INTRODUCTION

It is often claimed that 1 John contains no references to Jesus' resurrection. For example:

> Except for the singular fact of its silence as to the Resurrection, the Epistle, in its eschatology, covers exactly the same canvas as the Gospel.[1]
>
> In connection with the doctrinal standpoint of the Johannine Epistles, one further factor merits discussion. While the death of Jesus is important (cf. e.g. i.7; ii.2), there are no references whatsoever to the resurrection (except indirectly perhaps in ii.1, and there it is to the results not the fact itself). The living Christ, in whom his people now dwell, is in the forefront of the writer's mind, but of the resurrection itself he is silent.[2]
>
> [T]here are no references to his [Jesus'] birth, resurrection or exaltation, and even his death is more implied in the concern for what it achieves than proclaimed as a fact to confront, stumble over or struggle to interpret.[3]

Some scholars have found the absence of references to the resurrection puzzling given its emphasis in John's Gospel and the other New Testament documents.

> It is interesting to notice that neither 1 John nor Hebrews emphasizes the resurrection of Jesus … This is a strange contrast with the literature of the New Testament in general. The complete absence of reference to the resurrection of Jesus in 1 John has

[1] Law 1979: 353. [2] Houlden 1973: 21.
[3] Lieu 1991: 75. See also O'Neill (1966: 66): 'There is no specific reference to Jesus' resurrection'; and von Wahlde (1990: 197): 'It is curious … that the final eschatology of 1 John does not discuss physical resurrection from the dead, as does the gospel.'

> to be seen over against the strong emphasis on this event in the Gospel of John.[4]
>
> It is not clear whether they [the false teachers] disbelieved in the resurrection of Jesus; one of the curious facts about this Epistle is that the resurrection is not mentioned, although John clearly presupposes it.[5]
>
> The absence of any real interest in the life of Jesus, including his resurrection, sits oddly with the emphasis on belief that he is the Christ or Son of God.[6]

However, there are some who see an allusion to the resurrection in the opening verse of 1 John.[7] This allusion moved Jones to ask: 'While the resurrection is apparently not an issue in 1 John, it appears more than likely that v.1 includes in its scope appearances of the risen Christ as recounted in John … Could it be that 1 John 1:1–4 is more related to the resurrection than normally thought?'[8]

This monograph presents a reading of 1 John that flows from understanding the opening verses of the book to be affirming the resurrection of the incarnate Christ. Since the opening of a document is integral to establishing its framework for interpretation, this research explicates the text of 1 John in light of the opening resurrection allusion. It argues that the resurrection is explicitly mentioned on three other occasions (4:2; 5:6–7, 20). Further, it also proposes that these resurrection affirmations are made in the historical context of an intra-Jewish disagreement over the identity of Jesus as the Christ, a disagreement in which the vital proof is Jesus' resurrection.

This 'resurrection' reading of 1 John has not been presented before because the allusion to the resurrection in the opening verses has generally been discarded for three reasons. First, under the influence of the historical reconstructions that dominate the interpretation of 1 John, the opening verses of 1 John are often understood to affirm the incarnation and not the resurrection. Brown exemplifies this when he disregards the possible allusion with the reasoning: '[T]here is no evidence that the epistolary author and his adversaries were quarrelling over the

[4] Painter 1975: 113. [5] Marshall 1978: 15. [6] Lieu 1991: 101.
[7] Haupt 1879: 7, 11; Plummer 1911: 73; Gore 1920: 59; Ross 1954: 135; Richter 1977: 141; Bruce 1979: 36; Barker 1981: 307; Stott 1988: 65; Klauck 1991: 61–4; Beutler 2000: 37; Thomas 2003: 65; Heckel 2004: 436–8; Kinlaw 2005: 99, 106; Morgen 2005a: 50–3; Yarbrough 2008: 38.
[8] Jones 2009: 21.

reality of the risen Jesus.'[9] Second, the allusion to the resurrection is ignored because of the similarity between the prologues of the Gospel of John and 1 John. Since John 1:1–14 affirms the incarnation, so too must 1 John 1:1–4. Thus Johnson comments: 'Just as the Gospel of John begins with a prologue (John 1:1–18), so do the letters. In both, the Word (logos) is the central theme. Here too the Elder introduces some of his principal concerns: the reality of the incarnation, eternal life, and fellowship with the community of believers.'[10] Third, the allusion to the resurrection is discarded due to the apparent lack of other references to the resurrection in 1 John. Smalley and Lieu both take this view:

> The words αἱ χεῖρες ἡμῶν ἐψηλάφησαν, 'and felt with our hands' possibly connect with the tradition behind Luke 24:39 (the risen Jesus says, 'Touch me and see,' using the aorist ψηλαφήσατε, 'touch'), although interestingly the resurrection is not otherwise mentioned in 1 John.[11]
>
> If it is drawing on resurrection traditions – and the absence of any interest in the resurrection elsewhere makes this entirely hypothetical – it takes the language of sensory experience, on which the proclamation of the message rests, and makes it its own, inviting readers to do likewise.[12]

In the course of this study, and the presentation of its new reading, these three standard reasons are discussed and considered.

The first part outlines and reviews the reading methods used in previous research on 1 John. The first chapter critically reviews previous methods for reading 1 John. The Historical Critical method and its resultant identifications are surveyed before more recent literary approaches are discussed. In light of this discussion, the second chapter outlines the method adopted in this research. This is a historically conditioned intertextual approach.

[9] Brown 1982: 163. Although Law (1979: 120) is not commenting on the possible resurrection allusion in 1:1, he still denies reference to the resurrection in 1 John on the basis of his historical reconstruction of the opponents when he states: 'It is sufficiently remarkable that the Resurrection finds no place in the apologetics of the Epistle, although the proofs of its reality are so carefully set forth in the Fourth Gospel. The reason probably is that Cerinthus and his school did not deny the *resurrection of Jesus'* (italics his). Similarly, Painter (1975: 113) argues: '1 John was not written to show that Jesus of Nazareth was divine (against Judaism), but to affirm his real humanity (against Gnosticism) to be the revelation of the character and saving work of God. In this context the importance of the resurrection falls into the background.'

[10] Johnson 1993: 25. [11] Smalley 2007: 8. [12] Lieu 2008a: 40.

The second part presents the reading of 1 John, paying particular attention to the introduction, due to its importance in establishing the reader's expectations. The third and fourth chapters contain detailed exegesis of the introduction (1:1–2:11). The third chapter is devoted to 1:1–5 and argues that the verses refer to the author's preaching of his/her first-hand experiences of Jesus' resurrection appearances. The fourth chapter presents a detailed reading of 1:6–2:11, arguing that these verses comprise the rest of the introduction to 1 John and as such provide a characterisation grid for understanding the situation of the author and readers. It suggests that the 'claims' in those verses could have occurred within first-century Judaism.

With the introduction in mind, the fifth and subsequent chapters explicate the rest of 1 John, paying particular attention to texts that apparently question either the proposed christology or the suggested historical situation ascertained from 1:1–2:11. The fifth chapter examines the verses that discuss the schism (2:15–27). It argues that 1 John can be understood in the context of intra-Jewish disagreement about the identity of Jesus. It provides an extended discussion of the historical evidence that supports such a reconstruction of first-century Judaism. The sixth chapter provides the results of reading 2:28–3:24. The seventh chapter is dedicated to a thorough discussion of the test for discerning if a spirit is from God or from the antichrist (4:2–3). This is because these verses are thought to contain 1 John's clearest affirmation of the incarnation. The eighth chapter outlines the reading of 1 John 4:7–5:21 before a conclusion reviews the reading method and summarises its results.

The reading finds explicit references to Jesus' resurrection in four places (1:1–3; 4:2–3, 5:6–7, 20) and provides some fresh perspectives on other passages. By allowing the introduction to establish the framework for interpreting 1 John, the resurrection is brought to the foreground with the result being a more satisfying reading of 1 John as a whole.

PART I

A Reading Method

1

METHODS OF READING 1 JOHN

This chapter reviews past methods of reading 1 John in order to inform the reading method utilised in this study. Previous methods can be grouped into two main categories – Historical Critical and Literary/Rhetorical. As a result the chapter has two parts. The first critically reviews the Historical Critical method and its resulting identifications of the opponents. The second describes and evaluates the work of four scholars who adopt a Literary/Rhetorical method. The observations that result from this assessment are used to inform the reading method adopted and described in the next chapter.

The Historical Critical method

The Historical Critical method seeks to reconstruct the historical situation that gave rise to 1 John. This involves the key issue of identifying the 'opponents' who have 'gone out' from the community (2:19). Scholars using the Historical Critical method tend to argue that 1 John was written for a polemical purpose in response to false teachers and teaching.[1] Their method has two stages. First, they use a mirror-reading method where the situation behind the text is reconstructed from the text itself. Then second, confirmation of the situation is sought in either a reconstruction of a split within the Johannine community due to internal factors, or identification of external false teachers based on other documents of the time.[2]

The situation behind the text is observed in three sets of passages. First, from 2:19 it is argued that a schism has taken place in which some people

[1] For example Brown 1982; Strecker 1996; Painter 2002.

[2] See Barclay 1987 for a description of this type of approach. Although he uses Galatians as the example, he lists the Johannine polemic against 'the Jews' or the schismatics as examples of opponents in the New Testament (1987: 73), and concludes: 'If these cautionary notes and positive suggestions are of any value, they could equally well be applied to … the Johannine letters' (1987: 90).

have left the church. Second, two groups of passages are understood to explicitly reveal the teaching of those who have departed. The passage that contains the description of the schism (2:18–23) also speaks about antichrists who deny that Jesus is the Christ (2:22). This same group of people is again referred to in 4:1–3, where it is indicated that they would not confess that Jesus has come in the flesh (4:2). To these two passages is often added 5:1–8 on the basis of the similarity of language. Even though the vocabulary of antichrists and false prophets is not present, the themes of the identity of Jesus as the Christ (5:1; cf. 2:22), and the Son of God (5:5), and the idea of him 'coming' in blood and water (5:6; cf. 4:2) are cited as evidence that these verses are again describing those who have left. From these verses it is concluded that christology is an area of disagreement. Third, it is argued that some verses record the 'claims' (or sentiments) of the false teachers (1:6, 8, 10; 2:4, 6, 9; 4:20) and John's response. These passages reveal that a disagreement on ethics also contributed to the schism. The mirror-reading first step is circular in that it seeks to understand the text in light of a historical situation that is reconstructed from the text itself.[3]

With this first circular step completed, the majority of scholars start a second step of the process, investigating the first- and second-century milieu for any known people or movements that displayed the same christology and/or ethics opposed in 1 John.[4] This second step is an appeal to history to validate the historical reconstruction made in the first step. It does not prove the reconstruction so much as display that the reconstruction is viable within the first-century context and so supports the reconstruction.

Beyond the general problems associated with mirror reading that Barclay seeks to overcome,[5] there are four main problems with the mirror-reading method when it is applied to 1 John.

First, there is some dispute over which texts should be used in identifying those who have left and their teaching. There is a general consensus that the christological texts (2:22–3; 4:2–3; 5:6–8) reveal something of the opponents' teaching. However, there is disagreement about those used to reconstruct the ethics of the opponents (1:6, 8, 10; 2:4, 6, 9;

[3] The observation that the method is 'circular' is not meant to be negative or dismissive. The next chapter will outline a method that argues for the strength of a 'circular' method validated by tangents.

[4] A minority of scholars prefer to construct a source internal to the community as the reason for the schism. See for example Brown 1982; Painter 1986; Klauck 1988; von Wahlde 1990.

[5] Barclay 1987.

4:20). Lieu argues that the ethical texts should not be included because the opponents are not discussed explicitly until 2:18 and then only in relation to the christological question.[6] Edwards contends that the ethical passages are addressed to the author's community and not the opponents, so the passages should not be used in any reconstruction of the opponents.[7] Further, Griffith has argued that the 'claims' formulae ἐὰν εἴπωμεν ὅτι and ὁ λέγων ὅτι are a common rhetorical device used in the first century to transmit teachings and define communities and so should not be used to reconstruct the ethics of the opponents.[8]

Second, there are some problems associated with reconstructing the christological teaching of those who have left. Only the first two christological texts (2:22; 4:2–3) possibly report the position of the opponents and neither of these spells it out in any detail, so caution is warranted in their use as sources for a reconstruction. Further, scholars usually start with 4:2–3 because it is more detailed and then read 2:22 and 5:6–8 in light of it.[9] However, this reverses the natural reading order of the text.

Third, the 'polemical' tone of the language of 1 John poses potential problems for the reconstruction. Perkins warns about identifying the opponents due to the rhetorical nature of 1 John's language in describing them.[10] Further, Burge notes that there does not appear to be any extant record of the opponents' teaching in their own words.[11] So to reconstruct their teaching through the words of others who are in disagreement with them is problematic.[12]

Fourth, there is growing scepticism about the possibility of reconstructing history in general. Schmid, on the basis of a more post-modern epistemology, insists that it is virtually impossible to move from a text to its historical situation.[13]

However, these weaknesses do not negate the value of the method, rather they temper the certainty with which identifications can be made. Identifications of the opponents made solely from the text of 1 John may pass the first two tests of any good hypothesis, that they explain the data and that they are internally self-consistent. Yet, if they lack any

[6] Lieu 1981: 211. She concludes: 'it is therefore the christological statements which must bear the full weight of any attempt to define the heresy'.
[7] Edwards 1996: 67.
[8] Griffith 1998: 255–60, although his position is qualified in chapter 4.
[9] For example Thompson 1992: 79; Johnson 1993: 6; Uebele 2001: 119; Thomas 2003: 132.
[10] Perkins 1979: xxi-xxiii. [11] Burge 1996: 27.
[12] Johnson 1993: 6.
[13] Schmid 2002: 54–8; Schmid 2004a: 30, 33.

substantiating evidence from the first century, they should be adopted with caution. The value of identifications resides not just in their explanation of the details of 1 John, but also in the first-century evidence cited to support the identifications. With these warnings in mind, it is to a review of the identifications that the research now turns.

Historical identifications

The following list of identifications of those who have left is not intended to be exhaustive.[14] Instead, its aim is to outline and critique the main proposals found in the secondary literature. It should be noted at the start of this list that many of the identifications also cite the ethical material as support. This material is not discussed here because it is unclear what role the 'slogans' should play in a reconstruction of the opponents.[15] Further, the differences between the christology of 1 John and that evident in the proposals, are enough to evaluate the identifications' plausibility, without utilising the ethical material.

Opponents within earliest Christianity

The usual place to start possible identifications of the false teachers is with opponents addressed in the other earliest Christian documents.[16] Brown cites four possible alternatives: those addressed by Paul in Colossians, those addressed in the Pastoral Epistles (1 and 2 Timothy, Titus), the groups condemned in the letters of Revelation 2–3, and the sectarian followers of John the Baptist.[17] Though not cited for the sake of identifying the opponents but rather dating 1 John, Robinson notes some parallels between 1 John and the false teachers/teaching in 2 Peter and Jude.[18] This results in possible parallels with eight other early Christian books.

The christological deviations addressed in Colossians are the basis for parallelling the opponents. These deviations seem to be addressed in Colossians 2:8–10 and 16–23. However, even though these deviations involve christology, there are significant differences between those in

[14] Lists of identifications can be found in most commentaries but see in particular Brown 1982: 55–68; Beutler 1988: 3774–9; Streett 2011: 5–111.

[15] See Lieu and Griffith's criticisms noted in the last section.

[16] This study limits these documents to the New Testament but does not label the group as such in order to avoid historical anachronism.

[17] Brown 1982: 56–7. [18] Robinson 1976: 286–7.

Colossians and 1 John. The false teaching in Colossians involves feasts, angels, and rules, none of which are mentioned in 1 John.

Brown groups the Pastoral Epistles together in his analysis of their false teachers. However, they are three different letters to different localities so the opponent in each letter needs to be examined on its own terms.

The false teachers in 1 Timothy have wandered away, devoting themselves to myths and genealogies. They desire to teach the law (1:3–7) but follow evil spirits, denying marriage and certain foods (4:1–3). They are caught up in godless talk and ideas that are falsely called knowledge (6:20–1). This description does not contain the christological errors opposed by John. Likewise, the false teachers described in 2 Timothy also lack correspondence with 1 John. They are recorded as believing that the resurrection has already happened (2:17–18), something not addressed in 1 John. Finally, the false teachers in Titus appear to have a Jewish flavour, being described as 'of the circumcision group' (1:10–11), teaching Jewish myths (1:14) and arguing about genealogies and the law (3:9). This description does not match the portrayal of John's opponents because there are no points of christology at stake.

In the opening chapters of Revelation there are two groups who are condemned as teaching false ideas.[19] The Nicolatians seem to be advocating eating food sacrificed to idols and sexual immorality (2:6, 14–15). The false prophetess Jezebel was also teaching that sexual immorality and eating food sacrificed to idols were acceptable (2:20–3). There appear to be no christological denials in the false teaching in Revelation 2–3.

Brown also noted a possible parallel with the sectarian followers of John the Baptist who may be addressed in John's Gospel.[20] Brown suggests that these followers saw John the Baptist (and not Jesus) as the light sent by God (1:8, 30). However, even Brown acknowledges that so little is known about this group it would be difficult to identify them as the opponents in 1 John.

Robinson noted four similarities between the opponents' teaching in 2 Peter/Jude and 1 John.[21] Both seem to deny Jesus as the Christ/Son of God (1 John 2:22ff.; 4:15; 5:1, 5; cf. Jude 4; 2 Peter 2:1). The promise that believers will share in the divine nature (2 Peter 1:4) is similar to John's teaching that God's children will be made like God when Jesus returns (1 John 3:2). The false teaching in both 2 Peter and 1 John is connected

[19] Büchsel 1933 as noted in Brown (1982: 56).
[20] Brown 1982: 57. [21] Robinson 1976: 286–7.