A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on 1 John 1:1-2:2

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I. Rhetography

In the *exordium* of vv. 1-4, three of the five senses are in play: seeing, hearing, and touching. These three senses are central for gathering reliable information about an experience. The Elder and the Johannine School, as recipients of eyewitness testimony, talk in terms of hearing, seeing, and touching the revelation of the word of life in Jesus Christ that was the experience of their predecessors. In antiquity followers of a religion could speak in this way of vicariously experiencing the key moments of their religious heritage. Later generations perceived themselves in solidarity with the religious experience of their forerunners in the faith (Amos 2:10-11; Joshua 24:7).¹

The *exordium* also presents a strong instance of precreation discourse with the rhetography of imperial household. What Vernon Robbins has observed about the Gospel of John clearly applies here in 1 John:

> Blending the imperial household with the household of God, the Gospel of John evokes an imperial primordial household outside of time and space with an intimate relation between the imperial father and his son. The father sends his son out into his empire to distribute the benefits of his eternal wealth to those who profess unconditional loyalty and friendship to the son. By this means, friendship with the son enacts a relationship with the father that yields benefits from the realm of eternal peace, salvation, and life.”²

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The Father has sent his Son into the world to reveal the primordial wisdom that the Father has revealed to the Son before creation. That Son has been revealed and experienced as word of life and has imparted his wisdom to the Johannine tradition-bearers, creating fellowship with anyone who adheres to that wisdom.

The Elder and the tradition-bearers are portrayed as wisdom teachers who dispense this primordial wisdom within the new fellowship created by the revelation of the Son. It is in many ways a priestly fellowship, for access to the Father and Son is only granted through the fellowship that adherence to this wisdom creates.

As the *probatio* begins in v. 5 the picture is one of messengers faithfully proclaiming the message of the one that sent them. They are tradition-bearers who share the initial revelation of the word of life (1:1-4). In vv. 5b-7a the picture shifts to light and darkness. The hearers were very familiar with the problem in the ancient world of finding adequate light once the sun set. Walking was always preferable in the light rather than the darkness. The hearers were also familiar with walking as a metaphor for the ethical conduct of daily life. Combined with the light and darkness, the metaphor moves to the alternatives of the ethical walk that is illuminated so that someone will not fall and an ethical walk that is not illuminated so that someone stumbles over the rocks of the violation of social convention and sin.

In v. 7b, two consequences of the ethical walk are given. These create a picture of community and fellowship which results when the ethical walk is conducted in the light. The mind quickly moves to the bloody sacrifice of Jesus on the cross and cleansing with his blood. The word "blood" connotes the Jewish sacrificial system and the crucifixion of Jesus and what both mean for atonement (cf. 2:2; 4:10). First century Jewish hearers may picture the sacrifices in the temple and the sprinkling of the blood upon the congregation at the Day of Atonement. The Gentile hearers may picture the blood of the bull flowing down upon the initiate in Mithraism and other initiation rites. In both cases a fellowship seeking cleansing from the divine is the focus. The rhetography places the priestly images within the context of the ethical walk. The priestly act of Jesus becomes effective in the lives

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of the hearers when they walk in the light.

Verses 8-9 picture a penitent before the God of Israel, the one who is "faithful and just," a description of God that, for the Jewish hearers would continue their picture of the Day of Atonement.

In 2:1a, the diminutive "little children" (teknon) is used in direct address (along with teknon and paidion) throughout 1 John (2:1, 12, 28; 3:7, 18; 4:4; 5:21). Along with paidion, it refers specifically to the Christians of the Johannine community, unlike teknon which refers to Christians in general.\(^4\) The picture is one of the traditional role of a father instructing his children and of a wisdom teacher instructing his pupils. Wisdom teachers often addressed their audience as child or children (Ps 34:12[11]; Prov 4:11; 5:1; 7:24; 8:32; Sir 2:1; 3:1; Tob. 4:3, 12, 13). This relationship is patterned on the father's instruction of sons within the context of the household.\(^5\) Here there is a blend of teaching of the father to child and wisdom teacher to student facilitated by the less precise picture of a "fellowship" addressed by an authoritative Elder that is guiding this section that can invoke either image.

The underlying imagery in 2:1 is that of an advocate in a courtroom working on behalf of a client (Rom 8:34). Jesus is the advocate before God due to his role as High Priest who offered the perfect sacrifice of himself for all time (Heb. 7:25; 9:24).\(^6\) The Elder switches from Jesus as advocate to Jesus as the atoning sacrifice for our sins.\(^7\) The hearer pictures the ritual of the Day of Atonement and the blood of the sacrificial lamb. Advocacy is a consequence of sacrifice. Priestly discourse is dominant within a judicial scene.

**II. InnerTexture**

First John 1:1-4 is the *exordium*, the initial element of rhetorical

\(^4\) Brown, *Epistles of John*, 213-14
arrangement that prepares the audience for what the rhetor desires to say.⁸ The *exordium* of epideictic rhetoric is often drawn from the person discussed, from the audience, or the main subject (Ar. *Rhet.* 3.14.1414b.1-1415a.4; *Her.* 3.6.11-12). The *exordium* of 1 John introduces the main subject—the witness to the revelation of life. Life or eternal life is a spiritual quality of life offered to the believer and in part demonstrated by Jesus who is the life (John 6:35, 48; 8:12; 11:25; 14:6). It is salvation (John 3:16; 17:2-3).⁹ The *exordium* also introduces the intent in writing which here is to insure the continued fellowship between the Elder, other Johannine tradition-bearers, God, and the churches. The main subject and the intent in writing are related, for the basis of fellowship is the shared adherence to the revelation of life.

The length of the *exordium* was determined by the case. If the case is truly honorable, the *exordium* may be hastily set aside with the introduction of the main subject (*Rhet. ad Alex.* 29.1437b.33ff; Cic. *Inv.* 1.15.21). The brevity of the *exordium* and the introduction of the main subject indicates that the Elder assumes that the churches are favorable toward him and his message. A reconstruction of a rhetorical situation which posits that the Elder's opposition is within the churches is not supported by the rhetoric. The Elder's heavy amplification of the nature of his proclamation (as will be demonstrated below) indicates that the audience, while favorable, may not completely adhere to his version of the tradition or adhere to the tradition to the degree he feels necessary.

The focus of the discussion of the *exordium* in the ancient handbooks pertains to its three main functions of making the audience attentive, receptive, and well-disposed.¹⁰ Overall, the Elder's ethos, as a tradition-bearer of the Johannine School, is central in gaining attention (Ar. *Rhet.* 3.14.1415a.7). Ethos is moral character and conduct, the course of life. As an artificial proof, it is the demonstration through the speech of the rhetor's goodness, goodwill, and moral uprighteousness.¹¹ As we will see below, the Elder takes great pains to amplify the ethos of the tradition he bears (that is, its eyewitness nature) and secondarily himself as an authoritative bearer of that tradition. He bolsters his tradition and his own

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¹⁰ For detailed discussion of ethos, see Lausberg, *Handbuch*, 1.141-42, 257; 1.150-63; 263-88.
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ethos before he begins to refute secessionist claims against the tradition and the tradition-bearers.

In regard to goodwill the rhetor believed to be a good man was considered the strongest influence in the case and central to obtaining goodwill in the *exordium* and the case in general (Quint. 4.1.7). In 1 John the Elder's main concern in the *exordium* appears to be the establishment of the ethos of himself and his message. The "we" of the *exordium* is a genuine plural.\(^\text{12}\) It does not mean "we" as in the entire Johannine Community\(^\text{13}\) since the Elder shifts to the second person "you" throughout the *exordium*, and both he and the recipients are members of that community. Neither does it refer to the actual eyewitnesses of the ministry of Jesus.\(^\text{14}\) Nor does it refer to a prophetic self-consciousness of one appropriating the experience of an eyewitness.\(^\text{15}\) It is a distinctive *we*\(^\text{16}\) and refers to "the tradition-bearers and interpreters of the larger Johannine Community who preserved a witness of auditory, visual, and manual contact with Jesus, probably stemming from the Beloved Disciple."\(^\text{17}\) The Elder stresses his role as an official tradition-bearer in the community and that his message is in agreement with the testimony of actual eyewitnesses of the revelation of the word of life from the baptism of Jesus onwards. The shift from the plural "we write" (*graphomen*) in the *exordium* (1:4) to the singular "I write" (*grapho*) (2:1, 7-8, etc or "I wrote" (*egrapsa*) (2:14, 21 etc) after the *exordium* indicates that "the author of this Epistle is conscious of himself as having a personal authority, i.e., as being a representative of the bearers of the tradition."\(^\text{18}\) With regard to the ethos of his proclamation, the Elder emphasizes the origin and the eyewitness nature of the tradition he is proclaiming.

\(^\text{12}\) For a discussion of all the possibilities of the referent of "we," see Schnackenburg, *Johannine Epistles*, 51-56.
\(^\text{15}\) Schnackenburg, *Johannine Epistles*, 55.
\(^\text{16}\) With the possible exception of "our" (*hemon*) in v. 4 which may be inclusive of the Johannine school and audience, used to emphasize the union that results from proclamation of the "we" in v. 3 (de Jonge, "Analysis of 1 John 1.1-4," 327). However, it is unlikely that the strong distinctive *we* of vv. 1-3,5 would suddenly shift there.
The *exordium* also briefly indicates some or all of the topics and propositions to be developed in the body or *probatio* of the work, those topics most useful to the rhetor or those providing a general approach to the case (Quint. 4.1.23-27). The Elder states that his main reason for writing is to proclaim the eyewitness testimony so as to facilitate the audience's fellowship with the Johannine tradition-bearers, the Father, and the Son; and to increase the joy of the Johannine School. One common topic is past fact (Quint. 5.8.4-5; 5.10.20-99) which the Elder uses to emphasize the past fact of the manifestation of the word of life and witness to it. Several specific *topoi* are introduced in the *exordium* of 1 John, including *arche* (1:1), *akouein* (1:1, 3), *horan* (1:1-3), *ophthalmos* (1:1), *theasthai* (1:1), *logos* (1:1), *zoe* (1:1, 2), *phaneroun* (1:2), *martyrein* (1:2), *apangellein* (1:2, 3), before (*pros*) the Father (1:2), *pater* (1:2, 3), *koinonia* (1:3), *huios* (1:3), *Iesous Christos* (1:3), *graphein* (1:4).

### A. Refutational Strategy

The *probatio* of 1 John confronts us immediately with refutation.19 The opening two sections (1:5-2:2; 2:3-11) state and refute six propositions of the secessionists (1:6, 8, 10; 2:4, 6, 9), each followed by refutation. "The refutation is that part of an oration in which arguments are used to impair, disprove, or weaken the confirmation or proof in our opponents' speech" (Cic. *Inv.* 1.42.78) Refutation is usually found in judicial rhetoric, not epideictic which is the classification of 1 John. However, refutation here is not of charges made against the Elder in any formal sense, but of propositions of the secessionists that challenge the traditional understanding of Johannine theology. In order to elicit the churches' adherence to traditional understanding of the theology, the Elder, in his role as educator correlative with the purposes of epideictic rhetoric, is distinguishing which propositions do not deserve adherence and why. In this sense, refutation can be expected in epideictic rhetoric.

After the *exordium*, it was advised that the propositions of the opposition be stated one at a time, showing them to be inexpedient and inconsistent with policies advocated" (*Rhet. ad Alex.* 34.1440a.5ff). Beginning with refutation particularly applies to those propositions for which the opposition has convinced the audience are probable (*Ar. Rhet.* 3.17.1418b.15; *Rhet. ad* 3.17.1418b.13-15; *Rhet. ad Alex.* 13; 34.1440a.5-25; 36.1443b.25-1444b.8; Cic. *Inv.* 1.42.78-51.96; *De Or.* 2.53.215-16; *Part. Or.* 12.44; Quint. 5.13.)

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19 For further discussion of refutation, see *Ar. Rhet.* 2.23.1400b.30; 2.25-26; 3.13.1414b.4-5; 3.17.1418b.13-15; *Rhet. ad Alex.* 13; 34.1440a.5-25; 36.1443b.25-1444b.8; Cic. *Inv.* 1.42.78-51.96; *De Or.* 2.53.215-16; *Part. Or.* 12.44; Quint. 5.13.
Alex. 36.1443b.25ff). In refutation, if the opponent has spoken first and the arguments are numerous, strong, and have met with some approval, the rhetor must refute them first in order "to destroy the impression made by the adversary" (Ar. Rhet. 3.17.1418b.13-15). The fact that the Elder places refutation at the beginning of the probatio implies that the propositions he refutes engender some conviction and approval in the churches. The arguments of the secessionists must be refuted so that a call to adhere to traditional values can be more effective.

Two approaches to refutation are to refute the arguments of the opposition en masse if they are weak, and singly if they have cumulative force (Quint. 5.13.11-15). Refutation point by point is the best method of refutation (Cic. Part. Or. 12.44; Quint. 5.13.28). When listing singly, Quintilian advises "we must never under any circumstances repeat our opponent's charges together with their proofs, nor emphasize any of his points by amplifying them, unless we do so with a view to making light of them..." (Quint. 5.13.27). The Elder lists the arguments of the opposition singly rather than en masse and does so without their accompanying proof. This indicates that these arguments have cumulative force and are too strong to be quickly brushed aside as a group.

One type of refutation used here in 1 John is the objection (enstasis), stating an opinion which is intended to make it clear that the adversary's syllogism is not logical, or that he has assumed some false premise" (Ar. Rhet. 2.26.1403a.4). One subtype of objection is one in which the opponent's proposition itself is the subject of objection. This is used especially if the proposition is obviously false or a proposition can be made to the contrary (as here). Stating propositions without formal proof, as in refutation by objection, or juxtaposing propositions to the contrary, are accepted techniques in reasoning in ancient rhetoric. The Elder combines refutation by objection with another effective technique—juxtaposition. Aristotle observed that things juxtaposed are more noticeable and clear to the audience (Ar. Rhet. 2.23.1400b.30; 3.17.1418b.13). The Elder juxtaposes secessionist and traditional Johannine propositions to clarify the propositions to which he wants the churches he wants them to adhere to and show how

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20 Ar. Rhet. 2.25.1402a-1402b.7; 2.26.1403a.3-4; 3.17.1418b.14; Quint. 5.13.15. Countersyllogism is listed as the other type.
21 Ar. Rhet. 2.25.1402a.1-1402b.7; Quint. 5.13.15-16.
22 3Cic. Inv. 1.42.79; Part. Or. 12.44; Quint. 5.13.15-16.
23 4Cic. Part. Or. 13.47; Quint. 4.4.8.
the secessionist propositions vary from them.

The Elder does not refute the claims of the secessionists with enthymemes, syllogisms, or more elaborate refutational schemes. One common method of refutation is the countersyllogism which is used when the opponent's "arguments have met with approval" (Ar. Rhet. 3.117.1418b.15). The Elder does not take this approach, further indicting that his audience is not convinced by the secessionists. Rather he relies upon objections based on ethos. He places great trust in the ethos of the Johannine tradition-bearers and tradition, not in argumentation.

From the position of his own strong ethos the Elder works to lessen the ethos of the secessionists. The technique of refuting by using attributes of the opposition is used (Cic. Inv. 1.42.78), here stating that the secessionists walk in darkness, deceive themselves, are liars, make God a liar, and ought to change their ethical walk. In the process the Elder clarifies the issues for his audience's adherence. All these techniques are in line with the form and function of epideictic rhetoric.

B. Refutation of Three Secessionist Propositions (1:5-2:2)

This unit is composed of an initial proposition about the nature of God as light (1:5) followed by three units of positive and negative antithetical parallelism that contrasts the propositions of the secessionists with the truths that the proposition that God is light reveal (1:6-2:2).

1. The Initial Proposition (1:5)

Knowing that the prologue of 1 John is modeled on the prologue of the Gospel of John, the beginning of a new unit is indicated by the opening of v. 5 ("this is the message") that parallels John 1:19 ("this is the testimony") which begins a new section of the Gospel of John after the Prologue. The formula "and this is" (kai houtos estin) and variants (1:5; 2:25; 3:8, 23; 4:9, 10, 17, 21; 5:4, 11, 14), and the related formulae "for this is" (hoti houtos estin, 3:11; 5:9; houtos gar estin, 5:3) are used throughout the probatio of 1 John to define or explain a topic that has been previously discussed. The formulae usually point forward to a following explanation acting as a summary. However, occasionally it points backward to a previous

24 Brown, Epistles of John, 225.
explanation (as here) and introduces further explanation (here in the "that" [hoti] clause). 25

The Elder's proposition is a major component of the message he has been discussing and wishes to proclaim in more detail to the churches: "God is light and in him is no darkness at all" (cf. John 8:12). The proposition is an antithesis composed of a positive ("God is light") and negative reiteration of that positive ("in him there is no darkness at all"). It is an example of refining (expolitio), a figure of thought which "consists in dwelling on the same topic and yet seeming to say something ever new," the type which alters the idea by using the contrary (Her. 4.42.54-44.58). The double, emphatic negative (ouk...oudemia) places the emphasis upon the negative clause. This pattern of the positive followed by the negative opposite is part of the Jewish rhetorical tradition as well (Deut. 32:4; Ps. 92:16[15]).

2. The Refutation and Counterpropositions (1:6-2:2)

The proposition of v. 5 is followed in 1:6-2:2 by a carefully constructed scheme of six "if" (ean) clauses in three pairs. The Elder's formulation of three propositions of the secessionists which relate to the proposition of v. 5 are introduced with "if we say" (ean eipomen, 1:6, 8, 10) and are each refuted. They are each followed by one of the Elder's three antithetical propositions derived from the Johannine tradition beginning with "if" (ean, 1:7, 9; 2:1). 26 Beginning his work with refutation and refuting the secessionist propositions individually both indicate that the Elder anticipates that the secessionist doctrine may have made inroads in the churches. By posing conditions with himself and his audience as subject, the Elder is able to demonstrate to his audience, without being accusatory, the failure of the propositions to which they may have or are tempted to give their adherence. The "we" is no longer distinctive of the Johannine tradition-bearers, but inclusive of the entire Johannine Community that face these false propositions.

This initial rhetorical unit is bound by inclusio, a repetitive figure of speech in which "the end may correspond with the beginning" (Quint. 9.3.34). The inclusio is formed in the first (1:6-7) and the third (1:10-2:2) claim, refutation, and counterproposition. 1 The phrase, "we lie," in the refutation of

25 Pace Bultmann, Johannine Epistles, 15, n. 1; Brown, Epistles of John, 192; Smalley, 1,2,3 John, 19.
26 Bultmann, Johannine Epistles, 21; Marshall, Epistles of John, 110; Brown, Epistles of John, 197, 225, 232; Smalley, 1,2,3 John, 20-21.
1:6 corresponds to, "we make him a liar," in the refutation of 1:10. The reference to the blood of Jesus in the counterclaim of 1:7 corresponds to the reference to Jesus' atoning sacrifice in the counterclaim of 2:2. This section introduces the important related antithetical topics of truth/falsehood, and light/darkness.

Regarding progressive texture, there is increasing order of severity in both the secessionist claims and the Elder's responses. The claims of the secessionists move from claiming to have fellowship with God (v. 6), having no sin (v. 8), and not having sinned (v. 10). The consequences move from lying (v. 6), to self-deception (v. 8), to making God a liar (v. 10).

a. The First Secessionist Proposition, its Refutation, and Counterproposition (1:6-7)

In 1:6 the Elder writes, "If we say that we have fellowship with him while we are walking in darkness, we lie and do not do what is true." The claim to be able to have fellowship with God would be accepted as a possibility by the Elder provided Johannine tradition is being followed (1:3). Apparently the secessionists are claiming "We have fellowship with God" while their behavior indicates that they attributing no salvific import to their ethical walk as taught within Johannine tradition. With his formulation and refutation of this proposition the Elder provides a thinly veiled accusation. Although the secessionists claim to have fellowship with God, they walk in darkness, lie, and do not do what is true. The Elder refutes the claim by objection based on fact: it is simply a lie and untrue.

The assessment, "lie and do not do what is true" is strong. "Lie" (pseudesthai) is not a just intentional lies, but an intentional pattern of hostility to the truth. The liars are the secessionists who do not obey the commandments and have the truth within (2:4), deny that Jesus is the Christ (2:22), and claim to love God while hating other members of the community (4:20). They do not walk in the truth (2 John 4; 3 John 3-4).

The Elder gives his antithetical counter-proposition in 1:7: "but if we walk in the light as he himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin." In the initial

27 Brown, Johannine Epistles, 231.
proposition of 1:5 the topic of "being in" (*einaī en*) stated that there is no darkness in God. Now the positive side of this negative is stated: God is in the light. Walking in the light is equivalent to doing what is true (v. 6).

If we were looking for an exact antithesis, we expect the counter-proposition to read "but if we walk in the light as he himself is in the light, we have fellowship with God...." However, as is his custom, the Elder introduces new elements as he develops his argumentation. Instead of fellowship with God the emphasis is upon fellowship with "one another," that is, the Johannine Community. It has already been noted in the exordium (v. 3) that fellowship with the Father and his Son is through adherence to the Johannine School's interpretation of the tradition and fellowship with it. Thus, fellowship with the Johannine Community assumes fellowship with God.

By stating the counter-proposition in this fashion without exact antithesis, the Elder excludes the secessionists from walking in the light and being cleansed from all sin because they are not in fellowship with the Johannine Community and have in fact seceded (2:19; 4:1; cf. 2 John 7). Also, since the churches addressed have maintained fellowship with the Johannine Community, the Elder thus assures them that they walk in the light and are cleansed. The churches can better distinguish themselves from the secessionists and understand their relation to the Johannine tradition to which the Elder wants them to adhere.

b. The Second Secessionist Proposition, its Refutation, and Counter-proposition (1:8-9)

The second proposition of the secessionists and its refutation is: "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us." This second proposition of the secessionists is "We have not sinned." This claim has been understood as either a perfectionist claim ("we are not guilty, for we have never sinned") or a libertine claim ("we are not guilty although we have sinned"). The usage of the phrase "to have sin" (*hamartian echein*) in the Gospel of John (9:41; 15:22, 24; 19:11) indicates that it refers to being in a state of sin resulting from sinning or holding a wrong attitude toward sin.\(^{29}\) Apparently the secessionists were claiming that no sin committed by the believer can break communion with God and thus they were free from the

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guilt of sin no matter what their ethical behavior.

The Elder does seem to allow for the state of sinlessness (3:6, 9; 5:18), but it is an ideal stained by the reality of sin requiring confession (1:9; 2:1-2). The Elder refutes the proposition by objection on the basis of fact: the claim is simply deceptive and untrue. Whereas the first proposition ("We have fellowship with God") is not refuted for its content but because of behavior indicating it was not true for the claimant, the second proposition ("we have not sinned") is totally rejected for content: "we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us."

In the counter-proposition of 1:9, the Elder asserts his understanding of the role of sin in the lives of the audience: "If we confess our sins, he who is faithful and just will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness." In contrast to the secessionist proposition that they "have no sin," the Elder does not simply reply that Christians do have sin, but rather moves to the broader issue of the proper response to sin: public confession and forgiveness.30 He uses the Community tradition of confession and forgiveness in the counter-proposition to show the false nature of the secessionist proposition.

The descriptors "faithful" and "just" act as the antithesis of the error in the life of the believer—sin (hamartia) and unrighteousness (adikia). The antithesis between dikaios and adikia implies that those who deny their sin and remain unrighteous, are not righteous as God is and thus are not in the light as he is or in fellowship with him and the Johannine Community. The topic of just (dikaios) and doing righteousness (poiein [ten] dikaiosyne) are further developed together in 2:29, 3:7, 10 where the Elder makes more explicit the contrast between doing sin and doing righteousness.

c. The Third Secessionist Proposition, its Refutation, and Counter-proposition (1:10-2:2)

The Elder provides yet another proposition of the secessionists and its refutation: "If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his

30 That the confession is public is affirmed by Johannine usage (John 1:20; 9:22; 12:42; 1 John 2:23; 4:2, 3, 15; 2 John 7; cf. John 20:23) and by Westcott, Epistles of St. John, 23; J. P. Thornton-Duesbery, "1 John i.9", ExpTim 45 (1933/34) 183-84; Marshall, Epistles of John, 113; Brown, Epistles of John, 207-8, 237; Smalley, 1,2,3 John, 31. Contra Bultmann, Johannine Epistles, 21, n. 28; Schnackenburg, 81.Michl Briefe, 207. Cf. Lawrence M. Rogers, "1 John i.9", ExpTim 45 (1933/34) 527.
The Elder refutes the proposition "we have not sinned" by objection based on the stasis of fact: such a proposition is untrue when evaluated by God and his word. The Elder is basing his refutation upon the judgment (kriseis) of God himself as expressed in Jewish-Christian and Johannine tradition that all of humanity is guilty of sin. Thus to deny not having sinned is to deny God's assessment of the human condition and to make God a liar.

This proposition and refutation sound very much like that of 1:8. However, another factor is also at play, for 1:10 is a stronger statement than 1:8. Whereas in 1:8 the proposition is denying the guilt of sin after conversion, the proposition in 1:10 is denying the possibility of sin after conversion. Whereas in 1:8 the consequence of such a claim is exclusion from the truth, in 1:10 it is to make the twofold mistake of making God a liar and to be excluded from God's word, that is, from life (cf. 1:1) and truth (John 8:31-32) as God has revealed to humanity through Jesus Christ. It is to place God on the level of the devil, the father of lies (John 8:44). Not to accept God's testimony is to make him a liar (5:10) and God has testified to the sinfulness of humanity.

The refutation of 1:10 further develops the topics of the two preceding refutations. In 1:6 the topic of deception refers to making false claims of fellowship with God as lying (pseudesthai) and in 1:8 it refers to disclaiming sin as self-deception (planan). Here it goes one step further to make God himself a liar (pseustes; cf. 5:10). This should serve to lessen the ethos of the secessionists and their doctrine. As the probatio will further point out, such lying is in keeping with the nature of the secessionists as liars (2:4, 22; 4:20) who make God a liar by not accepting the testimony he bore his Son (5:10). Also, regarding the topic of "being in" (einai en), in the refutation of

31 Brown (Epistles of John, 205-6, 211-12, 234, 238-39). Cf. Smalley (1,2,3 John, 33) argues that in 1:8 the secessionists deny the principle of sin (indicated by the present tense) and in 1:10 they deny the expression of sin (indicated by the perfect tense). Contra Bultmann, Johannine Épistles, 21.

Schnackenburg (Johannesbriefe, 88 and n. 2), and Marshall (Epistles of John, 115) who see no difference between the claims of 1:8 and 1:10.

32 Gen. 8:21; 1 Kgs 8:46; Ps 14:3; 53:2; Job 4:17; 15:14-16; Prov 20:9; Eccl 7:20 [21]; Isa 53:6; 64:6; John 2:24-25; 16:8-9; Rom 3:22-24; 8:1.
1:8 the deceptive claim to be without sin excludes the secessionists from being in the truth. In 1:10 a similar claim is said to exclude the word being in them. The *topos* of "being in" here unites the virtually synonymous topics of truth and word (John 17:17). The word is in those who have conquered the evil one (2:14).

Between the refutation and the counterproposition of 1:10 in 2:1a the Elder inserts a parenthesis. "My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin." Although insisting that Christians do sin, the Elder does not want to encourage sin. A parenthesis is indicated by the Elder's switch to the first person singular from the plural, and addressing the audience in the second rather than first person plural. The parenthesis breaks up the heavy bombardment of proposition, refutation, and counter-proposition begun in 1:5.

The Elder states that his purpose in writing this section is so that the audience will not sin. He refers to the entire unit of refutation and counter-proposition in 1:5-10 that bases Christian behavior on the nature of God as light. 33 This statement of purpose further bolsters the ethos of the Elder and elicits positive pathos because his motivation in writing is for the positive benefit of the audience. The ethos of his message is built up also because it is implied that his interpretation of the tradition is able to keep the audience from sinning, and the ethos of the secessionists' message is torn down by the implication that it leads to sin. Even allowing for sin, the Elder is assuming a strict ethical code of making every effort not to sin after conversion that is in league with Johannine tradition (John 5:14) and early Christianity in general (Rom 6:1).

The Elder continues in 2:1b–2 with his counter-proposition to the proposition and refutation of 1:10: "But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; and he is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world." Here the Elder cleverly conceals a strong constraint. There is a switch from "if we" which began the counter-propositions in 1:7 and 1:9 to "if anyone" (*ean tis*). In conjunction with the content of the parenthesis, this

33 (Pace Haas, *Letters of John*, 40). In 1:4, the referent of *tauata* was the whole epistle. Here, many see 1:8-10 as the referent (Bultmann, *Johannine Epistles*, 22, n. 35; Marshall, *Epistles of John*, 116, n. 21; Brown, *Epistles of John*, 215). Marshall (*Epistles of John*, 116, n. 21) suggests that the entire epistle may be the referent (cf. 5:13). Smalley (*1,2,3 John*, 35) suggests 1:6-10, the first chapter, or the entire epistle. 1:5-10 as the referent (Schnackenburg, 85). 1:5-10 (Strecker, 35).
indicates that the Elder expects the churches to look upon sin as the exception, not the accepted norm of the Community. He does not expect the churches as a whole to have a problem with sin, just an occasional "anyone." By contrast, when he turns to the advocacy of Jesus Christ and his atoning sacrifice from which he and the churches positively benefit, he returns to "we" and "our." By this shift the Elder subtly implies he is capable of the occasional sin and helps narrow the gap between himself and the church members to be more rhetorically effective.

As he did in the counter-propositions of 1:7 and 1:9, the Elder affirms the salvific provisions of God for sin. Whereas in 1:7 it is affirmed that the blood of Jesus cleanses from sin, and in 1:9 that God forgives and cleanses from unrighteousness, now Jesus is portrayed as an advocate before the Father and as an atoning sacrifice for sin. In his portrayal of Christ as an advocate, the Elder uses the term paraclete (parakletos) used in John's Gospel in the Farewell Discourse for the intercessory role of the Holy Spirit (14:16) who teaches the church and reminds it of the teaching of Jesus (14:26), testifies to Jesus (15:26), and was sent by Christ to prove the world wrong about sin, righteousness, and judgment (16:7).

This counter-proposition further develops the topic of blood mentioned in the first counter-proposition in 1:7. The emphasis upon Jesus' role as an atoning sacrifice for sin is made using amplification by augmentation. Not only was his sacrifice for the sins of the Johannine Community, but also for the sins of the whole world (cf. 4:10, the only other occurrence of this topos). There is climax in the counter-propositions, for in 1:7 the blood of Jesus cleansed the sins of the Johannine Community, in 1:9 God cleansed the Johannine Community from all unrighteousness, and now Jesus' sacrifice is the atoning sacrifice for all the sins of the Johannine Community, in fact, the whole world. Johannine theology clearly spells out God's redemption of the world through Christ (John 1:29; 3:16-17; 4:42; 6:33, 51; 12:46-47; 1 John 4:14), a world hostile to God (John 7:7; 15:18).

The three secessionist propositions are arranged in increasing order of seriousness. The first does not recognize sin as incompatible with the Christian life. The second recognizes sin in a Christian's life, but not assigning of guilt. The third denies even the possibility of sin in a

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34 Cic. Part. Or. 15.54; Quint. 8.4.3-9.
35 I am assuming that there is ellipsis here so that the last phrase reads "(the sins of) the whole world."
Christian's life. There is also a corresponding intensity in the Elder's refutation of these secessionists' propositions: to lie and not do the truth (1:6), to deceive oneself and exclude the truth from oneself (1:8), and to make God himself a liar and exclude his word from oneself (1:10).

III. Intertexture

The intertexture of 1 John is drawn from the Old Testament, Jewish tradition, and the Johannine tradition as epitomized in the Gospel of John and handed down to the Elder and other Johannine tradition-bearers.

The Elder used the Prologue of the Gospel of John to create his *exordium*. Brown says of the prologue of 1 John, "it is a reinterpretation of the GJohn Prologue, done in order to refute adversaries who are distorting the meaning of the GJohn Prologue."36 The Elder molds different elements of the prologue to bolster the ethos of himself and the Johannine tradition-bearers' proclamation. Whereas the "beginning" in the prologue is the beginning before creation (1:1), the "beginning" in the *exordium* is the start of Jesus' public ministry (1:1). Whereas the prologue speaks of " beholding " Christ's glory (1:14), the *exordium* speaks of "looking" and "touching" the revealed Christ (1:1, 3). Whereas in the prologue the "we" beholding are the entire Johannine Community as a whole, in the *exordium* the "we" is the Johannine tradition-bearers. Whereas the "word" in the prologue is the preexistent Word, in the *exordium* it is the message preached by Jesus during his ministry and that message as proclaimed by the Johannine tradition-bearers. Whereas in the prologue life is revealed to the world by the Word (1:14), in the *exordium* life is personified and revealed to the Johannine tradition-bearers (1:2). Whereas in the parenthesis of the prologue John the Baptist testifies to the light coming into the world (1:6-8), in the parenthesis of the *exordium* the Johannine School testifies to an eternal life revealed. These changes place the revelation of Jesus Christ and the interpretation of it within the control of the Johannine School which testifies to Jesus through the testimony of Jesus (John 3:31-32) through the Paraclete (John 15:26-27). The Elder's desire to bolster his ethos and the ethos of his message is readily apparent in his modifications of the Prologue.37

The portrayal of God as light in the proposition of 1:5 is based on the portrayal of God in the Old Testament (Ps 27:1; 36:9; 104:2; Isa 10:17; 60:19-20; Mic 7:8; cf. 1 QS 1:9-10; IQQH 18:29; 1 Tim 6:16), is used to describe the coming of Jesus in the Gospels (Matt 4:16; Luke 2:32; John 1:4-9; 3:19-21; 12:46), and is one of Jesus’ own self-designations in the Gospel of John (John 8:12; 9:5; cf. 12:35-36, 46). Being grounded in tradition, this understanding of God provides the Elder with a strong proposition about the character of God upon which to base the refutation in 1:6-2:2.

In the proposition and counterproposition of 1:7 the Elder makes the point that for fellowship with other Johannine Christians and for cleansing from sin, behavior must accord with the nature of God; it must be walking in the light. In the proposition of 1:5 God is said to be light, while here he is said to be in the light. The latter is a more common biblical topic (Ps 104:2; Dan 2:22; Isa 2:5; 1 Tim 6:15-16). The switch is probably made for reasons of the comparison, for in 1:7 the condition is "if we walk in the light," not "if we are light." In 1:5 God as light is the basis of Christian behavior, now God in the light is the model for such behavior.38

The verb peripatein ("walk") is a common biblical metaphorical expression for a way of life, conduct, or course of life (1 John 2:6, 11; 2 John 4; 3 John 3-4). The Johannine tradition taught that following Jesus was not to walk in darkness but to have the light of life (John 8:12; 11:9-10; 12:35-36; 1 John 2:11). It also taught that people who walk in darkness hate the light for exposing their deeds (John 3:19-21). Deeds are crucial in how one relates or does not relate to the God who is light. Intertestamental Judaism also taught walking in the light (1 En. 92:4-5; T. Levi 14:3-4; T. Naph. i 2:10).

In the counter-proposition of 1:9, the Elder asserts his understanding of the role of sin in the lives of the recipients: "If we confess our sins, he who is faithful and just will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness." He describes God as faithful (pistos) and just (dikaios). These qualities of God are classic descriptions in the Judeo-Christian heritage (Deut. 32:4; Ps. 144:17; 1 Cor. 1:9; 10:13; 1 Clem.27:1; 60:1). God is described as faithful to his covenant promises (Exod. 34:6; Ps. 89:1-4; Rom. 3:3-4; Heb. 10:23; 11:11) which include forgiveness to those who break covenant and seek forgiveness (Jer. 31:34; Mic. 7:18-20). God is just

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38 Brown, Epistles of John, 200-201; 237 n 32. A similar relationship is established with God and love in 4:7, 8.
as he lives up to his covenant promises, including being forgiving (Ps. 33:5; Deut. 32:4; Ps. 144 [145] 17) and as judge (Ps. 7:11; 2 Macc. 12:6; 2 Tim. 4:8; Rom. 3:26; John 17:25). The premise that God is faithful and just adds great authority to the Elder's proposition and assertion that God will forgive and cleanse-- forgiving and cleansing being two expressions of God's faithfulness and justice.

In the digression on 2:1a, the diminutive "little children" (teknion) has a single use in the Gospel of John. It is at the beginning of the Farewell Discourse in Jesus' address to his disciples (13:33). As Brown observes, "the author speaks as a member of the Johannine School preserving a tradition from the beginning; imitating Jesus' affectionate address for his disciples at the Last Supper as he gave them the commandment to love (John 13:33). In this father-to-children pattern the implicit authority is that of a tradition-bearer; the implicit age is that of an elder in Christianity ("the Presbyter" of II and III John)." 39 In other words, the simple address teknion indicates that the Elder is speaking with considerable ethos; ethos that may be withheld by those partially convinced by the secessionists.

Brown makes the important observation that the topics and themes introduced in 1:5-2:2 reflect what we know of conversion, initiation, and baptismal language used by the Essenes and Early Christians. 40 The Elder's stress upon his tradition being "from the beginning" of Jesus' self-revelation (1:1, 3, 5) and his assumption that the churches know this tradition (2:7, 21, 24, 27; 3:11; 5:18-20) indicate that what the Elder gives in 1:5-2:2 may be what the church members heard when they were converted. The Elder is requiring the churches to rely upon their original understanding of Christianity that they found convincing and lead them to accept the faith, an understanding undergirded by the ethos of the Johannine Community as a whole, its tradition-bearers, and ultimately Jesus Christ. He asks the churches to adhere to tradition which has had their allegiance and to see more clearly the secessionist propositions as alterations of that tradition.

In summary, the Elder presents himself as a wisdom teacher teaching the children. He is not just any wisdom teacher, but one who brings eyewitness tradition of eternal life that was revealed. This tradition is in alignment with and expressed in terms in synch with tradition found in the Old Testament,

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IV. Social and Culture Texture

This section of 1 John clearly exhibits an introversionist response to the world. The world is evil and salvation is obtainable through fellowship with the community. It is only in the community that there is revealed light, access to the Father and Son, and cleansing from sin. However, there is also a reformist response, for implicit in the metaphor for light is the need to spread that light to the whole world for whom the Son that revealed it died (2:2).

As can be seen in the rhetoric, the space of the household, wisdom school, and temple have been gathered together into the space of the fellowship of the Johannine Community. This makes maintaining a relationship with the Johannine Community essential for continued spiritual well-being.

Regarding social and cultural knowledge the Elder assumes that the recipients know, the paraclete topic in 2:1 reintroduces the topic of "before the Father" (πρὸς τὸν πάτερα) first mentioned in the exordium in reference to eternal life before the Father (1:2; cf. John 1:1). Here Jesus Christ who is eternal life is now once more before the Father. The underlying imagery is that of an advocate in a courtroom working on behalf of a client (Rom 8:34). Jesus is the intercessor before God due to his role as High Priest who offered the perfect sacrifice of himself for all time (Heb. 7:25; 9:24). As God was just (δικαίος) in the counter-proposition of 1:9, here the topic is applied to Jesus as righteous (δικαίος) as also in 2:29 and 3:7. Jesus' righteousness is the basis of his advocacy with the Father.

John's switch from advocate to Jesus as the atoning sacrifice recalls the ritual of the Day of Atonement and the blood of the sacrificial lamb. There is a debate whether "atoning sacrifice" (hilasmos) denotes expiation (sinner is made pleasing by cleansing of sins at the instigation of God) or propitiation (God is appeased by sacrifices offered for the sinner at the instigation of people) or both. It is probably expiation. In the only other passage in

Johannine literature in which hilasmos appears God sends the Son as an atoning sacrifice out of love for the world (1 John 4:9–10; cf. Rom 3:25) and in 1:7 it is Jesus' blood that cleanses the Christian from unrighteousness. In the New Testament the word group relates to God showing mercy (Matt 16:22; Luke 18:13; Rom. 3:24-25; Heb. 2:17; 8:12; 9:5)

V. Ideological Texture

In the exordium the main reason for writing is to proclaim the eyewitness testimony in order to facilitate the recipients' fellowship with the Johannine tradition-bearers, the Father, and the Son, and to increase the joy of the Johannine School. It is an assumed premise that allegiance to the Elder's understanding of tradition is a prerequisite for fellowship not only with the Elder and the Johannine School, but also with the Father and the Son—a unity in Johannine thought (1 John 2:22-24; 2 John 9; John 14:9; 17:3, 10-11, 21). This emphasis is strong because the exigence involves secessionists who teach what the Elder deems to be an unsalvific interpretation of Johannine tradition that destroys fellowship with the Johannine Community.

The stress upon the physical nature of the manifestation of the eternal life—that it could be seen, heard, and touched—lays the foundation for the polemic against the secessionists' denial of Jesus Christ come in the flesh (4:2; 2 John 7), by water and blood (5:6). It is a premise that reliable tradition is only that which comes from eyewitnesses and their designated successors. It does not come from those making innovations in that tradition.

The Elder's proposition in v. 5 assumes that light is God's nature. God's light is related to salvation (1 John 2:8) and entered the world with the incarnation (John 1:9; 3:9). God's nature is determinative for Christians. They are to walk in the light (1:7) and abide in the light and love fellow Christians (2:10).

The carefully structured, emphatic nature of the proposition serves an ideological purpose. The proposition contains the first instance of the topic of interiority using the formula einai en. Einai en occurs 18 times in 1 John, and 4 times en occurs with einai understood. The formula can be grouped into three broad categories: 1) indwelling of God and Jesus in the Christian and vice versa (2:5; 4:4; 5:20), 2) indwelling or lack thereof of other realities
in the Christian such as love, truth, word of God, and sin (1:8, 10; 2:4, 10, 15; 3:5), and 3) miscellaneous uses (1:5, 7; 2:9, 11, 15-16; 4:3-4; 17-18; 5:11). It is the Elder's strong proposition that darkness is not in the nature of God. The implicit assumption and ethical challenge is that all Christians must be walking or abiding in the light in order to be in God. All aspects of the darkness are outside the bounds of fellowship with God. In this form the proposition is a referent point for the refutation of secessionist claims in 1:6-2:2. Any claim by the secessionists must be measured for its truth against the revealed nature of God as light and its ability to maintain a Christian in the light or deter them into darkness.

The proposition was "heard from him," that is, Jesus. The proposition is not a saying of Jesus known from the written Gospels, but Jesus himself understood by the Johannine Community to have revealed that God is light (John 1:4, 7-9; 3:19-21; 8:12; 9:5; 11:9-10; 12:35-36, 46). The Elder is assuming that revelation from the Son is a strong authority. The initial proposition is bolstered by the ethos of the Johannine School, for the "we" is distinctive. It is the Johannine School that has heard the message from the Son and is about to proclaim it to the churches. The Elder assumes that this revelation only comes from the succession of those who originally heard the revelation. The topics of hearing (akouein), proclaiming (anangellein), and the message (angelia) recur from the exordium and serve to link the historical and eyewitness nature of the proclamation of the Johannine School underscored in the exordium to the first proposition of the probatio.

The switch from "testify" (apangellein- 1:2, 3) to "proclaim" (anangellomen- 1:5) adds authority to the proposition and further shapes the perceived role of the Elder and the Johannine School. "Proclaim" is the verb used in Johannine tradition for Jesus' proclamation to his disciples of all that he heard from the Father (John 4:25; cf. 12:49-50) and for the Paraclete's declaration to the disciples of what he received from Jesus (John 14:26; 16:13-15). It also connotes reporting the words of someone else, and here the someone else is Jesus through the Apostle John and/or the Paraclete to the Johannine School and ultimately to the Johannine Community. "The reworking of the Jesus tradition through the Paraclete which produced

43 Malatesta, _Interiority_, 27-34; Brown, _Epistles of John_, 195-96.


GJohn [Gospel of John] did not stop with that document; and 1 John's tradition 'from Christ' may represent a (Paraclete-inspired) reworking of sayings similar to those in GJohn about light and darkness...⁴⁶

As the secessionist claims to follow indicate, the proposition as it stands would have been acceptable to the secessionists. They would claim to be in the light and not the darkness, but, as the Elder will point out, their ethical walk shows them to be in the darkness. In 1:6-2:2, the secessionists have a static view of the spiritual status they have in Christ while the Elder has a dynamic one. For the secessionist, the ethical walk does not impinge on spiritual status, but for the Elder spiritual status is crucially dependent upon behavior. The Elder's dynamic position is in line with the Johannine tradition (John 8:31-32).⁴⁷

In 1:6 the Elder assumes that fellowship with God is possible, but such a claim is false if the ethical walk is according to darkness. The assumptions shaping the community here at play are that 1) there is absolutely no darkness in God and thus those walking in darkness cannot have fellowship with God (1:5); 2) Those doing evil hate the light and those doing truth come to the light (John 3:20-21); and 3) fellowship with God depends in part upon obedience to the proclamation of the Johannine tradition-bearers who proclaim that fellowship has ethical implications (1:1-3)

In 1:7 in addition to fellowship with other Johannine Christians, walking in the light leads to cleansing from sins committed after conversion. As the present tense of "cleanse" (katharizo) indicates, cleansing occurs over and over again as needed (and thus cannot be a one time, pre-conversion action).⁴⁸ The Elder assumes that even though Christians are required to walk in the light, they will inevitably sin and that there is cleansing available for that sin. He assumes that participation in the Johannine fellowship is priestly in that it effects the cleansing by the Blood of Jesus, in part because fellowship requires a pure ethical walk.

In 1:8 the emphatic phrase "we deceive ourselves" (heautous planomen) suggests a deliberate spurning of the truth as "the truth is not in us" that

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⁴⁷ Brown, Epistles of John, 236.
⁴⁸ Brown, Epistles of John, 202. Smalley (1,2,3 John, 24) sees it as sin in general, plus sin after conversion.
follows indicates. The implicit accusation is that the secessionists purposefully deceive themselves in order to hold the proposition "we have no sin." The Elder is assuming that all Christians have sin at some time and in some proportion and; an assumption based on the understanding that God sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for that very reason (1:7; 2:2).

In v 9 the Elder assumes that sin must be confessed in order for the Son to forgive and cleanse the Christian from sin. Confession is essential to the forgiveness of post-conversion sin. Verse 10 assumes that God has pronounced human beings to be sinners and to deny that status is to make God a liar and not to have the word of life within. Denial of sin is indicative of not being a Christian.

VI. Rhetorical Force as Emergent Christian Discourse

In summary, the rhetography is rich. Precreation discourse of a father instructing his son who beings the teaching to the kingdom creates a fellowship that is prophetic in proclaiming that message, priestly in functioning as an avenue to God for those adhering to the message, and dispensing the wisdom that is the revealed truth from the Son. There is the overlapping images of a father teaching his children and a wisdom teacher teaching his student and the related ethical walk that a father and teacher enable their children/disciples to follow. Within the community and by adherence to its ethical precepts, the proclamation of the revelation of the Son and his sacrifice effect cleansing and bring life. Apocalyptic and miracle discourse are missing indicating that the kingdom has arrived and has settled in for the duration.

The Elder is in continuity with the wisdom begun by God to the Son as he dispenses that wisdom to the community, which in turn being the benefits of God to the community. These benefits, include cleansing from sin, are only realized within the fellowship of the community and its wisdom. The Elder has an almost exclusive claim on ethos and logos. From is authoritative position, in the inner texture the Elder refutes the assumptions and claims of the secessionists with a skillful use of Greco-Roman rhetoric; claims that would prevent those who adhered to them from being in fellowship with the Johannine community and thus with God. In this context the Elder's rhetoric becomes part of his prophetic, priestly, and wisdom teacher roles in the community.
In the intertexture of the *exordium*, the Elder's changes to the prologue of the Gospel of John places the revelation of Jesus Christ and the interpretation of it within the control of the Johannine School. The School witnesses to Jesus through the testimony of Jesus given in person (3:31-32) and later through the Paraclete (John 15:26-27). Again, the Elder has greatly amplified his authority, portraying himself as an interesting combination of a wisdom teacher and a prophet faithful to the tradition of the community.

The ideological texture emphasizes that authentic tradition comes from eyewitness testimony through the Johannine-tradition bearers. Central to that tradition is the premise that God is light and all behavior of anyone claiming to be Christian must be in conformity to that light. Post-conversion sin must be acknowledged and God's provision for cleansing utilized in order to remain in the light of God and fellowship with other Johannine Christians.