5:12. If we analyze each of these divisions in terms of the two leading purposes mentioned above, we can observe that there is an alternation of purposes in the various units. The reason why these two types of material appear in the epistle is not necessarily that the adversaries were accused of ethical and Christological errors.¹

¹So Brown, Epistles, p. 120.
but that there were two main purposes in the writer's mind.¹

In observing the transition from one division to the other, it seems that the writer did not have a previous plan in his mind, but was rather guided by ideas suggested from the last paragraph, and frequently on the basis of catch-word-type connections. At the end of the prologue, he wrote, "that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you" (1:3). The first division begins in vs. 5 in the following way: "This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you . . . ."² At the end of the first division, the writer says that "the world passes away, and the lust of it" (2:17), an expression which apparently occasions the statement, "Children, it is the last hour." This in turn introduces the subject of the antichrist which initiates the first warning section. At the end of this warning section, our author uses the verb "abide" several times, especially in the sense of abiding in the Son and in the Father. This concept acts as a safeguard against the teaching of the adversaries. The last part of 2:27, which states, "just as it has taught you, abide in him," produces the transition to the hortatory section that follows, in this way: "And now, little

¹See Schnackenburg, Johannesbriefe, p. 10; also Painter, p. 112.

²The verb used in vs. 3 is apangellô, while the words in vs. 5 are angéllia and anangellô, respectively.
children, abide in him, . . . " At the end of this section, it is stated, "And by this we know that he abides in us, by the Spirit which he has given us" (3:24). The word *pneuma* reminds the writer of other kinds of spirits, so he initiates the following warning section with these words: "Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are of God." The last section begins in 4:7 with no apparent catch-word or thought connection with the previous paragraph: "Beloved let us love one another." However, since this is the favorite subject of the author, this lack of connection is not so strange after all, and he does not need to be reminded of that. The epilogue has the same connection. At the end of the last hortatory section, he wrote: "He who has the Son has life; . . . " The epilogue is then initiated: "I write this to you who believe in the name of the Son of God." Besides these connections between sections, there are other similar connections between subdivisions that also testify to the way the author composed his writing.¹

This duality of purpose is also seen when the different subdivisions are compared with each other. There is some kind of parallelism in the subdivisions, but it is not followed perfectly in the different sections. So, it should not be considered as a clue to a structural plan,

¹See, for example, the connections between 3:10 and 3:11; 3:18 and 3:19; 4:12 and 4:13; 4:21 and 5:1; 5:5 and 5:6.
but rather as an evidence of the writer's duality of purpose that he never forgot in the process of writing. The following outline illustrates this:

Prologue (1:1-4)

First Hortatory Section (1:5-2:17)
  Walking in Light (1:5-2:6)
  Walking in Love (2:7-11)
  Not to Love the World (2:12-17)

First Warning Section (2:18-27)
  Beware of the Antichrists (2:18-23)
  Abiding in the Father and the Son is the Safeguard (2:24-27)

Second Hortatory Section (2:28-3:24)
  Doing Righteousness (2:28-3:10)
  Loving One Another (3:11-18)
  Obeying God's Commands (3:19-24)

Second Warning Section (4:1-6)
  Beware of False Prophets (4:1-3)
  He Who Is of God Overcomes Them (4:4-6)

Third Hortatory Section (4:7-5:12)
  Loving One Another (4:7-12)
  Abiding in God and in Love (4:13-21)
  Keeping His Commandments (5:1-5)
  Believing in the Son (5:6-12)

Epilogue (5:13-21)

It seems clear that a fairly close parallelism exists between the two first hortatory sections. "Walking in Light" is parallel to "Doing Righteousness," and "Walking in Love" is similar to "Love for One Another." This parallelism is broken in the third subdivision, where "Not to

\[1\]For the main principle governing this outline, we are indebted to several commentators who have pursued this type of approach. Among them are: Theodor von Haring, "Gedankengang und Grundgedanke des ersten Johannesbriefs," pp. 173-200; Belser, Die Briefe des heiligen Johannes, Übersetzt und erklärt, p. 1; Michl, p. 203.
Love the World" is, apparently, not parallel to "Obeying God's Commands." The word kósmos, which is predominant in the former, is totally wanting in the latter.

A more complete parallelism is found in the warning sections. The subdivision "Beware of the Antichrists" is clearly similar to "Beware of False Prophets"; and the second subdivision, "Abiding in the Father and the Son is the Safeguard," has some resemblance to "He Who Is of God Overcomes Them." Though the wording is different, it is possible to find a theological connection between the concept of "abiding" and the idea of "being," especially since the statement "you are of God" presupposes "he . . . is in you" (4:4).

The parallelism is disrupted again in the third hortatory section, but a basic resemblance exists. The first two subdivisions, "Loving One Another" and "Abiding in God and in Love," are parallel only to the second subdivision of the first and second hortatory sections. The third subdivision is parallel to the third one of the second hortatory section, but not to the third subdivision of the first hortatory section; and the fourth subdivision has no parallel with either corresponding subsection. So, there is a basic parallelism, but not a perfect one. It seems as though the writer was trying to keep his purposes in mind without a preconceived outline, and going over the same familiar subjects but without the precision expected of a sophisticated writer.
It should be mentioned that some commentators consider the passage of 5:6-12 not as a subdivision but as a separate section dealing with polemical issues, and as a result, have come up with six alternating sections, three paraenetic and three polemical. However, the designation of that passage as polemical is debatable, since allusions that might exist in that passage to adversaries' positions is not enough reason to identify a passage as polemical. The passage lacks the clear reference to opponents seen in the parallel passages mentioned above. On the other hand, its lack of parallelism with corresponding subsections might suggest a different classification, and this is what has motivated its identification as polemical, since it produces a balance between paraenetic and polemical sections. And yet, since the writer has not demonstrated a perfect parallelism in the other subsections, it seems unwarranted to use that criterion alone for classifying a passage.

Summary

We conclude that the epistle cannot be structured following any scheme based on a consecutive argument throughout it. It is, however, possible and defensible to trace a basic structure in which the two leading purposes of the writer are presented in an alternate fashion. Such

1 We prefer to use in our outline the term "warning," since the epistle was not written to the adversaries but to the writer's community.
a structure should not be expected to conform to modern standards, but rather to reflect the writer's ability to convey his ideas and thoughts motivated by two basic purposes: encouragement and warning. No significant help is found here to clarify the problem under discussion. However, the structure of the document reveals that the passages in which the hamartiological problem is found belong to paraenetic sections. This indicates that they do not reflect any direct polemic on the part of the writer, but rather should be understood as hortatory in nature, and addressed to the members of his community with the purpose of correcting some deficiencies which he found in them.
CHAPTER FOUR

THE SIN TERMINOLOGY IN THE JOHANNINE LITERATURE

Introduction

The present chapter consists of a review of the sin terminology in the Johannine literature with the purpose of presenting a linguistic and theological setting for the exegetical study that follows.

The rich sin terminology of the NT,\(^1\) stemming from an even richer Hebrew vocabulary regarding sin\(^2\) (though lost in great part in the LXX translation),\(^3\) is considerably reduced in the Johannine writings. The Johannine vocabulary for sin limits itself to the word-group *hamartánō* and the terms *adikía*, *anomía*, *ponérōs*, and


\(^3\) Due primarily to the fact that several Hebrew words were translated by either *hamartía* or *hamártema*. See G. Bertram, "Theological Nuances of *Hamartía* in the LXX," *TDNT* (1964), 1:286-289; G. Stählin, "The Linguistic Usage and History of *Hamartánō*, *Hamártema*, and *Hamartia* before and in the N. T.," *TDNT* (1964), 1:293, 294.
Theologically speaking, it stands midway between a limited presentation in the synoptic tradition and the climactic exposition found in the writings of Paul.1

Obviously, the NT use of the different words for sin does not stand in a vacuum. It actually stems from the cultural and theological milieu reflected in the OT and in the intertestamental literature. It is for this reason that it is necessary to present a brief summary of the semantic value of the Johannine terminology for sin as reflected in the OT and in the intertestamental literature.

The Hamartánō Group

Background

In the LXX the Hamartánō group is, by far, the preferred translation of the Hebrew root bata' and its derivatives.2 ḫaṭa' means "to sin," "to miss (a mark)," "to go astray," etc. It can refer to social misconduct, rebellion, mistreatment, offense against a superior,


transgression of Yahweh's commands, etc.\(^1\)

Outside the Bible, the *Hamartánê* root is found, from Homer onwards, with the sense "not to hit," "to miss." It was also used in reference to intellectual shortcomings, erroneous acts and, sometimes, with the sense of doing wrong or committing illegal acts.\(^2\) It seems to have been through the translation of *hata* and other Hebrew terms in the LXX that it came to have its distinctive religious connotations,\(^3\) since the Biblical view of sin is not found in classical Greek.\(^4\) The noun *hamartía* was also used in a metaphorical sense to denote the


\(^3\)Cf. Stählin, p. 293.

negative "nature of an act." For Aristotle, it was the "missing of virtue," "wrong without kakía." ¹

In the LXX, hamartía became the regular term for "sin," being used as a synonym of hamárțēma, "sinful act," "sin." ² The same is true in the intertestamental literature, where the meaning "failure," "error," "sin" is constantly found. ³ The New Testament use of hamartía is very similar to that of the LXX. Its main connotations have been aptly summarized by Stählin as: (1) an individual act, (2) a description of the condition of man, (3) a personal power.⁴ As we shall see later, all these senses are represented in the Johannine literature. These categories, however, are not unique to the New Testament, since similar concepts are found outside of it. What is

¹Stählin, p. 294.

²Cf. ibid; Turner, p. 413. Hamárțēma is a rare word in the New Testament. For a subtle distinction between hamartia and hamárțēma, see Trench, p. 233; Turner, p. 294; also Günther, "Hamartia," p. 577, who urges such a distinction.


peculiar to the New Testament concept of sin is its "presentation of Jesus as the conqueror of sin,"¹ a concept which appears profusely throughout its books.

The Gospel of John

Hamartánō

In John 5:14 we find the first occurrence of the verb "to sin" in the gospel (though the noun had been used in 1:29). Jesus, after healing the invalid at the pool called Bethesda, found him at the temple and told him: "Sin no more." There is no reference to specific sins, though acts of sin must be in view. The use of the present imperative here may have the force "not to go on sinning."² Jesus' command contains several implications: (1) that the paralytic had been a sinner;³ (2) through his encounter with Jesus his previous sins had been dealt

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¹See McKenzie, p. 820; Grundmann, pp. 304, 305; S. J. De Vries, "Sin, Sinners," *IDB* (1962), 4:371; etc.


with; (3) there was a relationship between his sins and his illness; (4) Jesus' concern was not only with physical illness but also with moral evil. Since Jesus rejected the popular view that sickness was always a direct punishment for sin, the relationship he saw between sin and sickness might have been viewed by him in a deeper sense, as a basic evidence of his victory over Satan and sin.

The second appearance of the verb *hamartáno* is found in 8:11, in the context of the well-known pericope of the adulterous woman. The story was not originally a part of John's gospel, but the story's use of the verb...

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2Sanders, p. 162.

3See below, on John 9:3.


5For a discussion of the problem see J. H. Bernard, 2:715; Schnackenburg, *The Gospel according to St.*
conforms to the Biblical usage. The phrase "sin no more" is identical with the one in 5:14. Here, however, we have reference to the specific sin of adultery, whereas the statement of 5:14 is general.  

In John 9:2,3, hamartánō is used twice in connection with the incident of the man who was blind from birth. The disciples assumed that sickness came from sin, a popular belief that might have been reinforced by the example of the paralytic of Bethesda. But Jesus rejected the notion that that is always the case. "To sin" in this context apparently refers to acts of sin.

These are the only instances of the use of hamartánō in the gospel, and no unique meaning is detected as compared with the rest of the New Testament.

Hamartía

Contrary to hamartánō which is used sparingly in the gospel, the noun hamartía appears seventeen times. The


first occurrence of that word is significant and is found in the mouth of John the Baptist: "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world" (1:29). Though different interpretations have been held regarding the meaning of the word "lamb," and the implications of the verb "to take away," we are primarily concerned here with the use of *hamartía*. In this text *hamartía* appears in the singular, not in the plural as in 1 John 3:5. This has some significance since the singular (which is preferred in the gospel over against the plural of the synoptics) may suggest sin in general without reference to particular sins. It may be that sin is thought of as a state or power rather than as a deed. In this way, *hamartía* has usually been considered as "a principle," "the whole collective burden of sin which weighs on mankind," "guilt and..." 

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2 Cf. Lyonnet and Sabourin, pp. 38, 39.

3 See C. L. Breland, "*Hamartánô* and *Hamartía* in John" (Ph. D. dissertation, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1928), p. 20.

In John 8 we find *hamartía* six times. The expression "you will seek me and die in your sin" (vs. 21) introduces again the singular form of *hamartía*. In vs. 24, however, the same expression occurs twice with *hamartía* in the plural: "I told you that you will die in your sins, for you will die in your sins unless you believe that I am he." The singular form of vs. 21 is usually taken as referring to the particular sin of unbelief and rejection of Jesus on the part of Jesus' audience, something which is prominent in John. But the fact that the same expression is repeated twice in the plural in the same short context introduces doubt as to the correctness of this view. It seems preferable to take the singular as referring to the sinful state or condition in which an unbelieving person is, and the plural as repeating the same thing by focusing on individual acts which produce

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4. See, for example, 9:16-41; 15:22-24; 16:8; etc. Cf. also Günther, "Hamartía," p. 582.

5. Cf. Maggioni, p. 239, who holds that the sin is only one, unbelief, but expressed in a variety of forms. See also Brown, *The Gospel according to St. John*, 1:350;
that condition. Those who rejected Christ were left in that sinful condition created by their particular sins and without a savior.¹

Two interesting expressions are introduced in vs. 34. One is "every one who commits sin." This is the rendering of *ho poiôn tê̂n hamartían* which uses the present participle of *poiēs*. It has been felt that the present tense should be understood in terms of continuous action here, since the context places emphasis on remaining and continuing. The opposite of being a slave is being free, which in turn is the result of being Jesus' true disciples and having knowledge of the truth (vss. 31, 32). Moreover, the peculiar construction "to do sin" seems to suggest also a continuing action.² Consequently, the translation, "he who continues in sin,"³ "whoever habitually asserts his own will,"⁴ and he who lives "a life of sin"⁵ have been thought to be well grounded. Some⁶ have had the

Westcott, The Gospel according to St. John, p. 130.


²Cf. Evans, p. 54.

³Morris, p. 458.

⁴Tasker, p. 119.


⁶See, for example, Barrett, The Gospel according to St. John, pp. 345, 346; Schnackenburg, The Gospel according to St. John, 2:208; Sanders, p. 208, n. 1; J. H. Bernard, 2:306.
impression that "to do sin" involves more than a single action and implies a "complete separation from God." Here the singular hamartía refers to sin as something that can be done. The resulting condition is servitude. Contrary to all this, the passage does not necessarily refer to habitual sinning. It seems to allude to the internal opposition to the will of God that sin creates in man, without contemplating directly the practice of sin.

The other interesting expression is "a slave to sin." The genitive tès hamartías, though strongly supported by the quality and number of manuscripts, is commonly considered a doubtful reading. It has been retained in the text, however, and its omission understood as a stylistic improvement introduced by later copyists. But it is also possible that a later scribe may have added the expression tès hamartías from the similar phrase in Rom

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1 Grundmann, p. 306.
2 See above, pp. 22-28.


5 This is the opinion of Brown, The Gospel according to St. John, 2:355; Sanders, p. 228; Lazure, p. 296, n. 32; Lindars, p. 325; etc.
6:17: "You who were once slaves of sin"; it might have been also added as an additional comment.\(^1\) At any rate, the omission does not affect the meaning of the passage, since in vs. 44 the kind of slavery referred to is spelled out: it is a slavery to the devil. Yet, it does affect the conceptual use of *hamartía* in John, since, if it is retained, it would have the meaning of "power," "agent," almost a personification of sin, as already known in Paul (Rom 6:17, 20).\(^2\)

The last reference to *hamartía* in this chapter is found in vs. 46, where Jesus asks: "Which of you convicts me of sin?" (Gr. *peri hamartías*). Jesus stated that he came to tell his hearers the truth (vs. 40). Since they could deny his truthfulness, he appealed to his known moral integrity.\(^3\) The singular of *hamartía* points to sinfulness in general, and not to a single sin.\(^4\)

John 9 uses the word *hamartía* three times. The subject of the miracle performed for the man born blind is presented. The question of the disciples, "who sinned, this man or his parents?" (vs. 2) was interpreted and applied by the Jews: "You were born in utter sin" (vs.

\(^1\text{See Barrett, The Gospel according to St. John, p. 346.}\)

\(^2\text{A similar idea appears in 2 Pet 2:19 as "slaves of corruption."}\)

\(^3\text{Lindars, p. 330.}\)

\(^4\text{See Westcott, The Gospel according to St. John, p. 137.}\)
34). Literally it reads: "in sins you were born altogether." The expression "in sins" is in an emphatic position. According to the Jews, the man's blindness was but a sign of deep sinfulness. The plural, "sins," apparently refers to sin in general, without pinpointing any particular sins.

Hamartía is used twice in vs. 41, but now in the singular. Here the sense of "guilt" comes to the surface. This is seen in the RSV translation: "If you were blind, you would have no guilt; but now that you say, 'we see,' your guilt remains." Since this statement was addressed to unbelieving Pharisees, the particular sin in mind was their unbelief.

Chapter 15 also contains three times the noun hamartía, twice in vs. 22 and once in vs. 24. In each instance the word is in the singular. In the first and third occurrences the sense of "guilt" is apparent: "If I had not come and spoken to them, they would not have sin" (vs. 22); "If I had not done among them works that no one else did, they would have not sin" (vs. 24). However, the second instance in vs. 22, "But now they have no excuse

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2See also Schnackenburg, The Gospel according to St. John, 2:256.

for their sin, is a reference to the sin of unbelief and rejection of the message of Jesus. So, we have here in close connection two different nuances of hamartía: "guilt" and a particular condition of unbelief and rejection which is epitomized in the word hatred.¹ This is considered to be the sin par excellence.²

There has been much discussion regarding the meaning of 16:8,9. This discussion has been generated by the meaning of the verb elênchō and its relationship to sin, righteousness, and judgment.³ But the anarthrous singular hamartía is clearly defined in vs. 9: "of sin, because they do not believe in me." Again, hamartía is related to the condition of unbelief, but its apparent meaning is "guilt."⁴ The world will be convinced of its sin (guilt) because it rejected Christ.⁵

This idea of "guilt" is again seen in 19:11,⁶


⁵Haenchen, 2:144.

where Jesus answered Pilate: "You would have no power over me unless it had been given you from above; therefore, he who delivered me to you has the greater sin."\(^1\)

The last occurrence of *hamartía* in John is in 20:23: "If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven." The anarthrous plural here could indicate specific acts. The only other two occurrences of the plural, however, show that the possibility of sin in general might be in view. In 8:24 the plural form is paralleled to the singular (vs. 21), which might suggest that for John, "sins" is a general statement with the meaning of "state" or "condition."\(^2\) The use of the plural, however, is so restricted in the gospel that it is not possible to be certain.\(^3\) But at least we have evidence for the possibility of such a meaning in the present passage. This, in turn, could provide an interesting interpretation for the problem of forgiving and retaining sins.\(^4\)

\(^1\)See on 9:41; 15:22.

\(^2\)See above, pp. 163-165.

\(^3\)A different phenomenon is found in the first epistle where it is used many times.

\(^4\)This would mean that to the apostles was given the power of forgiving and retaining sins in relation to a sinful state or condition, and not in connection with individual sins.
Hamartánō

Hamartánō appears ten times in the Johannine epistles, all of them in the first letter.\(^1\) In every case, it has the usual meaning of the New Testament, that is to say, it is used theologically and refers to offenses against God. As it is the case with the gospel of John and the entire New Testament, the secular meaning of "missing a mark" or "error" is wanting. The specific nuances and different connotations that it might have are discussed in the next chapter in conjunction with the exegesis of different passages.\(^2\)

Hamartía

The noun hamartía is used in the epistles even more profusely than the verb. It appears seventeen times,\(^3\) as many as in the gospel, which is a much longer document.

In 1 John 1 we have three instances of its use. The expression in vs. 7, "the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin," uses hamartía as an anarthrous singular. Since the noun is modified by "all," it is probably a comprehensive statement covering all kinds of

\(^1\)Cf. 1:10; 2:1ab; 3:6ab,8,9; 5:16ab,18.

\(^2\)We note a preference on the part of the writer to use the verb in the present tense, seven out of ten times. Cf. 3:6ab,8,9; 5:16ab,18.

\(^3\)Cf. 1:7,8,9; 2:2; 3:4,5,8,9; 4:10; 5:16,17.
sins. The phrase seems to be a parallel to "from all unrighteousness" (vs. 9) and as such includes every sin for which confession brings forgiveness. In vs. 8 we find the expression "to have sin," which in the gospel was used with a strong sense of "guilt." This sense is apparently prominent here, though specific acts are more probably in the writer's mind. The act of sin and its responsibility are not always sharply distinguished, either in the Old Testament or in the New. The statement of vs. 9, "if we confess our sins, he . . . will forgive our sins . . ." suggests that our author is thinking of specific acts and not merely of the "guilt" of those actions. This is also corroborated by the author's desire that his children "may not sin," and his concession that "if any one does sin, . . ." (2:1).

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1 Cf. Brooke, A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Johannine Epistles, p. 16. Other commentators prefer to see this "sin" as a principle; cf. Westcott, Epistles, p. 22; Neil Alexander, p. 50.

2 There is no warrant for the view that "sin" in vs. 7 refers to "the defilement caused by the sin nature," as proposed by W. R. Cook, "Hamartiological Problems in First John," BibSac 123 (1966):251; or the "stain of sin," as held by Stott, The Epistles of John, p. 75; cf. also Bruce, The Epistles of John, p. 44.


4 See Evans, p. 55; Breland, p. 20.

5 We have seen in the gospel (8:21,24) that the evangelist used the singular and the plural of hamartía with the same meaning of "guilt" and in the same context. 1 John seems to be different, however, with its prevalence.
The expression in 2:2, "he is the expiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world," should be understood in line with 1:7-9. Though the element of "guilt" is present, sins as acts against the will of God should be understood. The same is apparently true regarding 2:12: "... because your sins are forgiven for his sake."

After several instances of **hamartía** in the plural, the writer returns to the singular form in 3:4: "Every one who commits sin is guilty of lawlessness; sin is lawlessness." "To commit sin" is the rendering of the Gr. *pᾶς ὁ ποιῶν τὴν ἁμαρτίαν*, "everyone who does sin." Above we found this phrase in John 8:34, which some have associated with the practice of sin. Though that meaning is also found here,¹ some objections have been raised against it.² Obviously the sense of "guilt" is discarded, since "guilt" is not something that can be done or committed, but rather something that can be felt. The arthrous singular here, as there, has the meaning of sin in general. The statement has a sharp contrast in the expression of 2:29: "Everyone who does right [Gr. τὸν δικαίοσύνην] is born of him."³ Hence, the sense of sinful

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²See our discussion below, on pp. 230-233.
³Cf. vs. 7, "He who does right is righteous."
actions as opposed to righteous deeds is apparent.\(^1\) The presence of the article has led scholars to emphasize either "sin in its completeness,"\(^2\) or the identification of a specific sin.\(^3\) In any case, the article seems to make sin more definite, something that we miss in the English translation.\(^4\)

In vs. 4, our writer shows his intention to define sin: "Sin is lawlessness" [Gr. anomía]. Both nouns in this statement have a definite article which shows their definiteness in the writer's mind. We reserve the term anomía for a later discussion.

Our author returns to the plural form of hamartía, along with a singular one, in vs. 5: "You know that he appeared to take away sins, and in him there is no sin."\(^5\) The expression "to take away sins" is similar to John 1:29, with the exception that there the singular was used. The change from the singular to the plural may indicate that the author wants to emphasize the "ordinary sins of

\(^1\)See Brown, Epistles, p. 398, who translates it as "everyone who acts sinfully."

\(^2\)Westcott, Epistles, p. 102.

\(^3\)This is the opinion of M. Vellanickal, The Divine Sonship of Christians in the Johannine Writings (Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1977), p. 257, who thinks that the refusal to believe in Jesus is the sin in view.

\(^4\)Cf. Lenski, Epistles, p. 455.

\(^5\)There is a textual uncertainty regarding the words tås hamartías. The plural, however, is kept in all variants. See Aland et al., p. 817, n. 2.
life,"¹ as contrasted with "the sin of the world," which underlines the collective notion of sin.² The last part of vs. 5, "in him there is no sin," uses the anarthrous singular. The construction of the sentence shows that the emphasis falls on "sin."³ ἡμαρτία in this context apparently means "sinfulness."⁴ The use of the present may suggest Christ's character (note the use of "is" instead of "was").⁵ It is obvious that for our writer's own purpose, Christ's sinlessness was important.⁶

The next usage of ἡμαρτία is found in vss. 8 and 9: "He who commits sin [Gr. ὁ ποιῶν τὴν ἡμαρτίαν] is of the devil; for the devil has sinned from the beginning." The statement is in contrast to "he who does right [Gr. ὁ ποιῶν τὴν δικαιοσύνην] is righteous," and parallel to vs.₁⁷

¹See Brown, Epistles, p. 402; also Brooke, pp. 85, 86, who has the concept of "many acts of sin." Cf. also Westcott, Epistles, p. 103; Houlden, Epistles, p. 92; Bruce, The Epistles of John, p. 89; Dodd, Epistles, p. 73. Bultmann, Epistles, p. 50, sees the plural as a reference to the possibility of freedom from sinning, and not as a reference to forgiveness of past sins. In this line see also Grayston, Epistles, p. 105, who considers it as the removal of "the choosing of sinful actions."

²See above, p. 162.

³Cf. a similar statement seemingly regarding Jesus in John 7:18, "In him there is no unrighteousness [ἀδικία]."

⁴So Brown, Epistles, p. 402; Lenski, Epistles, p. 457.

⁵See, for example, Westcott, Epistles, p. 103; A. Wilder, 12:258; etc.

⁶Cf. John 8:46; 7:18; 1 John 2:1; 3:3,7; also Brown, Epistles, p. 402.
9, "no one born of God commits sin [Gr. hamартían ou poiei]." This is the same phrase as in 3:4 and should have the same meaning here. Our author is obviously talking about conduct. We have seen that some have suggested the meaning of habit and practice for this phrase.\(^1\) They find support here, not only because of the use of the present tense—which sometimes may not indicate a continuous action—but because it is associated with expressions that indicate linear action, such as "for the devil has sinned from the beginning [Gr. απ' αρχῆς ὁ διάβολος hamartánei]" and also the verb "abide" in vs. 6. This, however, may not necessarily be correct. See our discussion in this regard in chapter 5.\(^2\)

In 4:10 ἁμαρτία appears again in the plural: "God . . . sent his Son to be the expiation for our sins." The usual meaning of actions and deeds is clear here, as it was in 2:2,12.

Chapter 5:16,17 contains the last four instances of ἁμαρτία in 1 John. They appear in conjunction with the

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\(^1\) Cf. also Brooke, p. 88, who holds that the expression means a "whole course of action." Also see Westcott, Epistles, pp. 101, 102, 105, 106; Bruce, The Epistles of John, p. 92; Stott, The Epistles of John, pp. 124-126; Dale Moody, pp. 64, 65; Wilder, p. 258. On the other hand, Law, p. 219, believes that to hold that is to miss the point. For him, "being" is to be tested by "doing," since our writer was opposing the adversaries' assertion that in order to be righteous it was not necessary to do right. This opinion, however, is due to the overemphasis of controversial language that Law holds.

\(^2\) See p. 247.
reference to "mortal sin" [Gr. hamartía prós thánaton], and "not a mortal sin" [Gr. hamartía mē prós thánaton]. Though this is a difficult passage,1 we are concerned here with the meaning of hamartía. Whether our author regarded this kind of sin as a single action or as a succession of them (or even a state of mind) is not important here. What is relevant is that it refers to a particular kind of sin. Vs. 17, however, gives a different nuance to hamartía in stating, "all wrongdoing is sin"[Gr. pása adikía hamartía estín]. The anarthrous hamartía apparently refers to sin in general, since it is coupled with the collective adikía.2

The Book of Revelation

Hamartía is the only member of the hamartánō group that appears in the book of Revelation. It is used three times (1:5; 18:4,5) and always as an arthrous plural. This clearly indicates that sins as actions and deeds are contemplated.

The Adikía Group

Background

Adikía, outside the Bible, has the meaning of "unrighteous action," "unrighteousness," "wickedness," "unjust act," "iniquity," "transgression" (usually in the

1We discuss this passage in detail in pp. 247-261.  
2See below, pp. 178, 247.
plural).\(^1\) It also has the meaning of "injury" or "harm,"\(^2\) "unlawful conduct toward men."\(^3\)

In the LXX adikía is a sin against God, being the usual translation of the Hebrew word ʿāwōn, "guilt,"\(^4\) and sometimes equated with hamartía.\(^5\) It also renders other Hebrew words with the meaning of "dishonesty," "injustice," "disloyalty," "apostasy."\(^6\) Among these various meanings, it is interesting to note that adikía or ádikos are sometimes opposed to álētheía.\(^7\) The Hebrew word sheqer, in the sense of lying or untruthfulness, is frequently rendered adikía, ádikos or adikōs, especially in the Psalms.\(^8\)

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\(^1\) W. Bauer, pp. 17, 18. Also with the same meaning in modern Greek; see Pring, p. 3; Whitelocke, 1:442-444.


\(^3\) Shrenk, p. 154.


\(^5\) Barclay, New Testament Words, p. 52; Günther, "Adikía," p. 574; etc.

\(^6\) With this range of meaning it appears also in the Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha; see Whitelocke, 1:442-444.

\(^7\) See Sus 1:53; WisSol 14:29; etc. Cf. also Schrenk, p. 154; Günther, "Adikía," p. 574.

\(^8\) Cf. Pss 51:5; 119:29,69,164; 144:8,11; etc.
In the New Testament, *adikía* has the same basic meaning as that of the LXX, and it is primarily used by Paul, Luke, and John. Its use shows a reference to accepted categories of injustice, whose particular meaning has to be derived from the context.\(^1\) In Paul it is an "unjust action" (2 Cor 12:13), a "violation of the divine law" (Rom 1:29), "legal injustice" (Rom 9:14). It is also a sign of the operation of the antichrist (2 Thess 2:10).\(^2\) *Adikēma* is used in the New Testament only in the book of Acts, with the sense of "criminal act" (18:14; 24:20), and in Revelation where it is parallel to *hamartía* (18:5). The verb *adikēo* has the meaning of "acting unjustly" or "harming," either men or things,\(^3\) and is frequently used in the book of Revelation.

The Gospel of John

*Adikía* appears only once in the gospel: "He who seeks the glory of him who sent him is true, and in him there is no falsehood [Gr. *adikía*]" (7:18). According to the context, Jesus showed that the unselfishness of his own motive is the proof of his integrity. As the RSV's translation shows, *adikía* means "falsehood" in this context, since it is opposed to *alethēs*, "true."\(^4\) This

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\(^1\) Günther, "Adikía," p. 575.
\(^3\) See W. Bauer, p. 17; de Vries, p. 371; etc.
meaning is also seen in the LXX, where it translates the Heb. *sheqer*. The basic meaning outside of this gospel, however, is "wrongdoing," "injustice." The following verses (19-24) show that Jesus might be referring to the charge of Sabbath violation as a result of healing the paralytic of Bethesda in chapter 5. If this is the case, then adikía should retain its basic meaning of "wrongdoing." But it is not altogether clear that a Sabbath violation would be characterized as adikía, unless adikía means more than "wrongdoing." It is, then, preferable to take adikía as meaning "falsehood."

The Johannine Epistles

The word appears only twice in the Johannine epistles. In 1:9, adikía is coupled with *hamarçía*: "He . . . will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness." Most commentators regard the two terms also supported by Lindars, p. 289. Cf. Brown, *The Gospel according to John*, 1:312, who translates it as "dishonesty."

See above, p. 180.

See J. H. Bernard, 1:261. Sanders, p. 206, believes that the charge of "unrighteousness" was raised against Jesus because he was thought to mislead the crowds.


*Cf. Schnackenburg, *The Gospel according to St. John*, 2:133, who gives adikía the comprehensive sense of "sin," and Haenchen, 2:11, 14, who translates it "wickedness."*
as synonyms and as showing no progression of thought.\textsuperscript{1} Others would prefer to take it as "injustice," a term that involves not only sin against God but also against man.\textsuperscript{2}

In 5:17 we find the statement, "all wrongdoing is sin, but\textsuperscript{3} there is sin which is not mortal." Despite the apparent equation between adikía and hamartía, the two terms do not seem to be interchangeable. Since it is adikía that is related to hamartía, we should expect that the former indicates a particular form of hamartía. Moreover, if we give to kai its well-known consecutive sense,\textsuperscript{4} "so, there is sin not unto death," then it is possible that adikía is a sin which does not reach the status of "sin unto death," but rather should be classified as "sin not unto death." On this line of thought, adikía seems to have the meaning of "injustice," wrongdoing," a kind of sin that is more applicable to man's relations to fellow men than to man's relation to God. Though schemes are not always appropriate to represent range and nuances of meaning, it seems that for our writer, and in light of the statement of 3:4, where hamartía is said to be anomía, there is a progression of

\textsuperscript{1}Especially since in 5:17 adikía is said to be hamartía. Cf. Bruce, p. 45; Brown, Epistles, p. 211; etc.

\textsuperscript{2}See, for example, Brooke, p. 21.

\textsuperscript{3}The Greek conjunction kai sometimes has an adverbative sense, as in this place. See Blass, p. 227.

\textsuperscript{4}For this use, see Blass, p. 227; Robertson, Grammar, p. 1183.
thought starting from adikía and ending with anomía. This can be illustrated as follows:

Adikía-------Hamartía-------Anomía

The Book of Revelation

The noun adikía is not used in Revelation, but adikēma is used once (18:5) in a parallel construction with hamartía. The meaning seems to be "wrongdoing," "misdeed," "crime."²

The verb adikeō, on the contrary, appears eleven times in the book.³ It has the general sense of "to harm," "to injure," with the possible exception of 22:11, where "evildoer" and "to do evil" seem to be preferred.

Anomía

Background

Etymologically speaking, anomía can have two meanings. Either it refers to "without (the) law," or it means "against a (the) law."⁴ In the long run, it logically acquired the meaning of "wrongdoing," "sin," "transgressions," especially in the plural.⁵ The singular,

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²Cf. Acts 20:14; 24:20 where the sense of "crime" is prominent.
⁵See, for example, PssSol 15:10; WisSol 4:20;
however, sometimes denotes a state of lawlessness or wickedness.

In the LXX and the Pseudepigrapha, anomía is a common term with all the meanings mentioned above. There is no fixed Hebrew equivalent, but the most frequently used is 'āwōn.¹ Generally speaking, anomía possesses no greater connection with the law than the rest of the sin terminology of the LXX.²

In the NT, we observe the same meaning as elsewhere.³ The plural refers to "sinful acts" (though mostly in quotations).⁴ The meaning "sin," "unrighteousness," or "iniquity" seems to be prevalent. In this regard anomía is a synonym of hamartía with no direct focus on the law.⁵ Some of the occurrences, however, seem

PrMan 1:9,12,13.


²Bernard, p. 532.

³The term appears fourteen times in the entire NT, including twice in 1 John 3:4, with no occurrence in the rest of the Johannine writings. The other places are: Matt 7:23; 13:41; 23:28; 24:12; Rom 4:7; 6:19; 2 Cor 6:14; 2 Thess 2:3,7; Titus 2:14; Heb 1:9; 10:17.

⁴See, for example, Rom 4:7 quoting Ps 32:1.

⁵Gutbrod, pp. 1085-1086. In some passages in Matthew, a reference to the law might be intended, as seems to be the case in 23:28.
to have a dualistic and eschatological setting. About ten times in the LXX anomía translates the Heb. āwēl, āwlah, as "perversity," "wickedness." Since this word is used in the Qumran writings in a dualistic context, some have seen in it the meaning of a general state of hostility against God. Moreover, we have seen above that over twenty times anomía translates the Heb. peshaʾ, whose basic meaning is "revolt," "rebellion." This is important because in 1 John 3:4 the same context occurs in the only two instances of the use of the word. De la Potterie has indicated three stages in the semantic development of the term anomía. First, there was the meaning "transgression of the law" or "illegality" reflected in the writings of Euripides and Demosthenes. In the next stage, reflected in the Septuagint, anomía became a synonym for hamartía. Finally, there was the New Testament where, with few exceptions, anomía refers to the collective state of hostility and revolt manifested by the forces of evil.


2 See, for example, IQS 3:17-23; 4:9,17,24; 1QH 14:15,26; 15:25; etc.


4 See below, pp. 230-233.

against the kingdom of God in the last times.

It seems to be necessary, at this point, to study the use of *anomía* in the NT in order to find out the shades of meaning it may convey. In the gospels, only Matthew uses the term *anomía*, and this on four occasions (7:23; 13:41; 23:28; 24:12). With the exception of 23:28, these texts are located in an eschatological context. This imparts a serious quality to *anomía*. The statement of 7:23, "depart from me, you evildoers," belongs to the end of the Sermon on the Mountain. But its immediate context refers to the eschaton. Beginning with vs. 15, there is the mention of the "false prophets." Vs. 21 refers to the entering into the kingdom of heaven. That this is the eschatological kingdom is clear from the statement of vs. 22: "On that day many will say to me . . . ." The phrase "depart from me, you evildoers" [Gr. hoi ergazómenoi tēn anomían] is a quotation from Ps 6:8 (LXX).¹ That Psalm is a prayer on the part of the psalmist to be delivered of distress and trouble caused by his enemies whom he called "workers of evil." The context is persecution and affliction, which is not apparent either in this passage or in the Lucan one. But the idea that this term is applied to enemies of God's people gives to it a serious connotation. It is not just a reference to any sin, but to a

¹It is interesting to note that Luke 13:27, which also quotes this Psalm, uses *adikía* instead of *anomía*. Matthew, however, uses *anomía*, which is the LXX rendering of the Heb. *tōwôn* in this passage.
particularly terrible sin which manifests itself in hatred and persecution.

The passage 13:41 is part of Jesus' explanation regarding the parable of the weeds of the field: "The Son of man will send his angels, and they will gather out of his kingdom all causes of sin and evildoers [Gr. toũs poioũntas tēn anomian]." The eschatological note is apparent. The term refers to those who will be left out of the kingdom and thrown into the furnace of fire. They are sons of the devil (vs. 38), since they were "sown" by him (vs. 39). A dualistic picture is presented with the distinction between the children of the kingdom and the sons of the devil.

The reference to "anomia" in 24:12 is very interesting, since it fuses several elements suggested in the context of the previous passages: "And because wickedness is multiplied [Gr. plethunthēnai tēn anomian], most men's love will grow cold." The passage belongs to Jesus' eschatological sermon delivered on the Mount of Olives. According to Jesus, there will be hatred and persecution against his followers (vss. 9, 10) along with the increasing activity of false prophets who will lead many astray (vs. 11). Clearly, anomía here is used in reference to those particular sins presented in an eschatological framework.

The only occurrence of anomía in Matthew that does not have an eschatological overtone is 23:28, where Jesus addressed the scribes and Pharisees: "So you also
outwardly appear righteous to men, but within you are full of hypocrisy and iniquity [Gr. anomías].” Anomía here might be an ironic reference to Pharisees who pretended to keep the law, but at the same time disregarded the basic principle of it. However, the seriousness of the sin referred to by anomía is better understood in the light of Jesus’ declaration that they were sons of persecutors and murderers of prophets, and that they will do the same thing to those whom Jesus will send to them: "Therefore I send you prophets and wise men and scribes, some of whom you will kill and crucify, and some you will scourge in your synagogues and persecute from town to town" (vs. 34). There is no apparent eschatological reference, though the statement, "all this will come upon this generation," should not be overlooked.

In Rom 6:19 Paul twice uses the word anomía: "For just as you once yielded your members to impurity and to greater and greater iniquity [Gr. te anomía eis tēn anomían], so now yield your members to righteousness for sanctification." The RSV translation of anomía as "iniquity" seems to be warranted, since the apostle refers to pre-Christian experience on the part of his readers. Serious sin is obviously in view.

In 2 Cor 6:14 anomía is opposed to dikaiosúnē: "For what partnership have righteousness and iniquity?" We can judge the meaning of anomía in the present passage in the light of the other contrasts Paul makes: Light--
darkness; Christ--Belial; believer--unbeliever; temple of God--idols. Thus it is parallel to "darkness," "Belial," "unbeliever," "idols." Consequently, it represents a conduct in complete opposition to what God stands for.

2 Thess 2:3,7 provides another interesting use of anomía. In this eschatological passage, Paul talks about the "man of lawlessness [Gr. ho ἄνθρωπος τῆς anomías]," and of the "mystery of lawlessness" [Gr. μυστήριον τῆς anomías]. It is clear from this passage that, for Paul, before the day of the Lord there will be an outbreak of evil characterized by "rebellion" [Gr. ἀποστασία] idolatry, Satanic activity, signs, wonders, deception and delusion. All this Paul describes with the genitive of anomía.

The last use of anomía in Paul is Titus 2:14: "who [Jesus Christ] gave himself for us to redeem us from all iniquity [Gr. ἀπὸ πάσης anomías] and to purify for himself a people of his own who are zealous for good deeds." The context shows that Paul here uses anomía in reference to "irreligion," "worldly passions,"

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1The adopted reading, however, is classified "C" in the UBS Greek Text, since the term hæmartí̂a is also supported by ancient authorities; see Aland et al., p. 715, n. 1.

2The other NT usages outside 1 John are Rom 4:7; Heb 1:9, and 10:17. They are quotations from the OT, mostly in the plural, and reflect LXX usage. The exception is Heb 1:9, which uses the singular. It should be noted, however, that this singular is anarthrous and reflects the LXX translation of the Heb. resha', "wickedness."
"intemperance," etc. Though vs. 13 mentions the "blessed hope" of the appearing of Jesus Christ, the use of anomía here does not have an eschatological thrust. The general meaning of "iniquity" seems to be appropriate.

In summary we can say that the term anomía in the NT has the connotation of serious sin. It indicates rebellion against God and frequently has eschatological and dualistic overtones.

The noun ánemos appears only seven times in the NT,\(^1\) and the only two gospel occurrences reflect OT quotations from Isa 53:12. The adverb anómos appears only twice, in Rom 2:12. None of these terms, however, appear in the Johannine writings.

The Johannine Epistles

In the Johannine writings, as we mentioned above, anomía is used only in 1 John 3:4. Three views have been held regarding its meaning in this passage. First, the most common translation of anomía is "transgression of the law" or "lawlessness."\(^2\) This translation is based

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\(^1\)See Mark 15:28 (This reading is usually rejected because of inferior attestation); Luke 22:37; Acts 2:23; 1 Cor 9:21; 2 Thess 2:8; 1 Tim 1:9; 2 Pet 2:8.

\(^2\)Cf., for example, J. H. Bernard, 2:532, who says that only the meaning "violation of the law" can be recognized in this passage; Trench, p. 231 and Berry, p. 14, who refer to it as the "non-observance of a law"; Breland, p. 21, as a "condition without law"; de Vries, "Sin," p. 371, who states that the term indicates an attitude or condition of contempt for, and violation and ignorance of the law; Findlay, Fellowship in the Life Eternal, p. 255, defines it as "illegality"; JB, as "sin is to break the
primarily on etymological grounds and, frequently, is considered as proper since 1 John is thought to oppose antinomian practices.\(^1\) Second, anomía is considered to be a synonym for hamartía, an understanding frequently based on the translation of the word in the LXX.\(^2\) Third, anomía is rendered as "iniquity" and especially understood as an eschatological term referring to the outbreak of evil in the last days.\(^3\)

It is true that the term "law" does not appear in 1 John, and that even if it did appear, it would be different in content than the OT concept of law. However, 1 John does have an emphasis on the keeping of the commandments, especially the commandments of believing in law." For the view of "lawlessness," see RSV's rendering as "sin is lawlessness"; C. R. Smith, *The Bible Doctrine of Sin* (London: Epworth Press, 1953), p. 71, accepts the translation of "lawlessness," but recognizes that the use is wider than the reference to the Mosaic law; McKenzie, p. 820; W. Barclay, *A New Testament Word Book*, p. 52, who says that anomía is lawlessness, and the spirit that induces man to do what he likes; K. H. Schelkle, *Theology of the New Testament*, 4 vols. (Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1970), 3:56, considers it as lawlessness, which is an opposition to the divine will which imposes an order of conduct; Evans, p. 58, considers it as "the behavior which runs counter to the divine ordinance and a contradiction of God's will"; H. H. Esser, "Nómos," *NIDNTT* (1975), 2:449; etc.

\(^1\) See, for example, Windisch, p. 121.

\(^2\) At least seven times it translates the Heb. ḫattāt, which is the usual word behind the term hamartía.

Jesus and the exercise of love (2:3-11). This might indicate that the concept of anomía in 1 John does not need to be divested of its etymological meaning, provided that it is conceived as the conduct that prescinds from the divine will and shows hostility and opposition toward God. Yet, the Johannine expression "sin is lawlessness" is not convertible into "lawlessness is sin," since there seems to be a progression in significance from the one term to the other, and this suggests that for the writer hamartía and anomía do not cover exactly the same ground. Hamartía needs to be seen as anomía, and this means that anomía has a wider scope than hamartía. This concept of anomía as a state of opposition and hostility toward God is very important in the understanding of the stated impeccability of 1 John, not only because the two occurrences of anomía are found in its immediate context, but also because it provides a suitable qualification for the author's denial of sin in the Christian life.

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1 See Lazure, pp. 307-309; Schnackenburg, Johannes-briefe, p. 165; Gutbrot, "Nòmos," p. 1086; Schelkle, p. 56; J. B. Bauer, p. 857; Evans, p. 58; etc.

2 Contrary to G. Findlay, Fellowship in the Life Eternal, p. 256, and others.

3 See above, p. 183.

4 Gutbrod, p. 1086.
The Kakós Group

Background

The term kakós originally had the meaning of "unserviceable," "incapable," "poor of its kind." It also meant "morally bad," "wicked," "weak," "unhappy," "bad," "evil."¹ In the Greek world, kakós, as a noun, has the meaning of "evil." On one side, it is a metaphysical principle; on the other, it is the evil to be found in the ignorance of men.² In some of the papyri, it has the wide sense of "troublesome," "distressing," to mind and body.³

In the LXX, kakós is frequently the translation of the Hebrew ra'⁴ (translated also by ponérós). It has the sense of "evil" or "disaster." It is the divine punishment that God brings upon apostasy and idolatry.⁵

In the NT, kakós is not as prominent as ponérós and hamartía. It is an evil principle which resides in man's heart. Man, without Christ, is enslaved to evil and cannot do good. For Paul, kakós is the action of a man


³See Moulton & Milligan, p. 317.


separated from God. As "godlessness," it is closely related to hamartía.\textsuperscript{1}

Kakopoívō means "to act badly," "to do evil," "to do evil to someone." The last meaning is common in the LXX.\textsuperscript{2} The noun kakopoiós is the "one who does evil."\textsuperscript{3} Both terms appear in the New Testament in a few places and with the same meaning.\textsuperscript{4}

The Gospel of John

The kakós word-group appears three times in the gospel. In 18:23 it is used both as an adverb and as a noun, with the sense of "wrongly" or "wrong." In vs. 30 the form kakón appears as an object of the verb poieō.\textsuperscript{5} The accepted reading shows that the Jewish leaders may have accused Jesus of "habitually doing wrong,"\textsuperscript{6} or of being an "evildoer."

The Johannine Epistle

This group appears only twice in the Johannine

\textsuperscript{1}Cf. Grundmann, "Kakós," p. 481.

\textsuperscript{2}See id., 485; Moulton & Milligan, p. 316.

\textsuperscript{3}In the papyri, kakopoívōs has the sense of "sorcerer," "magician," or "poisoner," which is considered a parallel to 1 Pet 4:15; see Moulton & Milligan, p. 317; W. Bauer, p. 397; Lofthouse, p. 266.

\textsuperscript{4}See, for the verb, Mark 3:4; Luke 6:9; 1 Pet 3:17; 3 John 11; for the noun, 1 Pet 2:12, 14; 4:15.

\textsuperscript{5}Cf. Aland et al., p. 404, n. 5, for other manuscript variants of the same root.

\textsuperscript{6}See Morris, p. 764, n. 63.
epistles and exclusively in 3 John 11: "Beloved, do not imitate evil [Gr. to kakón] but imitate good . . . he who does evil [Gr. ho kakopoion] has not seen God." The neuter refers to "what is evil or bad." The compound kakopoion\(^1\) indicates the agent.

The Book of Revelation
Revelation uses the word kakós twice--once as a noun (2:2) with the sense of "evil ones," and once as an adjective, parallel to ponērós (16:2).\(^2\)

\textbf{Ponērós}

Background
In the Greek world, ponērós originally meant "laden with care,"\(^3\) "sorrowful," "unhappy." Later, it evolved into that which causes trouble and brings sorrow. It could mean "pitiable," "incompetent," "wretched," "poor." In political and military affairs it meant "unsuccessful," "useless." In the social realm, ponērós refers to plebeians, men of rude and insolent manners. It was finally applied to the moral sphere with the sense of

\(^1\)The use of the present tense is taken as indicating the continuing action of both "good" and "evil."

\(^2\)The meanings "foul" (RSV, NEB), "noisome" (ASV), "loathsome" (Smith & Goodspeed, NBV), "severe" (NAB), "disgusting" (JB), "ugly" (NIV), etc., have been suggested.

\(^3\)Probably etymologically derived from pónos, "work," "toil"; see E. Achilles, "Ponērós," \textit{NIDNTT} (1975), 1:364.
"morally reprehensible" in relation to gods and men, "morally bad."^1

In the LXX and other Greek translations, it was frequently translated from ra and its derivatives with the following shades of meaning: (1) "bad," in nature or condition; (2) "dangerous," "harmful"; (3) "unfavorable," as for example, with regard to man's reputation; (4) "ugly," "sorrowful," "unhappy"; (5) "evil," in the moral sense.^2

In the NT, ponérōs is also used with the meaning of "bad," "harmful," "unserviceable," "useless," etc.^3 The moral sense is also predominant, both as an adjective and as a noun. The plural noun is frequent in the sense of "wicked men." The singular is used for the wicked one^4 par excellence, that is to say, the Devil (Mark 4:15 is an indisputable example).^5

^1 For a full discussion see E. Achilles, "Ponérōs," p. 565; G. Harder, "Ponérōs," "Ponéría," TDNT (1968), 6:546; see also Moulton & Milligan, p. 528, where the meanings "toilworn," "laborious," and "evil" are cited.

^2 For a complete discussion and references, see Harder, pp. 549-551; cf. also W. Bauer, pp. 690, 691; Achilles, "Ponérōs," p. 565.

^3 The Greek word is used 78 times (24 times in Matt, 12 times in Luke, 13 times in Paul, 8 times in Acts, and 12 times in the Johannine writings, including once in Revelation.


^5 In some passages it is difficult to distinguish...
The Gospel of John

*Ponērōs* is used three times in the gospel with the usual sense of "evil." It modifies "deeds" (3:19) and "works" (7:7) as an adjective, and as a noun is used with the general sense of "evil" or the "evil one" (17:15).¹

The Johannine Epistles

This word appears eight times in the epistles, both as a noun and as an adjective.² The use of the adjective with the sense of "evil," as in the gospel, modifies the nouns "works" (3:12; 2 John 11) and "words" (3 John 10). The other occurrences are nouns. It is with this usage that confusion arises in some cases regarding its precise meaning, since, as we noted above, it is not always easy to distinguish between the masculine and neuter forms. In 5:18 we have, however, a clear example of between the masculine form and the neuter, between the "evil one," and "that which is evil." See Lofthouse, p. 267; Harder, p. 554; Achilles, "Ponērōs," pp. 567, 568.

¹The Gr. τὸ ponērōn is ambiguous, and it is not easy to decide whether it is a masculine form ("the evil one") or a neuter form ("what is evil"). Most commentators, however, in light of the uses in 1 John, prefer to see a reference to the "evil one." See Schnackenburg, *The Gospel according to St. John*, p. 184; Westcott, *The Gospel according to St. John*, p. 244; Sanders, p. 375; Barrett, *The Gospel according to St. John*, p. 510; Tasker, p. 193; Haenchen, 2:149; Morris, p. 730; B. M. Newman, and U. A. Nida, *A Translator's Handbook on the Gospel of John* (London: United Bible Societies, 1980), pp. 538, 539; etc. In 1 John 5:19, however, the meaning "evil," as an abstract noun, makes better sense.

²Cf. 2:13,14; 3:12ab; 5:18,19; 2 John 11; 3 John 10.
the masculine form, the "evil one." The statement of 3:12 seems to be clear also: "And not be like Cain who was of the evil one and murdered his brother." The question arises as to whether the other examples should be taken as masculine also, or whether it is possible to find another meaning in them. Most commentators, following the previous examples, take the others as meaning the same.¹ Let us notice the RSV translation: "because you have overcome the evil one" (2:13); "and you have overcome the evil one" (2:14); "the whole world is in the power of the evil one" (5:19). The last statement is especially open to some doubts² as to the proper translation. The Gr. construction ho kósamos hólos en tò ponerò keitai is unusual³ in reference to a masculine form. The neuter, "that which is evil," makes better sense and might be an indication of a different meaning here. Yet, since we have clear examples of the masculine form in this close context, besides the use of the article in the other passages referred to, the meaning "evil one" is probably to be preferred.⁴

¹See, for example, Lenski, Epistles, pp. 419, 439.
²See Bultmann, Epistles, p. 89; Grayston, Epistles, p. 145.
³The expression is found nowhere else in the New Testament, and the use of the verb keimai in the LXX (2Mac 3:11; 4:31, 34) has rather the meaning "to be in the state or condition of." See W. Bauer, pp. 426, 427; Brown, Epistles, p. 623.
⁴Though the "evil one" or Satan is sometimes personalized in the OT and in many cases in the NT, it is not clearly so in the Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha (MartIs
Ponērōs appears only once in the book of Revelation, in the parallel construction mentioned in 16:2. It qualifies the noun "sore," not only here, but also in some passages of the Old Testament (LXX). The general meaning of "evil" is obviously applied here to a physical condition.

Summary

This general survey shows that three word-groups are important for the understanding of the Johannine concept of sin. They are: hamartánō, anomía, and adikía. Of them, the first two are the most relevant for our present study. Regarding the word-group hamartánō, we have noted that hamartía is used seventeen times in the gospel, thirteen times in the singular and four times in the plural. In the singular, six usages are arthrous and seven anarthrous; in the plural three are arthrous and one anarthrous. The anarthrous singular form is apparently

2:2; TGad 4:7; 1En 54:6; TMos 10:1). One of the clearest examples of the personal character of Satan is that of Jub 17:16, where Satan challenges God to put Abraham to test. With few exceptions, in the Tannaitic literature Satan is an impersonal force (Tosef. Shab. 17:3; Mishnah Ber. 9.5; Sif. Deut. 21:18). A clear personalization is found in the story of R. Meir related in B.T. Gitt. 52a. Satan became more prominent in the Amoraic period, where he is sometimes identified with the evil inclination in general and also with the angel of death (B.T. B.B. 16a). He emerges, however, more and more as a distinct identity (B.T. Sanh. 89b; Gen. Rab. 38:7; B.T. Shab. 89a; B.T. Sanh. 107a; B.T. R.Sh. 16b; B.T. Yom. 20a).

1See Deut 28:35; Job 2:7.
used with the general meaning of "state" or "condition."\(^1\) However, on two occasions, after the anarthrous singular form, the arthrous singular is used when hamartía is more particularly considered (9:41; 15:22). No special significance should be drawn from this, since it is simply natural to add the article when the noun hamartía is more particularly conceived, especially in conjunction with the possessive adjectives. In the other arthrous singular forms, the sense "state" or "condition" is also applicable (especially in 1:29 and 8:21), while in 8:34, hamartía is considered as a "power,"--if the textual reading is correct. Hamartía, then, appears as a "master," and he who does sin as a "slave."

In the arthrous plural forms (8:24a,b; 20:23), as well as the only anarthrous plural (19:34), the sense seems to be similar to the arthrous and anarthrous singular, especially since "in your sins" (8:24) is parallel to "in your sin" (8:21).

All this seems to suggest that in the gospel of John, the term hamartía, whether used in the singular or in the plural, whether arthrous or anarthrous, refers to a "condition" or a "state" of alienation from God, a condition that is mainly revealed by unbelief in Jesus.

In the epistles, the picture is different. The plural is used six times and always with the article. The

\(^1\)Cf. 8:46; 9:41; 15:22,24; 16:8,9; 19:11.
suggested meaning is actions and deeds, though, as is the case with gospel, the sense of "guilt" is always present. The singular is used with and without the article. The anarthrous form occurs eight times, and it is not easy to find a pattern of meaning in its use. It appears, however, that the anarthrous singular is used when a very general sense regarding sin is meant. Three times hamartía occurs with the article (3:4ab, 8). In each case it is possible to see in it an air of definiteness that is not usually transmitted into English. The best attempt to understand it is probably that of Westcott: "Sin in its completeness." 2

Among the words studied here, the term anomía seems to be the most important one for the understanding of the hamartiological problem of 1 John. In the singular, it sometimes refers to a state of hostility and rebellion against God, which, in a dualistic and eschatological context, like that of 1 John 3, may provide a hermeneutical element that should help to clarify the categorical statement that the Christian does not and cannot sin.

1Cf. 1:7, 8; 3:5, 9; 5:16ab, 17ab.
2Westcott, Epistles, p. 102.
CHAPTER V
EXEGESIS OF 1 JOHN 1:5-2:6, 2:28-3:10, AND 5:13-21

It is the aim of the present chapter to do an exegesis of the three major passages which contain the conflictive statements regarding impeccability. We think that this will provide an exegetical basis for the understanding of the problem in light of its literary context and, it is hoped, will advance a solution which is in harmony both with the immediate and the general context of the epistle, and with the Christian experience as a whole.

Exegesis of 1 John 1:5-2:11

Introduction

This passage belongs to the first hortatory section of the epistle (1:5-2:17), and may be divided into four parts (1:5-7; 1:8-2:2; 2:3-6; 2:7-11), each emphasizing in different ways the main purpose of the epistle as it is stated at the end of the prologue: "that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you may have fellowship with us; and our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. And we are writing this that our joy may be complete" (1:3,4). It
seems to be clear that our writer's intention in the present section is to promote a close spiritual fellowship among the members of his community,\(^1\) a fellowship that he somehow considers to be endangered or diminished by some problems that he tries to correct.\(^2\) In the passage under consideration, the main problem is the lack of correspondence between behavior and profession. In the paragraphs that follow, I try to present the reasons why I do not subscribe to the usual concept that in this passage the

\(^1\) We have seen that in the epilogue the writer once more emphasized his intentions when he wrote: "I write this to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life" (5:13). To have fellowship with the Father and the Son, and to be assured that one has eternal life, seem to be interrelated in the writer's mind, since he is persuaded that "he who has the Son has life" (5:12).

\(^2\) Many commentators have seen, in one way or another, the importance of the theme of "fellowship" in this section. Among them are the following: Cox, p. 323; Drumond, p. 1153; Erdman, p. 116; Findlay, Fellowship in the Life Eternal, p. 95; Gingrich, p. 38; Hoeh, p. 28; C. C. Hodges, "Fellowship and Confession in I John 1:5-10," BSac 129 (1972):48; Knox, p. 152; Lenski, Epistles, p. 382; McDowell, p. 197; Michal, p. 203; Morris, p. 1261; Roberts, p. 30; Ryrie, p. 1466; Schnackenburg, Johannesbriefe, p. 66; G. Schunack, Die Briefe des Johannes (Zurich: Theologischer Verlag, 1982), p. 23; M. H. Shepherd, p. 936; Windisch, p. 111; Wilder, p. 221. It is interesting to note that some early Christian writers associated with the term "fellowship" the participation in the Eucharist. This is clear, for example, in some of the Ignatian letters which refer to some members who, for Docetic reasons, abstained from it (Eph 20:1,2; Tral 9-11; Smyr 7:1). However, what is clear in Ignatius is not clear in 1 John. Though our writer was also opposing a similar idea, nowhere does he mention the Eucharist. His use of koinōnia seems to be a reference to "fellowship" in general, without a specific content, a meaning that is also found in Ignatius (see Eph 5:1-3). For the Ignatian letters, see W. R. Schoedel, Ignatius of Antioch, ed. H. Koester (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985).
writer is opposing certain claims on the part of his adversaries. This position, however, should not be understood as an evidence of lack of connection between what the author states and the situation in his community. I see this connection as having paraenetic rather than polemical function.

In order to see the structure of this section, we may arrange it as follows:

1:5-7: Fellowship and Walking in Darkness
1:8-2:2: Fellowship and the Problem of Sin
2:3-6: Fellowship and Disobedience
2:7-11: Fellowship and the Commandment of Love

This arrangement shows, on one hand, that 1:5-7 and 2:3-6 run parallel to each other, and that walking in darkness and disobedience are also similar. On the other hand, 1:8-2:2 and 2:7-11 are explanations or qualifications of something said before that the writer saw it was convenient to explain or amplify. 1:8-2:2 is an excursus explaining why a Christian, who should walk in the light, is said to need cleansing from sin. His answer is double. First, human nature is sinful, and to say the contrary, is to "deceive ourselves" (vs. 8). Second, God has made this evaluation, and to say otherwise is to "make him a liar" (vs. 10). This explanation, in turn, imposes upon the author the necessity of making clear that this does not mean indulgence in sin (2:1). Christians rather are to avoid sin. If they do sin, however, there is a solution,
since Jesus died for their sins and is their advocate before the Father. 2:7-11 is a particular application that our writer makes of his statement that he who knows God should keep his commandments (2:3). In 1 John the commandment par excellence is the commandment of love, and he who practices it is the one who really knows God and abides in the light.

1:5-7: Fellowship and Walking in Darkness

The first thing that our writer states in vs. 5, and which furnishes the basis for his hortatory endeavor, is that "God is light and in him is no darkness at all." The metaphorical meaning of "light" is well-known in the Bible and elsewhere. In the OT we find frequent references to light as an attribute of God, but nowhere do we encounter the peculiar Johannine statement that "God is light." In the NT the word phōs appears 72 times, 33 of which are in the Johannine writings, and it is John who

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2See, for example, Ps 4:6; 104:2; Dan 2:22; Hab 3:4; etc.

3Philo On Dreams 1.13.75 refers to God as "light" and the archetype of every other light. He brings out the intellectual aspect of light, and is similar to James 1:17 which describes God as the "Father of lights."
refers to the statement of Jesus: "I am the light of the world" (8:12; 9:5; 12:46). The term had a pregnant meaning in the Hellenistic world, but in our passage, the reference to God as "light" has an obvious moral connotation that refers to the holiness and purity of God.¹ A similar thing can be said of "darkness," which in the Johannine dualism stands in opposition to "light,"² so that "darkness" stands for a sinful way of life and unrighteousness (cf. Eph 5:1-14).

In vss. 6 and 7, the author draws the conclusions derived from his statement that God is light. It is clear for him that nobody should claim to have fellowship with God and, at the same time, to walk in darkness. Such a claim can only be a lie, and it is a sign that such a person does not "live according to the truth."

By far the most common interpretation of vss. 6-10 is the one which holds that the author is here quoting or paraphrasing some claims raised by his adversaries or, at least, by some members of his community who had been

¹See Barclay, p. 31; Brooke, p. 12; Bruce, p. 41; G. W. Barker, pp. 309, 310; Burdick, p. 120; Bonsirven, pp. 86-88; Dodd, Epistles, p. 19; Gingrich, p. 38; Haas, p. 32; Hobb, p. 30; Hodges, p. 50; Houden, Epistles, p. 57; Johnston, p. 1036; Lenski, Epistles, p. 385; Marshall, Epistles, p. 109; Roberts, p. 30; Ross, p. 141; Smalley, 1, 2, 3, John, p. 20; Stott, pp. 71, 72; Westcott, Epistles, p. 14; Wilder, p. 221; etc.

influenced by them, and whom he tries to oppose. However, after a meticulous reading of the epistle and a careful consideration of the evidence provided, one is left wondering whether this interpretation reads too much between the lines. We argued in chapter 2 against the supposition that the community was experiencing an acute crisis. We also discussed the indefiniteness of the heresy combatted, whose specific views are restricted to Christological issues with no definite evidence of moral or ethical involvement. Moreover, we have also argued against the view that the main purpose of the epistle is polemical or controversial, and we have rather concluded that its main emphasis is pastoral and hortatory, with the warnings against false prophets and antichrists in the background.

One particular element that is usually ignored in the contemporary discussion of the present passage is the significance of ἐπομενε which three times introduces the

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1See, for example, N. Alexander, pp. 32; Barclay, p. 34; Barker, p. 310; Bogart, p. 27; Boice, p. 36; Werner de Boor, Die Briefe des Johannes (Wuppertal: Brockhaus, 1974), p. 38; Brown, Epistles, p. 205; Bruce, p. 44; Bultmann, Epistles, p. 20; Burdick, p. 121; D. E. Cook, "Interpretation of 1 John 1-5," p. 447; Dodd, Epistles, p. 21; Haas, p. 33; Hobb, p. 33; J. L. Houlden, "Salvation Proclaimed: II. 1 John 1:5-2:6: Belief and Growth," p. 132; Johnston, p. 1036; Kubo, pp. 49, 50; Lenski, Epistles, p. 386; Lewis, p. 20; Marshall, Epistles, p. 110; Roberts, p. 33; Ross, p. 145; Smalley, 1,2,3 John, p. 20; Stott, p. 74; etc.

2This is Dodd's (Epistles, p. 21) expression for the procedure.

3See above, pp. 76-80.
alleged claims of the adversaries.\textsuperscript{1} One suspects that the overemphasis on controversial language is responsible for this omission. It is my opinion that the evidence provided by this expression, as discussed below, along with the other evidences cited, indicates that the usual understanding of the passage under discussion sees more than is usually there.

\textsuperscript{1}Among modern commentators on the epistle who say little or nothing regarding the significance of this conditional phrase are Barclay, p. 34; Brown, Epistles, p. 197, who thinks that it reflects the language of jurisprudence, which was the opinion of Law (p. 130), and who follows Haas (p. 33) in his concept as "expectational"; Bruce, p. 42; Bultmann, Epistles, pp. 18, 19; Barker, p. 310; Boice, p. 37; Burdick, p. 121, who recognizes the hypothetical nature of the phrases, but then goes on to say that "no doubt . . . these hypothetical statements represent claims made by the false teachers"; Dodd, Epistles, pp. 19, 20; Hobbs, p. 31, who notes the aorist subjunctive form, but apparently makes it refer to Gnostic groups; Houlden, Epistles, p. 55; Johnston, p. 1036; Law, p. 128; Lenski, Epistles, p. 386, who translates the phrase as, "if we actually say," and considers that the writer "is not speaking abstractly and theoretically," but rather has the doctrine of Cerinthus in mind; Marshall, Epistles, p. 110, who considers that these phrases were probably "real statements made by the people in the church . . . that reflect the outlook of the people who were causing trouble in the church"; Roberts, p. 30; Ross, p. 142; F. F. Segovia, Love Relationship in the Johannine Tradition. \textit{Agape} in I John and the \textit{Fourth Gospel}, Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series 58 (Chicago: Scholars Press, 1982), p. 41, who considers the statements as characterizations of the opponents' stance; Smalley, 1, 2, 3 John, p. 21, who thinks that those referred to by the conditional phrases are those inclined to Gnostic views; Stott, p. 74, who attributes them to claims on the part of the heretics; Westcott, Epistles, p. 19, who though not applying the statements to opponents, considers that the phrase "contemplates a direct assertion"; and Wilder, p. 223, who considers them as quotations from the false claims, apparently from Gnostic opponents.
As we suggested above, the statements of 1:6,8,10, which are constructed with εἰπάν plus the aorist subjunctive, are usually considered as belonging to the third-class condition, a type of construction that states the matter in terms of the future, but conveys a grade of uncertainty. This is not easy to express in the English language, which has no distinct form for the subjunctive mode. Certainly, to translate, "if we say . . ." in each case, as it is done in most English versions, is to give an air of certainty to expressions that the writer intended otherwise. A more faithful translation would be: "If we would say . . .," or "if we should say . . . ."

The Johannine writings are very fond of this construction with εἰπάν plus the subjunctive. The Gospel of John uses it on forty-six occasions, of which twenty-one are with the present subjunctive and twenty-five with the aorist. In 1 John it appears twenty-one times, of which ten are in the present and eleven in the aorist. It appears also twice in 3 John, both with the aorist, and five times in Revelation, of which four are with the

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1See p. 91-93.
3See 1 John 1:6,7,8,9,10; 2:1,3,15,24,28,29; 3:2, 20,22; 4:12,15,20; 5:14,15,16.
4Cf. vss. 5,10.
aorist. As we saw above, the subjunctive usage in this type of conditional clause is mostly used to indicate potentiality, and serves the purpose of presenting a hypothetical situation, which is not necessarily true in the present, but has the potentiality or probability of being realized in the future. This is well illustrated by his statement of 5:16, "if anyone sees [Gr. eán tis ídē] his brother committing what is not a mortal sin." It seems

2See above pp. 92, 93.
3Among those commentators who see a hypothetical meaning in the use of the subjunctive in this passage are the following: E. A. Abbott, Johannine Grammar (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1906), p. 372, suggests the translation, "in the supposition that," "put the case that," "if we should say"; however, he grants that this is the general, though not invariable, use of the epistle; Plummer, p. 80, sees its hypothetical character, but adds that "doubtless there were some who said so, and . . . thought so"; Hodges, p. 50, considers the statements as "possible affirmations"; Alford, p. 856, takes them as "purely hypothetical"; Braune, p. 31, describes it as an "objective possibility"; F. C. Cook, pp. 306, 307, says that it expresses "mere supposition, not conviction," and sees a "subtle gentleness" in the form of the expression; Hüther, p. 481; Knox. pp. 152, 153; Morris, p. 1261; Nichol, p. 630; Nicoll, p. 171, calls it a "gentle and charitable hypothesis"; Robertson, Word Pictures in the New Testament, p. 207, takes the subjunctive aorist as ingressive, "up and say"; Ryrie, p. 1466, considers it a "very delicate way to state a possibility"; Sawtelle, p. 10; Vincent, p. 314, considers that the subjunctive "puts the case as supposed, not assumed"; Weidner, p. 276; Wuest, p. 101, says that the author proposes "a hypothetical case," but he mistakenly calls it a deliberative subjunctive. For a discussion of the conditional phrases in the subjunctive mode see Blass, p. 373; Robertson, Grammar of the Greek New Testament in the Light of Historical Research, pp. 1018, 1019; Dana, p. 290; G. B. Winer, A Grammar of the Idiom of the New Testament, 7th ed. (Andover: Warren F. Draper, 1872), p. 291; Zerwick, p. 102.
clear that the writer uses this hypothetical language only to point to an event which could take place. The third-class condition may even be involved in a situation which is totally imaginary, as when Paul said to the Corinthians: "If the foot should say . . . " [Gr. eu elles ho poos], or "if the ear should say . . . ." [Gr. eu elles to oos] (1 Cor 12:15, 16). The possibility exists, then, that the epistolary writer is not speaking of something certain when he writes: "eu elles eipomen . . . ." And if it is not certain, then it would not appear to refer to his opponents' claims, and his words would not be quotations from his adversaries. Had the author wanted to convey the contrary, he might have used ei plus the present indicative which refers to a concrete situation, as in 5:9: "If we receive the testimony of men, the testimony of God is greater" (Gr. ei . . . lambanomen . . . .).

However, if there was no concrete controversial situation envisioned in this passage, did his words have any relevance? What was he referring to? Why did he use hypothetical language? It is obvious that he was speaking to his community and that he did it in an affectionate way. So, the possibility that he perceived some spiritual deficiencies in his community and wanted, in a delicate manner, to correct them, but at the same time did not want to use invective, seems to be a plausible one. When it is seen in this way, the epistle testifies to some problems in the community. There were some who did not live up to
the Christian standard, practicing the works of darkness, and in so doing, they were contravening specific Christian commands (2:4); others were not practicing Christian love (2:7-10; 3:11-18; 4:7-5:5); still others felt a strong attraction for the world which motivated his advice: "Do not love the world or the things of the world" (2:15-17; 5:4,5); and finally, there was the problem of sin in general that needed to be confronted (3:1-10). All of this, in addition to the danger of false prophets and antichrists' teaching, which we suggest was more in the background than in the foreground of the epistle. This indicates a strong pastoral concern on the part of the writer, and it seems obvious that, in dealing with these matters in a public manner, the hypothetical language is the more fitting.

We have seen above that the stated purpose of the epistle is to promote fellowship among the members of the community, with each other and also with the Father and the Son (1:3). In vss. 6 and 7, it is stated that fellowship with God cannot be claimed by a person who walks in darkness. We would expect that, with that introduction, the word fellowship (Gr. koinōnia) would play an important role in the development of the epistle, but it does not.

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1Cf. the long hortatory section that Paul wrote in the epistle to the Ephesians, in which he used a similar language with light and darkness motifs, to a congregation that, though Christian, were practicing the works of darkness and not living according to the light (Eph 5:1-21).
The word is dropped afterward and is not found in the rest of the document. But if that was the specific purpose of the writer, it is logical to assume that he might not have left his purpose behind, but rather made a change of terminology. Among the important words that our writer uses again and again, we find "to know" (Gr. γινώσκω), "to be in" (Gr. εἰμί), "to abide" (Gr. μένω), and "to be born of God" (Gr. γεννάω). Twenty-three times the epistle uses the verb "to know," and eleven of these occurrences refer to God. The verb "to be in him" is used twice in a mystical way: "By this we may be sure that we are in him" (2:5); "and we are in him who is true, in his Son Jesus Christ" (5:20). The verb "to abide" is found twenty-three times in the epistle, of which twenty are used mystically. Gennáō is used ten times in the epistle with

1The verb appears once in 2 John 11, but the reference is neither to God nor to the community members, but to false brethren.

2See 2:3,4,5,13,14,18,29; 3:1,6,16,19,20,24; 4:2, 6,7,8,13,16; 5:2,20. The gospel uses 57 times the same verb, of which 9 occasions refer to God.

3The relationship of the Father with the Son is described in the gospel of John in terms of "einai en." See 10:38; 14:11; 17:21; cf. also E. Malatesta, pp. 132, 133.

4Cf. 2:6,10,14,17,19,24,27,28; 3:6,9,14,15,17,24; 4:12,13,15,16. Besides that, it is used three times in 2 John (vss. 2,9), and 35 times in the gospel, of which 16 have mystical meaning. For a discussion of the Johannine concept of "abiding," see F. Hauck, "Ménō," TDNT (1967), 4:574-576; Malatesta, p. 24; Jurgen Heise, Bleiben. Menein in den Johanneischen Schriften (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1967), p. 120.
almost all the cases in its metaphorical sense.\(^1\) Besides that, there are two other expressions that are equivalent to *gennáō*. They are: "to be of God" and to be "children" of God.\(^2\) A comparison among several passages shows that the writer saw a close conceptual interrelationship among these terms. In 2:3, "to know" God is tied up with the keeping of the commandments: "By this we may be sure that we know him, if we keep his commandments." Two verses below we find: "By this we may be sure that we are in him: he who says he abides in him ought to walk in the same way he walked." If "to walk" is parallel to "keep his commandments," as it obviously is, then "to know," "to abide," and "to be in him" are also parallel.\(^3\) In 3:24 we

\(^1\)See 2:29; 3:9; 4:7; 5:1,4,18. In the gospel, it appears 18 times, with 5 occasions in the extended sense, of which all are in chapter 3 (vss. 3,5,6,7,8).

\(^2\)See, for example, 3:1,2,10; 4:1,2,3,4,6; 5:1,2,19.

are told: "All who keep his commandments abide in him, and he in them." This indicates that, for our writer, these terms have conceptual relationship among themselves, and refer to the same idea. In 1:7, "to walk in the light" is parallel to "we have fellowship with one another." In the same vein, in 2:9,10, to be "in the light" and "abide in the light" are also parallel, and make the connection with the concept of fellowship. In 3:6 we also see a connection between "abiding" and "knowing": "No one who abides in him sins; no one who sins has either seen him or known him."

The relationship between "to know him," and "to be in him" is once more suggested in 5:20: "And we know that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding, to know him who is true; and we are in him who is true, in his Son Jesus Christ."\(^1\)

The verb γεννάω has its own set of relationships. One does right because he has been born of him (2:29), and the person who does right is righteous, as he is righteous (3:7). In 3:10, "whoever does not do right is not of God," showing that "to be born of God" and "to be of God" are parallel expressions. This is also tied with the concept of fellowship of 2:6 and 1:7. In 3:6 and 5:18, "no one who abides in him sins," while in 3:9, "no one born of God sins . . . and he cannot sin because he is born of God."

\(^1\)Cf. R. Bultmann, "Giνασκεν κτλ.," TDNT (1964), 1:689-719, especially p. 711, where he states: "The word . . . denotes emphatically the relationship to God and to Jesus as a personal fellowship . . . ."
This indicates that "to be born of God" is parallel to "abiding in him." Moreover, "to be born of God" is associated with "knowing God" in 4:6-8, and through the concept of love, these two concepts are tied with "abiding": "He who loves is born of God, and knows God," "if we love one another, God abides in us ..." (4:7,12; cf. 4:16 and 5:1,2). This shows that our author never lost sight of his primary purpose of emphasizing communion and fellowship with God to his readers, though for some reason he chose a variety of terms to focus the same subject.²

"To walk" (Gr. peripatēō) is a well-known Semitism for the walk of life which emphasizes the moral conduct.³ It is the equivalent of the Heb. halakh whose metaphorical

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¹For the meaning of gennāō in the Hellenistic world, and in the OT and NT, see A. Ringwald, Gennāō, NIDNTT (1975), 1:176-180; F. Büchsel and K. H. Rengstorf, "Gennāō ktl.", TDNT (1964), 1:665-672, especially p. 671, where the term is associated with fellowship and relationship; see also de la Potterie, "Sin is Iniquity," p. 47.

²Another possible way that he used to convey the same idea is the use of the verb "to have" with God or the Son as its objects. In 2:23 we read: "No one who denies the Son has the Father. He who confesses the Son has the Father also"; and in 5:12, "he who has the Son has life." Both cases emphasize belief in the Father and the Son. But in 2 John 9, the concept of fellowship and communion is stronger: "Any one who goes ahead and does not abide in the doctrine of Christ does not have God; he who abides in the doctrine has both the Father and the Son." See Castro, p. 192; Cigoña, p. 129; etc.

meaning in the OT is also common.¹ In the NT this sense of the term is almost restricted to the uses in Paul and John.² Though the gospel of John has one clear example of this usage (8:12), it is in the Johannine epistles that it appears several times with that meaning.³ It is clear that the expression "to walk in light" is parallel to "being in the light" and "abiding in the light" (2:9,10), as "walking in darkness" is parallel to "being in darkness" and "abiding in darkness" (2:11), and as such, is conceptually related to the word koinōnia as well. It is, then, a way of life.

The statement of 1:6, "we . . . do not live according to the truth," is interesting, since it shows that for our writer "truth" is something more than an intellectual idea.⁴ The Greek expression "ou poiooimen tēn alētheian" speaks of "doing the truth," and indicates that "truth" has to do also with action.⁵ In the OT, "truth"

¹ See F. J. Helfmeyer, "Halakh", TDOT (1978), 3:388-403. Peripatēo is not, however, the preferred translation of halakh in the LXX, which uses poreōmai more frequently. But it does use peripateō in the figurative sense, as, for example, in 2 Kgs 20:3; Eccl 11:9.

² The other NT examples of this use are Mark 7:25; Acts 21:21; Heb 13:9; Rev 21:24.

³ Cf. 1 John 1:6; 2:6,11; 2 John 4,6; 3 John 3,4.

⁴ Cf. a similar expression in John 3:21: "But he who does what is true [Gr. ho dē poiōn tēn alētheian] comes to the light . . . ." The expression seems to be a Semitism; see Turner, 4:68.

(Heb. 'emeth), is never a merely abstract and theoretical concept. Actually, "truth" is found not only in words but also in deeds. The use of ἀλήθεια in the NT is also confined for the most part to the Pauline and Johannine writings. Various meanings can be detected in this literature, but in it, "truth," in the absolute, means the revelation of God's nature and salvific purpose in Jesus Christ. In the passage under consideration, two main views seem possible. The first one interprets the expression "to do the truth" as meaning "to practice the truth," or "to live according to the truth." John 3:21 is usually quoted as having this meaning, since its immediate context has to do with "deeds." Moreover, "truth" is


1Nearly half of the 109 occurrences of the word ἀλήθεια appear in the Johannine writings, 25 times in the gospel and 20 times in the epistles. Besides, the adjectives alethes and alethinos appear 17 times out of 26, and 23 times out of 28, respectively. This indicates the importance of "truth" in these writings.


3Cf. the following passages that confirm this view: John 1:17; 8:32; 14:6; 17:17,19; 18:37; 1 John 2:21; 3:19; 5:6; 3 John 4,8; see also Smalley, 1, 2, 3 John, p. 23; Brown, The Gospel according to John, p. 355.
opposed to "evil" (vs. 20). The second viewpoint considers that the idea of truth versus falsehood is prominent. There is a conflict between profession of faith and actual practice which is inconsistent with Christian behavior. A parallelism of expression is also seen, in which "not to do the truth" is parallel to "lie." Hence, "to do the truth" is similar to "tell the truth," which is followed in the next verses by an ascending seriousness of lies: "we lie," "we deceive ourselves," and "we make him a liar." This is also seen in the parallel statements: "we do not do the truth," "the truth is not in us," "his word is not in us" (vss. 8-10). Furthermore, in 2:4 we have again the parallelism between lie and truth in the same frame of conflict between profession and practice: "He who says 'I know him' but disobeys his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him." Though the parallelism needs not to be considered synonymous, and there could be a progression of thought in the parallel parts, rendering what we could call a progressive parallelism; the weight of evidence favors taking the expression as parallel to lying.  

The expression of vs. 7, "we have fellowship with one another," is not what we would expect, especially

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1 A number of authors prefer to see a combination of both ideas, word and deeds, profession and practice. See Westcott, *Epistles*, pp. 19, 20; Stott, p. 74; cf. also the RSV translation: "do not live according to the truth," and the NEB rendering: "Our words and our lives are a lie." On the other hand, Lenski (*Epistles*, p. 386) says that it means "not to have the truth."
after stating in vs. 6, "we have fellowship with him." Certainly it would have been better, in terms of logic, if that sentence of vs. 7 would read the same as vs. 6. Our author, however, seems to view fellowship with each other as a corollary of fellowship with God, since for him, as we have seen, fellowship involves "knowing," "abiding," and "being in" God. He actually thinks of both as mutually inclusive, as can be concluded from the statement: "So that you may have fellowship with us; and our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ" (1:3). The change from the expected "fellowship with God" to "fellowship with one another" shows the interest of the author in promoting a Christian fellowship which might have been lacking in his community. It is not necessary to suppose that this was directed against the writer's opponents who allegedly claimed fellowship with God but neglected the fellowship with the common believers.\(^1\)

The last part of vs. 7 reads: "And the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin." There is no obvious logical connection of this phrase with what precedes. It introduces, however, the subject of sin which follows. Nevertheless, there might be a connection with the expression "walking in light." Our author has been saying that to have communion with God entails "to walk in the light." To profess that communion while walking in

\(^1\)So Haas, p. 35; Marshall, Epistles, p. 111; Brown, Epistles, p. 197; Barker, p. 310; Smalley, 1, 2, 3 John, p. 24; Stott, p. 74; etc.
darkness is a lie. This statement might have the purpose of qualifying what "walking in the light" means, or, at least, it shows our author's understanding of it. The difference between those who walk in darkness and those who walk in light is that the latter, in the event of sin, have a means to cleanse it. This shows that our writer does not discard the possibility of sin in the Christian life.

1:8-2:2: Fellowship and the Problem of Sin

We saw above that our author used catch-word connections in the process of writing. This seems to be true also regarding vs. 8. After mentioning "sin" in the last part of vs. 7, he now proceeds to clarify his meaning: "If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us." That is to say, vss. 8 to 10 are the explanation of the last part of vs. 7, in which our writer reckons with the possibility of sin in the Christian life. Apparently, our author is saying that the recognition of sin is a prerequisite of cleansing. To that, he adds in vs. 9: "If we confess our sins . . . ." He then completes the picture he wants to draw: recognition of sin and confession are steps to forgiveness and cleansing. The negation of sin involves a misunderstanding of the human experience, and that is self-deceit: "We deceive ourselves." But it also implies something more.

See above, pp. 151-153.
serious: "We make him a liar, and his word is not in us" (vs. 10). That this is the train of thought of this section is clearly seen in the first verse of chap. 2: "My little children, I am writing this to you so that you may not sin; but if any one does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous." Following his procedure of qualifying what he has already said, our writer now introduces a word of explanation. Recognition of sin does not involve permission for sinning. That would mean to walk in darkness! He hurries to state that that is not what he means, and then uses the aorist tense which refers to a particular sin, "that you may not sin." He has said that he who walks in the light is not supposed to walk in darkness. Now he again qualifies his words by stating: "But if any one does sin [aorist subjunctive again], we have an advocate . . . and he is the expiation for our sins . . ." (2:1,2).

1Gr. hīnā mé hamártētē, probably an ingressive aorist, "do not begin to sin," which might show the intention of the writer to avoid misunderstanding.

2"But" here translates kaf. Since it joins antithetical clauses, its adversative meaning is probably correct. For the adversative meaning of this conjunction, see Dana, p. 250.

3Following this line of thought, it seems to be unnecessary to make too sharp distinctions between the expression "we have no sin" (vs. 8) and the statement "we have not sinned" (vs. 10), as though the former refers to either to sin as a principle or to guilt, and the latter to acts of sin. The statements of 1:9: "If we confess our sins, . . ." and 2:2: "He is the expiation for our sins, . . ." seem to preclude that procedure. Among the commentators who follow the interpretation of "sin" of vs.
After these words of explanation, our writer continues with his main theme: fellowship with God. In vss. 3-6 of chap. 2, he associates knowledge of God with the keeping of the commandments. This is the sign that we know God, "if we keep his commandments" (vs. 3). We have already mentioned that "to know God" is parallel to "having fellowship with him," and that "to keep his commandments" is parallel to "walking in the light." Again, our author draws the same conclusion: To say that

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8 as a principle of sinfulness we find the following: Brooke, p. 17; W. R. Cook, p. 252; Bruce, p. 44 (?); Barker, p. 311; Burdick, p. 125; Cooper, p. 240; Hobbs, p. 35 (as an alternative); Smalley, 1,2,3 John, p. 29; Gingrich, p. 48; Jelf, p. 11; Nicoll, p. 172; Westcott, Epistles, p. 22; Stott, pp. 76, 77; Ryrie, p. 1467; Wuest, p. 103; Haas, p. 36 (though he says it includes guilt); Ross, p. 145, speaks of "indwelling" or "original sin"; Alford, p. 858; Morris, p. 1262; Nichol, p. 632 (apparently); Robertson, Word Pictures in the New Testament, p. 208 (though "personal guilt" is included); Weidner, p. 278, includes both "original and actual sin"; etc. Among those who consider sin as "guilt" or "responsibility" are: Barclay, p. 38 (as an alternative); Law, p. 130; Brown, Epistles, p. 205; Dodd, Epistles, p. 22; F. C. Cook, p. 308; etc. There are those who see the statement as quite general or make no distinction with vs. 10: Lenski, Epistles, pp. 394, 395; Marshall, Epistles, p. 115; Plummer, p. 83; Hüther, p. 485; Schnackenburg, Johannesbriefe, p. 88, n. 2; Vincent, p. 318; etc. See our discussion above, on p. 221, n. 2, in which we also do not see much difference. Those who see these expressions in a polemical context have to decide whether they refer to pre-conversion or post-conversion experience. Since it is difficult to conceive that Christians would deny their past sins, some are led to accept a post-conversion experience, in which case a type of perfectionism is in view. See for this, K. Wengst, Härezie und Orthodoxie im Spiegel des ersten Johannesbriefes, p. 38; Brown, Epistles, p. 212; Bogart, p. 51; etc., who propose a type of secessionist perfectionism based on the gospel of John.
we know God, and at the same time disobey his commandments, is a lie (vs. 4). The commandments are identified with the parallel statement, "his word" (vs. 5), and more particularly, with the commandment of love of the following verses (vss. 7-11), which is hinted at in the expression, "in him truly love for God is perfected."

2:7-11: Fellowship and Love

Verses 7-11 focus on the commandment of love. To keep the commandments of God includes the keeping of the commandment of love. Since the "keeping of the commandments" is parallel to "walking in the light," it is only natural to assume that "he who says he is in the light and hates his brother is in the darkness still . . . and walks in the darkness." But "he who loves his brother abides in the light . . . ." (vss. 9, 10). The corollary is that he who obeys the commandment of love has communion with God who is light. In all this, it is not necessary to assume that this emphasis was directed against the secessionists who, by despising their humble brethren, considering themselves superior, or abandoning the community, were showing lack of love.¹ It seems more natural to consider

¹For the view that the emphasis on love reflects a polemic against lovelessness on the part of the heretics combated in the epistle, see for example, Bogart, pp. 132, 133; Brown, Epistles, pp. 83-86; Burdick, pp. 151, 152; Dodd, Epistles, pp. 35, 36; Grayston, Epistles, p. 17; Law, pp. 30, 31; Lenski, Epistles, p. 415; Roberts, pp. 47, 48; Smalley, 1, 2, 3 John, pp. xxvi, xxvii; Stott, p. 94; Wengst, pp. 53-59; Wilder, p. 234; etc.
these words as directed toward a community in which, in the writer's opinion, there was lack of love among its members.\(^1\)

**Summary**

The study of this passage has indicated that the probable reason why our author made these hypothetical statements, along with his negations of sinlessness, is not that he was directly combatting a false teaching, nor that his community held perfectionistic views, but rather to express the tension existent in the Christian who, while walking in the light, has the possibility of committing sin, for which, however, there is forgiveness and cleansing.

**Exegesis of 1 John 2:28-3:10**

**Introduction**

After the first warning section (2:18-27), our author returns to the second hortatory section which is contained in the passage 2:28-3:24. This passage may be divided into three subdivisions: (1) Fellowship\(^2\) with God and doing right (2:28-3:10); (2) Fellowship with God and love for one another (3:11-18); (3) Fellowship with God

\(^1\)See our discussion above, on pp. 68, 69.

\(^2\)We have chosen the word "fellowship" to characterize this section, with the sole intention of showing the continuity of our author's purpose. However, it is obvious that the term "abiding" would be more appropriate to the case, since it replaces the term \koinônia\, which is no longer used in the rest of the document.
and confidence based on obedience (3:19-24).

As we saw above, this section is also governed by catch-word connections. In the last verses of the previous section, the writer has used the verb ménein five times (vss. 24-27). So, he starts the following paragraph with the expression: "And now, little children, abide in him, . . . ." In 3:10, he concludes: "whoever does not do right is not of God, nor he who does not love his brother." This last statement serves the purpose of introducing another discourse on love, which is the subject of the following subdivision, and which starts as follows: "For this is the message which you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another" (vss. 11-18). At the end of vs. 18, he says: "Little children, let us not love in word or speech but in deed and in truth." This last word, "truth," is used for starting the following subdivision: "By this we shall know that we are of the truth, . . . ." (vs. 19).²

1 John 2:28-3:10 may be subdivided into three parts: (1) Abiding and doing righteousness (2:28-29). (2) Abiding and being pure (3:1-3). (3) Abiding and not committing sin (3:4-10). Its main theme is the relationship between the children of God and sin. With it, our author returns to the question raised in 1:6-2:2. There,

¹See pp. 152, 153.
²Emphases are mine.
he conveyed the idea that fellowship with God and walking in the light is not necessarily broken by the sins of the Christian, provided that they are confessed and forgiven. The aim of the Christian is that he "may not sin," but he recognizes that the Christian, in fact, sins (2:1,2; 1:8,10). In this passage, our writer introduces a teaching that is usually considered as contradicting the concepts already expressed in the first paraenetic section. We investigate now to what extent that is true.

Abiding and Doing Righteousness (2:28-29)

We have said that vs. 28 takes over the concept of "abiding" from the previous section and extends it to the next one. However, "abiding" in this section has a different connotation from the previous one. There, it refers to teaching, "what you heard from the beginning," "the anointing which you received from him" (vss. 24, 27). Here, it is associated with behavior, with doing right. There is a parallelism between vss. 28 and 29. The statement of vs. 28, "abide in him . . ." leads us to expect in vs. 29, "one who does right abides in him." Instead, our author chose, "one who does right is born of him." This is due to the writer's idea that "abiding in him" and "being born of him" are intimately related, as is clearly seen in 3:6,9.¹

We have seen that there is a parallelism between

¹See above, pp. 213-216.
"abiding" and "being born of." "Doing right" is now associated with "being born of him." Consequently, the expression "we may have confidence and not shrink from him in shame at his coming," associated with "abide in him," should be parallel to "doing right." Therefore, both expressions have to do with moral behavior.¹ So, our author is saying that the secret of being ready for Christ's parousía is abiding in him, which entails a righteous behavior.²

Abiding and Being Pure (3:1-3)

The mention of "being born of him" (vs. 29) is connected by our author with being "children of God." Such a privilege is grounded in the love of the Father. Our writer felt that his readers were not living up to their status as children of God, and so he declares in both vs. 1 and vs. 2 that they truly are God's children. His intention is to stimulate his readers to become what they are. So, the reason for this emphasis is a moral one, as it is evident from the expressions "what we shall be," "we shall be like him,"³ and "every one who thus hopes in him


²For the concept of righteous behavior in this section, see Houlden, Epistles, p. 88; Bruce, p. 79; Barclay, The Letters of John and Jude, p. 85; etc.

³Most commentators, however, take this expression
purifies himself as he is pure." Later in vs. 5 he says, "in him there is no sin." The implication seems to be that, even though the author felt that they were not "like him," they had the opportunity to purify themselves in that hope and live up to the standard of children of God. In this way, this passage seems to have the same intention as that of 1:5-2:6, where those who have fellowship with God, who is light, are exhorted to walk in the light, not in the darkness. In the event of sin they have forgiveness and cleansing, but those who abide in him ought to walk as Jesus walked.

Abiding and Committing Sin (3:4-10)

The statement of vs. 4 that "every one who commits sin is guilty of lawlessness; sin is lawlessness," is usually considered a definition of sin. Actually, what we have here is an equation between ἁμάρτια and ἁμαρτία. This equation suggests that the intention of the writer is to establish the gravity of ἁμάρτια by equating it with ἁμαρτία. ἁμαρτία appears, then, to have a wider scope than

to refer to the future glory of the Christian after the manifestation of Christ. See Houlden, Epistles, pp. 91, 92; Marshall, Epistles, p. 174; Ladd, p. 613; Kotzé, p. 81, etc. However, the context shows that these statements of 3:2 are in reference to the fact that the Christians are yet to become what they are to be; see Bogart, p. 63, who recognizes this, even though he upholds a perfectionist position in the Johannine community.

1See Marshall, Epistles, p. 174.

2See, for example, L. Abboth, "What Is Sin," Outlook 49 (1894):592.
hamartia. The view that anomía implies that the opponents were guilty of moral laxity or antinomianism is discounted by the fact that it is hamartia that is equated with anomía, and not vice versa. We should also put aside the suggestion that hamartia and anomía are synonymous and cover the same ground. It is simply not the same to say "hamartia is anomía," as it is to say "anomía is hamartia." Anomía has a greater seriousness; there is progression of thought from one term to the other. This

1Cf. Bultmann, Epistles, pp. 50, 51; Smalley, 1, 2, 3 John, p. 154; Haupt, p. 334. See also De Wette, p. 383, who said that anomía is the narrower, while hamartia is the broader idea, which is essentially correct, since anomía focuses in a particular kind of sin.

2See Barclay, The Letters of John and Jude, p. 91; Stott, p. 122; Law, p. 217; N. Alexander, pp. 82, 83; Laurin, p. 107; Macknight, p. 662, n. 2; Plummer, p. 123; Smalley, 1, 2, 3 John, p. 154; etc.

3See Brooke, p. 84; Brown, Epistles, p. 399. But Bultmann, Epistles, p. 50, gives a different twist when he says that the false teachers were antinomians because they professed to be sinless; so also Bonnard, p. 69; Casabó, p. 289; I. H. Marshall, Kept by the Power of God: A Study of Perseverance and Falling Away (London: Epworth, 1969), p. 183; McDowell, p. 208; but the claim to sinlessness on the part of the opponents cannot be clearly supported from the document. On the other hand, it cannot be demonstrated from the epistle that the opponents held a different concept of sin, as suggested by some commentators. On this view see Loisy, p. 554; Wordsworth, p. 115, who saw anomía as a reference to Ebionites and Cerinthians who professed to keep the law, but who were actually violating it when they sinned. But there is no sign in the epistle of a controversy over the law.

4Contrary to Bruce, p. 89, who thinks that the phrase is convertible. See also Lenski (Epistles, p. 455) who says that the terms are identical and interchangeable; cf. also Alford, p. 883; Argyle, p. 62; F. C. Cook, p. 326; Hoskyns, p. 667; Jamieson, p. 1504; Nichol, p. 650; Nicoll, p. 184; Plummer, p. 123; Ryrie, p. 1473; etc.
lends some support to the common translation of anomía as "transgression of the law" or as "lawlessness." Against this, the objection has been raised that since the context does not have even the term for law, and that the epistle does not focus on any law, then the law, according to OT standards, is not in view. This objection has a valid point. Therefore, the translation of anomía as "the transgression of the law" is not warranted. But anomía can still preserve its association with law in general in the context of the epistle. It should be remembered that the epistle does have an emphasis on the commandments of God or Christ, and does emphasize obedience, especially the kind of obedience that Christ exemplified in his commandment on love (2:3-11; 3:19-24). If this is granted, then anomía may have the meaning of rejection and opposition to

1Cf. Bede In I Epistolam S. Johannis 3 (PL, 93:100B), who refers to anomía as acts contrary to the equity of the divine law; see also, Lapide, p. 409; A. Makrakis, Interpretation of the Entire New Testament, 2 vols. (Chicago: Orthodox Christian Educational Society, 1950), 2:1975; Maunoury, p. 380; Morris, p. 1265; Orr, p. 1661; Patrick et al., p. 993; Roberts, p. 79; Röthe, p. 304; R. Shepherd, Notes Critical and Dissertatory on the Gospel and Epistles of St. John (London: Nichols, 1795), p. 346; Vincent, p. 346; Willmering, p. 1187; etc.

2See, for example, Brown, Epistles, p. 399.

3Cf. Malatesta, Interiority and Covenant, p. 250, who relates the term anomía to the law of the new covenant; Brooke, p. 85, refers it to the transgression of the law of love; see also Houlden, Epistles, p. 92; Lowrie, p. 111.
God's will and rule, in whatever way and form that exists.\textsuperscript{1}

This understanding has led some scholars to hold the possibility of taking anomía as a serious sin,\textsuperscript{2} as "iniquity."\textsuperscript{3} In one of the contemporary applications of this view, anomía is identified with the great iniquity of the last days, with the mystery of lawlessness and the man of lawlessness of Paul. This fits well with the context, since hamartía is clearly equated with anomía in order to show its seriousness. It also harmonizes with the emphasis given in this passage to the difference and opposition existing between the children of God and the children of the devil, and with the evidences that show that our author was conscious of living in the last days.\textsuperscript{4}

\textsuperscript{1}There are a number of authors who have supported this view or a similar one. Cf. Bruce, p. 89; Law, p. 217; Wilder, p. 256, gives the sense of "anarchy"; Burdick, p. 237, "the repudiation of the expressed will of God"; see also Gutbrod, p. 1086; Bonsirven, p. 154; N. Alexander, p. 83; Haas, pp. 81, 82; Alleman, p. 670; Boice, pp. 105, 106; Cowles, p. 337; Cox, pp. 340, 341; Ellicott, p. 218; Gore, pp. 141, 142; Grayston, Epistles, p. 104; Hoskyns, p. 667; Hütther, p. 554; Kohler, p. 115; Lewis, pp. 35, 36; McDowell, p. 208; Meyer, p. 641; Ramsay, p. 286; Weidner, p. 304; etc.

\textsuperscript{2}Contrary to Dodd, Epistles, p. 73, who considers that anomía has the crude sense of "wrong": "Sin is wrong," as though hamartía might have implied nothing wrong. But this is difficult to maintain in the epistle.

\textsuperscript{3}This was the translation of the Vulgate (Lat. iniquitas), which was followed by Augustine, Bede, and many others in modern times.

\textsuperscript{4}For a full discussion of this view see I. de la Potterie, "Le péché, c'est l'iniquité (I Joh. III,4)," NRT.
However, this view has the contextual difficulty of assuming different nuances to the terms *hamartía* and *hamartánō*, not only in the epistle as a whole, but in the immediate context of chap. 3. In the expression of vs. 5, "he appeared to take away sins, and in him there is no sin," the term "sins" can hardly have the same meaning as in vs. 4, if *hamartía*, by equation, is "the iniquity" of the last days. It has to be granted that in vs. 4 the singular is used against the plural in vs. 5, and that this could explain the difference in nuance. Yet, we have seen above that the arthrous singular of *hamartía* is sometimes equivalent in the Johannine literature to the arthrous plural.¹

Besides the noun *hamartía*, we also have the verb *hamartánō* which introduces some questions regarding the correctness of this viewpoint of taking *anomía* as the iniquity of the last days. We have in this passage the use of the expression "to do sin" (Gr. *poieī hamartian*) three times (plus twice the expression "to do righteousness,"

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¹For the contrary see Segalla, p. 340, who argues that the plural form is used in a moral sense, but the singular is used theologically in refutation of heresy.
and once the expression "to do lawlessness". Some have suggested that this expression has a special connotation in the Johannine writings, and one different from *hamartánō*. But this is not supported by the present passage. The parallelism of vss. 6 and 9 shows that not only is "abiding" parallel to "being born of," but also that *hamartánō* is parallel to "doing sin." Granted this parallelism, *hamartánō* must refer to the sin of *anomía* also. This, however, introduces an irregularity, since in 2:1 and 1:9 the Christian is assured of forgiveness and intercession for his sinning. This, however, should not be *anomía*, given that *anomía* has, apparently, no forgiveness. This seems to be the main obstacle to the correctness of the view under discussion. But in the present context *anomía* can be taken as the eschatological sin of iniquity, provided that we allow our writer to use *hamartía* and *hamartánō* in two different ways: one in reference to ordinary sins, and the other in reference to the sin called *anomía*; one in reference to the Christian, who can commit some sins; the other in relation to Christians who cannot commit the sin of *anomía*. The clue to solving this dilemma is provided in the epistle itself, which records that the Christian can commit some sins but not others. In 5:16-18, the Christian is said to commit what is called "sin not unto death," which is considered as "wrongdoing"

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1 Harris, p. 355; Inman, p. 141.
(adikía). The following statement which says that "any one born of God does not sin . . ." seems to have an antithetical character and, therefore, be a reference to "sin unto death." This equates the sin of anomía with the "sin unto death," and is, therefore, the sin that the Christian cannot commit.¹

This understanding of anomía is capable of reconciling the sin terminology of 1 John, and advancing a solution to the hamartiological problem of the epistle. Not only does it fit the immediate context of chap. 3, with its dualism between the children of God and the children of the devil, but it also helps explain why a Christian can sin and cannot sin at the same time. It also provides an interesting solution to the traditional problem of understanding the "sin unto death" and the "sin not unto death" of chap. 5.

Taking this qualification of hamartía and hamartánō as a point of departure, the following verses should be understood in accordance with it, giving to hamartía and hamartánō the sense of anomía. Vs. 6 reads: "No one who abides in him sins; no one who sins has either seen him or known him." We saw above that "abiding" is parallel to "fellowship." We then could paraphrase this verse as follows: "No one who abides in God is in opposition to him; no one who is in opposition to God has had

¹See our discussion below on 5:13-21.
either communion or fellowship with him." In the last part of the verse our author repeats the same thought in a different manner: "No one who sins has either seen him or known him." Since the first part of this sentence is parallel to the second part of the previous one, it is reasonable to think that "seeing" and "knowing" are parallel expressions to "abiding." In vss. 7 and 8 the author proceeds to draw a sharp antithesis between the one who does righteousness and the one who does sin (hamartía). But since he has qualified hamartía as anomía, the antithesis is actually between righteousness (Gr. dikaiosúnē) and anomía. It is interesting that Paul makes exactly the same antithesis in 2 Cor 6:14: "For what partnership have righteousness [Gr. dikaiosúnē] and iniquity [Gr. anomía]?" In 1 John he who does righteousness is in fellowship with God, but he who does sin is in communion with the devil. The devil has always been in opposition to God; those who commit sin join him in that opposition. A picture of conflict is presented. The Son of God came to destroy the works of the devil. It seems to be clear that it is this moral dualism that permeates our author's concept of sin; it is God versus the devil.

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1 See above, p. 217.

2 See also Rom 6:19; Heb 1:9; 1 Tim 1:9; 2 Pet 2:8.

3 This is the same ethical dualism presented in the concept of light versus darkness in chap. 1, which necessarily involves two different groups: those who walk in light and those walk in darkness (1:6,7).
Vs. 9 is a parallel to vs. 6, but with a different category: "No one born of God commits sin [hamartía]; for God's nature abides in him and he cannot sin [Gr. hamartánein] because he is born of God." The true child of God cannot commit hamartía which is anomía. "Abiding" and "being born of" are clearly parallel expressions. The former emphasizes "remaining" and "communion," while the latter emphasizes "belonging" and "family." But it is a "belonging" that endures, since the perfect tense is used: "he who has been born of him" [Gr. gegenneménos]. The reason why he does not and cannot sin is because "God's nature abides in him." Different interpretations have been advanced regarding the Greek word spatma used in this sentence, but the most natural interpretation seems to be

1There are two main interpretations regarding the phrase "his seed abides in him." In the first one, the pronouns "his" and "him" are made to refer to God; consequently, the translation is "for the offspring of God remain in Him"; so Moffatt; also N. Alexander, p. 86; A. W. Argyle, "1 John iii 4f.," ExpTim 65 (1953):62-63; Bruce, p. 92; F. C. Cook, p. 328; Perkins, pp. 41, 42; etc. In the second one, the pronoun "his" refers to God, and "him" is made refer to the believer: "God's seed remains in him." Both interpretations are grammatically correct, and both can be made to fit into the context of God's children as opposed to the children of the devil. Regarding the second one, still several interpretations are suggested in connection with the meaning of "God's seed." The main ones are: (1) The Word of God; followed by Alford, p. 886; Bengel, p. 797; Blackley, p. 316; S. T. Bloomfield, Recensio Synoptica Annotationis Sacrae; Being a Critical Digest and Synoptical Arrangement of the Most Important Annotations on the New Testament, 8 vols. (London: C. and J. Rivington, 1828), p. 758; Bonnard, p. 72; F. M. Braun, Jean le Théologien, 4 vols. (Paris: Gabalda, 1959-1972), 3:118; G. Clark, p. 101; Cothenet, "Les Épitres de Jean," p. 69; Cowles, p. 340 (?); Culler, p. 245; de la Potterie, "The Impeccability of the Christian,"
that which takes *σπέρμα* in connection with the expression "to be born of God," which is twice repeated in the verse.1 Someone belongs to a family when he has been born into it. He who has been born into God's family belongs to

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1Actually, the interpretation which sees the pronouns as referring to God and translates *σπέρμα* as "offspring" fits better the present interpretation. However, it has some weaknesses, besides being tautologi-

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him; he cannot belong to the devil and his family. So the RSV's translation conveys the essential thought. The child inherits the characteristics of the father and behaves as part of his family: "By this it may be seen who are the children of God, and who are the children of the devil: whoever does not do right is not of God, nor he who does not love his brother." With this thought, our writer returns to what he stated at the beginning of the section: "If you know that he is righteous, you may be sure that every one who does right is born of him" (2:29). It seems to be obvious that the whole section has the purpose of encouraging his readers to be what they are. The right conduct and love for one another, as members of God's family, is the external evidence that shows to what group they belong. This section does not need to be controversial or polemical. It is the same emphasis we found in 1:6-10: those who say that they have communion with God, who is light, should walk in light, not in darkness.

Summary

The parallelism between the sections 1:6-2:2 and 2:28-3:10 shows in what sense the expressions "does not sin" and "cannot sin" should be understood. In the first section, those who walk in light are not necessarily

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1 Though the translation "God's nature" involves a philosophical principle that can be deceiving; see Perkins, p. 41. This is not the case, however, if "nature" is understood in the context of generation: the child inherits the nature of the father.
exempt from sin, though they are encouraged "not to sin" (2:1). In the second, the same qualification should apply, though it is only implicit: not to sin is to belong to God's family, rather than the devil's. The one who is a child of God does righteousness and has love for others. If this parallelism with the first section means something, then the statements "does not sin" and "cannot sin" should be qualified with the expression "as the devil and the children of the devil do, who commit the sin of anomía." Besides this, we also have two more qualifications: "No one who abides in him sins" (vs. 6); "no one born of God commits sin" (vs. 9). "Abiding" and "being born of" are parallel expressions which refer to the same idea of belonging to God's family. As a member of God's family, the Christian does not and cannot join the family of the devil.

Exegesis of 1 John 5:13-21

Introduction

This passage is usually considered the epilogue of the epistle. As is the case with other sections of the document, it is related to the previous one not only by the repetition of ideas already presented, but also by the characteristic catch-word connections of the epistle.  

1Many commentators have seen the beginning of this section in other verses than vs. 13. See chapter 3 above.

2Schnackenburg (Johannesbriefe, p. 273) calls it "assoziative Voranschreiten."
last verses of the previous section emphasize belief in the Son. The last verse reads: "He who has the Son has life; he who has not the Son of God has not life." Following that line of thought, vs. 13 states: "I write this to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life." The connections are clear, but now the author advances toward the conclusion of the document.

A close look at the section shows that it does not contain many new ideas or thoughts. We have already read about "eternal life" (1:2; 2:25; 3:14, 15; 5:11), "confidence" (2:28; 3:21; 4:17), "prayer" (3:22), the problem of "sin" in the Christian life (1:8,10; 2:1,2; 3:6,9), the idea that the Christian is "born of God" (2:29; 3:9; 4:7; 5:1,4), the "evil one" in opposition to God's children (2:13,14; 3:8-10), the concept that "we are of God" (4:1-6), that the "Son of God has come" to enable us "to know God,"¹ and that we are in "his Son Jesus Christ" (2:6). So the section is really a summary of the main ideas that the writer has touched upon in one way or another in the development of the epistle. It makes some qualifications to previous statements, however. In vs. 14 we find the statement that petitions should be in

¹As we saw above (pp. 95-97), there is a great emphasis in the epistle on "knowing God," though the particular expression that the Son came "to give us understanding, and know him who is true" is more akin to the thrust of the gospel than the epistle.
accordance with God's will, which seems to be a clarification of the statement of 3:22, "we receive from him whatever we ask." In relation to sin, there is the information that there are two kinds of sins, a "sin unto death" and a "sin not unto death." Finally, there is the attribution to Jesus Christ of the title "true God and eternal life," which, though not encountered elsewhere in the epistle, is similar to the conclusion and general emphasis of the gospel (20:28,31).

It is not easy to divide the section into self-contained units. For practical reasons, however, we will divide it into four parts: (1) Introductory Statement (vs. 13); (2) Confidence and Prayer (vss. 14-17); (3) Three Christian Certainties (18-20); (4) Final Statement (vs. 21).

Introductory Statement (vs. 13)

The statement of vs. 13 is usually considered analogous to the similar statement in the epilogue of the fourth gospel (20:31). As we noted above, they are similar, but not identical. Both are statements of

1 Some commentators have held that the expression of the same verse, "This is the true God and eternal life" should be understood as a reference to "him" (God), and not as a reference to Jesus Christ. Though this is possible, the syntactical structure of the phrase makes it improbable; see Chaine, p. 224; Schnackenburg, Johannesbriefe, p. 291; Bultmann, Epistles, p. 90; de Jonge, De Brieven van Johannes, p. 232; Bruce, p. 128; Haas, p. 129; Marshall, Epistles, p. 254; etc.

2 See on pp. 140, 141.
purpose, and both emphasize belief in the Son of God. But while the fourth gospel intended to generate faith in the readers, the epistle was addressed to readers who already had faith. The gospel promised life (in this particular passage), while the epistle assured that that life was a present reality for the believers.

The expression "I write this" is primarily a reference to the previous verses in which the author emphasizes the importance of believing in the Son of God. Yet, it might have been intended also as a general conclusion for the whole letter. This is the more probable, when we compare it to the already-mentioned similar statement of purpose at the end of the fourth gospel, which is clearly a conclusion. Besides that, throughout the epistle we see signs and emphases that testify to the stated purpose of the writer. The "I write this" may be considered, then, to cover the whole epistle, though it particularly focuses on the previous section with its emphasis on believing in the Son of God.

This verse (vs. 13) emphasizes the fact that eternal life belongs only to those "who believe" in the

1The words "I write this," present tense in English, are actually "I wrote this" in Greek (tota egrapsa). They are sometimes considered an epistolary aorist; cf. the use of the perfect in the gospel: "This I have written"; see Robertson, A Grammar of the Greek NT in the Light of Historical Research, p. 845. Cf. also Houlden, Epistles, p. 137, who considers it as a sign of conclusion.
name of the Son of God. The previous verse has emphasized that life is only possible in connection with the Son: "He who has the Son has life" (vs. 12). This shows a parallelism between "to have the Son" and "to believe in him." As we saw above,¹ this is also evident in 2:22,23, where he who confesses the Son has the Father also. This in turn, through the concept of confession, ties in with the idea of "being of God" in 4:1-6, which is part of a series of interconnected ideas that end in the concept of "fellowship" with God. So, only those who believe in the Son, that is to say, who have communion with him, have eternal life.

Confidence and Prayer (vss. 14-17)

Vs. 14 speaks about "confidence" (Gr. parrēsia). Three other times our author has mentioned this word, and always in a context of relation to God. In 2:28, "abide in him, so that when he appears we may have confidence and not shrink from him in shame at his coming." In 3:21, "Beloved, if our hearts do not condemn us, we have confidence before God; and we receive from him whatever we ask, because we keep his commandments and do what pleases him." In 4:17, "In this is love perfected with us, that we may have confidence for the day of judgment, because as he is so are we in this world." In all of the cases, confidence is based on "abiding in him." The first case is

¹See above, pp. 214-217.
perfectly clear, but not so the other two cases where an examination of the context is necessary. In the second case, confidence comes through keeping the commandments, which in turn is grounded on abiding in him (3:24). In the third case, confidence is through love, but that is only because "he who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him" (4:16). And so, here, in 5:14, confidence is apparently derived from the certainty of having eternal life (vs. 13). But, as we saw above, the possession of eternal life is tied in with having the Son, believing in him, and, in the final analysis, abiding in him. So, the use of parrésía in the epistle is founded on communion with God, fellowship with him. It is no wonder that this word is used twice in connection with prayer, in this instance and also in 3:21,22. It is this communion and fellowship with God that gives the Christian the "confidence" of approaching God through prayer with the certainty of being heard. In 3:21,22, the certainty of receiving whatever is asked is grounded on a context of harmony with God through obedience to his commandments. Here, that certainty is based on asking according to God's will. Both concepts are obviously related.

In vs. 15 our author shows the logical corollary of having confidence in God: the Christian should pray and have the certainty that God has granted his petition. It is in this context of prayer that our writer introduces the case of the sinning brother. It, then, must be related
to the subject which he is developing: confidence in prayer. He states in vs. 16: "If any one sees his brother committing what is not a mortal sin, he will ask, and God will give him life for those whose sin is not mortal."

This verse has difficulties from one end to the other. But one thing seems to be clear and that is its relationship to confidence in prayer. Prayer for a sinning brother seems to be an illustration of how the Christian can pray with confidence before God. Two verses before, our author has said that prayer should be done according to God's will. The assumption is made that praying for a sinning brother is in accordance with God's will, and for this reason God will answer that prayer favorably. The Christian may have confidence in this. But there seems to be a clarification to this: a favorable divine response is applicable to those who sin not unto death. Our writer apparently considers that to pray for the sin unto death is either not according to God's will or the Christian has not the same confidence that God will answer his prayer, as would be the case with the sin not unto death.²


²Cf. Lapide, p. 483; Russell, p. 1261; Vawter, p. 411; etc.
The statement of vs. 17, "All wrongdoing is sin, but there is sin which is not mortal," should be understood as a qualification of the distinction between sin not unto death and sin unto death. Apparently, our author sensed that a clarification was needed, since someone might infer that sinning not unto death was innocuous. On the contrary, he affirms that every injustice and wrongdoing is sin, but it is necessary to concede that not every sin is mortal. In the matter of confidence in prayer, not all sins are equal. "Mortal sin" has in itself a characteristic that makes prayer in behalf of the person who commits it uncertain regarding God's favorable answer. This is the natural corollary of associating the distinction between "mortal" and "not mortal" sins with confidence in prayer. It is necessary to state, however, that this discussion of the sin unto death is secondary in the context. It is a qualification on the part of the author, and as such, an excursus taken to avoid any misunderstanding.

The expression "If any one sees his brother" (vs. 16) uses εἶν plus the aorist subjunctive of ἠρώο, a conditional statement that indicates possibility, but not a reference to an actual case. The use of the verb "to see" implies that the sin referred to is something that can be observed. Thus, the sin which is not unto death is either an external act or a condition that can be observed externally. By the words "his brother," contrary to what
some argue, the writer must be referring to a fellow Christian, a member of the community of the observer. The expression, "committing a sin" (Gr. *hamartánonta hamartían*), a cognate accusative, has obviously the same meaning as the simple *hamartánō* found in vs. 18. The RSV rendering, "not a mortal sin," comes from the Greek expression *hamartían mê pròs thánaton*. The translation is good, but it has the disadvantage of using a term ("mortal") that, in the Catholic moral theology, is applied to certain types of sins that are quite different from those referred to here. The expression is unique in

1Cf. 2:9-11; 3:10,12-17; 4:20,21. This is the position of Augustine Our Lord's Sermon on the Mount 1.22.73 (NPNF, first series, 6:30); Jelf, p. 77; Marshall, Epistles, p. 246, n. 15; Miguens, p. 65; Moody, p. 111; Neander, p. 308; Nichol, p. 678; Ramsay, p. 326; Scholer, p. 238; Smalley, 1, 2, 3 John, p. 299; Westcott, Epistles, p. 191; etc. Others take the expression metaphorically, as a reference to human beings in general or to neighbors; see Barnes, p. 349; Stott, pp. 189, 190 (who argues that neither the "sin not unto death" nor the "sin unto death" refers to believers).

2According to Roman Catholic moral theology, venial sins are those which do not necessarily need to be confessed in the sacrament of penance, while mortal sins must be confessed; mortal sins are those by which one falls from justice, while verial sins are those by which the sinner does not cease to be just. On this, see I. Mc Guiness, "Sin (Theology of)," New Catholic Encyclopedia, 1967 ed., p. 245. It should be mentioned, however, that St. Thomas Aquinas, the systematizer of the Roman Catholic moral theology, considered that, in the final analysis, mortal sin is the turning away of the soul from its ultimate goal, which is God, and to whom it is united by charity; see T. Aquinas, *Summa Theologicae*; Latin text and English translation, Introductions, Notes, Appendices and Glossaries, 60 vols. (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Co.; London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1969), vol. 25: *Sin*, 1a2ae.72.5.
the NT, though in the way our writer uses it, without any clarification, it seems to be convey a familiar idea to his readers.\(^1\) The only other expression that has a conceptual similarity is found in the gospel of John, where Jesus referred to Lazarus' sickness as οὐκ ἐστὶν πρὸς θάνατον (11:4; cf. also 4:35).\(^2\) In this case, however, the expression qualifies "sickness," not "sin." But it still can illuminate the sense in which it is used by the writer. Obviously, Jesus meant that Lazarus' sickness was not to result in his death, though temporarily it did. It was not a mortal illness from his standpoint.

This comparison also leads us to clarify what type of death is referred to in the verse under consideration. It is obvious that Christ meant physical death in reference to Lazarus. Is it used in the same sense in this passage? The word θάνατος, in addition to the four

\(^1\)In the intertestamental literature a similar expression appears, especially in reference to deliberate or grievous sins. In TIss 7:1, the patriarch is represented as saying: "I am not conscious of committing any sin unto [Gr. εἰς] death" (so the MSS, B, S, A); see R. H. Charles, The Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament, vol. 2: Pseudepigrapha (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1913):327. This expression is accompanied by fornication, drunkenness, covetousness, etc. In Jub 21:22 there is a warning against committing "a sin unto death before the Most High God" (cf. also what is said in 26:34; 33:13,18, and TGad 4:6). It is probable that this terminology influenced the Christian community, though we do not have evidence that such an influence went beyond the mere application of its principle.

\(^2\)The Greek expression πρὸς θάνατον indicates an orientation toward death; see Brooke, p. 146; Schnackenburg, Johannesbriefe, p. 276; etc.
instances in this passage, is used two more times in the epistle. In 3:14 we read: "We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brethren. He who does not love abides in death" (emphasis mine). It is obvious that thanatos here does not mean physical death. It is rather the opposite of zoē, which refers to spiritual life. This spiritual life, or eternal life, has a great emphasis throughout the epistle, but especially in the immediate context in which the sin unto death is mentioned: "God gave us eternal life" (vs. 11); "this life is in his Son" (vs. 11); "He who has the Son has life; he who has not the Son has not life" (vs. 12); "that you may know that you have eternal life" (vs. 13); "This is the true God and eternal life" (vs. 20). With this framework, it would be really strange if our writer meant something different than spiritual death, or eternal death. So the context points to thanatos as spiritual death.

The expression, "he will ask and God will give him life" (literally: "he will ask and he will give him life") substitutes "God" for the subject "he." It is really surprising to find a change of subject in two verbs joined by the conjunction kai. It is argued that in the epistle it is God who gives life (vs. 11), and it is incongruous that a Christian could be said to give life to a fellow

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1See, for example, 1:1,2; 2:25; 3:14,15; 5:12,13,16.

member. But our writer is speaking of intercession on behalf of a fellow member, and it is only in that sense that he gives him life. It is the same sense found in Jas 5:20: "Let him know that whoever brings back a sinner from the error of his way will save his soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins."  

The statement "he will give him life" raises the question as to what kind of "life" is referred to. As we saw above, it must be a reference to eternal life so often mentioned in the context. The writer, then, means that he who commits sin not unto death receives life from God rather than the death that might be expected. But, since the sin is not unto death, how can he lose his life? This is a strange paradox, indeed. However, this problem might have an explanation in the writer's distinction between sins. In vs. 17 he says: "All wrongdoing is sin, but there is a sin which is not mortal." He considers every unrighteousness as a sin, but recognizes that not all sins are equal. Apparently, our author thinks of the sin not unto death as severing the Christian from his life, but not irredeemably. For him, there is a solution for the sin not unto death. That is probably the reason why the

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1 Cf. Lenski, Epistles, p. 534; Marshall, Epistles, p. 246; Schnackenburg, Johannesbriefe, p. 276; Scholer, pp. 239, 240; Westcott, Epistles, p. 191; etc.

2 Among the interpreters who have maintained the same subject for both verbs are: Alford, p. 914; Brooke, p. 146; Bultmann, Epistles, p. 87, n. 16; Lücke, p. 280; Plummer, p. 167; etc.
Christian can give life to a fellow member when he does not commit mortal sin.

In vs. 16 we also find the declaration: "There is sin which is mortal." We saw above that "mortal" refers to spiritual death. But what is this sin? Our author does not identify it. It may, however, be circumscribed. The "sin which is not mortal" is something observable, it can be seen. So with the "sin which is mortal"; it must be observable as well. When a Christian prays for a fellow member who commits this sin, he is confident that God will hear his prayer. But regarding the "sin which is mortal" our writer says: "I do not say that one is to pray for that." He does not have confidence that a prayer for the "sin which is mortal" will be effective, as it was for the other.¹ And since he is talking about confidence in prayer, it is only natural that he is led to discourage something that brings no confidence when the Christian prays. The expression "I do not say that one is to pray for that" has been subject of two different interpretations. On one hand, there are those who consider it as a prohibition to pray for those who sin unto death. This view is usually invoked by making a distinction between the verbs aitēō (to ask as an inferior), and erotāō (to request as an equal). This distinction, however, seems to be too subtle.² On the other hand, some

¹See Stott, p. 187; Vine, p. 106.
²See Brooke, p. 147; Chaine, p. 220; Scholer, p.
maintain that there is no prohibition, but a type of
discouragement or a statement that does not recommend
prayer on that subject or for those who sin that way.\textsuperscript{1} L.
P. Trudinger,\textsuperscript{2} assigns to the verb erot\ao the meaning of
"ask questions," so that there should not be a debate on
the subject of sin unto death.\textsuperscript{3} It is also viewed as
suggesting interrogatory questions addressed to God.\textsuperscript{4} But
the attribution of this meaning to erot\ao in a context of
prayer is certainly extraordinary.\textsuperscript{5} The view of
Bauernfeind\textsuperscript{6} though acknowledging that the epistolary

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item See, for example, Brooke, p. 147; Brown,
Epistles, pp. 613, 614; Nichol, p. 679; Packenham, p. 140;
Plummer, p. 166, 168; The suggestion (Brown, Epistles, p.
614, Scholer, p. 243, n. 65, and others) that our writer
is following the example of Jesus who did not pray for the
world (John 17:9), seems to be incorrect, since that
prayer of Jesus has the specific context of his departure,
and focuses, obviously, on those whom he was leaving
behind and who were in need of encouragement and faith;
see A. H. Dammers, "Hard Sayings—II. I John 5:16ff.," Theology

\item L. P. Trudinger, "Concerning Sins, Mortal and
Otherwise; a Note on I John 5:16-17," Bib 52 (4,

\item See also W. R. Cook, "Hamartiological Problems in

\item See Wordsworth, p. 125.

\item See Scholer, p. 244.

\item Bauernfeind, pp. 43-54.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
writer does not actually forbid prayer for the 'sin unto death,' is that he is trying to regulate the pneumatic prayer of some who dared to pray for the sin unto death, when that is a matter of the divine Spirit Himself. This view presupposes a controversy between pneumatic and regulated prayer that is not indicated in the epistle.\(^1\)

Regarding the specific identity of the 'sin which is mortal,' it is evident that our writer seems to refer to something well-known to his readers. However, it is very difficult for us today to understand what that was. Consequently, many suggestions have been advanced in an attempt to clarify its meaning.\(^2\) These suggestions may be classified from two different viewpoints.\(^3\) One view sees the mortal sin as a state (which might find expression in different acts)\(^4\) or condition resulting usually from repeated sin. It is sometimes presented as the state of sin in which a person loves sin,\(^5\) habitual and pernicious\(^6\)

\(^1\)See Scholer, p. 243, n. 68.


\(^3\)For a helpful arrangement of the various suggestions, see Brown, *Epistles*, pp. 613-619, who classifies four different types according to petitions, penalties, sins, and people.

\(^4\)See Brooke, p. 146.

\(^5\)Cf. Barclay, p. 143; W. R. Cook, p. 258.

sining, a state of willful sin, or willful opposition to God, or a reference to a sinful life. The second view tries to identify the "sin which is mortal" with some specific sins, as for example, deliberate or grievous sin (as in Heb 10), conscious and determined sins, or sins of set purpose and malice, serious sins based on the OT classifications, very grave sins remitted with difficulty, or only through extraordinary grace which God gives. It is also considered as unrestrained sin, sins beyond hope, irremissible sins, or sins that lead to

1Cf. Dummelow, p. 1057; J. Harris, p. 388; Jelf, p. 78, respectively.

2Some of these views are not necessarily mutually exclusive, and sometimes the same authors hold similar views.

3Bultmann, Epistles, p. 87; Lias, p. 408; W. Nauck, p. 144; Schnackenburg, Johannesbriefe, p. 277.

4Ellicott, p. 240; Hilary Tractus Super Psalmos 140.8 (PL, 9:828C), respectively.

5A. Clark, p. 926; Gore, pp. 209, 211; Origen On Matthew 13.30 (ANF, 10:492,493), but without specifying; see also Commentariis in Exodum 10.3 (PG, 12:371C). According to the OT, the sacrifices offered in the tabernacle and in the temple expiated indeliberate sins (Lev 4:2,13,22,27; 5:15,17), but no provision was made for those sins which were considered as "high-handed sins." The person incurring those sins was to be cut off from his people (Num 15:30,31; Deut 17:12). Apparently the same principle was applied in the Qumran community, where those who sinned inadvertently were given a probationary time of two years, while those who committed deliberate sin were expelled from the community forever (see 1QS 8:21-9:2). The main objection to this view is that we have no evidence in the epistle that the Johannine community was applying this criterion.

6See Ambrose Concerning Repentance 1.10.44-47 (NPNF, 10:336, 337); Lapide, p. 484.
destruction,¹ unrepented sin,² hatred that leads to murder,³ the list of sins mentioned in the Didache 5:1-5,⁴ sin that continues without repentance until physical death,⁵ something that cuts a brother off from the communion of the saints, or alienates a sinner from fellowship with God,⁶ sins that are incompatible with being a

¹See Conner, p. 186; Fisher, p. 449; Tertullian On Modesty 2 (ANF, 4:76, 77; as adultery, murder, fraud, idolatry, blasphemy, etc.); Origen, Commentariis in Exodum 10.3 (PG, 12:372C), respectively.


³Lazure, p. 312; Windisch, p. 136, includes also apostasy and idolatry.

⁴The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles, Commonly Called the Didache, LCC, vol. I: Early Christian Fathers, trans. and ed. C. C. Richardson (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1953), pp. 171-179. There is here a description of some specific sins which are called "the way of death," which is said to be represented in 1 John 2:16, and which refer to some Christians who were practicing them without any shame or repentance; see R. Seeberg, "Die Sünden und die Sündenvergebung nach dem ersten Briefe des Johannes," in Das Erbe Martin Luthers und die gegenwärtige theologische Forschung (Leipzig: Dörfbling & Franke, 1928), pp. 28, 29, who holds this view, and associates 1 John 1, 2 with a baptismal confessional setting. This, however, is doubtful; see Scholer's criticism on p. 236.


child of God, or specific sins against divine illumination and with malice,¹ sin against the Holy Spirit,² sins that result in physical death, or carry death,³ sin committed

¹See Marshall, Epistles, p. 248; G. Clark, p. 164, respectively.

²Based on Matt 12:30-32 and parallels. This view is held by the following commentators: Barker, p. 355 (as a possibility); Barnes, p. 350; Cowles, p. 360 (including also apostasy after being enlightened); Drummond, p. 1158 (most likely); Makrakis, p. 1993 (probable); J. Morgan, p. 496 (but vinculated with the rejection of Christ and his salvation); Morris, p. 1270 (which includes remaining in sin); Novum Testamentum, p. 581; Plummer, p. 167; Ross, p. 221; Röthe, p. 470; Sawtelle, p. 61 (but including the rejection of the true nature and messiahship of Jesus); R. Shepherd, pp. 389, 390; Stott, pp. 188, 189 (apparently, but restricted to unbelievers). Cf. also The Pastor of Hermas 3.6.2 (ANF, 2:36, 37), where there are two types of sins, one to corruption and one to death (Gr. eis thánaton). The sin to death is associated with blasphemy against the name of God, an apparent dependence on the sin against the Holy Spirit. This view is interesting because it provides us with the principle that some sins may be beyond forgiveness. There is, however, no evidence that 1 John is dealing with this specific phenomenon.

³There are some passages in the OT when God warned that some sins would be punished with physical death (see, for example, Num 18:22, where the LXX uses the expression ἐκ τοῦ ἀνάπτωσιν θανάτου, as well as NT examples (such as 1 Cor 5:5; 11:30; Acts 5:1-11). Such is the meaning also of the passages in Tiss 7:1 and Jubilees 21:22; 26:34; 33:18. Cf. T.B. Sotah 48a, where the neglect of the terumah is called a mortal sin. Among those who favored this view are: Bruce, p. 124 (as a possibility); A. Clark, p. 925 (sins deserving civil capital penalty, or divine punishment involving the death of the sinner); Gingrich, p. 187 (sins which God condemns with physical death as in Acts 5, and 1 Cor 5); Ironside, p. 216 (physical death, as that of Moses, Ananias and Saphira, etc.); Kelly, p. 387 (acts of sin aggravated by special circumstances which affront God, and which he punishes with physical death); Jerome Commentariorum in Jeremiah Prophetam 3.14.11,12 (PL, 24:772C (grave sins which God has determined to punish with death); Macknight, p. 674; Ryrie, p. 1477; Vine, p. 105; G. Williams, p. 1017.
under the domination of the old nature, sins which are "bound" or "retained," the sin of those who depart from the community and fight against it. The great majority of commentators, however, favor the opinion that the sin (apparently). This viewpoint does not fit the immediate context of the epistle and renders Jesus' teaching on the unimportance of natural death for the Christian incomprehensible (John 8:51; 11:26). For the concept of sin unto death as meaning "carrying death," see Chaeremon, quoted by John Cassian On Perfection 9, in John Cassian Conferences (New York: Paulist Press, 1985), p. 148.

1 S. Cox, "The Sin unto Death. 1 John vs. 16," Expositor, second series, 1 (1881):431. His position is that so long as the old nature dominates, our sins are "unto death."

2 M. Miguens, "Sin, Prayer, and Life in 1 John 5, 16," in Studia Hierosolimitana, in onore del P. B. Bagatti, 2 vols. (Jerusalem: Franciscan Printing Press, 1976), 2:81, 82. According to this author, this passage is parallel to John 20:23; Matt 17:18; and 1 Cor 5:4. From a comparison of these passages, he concludes that the prayer mentioned in our passage is not allowed because it goes against the official policy of retaining and remitting sin. But the circumstances of those passages are not the same as that of the epistle, nor does its language resemble theirs.

3 Augustine Our Lord's Sermon on the Mount 1.22.73 (NPNF, 6:30, 31); cf. also Bonsirven, p. 143.

4 Cf. N. Alexander, p. 128; Alford, p. 916; Alleman, p. 672; Barker, p. 355; Bengel, p. 813; Bennet, p. 318; Bonnard, p. 114; Brooke, p. 146; Brown, Epistles, pp. 617, 618 (the sin of those who did not believe in Christ, as the secessionists who abandoned the koinōnia); Bruce, p. 125 (as a possibility); Bultmann, Epistles, p. 87 (as a possibility); Burdick, p. 403 (but including disobedience and hatred); Calvin, p. 311; Cameron, p. 243; Casabó, p. 415; Dodd, Epistles, p. 136 (probable); Chaine, p. 219; Charue, p. 553; D. E. Cook, p. 459 (the sin of the heretics); L. G. Cox, p. 361 (deliberate and willful sinning of the backsliders); Dietrich, p. 53 (the heretics' sin); R. Eaton, The Catholic Epistles of St. Peter, St. James, St. Jude, and St. John (London: Burns, Oates and Washbourne, 1937), p. 191; Easton, p. 1358 (the
which is mortal is a kind of apostasy from Christ, which
includes the denial of the incarnation in relation to the
opponents' claims, and the abandonment of the Christian
community and fellowship. In our opinion, this view which
tries to explain the sin which is mortal in accordance
with the context of the epistle and in harmony with its
background of danger from those whom the author called

sin of the heretics); Erdman, p. 151; G. Findlay,
Fellowship in the Life Eternal, pp. 406, 407; M. García
Cordero, "Las Diversas Clases de Pecados en la Biblia,"
CienTom 85 (1958):430 (apostasy parallel to Heb 6); J. M.
Gibbon, Eternal Life. Notes on Expository Sermons on the
Epistles of St. John (London: Dickinson, 1890), p. 172
(willful rejection of Christ with full knowledge); Grayston,
Epistles, pp. 143, 144 (apostasy as in Heb 6); Haas, p. 128, 127 (only as a possibility); Haupt, p. 327
(consummated enmity to Christ); J. Herkenrath, "Sünde zum
Tode," in Aus Theologie und Philosophie, ed. T.
Steinbüchel and T. Müncker (Düsseldorf: Patmos-Verlag
Dusseldorf, 1950), pp. 135, 136; Hobbs, p. 138, 139;
Hoskyns, p. 670; Hüther, p. 617; Jamieson, p. 151; Jenks,
p. 649; Johnston, p. 1038; A. Klöpper, "Zur Lehre von der
Sünde im 1. Johannesbrief, Erläuterung von 5,16 fin.," ZWT
43 (1900):589, 590; Kohler, p. 196; Knox, p. 174; Lapide,
p. 485; Laurin, p. 179; Law, p. 141; Lenski, Epistles, p.
536; Lewis, p. 121; Loisy, p. 576; Lücke, pp. 284, 285;
Maggioni, p. 246; Marshall, Epistles, p. 248; idem, Kept
by the Power of God, p. 186 (the sin of the false
teachers); Maunoury, p. 443; McClendon, p. 208; McDowell,
306; Nicoll, p. 198 (sin parallel to Matt 12 and Heb 6);
Orr, p. 1666; Patrick et al., r. 1000; Perkins, p. 65;
Roberts, p. 140; Robertson, Word Pictures in the New
Testament, p. 244; Russell, p. 1261 (possibility);
Scholer, p. 246 (including hatred); Smalley, 1, 2, 3 John,
p. 298 (including lack of love, but on the part of
unbelievers or heretically inclined believers); Thomas, p.
134; Thüsing, p. 99 (including hatred of one's brother);
J. Townsend, "The Sin unto Death (I Jo 5:16f)," RestQ 6
(1962):149; Vawter, p. 412 (the activity of the
antichrists, and parallel to Mark 3 and Heb 10); Vedder,
p. 131; Vincent, p. 371; B. Weiss, 4:363; Wesley, p. 387
(apostasy from godliness); Williams, p. 60; Willmering, p.
1188; Wuest, p. 181.
antichrists and false prophets is a valid one. As we saw in chapter 2, the polemical sections of the epistle concentrate on warnings against the false prophets who are accused of denying that Jesus has come in the flesh (4:1-6), and therefore are called antichrists, since they deny that Jesus is the Christ (2:18-27); hence the emphasis in the epistle on believing in Jesus, especially in 5:6-12, which is the immediate context of our passage under consideration. We have also seen that our writer precedes our section with a strong declaration of what it means to believe in the Son: "He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son has not life." It is, then, reasonable to believe that, when our author in a few verses below speaks of the "sin which is mortal," he probably has in mind those who called themselves Christians, but who, at the same time, refused to believe in Jesus as come in the flesh, in the way our author conceived such belief. It is obvious that, in our writer's mind, separation from Christ is a logical result of unbelief that brings the opposite of life. Only those who

1 Some commentators prefer to leave the problem of the identification of this sin without solution. Cf. Cooper, p. 247; Schnackenburg, Johannesbriefe, p. 278.

2 See above, pp. 80-89.

3 It is interesting that this emphasis on believing is mainly the characteristic of the final chapter of the epistle. Of the nine uses of the verb pisteuō in the epistle, six are located in the final chapter. See 3:23; 4:1,16; 5:1,5,10,13.
believe have eternal life (5:13). It is a reasonable inference that those who refuse to believe do not have eternal life. They can be said to commit the sin which is mortal.

Three Christian Certainties (vss. 18-20)
Vs. 18 introduces the first of three affirmations contained in this last part of the epilogue: "We know that any one born of God does not sin, but he who was born of God keeps him, and the evil one does not touch him." The first part of the verse is almost identical to 3:9, with the exception that oux hamartánei takes the place of hamartían ou poiēt.

We should expect that both statements, which are so similar, would have the same meaning and intention. But, what is the relationship of this statement to its immediate context? What is the sin that the one born of God does not commit? It is only logical to assume that since it speaks about sin, it should be related somehow to the problem of sin under discussion. The most natural connection, then, is to understand the statement in the light of the sin which is mortal. It is difficult to understand how a writer who, after stating that a brother can commit a sin which is not mortal, can say that the one born of God does not sin, if that sinning is understood in...

1Cf. the same emphasis in the gospel of John in the following passages: 3:15,36; 5:40,47; 11:25,26; 20:31. The sin par excellence in the gospel is unbelief (16:9).
absolute terms. It is precisely the same dilemma presented in 1:8-10 in comparison to 2:1,2. There seems to be only two possibilities: either the writer was so blind that he did not realize the blunder he was making, or the verb *hamartánei* has to be qualified.¹

Since nobody should be charged with such a blindness, unless there is no possibility of finding a reasonable solution to his apparent contradiction, we opt for the route of qualification. It seems to me that there are two elements that provide such a qualification for the verb *hamartánō*. The first one is the expression "born of God" (Gr. *gegennēménos ek toû theóû*), which is exactly the same expression as in 3:9. There we saw that it is parallel to "abiding" and other expressions, including "to be of God," which appears in vs. 19, and also the similar statement of vs. 20, "we are in him." This shows that, for our writer, the reason why a Christian does not sin is because he has been born of God, and as such, he abides in God; he is in fellowship with him, he belongs to him. The same dualism of chap. 3 is reflected here in the phrase: "we are of God and [but]² the whole world is in the power

¹ A third possibility taken by Bultmann, *Epistles*, p. 85, and others, does not solve the problem, but rather passes the contradiction on to the ecclesiastical redactor. One is left wondering whether this redactor was so blind that he did not realize that he was creating an unsurmountable problem. See the structural and linguistic analysis of W. Nauck, pp. 133-146, who argues that the passage is an integral part of 1 John.

²Adversative καί; see Blass, 442.1.
of the evil one . . . and we are in him who is true, in his Son Jesus Christ” (vss. 19,20). As a child of God, the Christian belongs to another camp, not to the devil's. But, still, the Christian sins. Is there any difference between the sin of the Christian and the sin of the world? Some have tried to explain a difference on the basis of the use of the present tense in our verse: "any one born of God does not sin." It is said that the Christian does not sin habitually and persistently as is the case of those who are not born of God.¹ We have seen that our writer is not consistent in the use of the present tense. Hence, this meaning is not easily seen. However, the attribution of continuous action to the statement of vs. 16, "committing what is not a mortal sin," should not be pressed since the emphasis is on the action as being done and not to its continuity.²

A more appropriate solution is to qualify the verb ἁμαρτάνω with a second element, that which is provided by the concept of "sin which is mortal." In this view, he who has been born of God does not sin in the sense that he does not commit the "sin which is mortal." Our writer would be saying that he who has been born of God, who

¹See, for example, Alleman, p. 672; Barnes, p. 351; Bloomfield, p. 780; Cameron, p. 246; Hobbs, p. 139; Nicoll, p. 198; Orr, p. 1667; Roberts, p. 143; Ryrie, p. 1477; Smalley, 1, 2, 3 John, p. 302; Vine, p. 107; Wuest, p. 182.

²For this position, see Scholer, p. 231.
abides in him and has communion and fellowship with him, he who is of God and in his Son, does not commit the "sin which is mortal."¹ If someone were to ask our author, how is it that the false prophets and the false teachers whom you call antichrists were (or are?) Christians, and yet, they abandoned the Christian community and denied Jesus Christ as come in the flesh? Our writer would certainly reply: "They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us; but they went out, that it might be plain that they all are not of us." In essence, our author would be affirming his first certainty of the Christian life: the one who is born of God does not commit the "sin which is mortal"; he who is in fellowship with him and abides in him cannot deny him. There is a situation similar to 3:6,9. There, sinlessness and impeccability are qualified by three elements: abiding in him, being born of him, and the concept of anomía. Here, 5:18, sinlessness is qualified by two elements: being born of God, and the concept of the "sin which is mortal." In both cases the qualifying elements are parallel. Earlier, we have referred to the parallelism of the phrases "abides in him"

¹This view goes back to Tertullian On Modesty 19, and was later endorsed by Bede In I Epistolam S. Johannis 5 (PL, 93:117D), who, to the expression "does not sin," added "unto death"; see also Cowles, p. 361; probably, Makrakis, p. 1994; Röthe, p. 472; Scholer, pp. 245, 246. This idea is rejected by Brown, Epistles, pp. 619, 620, since he advocates perfectionistic views for the Johannine community.
and "born of God." But also anomía is parallel to "sin which is mortal." We saw that anomía is rebellion against God, and clearly vinculated with apostasy, as is the case when Paul, speaking of the man of anomías, the son of perdition, the ánemos, he who opposes God, the mystery of anomías, also speaks of he apostasía. This ánemos is presented in opposition to Christ, since he is destroyed on the occasion of Christ's parousía (2 Thess 2:1-1'). It is no wonder that our writer called those who denied the incarnation of Christ antichrists. So, anomía is closely related to apostasy and the denial of Christ, which, as we have seen, is probably referred to as the "sin which is mortal." This parallelism confirms both qualifications and provides a reasonable solution to the problem of sinlessness and impeccability in the epistle.

The second part of vs. 18 contains a textual problem.\(^1\) It reads: "but he who was born of God keeps

\(^1\)Reflected in the "C" classification by the UBS Greek Text critical apparatus. There are four different variants. Some good manuscripts support the reading tereí heautón (Codex Sinaiticus, the corrector of Codex Alexandrinus, etc.); others support the accepted reading (the original of Codex Alexandrinus and Codex Vaticanus); still others support hautón, especially minuscules and Old Latin manuscripts. For a complete list, see the critical apparatus of the above-mentioned text. For the reasons behind the acceptance of the preferred reading, see B. Metzger, A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament, p. 719; see also the helpful discussion of Brown, Epistles, pp. 620-622. There are also some who substitute he gennésis for ho gennéthelis, a variant which is poorly attested. For this, see the apparatus of E. Nestle et al., Novum Testamentum, 26th ed. (1979), p. 625; cf. A. Harnack, "Zur Textkritik und Christologie der Schriften des Johannes," in Studien zur Geschichte des Neuen Testaments.
him, . . . ." The accepted reading is highly doubtful, and a decision can hardly be taken.¹ I prefer the reading, "he who was born of God keeps himself," which is theologically objectionable,² but reflects the unqualified language

¹For a helpful discussion of the various possibilities, see Brown, Epistles, pp. 620-622.

²Among the many authors who favor the reading "keeps him" are: Barclay, p. 144; Barker, p. 356; Boice, p. 179; Brooke, p. 149; Dummelow, p. 1057; Haas, p. 128; Marshall, Epistles, p. 252; Nauck, p. 139; Nicoll, p. 198; Ramsay, p. 329; Ross, p. 223; Smalley, 1, 2, 3 John, p. 303; Vellaniëkcal, pp. 276-281, 283; Westcott, Epistles, p. 194; G. Wohlenberg, "Glossen zu ersten Johannesbrief," NZK 13 (1902):240. This reading assumes that the expression ho gennethels is a reference to Christ; see H. Riesenfeld, "Tērēa, ktl.," TDNT (1972), 8:143. This title, however, is never applied to Christ in the NT. There is also the suggestion that the expression tērei autón has the meaning "he [the Christian] holds on to him [God]"; see Houlden, Epistles, p. 133; Schnackenburg, Johannesbriefe, first ed., p. 280, who had followed Bauer (p. 822) and Herkenrath (p. 127). Others have considered the phrase as a Semitism, and have translated it, "Whoever has been begotten of God, he [God] keeps him, so that the evil one does not touch him"; see for this, K. Beyer, Semitische Syntax im Neuen Testament (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1962), 1:215-218. This is followed by Schnackenburg, Johannesbriefe, 2nd ed., p. 280; A. Segond, "I Épitre de Jean, chap. 5:18-20," RHPR 45 (1965):350, who refers to H. Monnier in this regard; P. Couture, The Teaching Function in the Church of 1 John (Rome: Gregorian University, 1968), p. 211. See, however, the criticism of M. de Jonge, De Brieven van Johannes (Nijkerk: Callenbach, 1968), p. 229.
which the author is used to. 1

The second certainty is seen in vs. 19: "We know that we are of God, . . . ." The whole world is in the power of the devil, but the writer assures his readers that they are in the power of God. There are two irreconcilable groups, the Christians led by God, and the world led by the devil. That is one of the reasons why the Christian, according to our author, should not love the world (2:15-17). The third, and last, is a tacit Christological confession which assures his readers in the conviction of their faith in the one sent by God to impart understanding and knowledge about him.

Final Statement (vs. 21)

This last verse has no certain connection with the previous verses. 2 It seems to be a last recommendation to ensure a healthy spiritual condition among the members of his community. In a nutshell, it reflects the same tension

1 See, for example, the expression in 3:3: "every one who thus hopes in him purifies himself (Gr. hagnizeiheautón) as he is pure." Also 5:21: "Little children, keep yourselves (Gr. phuláxate heautâ) from idols." For a similar use in other NT writers, see Jude 21; James 1:27; 1 Tim 5:22. This was the view followed by most of the Greek fathers; see, for example, Didymi Alexandrini Enarratio in Epistolam I S. Joannis 5.18 (PG, 39:1805B). Among modern commentators, see Barnes, p. 352; Bennet, p. 319; Bloomfield, p. 780; Brown, Epistles, p. 622; Hütther, p. 620; Lenski, Epistles, p. 538; etc.

2 Some think that it is connected with the same sin of apostasy, since idolatry necessarily involves a kind of rejection of God; see Casabó, p. 416. Others, as Nauck, p. 137, make this injunction parallel to sin: "keep yourself from sin."
encountered in the body of the epistle against which the Christian should be on guard, even against so crude a sin as that of idolatry.\(^1\) This warning would be totally in vain if the Christian is not in danger of committing even this kind of sin. And yet, it is in keeping with the same affectionate way in which he has addressed his readers throughout the epistle.

Summary

In this last portion of the epistle, usually called the epilogue, the epistolary writer wants to give confidence and assurance to his readers. He gave them the assurance that they have eternal life (vs. 13), a privilege that is based on the fact that they have the Son of God (vss. 11,12). Having the Son of God, that is to say, having communion with him, produces confidence, a confidence which is manifested in the way the Christian prays, because he is sure that God will grant his petitions, which, however, should be made according to God's will. In this regard, there is a petition which the Christian is not sure that God will grant: intercession for those who sin unto death. It is reassuring that the Christian, who has been born of God, does not commit the sin unto death, which is \textit{anomía}, because he is of God, and the

\(^1\)Idolatry may also be taken figuratively, in which case, idols of the heart are meant, as in Qumran (IQS 2:11-17; 4:5); see Bruce, p. 128; Houlden, \textit{The Johannine Epistles}, p. 138; Marshall, \textit{Epistles}, p. 255; Schnackenburg, \textit{Johannesbriefe}, pp. 292, 293; and many others.
Son of God has given him understanding to know God. He, however, has to exercise vigilance and faith.

**A Multiple Approach as a Solution**

It has been clear up to now that a single approach is not sufficient to explain the whole problem confronted in the document. It has also been found that the best approaches are those which are able to combine various elements from different views, in order to account for the manifold elements involved. We have already seen some of those attempts in chapter 1. It is in this approach that I find the most fruitful and successful solution to the problem under consideration, though it may still leave something to be desired.

In the epistle, there are four qualifications to the statements of impeccability and sinlessness. The first two are explicit in the text; the last two are implicit in the context. They are: (1) The concept of abiding in Christ (3:6); (2) the concept of being born of God (3:9; 5:18); (3) the concept of anomía understood as rebellion against God's commands and, specifically in the Johannine epistles, a rebellion manifested against God's command of believing in Christ as come in the flesh (3:4, 23; 2:22; 4:2, 3; 2 John 7); and (4) the concept of the "sin unto death" (5:16, 17). The integration of these qualifications into a single scheme can provide a reasonable solution to the problem under consideration and also provide many
points of contact with other views discussed above.

The procedure is as follows: The parallel statements of 3:9 and 5:18 open the possibility of understanding 3:9 in terms of the context of 5:18. In this passage, immediately after presenting the Christian as committing "sin not unto death" as different from "sin unto death," it is stated that "we know that any one born of God does not sin." A logical conclusion is that the sin which the one born of God does not commit is the "sin unto death."¹ But what is this "sin unto death"? Our writer has previously stated that "he who has the Son has life; he who has not the Son has not life" (5:12; cf. John 5:24). The rejection of Christ on the part of those who are supposed to believe seems to be the "sin unto death." It is the sin of those who abandon Christ. It is a sin of rebellion against God. Yet, it is a sin that can be committed by those who, having once believed, do not abide in the Son and maintain their divine birth. Hence, the exhortations to abide in him. He who abides in him does not commit that sin. He who "has been born," that is to say, he who was born of God and by abiding in Christ maintains that

¹Schnackenburg (Johannesbriefe, p. 184) rejects this view because he thinks the particular subject of the sinning brother is closed in vs. 17. According to him, the writer returns to the fundamental in vs. 18, where he moves on the ground of principles as in 3:9. But his reasons are not convincing since he does not explain why the writer changes his thought so abruptly and leaves no connection with the previous ones. How could our writer not see any contradiction with the statements penned just one or two verses before?
condition, cannot commit the sin unto death. The believer who abides in Christ, however, can commit other sins, because he still lives in this sinful world. He still has sinful tendencies in his being, carries two natures within, and is a child of two worlds. But for those sins, he finds pardon and forgiveness in Jesus his advocate before the Father (2:1). And yet, his sinning is not a continued practice. He who has fellowship with God does not walk in darkness (1:6); rather sin is an accident in his life which requires confession and cleansing (1:8,9). His heart has been committed to Christ, and his sins do not destroy his allegiance and covenant with his Master.\footnote{1}{Cf. Malatesta, \textit{Interiority and Covenant}, pp. 250, 251, who sees a covenantal emphasis in this section of the epistle.}

As it is clearly seen, this is an eclectic approach. It tries to do justice to some of the views that are more in harmony with the background and theology of the epistle and the Johannine writings as a whole. But it is not free from criticism. It shares some of the objections raised against the particular views incorporated. Nevertheless, a reasonable answer can be given to each one of them, either from the epistle itself or from the Johannine corpus as a whole. However, its main advantages are
that it does justice to the categorical language of the epistle, takes into consideration the particular and general contexts of the document, and explains why a believer can and cannot sin at the same time.
SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Summary

The First Epistle of John is both encouraging and challenging. Many people have found comfort and courage in it. Its practical approach and the simplicity and warmth of its language—though its mysticism and abstractness frequently stresses the mind—have won the hearts of many.

Nevertheless, the epistle contains a distinctive teaching regarding sin that has motivated a great deal of study and investigation, and which, doubtless, will continue to do so. With outstanding simplicity, it teaches that the Christian sins, and it reminds the Christian that, in the event of sin, he has an advocate before the Father, Jesus Christ, who is the expiation for his sins (1:8-10; 2:1). And yet, with the same simplicity, it affirms that "no one who abides in him sins; no one who sins has either seen him or known him"; "no one born of God commits sin; for God's nature abides in him, and he cannot sin because he is born of God"; "we know that any one born of God does not sin, but he who was born of God keeps him, and the evil one does not touch him" (3:6,9; 5:18).

In search of an appropriate solution, many
different proposals have been advanced, which range from
the tacit recognition of the irreconcilability of the
statements of the epistle (Redactional Approach) to the
pragmatic and literal understanding of its teaching (Per-
fectionistic Approach). None, however, in my view, has
been able to present a satisfactory solution which takes
into consideration the literary context and the categori-
cal language of the document.

Nevertheless, in the long history of the inter-
pretation of the epistle, interesting and important sug-
gestions have been made, which, in my view, have partially
explained the hamartiological problem posed by the docu-
ment. The suggestion of Tertullian that the problem of
chap. 3 could be solved in reference to the "sin unto
death" of chap. 5 introduced an interesting theory that
was not revived until recent times. That great student of
the Bible, St. Augustine, sensitive to the immediate
context of the statements regarding impeccability,
advanced the idea that the problem could be resolved in
terms of the concept of abiding: "In quantum in ipso
manct, in tantum non peccat." This view has prevailed with
many writers until modern times, when some new ideas have
been introduced.

One of these new ideas that has been influential
among modern writers has been derived from the realization
that, especially in the Johannine theology, there is a
tension between the present and the future, by which the
promises of the age to come have begun to be realized in the present. Consequently, the Christian is said to be impeccable because that is one of the promises for the age to come. At the same time, since he still lives in this present world, he is capable of sinning, and in fact, he still sins.

Another modern view that has had many followers states, following grammatical principles regarding the use of the present tense, that the Christian cannot sin in the sense that he does not do it habitually. Others, realizing that in the context of the epistle there is a contrast between the children of God and the children of the devil, came up with the suggestion that sinlessness and impeccability for the Christian are claimed only in this sharp contrast. That is to say, the Christian does not sin in the sense in which the children of the devil do.

As we have noted in chapter 1, none of these suggestions, and many other variants, completely does justice to the context and the categorical language of the epistle. They do, however, present us with some solutions that are partially correct. This raises the possibility of whether or not the problem of the epistle can be resolved by a multiple approach that combines the characteristics of other approaches which fit the context and language of the epistle, but avoids those elements that do not. This is especially necessary since the problem of most of the useful approaches is due to the fact that they are not
comprehensive enough to account for all the elements that the case requires.

We examined in chapter 2 the historical background of the epistle with the purpose of seeing in what ways, if any, the historical situation of the epistle was related to the problem of hamartiology. This was especially necessary since some solutions examined in the present study claimed that the controversial situation of the document was responsible, either for the language and phraseology of the problematic statements or for their content. Though there are two major portions of the epistle dedicated to warn the readers against the danger of some "antichrists" and "false prophets," the major thrust of the epistle is paraenetic and hortatory in nature. The controversial language of the document is explicitly limited to the area of Christology, and the allegation that it reflects ethical behavior on the part of the opponents, who either held an antinomian position or an ascetic or perfectionistic stance, is not clearly supported by the epistle. Ethical injunctions of the document seem rather to reflect a spiritual laxity on the part of the members of the writer's community.

Chapter 3 was devoted to the study of the literary structure of the epistle. The study of the underlying structure of a document is always an indispensable tool in its interpretation, and it was included as a help for the exegetical portion of this study in order to delimit the
passages under consideration and show their emphases. 1 John, however, does not have a logical structure. The conclusion was reached that it shows a type of psychological development which is governed more by catch-word connections than by logical transitions. There is an alternation of paraenetic and warning materials which is in keeping with the dual purpose of the writing: exhortation and warning.

In chapter 4 we reviewed the sin terminology of the Johannine writings with the purpose of seeing to what extent that terminology could help in the clarification of the problem. Though the term anomía appears only twice in the Johannine writings, it became very relevant, since both appearances are in the immediate context of the problematic statements of chap. 3. Besides that, it became clear that anomía has the special connotation in the NT of rebellion and opposition to God, an element with eschatological overtones that furnishes a significant contribution to the nature of the sin spoken of in the context of 1 John 3.

The major portion of this study (chapter 5) was dedicated to an exegesis of the passages which provide the immediate context for the understanding of the problem (1:6-2:11; 2:28-3:10; 5:13-21). There is a close parallelism between chap. 1 and chap. 3, and in chap. 5 the statement of impeccability of chap. 3 is repeated almost verbatim. This exegesis shows that the evidence for
controversial language in chap. 1 is scanty, and that there are not enough reasons to think that the writer was quoting the opponents. It indicates that the parallelism between chap. 1 and chap. 3 points to a difference between the sinning of the children of God, and the children of the devil. It also shows that it is possible to relate the "sin unto death" terminology of chap. 5 to the statements of impeccability of chap. 3. It is apparent that those statements should have four main qualifications or restrictions: (1) The concept of "abiding" which is explicitly stated in 3:6,9; (2) the concept of "being born of God" which is three times stated in relation to impeccability (3:9; 5:18), and which is clearly parallel to "abiding"; (3) the term anomía which is said to qualify sin in 3:4; and (4) the "sin unto death" terminology which is closely related to the statement of impeccability in 5:18. The content of these qualifications is summarized in the next section.

Conclusions

The problem of sinlessness and impeccability in 1 John is complex and difficult. A single approach is not sufficient to account for all the variety of elements that need to be taken into consideration. A satisfactory solution, however, can be reached if various elements are fused together in a multiple approach that combines the following elements:
There is a close parallelism between the sections 1:6-2:2 and 2:28-3:10. This parallelism provides a point of reference in which the expressions of sinlessness and impeccability of chap. 3 should be understood. In chapter 1, those who walk in the light are not necessarily exempt from sin (1:7,8-10), though they are encouraged not to sin (2:1). The same pattern is found in 2:28-3:10. God's children are those who do righteousness, which is parallel to "walk in the light," since "light" has an ethical connotation in the epistle. This shows a sharp contrast with the children of the devil, who commit sin. This does not mean that the children of God are perfect, since there is the qualification: "it does not yet appear what we shall be." However, the Christian is supposed to "purify himself as he is pure." So, the implication seems to be clear: the children of God do not sin in the same way as do the children of the devil.

The Augustinian solution, "In quantum in ipso manet, in tantum non peccat," is correct, since it was obviously based on the explicit statement, "No one who abides in him sins," which is an appropriate qualification for sinning. "Abiding" is a parallel expression to "being born of" and refers to the same idea of belonging to God's family. This means that as a member of God's family, the Christian cannot join the practices of the family of the devil. It is also parallel to other expressions such as "to be of God," "to be in him," and "to know" and "see"
God. And yet, this view does not explain why a Christian is not able to remain in God, an experience which would be able to keep him from sinning. Another explanation seems necessary.

An additional clarification is found in the concept of anomía. It refers to "rebellion" and "opposition" to God's will and has eschatological overtones. The sin alluded to in 3:4 is said to be anomía, "sin is lawlessness" [Gr. anomía]. Hamartía and anomía here are not synonyms. There is a progression of thought implicit in the statement. This suggests the idea that the sin that the children of God do not commit and cannot do is the sin of anomía. This is the sin of the children of the devil and the devil himself, but not of the children of God.

In 1 John 5:16-18 the statement that there is a sin which is "unto death" is placed in the immediate context of the statement that the "one born of God does not sin." A brother is seen committing a sin which is "not unto death." The implication is that one who is born of God does not commit the sin unto death. "Sin unto death" terminology is then parallel to the sin of anomía, which is also denied for the one born of God in chap. 3, if my reconstruction is correct. The sin "unto death" seems to refer, in the context of the epistle, to the denial of Christ, especially in reference to those who denied that he had come in the flesh, and for that reason were labeled by the writer as "antichrists." This does not mean that a
Christian cannot commit the "sin unto death." All his injunctions to be vigilant and have faith found in the epistle would be meaningless if that were the case. That is true only in relation to the one "who abides in him." No one who abides in him can deny him. Only those who fail to remain in him are capable of rejecting him.

The final element that needs to be included is the answer to the pragmatic question, Why does the Christian sin? Why does he fail to "abide in him," and, as a result, commit sin? It is here that the well-known eschatological tension of the Johannine writings has its place. The Christian, though partaking of the benefits of the age to come, still lives in this world, which "is in the power of the evil one" (5:19). He still has to exercise vigilance and faith, which "is the victory that overcomes the world" (5:4). He still needs to be encouraged to love his brother (2:10; 3:11,17; 4:7,11, 12,21) and keep God's commands (2:10; 5:2,3). He also needs to be admonished not to love the world or the things of the world (2:15-17), and to keep what he heard from the beginning (2:24). He needs to be constantly reminded that the secret of the Christian life is to "abide in him" (2:28). All this indicates that he still has sinful tendencies, carries two natures within, and is a child of two worlds. Though he still can sin, sin is not a habit but rather an accident in his life, and does not destroy his allegiance to his Master nor disrupt his abiding in him.
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