

Cork Scripture Group - Spring 2022 (Session 1)

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I. Schism within the Johannine Community: General Overview of 1-2-3 John.

Read the Second Letter of John

Text

The elder (Ὁ πρεσβύτερος Heb.zaken) vv.1-3: Letter opening

to the elect lady (ἐκλεκτῆ κυρία) and her children,
whom I love in the truth,
and not only I but also all who know the truth,
² because of the truth that abides in us and will be with us forever:

³ Grace, mercy, and peace will be with us
from God the Father
and from Jesus Christ, the Father's Son,
in truth and love.

⁴ I was overjoyed vv. 4-11: Letter body
to find some of your children
walking in the truth,
just as we have been commanded by the Father.

⁵ But now, dear lady,
I ask you,
not as though I were writing you a new commandment,
but one we have had from the beginning,
let us love one another.
⁶ And this is love,
that we walk according to his commandments;
this is the commandment
just as you have heard it from the beginning-- you must walk in it.
⁷ Many deceivers have gone out into the world,
those who do not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh;
any such person is the deceiver and the antichrist (ὁ ἀντίχριστος)!

⁸ Be on your guard,
so that you do not lose what we have worked for,
but may receive a full reward.
⁹ Everyone who does not abide (μένων) in the teaching of Christ,
but goes beyond it (ὁ προάγων),
does not have God;
whoever abides in the teaching has both the Father and the Son.

¹⁰ Do not receive into the house {i.e. the church}
or welcome anyone who comes to you
and does not bring this teaching;

¹¹ for to welcome is to participate (κοινωνεῖ)
in the evil deeds of such a person.

¹² Although I have much to write to you, vv. 12-13: Letter closing
I would rather not use paper and ink;
instead I hope to come to you
and talk with you face to face (στόμα πρὸς στόμα),
so that our joy may be complete.

¹³ The children of your elect sister send you their greetings.

Commentary on 2 John

vv.1-3 Letter opening- a summary of the mutual love that was the hallmark of Johannine Christians (Jn 13:34-35). It serves to enlist the goodwill of the audience.

v.1 The elder (ὁ πρεσβύτερος, Heb. *zaken*) ... this term stresses the author's sense of authority over the leaders of the churches in his network and his role as guardian of sound teaching.

In Judaism, "elder" (*zaken*) was a technical term for a member of the council of community leaders. Each Jewish community had a group of older men responsible for interpreting the Law and deciding disputes within the community. The presbyters in early Christian congregations (Acts 14:23; James 5:14) were apparently derived from the elders of Jewish communities; the literal translation of *zaken* in to Greek gave *presbuteros* a technical sense. The early Christian elders had comparable functions in overseeing community affairs, deciding disputes, and preserving the teachings (Acts 11:30; 15:6.22; 1 Tim 5:17). The author of 2 John identified himself as "the Elder," a rare use of the term as an individual title, since the office was normally plural (cf. 1 Tim 4:14; 1 Tim 5:19 is generic).

... elect lady (ἐκλεκτῆ κυρία) and her children ... an honorific title for the community; see v.13.

... emphasis on "truth" ... the "elder" attributes moral value to the way that the "elect lady" respond to his own authority: she is praised for her commitment to "truth," which in this case means that they affirm the doctrines of the Elder as normative for their church.

vv.4-11 Letter body - the business of the letter, essentially a warning against false teachers and the demand that no one associate with them in any way.

v.4 an expression of joy at how recipients are faring.

vv.5-6 He urges his readers to love one another and to keep God's commandments. The "new commandment" to love one another was central to Johannine Christianity (John 13:34-35;. 1 John 2:7-10)"³⁴ I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. ³⁵By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."

vv. 7-11 Then, he warns them to be on guard against deceitful antichrists and urges them not to welcome anyone who fails to keep to the teaching of Christ.

v.7... many deceivers . . . the issue of false teaching emerges explicitly .
... "gone out into the world" [ἐξῆλθον εἰς τὸν κόσμον].
... deep ambivalence of the Johannine writings towards the entity called the "world."
In the Fourth Gospel, the world is at once the arena for the revelation of Jesus and the object of God's love and salvation (Check out: John 1:9; 3:16-17; 4:42; 6:14.33.51; 8:12; 9:5; 10:36; 11:27; 12:46-47; 17:21-24).
Because of its rejection of God in Jesus, it is a place characterized by the absence of God and hostility towards believers
(Check out: John 1:10; 7:4-7; 8:23; 11:9; 12:25;.31; 14:17-31; 15:18-19; 16:8.11.33; 17:6.9.11.14.16.18.25).

The same tension is found with equal intensity in 1 John: "the world" was the recipient of God's love and salvation through Jesus (1 John 2:2; 4:9.14.17) but exists now as a place dominated by a power other than God's (5:19), reflecting this in its perverted values and hatred for the "children of God" (1 John 3:15-17; 3:1.13; 4:1-5; 5:4-5).

Those who have left the elder's community and "gone out into the world" therefore partake of its values. They are collectively "the deceiver and the antichrist" (2 John 7). Whether by their explicit teaching or their actions, their deception amounts to this: "they deny Christ coming in the flesh" (v.7)

v. 9 ... The elder portrays those who have left as those who do not hold fast to the community traditions: "⁹Everyone who does not abide in the teaching of Christ, but goes beyond it [*proagei*], does not have God"

The ambiguity of the expression "teaching of Christ" may be deliberate. It includes teaching "about Christ," that is, a proper understanding of Christ, for that is required to "have both the Father and the Son." But it may also include the teaching "from Christ", meaning the commandments that Jesus himself taught them "from the beginning," to love one another.

v.10 ... Concern for false teachings here combined with practical directives on hospitality. Believers are not to receive into their houses anyone not espousing the proper teaching. They are not even to greet such people.

Here in 2 John we see the survival techniques of communities faced with deviance: shunning and excommunication
The stakes are outlined succinctly: "Whoever greets them makes fellowship [*κοινωνεῖ*] with their evil deeds (v.11).

This compact observation contains a complex of interconnected concepts.

- First, hospitality means more than the sharing of space and food - it implies a spiritual communion.
- Second, evil behaviour is thought to follow directly from wrong thinking. Thus in this view, listening to wrong teaching about Jesus leads to evil deeds against Jesus.

The refusal of hospitality in this case is therefore not an act of hostility towards individual persons, but a defensive measure against error and evil by a community fighting to maintain its own identity.

vv. 12-13 ... Letter closing. Ancient letters frequently end with a notice of the sender's future travel plans (cf Romans 15:22.33).

v. 12 The author indicates that he still has much to say to his readers but would rather do it "face to face" (στόμα πρὸς στόμα v. 12) so that his joy and their joy may be complete. [Like Paul: Check out: Rom 15:30-31; 1 Cor 16:5-7; 2 Cor 13:1-10; Phlm 22].

Why this could not be so through his letter is unclear. The author gives no reason to think that he did not expect his letter to be successful, but he thought he could do better in person.

V. 13 ... Ἀσπάζεται σε τὰ τέκνα τῆς ἀδελφῆς σου τῆς ἐκλεκτῆς.

He sends greetings from the children of the elect sister of the lady to whom he has written. In all probability this is a reference to the members of his own local church.

NOTES

"Nations and peoples are largely the stories they feed themselves. If they tell themselves stories that are lies, they will suffer the future consequences of those lies. If they tell themselves stories that face their own truths, they will free their histories for future flowerings."

-Ben Okri, *A Way of Being Free*.

Part I. Schism within the Johannine Community: General Overview of 1-2-3 John.

Read the Text

Read in this order: 1 John, 2 John, 3 John (canonical order). Next, read in this order: 3 John, 2 John, 1 John. Note any difference(s)! Impact? Next, read the Gospel of John. No analysis (jparalysis!): just read.

Sean O Caoinleain, 1920-2001: ὁ θεὸς ἀγάπη ἐστίν [1 Jn 4:8.16]
Professor John Quinlan, Chair of New Testament, St Patrick's College, Maynooth, formerly of Fontbonne College MO., USA and Notre Dame.

ὁ μὴ ἀγαπῶν οὐκ ἔγνω τὸν θεόν, ὅτι ὁ θεὸς ἀγάπη ἐστίν.

Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love. (1 Jn 4:8; NRSV]

One of the finest paragraphs in the NT:

"⁷Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. ⁸Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love. ⁹God's love was revealed among us in this way: God sent his only Son into the world so that we might live through him. ¹⁰In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins. "Beloved, since God loved us so much, we also ought to love one another. ¹²No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God lives in us, and his love is perfected in us." - John 4:7-12 [... not community perfection ... foundation is God's gift]

Other fine passages

Check out: 1 John 3:1-3 - NRSV: "See what love the 'Father has given us [δέδωκεν], that we should be called children of God; ... "

- JB: "Think of the love that the Father has lavished [δέδωκεν] on us, by letting us be called God's children; ... "
["children of God" ... reinterpret ancient phrase ... faithful believers in Christ]

Check out: 1 John 1:1-4 ... "We declare to you what was from the beginning ["Ὁ ἦν ἀπ' ἀρχῆς;], what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the word of life ... "

(1 John appeals to the primitive message ... repeated several times, 2:7;

2:13-14; 2:24; 3:11]

On "love" in Bible check out: John 3:16; John 15:13; Rom 5:8; Eph 2:4-5; 1 John 4:17-19; Jer 31:3.

Up hands: when did you last read 1-2-3-Jn.

Johannine Epistles in the Lectionary

1 Jn is the only biblical 'book' in its entirety in the Lectionary. Read every year on weekdays of the Christmas season. Read on Sundays of Easter in Year B. Used on several Saints Days.

Augustine: *"This book is very sweet to every healthy Christian heart that savors the bread of God, and it should constantly be in the mind of God's holy church."*

2 Jn and 3 Jn are never read on Sundays.

A reading from each letter occurs at weekday Mass every two years: Year II, 32 W Ord: Fri 2 Jn 4-9, Sat 3- Jn 5-8.

A New Situation: Schism

Notice, no reference to "the Jews" in 1-2-3 John. "The Jews" figure prominently in the Fourth Gospel, x61: points to the tension between Christ-followers and the synagogue, see John 9:22:

*"22 His parents said this because they were afraid of the Jews; for the Jews had already agreed that anyone who confessed Jesus to be the Messiah would be put out of the synagogue." [Brown, Raymond E., *The Community of the Beloved Disciple: The Life, Loves, and Hates of an Individual Church in New Testament Times* (New York 1979)94-9]*

Best to see 1-2-3 John written after the rupture with the synagogue, i.e., independent of the Jewish matrix. The degree of reassurance previously given by the sense of belonging to the synagogue was no longer theirs. Their reassurance came now solely from their common commitment to Christ and to one another.

1 John 2:19 is a vital clue to a new situation

"19 They went out from us, but they did not belong to us; for if they had belonged to us, they would have remained with us. But by going out they made it plain that none of them belongs to us.'

There had been a schism within the community. It is not just that one or two had left the fellowship, but the group itself had split. The words of 1 John are addressed to those who had remained true to the original message.

"The complaint is that the outgoing group had not remained true to that original message. The implied charge that the outgoing group were liars and were walking in darkness (2:4.11) is simply the writer's way of characterizing those who disagreed with him - no doubt primarily because they (forcefully) disagreed with him, with his understanding of the message 'from the beginning,' which disagreement therefore constituted them as liars and walking in darkness" Dunn, James D.G., *Christianity in the Making Vol. 3: Neither Jew Nor Greek. A Contested Identity* (Grand Rapids, MI 2015)776.

What was the disagreement? Who are the "liars"? Who are the antichrists?

Un recit? Non, pas de recit, plus jamais.

[A story? No. No stories, never again]

- Maurice Blanchot

General Issues of Text and History

In English Bibles: "The First Letter of Jn," "The Second Letter of Jn," and "The Third Letter of Jn." Impression that all three= letters; all three= written by John; all three = a definite order: 1,2,3!

Is this the case?

1Jn does not have letter format!

Klauck, Hans-Josef, *Ancient Letters and the New Testament: A Guide to Context and Exegesis* (Waco 2006) deSilva, David, "Types of Letters" *An Introduction to the New Testament* (Downers Grove, IL 2004)533-34.

Typical format of a letter: Salutation - Thanksgiving - Main Body - Closing.

1Jn: no salutation, no closing; no sender, no recipient. Rather a theological treatise or tract.

2-Jn and 3-Jn do have letter format

2Jn 1 ... salutation= "*The elder to the elect lady and her children, whom I love in the truth, and not only I but also all who know the truth,*" ... closing= "¹³*The children of your elect sister send you their greetings.*"

3Jn 1 ... salutation = "*The elder to the beloved Gaius, whom I love in truth.*" ... closing= "¹⁵*Peace to you. The friends send you their greetings. Greet the friends there, each by name.*"

Order?

Virtually nothing in the books to indicate the sequence. [See 3-Jn 9 ... "I have written something to the church;"]

It seems the letters were simply arranged and numbered according to

length, from longest to shortest.

John as author?

1-Jn is anonymous; 2-Jn and 3-Jn by someone who calls himself "the elder" (2-Jn 1; 3-Jn 1)

In the early church the works came to be ascribed to the apostle John. Reasons: (1) language, style, outlook of the letters similar to Fourth Gospel ... same author! (2) author of Fourth Gospel identified with the apostle John [John 21:20... "the disciple whom Jesus loved"... and John 21:24... "This is the disciple who is testifying to these things and has written them."]

Check out for yourself similarities between the Johannine Letters and the Gospel of John

- light and darkness (1 John 1:5-7; 2:9-11; cf. John 8:12; 12:46)
- unity of Father and Son (1 John 1:3; 2:22-24; 2 John 9; cf. John 5:20; 10:30, 38; 14:10)
- references to "the truth" (1 John 2:21; 3:19; 2 John 1; 3 John 3, 8; cf. John 8:32; 18:37)
- use of *parakletos*, "Paraclete" (1 John 2:1; John 14:16, 26; 15:26; 16:7)
- being hated by the world (1 John 3:13; cf. John 15:18-19; 17:13-16)
- God sending Christ into the world out of love (1 John 4:9; cf. John 3:16)
- Jesus coming in the flesh (1 John 4:2; 2 John 7; cf. John 1:14)
- Christ laying down his life for others (1 John 3:16; cf. John 10:11, 15, 17-18; 15:12-13)
- being born of God (1 John 2:29; 3:9; cf. John 1:13; 3:3-8)
- knowing God (1 John 2:3-5, 13-14; 3:1, 6; 4:6-8; cf. John 1:10; 8:55; 14:7; 16:3)
- abiding in God/Christ (1 John 2:6, 27-28; 3:6, 24; 4:13-16; cf. John 6:56; 15:4-10)
- new and old commandments (1 John 2:7; 2 John 5; cf. John 13:34)
- loving one another (1 John 4:11-12; 3:11, 23; 2 John 5; cf. John 13:34; 15:12)
- water and blood (1 John 5:6-8; cf. John 19:34-35)
- that joy may be complete(! John 1:4; 2 John 12; cf. John 15:11; 16:24; 17:13)

Most modern scholars amend this picture. The dominant view today is that John's Gospel was produced in stages ["developmental approach"]: the apostle John may have been responsible for the "first draft" but others expanded and edited it. 1-2-3 Jn usually are ascribed to one of these later editors.

Each new edition adjusted the prior presentation to address new challenges faced by Johannine churches. In this approach, 1-2-3 Jn are seen as evidence for a specific challenge, an inner-community schism that led "orthodox" Johannine Christians to alter their presentation of Jesus in response to the claims of the Antichrists, seen as a (mis)interpretation of earlier drafts of the Fourth Gospel.

Brown, Raymond E., *The Community of the Beloved Disciple: The Life, Loves, and Hates of an Individual Church in New Testament Times* (New York 1979) ... "the message enshrined in the [Fourth] Gospel ... led to the split of the community [described in 1-2-3 Jn] because two groups interpreted it [the written Gospel] in different ways" pp. 97, 106-107.

See Brown and Francis J. Moloney, *An Introduction to the Gospel of John* (New York 2003)74-86. The thesis that 1-2-3 Jn were written after the fourth Gospel is foundational to almost all recent reconstructions of the history of Johannine Christianity:

Von Wahlde, Urban C., *The Gospel and Letters of John* (3 vols; Grand Rapids 2010) ... "1 John comes from a period in the history of the community *after* the composition of the second edition of the Gospel and *before* the composition of the third [ed]" I:48-49.

Jobes, Karen H., *I, 2, & 3 John* (Grand Rapids 2010) ...Although 1 John's primary purpose was not polemical, the schism within the community was the immediate occasion of the letter, and the origin of that schism are to be seen in those elements in the thought of the community of 1 John that necessitated both the Christological and the moral debate [to which the letter alludes], It is when we trace the roots of these elements to the Fourth Gospel that we can understand better the problem and achievement of 1 John" p.25. See Rensberger, David, *1 John, 2 John, 3 John* (Nashville 1997)20-21.

So, 1-2-3 John makes the most sense when we understand the Elder and the Antichrists to be competing interpreters of a previously written narrative Gospel. By most reckonings, this would place 1-2-3 John in the period 100 to 110?

See: Brown, Raymond E., "History of the Johannine Community" *An Introduction to the New Testament* (New York 1997) 3373-376/

"Four phases are involved.

- (1) A phase preceding the written Gospel (up to the 70s or 80s) [374] ...
- (2) The phase during which the basic Gospel was written by the evangelist [375] ...
- (3) The Phase during which the Johannine Epistles were written (ca. AD 100). The community split in two: ... Some adhered to the view represented by the author of I and II John (another Johannine writer distinct from the evangelist). He complemented the Gospel by stressing the humanity of Jesus (come in the flesh) and ethical behaviour (keeping the commandments)
- (4) The phase during which III John was written and the redactor added chap. 21 (AD i00-110/) [376]."

House Churches

Christians gather at home= house church (up to 150); *domus ecclesiae* (150-250); *aula ecclesiae* (250- 320); basilica type (320+).

The letters presuppose a setting in which a number of "house churches" in different localities relate to each other through mutual friendship, hospitality and support.

The elder (2-Jn 1; 3-Jn 1), Gaius (3-Jn 1), and Diotrephes (3-Jn 9) apparently are leaders of churches in neighbouring communities.

Occasion for all three letters is the outbreak of conflict and schism in this network of churches.

Study Questions

- (1) According to 1-2-3 John, what sort of conflict has occurred, and how has that played out within the community?
- (2) Based on clues within the Johannine letters, what beliefs or values might be attributed to the secessionists who caused trouble within the community?
- (3) identify the "family" metaphors in these letters. What does this tell you about the author's understanding of church? What relationships do these terms describe.

