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Robert M. Price

The *Sitz-im-Leben* of Third John: A New Reconstruction

Dr. Price has previously written in our pages on aspects of the contemporary theological scene ('Inerrant the Wind: The Troubled House of North American Evangelicals', EQ 55, 1983, 129-44; 'Clark H. Pinnock: Conservative and Contemporary', EQ 60, 1988, 157-83).

It is clear to most scholars how the first and second epistles of John are related: 2 John seems to be a miniature 1 John, a short note summarizing important themes treated at length in the larger and more impersonal tractate. But where, if anywhere, does the tiny 3 John fit? Some see it as having no substantial relation at all, while others seek to read the situation described in the other two in between the lines of 3 John. The third epistle is so short, and so much is taken for granted in it, that the diminutive text has invited a number of competing interpretations. One might compare the conflicting theories with Penelope's suitors: there are more than enough, many of them attractive in their own way, but none entirely succeeds. I would like to propose yet another, and while I will not claim my reconstruction of the *Sitz-im-Leben* of 3 John is Penelope's true mate Odysseus, I do venture to say it may have the best chance at winning Penelope until her husband arrives (if he ever does!).

All explanations of 3 John must reckon with three basic questions. First, who are the characters Diotrephes and the Elder (at least, who are they relative to one another)? Second, what situation called forth the obvious acrimony between the Elder and Diotrephes? Third, how is this letter related to 1 and 2 John, especially in view of the refusal of hospitality to itinerant 'brethren' that is condemned in 1 and 3 John, yet enjoined in 2 John? I will briefly review five major theories, all of which address the first and second questions explicitly and the third at least implicitly.

Five Theories

First, attention must be drawn to the fascinating if implausible

theory of William Alexander (1889). Bishop Alexander conjectures that the Elder is the apostle John and also the fourth evangelist, the traditional view. Gaius, to whom the epistle is addressed, is none other than Gaius of Corinth, Paul's host in that city (Rom. 16:23). 3 Jn. 5 and Rom. 16:23 both make note of Gaius and his hospitality, surely no coincidence. Besides, the Synopsis of Sacred Scripture of Pseudo-Athanasius links John and Paul's host Gaius, making this Gaius the publisher of the fourth gospel in Ephesus. Diotrephes is one of the usurping schismatics in Corinth to whom 1 Clement was written. Diotrephes' exclusion of the Elder's messengers is a strategy to consolidate his control in Corinth. Finally, Demetrius is perhaps the Ephesian silversmith of Acts 19, who Alexander conjectures was converted and became a close associate of John in Ephesus.¹

No scholar holds this view today, and rightly so, because it is a tissue of fanciful conjectures. Clever enough, the theory is utterly vitiated by the tendency to assume a very small cast of characters in early Christianity so that it seems likely that two occurrences of the same name must represent the same person. This sort of scholarly game is still reasonably popular, as when Luke is proposed as the author of Hebrews or the Pastoral Epistles, as if similar literary styles or stages of ecclesiological evolution must denote the same writer.

Alexander's view is seldom if ever invoked by scholars of 3 John, but it comes in for implicit criticism when they advise (quite properly) that the name Gaius is so common that it would be the greatest coincidence if 3 John's Gaius were the same as any of the men referred to in Acts 19:29; 20:4; Rom. 16:23; 1 Cor. 1:14.² But the tendency to see Diotrephes as an ambitious church politician and little more has survived.

Second, Adolf Harnack (1897) brought the nature of the ecclesiastical power struggle witnessed in 3 John into sharper focus. Harnack thought he recognized in Diotrephes 'the first monarchical bishop we know', a precursor to Ignatius of Antioch. The Elder is not John son of Zebedee (who drops out of contention as a candidate for the identity of the Elder in all

¹ William Alexander, *The Epistles of St. John, Twenty-one Discourses* (New York, 1903), 300-303. Alexander notes that he subsequently discovered that Bengel had anticipated his identification of 3 John's Gaius with Paul's Gaius, but that Alexander had developed it independently and carried it further, as outlined here. A somewhat similar theory, which also makes 3 John's Gaius the Corinthian Gaius, is that of J. Chapman, 'The Historical Setting, of the 2. and 3. Epistles of St. John', *Journal of Theological Studies*, 1904, 357ff, 517ff.

² E.g., Rudolf Bultmann, *The Johannine Epistles* (Philadelphia, 1973), 95-96.

theories from this point on), but rather the leader of a group of itinerant missionaries. The decision of Diotrephes to ban these missionaries must be understood as symptomatic of that widespread late-first, early-second century quenching of the Spirit of prophecy by the ecclesiastical establishment.³

The real weakness of Harnack's view is the lack of any satisfactory motive for the decisive action of Diotrephes. Something more specific than a general philosophy of church authority must have provoked him. Recently Raymond E. Brown (1979) has suggested a more concrete motivation. Brown sees Diotrephes reacting to the intra-Johannine schism clearly attested in 1 and 2 John. Rival missionaries and prophets were calling on churches and teaching radically different doctrines. Diotrephes found himself without adequate criteria to tell the wolves from the sheep, so he closed the door of his church to both.⁴

Brown's reconstruction supplies the specific motive lacking in Harnack's theory, but it has a weakness of its own. 3 Jn. 10 seems to make it clear that Diotrephes' actions stemmed from some animosity toward the Elder, not simply panic at a confusing situation. It seems Diotrephes wanted to hear no more from the Elder or his representatives.

Given the basic Harnack model, would there be any relation between 3 John and the other two epistles? Theodor Zahn (1909) proposed that 2 John was the letter from the Elder mentioned in 3 Jn. 9, and he believes it was sent simultaneously with 3 John with the expectation that it would be read in Diotrephes' congregation despite the latter's wishes. The reconstruction seems to fly in the face of the clear implication of 3 Jn. 9, that the present letter to Gaius is subsequent to a letter that was *not* publicly read.⁵

The third theory, that of Walter Bauer (1934), supplies a definite reason for Diotrephes' animosity toward the Elder. Bauer views Diotrephes as a heretic representing the views condemned by the Elder in 1 and 2 John. The Elder expelled and debarred those carrying the heretical doctrine in 1 Jn. 4:3 and 2 Jn. 7, so now Diotrephes has simply returned the favor, slamming the door

³ Adolf von Harnack, 'Über den dritten Johannesbrief, *Texte und Untersuchungen zur Geschichte der altchristlichen Literatur* 15:#3b (Leipzig, 1897), 3-27.

⁴ Raymond E. Brown, *The Community of the Beloved Disciple* (New York, 1979), 160-161.

⁵ Theodor Zahn, *Introduction to the New Testament*, Vol. III (Minneapolis, 1977), 378; G. G. Findlay, *Fellowship of the Life Eternal* (1909), 38 (as cited in Donald Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction* [Downers Grove, Illinois, 1970], 896) suggests that the Elder wrote another letter to accompany 3 John but *without* much hope that it would be read.

in the faces of the Elder's emissaries. "To be sure, 3 John does not contain an explicit warning against false teachers. Nevertheless its close connection with 2 John is a sufficient indication of its thrust. And the assurance repeated no less than five times in this brief writing that the brethren who support the elder possess the "truth"—that entity which in 2 John and also in 1 John distinguishes the orthodox believer from the heretic—renders it very unlikely, to my way of thinking, that we are dealing merely with personal frictions between the elder and Diotrephes.⁶ Here Bauer seems to anticipate the criticism leveled at his theory by many scholars since, that if the Elder's complaint against Diotrephes were heresy, surely he would not have neglected to mention it.⁷ I believe Bauer's critics are right. Bauer's argument almost assumes that Gaius would have read the other Johannine epistles and known to use them as a key to interpreting 3 John just as Bauer is doing. More serious still, the problem is not simply that the Elder does *not* mention heresy; it is rather that he *does* mention his trouble with Diotrephes and it is 'personal friction' (at least as far as the Elder yet knows—see below).

The fourth theory is that of Ernst Käsemann (1951), who turned Bauer's hypothesis on its head, suggesting instead that the Elder was an elder serving under Diotrephes' authority and had been excommunicated by Diotrephes for his gnosticizing ('naive docetic') treatment of Jesus Christ⁸ as (according to Käsemann) we find it in the Gospel of John.⁹ This view has found supporters in, e.g., Kurt Rudolph and Wolfgang Langbrandtner.¹⁰ But as the mirror image of Bauer's view, it does not really evade the problems of Bauer's view. As Bultmann points out, "The theme of right doctrine is scarcely under discussion in 3 John . . ."¹¹ and as Marxsen adds, "There is no mention of an excommunication of

⁶ Walter Bauer, *Orthodoxy and Heresy in Earliest Christianity* (Philadelphia, 1971), 93; cf. also A. H. McNeile *An Introduction to the Study of the New Testament*, 2nd edition, revised by C. S. C. Williams (Oxford, 1953), 308. 'If conjecture is allowable, Diotrephes may have had Gnostic tendencies which easily fostered spiritual pride. If so, this letter and the warning in 2 John 10, 11 reflect the two sides of the conflict.'

⁷ E.g., Willi Marxsen, *Introduction to the New Testament* (Philadelphia, 1976), 268; Guthrie, 898; recently Judith Lieu, *The Second and Third Epistles of John: History and Background* (Edinburgh, 1986), 159.

⁸ Ernst Käsemann, 'Ketzer und Zeuge: Zum johanneischen Verfasserproblem', *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche* 48 (1951), 292–311.

⁹ Ernst Käsemann, *The Testament of Jesus* (Philadelphia, 1978), 26.

¹⁰ Kurt Rudolph, *Gnosis* (New York, 1983), 306; Wolfgang Langbrandtner, 'Weltferner Gott oder Gott der Liebe: Die Ketzerstreit in der johanneischen Kirche', *Beiträge zur biblischen Exegese und Theologie* 6 (Frankfurt, 1977).

¹¹ Bultmann, 101.

the presbyter. If this had really happened, the author would hardly have restricted himself to accusing Diotrephes merely of speaking slanderously of him. And how would he have been able to reckon on the possibility of confronting Diotrephes when he came on a visit?¹²

The fifth view, John C. Meagher's (1983), reverses things yet again, putting the matter in a radically new perspective. For Meagher, the crucial clue as to both the meaning and the relationship of at least 2 and 3 John is the issue of barring the travelling brethren. What is advocated in 2 John is decried in 3 John. Meagher suggests that 3 John is by a different author than 2 John and is written in refutation of it. The writer of 3 John has been stung by the very exclusion mandated in 2 John. '2 John and 3 John do indeed belong together, but . . . they are type and antitype.'¹³ Meagher thinks 2 John may actually be the work of the Elder but is more likely a pseudepigraph seeking to appropriate the Elder's authority to exclude heretics. 3 John, he reasons, is certainly a pseudepigraph subsequently invoking the Elder's authority against those including Diotrephes who engineered or implemented 2 John's exclusionary policy.¹⁴

Meagher sees 3 John as a 'fossil remain of an alien gospel'¹⁵ which bypassed the mediation of Jesus Christ and offered its adherents an immediate vision of God. Meagher notes that Jesus Christ is not mentioned in 3 John and that, since 'he who does evil has not seen God' (3 Jn. 11b), it is implied that the one who does good can in this life see God in some mystical sense. Meagher observes that both the fourth gospel and 1 John teach that no one can see God (Jn. 1:18; 6:46, 1 Jn. 4:12, 20) at least until the eschaton (1 Jn. 3:2). 1 Jn. 3:6 does imply that the righteous may see 'him', since 'no one who sins has . . . seen him', but the 'him' refers, in context, to Christ, not God.

External attestation, too, suggests to Meagher that early Christians understood 3 John to be heretical and to have been written by a different author. The unknown Latin translator of

¹² Marxsen, 268.

¹³ John C. Meagher, *Five Gospels, An Account of How the Good News Came to Be* (Minneapolis, 1982), 208.

¹⁴ I believe Meagher could simplify his case by dropping the pseudepigraphy business and viewing 2 and 3 John as letters by two different 'elders' representing both sides of the intra-Johannine schism (cf. Lieu, 163). The similarity of styles would simply reflect the customary distinctive style/jargon of the Johannine school

¹⁵ Meagher, 209.

1 and 2 John neglected 3 John, leaving it for someone else to translate. The Muratorian Canon knew but two Johannine epistles. Clement of Alexandria knew only 1 and 2 John.

Meagher's case is ingenious but hangs from entirely too thin a thread. The extreme brevity of the letter may account for the lack of Jesus' name in it (though it is surely 'the name' of Jesus that is referred to in verse 7). Though the Johannine literature does scrupulously avoid allowing that human beings can see God unaided, the Johannine technique of predicating the same things of God and Jesus in a repetitive fashion (e.g., Jn. 5:17; 6:32; 51; 10:28, 29; 16:14-15) suggests that 3 Jn. 11 is parallel in meaning to 1 Jn. 3:6 in the understanding that the believer can see Jesus Christ (1 Jn. 3:6) and to see him is to see the Father (Jn. 14:9). As for the early church's neglect of 3 John, the traditional explanation seems entirely adequate: the letter was so brief that it simply 'got lost in the shuffle' and many churches had never seen it. This is all the more likely than Meagher's reading of the evidence since some in the ancient church, as Meagher himself admits,¹⁶ knew neither 2 nor 3 John; 2 John cannot be understood as heretical on Meagher's terms, but like 3 John, it is quite short.

A New Reconstruction

The very number and variety of theories I have considered have inclined some scholars to skepticism. For instance the author of the most recent treatment of these questions, Judith Lieu, concludes: 'Ultimately any attempt at a confident reconstruction must founder on [the] silences of the letter . . . and on our ignorance about the constitution and self-identity of the first Christian groups.' The whole situation, she feels, 'will remain something of an enigma.'¹⁷ Yet if a new paradigm were to be applied to the evidence in such a way as to account for most of it plausibly and economically, and at least consistently with what little we do know of the Johannine communities, we might have some grounds for confidence in such a reconstruction.

All five views considered above have problems, though each is able to make some sense of important aspects of 3 John. I will now propose a sixth reconstruction of the *Sitz-im-Leben* of the epistle. As will become apparent, it seems likely to me that the epistles were written in just the reverse of the order in which they occur in the New Testament canon. Let me remind the reader that the canonical order

¹⁶ Meagher, 306.

¹⁷ Lieu, 163.

results simply from the descending length of the three letters, just as Paul's letters are arranged from longest to shortest (as also the Surahs of the Qur'an), and from the early prominence of what we call 1 John.

As all agree, the Elder sent out itinerant, 'circuit-riding' brethren who, both from internal evidence and by analogy with the Gospel of Matthew and the *Didachē*,¹⁸ were prophets who spoke by inspiration of the Spirit/Paraclete. The Elder and his home community guided and supervised a network of satellite churches, apparently small house churches, over a wide area, keeping in touch by means of these travelling brethren who lived by the charity of their hosts in each town, and presiding in the weekly worship service where they would prophesy, teach, read encyclicals from the Elder, or all three. I will outline how, in such a context, the three Johannine epistles came to be written.

In order to keep the proposed sequence of events clear, I will number the major developments.

1. One day among the brethren in the home Johannine community, one prophet receives a revelation containing a radical new Christological development, one of a docetic character, either that Jesus Christ only seemed to have a body of flesh (as in the Acts of John, supposedly the work of Leucius, a purported disciple of John)¹⁹ or that the Christ-Spirit only temporarily rested on the human Jesus (as Cerinthus, the traditional opponent of John, thought). The first idea seems to be reflected in 1 Jn. 4:2-3; 2 Jn. 7, the second in 1 Jn. 2:22.²⁰ The origin of this doctrine in a revelation is reflected in 1 Jn. 4:1. Its supposed character as an advanced teaching is mentioned in 2 Jn. 9.

2. This docetic revelation was vouchsafed in a small prophetic circle, not the larger community meeting. After discussion among themselves the (apparently few) 'enlightened ones' correctly surmise

¹⁸ Mt. 7:15-20; 10:5-16, 40-42; 25:31; 25:31-46; *Didachē* chapter 11.

¹⁹ So says Epiphanius, *Panarion* 51.6.9. See M. R. James, *The Apocryphal New Testament* (Oxford, 1972), 288; W. Schneemelcher and K. Schäferdiek, 'Second and Third Century Acts of Apostles, Introduction', in Wilhelm Schneemelcher and Edgar Hennecke (eds.) *New Testament Apocrypha*, Vol. II (Philadelphia, 1965), 186-187.

²⁰ Raymond E. Brown (*The Community of the Beloved Disciple*, 110-123) hesitates to make the Johannine schismatics docetists for fear of being anachronistic. Yet it is hard to deny the term docetism to a view which can be summed up as denying that Jesus Christ came in the flesh. Docetism took several forms in the early church and Gnosticism, and the term need not imply any particular later Gnostic system. Brown's own cautious and nuanced reconstruction of the views of the Elder's opponents strikes me as too vague and sophisticated to fit the historical situation.

that their fellows would not appreciate their revelation, so rather than risk casting their pearls before swine, they decide to teach the new Christology only in their travels to receptive listeners in the satellite congregations. This condescension toward the 'unenlightened' is reflected in 1 Jn. 2:9, etc. Should they risk submitting their revelation to be weighed by the others (cf. 1 Cor. 14:29; 12:2-3), they knew that they might be expelled, and if that happened their welcome in Johannine circles would be withdrawn. So here was another reason to teach their new doctrine 'on the road' without the knowledge or the permission of the Elder. They would claim to represent him in order to gain a hearing and then the new Truth would commend itself.

3. The docetic brethren pursue this course of action as soon as it is their turn to set out on a mission. They preach docetism without obstacle or event, apparently making a goodly number of converts, since by the time 2 and 1 John are written, many seem to adhere to the new doctrine: only 'some' of the members of one church still embrace orthodox doctrine (2 Jn. 4). Those in the churches who accept the new Christology believe it to be new teaching from the Elder since it was implicitly taught with his authorization, by his well-known representatives.

4. All goes reasonably well for the docetic brethren until they reach the church of which Diotrephes is the local head. At first he welcomes them, but is immediately shocked and disturbed by what he hears. He knows genuine, traditional Johannine doctrine ('what was from the beginning'—1 Jn. 1:1) too well to believe that this new prophecy could be genuine. Yet it does not occur to him to doubt that the docetic brethren really do have the Elder's authorization. Most likely he has entertained and honored these very brethren in the past and knows them as the Elder's emissaries. So Diotrephes concludes that the Elder is responsible and thus must have become a heretic if not a madman. He loses no time in announcing this to his congregation and in ejecting the docetic brethren. Since he believes docetism is the new Johannine 'orthodoxy', Diotrephes severs connections with the Johannine community, forbidding his members to have anything to do with the mad Elder or his false teachers.

5. Rudely expelled from Diotrephes' congregation, the docetic brethren continue on their way and meet with no further incident. We may imagine them shaking the dust from their feet as they left the community of Diotrephes (Mk. 6:11). Upon their return to the home base (cf. Acts 14:26-27), they do not tell of the trouble with Diotrephes, because of course that would expose their secret either immediately or as soon as messengers were sent to find out why Diotrephes expelled them. Naturally the docetic brethren want to

keep their secret as long as possible so as to keep their Johannine credentials and assure themselves a wide hearing for as long as possible.

6. Eventually another team goes on their rounds. They, too, make most of their journey without incident. Since there is no reason to imagine that Christology, orthodox or not, was the topic every time a Johannine team came into town, the subject may not have come up, and no conflict was apparent between this team and the previous, docetic, one.

7. The new team reaches Diotrephes' church and meet with a rude surprise. All church members with whom they are accustomed to stay either suspiciously or regretfully turn them away, having been ordered not even to speak to any Johannine emissaries (the same policy as in 2 Jn. 10—see No. 11 below). They find shelter with Gaius, who is a local friend and colleague of the Elder, apparently not a member of Diotrephes' congregation (see below). They complete their circuit without further incident.

8. The brethren return to the home community, where they share their unpleasant experience and what little they understand about it. All they have been able to glean is that Diotrephes has condemned the Elder and warned his congregants to have nothing to do with his representatives. The Elder, still unaware of the surreptitious preaching of docetism in his name, has no idea of the real motives of Diotrephes. All he can conclude is that Diotrephes has gone power-mad and is maligning him as an excuse for repudiating the Elder's supervision.²¹ Through all this the docetic brethren are keeping mum.

9. The Elder fires off a letter to Diotrephes' church, sending it perhaps with the next group of missionaries, or perhaps by special direct messenger. In either case, he is not given a hearing. (Of course Diotrephes, zealot for 'that old time religion', will not countenance the reading of an epistle full, as he thinks, of heresy.) This letter is that mentioned in 3 Jn. 9.

10. Eventually the Elder sends out another missionary. The Elder knows Demetrius can expect no hospitality from Diotrephes' congregation, so he sends him to lodge with nearby Gaius instead. 3 John is the letter of recommendation for Demetrius, presented to Gaius on Demetrius' arrival. Presumably Demetrius was a relatively

²¹ Lieu understands it in similar terms: 'It would seem . . . that it is Diotrephes who is making theological judgements, the significance of which the Elder fails to understand. If Diotrephes condemns him and the brethren on doctrinal grounds, these are not so well-defined and acknowledged for the Elder to see them as leading to his exclusion; for him this remains tyranny and an insult' (159).

new recruit and Gaius had never met him before. Gaius is not acutally a member of Diotrephes' church or he would not need to be informed of Diotrephes' actions.²² He seems not to be a member of another local church either, though, because if he were, 3 John would not refer to Diotrephes' congregation as 'the church'. At any rate, the Elder thanks him for his recent support of the brethren rejected by Diotrephes and urges him not to adopt Diotrephes' policy. He seems to be apologizing for imposing on Gaius' hospitality, explaining that the local church of Diotrephes will not fulfill what should be its responsibility. He promises to come personally to set matters in order, but until he does, he appreciates Gaius' kind generosity.

11. The Elder finally makes his way to Diotrephes' church and confronts him. What does he mean by slandering the Elder and breaking off all ties to him? Does his egotism know no bounds? Diotrephes heatedly replies that he is only doing his best to safeguard the true doctrine once learned from the Elder before the latter had begun listening to the doctrines of demons. Diotrephes explains that of course he means the docetism taught in the Elder's name by his travelling brethren. John is shocked! He angrily repudiates any such mad teaching. Then he pauses. The light dawns. He begins to realize what has really happened. Diotrephes is made to understand the true situation as well, and the two shake hands, agreeing to fight side-by-side to preserve Johannine orthodoxy. The Elder now agrees with Diotrephes' strategy of noncooperation with docetists and decides to adopt it himself and to advise all his churches to do the same.

12. The Elder returns home and expels those docetic brethren whose names have been supplied by Diotrephes. The Elder cannot be sure either that these heretics may not continue misrepresenting themselves as his agents, or that there may be other docetists in the fold (more of the original prophetic coterie who however did not embark on the mission with the others, or converts recruited by the original docetists) who may continue the deceptive practice. So he begins to write a series of letters to his various churches. 2 John is one of these. In them he supplies a doctrinal shibboleth rather than a blacklist of names, since he cannot be sure who the hypothetical

This should read "the Elder" - web editor

²² A. Malherbe ('The Inhospitability of Diotrephes', in J. Jervell and W. A. Meeks [eds] *God's Christ and His People* [Niils Alstrup Dahl Festschrift], Oslo, 1977), 222-232, suggests that Gaius and Diotrephes lived in the same town but attended different small house churches. Malherbe astutely points out that Gaius would hardly need to be informed by the Elder of Diotrephes' doings if Gaius attended the same church. But it seems to me that there is still a problem in that the Elder refers to Diotrephes' congregation simply as 'the church' and in his and Gaius' area.

secret docetists might be, at least not without finding out the hard way as he did in the case of Diotrephes' church!

13. The Elder is generally disinclined to write letters anyway (2 Jn. 12; 3 Jn. 13), so he soon decides that instead of writing individual letters to all his churches he will compose a longer and more detailed encyclical (1 John) to all the churches explaining the danger of the docetic imposters, how they teach a doctrine inspired by the Antichrist (4:3), how the fact of their past membership in the Johannine organization counts for nothing now that they teach heresy (2:18-19), etc.

I believe the foregoing reconstruction adequately explains all the evidence, making better sense of it than the earlier theories, though preserving certain worthwhile insights contained in those theories. For instance, à la Harnack, we do see Diotrephes becoming suspicious of unpredictable and dangerous prophetic authority, and like Brown, we can see that the intra-Johannine schism provided the occasion for Diotrephes' alarm. But my reconstruction explains how Diotrephes would have had occasion to 'prate against' the Elder 'with evil words' (3 Jn. 10). Like Käsemann, I think that Diotrephes regarded the Elder as a heretic, though only erroneously and temporarily, while simultaneously the Elder must have (also erroneously and temporarily) regarded Diotrephes as an arrogant autocrat trying to consolidate his power at the Elder's expense, just the motivation ascribed to Diotrephes by Alexander, Zahn, and many other commentators. Like Meagher, I regard the similarity of the exclusion policy condemned in 3 John and advocated in 2 John to be more than coincidence, but I find the solution in the Elder adopting Diotrephes' 'prescription against heretics' once it became clear just who the heretics really were. It will thus be seen that I believe most of the previous theories have caught some aspect of the complex *Sitz-im-Leben* presupposed by 3 John, but none has grasped the entirety of that situation.

Finally, on the theory proposed here, the connection between 3 John and the other Johannine epistles is a close one indeed. In fact, 3 John understood this way sheds new light on the hitherto obscure and very important initial stage of the intra-Johannine schism, and this may be the most significant implication of the theory.