

Theo 210, Week #11:
Questions about the Johannine Letters (ANSWER KEY)
The University of St. Francis

True/False

1. True Many scholars believe that the opponents denounced in 1 Jn espoused Docetism, the view that Jesus was pure spirit and only seemed to be human.
2. True The author of 1 Jn claims that people who do not love cannot know God because God is love. (1 Jn 1: 9)
3. True Many apocalyptic writers viewed history as running in a straight line toward a predestined end.
4. True Modern-day apocalypticists tend to interpret the Book of Revelation predictively, holding that its many visions and symbols relate to contemporary events.
5. False Virtually all modern scholars believe that the Gospel of John and the Book of Revelation stem from the same author.
6. True The author of the Book of Revelation is one of many New Testament authors who explicitly claimed divine inspiration for his work. (Rev. 1: 10-11)
7. True Many believe that the number 666 in the Book of Revelation is a symbolic representation of the emperor Nero.

Short Answer

The Letters of John

1. Historically, the author of John's gospel has been regarded as the author of 1 Jn as well. In what way does the writer, in his introduction, seek to reinforce the truth of his message?
 - a. By stating that it's all perfect common sense.
 - b. *By describing himself as a witness to the life of Jesus***
 - c. By drawing upon his authority as an apostle and church leader.
 - d. By claiming that God will strike dead any that don't believe him.

"That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched — this we proclaim concerning the Word of life. The life appeared; we have seen it and testify to it, and we proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and has appeared to us." (1 Jn 1: 1-2) In John's letters, he appears to be countering a false doctrine known as Docetism. This held that Jesus only appeared on Earth in pure spirit form and with no physical body. John, here, is quick to point out that he is not only proclaiming what he has seen but also what he has touched.

The name John is never mentioned anywhere in his three letters. Their traditional attribution to the apostle John comes from this claim to have been an earthly witness of Jesus, and from the similarities in style that they share with John's gospel.

2. What is the message that the author of 1 Jn claims to have heard from Jesus and is now proclaiming to his readers? (1 Jn 1: 5)
 - a. God is All-Powerful
 - b. God is Forever
 - c. God is not Dead
 - d. *God is Light.***

"This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: God is light; in him there is no darkness at all." (1 Jn 1: 5) John's

constant refrain through this first letter is that it's impossible to sin (be in darkness) and truly know God. Light is also a recurring motif in John's gospel. References include: "He himself was not the light; he came only as a witness to the light. The true light that gives light to every man was coming into the world." (John 1: 8-9) "This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that his deeds will be exposed." (John 3: 19-20) "When Jesus spoke again to the people, he said, 'I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.'" (John 8: 12)

3. The author of 1 Jn says that some people deceive themselves - the truth is not in them - when they say that they are living without what? (1 Jn 1: 8)

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|----------|---------|
| a. Sleep | c. Sin |
| b. Jesus | d. Food |

"If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us." (1 Jn 1: 8) These are words that are now used in the Eucharistic liturgies of many Christian denominations.

4. The author of 1 Jn accuses those who deny the humanity of Jesus of being in grave doctrinal and moral error, calling them what?

- | | |
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| a. Heretics. | c. The Circumcision. |
| b. Dogs. | d. Anti-Christ. |

5. At the beginning of 1 Jn: 2, the author encourages his readers, saying that that they have Jesus to help them in their fight with sin. Which of these is NOT one of the phrases that he uses to describe this work of Jesus?

- a. He is an atoning sacrifice for our sins.
- b. He is the "Righteous One."
- c. *His punishment will stop us making the same mistake again.*
- d. He speaks to the Father in our defense.

"My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defense — Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world." (1 Jn 2: 1-2) John's view of Christian faith is not of a punishing God but of a father who lavishes great love on his followers (1 Jn 3: 1) and hears their every request (1 Jn 5: 14).

6. People are torn, according to the author, between the things of the world and the things of God. He implores his readers not to love the world or anything in it. Which word completes the following quote?

"Yet the world and its enticement are passing away. But whoever does the will of God remains ____." (1 Jn 2: 17)

- a. *Forever.*
- b. Longer.
- c. In Peace.
- d. And Learns.

"World" is another word of which John makes distinctive use in his gospel. The sense he seeks to convey is very much in line with the saying that Christians should be "in the world but not of it" and is quite different to the other gospel writers. This is best illustrated from the following verses in which Jesus is praying for his disciples on the night of his arrest:

"I have given them your word and the world has hated them, for they

are not of the world any more than I am of the world. My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one. They are not of the world, even as I am not of it." (John 17: 14-16).

7. In 1 Jn 2 - 3, the author addresses three groups of people, differentiated by age. Which of these is NOT one of those groups?

- a. Fathers
- b. *Grandfathers in the Faith*
- c. Young Men
- d. Dear Children

1 Jn 3-11 is an example of a writing style known as parallelism. John speaks to each group, identifying the children as having been forgiven and knowing the Father; the young men as having overcome the evil one; and the fathers with knowing "him who is from the beginning." Probably he is directing these comments to different levels of spiritual maturity within the church.

8. Like many in the early church, the author of 1 John believed that the end times and second coming were near. John refers to which happening in order to support this belief? (1 Jn 2: 18-19)

- a. *There has been a division within the church*
- b. A date has been printed in the church notices
- c. A comet has been seen in the sky
- d. A totally reliable prophet has predicted the event

"Dear children, this is the last hour; and as you have heard that the antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have come. This is how we know it is the last hour. They went out from us, but they did not really belong to us. For if they had belonged to us, they would have remained with us; but their going showed that none of them belonged to us." (1 Jn 2: 18-19)

To take him literally, John believes not just that this is the last days but also the final hour. In seeing doctrinal division within the church as evidence of this, he may be drawing on the tradition found in both

2 Peter and Jude that:

"In the last times there will be scoffers who will follow their own ungodly desires." (Jude 18 see also 2 Peter 3: 3). Jude attributes these words to the apostles themselves.

Curiously, the Bible's only use of the word antichrist comes in John's first two letters. It should also be printed with a lower case "a" as John does not have one specific person in mind. Rather he is thinking more generally of the spirit of the age, that is opposed to the things of Jesus, and those affected by it.

9. "Those who obey his commands live in him, and he in them." (1 Jn 3: 24) What does the author of 1 Jn offer as evidence that Jesus lives in Christians?

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|-----------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| a. The Martyrdom of Stephen | c. <i>The Gift of the Holy Spirit</i> |
| b. Old Testament Prophecy | d. He Offers no Evidence |
- "Those who obey his commands live in him, and he in them. And this is how we know that he lives in us: We know it by the Spirit he gave us." (1 Jn 3: 24)*

For the early Christians, the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, as given on the day of Pentecost, was the crowning confirmation of the truth of the gospel. The writer of Ephesians, using the language of business and leaving a deposit to secure a purchase, describes the Holy Spirit thus:

"And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession — to the praise of his glory." (Ephesians 1: 13-14).

10. Echoing many of the New Testament writers, the author warns that his readers should not be surprised if the world hates them. To which Old Testament story does he refer, claiming that it shows an evil man killing his righteous brother? (1 Jn 3: 12-13)

- a. Jacob and Esau
- b. *Cain and Abel*
- c. Moses and Aaron
- d. Judah and Joseph

"Do not be like Cain, who belonged to the evil one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his own actions were evil and his brothers were righteous. Do not be surprised, my brothers, if the world hates you." (1 Jn 3: 12-13)

Jude, in his short book, also uses Cain as an illustration of evil and rebellious ways (Jude 11)

11. At the beginning of 1 Jn 4, what does the author say it is necessary to do when anyone claims spiritual revelation?

- a. Put their ideas into action
- b. Promote them within the church
- c. Run a mile
- d. *Test the spirits*

"Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world." (1 Jn 4: 1)

For John, spiritual revelation is not enough unless it is grounded in acceptable doctrine. Here, he is once again taking aim at the Docetists (those who claimed Jesus had no physical body) as, in the following verse, he writes:

"This is how you can recognize the Spirit of God: Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, but every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God." (1 Jn 4: 2-3).

John is, of course, reflecting the words of Jesus that Christians shouldn't blindly accept everyone that claims to come in his name:

"Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves. By their fruit you will recognize them." (Matthew 7: 15-16).

12. The author of 2 & 3 Jn identifies himself only as what?

- a. The Alpha and the Omega.
- b. A Fellow Servant.
- c. The Apostle John.
- d. *The Elder*

John does not elaborate on what is meant by "The Elder," but it is generally presumed to indicate a role in church leadership. In fact, none of the letters attributed to John even bear his name. The apostle John has, traditionally, been regarded as their author due to a similarity in style with John's gospel.

13. In 2 Jn, he is writing to "the chosen lady and her children." What do most people interpret this to mean?

- a. They have no idea
- b. The Virgin Mary and the siblings of Jesus
- c. *A Church congregation*
- d. A woman he was hoping to marry

We have no other record of the situation in which John is writing. It is most probable that there is a mother church with various satellite house churches. The "chosen lady" would therefore refer to the central church and "her children" either to the church members or to the other churches.

14. In 2 & 3 Jn, the author describes the recipients as having brought him great joy by doing what?

- a. Using stand-up comedy to promote the gospel
- b. Learning verses from scripture
- c. *Walking in the truth*
- d. Supporting him financially

"It has given me great joy to find some of your children walking in the truth, just as the Father commanded us."

(2 Jn 4) "It gave me great joy to have some brothers come and tell about your faithfulness to the truth and how you continue to walk in the truth."

(3 Jn 3)

John may be so overwhelmed with joy that he feels compelled to write about it, but it's also a great way, psychologically, to make the subjects more receptive to what you're about to ask of them!

"For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ." (John 1: 17)

*"Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."
(John 8: 32)*

Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. (John 14: 6)

"But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth." (John 16: 13)

This reinforces the view that John was familiar with those to whom he was writing.

15. It appears that John is having to address an element of disorder within the church. He returns to a familiar theme - "Love one another" - but how does he define love on this occasion? (2 Jn 5-6)

- a. Imitating those in leadership
- b. Laying down your life if required
- c. *Obeying God's commands*
- d. Showing hospitality to pilgrims

"And now, dear lady, I am not writing you a new command but one we have had from the beginning. I ask that we love one another. And this is love: that we walk in obedience to his commands. As you have heard from the beginning, his command is that you walk in love." (2 Jn 5-6)

This is a theme that harks back to John's first letter where, several times, he links love with obedience to God's commands. It is probable that one of his targets was those that distorted the gospel to claim that, if salvation came through faith alone, any behavior was acceptable. Here, though, it is most likely preparing the ground for the attack he is about to launch on those to whom he is doctrinally opposed.

16. John warns the church against deceivers. What is the particular heresy that he attributes to these people? (2 Jn 7)

- a. They do not acknowledge the authority of John.
- b. *They do not acknowledge that Jesus came in the flesh*
- c. They believe that sacrifices are still necessary.
- d. They believe that Jesus was a woman.

"Many deceivers, who do not acknowledge Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh, have gone out into the world. Any such person is the deceiver and the antichrist." (2 Jn 7)

The name of this heresy is Docetism. Its proponents believed that Jesus only appeared in spiritual form. He, therefore, couldn't have

had a physical body and couldn't have died on the cross.

17. How does John urge his readers to treat any visitors that do not bring “the teaching of Christ”? (2 Jn 10)

- a. *Do not welcome them*
- b. Report them to the apostles
- c. Try to convert them to the truth
- d. Drown them in the nearest river

“If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not take him into your house or welcome him.”
(2 Jn 10)

This goes against the traditional Christian teaching of practicing hospitality, which was inherited from the religion's Jewish roots. It does underline, however, how vital John saw it to protect this church from false doctrine.

18. John's third letter is addressed to Gaius, an individual whom John is clearly seeking to bring to his point of view. How does he describe Gaius in the introduction? (3 Jn 1)

- a. My Sparring Partner
- b. *My Dear Friend*
- c. My Father in the Lord
- d. My Old Mate

“The elder, to my dear friend Gaius, whom I love in the truth.” (3 Jn 1)

There is a Gaius mentioned as one of Paul's companions in Acts and also referenced in Paul's letters to the Romans and Corinthians. This was, however, a common name and John gives no further information about Gaius in his letter. It is, therefore, impossible to say whether there is any connection between the two.

It is also impossible to say whether John really was a dear friend of Gaius or whether this is his subtle way of drawing Gaius to his side

against Diotrephes.

19. It appears, from 3 Jn, that John is having problems with a fellow church leader named Diotrephes. Which of these is NOT a fault that John attributes to him?

- a. Slandorous gossip
- b. Refusing to have anything to do with John
- c. Putting people out of the church

d. Gross immorality

"I wrote to the church, but Diotrephes, who loves to be first, will have nothing to do with us. So if I come, I will call attention to what he is doing, gossiping maliciously about us. Not satisfied with that, he refuses to welcome the brothers. He also stops those who want to do so and puts them out of the church." (3 Jn 9-10)

Again, we have no further information about Diotrephes (whose name means "nourished by Jupiter") beyond these verses. All that can, therefore, be said with certainty is that he and John did not agree and that he, too, was in a leadership role having the authority to expel church members. It has been suggested that 2 Jn indicates a division within John's church with opposing factions and that Diotrephes led a satellite house group. Under this theory, John was keen to promote one point of view, but Diotrephes did not want to take sides and chose to avoid contact with either of the parties. It has also been proposed that Diotrephes was the local bishop.

20. By contrast, 3 John is full of praise for someone who shares a name with a silversmith that caused a riot in Ephesus when Paul was visiting. What is this name? (3 Jn 12)

a. Demetrius

c. Damascus

b. Dermatitis

d. Demimoore

"Demetrius is well spoken of by everyone – and even by the truth itself. We also speak well of him, and you know that our testimony is

true." (3 Jn 12)

Ephesus had a pagan temple dedicated to the goddess Artemis. Demetrius was concerned because he made silver shrines dedicated to the goddess and could see his income tumbling as a result of Paul's preaching. He, therefore, called a meeting of local craftsmen and incited them to riot. The crowd seized Gaius and Aristarchus, Paul's travelling companions, but, after several hours, were persuaded to disperse by the city clerk (Acts 19). It is interesting to note the juxtaposition of the names of Demetrius and Gaius here, just as they are in 3 Jn, but there is no reason to believe this is anything other than coincidence.

21. In both letters, the elder says that there is more to be said but doesn't want to do so in writing. Instead, how is he intending to communicate? (2 Jn 12; 3 Jn 13-14)

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| a. By Email | c. Through Mutual Friends |
| b. Face to face | d. In Heaven |

"I have much to write to you, but I do not want to use paper and ink. Instead, I hope to visit you and talk with you face to face, so that our joy may be complete." (2 Jn 12)

"I have much to write you, but I do not want to do so with pen and ink. I hope to see you soon, and we will talk face to face." (3 Jn 13-14)

The Book of Revelation

1. The term "revelation" translates the Greek word *apokalypsis*, which means what?

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| a. Unveiling | c. Left Behind |
| b. Prophecy | d. Shaking |

2. The term “eschatology” means the study of beliefs about what?
- a. Ethics.
 - b. Evil.
 - c. The Origins of the Bible.
 - d. *The End of Time.*
3. An example of apocalyptic writing in the Hebrew Bible would be found in what book of the bible?
- a. 2 Kings.
 - b. 1 Chronicles.
 - c. Micah.
 - d. *Daniel.*
4. Why did many apocalyptic books used bizarre symbols and code words?
- a. Their authors wanted to shock or frighten their readers.
 - b. *Their authors wanted only believers and not the pagan persecutors of the faithful to understand what they were writing.*
 - c. Their authors wanted to confuse their readers.
 - d. Their authors never thought very many people would read what they wrote.
5. The author of Revelation claims to be on what Mediterranean island when he receives the visions recorded in his book? (Rev 1: 9)
- a. Cyprus
 - b. Crete
 - c. Mykonos
 - d. *Patmos*
6. If the image of the lamb represents Christ in the Book of Revelation, then what image represents Satan?
- a. Cow
 - b. Eagle
 - c. Unicorn
 - d. *Dragon*

7. In the Book of Revelation, events happen most often in what number of sets?
- a. Two. **c. Seven.**
b. Three. d. Twelve.
8. In Rev. 12-16, a war in heaven parallels what battle, a climactic confrontation between Good and Evil on the earth?
- a. Armageddon** c. Waterloo
b. Actium d. Thermopylae
9. Most modern scholars believe that the beast in Rev. 13 is a symbol for what?
- a. The Roman Government (specifically Nero).**
b. Saddam Hussein.
c. Napoleon Bonaparte.
d. Adolf Hitler.
10. Revelation 20 portrays the final place of the wicked as a lake of fire, which the author also calls what?
- a. The Deep Six. **c. The Second Death.**
b. The End of the Line. d. The Mark of the Beast.
11. In Rev. 21-22, the author's image of heaven is described using the bizarre symbol of a wedding between what?
- a. Prince and a Pauper. c. Beast and a Dragon.
b. Lamb and a Holy City. d. Lion and a Lamb.

Essay

1. What sort of conflict appears in each of the three Johannine letters?

Each of the letters indicates in its own way that there is conflict among the readers. In 3 Jn, the dispute appears at first reading to be purely political, taking the form of a conflict between rival leaders. In 2 Jn, that conflict is connected to the issue of proper teaching. And in 1 Jn, doctrinal and moral disagreements dominate. The conflict appears to be one generated from within rather than from without. In contrast to the Gospel of John, the issue is not hostility or persecution from the world but internal disputes and rivalries.

The surface issue concerns the proper understanding of Jesus, but the dimensions or even the precise nature of the conflict are not easy to recover. First and Second John clearly indicate that convictions concerning Jesus have become – if not the cause of the divisions – at the very least the banners of the respective parties. In the most explicit fashion, the content of belief, rather than simply the assent of faith, becomes here a criterion for membership. The terms “orthodoxy,” “heterodoxy,” and “heresy” are appropriate ones in these letters. Thus, we find the use of the verb “to confess” (homologeō, exhomologeō; 1 Jn 2: 23, 4: 2, 3, 15, and 2 Jn 7) and “to deny” (arneomai; 1 Jn 2: 22–23). In a shift from the Fourth Gospel, the opponents are thus not unbelievers but fellow Christians; they are not purely outsiders but ones who had at first belonged to the author’s own group: those “who went out from us” (1 Jn 2: 19). Now, they are given traditional titles of disdain: they are “false prophets” (1 Jn 4: 1) and “antichrists” (1 Jn 2: 18, 22; 4: 3). In the description of 2 Jn 7, they are above all “deceivers who have gone out into the world.”

These designations do not, however, establish what doctrinal points separate the various Johannine groups. For instance, one could question how literally the author understands the term “antichrist”: does the individual completely deny Christ or simply hold to a different view of Jesus as Christ? A number of creedal statements in 1

and 2 Jn are pertinent here. In 1 Jn we find the phrases “he who denies that Jesus is the Christ” and “he who denies the Father and the Son”; together, these statements designate a liar and an antichrist (2: 22). In contrast, the readers are to “believe in the name of the Son Jesus Christ” (3: 23). A similar opposition appears later between “every spirit which confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh” and “every spirit that does not confess Jesus” (4: 2–3). In the same chapter, the orthodox group testifies “that the Father has sent the Son as Savior of the world,” and this is placed next to “whoever confesses that Jesus is Son of God” (4: 14–15). A series of confessional phrases follows in chapter 5: “whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ” (5: 1); “whoever believes that Jesus is the Son of God” (5: 5); “whoever believes in the Son of God” (5: 10); “believe in the name of the Son of God” (5: 13); and “we know that the Son of God has come” (5: 20). Finally, 2 Jn 7 has, “who will not acknowledge the coming of Jesus Christ in the flesh.”

These phrases make fairly obvious what this orthodox group confesses. But it is not at all clear what the content of the “heterodox” belief is. It is not certain that everything the author’s group affirms is being denied by their opponents. Nor does it appear that the denials add up to a coherent confession. According to the writer, the antichrist denies that “Jesus is the Christ,” denying the Father and the Son (1 Jn 2: 22). But it is difficult to determine whether the denials of Jesus (1 Jn 4: 3) and “that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh” (2 Jn 7) represent expansions, refinements, or equivalents to the rejection of Jesus as the Christ. We cannot confirm whether the opponents challenge the confession that Jesus is the Messiah, that he is the Son of God, or that he is truly human. Perhaps they denied that Jesus “came” as God’s son, believing instead that he was “adopted” as God’s son in the resurrection. Moreover, we cannot be certain that the author actually knew the precise position of those who had separated themselves from the community. Indeed, given the ancient practice of vilifying opponents—depicting them as having all forms of doctrinal and moral failures—we must also question how much of the portrayal may be owed to the author. Nevertheless, the writer

does seem convinced that the opponents are deficient in their understanding and appreciation of Jesus. The figure who was, according to the Fourth Gospel, the abiding center of their life and unity, is here the focal point of dissension and division.

Any attempt to reconstruct a coherent position for the “opponents” must deal with two methodological difficulties. First, we cannot assume from every positive statement or exhortation that the opposition held a direct counterview. The author’s insistence on love, and particularly on the practical expression of love, may reflect a lack of care among the opposition party; on the other hand, it need not. Second, we cannot assume that the theological framing of the division was either more or less important than the social dimensions of that conflict. These were at least twofold: the mutual withholding of hospitality, and rival claims to leadership (see 2 Jn and 3 Jn). We do not have sufficient information to decide whether the political and social conflicts preceded, accompanied, or followed the theological disagreement. Moreover, we must always keep in mind that, in early Christianity, to deny hospitality to a fellow Christian was also to deny Christ. Thus, there may be a confluence of conceptions here, so that the theological conflict expresses at a higher level the reality of the social dissension.

Whatever the precise nature of the disputes, any sort of division would be a severe crisis for a church that lived within the symbolic framework we have seen in the Fourth Gospel. The farewell discourse of Jesus (John 15: 1–17: 26) portrays a community of friends. They share in one Spirit; being joined to Jesus as Jesus is to the Father, in a fellowship of unity and love. For a community with such a self-understanding, any dissension and deviance would be difficult to understand or assimilate. But a clash over the right understanding of Jesus, and a division leading to mutual excommunication, would challenge this community’s very identity and existence.

2. What accusations are made against those who left the Johannine community?

The remarkable thing about 1 Jn is that it does not consist of a bitter polemic against those who departed or a sustained refutation of their claims. The focus of this writing is not on the outsiders but on those who remain. However, they are not simply congratulated for holding on to the truth. Rather, they are challenged to a renewed affirmation of their identity, which cannot be simply a matter of correct doctrine. It is a practical exhortation throughout: it begins with: "I am writing to you so that you may not sin" (2: 1); and ends with: "Little children, keep yourselves from idols" (5: 21).

In 1 Jn we find the rare phenomenon of a perfectionistic and sectarian community dealing with failure and division not by blaming those who left but by renewing community identity through a recollection of the fundamentals of community belief. The faithful remnant is encouraged to cultivate a new alertness to its own failures. And these failures, it becomes clear, are those of complacency: an unheeding and comfortable confidence in the sufficiency simply of being an insider. But it is not enough, any longer, to claim the Spirit; now everyone must "test every spirit to see whether they are of God" (4: 1). It is not enough to claim distinction from "the world"; the departure of some has shown that "the world" is not simply out there but also inside the community itself. Thus, the response to division is the cultivation of stronger borders of community identity in order to solidify group cohesion.

3. What do the Johannine epistles share in common with the Gospel of John in terms of vocabulary, theme, and perspective?

The style of 1 Jn is much like that of the Fourth Gospel. Its Greek is, if anything, even simpler, while its vocabulary is more abstract. The combination makes it a difficult composition to read sequentially, as the same points appear to be made repeatedly with only slight variations. The style can be deceptive, for it sometimes contains the

form of argument while lacking its logic. Thus from 1: 6 to 2: 5 we read eight conditional sentences. Each of them has an internal coherence. But when read in sequence, not only the connection between them but also their individual points are easily forgotten.

The most striking stylistic element in 1 Jn is the apparent self-contradiction regarding the believer and sin that is found throughout the letter: one sentence affirms something that another appears to deny. For instance, the writer claims that anyone who says they are without sin is a liar and makes a liar of God (1: 8–10). Yet, the writer also maintains further on that anyone who sins is a “child of the Devil” and does not abide in Jesus (3: 4–10). Not surprisingly, various source theories have been invoked to account for this phenomenon. They are not necessary, however. The function of the phraseology is an important key to deciphering the elder’s meaning: what is granted by way of proposition (“everyone sins”) in one place is taken away by way of exhortation (“do not sin”) in another. The vacillation between affirmation and exhortation in 1 Jn derives not from a multiplicity of sources and editors but from the internal tension created by the author’s task: encouraging faithfulness to God in a context where many of the community have left to “walk in the darkness.”

This composition shares the same symbolic world as the Fourth Gospel. We find in it many of the Gospel’s major themes: the distinctions between light and darkness (1: 5; 2: 8–9, 10), truth and falsehood (1: 6; 2: 4, 21, 27; 3: 19; 4: 6, 20; 5: 7), the community and “the world” (2: 15; 3: 1; 13; 4: 3, 4, 5; 5: 19), and life and death (1: 2; 3: 14–15; 5: 11, 13). Moreover, in 1 Jn we find the same conviction of being in touch with the “beginning.” It occurs here in several senses: chronological, ontological, and existential. Chronologically, they have received truth from the traditions passed on to them “from the beginning” (1: 1; 2: 24; 3: 11); ontologically, they “know”/“abide in” Jesus who is himself “from the beginning” (2: 13–14; cf. John 1: 1); existentially, they are in direct communion with the Holy Spirit (2: 20, 27; 3: 24; 4: 2, 6, 13; 5: 7). The believers are those who are “born of

God" (3: 1, 2, 10; 4: 4, 7; 5: 1, 4, 18, 19). They "bear testimony" (4: 14; 5: 7, 10) to what they "see and hear" (1: 3; 2: 24; 3: 2, 6), even as they "abide" (2: 6, 10, 17, 24-25; 3: 6, 24; 4: 12, 13, 15) both in the commandment (2: 3; 3: 22; 5: 2) and in the love (3: 11, 14, 18; 4: 7, 11-12, 21) revealed to them in the Son of God (4: 7-10).

What distinguishes the shaping of these symbols in 1 Jn, however, is that none of them can be affirmed as straightforwardly as in the Fourth Gospel. This is a community divided: some have "gone out from us" (2: 19). And although the elder insists that if they "had really been of us" they would not have left, the identity of this community that defines itself in terms of its share in the Spirit—its unity and its love—is severely shaken. At least two groups now lay claim to being the community of the beloved disciple, and their claims appear to be mutually exclusive. Thus the task before the elder is to assert the traditional claims for his readers, but at the same time to consider the new circumstance of division and dispute.

4. Identify the "family" metaphors in the Johannine letters. What does this tell you about the author's understanding of church? What relationships do these terms describe?

Whatever the precise nature of the disputes, any sort of division would be a severe crisis for a church that lived within the symbolic framework we have seen in the Fourth Gospel. The farewell discourse of Jesus (John 15: 1 – 17: 26) portrays a community of friends. They share in one Spirit; being joined to Jesus as Jesus is to the Father, in a fellowship of unity and love. For a community with such a self-understanding, any dissension and deviance would be difficult to understand or assimilate. But a clash over the right understanding of Jesus, and a division leading to mutual excommunication, would challenge this community's very identity and existence.

5. What do the terms “millenarian” and “apocalyptic” mean? In what senses is Revelation an apocalypse? How is it different?

Misunderstandings appear to be invited by the text itself, for it claims to offer a “revelation from Jesus Christ” which makes known to the readers “what is going to happen shortly” (1: 1). No wonder it has often been taken as a divinely certified blueprint for the future.

Already in the second century, Papias found in passages like Rev. 20: 4–6 a promise of a literal earthly thousand-year (millennial) reign of the saints preceding the end of time:

They came to life and reigned with Christ a thousand years. The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended. This is the first resurrection. Over such the second death has no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and they shall reign with him a thousand years (20: 4–6; cf. Eusebius Ecclesiastical History III.39.12).

Papias was among the first of many “millenarians” – including Irenaeus, the Montanists, Joachim of Fiore, and some radical reformers of the sixteenth century – who found in Revelation a guide to the restored heaven and earth (21: 1–2).

6. What does Revelation share in common with the Gospel of John in terms of vocabulary, theme, and perspective?

The major question that arises is whether these concrete references suffice to place Revelation within the Johannine world familiar to us from the epistles and the Gospel. The debate in early Christianity over whether the “elder” of the Johannine epistles was to be identified with the “beloved disciple” who wrote the Fourth Gospel carried over into the discussion of the authorship of Revelation. There was never a unanimous consensus on this issue in the early church; the “elder” and the “beloved disciple” were often viewed as separate people. Thus, Papias thought that the writer of Revelation was the “elder” (see Eusebius Ecclesiastical History III.39.5-14). But Polycrates, the

late second-century bishop of Ephesus, traced the ancient tradition of the Asian churches associated with Revelation back to Philip and John, the beloved disciple (Eusebius Ecclesiastical History V.24.2-5).

In either case, some scholars have great difficulty imagining this writing's outlook as existing side by side with that of the letters and the Gospel. They can find a place for it only by placing it very early or very late in a chronological development. Others think of Revelation as another product of the circle or school of Johannine Christianity. They attribute its differences less to the passage of time than to the transformations required by the apocalyptic genre – as opposed to the epistolary or narrative genre. Because of the lack of evidence, however, such connections are open to debate. As for the dating of the work, the clear data it presents of active and organized persecution makes a date toward the end of the first century the most likely.

Once it is granted that the apocalyptic genre drastically reshapes the view of the world, the deep harmony in outlook and symbolization between Revelation and the other Johannine writings is all the more impressive. Only a few points can be touched on here, beginning with the designations for Jesus. In the Fourth Gospel, the title “Lamb of God” was applied to him (1: 29, 36). In Revelation, the title becomes the central image for the crucified and raised Messiah. He is the Lamb who was slain but now lives (5: 6–8, 12–13; 6: 1, 16; 7: 9, 10, 14, 17; 12: 11; 13: 8, 11; 14: 1, 4, 10; 15: 3; 17: 14; 19: 7–9; 21: 9, 14, 22, 23, 27; 22: 1–3). He is also “Son of man” (1: 13; 14: 14; cf. John 1: 51) and “Son of God” (2: 18; cf. John 11: 27; 20: 31; 1 John 3: 8). He is the “Word of God” (logos tou theou; 1: 2, 9; 6: 9; and, above all, 19: 13; cf. John 1: 1–14), and “king”/“King of kings” (1: 5; 15: 3; 19: 16; cf. John 18: 29–19: 22). As in the other Johannine writings, Jesus is the “faithful witness” (1: 5; 3: 14; 19: 11; cf. John 5: 32; 8: 14; 1 John 5: 9), the one who “loved us and freed us from our sins by his blood” (1: 5; cf. 1 John 1: 7; 5: 6–8; John 19: 34), and “the one who comes” (1: 4, 8; 2: 5; 3: 11; cf. John 1: 9; 11: 27; 1 John 4: 2; 5: 6; 2 John 7).

Even more striking are some designations associated solely, in the NT, with the Johannine writings. Jesus, for example, identifies himself by “I am” sayings (1: 8, 17; 2: 23; 21: 6; 22: 13, 16; cf. John 6: 35; 8: 12). He is also called “the beginning [archē] of God’s creation” (3: 14) as well as the “beginning and the end” (21: 6; 22: 13; cf. John 1: 1–2; 1 John 1: 1). Picking up on Jesus’ characteristic speech in the Fourth Gospel, Revelation calls him simply the “Amen” (3: 14; cf. John 1: 51; 5: 19). Jesus also refers to “my Father” (2: 28; 3: 5, 21; cf. John 5: 17, 43; 14: 2) and “my God” (3: 2, 12; cf. John 20: 17). In another distinctively Johannine phrase, Jesus says that just as he has received authority from the Father, he also gives it (2: 26–28; cf. John 1: 12; 17: 2). And the Johannine metaphors of water, light, and life are – each in its own way – attached to Jesus in Revelation: Jesus is the one who will give the thirsty a drink from the fountain of the water of life (7: 17; 21: 6; 22: 1, 17; cf. John 4: 14; 7: 37–39); from him comes life (2: 10; 3: 5; 11: 11; 22: 2, 14, 19; cf. John 1: 4; 3: 15); and he is the light of the new Jerusalem (21: 24; 22: 5; cf. John 8: 12; 1 John 2: 8). Thus, the language used to describe Jesus has real resonance and congruity with the images and expressions from the Fourth Gospel.

The conflicts and loyalties of this community are also symbolized in a manner similar to that in the other Johannine writings. The community’s members stand in opposition to those they call “false Jews” (2: 9; 3: 9), members of the “synagogue of Satan” (2: 9; 3: 9). We remember how the Fourth Gospel placed Jesus in conflict with the Jews (see esp. John 8: 12–58), and believers in conflict with the synagogue (John 9: 22). As in the Johannine letters (1 John 3: 7; 4: 6; 2 John 7), the opponents here are “deceivers” (Rev. 2: 20; 12: 9; 13: 14; 18: 23; 19: 20; 20: 3, 8, 10) who speak with an ungodly spirit (Rev. 13: 15; 16: 13–14; 18: 2; cf. 1 John 4: 1–3, where the antichrist is characterized thus). Ultimately, the community’s conflict is with Satan, as was the case with Jesus in the Fourth Gospel (Rev. 2: 9, 13, 24; 3: 9; 12: 9, 12; 20: 2, 7, 10; cf. John 6: 70; 8: 44; 13: 2, 27). And like the beloved disciple and the believers of the letters, the community in the Book of Revelation is one of “witnesses” (1: 2 2: 13; 6: 9; 11: 3, 10; 19: 10; cf. John 19: 35; 21: 24; 1 John 1: 2; 4: 14; 5: 9–12; 3 John 3, 12) who have, by

their faith and love, become “conquerors” over evil and falsehood (Rev. 2: 7, 11, 17, 26; 3: 5, 12, 21; 21: 7; cf. 1 John 2: 13–14; 4: 4; 5: 4–5) just as Jesus has already conquered (Rev. 5: 5; 17: 14; cf. John 16: 33).

The similarities of ostensible setting, context, self-designation, and description of Jesus are indeed striking. If not written by the same person or within the same school, it appears that the seer of Revelation was at least thoroughly familiar with either the Fourth Gospel and epistles or with the symbolic world reflected in those same writings.

Of course, at some point the Johannine symbolic world coalesces with the symbolic world of early Christianity more generally. We cannot say, for instance, that the Johannine symbolic world must be identified solely with the communities associated with the Johannine texts, nor that those same communities necessarily are the point of origin of the Johannine symbolic world itself. In the final analysis, early Christianity was a much more dynamic movement than this, with ideas and motifs constantly intersecting and intermingling. This dynamism is perhaps reflected nowhere else better than in Revelation, where the symbolic world so grounded in one segment of the NT corpus can be utilized in such similar ways in such an obviously different framework. If nothing else, this demonstrates that even a seemingly “renegade” NT writing like Revelation is ultimately grounded in the very heart and soul of early Christian tradition.

7. How would you state the central message of the letters to the seven churches in your own words? How was this message particularly important in the first century? In what sense is it an enduring message?

The seven churches of Asia to which John writes (1: 4) are located in well-known cities: Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea. The letters contain small touches that may reflect knowledge of local conditions and traditions. The churches in Philadelphia and Smyrna also received letters from

Ignatius of Antioch early in the second century, and Ephesus was the destination of letters written by both Paul and Ignatius. Laodicea is also mentioned in Paul's epistle sent to the Colossian community (Col. 4: 13-16).

In the seven "spirit letters" that follow his opening vision (1: 9-19), John—the writer and seer—addresses the conditions of these churches. He names allies (like Antipas, the faithful witness; 2: 13) and opponents (like Jezebel, the prophetess; 2: 20-23). Some opponents are designated as "false apostles" (2: 2) and another group is called the "Nicolaitans" (2: 6, 15). The latter advocated a liberal policy regarding eating idol meat (2: 6, 14, 20), a practice reprehensible to the writer (cf. 1 Cor. 8: 1-13). John also refers to "false Jews" (3: 9), the "synagogue of Satan" (2: 9), "Satan's throne" (2: 13), and "the deep things of Satan" (2: 24). The allusive nature of these identifications suggests that those so designated were already well known to the readers. The opposition is more elaborately disguised in the visions, but the harlot—"Babylon the great, the mother of whores"—who brings destruction on the saints (17: 4-6), clearly is intended to represent the Roman Empire (cf. 17: 9-14).

In the letters, the voice of prophecy is open and direct. The prophet speaks in the name of Jesus and with his Spirit. Jesus is revealed in the opening vision as "standing in the midst of the lampstands" (1: 13), which, we are told, "are the seven churches" (1: 20). Here is the resurrected Lord present to the church through the Spirit. Such prophetic speech as we find here may reflect the liturgical practice of the primitive community (cf. 1 Cor. 12-14). We find in the prophetic utterances sayings that also appear in other NT writings (cf. Rev. 3: 3 and 1 Thess. 5: 2, Matt. 24: 43; Rev. 3: 20 and Matt. 24: 33, James 5: 9; see chap. 6, above).

The letters—or, more formally, decrees or edicts—follow a strict four-stage pattern:

(1) Each begins with the command to the seer that he should write to a specific church—"to the angel of the church at Ephesus, write" (2: 1; cf. 2: 8, 12, 18; 3: 1, 7, 14). The addressee is actually the "angel" of the

church, the heavenly counterpart to the individual communities (1: 20). Moreover, each opening statement contains a reference to Jesus as the one who speaks.

(2) Jesus is then identified by a series of epithets: He is the one “who holds the seven stars in his right hand, who walks among the seven golden lampstands (2: 1); “the first, the last, who died and came to life” (2: 8; cf. 1: 17; 22: 13); the one “who has the sharp, two-edged sword” (2: 12; cf. 1: 16); the “Son of God” (2: 18); the one who has the “seven spirits of God and the seven stars” (3: 1; cf. 1: 4; 5: 6; 22: 6); the “Holy One, the True One, who has the key of David” (3: 7; cf. 5: 5; 22: 16); and the “Amen, the faithful and true witness, the Beginning of God’s creation” (3: 14). This assemblage of names and titles is strongly reminiscent of the process of “naming Jesus” in the opening sequence of the Fourth Gospel (John 1: 29–51). The epithets, which are explicitly based on the opening vision (1: 9–20), provide literary signals that connect the letters to the later visions of the book as well.

(3) There follows the statement “I know,” which leads to the description of the churches’ respective situations (2: 2, 9, 13, 19; 3: 1, 8, 15), containing commendation or judgment. For some of the communities, there is praise: they have patiently endured (2: 2, 3, 19; 3: 10); come through tribulation and poverty (2: 9); held fast to the name (2: 13); and have kept love, faith, and service (2: 19). Other communities receive mostly blame: they have abandoned love (2: 4); fallen into idolatry and immorality (2: 14–15, 20–22); and developed a tepid Christian practice (3: 15).

(4) Every one of the communities receives an exhortation (2: 5, 7, 10–11, 16–17, 25, 29; 3: 3–4, 11, 18–19) and a promise (2: 7, 11, 17, 26–28; 3: 5, 12, 20–21), placed in the context of the repetition of the phrase: “let everyone who has an ear listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches” (2: 7, 11, 17, 29; 3: 6, 13, 22).

8. What role does persecution play in Revelation? What do we know about the persecutions of the early church in the first century?

Witness in Persecution and Death: The Visions

Once the seer passes through the open door of heaven (4: 1), he and the readers are swept into a world quite unlike any other. The visions of Revelation are dazzling in their imagery, even if not altogether coherent.

The first conviction is that “in heaven” the victory over evil and death has already been won by God and the Messiah. The idolatrous powers strutting the earth are illusory; there is but one power controlling history. Second, the apparent dominance of evil in human affairs is itself part of God’s triumphant plan, and those who come through suffering and persecution faithfully receive the reward of eternal life with God. God is in control of the world, and evil is not running rampant; rather, everything is taking place according to God’s design. Third, the history of humans has a goal even on earth: the time of the suffering of the saints will come to an end, the visible and effective rule of God among humans will be established, and the wicked will be judged. Fourth, those who share the witness of Christ on earth in the face of death will share as well in heaven his victory over death.

In the visions, we see that the witness of believers to Jesus can lead to the shedding of their blood (6: 10; 7: 14; 12: 11; 16: 6; 17: 6; 18: 24). More than the avoidance of idolatry and immorality may be demanded of the Christian; the giving of one’s life itself may be necessary. And if it is, there is the knowledge that those who so die share in the witness of the one “who was slain but now lives” (5: 6) and who ransomed humans by his blood (5: 9). Indeed, the garments of the saints are “washed in the blood of the Lamb” and made pure (7: 14), indicating that those who imitate the death of Jesus are saved by his atoning death for them. Now we understand the logic of being a witness (martus), as it culminates in “martyrdom.” There is also a reversal:

just as the blood of Jesus and the saints is spilled now, so the blood of the wicked will soon be on the garments of Christ when he comes to judge with a vengeance (19: 13; cf. Isa. 63: 1-6).

That the Christians addressed by the visions faced real death cannot be doubted. The seer observes in heaven “under the altar the souls of those who had been slain for the word of God, and for the witness they had borne” (6: 9); and in the battle against the dragon, “they have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, for they loved not their own lives even unto death” (12: 11). The beast from the earth – the false prophet – makes war on the saints, trying to conquer them (13: 7); he marks everyone with his seal, making them slaves (13: 16). The Christians, again, bear witness in these battles by laying down their lives in imitation of Jesus.

The persecution suffered by the saints is one sponsored by the great harlot Babylon (14: 8; 17: 1-18). Just as the Babylon of old waged war on God’s people Israel, so too the new Babylon – the Roman Empire – is devoted to the destruction of God’s people in Christ. Even though 18: 2-19: 8 is a hymn celebrating her great fall, for those whose lives are still within her grasp she remains a powerful and demonic presence: “In her was found the blood of the prophets and saints and of all who have been slain on the earth”(18: 24).