"Dear Children" Versus the "Antichrists"
The Rhetoric of Reassurance in First John

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This paper approaches the study of "rhetoric" as manifested in John's first epistle from the joint perspective of form, content, and function. Four primary stylistic features of this letter are singled out for special examination and exemplification: recursion, contrast, focus, and mitigation. These interrelated devices enable the author to enhance his chosen "rhetoric of reassurance" whereby he seeks to strengthen and encourage the community of believers which is being threatened by false teachers. His message, which majors on the three themes of faith, love, and obedience in relation to the central truth about Jesus Christ, the Son of God (3:23), is synonymously and systematically recycled for emphasis throughout the discourse. This hortatory-homiletical discourse is also analyzed in a general way in terms of the principal "speech acts" that it performs in relation to its potential audience, then and now. A concluding section outlines some of the major implications of this distinctive Johannine rhetoric in relation to text analysis, interpretation, and communication (Bible translation, print formatting, and media transposition).

Why the great need for reassurance?

It is quite evident that the author of 1 John[1] was very concerned about reassuring and reinforcing his listeners (readers)[2] with regard to several important matters pertaining to their Christian faith and life. The text--variously classified by scholars as a general epistle, a sermon, a tract, an instructional "enchiridion," or simply a theological "writing" or essay[3] –begins with an elaborate personal "testimony" concerning the validity of its contents (1:1-4), and it ends with a pronounced emphasis on "knowing" the "*truth*" about "eternal life" (5:13-20). So what was the problem—why did John feel it necessary to pen this relatively long discourse on what may seem at first reading to be a rather limited theme? What "truth" are we talking about, and what could be confusing about the way to "eternal life"?

Questions such as these cannot be ignored in any complete exegesis, nor can they be answered without at least some knowledge about the situational setting of this epistle. Although no dates are given and no concrete historically unidentifiable events are referred to, John does give some indirect indication in the letter of the nature of the problems that his "children" (whether fellow Christians in general or more familiar parishioners) were facing and why he felt compelled to write as he did. In short, there was a group-internal crisis that had been occasioned by an undisclosed number of false teachers ("antichrists," 2:18) and separatists (2:19) who were promoting what they claimed to be a new, divinely revealed "gospel of knowledge." This was composed of an enticing mixture of Christian ideas and those of popular Greek philosophy with a few prominent Judaistic (or rabbinical) notions thrown in for good measure.[4] The errors being proclaimed were both

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[1] In the absence of convincing evidence to the contrary, I will assume the long-standing canonical tradition that the author of the writing known as "First John" was the (by then, c.a. 90+ AD) aged apostle of the Lord called "John," the son of Zebedee (Lk 5.10). This was the "disciple whom Jesus loved" (Jn. 13.23, 19.26), the probable author of the fourth gospel, who refers to himself as "the Elder" in the second and third epistles of John (2 Jn. 1, 3 Jn. 1). For a discussion of the authorship of 1 John, see Burdick (1985: ch 2; Sherman & Tuggy 1994:5).

[2] On a number of occasions in the letter, John refers explicitly to his act of "writing" it (e.g., 1.4; 2.1,7-8, 12-14, etc.), but it is highly likely that most of his receptors would be in fact "hearers" of his words. Thus I will usually refer to this group with the primary channel of communication in mind, i.e., "audience," "listeners."

[3] For a discussion of these and other genre classifications, see Thompson 1992:18; Johnson 1993:13; Sherman & Tuggy 1994:6; Edwards 1996:34-35.

[4] For a good summary of the probable anti-Christian errors of this heretical sect, frequently referred to as "incipient Gnosticism," see Johnson 1993:18-20. Similar teachings are also alluded to and argued against in other NT letters, such as Colossians, 2 Peter, and Jude. Neufeld rightly cautions against the attempt to identify this group too precisely in terms of later second century heterodox movements (1994:ch.2).

doctrinal and moral in nature: The false teachers denied the full humanity of Jesus Christ, and they practiced a lifestyle that was contrary to fundamental Christian principles, including the central "love precept" (e.g. Christological error: 2:22-23; 4.2-3; moral error: 1:6; 2.4, 9-11, 15-16). This elitist, intellectualistic, opportunistic, and often libertinistic "religion" attracted many and probably confused even more of the early believers, who did not have full or concrete access to the New Testament canon, especially the gospel record, that we rely upon to combat such heresies today.

So the wise and experienced "Elder" (cf 2 Jn. 1; 3 Jn. 1) fights back with his pen for a sword. The result is this highly emotive pastoral and polemical letter designed to give his scattered flock (and probably others) the personal re-assurance that they needed in the face of this serious threat to their faith. Their salvation *was* certain, says John, and could not be subjected to doubt or revision, for it was based on the unchangeable, Christ-centered gospel message preached from "the very beginning" of the apostolic movement (1:1; 2:13; 3;11). This was objective, unalterable truth, attested to both externally and internally by the Spirit of God (5:6-11). But confused or wavering believers needed to make this good news subjectively true for themselves. So John gives these "dear friends" (ἀγαπητοί, 2:7) and all others similarly "born of God" (5:18) a simple religious exercise to accomplish this individual objective: Remain faithful to what you have been taught, especially the three key principles of *faith*, *obedience*, and *love* as directed and exemplified by Jesus Christ (3:7-10, 19-24). How can you be sure that you are a true Christian and on the right path to eternal life? Remain in constant, active fellowship with the Father and the Son by the power of the Holy Spirit (1:3; 2:24-27). And then, in a spirit of loving concern, exercise your faith by continually assisting, encouraging, and praying for (3:16-18; 4:19-21; 5:15-17) fellow "children of God" (5:19) who may be in danger of losing the way due to "antichristian" deception and diabolical influence from within (2:15-16) and/or without (2:18, 22; 3:8-10).

That is, in essence, "the message (we) have heard from the beginning" (3:11), which we joyfully continue to proclaim (1:4-5). It is not difficult to derive these themes from 1 John, for they are all clearly and graphically stated and reiterated in one form or another throughout the text. The purpose of the present essay is to demonstrate how this doctrinal and ethical *content*, i.e., *what* John says, is complemented and reinforced by *how* he says it, i.e., by the compositional style of the text. In other words, how does the author's rhetorical manner of writing serve, via the spiritual "anointing" of the Holy One (2:20-21, 26-27), to strengthen not only his message, but through that also his listeners' certainty about their Christian (= Christ-oriented, motivated, and directed) truth and life? How does it reassure them about the *past* (what God has done for them through Christ, 4:9-10), *present* (their current victorious standing before God in Christ, 4.4), and *future* (their ongoing fellowship with God and Christ to all eternity, 2:28)? After an overview of the principal rhetorical features of 1 John, I will show how they operate together to define both the structure and the nature of this text as well as to highlight its major themes and communicative objectives. The latter includes a consideration of the function of such NT epistles as a dynamic verbal substitute for the physical presence of the writer, especially when "re-oralized" during public proclamation. Several larger pericopes will be examined in greater detail to demonstrate just how masterfully crafted this work is when one looks beneath the simple surface forms of the text. This study will conclude with a brief consideration of its implications for transmitting the reassuring divine truths of 1 John today in a functionally equivalent, rhetorically appropriate way in a diverse sociocultural (i.e., world), but equally antichristian (i.e., "world," 2:15) situational context.

Is John too among the rhetors?

The term "rhetoric" refers to the use of carefully selected and arranged stylistic devices and compositional techniques in a given language and literary tradition to support or enhance the content and purpose of one's messages.[5] The overall objective is to "persuade" (in the wider sense of exerting influence

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[5] This study of the "style" and "rhetoric" of the various writings of Scripture does not intend to downplay or ignore the "inspiration" of the Holy Spirit in the activity of composition; rather, my desire is to augment one's understanding of the manifold and wondrous

upon)[6] a particular audience (or readership) with regard to some specific *doctrinal* (truth-error) position, e.g. "Christ" vs. "antichrist," *moral* (right-wrong) issue, e.g. "light" vs. "darkness," or *ethical* (good-bad) stance, e.g. "loving" vs. "unloving." Such persuasion may be manifested in relation to two basic cognitive and emotive stances, i.e. *continuity* or *change*. In other words, the goal of the rhetoric of literary discourse is to strengthen or reinforce a previously existing state of mind/behavior or, alternatively, to occasion a significant shift in one's thinking and actions.[7] The rhetorical features of a text constitute a partial set of an author's total inventory of compositional skills, i.e. the particular linguistic and literary forms chosen from those potentially available in one's verbal repertory in order to render a specific text, whether oral or written, in the most *effective* way possible. In other words, the aim is to get his point and purpose across with the most impact, appeal, appropriateness, and relevance for the audience and setting concerned. Functional considerations thus interact closely with those pertaining to form (structure and style) in any complete rhetorical study.

The epistles of John are not among the most highly regarded instances of New Testament literary style, let alone rhetoric. In a highly regarded study of the subject, the following conclusion is reached:[8]

> The style of the Epistles ...is one of extreme simplicity all through, with some monotony of construction .... the author's sentences are very brief...his Greek is elementary ...and repetitive (e.g. the numerous *I write to you* ...as if it were the style of an old man.

Turner,[9] along with a number of other scholars, attributes the characteristics of John's Greek to "Semitic" influence, while others go on to explain the alleged lackluster style of the epistles in relation to the gospel as being a natural outcome of the different type or genre of discourse:[10]

> The epistle, however, contains no recitation of events or discourses. It is solidly didactic in nature with no variation from narration to public address to interpretation. Its propose is not inherently conducive to the subtle variety of rhythm that Dodd finds in the gospel.

It is not surprising then that one does not find many studies devoted specifically to the rhetorical features of the Johannine corpus.[11] Perhaps it is thought that any text so obviously repetitive in construction cannot really manifest a great deal of compositional skill, let alone compelling rhetoric. But as we shall see, repetition—or better, *recursion*—is the key to understanding the intricate structure as well as the persuasive purpose that lies just beneath the surface of the text—a manner of writing that is as esthetically engaging as its message is theologically convincing. The writer's word of *reassurance* (i.e. the text's primary communicative function) thus reaches out towards his receptors along the planes of both form and content.

The main characteristics of the rhetorical *style* of 1 John are not difficult to discern, especially when these are compared with the prominent literary features of his other writings. Thus, along with the principal aspects of the theological and moral content of this letter, we find that he reuses a number of preferred compositional techniques, even as he recycles a distinctive set of religious terms and expressions. The recursive form and content of his message is not "circular" in the sense of arguing aimlessly "in a circle" or in an amorphous manner, but instead, we have a cyclical but progressive and cumulative presentation of a cluster of key theological truths and ethical principles. Thus the primary device of conceptual-thematic reiteration features

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nature of this process. Thus the "words," or message "taught by the Spirit" (1 Cor. 2.13), refers not only to their content, but also to their manner of expression in human language, using all the verbal resources that were available at the time.

[6] I think that this broader reference is present also in the classical Aristotelian definition of rhetoric as the "art of persuasion."

[7] John's First Epistle aims to accomplish the first objective (5.13) and his gospel the second (20.31).

[8] Turner 1976:135.

[9] Turner 1976:135-137.

[10] Burdick 1985:19.

[11] Duane Watson has produced two good stylistic analyses of 1 John (1989 and 1993), but these studies tend to "overread" the biblical text in favor of a Classical rhetorical format and hermeneutical perspective. The majority of predications are rhetorically "marked" in some way or another such that the difference between what is usual or expected and the extraordinary is often difficult to distinguish.

a great deal of variation and progressive elaboration to produce the centrifugal development of a basic set of themes that revolve around *faith* in Christ, *obedience* to God, and *love* for fellow believers, e.g. 4:7-5:5: victorious faith (Jesus is the Christ/Messiah) => non-discriminatory love (for the heavenly Father as well as all his children) => faithful obedience (to God's unburdensome commands). Each of these themes is specifically worded and variously reiterated to combat the chief errors of the false teachers—their denial of the incarnational truth that Jesus is the Son of God, their separation from and disparagement of fellow Christians whom they regarded as their spiritual inferiors, and their flesh-denigrating, immoral life style.

Four distinct but integrated aspects of Johannine rhetoric

Nigel Turner calls attention to the following features as being typical of John's "extreme simplicity" of style:[12]

> ...a limited vocabulary, comparatively free from synonymns...repetition of the same grammatical construction, a paucity of particles, frequent asyndeton or connection mainly by means of *and*,
>
> καί ... οὐ for οὐδέ...

From a rhetorical perspective, however, we must go beyond mere considerations of linguistic form and investigate the various communicative *functions* for which the preferred literary forms were used. This aspect will be surveyed more specifically later in the study, but in preparation for that, it may be helpful to view Johannine style from an integrated, purpose-oriented perspective. Accordingly, we may categorize these writings, 1 John in particular, with respect to four primary features, that is, techniques which the author heavily relies upon as the basis for his rhetorical strategy of reassuring argumentation, namely, recursion, contrast, focus, and mitigation. These are described and selectively illustrated below:

1. Recursion

This is obviously the most prominent formal characteristic of 1 John—from the very "beginning" of the composition (1:1-4). But the type of reiteration manifested is considerably more complex than it is usually described in commentaries and other scholarly studies. It also encompasses much more text than the obvious instance found in the lyric passage of 2:12-14. In the first place, it is essential to analyze this feature from a *discourse* point of view, that is, moving beyond the confines of the individual verse and pericope to incorporate the entire composition. Furthermore, in any thorough examination of textual recursion, one must keep in mind that it is not only *quantity*, or frequency of usage, that is important, but *quality* too, that is, the relative thematic importance of the various words which are repeated as well as their artistic combination with other stylistic devices. In the Johannine writings, this vital inventory will always include the key terms (nouns, related verbs, and adjectives) that convey the central theological and pastoral concepts of his message, for example, in 1 John: "knowledge/know," "love," "true/truth,"[13] "command," "children," "testimony/testify, "remain," "confidence," and of course the several references to the deity, "Jesus Christ" in particular since he was/is the divine person at issue. Reiterated terms that give a particular character to 1 John (i.e. as distinct from the gospel[14] would include such items as "devil" (διάβολος, e.g. 3:8, 10), "antichrist(s)" (e.g. 2:18, 22), and "liar" (ψεύστης,

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[12] Turner 1976:133.

[13] The top three lexical stems in 1 John numerically are: "love" (ἀγαπ-) = 43x, "know/ledge" (οἶδα, γινωσκ-) = 42x, "true/truth" (αληθ-) = 16x.

[14] I am assuming temporal priority of the gospel. The first epistle may have been written in part to counteract certain misunderstandings and misapplications of the gospel.

e.g. 1:10; 2:4, 22; 4:20) on the negative side with "anoint" (χρῖσμα, e.g. 2:20, 27) and "brother" (ἀδελφός, e.g. 2.9-11) having a positive connotation.

Finally, it is important to consider the occurrence of *synonymous* expressions as well as terms that belong to a particular *semantic domain* (lexical field). Examples of notable synonym sets would include groups such as: "fellowship" and "remain in"; "walk in," "obey," and "do"; "children of God" and "born of God," "sin" and "unrighteousness." Depending on the specific context, there may be some significance attached to the use of one term rather than another of the set, but in most cases the difference in meaning is not great. One instance of a prominent semantic domain that is manifested in the text of 1 John is that which designates the agents of wickedness: "the antichrist," "antichrists" (plural), "the devil," "the world," and "Cain." On the other side of the spiritual fence we have John's addressees: "dear children," "fathers," "young men," brothers," and "dear friends." Often these synonyms and related terms function as equivalents in the various parallel arrangements that the author utilizes to structure and to shape his strongly contrastive, hortatory discourse (e.g. *three* positive versus three negative attributes in 2:14, 16).

Verbal recursion in 1 John serves to lend surface *cohesion*, or formal "connectivity," as well as underlying conceptual *coherence* to many of the included pericopes and other (larger or smaller) textual units. Observe, for example, the tangible sensory component that is manifested by many of the words found in the introduction, e.g, "see," "hear," "eyes," "hands," "touch" (1:1), which serve to highlight the concrete, historically reliable nature of the message that John "proclaims" (v.2). Later, in the paragraph of 3:4-10, the noun or verb form of the lexical stem ἁμαρτ- is reiterated ten times, and this is augmented by two occurrences of "lawlessness" (ἀνομία) and also by one appearance of "lead astray" (πλανάω). Many of these instances are negativized, however (e.g. "Everyone who is born of God will *not* commit sin"—3:9; cf. 3:6), or they are actions condemned (e.g. "Everyone who sins has *not* seen him [God]"—3:6). Thus on the whole, the entire paragraph functions to promote a "righteous" life style (the stem δικαι— appears 4x), one that befits the "children/begotten/seed of God" (5x) who were delivered from "the devil's" (4x) power by "the Son of God" (3:8). The *antithesis* that is highlighted here is also typical of Johannine discourse (see point 2 below).

The cohesion-fixing recursion that runs throughout a given section may at times be more formal (syntactic or logical) and extensive in nature. The discourse unit running from 1:5 to 2:2, for example, is held together by a negative-positive alternation that assumes the following generic shape:

(-) "if we say" [present general condition] + false claim => *adverse outcome* (1:6, 8, 10)

(+) "(but) if' [PGC] + contrasting behavior => *divine blessing* (1:7, 9, 2:1)

The third and final pairing is climactic, and this is indicated by means of a subtle *shift* in the pattern at the end. Thus in 2:1, the contrasting (positive) behavior is not carried out by the believer, but by his Lord, who "speaks in defense" of those whom he has redeemed (2:2). The importance of this threefold reiterated structural pattern is that it shows that the present chapter division is not situated in the best place. The onset of 2:3 would have been a better place to begin according to the logic of John's progressive argument from 1:5—despite the initial καί at 2.3 (cf. 3.19).

Turning to another longer passage, we observe that chapter four as a whole is demarcated into four major sections by means of lexical recursion. The first (vv.l-6) contrasts two sorts of "spirit" (πνεῦμα-7x): that are "[out] of God" (ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ-6x) versus that of "the world" (κόσμος--6x). The second "paragraph" (vv.7-12) shifts the topical focus to "love" (ἀγαπ-), the stem of which appears 15x including the vocative introducer, Ἀγαπητοί. Being an "event" word, "love" requires a subject and an object, and here the emphasis is on "God" and "we/us" throughout the section which centers upon "his Son" (2x) in vv.9-10. "The Son," in turn, becomes

the focus of the significant theological affirmation of paragraph three (vv.13-16), which climaxes in the "confession" (ὁμολογέω) that "Jesus [i.e. the Man] is the Son of God" (v:15b). The fourth paragraph (vv:17-21) returns after the Christological proclamation to the subject of "love" (11x--anticipated by two occurrences in v.16b), this time to emphasize a new object, i.e. one's Christian "brother" (ἀδελφός –3x). The point is that one cannot claim to love God if one does not at the same time manifest sincere "brotherly" (including "sisterly"!) love (v.20).

Chapter four illustrates another prominent Johannine recursive technique which has rhetorical implications in that it also contributes to the impression of a "well-formed" and hence "credible" discourse. This is the so-called "tail-head" construction (technically termed *anadiplosis*) in which an element found at the end of one discrete structural unit (from a clause up to the largest constituent textual segment) is repeated in either exact or slightly altered form at the beginning of the next unit. This device functions both to help mark the boundary separating the two units and also to indicate that there is some connection between them. *Anadiplosis* is operative at each of compositional borders identified above in chapter four of 1 John, i.e. 3:24—πνεῦμα—4:1 [plus a contrast between the divine and human "spirits"]; 4:6—ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ-4:7; 4:12—μένω ἐν-4:13; 4:16b—ἡ ἀγαπή-4:17. The final overlapping parallel is considerably more developed:

4:21 ...ὁ ἀγαπῶν	τὸν θεὸν	ἀγαπᾷ	καὶ τὸν ἀδελφὸν αὐτοῦ.
5:1 ...ὁ ἀγαπῶν	τὸν γεννήσαντα	ἀγαπᾷ	[καὶ] τὸν γεγεννημένον

Indeed, the preceding correspondence is so strong that one might question the presence of a discourse boundary at this point. This brings up an important heuristic principle of rhetorical-structural analysis: The more *demarcative* devices that appear on either side of such a putative border, the more probable it is that the break-plus-new-beginning (or *closure + aperture*) was actually intended by the original author. Needless to say, a careful evaluation of all textual evidence is necessary, and differences of opinion must be allowed for. But the analyst should never lose sight of the fact that such detailed literary and linguistic study cannot stand as an end in itself, but it must always relate in some concrete way to a clarification of the form, content, and purpose of the biblical text under consideration (e.g. the shift from an ethical [4:19-21] to a Christological + ethical segment [5:1-5] of hortatory discourse).

One important recursive technique based on recursion that is especially helpful in defining the *outer* boundaries of compositional units is called the *inclusio*, or "sandwich structure." This features a pattern of reduplication that occurs at the opening and close of a given section, hence distinguishing it from its textual context (or "cotext"). The most important example of this in 1 John serves to enclose the epistle as a whole: In 5:20b we read, "...*we are in* the truth, in *his Son, Jesus Christ*. He is the true God and *eternal life*." This expression of confident faith reflects back on several corresponding phrases in the letter's introduction: "...and we proclaim to you *the life eternal*...and *our fellowship is with* the Father and with *his Son Jesus Christ*" (1:2, 4). There is actually a double *inclusio* at 5:20, for the preceding words reiterate those found at 5:13, which is viewed by many scholars as the beginning of the conclusion to this epistle: "...in order that you may know that you have *eternal life*, you who believe in the name of *the Son of God*" (cf. also 5:1) The passage 5:11b-12 in turn forms another *inclusio* with the letter's introduction: "...God *gave us eternal life*, and this life is *in his Son. He who has the Son has life*..." Less extensive instances of this bounding device appear periodically throughout the book to segment the discourse into more manageable chunks of meaning, e.g. "*And this is how we know that* we belong to the truth..." (3:19) – "*And this is how we know that* he abides in us..." (3.24); "test *the spirits* to see whether they are *from God* (4:1) -- "We are *from God* ... by this we recognize *the spirit* of truth and *the spirit* of falsehood" (4:6).

Two secondary compositional techniques that are closely related to the structure of an *inclusio* are termed "anaphora" and "epiphora." *Anaphora* features the reiteration of corresponding lexical and conceptual

material at the respective *beginnings* of distinct adjacent or non-adjacent textual units. For example, the book's opening words state: "That which was *from the beginning, which we have heard... that we proclaim* also to you" (1:1, 3). At the start of the body of the letter we read: "And this is the message which *we have heard* from him, and *we announce* to you..." (1:5). These words reappear in the passage which some commentators regard as the midpoint of the book, namely, 3:11, which is in any case a new sectional opening: "This is the message *you heard from the beginning*..." In contrast, *epiphora* is manifested when there is a recursion of the same or similar words at the respective *endings* of different discourse segments. An instance of this feature occurs to mark the close of two non-consecutive paragraphs in the middle of the book: "...you know that *everyone who does righteousness has been born of him* [God]" (2:29) -- "...*everyone who does not do righteousness is not* [born] *of God*..." (3:10). The latter verse continues: "...and *whoever does not love his brother*," which is later paralleled at the close of chapter four by a similar, but contrastive, expression: "...the one who loves God *must love also his brother*" (4:21).

Due to the unusually heavy overlapping of concepts on the boundaries of the compositional units of 1 John (i.e. *anadiplosis*), the operation of *anaphora* and *epiphora* is not as definitive or clear-cut as it is in other biblical books. But when used in conjunction with other structural markers, such patterned recursion does play a role in both textual demarcation and topical highlighting. The additional function of text *foregrounding* is illustrated in the A-B-C-D serial parallelism that appears in the thematically focal and semantically unique passage of 3:16 :

ἐν τούτῳ γνωσομέθα τὴν ἀγάπην, ὅτι

ἐκεῖνος	ὑπὲρ ἡμῶν	τὴν ψυχὴν αυτοῦ	ἔθηκεν
καὶ ἡμεῖς	ὀφείλομεν	τὰς ψυξὰς	θεῖναι
	ὑπὲρ τῶν ἀδελφῶν		

Here we have a summary of the principal theological and moral concerns of the letter,[15] and the reiterated syntactic format strengthens the exhortation to follow the example of Jesus Christ in exercising ἀγάπη-love on behalf of the fellowship of believers in him. At the same time the errors of the antichristian heretics are exposed, namely, that Jesus Christ was not the Son of God who died to save all sinners (cf. 3:8, 23), and that an "enlightened" (knowledgeable/*gnostic*) "love" need not concern itself with the harsh realities and demands of everyday life (cf. 3:17).

2. Contrast

Much of the "recursion" (no. 1 above) in John is contrastive in nature. That is to say, the reiterated material usually involves an opposition or antithesis of some kind in keeping with the periodically polemical tone of the letter. Such contrast highlights the need for a firm decision concerning right and wrong and a concrete commitment to a correct Christological confession coupled with godlike moral action. This strongly antithetical style is clearly evident in the hypothetically-phrased series of theological propositions found in chapter one, e.g. 1:5b-7a:

<u>a</u>	<u>b</u>
A. ...ὅτι ὁ **φῶς** ἐστιν	καὶ **σκοτία** ἐν αὐτῷ οὐκ ἔστιν οὐδεμία.

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[15] 3:16 is unique for1 John in that it is the only place where believers are reminded of the supreme sacrifice of love, namely, giving one's life for another, according to the example of Christ (cf. John 10:11, 15:13).

ἐὰν εἴπωμεν ὅτι

B. <u>κοινωνίαν ἔχομεν μετ᾽ αὐτοῦ</u>   καὶ ἐν τῷ **σκότει** περιπατῶμεν,

ψευδόμεθα

καὶ **οὐ** ποιοῦμεν τὴν **ἀλήτηειαν**·

C. ἐὰν δὲ ἐν τῷ **φωτὶ** περιπατῶμεν

ὡς αὐτός ἐστιν ἐν τῷ **φωτί**   <u>κοινωνίαν ἔξηομεν μετ᾽ ἀλήλων</u>...

Thus we have a graphic contrast (boldfaced print) in segments (a) and (b) of lines A and B and an antithetical parallel in lines B and C that appear in reversed order from their occurrence in A (i.e. φῶς and σκοτία). The latter alternates with a constant, κοινωνίαν ἔξηομεν... Is there any significance to such intricate patterning? By way of conjecture we might say that in this particular case the verbal arrangement serves to highlight the thematic contrast being discussed, perhaps suggesting that one's words and deeds cannot be separated as far as true "fellowship" (κοινωνία) and one's public "confession" of penitence (ὁμολογέω, v.9) is concerned. A few more of the many major contrasts that occur in the letter are as follows:

"if we say that we have *no* sin"	"if we confess our sins"	
"if we say that we have *not* sinned"		(1:8-10)

"that you do *not* sin"	"and if anyone sins"	(2:1)

"the one ...who does *not* keep his commands"	"but the one who keeps his word"	(2:4-5)

"*not* a *new* command"	"but an old command"	(2:7)

"the *darkness* is passing away"	"the true *light* is already shining"	(2:8)

The one who says he is in the *light*   and *hates* his brother

                                  he is in the *darkness* until now.

The one who *loves* his brother

he remains in the *light*…   The one who *hates* his brother

                                    he is in the *darkness*

                                    and he walks in *darkness*   (2:9-11)

The last example is an illustration of how complex antithetical expression can become in 1 John, and the listing (from just a portion of chapter two) gives an indication of how densely packed it is in the discourse as a whole. Such paired oppositions alternate in a variety ways and utilize recursion and variation in different combinations and proportions (note the paired false/true series of religious positions in chs.l-2: 1:6/7, 1:8/9, 1:10/2:1-2, 2:4/5, 2:6/7-8, 2:9/10-11). Perhaps this style of writing on its own is intended to suggest the explicit, either-or nature

of orthodoxy or the manifold manner in which heresy can creep into a larger, perhaps doctrinally untested group and infect the truth of God's Word (cf. 1:5-6). In any case, it does reflect the clear-cut method of John's argumentation: as far as he was concerned, there was absolutely no room for ambiguity, equivocalness, uncertainty, or "gray areas" with respect to either the doctrine of Christ or the Christian life (2.21, 29). Less obvious, *transdiscourse* contrasts also appear, such as that which distinguishes the truth of the `beginning' of the gospel proclamation (1:1-2) with the error that will characterize its transmission in "the last hour" (2:18).

A final important type of contrast in 1 John could also be classified under "recursion" above because it is based on the reiteration of certain key features of form and/or content. However, the contrast is manifested in the order of occurrence of these items: the series first moves in one direction or according to one arrangement and then reverses at the midpoint to go back the other way. The simplest example of this contrastive pattern is the four-term *chiasmus*, e.g. 3:6:

> A: Everyone who *in him remains*
> 　　B: he <u>does not sin</u>;
> 　　B': everyone who <u>continues to sin</u>
> A': he *has not seen him*
> 　　and he *has not known him*.

Similarity and contrast work together in the preceding passage to highlight the results of habitual sin in a person's life: all personal fellowship with God is broken, as stressed by the double negative expression at the end of the assertion (A'). Another common type of antithetical parallelism consists of five terms, with special emphasis on the odd element in the middle of the structure, e.g. 3:9:

> A: The one *who has been born* <u>of God</u>
> 　　B: he does not go on committing sin,
> 　　　　C: because **his** [God's] **seed** in him abides;
> 　　B': and he is not able to go on sinning,
> A': because <u>of God</u> *he has been born*.

In this case, the reversed parallel structure may assist with the interpretation of the problematic term "seed" ($\sigma\pi\acute{\epsilon}\rho\mu\alpha$). According to the structure, it would seem that this seed is closely related in meaning to the expression "born of God," found in chiastic order itself in lines A and A'. Thus the metaphor of "seed" would refer to that element in one's spiritual existence that produces "new life" and results in "offspring" or "children," namely, the Word of God (cf. "message," 3:11; 2:24), Holy Spirit (cf. 3:24), or perhaps the new (divine) nature (or "life," cf. 2:25).

These structural correspondences and contrasts are linked and interwoven with one another regularly throughout 1 John. In the next passage (4:20) a double chiasmus foregrounds the terms of a twofold opposition:

> If anyone says, "*I love* 　　　　　　　　　　**God**,"
> 　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　and **his brother**
>
> *he hates*, he's a liar!
> For the one who does not *love*
>
> 　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　**the brother** whom <u>he has seen</u>,
> 　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　**the God** whom <u>he has not seen</u>
> he is not able *to love*.

The following is another, more complex example which internally organizes the short paragraph covering 2:18-19:

Little children, *it is the last hour*,

> and just as you heard that <u>antichrist is coming</u>,
> even now <u>many antichrists have come</u>;

wherefore we know that *it is the last hour*.

> <u>Out from us</u> they went,

but *they were* **not** <u>of us</u>,
for if <u>of us</u> *they were*,

> *they would have remained* <u>with us</u>; but
> [[[they went <u>out from us</u>]]]
> in order that *they might be manifested*

that *they were* **not** all <u>of us</u>.

In this instance the alternating reversals and contrasts help to spotlight the prior precarious nature of the state of κοινωνία within the Johannine group: The "coming" of the antichrist(s) meant the "going" of a considerable number (or it would not have been mentioned) of false Christians. However, the sad but positive result has been that a needed separation (note the repeated "out from among us" –ἐξ ἡμῶν) has occurred whereby the "truth" about Jesus Christ has become more clearly "known" (cf. 2:20ff). This analysis gives one a good idea of how the *ellipsis* of v. 19b (shown in triple [brackets]) may best be "filled out" according to the lexical and structural cotext.[16]

Contrastive "chains" of antitheses are also constructed to form a topical background against which some associated theological concepts or propositions may be reflected and perhaps highlighted. We see this, for example, in the contrast that is drawn between the motivating source and force (i.e. "S/spirit" πνεῦμα) which is operating behind the words and deeds of the "children" of God as opposed to the "false prophets" in 4:1-6:

of God <> *into the world* <> [Spirit] **of God** > **of God** <> [not] **of God** > *in the world*
<> **of God** <> *in the world* > *of the world* > *the world* <> **of God** > **God** <> [not] **of God**

John thus reassures believers by his very epistolary style that Christians can surely know where they—and "the spirits"—stand in relation to God by means of their confession of faith (and life). It is a matter of day or night, divine "light"—or diabolical "darkness" (1:5-7).

3. Focus

The discourse of 1 John is permeated with features that serve to *foreground* certain vital theological notions which the Elder happens to be discussing. Whereas the two techniques described above, recursion and contrast, tend to be manifested over a larger portion of the text, "focus" is normally limited to the sentence, or less, the clause, level of discourse structure. In addition to such well-known lexical usages as "amplification" (e.g. 2:2, 3:2, 5:9) and figurative language (e.g. light-darkness in 1:6-7; anointing in 2:27; murderer in 3:15), there are three interrelated grammatical devices that function to bring about the rhetorical effect of *focus*: demonstrative pointing (to what is especially prominent in the context), syntactic front-shifting, and the use of a separable personal pronoun. These may be reiterated and/or conjoined to extend the scope of a given concept in focus over a longer stretch of text.

Most important of the *demonstrative* "pointers" is the phrase [καὶ] ἐντούτω γινῶσκομεν ὅτι... " [and] in this (= by this means) we know that..." This expression usually appears at a crucial juncture in the discourse, i.e.

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[16] Neufeld would "de-historicize" the exit of the antichrists and presents this section as if it were a literary creation "which is so realistic in its depection that it prevents speech that would condemn them [i.e. those who would deny Christ]" (1994:106). But such a reading is not necessary to preserve the contemporary relevance of this indirect admonition by way of a historical report.

the beginning, internal peak, or ending of a given pericope. For example, it occurs at the opening and close of the paragraph which spans 3:19-24:

> [And] in this we shall know that we are of the truth... (19a)
> ...and in this we know that he remains in us, of the Spirit whom he gave us. (24b)

The formally parallel construction on the external boundaries of this text invites readers (hearers) to forge some additional connections of meaning. Here such an exercise is not difficult, for there is an obvious relationship between the "truth" (ἀλήθεια) of God's Word (or the "truthfulness" of his faithful people) and the "Spirit" (πνεῦμα) who inspired it (them, cf. 4:2). In most cases the demonstrative is *cataphoric* in nature, that is, it points forward to its referent in the text (4:2). However, *anaphoric* (i.e. back pointing) references also occasionally appear (e.g. 4:6), while in some passages the demonstrative clearly acts as a Janus-like transitional device by pointing simultaneously in both directions. For example, in 3:19a above, "this" indicates that an active "love-style" (v.18) helps to reassure Christians of the genuineness ("truth") of their faith and hence also to calm their troubled conscience (lit. "heart," v.19b). Similarly, in 1:5a we read: "And this (αὐτὴ) is the message which we have heard from him ...," which clearly reflects the letter's prologue (l:l-2) and at the same time points us ahead to the new topic, "light" and "darkness" (1:5bff).

Several variants of the preceding focusing construction appear in 1 John, but they all involve a clause-initial demonstrative word and function to draw special attention to its referent in the text. The following examples illustrate the variety of expression that is encountered:

> In this (ἐν τούτῳ) the love of God is manifested among us... (4.9)
>
> In this (ἐν τούτῳ) love has been perfected with us... (4.17)
>
> And this (αὐτὴ ἐστιν) is the proclamation which he himself proclaimed to us... (2.25)
>
> And this precept (ταυτὴν τὴν ἐντολὴν) we have from him... (4.21)
>
> This one (οὗτος) is the one coming through water and blood... (5.6)
>
> These things (Ταῦτα) I wrote to you so that you might know that... (5.13)

This demonstrative device is one of the characteristic features of Johannine compositional style and an important factor in the incisive, unequivocal nature of his rhetorical argument in defense of the God-Man, Jesus Christ and the Christian life-style featuring mutual love among the membership.

The last example above also illustrates another technique for focusing one's attention on a particular feature of the clause, namely, *front-shifting* (also known as syntactic "fronting" or "advance-ment"). In this case, a certain grammatical element is placed ahead of its normal position in the clause, usually at its beginning.[17] Thus in 5:13, the direct object Ταῦτα occurs before the verb "I wrote" (ἔγραψα)—in this instance probably to initiate a new paragraph dealing with some more of "the things" that assure the readers of "eternal life." A similar example involving a noun phrase occurs in 2.7:

> Beloved, not *a new command* I write to you...

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[17] The "unmarked," or more expected, syntactic order of eventive clauses in biblical Greek prefers the main verb in first position (after any conjunction or adverb). In non-eventive or predicative clauses, however, the subject/topic usually initiates the utterance. A deviation from the norm, i.e. a unit that is "front-shifted," is "marked" as being specially prominent for the purposes of *focalization* (i.e. emphasis) or *topicalization* (to indicate a change in topic).

John here begins his consideration of the "new" versus the "old" command (ἐντολή, v.8). An emphatic sort of focus with the imperative ἴδετε "behold!" serves to express John's amazement over the wonder of the subject he is dealing with in 3:1:

> Behold, *what great love* he has given to us God (has)... !

In the next passage we observe that focal fronting may occur anywhere in the clause, wherever an element is shifted ahead of its expected syntactic position:

> ἀλλ' ἡ τελεία ἀγάπη **ἔξω** βάλλει τὸν φόβον. (4:18)
> But the mature love **out** it casts fear.

John could have expressed the same idea (minus the emphasis) with the compound verb ἐκβάλλω "cast out." But to more fully stress the notion of "victorious" (cf. 5:4-5) love, he uses a separable adverb and places it before the simple verb for greater impact. Another, more complex example follows:

> But *whoever* keeps *his* word (αὐτοῦ τὸν λόγον), truly *in this one* (ἐν τούτῳ) the love of God has been fulfilled. (2:5)

In this passage, there are three instances of semantic focus: The genitive pronoun αὐτοῦ reminds us that it is the "word/commands of Christ/God" which is of primary concern; the demonstrative phrase forges a contrast between the true and the false Christian (cf. ἐν τούτῳ in the preceding clause); and the frequently occurring indefinite relative construction (ὅς δ' ἂν τηρῇ) emphasizes the crucial action or behavior that John is enjoining upon his readers.

Much less common than syntactic advancement is *back-shifting* for the purpose of foregrounding crucial semantic constituents in the clause (or sentence).[18] Two good examples of this device appear in 1 John 5:4-5:

> And *this* is the victory that has overcome the world, [namely] **our faith**.
> Now *who* is the one conquering the world—
> > **if not the one who** believes that Jesus is the Son of God?

In the first line the simple noun "faith" is clearly in focus at the end of the utterance (cf. a similar construction in 5:6). The subsequent rhetorical question, which displays a similar deictic-resumptive pointing technique, then serves to highlight the object of that faith in a complete Christological assertion which definitively supplies the only correct answer.

The use of a *separable* form of the subject personal *pronoun* (being grammatically optional) also contributes a degree of emphatic focus to any utterance in which it occurs, for example, to make a somewhat greater impression upon readers:

> And *as for you* (καὶ ὑμεῖς), the anointing which <u>you</u> received from him remains in you... (2:27)

John thus tries to make sure that the implications of God's great grace—in the form of his spiritual "anointing"--do not escape his troubled flock.[19] A similar purpose is effected in 4:10 as the Elder utilizes full

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[18] This feature is not often discussed in the scholarly literature, either with regard to NT Greek or to Hebrew, where it also occurs.

[19] The pronoun ὑμεῖς is redundant (since it occurs in an inseparable verbal suffix, ἐλάβετε), and it is front-shifted for good measure.

pronouns within an antithetical parallel construction to exclude any notion of synergism with regard to our salvation:

> In this [manner] is [genuine] love [manifested]—
> > *not* that **we** have loved God [i.e. effectually],
> > *but* that **he** loved us and sent his Son... [i.e. he overtly demonstrated his love]

The words in brackets are an attempt to reveal some of the implicated meaning in John's dense and incisive theological discourse (in the original), a significance that unfortunately tends to go unnoticed by the uninitiated modern reader. Similarly in 3:24, a typical translation in English does not bring out the emphasis conveyed by the independent third person pronoun (capitalized below with reference to Christ):

> And the one who keeps His (αὐτοῦ) commandments,
> > in Him (αὐτῷ) he remains,[20]
> > and He [Himself (αὐτὸς) [remains] in him.

Thus the miracle of Christ's personal in-dwelling is brought *audibly* to the listener's attention, an implication that is underscored by an elision of the verb "remains."

4. Mitigation

The text of 1 John is composed as a topical *sermon* in the form of a letter.[21] It is pastoral and polemical in nature, that is, intended both to strengthen and instruct the flock of believers and at the same time to attack and warn against false teachers who had broken away from the fellowship (2:19) and were threatening further damage (2:26). As an instance of *hortatory* discourse, 1 John features a continual recycling of a set of three major rhetorical considerations: *problem* (false teaching => unfaithful living), *solution* (an admonition or appeal to "keep" God's "precepts"), and *motivation* (an argument in favor of "true" faith and the godly way versus the "antichrists"). The key to this tripartite pattern of persuasion for the sake of reassurance is the middle constituent, the "solution," but it is not often an effective communicative strategy to simply give this in the form of a string of overt commands, especially when one is writing to one's "dear children." Rather, desired result— whether the initiation, reinforcement, or modification of a certain theological position or ethical behavior—must be conveyed in various ways (to prevent boredom) and repeatedly (to impress it upon the memory).

This is what John does so well in his letter: his threefold message is elementary but essential—continue to: (a) *trust* in and *confess* Jesus as the divine Christ; (b) lovingly *help* fellow Christians in need; and (c) let your lifestyle be governed by *obedience* to the Word of God (this triad is summarized in 3:22-23). He impresses these three concerns on his readers in a variety of ways which involve a greater or lesser amount of "*mitigation*" or "amelioration."[22] In other words, he employs a number of different syntactic and lexical constructions in order to communicate his crucial admonitions, appeals, and assurances. He thereby "manages" the discourse in order to achieve his communicative goals, but with a minimum "show of strength" lest any possible resentment

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[20] In such instances, the older convention of capitalizing references to the deity would come in handy (at least for the reader) and lessen the need for inserting an explicatory full noun, e.g. "Jesus Christ" (cf. v.23; Jn.13:34-35).

[21] Though it lacks many of the typical opening and closing features of a NT letter, the body is epistolary in nature, not unlike that of James, e.g. the many personalizing and "presentizing" vocatives, coupled with simple, familiar diction, which evoke the setting ("discourse"; Hatim & Mason 1997:216) of a pastor patiently instructing his flock. Perhaps the beginning and ending were modified (or excised) so that the text might better serve as a circular document, that is, sent to a number of scattered Johannine groups in Asia Minor.

[22] See Longacre 1983: *passim*.

arise among the members of his audience.[23] The result is a *continuum* of possibilities, ranging from the greatest to the least degree of mitigation/directness of expression. I have distinguished six "degrees" which are exemplified below (#0, the least/zero mitigation [or most direction] => #5, the highest degree of mitigation [least direction]):

#0—*imperative* form of the verb:

> The imperative is rhetorically *un*mitigated; it is direct and explicit; hence there can be no doubt about the speaker's intention, e.g.
>
>> negative: Beloved, do not believe (μὴ...πιστεύετε) every spirit...
>>
>> positive: ...but test (δοκιμάζετε) the spirits... (4:1, note the chiasmus in Greek)
>
> There are not many such overt commands in 1 John, which is perhaps an indication of the close relationship that bound the Elder to his "beloved ones" (in addition to the preceding see: 2:15, 24, 27, 28; 3:7, 13; 5:21). The only noticeable concentration occurs at the end of ch. 2 in the repeated imperative "remain!" (μένετω/μένετε). Indeed, this could be taken as a summary of John's entire message: Remain faithful to God and his Word, and he will remain "with-in" you unto eternal life (2:24-28).

#1—overt reference to a *command* of God:

> In this case, the writer/speaker does not give an imperative; rather, he mentions some imperative of God, (usually) referred to in the Old Testament or in the remembered--and authoritative--words of Jesus Christ to his disciples, e.g.
>
>> And this is *his command*, that we believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and that we love one another, just as *he gave* [the] *command to us*. (3:23)
>
> Although the "commands" (ἐντολαὶ) of God are mentioned a number of times in the letter (e.g. 2:3; 5:3), the preceding is the only specific one (actually a closely linked pair) that is given. Obviously, if the Lord once gave such a prescription or prohibition, it is still valid and to be obeyed by his people today (cf. also 3:11, 23).

#2—use of the verb "ought" (ὀφείλω) or "must" (δεί, not found in 1 John):

> In this case, the imperative of the speaker is not quite as direct, but it is nevertheless unmistakable, e.g.
>
>> Beloved, if in such a way God loved us, so also *we ought* to love one another. (4:11)
>
> This construction is not very common in 1 John (cf. 2:6; 3:16).

#3—an imperative conveyed by a construction involving the *subjunctive verb*:

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[23] "Managing ... involves steering the discourse towards [the] speaker's goals" as distinct from "monitoring" it, that is, "expounding in a non-evaluative manner" (Hatim & Mason 1997:220).

Such a command is quite mitigated; that is, it is conveyed more by implication rather than by direct statement. The subjunctive may occur in several different types of syntactic construction, e.g.

> My little children (also a mitigating device!), these things I am writing to you *in order that* [ἵνα] *you do not sin*. (2:1; negative purpose clause)

> Beloved (another mitigating vocative), *let us love* one another (ἀγαπῶμεν), for love is of God. (4:7; hortatory subjunctive)

> For this is the love of God, *that* [ἵνα] *we continue to keep* his precepts. (5:3; ἵνα explanatory clause)

We observe that the command is rather veiled in the final example; it is conveyed even more implicitly in the final group.

#4—*conditional* and *relativized* assertions:

Most readers/hearers would probably not regard this class as commands at all since they are "disguised" in the form of grammatical constructions that are normally used for other purposes. However, they are most important in 1 John, not only due to their frequency of occurrence, but because they often reflect a particular error that the anti-Johannine group was promoting with regard to doctrine or practice, e.g.

> *If* (ἐάν) we say that we have fellowship with him and walk in the darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. (1:6)

In such conditionals (present general) which begin with the rhetorical device, "if we say," John is probably alluding to some false claim by the heretics in the protasis. The apodasis then conveys an implicit prohibition, i.e. we/you ought not "walk in the darkness" that way! Without the "we say" (εἴπωμεν), the injunction, contained in the protasis, is positive, e.g.

> *If* (ἐάν) we walk in the light..., we have fellowship with one another... (1:7)

In other words, let us "walk in the light," and we will receive a blessing (i.e. the content of the apodasis; cf. 4:12).

More common than the preceding conditional construction is the relativized (or articularized) participial construction. It occurs throughout the letter and conveys a variety of mitigated imperatives, e.g.

> *The one who says* (ὁ λεγων ὅτι), "I know him!"--and does not keep his precepts, he is a liar... (2:4; i.e. we must keep his precepts)

More frequently, however, the implicit command is conveyed in the participle that immediately follows the article, e.g.

> *The one who loves* (ὁ ἀγαπῶν) his brother remains in the light...

The one who hates (ὁ δὲ μισῶν) his brother in in the darkness... (2:10-11)

Here we have a contrastive parallel construction (cf. no. 2 above): The repetition reinforces the point. The context indicates where a prohibition is needed instead of a prescription (cf, also 3.7-8).

#5—*negative attribution* and association:

This type of "imperative" is so indirect or implicit that it could be argued that it does not constitute an independent instance of mitigation at all, but rather depends on one of the other modes listed above, especially #4, to which it is closely related. The following attribution, for example (2:11b), comes right after an ameliorated imperative of type 4 (2:11a):

He does not know where he is going *because the darkness has blinded him.*

There is obviously an implicated appeal not to allow one's life to be characterized by "darkness," but does this function as a distinct (covert) prohibition? In the following passage (2:22), the direction of dependence is reversed; in other words, the mitigated command (type #4, 2:23) follows the negative attribution:

Such a man is the antichrist; he denies the Father and the Son.

Whether this sort of pejorative qualification is classified as a separate mode of ameliorated injunction or not (cf. also 2:16), it does illustrate the extent of the hortatory continuum and the degree to which John's discourse is designed to direct his hearers along the path of doctrinal and ethical "truth" (3:19; 4:6). To do otherwise is to place oneself in the opposite category of the "worldly":

They are *of the world*. For this reason *of the world* they speak, and *the world listens to them.* (4:5)

It is interesting to observe how John skillfully interweaves these different types of mitigated appeal throughout the text--to continually keep the pressure on, so to speak, but to do this gently and without overdoing it. His rhetoric was intended to reassure his readers, not to arouse their ire or to increase their uncertainty. The following is a longer illustration of this mixed compositional technique (3:7-10):

Dear children, *let no one mislead* you (#0). He who does what is right is righteous [= *do what is right*, #4], even as he (Christ) is righteous. He who does what is sinful is of the devil [= *do not do what is sinful*, #4], for the devil has been sinning from the beginning. For this reason the Son of God was manifested, that he might undo the works of the devil [use of an extreme, negative *example* to reinforce a characterization of the ungodly is a variant of the fifth type of mitigation]. Everyone who has been born of God *does not continue to sin* [#4] because his seed remains in him. By this means the offspring of God are made manifest as well as the offspring of the devil [= *they do not continue to sin*, #4/5; this utterance is even more mitigated because it depends on the preceding]. Whoever does not do what is right [= *he must do what is right*, #4] is not (a child) of God and neither is he who does not love [= *he ought to love*, #4] his brother.

Thus we see that there is a rhetorical appeal in virtually every (Greek) sentence, and yet the message does not seem overpowering or overbearing. This is because the author has wisely made abundant use of the most mitigated devices available in his language. Nevertheless, the desired impact is definitely present due to the

sheer amount of hortatory recursion that is interwoven in the text. In short, we ought to do--or better, we cannot help but doing--what is right (i.e. according to God's revealed will) for the sake of Christ and for everything else that the heavenly Father has done through his Son to destroy the power of the devil over us. Such is the fruit of the unfailing reassurance that he gives us.

The rhetoric of epistolary speech acts

Our survey of the different types of mitigation in 1 John leads naturally to a consideration of the so-called "pragmatic" dimension of discourse in terms of the various principal kinds of "speech acts" that the letter performs. A given *speech act* consists of three distinct aspects of a verbal event of message transmission, whether oral or written: The *locution* is the specific vocal utterance or discrete segment of writing under examination, which may range from a single complete predication to an entire text, large or small. This locution may be described in terms of a primary *illocution* that it manifests, that is, the particular communicative force that the source (speaker/writer) intends his words to convey to readers or hearers. The larger the locution, the broader or more generic the illocution that is needed to characterize it. Thirdly, there is the *perlocution* or the actual effect of the locution upon the receptor (group). This may vary to a greater or lesser extent from the illocution actually desired by the author. In the case of a written document, the perlocution is more difficult to determine due to the separation between the source and receptor(s),[24] but even in an oral/aural setting this effect may not be immediately apparent.

Speech acts may be identified and categorized with varying degrees of specificity. Seven general types may be noted, roughly in their order of importance in the NT epistolary literature:[25]

a) *Directives* – speech acts (SA s) that are intended to modify the behavior of the receptor (R) in some tangible way, e.g. via the different forms of mitigation noted earlier—to command, urge, preach, exhort, advise, etc.

b) *Informatives* – SA s that seek either to reinforce the present cognitive state of R or to modify/change it in some way, e.g. to declare, describe, expound, explain.

c) *Evaluatives* – SA s that express a particular judgment, evaluation, criticism, or opinion of some sort, e.g. to condemn, rebuke, commend, praise.

d) *Expressives* – SA s that aim either to externalize the emotions of the source and/or to influence the emotive state of R, e.g. various types of exclamation and utterances that convey strong feeling, e.g. of joy, grief, anger, affection.

e) *Commissives* – SA s that commit the S to some future course of action in relation to R, e.g. promise, vow, pledge.

f) *Interactives* – SA s that serve to open, maintain, or close a certain complete text or speech event, e.g. "phatic" speech, the language of greetings, farewells, and reciprocal ego-"stroking."

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[24] One probable instance of the delayed report of a definite perlocutionary effect is evident in the Corinthian correspondence, where 2 Cor. 2:5-11 very likely summarizes the outcome of Paul's rebuke and admonition to the congregation found in 1 Cor.5:1-5 with regard to certain disciplinary procedures.

[25] For a somewhat shorter listing, see Hatim & Mason 1990:60. In a sense this system is simply an elaboration of the framework proposed in Classical Greco-Roman rhetoric for analyzing the "persuasive" nature of an oration, namely, in terms of *logos*, *ethos*, and *pathos*—that is, an appeal to conceptual "logic" or reason, to the credibility and character of the source, and to the emotions of the audience, respectively (Murphy 1994:58-63).

g) *Performatives* – SA s which actually carry out or effect the particular action that they refer to,
e.g. bless, baptize, curse, ordain, marry, excommunicate.

In 1 John the last four types occur either rarely, if at all, or only in combination, e.g.

We write this that our joy might be made complete. (1:4 -- expressive + directive)
My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. (2:1-- interactive + directive)
How great is the love the Father has given us, that we should be called the children of God, and
we are! (3:1 -- expressive + informative)

The first three generic speech acts, however, are crucial to the rhetorical strategy of the author. The *directive* function appears to be primary, but as our examination of mitigation in the epistle showed, he only rarely comes right out and orders his readers/listeners to do as he asks. Rather, he applies various forms of "gentle verbal persuasion" in order to reassure them of their standing before God as his children and in adhering to the faith-life that they had received via apostolic testimony "from the very beginning" (3:11). Instead of applying his "power" (authority) as a leader in the church (cf. 1:1-4), the Elder often appeals to the "solidarity" that he enjoys with his readers, i.e. "we": they all needed a Savior from sin as well as a Support during hard testing (e.g. 2:1-2; 3:20-22).[26] This predominantly directive, but at the same time muted, mode of discourse is implicitly reinforced also by the two other major categories of speech act. Thus one notes a periodically reappearing sequence of both *informative* statements, which in the main set forth the essential Christology of the epistle, and also *evaluative* descriptions, which delineate the antithesis, namely, as displayed by the words and deeds of the errorists. Such evaluation-oriented utterances are characteristic of *argumentative* texts.[27] At times these latter two types of utterance appear side by side, e.g.

Now the world along with its cravings is passing away, but he who does the will of God remains
forever (2:17, informative + evaluative)

As was pointed out earlier, such evaluative speech acts are also implicitly directive in the sense that they either warn listeners against or serve to promote the kind of behavior (words/deeds) that is being spoken about. On the other hand, the very mitigated (type 4) sort of directives become in effect almost evaluative in nature because they invite the audience to first apply the generalization, whether positive or negative, to themselves, for example:

He who does what is sinful is of the devil, because the devil has been sinning from the beginning.
The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil.
(3:8, mitigated directive [= evaluative] + informative)

In any case, all three types of speech act—the directive, informative, and evaluative—complement one another to support or undergird the letter's principal aim of persuasion along the lines being delineated by the "Elder," which involve both a set of unchangeable theological principles and values plus an appropriate love-centered

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[26] The manipulation of power and solidarity is one of the "politeness"-related strategies of discourse development, and so is a desire to maintain the addressees' "face," that is, to prevent "shame" and retain their positive "self-image" (Hatim & Mason 1997:79-81). Indeed, they should have remembered "the message [they] heard from the beginning" (3:11), but the author does not overtly rebuke this lapse that at least some seemed to be experiencing.

[27] According to Hatim and Mason, "all argumentative texts seek to promote or simply evaluate certain beliefs or ideas, with conceptual relations such as reason, significance or opposition becoming naturally meaningful and frequent" (1997:131; cf. 213). However, such a characterization would seem to apply largely to discourse organized according to the principles of deductive logic, but not as readily to induction, in which a "thesis" is derived from a variety of examples, illustrations, case studies, anecdotes, stories, and so forth.

life-style to go with these. Thus the Christological assertions (regarding his deity [2:23] and his humanity [4:2]) are made with the expectation that the audience will also affirm and adhere to them. Similarly, the contrary doctrinal and moral position of the antichrists is set forth in the clearest possible terms with the understanding that the author's "dear children" will either avoid or repent of such lawlessness and sinning (3:4-6) at all costs, for it is indeed a matter of life or death (5:12). The discourse of 1 John as a whole is carefully crafted so that all of its parts with respect to both form and content will promote this unmistakable purpose, namely, "knowing" the "truth" about the principles and practice of God-pleasing religion (e.g. 1:6,8; 2:4,8,20,21; 3:19; 4:6; 5:6, 20).[28] By this means the author reassures his fellow-believers (but only them!) that they are definitely on course, having nothing to fear in their relationship to the Father with regard to both present and future (e.g. 3:1-2; 4:17-18; 5:13-14.)

Returning then for a moment to our earlier consideration of four of John's principal rhetorical techniques (recursion, contrast, focus, mitigation), we note that whether individually or in conjunction they represent a rather more "*marked*" or "*dynamic*" form of discourse.[29] There is a perceptible deviation from the norms of ordinary speech or writing, and such a "flouting" of convention usually conveys specific *implicatures*, or implied significance, within the cotext concerned. For example, the superabundant recursion in John would run counter to the so-called "conversational maxim" of *quantity* (i.e. give only as much information as needed), while the various focusing techniques would "violate" the maxim of "manner" (i.e. speak in a simple, straightforward way).[30] Such unexpectedness or relative novelty would urge the audience to take notice, e.g. "Listen, this sentence is important"; or "This expression may have a deeper significance"; or "You need to make a connection here with something that has already appeared in the text." By these means the message is structured and shaped so that it will (from the author's perspective) have the greatest possible rhetorical impact and appeal, but all in the service of its intended spiritual meaning and purpose. This is not literary art "for art's sake" or a strategy of speech acts applied for the sake of mere speaking. It is rather the inspired and heartfelt "testimony" of a writer intent on *reassuring* his readers with "the Word of life" so that their mutual "fellowship" might be reinforced and their "joy" ultimately made "complete" (1:14).

Implications of Johannine rhetoric for biblical studies and contemporary communication

In this final portion of the analysis we will take up the inevitable "*so what*?" factor: How does this information about the different aspects of compositional rhetoric in 1 John help us to better understand his intended message and to transmit it more effectively in today's world? This is a valid twofold concern that needs to be considered in the evaluation of any technical literary study, but perhaps more so where the Word of God is involved. I would hope that at least some of the preceding examples have begun to demonstrate the advantage of looking at such a paraenetic text from a rhetorical perspective: *What* was the original author trying to convey to his readers; *why* did he feel it necessary to do this; and *how* did he go about accomplishing these objectives by means of the various persuasive devices that he used? A careful examination of the rhetoric of discourse can help us to answer some, not necessarily all, of these practical questions. In the following remarks

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[28] 1 John appears to illustrate both "through" and "counter" types of (deductive) argumentation since its textspanning sequence of "theses" regarding theology (Christology) and morality (love + obedience) may or may not be accompanied by a citation (whether directly or by implication) of the opponents' position (Hatim & Mason 1997:127), in the first chapter for example: *through* = vv.1-4; *counter* = vv.8-10; *mixed* = vv.5-7. It is definitely an author "managed" presentation since the discourse is rhetorically fashioned so as to carry out his primary communicative objectives (*ibid*:220).

[29] A marked, "defamiliarized," use of language is that which defies "normal expectations and thereby exhibit[s] a certain degree of discourse dynamism" in order to create a special communicative effect (Hatim & Mason 1997:39). Marked items are less frequent/predictable in occurrence than unmarked ones (*ibid*:12) and hence make a greater impression on the reader/hearer's perception and memory.

[30] Hatim & Mason 1997:215. What actually constitutes the sub-dialect of "normal" *koine* or even New Testament Greek is of course a debatable issue, but it would seem that many at least of the examples cited in the present study would fall outside the bounds of what would be regarded as ordinary literary (epistolary) usage, certainly in their combined occurrence over a stretch of text.

I will summarize and further illustrate these insights according to the two broad categories of form-content and function.

1. Form-Content

I will discuss issues of form and content together because they cannot really be separated in a holistic analysis: Any change or shift in the forms of a discourse will inevitably modify the message that it conveys in some way. Of course, the function may also be affected, but it is somewhat easier to consider this separately. In any case, we turn to the most basic aspect of any composition, that is, the text itself: What light can a rhetorical analysis shed on matters of *textual criticism*? A good example is found in 2:20 and concerns the reading πάντες "all [persons]" as opposed to πάντα "all [things]". The UBS4 text selects the former but assigns it a "somewhat doubtful" [B] rating. Metzger comments on this decision:[31]

> A majority of the Committee, understanding the passage to be directed against the claims of a few to possess esoteric knowledge, adopted the reading πάντες, read by ...The reading πάντα, which is widely supported by ...was regarded as a correction introduced by copyists who felt the need of an object after οἴδαμεν.

However, in favor of πάντα is the overall rhetorical structure of the Greek text—in this instance, a rather long *introversion* of parallel lexical and topical elements that stretches from verses 18 through 28 as follows (given only in summary form):

A (18-19): a "manifestation" of the exit (non-"abiding") of the antichrists [Note
    the internal chiastic construction of v.18, centering upon the "antichrists".]

  B (20-21): about an "anointing" from the "Holy One" so that you know "**all things**";
        John "writes" about the "truth"

    C (22): the liar = antichrist "denies" (2x) that Jesus is the Christ,
          hence both the Father and the Son

      D (23): no one who denies the "Son" has the "Father";
            whoever confesses the "Son" has the "Father"

        E (24a): as for you—let what *you heard*
                  from the beginning
                    abide
                        in you

        E' (24b):   if *in you*-
                      it *abides*
                  what *from the beginning*
              you heard

      D' (24c): you will abide in both the "Son" and the "Father"

    C' (25): this is the "promise" (2x) which he (= Father/Son) gave us, namely, eternal life

  B' (26-27d): about an "anointing" from him that abides in you and which

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[31] Metzger 1994:641. For further discussion, see Smalley 1984:91-92

teaches you "**all things**" concerning what is "true"

A' (27e-28): you must "abide" in him (Christ), for he will be "manifested"

Thus according to this reading, the "all things" (πάντα) of element B would match that of its parallel in B', and the referent would undoubtedly encompass the matter of mutual "abiding," which is stressed in the center of the structure (i.e. E-E', itself a chiastic arrangement). An "internal" argument based on such symmetrical patterns is not conclusive by any means, but it is an additional bit of evidence that needs to be considered in support of one variant or another.

A similar sort of application can be made at the highest levels of discourse structure such as the division of the text into larger paragraph units. A rhetorical-compositional argument may be utilized to argue for one *segmentation* of the text instead of another. For example, a *crux interpretum* as far as the macrostructure of 1 John is concerned appears in 4:16-17: Does a new paragraph begin at v.16 (GW, LB), v.17 (NKJV), or in between the two (NIV, NRSV, REB, NAB, GNB, CEV)? Obviously, a break between verses is the most popular choice, but is this the correct one? A careful examination of the textual patterning in this section of chapter four would tend to support, of all versions, the isolated decision of the NKJV. The following is a summary of the evidence in favor of this format:

a) An *inclusio* is formed between vv. 13 and BOTH 16a by the verb "know" (γινῶσκω, despite a difference in tense) AND 16b by the verb "remain" (μενῶ, despite a difference in person).

b) A series of semantically interrelated chiastic patterns at the close of the pericope (vv.13-16) serves to lock v. 16b into the preceding text:
     15b: God / in him // and he / in God
     16a: the love / God // God / loves
     16b: the one who remains / in love // in God / he remains--and God
                                          in him / he remains.

c) The two paragraphs surrounding vv. 13-16 are linked by a tail-head correspondence (i.e. *exclusio*): "his love in us has been made complete" (12b) – "love with us has been made complete" (17a; note another chiastic arrangement in the wording).

d) The paragraphs beginning at vv. 13 and 17 lead off in the same way, i.e. ἐν τούτῳ (= structural *anaphora*).

e) A contrastive *inclusio* ties vv. 17 and 18 together into a unit: "love has been made perfect" (17a) -- "he has *not* been made perfect in love" (18b).

f) Verse 16b is an important thematic summary statement and better fits as a conclusion to vv. l3ff than as an introduction to vv. l7ff.

An argument such as the preceding based on the compositional arrangement of a discourse is not indisputable of course, but it is a factor that is not always given the attention it deserves either in biblical studies or in text formatting operations.

A recognition of John's use of the rhetorical strategies of recursion, contrast, focus, and mitigation can also assist the analyst in an *interpretation* of the text by calling attention to certain aspects of form-content that often get overlooked simply because they are not perceived. Notice how these four discourse-related devices interact in the following pericope (5.1-5) to heighten the notion of "reassurance" (and a resultant "responsibility"!) that John is reinforcing for his readers:

A Everyone who *believes*—that **Jesus** is the Christ (1a)

    B he has been *begotten of God* (1b),

        C1 and everyone who *loves* <u>the begetter</u> (lc)
           C2 he also *loves* the ones begotten by him (1d).

           C2' In this we know that we *love* the children of God (2a),
        C1' whenever we *love* <u>God</u> (2b),

           D and his commands we keep (2c).

        C1" This is the love of God (3a),

           D' that his *commands* we keep (3b),
            and his *commands* are not heavy (3c).

        B' For the one who has been *begotten of God* (4a),

             E he has *defeated the world* (4b),
             E' and this is the victory
               which has *defeated the world* (4c),
  (A) even our *faith* (4d).

             E" Who is the one who has *defeated the world* (5a),

    A' if not the one who *believes*--that **Jesus** is the Son of God? (5b)

Reiterated lexical correspondences form a number of interlocked parallels which, when spatialized as above, reveal John's tightly structured argument. This passage effectively synopsizes the three major concerns in his letter—the threefold "*test*" of true discipleship: faith in Christ (A), love for fellow Christians (C), and obedience to the divine precepts (D). The other two topical sets are a summary of the gracious results of such fidelity and steadfastness: (B) we are the children of God, and (E) we have overcome the world (and the devil!). This pericope is bounded (i.e. *inclusio*) by a fundamental Christological confession, one that foregrounds his humanity in the name "Jesus," perhaps because this was the particular doctrinal point in controversy. The entire passage is neatly stitched into its cotext by a pair of overlapping key terms (i.e. *anadiplosis*) on either end: "love" (4:21//5:1) and "Jesus" (5:5//5:6).[32]

    In addition to clarifying the various interwoven relationships of meaning, this type of rhetorical analysis can at times throw the weight of evidence in favor of one *exegetical* decision over another (much as in the case of alternative text readings). For example, the discourse organization as shown above would encourage one to construe "love of God" (ἡ ἀγάπη τοῦ θεοῦ) in verse 3 (C1") as an objective genitive, i.e. (our) "love for God," following the analogy of C1 and Cl'. Finally, the symmetrical structure as a whole draws attention to any anomalous elements, those which do not quite fit the pattern—notably, the somewhat obtrusive comment in 3c (D'): "...and his commands are not heavy." However, there may be more meaning here than meets the ear—or

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[32] We note examples of *anaphora* (similar beginnings) with the expression "born of God" at 4:7 and 5:13 in addition to 5:1. The compositional device of *epiphora* (similar endings) is formed by the phrase "Son of God" at 4:15 and 5:12 in addition to 5:5.

the eye: Perhaps this is intended to counter an accusation leveled by the libertinistic schismatics that John's "old" and "new" commands (cf. 2:7-8) were unnecessarily oppressive, an unwarranted limitation of their "Christian freedom" in the evil "flesh/body."

A similar structurally-based argument might shed some light on perhaps the most enigmatic passage in 1 John, namely, 5.6: "This is the one who came through (διά) water and blood--Jesus Christ--not in (ἐν) the water alone, but in the water and the blood." There are understandably many proposed interpretations of the key terms "water" and "blood" (cf. Neufeld 1994:129, n.65), but surrounding symmetrical discourse patterns would lead one to conclude that "water" very likely refers to Jesus' birth, possibly also his ritual "birth" in baptism. This interpretation is suggested by structural *anaphora* and the analogous references to being "born" (γεννάω) in the unit-intial passages of 4:7 and 5:1 (cf. John 1:13-14). The "blood" then designates Christ's vicarious, redemptive death on the cross (cf. 1:7), and together the figurative pair, water and blood, stress the reality and significance of his incarnation. "Jesus," the man, was also the divine "Christ," the "Son of God" (cf. 5:5 [= *anadiplosis*] and 5:12/13 [= *inclusio/exclusio*]).

To conclude this section on the form-content of 1 John as elucidated by its rhetorical dynamics, I will make a brief observation on the overall *organization* of the letter and the relatively common proposal by commentators that its discourse as a whole features a threefold reiteration of the "three tests" of a valid Christian profession: faith (doctrinal), obedience (moral), and love (social). R.C.H. Lenski, for example, posits three cycles that cover these sections of the epistle: 1:5-2:28, 2:29-4:6, and 4:7-5:12.[33] I do not dispute the presence and the importance of these three themes in the letter, but I do not feel that the text can be quite so neatly demarcated in terms of its structure. The third section in particular is difficult to differentiate as evidenced by the titles that are suggested, e.g. "Closer correlation of righteousness, love, and belief."[34] Then too the internal sections are often rather arbitrarily set up and labeled, e.g. "Sonship demands love of fellow believers, 3:10b-24."[35] In this case, the discourse unit proposed is too long, its beginning being more accurately fixed at 3:11, and it includes a distinct segment that does not deal specifically with "sonship," i.e. 3:19-24. The problem is that these inaccurately defined and designated text units may confuse or mislead unsophisticated readers with regard to the author's intended organization of ideas and the unfolding development of his argument. A greater difficulty is that the attempt to apportion the text into clearly differentiated units of content leads one to overlook or ignore the prominent sequence of Christological propositions that runs throughout the entire work, simply because they do not happen to fit into a given larger category.

It may be more accurate, therefore, to describe overall arrangement of 1 John, not as a "spiral," a "winding staircase," or an "inverted pyramid or cone," as is commonly the case,[36] but rather as the dynamic *armature* of a motor which is characterized by a central metal core situated between the poles of a magnet and wrapped with coils of wire. When an electric current is introduced into the wire, the core begins to rotate rapidly due to the magnetic field that is set up thereby creating a powerful force (torque). Such is the ever-changing but always familiar discourse of 1 John. Thus a better way perhaps to display the text's organization is to view the sequence of Christological assertions as the foundational "core" around which is "wound" a variety of individual pericopes that pertain primarily to the macro-themes of "obedience" and "love" but which include a number of topics of distinct but related interest, especially in the first two and the final chapters.

The following diagram is a crude attempt to present a paradigmatic display of the overlapping and interwoven formal organization of content in 1 John, i.e. the "expression" of its "substance". In the central horizontal "channel" is listed the series of Christ-oriented doctrinal passages (all highly condensed or implicit items are indicated in parentheses), and circling around this preeminent nucleus is the sequence of ethical topics

[33] Lenski 1945:366-367. For a similar outline, see Burdick 1985:88-90.
[34] Law, Cited by Burdick 1985:87.
[35] Burdick 1985:89
[36] Some suggestions of commentators listed by Burdick 1985:86, 91.

which are listed in lettered order and identified on the right, including "other" concepts that are related to "love" and/or "obedience," whether by semantic association or antithesis:

LOVE ‖	CHRIST	‖	OBEDIANCE	OTHER	Description
‖		‖			
‖	1:1-2	‖		a	a: divine fellowship and testimony (1:1-4)
‖	1:7,9	‖	b		b: we ought to walk in the light (1:5-7)
‖	------	‖		c	c: we should confess our sins (1:8-10)
‖	2:1-2	‖	d		d: we must obey God's commands (2:1-8)
e ‖	------	‖			e: show light and love your brother (2:9-11)
‖	2:12	‖		f	f: victory in knowing God/Christ (2:12-14)
g ‖	------	‖			g: do not love the world (2:15-17)
‖	------	‖		h	h: revelation of antichrist[s] (2:20-23)
‖	2:22-23	‖		i	i: knowing the Truth/Christ (2:20-23)
‖	(2:28)	‖	j		j: remain faithful in your anointing (2:24-8)
‖	(3:2), 3:8	‖	k		k: God's children do right/avoid sin (2:29-3:10)
l ‖	3:16	‖			l: we should love one another (3:11-18)
‖	(3:23)	‖	m		m: assurance through obedience (3:19-24)
‖	4:2	‖		n	n: discerning the S/spirit of truth (4:1-6)
o ‖	4:9-10	‖			o: we love because God loved us (4:7-16)
p ‖	4:14-15	‖			p: love is fearless and unfeigned (4:17-21)
q ‖	5:1,5	‖			q: victorious love is built on faith (5:1-5)
‖	5:6	‖		r	r: true testimony about God's Son (5:6-12)
‖	5:11-12	‖		s	s: reassurance of answered prayer (5:13-15)
‖	5:13	‖		t	t: the sin that does/not lead to death (5:16-7)
‖	5:20	‖		u	u: knowledge that we are God's children (5:18-20)
‖	-----	‖	v		v: keep away from idols! (5:21)

The preceding is not offered as the complete "answer" to the mystery of the structure of 1 John, but at least it does offer a different perspective on how the author has expertly fashioned the text in order to effectively carry out his communicative purposes (to be discussed below). The sustained thread of theologically interrelated dogmatic assertions provides a unified "directive" purpose for the whole, i.e. how Christians are to confront the crisis posed by the antichrists, and gives both cohesion (surface *texture*) as well as cohesion (deep *structure*) to the entire message. The schema proposed above seeks to give special prominence to the doctrinal component of this epistle, namely, the person and work of "Jesus Christ, the Son of God" (3:23; 5:20), but this is because of the perceived importance of this truth to John's message as a whole. It is also interesting to observe that almost a quarter of the verses which comprise this book include some significant Christological statement (i.e. 26/115). As is evident throughout the text, the letter also closes on a vividly contrastive note (v): thus an "idol" is anything (of the antichrist [2:22], the world [4:5], or the devil [3:11]) pertaining to our faith or

practice that would lead us away from fellowship and life with Christ and his heavenly Father (1:3; 5:20—the "great" *inclusio*!).[37]

2. Function

The form and content of any literary work (discussed above) are used in the service of function, that is, the principal objectives of the author in composing his text. John leaves no doubt as to what his main communicative goal was,[38] for this is clearly stated in 5:13 (NIV, cf. Jn. 20:31):

I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life.

Thus the Elder wanted to inspire his receptors with the "confidence" (παρρησία, 5:14; 3:21) that they were most certainly the "children of God" (5:19), disciples who could look forward with eager expectation to the "coming" of their Lord (2:28). Indeed, the John's practically-minded discourse is clear and easy to understand. But as I have attempted to show in this study, the apparent simplicity of the text's surface structure, masks a rather complicated interweaving and intensification of key themes and concepts. On an implicit level—even when it is not recognized by the reader or hearer—such a "*rhetoric of reassurance*" acts to subtly reinforce the main contours of his message. For those who are able to investigate the original language more fully, each entry into the text reveals more intricacies of its construction that draw attention to some previously unperceived aspect of meaning. One might even go so far as to say that the distinct iterative, interlocking, and overlapping style of 1 John in itself embodies a formal reflection of the book's central truths, namely, the need for complete, unequivocal unity, harmony, communion, and fidelity within the corporate Body of Christ.[39] Furthermore, the theological, moral, and social components of the message cannot be separated from one another. In other words, the central themes of faith, love, and obedience are interconnected and work themselves out in conjunction--that is, through the "anointed" leading of the Holy Spirit (2:27; 3:24; 5:8), within the individual Christian's daily life as well as the communal fellowship of believers.

In addition to enhancing the overall effectiveness of a communication of content, the reassuring rhetoric of John performs a number of other, secondary functions in the discourse. Four of these are worthy of special mention, namely, those which pertain to impact, appeal, urgency, and memory. The compositional strategies of recursion, contrast (antithesis), focus, and mitigation operate together to augment the persuasive "force" of the text—under the controlling direction of Holy One (2:20). Thus a judicious application of rhetorical technique serves to convey the intended message—with greater *impact* on the mind, especially with regard to its main points; in a more *appealing*, hence attractive, manner; with the necessary *urgency* as befits issues which pertain to life and death; and with increased *memorability* so that the basic teachings can be more readily recalled and

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[37] In the context of the discourse as a whole, the seemingly misplaced reference to "idols" at the end of 1 John turns out to be very much "in place" and a graphic way for the Elder to leave his readership with something very colorful and concrete to remember: This prohibition calls to mind the First Commandment (Exodus 20:4-6, 23) and its juxtaposition with a confession of "Jesus Christ" (5:20) also stresses the deity of their Lord and Savior. Thus anyone who would deny Jesus in word or deed also denies the Father (cf. 2:22-23)—hence his/her idolatry!

[38] A text's dominant rhetorical purpose "will determine the factors and circumstances in a communicative situation which are to be selected and made salient" (Hatim & Mason 1997:130). These would naturally include the specific stylistic (textual) features that are selected in order to accomplish this primary function in accordance with the particular "text type" concerned, i.e. argumentation, exposition, or instruction (*ibid*:193-194).

[39] Thus a "flouting" of the "conversational maxim" of "quantity" (i.e. supply only as much information as needed) would stimulate this "implicature" of fundamental theological-pragmatic significance in relation to the text's abundance of recursion (Hatim & Mason 1997:215).

applied. Johannine discourse is an excellent illustration of the integrated operation of these four basic functions.[40]

Granted that the preceding assessment of the communicative quality of 1 John is true, one confronts the unavoidable question: All this applies to the biblical *Greek* text, so what does this mean for those who cannot read the original? How can the essential meaning and purpose of John's "rhetoric of reassurance" best be communicated today, especially to those who may be facing a religious crisis of doubt and controversy similar to that which threatened the various Johannine addressee communities? A language-contrastive, discourse-oriented, structure-functional, stylistic-rhetorical method of text analysis such as that (partially) exemplified in this study has many important implications for transmitting the biblical message most effectively in receptor languages all over the world. I will limit my consideration of this development to the three associated areas of Bible translation, text supplementation, and media transposition:

It would seem at first that *Bible translators* would have a relatively easy time with the rhetorical dimension of Johannine literature due to its uncomplicated sentence syntax and the seemingly elementary diction. But John's vocabulary is actually quite complex due to its general (some might say "abstract") nature, which often allows for more than one interpretation, perhaps deliberately so.[41] A related difficulty in many languages, such as the Bantu group in Africa, is the expression of basic "event" ideas in the form of nouns rather than as verbs which are stylistically more natural, e.g. love, anointing, command, confidence, and sin.

On the other hand, the use of so much lexical recursion, whether for topical highlighting and/or emphasis, does not present an aesthetic problem as may be the case in modern English writing. Repetition, exact as well as synonymous, in Bantu languages is characteristic of all *oral* forms of discourse, which is by far the most common mode of communication in the regions where they are spoken. Similarly, the dramatic, antithetical manner of expression is a familiar technique in both public narration and formal argumentation, as are the main devices employed to convey a special "focus" in 1 John, i.e. demonstrative pointing, front-(back)-shifting, and the use of a separable personal pronoun. However, it may be helpful to point out the various recurrent similarities and contrasts for the reader, e.g. in footnotes or by means of selective cross-references, so that they may be studied also synchronically in relation to one another as distinct topical groupings (possibly including also significant correspondences in John's gospel).

Perhaps the biggest challenge to translators is to find corresponding devices in their language to convey the various forms of "mitigation" that are found in the reiterated appeals of the Apostle to his troubled flock in need of divine reassurance. The greatest difficulty in this respect is the literal use of a conditional construction for this purpose, e.g. "If we say that..." Frequently this will have to be restructured or rephrased in a given translation in order to preserve the intended sense, e.g. Bantu: "if' => "when(ever)" (1:8-10).[42] The primary goal in all such stylistic matters is to discover and utilize devices that are the closest functional equivalents in the receptor language, namely, those compositional forms (including genres) which have essentially the same

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[40] 1 John is usually classified as an instance of the "*epideictic* species" of Classical rhetoric. "The purpose of an epideictic speech is to increase the intensity of adherence to values held in common by the audience and the speaker" (Perelman & Olbrechts-Tyteca 1969:52). Watson gives another characteristic: "...the aim of epideictic rhetoric is praise and blame in order to increase or decrease the ethos of others ....[and] stresses the best course of action to take under the circumstances" (1993:121-2). Obviously, the "antichrists" and their adherents are "blamed" in 1 John, and the "best course" to follow is "the message you heard from the beginning" (3:11). But I do not think that it is helpful to categorically exclude the two other so-called "species" of rhetoric from the epistle (*pace* Watson *ibid*:123). Surely there are elements of both *judicial* pronouncement (i.e. judging right from wrong in relation to the past, e.g. the significance of Christ's incarnation) and especially also *deliberative* appeal (i.e. urging expedient versus harmful behavior in relation to one's future) intermingled with the epideictic variety (cf. Murphy 1994:62).

[41] I have termed the intentional use of two (or more) senses under the same lexical form "semantic density" (Wendland 1990). The point is that both senses are non-contradictory and meaningful in the given cotext. It may be that John's "concentrated" and compact form of discourse was made possible by the fact that the recipients of his letters were already familiar with the concepts concerned and probably much of the instruction given by their "Elder" as well, for example: "he who is in you" = (a) God +/- (b) Christ +/- (c) the Holy Spirit, and/or (a + b + c).

[42] Thus in Chichewa, a south-central Bantu language (Malawi/Zambia), the intended relation would be expressed, not by a "pure" conditional conjunction, i.e. *ngati* "if' (hypothetical), but by an "indefinite relative" verbal infix, i.e. *-ka-* "if/whenever." On the other hand, a "present general" condition like that found in 3:21, would require a causal conjunction in Chewa, i.e. *popeza* "since."

rhetorical force and purpose. In cases where such form-functional "matches" cannot be made in translation, especially with regard to certain "marked" forms (e.g. figurative language) in the original, then the principle of "compensation," or replacement, may be applied whereby different literary devices (e.g. intensifiers) are employed in the target language to reproduce the overall intended effect.[43]

A serious problem that faces contemporary communicators of the Johannine message is what to do about the many meaningful *structural patterns* that are formed by the various types of recursion which are found in the text. An accurate division of the composition into smaller cohesive units, or "paragraphs," is an important exercise, for it is the most evident and immediate tool for showing how John ordered and arranged his thoughts. Therefore this process cannot be left either to chance or to arbitrary choice. As was shown earlier, a careful study of the larger textual organization can often help to provide evidence that will support one breakdown of the discourse over another possibility. But then there is the more complex issue of what to do with all the symmetrical patterning that lies just beneath the surface of the text—patterns that are present not just for esthetic embellishment, but which serve to foreground certain crucial themes and motifs throughout the epistle. Perhaps not a great deal may be done in this regard due to conservative publishing procedures, especially where Bibles are concerned, but it may be helpful on occasion (e.g. Bible study, sermon bulletin insert, printed text for a special religious occasion) to employ a more rhetorically-sensitive discourse display in order to reveal the dynamics of the letter as it was originally fashioned and focused.[44] For the sake of illustration, the following is a presentation of the pericope of 1 John 3:19-24 in a single-column format which is more closely patterned after that of the original text (the translation is my own):

> The practice of love is how we know that we belong to the truth, [19]
> and it enables us to set our hearts at rest in God's presence.
>> For if our conscience condemns us, [20]
>> we trust that God is greater than our conscience,
>>> and he knows all things
>
> Dear friends, since our conscience cannot condemn us, [21]
> we have confidence before God
> in knowing that we receive the things we pray for. [22]
>> Because of this we hold to his precepts
>> and do the things which are pleasing to him.
>>> This is his great command— [23]
>>>> that we believe in the name
>>>>> *of his Son, Jesus Christ,*
>>>> and that we love one another,
>>> just as Jesus commanded us.
>> All those who hold to his precepts abide in him, [24]
>> and he abides in them.
> So this is how we know that he lives in us:
> We know it by the Holy Spirit whom he gave us.

Of course, some preliminary explanation will undoubtedly be necessary in order to advise readers as to how such a layout of the text operates and what it is supposed to indicate, e.g. with a special emphasis above on the central Christological core.[45] But once people become familiar with the technique, it can help them to better

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[43] For a discussion on the application of this principle, see Hatim & Mason 1997:114-116.

[44] Such elaborately patterned (parallelistic/introverted) structures are admittedly less common (hence more rhetorically "marked") in English than in Hebrew literary discourse. However, there seems to be no other way (i.e. without massive verbal restructuring and versal reordering) to efficiently and effectively convey the original textual functions of this device, e.g. cohesive bonding, thematic highlighting, lexical linkaging, rhythmic sequencing, sectional demarcating, and generic differentiation (i.e. poetry vs. prose).

[45] The importance of the structural nucleus in v.23 is implicitly reinforced by the underlying semantic organization of this pericope. A propositional analysis reveals the central, twofold "command" to be enclosed, or enveloped, by a pair of motivational kernel-clause

understand the distinctive movement of meaning within a given pericope, and it may also enable them to read it more intelligibly, both silently and as a public proclamation. Even if it proves impossible (due to printing conventions) to typographically display a text's principal structural patterns as just illustrated, a simple reorganization and formatting of the discourse according to rhythmic utterance units (e.g. the individual line segments above) would greatly assist oral readers/reciters to "perform" their piece publicly in a more meaningful way. It may be observed in this connection that various other "supplementary helps" such as section headings, cross references,[46] explanatory footnotes, and diagrams/charts/ illustrations can also be employed to give readers (and through their more nuanced elocution also hearers) a clearer understanding of what is going on in the original text with regard to form, content, and function.

The preceding comments bring up a final matter of concern in the current task of communicating the Word of God as accurately and effectively as possible. It is one thing to have a reliable translation of the biblical text in meaningful language, but then the question is: Which is the best modern medium to transmit the Word in view of the many options in today's world? How can we encourage people to just listen—perceptively—to the message in the first place? Questions like these lead up to the issue of "*media transposition*," that is, which channel of transmission is best suited to convey the translated Scriptures for a particular human constituency and situational context (including spiritual need). Taped cassettes, for example, may be the best form of communication in areas that have a low level of functional literacy and where vigorous oral discourse is by far the most popular mode of message transmission, even for the literate (e.g. many parts of Africa). The esthetics of such audio productions might be further enhanced through the inclusion of a text-complementary musical background in the local idiom and by means of either an oratorical declamation of the discourse in rhythmic segments in the manner of a traditional praise poet or a dramatic presentation using several contrastive voices and speech styles.

On the other hand, an electronic format (computer diskette, CD-ROM, and perhaps also the Internet) may be an effective vehicle in technologically advanced and "gadget oriented" societies where Christianity is a decidedly minority religion (e.g. many parts of Asia). For the latter group, a device such as a "hypertext" software program would be a useful tool first of all to give wider access to the biblical text, and secondly to better reveal its literary artistry and theological message, for example, with respect to a given passage any lexical or structural parallels and correspondences, both within and without the discourse concerned, i.e. *intra-* and *inter*-textual references. Such an interactive electronic device would draw the user's attention to the religious depth and literary richness of 1 John, e.g. in relation to 2 & 3 John, John's gospel, Revelation, the synoptic gospels, and so forth, in increasingly wider circles of semantic relevance.

But when all is said and done—or tried, e.g. a modern, idiomatic translation, a well-formatted text in print, even a high-tech multimedia production—the means must never be allowed to overshadow the divine *message*. Such techniques may be of great assistance in the contemporary transmission of John's epistolary homily, but our primary theological emphasis and communicational focus must always remain firmly fixed upon the content of what the Elder had to say, in particular, concerning his foundational Christological core. Only a correct confession about Jesus the Christ in word and deed will result in genuine Christian conversion and communion. Indeed, this message is the only thing that can provide real comfort, encouragement, and hope to all his "little children" today as they continue to wage their ongoing battles against all the "antichrists" and "idols" of this "world-age." We may be about the enter the twenty-first century, but the moral and spiritual

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complexes, namely, vv. 19-22 and v.24. Even the "soundscape" of the discourse is pressed into service to focus attention on the Christological center: τοῦ υἱοῦ αὐτοῦ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ --a rhymed and rhythmically elongated focal phrase.

[46] More important than the typical lexical and topical references for an oral-aural oriented audience, e.g. the Chewa and many other Bantu peoples, would be those of a *narrative* nature, that is, references) to OT or NT stories that illustrate or exemplify the main concept, truth, or teaching of a given pericope (this idea was suggested in a paper entitled "Bible Translation and the Affective Domain of the Thai," presented by Ms. Ubolwan Mejudhon to the UBS Triennial Workshop, May 19, 1997, in Merida Mexico, p.17). For example, Christ's extended metaphor of the vine and its branches (John 15:1-17) would be an appropriate background reference for 1 John 3:19-24.

"darkness" surrounding us is just as great as it was 2000 years ago (2:9-11, 15-17)—and hence the corresponding need for the divine "light" of such a dynamic rhetoric of reassurance (1:7).

ἡμεῖς ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ ἐσμεν! (4:6a)

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