Southeastern University

FireScholars

PhD in Organizational Leadership

Summer 2022

An Exegetical and Phenomenological Study of 1–3 John as a Model for Developing Biblical Community Through Spiritual Leadership Practices

Joseph Pastori

An Exegetical and Phenomenological Study of 1–3 John as a Model for
Developing Biblical Community Through Spiritual Leadership Practices

Submitted to Southeastern University

Jannetides College of Business, Communication, and Leadership

In partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy in Organizational Leadership

Joseph Pastori
July 2022

Jannetides College of Business, Communication, and Leadership

Southeastern University

This is to certify that the dissertation prepared by:

Joseph Pastori

titled

AN EXEGETICAL AND PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF 1–3 JOHN

AS A MODEL FOR DEVELOPING BIBLICAL COMMUNITY THROUGH

SPIRITUAL LEADERSHIP PRACTICES

Has been approved by his committee as satisfactory completion of the dissertation

requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Approved By:

Joshua D. Henson, Ph.D., Chair

Jannetides College of Business, Communication, and Leadership

Bethany D. Peters, Ph.D., Methodologist

Jannetides College of Business, Communication, and Leadership

Carlo A. Serrano, Ph.D., Committee Member

Jannetides College of Business, Communication, and Leadership

Southeastern University Institutional Review Board Approval:

July 22, 2022

Abstract

Pastors and church leaders have been trusted with the New Testament responsibility of building biblical community characterized by *koinonia*. For contemporary pastors, this means developing this community while addressing internal conflicts and an increasing level of opposition from a post-Christian societal culture. The leadership approach of the Apostle John and the biblical principles in the epistles of 1–3 John serve as a model for building and maintaining biblical community while addressing internal and external challenges. Spiritual leadership theory (Fry, 2003) and organizational culture (Cameron & Quinn, 2011; Schein, 1986, 1990) provide valid theoretical constructs that are compatible with the Scriptural approach as taught and modeled by the Apostle John. This study included an exegetical analysis of the New Testament epistles of 1–3 John, as well as a phenomenological study of contemporary church leaders as a model for developing biblical community through spiritual leadership practices in a post-Christian culture. The exegetical analysis produced seven broad leadership themes. The biblical themes formed the basis for in-depth qualitative interview questions that 11 Assemblies of God presbyters responded to. The results integrated Scripture, leadership theory, and phenomenological findings to serve as a guide for contemporary church leaders who are endeavoring to build and maintain biblical community in a post-Christian society.

Keywords: *Apostle John, spiritual leadership theory, organizational culture, biblical community*

Dedication

This work is dedicated to God Almighty—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. I undertook this project as an act of worship to God: to glorify Him, to equip the church, and to advance His kingdom. I could not have done this without His constant help.

I also dedicate this work to my family. To my beautiful wife Lisa, the love of my life, for her grace, patience, love, encouragement, and prayers. This project would not have been possible without her enthusiastic support. To my sons Ronald and Shane, for their confidence, encouragement, support, and prayers. Whenever I expected the worst, they always believed the best. To my late mother, Anna M. Pastori, who always believed that I could achieve anything and made it possible for me to pursue my life's passions. And to my late mother-in-law, Franda H. Kincaid, for her faithful prayers, support, and confidence in my calling to ministry.

Finally, this work is dedicated to Bethel Assembly of God in Newark, NJ, a church that has been a home to us for over 30 years and a congregation who has been our family. Thank you for the honor of allowing me to serve as your senior pastor for the last 18 years and for all the love, support, confidence and trust that you placed in my ministry during that time, despite my many shortcomings.

Acknowledgements

My undying gratitude goes to the many who have made it possible for me to complete this work. I thank Almighty God, who has been a Father to the fatherless and revealed the depth of His love for me through Jesus Christ. I cannot express the depth of gratitude that I have for the Lord Jesus Christ, who transformed my life through His glorious work on the cross (which I discovered through the study of His Word) and invited me into fellowship with the Father, the Son, and the body of Christ (1 Jn. 1:1–7). I thank God for the Holy Spirit who anointed me for the task, opened God's Word to me, and strengthened me when I needed it most.

My deepest gratitude goes to my wife, Lisa Pastori, for the countless ways her support made this possible. Only God knows the many ways she sacrificed so that I could devote time and energy to this project. She was a model of patience and grace while providing regular encouragement and prayers. I also greatly appreciate my sons Ronald and Shane for their enthusiastic support and the many sacrifices they made while I was on this journey. They were a constant source of encouragement, which gave me confidence and resolve. I especially appreciate the many times that Shane laid hands on me and prayed me through my most difficult moments.

I would also like to thank the faculty members of Southeastern University who equipped me as a scholar. I especially appreciate the following instructors who had a profound impact on me during my time at SEU. Thank you, Dr. Jennifer Carter, an extraordinary educator who always provided exemplary leadership for our program and the grace of a true professional. I appreciate the many ways you

equipped me in my academic endeavors and gave me confidence. Thank you, Dr. Emile Hawkins, for the numerous ways you inspired me and gave me the resolute determination to persevere. At critical points, your anointed teaching and godly example convinced me I was in the right place doing the right thing. Thank you, Dr. Bethany Peters, for believing in me and for motivating me in numerous ways that built my confidence. I appreciate your brilliant insights and regular encouragement that strengthened and encouraged me as a person and as a scholar. And thank you, Dr. Joshua Henson, for your energy, enthusiasm, and encouragement. You always gave me wise advice. You went out of your way to be available for help and support. You always believed the best, even when I found it difficult. Most of all, you always made me feel like I could do the impossible.

I also want to express my appreciation to the faculty and staff of Southwestern Assemblies of God University, my past and future home. My gratitude especially goes to Dr. Larry Hester, who was a fountain of faith and encouragement, Dr. Chuck Wilson, who convinced me to pursue my doctoral studies and believed in my ability; Dr. Jimmy White, a dearly loved mentor and friend; Dr. Robert Harden, for always providing wise counsel and direction that led me to reach higher; and for Dr. Clancy Hayes, who believed in me and saw my potential as a professional.

Table of Contents

List of Tables

Chapter 1 – Introduction

When Simon Peter declared his conviction that Jesus was "the Christ, the Son of the living God" (*New King James Version*, 1982, Matt. 16:16), Jesus replied that such a confession of faith would provide the foundation upon which He would build His church (Matt. 16:18). In other words, the establishing of the Christian faith would take place in the context of biblical community, and this model passed from Christ to His disciples and subsequently to those who would follow thereafter (Ferguson, 2004; Keener, 2009; Martens, 2008; Peters, 2018) consisting of believers called out from the society at large (Matt. 28:19; 1 Cor. 3:9; 2 Cor. 6:16–17; Eph. 2:20–22; 1 Pet. 4:12–14). This would reflect the biblical community that was foundational to God's covenant people throughout the Bible, including that of Jesus and His disciples (Keener, 2009; Overdorf, 2012). Christ's pronouncement found its initial fulfillment on the day of Pentecost when the New Testament biblical community was established with 3,000 people (Acts 2:42–47). They regularly engaged in practices that edified its members in the faith and provided a basis by which they could experience communion with God and one another (Dawn, 1989; Garrison, 2015). That sense of biblical community remains the means by which people are joined in intimate fellowship by their mutual identification and communion with God, as revealed in the New Testament (Ferguson, 2004; Martens, 2008).

This faith community, however, exists in the context of a larger secular society that has often reacted with hostility toward its message and values (Matt. 5:11; 24:9; Jn. 15:18–19; 1 Jn. 5:19; Bateman, 2017; Water, 2001, 2002; D. H. Williams, 2019). The adversity from the community at large continues to grow in its intensity in a post-Christian culture (Adhar, 2013; Little, 2018). Differing values on a host of issues provide the flashpoints for a clash with the outside culture (Hunt, 2013; O'Leary, 2016), resulting in legal action taken against people of faith in the public realm over a variety of issues (Family Research Council, 2017a; Shackelford et al., 2016). At the same time, the church has a biblical mandate to serve and engage the culture at large (Matt. 5:13–16; 28:19; Lk. 6:27–28; Acts 1:8; Gal. 2:10; Php. 2:15) by caring through compassion ministries and sharing the

gospel message (Hovsepian, 2012; Peters, 2018; G. G. Robinson, 2018; Stetzer, 2018), regardless of the response.

Furthermore, to effectively impact the culture at large, the church must address organizational cultural challenges that threaten to undermine biblical community and cause division. Yet, external cultural issues lie at the heart of factors that threaten to divide the church from within. A recent example involved conflicts that have caused a split within the Southern Baptist Convention concerning issues such as political involvement, critical race theory, gender roles, and LGBTQ involvement (Bailey, 2021b; Crary, 2021; Lovett, 2021). These are the latest problems to emerge, exacerbating divisions that have been building over the last several years (Bailey, 2021a; Lovett, 2017). Likewise, the Presbyterian Church in America recently faced internal divisions as pastors and church leaders passed a resolution in their General Assembly declaring that those who identify as gay are disqualified from seeking ordination (E. M. Miller, 2021), once again revealing how outside cultural issues are creating internal organizational rifts in the body of Christ.

These divisions cause stress that undermines the stability of the church as an organization and has an adverse effect on the pursuit of its strategic mission. As a result, some key developments indicate a lack of effectiveness in building and maintaining healthy biblical community. One such development reflects the steady decline in church attendance over the last 20 years (Conway, 2011; Jones, 2021; Nguyen, 2018). This shift reveals not only a larger number of people with no religious affiliation, but a decrease among those who do identify with a religious tradition as well (Jones, 2021). It also confirms that in some cases, disagreements with the church over cultural issues contribute to this disengagement (Conway, 2011). Although this trend reflects declines among all age groups, the drop in attendance among emerging adults, young adults ages 18–29 (Arnett, 2015), shows a much sharper level of disengagement (Kinnaman & Hawkins, 2011; Powell et al., 2017; Rainer & Rainer, 2008; C. Smith & Snell, 2009). Emerging adults give various reasons for leaving the church, which include a perception that the church is unfriendly or unsafe, that its members are judgmental and/or hypocritical, and

that they have different preferences in worship styles (Enis, 2018; Kinnaman & Hawkins, 2011; Rainer & Rainer, 2008).

Parishioners are not the only ones whose numbers are shrinking. Another development indicating a lack of healthy biblical community involves the growing number of pastors and priests who are leaving the ministry, coinciding with a decline in those who choose ministry as a vocation (Conway, 2011; Goodall, 2006; Hester, 2017). Although burnout and conflict serve as factors that contribute to turnover intentions (Goodall, 2006; Hester, 2017), many who remain in the ministry struggle with burnout and its effects also (Hester, 2017). Therefore, the challenge that lies before the church and its leaders remains to encourage and develop fellowship among its members by building a biblical organizational culture that will, not only nurture biblical community, but also offset divisive influences while engaging an adversarial culture at large. This warrants an examination of the dynamics of organizational culture and its importance for the church.

Organizational culture (OC) is a set of general assumptions that a group develops and adopts as means of establishing and governing accepted behavior within its structure (Schein, 1986). The underlying assumptions develop out of the group's shared values and form the basis for acceptable conduct within the organization, creating the spirit that defines its character (Hattingh, 2019; Mosley & Matviuk, 2010; Schein, 1990). As such, culture serves as a unifying factor that binds members together in support of their common purpose (Cameron & Quinn, 2011; Meyerson & Martin, 1987; Struecker, 2015). For the church, it means embracing a mission that centers around scriptural values (Struecker, 2015). A healthy OC creates the strength and stability that equips its members to effectively resolve problems associated with external pressures and internal conflicts, thereby reducing anxiety (Schein, 1986, 1990). Such unity and stability position the organization for longevity through passing on its deeply held values to succeeding generations (Hattingh, 2019).

Spiritual leadership theory (SLT) offers a leadership construct that lends itself to adaptation in a ministry setting (Henson, 2015; Wamble, 2019; Washington, 2016). Although it was originally developed to integrate spirituality

into a variety of organizational contexts (Fry, 2003; Fry & Matherly, 2006), SLT endeavors to avoid sectarian differences by deemphasizing the religious aspect of the theory for the sake of inclusion in secular settings (Fry, 2003, 2005); however, the theoretical underpinnings of the construct have their origins in theology and religious practice (Fry, 2005). In his model of spiritual leadership, Fry (2003) proposed that a leader's values, attitudes, and behaviors serve as a source of intrinsic motivation that inspires vision, hope/faith, and altruistic love to facilitate a sense of spiritual survival through calling and membership. Spiritual leadership promotes several positive outcomes on a personal and organizational level, which include ethical and spiritual well-being, vision and values congruence, increased organizational commitment, greater productivity, reduced stress levels, and a healthy work-life balance (Egel & Fry, 2015; Fry, 2005; Fry & Matherly, 2006; Yang & Fry, 2018). Furthermore, the construct has a body of empirical support in a wide array of organizational settings (Adebiyi, 2016; Fachrunnisa & Adhiatma, 2014; Fu et al., 2019; Milliman & Ferguson, 2008; Mubasher et al., 2017; Nguyen et al., 2018).

As a leadership paradigm that promotes spiritual practice and team building, stimulates organizational commitment, and values concern for the spiritual well-being of followers, SLT serves as a suitable model for ministry application. Furthermore, its facilitation of vision, hope/faith, and altruistic love align well with the values of Johannine teaching (1 Jn. 2:28–3:3; 4:7–21; 5:4). Likewise, it has demonstrated compatibility with such leadership approaches as authentic leadership (Fry & Whittington, 2014; Hannah et al., 2011; Henson, 2015), servant leadership (Fry et al., 2007), and transformational leadership (Washington, 2016).

SLT has been critiqued by those who view it as incompatible with standards of biblical leadership because of its adaptability to secular contexts and lack of an exclusive link to the Bible and Christian tradition (Babyak, 2013; Choi, 2016), and their concerns carry some merit. Secular models do reflect the thinking of the culture at large to a degree, so Christian church leaders must build their leadership firmly on a scriptural foundation to avoid allowing cultural paradigms to exert inordinate influence in the church (Crowther, 2012) and dilute ethical and moral

standards (Henson, 2015). Still, Christian leaders can err in their attempt to develop an entirely biblical leadership theory by embracing one of two extremes—adopting a "Christ against culture" attitude (Kessler, 2013, p. 2; Niebuhr, 1951, pp. 45–82) or retrofitting Scripture to support a claim to biblical origins for a secular model (Kessler, 2013). A more balanced application would follow the recommendation of Luther and Calvin by cautiously studying the findings of relevant secular learning in light of Scripture, recognizing that God Himself is the ultimate source of all truth (Langer, 2014). As Gangel (1989) explained, "We must also understand the Augustinian process of 'spoiling the Egyptian,' learning all we can from past research of secular leadership and adapting it theologically to the service of Christ and His Church" (p. 45). In so doing, church leaders can appreciate and utilize compatible principles found in SLT that find support from Scripture (Henson, 2015).

By design, SLT offers a paradigm that focuses on a broad spirituality, rather than application in any specific religious or faith tradition, in order to promote inclusion and avoid sectarian conflicts in the secular or pluralistic workplace (Fry, 2003). Even so, its framework does allow for application in a faith-based context (Fry, 2003; Fry et al., 2010; Henson, 2015; Washington, 2016); however, spiritual leadership has not been studied as part of paradigm to promote an OC that supports *koinonia*. Furthermore, OC has not been studied as an element of spiritual leadership in the pursuit of biblical community. Likewise, none of these factors have been studied as components that develop biblical leadership, specifically as modeled in the Johannine literature (Ogereau, 2009; Poon, 2006).

The New Testament epistles of John provide a framework for building and maintaining biblical community while addressing external cultural influences and their impact on the church's OC (1 Jn. 2:15–27). The Apostle John demonstrated strong pastoral leadership in addressing various conflict situations that threatened to cause division and undermine healthy *koinonia* in the church (Pastori & Henson, 2022, 1 Jn. 1:3–10). He also communicated a compelling vision of abundant life in Christ and rich biblical community (Pastori & Henson, 2022, 1 Jn. 1:1–7). Furthermore, John taught clearly articulated values to the believers under his care,

which include a firm commitment to the truth (1 Jn. 1:6–8), faith (1 Jn. 5:4), biblical community (1 Jn. 1:3–7), and altruistic love (4:7–21), to name a few (Pastori & Henson, 2022). John also modeled a deep spiritual capacity, another notable leadership quality that permeated his writings (Pastori & Henson, 2022, 1 Jn. 1:1–4). This quality provided a foundational basis for his spiritual leadership and equipped him to serve as an example as he built biblical community that facilitated unity and healthy *koinonia* with God and Christians.

Statement of the Problem

In his first epistle, the Apostle John explained that the apostolic witness he proclaimed regarding the reality of Christ provided the basis for one to experience relationship with God and with other believers (1 Jn. 1:3). The New Testament Greek word κοινωνία (*koinonia*), can be defined as a "close association involving mutual interests and sharing, association, communion, fellowship, close relationship" (Danker et al., 2000, p. 552). This word characterizes the relationship that serves as the basis for New Testament spiritual community among those who profess Christ. Because God—represented by the Trinity (Matt. 28:19)—exists in a perfect union of love, the origins of community begin with Him. As those created in His divine image, humans share an orientation toward community (Bilezikian, 2002; Martens, 2008). This predisposition toward fellowship coincides with God's design for humanity to find a multidimensional level of satisfaction (i.e., spiritual, emotional, and relational) in communion with Himself and others, with love as a foundational element (Ferguson, 2004; Garrison, 2015). The centrality of a faith community whose distinctive identity focuses on relationship with God, first in Judaism and then extending to Christianity, sets these faiths apart from other religions (Hinduism and Buddhism, for example) that place emphasis on the individual (Martens, 2008). With Christ's coming, God opened the opportunity for fellowship by extending an invitation to all humanity through His Son to encounter biblical community. The fellowship shared by Christ with His disciples transitioned to the early church, where from its inception (Acts 2:42–47) a bond of fellowship served as a formative principle (Dawn, 1989; Garrison, 2015; Overdorf, 2012).

An understanding of biblical community begins with an exegetical study of the Old and New Testament scriptures and the lived experiences of churches throughout the ages (P. W. Perkins, 2012). Wood (as cited in Spyker, 2013) defined community as follows:

> A group of people who have a sense of common purpose(s) and/or interest(s) for which they assume mutual responsibility, acknowledge their interconnectedness, respect the individual differences among members, and commit themselves to the well-being of each other and the integrity and well-being of the group. (Communities in Cyberspace section, para. 3)

Using Ebersole and Woods's (2001) description of community as a sharing of things in common (including traditional elements such as ceremony, ritual, and discourse), Nave (2018) proposed the following definition of biblical community: "Biblical community makes things common or shares an interest 'in Christ' with the Holy Spirit guiding ceremony, ritual, dialogue, mutual responsibilities, and interconnectedness" (p. 28). This definition emphasizes the fellowship aspect of biblical community. Perkins's (2012) definition of biblical community encapsulates Bonhoeffer's (2015) philosophy in part, which includes a focus on the activities carried out by the members:

> Biblical community is a group of people who utilize their gifts (talents and abilities) for the encouragement, exhortation, and social welfare of one another around the common belief in Jesus Christ as the Son of God, and for His honor and glory. (P. W. Perkins, 2012, p. 6)

Bonhoeffer (2015) also added that in Christian community, members in fellowship experience together the presence of Christ in their midst. He concluded, "Christian community means community through Jesus Christ and in Jesus Christ. There is no Christian community that is more than this, and none that is less than this.…We belong to one another only through and in Jesus Christ" (Bonhoeffer, 2015, p. 5). Together, these definitions capture the essence of biblical community among those who share Christ.

Believers joined in Christian fellowship share a common set of core values that contribute to the distinctive character of the community (Bonhoeffer, 2015; P.

W. Perkins, 2012) and form the basis of healthy church relationships and practices (Gangel, 2001; Macchia, 1999). Those dedicated to Christ and to one another generally value active participation in discipleship and spiritual formation (Garrison, 2015; Macchia, 1999; P. W. Perkins, 2012; Scorgie & Reimer, 2011; P. S. Williams, 2020), acts of service done from an attitude of love (Bilezikian, 2002; Gangel, 2001; Garrison, 2015), a commitment to care for the needs of its members (Cornette, 2017; Macchia, 1999) as well as the poor (P. W. Perkins, 2012; Peters, 2018), a commitment to justice (P. W. Perkins, 2012; Scorgie & Reimer, 2011), the development and active use of spiritual gifts (Gangel, 2001; Garrison, 2015; Macchia, 1999), a lifestyle of genuine worship (Garrison, 2015; Macchia, 1999), and an intentional effort to share the gospel of Christ (Cornette, 2017; Garrison, 2015; Macchia, 1999; P. S. Williams, 2020). Collectively, these practices create a sense of community that stands as a distinguishing characteristic to the culture at large (John 13:35). This open, receptive atmosphere provides a place of acceptance and healing (Martens, 2008; Wright, 2006). N. T. Wright (2006) described church with vivid imagery that captured the beauty of *koinonia* in action:

> It's a place of welcome and laughter, of healing and hope, of friends and family and justice and new life. … It's where people bring their own small faith and discover that when they get together with others to worship the true God, the whole becomes greater than the sum of its parts. (p. 105)

As Christians subordinate their sinful behavior in favor of serving the needs of others (Php. 2:3–4), they contribute to genuine biblical community (D. A. Fee, 2018). In growing closer to one another, they draw near to the Father's heart also (Lawson, 2013). Fee (2018) proposed that such relationships demonstrate the interpersonal qualities of the Trinity, which ultimately brings glory to God.

Although the church community offers an approachable, attractive, and nurturing atmosphere of fellowship (Martens, 2008), it does not exist in isolation (Schein, 2017). In the musical *Fiddler on the Roof,* the milkman Tevye compared his own Jewish community with the broader Gentile community at large by saying, "Then there are the others in our village. They make a much bigger circle. We don't bother them, and so far, they don't bother us" (Jewison, 1971). With this statement,

he acknowledged significant, potentially irreconcilable differences between the cultures that existed in a tenuous balance while also foreshadowing tensions to come. Like the relational and cultural dynamic described by Tevye, the church and the larger community beyond its walls represent cultures in conflict. Although free religious practice and expression were a typical part of American public and private life for over two centuries, the last several decades have seen a growing intolerance for even the most innocuous public expressions of faith (Family Research Council, 2017a). Activities such as mentioning God or prayer in commencement addresses, prayer before or after school sporting events, public displays of the Ten Commandments, and other common practices have been regularly targeted for legal action by groups such as the Freedom from Religion Foundation and the American Civil Liberties Union (Family Research Council, 2017a; Shackelford & Bufferfield, 2017a). Moreover, Christians face mounting pressure to violate their convictions regarding sexuality and are forced to fund activities that violate their deeply held beliefs. Even members of the U.S. military face growing hostility toward practicing their faith (Shackelford & Bufferfield, 2017b). Also, during the COVID-19 pandemic, as churches were ordered to stay closed, Evangelical Christians took issue with the view adopted by some states that considered liquor stores and abortion clinics as essential services while minimizing the importance of religious observances (Hallowell, 2020; Lubold & Lucey, 2020).

A noticeable shift away from religion and faith has occurred steadily over the last 50 years, giving way to a post-Christian process of secularization in society (Boeve, 2018; Noel, 2015). Trends ranging from a decline in weekly Mass attendance across Europe (Boeve, 2018) and a reduction in religious conservatives serving in Great Britain's government (Hunt, 2013) reflect a general movement toward post-Christian attitudes in the West. Roughly 25 percent of Americans now consider themselves non-Christian, either belonging to another religion or having no faith at all, and these percentages are even higher in other Western nations (Stetzer, 2018). As a community of faith, the church stands in opposition to this trend and endeavors to extend its influence through the gospel proclamation, its ministry initiatives, and its moral convictions (Dawn, 1989; Paas, 2012). The

sentiments expressed by a government report on peaceful coexistence (U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, 2016) sought to undermine the church's impact in public life by limiting religious exemptions. Likewise, some celebrate the shift toward nonreligious behavior, indicating a disdain for religion and denying that it offers any genuine value to society (Zuckerman, 2015). These things indicate a rise in hostility toward Christianity.

As the shift in Western culture continues to trend toward a postmodern, anti-metaphysical realism, opposition from a post-Christian culture toward those with biblical values continues to rise (Little, 2018). What began as a "benevolent secularism" has continued to move steadily toward a "hostile secularism" (Adhar, 2013, p. 415). The removal of every vestige of religion from the public sphere indicates a move away from religious tolerance toward antagonism (Adhar, 2014). As Adhar (2013) observed, "Hostile secularism teaches that religion is a potentially dangerous, irrational thing and thus ought to be quarantined in the private sphere" (p. 418). Taken to its logical conclusion, it establishes unbelief as a state public policy (Adhar, 2013).

For example, Martin R. Castro, Chairman of the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, stated, "The phrases 'religious liberty' and 'religious freedom' will stand for nothing except hypocrisy so long as they remain code words for discrimination, intolerance, racism, sexism, homophobia, Islamophobia, Christian supremacy or any form of intolerance" (U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, 2016, p. 29). Noting the irony of a report that claims to promote "peaceful coexistence," O'Leary (2016) explained that the report characterized exemptions based on principled, scriptural, religious convictions as an infringement of the civil rights and civil liberties of others. In other words, post-Christian hostile secularism views any disagreement or exemption related to critical moral issues based on religious conscience as a form of oppression, as exemplified by Zuckerman's comments:

> Religion has historically been a leading source of misogyny and homophobia. Indeed, numerous studies show that strong religiosity is highly correlated with being against women's rights and gay rights.…The weakening of religion will add sanity and safety to our sex lives. And it will

help win the right to die peacefully and painlessly. (Zuckerman, 2015, para. 13)

The natural progression of this trend has led to numerous accounts of hostility toward public religious expression in every sector of public life, including government and public places, education, churches and ministry activities, and the military (Family Research Council, 2017a; Shackelford & Bufferfield, 2017b; Shackelford et al., 2016).

Although uncertainty exists among Christians and non-Christians alike regarding what the future holds for Christianity's place in the public square (Boeve, 2018), the exponential increase in expression of hostile secularism require a response from the faith community (Dufault-Hunter, 2008; Family Research Council, 2017a). If anything, legal challenges have had some success in resisting secular overreach (Shackelford et al., 2016). As Senator Ben Sasse (2016) expressed in his response to the report on peaceful coexistence, human freedom does not originate with any government entity; rather, a free people voluntarily empower the government with authority. Nevertheless, as all authority ultimately extends even beyond the human realm (Matt. 28:18; Eph. 1:20–23; Php. 2:9–11), an appropriate response from the faith community should instead reflect the redemption and reconciliation characterized by believers acting as Christ's ambassadors (2 Cor. 5:18–20) living in biblical community (Peters, 2018).

Rather than contribute to the polarization that exists in today's post-Christian culture, Christians can present the glory of God as revealed in biblical community through its various expressions of outreach, which likewise contributes to the health of the fellowship (Taylor, 2003). Such outreach involves engaging the culture with biblical truth regarding the sinfulness of humanity balanced with sensitivity and understanding (Hovsepian, 2012; Little, 2018; Poppinga et al., 2019). As Robinson (2018) proposed, "In a post-Christian society, the church must live as though everything is sacred—because Christ has made it so. The grand metanarrative of the Bible, then, becomes our corrective lens both inside and outside of the church" (p. 17). This stands in bold contrast to the post-Christian objectives pursued by a hostile secularism; however, the gospel message as lived

and proclaimed in love by a biblical community has the promise and potency of divine empowerment (G. G. Robinson, 2018). Yet, the ability to live out that mandate with impact becomes severely compromised if the church is riddled with internal divisions. If its members are divided on the controversial issues raised by societal culture and influenced by its values and opinions, then the church ceases to be an influential instrument of community transformation (Matt. 5:13–15). Therefore, the building of a healthy OC through *koinonia* that will withstand the pressures from culture at large remains a priority.

Despite the importance of these issues to the contemporary church, a lack of literature exists that connects SLT, OC, and biblical leadership as demonstrated in the Johannine model. The basic principles of SLT offer a leadership paradigm that is well suited for application in a faith context, in particular as it compares and contrasts to biblical leadership as demonstrated by John (Akin, 2001; Fry, 2003; Hiebert, 1991; Westcott, 1902). Concomitantly, the principles of OC fit well with an exploration of the development of biblical community as characterized by *koinonia* (Cameron & Quinn, 2011; Fry, 2005; Schein, 1990; Sweeney & Fry, 2012). Seeing the lack of literature linking these critical concepts, the current researcher aimed to explore their relationship in an effort to serve contemporary pastors and church leaders as they endeavor to lead their congregations by developing a biblical culture that can successfully navigate the challenges presented by internal conflict and societal pressures (Blackaby & Blackaby, 2011; Cameron & Quinn, 2011; Davis, 2012; Macchia, 1999; Panikulam, 1979; Schein, 1986).

Purpose of the Research

The current researcher analyzed the leadership of the Apostle John as demonstrated in his New Testament epistles (1–3 John) in view of SLT (Fry, 2003; Fry & Matherly, 2006; Fry & Whittington, 2014) for developing a biblical OC in the local church (characterized by *koinonia*) while navigating the challenges of an adversarial societal culture. As one of the original 12 apostles of Jesus (Matt. 10:2; Mk. 3:14–17; Lk. 6:13–14), John occupied a strategic place in the development of Christianity and the establishment of the church. Not only did he observe the life, leadership, and ministry of Jesus in a wide variety of contexts, he had access to

more in-depth teaching and training (Matt. 13:16–17; 17:19–20; Mk. 3:10, 34; 13; Lk. 11:1). John was also part of an inner circle of disciples (with Peter and James) that accompanied the Lord on special occasions, had greater access to Him, and received special revelation (Matt. 17:1; 26:37; Mk. 5:37). Furthermore, John is commonly identified as the disciple "whom Jesus loved" (Jn. 13:23–27; 19:26–27; 20:2; 21:7, 20–22), a designation indicating deeper intimacy, which accorded him an even greater degree of trust and revelation. For example, Jesus trusted the care of His mother to John after His crucifixion (Jn. 19:26–27), and he received the apocalyptic vision which formed the book of Revelation (Keener, 1993; Keinath, 2018; Pate, 2011; Rev. 1:1–2, 9–20; 22:8–11).

Not only did the Apostle John play a founding role in the development of the Christian church, but he helped to navigate it through the various challenges that it faced through the remainder of the first century. This included the church's explosive initial growth (Acts 2:42–47; 5:12–14) and the spread of Christianity from Judea to the rest of the Roman empire. All of this took place during a time of great upheaval for the church and the Jewish people, which included seasons of intense persecution, the destruction of Jerusalem and the Jewish temple, and internal organizational challenges (such as the rise of false teachers and disputes over doctrinal error) as the church matured through the decades (Fouard, 1905; MacDonald, 1877). The importance of his leadership grew even greater as he remained the last surviving member of the original 12 apostles, playing a critical role through the end of the first century. This seniority afforded him respect and dignity during the church's transition to a new generation of leadership that had not experienced Christ's ministry firsthand (Pate, 2011). During John's later years, historical tradition credits him with having written the Gospel of John, his three epistles, and Revelation, a body of influential literature that likely brought the New Testament canon to a close (Pate, 2011). During this period, he also reportedly settled in Ephesus, where he spent his remaining days, likely serving the church at Ephesus and other associated churches in the area (Hiebert, 1991; Kruse, 2020; Osborne, 2007).

An examination of SLT principles (Fry, 2003, 2005; Fry & Matherly, 2006) has revealed a compatibility with the leadership themes taught by the Apostle John in his three epistles—vision (1 Jn. 1:1–4) faith/hope (1 Jn. 3:3; 5:4), and altruistic love (1 Jn. 4:7–21). Although Ogereau (2009) and Poon (2006) have examined Johannine leadership, no scholars have analyzed this relationship identifying the similarities between spiritual leadership and biblical leadership from the Johannine perspective to develop a model for contemporary application. Furthermore, building an OC characterized by vision, faith/hope, and altruistic love that promotes calling and membership (Alimudin et al., 2017; Çimen & Karadağ, 2019; Fry & Cohen, 2009; S. B. Sanders, 2014) fits well with John's concept of biblical community as exemplified by *koinonia* (P. Perkins, 1983; Watson, 1993). Yet, despite this congruence, no researchers have made this connection between SLT and the development of biblical OC in the Johannine model. The researcher of the current study conducted a thorough exegetical analysis of the epistles of John to identify the ways the apostle exemplified spiritual leadership (Fry, 2003, 2016) and biblical leadership (Babyak, 2018; Blackaby & Blackaby, 2011) while building and maintaining an OC that embodied *koinonia* (Davis, 2012; Panikulam, 1979) through a demonstration of vision, faith/hope, and altruistic love. The questions for the in-depth interviews with contemporary pastors emerged from the exegesis. This exegetical and qualitative analysis validated the relationship between spiritual leadership, OC, and the Johannine leadership model.

Therefore, the purpose of this study was to conduct an exegetical analysis of 1–3 John to develop themes related to the Apostle John's leadership principles that align with SLT (Fry, 2003). This analysis yielded themes associated with the establishment of a healthy OC (Cameron & Quinn, 2011; Schein, 1988) as characterized by biblical community that embodies *koinonia* (Davis, 2012; Panikulam, 1979). The biblical principles derived from exegesis provided a basis for in-depth interviews with contemporary pastors to compare their practices to those biblical principles. Moreover, the principles derived from the exegesis and the in-depth interviews were then compared with spiritual leadership theory (Fry,

2003) and organizational culture as defined by Schein (1988) and Cameron and Quinn (2011).

Research Questions

A significant goal of the New Testament church lies in building and maintaining a biblical community characterized by *koinonia* (D. A. Fee, 2018). As such, it includes fellowship among members with God and one another for the purpose of mutual edification (Nave, 2018; P. W. Perkins, 2012). The end result of this fellowship and the ensuing edification is a healthy OC that will energize the church in its pursuit of its God-given calling (Gangel, 2001; Macchia, 1999), as well as the ability to deal with both internal conflict and pressure or persecution from societal culture (Schein, 1986, 1990). This need for healthy OC becomes increasingly important as the culture at large reflects a post-Christian adversarial posture toward the church (Adhar, 2013; Little, 2018). This will equip the local church to act as God's redemptive agents to a hostile societal culture (Peters, 2018).

A study of 1–3 John offered considerable insight into how the Apostle John provided biblical leadership that embodied principles compatible with SLT (Fry, 2003, 2009; Washington, 2016) while addressing issues that threatened to undermine a healthy OC as inherent in biblical community (P. Perkins, 1983). His tenure as a founding apostle allowed him to play a significant role in the establishment and development of the church and granted him significant influence over an extended period of time (Fouard, 1905; MacDonald, 1877; Robertson, 1935). This study of the Apostle John's leadership as an example of leadership principles that have a relationship with SLT and developing a healthy organizational church culture will help to fill some gaps in the current literature.

To arrive at a discovery of the leadership themes demonstrated by the Apostle John in 1–3 John in view of SLT and building a healthy OC through an exegetical analysis, the researcher developed the following research questions:

RQ1: What characteristics defined the leadership demonstrated by the Apostle John (Poon, 2006)?

RQ2: How do the leadership principles exhibited by John compare and contrast with spiritual leadership theory (Fry, 2003)?

RQ3: How do the principles of biblical community in the epistles of John

compare and contrast with the theory of organizational culture (Cameron &

Quinn, 2011; Panikulam, 1979; Schein, 1986)?

RQ4: How did John handle the leadership challenges facing his ministry

(Ladd, 1993)?

In-depth interview questions for qualitative analysis emerged from a thorough

exegesis of 1–3 John. Qualitative analysis then provided answers to these research

questions:

RQ5: What approaches have contemporary pastors used to develop a

healthy New Testament biblical community while engaging a post-Christian

culture (Adhar, 2013, 2014; Hattingh, 2019; Macchia, 1999)?

RQ6: What methods have contemporary pastors used to gauge the status of

biblical community (Davis, 2012; Macchia, 1999; Panikulam, 1979)?

RQ7: What aspects of post-Christian culture do contemporary pastors

perceive to pose a threat to biblical community (Boeve, 2018; Noel, 2015;

Paas, 2012)?

RQ8: How do the methods of contemporary pastors compare and contrast to

the theoretical constructs of spiritual leadership theory and organizational

culture (Boeve, 2018; Cameron & Quinn, 2011; Fry, 2003; Little, 2018; G.

G. Robinson, 2018; Schein, 1988)?

An exegetical analysis of John's epistles, combined with in-depth interviews with

contemporary pastors, enabled the researcher to answer these questions.

Significance of the Research

This study met a critical need that addresses challenges the contemporary

church faces as it seeks to build biblical community while reaching and engaging a

post-Christian societal culture that has increased in its hostile attitude toward

Evangelical Christianity. By demonstrating the relevance of SLT as a valid model

for the application of biblical leadership principles and OC development as taught

in the Johannine letters, this study sought to apply timeless scriptural truths to these

contemporary problems. Of all the literature in the Johannine corpus, John's

epistles offer the most direct teaching that confronts the relevant issues at hand. In

these writings, John focused on leadership matters such as challenges to his Apostolic authority and disrupting forces that subvert healthy biblical community (Ogereau, 2009). His teaching and example provide today's leaders with a plan to implement solutions that can build a strong, healthy local OC that will equip the church for effective ministry and strengthen its members as they serve and engage the community at large (Poon, 2006).

The findings of this study may benefit today's pastors and church leaders and provide support as they face the complex problems that accompany spiritual leadership and organizational health. This study addressed the problems associated with the decline of the contemporary church. The weakness of the church's spiritual leadership and OC has given rise to a decline in church attendance, a diminishing of the church's influence in the public square, an increase of discouraged pastors leaving the ministry, and a rise in divisions among members of the body of Christ (Conway, 2011; Goodall, 2006; Hester, 2017; J. M. Jones, 2021). By building biblical community characterized by *koinonia* as taught in John's epistles, church leaders can equip people to face the challenges presented by society at large (D. A. Fee, 2018). A healthy OC that nurtures biblical community will instill boldness and confidence in believers, causing them to grow in faith, in ministry effectiveness, and in a positive Christian witness (Gangel, 2001; Gasser, 2002; Hattingh, 2019). This, in turn, will lead to increased church growth, more effectual discipleship, greater pastoral retention, and better long-term organizational health and vitality (Cornette, 2017; Macchia, 1999; Overdorf, 2012; P. S. Williams, 2020).

This study added a leadership dimension to Johannine scholarship to supplement the rich theological base of knowledge that exists. As an apostolic figure, John is generally viewed as a pastor and theologian (Akin, 2001; Hiebert, 1991; Kruse, 2020; Westcott, 1902). His epistles, however, reveal his leadership ability by offering a demonstration of how he implemented the principles he taught (Ogereau, 2009; Poon, 2006). John was one of the foundational leaders of a movement that has endured for well over 2 millennia (Fouard, 1905; MacDonald, 1877; Robertson, 1935). Likewise, he was a founding leader of the organization

that grew out of that movement. As such, he played an influential role in the organizational development of the church in his various ministry capacities (Fouard, 1905; D. A. Hayes, 1917; Hewit, 1895; MacDonald, 1877; Robertson, 1935). Under his leadership, the churches that he served faced the challenges of a hostile societal culture while working out internal conflicts that threatened to disrupt *koinonia* in their biblical OC (1 Jn. 1:5–10; 2:15–19, 26). Moreover, as one who had a different ministry approach than other apostles (e.g., Peter and Paul), John's example demonstrated that a diversity of leadership styles can serve the church well in its efforts to equip believers and make organizational progress (Goleman et al., 2013; Nee, 2012).

Conceptual Framework

In conducting this study, the researcher followed a conceptual framework that used SLT as initially proposed by Fry (2003) as its leadership paradigm. The researcher addressed leadership in the church and viewed leadership from a biblical model (Lk. 22:25–27; 1 Pet. 5:1–3), specifically from a Johannine perspective (1 Jn. 1:1–3; 2 Jn. 1–4, 3 Jn. 1–4, 9–10). Likewise, this study discussed the leadership concept of OC as proposed by Schein (1988) and Cameron and Quinn (2011). Because it addresses the OC related to the local church, the researcher focused on promoting biblical community as specified in Scripture (Acts 2:42–47) and characterized by *koinonia* (1 Jn. 1:3, 6–7).

Methodology

This study provided a thorough exegesis of the New Testament epistles of John using socio-rhetorical analysis (Henson et al., 2020; Robbins, 1996b) to better understand the Apostle John's leadership principles and the themes that emerged for a comparison with spiritual leadership theory (Fry, 2003, 2016) and organizational culture (Cameron & Quinn, 2011; Schein, 1986, 1988). Likewise, it included a phenomenological qualitative aspect in the form of in-depth interviews (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Mikėnė et al., 2013; Patton, 2015) to understand how contemporary pastors apply biblical principles of SLT and OC in their local church context to facilitate biblical community as characterized by *koinonia*. Combining

these research methods increased the reliability and credibility of the findings (Carter et al., 2014; Golafshani, 2015; Patton, 1999).

Whereas studies that utilize only one research method have a greater likelihood of including any weaknesses or errors inherent in that approach, employing multiple research methods increases the validity and reliability of the data collected (Golafshani, 2015; Patton, 1999). Triangulation is a strategy that includes more than one research method to reinforce the integrity of a study and verify the quality of the data (Carter et al., 2014; Golafshani, 2015; Patton, 1999). Because no particular method for triangulation is recommended above another in a qualitative study (Golafshani, 2015), the researcher should chose the data collection approach that will best fit the study (Carter et al., 2014). For this study, in-depth interviews provided a valuable point of comparison for the exegetical analysis.

Exegetical Analysis

In this qualitative study, the researcher conducted an exegetical analysis of 1–3 John using socio-rhetorical analysis. Because the sacred Scriptures are God's Word and represent His revelation to humanity, the task of biblical study should carry reverence for the text in an endeavor to discern God's intended purposes (Duvall & Hays, 2012). This begins with sound interpretation through a discovery of the text's plain meaning (G. D. Fee & Stuart, 2003). The challenge associated with the interpretive task includes taking a text given in a specialized context and relating it to a broader audience (Robbins, 1996b). God's Word has significance for all people in every generation and culture; therefore, interpretation carries a need to balance timeless relevance with historical specificity (Duvall & Hays, 2012).

Socio-rhetorical analysis explores the various facets of the text, including its scholarly, social, cultural, and ideological aspects, in an effort to more fully appreciate the relationship between text and context (Gowler, 2010; Robbins, 1996b). By examining the text with consideration for the views that come from various different social science disciplines, the inquiry allows for a fuller exploration of possible meanings (Robbins, 1996b). In this way, scholars from different disciplines can offer insights into the text (Gowler, 2010). The purpose is not necessarily to arrive at a universal agreement among interpreters, but to

facilitate a dialogue that opens up the richness of meaning through a diversity of perspectives (Robbins, 1996b). As Robbins noted, this encourages the scholar to arrive at the intersection of faith, lived experience, and interaction with the text to draw meaningful conclusions.

Duvall and Hays (2012) likened the attempt to bridge the context of the biblical world to contemporary application to trying to cross a river. The process begins with arriving at a thorough understanding of the biblical text as original audience understood it. On the other side of the river lies relevant meaning for today's reader. Crossing this river requires a sound method of exegesis and hermeneutics (G. D. Fee & Stuart, 2003). Socio-rhetorical analysis provides the vehicle that makes the bridging of these two places possible (Henson et al., 2020).

Henson et al. (2020) explained that the significance and reliability of socio-rhetorical analysis comes from taking a view of textual analysis that is scientific (i.e., bringing with it a variety of scholarly tools for interpretation), systematic (i.e., examining Scripture in an organized, logical fashion), and holistic (i.e., using a diversity of means to discover meaning). This involves a thorough analysis of the biblical text using multiple textures to explore the depths of truth found in God's Word and extracting the richness of divine revelation (Henson et al., 2020; Robbins, 1996b). Inner texture involves the internal language elements of the text and how they relate together to communicate meaning and form a logical, coherent unit (Henson et al., 2020; Robbins, n.d.). Intertexture includes the text's use of and relationship with material outside the text from other sources (Henson et al., 2020; Robbins, n.d., 1996b). Social and cultural texture describe the nature of the text as it reflects the society and culture within which it exists. It includes the elements such as cultural attitudes, values, and mores (Robbins, n.d.). Ideological texture explores the interpretive paradigm and worldview that the scholar brings to the text and how it influences meaning (Henson et al., 2020; Robbins, n.d.). Sacred texture is concerned with who God is and what spiritual truth He intended to communicate with others (Henson et al., 2020). Together these textures provide the scholar with a thorough analysis of the salient elements that contribute to meaning and understanding in relating the sacred text to a contemporary context.

Phenomenological Inquiry

The researcher of this study took a phenomenological approach to qualitative inquiry utilizing in-depth interviews. According to Creswell and Poth (2018), "A phenomenological study describes the common meaning for several individuals of their lived experiences of a concept or a phenomenon" (p. 74). Therefore, this study explored the lived ministry experiences of the participants to better understand how their experiences relate to Scripture and theory (Saldaña & Omasta, 2018). The in-depth interview is a one-on-one discussion that allows the researcher to direct focused questions to a single participant at a time (Creswell, 2015). This method allows for open-ended questions without any predetermined expectations or pressure, encouraging participants to say as much as they choose in their own manner of speaking (Leavy, 2017). Because of the minimal restrictions on responses, in-depth interviews can provide a rich, diverse pool of data for analysis (Mikėnė et al., 2013). Furthermore, such interviews give participants the opportunity to share a depth of personal material, which could include their values, attitudes, beliefs, and experiences (Lambert & Loiselle, 2008; Mikėnė et al., 2013; Milena et al., 2008). As such, the individual interview provides an atmosphere that encourages participants to feel relaxed and confident as they offer vivid responses that communicate the various facets of their perspective related to the research topic (Milena et al., 2008). Furthermore, in-depth one-on-one interviews are particularly effective in allowing participants to share sensitive information (Creswell, 2015; Kruger et al., 2019; Milena et al., 2008) Simply put, it offers an opportunity for the participant to share their story (Mikėnė et al., 2013). For the purposes of this study, in-depth interviews provided an opportunity to assess the experiences of contemporary pastors in comparison to the leadership and cultural challenges addressed in the Johannine epistles.

Participants. Although formally founded as an organization in 1914 in Hot Springs, Arkansas, the Assemblies of God (AG) began as a development of a global Pentecostal revival movement (Blumhofer, 1985). Since that time, the organization has expanded beyond the General Council of the Assemblies of God in the United States (with headquarters in Springfield, Missouri) to include the

World Assemblies of God Fellowship (Blumhofer, 2003). The AG is currently the largest Pentecostal denomination in the world, with an estimated 13,000 AG churches, 3,000,000 million members and adherents in the United States, and 69,000,000 worldwide adherents (General Council of the Assemblies of God, n.d.). AG presbyters from the northeast region of the United States served as the subjects for the in-depth interviews in this study. Presbyters in the AG fellowship serve as local church pastors, but also have spiritual and administrative oversight of several other pastors and churches. Furthermore, they come from very diverse ministry and cultural contexts. This diversity provides a variety of communities (urban, suburban, and rural), as well as a rich mix of ethnicities and cultures. This variety gives presbyters a very broad overview of church leadership and organizational cultural dynamics.

Having received authorization from Southeastern University's Institutional Review Board, potential candidates received an email which included pertinent information related to the study. It also included an advisory regarding any potential risks, affirmed that participants had the option to leave the study at any time, and explained the voluntary nature of the process. Furthermore, it assured potential participants of the confidentiality of all collected information. Each participant was required to fill out an Interview Consent Form, which contained relevant information related to participation. It also included information that advised participants that the sessions will be video recorded, and all information will be keep entirely confidential. Likewise, it reminded participants of the voluntary nature of participation, informed them of potential risks, and explained that they could choose to not answer any questions and/or withdraw from involvement at any time. Any potential participants who expressed discomfort regarding the process or who refused to sign the consent form forfeited their opportunity to participate in the study.

Patton (2015) suggested that no specific rules exist to identify the number of participants in a study. Although the researcher may consider a variety of factors to determine the number of participants needed to reach data saturation, the most important consideration remains the quality of data per participant (Morse, 2000;

Patton, 2015; Saldaña & Omasta, 2018). According to Patton (2015), a smaller sampling that includes a concentration of important information (such as the data obtained using in-depth interviews) can provide a wealth of useful information. He further stated, "Small samples that are truly in-depth have provided many of the most important breakthroughs in our understanding of the phenomenon under study" (Patton, 2015, p. 312). Morse (2000) noted an inverse relationship between the number of participants and the amount of usable information. In other words, the more information-rich the interviews, the fewer participants that are needed. In keeping with the qualitative approach taken by Hattingh (2019) in a similar project, this study included in-depth interviews with 11 participants.

Data Collection and Analysis. In-depth interviews were conducted by way of Zoom conference calls. All participating presbyters are well-acquainted with this platform and utilize it regularly. This allowed for maximum opportunity for meeting availability using a medium with which they had developed a considerable level of comfort. It also provided a vehicle for video recording to observe facial expressions as a supplement to the audio transcripts (Patton, 2015; Saldaña & Omasta, 2018).

Video recordings were transcribed using Otter.ai and were reviewed for errors and corrected. Participants' names were changed during the process. Videos and transcripts were imported into MAXQDA Analytics Pro 2022 software for qualitative analysis. Data were analyzed and coded (Saldaña & Omasta, 2018) to develop major categories and broad themes related to the central phenomenon (Saldaña, 2021). The categories were developed from themes that were generated by the exegesis to provide an interpretation of the data and offer a better understanding of the results as related to the central phenomenon and leadership theory.

Scope and Limitations

A lack of universal agreement regarding some historical aspects of John's background and authorship do exist. Church tradition attributes authorship of all the works in the Johannine corpus—the Gospel of John, 1–3 John, and Revelation—to John (Culpepper, 1994; Ogereau, 2009; Pate, 2011), the son of

Zebedee (Matt. 10:2; Mk. 1:9; Lk. 5:10), who became one of Christ's original 12 apostles (Matt. 10:2; Mk. 3:14–17; Lk. 6:13–14), also known as the Beloved Disciple (Jn. 13:23–27; 19:26–27; 20:2; 21:7, 20–22). A body of critical scholars have questioned the Apostle John's authorship of various works in the Johannine corpus, which includes Beasley-Murray (1999), Brooke (2004), Brown (1982), Bultmann (1973), Culpepper (1998), Dodd (1946), Edwards (2001), Smalley (1984), and Strecker (1996). Some have attributed the various works to different authors, while others subscribed to the view that a Johannine community acted collectively to produce these writings. Moreover, some of the life events associated with John have grown beyond tradition to become a part of legend (Culpepper, 1994). Nevertheless, the early church elders (Fouard, 1905; MacDonald, 1877; Pate, 2011; Robertson, 1935) and a considerable group of scholars have supported the Apostle John's authorship of the Johannine epistles—Akin (2001), Carson et al. (1992), Comfort and Hawley (2007a, 2007b), Hiebert (1991), Kistemaker (1986), Lenski (1966), Plummer (1909a, 1909b, 1909c), Robertson (1935), Stott (1988), and Westcott (1902), to name a few. Therefore, sufficient, credible scholarly support exists that advances the view that the Apostle John wrote the epistles traditionally ascribed to him and historical events related to his life and ministry. Furthermore, Streeter (1924) asserted that in light of the abundance of authoritative sources that ascribed Johannine authorship to these works, the burden of proof lies with critics who dispute the historical record related to John to provide conclusive evidence to uphold their claims.

Another limitation of study is that the biblical leadership perspective examined was specifically related to the Apostle John. Furthermore, this inquiry focuses on that leadership as depicted in John's epistles (Ogereau, 2009), and excludes his other writings; however, the Bible provides a wealth of other leadership perspectives and styles that can inform contemporary leadership studies (J. S. Burns et al., 2014; Crowther, 2012; Hattingh, 2019; Henson, 2014; S. E. Patterson, 2017; K. M. Smith, 2019). A related limitation of this study was the researcher's adoption of spiritual leadership theory as a leadership paradigm (Fry, 2003). Although spiritual leadership was compatible with the aims of this study,

other leadership models offer promise for application in a Christian context, including servant leadership (Greenleaf, 2002), authentic leadership (Gardner et al., 2011), transformational leadership (Bass & Riggio, 2016; J. M. Burns, 1978), and ethical leadership (M. E. Brown et al., 2005).

Finally, the contemporary leadership perspective in this study was limited to that of the interview subjects who are all Assemblies of God pastors and presbyters in their district/network. Although they do represent a diversity of ministry contexts (urban, suburban, and rural), and ethnicities, they come from a similar Evangelical, Pentecostal doctrinal perspective. A study of spiritual leadership and OC in different denominational and cultural contexts would add considerable value in the development of contemporary biblical leadership and *koinonia* in other church settings (Adebiyi, 2016).

Definition of Terms

Biblical community reflects an organizational quality, as well as a spiritual reality, as the body of Christ is both organization and organism (Gangel, 1989). It is the internal OC established by the church that reflects the New Testament biblical values, assumptions, and expectations that members of the body of Christ bring to the organization (Davis, 2012). Biblical community represents a people group called out of the culture at large by God (Martens, 2008) for the purposes of discipleship and sanctification (2 Cor. 6:14–18) so that its members can impact societal culture as Christ's ambassadors with the gospel (2 Cor. 5:16–21). For the purposes of this study, the terms "biblical community" and "spiritual community" were used interchangeably.

Biblical leadership, although spiritual in nature, is distinctly different from spiritual leadership as expressed in Fry's (2003) model. It represents an expression of leadership as taught and modeled in the Bible, primarily in the New Testament (Matt. 20:25–28; Jn. 13:13–17; Php. 2:5–8). It is characterized by humility (DeNeal, 2019), the leading of the Holy Spirit (Bekker, 2012), sacrificial service (G. W. Jones, 2012), and a commitment to the will of God (Blackaby & Blackaby, 2011). Biblical leadership reflects a biblical worldview (K. M. Smith, 2019),

thereby offering a different leadership paradigm from that exercised in the secular world.

Koinonia is a New Testament Greek word that is generally translated as "fellowship." It is the distinguishing quality of biblical community and is defined as a "close association involving mutual interests and sharing, association, communion, fellowship, close relationship" (Danker et al., 2000, p. 552). This word characterizes the relationship that serves as the basis for New Testament spiritual community among those who profess Christ.

Organizational culture, according to Schein (1986), is an internal organizational quality defined as follows:

> For any given group or organization that has had a substantial history, culture is the pattern of basic assumptions that a group has invented, discovered, or developed in learning to cope with its problems of external adaption and internal integration, and that has worked well enough to be considered valid, and, therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think, and feel in relation to those problems. (pp. 30–31)

Because it represents a social construct of the organization, culture is what brings the members of the organization together and keeps them together (Cameron & Quinn, 2011).

Societal culture (also called the *culture at large*) also has a natural and a spiritual component to it. Project GLOBE (House et al., 2004) defined societal culture as the "shared motives, values, beliefs, identities, and interpretations or meanings of significant events that result from common experiences of members of collectives that are transmitted across generations" (p. 15). It is distinct from OC because it represents "the language, norms, and philosophies of a nation or civilization" (Cameron & Quinn, 2011, p. 169). It has a spiritual dimension, however, because it also signifies the corrupt world system that is in rebellion against God and his kingdom (Bates, 1911). In the Johannine literature, it is identified with the Greek word κόσμος (*kosmos*, or "world") which is defined as "the world, and everything that belongs to it, appears as that which is hostile to God" (Danker et al., 2000, p. 562).

Spiritual leadership theory (also referred to as *spiritual leadership*) is a leadership model proposed by Fry (2003). According to this paradigm, intrinsic motivation fueled by the leader's values, attitudes, and behaviors serves as a catalyst that integrates vision, hope/faith, and altruistic love to promote a sense of spiritual survival through calling and membership. It creates an organizational culture that allows leaders to express sincere caring, concern, and gratitude, which facilitates a sense of belonging and a feeling that members are understood and appreciated.

Summary

The importance of the church's global mission to proclaim the gospel of Jesus and advance the kingdom of God creates a sense of urgency in the body of Christ to prioritize effective biblical leadership and healthy biblical community (Babyak, 2018; Little, 2018; P. W. Perkins, 2012). Not only does this better create an OC that nurtures faith while resolving internal conflict, but it equips the church to face external challenges presented by societal culture (Peters, 2018; Schein, 1986). Otherwise, ineffectual leadership and weakened organizational structure would undermine the church's long-term viability by tolerating factors contributing to division and decline. SLT serves as a paradigm appropriate for development in a faith-based setting (Fry, 2003; Henson, 2015; Wamble, 2019; Washington, 2016). Likewise, a focus on strengthening OC also has value for the local church (Hattingh, 2019; Mosley & Matviuk, 2010). Together, these serve as strategic areas of focus for the local church to promote biblical leadership that encourages and facilitates biblical community. In particular, the Johannine leadership model presents a compatible approach to encourage the cultivating of these healthy organizational dynamics (1 Jn. 1:1–7).

A study of John's epistles provided an understanding of how the Apostle's leadership informed his approach to problem solving (Ogereau, 2009; P. Perkins, 1983; Poon, 2006). Socio-rhetorical analysis (Henson et al., 2020; Robbins, 1996b) served as an effective method for conducting a thorough investigation into the leadership principles taught in Scripture, providing an opportunity to identify an alignment of application with spiritual leadership and organizational cultural

development (Adebiyi, 2016; Fry & Cohen, 2009; S. B. Sanders, 2014). By conducting in-depth qualitative interviews with contemporary pastors (Creswell, 2015; Mikėnė et al., 2013; Milena et al., 2008), the researcher was able to relate how they demonstrate biblical leadership in the pursuit of building a healthy church culture that nurtures *koinonia* while also mitigating the effects of a hostile societal culture (Martens, 2008; Noel, 2015). Furthermore, the findings provided a better understanding of the potential for spiritual leadership to enhance their efforts (Henson, 2015; Thompson, 2017), while also assessing their identification and application of leadership as taught in the Johannine epistles (Ogereau, 2009; Poon, 2006). In this way, the study provides support for contemporary pastors by demonstrating the value of the Johannine model as they address the multifaceted challenges of contemporary ministry.

Chapter 2 – Literature Review

In this literature review, the researcher presents a scholarly rationale for the study and provides support for its merit in adding to the body of knowledge (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). This review concentrates on the study's primary theoretical constructs and biblical organizational leadership considerations. Specifically, this study offered an exploration of literature related to spiritual leadership theory, organizational culture (including internal organizational culture and external societal cultural influences), biblical community as characterized by *koinonia*, and Johannine leadership, the leadership style, priorities, and characteristics as embodied by the Apostle John.

Spiritual Leadership Theory

In a seminal work on spiritual leadership, Fry (2003) proposed the framework for SLT. Fry suggested that SLT is an essential element of a learning organization (Senge, 2006), which leads to positive organizational outcomes. Fry (2003) offered this definition of spiritual leadership:

> I define spiritual leadership as comprising the values, attitudes, and behaviors that are necessary to intrinsically motivate oneself and others so that they have a sense of spiritual survival through calling and membership. This entails creating a vision wherein organization members experience a sense of calling in that their life has meaning and makes a difference; establishing a social/organizational culture based on altruistic love whereby leaders and followers have genuine care, concern, and appreciation for both self and others, thereby producing a sense of membership and feel understood and appreciated. (pp. 694–695)

Fry intended to develop a causal theory to bring about positive outcomes from a broad spirituality in a variety of organizational contexts, especially a pluralistic secular work environment. At the same time, SLT attempts to avoid sectarian biases that have the potential to create divisions. According to Fry (2003), "Spirituality reflects the presence of a relationship with higher power or being that affects the way in which one operates in the world" (p. 705). Because of a lack of

secular development of spirituality in leadership studies, Fry incorporated ethics and values from Western religious and theological literature related to leadership and organizational theory (Blackaby & Blackaby, 2011; MacArthur, 1998; McNeal, 2011; J. O. Sanders, 2007). Altruistic love serves as the cohesive element that reconciles spirituality and religion, regardless of tradition.

Fry credited Giacalone and Jurkiewicz's (2010) definition of workplace spirituality as foundational to the development of SLT: "Aspects of the workplace, either in the individual, the group, or the organization, that promote individual feelings of satisfaction through transcendence" (p. 13). Although Fairholm (1997, 2000, 2001) offered a valid model of spiritual leadership, Fry (2003) noted that it did not constitute a formal theory. Therefore, SLT meets a need in providing a theoretical foundation for practical application in the marketplace. Fry (2003) also noted, "Spiritual leadership theory is not only inclusive of other major extant motivation-based theories of leadership, but that it is also more conceptually distinct, parsimonious, and less conceptually confounded" (p. 693). Because it offers biblical values (vision, faith/hope, and altruistic love) that have application in a faith-based organization consistent with principles taught in the Johannine literature, SLT as proposed by Fry served as a theoretical paradigm for this study.

Fry (2005) postulated that SLT in an organization can foretell the likelihood of worker ethical and spiritual well-being along with corporate social responsibility. Stating that a universal agreement exists regarding the fundamental ethical values that contribute to healthy living and well-being, Fry called attention to the beneficial aspects of positive psychology in creating a vision of an attractive quality of life. By adhering to integrity in personal leadership that embraces positive values, attitudes, and actions rooted in altruistic love, a culture develops that advances ethical well-being. Likewise, a vision that promotes service instills a sense of calling, which gives workers a feeling that they are making a difference for good in others' lives. This adds meaning to their work, adds satisfaction to life, and contributes to greater physical health. The positive personal outcomes that result from the ethical and spiritual well-being of spiritual leadership are joy, peace, and serenity. Furthermore, SLT's contribution to ethical and spiritual well-being will

foster corporate social responsibility. For the current study, Fry's assertions that SLT contributes to positive ethical and spiritual well-being, as well as promoting corporate social responsibility, supports the construct's value in developing an organizational culture that encourages biblical community.

Fry and Matherly's (2006) conference paper reported the results testing the impact of SLT on organizational performance. They surveyed 347 workers from 43 company-owned wholesale distributorships that served as a large distributor of electrical power-source equipment located in the southwestern United States. The study results provided support for SLT as a substantial motivator of organizational commitment, productivity, and sales growth. Fry and Matherly suggested that in addition to increased output, their results also indicated that a workplace that emphasized spirituality offers sustained success and a competitive edge. They attributed these positive outcomes to a feeling of transcendence among workers related to a sense of calling in their vocation and an experience of social connection to the organization through membership. These organizational dynamics serve as important indicators of SLT effectiveness. As they described it, "This research brings to the forefront the proposition that spiritual leadership is an intangible asset that is a lead indicator of future financial performance" (Fry & Matherly, 2006, p. 18). Fry and Matherly's findings provided support for this study, confirming the validity of SLT as a valuable approach that contributes to key organizational outcomes.

Fry et al. (2007) presented spiritual leadership theory as a paradigm that reconciles conflicting aspects of servant leadership theory (Greenleaf, 2002; K. A. Patterson, 2003). Positive organizational scholarship and workplace spirituality are important factors in organizational transformation, which prioritizes both organizational effectiveness and worker well-being. These authors proposed that the spiritual leadership principles that promote organizational transformation and positive organizational development in the interests of both individual well-being and organizational performance, outcomes that are viewed as divergent interests in servant leadership, offer an answer to this complication. As noted by Fry et al. (2007), "The purpose of spiritual leadership is to create vision and value

congruence across the individual, empowered team, and organization levels and, ultimately, foster higher levels of both organizational commitment and productivity" (Introduction section, para. 5). Having found in spiritual leadership a vehicle for values integration in servant leadership, the authors advance legacy leadership as a model for the further spiritual development of servant leadership. This research demonstrates the usefulness of SLT in creating values congruence in organizations, thereby reinforcing its suitability as a leadership paradigm that encourages positive spiritual outcomes for the organization as well as the individual. This aligns well with the principles of biblical community.

Fry (2009) propounded that in spite of advances made in technological progress and prosperity, people are losing confidence in the collective values of societal culture, facilitating a needed spiritual reawakening among contemporary leaders. Increased focus on developing business and technical knowledge coinciding with a lack of emphasis on developing the inner life of students morally and ethically emerges as a likely contributing factor to moral decline in the culture. Fry suggested that personal leadership offers a starting point to personal development by an individual's taking proactive measures to pursue spiritual growth. Fry (2009) explained how SLT can present a path for individual development: "Personal spiritual leadership is practiced by authentically pursuing a personal vision, based in altruistic values, that creates a sense of calling and membership and produces high personal commitment, productivity, and life satisfaction" (p. 80). In this way, SLT offers a valid guide for helping students understand how to go about growing in spiritual matters. As such, it serves as a means of self-examination, a motivator to realize personal potential, and tool for the discovery of one's personal mission. Fry's work clarifies the importance of personal spiritual development as an important contributor to cultural improvement, which supports this study in promoting factors that contribute to a healthy organization culture through biblical community.

Fry and Cohen (2009) offered SLT as an organizational model that can enable organizations to recover from an extended work hours culture (EWHC), an organizational cultural dynamic that encourages and promotes working longer

hours to the detriment of employee health and well-being. They maintained that organizations create and sustain this culture through their various organizational structures, management practices, and reward systems. They further contended that this kind of organizational dysfunction is on the rise and becoming normative organizational behavior in today's marketplace. SLT strives to create values congruence by aligning the needs of leadership with followers on an individual, team, and enterprise level through a sense of calling and membership that ultimately leads to positive organizational outcomes such as employee well-being, increased organizational commitment, financial success, and corporate social responsibility. Fry and Cohen cited studies in a wide array of organizations in various sectors that support the validity that SLT is an agent of transformation on an individual as well as organizational level. Because a healthy organizational culture is an essential element of biblical community, Fry and Cohen's work support the value of SLT in this study.

Fry et al. (2010) conducted an illustrative case study at Cordon Bleu-Tomasso Corporation, a Canadian frozen food processing company, to support their supposition that the Spiritual Leadership Balanced Scorecard Business Model promotes personal and organizational health as well as productivity. This model aims to create a workable business model that combine a strategic performance measurement with SLT. This model proposes that employee growth and development through learning plays a critical role to developing an effective operation that also inspires and motivates its workforce. Cordon Bleu-Tomasso creates stakeholder satisfaction through vision, mission, and purpose, out of which come a strategic planning and action steps. The practice of religion and spirituality in a voluntary, pluralistic fashion plays a key part in the success of this model. The positive outcomes recorded in this case study provide further support that SLT supplements and enhances a successful organizational model to create a culture that meets organizational objectives while at the same time nurturing the growth and well-being of its members. That helps to support the purposes of this study.

Sweeney and Fry (2012) offered a model designed to facilitate character growth in leaders. They deduced that character development flows from the

assimilation of the leader's core values and beliefs into the leader's self-identity. According to Sweeney and Fry, a leader's character is a multifaceted entity consisting of a sense of agency, self-awareness, self-regulation, self-motivation, and social awareness and a connection with others. They suggested that spiritual leadership, with its emphasis on vision, hope/faith, and altruistic love, contributes to the growth of core values, self-motivation, self-identity, and social awareness. Sweeney and Fry explained that a motivational vision founded in values and serving a higher purpose instill a sense of personal mission in individuals. Such service requires people to transcend self-interest and enter a united agreement in the pursuit of a goal larger than their personal concerns. Sweeney and Fry's study presents a reminder that character growth and development remain an important element in the building of an organizational culture that prioritizes community, an important consideration for this study.

Fry and Whittington (2014) conducted a study that began with extracting information related to positive organizational scholarship and workplace spirituality through which they evaluated transformational (Bass & Riggio, 2016) and servant leadership (Greenleaf, 2002) in light of authentic leadership (Luthans & Avolio, 2003). Then they presented the basic principles of each theory as a transition to offer spiritual leadership (Fry, 2003, 2005) as a developing construct to facilitate organizational transformation. Ultimately, they recommended legacy leadership (Whittington et al., 2005) as a more defined model of spiritual leadership to bring about organizational transformation and the growth of positive organizations. As Fry and Whittington (2014) explained, "In the legacy leadership framework, 'changed lives' provides a measure of the leader's influence on the lives of their followers" (p. 26). The changed lives are inspired by the authentic behavior observed in the legacy leader. The changed lives begin as an internal dynamic that influence one's motives and values, which then extend outwardly and positively affect attitudes and behaviors related to the organization. Fry and Whittington suggested that the legacy leadership paradigm expands authentic leadership while adhering to the basic tenets of spiritual leadership. This paper helps to establish SLT as a leadership construct that shares common principles with

other positive leadership paradigms and demonstrates compatibility with these approaches. Furthermore, as a general model of spiritual leadership, it can accommodate the development of more nuanced and specific spiritual leadership constructs. For example, just as legacy leadership extends SLT to exhibit a leadership paradigm suited to the leadership of the Apostle Paul (Whittington et al., 2005), SLT holds forth the possibility of further development of a leadership approach defining the Johannine model.

Egel and Fry (2015) speculated that SLT has a positive impact on team creativity through the facilitating outcomes of team-goal orientation, safe relational context, and information exchange. They theorized that a link exists between team creativity and SLT's calling and membership components. The findings of their study suggested that although creativity as a leadership activity has a spiritual quality, it can also be the subject of scientific inquiry. Leaders can serve as catalysts for team creativity by appreciating the efforts of team members and demonstrating encouragement in their contributions. The leader acts as a visionary that inspires team members to take committed actions to facilitate the vision. Egel and Fry's work supports the current work in asserting the relationship of SLT to team creativity and the value of leadership vision in achieving organizational objectives.

Fry (2016) summarized the basic paradigm of SLT in a book chapter and presented it as an effective model for leadership in the public sector. Fry postulated that spirituality, as commonly associated with the timeless religious teachings of the world's great faith traditions, offers a sound theoretical basis for the development of leadership because of its emphasis on loving and serving people. Therefore, the author argued that developing effective leaders who could serve the public well despite the complexities of contemporary societal challenges remains a priority. As such, spiritual leadership offers a valid model worthy of consideration in today's public sector. Fry's reinforcement of the flexibility and adaptability of SLT with its focus on values that have universal appeal (Henson, 2015) further confirms the value that this theoretical construct presents in a faith-based organizational context as suggested by this study.

Yang and Fry (2018) investigated the degree to which spiritual leadership diminishes burnout among medical laboratory personnel, while contributing toward positive organizational commitment, productivity, and life satisfaction among workers. They received survey responses from 235 participants who work in medical laboratories throughout the United States, and the results of the analysis indicated that SLT had a positive effect on organizational commitment, unit productivity, and life satisfaction. Furthermore, these researchers found that membership totally reinforced a moderating relationship between SLT and burnout. Likewise, the suitability of SLT reinforces the importance of the construct's value in promoting spiritual well-being. Yang and Fry concluded that SLT contributes to positive outcomes on a both personal and organizational level and facilitates the development of a healthy organizational culture. Their conclusions hold promise for the current study in its examination of an organizational culture that builds biblical community characterized by *koinonia*.

Henson (2015) studied the function of spirituality in the moral development aspect of authentic leadership. This author contended that because ethics and values do not develop in a moral vacuum, the Scriptures have a place in the scientific study of leadership, especially as it relates to the formation of the leader's values and ethics. By conducting a thorough exegetical analysis of the New Testament epistle of Titus using socio-rhetorical analysis, Henson identified five leadership themes that yielded 10 leadership principles that basically align with how authentic leadership theory accounts for moral development. Furthermore, the core values that emerged from textual analysis have universal appeal in secular as well as religious traditions. Henson's research contributes to this study by recognizing the importance of organizational culture (particularly a biblical organizational culture) and its potential to impact societal culture. Henson also recommended that leaders recognize the value of spirituality in overall organizational leadership, while serving as a basis for further study. As spirituality and its associated values compare favorably with spiritual leadership theory, it provides a suitable theoretical construct for a faith-based setting.

Wamble (2019) examined how emotional intelligence and spiritual leadership in church leaders and members builds trust and contributes to organizational success. Wamble surveyed church leaders and members using instruments that measured emotional intelligence, spiritual leadership, and trust to determine their impact on organizational effectiveness. Quantitative analysis revealed a significant positive relationship between emotional intelligence and spiritual leadership on trust, leading to trust having a substantial impact on organizational effectiveness. Wamble concluded that these factors can facilitate transformation in a faith-based community. This study likewise affirmed the promise of positive influence that spiritual leadership offers, making it a valuable leadership paradigm for a biblical community.

Washington (2016) endeavored to find a common leadership approach that would equip Christian pastors for organizational success. Noting a gap in literature that investigated spiritual leadership theory in religious organizations, Washington conducted a grounded theory study using spiritual leadership to develop a model for effective pastoral leadership. Qualitative analysis of responses to questionnaires by 20 pastors and 20 church members indicated that an integration of spiritual leadership and transformational leadership theories proved effective in a religious context. Washington suggested that this approach would serve as specific framework for pastoral leadership effectiveness. Having demonstrated the usefulness of spiritual leadership theory in a religious setting, Washington proposed that it provides a leadership paradigm that warrants further investigation as it relates to developing pastoral effectiveness. This observation further confirms that universal organizational application notwithstanding, spiritual leadership offers positive potential for faith-based organizational application.

Adebiyi (2016) conducted a study attempting to replicate results obtained by Fry et al. (2005) in a Nigerian cultural context. The study included a questionnaire with responses from 252 workers from various public and private organizations in Nigeria. Adebiyi found that only four out of 12 SLT construct factors measured had statistical significance, noting a significant relationship recorded between calling and meaning and organizational commitment. Adebiyi

suggested that cultural differences accounted for the difference in the study's outcomes. Even so, the study affirmed the importance of relational connections in a community in developing an organizational culture that promotes inclusiveness, understanding, and an appreciation among members. These factors, in turn, will contribute toward the building of organizational commitment and productivity. Adebiyi offered a recommendation that revisions Fry (2009) proposed that included personal inner development and life satisfaction as additional factors may improve the relationship among the model's measurable factors. Adebiyi's work further sustained the value of building community through healthy relationships as part of positive organizational culture, which has value for the current study.

Fachrunnisa and Adhiatma (2014) studied the function of SLT in the creative process between leaders, fieldworkers, and the community they intend to reach as part of an Indonesian government family planning program. The researchers proposed that workers, whose job entailed giving presentations and consultations about the necessity of contraception to manage birth rates, needed creativity to reach and engage the community to ensure success of the program. Likewise, they needed strong levels of job-related spirit, vision, and passion. Moreover, they speculated that the fieldworkers required support related to their well-being from leadership to fortify their efforts in reaching the community. A quantitative analysis of data received from fieldworkers by way of questionnaire supported the study's hypotheses. These authors concluded that their research contributed to the development of a conceptual model that integrated SLT with employee performance and job satisfaction, supported their assertion that spiritual well-being is expected to facilitate a relationship between spiritual leadership, creative process, and job satisfaction, and determined that creative process engagement had a positive relationship with employee performance. Their findings demonstrate the important role that spiritual leadership plays in supporting organizational productivity and creativity.

Fu et al. (2019) sought to determine the positive impact of spiritual leadership on job performance by observing relational energy as a facilitator and leader integrity and relational energy differentiation as potentially limiting

conditions. Employees and their immediate supervisors served as the subjects of this quantitative study of a Chinese health services organization that provided long-term inpatient nursing and rehabilitation care. The analysis for this study included survey responses from 497 employees and 108 supervisors. The researchers found that spiritual leadership had a positive relationship with relational energy, which in turn impacted job performance. Additionally, they found that spiritual leadership and relational energy depended upon the perception of leader integrity. Fu et al. deduced that their research determined that spiritual leadership contributed to relational energy, identified relational energy as a facilitating means in job performance, demonstrated the importance of leader integrity as a necessary element contributing to spiritual leadership, and showed the relevance of spiritual leadership and relational energy in a non-Western culture. In addition, the researchers asserted that spiritual leadership is a valuable means of inspiring employee relational energy, which positively influences job performance; spiritual leadership has value in creating employee relational energy, which is further enhanced by perceptions of leader integrity; and clarifies how leaders should show sensitivity in their daily treatment of workers by developing better relationship with associates. This study supports the value that spiritual leadership demonstrates as a motivational factor in community relationships among leaders and supporters, highlighting the importance of integrity in the process.

Milliman and Ferguson (2008) noted that although differing definitions of spiritual leadership exist, the various depictions all contain common elements. Yet, they joined Benefiel (2005) in asserting that one shared characteristic is their emphasis on the leadership aspect of spiritual leadership instead of the spiritual. As such, they questioned whether contemporary scholars have a clear understanding of what genuine spiritual leadership looks like in actual practice. To provide a vivid example of spiritual leadership in action, they conducted a case study on the leadership style of Steve Bigari, an executive and entrepreneur who has worked in business and nonprofit enterprises alike. They used in-depth interviews to capture his leadership style and how he demonstrates spiritual leadership. They specifically sought to observe how his leadership reflected the vision, hope/faith, and altruistic

dimensions of Fry's (2003) model. His concern for low-income workers and the solutions he implemented illustrated a growing development of the spiritual quality in his leadership over time. They witnessed that Bigari's religious faith contributed to spiritual leadership characteristics at work in various leadership initiatives in his organizations. Their findings confirm the efficacy of SLT as a measure of potential spiritual impact that a leader can make in an organization.

Mubasher et al. (2017) conducted a systematic literature review synthesizing 62 studies exploring spiritual leadership. Among their findings, they noted that no definitive definition of spiritual leadership had emerged. Fry's (2003) dimensions of altruistic love and hope/faith are the most frequently mentioned in research and have solid quantitative and qualitative support in the literature. A smaller proportion of the studies give attention to spiritual leadership models other than Fry's. Although SLT is being studied in a variety of settings and cultural contexts, a significant gap still exists in South Asia, and spiritual leadership has ample evidence that supports its value as a practical approach that results in organizational progress and the well-being of individuals. The strong support that this study provides regarding the successful implementation and positive results in a diversity of organizations suggests that SLT remains a valid leadership paradigm that contributes to organizational health.

P. V. Nguyen et al. (2018) sought to assess the effectiveness of SLT by evaluating the efficacy of spiritual survival and empowerment on logistical outcomes as demonstrated by commitment and citizenship behaviors. The researchers' quantitative analysis of data from 329 Vietnamese full-time employees in Ho Chi Minh City was followed by qualitative analysis to better comprehend results and offset the effects of unintended consequences related to the quantitative research conducted. The results of these analyses affirmed the value of spiritual leadership in enhancing the work environment through a greater sense of significance associated with work and deeper meaning contributing to a better quality of life. The researchers determined that spiritual leadership showed a noteworthy relationship with meaning and calling, as well as membership and worker empowerment. Moreover, meaning and membership had a significant

influence on organizational commitment with concomitant impact on organizational citizenship behaviors. Their study offers further confirmation of the impact that SLT can have in creating a positive organizational culture.

Babyak (2013) contended that although a growing body of research has developed that recognizes the value of faith in the marketplace, it has largely excluded religion as a component of spiritual leadership. In their attempt to avoid conflicts over differing belief systems, however, spiritual leadership approaches focusing exclusively on spirituality lack an essential, potent factor that makes faith-based leadership effective. Babyak sought to develop a new theory of leadership focused on biblical principles and developed a scale, the Biblical Leadership at Work Scale, to measure a leader's relationship with God, relationship with others, completing the mission, and organizational relationship skills. Results of quantitative analysis revealed that the instrument measured the first three factors effectively, with the last requiring further study. Therefore, the scale needs additional development to determine effectiveness. Still, this author established the importance of biblical leadership and served as a foundational attempt to develop a leadership theory based exclusively on biblical principles. Babyak's recognition of the biblical component to effective spiritual leadership contributes to the current study, which examines leadership in a faith-based context.

Babyak (2018) declared that Christians in the secular marketplace need a new theory of leadership that encourages them to live out their faith at work while creating positive organizational outcomes. Arguing that no settled definition of spiritual leadership exists in contemporary scholarship, Babyak (2018) attributed this in part to the wide disparity that exists even in defining the two terms "spiritual" and "leadership" (p. 57). Furthermore, Babyak cited Niewold's (2007) assertion that servant leadership theory (Greenleaf, 2002) has found acceptance among Christians as the paradigm of leadership practiced by Jesus. By conducting an ideological exegesis of Luke 9:57–62, Babyak (2018) rejected the claim that Christ's leadership was best exemplified by servant leadership, proposing a new biblical theory of leadership to correct the deficiencies of the Faith at Work Movement. Babyak suggested a framework originally proposed in a previous work

(Babyak, 2013) that includes the following dimensions: relationship with God, relationship with others, an emphasis on mission completion, and organizational relationship skills. Babyak's (2018) work supports this study in affirming the need for a biblical foundation for spiritual leadership in a Christian organization.

Choi (2016) asserted that leadership practices employed by those serving in religious contexts often reflect cultural influence instead of biblical principles; however, only biblical leadership in the power of the Spirit has the potential for transformational impact in organizations and beyond. For this reason, leaders must incorporate biblical principles in a leadership model apart from societal culture. Choi conducted an analysis of the New Testament book of Revelation and examined the cosmic conflict between God and Satan (The Great Controversy) and contrasted the factors that characterize the leadership of the Lamb and the Dragon across the dimensions of power and authority, equality and unity, motivating followers, humble sacrifice, spiritual transformation, and emotional values. The study observed that Lamb's leadership offers a profound, paradoxical difference in the exercise of leadership as compared with the Dragon; as such, it reflects a character unlike contemporary leadership models. Choi depicted the Lamb's leadership model as spiritual, theological, moral, eschatological, ecclesiological, relational, and missional. Choi's study offers valuable insights that support this study because it explains the importance of leadership that reflects biblical principles in the establishment of a biblical organizational culture.

Crowther (2012) noted the increase in interest related to spirituality in leadership studies, which has given rise to leadership theories, such as SLT (Fry, 2003), servant leadership (K. A. Patterson, 2003), authentic leadership (Avolio et al., 2004; Klenke, 2007), and kenotic leadership (Bekker, 2006) that allow for a spiritual component. The value of these approaches notwithstanding, Crowther (2012) argued that current leadership paradigms incorporate elements of the culture at large. Although such models have some value in terms of ministry leadership, they also may include values and practices at odds with the teachings of Scripture. Emphasizing the importance of the Christian Bible as a source of leadership guidance, Crowther conducted an exegetical analysis of the New Testament epistle

of 1 Peter and identified 10 leadership principles that emerged and compared them with authentic and kenotic leadership. The study revealed some similarities as well as differences with authentic leadership, yet kenotic leadership aligned much more closely with principles from 1 Peter. The application of such principles in the contemporary church can better reflect leadership as taught in the Scriptures and equip the church to be a countercultural force of influence on societal culture. Crowther's work supports this study by affirming biblical principles as a necessary leadership element in the formation of a Christian organizational culture. Moreover, it also demonstrates the potential value of New Testament apostolic writings as a valid model for contemporary church leadership.

Cited by Fry (2003) as a theological work that contributed toward the development of spiritual leadership theory, Blackaby and Blackaby (2011) wrote their book to provide Christians with an alternative approach to the secular leadership paradigms presented in contemporary leadership literature. They cited this as an important need and contended that the contemporary church lacks effective leadership. They contrasted the difference between secular leadership and Christian leadership as depicted in the Bible. Observing that the church too readily adopts secular leadership paradigms, they explain that God's kingdom extends to every area of life and requires strong leaders who could fulfill their God-given leadership role to extend the kingdom of God into every realm, whether secular or sacred. They characterize spiritual leadership as follows: "We believe true spiritual leadership can be defined in one concise statement: Spiritual Leadership is moving people on to God's agenda" (Blackaby & Blackaby, 2011, pp. 36–37). This would require that the spiritual leader seek God's guidance in setting direction and planning goals for the organization. The primary goal of spiritual leadership, as exemplified by Christ, is to discover the will of God the Father and execute the same. They explained, "The primary goal of spiritual leadership is not excellence in the sense of doing things perfectly. Rather, it is taking people from where they are to where God wants them to be" (Blackaby & Blackaby, 2011, p. 125). Blackaby and Blackaby's work provides clarity regarding the nature and purpose spiritual leadership as a means of accomplishing God's will and advancing God's kingdom.

It offers an important focus that aligns well with the current study in directing a Christian organization to reject worldly paradigms in favor of biblical principles. This becomes even more critical because the church represents a body that stands in contrast to the values and standards of the culture at large.

Alimudin et al. (2017) sought to discover the cause of high employee turnover at Society's Eye Hospital in East Java, Indonesia, even though the hospital administrator incorporated elements of spiritual leadership which include vision, hope/faith, and altruistic love. The purpose of this study was to discover how to increase employee loyalty at the hospital. A qualitative analysis of questionnaires administered to 51 participants revealed that spiritual leadership had a positive influence on organizational culture, and an improved organizational culture was believed to positively affects employee loyalty. Alimudin et al. noted that although the leader demonstrated other spiritual leadership characteristics, they scored lower in honesty, which likely accounted for the diminished impact of spiritual leadership on employee loyalty. The importance of this study demonstrates that although spiritual leadership principles have the potential for positive organizational impact, consistency of character remains an important element in spiritual leadership effectiveness. This observation helps this study by emphasizing the need for integrity and character growth in a faith-based organization.

Çimen and Karadağ (2019) studied the relationship between teachers' perceptions of spiritual leadership, organizational culture, organizational silences, and academic success. A sampling of 457 high school teachers representing 24 high schools from the Central Anatolia province of Turkey were administered the Spiritual Leadership Scale, School Culture Inventory, and the Organizational Silence Scale. Results were compared with the average student scores from the Higher Education Entrance Examination (YGS) and the Undergraduate Placement Examination (LYS). The findings indicated that spiritual leadership had a positive impact on organizational culture, yet had no impact on organizational silence (the hiding of personal opinions and concerns about problems in the organization). Organizational culture had a positive effect on the school's YGS scores and a negative effect on LYS scores—which, due to the different nature of the tests, was

still perceived as contributing to overall academic success. Organizational culture had no effect on organizational silence, which, in turn, had no effect on academic success. The most significant findings were reflected in the positive impact of spiritual leadership on organizational culture, which likewise had an impact on academic success. Their findings serve the purposes of the current study by affirming the potential that spiritual leadership has on organizational culture, which potentially produces more positive organizational outcomes.

S. B. Sanders (2014) studied the relationship between spirituality in leadership and ethical behavior when controlling for the variables of age, gender, education, length of employment, marital status, and work schedule using SLT as a framework. Participants from all levels of leadership were selected from two rural hospitals ranging from small to medium in size. Analysis of the 190 participants confirmed the existence of a positive relationship between leaders' spirituality and ethical behavior. S. B. Sanders observed that a spiritual organizational culture contributes to leaders' behaviors, whose spirituality then influences ethical behavior. This study supported the conclusions of previous works that suggest spirituality facilitates positive organizational outcomes.

Organizational Culture

Schein (1988) explained that an organization must face the challenge of "learning to cope with its problems of external adaptation and internal integration" (p. 7) as it relates to its unique culture. This understanding prompted an exploration of literature that relates to both internal organizational culture and external societal culture. Because the church represents a religious organization with spiritual concerns, this section of the literature review highlights areas of particular interest as it relates to the church's organizational context withing the larger context of the societal culture at large.

Organizational Culture (Internal)

Schein (1986) sought to provide clarity regarding misunderstandings and misconceptions that managers and other organizational leaders sometimes have about organizational culture. A better understanding of culture and its importance

to any enterprise will help leaders to better create culture change and sustain healthy organizational cultures. Schein offered six pitfalls that lead to unintended mistakes leaders make related to organizational culture: (a) shallow or erroneous definitions of culture, (b) too limited a view of what culture covers, (c) stereotyping total cultures into general types, (d) simplistic views regarding the origins of culture and how it changes over time, (e) ignoring the effects of an organization's various life stages on cultural matters, and (f) inability to identify training and organization development's own occupational cultures. Schein's explanations of common culture-related errors provide valuable insight for this study in its effort to identify ways of building a healthy biblical community in the church.

Schein (1988) presented an overview of organizational culture, explaining that the study of organizational culture holds greater promise for group research than society at large because cultural groups tend to be more homogeneous and have a history that is more easily traced. He offered an overview of the state of organizational research and the different philosophical approaches to its study. Extolling the value of clinical research as a preferred mode of inquiry, Schein stated that culture is the domain of groups comprising the accumulated learning each group has gained over time. Schein offered a definition of culture, broken into its components as follows:

> Thus, culture can be thought of as 1) A pattern of basic assumptions, 2) invented, discovered, or developed by a given group, 3) as it learns to cope with its problems of external adaptation and internal integration, 4) that has worked well enough to be considered valid and, therefore 5) is to be taught to new members as the 6) correct way to perceive, think, and feel in relation to those problems. (p. 7)

Schein also identified three levels of culture: artifacts (the visible, sensory aspects of culture that one initially observes when joining a new culture), values (the goals ideals, mores, philosophical and ethical standards, and other such principles), and underlying assumptions (observable behaviors with all their complications and inconsistencies that are taken for granted over time). Ultimately, culture is everywhere, representing the totality of group life. Schein's research provides a

valuable foundational understanding of organizational culture and its centrality in ordering the behaviors and practices of a people group such as a worship community, which serves the purposes of this study.

In addition to providing his definition of culture, Schein (1990) offered a suggestion about the best approach organizational psychology can take to analyze organizational culture. This proposal comes as a response to the various biases that each of the social sciences bring to their research. As culture evolves from the collective learning of the group accumulated over time, any group with enough of a shared history can constitute a cultural group, with the possibility that an organization can have several subcultures also. Shared learning develops as the group forms conventional assumptions that govern thinking, feeling, and perceptions, which create a sense of predictability that reduces anxiety. Schein also explained how cultural factors—observable artifacts, values, and underlying assumptions—reveal the character of a given culture over time. As culture is omnipresent, it covers each facet of group life. A persistent inquiry that includes first-hand experience coupled with penetrating questions can allow a researcher to gain insight into the underlying assumptions inherent in the culture. Schein identified the various cultural dynamics to consider: (a) how a culture is created, (b) how culture preserves itself through socialization, (c) the evolutions that takes place over time, and (d) directing the flow of evolutions through change management. Schein's work reinforced the importance of discernment in discovering the various dimensions at work in a culture to better how it works in each group. This recommendation serves this study in its pursuit of understanding the culture at work in a biblical community.

Schein (2017) presented a comprehensive study of the various aspects at work in organizational culture, delivering its theoretical principles with practical advice for organizational leaders to apply in today's enterprises. In addition to the various aspects of culture, other leadership issues were explored to better equip leaders to recognize the importance of culture and guide their organizations accordingly. Schein included several case studies from organizations in various sectors to illustrate the concepts presented. The book also explained the importance

of knowing about and interacting with macro cultures, the larger cultures that exist beyond the organization such as nations, ethnic groups, and other entities that exist in the larger context of society. Schein also addressed providing leadership in change management. This book is a valuable overall reference regarding the various issues related to leading effectively with an understanding of the key role that culture plays in every aspect of organizational life. Schein's book holds value for this study in the wealth of general information it provides regarding all the facets of organizational culture, plus the importance of recognizing macro cultures and learning to interact wisely with them. This is especially relevant given that this current study addressed complications associated with engaging a post-Christian societal culture.

Hattingh's (2019) study addressed the issue of leadership succession in the church and other contemporary enterprises. Recognizing the limited information that speaks to succession in the church and beyond, the diversity of opinions regarding genuine Christian leadership, and the scarcity of research that approaches succession from a biblical paradigm, Hattingh conducted an exegetical analysis of Hebrews 13:7–19 to provide a biblical foundation for succession. The study then included in-depth interviews to better understand the experience of contemporary leaders, both predecessor and successors, as they went through the succession process. Hattingh identified six themes that emerged from analysis: story, behavior, beliefs, spirituality, culture, and relationships. Five patterns were discovered related to the cultural aspects of a healthy succession: authenticity and adaptability, learning and development, values and beliefs, integration and application, and relational and inclusion. Hattingh's observations related to the cultural aspects of succession have relevance to the current study because healthy discipleship in a biblical community includes mentoring and succession. Furthermore, Hattingh's exegetical analysis and qualitative approach provided a valuable model for the current study.

Cameron and Quinn's (2011) work served as a fitting complement to Schein's (2017) book. They emphasized the critical importance of understanding organizational culture to better lead an effective change effort in any enterprise.

Organizations that fall short in meeting their objectives often do so because of a failure to change the culture. Conversely, those companies that achieve success generally have a strong organizational culture. Cameron and Quinn (2011) identified the elements of culture as implicit assumptions, contracts and norms, artifacts, and explicit behaviors of the organization's members. To better understand the dimensions of culture and how to facilitate effective change, Cameron and Quinn developed the Organizational Culture Assessment Instrument (OCAI). The OCAI, which assesses six dimensions of organizational culture, is based on the Competing Values Framework, which recognizes that the various dimensions of culture exist in tension with one another. Stability, order, and control exists in a competing relationship with flexibility, discretion, and dynamism. Likewise, internal orientation, integration, and unity exist in opposition to external orientation, differentiation, and rivalry. Out of these two dimensions, four organizational effectiveness indicators form quadrants that identify the cultural orientation of the organization—clan (collaborative), adhocracy (creative), market (competitive), and hierarchy (control). According to Cameron and Quinn (2011), "The OCAI therefore is an instrument that allows you to diagnose the dominant orientation of your own organization based on these core culture types. It also assists you in diagnosing your organization's cultural strength, cultural type, and cultural congruence" (p. 41). Cameron and Quinn's work helps to clarify visually the relationship between the various culture types and the way to successfully implement cultural change in keeping with the values of the organization, which aligns with this study's goals.

Mosley and Matviuk (2010) explained the necessity of organizations to adapt in uncertain times to handle unexpected challenges while simultaneously seizing opportunities. The rapid acceleration of change in contemporary markets requires a new way of thinking to successfully implement organizational transformation. Mosley and Matviuk emphasized the power of culture, observing that meaningful, effective change can only take place if strategy is linked to a profound cultural shift. Leaders play a critical role in this organizational design process. Design, culture, strategy, and personnel must work together to equip

organizations to compete in tumultuous times. The right fit will result in a design that will prove viable and able to achieve organizational objectives. Mosley and Matviuk's work offers value for this study in its recognition of the critical nature of cultural strength as it relates to organizational adaptation during turbulent times.

Meyerson and Martin (1987) presented three unrelated views of culture and culture change. They stressed the need to understand the three different paradigms to better grasp organizational change. The first paradigm is what they described as integration, in which culture is viewed as a uniting factor that joins otherwise diverse group members. As such, cultural change is approached as a massive process that takes place across the enterprise. The second paradigm they identified is differentiation, which lets leaders allow for certain inconsistencies and lack of consensus in the interests of diversity. Rather than view change as a top-down process, differentiation encourages change on a local level among smaller groups. They labeled the third paradigm as ambiguity, in which cultural vagueness or obscurity is viewed as an acceptable norm. This third paradigm places the emphasis on individual adaptations to changes in the organization. As Meyerson and Martin (1987) stated, "Each cultural paradigm draws attention to a distinct set of organizational processes and simultaneously blinds others. With each set of processes comes a distinct view of how cultures change" (pp. 641–642). These scholars proposed that a knowledge of each approach would help to avoid oversights in dealing with the complexities associated with change. Meyerson and Martin's study aided this study by underscoring the need to understand the different dynamics at work with each change model to avoid blind spots in recognizing areas needing attention.

Struecker (2015) presented a biblical model for leading change that can aid church pastors in transforming their organizational culture. In this model, Struecker proposed that the pastor is the most influential person in the organizational change process. Applying Meyerson and Martin's (1987) assumption that organizations hold to a common set of values, Struecker (2015) suggested that the first paradigm in their approach represented the best explanation of how the Spirit works through the local pastor as the change agent in a congregation. Aligning with Meyerson and

Martin's (1987) assumption, Struecker (2015) characterized culture change as "a process that continues to affect the philosophy and practice of the church, has been accepted by many different demographics within the church, and has remained in effect over a long period of time" (p. 7). This researcher also applied Kotter's (1996) change model to the individual congregation, emphasizing step eight in the process, which is anchoring new approaches in the culture. Beginning with a study of appropriate passage of Scripture that offered a biblical model of leadership as a baseline, Struecker (2015) conducted quantitative analysis of responses from 150 Southern Baptist senior pastors. Six leadership competencies for the senior pastor emerged from this inquiry: people skills, management skills, godly character, firm personal convictions, charisma, and sensitivity to God's calling. Struecker concluded that the church's senior pastor must be able to ascertain the church's organizational culture, engage in a continual process of leading the culture, and act as the guardian of the culture, protecting the congregation from both internal and external threats that could undermine the fellowship's culture. Struecker's study supports this study by offering a model of pastoral leadership related to organizational culture compatible with the approach demonstrated by the Apostle John in his epistles.

Societal Culture (External)

The Global Leadership and Organizational Behavior Effectiveness Research Program (GLOBE; House et al., 2004) is a massive collaborative research project with the goal of examining the effects of societal culture on leadership, organizational effectiveness, societal marketplace competitiveness, and the well-being of the societies' members. This study, which was conducted in three phases (with the possibility of additional phases in the future), included intense quantitative and qualitative analysis of 62 cultures. Researchers identified nine major cultural attributes (uncertainty avoidance, power distance, institutional collectivism, in- group collectivism, gender egalitarianism, assertiveness, future orientation, performance orientation, and humane orientation) and six global leadership behaviors (charismatic/value-based leadership, team-oriented leadership, participative leadership, humane-oriented leadership, autonomous leadership, and

self-protective leadership). The researchers for this project defined culture as "shared motives, values, beliefs, identities, and interpretations or meanings of significant events that result from common experiences of members of collectives that are transmitted across generations" (House et al., 2004, p. 15). The GLOBE study aids this study by providing a clear understanding of society at large as a macro-cultural influence whose impact organizational cultures must recognize, assess, and address in keeping with their values and purpose.

Sengupta and Sinha (2005) conducted a study to understand the effects of societal culture and organizational culture on managers' behavior. Their rationale stems from the assumption that societal culture has an impact on organizations function within the larger cultural context. Consequently, cultural values influence people's behavior, which also has an impact on work perceptions and expectations, as well as their interaction with fellow workers. Therefore, they sought to discover the effect societal and organizational culture have on managers' attitudes and thoughts related to work. Quantitative analysis of questionnaire responses from 101 attendees of the Indian Institute of Management in Calcutta, India confirmed that societal culture does impact the beliefs and practices of people whose organizational function within the larger culture. Their findings add value to this study by highlighting the impact that the culture at large can have on an organization, which means leadership should be alert to way societal culture could undermine organizational values and practices.

Little (2018) observed that post-Christian culture has created two intellectual concepts of reality that undermine a general belief in God: post-modernism (each person has an individual authoritative ethical position in the pursuit of personal satisfaction) and anti-metaphysical realism (which perceives scientifically observable fact as the only basis for reality). The rejection of spiritual inquiry, however, leaves these two post-Christian visions of reality inadequate to create an orderly, stable society. Therefore, the church must maintain a commitment to objective, absolute truth in order for the gospel message to have impact in a milieu hostile to Christian realism. This commitment includes adherence to the biblical teaching regarding the fallen, sinful condition of humanity

apart from Christ as part of the message of good news of reconciliation with God through Christ. In this way, the church can serve as a community that demonstrates an incarnational testimony to the biblical image of reality. As Little (2018) concluded, "Only historic Christianity provides the vision of reality that orders life the way the universe is" (p. 14). This reality supports why a consistent Christian witness has advanced the cause of good in the service of humanity. Little's work supports this study by providing a strong case for the church to adhere to its biblical convictions in the pursuit of an organizational culture that affirms Christian values.

In a response to Little (2018), G. G. Robinson (2018) proposed that in a post-Christian society in which people are spiritually adrift, it will take an approach that combines the intellectual apologetics of philosopher Francis Schaeffer and the practical life application of Lesslie Newbigin, a missiologist, to effectively evangelize. G. G. Robinson (2018) characterized this dual approach as "bow ties and blue jeans" (p. 17). The intellectual and practical must come together in response to the rapid change that have given rise to a post-Christian culture. G. G. Robinson's work serves this study by offering a complementary perspective on ministry to a post-Christian culture by balancing biblical theology with practical service in a spirit of love and compassion.

Paulsen (2012) presented an analysis of the U.S. Supreme Court's decision in *Christian Legal Society v. Martinez*. Labeling the Court's determination as possibly "The Worst First Amendment Free Speech Decision of the Past Fifty Years" (p. 283), Paulsen further classified the outcome as one of the worst Supreme Court First Amendment decisions of all time. The *Christian Legal Society* decision basically stated that Christian student groups are prohibited from having a decidedly Christian identity that requires members (even just leaders) to adhere to a statement of faith as a condition for membership. Paulsen (2012) explained, "Simply stated, student religious groups on state university campuses do not possess First Amendment rights to freedom of association for expressive purposes" (p. 284). Paulsen voiced concern that the *Christian Legal Society* decision could empower college administration officials who have adversarial views toward Christianity to undermine the distinctively biblical character of the group by

insisting that such groups accept members who openly oppose their values, thereby undermining the group's purpose. Paulsen's analysis of the Court's decision in *Christian Legal Society* offers an explanation that defined the hostility that some secular authorities hold toward religious practices in public life. It serves as a warning that people of faith will have to contend vigorously for their Constitutional rights related to religious expression. Therefore, Paulsen's article supports this study by identifying the potential adversarial conflicts that the Christian community can expect from society at large.

Adhar (2013) contended that secularism is a political philosophy that is not neutral, even though its proponents claim it is. Adhar (2013) identified two forms of secularism: "benevolent" secularism and "hostile" secularism (p. 409). Generally, secularism holds that a strict structural separation should exist between the state and religious activity. The exercise of benevolent secularism will cause the government to abstain from embracing or implementing any religious beliefs, conventional or otherwise. The state takes a nonreligious posture, yet recognizes the place that religion has in the lives of individuals as well as communities. As such, although not promoted, religious expression and practice are not suppressed either. Hostile secularism seeks to exclude all religious input in the formation and implementation of public policy to shield the populace from the alleged irrational illusions perpetrated by religious faith, establishing unbelief as the official state position. In this way, proponents of hostile secularism view their secular belief system as superior. According to Adhar (2013), "Hostile secularism teaches that religion is a potentially dangerous, irrational thing and thus ought to be quarantined in the private sphere" (p. 418). Such an aggressive form of secularism makes no attempt to offer an unbiased view of religious practice. Instead, proponents establish hostile secularism as the preferred practice, which positions it to function as a vehicle for state-sponsored persecution of religious activity. According to Peter Kirsanow (2016), "Secularism is a jealous god, and it will brook no others" (p. 111). The concern Adhar raised is that benevolent secularism can easily morph into hostile secularism over time. Adhar's work adds value to this study by raising

awareness of the adverse posture that hostile secularism adopts toward the church in a post-Christian society.

Adhar (2014) offered an analysis of the issue of separation of church and state regarding publicly-funded school chaplaincy, an issue raised in *Williams v. Commonwealth*, an Australian legal case. Adhar argued that state-funded chaplaincy programs offer no threat of establishing government-sponsored religion, nor do they violate the principle of church-state separation. Adhar (2014) traced the use of the phrase "wall of separation between church and State," a foundational principle in the Establishment Clause that the U.S. Supreme Court has used to place government restrictions on public religious practice, to a letter written by Thomas Jefferson to the Danbury Baptists Association in 1802. Adhar contended that U.S. legal precedent was based not on the text of the Constitution, but on an obscure reference made in passing by Jefferson. For this reason, some judges have viewed a measure of overreach in its application in American jurisprudence. Adhar explained, however, that the Australian courts have not had as strict an application of that legal principle. Adhar then argued against the objections that opponents of publicly funded chaplaincy programs raised, ultimately stating that the tension between church and state will always exist when seeking to create acceptable boundaries of religious practice in public life. This author concluded, "A wall of separation requires the solid, sun-baked ground of skepticism and religious hostility beneath it. It simply cannot be built on the soft and malleable soil of religious tolerance" (Adhar, 2014, p. 41). The article offers value to this study in its explanation of the delicate balance required in church-state relations as well as a reasonable proposal of religious practice in public life.

Yancey and Williamson (2015) conducted a study to determine whether anti-Christian attitudes existed in American society. Their research included qualitative data from 3,076 participants, which revealed a surprisingly high level of hostility toward Christians, especially toward conservative Christians. The researchers used quantitative analysis to determine the degree of antagonism toward conservative believers. They then followed up with qualitative inquiry consisting of open-ended responses to questionnaires from 3,577 participants from

groups likely to demonstrate hostility toward Christians to better understand the nature of the animosity. Their findings prompted them to describe the level of hostility they encountered as "Christianophobia" (p. 2). Furthermore, although Christianity represents the largest religious segment in the United States, the findings revealed a growing intolerance toward Christians. In fact, the researchers observed that those with anti-Christian bias are more likely to have greater social influence because of their education and economic standing, which means that they are in positions of power in which they can potentially act on their animosity. Likewise, those who identify as conservative Christians face a distinct disadvantage in certain segments, such as academia and media. Yancey and Williamson (2015) concluded, "We want to show that our research has revealed attitudes of real hatred and fear, which we take seriously" (p. 5). Their findings support this study by confirming the challenges Christians face in a post-Christian culture, thereby creating the necessity of developing a strong biblical community that will nurture the faith of believers and equip them to face such challenges with grace, dignity, and love.

Tushnet (2016), a Harvard Law School professor, proposed a strategy for taking an aggressive posture in advancing progressive jurisprudence, calling on liberal jurists to abandon "defensive-crouch constitutionalism" (para. 1), a nuanced legal approach that advocated for moderately liberal positions. Tushnet claimed, however, that the time for such an approach had passed because most sitting judges on district and appellate courts were liberal appointees. Among other things, Tushnet recommended taking a hard line against conservatives and those who support protections for religious freedom. Stating that "the culture wars are over; they lost, we won" (para 5.), Tushnet promoted taking an approach like the post-World War II treatment of Germany and Japan, stating, "My own judgment is that taking a hard line ('You lost, live with it') is better than trying to accommodate the losers" (Tushnet, 2016, para 5). Tushnet's proposals serve this study by revealing the potential challenges people of faith could face. As secularists gain power in a post-Christian society, they have less of an incentive to find common ground with

opponents, instead treating them like enemies while criminalizing their beliefs (Deneen, 2021).

The U.S. Commission on Civil Rights (2016) published a report offering recommendations regarding religious practice as it relates to civil liberties and nondiscrimination laws. According to the report, "The Commission sought to learn how best to reconcile the conflict which in certain cases may exist between those seeking to practice religious faith and those seeking compliance with or protection of nondiscrimination laws and policies" (U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, 2016, p. 1). The Commission consisted of eight members who heard testimony from experts and scholars viewed as authorities in the relevant field. The Commission's majority issued their recommendations, with two members offering rebuttals to the committee's findings.

The U.S. Commission on Civil Rights' (2016) majority contended that civil rights safeguards, which they defined in terms of "race, color, national origin, sex, disability status, sexual orientation, and gender identity" (para. 5), should receive greater priority in determining legal matters over religious convictions. In fact, the Commission stated further that religious exemptions should be defined in the strictest, most narrowly defined terms on an individual basis because "overly-broad religious exemptions unduly burden nondiscrimination laws and policies" (U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, 2016, para. 9). In other words, the intent of civil liberties and nondiscrimination laws outweighs religious objections. This assumption has a bearing on a religious group's right to choose its leaders and members based on doctrinal matters, as well as its ability to determine morally acceptable behavior among its members. If a group's tenets of faith, as in the instance regarding the *Christian Legal Society* case (Paulsen, 2012), are thought to violate nondiscrimination laws, they should be denied religious exemption because of the greater importance ascribed to civil violations. The Commission's rationale stems from its constricted interpretation of the Religious Freedom Restoration Act (RFRA) as applying to First Amendment free exercise rights, which are still subject to restrictions under the Establishment Clause.

Although the report's (U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, 2016) title alleges to promote "peaceful coexistence," it seems to foment division, especially because of its bias toward one side of the issue (DeGirolami, 2016; Epstein, 2016; Haynes, 2016; O'Leary, 2016; Senz, 2016; Slade, 2016). DeGirolami (2016), one of the scholars who testified before the Commission, remarked that the committee should be renamed, "The U.S. Commission on Abolishing Religious Freedom" (para. 1). The Commission's conclusions caused DeGirolami to regret having testified, considering participation in the hearings a waste of time. Likewise, Peter Kirsanow and Gail Heriot, two of the Commission's members, wrote lengthy responses refuting the report's conclusions (U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, 2016, pp. 42–153, 167–170). The consensus of the report's critics concludes that the Commission's way to resolve the conflict that sometimes arises when religious principles are at odds with civil rights issues is to subordinate religious concerns by treating them as criminal violations (DeGirolami, 2016; Epstein, 2016; Haynes, 2016; O'Leary, 2016; Senz, 2016; Slade, 2016; U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, 2016).

The Commission's report served this study by identifying the kinds of pressures that societal culture can exert on the church as adherents apply biblical principles in creating and upholding a scriptural organizational culture. By denying religious organizations the right to choose their own leaders and members (not to mention what the organization deems morally acceptable behavior for its members), the report's recommendations foretell a possible threat that could lead to both external pressure and internal organizational conflict, as addressed in John's epistles.

The First Liberty Institute published its first report (Shackelford et al., 2016) chronicling a rise in hostility toward religion in various public sectors. In particular, the report listed over 1,200 instances of adversarial actions taken toward religious expression in various public forums (such as government and marketplace), schools (ranging from elementary through higher education), the U.S. military, and even churches and various other ministries. The report identified the nature of each conflict and the outcomes associated with each case. The

following year, the organization followed up with two other reports (Shackelford & Bufferfield, 2017a, 2017b), one of which included an update of its earlier report , and the other focusing exclusively on instance of religious discrimination in the military. According to the report, "This past year has seen the continuation of high-profile attacks on religious liberty in the public arena as people of faith have been fired, refused employment, or fined for practicing their faith or speaking out about their religious beliefs" (Shackelford & Bufferfield, 2017a, p. 13). The 2017 report documented approximately 200 additional cases from the previous year while noting that it does not include a comprehensive list of such cases.

The Family Research Council (2017a) also published a report listing instances of hostility toward religious expression in the U.S. The report recorded cases of hostility toward religious expression in the public square, educational institutions on all levels, toward religious perspectives related to sexuality, and the suppression of religious viewpoints regarding sexuality using nondiscrimination laws. The Family Research Council also issued reports that documented instances of religious discrimination in the U.S. military (2015, 2017b). Some overlap does exist in the cases listed in these reports and those issued by First Liberty Institute (Shackelford & Bufferfield, 2017a, 2017b; Shackelford et al., 2016). The reports also list cases unique to each publication. All the above reports taken together confirm the conclusion that hostility toward religious practice in various public sectors is on the rise and will likely continue to increase in a post-Christian culture. These documents support this study by providing additional evidence that the church faces external pressures from societal culture.

P. S. Williams (2020) proposed that the church adopt a proactive posture to face the challenges of a post-Christian culture. Explaining that the church faces a two-fold obstacle in the form of an archaic organizational infrastructure and an increasingly pagan, anti-Christian societal culture, P. S. Williams suggested that this context calls for the church to face these obstacles with humility, boldness, and an expectation of God's manifest presence. In this way, the church can find the same dynamic empowerment that enabled it to overcome the challenges that it faced by societal culture throughout the ages. This involves God's community of

faith to view themselves as exiles in today's word. It also means shifting their identity from aliens to ambassadors to foster discipleship and mission with a prophetic edge. Likewise, it means that as God's ambassadors in exile, they can engage societal culture with innovation while reaching out in love. This work by P. S. Williams supports the current study by providing a valuable paradigm that will equip the church to face the challenges of engaging a post-Christian societal culture.

Spiritual Leadership Theory and Organizational Culture

Fry et al. (2005) studied the relationships between spiritual leadership, spiritual survival, and organizational productivity and commitment. Quantitative data were collected from 181 participants who served as part of a new Apache Longbow helicopter attack squadron. The results indicated support for a positive relationship between spiritual leadership, spiritual survival, and organizational productivity and commitment in a military context, demonstrating yet again the adaptability of the construct in various organizational contexts. For this reason, the researchers recommended "research on the role of organizational culture in creating a sense of employee membership and its ultimate effect on important organizational and personal outcomes" (Fry et al., 2005, p. 859), which aligns with the aims of this study in the researcher's proposition that using spiritual leadership in the Johannine model will build biblical community that advances organizational aims.

Arsenich (2018) studied the relationship between workplace spirituality and organizational citizenship behavior, noting a common link by way of transcendent self-interest. This investigator also sought to discover whether affective, normative, or continuance factors of organizational commitment would partially or completely mediate the relationship between spirituality in the workplace and organizational citizenship behaviors. Data from 198 full-time medical or general practice receptionists with 5 years of experience were collected through surveys. The results confirmed that a positive relationship exists between workplace spirituality and organizational citizenship behaviors. Furthermore, the results indicated that workplace spirituality was also partially mediated by normative organizational commitment but not affective or continuance commitment. Arsenich's research

contributed to this study by confirming the value of spiritual leadership theory in contributing to a positive organizational culture and organizational effectiveness.

Chen and Yang (2012) studied the effect of spiritual leadership on organizational citizenship behavior in the finance and retail services industries to discover the applicability of SLT (Fry, 2003) principles across differing business contexts. The researchers analyzed quantitative responses from 466 participants in 28 major companies in the financial services and retail services sectors. Their results revealed that leaders who displayed spiritual leadership characteristics had a positive impact on the sense of meaning/calling and membership of employees. Workers who felt a deeper sense of meaning and membership were more intrinsically motivated to demonstrate positive organizational citizenship behaviors. Although these scholars found that spiritual leadership was effective across the different industries, the impact was stronger in the retail industry than in the financial services industry, possibly due to some intangibles inherent in finance. Chen and Yang's work provides value in support of the current study by affirming the positive influence on organizational culture across disciplines, supporting the generalizability of SLT principles.

Hunsaker (2012) sought to test the universality of SLT (Fry, 2003) in a Korean context. Their study's participants came from a financial services company in Seoul, Korea. The results of the quantitative analysis of data from 383 surveys provided support for the universal application in a Korean context. The results also supported another study objective, which included combining SLT factors into a higher-order factor. Hunsaker concluded that both lower and higher-order SLT variables have value in measuring various leadership issues which might require organizational improvement measures. Hunsaker's work provides additional support for this study by confirming the value of SLT principles in a variety of organizational contexts.

Johnson's (2020) endeavored to discover the degree to which two dimensions of SLT—vision and hope/faith—predicted total organizational citizenship behavior (OCB) for Christian adults who work in the United States. Participants included a homogeneous group of 135 people who fit the intended

target population. Quantitative analysis revealed that a significant relationship did exist between both vision and hope/faith on OCB, indicating that these factors are effective in facilitating positive organizational outcomes. Their findings align with those of other studies that likewise support the same conclusions. Johnson's work serves this study by demonstrating the value that SLT potentially has in producing positive organizational effects among Christians.

E. Karadağ (2009) tested the assumption that spiritual leadership has an impact on organizational culture formation. E. Karadağ conducted quantitative analysis of responses from 359 elementary teachers who work in 21 public schools in Ataşehir-Istanbul, Turkey. Structural equation modeling was used to analyze teachers' perceptions of their principals' spiritual leadership behaviors and how it affected organizational culture, as well the impact of spiritual leadership on the identified variables of organizational culture (administrative, social, value, and objective). E. Karadağ found that the principals' peace and performance-oriented behaviors caused an increased perception of organizational culture overall and impacted administrative, social, value, and objective variables. The researcher deduced that structural equation modeling showed that organizational culture as a concept may be perceived by multiple variables. This author concluded that a spiritual leader can use faith and a sense of belonging to arouse administrative and value variables to enhance organizational culture. This research informed the current study by affirming the potential impact of spiritual leadership on various elements of organizational culture.

M. Karadağ et al. (2020) endeavored to determine whether a relationship exists between spiritual leadership, school culture, and academic success. This mixed methods study combined quantitative data from 441 high school teachers from 12 high schools (seven high achieving schools and five low achieving schools) in the Şanlıurfa province of Turkey with a qualitative component using in a case study design with a semistructured interview. Analysis revealed a high relationship between the spiritual leadership variable and the school culture and achievement variables. Those schools identified as high achieving had stronger spiritual leadership and school culture qualities than lower-performing schools. The

most prominent results were found in relation to spiritual leadership and school culture. The researchers noted that as the teachers' perception of spiritual leadership increased, their perception of school culture likewise rose. These conclusions support this study by demonstrating the strong link that exists between a spiritual leadership and its impact in creating a positive organizational culture.

Using a theoretical framework that incorporated SLT, transformational leadership, and servant leadership, Primeau (2018) studied the connection between spirituality and leadership and how the leader's spirituality can facilitate positive organizational outcomes such as higher morale and increased productivity. Through a case study design utilizing face-to-face interviews with 12 people who served in various leadership capacities in Christian universities and faith-based organizations (such as churches) from various places in central and western Michigan, the researcher collected data related to spirituality in leadership. Primeau found support for a connection between spirituality and leadership success, an association of emotional intelligence with spiritual leaders, that spiritual leaders have a distinctly different approach to leadership, that evaluation standards should be the same for spiritual and nonspiritual leaders alike, and that organizational spirituality benefits everyone. Furthermore, spiritual leadership led to increased job satisfaction, higher morale, and increased productivity. The findings revealed that emotional intelligence contributed to a difference in leadership style among spiritual leaders, and spiritual leaders value employee development, as well as self-awareness and self-mastery for themselves and their personnel. Primeau's research provides additional support for this study by confirming the association of positive organizational outcomes with spiritual leadership.

J. J. Yancey (2020) sought to better understand the impact of spiritual leadership on organizational education. Based on the assumption that spiritually healthy people will develop and maintain a healthy spiritual culture, J. J. Yancey endeavored to discover how spiritual leadership influenced the educational and training initiatives in a banking institution in the central southern part of the U.S. Data collection for the case study involved email/interviews with 12 participants and a content analysis of the bank's training materials and archived information

containing reports and surveys which documented spiritual influence in the organization's approach to education and training. Their findings indicated that leaders demonstrated characteristics of spiritual leadership and transformational leadership. These qualities normally do not align with a financial institution, which places priority on bottom-line considerations. Nevertheless, leaders in this enterprise placed priority on faith, religious values, spiritual principles, and elements of servant leadership. These factors motivated employees to embrace the organization's mission, inspired commitment, and encouraged serving the spiritual-transformational goals of the organization. This research provides support for the current study by demonstrating the positive impact that an appropriate spiritual focus can have on organizational culture.

Biblical Community

Ferguson (2004) proposed that creating biblical community is a necessary element of church planting because it is an essential part of the church experience. Ferguson described biblical community—a shared relational connection that believers experience with God and one another—as something that is part of God's original design for humanity. Acts 2:42–47 is a key New Testament passage highlighting the essence of biblical community for the church. Ferguson explained that one feature of New Testament community that this passage highlighted is the importance of small groups. Just as in the early church, believers experienced celebration as a part of a biblical lifestyle, connection to one another in tightknit relationships that transcended weekly gatherings, and contribution in their willingness to sell their possessions and give toward the needs of others. Furthermore, as depicted in the relationship between Paul and Timothy and biblical advice he passed on to him (2 Tim. 2:2), developing leaders is an indispensable aspect of biblical community. Ferguson's work supports this study in its description of biblical community and its centrality in the life of the New Testament church today as it was in the first century (1 John 1:1–7).

In his commentary on the Gospel of Matthew, Keener (2009) identified Matthew 16:13–20 as a critical teaching that foretold of the biblical community (*ekklesia* or church) that would be born out of the revelation that Jesus was (and is)

the Christ. Keener stated that teachers in antiquity would regularly establish communities of students (i.e., disciples) who would carry on their doctrines. In fact, planning this kind of initiative would typically employ such language as indicated by other Jewish movements of the time (e.g., the Essene community). Jews familiar with the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures, would recognize those terms as referring to the Jewish worship community. Jesus declared, "On this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it" (*New King James Version*, 1982 Matt. 16:18c-d). This enduring quality spoke of the perseverance of the church, the biblical community that Jesus would establish, that would withstand persecution and other trials, continuing to overcome until the return of Christ at the end of the age. Keener's observations support this study by presenting a fundamental understanding of the New Testament biblical community as a continuation of the traditional Jewish worship community that had faith in Jesus Christ as its ultimate foundation.

Martens (2008) considered the establishment of a biblical community (first as a Jewish community in the Old Testament and extending to the New Testament through the church) as a part of God's central plan for humanity. This community focus set Judaism and Christianity apart from religions centered on the individual such as Buddhism or Hinduism. For the Christian, the Trinity provided the basis for spiritual community among believers. A Christ-centered community finds empowerment in the grace of God and the spiritual gifts endowed to God's people, as they exist in a caring, supportive relational interdependence. Beginning as a community that shared its property and goods in common, the biblical community continued to grow, demonstrating its dynamic and outward-directed qualities. Nevertheless, Martens identified human sinfulness, individualism, disunity, leadership dysfunction, and apathy as potential threats to unity in the biblical community. Martens's explanation of the essential qualities of the worship and potential threats to community serve this study well because they fit well the framework of Johannine theology (1 Jn. 1:1–10).

Peters (2018) studied the effects of consumerism and individualism with the intent to recover the transformational impact of the church through developmental

Christian community. Peters conducted a study of biblical passages that provided a foundational understanding of biblical community. The scriptural support for biblical community reinforced the priority that Scripture gives to this important aspect of worship and why the contemporary church needs to recapture this community dynamic. This dynamic provided the basis for the development of a proposed prototype for the establishment of Christian community. This was followed by interviews with a panel of experts (which included denominational leaders, professionals with doctorates and doctoral students, pastors, former pastors with broader ministry experience, church planters, and a lay ministry leader) on their view of the proposed, which included a sermon series based on Romans 12, a cluster-group experience, journaling, and possibilities for post-experience application. Comparative analysis of responses helped to refine the prototype for future use.

Overdorf (2012) conducted an in-depth study of the Bible to distill its teaching on the priority of spiritual community. Overdorf explained the centrality of community as it appears throughout the Bible and coalesces in its teaching about the church. In God's plan for human redemption, He also sought to redeem a people called as a community. The cross of Christ provided the means through which the church can recapture the heart of God's design for spiritual community as the church represents those who are restored to fellowship with God and one another. Ultimately, a people who are restored to spiritual health will reflect that health in their collective relationships, resulting in a community that experiences the joy of fellowship while reflecting the glory of God. Overdorf's book serves this study by providing scriptural support for the importance of a healthy organizational culture as characterized by *koinonia*.

Dawn (1989) studied the biblical and theological foundations of the Sabbath and their relation to practical life for today's believers. One aspect of the Sabbath experience that emerged was the importance that its observance plays in biblical community. The Scriptures challenge humans' values systems, which by default reflect the influence of the culture at large, which most often runs contrary to the Bible's teaching. Biblical community, in its truest sense, not only connects

believers in a local fellowship one with another, but it also joins them with the members of the universal body of Christ. The Christian community provides a point of stability for believers as they grow together in the intimacy of relational fellowship. Just as this was a priority for the early church (Acts 2:42–47), it remains essential for the church today. Dawn's observations about the nature of spiritual community reinforces the importance that this current researcher placed on biblical community in creating a culture that transcends the influence of society at large.

Garrison (2015) combined biblical insights from Acts 2:42–47 with experience gained as a pastor to develop a model of healthy ministry for the contemporary church. Garrison proposed that a church empowered by the Holy Spirit is a community committed to fulfilling Christ's mission, building and maintaining loving relationships, reaching out to the community beyond the church, and reproducing disciples dedicated to Christ and His mission. This process of reproduction is central to creating a vibrant spiritual community that prioritizes the building of relationships as an extension of God's kingdom. As such, the church transcends ordinary organizational paradigms, as believers are united by their spiritual bond in Christ. The natural result of loving community facilitates healing in people's lives. Garrison's work supports this study by offering further confirmation of the blessings that follow when God's people are intentional about building a biblical culture that nurtures faith.

Bilezikian (2002) maintained that although the church had lost a scriptural view of community, as evidenced by human structures and hierarchies, it was regaining its identity as a biblical community. This realization coincided with God's original design for the faith community, as demonstrated by the love and unity of the first-century church. That original biblical design was based on three structures revealed in Genesis 1–2. The oneness of community was designed to reflect the unity embodied in the unity of the Trinity, God in three persons united in love. Likewise, relationships we also a feature of the community that God ordained for humanity to experience through oneness among its members. The third structure appeared in the form of service, the ministry stewardship that God trusted

to humanity. These three structures were corrupted, however, when sin entered the world; as such, it also represented the corruption of spiritual community. The fall resulted in estrangement from God and a destruction of the oneness that the man and woman had shared. Instead, it degenerated into separation and discord, which led to a hierarchy of relationships, resulting in a subordination of women in the community of faith. This also led to an undermining of ministry partnership shared by male and female alike; however, the redemption of spiritual community means a restoration of oneness with God, a renewal of mutual servanthood among men and women, and a restoration of complementary ministry structures shared by men and women. Bilezikian's work contributes to this study by affirming the value that each member of the spiritual community brings to the fellowship, in keeping with the Johannine model (1 Jn. 2:12–14).

Ebersole and Woods (2001) addressed the theoretical and theological issues related to virtual community, which is made possible by computer-mediated communication (CMC). Today's technology renewed the tension that exists when new media seeks to redefine community, a challenged faced by society and the church with the development of each new form of communication. Theological interests are related to the church's calling in society as a community of believers. Ebersole and Woods (2001) stated, "Christian theological studies of community have focused on the *koinonia* or fellowship that results when believers, motivated by the agape love of God, join together in fellowship and unity" (p. 187). They addressed the issue of whether believers can experience genuine *koinonia* by way of technology in a postmodern societal culture in which community is interpreted in the broadest possible terms. A virtual community replicates in-person meeting with face-to-face communication; as such, it represents a copy of—but not a replacement for—community in the ideal sense. Virtual community may be able to incorporate the social aspects of fellowship but not the communal intimacy. As Bonhoeffer (2015) observed, Christian brotherhood is a divine reality and a spiritual reality, which, according to Ebersole and Woods (2001), excludes virtual reality. Using Martin Buber's (1970) *I and Thou* concept of communication as a basis for authentic community, Ebersole and Woods (2001) offered six virtues that

correspond with Buber's (1970) model by which virtual community can be evaluated: communication, intimacy, honesty, commitment, diversity, and safety. Using these criteria, they determined that CMC can only go so far in facilitating genuine community. In the end, Ebersole and Woods recommended a balanced approach to CMC and cautioned that because people can avoid essential elements of community such as accountability or responsibility, the character of community can become distorted. Still, the church has a responsibility to explore the redemptive possibilities presented by CMC. In this way, the church can recognize both the pitfalls and potential of this medium. This contribution by Ebersole and Woods supports this study by expanding the parameters of biblical community that the church must consider in seeking to create an organizational culture that promotes genuine *koinonia* in a digital age.

P. W. Perkins (2012) conducted a study to determine whether an online social network like Facebook could provide the essential characteristics of a biblical community. This case study of eight Christian college students from two midwestern schools (Premier Music College and Smallville Christian College) resulted in both qualitative and quantitative data, which were intended to add to a fuller understanding of the qualitative findings. Generally, the participants believed that Facebook provided a place to connect with other people and share useful information. The relational connections were a source of acceptance, encouragement, communication, and private accountability. It served as a supplement to their real-world community, although not a replacement for it. This study by P. W. Perkins supports the current study by suggesting that elements of biblical community can include creative alternatives by which people can make kingdom connections and experience fellowship. It does not, however, act as a replacement for the local worship community.

Nave (2018) studied the biblical community behaviors of women connecting by way of Facebook. The research involved a mixed methods study of women in a local church women's ministry. Quantitative analysis of a survey was combined with qualitative inquiry using responses from open-ended questions. The instruments were validated by an expert panel of women's ministry leaders with

publication and education achievements to their credit. Nave concluded that a social media platform like Facebook was inadequate to sustain all aspects of spiritual community. In particular, the medium proved inadequate as a means of providing accountability for sin and confession. Nevertheless, Facebook had some value in providing some elements of spiritual community and could be an instrument of value when combined with other means of connecting members of the body of Christ. Nave's work provides support for this study by reinforcing the need to appreciate the potential that social media and other tech solutions offer as instruments for facilitating spiritual community as well as the need to recognize their value while working within their limitations.

Bonhoeffer (2015) described the qualities that should characterize Christian community. For Bonhoeffer, community involves the physical presence of believers experiencing the joy of a shared life in Christ. The longing that believers naturally feel to be with others in the body of Christ is a natural desire that God instilled in humanity. The appearance of Christ in bodily form on earth to fellowship with humanity speaks to the need that believers have for spiritual community. Likewise, the physical presence of Christians in the company of other believers is a source of comfort and encouragement. The fullness of Christian community comes through its spiritual character. Christian community takes place through Christ; He is the unifying factor that brings believers together in a spiritual bond that transcends typical human relationships. In this way, believers become a spiritual family—brothers and sisters who are one in spiritual unity with Christ. In fact, the more Christians experience an increasing sense of community, the more other temporary things diminish as Christ emerges more fully. Just like the grace of God, spiritual community is a gift of God that is endowed to believers. In this way, Christian community has an organic quality to it. According to Bonhoeffer, "Christian community is not an ideal we have to realize, but rather a reality created by God in Christ in which we may participate" (p. 13). Because biblical community is spiritual in nature, it is unlike any other human connections that are largely a result of emotions. Bonhoeffer's work supports this study by emphasizing the spiritual character of biblical community as characterized in the Johannine letters.

Gangel (2001) proposed that healthy churches should not assess their organizational soundness based on worldly paradigms or societal norms, but should pattern their spiritual community on scriptural principles. For example, numerical growth is not always an indication of spiritual well-being. Instead, contemporary church leaders should look to the biblical pattern of the first-century church in Acts 2:42–47, whose numerical growth was nurtured by a continuation of sound biblical practices that facilitated healthy community. Gangel cautioned against the approach some contemporary leaders employ, which measures success strictly in terms of pragmatic outcomes. Alternately, the community of believers should measure the quality of ministry by the presence of unity in Christ among believers, which is central to *koinonia*, and accountability to God's Word and one another (E. L. Hayes, 1999). In fact, Gangel (2001) posited that the local church should prioritize developing a culture that builds and edifies believers and cultivates biblical virtues among its people to present a more positive witness to outsiders. This becomes possible by building the culture on a foundation of scriptural values, not sociological paradigms or innovative marketing. Such contemporary approaches will prove inadequate to equip the church face the challenges of a post-Christian societal culture. Gangel's analysis upholds this study by emphasizing the paramount importance of scriptural priorities in building spiritual community.

Macchia (1999) explained that church health, a product of a healthy pastor and leadership team, is essential for a church to have maximum impact. Macchia visited 100 churches in New England and followed up with survey data from 1,899 participants. Subjects were from various denominations and represented diversity in size, ethnicities, and other contextual settings. An analysis of the data revealed that Scripture and prayer were foundational to church health. Furthermore, they found that healthy churches shared nine common health indicators: (a) love, acceptance, and forgiveness; (b) relational integrity; (c) desire for personal growth; (d) a transition from traditional to contemporary worship; (e) prayer; (f) relationship-centered ministry; (g) incorporation of personal stories; (h) service; and (i) networking. Those surveyed were asked to evaluate Macchia's 10 characteristics of a healthy church. The survey data found strong support for all 10

characteristics, which were subdivided into three categories: (a) how one relates to God (God's empowering presence, God-exalting worship, and spiritual disciplines), how one relates to their church family (learning and growing in community, a commitment to loving, caring relationships, and servant-leadership development), and how one's church ministers and manages (an outward focus, wise administration and accountability, networking with the body of Christ, and stewardship and generosity). Macchia's study further supports this study by emphasizing the priority of Scripture, prayer, and other biblical health indicators in facilitating a spiritual culture characterized by *koinonia*.

Scorgie and Reimer (2011) offered an overview of the essential qualities of biblical community and present their rationale regarding its necessity. They suggested that practically speaking, Christian community naturally avails itself of the existing network of human relationships that believers have. Also, relationships reflect our reality as those who are created in the image of God and reflect the relational nature of the Trinity. Likewise, because the very nature of God is love, people reflect such love by overcoming their limiting self-interests through the selfless nature of community. Moreover, living in community with other Christians reflects a priority of the Holy Spirit, who constantly works in believers to develop biblical relational qualities that counteract sinful human tendencies. As such, believers in community display a very different attitude toward power than the worldly paradigm of leadership, choosing instead to embrace transparency and egalitarianism in the body of Christ. Ultimately, because social dynamics are foundation to formational elements of life, including the spiritual, biblical community stands as a central influence that contributes toward spiritual growth. In this way, people recognize that participating in relationships with other believers represents the fullest expression of human potential. Scorgie and Reimer's evaluation of community coincides with this study's view of Christian community as an undeniably essential part of life in Christ.

Cornette (2017) studied the membership practices of 10 churches from three Christian denominations (United Methodist, Wesleyan, and Southern Baptist Convention), all of whom had similar doctrinal views, with the aim of better

understanding an effective way of moving church attenders to membership. In this study, membership was a means of determining an individual's commitment to the local church community. Embracing the responsibility associated with commitment to the church body is a mark of a healthy Christian community. Cornette analyzed the membership assimilation process followed by nine churches by way of in-depth interviews with the senior pastors and compared them with interviews of pastoral staff members from First Baptist Church of Venice, Florida, a church that had doubled its membership over the last 5 years. From the data, Cornette developed a five-step model for increasing church membership, which included (a) following up with each guest, (b) communicating the necessity of church membership, (c) offering opportunities for commitment, (d) informing the church family and guests about new members, (e) assimilation into Bible studies. Cornette's work supports this study with its recognition that building and maintaining a healthy spiritual community requires consistent intentional effort.

Lawson (2013) argued that the church today is experiencing ineffective discipleship, providing inadequate spiritual growth and maturity among believers. Lawson conducted a thematic content analysis of the Bible, as well as theological and academic literature. The findings resulted in a discipleship pattern developed by Jesus, which had three primary characteristics: the importance of God's Word, Christ's model, and Christ's commissioning of His disciples. This model was further expanded through the life and ministry of the Apostle Peter. Sanctification through effective discipleship served as a precursor to building healthy spiritual community. Ultimately, this resulted in deeper fellowship with the God the Father as well. Lawson's work adds value to this study by pointing out the importance of the discipleship process in building and maintaining biblical community in the church.

Stetzer (2006) advocated a strategy for church planting that involves a missions model that seeks to contextualize the gospel to the indigenous culture and develop an understanding of the missions context while maintaining a biblical organizational culture. As people naturally seek community, a missional church will make biblical community a priority because it provides the best context for

spiritual growth. In fact, a robust Christian community has an evangelistic character to it because it naturally leverages the human desire for relationships, facilitating a connection both with God and others. Genuine community, which is something that cannot be manufactured, offers a welcoming atmosphere, even for those who have not yet come to faith, giving them opportunity to experience the irresistible love of God through the church. At the same time, the missional character of the church will cause its members to mobilize to reach out strategically and redemptively cross culturally to the society at large. Stetzer (2006) also identified "koinos" churches, which prefer a more intimate relational model. According to Stetzer (2006), "Koinos churches are churches that, at their core, have committed to have face-to-face relationships in such a way that they truly live life together" (p. 171). Their commitment to biblical community causes them to intentional remain smaller so that they can maintain a more intimate relational character. Stetzer concluded that missional churches must provide a vivid example of Christian community to draw other as part of an intentional evangelism approach. Stetzer's church planting model supports this study by emphasizing the importance of a strong biblical community while recognizing its potential as a means of reaching others in the culture at large.

Panikulam (1979) studied the New Testament concept of *koinonia*, which is usually translated as "fellowship" in English, stating that it summarized in one word the essential, central quality of Christianity. The Apostle Paul used the word most often among New Testament writers, focusing on the spiritual fellowship that believers share with the Son, stressing the vertical aspect of *koinonia*. Luke, on the other hand, places more emphasis on the community aspect of fellowship that believers in the church share one with another, the horizontal aspect. 1 John offers probably the most fully developed understanding of *koinonia*, taking the concept as taught by Paul and Luke further. Only in 1 John 1:3 does the Bible declare that believers can have fellowship both with the Father and the Son. Likewise, believers in Christ have the fulness of fellowship with one another and with God. In this way, 1 John explores more fully both the horizontal and vertical dimensions of fellowship. Panikulam observed, "The mutual *koinonia* of the believers are brought

to a *koinonia* with the Father and the Son, and by doing that 1 John has added to the theological depth of *koinonia*" (p. 140). With this understanding, one can view *koinonia* as an act of divine initiative, with God calling believers into fellowship through Christ with Himself and with one another. This work by Panikulam supports this study by exploring the dimensions of *koinonia* as a defining quality of biblical community and by recognizing how 1 John expands the concept of *koinonia* to emphasize its vertical and horizontal aspects.

Davis (2012) postulated that activity done with God's presence and empowerment to facilitate drawing people into deeper communion with God and one another is the basis for genuine Christian ministry. Davis explained that God's presence and empowerment in the ministries of Moses, Joshua, Jesus, and Paul illustrate the principle of divine-human partnership in both the Old and New Testaments. Jesus especially exemplified ministry done in partnership with God by way of divine empowerment and fellowship in the Holy Spirit. Likewise, in commissioning His disciples, Jesus emphasized the importance of divine partnership and communion as essential elements of ministry. In fact, the Christian teaching regarding the Trinity provides the basis for this ministry paradigm, as ministry activity among believers should reflect the same partnership and communion that exists among Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. According to Davis, "Teleologically, bringing persons into ever-deepening communion with God the Father, through Jesus Christ the Son, in the communion of the Holy Spirit, is recognized as the ultimate purpose and goal of all church ministry (worship, discipleship, mission)" (p. 127). This increasing intimacy with God naturally facilitates a stronger bond of fellowship among believers, as well as communion of the united body of Christ with God. Davis's article further strengthens this study by offering a model of ministry and fellowship in keeping with the Johannine doctrine of *koinonia*.

Gasser (2002) addressed the shift in church organizational evaluation emphasis from church growth to church health. A lack of agreement exists, however, on what constitutes church health. Some use synonyms to describe aspects of health, while others offer a set of characteristics associated with health.

Likewise, different approaches to health also exist, which include a process to facilitate health (otherwise known as a steps strategy) or pursuing conditions that define health (a set of qualities or goals associated with health). Moreover, three prevalent perceptions of health have emerged. Health can be defined as growth, as discipleship, or as quality. Gasser concluded that no one system of church health can comprehensively address all the needs associated with church health. Each philosophy has value in providing an understanding of effective ministry, and their proponents profess that they are based on biblical principles; however, they combine biblical principles with sociological theory and expert opinion. Gasser argued that the best methods rely on the eternal values of Scripture rather than shifting sociological trends. Gasser's work supports this study by affirming the paramount importance of Scripture in defining biblical community and organizational health rather than overemphasizing human models.

Johannine Leadership

Akin (2001) supported the traditional view that John, the son of Zebedee, wrote the Johannine epistles. Noting both internal and external evidence that suggest common authorship, Akin observed that the Johannine authorship was universally accepted by the early church. Akin gave considerable weight to the author's claim to be an eyewitness of Christ, even though modern critical scholars have called this into question. No valid reason exists to question the authoritative eyewitness credentials of the author (Carson et al., 1992). Furthermore, Akin (2001) explained that a considerable body of scholars have supported Johannine authorship. Therefore, Akin's work fortifies this current study by upholding the Apostolic qualifications that made John a highly respected leader among first-century Christians.

Hiebert (1991) highlighted the pastoral concern that John felt for the spiritual well-being of his readers, recognizing their potential vulnerability to both worldly influences and false teachers. Hiebert suggested that the character of 1 John reflects a fatherly attitude toward younger believers and the challenges they face in their generation. For this reason, the Apostle sought to build up his spiritual followers in their faith. In true pastoral fashion, he provided sound doctrine and

affectionate assurance to build the confidence of his people. Hiebert's book supports this study by helping to define the contours of John's leadership characteristics.

Westcott (1902) also affirmed the Apostle's authorship of the Johannine epistles, observing unmistakable stylistic similarities that identify them with the Gospel of John. A key indicator for Westcott lies in the confident apostolic authority exerted by John in providing pastoral leadership, addressing doctrinal issues, and challenging those who are in error. His strength of leadership stemmed more from the nobility of his personhood, rather than an exercise of positional power. The depth of his personal experience supported his practical—yet principled—approach to applying the truth and his invitation to engage in fellowship with God and one another. Westcott's study informed this current project by helping to further define the character of John's leadership and what made him such a respected figure.

Fouard (1905) presented a detailed and well-documented account of the life and ministry of John. As the last surviving Apostle, John held a very esteemed position among believers during what was viewed as the end of the apostolic age. Fouard provided support for John's authorship of the Johannine corpus. For example, the intimate eyewitness account of the Gospel would suggest firsthand knowledge. Otherwise, one would have to view it as a forgery. Likewise, Fouard offered an explanation that noted early Christian witnesses that support the traditional view regarding authorship of the Johannine writings. Fouard's book supports this study by highlighting the profound respect that John's leadership inspired among first-century Christian and how he effectively used his leadership to provide stability to the church at the close of the apostolic era.

MacDonald (1877) also chronicled the life and writings of the Apostle John, giving a thorough view of the historical context in which John lived and ministered. Consequently, MacDonald helps to better understand the ministry of John in relation to that context. The author supported the traditional view of the life, ministry, and writings of John (however, trying to avoid overly speculating), showing how those events intersected with the times. The Apostle's personal

temperament and intimate personal connection to Christ shaped the trajectory of his ministry, while supporting his authoritative standing among the churches of the latter first century (Howson, 1877; MacDonald, 1877). MacDonald's work upholds the current study by offering further support for the tenor of the Apostle's leadership.

Pate (2011) examined the writings of John and offered historical context as well as commentary and analysis of their content. Pate is a contemporary scholar who also holds to the traditional view that the Apostle wrote the Gospel of John, 1–3 John, and Revelation. Having evaluated the various viewpoints regarding authorship of the Johannine corpus, Pate offered conclusions based on internal and external evidence that support Johannine authorship. Furthermore, Pate offered a plausible explanation to refute the objections to critics of Johannine authorship. This work serves the current study by providing additional credible scholarly support for the Apostle's authorship of the Johannine epistles.

Kruse (2020) operated from a supposition that the same author wrote 1–3 John and likely wrote the Gospel of John as well. Although allowing for the possibility of differing authorship scenarios of various component of the Johannine corpus, Kruse accepted the likelihood of the Apostle John having written the Gospel and the epistles, especially given the indication of internal evidence. Kruse suggested that 1 John was written as an encyclical to various churches dealing with relevant doctrinal issues, 2 John was written to a specific local church, and 3 John was written to an individual (Gaius). Kruse's commentary supports this study by offering a plausible leadership context in which the Apostle John operated.

Comfort and Hawley (2007a, 2007b) also ascribed authorship of the Johannine epistles to the Apostle. Just as the Gospel of John (Osborne, 2007), 1 John makes a claim to an eyewitness account that most closely aligns with the Apostle John. Comfort and Hawley (2007a, 2007b) also noted the close internal stylistic similarities shared by the Gospel and the Epistles. Although they acknowledged the supposition raised by critics that another author (John "the elder") penned 2 and 3 John (2007b), they dismissed the theory as unlikely considering the strong internal evidence and external evidence and because the

assumption is based on a possible misinterpretation of Papias by the historian Eusebius (Schaff & Wace, 1890). As John wrote the letters toward the end of his life, it stands to reason that he would refer to himself (quite modestly) as "the elder" (Comfort & Hawley, 2007b) Moreover, the respect ascribed to the Apostle by the early church leaders prompted them to include 2 and 3 John in the canon because of their association with John. In fact, the reverence accorded to John as an Apostolic figure ties in well with the leadership theme of 3 John, which represented a challenge to John's leadership by Diotrephes. As an example of one who both taught and exercised servanthood in leadership, John rebuked the authoritarian approach exercised by Diotrephes. Comfort and Hawley's (2007a, 2007b) work aid this study by their credible support for Johannine authorship of the epistles and for their observations of the leadership contributions made by the Apostle. Furthermore, Comfort and Hawley's (2007b) analysis that supports the authorship of 2 and 3 John speak not only to the authenticity of the Apostle's authorship, but to the historical stature attributed to John as well.

Ogereau (2009) contended that today's Pentecostal pastors need leadership models formed by sound biblical and theological models instead of today's secular paradigms. Although many consider the Apostle Paul to be a model of biblical leadership, Ogereau perceived that the Apostle John is neglected as an additional model of church leadership. Specifically, John's leadership style blends strong apostolic authority with gentle pastoral care, a model that would serve today's leaders admirably. Ogereau also made a strong case in support of the Apostle's authorship of the Johannine epistles based on the internal unity of the writings, the inherent apostolic witness, and the leadership stature ascribed universally to the Apostle. John's quality of a loving shepherd in support of his followers is balance by courageous confrontation to those who undermined the unity of the church through doctrinal error and ungodly leadership practices. As such, this leadership approach has relevant application in contemporary churches. Ogereau's article has value for the current study by its recognition of the value of John's leadership approach, its attention to a paucity of literature promoting a Johannine model of leadership, and its call for further studies in the Johannine leadership model.

Poon (2006) also investigated the Johannine approach to leadership by conducting a socio-rhetorical analysis of John 21:1–25. Poon's observation stemmed from a study of Christ's restoration of Simon Peter. The themes that emerged from an analysis of the text were leadership based in love, leadership as a redemptive and restorative process, leadership as a catalyst for follower commitment, and leadership that inspires followers to pursue the realization of elevated personal and organizational objectives. Poon proposed that the findings suggested SLT as a valid leadership paradigm that supports the Johannine model in this passage. Poon's work supports this study by recognizing a Johannine leadership model as valid for contemporary leaders and by linking it with spiritual leadership theory.

Robertson (1935) provided a biographical portrait of the Apostle John and the various transitions that shaped his life and ministry. This author presented John as the somewhat mystical spiritual personality who—as a younger apostle—did not gain immediate prominence, but grew in stature over time. He was likely one of the followers of John the Baptist who transitioned to following Jesus. As such, he was one of his earlier followers, yet his humility allowed others to emerge to the fore. Although not formally trained as a scholar, he nevertheless demonstrated the intellectual and spiritual capacity that established him as a theologian. Robertson (1935) expressed support for the Apostle as the author of the Johannine corpus, while rejecting "the shadowy figure whom Papias calls 'the elder John' according to Eusebius" (p. 22). Instead, Roberson corrected the misunderstanding commonly ascribed to Papias (Schaff & Wace, 1890). Robertson's (1935) work contributed to this study by providing additional support for the various historical and traditional events associated with the Apostle and by offering additional context for the Johannine epistles and more support for John's authorship.

Hayes (1917) presented a work that explored the many facets of John that made him a unique figure among the early church leaders. He sought to adhere to church traditions that had historical support while rejecting material attributed to legend. As such, Hayes focused on John's singular qualities as the self-effacing disciple who preferred to allow others to emerge to the forefront, the Boanerges

(son of thunder) who was a courageous man of fiery convictions and a commitment to the truth, and the disciple who experienced a close, intimate, personal relationship with Christ, and the deep, spiritual theologian. In fact, Johannine theology was the dominant theological viewpoint that addressed the challenges faced by the church at the end of the apostolic age. Hayes's book contributes to this study by ascribing value to spiritual qualities not usually associated with contemporary, secular leadership paradigms.

Nee (2012) described the theology and spiritual distinctives of John's ministry as corresponding to his earlier identified profession. This author observed that Peter the fisherman, who was first found casting his net into the sea, became an evangelist who advanced God's kingdom as a fisher of men (Mk. 1:16–17). His ministry eventually was eclipsed by Paul, a tentmaker (Acts 18:3), who advanced God's kingdom by building the church across the Roman Empire, bringing about multiplication by construction. The proliferation of converts needed the more permanent organizational structure provided by Paul's theology and ministry. At the end of the apostolic age, doctrinal error, false teachers, and organizational dysfunction called for a ministry of restoration, as characterized by John, who was first identified as in the boat mending nets (Mk. 1:19). Nee described all of John's writings as having a quality emphasizing recovery and restoration. In fact, Nee observed that the Johannine writings represent "lasts." His Gospel is the last of the Gospels, his letters are the last of the New Testament epistles, and the Revelation ends the canonical books, closing out the divine scriptural revelation to humanity. Nee's work provides value for this study by defining the contextual characteristics that shaped John's theology and leadership and provide its distinguishing features.

Summary

The church presents an interesting challenge to the study of organizational leadership because of its inherent spiritual nature. As a spiritual entity, it has a mystical element to it that makes it unlike other organizations. According to Gangel (1989), a mischaracterization of the spiritual nature of the church can cause confusion regarding effective and appropriate leadership. Clarity comes from properly recognizing the unique classification of the church as both an organization

and an organism. "The church is *organism* because it is the body of Christ, a spiritual and eternal entity not hinged to earthbound restrictions and guidelines" (Gangel, 1989, p. 10). At the same time, it is an *organization* because it has the same responsibilities incumbent upon any other corporate entity (i.e., maintaining the appropriate relationship with governing authorities, responsible stewardship of its material and human resources, and a pursuit to fulfill its organizational purpose) and must meet the same criteria accordingly.

Spiritual leadership theory as initially proposed by Fry (2003) and organizational culture as proposed by Schein (1988) and Cameron and Quinn (2011) provided a suitable theoretical framework that is compatible with the distinctive leadership issues that confront the church as it addresses both internal conflicts and external pressures presented by contemporary society (Schein, 1986, 1990; Washington, 2016). Likewise, the eternal wisdom of the Holy Scriptures presents insight for establishing and maintaining biblical community as characterized by *koinonia*. The Johannine model of leadership has much to offer contemporary pastors and church leaders as they address these challenges, drawing from the eternal wisdom of the Scriptures.

Chapter 3 – Methodology

Through this study, the researcher sought to find a model that would serve the contemporary church in establishing biblical community while facing the realities of internal organizational challenges and external societal hostility in a post-Christian culture, the methodology reflected those purposes accordingly. Specifically, the researcher utilized methods that combined eternal biblical truth with an understanding of how contemporary pastors implement those principles in serving their congregations. This approach involved a thorough exegetical analysis of the Johannine epistles using socio-rhetorical analysis to develop interview questions for qualitative inquiry. Using a phenomenological qualitative approach, the data collected through in-depth interviews offered insight into how pastors apply the scriptural and theoretical leadership principles in their contemporary context. Their lived experiences offered a broader understanding of biblical application and strategic implementation of theory by bridging the cultural context in which Scripture was written with the contemporary church's world (Duvall & Hays, 2012; Witherington, 2009).

Research Questions

This researcher examined the efficacy of spiritual leadership theory (Fry, 2003) and organizational culture (Cameron & Quinn, 2011; Schein, 1988) as a valid theoretical leadership framework for establishing a healthy, resilient biblical community as characterized by *koinonia*. The New Testament teachings of the Apostle John served as the biblical model for church leadership in addressing the challenges of building healthy spiritual community while dealing with internal conflict and external opposition. A detailed exegetical analysis of the Johannine epistles with attention to the principles embodied in the SLT and OC leadership paradigms provided answers to the following research questions:

RQ1: What characteristics defined the leadership demonstrated by the Apostle John (Poon, 2006)?

RQ2: How do the leadership principles exhibited by John compare and contrast with spiritual leadership theory? (Fry, 2003)?

RQ3: How do the principles of biblical community in the epistles of John

compare and contrast with the theory of organizational culture (Cameron &

Quinn, 2011; Panikulam, 1979; Schein, 1986)?

RQ4: How did John handle the leadership challenges facing his ministry

(Ladd, 1993)?

Leadership themes that emerged from exegetical analysis formed the basis for in-depth interview questions. Qualitative analysis aided in better understanding the lived experiences of contemporary pastors by answering the following research questions:

RQ5: What approaches have contemporary pastors used to develop a

healthy New Testament biblical community while engaging a post-Christian

culture (Adhar, 2013, 2014; Hattingh, 2019; Macchia, 1999)?

RQ6: What methods have contemporary pastors used to gauge the status of

biblical community (Davis, 2012; Macchia, 1999; Panikulam, 1979)?

RQ7: What aspects of post-Christian culture do contemporary pastors

perceive to pose a threat to biblical community (Boeve, 2018; Noel, 2015;

Paas, 2012)?

RQ8: How do the methods of contemporary pastors compare and contrast to

the theoretical constructs of spiritual leadership theory and organizational

culture (Boeve, 2018; Cameron & Quinn, 2011; Fry, 2003; Little, 2018; G.

G. Robinson, 2018; Schein, 1988)?

Because sound scriptural teaching should provide the foundation for accepted spiritual practice, exegetical analysis stood at the heart of this study.

Disposition of the Researcher

To better arrive at an accurate understanding of the meaning of the text, an important aspect of the interpretive process includes an understanding of the worldview that the researcher brought to the project. As Robbins (n.d.) noted, ideological analysis examines the influences that affect writers, readers, and texts as written. According to Robbins (1996b), "From the perspective of socio-rhetorical criticism, a 'complete' interpretation includes the interrelation among the author, the text and the reader" (p. 39). For this reason, it is important to note that

the research perspective for this proposed project is mostly conversionist because of my firm conviction in the power of transformation through salvation (Jn. 3:3; 2 Cor. 5:17; Titus 3:5). It also includes some elements of gnostic-manipulationist, thaumaturgical, and revolutionist. The gnostic-manipulationist perspective comes from the belief in the transformational power of God's word at work in the lives of individuals (Rom. 12:2; Eph. 4:22–24; Col. 3:10) and at work in the biblical community, especially in its impact on relationships (Eph. 4:31–32; 1 Jn. 4:7–21). The thaumaturgical perspective stems from the conviction in the present work of the Holy Spirit through believing individuals, as well as the church, as God's agents to facilitate healing and compassion to a hurting world (Lk. 4:18–19; Mk. 16:15–20; Acts 1:8). The revolutionist perspective is limited to a belief related to certain eschatological events, few of which have bearing on this study. The primary mode of discourse in this study is historical-critical, with social-scientific as a secondary mode.

Overview of Exegetical Analysis

Because the Bible is God's Word, it has a relevant message for all people, for all time (G. D. Fee & Stuart, 2003). Unlike other texts that are of human origin, the Bible is eternal and unchanging (Henson et al., 2020). Isaiah the prophet wrote, "The grass withers, the flower fades, But the word of our God stands forever" (*New King James Version*, 1982, Isaiah 40:8). G. D. Fee and Stuart (2003) explained that every reader is an interpreter, and the goal of interpretation lies, not in trying to extract a mysterious, esoteric meaning, but to arrive at the text's clear meaning. To discover the plain sense of the text requires a critical examination of the text for the sake of arriving at an informed opinion regarding its meaning (Carson, 1984). As Carson (1984) put it, "A critical interpretation of Scripture is one that has adequate justification—lexical, grammatical, cultural, theological, historical, geographical, or other justification" (p. 12). It involves trying as closely as possible to discern the authors original intent (G. D. Fee & Stuart, 2003; Osborne, 2006). For this reason, the interpreter must know the principles that apply to properly interpret the meaning of the text (Duvall & Hays, 2012; G. D. Fee & Stuart, 2003; Osborne, 2006). Likewise, the interpreter has a responsibility to avoid common exegetical

fallacies that involve the misapplication of word studies, grammatical errors, flaws in logic, and presuppositional and historical fallacies (Carson, 1984). Paul described well the task of the interpreter: "Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth" (*New King James Version*, 1982, 2 Tim. 2:15).

Duvall and Hays (2012) used the metaphor of a journey to describe the task of interpreting the Scriptures, a process that involves the following steps: (a) discerning the meaning to the original audience ("grasping the text in their town," p. 41), (b) identifying the differences between the initial audience and the contemporary reader ("measuring the width of the river to cross," p. 42), (c) discovering the theological principles ("crossing the principlizing bridge," p. 43), (d) examining how the theological principle(s) fit with the overall teaching of Scripture ("consult the biblical map," p. 44), and (e) applying the theological principles in the contemporary context ("grasping the text in our town," p. 45). Such a process helps to address the challenge of bridging the distance between the biblical context and the contemporary world (Osborne, 2006). Socio-rhetorical analysis served as the vehicle in this study to connect the world of the Bible to the contemporary context and provide an interpretation of the text that promotes practical application.

To supplement the socio-rhetorical analysis, other hermeneutical approaches were consulted, such as Osborne's (2006) hermeneutical spiral. According to Osborne (2006), "Biblical interpretation entails a 'spiral' from text to context, from its original meaning to its contextualization or significance for the church today" (p. 22). Osborne maintained that it is possible to discover the biblical author's original intent. The use of the spiral as a metaphor for the interpretive task informs the student of Scripture that interpretation is an open-ended process that moves ever closer to the original intended meaning of the text (with consideration to its cultural context) to discover the significance for the contemporary reader. At times, the process in this study included word studies of the original Greek text when necessary to promote clarity and understanding.

Johannine Epistles

The New Testament epistles of John provided the text of Scripture for this study. The Apostle John faced problems with which contemporary pastors and church leaders can identify, including sin in the lives of believers (1 Jn. 1:8–2:2), hatred and internal divisions among members (1 Jn. 2:9), struggles with worldliness (1 Jn. 2:15–17), people leaving the church (1 Jn. 2:19), false teachers and corrupt doctrine (1 Jn. 2:18, 4:1–3; 2 Jn. 7, 10), and corrupt, dysfunctional leaders (3 Jn. 9–10), to name a few. Furthermore, John emphasized the importance of a biblical community that incorporated fellowship (*koinonia*) through experiencing the living, manifest presence of God, a reality that believers in Christ could share in communion with one another (1 Jn. 1:1–4, 7). This incarnational reality represented the unique bond that joined Christians in the church to one another. The love of God provided the impetus that created that relational dynamic in the church (1 Jn. 4:7–21). Robbins (1996b) noted, "Christianity creates a particular kind of culture with the hope that its adherents will steadfastly choose this mode of conviction, belief, attitude, feeling, action and thought as their 'primary' culture" (p. 4). Through exegetical analysis, this study endeavored to extract principles from the Scriptures to facilitate the building of that kind of culture in the contemporary church.

English Bible Translation

Unless otherwise indicated, the base English New Testament text for this analysis was the New King James Version (1982). Although every English translation of the Bible has strengths and weaknesses, the translation that most closely aligns with the intended purpose will determine the best version to use (Thomas, 2004). This is due in part to the philosophy that governs the translation. Formal equivalence, sometimes described as "literal" translation (G. D. Fee & Stuart, 2003), attempts to reproduce the original form or structure of the text while finding the closest word that corresponds in meaning (G. D. Fee & Stuart, 2003; Marlowe, 2012; Ryken, 2002; Stallard, 2003; Thomas, 2004). For this reason, formal equivalence is preferred when concerned with the precise, literal translation of the text with a focus on accuracy (Marlowe, 2012; Ryken, 2002; Stallard, 2003;

Thomas, 2004). Functional equivalence, sometimes referred to as "dynamic equivalence" (G. D. Fee & Stuart, 2003; Stallard, 2003; Thomas, 2004), places greater emphasis on readability in the receptor language, so it seeks to align grammar with contemporary usage and translates words using a more understandable corresponding word or phrase (Ryken, 2002; Stallard, 2003, 2003; Thomas, 2004). In an attempt to limit ambiguity of meaning, a functional equivalence offers a possible interpretation of obscure passages to better aid in understanding. As the current researcher intended to conduct a thorough exegetical analysis of the texts of 1–3 John, a formal equivalence translation better served the intended purpose.

Ryken (2002) proposed 12 factors to consider when choosing a Bible translation: (a) accuracy, (b) adherence to the original wording, (c) effective diction, (d) theological orthodoxy, (e) preserving multiple meanings, (f) maintaining the full exegetical potential of the text, (g) expecting the best from readers, (h) consideration of the cultural context of the Bible, (i) an unobstructed presentation of the text (or "what you see is what you get"), (j) retaining poetic principles, (k) excellence of rhythm, and (l) literary dignity and beauty. With respect to these qualities and in the interest of adherence to formal equivalence, the New King James Version satisfies these considerations.

Because the NKJV uses the Textus Receptus (Stephanus, 2002) as its base Greek text, instead of the preferred critical text (Nestle et al., 2012), contemporary scholars view this as a weakness of the translation, a valid criticism (Marlowe, 2009; Ryken, 2002; Thomas, 2004). The NKJV text includes detailed marginal notes that present variant readings ("Preface to the New King James Version," 1982) from the critical text (Nestle et al., 2012) and the Byzantine "Majority Text" (M. A. Robinson & Pierpont, 2005). The NKJV serves as an otherwise strong text for the purposes of detailed analysis (Marlowe, 2009, 2012; Ryken, 2002; Thomas, 2004); therefore, the researcher of this study utilized the NKJV with particular attention and priority given to textual variants as listed in the marginal notes (Marlowe, 2009).

Phase 1: Socio-Rhetorical Analysis

Socio-rhetorical analysis provides a method for studying the various aspects of Scripture from different angles—which, when taken together, present a way of better understanding how the various components of the text work together to provide meaning. Robbins (1996b) described this approach as a tapestry that weaves together different threads of meaning, principles, philosophies, opinions, feelings, and actions. Socio-rhetorical analysis has the potential to broaden the paradigms of biblical inquiry (Witherington, 2009) because it incorporates principles of anthropology and sociology into the exegetical process (Robbins, 1996a).

In describing the necessary tension that exists between biblical exegesis and social science inquiry, Henson et al. (2020) explained how this approach provides a balance that enriches biblical studies: "So then, we approach the sacred Scriptures with a reverent desire to discover the truth that God has made available to us and apply it into our contemporary social scientific contexts" (p. 3). Likewise, Robbins (1996a) explained that joining together different methods of interpretation is one of the foremost tasks that confronts the interpreter. Robbins (1996a) stated further that the ultimate objective of socio-rhetorical analysis is "to bring skills we use on a daily basis into an environment of interpretation that is both intricately sensitive to detail and perceptively attentive to large fields of meaning in the world in which we live" (p. 2). In other words, the idea behind socio-rhetorical inquiry is to bring together ordinary skills people use in daily life (perhaps without realizing it) to investigate the interrelated details of the language used in the text (Robbins, 1996a).

In the end, socio-rhetorical analysis can be viewed as a historical inquiry (Witherington, 2009), as well as scientific, spiritual, and applicable (Henson et al., 2020). As mentioned before, the tapestry that makes up the text's meaning includes various textures that together contribute to a holistic approach to the study of Scripture (Robbins, 1996b). These textures are inner texture, intertexture, social and cultural texture, ideological texture, and sacred texture.

Inner Texture Analysis

Inner texture incorporates six different angles from which to view the various language techniques that contribute to the structural form the text (Henson et al., 2020; Robbins, 1996a, 1996b). Inner texture is concerned specifically with what the words of the text itself communicate (Robbins, 1996b). Textual units acts as natural divisions that set boundaries between ideas (Henson et al., 2020). Repetitive patterns highlight words and/or phrases that are used more than once in a pericope (Robbins, 1996a). Progressive patterns flow out of repetition and represent the advancement of ideas driven by techniques such as chiasm (multiple parallel theme that meet in the middle for resolution) or encapsulation (thoughts that are developed between explanations at the beginning and end (Henson et al., 2020). Opening-middle-closing patterns represent the composition of the beginning, body, and ending of a textual unit as characterized by repetition, progression, and narration, which form a plot of sorts (Henson et al., 2020; Robbins, 1996a). Argumentative patterns reveal the logic or rationale for the ideas proposed by the author (Henson et al., 2020; Robbins, 1996a). Sensory-aesthetic patterns are concerned with the various senses that the text arouses (Robbins, 1996a). Such patterns, according to Henson et al. (2020), include emotion-fused thought (clear, unequivocal expressions of feeling), self-expressive speech (involves the use of words as spoken communication), and purposeful action (involves physical activity). Together these literary and rhetorical techniques contribute to a deeper understanding of the words in the text and their meanings (Robbins, 1996a).

Intertexture Analysis

Intertexture involves an examination of elements in the author's context apart from the text that contribute to the meaning of the text itself (Gowler, 2010; Robbins, 1996a). Oral scribal intertexture refers to other texts or oral traditions that have influenced the author's thinking (Henson et al., 2020; Robbins, 1996a). According to Henson et al. (2020), this includes recitation (incorporating or attributing the substance of another source into the text), recontextualization (the inclusion of a reference to another source without identification or attribution), and

reconfiguration (the incorporation of another work that serves to foreshadow the creation of a new event). Social intertexture involves the various elements of societal structure (Robbins, 1996a). This includes the common understanding of social norms held by the various publics in the author's world and encompasses social roles, social identities, social codes, and social relationships (Henson et al., 2020). Two lesser used forms include narrative amplification, which lengthens a short narrative, causing it to grow in scope and complexity, and thematic elaboration, which embellishes a theme from a prior text and uses rhetorical techniques to enhance it (Gowler, 2010). Cultural intertexture includes any identification of the various artifacts and cultural conventions that existed in the author's context and appears in the form of reference, allusion, or echo (Robbins, 1996a). A reference is a direct mention of a person or entity identified as a part of a recognized tradition. An allusion is a suggestion of recognized tradition without specifically citing the tradition. An echo is a delicate (perhaps barely perceptible) trace of a concept from a cultural convention (Henson et al., 2020; Robbins, 1996a). Historical intertexture includes events that take place apart from the text, yet are recorded as verified accounts by the author (Henson et al., 2020; Robbins, 1996a).

Social and Cultural Texture

Social and cultural texture is concerned with the influence exerted on the text by the society and culture at large (Henson et al., 2020). This texture identifies how the text relates to the social and cultural positions, values, and manners in which citizens interact in the social milieu and by locating itself in relation to the foremost cultural system as agreeing with it, fighting it, or attempting to change and/or reform it (Gowler, 2010). There are three facets that are part of social and cultural texture: specific social topics, common social and cultural topics, and final cultural categories (Henson et al., 2020). Specific social topics refer to commonly held religious worldviews (Robbins, 1996a). Henson et al. (2020) offered a description of these worldviews. The conversionist worldview believes the only hope of salvation for the world's wickedness and that of its people is through transformation (a new birth). The revolutionist worldview endorses the

supernatural destruction of the world to prepare the way for a newly created order. The introversionist worldview views the world as hopelessly wicked and that salvation comes through total withdrawal. The gnostic-manipulationist worldview believes that evil is defeated by transformed relationships that promote the right way to overcome. The emphasis of the thaumatological worldview is the relief of suffering through healing, restoration, and compassionate care in this life in preparation for eternal life beyond the grave. The reformist worldview characterizes the world as ruined by unjust, unethical social structures that must be overhauled through social change. The utopian worldview advocates a new social order through godly principles that vanquish evil as people rebuild an ideal civil order.

Common social and cultural topics refers to the knowledge that people in each time and place hold—either consciously or unconsciously—in relation to the shared values, expectations, ideals, and beliefs (Robbins, 1996a). Recognition of such topics, as removed from the reader's own milieu, will help offset instances of ethnocentrism or exercising anachronistic tendencies in interpretation (Henson et al., 2020). According to Robbins (1996a), these topics include (a) honor, guilt, and rights cultures, (b) dyadic and individual personalities, (c) dyadic contracts and agreements, (d) challenge-response (riposte), (e) agriculturally based, industrial, and technological economic exchange systems, (f) peasants, laborers, craftspeople, and entrepreneurs, (g) limited, insufficient, and overabundant goods, and (h) purity codes. To these, Henson et al. (2020) added Old Testament law.

Honor, guilt, and rights cultures refer to positions of power, sexual standing, and social status in a male-dominated society (Robbins, 1996a). Dyadic and individualist personalities differentiate between those who find their worth in terms of another person versus those who operate more independently. Dyadic contracts and agreements speak of various legally binding arrangements between pairs of individuals. Robbins identified challenge-response (riposte) as a give-and-take communication dynamic which uses provocation to elicit a response. Agriculturally based industrial and technological exchanges systems recognizes the type of agrarian economic systems of commerce that existed prior to contemporary

industrial practices. Peasants, laborers, craftspeople, and entrepreneurs refers to the economic developments of working-class day laborers in a preindustrial urban environment. Limited, insufficient, and overabundant goods speak of the restrained desires held by the working poor who sustained themselves through a hand-to-mouth existence. Purity codes classify socially accepted boundaries that attempt to create a separation from what was considered impure or unclean. Old Testament law speaks of the various ordinances and ceremonial regulations, some of which had moral implications, that related to the Mosaic law that gave order to Hebrew society and created a distinction between Jews and Gentiles (Henson et al., 2020).

Final cultural categories refers to the five classes of cultural rhetoric that pinpoint a person's cultural perspective (Henson et al., 2020). These types include (a) dominant cultural rhetoric, which is supported by the various systems of the culture's majority; (b) subculture rhetoric, which belongs to a smaller culture which operates within a larger one with some differentiation; (c) countercultural rhetoric, which is communication that belongs to a subgroup that rejects the culture at large and sees itself as separated; (d) contracultural rhetoric, which develops as a communicated response to an element of conflict with the dominant culture; and (e) liminal rhetoric, which emanates from a group in transition that lacks a settled social identity, resulting in panicky, disjointed communication designed to raise urgent concerns.

Ideological Texture

Ideological texture addresses the potential ways people relate to the Scriptures (Henson et al., 2020). Robbins (1996a) explained, "Ideological texture concerns the way the text itself and interpreters of the text position themselves in relation to the other individuals and groups" (p. 4) . It considers the various perspectives that people bring to the text and the different responses that the text evokes. The importance of ideological texture is to raise an awareness of factors that could contribute to eisegesis or anachronism if they are not identified (Henson et al., 2020). Ideological texture considers a person's individual location, relation to groups, modes of intellectual discourse, and spheres of ideology (Robbins, n.d., 1996a).

Individual locations refer to the worldview that the reader brings to the text (Henson et al., 2020), which includes specific topics (e.g., conversionist, revolutionist, introversionist, gnostic-manipulationist, thaumaturgic, reformist, and utopian) and final categories (e.g., dominant culture, subculture, counterculture, contraculture, and liminal culture). Relation to groups refers to a person's interaction with others based on ideology and association and includes the following six categories: clique, gang (or troop), action set, faction, corporate group, and historic tradition (Henson et al., 2020; Robbins, 1996a). Modes of intellectual discourse are the various interpretive filters that a person brings to the study of Scripture and includes historical-critical discourse, social-scientific criticism, history-of-religion's discourse, new historical discourse, and postmodern deconstructive discourse (Henson et al., 2020; Robbins, 1996a). Spheres of ideology analysis conducts a study of the location, groups, and discourse for as many as may potentially interact with the text, which would include the actual author, implied author, implied audience, historical audience(s), and contemporary reader/interpreter (Henson et al., 2020).

Sacred Texture Analysis

Sacred texture, which is interrelated to the other textures, is concerned with all things related to Divinity and relationships between humanity and the Divine (Henson et al., 2020; Robbins, n.d.). According to Henson et al. (2020), " Sacred texture is about the message to humans in knowing God, knowing who God is and in responding to God. This is the ultimate question" (p. 175). Due to its interconnection with the other textures, the possibility exists for all textures to work together toward the ultimate goal of knowing, understanding, and connecting to God (Henson et al., 2020). To aid the researcher in achieving this aspiration, sacred texture makes an analysis of the following categories: Deity, holy person, spirit being, Divine history, human redemption, human commitment, religious community, and ethics (Henson et al., 2020; Robbins, 1996a).

Deity refers to God, who may have an active role in speaking and acting in the text or whose presence is implied (Robbins, n.d., 1996a). Describing attributes of God and His nature represents the best way to begin an analysis of sacred texture

(Henson et al., 2020; Robbins, 1996a). The holy person category involves the analysis of persons identified as having a special relationship with God, most notably Jesus Christ (Henson et al., 2020; Robbins, 1996a). The spirit being category includes spiritual entities, which could refer to the Holy Spirit, angelic beings, the devil, or demonic spirits (Henson et al., 2020). Divine history refers to the understanding of how Divinity has an impact on historical events, which could include eschatological events, apocalyptic events, or matters related to salvation history (Robbins, 1996a). Human redemption refers to God's activity as it relates to restoring and transforming humanity beyond the limits of mortal and moral frailty (Henson et al., 2020; Robbins, 1996a). Human commitment refers to the reciprocity of people who respond to God and seek to serve the Lord in various ways (Henson et al., 2020; Robbins, 1996a). Religious community refers to the fellowship among people of faith and the spiritual dynamic that makes the resulting spiritual entity greater than the sum of its part (Henson et al., 2020). Ethics describe the obligation that people have related to beliefs and behavior in circumstances ranging from everyday life to extreme events in terms of their commitment to God and His will (Robbins, 1996a).

Phase 2: Phenomenological Research

The combination of exegetical analysis with qualitative inquiry strengthened this study by providing different sources of data and methods of evaluation, a process of data triangulation (Golafshani, 2015; Patton, 2015). This reduced the likelihood of erroneous data by providing a means of cross-checking validity (Patton, 2015). Exegetical analysis yielded information related to principles of spiritual leadership, organizational culture, biblical community, and the Johannine leadership model. From this detailed analysis, questions were developed that provided a better understanding of how pastors are applying timeless biblical principles in a contemporary context. This served as the basis for qualitative inquiry. By combining these methods, this study offered a larger understanding of the central phenomenon (Carter et al., 2014; Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Specifically, the researcher conducted phenomenological research to better understand the lived experiences of pastors as they endeavor to build and maintain

biblical community amid the internal conflicts that rise from division in its various forms and external opposition from a post-Christian societal culture (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Saldaña and Omasta (2018) explained that phenomenology "distills primarily interview data to their essences and essentials to determine what something 'is' or 'means' to a collective body of participants" (p. 151). Creswell and Poth (2018) identified a number of distinguishing characteristics related to phenomenological inquiry, which include (a) an emphasis on a phenomenon to be investigated, (b) exploration of the phenomenon with a group who have experienced the phenomenon, (c) a basic discussion of the central phenomenon, (d) a removal of the researcher out of the study by avoiding discussion of personal experiences, (e) data collection by way of interviewing those who have experienced the phenomenon, (f) data analysis that follows a process that moves from statements to meaning to detailed descriptions, and (g) a description of the essence of the experience for participants (i.e., what they have experienced and how they have experienced it).

In-depth interviews provided the means of data collection to discover the lived experiences of the participants (Milena et al., 2008). In-depth interviews are lengthy, detailed one-on-one discussions that allow a single subject to answer open-ended questions and offers participant opportunities to provide as much information as they choose regarding their personal experiences (Creswell, 2015; Leavy, 2017). Because questions are open-ended and presented in a more relaxed format, in-depth interviews can serve as a source of abundant data covering a wide range of ideas (Leavy, 2017; Mikėnė et al., 2013). Furthermore, the interviews were semistructured to allow for flexibility in exploring relevant themes. According to Milena et al. (2008), "In depth interview is an effective qualitative method for getting people to talk about their personal feelings, opinions, and experiences. It is also an opportunity to gain insight into how people interpret and order the world" (p. 1279). Because it is a more relaxed approach to information gathering in a one-on-one setting, this approach is especially useful for providing a forum for participants to share sensitive, candid responses that might otherwise be unavailable (Creswell, 2015; Kruger et al., 2019; Milena et al., 2008, 2008).

Ultimately, through in-depth interviews, the subjects of this study had a forum to share their unique experiences and tell their personal stories (Mikėnė et al., 2013).

Participants

The subjects for this study included Assemblies of God presbyters, who are competent ministers of mature experience. As a former AG presbyter, the current researcher is well acquainted with all aspects of the responsibilities associated with that ministry position. They are elected to their position by their peers, so they are well respected among their colleagues. In the AG fellowship, a presbyter has spiritual and organizational oversight for many pastors and churches (usually between 20–50 credential holders and roughly an equal number of churches) in their respective geographical region or in relation to a specific ethnic group. This means that they are often called upon to mediate conflict and intervene in a wide variety of church problem situations. Furthermore, they have firsthand exposure to a widely variety of ministry styles and individual church organizational cultures. In the geographical region under consideration, presbyters generally function as senior pastors as well. Because of their personal pastoral experience and their exposure to a broad range of ministries, they are a rich source of valuable information regarding the phenomenon under consideration.

No definitive guidelines exist to identify the exact number of subjects needed (Patton, 2015); therefore, the key factor to consider is the quality of the data provided by each participant (Morse, 2000; Patton, 2015; Saldaña & Omasta, 2018). A smaller sampling of participants (such as those who participate in in-depth interviews) has the potential to provide a wealth of valuable information that may make it easier to reach data saturation (Morse, 2000; Patton, 1999). Following the approach taken by Hattingh (2019), who conducted a similar study, the researcher conducted interviews with 11 subjects. No additional participants were necessary to reach data saturation. Moreover, no follow-up interviews were required to provide additional data.

Data Collection and Analysis

In-depth interviews were conducted according to a prepared interview protocol. As part of the protocol, the participants were reminded of matters related to ethical consideration and informed of their rights as voluntary participants. Questions for the interview emerged from the exegetical analysis. The protocol provided the questioning framework that the interviewer followed, yet it also allowed the researcher to pursue a line of questioning as suggested by the issues raised relevant to the topic in keeping with the informal conversational interview approach (Patton, 2015). Each interview ran between 45–60 minutes. As mentioned before, no follow-up interviews were necessary to obtain additional data from any participant.

Each presbyter was interviewed by way of a Zoom conference call, a medium that the participants utilize regularly, providing a significant familiarity factor and comfort level. Not only did video conferencing offer convenience in scheduling related to time and distance, it also provided an opportunity to record video as well as audio, which presented an opportunity to analyze facial expressions (Patton, 2015; Saldaña & Omasta, 2018). Otter.ai was used to transcribe the recordings, which were reviewed for errors and corrected. The process also allowed for the names of participants to be changed to maintain their confidentiality.

For qualitative analysis, the video files (with audio) and transcripts were imported into MAXQDA Analytics Pro 2022 software. Just as the Scriptures, through exegetical analysis, provided the framework from which the interview questions were developed, Scripture provided the underlying framework for the coding process. Each code had a relationship to the Scriptural themes that emerged from the interviews. The data was analyzed and coded through two coding cycles to reach data saturation (Saldaña, 2021; Saldaña & Omasta, 2018). Moreover, the data were coded using values coding and process coding (Saldaña, 2021). From the coding process, data were analyzed to discover the major categories that related to the exegetical themes that emerged from exegetical analysis related to the central phenomenon (Saldaña, 2021). The information provided through qualitative

analysis was then compared with the exegetical analysis and the literature to provide an interpretation of the findings. The goal was to arrive at a better understanding of the results in light of Scripture, the central phenomenon, and the leadership theories under consideration. Together, these analyses provided an appropriate level of data triangulation by including more than one research method to reinforce the integrity of the study and verify the quality of the data (Carter et al., 2014; Golafshani, 2015; Patton, 1999).

Ethical Considerations

The project was submitted to Southeastern University's Institutional Review Board to ensure compliance with ethical standards. The researcher made initial prior contact with potential candidates personally in order to assess their willingness and availability. Upon approval of the IRB, potential candidates were notified by way of email, which included all relevant information relating to the study. Potential candidates also received an advisory alerting them to any potential risks. They were also informed that they may leave the study at any time and informed that their participation is strictly voluntary. Candidates for participation also received assurance that their responses and all data collected from them will remain strictly confidential. To preserve their anonymity, their geographical region also remained unnamed in this study. Further, in keeping with the principle of informed consent, each participant filled out an Interview Consent Form. This form provided important information related to their participation, reminded the participants that their interview would be recorded on video, and reminded them that their interviews and all associated information would be kept confidential. Subjects also received a reminder of the voluntary nature of their participation, were notified of any potential risks associated with participation, and were instructed that they may choose not to answer any questions and could choose to withdraw from the study at any time. Participants were advised that they would have the opportunity to review their responses for accuracy. No candidates communicated any discomfort with the process or who refused to sign the Interview Consent Form, clearing them to participate in the study.

Summary

Through this study, the researcher endeavored to identify a model for biblical community in post-Christian societal culture by a detailed exegetical analysis of the New Testament epistles of John using socio-rhetorical analysis. Spiritual leadership theory (Fry, 2003) and organizational culture (Cameron & Quinn, 2011; Schein, 1988) provided the theoretical framework for an analysis of the leadership demonstrated by the Apostle John, as compared with biblical leadership principles, in an effort to identify a model for establishing biblical community characterized by *koinonia*. Interview questions were developed from the exegetical study and served as the basis for the phenomenological qualitative inquiry by way of in-depth interviews with Assemblies of God presbyters to better understand the lived experiences of contemporary pastors as they work to develop and maintain biblical community in their organizational contexts. The goal was to extract biblical leadership principles that have the support of recognized leadership constructs in order to provide contemporary pastors with a model for establishing biblical community while addressing internal organizational challenges and external hostility from societal culture. The results provide a viable model for the contemporary church to develop strong scriptural leadership in the pursuit of a healthy biblical organizational culture that will encourage and sustain believers as they strive to fulfill their God-given calling and mission.

Chapter 4 – Findings

As Scripture represents the foundation of all teaching regarding theology and practical ministry (2 Tim. 2:16–17), this study's methodology begins with a thorough investigation of the New Testament epistles of 1–3 John. As mentioned earlier, socio-rhetorical analysis provided the vehicle for exegetical study of the pericopes as well as the entire body of writings. This analysis involved an examination of 12 pericopae; therefore, the researcher could not identify every single instance of each rhetorical device in the various textures, a monumental feat given the amount of repetition in the Johannine writings. For example, John uses many repetitive patterns and repetitious devices such as expolitio and conduplicatio in almost every pericope. Such redundancy would be counterproductive. Instead, in the analysis, the researcher highlights an example of the use of the various (and numerous) rhetorical devices that John employed. The goal of the exegesis is to reach data saturation such that the textual layers, rhetorical devices, and themes that encompass the totality of the Johannine epistles will be adequately addressed. Questions for phenomenological inquiry emerged from this exegetical analysis.

The Implied Author of 1–3 John

The issue of authorship continues to be a hotly debated topic among scholars, not only related to the entire body of Johannine writings, but even for the three epistles traditionally attributed to the Apostle John, the son of Zebedee (Culpepper, 1998; Marberry et al., 2010; Pate, 2011). Historic church tradition, consisting of early church leaders and theologians, universally ascribed the Gospel of John and 1 John to the Apostle (Akin, 2001; Kruse, 2020; Marberry et al., 2010). In fact, no alternative author was even suggested by the early church for these writings (Akin, 2001). History placed John ministering in Ephesus and other churches in Asia minor at the end of the first century (Keinath, 2018), supporting the likelihood that 1 John was an encyclical to those churches (Lenski, 1966). Furthermore, the overwhelming majority of the early church likewise attributed the epistles of 2 and 3 John to the beloved disciple as well (Akin, 2001; Kistemaker, 1986; Kruse, 2020). Numerous traditional accounts, including among some who

themselves were disciples of John, supported Johannine authorship, making this the most plausible view (Kistemaker, 1986; Plummer, 1909a).

Some contemporary critics have questioned Johannine authorship and proposed a variety of alternative scenarios. One of the more prominent theories put forth suggested that another person named John, known as John the Elder or Presbyter, wrote 2 and 3 John—or perhaps all three Johannine epistles (R. E. Brown, 1982; Comfort & Hawley, 2007a; Marberry et al., 2010; Marshall, 1978; Rensberger, 2001). As the author is not identified by name in any of the three epistles, they take special note that the writer of 2 and 3 John identified himself as ὁ πρεσβύτερος (*ho presbyteros*), which is transliterated in English as "the presbyter" but is most often translated as "the elder" in English Bible translations. Danker et al. (2000) explained, "Just how we are to understand the words *ho presbyteros*, applied to himself by the author of the two smallest Johannine letters remains in doubt. But in any case, it is meant to indicate a position of great dignity" (p. 862). Therefore, the Elder, whose title may have been conferred upon him by his followers, was believed to be an authoritative figure who demonstrated compassionate, pastoral care (Marshall, 1978; Rensberger, 2001).

This view finds possible support in an obscure quote from a fragment of writing by Papias (1885), an early church leader who wrote in the early second century (Kruse, 2020), as recorded by the fourth-century historian Eusebius (Kistemaker, 1986):

> If, then, anyone who had attended on the elders came, I asked minutely after their sayings,—what Andrew or Peter said, or what was said by Philip, or by Thomas, or by James, or by John, or by Matthew, or by any other of the Lord's disciples: which things Aristion and the presbyter John, the disciples of the Lord, say. For I imagined that what was to be got from books was not so profitable to me as what came from the living and abiding voice. (Papias, 1885, p. 153)

The lack of clarity related to this quote did little to resolve the matter. For example, Eusebius interpreted this passage as referring to two distinct persons (one who was the Apostle and another who was the Elder), but Irenaeus, another early church

leader, contended that both mentions of John referred to the Apostle (Comfort & Hawley, 2007a).

In fact, some scholars have made a solid argument that the Elder is indeed the Apostle John. In addition to strong support from most early church leaders that ascribed the title of elder to the Apostle (Marberry et al., 2010), no early church leaders seriously considered anyone else to have authored the letters apart from a minority who embraced the elder hypothesis (Akin, 2001). Also, little (if anything) is known about the figure proposed to be the Elder (Kistemaker, 1986), and the title of "elder" did not command the same respect as an apostle in the early church (Carson et al., 1992). Moreover, apostles were known to have been referred to as elders (Burge, 1998; Kistemaker, 1986). This would have been especially fitting because John was much older at the time of writing (Comfort & Hawley, 2007b). Add to that the author's reference to himself not as "*an* elder," but "*the* elder" (Carson et al., 1992, p. 449; Kistemaker, 1986, p. 198), which suggests more than just the average church elder. As Westcott (1902) observed, "It is most unlikely that 'the elder John' would be in such a position as to be described by the simple title 'the elder,' which denotes a unique preëminence" (p. lv). Clearly, John—who, at the turn of the century, was likely the last living Apostle—was of such stature that the designation would have been universally recognized among his contemporaries (Carson et al., 1992).

Another prominent view among some modern scholars is that the epistles, along with the rest of the Johannine corpus, were the product of a Johannine community or "school," a community of disciples formed by the Apostle John (R. E. Brown, 1982; Culpepper, 1998; Rensberger, 2006; D. M. Smith, 1991; Strecker, 1996; Thatcher, 2006). This school would likely have been based in or near Ephesus, where the Apostle John was reported to have spent his last days (Rensberger, 2001). According to Strecker (1996), "The suggestion that a 'school' forms the background for the Johannine writings should also be kept in mind in explaining gaps and abrupt transitions in the Johannine Letters" (p. xxxvii). The Johannine school theory has its critics as well (Carson, 1981; Carson et al., 1992; Kistemaker, 1986; Pate, 2011). Carson (1981) pointed out that the characteristics

school theory advocates claim defined the community could easily apply to a church, or perhaps a network of churches (Kruse, 2020). Pate (2011) noted a tendency for school theory advocates to minimize the involvement of the Apostle in such a community. The most convincing argument against the school theory is that it rests upon recreations based on assumption, not verified evidence (Carson et al., 1992; Kistemaker, 1986).

Because the likelihood of a firm resolution to this issue seems elusive, some have opted to leave the authorship of these epistles open (Marberry et al., 2010); however, several factors weigh heavily in support of the Apostle John's writing the epistles that bear his name. Internal and external evidence strongly support Johannine authorship (Akin, 2001; Marberry et al., 2010; Pate, 2011; Thatcher, 2006). Unity of language, style, and theme clearly suggest a common author (Keinath, 2018; Kruse, 2020; Stott, 1988; Westcott, 1902; Witherington, 2006). In fact, the internal similarities between the Gospel of John and 1 John are greater than other New Testament works from the same author such as Luke and Acts, the epistles to Timothy and Titus, 1 and 2 Thessalonians, Ephesians and Colossians (Stott, 1988) and 1 Corinthians and Philippians (Wilson, as cited in Kistemaker, 1986). Likewise, the internal evidence shared among the three epistles of John (McDowell, 1972) with the Gospel of John also strongly supports common authorship (Hiebert, 1991; Plummer, 1909a; Westcott, 1902). The case for internal evidence, combined with the preponderance of external evidence makes a solid case for Johannine authorship (Comfort & Hawley, 2007a; Hiebert, 1991; Plummer, 1909a).

Another factor favoring the Apostle John's authorship of these epistles relates to the recognition of the writer as an eyewitness of the ministry of Jesus (Marberry et al., 2010; Stott, 1988; Thatcher, 2006). Not only does the author communicate a level of intimacy with Christ consistent with that of the beloved disciple, the combination of humility and confident influence suggests apostolic authority (Akin, 2001; Jobes, 2014; Kistemaker, 1986; Stott, 1988; Westcott, 1902). At the same time, the writer conveys a pastoral concern with a fatherly tone consistent with a much older person who has deep affection for his followers

(Lenski, 1966). These factors are consistent with the early church tradition associated with the Apostle (Jobes, 2014; Lenski, 1966; Stott, 1988).

Although the issue of authorship of 1, 2, and 3 John may never be entirely settled (Jobes, 2014), when considering all factors, ascribing the works to the Apostle John seems the most acceptable approach. Even Brown (1982), a critic of the Apostle's authorship, conceded a point raised by Streeter (1924) and later asserted by Burge (1998) that the greater burden of proof lies with those who contest apostolic authorship. Still, although Brown and other critics make a strenuous argument against authorship by John, the son of Zebedee, they still fall short in refuting the overwhelming majority of early church elders and church tradition, not to mention a solid majority of evangelical scholars (Keinath, 2018). McDowell (1972) proposed, "It seems reasonable, in the absence of positive evidence to the contrary, to accept the testimony of the early church fathers, who were closer to the scene by 1800 years than twentieth-century scholars" (p. 190).

Another important factor to consider in determining authorship lies in the academic approach that guides the study. As Keinath (2018) explained, higher criticism is more focused on studying the origins and sources of biblical texts from a secular, rationalistic point of view that dismisses the supernatural and divine revelation. Most critical works fall into this category, and as such, are more inclined to reject Johannine authorship. Lower criticism, on the other hand, focuses more on communicating the meaning of the text, with emphasis on the spiritual character of Scripture. Authors taking this approach are more likely to accept the authorship of the Apostle John. The current research project was much more aligned with the objectives of lower criticism. Nevertheless, even allowing for alternate theories, the end result still remains that the Johannine epistles clearly communicate an exemplary leadership model (Dodd, 1946). A study of the challenges addressed in the Johannine epistles will affirm that they offer valuable guidance for contemporary church leaders (R. E. Brown, 1982).

The Intended Audience of 1–3 John

The most common view concerning the intended audience for John's letters is that they were written to a community of believers in Asia Minor (Marshall,

1978; Witherington, 2006) during John's latter years when he was reported to have settled in Ephesus (Kistemaker, 1986). This community was likely a network of church congregations under John's leadership (Brooke, 2004; Hiebert, 1991; Kistemaker, 1986; Kruse, 2020; Plummer, 1909a). Most (if not all) of these churches were house churches (Smalley, 1984) with local, self-governing supervision under the Apostle John's leadership (Thatcher, 2006).

The believers had a familiarity with John's Gospel (Comfort & Hawley, 2007a). The congregations were believed to include a diversity of people from different backgrounds. Some were mature believers who had been in the faith for several years (Hiebert, 1991; Smalley, 1984). Others were Hellenized Jews with a limited connection to Judaism (Burge, 1998) including some with inclinations toward false doctrine (Smalley, 1984). Still others came from pagan Gentile backgrounds with no knowledge of Judaism (Burge, 1998; Hiebert, 1991).

The second epistle was addressed "To the elect lady and her children" (*New King James Version*, 1982, 2 Jn. 1a). Some have interpreted this literally, proposing that this letter was written to a devout Christian woman and her children (Comfort & Hawley, 2007b; Hiebert, 1991; Kistemaker, 1986). In fact, Comfort and Hawley (2007b) explained that in this context, the word for "lady," κυρία (or kyria), could be the proper name Cyria (p. 381). The great majority of scholars, however, have considered this to be a personification of an actual local church and its congregation (Comfort & Hawley, 2007b; Hiebert, 1991; Kistemaker, 1986). The third epistle is written "To the beloved Gaius" (*New King James Version*, 1982, 3 Jn. 1a), someone thought to be a friend and trusted worker who was admired by John (Hiebert, 1991; Kistemaker, 1986).

Each of the letters communicates a depth of affection that the Apostle had for those he addressed (Comfort & Hawley, 2007a; Kistemaker, 1986; Kruse, 2020; Stott, 1988). At the time of writing, John was much older, which gave his writing the quality of a father appealing to his spiritual family (Comfort & Hawley, 2007a; Kistemaker, 1986; Witherington, 2006). For example, although his readers were believers of all ages (Comfort & Hawley, 2007a), he frequently referred to them as his "little children" (Kruse, 2020). Still, they saw him as a respected figure who

supported them with love and affirmation and honored his personal, relational connection with Jesus (Comfort & Hawley, 2007a). As such, the letters have a pastoral tone, yet they also have a corrective purpose (Stott, 1988). He was writing to churches who were experiencing crisis brought on by conflict (Akin, 2001; Rensberger, 2001).

The Date of 1–3 John

As 2 and 3 John are believed to have been written to those who were among the Johannine churches, they were likely written during the same period (Comfort & Hawley, 2007b; Hiebert, 1991; Marshall, 1978; Thatcher, 2006), with 1 John possibly preceding 2 and 3 John (Witherington, 2006). One factor suggesting a date late in the first century is that the system of false doctrine John corrects in these letters appears more fully developed and its proponents better skilled in its presentation than earlier heretics (Jackman, 1988). They also reflect the writings of a much older person instructing a younger generation, indicating that it was toward the end of John's life (Akin, 2001; Hiebert, 1991; Plummer, 1909a). Following a move from Jerusalem prompted by growing persecution or its imminent destruction (Comfort & Hawley, 2007a), John eventually settled in Ephesus, where he ministered for his remaining years until the time of the Emperor Trajan, possibly as late as the turn of the second century (Akin, 2001; Barclay, 1976). Because the Gospel of John, written somewhere between 80 and 90 AD, likely preceded the letters, it would place their writing somewhere in the late 80s or early to mid-90s (Comfort & Hawley, 2007a, 2007b; Jobes, 2014; Smalley, 1984) or possibly 97 to shortly after 100 (Barclay, 1976; Hiebert, 1991). Therefore, the best range of dates would fall between 85 and 100 AD (Akin, 2001).

The Purpose of 1–3 John

John wrote his epistles to counteract the error of secessionists who had caused division in the churches under his supervision (Jackman, 1988; Marshall, 1978; Pate, 2011). Consequently, the churches faced both internal conflicts caused by false doctrine and external pressures arising from persecution as they dealt with these challenges (Thatcher, 2006). The first epistle corrected the heterodox teaching

promoted by false prophets who divided the church and took some followers with them after the split (Dodd, 1946; Jackman, 1988; Plummer, 1909a). The second letter addressed the impact that this conflict had on one congregation/family, warning readers to avoid supporting false teachers while maintaining sound Christian teaching (Comfort & Hawley, 2007b; Hiebert, 1991; Marshall, 1978; Plummer, 1909a). John's third epistle commended Gaius, a faithful follower of John, and encouraged him to continue in accepted Christian doctrine, support those who promote sound teaching, and beware the dictatorial actions of a local church leader (Comfort & Hawley, 2007b; Hiebert, 1991; Plummer, 1909a). John intended to encourage his readers to resist false teaching he identified as antichrist, while encouraging the believers to persevere in faith and sound teaching as they patiently endured persecution (Thatcher, 2006). Knowing and experiencing God would equip his readers to rise above the challenges of their day (Jobes, 2014).

The division in the Johannine church(es) presented a significant challenge. Former followers of John left the fellowship, having possibly established a separate congregation, yet still exerted influence over the remaining members, undermining their faith in sound teaching (R. E. Brown, 1982; Kruse, 2020; Marshall, 1978; Pate, 2011). The point of contention lay in a differing interpretation they had of the Gospel of John (R. E. Brown, 1982; Marshall, 1978; Pate, 2011; Smalley, 1984). Ironically, the problems caused by secessionists developed because they intended to improve Christian teaching with elevated thought in an attempt to make Christianity acceptable to popular society (Barclay, 1976). Their teaching, however, offered a distorted portrait of the Christology taught by John's Gospel and accepted as orthodox Christian teaching (R. E. Brown, 1982; Marshall, 1978; Thatcher, 2006).

Although some uncertainty exists regarding the exact doctrines John refuted in his epistles, the three most common views are teachings associated with (or a combination of) Docetism, Gnosticism, and Cerinthianism (Pate, 2011). Docetists rejected the incarnation of Christ (R. E. Brown, 1982; Kruse, 2020). They taught that although Christ appeared to have the form of humanity, He was really only divinity (Pate, 2011). Cerinthus, on the other hand, denied the deity of Christ. He

believed that Jesus was born of human parents, and the Christ spirit descended on Jesus when He was baptized and departed prior to His passion and resurrection (Pate, 2011). The teaching of Cerinthus was associated with a larger doctrinal system known as Gnosticism (Marshall, 1978). Gnostic teaching taught a strict form of dualism that viewed the spiritual realm as good and the material realm as evil, and these forces existed in opposition to each other (R. E. Brown, 1982; Marshall, 1978; D. M. Smith, 1991; Stott, 1988). The result was either a rigid asceticism that shunned material life as evil, or the other extreme, believing superior spiritual knowledge elevated followers above the material realm, giving them license to indulge the flesh without consequence (Pate, 2011; Smalley, 1984). Either way, such adaptations were an attempt to make Christianity acceptable to the popular culture of John's time. As Jackman (1988) observed, "In every generation the church is challenged by the world, either to confront or to absorb its culture, to 'be squeezed into its mould', or to 'let God re-mould your minds from within'" (p. 17). Unfortunately, the cumulative effect of such teachings offered a distorted Christology, by either denying Christ's humanity or His deity, while causing believers to neglect the Christian priority of love and obedience to Scripture's moral teaching (Kruse, 2020; Pate, 2011; Smalley, 1984).

Marshall (1978) suggested that John, in his first two letters emphasized largely theological issues, but he shifted focus somewhat to ecclesiastical concerns in the third letter. At that time, no system of leadership succession existed to move new apostolic leaders into place, which transitioned congregational leadership more toward local control. Likewise, this tendency also gave rise to a concentration of leadership under a single leader. According to Marshall (1978), "'Team ministry' was giving way to the idea of one man as the bishop who occupied a position of leadership over the other church officials" (p. 11). This led to the rise of a dictatorial figure like Diotrephes (3 John 9–10). Naturally, as Burge (1998) also observed, the absence of clear organizational structures and other foundational elements that provide order made the turn of the second century a time of uncertainty and turmoil for Christianity. Burge further added, "There were no creeds or church councils. There was not even a collection of books called 'The

New Testament' that could be used to arbitrate theological disputes" (Burge, 1998, p. 28). Such cultural developments necessitated the emergence of strong leadership.

This understanding helps to better frame the leadership challenge before John, as he dealt with the problems facing his flock, while encouraging them to pursue fellowship with God and one another. Prompted by his burden for the spiritual condition of his followers, John confronted the disruption of the church's fellowship instigated by false teachers whose error caused division (R. E. Brown, 1982; Hiebert, 1991). Realizing the destructive nature of the teaching and its adherents, John clarified the essence of biblical Christianity for his followers to affirm them in their faith and assure them of their standing in Christ (Hiebert, 1991; Kruse, 2020; Marshall, 1978). He did this by offering them a biblical understanding of Christ, an invitation to fellowship with God and one another, and clear guidelines that promote healthy relationships in the body of Christ (Jackman, 1988; Jobes, 2014; Witherington, 2006).

Although John wrote to bring a godly resolution to the conflict and controversy his followers faced, the circumstances provide a forum that the Apostle uses to communicate what healthy congregational life should be and how best to navigate such challenges in a way that reflects God's love (Burge, 1998). In fact, Jobes (2014) suggested that in the absence of a definite knowledge of the exact doctrine John refuted in his letters, readers should give greater attention to the positive purposes of John's writing. His writings contain rich lessons that focus on a clear understanding of Jesus and the need to have a right belief about Him, how believers should view sin, appropriate moral and ethical behavior, and the priority of loving relationships among God's children (Burge, 1998; Jobes, 2014). For example, John states his purpose for writing the first epistle as this:

> These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life, and that you may continue to believe in the name of the Son of God. (*New King James Version*, 1982, 1 Jn. 5:13)

This, and other similar statements, reframe John's reasons for writing in a much more positive light (Akin, 2001).

Rather than sounding like a distant theologian concerned with expounding esoteric knowledge, John's writings have an unmistakable pastoral tone that reflects a love and concern for the flock(s) under his care (Barclay, 1976; Brooke, 2004; Jobes, 2014). Brooke (2004) explained well the context of the Apostle's approach, placing more emphasis on pastoral care and building the faith of his followers rather than literary depth and prolific theology ideas. Brooke (2004) explained, "These are circumstances under which repetition was almost inevitable, especially in the case of a man whose nature led him to ponder deeply over a few ideas rather than to produce new thoughts every day" (p. x). Ultimately, John's leadership approach stands as a model for using spiritual leadership principles to build a strong organizational culture, which find its expression in New Testament biblical community characterized by *koinonia*, to equip believers to overcome the challenges associated with internal conflict and external opposition.

An Analysis of 1 John 1:1–10

John began with the assurance that the eyewitness testimony that he and the other apostles shared has its basis in experience. He shared about Jesus, not in a theoretical sense, but in a very real and personal way. His experience spoke of a deepening that happens over time with increased intimacy. "That which was from the beginning," speaks of Christ in eternity. It is a theological view of Christ. "Which we have heard" offers a reminder of the beginning of one's encounter with the gospel through hearing the word of God (Rom. 10:17) and what the Scriptures testify about Jesus. "Which we have seen with our eyes" speaks of the word becoming a living, visible reality. Further investigation finds expression with "which we have looked upon." This is the up-close scrutiny accompanying intimate interaction with God, which finds its culmination when "our hands have handled." With that, believers have touched the Lord and have experienced Him in the fullness of His reality.

John wrote, "In Him was life, and the life was the light of men" (*New King James Version*, 1982, Jn. 1:4). God revealed eternal life in the form of Jesus Christ. He existed with God in eternity past and sits at His right hand forevermore. Yet, He gave us a glimpse of that eternal life when He appeared and revealed the Father's

glory to us. The disciples beheld Jesus and had opportunity to observe Him in every context, and they saw in Him a revelation of the living God. The hope they offer is that all followers have opportunity to have fellowship together with the Father and with Jesus the Son. They shared this so that all may experience the fullness of joy that God intends for believers to experience through fellowship in His presence. Joy overflows when Christians experience Him personally and when they fellowship together as a spiritual community with Christ in their midst.

John communicates the heart of the message of the gospel and its theology. It begins with God and His nature. God is holy and pure. He is light, which stands in contrast to all that is evil, which is represented by darkness. God could speak light and create light because it is an extension of who He is—God is light. As such, he has no darkness in him. James observed, "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning" (*New King James Version*, 1982, Jas. 1:17). Just as light always dispels darkness, so God's light always illumines darkness. Darkness cannot triumph over light naturally. As John wrote, "The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it" (*English Standard Version*, 2001/2016, Jn. 1:5). The only way for darkness to prevail is by extinguishing the light.

With this understanding, John rightly observed that those who profess to have fellowship with God, yet walk in darkness, are lying (a quality of the darkness). As Paul wrote, "For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness?" (*New King James Version*, 1982, 2 Cor. 6:14). Genuine fellowship speaks of a communion of those who are of like heart. One cannot claim intimacy with God and yet embrace the darkness; however, one can lie about it. And John states that those who profess intimacy with God yet also do not love and practice the truth are liars. Believers experience true fellowship with one another as they fellowship with God in His light. The blood of Christ provides the believers' righteous standing in Christ, putting all followers of Christ on equal footing before God, enabling them to fellowship with God and one another.

Those who see themselves as without sin are self-deceived because they are blinded to their own depravity (Jn. 9:41). The Holy Spirit reveals humanity's sinfulness and brings conviction that impels one to seek forgiveness through repentance. Only when people fully recognize their innate sinfulness and take responsibility through confession can they received forgiveness and cleansing through the atoning sacrifice of Jesus. Christians receive cleansing through the blood of Jesus shed on their behalf. Otherwise, if any claim that they are inherently good apart from God, a basic tenet of humanism, then they in effect call God a liar. They deny what the Scriptures teach regarding the human sinful condition. To reject God's Word is to reject His estimation of right and wrong. This is evidence that God's Word is not at work in such persons and has no place in them.

Inner Texture

Although scholars have disagreed about the structure of 1 John because it seems to lack a linear flow of thought (Burge, 1997), its unique construction sets it apart and lends authority to the message (Bigalke, 2013b; Van Staden, 1991). Bigalke (2013a) suggested that the macrostructure of the epistle has a logical framework to the overall message. An analysis of the pericopae will provide a basis for relating the parts to the whole to discover the unity that exists in this letter and among the three epistles. First John 1:1–10 consists of two thematic textual units. Verses 1–4 serve as a prologue to the entire letter and immediately establishes the writer's authority as an eyewitness to the life and ministry of Jesus. John's personal experience with Christ allowed him to speak with conviction regarding the basis for fellowship with God and with others in the fellowship of believers. Having a longstanding, intimate relationship with Christ qualified the Apostle to invite others to share mutual fellowship with the Father and Son. The clause "This is the message" provides a transition to the next textual unit, as it explains the spiritual and relational essentials for fellowship.

The Johannine epistles are rich with repetition, a distinguishing yet underappreciated feature of John's writings that contributes to its strength (Watson, 1993). The repetitive quality throughout John's letters serves to make a point utilizing emphasis and expansion (Coombes, 2009; Watson, 1993). John used such

rhetoric to place special emphasis on values and priorities shared with his readers (Watson, 1993; Witherington, 2006). As an example of the importance that repetition plays in the Johannine literature, this pericope alone has 23 different repeated words or concepts, some of which foreshadow other themes used in John's writings (see Appendix A). For example, John makes extensive use of "we" (used 21 times in this pericope and 91 times in all three epistles) and "us" (used 6 times in this pericope and 43 times in all three epistles). The constant appearance of these words affectionately emphasized the common bond between John and his followers as he guided his readers through a progression of biblical truth. The Apostle also regularly used repetition of contrasts such as "light and darkness" and "truth and lie/liar," as well as "love and hate" (or "does not love") to make a point forcefully (Watson, 1993).

Most notably, in this pericope, a progression of ideas emerges from the pattern of repetition. A few smaller progressive units are contained within a larger progression in the overall pericope (see Appendix A). The pericope begins with a mini progression in verse 1, using asyndeton, a technique that omits word particles thereby increasing the accumulated effect of the words describing his personal eyewitness testimony (Watson, 1993). The eternal God who existed in eternity past ("That which was from the beginning"), who was known to them as members of the Jewish community ("which we have heard"), the Apostles knew personally as Jesus Christ ("which we have seen with our eyes"), with whom they interacted and observed in a variety of circumstance ("which we have looked upon"), and with whom they had intimate fellowship in a way that no others experienced ("and our hands have handled"). This opening progression establishes John's apostolic authority to deal with the problems that the church faces.

Verse 1 itself is contained in another of two small progressions in the larger unit, which also establish the Apostle's credentials to his readers. In this case, he incorporates exordium, another rhetorical device, that give his words impact. According to Witherington (2006), exordium here indicates John's moral authority to address his readers by virtue of his eyewitness encounter of God's glory that he experiences through close personal contact with Christ. This mini progression

provides an example of a regular tendency that John demonstrates throughout his epistles, communicating ideas through smaller units rather than larger expositions (Coombes, 2009). Bigalke (2013a) described 1 John's overall structure as a string of ideas joined by small chiastic units. For instance, verses 1 and 3 share similar ideas and grammatical structures that bookend verse 2. Verses 1–4 function as the apostolic testimony through which they invite other believers into shared fellowship with God and one another. This declaration of abounding joy acts as an encapsulation of this phenomenon (see Appendix A).

Verses 5–10 contain the next unit of progression, which describes the dynamic of spiritual progress among believers and the nature of their fellowship with the Father and others in the church. John exhorts his followers to evaluate the integrity of their own hearts by using contrasting imagery of light and darkness, sin and righteousness, and truth and deception. The essential thought in this progression links the words and actions of those in good standing with God and others with truth. The Apostle challenges his followers with a series of conditional "if" statements, using "protases" and "apodoses" to frame the parameters for fellowship (R. E. Brown, 1982). This line of rhetoric also employs "expolitio," a technique that offers a way of communicating the same idea with slightly different words each time to give the impression of saying something new (Watson, 1993; Witherington, 2006). The "if" statements challenge the readers to examine their own relationship with God and other believers through embracing light, sin (repentance), and truth. This passage also features "commoratio," another rhetorical device that appears throughout the epistle, which focuses on a topic and then later returns to it to add strength to the overall argument (Watson, 1993). In this case, the passage mentions the recurring themes of light and darkness, sin and righteousness, and truth and falsehood.

The larger progression in the pericope establishes the connection between the believers' right relationship with God and the "Word of life/His Word." The repetitions of "we/us" and "God/Father/He/Him" identify a link between Christians and God in fellowship through the Word. Verse 10 acts as an encapsulation that concludes that a positive, humble acknowledgment of sin (and repentance) shows

the believers' positive relationship with God because of the effects of His word in their lives.

This progression in verses 1–10 also highlights an opening-middle-closing pattern. John establishes his apostolic authority to extend an invitation for true believers to fellowship with God and one another. He then creates a connection with his readers by way of an inclusive device that Dodd (1946) described as "the preacher's 'we'" (pp. 9–10), a common feature of sermons that forms a shared bond between the speaker and audience. As mentioned before, "we" appears repeatedly throughout the three epistles, maintaining the sense of intimate connection that John shared with his followers throughout the writings. This creation of shared association with his readers and God through repetition is designed to facilitate fellowship with God and the body of Christ. To preclude the undermining of right relationships with God and others, he challenged Christians to walk in light and truth from a posture of repentance to maintain fellowship.

As already noted, the "if" assertions in verses 6–10 reveal an argumentative pattern that uses conditional statements as qualifiers. Those who argue that they walk in the truth, yet do not recognize their inherent sinfulness and take action accordingly (through the confession of sin), continue on a path of self-deception, a condition the Apostle associates with darkness. Conversely, continued fellowship with God and the church comes through maintaining a positive relationship with light and truth through walking in humility and repentance.

Described in the Gospel of John as the disciple "whom Jesus loved" (John 13:23; 19:26; 20:2; 21:7, 20) the author used language of the senses such as "heard," "seen," and "handled" to make an association with intimate fellowship with Christ. What began as a familiarity with historical understanding of God led ultimately to a development of increasing intimacy with Christ, from hearing to seeing to observing at close proximity to personal contact. This connection with God then results in relationship, as depicted by walking, a purposeful action commonly associated with a journey or pilgrimage. Moreover, John characterized redemption as cleansing, a process, not involving water, but the blood of Jesus, a much more vivid metaphor. Such richness of sensory-aesthetic imagery in John's

writings offers a wellspring from which he communicated a spiritual depth for his followers in all his writings.

Intertexture

This pericope also exhibits some rich oral-scribal intertexture. The prologue to the first epistle displays some distinguishing characteristics that are reminiscent of John's Gospel (R. E. Brown, 1982). As the Gospel was generally believed to have been written before 1 John, the opening verse presents a similarity that hearkens to the Gospel's prologue: "That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, concerning the Word of life—" (*New King James Version*, 1982, 1 Jn. 1:1). This verse constitutes a clear reference to the prologue of John's Gospel (R. E. Brown, 1982; Smalley, 1984). In the same way as the Gospel's prologue, it represents a recontextualization of God's creation (Kistemaker, 1986; Stott, 1988; Witherington, 2006). "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God (*New King James Version*, 1982, Jn. 1:1). In the Johannine sense, the Word referred to the Son, who was fully divine, was an active participant in the creation, and appeared in the person of Jesus Christ (Akin, 2001; Comfort & Hawley, 2007a; Ladd, 1993). According to Genesis, "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form, and void; and darkness was on the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters" (*New King James Version*, 1982, Gen. 1:1–2). When compared with the Genesis account, the Gospel version represents a recontextualization of the creation to prioritize the activity of Christ, the Word, as part of creation (Henson et al., 2020). John likely intended to reference a concept known in both Jewish and Hellenistic cultures (Ladd, 1993).

Another facet of creation also offered an example of oral-scribal intertexture that this pericope referenced in John's Gospel (R. E. Brown, 1982; Stott, 1988; Strecker, 1996). John wrote in verse 5, "This is the message which we have heard from Him and declare to you, that God is light and in Him is no darkness at all" (*New King James Version*, 1982). This instance of recontextualization compared with John 1:4, "In Him was life, and the life was the light of men" (*New King*

James Version, 1982) and Genesis 1:3–4, which stated, "Then God said, 'Let there be light'; and there was light. And God saw the light, that it was good; and God divided the light from the darkness" (*New King James Version*, 1982). These passages draw upon an association between God and light, reminiscent of His creation of light and dividing it from darkness (likewise indicating a separation between God and darkness), a reminder that God is the source of light (Witherington, 2006). Moreover, 1 John 1:4 also related God to both light and life, a recontextualization of Psalm 36:9, "For with You is the fountain of life; In Your light we see light" (*New King James Version*, 1982). This provided another instance in which John applied an Old Testament theme (Dodd, 1946; Kruse, 2020; Marshall, 1978). John also likely referenced Christ's teaching in the Synoptic Gospels about light:

> The lamp of the body is the eye. Therefore, when your eye is good, your whole body also is full of light. But when your eye is bad, your body also is full of darkness. Therefore take heed that the light which is in you is not darkness. If then your whole body is full of light, having no part dark, the whole body will be full of light, as when the bright shining of a lamp gives you light. (*New King James Version*, 1982, Lk. 11:34–36)

Such use of light/dark dualism appeared in other literature also. The Qumran community, for example, made use of that imagery (R. E. Brown, 1982; Kruse, 2020; Ladd, 1993), as did other nonbiblical writings (R. E. Brown, 1982), including the Didache (Holmes, 1999) and Philo (Philo of Alexandria, 1995).

This pericope offers another instance of recontextualization by associating obedience to God's commandments with walking, a metaphor for spiritual pilgrimage. The Old Testament makes frequent use of this metaphor, likening it to a person's way of life (Pate, 2011). According to the Apostle, "But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin" (*New King James Version*, 1982, 1 Jn. 1:7). This echoed what the Psalmist declared: "Blessed is the man Who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly, Nor stands in the path of sinners, Nor sits in the seat of the scornful" (*New King James Version*, 1982, Ps. 1:1). Such imagery

highlights John's penchant for applying scriptural truth to practical living, an important aspect of his writing (Jackman, 1988). The idea of walking in obedience also serves as another example of recontextualization by suggesting a connection with the Old Testament figure of Enoch. The Scripture records, "And Enoch walked with God; and he was not, for God took him" (*New King James Version*, 1982, Gen. 5:24), a reference to his obedience.

Another example of oral-scribal intertexture appears in verse 7. The Old Testament emphasized the importance of fellowship and community (Pate, 2011). The priority John placed on the fellowship of believers was reminiscent of the Jewish community established in the Old Covenant (Dodd, 1946). Fellowship (as characterized by *koinonia* in verses 3, 6, and 7) serves as a reconfiguration of the unity David envisioned in the Psalms when he wrote,

> Behold, how good and how pleasant it is For brethren to dwell together in unity! It is like the precious oil upon the head, Running down on the beard, The beard of Aaron, Running down on the edge of his garments. (*New King James Version*, 1982, Ps. 133:1–2)

Such unity in fellowship provided a model for John. In place of the anointing oil, the blood of Christ would serve as the unifying factor. Other outside entities aspired to the spiritual fellowship embodied in *koinonia* (Witherington, 2006). For instance, the Qumran community prioritized spiritual fellowship (Pate, 2011).

In verses 5–10, oral-scribal intertexture also appears in the form of thematic elaboration. John equated the theme depicting God as light with a commitment to the truth (Dodd, 1946; Hiebert, 1991; Kruse, 2020). The series of "if" statements in verses 6–10 put forth the rationale for John's thesis. In particular, the writer identified those who walk in darkness as liars. Those who claim to be sinless deceive themselves, and in so doing make God a liar, proving that they do not have God's Word in them. Yet, those who live humble lives in repentance and confession are cleansed and abide in the light of God's truth. The collective impact of the "if" declarations provide John's thesis, stating that those who live in God's light and truth, while confessing their sins in humility and self-examination, have a right standing with God and the community of faith. Conversely, those who claim

sinlessness yet live in darkness, prove that they do not honor God's truth. These attitudes and actions disqualify them from fellowship with God and the spiritual community (Kistemaker, 1986).

In this pericope, cultural intertexture appears in the form of John's declaration that right standing with God means "the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin" (*New King James Version*, 1982, 1 Jn. 1:7d). This statement offers an allusion to the Old Covenant requirement to present animal, substitutionary sacrifices to atone for sin (Bennett, 2021; Pate, 2011; Westcott, 1902). The law of Moses made frequent references to the different sacrifices that the God's law mandated for their redemption. For instance, the Passover observance required the blood of a lamb to provide absolution for the members of each household:

> Now the blood shall be a sign for you on the houses where you are. And when I see the blood, I will pass over you; and the plague shall not be on you to destroy you when I strike the land of Egypt. (*New King James Version*, 1982, Ex. 12:13)

Contrast this with John's teaching in 1 John 1:7, which asserted that Christ's sacrificial work on the cross provided atonement for all people in all ages, negating the requirement for ceremonial substitutionary offerings through animal sacrifices (Bennett, 2021; Smalley, 1984).

Social intertexture appears in this pericope when viewing the church as a community organization, which suggests the expectation associated with social roles, social codes, and interpersonal relationships. Participation in the spiritual community required its members to adhere to the church's biblical values (R. E. Brown, 1982; Kruse, 2020), while also rejecting false doctrine (Dodd, 1946). Verses 6–10, John's statement clarifying the basis for spiritual community, communicated the expectations associated with fellowship. The dynamics of *koinonia* in the community of faith created a sense of belonging and a personal stake among believers (Dodd, 1946). This share in the community is associated with responsibilities for members that accompany inclusion.

Arguably, this pericope presents historical intertexture by referring to the creation and the earthly appearance of Jesus. For some, the creation may not constitute a historical account, but others would view it from a faith perspective as a reliable record of life's beginnings. As for the life of Jesus, ample history exists that supports His earthly existence, to which John also testified (Hiebert, 1991; Stott, 1988). As the Docetics denied the physical, bodily appearance of Christ, alleging that He was divinity without corporal form, the historical record takes on significant importance (Akin, 2001; Ladd, 1993). Although John may appear to use dualistic language, his doctrine aligns entirely with traditional Christian beliefs (Ladd, 1993).

Common themes that appear in the Johannine literature emerge in this pericope as examples of reciprocal intertexture. In 1–3 John, the Apostle includes themes that are also prominent in the entire Johannine corpus (Smalley, 1984; Van Staden, 1991). For example, John's focus on the Word (Jn. 1:1, 14;1 Jn. 1:1; Rev. 19:13), life (Jn. 1:4, 11:25, 14:6; 1 Jn. 1:1–2; Rev. 2:7, 10, 3:5, 20:12, 22:1–2), light versus darkness (Jn. 1:5–9, 3:19–21, 8:12, 9:5, 12:35–36, 46; Rev. 21:23–24, 22:5), truth versus lies/deception and error (Jn. 1:14, 17, 4:23–24, 8:32, 44–46, 14:6, 18:37–38, 19:35; 1 Jn. 1:6, 8, 10), and sin versus confession/righteousness (Jn. 1:29, 8:7, 11, 21, 34, 15:22, 24, 16:8–91 Jn. 1:7–9; Rev. 1:5, 18:4–5; 19:8, 11, 22:11). Despite the different literary genres included in the Johannine corpus, the common themes reveal a unity throughout the entire body of John's writings.

Social and Cultural Texture

Admittedly, the Johannine epistles are not as rich in social and cultural texture. This pericope has characteristics of a conversionist worldview because it teaches repentance and spiritual conversion as the means by which genuine Christians avoid the world's influences and immorality (Henson et al., 2020; Robbins, 1996b). Verse 5, for instance, presents God as light contrasted with the world's darkness in verse 6. Although gnostic forerunners claimed to live in the light (even employing such rhetoric), John argued vociferously that they indeed dwelt in darkness (Marshall, 1978). John did uses dualistic language, yet it by no means implied that he endorsed gnostic philosophy (Ladd, 1993). In fact, real

spiritual perception did not emanate from claims of "secret knowledge" or mystical experiences tied to dualism (Hawkin, 2002). To the contrary, God imparted knowledge to faithful followers who lived in the light of scriptural truth. Moreover, in verses 6 and 8, the righteous quality of truth is compared to lies and deception in verses 6, 8, and 10. Verse 9 summarizes the conversionist perspective well: "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (*New King James Version*, 1982). As the secessionists professed to be without sin and did not acknowledge their carnal nature, the Apostle had to assert his conversionist convictions to counteract their false assumptions that they had a right standing with God (Brooke, 2004; Jackman, 1988; Smalley, 1984; Stott, 1988).

The gnostic-manipulationist worldview also emerges in this pericope. John's opponents alleged that they had special knowledge that supported their teaching (Ladd, 1993). Conversely, John repudiated their claims by also offering a gnostic-manipulationist statement, which rested upon credible, trustworthy knowledge that had its foundation in recognized, respected Christian teaching. John could make a credible, influential argument against the claim that Christ did not have a human form because of his eyewitness testimony (Akin, 2001). Combined with his experience as an eyewitness to Jesus' transfiguration and resurrection, he could state emphatically that Christ was both fully human and fully divine.

A common social and cultural topic that appears in this pericope is the father/son relationship as part of family life, a principle of honor (Robbins, 1996b). For the believer, John explained that "our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ" (*New King James Version*, 1982, 1 Jn. 1:3c). The father occupied the preeminent position in the first century household (Robbins, 1996b; Westcott, 1902). This family dynamic, as John proposed it, established structure and order in the fellowship of believers (Westcott, 1902). It drew a distinction between the roles and personalities of the Father and the Son (Pate, 2011). The Father, in His authoritative role, took initiative to reveal the Son, "which was with the Father and was manifested to us" (*New King James Version*, 1982, 1 Jn. 1:2d). The sacrifice of the Son made Him the redemptive figure who provide atonement

for Christians. Also, a purity code is in effect by way of cleansing through the Son's blood sacrifice (Henson et al., 2020); however, this sacrifice made for spiritual cleansing, not ceremonial observation.

The Docetists, as observed in the gnostic-manipulationist specific topic, engaged in a challenge-response encounter. They challenged the church's established doctrine of the person and work of Christ with a claim to have superiority over those they viewed with "lesser knowledge." Their opposition brought about division which undermined *koinonia* in the community of believers (Marshall, 1978). The author's corrective response provided a rebuttal to their rebellion, which found support among the faithful followers of Christ (Kruse, 2020). John's adversaries could not counter the force of his eyewitness testimony of Christ (Lenski, 1966).

The church, in relation to the culture at large, represented a counterculture within the Roman Empire (the dominant culture of the first century), but it operated as an independent cultural entity within its own organizational structure (Henson et al., 2020). Therefore, John represented apostolic leadership within that structure and used dominant cultural rhetoric accordingly. Those who embraced heterodox teaching functioned from a contracutural position by reason of their opposition to accepted Christian doctrine (Robbins, 1996b).

Sacred Texture

A review of previous observations related to God's activity in this pericope would show that John portrayed God as the Father of creation, eternally coexistent with the Son (1 Jn. 1:1–2). Furthermore, the author likened God to light and truth (Witherington, 2006). Light is a reflection of God's holiness (Hiebert, 1991). As the Apostle noted, God is pure light, reflecting a total separation from darkness and evil (Witherington, 2006). Christians who embrace truth and live with a humble, repentant attitude, regard self-examination as an essential practice, maintaining fellowship with God by cleansing through the blood of (Pate, 2011). A focus on God's holiness sets the standard of behavior for the faith community (1 Jn. 1:5).

Jesus is the focal point of the gospel message; as such, He occupies the preeminent place in John's writings (Jackman, 1988). The authoritative tone of the

prologue based on personal revelation created a vivid invitation to believers to share the reality of the living Christ (Kruse, 2020; Witherington, 2006). John's portrait of Christ emphasized His humanity along with His deity (Kruse, 2020). The Son of God, who co-existed with the Father in eternity, came in human form and interacted with His disciples as a genuine human being. John described Jesus as an approachable figure that offered fellowship with Himself and the Father to sincere seekers. The writer referred to the Son as "Jesus Christ" (1 Jn. 1:3), identifying Him as God's Anointed One. This term, which was also used described the kings of Israel and Judah, made reference to the Jesus as the Messiah, who would rule on David's throne (Pate, 2011). The multifaceted character of Christ emerged as an embodiment of God's glory and greatness fused with humility. Yet, Jesus made redemption available to humanity through the blood of His cross (Marshall, 1978). Genuine repentance, as evidence through sincere confession of sins, provided atonement for sins and access to God in fellowship (Akin, 2001).

As the disciple who shared a special intimacy with Christ, the Apostle John fits the description of a holy person. His striking encounter with God, as depicted in verse 1, highlighted his personal eyewitness testimony of Christ as he examined the many facets of His ministry up close (Marshall, 1978). This personal connection with Jesus provided the basis for his apostolic authority (Jackman, 1988; Pate, 2011; van der Merwe, 2018). In fact, in the Gospel of John he is described as the "disciple whom Jesus loved" (Jn. 13:23, 19:26, 20:2, 21:7, 20). Those who professed a connection with Christ and His church had an obligation to abide in God's light and observe His Word (Ladd, 1993). This commitment demanded that followers of Christ regularly applied God's truth to their lives, accepted what they discovered regarding God and his will, and repented of the sin and corruption that God's word uncovered (Kruse, 2020). Christians were expected to have an openness to God's truth while maintaining an attitude of humble repentance (Kruse, 2020; Lenski, 1966). One way that believers were taught to walk in the light involved following God's example of holiness and regularly seeking forgiveness through putting their trust in the sacrifice of Christ (Bennett, 2021). As John explained, "But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have

fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin" (*New King James Version*, 1982, 1 Jn. 1:7). A regular commitment to this lifestyle creates the basis for fellowship with God and the community of faith (Marshall, 1978; Witherington, 2006).

In terms of maintaining religious community, the Apostle wrote this letter to address false teaching that some erroneously accepted. Such heresy that disreputable teachers promoted disrupted the sense of unity in fellowship in the church. The Apostle intended to establish a sound basis for *koinonia*, or fellowship with the Father, the Son, and the church (Bennett, 2021). Not only must believers adhere to biblical truth, but they also had to remain in right relationship with God and others in the body of Christ. The essence of *koinonia*, as God intended, meant fellowship shared with the Father, the Son, and the community of faith, not with one to the exclusion of others (R. E. Brown, 1982). True spiritual community must be shared by all, bringing them together in a spirit of unity (Kruse, 2020; Marshall, 1978; Witherington, 2006).

An Analysis of 1 John 2:1–11

John made two points abundantly clear. First, believers should not sin, nor should they take sin lightly. Christians should endeavor to grow in Christ, follow the leading of the Spirit, and pursue sanctification. None will achieve sinless perfection in this life, but believers can live in such a way to avoid sin and/or the temptations that lead to sin. The sanctification process helps followers of Christ to grow in the divine nature so that they gradually become more like Jesus (2 Pet. 1:3–4). In other words, believers should take matters of sin very seriously and deal with it when it arises.

This leads to the second point: when believers inevitably sin, they have an advocate in Jesus Christ. Just as an attorney pleads the case of a client in court, Christ will plead His followers' cause before the throne of God. He makes His case not according to their own righteousness, for no one has any before God. Isaiah rightly observed, "We have all become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous deeds are like a polluted garment" (*English Standard Version*, 2001/2016, Is. 64:6a–b). Jesus makes the case based on the righteousness that He

purchased for repentant Christians with His own blood. He has become the expiation, the sacrifice that makes atonement for His followers before the throne of God. He is the Lamb of God who makes provision, not just for believers' sins, but the sins of the entire world. Because of His intercession, repentant sinners can come with confidence before the throne of God and find a warm welcome (Heb. 4:15–16).

John offered a measurement of Christians' relationship with God. If they obey God's commandments, that serves as an indicator of an authentic relationship with the Lord. Anyone can claim to know the Lord and have a relationship with Him. A common theme in John's literature, however, links obedience to God's commandments with the love of God and a relational connection with Him (Jn. 14:21; 1 Jn. 5:2–3; 2 Jn. 6). Anyone who claims to know and love God and does not walk in His word and obey His commandments is a fraud and a liar, according to John. As such, that person does not have the truth inside. David wrote, "You desire truth in the inward parts" (*New King James Version*, 1982, Ps. 51:6a).

Obedience to God's commandments shows the love of God at work in one's life. Perhaps because keeping His word often requires a denying of the flesh. As such, it would also require empowerment by the Holy Spirit. So, the person endeavoring to live according to God's Word makes a practice of knowing and doing the will of God as revealed in His Word. Christians do this because they love God and want His Holy Spirit to equip them to live in a way that pleases Him and that reflects the example of our Lord Jesus Christ. In his writings, John regularly called attention to the interrelationship between these factors.

John reminded Christ's followers to continue obeying the "old commandment which you have had from the beginning" (*New King James Version*, 1982, 1 Jn. 2:7b). In other words, God's eternal Word—the Scriptures—remains the ultimate guide in all matters of life and faith. Times may change, but God's Word never changes (Ps. 119:89; Is. 40:8). God's Word will always serve as a source of direction and instruction so that believers would know how to conduct themselves (Ps. 119:105). Likewise, because God's commandments reflect His

holy nature, they remain the standard by which Christ's followers measure right and wrong. That never changes for believers.

At the same time, John also emphasized the importance of love among believers, stating that it reflects the nature of God and should characterize their relationship with one another. He refers to love as a new commandment that believers should observe one toward another. In one respect, it represents nothing new because the result of the law is love for God and love for one's fellow human being (Rom. 13:8–10). The primary emphasis identifying love as the culmination of what the law teaches is likely new, especially as Jewish believers did not have to observe the ceremonial aspects of the law any longer. For them, this would serve as a shift in focus to the moral underpinnings of all aspects of the law.

John illustrated the importance of this truth by equating love and hate with light and darkness. A person who professes to love God would show a life characterized by love for others in the body of Christ. This serves as an indication that they are in the light. A lack of love—or hatred—would reveal that they walk in darkness. This would indicate a spiritual blindness because it speaks of self-deception. They are in darkness, but do not realize it. As Jesus said, people's character will be known by the fruit of their lives (Matt. 7:15–23).

Inner Texture

The pericope consists of two primary thematic textual units: verses 1–2 and verses 3–11. Although some scholars have included verse 1–2 in a unit beginning with 1 John 1:5, making the pericope 1 John 1:5–2:2 (Bigalke, 2013a; Kruse, 2020), 1 John 2:1 begins with a very clear text marker, "My little children, these things I write to you." This expression, which contains two phrases repeated throughout the epistle, indicates a shift from the encapsulation of 1:1–10. Verses 3–11 includes three smaller units, verses 3–6, 7–8, and 9–11, which structure the Apostle's argument to keep God's commandments. The arrangement of these units sets up a progressive pattern of idea development.

Verses 1–2 transition the discussion from the universality of sin to more specific issues related to disobedience, and the logical starting point lies at the universal measure of obedience to God—His commandments. In verse 2, John uses

"augmentation," which indicates an increase in the quality or intensity of something, often to the uttermost level (Watson, 1993). In this instance, it refers to the propitiation provided through Christ's sacrifice, which provides atonement, not only for John's followers, but potentially for the entire world.

Verses 3–6 begin with another clear text marker indicated by a separate common Johannine textual device, "Now by this we know." Throughout this unit, John uses contrasts to move his ideas through a progression. In this subunit, the Apostle begins with a general admonition to obey God's commandments. He uses the general contrasting ideas of obedience versus disobedience to make his point. In the next subunit, verse 7–8, he gets more specific about the commandments, again using contrast to make his point. In this instance, he distinguishes between the "old commandment" that he urges them to keep, yet at the same time saying it is a "new commandment." Essentially, God's moral standard does not change, even though it may be framed according to New Testament priorities. In verse 9–11, he then specified what he means by obedience to the commandments. Obedience to God's commandments find its ultimate fulfillment in the command to love. Those who love show evidence that they are God's children and are walking in the light. In this way, the Apostle progressed from the general idea of obedience to a specific expression of keeping God's commandments. This progressive pattern is typical of the epideictic rhetoric that John uses throughout his letters (Witherington, 2006).

Likewise, the progressive pattern moves forward through a series of mini chiasms, another distinguishing feature of John's writing observed earlier (Bigalke, 2013a), that seemingly contributes to a lack of linear flow. Yet, the compounding effect of these chiastic units leads to a progression of ideas that communicate John's values. Moreover, these mini chiasms form the basis of John's argumentative pattern, which advances his ideas while dealing with the misconceptions of those who are in error. In verses 3–11, this approach, in which John alternates back and forth between contrasts to make his point in mini chiastic units, I would characterize as *chiastic argument* (see Table 1). In verses 3–6, John expresses the importance of keeping God's commandments by contrasting the disobedient, characterized as self-deceived liars who have lost connection with the

truth, with the obedient, who demonstrate through their faithfulness that they abide in God. Similarly, in verses 7–8, John used this alternating argumentative pattern, or chiastic argument, to relate the "old commandment," a reference to the Ten Commandments (or law of Moses), to a "new commandment," which is a reconfiguration of the timeless moral imperatives of the Old Testament law, to a New Testament context. This recontextualization, which the writer accomplishes by way of "reflexio," a rhetorical technique that uses the same word (in this case "new") in two different ways (Watson, 1993), prioritizes love as the fulfillment of God's moral law (Mk. 12:29–31; Rom. 13:9–10). In fact, Jesus Himself identified it as a new commandment (Jn. 13:34). Finally, John uses the same chiastic argument to contrast those who hate their fellow believers with those who make it a practice to walk in love for others. Those who choose hatred stumble in their spiritual blindness.

Table 1

Chiastic Argument Structures in 1 John 2:3–11

Verses	Chiasm A	Chiasm B	Central Truth
2:3	Now by this we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments.		
2:4		He who says, "I know Him," and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him.	The disobedient do not know God
2:5–6	But whoever keeps His word, truly the love of God is perfected in him. By this we know that we are in Him. He who says he abides in Him ought himself also to walk just as He walked.		

Verses	Chiasm A	Chiasm B	Central Truth
2:7a	Brethren, I write no new commandment to you, but an old commandment which you have had from the beginning.		
2:7b		The old commandment is the word which you heard from the beginning.	God's standard of obedience does not change
2:8	Again, a new commandment I write to you, which thing is true in Him and in you, because the darkness is passing away, and the true light is already shining.		
2:9	He who says he is in the light, and hates his brother, is in darkness until now.		
2:10		He who loves his brother abides in the light, and there is no cause for stumbling in him.	The obedient walk in the light of love
2:11	But he who hates his brother is in darkness and walks in darkness, and does not know where he is going, because the darkness has blinded his eyes.		

Another progressive pattern appears in the form of encapsulation. The pericope begins with the Apostle's appeal to refrain from sin in 1 John 2:1. It ends in 2:11 with the consequences of continuing in unrepentant sin as expressed in hatred toward another believer. Verses 2–10 offer the means for atonement through Jesus Christ and the relationship between choosing to keep the commandments and experiencing the light of truth and the descent into hatred and darkness for those who willfully disregard the commandments. This same passage also highlights a

similar opening-middle-closing pattern. Specifically, John issued a warning against sin and the offer of redemption through the propitiation provided in Christ. For believers, the plot progresses based upon the choices they make. For those who chose to observe the commandments, their story ends with walking in the light with no fear of stumbling. Conversely, the story ends in tragedy for those who do not keep the commandments because their spiritual blindness causes them to stumble in the darkness. Although John does not use the specific word "stumble," he alludes to it through "emphasis," a rhetorical technique that implies something unstated (Watson, 1993).

Once again, the author used the sensory-aesthetic elements of light and darkness. Using "enargeia," an amplification technique intended to create a potent metaphor (Watson, 1993), the writer makes a comparison of love and hatred with light and darkness, an image used earlier in chapter 1 to refer to righteousness and truth. In this way, John is equating light with love, and darkness with hatred. Also, the image sharpens the focus of sin, mentioned earlier in general terms, to apply specifically to hatred toward another believer.

Intertexture

John's reference to a new commandment provides an instance of oral-scribal intertexture. Specifically, the Apostle recontextualized in this pericope a reconfiguration of the commandments. In Christ's Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5–7), Jesus contrasted the application (or misapplication, as it were) of the Mosaic law (in 1 Jn. 2:7 described as the "old commandment") with a higher application that better embodied the spirit of the commandment. This reconfigured the law of Moses for Christ's hearers. Using the expression, "You have heard that it was said," Jesus referred to the law of Moses (Matt. 5:21, 27, 33, 38, 43), and contrasted it with His reconfiguration using the words, "But I say to you/tell you" (Matt. 5:22, 28, 34, 39, 44). For example, Jesus taught,

> You have heard that it was said, "You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy." But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you. (*New King James Version*, 1982, Matt. 5:43–44)

In fact, Jesus reconfigured two Old Testament principles. The law of Moses stated, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself" (*New King James Version*, 1982, Lev. 19:18c); and in the Psalms it was written, "Do I not hate them, O LORD, who hate You? And do I not loathe those who rise up against You? I hate them with perfect hatred; I count them my enemies" (*New King James Version*, 1982, Ps. 139:21–22). Christ taught that in order to be like the Father, His followers should love their enemies as well as their neighbors.

Likewise, Christ extended that reconfiguration of the commandment to love in John's account of His farewell discourse. Jesus said, "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another" (*New King James Version*, 1982, Jn. 13:34). This directive further elevated the quality of love that believers should demonstrate. To provide an effective witness for Christ, they must love one another with the same sacrificial intensity that Jesus modeled.

John also provided an instance of social intertexture by ascribing to Christ the social role of Advocate (v. 1). The word παράκλητος (*paraklētos*) means "one who appears in another's behalf, mediator, intercessor, helper" (Danker et al., 2000, p. 766). To those believers who confess theirs sins, Christ becomes One who would plead their case before the Father, just as a defense attorney would represent a client (Keener, 1993). As it says in Hebrews, "He always lives to make intercession for them" (*New King James Version*, 1982, Heb. 7:25b).

Cultural intertexture appears in this pericope in the form of allusion. The Apostle wrote, "And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins" (*New King James Version*, 1982, 1 Jn. 2:2a). A propitiation was a sacrifice offered for atonement to appease the wrath of God against sin (Keener, 1993). As mentioned before, the law of Moses required animal sacrifice, as in the case of the Passover, to redeem God's people. The sacrifice of Christ on the cross provided a covering for humanity's sins once for all, with no need for further sacrifice (Heb. 7:27; 10:10).

Social and Cultural Texture

The specific social topic that emerges in this pericope advances a conversionist religious worldview. John emphasized the importance of believers

striving against sin, yet offered reassurance that Christ acts as an Advocate for those who look to Him in repentance. Referring to Christ, the writer emphasized, "And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world" (*New King James Version*, 1982, 1 Jn. 2:2). By broadening the scope of Christ's atonement to the world potentially, John advanced the conviction that the hope of the world lies in conversion.

The Apostle's emphasis on keeping God's commandments stemmed from the dominant culture rhetoric of the church's organizational culture. This directive to observe the commandments as taught in Scripture would serve as expected behavior in the spiritual community. As such, they reflect the values of the fellowship of believers, not the standard practice of the culture at large.

Sacred Texture

Deity is revealed in this pericope through the description of Jesus Christ as the Advocate of repentant sinners before God's throne. Sin is an offense that carries a penalty of eternal condemnation (Rom. 5:12; 6:23a). The righteousness of Christ is appropriated toward repentant sinners who trust in His atonement completely (Rom. 1:17; 2 Cor. 5:21). Although Satan stands before the throne of God ready to accuse those who sin (Zech. 3:1; Rev. 12:10), Christ pleads the cause of His people based on his atoning sacrifice. "Therefore He is also able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them" (*New King James Version*, 1982, Heb. 7:25). This sacrifice also speaks of human redemption. As John noted, "And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world" (*New King James Version*, 1982, 1 Jn. 2:2). Therefore, this redemption is not available exclusively to the church, but God extends the atoning sacrifice to the world, to all who would receive it by faith.

Human commitment requires that Christ's followers demonstrate their faith through observing God's commandments. According to John, this inclination provides evidence that believers know God and have a relationship with Him (v. 3). The result is an increasing development of Christlike character: "He who says he abides in Him ought himself also to walk just as He walked" (*New King James*

Version, 1982, 1 Jn. 2:6). The clearest demonstration of Christlikeness manifests itself as love that believers share one with another. This is a condition of religious community. Specifically, love serves as a mandatory, defining characteristic of biblical community as an expression of *koinonia*.

An Analysis of 1 John 2:12–17

John appeared to address believers in this passage according to their place in the spiritual life cycle more than biological age. Those he called "little children" are likely recent converts who are new to the faith. As such, they require basic teaching to understand the foundational elements of serving God. Paul stated that these believers require "milk" (elementary biblical teaching) because in their immaturity they cannot process deeper spiritual truths (1 Cor. 3:1–2; Heb. 5:13).

"Young men" refers to those who have been in Christ for some time and are ready to move beyond the rudiments of Christianity. They have been learning to apply God's word to their lives and are developing an understanding of how Scripture helps believers grow in faith and practice. In this way, they are learning to overcome the evil one by applying the word of God, even as Jesus did (Matt. 4:1–11; Lk. 4:1–13). They have had opportunity to grow and have acquired some experience. Yet, their youth and idealism give them strength and vitality that serve the ministry well.

Those who are "fathers" in the faith are mature believers who have a rich personal history with the Lord, and they know God intimately. Because of their maturity, they have a deeper understanding of the Word and can use it skillfully (2 Tim. 2:15; 3:16–17). What they may lack in energy, they make up with wisdom and a broader perspective of life. They are "fathers" also because their productivity and service has given birth to new believers (Jn. 1:12; 1 Cor. 4:15).

A healthy church should have people from each stage working together as a spiritual family. Each brings value to the ministry, and they all have value in serving one another. John addressed people at each of these stages of life and maturity so that they recognize their common purpose and receive this truth, which is intended for all believers. Therefore, his writing was directed to all believers, so all should give careful attention to heeding his instructions.

John warned the believer against having a love for the world. He does not mean that believers should not love people; "For God so loved the [people of] the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life" (*New King James Version*, 1982, Jn. 3:16). The world, in this sense, represents humanity. God loves humanity so much that He sacrificed His own Son to redeem all people. God loves people because He created them in His image (Gen. 1:26–27).

Instead, John stated that believers should not love the world's system and its values. These things are corrupt and beyond redemption. They reflect the sinful desires that lead people astray into abominable wickedness that separates them further from God. As James wrote, "Adulterers and adulteresses! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God" (*New King James Version*, 1982, Jas. 4:4).

John reminded Christ's followers that all these things, which seem so important and significant to people now, will eventually pass away. With that in mind, Peter challenged believers to reflect: "Therefore, since all these things will be dissolved, what manner of persons ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness?" (*New King James Version*, 1982, 2 Pet. 3:11). Furthermore, everyone's works will be tested with fire, leaving behind only that which has been done for the glory of God and the advancement of His kingdom (1 Corinthians 3:12–15). Ultimately, the only things that will remain are those people who commit themselves to God and doing His will.

Inner Texture

This pericope contains two thematic textual units. Verses 12–14 serve to identify those who are in Christ in their various stages of maturity, contrasting them with those referenced in the preceding pericope, who are stumbling in the darkness. Verses 15–17 describe the corruption of the world and the dangers that the world presents to those who are in Christ. This unit also prepares for a transition to warnings about false teachers, who prove their alliance with the world and its

values. They operate with the spirit of antichrist because of their adherence to false doctrines, causing them to separate from John and his followers.

This pericope continues with patterns of repetition, a distinguishing feature of the letters, as mentioned before. Verses 12–14 repeat John's representations of those who are new in the faith (identified as "little children"), those who are growing in the faith and developing in ministry (identified as "young men"), and those who are mature in the faith (identified as "fathers"). This rhetorical device, known as "distributio," attributes specific roles to a list of individuals (Watson, 1989). Also note that the stages described here ("little children," "young men," and "fathers") also indicates a progressive pattern of development. Not only does it advance in the age of the believers addressed, but also in development and maturity. As mentioned before, the Apostle's propositions are often arranged in chiastic form, and this passage continues that trend. He first addresses those who are "little children." Rather than continuing in chronological progression, he then addresses "fathers," and comes back to "young men." In chiastic form, this would naturally give the preeminent honor to the elders, while also clarifying characteristics of the younger as well.

The same chiastic form used in verses 12–13b is repeated in verses 13c–14. The repetitions "I write to/have written to you" are a figure of speech known as "epanaphora," phrases that are repeated for emphasis with similar and dissimilar ideas. followed with some slight changes as the pattern is repeated. The author also makes use of conduplicatio, an amplification technique that uses repetition and accumulation, and expolitio, a device mentioned earlier that uses repetition to advance the same idea with subtle differences that give the impression of saying something new (Watson, 1989). The repetitions "I write to/have written to you" are followed with some slight changes as the pattern is repeated. Thus, "I write to you, little children, Because your sins are forgiven you for His name's sake" (*New King James Version*, 1982, 1 Jn. 2:12), is modified to read, "I write to you, little children, because you have known the Father" (*New King James Version*, 1982, 2:13c). Likewise, amplification by accumulation occurs when the statement directed to young men, "Because you have overcome the wicked one" (*New King*

James Version, 1982, 2:13b) expands to "Because you are strong, and the word of God abides in you, And you have overcome the wicked one" (*New King James Version*, 1982, 2:14b–c).

In verses 15–17, the writer established his teaching regarding the corruption of the world's system with an argumentative pattern that explained his rationale. He exhorted his followers to not be enamored with the world and its allurements and listed his reasons: (a) believers cannot love the world and have God's love at the same time, (b) the world and all it represents is not allied with the Father, (c) and the world and its allurements are temporary. John made his argument by using accumulation, the compound effect of these warnings. Likewise, the Apostle amplified the effect of his argument with "polysyndeton," emphasizing a point by using additional word particles—in this case, the conjunction "and" (Watson, 1993): "For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world" (*New American Standard Bible*, 1971/2020, 1 Jn. 2:16).

Intertexture

This pericope has an instance of oral-scribal intertexture in John's description of the corrupting influence of the world. The dynamic mentioned in 1 John 2:16 (see previous paragraph) hearkens back to the serpent's temptation of Eve in the Garden of Eden: "So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food" (the lust of the flesh), "that it was pleasant to the eyes" (the lust of the eyes), "and a tree desirable to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate" (the pride of life; *New King James Version*, 1982, Gen. 3:6a–d). John's warning about the fleeting nature of this world's allurements (v. 17) also recalled the parable Christ taught about the foolish rich man who died suddenly and left his wealth behind (Lk. 12:16–21).

The temptation to which the writer referred has a relationship with the corrupt world system. John's connection between the world's wickedness and its carnal attractions offered a recontextualization of James's scathing indictment: "Adulterers and adulteresses! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes

himself an enemy of God" (*New King James Version*, 1982, Jas. 4:4). The Apostle likewise clarified the danger the world presented for believers, while also declaring that a friendly connection with the world and its corrupt system revealed a lack of relationship with God.

Social intertexture emerges as a consideration in this pericope related to social roles and social relationships. The Apostle's choice of metaphor to describe the distinction between those who are more mature in the faith and those who are less so also carries certain social expectations. Those whom John designates as "fathers" are most likely church leaders as well as mature believers. As such, they are expected to be held in high esteem and respected for their status and service (1 Thess. 5:13; 1 Tim. 5:17; 1 Pet. 5:5).

Social and Cultural Texture

Another worldview highlighted in this pericope is introversionist. The writer appealed to followers of Christ to withdraw from the world. He urged, "Do not love the world or the things in the world" (*New King James Version*, 1982, 1 Jn. 2:15a); however, he meant that they retreat, not necessarily in a monastic sense, but they should avoid the corrupting influences of the world. The rationale of his appeal also lay in part in a revolutionist worldview. John wrote, "And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever" (*New King James Version*, 19821 Jn. 2:17). The world in its current form, which is under the influence of the evil one (1 Jn. 5:19b), is irredeemable. The hope of Christ's followers lies in the belief that they will live forever in a new heaven and new earth (2 Pet. 3:12–13; Rev. 21:1). By denouncing the world and its corruption, which is characteristic of the culture at large, John also engaged in countercultural rhetoric.

Sacred Texture

John mentioned an important aspect as it relates to religious community. Specifically, the dynamic listed in verses 12–14 speaks of the value of intergenerational ministry. The Apostle addressed those he identified as "little children," "fathers," and "young men." Although this referred primarily to spiritual

stages of growth, it can also apply to the believers' natural life stages. Ultimately, it highlights the value that each person brings to ministry, and each received an appropriate word of encouragement accordingly.

The writer also called attention to an element of eschatology. By identifying the temporary nature of this present corrupt world, he warns believers to avoid perishing with it through giving in to its corrupting influences. This also speaks of an important aspect of sacred texture in terms of human commitment. Christ's followers must actively reject the world and its corrupting influences. As mentioned earlier, any positive affections associated with the present evil world signify a misplaced loyalty, an indication of personal corruption, and a breach in one's relationship with the Father (v. 15).

An Analysis of 1 John 2:18–27

John reminded Christ's followers that one sign of the last days is the operation of the spirit of antichrist at work in the world. Not only will this result in the ultimate appearance of the Antichrist, but others will be operating with that same spirit. In 2 Thess. 2:3, Paul identified the Antichrist as "ἄνθρωπος της αμαρτιας," or "the man of sin" (Stephanus, 2002), or "ἄνθρωπος τῆς ἀνομίας," or "the man of lawlessness" (Nestle et al., 2012). Sin and lawlessness characterize the spirit of antichrist and how it operates. According to John, that spirit is at work in the world and even works through individuals, whom he also identifies as "antichrists."

John stated that those who leave the church show that they were never really a part of the fellowship of believers. Their apostasy testifies against them that they had no genuine tie to the body of Christ. Otherwise, they would have a willingness to endure hardship for the sake of the gospel. Because believers have the Holy Spirit, "an anointing from the Holy One," as John put it, they have understanding regarding the spiritual realities at work in their day. As such, believers can discern truth from falsehoods.

Ultimately, the Apostle warned that anyone who denies that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, is a liar. John identified such a person as antichrist. He further clarifies that to deny the Son is to deny the Father also. One cannot profess

to know God while denying the deity of the Lord Jesus Christ. To know Jesus is to know the Father also because Christ and the Father are one (Jn. 10:30; 14:10).

John instructed believers to let what they heard from the beginning—the gospel of Christ—abide in them. The message they received will generate faith and draw them into intimate fellowship with the Father and the Son. Through faith, believers abide in God and enter the secret place of fellowship with God and experience His presence. This gives the assurance of eternal life. His promise in His Word and the reality of His presence testify to the reality of the eternal life that the believer receives.

John wrote these instructions so that Christians can stand fast in what they know to be true. Satan will try to use various means to deceive God's people, including false prophets and false teachers (Matt. 7:15–23; 2 Pet. 2:1; Jude 4). John stated that the anointing will instruct the believer regarding false teachers. In other words, the anointing of the Holy Spirit—the gift and presence of the Holy Spirit—will give followers of Christ discernment to recognize error and distinguish between truth and falsehood.

Inner Texture

This pericope consists of two thematic textual units. Verses 18–23 issue a warning about the spirit of antichrist at work in the world and how false teachers are aligned with that spirit, even as they have disassociated from the church. Through the anointing, the Spirit of God gives true believers discernment. The defining characteristic of those who reject the truth about God is their denial of the humanity and deity of Jesus Christ. The address "Little children" in verse 18 serves as a textual marker that identifies the beginning of the unit. The next textual unit offers further encouragement toward those who adhere to the truth as they follow the discernment of the Spirit. "Therefore" in verse 24 indicates a transition to this textual unit.

In this pericope, the writer advanced a progression by way of connection. John utilized amplification to make an association between the coming Antichrist (2 Thess. 2:3) and contemporary purveyors of false doctrine. Augmentation occurs by stating that as Antichrist is coming, the same spirit is at work in many antichrists

that are spreading destructive false teaching. John then made the connection with antichrists and the secessionists who have split from the church. Their leaving provided the proof that they were never really part of the fellowship but were deceivers. Those who adhere to the truth have discernment through "an anointing," the Holy Spirit resident in true believers.

The pericope offers an opening-middle-closing pattern as it resolves the conflict presented by the secessionists, who are operating from a worldly paradigm as influenced by the spirit of antichrist. The opening presents the conflict as a growing threat that the spirit of the Antichrist is in operation in many antichrists, an indication that events are propelling humanity toward the end of the age. The next development is the impact that such deceivers have had on the church by causing a split. The resolution comes, as John then reassured his followers that "the anointing" resides in them and equips them to detect the error of antichrist teachers so that they may remain safely in Christ.

This pericope also presents an argumentative pattern that explains John's rationale for his position in excoriating those who left the fellowship. The thrust of the Apostle's argument lies in verse 26: "These things I have written to you concerning those who try to deceive you" (*New King James Version*, 1982, 1 Jn. 2:26). John proposed that a rise in antichrist teachers were at work in his contemporary culture, and the secessionists fit such a description because of their lack of commitment to the church and their adherence to doctrines that denied Christ. The Apostle then presented a contrasting portrait of those who remained in the fellowship, as demonstrated by their loyalty to the doctrine of Christ. Their steadfast commitment to the truth gave evidence that they exercised discernment, which should serve as a source of assurance to them.

Intertexture

John proclaimed, "Little children, it is the last hour; and as you have heard that the Antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have come, by which we know that it is the last hour" (*New King James Version*, 1982, 1 Jn. 2:18). This declaration contains two instances of oral-scribal intertexture in the form of recontextualizations. The first one occurs in relation to John's statement reminding

believers that the Antichrist would one day appear. This referenced Daniel's prophetic vision that foresaw the rise of a political leader who embodied lawlessness (Dan. 7:8, 11; 11:31). Although this prophecy had an initial fulfillment through the Greek Seleucid ruler Antiochus IV Epiphanes (*King James Version with Apocrypha*, 1611/1900, 1 Macc. 1:10–64), his appearance foreshadowed another such ruler in the same mold (R. E. Brown, 1982; Yarbrough, 2008). In fact, when Christ referenced Daniel's prophecy regarding "the abomination of desolation" (Matt. 24:15), He spoke of a future event, which underscored the expectation that the Antichrist was yet to come. Paul identified the Antichrist as "the man of lawlessness," and "the son of destruction" (*English Standard Version*, 2001/2016, 2 Thess. 2:3c–d). In Revelation, this figure is identified as the "beast" (Rev. 13).

The second recontextualization concerns the appearance of false prophets. The Apostle wrote, "Little children, it is the last hour; and as you have heard that the Antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have come, by which we know that it is the last hour" (*New King James Version*, 1982, 1 Jn. 2:18). Jesus indicated that a rise in false prophets would serve as an indication of the end times, what John described as the "last hour." Jesus predicted, "For false christs and false prophets will rise and show great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect" (*New King James Version*, 1982, Matt. 24:24). Similarly, Peter (2 Pet. 2:1) and Jude (verse 4) warned about the appearance of false teachers. These teachers John characterized as "antichrists," and in so doing he associated these false prophets with the Antichrist that would one day appear. John also noted,

> They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us; but they went out that they might be made manifest, that none of them were of us. (*New King James Version*, 1982, 1 Jn. 2:19)

This presents the possibility that the appearance of these false prophets/antichrists and the secession associated with them is a possible recontextualization of Paul's prophetic declaration about a "falling away" (or apostasy) that would characterize the end times (2 Thess. 2:2).

In verse 20, John introduced cultural intertexture by way of allusion: "But you have an anointing from the Holy One, and you know all things" (*New King James Version*, 1982). This referred to the Old Testament practice of anointing someone with oil as a preparation for ministry. For example, God instructed Moses to anoint Aaron with oil as part of his ordination as high priest: "And you shall take the anointing oil, pour it on his head, and anoint him" (*New King James Version*, 1982, Ex. 29:7). This practice was also used to inaugurate the kings of Israel and Judah, as in the case of David: "Then Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed him in the midst of his brothers; and the Spirit of the LORD came upon David from that day forward" (*New King James Version*, 1982, 1 Sam. 16:13a–b). As the Scripture indicated, this symbolic act was a depiction of the empowerment of the Holy Spirit that would come upon the called individual. John used this allusion to describe the impartation of the Holy Spirit that equipped believers to discern truth from error (1 Jn. 2:20, 27).

Social and Cultural Texture

By emphasizing the anointing and its importance in obtaining divine understanding, the Apostle adopted a gnostic-manipulationist perspective. He wrote, "But you have an anointing from the Holy One, and you know all things" (*New King James Version*, 1982, 1 Jn. 2:20). The anointing that God gives through the Holy Spirit provides instruction in right doctrine and discernment to counteract false doctrine. In expressing this, John also engaged in dominant culture rhetoric. He asserted,

> They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us; but they went out that they might be made manifest, that none of them were of us. (1 Jn. 2:19 *New King James Version*, 1982)

By labeling the secessionists as apostate, John contextualized the departure of the secessionists from his authoritative posture. Their leaving provided proof that they did not genuinely belong to the community of faith.

Sacred Texture

An element of sacred texture in this pericope that refers to deity affirms the unity of the Father and Son. John wrote, "Whoever denies the Son does not have the Father either; he who acknowledges the Son has the Father also" (*New King James Version*, 1982, 1 Jn. 2:23). The writer highlighted how the Father and the Son identify as one (Jn. 17:11, 21). This is significant because it recognizes that although Jesus was fully human (1 Jn. 4:2), He is also still fully divine. The Apostle's acknowledgement of the Spirit's anointing (1 Jn. 2:20, 27; 4:4) serves as a reference to Spirit being, while also presenting an indirect affirmation of the divine Trinity.

Another reference to a spirit being in this pericope is found in John's mention of Antichrist (v. 18). Although the appearance of this figure will likely represent an actual human being, the spiritual character identified in Revelation of this figure is that of a beast allied with and empowered by Satan (Rev. 13:1–8). This reference also serves as an element of eschatology in two respects. First, it confirms the imminent appearance of this satanic figure in a prophetic sense. Second, the writer linked the eschatological expectation of this evil figure with a proliferation of other false christs who operate with the same spirit—further corroborating that the church is in the last hour.

These observations call attention to a reference to religious community. The departure of the secessionists, identified by the Apostle as antichrists, offered proof that they never were genuinely a part of the fellowship of believers. If they sincerely belonged to the body of Christ, they would have accepted the church's sound teaching and maintained the unity of fellowship in a spirit of *koinonia*.

An Analysis of 1 John 2:28–3:9

Believers should abide in Christ because He is their source of life and blessing (Jn. 15:4). One way that the Christian abides in the love of Christ comes through keeping God's commandments (Jn. 15:10). This will give the believer confidence at the coming of Christ. When He appears, He will be revealed in all His holiness and righteous glory, which will cause mourning and great distress among unbelievers (Matt. 25:31–33; Rev. 1:7). The followers of Christ will show

evidence of the Spirit of God at work in their lives (i.e., the fruit of the Spirit) in response to the grace of God. In this way, through the enabling of the Holy Spirit, they walk in righteousness and do what pleases God. Their obedience to God and His commandments bears witness that they are God's children.

The love that God the Father has lavishly given inspires wonder and gratitude (1 Jn. 3:1). Who could understand the depth of such love given to those so unworthy! It refers to an unspeakable depth of grace and goodness toward Christ's followers. God sacrificed His rightful, innocent Son so that those who were guilty and hopelessly lost could become part of His family. Because of Christ's sacrifice on the cross, those who believe receive forgiveness; however, it goes far beyond that! God, the Heavenly Father, makes a way that believers could become His children (Jn. 1:12; 1 Jn. 3:1–3). Along with that, He made provisions so that Christians could be sanctified and transformed into His image (2 Pet. 1:3–4).

Christians' affiliation with the Lord—indeed, their relational bond— identifies them with the Lord. As such, it also characterizes their relationship with the world. Just as the world rejected Christ, so it will reject those who belong to Him. As Jesus said, "If the world hates you, you know that it hated me before it hated you" (*New King James Version*, 1982, Jn. 15:18). Clearly, the believers' relationship with the Lord defines their relationship with the world. As God's children, who are being conformed into the image of Christ (Rom. 8:29; Php. 3:21), they will behold Him in all His splendor, His unfiltered glory. Likewise, Christ's followers will reflect His glory at His appearing (Col. 3:4). This hope motivates Christians to pursue holiness and grow in Christlikeness (2 Cor. 7:1).

John made an important point about believers in Christ as it relates to their standing in Christ. Because sin amounts to rebellious behavior that rejects the constraints of law, those who commit willful sin demonstrate a lawless spirit (1 Jn. 3:4). Christ came for humanity's redemption, as well as its regeneration. By virtue of His inherent holiness and His sinless life, He takes the repentant person's sins away along with the stigma and the penalty. The believer who abides in Christ, meaning who remains in intimate fellowship with Him and lives as led by God's Word and God's Spirit, will not sin (1 Jn. 3:6a). Those who remain in unrepentant

sin show by evidence of their lawless attitude and behavior that they have no connection with Christ (1 Jn. 3:6b).

Those who live by faith in obedience to God's word are righteous because Christ's righteousness has been appropriated to them (2 Cor. 5:21; Gal. 2:20). Those who sin willfully show their association with Satan because their attitudes and behavior reflect his characteristics (1 Jn. 3:8). Jesus came to obliterate everything associated with the enemy and the kingdom of darkness (1 Jn. 3:9). Ultimately, Christ will restore all that has been damaged by his evil influence. Even now, those who are in Christ have been born again and have a new spiritual nature. If believers live in keeping with their spiritual standing in Christ, they live righteous lives that please the Lord and give him glory. Through faith and the power of the Holy Spirit, they demonstrate lives that characterize God's divine nature at work in them (2 Pet. 1:3–4).

Inner Texture

This pericope has two main textual thematic units. Verses 2:28–3:3 offer a positive contrast between the anticipated coming of Christ and the believers' identification with him versus the appearance of the Antichrist and those allied with him (mentioned in the previous pericope). The textual marker, "And now" shifts the writer's focus toward the return of Jesus and its joyful implications for Christ's followers, whose righteousness identifies them as God's children. In verse 4, the word "whoever" transitions the discussion to the contrasts between sin and righteousness and children of God versus children of the devil. Verses 4–6 and 7–9 form subunits that provide mini chiastic arguments that highlight those contrasts, which serve as the bases for progressive patterns.

John uses a progressive pattern of development in verses 2:28–3:3 to explain that the blessing loyal followers of Jesus have grows greater with the anticipation of Christ's return, another case of augmentation. The writer emphasized the confidence that Christians have because their faithfulness proves they are children of God. As such, God lavishes his love upon them as dearly loved members of His family. This identification as children advances with the hope that as God's children, they will see Christ in His glory and share His divine nature.

As the progressive pattern advances to the next textual thematic unit in verses 4–6 and 7–9, chiastic arguments serve as the means of development using contrast between those who sin and those who practice righteousness. This progressive pattern also includes a connection, which likewise contains an element of amplification. The Apostle makes an association between sin, lawlessness, people who sin, and the devil. Those who sin show that they are lawless, which is characteristic of the antichrist spirit. Therefore, because sin is a work of the devil, those who commit sin are identified with the devil himself. Conversely, those who practice righteousness are identified with Christ, whose mission is to destroy the devil's work.

This pericope also includes an encapsulation as a progressive pattern. John begins the encapsulation with the assertion that those who practice righteousness are children of God. The discussion develops by way of the contrasts between those who sin versus those who do not sin. The end of the encapsulation in verse 9 states that those who are born of God have God's divine nature, making sin unnatural to their regenerated state. Also, contrast—in the form of "antithesis" (Watson, 1993)—serves as a tool for amplification in the Apostle's argumentative pattern. As the hope for those who are God's children grows greater, the destruction of the unrighteousness becomes more evident. In this way, the degeneration of those who commit sin becomes even more pronounced because of their association with lawlessness and the devil.

Intertexture

John presented oral-scribal intertexture related to a recontextualization of Christ's second coming. Jesus referred to His imminent return in Matthew 24: "For as the lightning comes from the east and flashes to the west, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be (*New King James Version*, 1982, Matt. 24:27). Likewise, Paul expanded on this in 1 Corinthians 15:51–53, placing emphasis on the transformation of human bodies to glorified, immortal bodies that believers will receive at that event. Paul touched on the same transformation theme in 1 Thessalonians 4:16–17, but with emphasis on the inclusion of those who previously died in Christ. John focused more on the spiritual impact of Christ's return on His

followers. They will have confidence at the Lord's appearance because they will be transformed to have His same spiritual nature: "We know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is" (*New King James Version*, 1982, 1 Jn. 3:2c-e).

Recontextualization also appears in the Apostle's characterization of the devil. John wrote, "He who sins is of the devil, for the devil has sinned from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil" (*New King James Version*, 1982, 1 Jn. 3:8). In Genesis 3, the tempter is referred to as "the serpent," the animal form through which the devil operated in the Garden of Eden. In fact, John retained that image in Revelation, when referring to him as "that serpent of old, who is the Devil and Satan" (*New King James Version*, 1982, Rev. 20:2b). Contextually, Jesus' description of Satan and those who operate under his influence, fits John's application in this pericope:

> You are of your father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own resources, for he is a liar and the father of it. (*New King James Version*, 1982, Jn. 8:44)

Just as Jesus identified those who operate with evil intent as the devil's children, so to speak, John made a connection between those who willfully commit sin (i.e., a characteristic of lawlessness, the spirit of antichrist).

This pericope contains an instance of social intertexture by way of social identities and relationships. The writer exclaimed, "Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God!" (*New King James Version*, 1982, 1 Jn. 3:1a-b). John's depiction of the Father's love called attention to the intimate relationship that believers have with God. Christ's parable of the prodigal son (Lk. 15:11–32) vividly illustrates the nature of this relationship and the depth of love that the Father has toward those who look to Him in humility and repentance. Just as the father in the parable displayed love characterized by grace, longsuffering, kindness, and compassion toward his undeserving son, the

Father in heaven freely bestows love and acceptance towards His spiritual children who are in Christ.

Social and Cultural Texture

This pericope contains a hint of the revolutionist worldview, as John reflected on the return of Christ and what that means for believers. He wrote, "And now, little children, abide in Him, that when He appears, we may have confidence and not be ashamed before Him at His coming." (*New King James Version*, 1982, 1 Jn. 2:28). This confidence at the return of Christ presents, not only assurance of a right standing, but also the hope of transformation: "Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is." (*New King James Version*, 1982, 1 Jn. 3:2). Furthermore, Christ's followers can find encouragement in His victory over the devil: "He who sins is of the devil, for the devil has sinned from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil" (*New King James Version*, 1982, 1 Jn. 3:8c-d).

Also, anticipation of Christ's return encourages believers to purify themselves from sin (v. 3:3). This expectation suggests elements of a conversionist worldview. As believers appropriate Scripture's promises in accordance with their position as children of God, they become recipients of God's divine nature (2 Pet. 1:3–4). This is what John meant when he declared, "Whoever has been born of God does not sin, for His seed remains in him; and he cannot sin, because he has been born of God" (*New King James Version*, 1982, 1 Jn. 3:9).

Sacred Texture

The love of the Father also appears in the sacred texture of deity. Love is the very essence of God's nature; as John observed, "God is love" (*New King James Version*, 1982, 1 Jn. 4:8b, 16b). That love, as lavishly offered to humanity, made it possible for believers to have a position in the spiritual community as children of God (v. 1a–b, 2a). This quality also calls attention to the human redemption aspect of sacred texture as well as the eschatological. The hope of

transformation at Christ's coming serves as a powerful motivator to pursue sanctification. Likewise, human commitment manifests in the believers' resolution to abstain from sin and follow righteousness.

The spirit being factor appears in this pericope in John's attribution of sin and lawlessness to the devil. Just as righteousness defines the godly person, so sin stands as clearly characteristic of the devil. Therefore, those who commit sin—as exhibited by a spirit of lawlessness—are inextricably linked to the devil. Just as God's children are characterized by obedience in the pursuit of sanctification in response to the overwhelming love of God, the devil's children bear his likeness through their propensity to sin.

An Analysis of 1 John 3:10–24

John further intended to draw a distinction between those who belong to God and those who oppose Him. Those who walk in darkness do not make a practice of righteousness (as defined by a biblical standard), nor do they show love toward God's children. Therefore, a key characteristic of righteousness is genuine love among believers. By using Cain's example (Gen. 4:3–9), John emphasized love among followers of Christ—brothers and sisters in the faith. Cain murdered his brother because Abel's righteous deeds exposed his own efforts as flawed (1 Jn. 3:12). John went so far as to characterize them as "evil." By this, he suggested that Cain's offering did not come from a sincere heart. He should have had love for his brother, but his brother's deeds exposed him. As a result, he murdered his brother, revealing that he was under the influence of the evil one.

John emphatically reminded believers that their identification with Christ would inspire the ire of unbelievers. For this reason, he told Christians to not be surprised when the world expressed its hatred for them (1 Jn. 3:13). As human beings, it is generally hard for people to bear because they are social creatures. People naturally want to be liked by others. So, when others express their antagonism, believers should remain confident of their standing in Christ. They are not to direct their beliefs or behavior by the opinions of others but by the Word of God (Acts 5:29).

That may very well be why the Apostle had such a deep concern for love and unity in the church. One of the defining marks of the believer is love for others in the body of Christ. A lack of love for others in the fellowship indicates a serious matter for concern. John used very strong language to characterize one who has hatred for others in the church. He called such a person a "murderer" who "abides in death." No one with that distinction can make a claim to eternal life!

John stated that God's very nature is love (1 Jn. 4:8, 16). The one who abides in love shows evidence of a connection with God. Just as love is God's nature, so it will reveal itself in the character and behavior of His children. At the same time, because God is the believers' Father, love should define how His family members conduct themselves in His house and among the other members of the household. This becomes so much more important because of the rejection they receive from the world. Believers who face the wrath and rejection of the world need the comfort and encouragement of the body of Christ. They need a safe place to recover from the hostility they encounter in the world.

The example of Christ instructs believers how they should love one another in the body of Christ. Just as Jesus laid down his life for others (Jn. 15:13), so Christ's followers should act accordingly and sacrifice their lives for others in the body of Christ (1 Pet. 2:21). Furthermore, Christians must demonstrate genuine love in tangible ways. One cannot make a claim to love another while seeing them in need and withholding good from them. The person who has the means to help and bless another should do so. Otherwise, to harden oneself toward another shows a decided lack of love. As John summarized, real love does not come by words, but by sincere, heartfelt actions.

John offered a comforting word to believers who may have doubts about themselves. Some who endeavor to walk softly before the Lord sometimes tend to judge themselves harshly. Because they are so intimately acquainted with their flaws, faults, and shortcomings, such persons can become their own worst critics. For those who fit that description, the Apostle gave reassurance that God knows His children better than they know themselves, and He views them through the filter of Christ's sacrifice on the cross (1 Jn. 3:20).

Even if believers' hearts do not condemn them, their confidence comes from Christ's atonement on their behalf. Yet, their right standing in Christ inspires an obedient response toward God's commandments. Furthermore, their standing as God's obedient children gives them confidence in prayer. Disobedience will hinder people's prayers (Ps. 66:18), but a commitment to obeying God and His word provides assurance that He will grant those things they ask in prayer. The heart of God's commandments finds expression through faith in Christ, the only begotten Son of God, and in loving their neighbors as themselves (Mk, 12:29–33; Rom. 13:8–10).

John highlighted here the interrelationship between believers' obedience to God's commandments, their fellowship with Him, and their intimate identification with Him. His presence in their lives and their position as redeemed children in Christ provides the impetus to obey the Word. Likewise, their continued commitment to keeping God's commandments offers a basis for continued fellowship with God and intimate relationship with Him. Furthermore, the Holy Spirit also bears witness that they are God's dearly loved children (Rom. 8:14–16; Gal. 4:6).

Inner Texture

The pericope contains two primary thematic textual units, each of which contains two subunits. Verses 10–15 further defines the activity of the devil's children as hatred toward believers. The declarative statement, "In this the children of God and the children of the devil are manifest" (*New King James Version*, 1982, 1 Jn. 3:10a) provides a textual marker that begins the first textual unit. The transition in thought, as indicated by "Do not marvel, my brethren" (*New King James Version*, 1982, 1 Jn. 3:13a), marks the next subunit, verses 13–15. The next textual thematic unit is set off by the indicator, "By this we know" (*New King James Version*, 1982, 1 Jn. 3:16a), transitions to the obligation that believers have to demonstrate tangible love toward others. Again, John uses "And by this we know" in verse 19 to mark the subunit that runs through verse 24, which begins a transition to the next pericope.

John made further use of progressive patterns through two instances of connection. First, the writer identifies a relationship between hatred/lack of love for a fellow believer, murder, and death (both natural and spiritual). Those identified as children of the devil do not have the capacity for loving others in the fellowship. John characterizes such a believer as a murder like Cain, who was also allied with the devil. The result leads to death—not only through an act of hatred (which John associated with murder), but ends in spiritual death also for the one steeped in hatred for another. Second, John makes a connection between love, God's commandments, and practical demonstration. Those who are children of God practice love, which is one of the commandments that John repeatedly emphasized. This love finds expression in tangible, outward acts of compassion for others in need. These connections are an example of synonymy, equating different words with a common idea, thereby suggesting similarity in meaning (Watson, 1993).

This progressive pattern of connections also contributes to the Apostle's argumentative pattern. John explained, "In this the children of God and the children of the devil are manifest" (*New King James Version*, 1982, 1 Jn. 3:10a). In this way, John draws a clear contrast between God's children and those of the devil by way of the drastically different modes of behavior and by the divergent consequences that result from their actions. Whereas the actions of those identified with the devil result in hatred and death, the actions of believers result in love expressed in compassion, which leads to life and assurance of a connection with God. Also, a sensory-aesthetic pattern demonstrates amplification through the use of strong, emotionally charged words (Watson, 1993). In describing the sin of hatred, John equated it with murder. This is an example of hyperbole, exaggerating a point to emphasize a truth (Watson, 1993).

Intertexture

This pericope includes a few instances of oral-scribal intertexture. In one instance, the author explained, "Do not marvel, my brethren, if the world hates you" (*New King James Version*, 1982, 1 Jn. 3:13). The writer offered this observation as a rationale for societal rejection of Christians and their beliefs, as characterized by Cain (Gen. 4:3–8). Just as Cain killed his brother Abel because of

his resentment of Abel's righteousness, the culture at large will reject the godly testimony of Christ's followers and subject them to persecution. John's statement likely references the exhortation of Jesus:

> Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, For theirs is the kingdom of heaven. "Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you. (*New King James Version*, 1982, Matt. 5:10–12)

Peter warned Christians not to be surprised if they suffer persecution for the gospel (1 Pet. 4:12–16). John likewise wanted his followers to be prepared for the possibility of persecution.

John's admonition equating hatred with murder (v. 15) offered an instance of oral-scribal intertexture that references Christ's caution against the consequences of anger toward a fellow believer. Jesus, in his reconfiguration of the law of Moses, mentioned earlier (Matt. 5), warned that anger toward another Christian can lead to grave outcomes. The Lord stated that the outcome of sinful anger can be compared to the consequences of murder, leading to both punishment by governing authorities and eternal condemnation (Matt. 5:21–26).

John's statement regarding Christians' obligation to the poor presents yet another instance of oral-scribal intertexture. It could also be considered an instance of social intertexture and cultural intertexture. The Apostle wrote, "But whoever has this world's goods, and sees his brother in need, and shuts up his heart from him, how does the love of God abide in him?" (*New King James Version*, 1982, 1 Jn. 3:17). This is a recontextualization of what the law of Moses commanded regarding an obligation to help those in need:

> If there is among you a poor man of your brethren, within any of the gates in your land which the LORD your God is giving you, you shall not harden your heart nor shut your hand from your poor brother, but you shall open your hand wide to him and willingly lend him sufficient for his need, whatever he needs. (*New King James Version*, 1982, Deut. 15:7–8)

Likewise, John's exhortation was also a recontextualization of the admonition made by James regarding the same obligation toward the poor (Jas. 2:15–16). In fact, these Scriptures also served as a social code that God's people were commanded to observed. Inasmuch as this practice was commanded by the Mosaic law, the moral obligation would have applicability to the church as well.

Moreover, the cultural intertexture appeared in the form of allusion to another Old Testament Principle. Specifically, it bore a relationship to the principle of redeeming another believer who has fallen on hardship: "'If one of your brethren becomes poor, and has sold some of his possession, and if his redeeming relative comes to redeem it, then he may redeem what his brother sold" (*New King James Version*, 1982, Lev. 25:25). A near relative could act as redeemer to one who faced destitution. John's teaching embodied the principle that as Christians, fellow believers can redeem other Christians who faced poverty. As followers of Christ, they have a responsibility toward their brothers and sisters in the faith.

Social and Cultural Texture

The writer adds an element of the thaumaturgical worldview by emphasizing the importance of love as demonstrated by compassion for others. John reminded believers of this obligation: "By this we know love, because He laid down His life for us. And we also ought to lay down our lives for the brethren" (*New King James Version*, 1982, 1 Jn. 3:16). Furthermore, he emphasized the importance of demonstrating that compassionate love in practical ways that minister to people's immediate needs. Yet, in terms of the culture at large, John engaged again in countercultural rhetoric by explaining to Christ's followers that they will be rejected by the world (v. 13).

Sacred Texture

Human redemption emerges in this pericope through the relationship of faith to obedience. John wrote, "And this is His commandment: that we should believe on the name of His Son Jesus Christ and love one another, as He gave us commandment" (*New King James Version*, 1982, 1 Jn. 3:23). Obedience to God's commandments is itself and expression of faith, especially as demonstrated by a

tangible expression of love. Such actions speak of the human commitment aspect of sacred texture also. Genuine love that reflects God's divine character will show itself in compassion toward people. Believers who commit to displaying such kindhearted, empathetic love show evidence of abiding in God (v. 24).

Also, this demonstration of love serves as an important aspect of religious community. The contrast between love and hate has significant implications for the faith community. Hatred, as exemplified by Cain and characterized by murder, is a destructive influence that hurts people, creates discord and disunity, and undermines spiritual community (vv. 12–15). Yet, love, as demonstrated in the mutual respect, concern, and compassion associate with Christ's followers, is a quality that promotes unity and testifies of the presence of God among His people (vv. 16, 23–24).

An Analysis of 1 John 4:1–6

John instructed followers of Christ to always exercise discernment, as they live in an evil age. Listening to evil influences, even from seemingly harmless sources, could undermine the faith of God's people. Paul warned, "Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons, speaking lies in hypocrisy, having their own conscience seared with a hot iron" (*New King James Version*, 1982, 1 Tim. 4:1–2). Notice that the Apostle instructed believers to test the spirits—the influence behind people's attitudes, words, and actions.

Christians can test the spirits by applying this scriptural standard John proposed (1 Jn. 4:13). Does the spirit acknowledge the deity and reality of Jesus Christ? Does the spirit recognize the atoning work of Christ through God's grace? Does the spirit reject human attempts to earn righteousness with God? As the Lord Jesus Himself taught, His followers can recognize false prophets by their fruit—the fruit that their lives display and the fruit of their teaching.

Ultimately, the source of false teaching is the spirit of the Antichrist at work in the world. This spirit of lawlessness has been at work throughout the ages and continues its attempt to mobilize evil in rebellion against God (2 Thess. 2:7). As Paul taught, through the ministry of the church, the Holy Spirit prevents this spirit

from advancing. That is why believers must vigorously oppose its activity through spiritual warfare (Eph. 6:12–13).

God's children can have confidence because the Spirit of God within them is greater than the spirit of antichrist at work in the world and in those who are in rebellion (1 Jn. 4:4). God's power at work in the believers will give them boldness and confidence and cause them to triumph over evil. Those who are of the world, who are not part of the community of faith, do not have the capacity to hear and receive the truth. Instead, they have their ears tuned to the deceptions of worldly voices (2 Thess. 2:10–12; 1 Jn. 4:5). On the other hand, those who belong to God discern between the spirit of truth and the spirit of error because the Holy Spirit in them will guide them (Jn. 16:13; 1 Jn. 2:27; 4:6).

Inner Texture

The transition of thought marks the division of the next pericope, 1 John 4:1–6, which consists of two smaller textual units. Because the spirit of antichrist is at work in the world, the church risks having its influence infiltrate the church through false teaching. In verses 1–3, the Apostle appeals to Christians to exercise discernment or "test the spirits, whether they are of God" (*New King James Version*, 1982, 1 Jn. 4:1b). In verse 4–6, John assured believers that through the Spirit, they can distinguish between those influences that are of God and overcome those that are not of God.

The author includes a progressive pattern that make a connection between ideas and contrasts those connections. John made a connection between the spirit of antichrist, false prophets, and error. Conversely, he also made a connection between the Holy Spirit, Christ, and the truth. These connections are then contrasted with each other as part of an argumentative pattern. Christians should apply a twofold litmus test that distinguishes between the spirit of antichrist and the Spirit of God. The first aspect of the test involves discerning the influence at work in the situation. John stated, "Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God, and every spirit that does not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is not of God" (*New King James Version*, 1982, 1 Jn. 4:2b–3a). In other words, at issue is any teaching or practice that supports or denies the essence

of the doctrine of Christ. The second aspect of the test involves identifying those who adhere to the truth of the gospel of Christ and those who embrace false doctrine. As John instructed, "He who knows God hears us; he who is not of God does not hear us" (*New King James Version*, 1982, 1 Jn. 4:6b–c).

The pericope also follows the opening-middle-closing pattern. The opening consists of the warning to exercise discernment against false teaching by testing the spirits. In the middle, the author develops the rationale for taking this precaution and the procedures that believers should follow to protect themselves from the spirit of antichrist that works through the corruption of erroneous doctrine. The closing brings about the resolution to the pattern that assures Christ's followers that they have the wherewithal to exercise sound spiritual judgment.

Intertexture

This pericope also contains instances of oral-scribal intertexture. John's appeal to confront false prophets served as a recontextualization of Scriptures that illustrate the importance of discerning the activity of false prophets and confronting their error. Jeremiah frequently had to confront false prophets while contending for the truth and delivering a faithful message from God. For example, when Hananiah opposed him and contradicted his prophecies, Jeremiah took a strong stand as directed by God: "Then the prophet Jeremiah said to Hananiah the prophet, 'Hear now, Hananiah, the LORD has not sent you, but you make this people trust in a lie'" (*New King James Version*, 1982, Jer. 28:15). God also directed Ezekiel to courageously confront those who spoke lying words: "And the word of the LORD came to me, saying, 'Son of man, prophesy against the prophets of Israel who prophesy, and say to those who prophesy out of their own heart, "Hear the word of the LORD'" (*New King James Version*, 1982, Eze. 13:1–2)! Furthermore, as mentioned before, Jesus predicted that a rise in false prophets would characterize the end times. Therefore, these recontextualizations supported John's instructions to test those who profess to declare God's word (v. 3).

Another oral-scribal recontextualization appears through the Apostle's declaration that the confidence to confront comes from the power of God's Spirit within His children. John wrote, "You are of God, little children, and have

overcome them, because He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world"
(*New King James Version*, 1982, 1 Jn. 4:4). This refers to the biblical promises that
God will give faithful believers power over the evil one. The psalmist wrote, "You
shall tread upon the lion and the cobra, The young lion and the serpent you shall
trample underfoot" (*New King James Version*, 1982, Ps. 91:13). Jesus clarified
what this symbolism means when He said, "Behold, I give you the authority to
trample on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and
nothing shall by any means hurt you" (*New King James Version*, 1982, Lk. 10:19).

Social and Cultural Texture

This pericope contains some gnostic-manipulationist worldview relating to
the believer's need to demonstrate discernment. John advised his followers,
"Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God"
(*New King James Version*, 1982, 1 Jn. 4:1a-b). The Apostle explained that by virtue
of God's presence within them (v. 4), they would have the ability to distinguish
truth from error. This is consistent with the gnostic-manipulationist assumption that
God's followers can overcome evil with the help of special knowledge (Henson et
al., 2020).

Sacred Texture

A depiction of deity appears in this pericope in John's description of God's
prevailing power and authority. The writer comforts Christians by assuring them
that God's power and presence resident in them is much greater than that of Satan
at work in the present evil world through the spirit of antichrist. Still, John
cautioned believers to put the spirits to a test, a reference to spirit beings. As God
has equipped believers with discernment through the Holy Spirit (1 Jn. 2:20, 27)
and the Spirit lives in them, they must show diligence in identifying the spiritual
influence they encounter to avoid deception.

An Analysis of 1 John 4:7–21

John taught about the primacy of love. Followers of Christ should
demonstrate love one for another, which would identify them as God's children. As

God's very nature is love, it should define those who profess to be born of God and have a relationship with Him (1 Jn. 4:7). A person who professes to know God, yet lacks love, does not really have a connection with Him. Without the same defining attribute that characterizes God, one could not claim to know Him or have an association with Him (1 Jn. 4:8). To know God is to encounter His love and experience it personally.

God exemplified love by sending His Son to redeem a fallen, rebellious humankind (Jn. 3:16). He did that by His own initiative, motivated by love and compassion for spiritually lost people who had no way to save themselves from death and eternal condemnation. He also acted without any incentive from humanity. The Scripture says that "While we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (*New King James Version*, 1982, Rom. 5:8b). After all, humanity had done nothing to merit God's good will. As the prophet proclaimed, "We have all become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous deeds are like a polluted garment" (*English Standard Version*, 2001/2016, Is. 64:6 a-b).

God showed the extent of what love should be like. Even though humanity did not love Him, he still loved them (1 Jn. 4:10). He demonstrated the depths of his love by sending Jesus Christ, His Son, and offering Him in their place. To sacrifice the One closest to Him shows the magnitude of genuine love. Because God loved His people in that way, they have an obligation to follow his example by loving one another with the same fervent, sacrificial love (1 Jn. 4:11). The love that characterizes their relationship with God should also characterize their relationship with others in the body of Christ.

Although no one can claim to have seen God in all His glory, when believers love each other, the presence and glory of God is revealed among them (1 Jn. 4:12). The love of God in their midst testifies of God's reality, even though no one can see Him with the natural eye. Likewise, God's love in Christ's followers accomplishes God's divine purposes through the healing and change it produces. Further testimony of God's reality comes by way of the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to His children as a pledge of their spiritual inheritance in Christ (Rom. 8:15; Gal. 4:6; Eph. 1:13–14).

Believers' personal, intimate experience with God and all these facets of spiritual life in Christ serve as a witness of Christ's reality and his saving power toward them. This recognition and confession of Jesus Christ in their lives provides a basis for fellowship with God (1 Jn. 4:15). They remain in Him by faith, and He dwells in them. Likewise, they believe in God's love for them, and they experience its transformational effects (1 Jn. 4:16). Christians dwell in God by staying connect to His love.

The love of God at work in the life of believers will give them confidence that they will not come under the same judgment that those who reject Christ will face. Jesus took upon himself God's punishment against sin. They stand in His righteousness, and this means that the believer does not have to fear God's wrath against sin. As the Word says, "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus." (*English Standard Version*, 2001/2016, Rom. 8:1). Because the Lord does not impute sin to those who claim Christ's righteousness through faith (Romans 4:5–8), His followers have been born again and have His divine nature (Jn. 3:3, 5; 2 Pet. 1:4).

Love serves as the perfect antidote to fear (1 Jn. 4:18). Where there is genuine love, fear cannot thrive. Love repels fear and drives it away from believers because there is no place for fear in an intimate relationship in which the Christian abides in God and God in them (1 Jn. 4:16). Those who are in right relationship with God have no reason to fear God's judgement because of their family affiliation with Him and because Christ already satisfied God's demands for judgment against sin (Jn. 3:17–18; 1 Jn. 4:9–10). In a larger sense, Christians can take comfort from this passage because fear in general can torment them. Those who belong to God can look to Him for relief, protection, and deliverance from fear (Ps. 34:4; 2 Tim. 1:7).

Just as God took the initiative in providing a way for our redemption, so He—the very embodiment and definition of love—demonstrated love toward His children first. Believers can love and have the capacity to love because God first loved them. Frail humans do not have it in themselves to love apart from God. They only have the capacity because it came from God first (1 Jn. 4:19).

Furthermore, those who are God's children have received His divine nature, so through the Spirit, they can love as God does. After all, foremost among the fruit of the Spirit is love.

Therefore, it should characterize their relationships with others, especially fellow believers. One cannot claim to love God and yet not love a brother or sister in Christ. It goes against the nature of God and His kingdom. To have a relationship with God by default means that His children must love the other members of His household. Otherwise, they really do not love God. John wrote that anyone trying to make such a claim is a liar (1 Jn. 4:20). Believers cannot say that they love a God they cannot see when they do not love a brother or sister who is created in His image. Therefore, Christians have an obligation to love others who are in Christ just as they profess to love God (1 Jn. 4:21).

Inner Texture

Although the pericope focuses on a single overall theme, it contains four textual units that offer subtle variations on that theme. In verses 7–11, John explained that God's love for humanity provides the rationale for believers to love one another. "Beloved" serves as the textual marker that transitions the text toward a focus on love. In verses 12–16, the focus shifts to the presence of love in and among believers, which acts as a witness that the divine Trinity is active among them, and these believers are abiding in God. The next textual unit, verses 17–19, places emphasis on the reassurance love provides by demonstrating that believers are in right standing with God. Verses 20–21 move the focus to the proposition that to love God means to also love fellow believers.

The focus of love in this pericope presents a repetitive pattern on a central theme of the epistle. John's homily on love in verses 7–21 offers the most extended attention given to one theme in the entire epistle. The words "love/loves/loved" appear 53 times in the three epistles, 46 times in 1 John, and 27 times in this pericope, more than half of the occurrences in the entire three letters. The repetition of this theme, which also appeared in 1 John 2:3–11 (love versus hate, which is the antithesis of love) and 3:10–24, reemphasizes the priority that the John places on

love above all else. The command to love lies at the heart of John's theology and represents the greatest commandment for believers.

The pericope also contains a progressive pattern in the form of a chiasm (see Appendix B). The ideas progress through various dynamics of love: (a) God's command to love, (b) God's command disobeyed by those who don't know Him, (c) God's love expressed to all, (d) God's love puts believer in a right spiritual standing, (e) God's love liberates Christians to love others, (f) abiding in God's love, and (g) abiding in God Himself. The chiasm climaxes with the affirmation that God sent Jesus to save humanity, the ultimate act of love: "And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent the Son as Savior of the world" (*New King James Version*, 1982, 1 Jn. 4:14).

The elements of the chiasm also contribute to John's argumentative patterns. In verse 8 and 20, the writer explained that one cannot make a claim to know God and yet have hate toward fellow believers. Also, in verses 10 and 18, the writer argued in favor of the redeeming aspects of God's love. In verses 12 and 16, love provides the evidence that the believer knows God and abides in His love. One other rhetorical device John uses as part of his argumentative pattern is "development of commonplaces," a form of amplification that makes use of topics that are common in various forms of rhetoric, such as possible-impossible, greater degree versus lesser degree, virtue-vice, an honor-dishonor (Watson, 1993). Verse 20 offers an example of possible-impossible, in which John explains, "For he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen (*English Standard Version*, 2001/2016, 1 Jn. 4:20b–c).

Intertexture

This pericope contains oral-scribal intertexture in the form of thematic elaboration (see Table 2).

Table 2

Thematic Elaboration of 1 John 4:7–21

Argument	Verses	Scripture Quotation
Theme	4:7a-b	Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God;
Rationale	4:7c	and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God.
Argument from the contrary	4:8	He who does not love does not know God, for God is love.
Argument from ancient testimony	4:9	In this the love of God was manifested toward us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him.
Argument from example	4:10	In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins.
Confirmation of the rationale	4:11	Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.
Argument from analogy	4:12	No one has seen God at any time. If we love one another, God abides in us, and His love has been perfected in us.
Argument from example	4:13	By this we know that we abide in Him, and He in us, because He has given us of His Spirit.
Confirmation of the rationale	4:16a	And we have known and believed the love that God has for us.
Argument from example	4:16b-c	God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God in him.
Argument from analogy	4:17	Love has been perfected among us in this: that we may have boldness in the day of judgment; because as He is, so are we in this world.
Argument from example	4:18	There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves torment. But he who fears has not been made perfect in love.
Argument from ancient testimony	4:19	We love [Him] because He first loved us.

Argument	Verses	Scripture Quotation
Argument from the contrary	4:20	If someone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen?
Conclusion	4:21	And this commandment we have from Him: that he who loves God must love his brother also.

It is interesting to note that the chiastic structure observed in the inner texture (see Appendix B) is also present here in the thematic elaboration.

Social and Cultural Texture

A trace of the reformist worldview appears in this pericope with the overall lesson of the positive changes made possible through love. When love becomes a central element in an organization's culture, it has a transformational effect, making the community a reflection of God's divine, loving nature. According to the Apostle, "Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. … For God is love" (*New King James Version*, 1982, 1 Jn. 4:7, 8b). John taught that love should be the defining characteristic in the believer and in the faith community: "Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another" (*New King James Version*, 19821 Jn. 4:11). John's homily on love in this pericope also includes countercultural rhetoric because the love that defines the community characterized by *koinonia* is the antithesis of the ethic that governs the culture at large. As John observed, "We know that we are of God, and the whole world lies under the sway of the wicked one (*New King James Version*, 1982, 1 Jn. 5:19).

Sacred Texture

As mentioned earlier, John stated that the very essence of God's being is love (1 Jn. 4:8b, 16b), an expression of deity in sacred texture. God's love provided the divine motivation for human redemption through the atoning sacrifice of Christ.

As a response to that awe-inspiring love, followers of Christ engage in the human commitment to express love toward one another as an act of obedience to God and as evidence that God's love is at work in them. As also mentioned before, love serves as the defining priority of the religious community.

An Analysis of 1 John 5:1–13

John emphasized the necessity of love as a primary imperative for the believer and its link to faith (1 Jn. 5:1). To believe in Jesus and to love the Father means obedience to the command to love those who are also born of God. Once again, John called attention to the link between faith and obedience also (1 Jn. 5:4). To love God and keep His commandments means that His people will have love and respect for others as well (1 Jn. 5:3). As Paul observed, the whole of God's law could be summed up in the command for believers to love their neighbors as themselves (Rom. 13:8–10). Love is the ultimate expression of obedience because it represents the fulfillment of God's law.

Love also has an impact on Christians' disposition toward God's commandments. Because of their love and gratitude toward God, they do not view his commandments as burdensome (1 Jn. 5:3). Their love for God provides a positive motivation for obedience. Likewise, obedience is an expression of faith in God and is evidence that Christ's followers are born of the Spirit. Their faith causes them to triumph over the adversity of the world and its hostility toward God and His children. Their victory over the world and all its evil influences lies in Jesus Christ (2 Cor. 2:14).

John also emphasized in his writings the importance of faithful witnesses. For example, in his gospel, John referred to the testimony of John the Baptist, the testimony of the Father, and the testimony of Christ's miraculous signs. These all bore witness to Jesus' divinity. The law of Moses stated that a matter must be established by two or three witnesses (Num. 35:30; Deut. 17:6; Jn. 8:17; 2 Cor. 13:1).

As for the Johannine Comma (the disputed portions of verses 7–8), very little support exists for their legitimacy as sacred Scripture (Akin, 2001; R. E. Brown, 1982; Gregory, 1907; Jobes, 2014; Painter, 2002; Westcott, 1902).

Therefore, as stated earlier, the critical text reading in this instance is preferred. With that in mind, the three witnesses that John appeals to are the Spirit, the water, and the blood (1 Jn. 5:8). The Holy Spirit bore witness to Jesus in numerous ways. At his baptism, the Spirit of God descended on Jesus (Lk. 3:21–22; Jn. 1:32–33). Furthermore, the Holy Spirit worked mightily through Jesus in signs and wonders that testified of his coming from the Father (Jn. 5:36; 10:37–38).

The water likely refers to His baptism. When John objected to Christ coming to him for baptism, Jesus replied, "Permit it to be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness (*New King James Version*, 1982, Matt. 3:15). The Father affirmed Jesus and bore witness to His Son at His baptism (Matthew 3:17; Mark 1:11). It could also refer to his humanity, as one born of Mary by way of water (i.e., the water of human childbirth). John always made it a point to emphasize both the humanity and deity of Jesus. Likewise, it may also hearken to the blood and water that poured out of His side when the soldier pierced Him after His death (John 19:34–35).

The blood refers to the sacrificial death of Christ on the cross. Through the blood of Christ, Christians have access to the Father (Eph. 1:7; 2:13, 18; Heb. 4:14–16). As the Father bore witness to Jesus that He is His Son, so He bears witness to believers that they are children of God (Rom. 8:14–15; Gal. 4:6). These three witnesses stand as the testimony of God, which is greater than any human testimony, no matter how many witnesses.

Those who have put their faith and trust in Christ have an internal witness that they belong to God through the Spirit (Rom. 8:14–15; Gal. 4:6). The person who refuses to believe in essence makes God a liar by denying the witnesses that God himself has offered regarding His Son. God presented these indications and signs to inspire faith. Those who reject them and refuse to believe deny the opportunity that God presents to reach them.

One powerful testimony God gives is eternal life that He makes available to those who believe in Jesus. Those who believe have Christ's life at work in them in this life and in eternity (Jn. 1:4). Without Christ, however, one has no hope of eternal life. Apart from Jesus, all that exists of life happens in this life and then

follows death and condemnation. John wrote so that believers may have the assurance of eternal life now and in eternity (1 Jn. 5:13). The believer does not have to wonder or hope to have eternal life. God gives it in response to their faith and trust in Jesus and His work on the cross.

Inner Texture

This pericope contains two thematic textual units. Although verses 1–3 continue with the theme of love from the last pericope, verse 1 shifts to a focus on faith and the commandments, which leads into the first thematic unit, verses 1–5. In verses 6–13, the pericope shifts to the witness of God, leading to the purpose of the epistle, which is stated in verse 13: that those who believe in Christ may have the assurance of eternal life and that they may continue in their faith. As mentioned earlier, the "Johannine Comma" is a disputed portion of 1 John 5:7–8, which is here quoted in brackets:

> For there are three that bear witness [in heaven: the Father, the Word, and the Holy Spirit; and these three are one. And there are three that bear witness on earth]: the Spirit, the water, and the blood; and these three agree as one. (*New King James Version*, 1982, 1 Jn. 5:7–8)

Because of the overwhelming evidence that this portion was not part of John's original text, analysis in this study will exclude the Johannine Comma. Although the doctrinal statement proposed by that text is consistent with New Testament Trinitarian teaching, it does not appear to meet the standard of divinely inspired Scripture in keeping with accepted principles of textual criticism (Akin, 2001; R. E. Brown, 1982; Hiebert, 1991; Westcott, 1902).

In verses 1–5, John made a connection between faith in the doctrine of Christ, keeping God's commandments, love for God and fellow believers, and family relationship with the Father and Son as children of God. Those who believe in Christ and express their connection with the Father through love show evidence of their relationship with the Son also. Genuine love for God will also manifest itself in tangible love toward other believers. With the statement "For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome" (*New King James Version*, 1982, 1 Jn. 5:3), John equated love with

obedience to God's commandments, especially the command to love one another. Likewise, the writer made a connection between faith in Christ and victory over the world system, which operates under the influence of the evil one (1 Jn. 5:19).

The Apostle also made a connection between the three witnesses that God provided that support the doctrine of Christ: "For there are three that testify: the Spirit and the water and the blood; and these three agree" (*English Standard Version*, 2001/2016, 1 Jn. 5:7–8). These three elements form the basis of God's threefold witness on behalf of His Son that supersedes the witness of humanity (v. 9). References to the elements of the Spirit, the water, and the blood are also part of John's sensory aesthetic pattern. The Spirit of God, who is equated with truth, supports the witness of the water and the blood (v. 6). The water, like other images in Johannine literature, seems to have multiple meanings. It can refer the water of natural childbirth, which gives further support for the humanity of Jesus against the claims of Docetists. It can also refer to the water baptism of Jesus, at which time the Father and the Spirit bore witness to Christ's divinity and calling. The water may also refer to blood and water that issued from Christ side following His crucifixion. "But one of the soldiers pierced His side with a spear, and immediately blood and water came out" (*New King James Version*, 1982, Jn. 19:34). This too would provide support for the humanity of Jesus, proving He died a literal, physical death. The blood could also have dual meaning referring, not only to this incident when Jesus' side was pierced, but most notably the blood that provided the atonement through the death of Christ (1 Jn. 1:7).

The threefold witness of the Spirit, the water, and the blood also form the basis of an argumentative pattern. These three elements are likened to three witnesses who provide a unified testimony, as in a court. They are God's declaration that every aspect of the gospel of Christ is indeed truth. As John wrote, "If we receive the witness of men, the witness of God is greater; for this is the witness of God which He has testified of His Son" (*New King James Version*, 19821 Jn. 5:9). As God presented these three witnesses, and His witness is greater than any human testimony, then it stands as authoritative and indisputable.

This pericope also follows the opening-middle-closing pattern. The opening states definitively that those who believe in Christ are God's children and observe His commandments. As the message of the pericope develops, it affirms that those who are born of God are destined to overcome the world and its corruption. As such, they prove by their victory the testimony God declared about Jesus. Unlike the secessionists who left the body of Christ (1 Jn. 2:19), they persevere and overcome, thus giving further evidence that indeed they are God's children. The resolution comes through the promise of eternal life. Because God gives victory over the world in this lifetime, He can offer the assurance that His children will live forever. The pattern is resolved through the promise given in the purpose statement of the epistle stated in verse 13.

Intertexture

This pericope offers several instances of oral-scribal intertexture. John once again addressed the theme of the believers' triumph over the world: "For whatever is born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith" (*New King James Version*, 1982, 1 Jn. 5:4). This instance of recontextualization hearkens back to the assurance that Jesus Himself gained victory over the world and its corrupting influences. Jesus offered this reassurance to His followers: "These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world" (*New King James Version*, 1982, Jn. 16:33). Because His followers are born of God, they share His divine nature. Furthermore, they have God abiding with them and living in them (1 Jn. 2:27; 4:4, 13), which secures their victory over the world's evil influence.

Another instance of oral-scribal intertexture also shares characteristics of cultural intertexture in the form of allusion. Specifically, John made reference to the divine witnesses that testified of the Son's reality: "For there are three that testify: the Spirit and the water and the blood; and these three agree" (*English Standard Version*, 2001/2016, 1 Jn. 5:7–8). This recalled the scriptural and social convention that required two or three witnesses to legally establish a matter. For example, the law of Moses stated,

A single witness shall not suffice against a person for any crime or for any wrong in connection with any offense that he has committed. Only on the evidence of two witnesses or of three witnesses shall a charge be established. (*New King James Version*, 1982, Deut. 19:15)

This principle especially applied in matters related to a capital offense (Deut. 17:6). Furthermore, in the New Testament Christ appealed to this principle as a consideration in conflict resolution. Jesus stated that when reasoning with a fellow believer, the presence of witnesses will serve to support one's case. Jesus said, "But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses" (*New King James Version*, 1982, Matt. 18:16). Likewise, this principle is supported elsewhere in the New Testament (2 Cor. 13:1; 1 Tim. 5:19: Heb. 10:28).

Intertexture in the form of recontextualization also appears in support of John's main objective for writing. The author stated his primary purpose for writing this epistle as follows: "I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life" (*English Standard Version*, 2001/2016, 1 Jn. 5:13). This assurance of eternal life provided a connection from John's main objective in writing to the primary theme of the entire gospel: "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life (*English Standard Version*, 2001/2016, Jn. 3:16). This connection establishes a link to an overarching theme of the Johannine writings: the assurance of eternal life in Christ. As John stated in summarizing the purpose of his Gospel, "But these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name" (*New King James Version*, 1982, Jn. 20:31).

Social and Cultural Texture

John's focus on eternal life through the sacrifice of Christ demonstrates yet again a conversionist worldview. The reemphasis on this specific social topic suggests that this is his dominant worldview. The threefold divine witness assures believers that through faith, they have a divine inner confirmation of spiritual life in the Son. John wrote, "He who believes in the Son of God has the witness in

himself" (*New King James Version*, 1982, 1 Jn. 5:10a). Furthermore, the Apostle affirmed, to have the Son means to have the life that He offers in Himself. The assurance of that life is a significant source of hope for Christ's followers.

Sacred Texture

This pericope vividly depicts both the divinity and holy person aspects of Jesus Christ. John wrote, "This is He who came by water and blood—Jesus Christ; not only by water, but by water and blood. And it is the Spirit who bears witness, because the Spirit is truth" (*New King James Version*, 1982, 1 Jn. 5:6). The threefold witness of God—the Spirit, the water, and the blood—testifies of His humanity and His divine nature (vv. 7–8). The witness of the Spirit also provides an instance of the Spirit being aspect of sacred texture in this passage. Also, the promise of eternal life in the Son offers a depiction of human redemption. As mentioned earlier, offering this assurance of eternal life served as the central purpose for which the Apostle penned this epistle.

An Analysis of 1 John 5:14–21

John assured his readers that when they pray in the will of God, the Lord hears and grants their requests (1 Jn. 5:14). The key factor here is the will of God. According to James, "You ask and do not receive, because you ask amiss, that you may spend it on your pleasures" (*New King James Version*, 1982, Jas. 4:3). In other words, when Christians offer their petitions with impure motives, then God has no obligation to grant their request. But if they pray in faith according to God's will, then they can have confidence that God will answer (1 Jn. 5:15).

One example John gave involves praying for others who have sinned. He taught that if someone prays for another who commits a sin "which does not lead to death," then God will hear the request. After all, this request is in line with God's will. Some debate exists regarding the meaning of sins that do and do not lead to death. One possibility refers to a sin that actually causes someone's death as opposed to a sin that does not lead to immediate death (Hodges, 1983). In other words, if someone dies because of a sinful act, then they are beyond answer to

prayer (Acts 5:3–10; 1 Cor. 11:29–30). On the other hand, believers can pray for those who sin, but it has not facilitated death.

When John wrote that those who are born of God do not sin, he does not mean that believers achieve sinless perfection. That would contradict 1 John 1:8–2:1. By this he meant that those who are in Christ do not make a regular practice—a habit—of committing willful, presumptuous sin. They endeavor to walk in the Spirit and live godly lives. If they do commit sin through weakness, they confess it and receive forgiveness. Because of this, they have assurance of protection from the evil one (2 Thess. 3:3).

Those who belong to Christ are a part of God's family and have a place in the community of believers. This provides a place of safety, nurturing, and encouragement from the culture at large (1 Jn. 5:18). Until Christ returns, the world remains under the domain of the wicked one (Eph. 2:2; 1 Jn. 5:19); however, as Christians pray fervently and advance the gospel, they can help to see God's kingdom come and His will done on earth as it is in heaven (Matt. 6:10).

Jesus came so that His followers may know God and experience the fullness of life in Him (1 Jn. 5:20). This realization offers comfort and encouragement to those who are in Christ. Believers can have fellowship and intimacy with Father God through Jesus Christ. Furthermore, they have His presence dwelling in and among them. In this way, they are partakers of eternal life, even on the earthly side of heaven.

Finally, the Apostle offered his instruction to avoid idolatry (1 Jn. 5:21). Falling into this sin will break fellowship with God and undo the good things that God is endeavoring to do. Therefore, the Lord offered a stern warning in Revelation to those in churches who eat things sacrificed to idols (Rev. 2:14, 20). No one can serve two masters (Matt. 6:24). Furthermore, God is a jealous God (Ex. 20:3–5), and this would constitute flagrant disobedience to the first and greatest commandment.

Inner Texture

This pericope, which consists of two thematic textual units, brings the epistle to a close. "Now this is the confidence," in verse 14, acts as a textual marker

that transitions the discussion to a focus on prayer and sin in verses 14–17. The will of God acts as a conditional factor in answering the believer's prayers. The last unit, verses 18–21, is set off by the textual marker "We know that." This unit summarizes the victorious state of the Christian in a fallen world and the hope that remains for those who are in Christ. It ends with John's final exhortation, that believers should avoid any form of idolatry, for it would undermine their standing in Christ.

This pericope contains yet another progressive pattern of connection, this time joining prayer, characterized by the act of asking, in verses 14–16, with God's will. This important distinction provides a conditional requirement. If the believer asks anything according to God's will, He will grant the petition. The significance of this condition lies with petitions asked in support of believers who sin. "If anyone sees his brother sinning a sin which does not lead to death, he will ask, and He will give him life for those who commit sin not leading to death" (*New King James Version*, 1982, 1 Jn. 5:16a-c). Conversely, John makes the connection between petitions not in accordance with God's will and unanswered prayer. Therefore, if a believer commits sin of such a serious nature that it leads to death, it falls outside God's will. John writes, in that case, "There is sin leading to death. I do not say that he should pray about that" (*New King James Version*, 19821 Jn. 5:16d-e).

This contrast between sin that does or does not "lead to death," also reveals an argumentative pattern that John makes related to the petitions of believers. Christians in good standing with God can pray with confidence. Seeking petitions on behalf of a brother or sister demonstrates another dimension of love for a fellow believer. Although love may have the best intentions in support of another, and it serves as a pure motivation, it does not guarantee the desired outcome. Even acts of love are ultimately subordinated to God's will. "Sin that leads to death," as John described it, falls outside the will of God.

Another argumentative pattern that emerges is John's assertion that those who are God's children overcome the evil one because they do not sin. Even though the whole world, in its rebellious state, lies under the devil's influence

through the spirit of antichrist, those who are born of God overcome that influence. John's rationale for this argument is not that followers of Christ have achieved sinless perfection. Instead, John's offered the thesis that those who abide in Christ appropriate His righteousness, making them impervious to the devil's designs. This assertion by John makes his final plea even more important. The followers of Christ should avoid idolatry in all forms at all costs. Otherwise, it could undermine their righteous standing with God and make them vulnerable to the wicked one's influence, which is what likely happened to the adversaries that John opposed in this epistle.

Intertexture

Several occurrences of oral-scribal intertexture emerge in this pericope. One instance of recontextualization appears in John's exhortation regarding prayer. John emphasized the importance of God's will in receiving answers to prayer:

> And this is the confidence that we have toward him, that if we ask anything according to his will he hears us. And if we know that he hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests that we have asked of him. (*New King James Version*, 1982, 1 Jn. 5:14–15)

John recontextualized a principle observed in both the Old and New Testaments: requests made in prayer must meet God's righteous standard to be acceptable and receive an answer. For example, the psalmist wrote, "If I regard iniquity in my heart, The Lord will not hear" (*New King James Version*, 1982, Ps. 66:18). James also affirmed this principle in emphasizing the importance of pure motives in prayer. He wrote, "You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions" (*English Standard Version*, 2001/2016, Jas. 4:3). This principle of approaching God with purity of heart, right motives, and submission to God's will is exceedingly important, as it relates to a particular area of sensitive prayer mentioned in the next reconfiguration.

John referred to a special circumstance that required sensitivity to God's will:

> If anyone sees his brother sinning a sin which does not lead to death, he will ask, and He will give him life for those who commit sin not leading to

death. There is sin leading to death. I do not say that he should pray about

that. (*New King James Version*, 1982, 1 Jn. 5:16)

John's reference to a "sin leading to death" likely refers to two instances discussed elsewhere in the New Testament. In Acts 5:1–11, Luke recorded an instance in which both Ananias and his wife Sapphira were struck dead because they conspired to lie about the price of a parcel of land they sold. Peter's accusation was that they lied to the Holy Spirit, an offense so serious that they both died immediately. Similarly, Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 11:27–30 that some suffered severe consequences because they observed the Lord's supper in a disrespectful manner. As Paul explained, "That is why many of you are weak and ill, and some have died" (*English Standard Version*, 2001/2016, 1 Cor. 11:30). These instances in which believers had died because of sin's consequences would put them beyond answer to prayer, which John described as "sin leading to death." To offer prayer in such circumstances would be out of God's will.

On the other hand, a reconfiguration of the positive expression of the same scriptural principle applies here as well. For those who observe a fellow believer committing a "sin which does not lead to death" (v. 16a) John instructed believers to pray in support of a brother or sister under those circumstances. This is in keeping with the principle of a stronger Christian supporting a weaker believer. As Paul wrote, "Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ" (*New King James Version*, 1982, Gal. 6:2). Likewise, James echoed this same principle when a believer leads a fellow Christian in repentance: "Let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save a soul from death and cover a multitude of sins" (*New King James Version*, 1982, Jas. 5:20).

The epistle ends with a recontextualization of another principle highlighted in both the Old and New Testaments. John offered this appeal: "Little children, keep yourselves from idols" (*English Standard Version*, 2001/2016, 1 Jn. 5:21). John referred to the foremost commandment: "I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. You shall have no other gods before Me" (*New King James Version*, 1982, Ex. 20:2–3). Also, the New Testament warned against the perils of idolatry. For example, the Jerusalem

council in Acts issued a warning to Gentile believers to avoid eating food offered to idols (Acts 15:28–29). In Revelation, Jesus also rebuked the churches in Pergamum and Thyatira because they had people who sacrificed to idols (Rev. 2:14; 2:20). This was a serious stumbling block to sin that required repentance and restoration.

Social and Cultural Texture

In this pericope, the writer presented another subtle suggestion of a thaumaturgical worldview. Although Christians can have confidence that prayers offered in the will of God will receive an answer, the writer placed specific emphasis on prayers given in support of other believers. John explained, "If anyone sees his brother sinning a sin which does not lead to death, he will ask, and He will give him life for those who commit sin not leading to death" (*New King James Version*, 1982, 1 Jn. 5:16a–c). This concern for the healing and well-being of others communicates a responsibility that members of the faith community have one toward another. The Apostle also suggested, however, that the world system in its current state, is hopelessly corrupt because it lies under Satan's influence (v. 18). Because the wicked world system is beyond redemption, John advocated for a revolutionist perspective that looks one day to a new world that reflects the character and values of the kingdom (2 Pet. 3:10–13; Rev. 21–22).

Sacred Texture

An instance of sacred texture describing deity appears in this pericope as a qualifying aspect of prayer. The writer stated that alignment to the will of God is a condition of answered prayer. This requirement reveals an aspect of God's holy character. Because God is the very embodiment of love (1 Jn. 4:8b, 16b), the source of all wisdom (Prov. 2:6–7; Jas. 1:5), and benevolent in His holiness (Ps. 100:5), He must answer prayer in keeping with His divine nature. "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning" (*New King James Version*, 1982, Jas. 1:17).

Eschatological sacred texture appears in another reminder of God's protection and victory over the evil one, even though this present world and the

culture at large lies under Satan's influence (v. 19); however, although Christ is the source of eternal life for those who abide in Him (an aspect of human redemption), believers must remain circumspect regarding influences that could cause them to stumble. This is relevant to the maintenance of religious community because of the need for Christ's followers to provide prayer support for believers who err (vv. 16–17). This is also evident in the Apostle's warning against sin that leads to death. This makes the closing exhortation to avoid idolatry a poignant aspect of human commitment (v. 21).

An Analysis of 2 John 1–13

In identifying himself as "the elder" (ὁ πρεσβύτερος or "the presbyter"), John likely referred both to his position as an Apostle and as one who was a seasoned father in the faith (Carson et al., 1992; Kruse, 2020; Marshall, 1978; Stott, 1988). John seemed to be writing to a prominent Christian woman and her family, an interpretation taken by some. Perhaps she was someone who had shown him hospitality in the same manner that hosts have provided for a known distinguished or spiritual leader (2 Ki. 4:8–10; Acts 16:14–15). Not only does he have special affection for her and her family, but her reputation and service had given her favor with the Christian community at large. Most scholars, however, have interpreted this as an anthropomorphic name speaking of a church and the congregation (Akin, 2001; R. E. Brown, 1982; Jobes, 2014; Kruse, 2020; Rensberger, 2001; Smalley, 1984; Stott, 1988). This is a more likely interpretation. Still, John rejoiced at their common bond of love in the Christian faith and offered an apostolic greeting.

John celebrated that her children (i.e., believers in the fellowship) were continuing in the faith and growing in their knowledge and practical application of what they have been taught in the Scriptures. They are likely children and/or young men like those he characterizes as advancing in their relationship with God (1 Jn. 2:12–14). He also offered a plea to observe the command to love one another, the primary essence of teaching embodied in the whole of the law (Mk. 12:28–33; Rom. 13:8–10). Likewise, as in 1 John, he equated love with a commitment to obedience to God's commandments.

John issued a warning concerning those who do not believe in and teach the biblical doctrine of Christ. Specifically, he referred to anyone who did not believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, having come in human form yet having full deity. John identified such a person who rejects the deity and humanity of Jesus as a deceiver and antichrist. Their false teaching could undermine the faith of God's people. For example, during this time early gnostic teaching was beginning to infiltrate the church. Therefore, believers should be on their guard against any who bring teaching that rejects the humanity and deity of Jesus Christ. If they reject this fundamental truth regarding His Lordship, they also will likely deny His atoning death on the cross and the need for salvation through Christ.

John also affirmed the exclusivity of the gospel of Christ. Jesus declared himself to be "the way, the truth, and the life" (*New King James Version*, 1982, Jn. 14:6). Likewise, the Apostles proclaimed that there is no other name given by which people can receive salvation (Acts 4:12). If anyone denies this truth, that person cannot have a relationship with God, for they deny the very way that grants access to the Father. Those who have put their faith and trust in Christ abide in God and therefore have the Father and the Son.

Although offering hospitality to ministers, travelers, and strangers was common in their culture (Heb.13:2), especially among believers (Gal. 6:10), John forbade showing such courtesy to false teachers. Any who received them into their homes (or church) became an accessory to their false teaching. By indirectly helping them to perpetuate their teaching, one becomes complicit in their error. Furthermore, it could give the false impression that God's people are lending credibility to their message. If the assumption that this elect lady was a woman given to hospitality, then John's warning makes sense as it applies to such hospitality. If it applies to a church, it could also extend to a church's prohibition to invite such false teachers to minister.

Although John had much to share, he opted to do so in person. This served to remind believers of the value of face-to-face communication. Some things are better said in person. Likewise, this example also affirms the importance of personal fellowship. Believers need interaction one with another. If God said that it

was not good for man to be alone (Gen. 2:18), then followers of Christ should recognize their need for fellowship. In this way, when spending time together building the common corporate bond in Christ, the relationships lead to blessing and an overflow of joy (1 Jn. 1:3–4).

Inner Texture

As this writing is a formal letter, it follows the structure common for that type of communication. The letter forms a single pericope that has four thematic textual units. Verses 1–3 function as the letter's greeting, which includes a salutation that identifies both the sender and the recipient, to whom the writer extends good wishes. In verses 4–6, the focus shifts to an exhortation to observe God's commandments. John then turns his attention to a warning against false teachers in verses 7–11. Verses 12–13 bring the letter to a close.

As the second shortest book of the New Testament (302 words in the NKJV and 245 words in the Nestle-Aland Greek New Testament), the letter is limited in its thematic development. This appears to be intentional, based upon the writer's statement in verse 12, in which he indicated that he would prefer to discuss matters in greater depth in person. The Apostle repeats progressive patterns made in 1 John by reestablishing a connection between love and observing God's commandments contrasted with a connection between deceivers (false teachers), antichrist, and erroneous doctrine. Naturally, this contrast between these connections sets up the Apostle's argumentative pattern, which gives a rationale for not granting hospitality to those who do not promote sound doctrine. Because they are spreading error that corrupts people and divides the community of believers, Christians are under no obligation to show them hospitality. To do so would be to participate in their evil deeds.

The format of this letter follows an opening-middle-closing pattern in keeping with that genre of literature. John addressed the recipient of the letter with an appropriate word of encouragement, offering a cordial greeting and a blessing. The writer then shifts to a word of commendation for adherence to truth and an appeal to remain steadfast in serving the Lord, as evidenced by an observance of the commandments. At this point, the letter transitions to a matter of concern for

the Apostle, dealing with a matter of potential conflict and offering instruction on how to handle related situations. Having resolved the issue of concern, John ends the letter with an affectionate closing.

Intertexture

This pericope contains an instance of cultural intertexture by alluding to the biblical tradition of showing hospitality. In fact, this could also be classified as a social code associated with social intertexture. For example, in Genesis 18:1–7, Abraham showed hospitality to travelers as a matter of principle, perhaps not even realizing at first that it was a divine visitation. Likewise, Lot welcomed the angels who appeared in Sodom, most likely assuming that they were travelers who needed a safe place to stay (Gen. 19:1–3). Yet again, Rebekah offered hospitality to Abraham's servant, who appeared to be a weary traveler in need of rest and provision (Gen. 24:25).

Providing hospitality, however, was a conditional matter. For example, Abraham shunned the king of Sodom and refused to take a reward from him when he rescued Lot and all those who had been taken captive with him, including the king of Sodom (Gen. 14:14–24). At the same time, he offered a tithe to Melchizedek, the king of Salem, who was an Old Testament type of Christ (Ps. 110:4; Heb. 7:1–10). This exchanged demonstrated the conditional aspect of showing hospitality and sharing fellowship. Christ offered a further example of this principle when he instructed his disciples to refuse to associate with those who willfully rejected the gospel: "And whoever will not receive you nor hear your words, when you depart from that house or city, shake off the dust from your feet" (*New King James Version*, 1982, Matt. 10:14).

This principle finds support in oral-scribal intertexture as well. According to Keener (1993), "In the Dead Sea Scrolls, one who provided for an apostate from the community was regarded as an apostate sympathizer and was expelled from the community, as the apostate was" (p. 717). As John (v. 10) suggested, providing housing or other support was considered an act of complicity. If nothing else, it suggested passive support for harmful doctrines that should be soundly rejected.

Conversely, the intent of shunning such action stands as a repudiation of teaching that imperils those who may hear and accept it.

Another instance of social intertexture applies in the social role of elder. In referring to himself as "elder," John called attention to the dual aspect of the word. One the one hand, it identified his position as a church leader. Peter used it in this context: "The elders who are among you I exhort, I who am a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that will be revealed" (*New King James Version*, 1982, 1 Pet. 5:1). Yet, in another sense, it served to remind his readers of the respect that was due to him because he was an older man, as mentioned before. It was written in the law of Moses, "'You shall rise before the gray headed and honor the presence of an old man, and fear your God: I am the LORD'" (*New King James Version*, 1982, Lev. 19:32).

Social and Cultural Texture

The social and cultural textures of 2 John and 3 John present two sides of the same common social and cultural topics principle. These epistles highlight the dyadic agreements that exist as part of the expectation associated with hospitality. In this pericope, John balanced the social norm of showing hospitality toward guests with the need to exercise discernment and sound judgment. The Elder wrote, "If anyone comes to you and does not bring this doctrine, do not receive him into your house nor greet him; for he who greets him shares in his evil deeds" (*New King James Version*, 19822 Jn. 10–11). Although a certain reciprocity existed between guest teachers and hosts (i.e., the travelers provided teaching and instruction and in return received provision from their host), John stipulated that the dyadic agreement was voided in the case that the teachers did not offer orthodox teaching (Keener, 1993).

Sacred Texture

Religious community as a feature of sacred texture appears in this pericope as a further exhortation to observe God's commandments. The central expression of obedience to God shows itself as a tangible demonstration of love toward other believers. Such obedience to God's commandments that united Christ's followers

together in *koinonia* served as a source of joy for the Elder. For this reason, the exhortation to abstain from false teachers and refuse to entertain them took on a heightened sense of urgency as a human commitment. As seen in the prior epistle, their poisonous doctrine caused division, undermined the *koinonia*, and caused many to leave the fellowship. The Apostle determined to take proactive steps to preserve the unity of fellowship among genuine followers of Christ.

An Analysis of 3 John 1–15

John wrote to a dearly loved brother in Christ named Gaius and offered an appropriate affectionate greeting. He also wished him well in every area of life. His joy in fellowship with Gaius abounded because of his continued growth in the faith. It is likely that Gaius came to Christ under John's ministry, so John regarded him as a son in the faith (1 Timothy 1:2). Just as any natural parent would care intensely about the well-being of a child, John showed his fatherly concern here, especially for his spiritual welfare. For any parent in Christ, a child's spiritual well-being is more important than anything else. Seeing that Gaius had continued in the faith provided the Apostle with great joy and rejoicing. As John stated, no greater joy exists for a parent than to see that their children have fully embraced the faith and are actively growing in it.

John commended Gaius for his hospitality toward his fellow Christians and in support of strangers. As mentioned earlier, in their culture, showing hospitality was very important, and those engaged in ministry relied on the good will, support, and hospitality of believers rather than non-Christians (here described as "Gentiles") so as not to bring reproach on the gospel. Those traveling ministers (or missionaries) who were recipients of his love and support gave a good report of his faithfulness. They were engaged in a faith venture and therefore lived by faith, which means they relied on the love and generosity of fellow believers. They rendered service as unto the Lord and devoted their time fully to God's work. They did not serve for worldly gain or material prosperity. That is why it was even more important that they find support among believers of like precious faith. Those who provided them in their work offered a valuable service in support of the gospel

itself. Such support constitutes a partnership in ministry. In serving them, they also served the Lord.

Diotrephes, on the other hand, did not share this same ethic of hospitality. He did not receive such traveling missionaries and threatened those who would welcome them with excommunication. He appeared to be a church leader who elevated himself but rejected John's apostolic leadership. He desired power and authority, gaining it by disrespecting and slandering legitimate servants of God who were ordained as leaders.

John offered a very simple, yet profound reminder regarding godly behavior. As obvious as it may sound, those who are godly would show it by their Christlike attitudes and actions. As Jesus taught, a tree is known by its fruit. A good tree will produce good fruit in the form of love and good deeds. On the other hand, a corrupt tree will produce bad fruit characterized by pride, the works of the flesh, and evil deeds (Matt. 7:15–20). Demetrius, whom John commended for his faithfulness in service and in support of the gospel, served as an example of one who produced good fruit. He stands in contrast to Diotrephes, who bore corrupt fruit.

John ended his letter with a desire to continue his communication with the recipient in person, a sentiment he also stated in 2 John. This served as another reminder that there is no substitute for meeting together face to face. Just as difficult discussions need to take place person to person, so the richest fellowship happens when believers come together to share love, support, and encouragement in Christ.

Inner Texture

This epistle is the shortest book of the New Testament (296 words in the NKJV and 218 words in the Nestle-Aland Greek New Testament). Like 2 John, this letter follows a form typical for that mode of communication. In fact, its structure is almost identical to the second epistle. The letter is a single pericope with four textual units. The first unit, verses 1–4, includes a salutation to the letter's recipient, Gaius, offering a blessing and affectionate affirmations. In verses 5–8, John applauded Gaius and encouraged him to continue showing hospitality in support of

travelers carrying the gospel message. In verses 9–12, the letter then shifts to a word of warning regarding the dictatorial behavior of Diotrephes, which is contrasted with the upright behavior of Demetrius. The remaining verses constitute the closing of the letter.

John intended this letter to serve as an invitation to discuss matters more in-depth in person, which explains the brevity of the writing and why he intentionally did not delve more deeply into relevant themes. Still, the Apostle used the opportunity to establish his argumentative patterns regarding issues of concern. He discussed the importance of showing hospitality to fellow believers, which provides a necessary balance to his teaching from the second epistle. In 2 John, the focus is on denying hospitality to false teachers to avoid supporting them in their evil works and thereby sharing in their deeds. The Apostle offered a rationale to Gaius in support of showing hospitality toward fellow Christians. Such kindness supports them in their advance of the gospel and prevents them from having to rely on non-Christians (who are intended by John's use of the term "Gentiles") for support. Furthermore, hospitality of this kind serves as a positive witness that testifies of a genuine relationship with Christ. Also, just as John equated providing hospitality for false teachers with participating in their wicked deeds, so the converse is true. Those who support God's servants are counted as fellow workers in the ministry.

John mentioned that he wrote to the church on a previous occasion, which may be a reference to 2 John, if indeed "the elect lady" is a personification of the church. It could also possibly refer to 1 John. This is less likely, however, as its structure suggests that it was written as an encyclical intended for much wider distribution. John encountered opposition from Diotrephes, and this provided the springboard for another argumentative pattern. In verses 9–10, the Apostle identified specific divisive behaviors that indicated a dictatorial attitude. According to John, Diotrephes (a) refused to welcome him and his associates, (b) spoke maliciously of them to undermine authority, (c) refused to welcome other faithful believers into the fellowship, and (d) excommunicated those who supported them. John continues his argumentative pattern by contrasting the reprehensible behavior of Diotrephes with the commendable behavior of Demetrius, who had a good

reputation among the believers because of his loving support and faithful adherence to sound teaching.

Much like 2 John, this letter has a similar opening-middle-closing pattern in keeping with its literary genre. Furthermore, as mentioned before, its structure is very similar to 2 John. Both letters begin with an affectionate greeting that acknowledges the recipients' faithful adherence to a sound Christian lifestyle. Then, they both transition to an exhortation that encourages the recipients toward continued observance of a godly course of action. Following this, both letters address a conflict situation that needs attention. Finally, they both end with a positive closing that expresses the intent to meet personally for more in-depth conversation and fellowship.

Intertexture

This pericope contains an instance of oral-scribal intertexture that highlighted the relationship between an instructor/mentor figure and a student/mentee. Likewise, it also represents an example of social intertexture by identifying this social relationship. The Apostle wrote, "For I rejoiced greatly when brethren came and testified of the truth that is in you, just as you walk in the truth. I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth" (*New King James Version*, 1982, 2 Jn. 3–4). John's description of his relationship with Gaius, referring to him as one of his "children," he used terminology that commonly characterized the mentor/mentee relationship (Keener, 1993). For instance, the expression "my son" is used 23 times in Proverbs (*New King James Version*, 1982). Also, in the New Testament, Paul referred to both Timothy and Titus as "a true son" (1 Tim. 1:2; Tit. 1:4).

Social and Cultural Texture

As mentioned earlier, dyadic agreements are a common social and cultural topic in this pericope. Specifically, it involves professional courtesy and hospitality that church leaders should extend to traveling missionaries (Keener, 1993). In this case, genuine teachers who came with apostolic recommendation were denied appropriate treatment. John was likewise snubbed, which prompted him to write,

"Diotrephes, who loves to have the preeminence among them, does not receive us.…And not content with that, he himself does not receive the brethren, and forbids those who wish to, putting them out of the church" (3 Jn. 9b–c, 10d–f *New King James Version*, 1982). This denial of an expectation associate with a dyadic agreement was an insult and a serious breach of etiquette. Fortunately, Gaius provided exemplary hospitality and courtesy in support of itinerant teachers.

Sacred Texture

This pericope includes sacred texture expressed through the examples of two holy persons who received commendation from the Elder. John rejoiced in the reported obedience and adherence to truth demonstrated by Gaius. Specifically, he showed appropriate Christian hospitality toward traveling missionaries and strangers. The Apostle wrote, "Beloved, you do faithfully whatever you do for the brethren and for strangers, who have borne witness of your love before the church" (*New King James Version*, 1982, 3 Jn. 5–6a). Such supportive, loving behavior served as a positive testimony that reflected well on the reputation of the church and gave evidence of the presence of God.

This issue of professional courtesy and Christlike hospitality is also a matter of ethics. Demetrius was the other person who received approval from the Elder. His behavior also reflected a positive witness for the cause of Christ. The conduct of Gaius and Demetrius stood in contrast to the unethical behavior of Diotrephes, who rejected apostolic authority and refused hospitality and fellowship to those sent by John. He further expressed his unethical behavior by threatening those who attempted to do right by the godly messengers (vv. 9–10).

List of Themes from Exegetical Analysis

From the foregoing analysis of 1–3 John, the following central themes emerged as a foundation for further qualitative inquiry. They provided the basis for the questions that were asked during the in-depth interviews (see Appendix C).

Theme 1: Effective Spiritual Leadership Flows From Divine Fellowship

John could vividly describe the intimacy of his relationship with Christ (1 Jn. 1:1–4), which began as a personal eyewitness to the ministry of Christ and as someone who was part of Christ's inner circle (Matt. 17:1; Mk. 5:37; 14:33). It further deepened through spiritual fellowship with the Father and Son (1 Jn. 1:3). In fact, he was known as the "disciple whom Jesus loved" (Jn. 13:23, 19:26, 20:2, 21:7, 20). The moral authority and conviction that gave impact and credibility to the Apostle John's leadership stemmed from his deep spiritual experience and his personal relationship with the Lord (Bekker, 2012). This aspect of leadership cannot be compartmentalized from other elements of effectiveness (1 Jn. 1:4). According to Henson (2015), "The convergence of theology and leadership theory will provide a better understanding of the role that faith, religious authority, and divine influence have in the leadership development of individuals and communities of faith" (p. 9). Therefore, a thorough examination of spiritual leadership must consider this factor as it relates to theoretical concerns (Choi, 2016). This theme informed the development of the following interview questions:

IQ1: Describe your personal relationship with God.

IQ2: What personal witness or indications have you received that assure you of a personal, intimate connection with God?

IQ3: How would you say that your relationship with God impacts your leadership?

Theme 2: Unity With God and Others is Essential for Biblical Community

The essence of biblical community, as characterized by *koinonia*, is fellowship shared with God and among others in the church (1 Jn. 1:3, 7). That shared fellowship is what makes the church a unique organization set apart from all other institutions (Ebersole & Woods, 2001; Panikulam, 1979). The essential quality that creates that spiritual distinctive is unity. As noted by Ebersole and Woods (2001), "Christian theological studies of community have focused on the *koinonia* or fellowship that results when believers, motivated by the agape love of God, join together in fellowship and unity" (p. 187). Davis (2012) characterized

this unity as a "divine-human partnership" (p. 115). This theme formed the basis for the following interview questions:

IQ4: Based on your reading of Reading of 1 John 1:1–10, how would you define biblical community?

IQ5: What approaches have you taken to build and promote biblical community in your congregation?

IQ6: How important is unity to building biblical community?

IQ7: What examples of biblical community have you observed in your church?

Theme 3: Community Stability Comes Through an Organizational Culture Based Upon Shared Values

In the case of spiritual community, the culture is strengthened by faith in Christ, systematic teaching, and the resulting behavior. John emphasized this by regularly exhorting his followers to obey God's commandments, which stood for the embodiment of Christian biblical principles (1 Jn. 2:3–8; 3:22–24; 5:2–3; 2 Jn. 4–6). This fits well within Schein's (2017) cultural framework:

The culture of a group can be defined as the accumulated shared learning of that group as it solves its problems of external adaptation and internal integration; which has worked well enough to be considered valid and, therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think, feel, and behave in relation to those problems. (p. 6)

This systematic, accumulated, common learning within the group forms the basic assumptions related to beliefs, values, and expectations (Cameron & Quinn, 2011; Schein, 2017). Likewise, one of the objectives of spiritual leadership theory is to create alignment of values throughout the organization. (Fry, 2003). Over time, these aspects become the stabilizing factors within the organization (Cameron & Quinn, 2011). This theme aligns with the following interview questions:

IQ8: What strategies have helped you maintain your values and doctrinal standards as a church?

IQ9: How have these practices helped you to maintain organizational and/or cultural stability?

Theme 4: Love is the Distinguishing Characteristic of the Biblical Community

As John stated emphatically in his writings, love is the ultimate fulfillment of God's commandments and is the distinctive that sets the spiritual community apart from any other organization (Jn. 13:34–35; 1 Jn. 2:8–10; 3:10–18; 4:7–21; 2 Jn. 5–6; 3 Jn. 6). Spiritual leadership theory aligns well with this biblical priority. Fry (2003) proposed that a significant part of creating intrinsic motivation in an organization's members is related to "establishing a social/organizational culture based on altruistic love whereby leaders and followers have genuine care, concern, and appreciation for both self and others" (p. 695). This sense of shared love in the context of community is central to biblical Christianity and is a defining quality (Bilezikian, 2002; Ebersole & Woods, 2001; Peters, 2018). This theme resulted in the development of the following interview questions:

IQ10: How have you seen love tangibly demonstrated in your church?

IQ11: In what ways do you encourage your people to make love a defining characteristic of your ministry?

IQ12: In what ways has your congregation shared God's love with your community?

Theme 5: Conflicting Organizational Standards and Values Will Undermine the Unity and Stability of the Biblical Community

In John's epistles, the Apostle identified teaching and practices that disrupted and threatened to undermine biblical community (1 Jn. 1:6, 8, 10; 2:18–19; 3:4, 8, 10, 15; 2 Jn. 7–10, 3 Jn. 9–10). Schein (2017) explained that over time, organizations tend to develop differences that may lead to conflict and the development of subcultures within the larger organizational culture. Eventually, such divisions cause fragmentation and alienation in the corporate entity (Cameron & Quinn, 2011). According to Cameron and Quinn (2011), "Strong cultures are associated with homogeneity of effort, clear focus, and higher performance in environments where unity and common vision are required" (p. 83). This theme informed the development of two interview questions:

IQ13: What challenges to your teaching, doctrine, and values have you encountered from inside the church?

IQ14: What other types of conflict that threaten the unity of the church have you encountered?

Theme 6: Conflicting Societal Standards and Values Place Biblical Community at Odds With Societal Culture

John also addressed outside forces that the church had to recognize so that they could take active measures to avoid corruption (1 Jn. 2:15–18; 4:3–5; 5:19). The corrupt world system and the spirit of antichrist presented societal pressures that would always create tension between the church and the culture at large. Little (2018) observed, "Society's vision of reality determines what is deemed acceptable or important" (p. 5). The Scriptures reveal that a biblical worldview is irreconcilable with the hopelessly corrupt values of this world's system (1 Jn. 2:15–17; Jas. 4:4). As a result, even in spite of the best efforts to reconcile those differences, conflict remains inevitable (U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, 2016). In line with this theme, three interview questions were developed:

IQ15: What aspects of today's culture do you think pose a threat to biblical community?

IQ16: Have you (or any churches you know) experienced any opposition to your (or their) church's ministry? Where did it come from? What prompted it?

IQ17: Have you (or any pastors and/or churches you know) encountered any hostility or threats from those in opposition? What forms did it take?

Theme 7: A Spiritual Leader Must Confront the Internal and External Challenges to Biblical Community

Having encountered opposition that challenged his authority, the Apostle John confronted those who threatened to undermine his spiritual leadership (1 Jn. 2:19, 22–23, 26; 4:3–5; 2 Jn. 7–10; 3 Jn. 9–10). When faced with those who cause division and disrupt the unity of fellowship, the spiritual leader has an obligation to confront such challenges (Henson, 2015). When the unity and spiritual well-being of the church are at stake, sometimes the most loving thing leader can do is to confront the trouble and/or the troublemaker (Burge, 1997). Jobes (2014) added, "It

is not a loving attitude to allow someone to wander from the truth without confrontation, as difficult as confrontation may be" (p. 325). Therefore, a spiritual leader must be willing to rise to the unpleasant task of addressing conflict with confident, yet loving, confrontation. Based on this theme, the researcher developed the following interview questions:

IQ18: In what ways have you confronted the challenges you faced from within the church?

IQ19: In what ways have you confronted the opposition and/or hostility you encountered from outside the church?

IQ20: Can you recall any other instances when your leadership was challenged and what approach you took to confront those challenges?

Qualitative Inquiry— Phenomenological Research

These findings represent the results of in-depth interviews with 11 Assemblies of God presbyters, who shared their lived experiences related to building biblical community in their ministries, while also engaging their local communities. Assemblies of God presbyters function as local pastors while also providing supervision for other pastors and churches in their ministry sections. As such, they serve as perhaps the closest ministry equivalent to John during the time in which he wrote his epistles, who likely pastored the church at Ephesus while ministering to a community of churches in the vicinity (Fouard, 1905; Hiebert, 1991; Kruse, 2020; Osborne, 2007).

These interviews were based on the questions generated by the seven themes discovered in the exegetical analysis of 1–3 John. They were semistructured to allow for greater elaboration and flexibility of responses. The results were analyzed with two coding passes: process coding and values coding. In process coding (also known as action coding), the analyst uses gerunds as codes to identify the actions of the participants as characterized by the data; in values coding, the analyst obtains insight into the values, beliefs, and attitudes that comprise the values system of each subject (Saldaña & Omasta, 2018). Process coding and values coding enable researchers to better understand the perspectives and activities

of the participants (Saldaña, 2021). The following sections include a discussion of the categories that supported each theme.

Theme 1: Effective Spiritual Leadership Flows From Divine Fellowship

The categories that grew out of questions about each presbyter's relationship with God describe the following aspects of their fellowship with God: spiritual dimension, personal growth, and ministry development. The frequencies for each category and code are illustrated in Table 3. The category of spiritual dimension had six codes: connecting personally with God (15), growing and deepening (9), encountering God with spontaneity (6), priority of God's Word (12), witness of the Spirit (18), and fullness of the Spirit (13). The categories and codes are evidenced by the following vivid responses from selected participants; as such, the discussion is framed according to the codes for each category.

Spiritual Dimension. The spiritual dimension aspect of their relationship with God reflected the very personal, intimate nature of their connection with the Lord. For example, Pastor Stephen described the proximity of his connection with God in very vivid terms: "My personal relationship with the Lord? Yes, it's life itself. It's everything to me. It is very personal. It is very real. It is moment by moment." Likewise, Pastor Bob recognized how his personal interactions with God have had a profound, lasting impression on him. He explained how such interactions led him to say, "Wow, God, You are real!"

Several participants characterized the personal nature of their relationship with God as relational. For Pastor Roger, it means relating to God just as he would to a friend. He also added that answers to prayer enhance the personal aspect of that relationship. Pastor Ryan explained that he talks to God regularly and views his connection with the Lord as a continuous communication. Likewise, Pastor Ryan and others shared how God speaks to them in various ways. Pastor William observed how he heard God speaking to him through Scripture as well as an inner voice. Pastor Arlen used the word "revelational" to depict his personal connection with the Lord. This personal aspect of their relationship with God is an absolute necessity for ministry. Pastor Randy was emphatic about how his relationship with God was foundational for him to function in his spiritual leadership role. For Pastor

Nathan, his relationship with God is the framework form which he operates in ministry. Pastor Andrew summarized its importance well: "I realized that the only way to sustain true ministry without pretty much losing your mind is to have an intimate, personal relationship with Jesus Christ on a daily basis."

Several participants added that another defining characteristic of their relationship with God is that it has a dynamic aspect. Pastor Fred stated that because of his personal connection with God, he is growing in trust and confidence. Similarly, Pastor Mark affirmed that although he is not perfect, his relationship with God is always growing. As he put it, "Every time I pick up God's word, I need to learn something new. I need to find something new in his word that will just come alive inside of me and change me." Pastor Nathan explained that his relationship with God "is every growing and deepening—week by week, day by day." Pastor Arlen added the idea that part of the dynamic aspect his relationship with God is falling in love with Jesus repeatedly. He also depicted the newness of that relationship as the believer's daily bread: "And that daily bread is something that I realize now that the freshness of your walk with the Lord is something that you carry and spills over into the lives of other people." In fact, the dynamic nature of personal fellowship with God is something that Pastor Bob said fills him with a sense of anticipation. He put it this way: "There's so much more I know he wants to do inside of me. And there's some more that I want him to do inside of me." Pastor William similarly expressed an excitement about the dynamic aspect of his connection with God, describing, "There is an ebb and flow to our relationship, where we, you know, we practice the disciplines of study and devotion, but there's also that spontaneity, of walking with God and Him speaking."

Still, among these presbyters, a consensus exists regarding the importance of Scripture in their personal relationship with God. For Pastors Fred and Randy, it is the measurement by which they evaluate their behavior. Likewise, for several others, their daily devotional time of reading the Bible serves as a crucial starting point for God's direction and activity in their lives. In fact, Pastor Bob referred to it as "a roadmap" from which he finds direction and acts as a point of engagement with God. Pastor Arlen acknowledged that regular interaction with God through the

Word enables him to maintain spiritual sharpness. In addition, the Bible serves as a foundational way through which God speaks to them that they can use to verify the soundness of other teaching and spiritual activity. Ultimately, the Word of God remains the primary way through which God talks to them. Pastor Roger put it best when he said, "I feel God speaks to me through His Word. When I read the Bible, I feel like there's a Living Being talking to me through it."

As Pentecostals, the presbyters place a high priority on the activity of the Holy Spirit in their lives. One way in which they acknowledge the work of the Spirit is through the witness of the Spirit that they testify to receiving in their personal lives and ministries. One way the witness of the Spirit serves them is through the confirmation that the Spirit provides in their study of Scripture. For example, Pastor Fred explained the importance of the Spirit's witness in the proper understanding of the Bible, proposing, "There are many individuals that can read the Word of God and can interpret it in multiple ways that don't necessarily reflect a relationship with the God that's being revealed. The Holy Spirit is that connection." Also, Pastor Stephen observed that it is the partnership of the Scriptures and the Spirit that speaks into the believer's life.

A key aspect of the ministry of the Spirit is the witness that they receive that confirms that God is real and that they are in right fellowship with Him. The witness of the Spirit gives Pastor Ryan confidence that God lives in him. Likewise, Pastor William attributed the witness of the Spirit to the assurance he has that God is real and is at work in his life. Pastor Stephen referred to 1 John 2:20, 27 when he affirmed that the Holy Spirit provides the authoritative witness that believers should receive that indicates their right standing with God and their ability to understand spiritual truth. Another aspect of the Spirit's activity that some of participants highlighted was the guidance and direction that they receive. For Pastor Ryan, an important part of the way the Spirit guides him is in the preparation of Bible messages he delivers to his congregation. He stated that he relies on the Spirit to guide him regarding what he should speak so that his followers receive a timely word from God. For others, the Spirit provides them with guidance in various areas of life and ministry. Pastor Randy trusts the Holy Spirit to guide him

in his decision making. Also, Pastors Mark and Nathan prioritize sensitivity to the Spirit so that they can follow His direction and act in keeping with God's will. As Pastor Nathan described, "I really believe the promptings and leadings of the Holy Spirit are absolutely essential to live our lives."

Several of the presbyters also testify of some more intensive activity of the Holy Spirit, which adds more depth to their experiences. Pastors Randy and Nathan credited the work of the Holy Spirit and the value they place on God's anointing in giving them the grace to overcome various temptations that could otherwise cause them to stumble. Pastors Mark and Bob described the activity of the Spirit at work in their lives and ministries in more multidimensional terms, meaning that they experience His activity in various ways, using the scriptural metaphor of "walking in the Spirit." Likewise, Pastors Bob, Stephen, and Arlen reported how the ministry of the Holy Spirit gives and added sense of divine empowerment, even in their various ministry activities. Some also shared how they have experienced a more supernatural presence of the Spirit at work. For example, Pastor Bob explained that the level of transformation that he experienced in his conversion was the due to the supernatural power of the Spirit in his life. Pastor Arlen, in describing the character of revelation he had received from God, recalled how he was briefly lifted out of himself when the Holy Spirit came upon him. Furthermore, he has witnessed various kind of miracles in his ministry. Pastor William also testified to having experiences that he would classify as supernatural throughout his life. Still, the anointing of the Spirit on their ministries was also something that several mentioned as a significant work of the Holy Spirit, which empowered them for divine service.

Personal Growth. The category of personal growth had five codes, which reflect the impact their relationship with God has had on them as believers in Christ: receiving divine grace (4), redemption through Christ (7), experiencing God's peace (5), humility and repentance (12), and following Christ's example (4). Several of the participants reflected on the depth of gratitude that they have toward God for the work of redemption He did in their lives through Christ and the work of grace that they continue to experience. For Pastor Roger, it started when he was

born again at 8 years old, yet he continues to live in the power of that experience. Pastor Randy celebrated the freedom from sin and guilt that he received through Christ's redemption. In acknowledging his gratitude for redemption through Jesus, Pastor Bob admitted that what Christ accomplished on the cross made it all possible. He declared, "I've seen the 'monster' inside of me, and it's ugly. And every once in a while, something will bring that 'monster' out. And I'll hear a little whisper, 'That's what I died for.'"

In addition to the initial work of redemption in their lives when they received Christ by faith, several participants also expressed appreciation for the continuing work of grace that God is doing in their lives and ministries. Pastor Stephen, referring to 1 John 2:1–2, spoke of the assurance of a continual cleansing from sin to cover his personal imperfections. Because of Christ's redemptive work, he had confidence that in Christ, he could be called "the righteousness of God" (2 Cor. 5:21). He continued, "It is nothing short of a mystery that we can be called the righteousness of God in Christ. … To me, it is right standing. It's also mercy. It's continuously knowing that I am not deserving of this." Pastor Ryan also reflected on the comfort of knowing that, as promised in 1 John 1:9, he could confess his sins and find forgiveness in Christ on a regular basis. Furthermore, the grace of God extended to ministry also provided a source of comfort. For Pastor Nathan, God's grace enabled him to deal with the challenges of ministry in a Christlike manner. Also, Pastor Arlen mentioned how God's grace meant that he could depend on God's ability to ministry, rather than having to rely entirely on his own competencies.

Another area of personal impact that some of the participants described as an outgrowth of their relationship with God is a sense of peace. For Pastor Randy, that peace represents a freedom from fear and the consequences of sin and guilt. Pastor Andrew identified his quiet time with God as a source of peace, a daily escape that helps him to deal with the challenges of life in a fast-paced world. According to Pastor Nathan, the peace of God serves as a significant means by which he discerns the will of God in his life. As he stated, "And it's really in those times that I've had to pause and determine, 'Okay, do I feel comfortable—comfort,

peace?'—those are the words that I use." In this way, he feels that he has a sense of resonance with the Holy Spirit.

Although the participants expressed their gratitude over the blessings of redemption, grace, and peace, some have also expressed humility, knowing that they live with personal shortcomings. Pastor Randy finds confidence in knowing that the Lord gives him grace to face various challenges, yet he also lives with the reality that his human frailty remains. The same applies to Pastor Nathan. Even though God had helped him to work through many of his personal character flaws, he still expressed a need to walk with humility, knowing that he still has weaknesses that may show. This realization of inherent weakness, as Pastor Stephen explained, also serves to keep him humble. For Pastor Fred, repentance is a lifestyle, a regular part of his personal Christian experience. As such, it shapes the way he views ministry. With that realization, he emphasized, "My approach to ministry is always, 'I'm a servant; I'm a servant; I'm a servant.'"

Another way that a few of the participants emphasized the impact of their relationship with God in their personal lives is the example that Jesus set for His followers. Pastor Fred, in discussing his approach to living a godly life, described it in terms of following the example of Christ. For Pastor William, being an effective leader begins with being an effective follower, which means that he looks to God as the model for his leadership. Pastor Bob expressed a similar belief, explaining that the example that Christ sets for him allows him to provide an example for his people to follow as well.

Ministry Development. The remaining category that describes the impact that a personal relationship with God has had on these presbyters is in the equipping and development that they receive for ministry. The codes that support this category are as follows: source of wisdom and direction (10), importance of integrity (4), answering the call (7), growing in confidence and trust (4), and depending entirely upon God (4). To rise to the position of presbyter means that each of these pastors has inspired confidence in their followers on a sectional level among other pastors and churches, as well as in their own home church. Yet, rather

than think that their accomplishments are due entirely to personal competence, many credited God as the source of their wisdom and guidance.

Among several, the guidance they receive from God generally flows out of their personal prayers and interaction with God. As Pastor Randy described it, the principles that he discovers in Scripture, aided by the guidance of the Spirit, give him a general sense of what to do. Pastor Nathan explained that God will guide him by giving him an internal sense that He is saying "yes" or "no" about a matter. In some instances, he feels God allows him to choose for himself. For Pastor Mark, he follows a regular questioning within himself if God is guiding him, and he acts in keeping with what he discerns is the Spirit's leading. Likewise, Pastor Andrew regularly acknowledges that God guides him through an inner prompting that he believes is God speaking to him. In fact, Pastors Roger, Bob, and Arlen also credited God with being a source of creativity for them, and in some instances giving them on-the-spot creative solutions.

A few participants also remarked about how their relationship with God impresses them with the importance of integrity. In describing how he endeavors to live with integrity, Pastor William stated, "And so you can talk about principles, you can get sermons for other people, but the greatest sermons are the one you literally lived your life from." Similarly, Pastor Bob expressed that as he tries to model a godly life for his followers, he realizes that it must flow from pleasing God in his own life. Pastor Andrew also said that he carefully considers the way he lives before his people so that he continues to inspire their trust: "I have to earn people's respect and honor in order to watch them fulfill their volunteerism, you might say."

For some participants, their relationship with God has had a significant effect on their sense of calling to ministry. As Pastor Fred expressed, his perception that he is a servant to God and others comes from a clear sense of calling. That conviction of his calling and how he goes about serving flows from his intimate relationship with God. Similarly, Pastor Stephen communicated that same feeling of obligation to serve as something that grows out of his personal relationship with God. He considers that his calling from God is a unique part of his identity. He stated, "But I think of what God said to Jeremiah, 'I've known you since your

mother's womb.'… That speaks of something very, very personal. And I am every day cognizant of that." He summarized that conviction by saying that for him, to know the Lord means to serve the Lord, what he described as an "intrinsic" and "integral" part of who he is. For Pastor Arlen, who came to faith as part of an underground church in a country that outlawed Christianity, the call to ministry represented a very serious commitment. Because of that, he needed confirmation of that calling, which grew out of his personal relationship with God. Pastor Ryan, in sharing about his call to the ministry, explained that a sacred calling is not something that someone can fake; rather, it must flow out of a genuine relationship with the Lord.

When it comes to the challenges of ministry, a sense of growing in confidence is balanced with a total dependency on God. Pastor Fred indicated that he sees both at work in his ministry. As he takes initial faith actions in ministry, they cause him to grow in trust over time so that he has the confidence to accomplish his ministry objectives. Yet, he also acknowledged his total dependency on God. Likewise, Pastor Bob also said that experience has helped him to grow in confidence as well, whereas Pastor Ryan recognized his need for God's help, stating, "Because I can't really be who I am without Christ. So, I need him in my life. So, without him, I can absolutely do nothing." Pastor Andrew also expressed that he increasingly feels a need to rely on God for his help due to the complexity of problems that people bring to him.

Table 3

Theme 1 Codes and Categories

Code	Category	Frequency of Occurrence
Connecting Personally with God	Spiritual Dimension	15
Growing and Deepening	Spiritual Dimension	9
Encountering God with Spontaneity	Spiritual Dimension	6
Priority of God's Word	Spiritual Dimension	12

Code	Category	Frequency of Occurrence
Witness of the Spirit	Spiritual Dimension	18
Fullness of the Spirit	Spiritual Dimension	13
Receiving Divine Grace	Personal Growth	4
Redemption through Christ	Personal Growth	7
Experiencing God's Peace	Personal Growth	5
Humility and Repentance	Personal Growth	12
Following Jesus' Example	Personal Growth	4
Source of Wisdom and Direction	Ministry Development	10
Importance of Integrity	Ministry Development	4
Answering the Call	Ministry Development	7
Growing in Confidence and Trust	Ministry Development	4
Depending Entirely upon God	Ministry Development	4

Theme 2: Unity With God and Others is Essential for Biblical Community

Questions related to unity with God and others as a necessity for biblical community provided information for the development of the following categories: catalysts for community and characteristics of community. The frequencies for each category and code are listed in Table 4. The category of catalysts for community had 10 codes: facilitated through the Spirit (7), importance of relationships (23), united around common beliefs (12), discipleship central to community (11), finding unity in diversity (9), staying focused on mission (5), accessibility a key to community (6), connecting through events (4), eating together (4), and gathering in small groups (5).

Catalysts for Community. Some of the participants highlighted the importance of the Holy Spirit in creating the atmosphere for biblical community. As Pastor William observed, biblical community, in its truest sense, cannot exist without the Holy Spirit, because a key ministry of the Spirit is to facilitate unity

among God's people. Pastor Stephen explained that as believers cultivate the presence of God in their lives, they are better able to facilitate community. Having the indwelling Holy Spirit draws believers one to another, Pastor Bob noted, creating a sense of *koinonia*. Although he recognized the value of other contributing factors in creating spiritual community, the common Spirit shared by believers in Christ creates the basis for that *koinonia*. Pastor Arlen also cited the importance of the Holy Spirit in experiencing *koinonia*. He concluded, "I realized that whenever there is a genuine unity by the Spirit of God, you notice that even with the Blessed Trinity, they were able to birth something supernatural." This spiritual dynamic exists when God's people allow the Spirit to draw them together in unity.

By far, the most widely reported catalyst for community among the presbyters is relationships. Although Pastor Stephen highlighted various ways for people to connect, he concluded that building one-on-one relationships is the most important way to facilitate those connections. Several others shared this opinion. For Pastor Fred, community begins with one's relationship with God, but it extends to the development of relationships with other people in the church. He stated, "So, community is living out with others the relationship I'm trying to live out with God." That is why Pastor Nathan recognized the need for people to break out of their own relational cliques. Pastor Roger made it a point to visit each person in his church to make that personal connection—which is no small task, as his church is quite large. Pastor Andrew also made it a priority to build one-on-one relationships with the pastors in his section. He started an initiative that encouraged pastors to call one another to keep them from becoming isolated. Along with his sectional officers, he would visit each pastor to see how they were doing; they would then share communion together.

Another observation Pastor Stephen made was that personal interaction was the biblical pattern. In fact, Pastor Randy noted that the purpose of his small group ministry was to facilitate the building of relationships and promote fellowship. Pastor Ryan also encourages his people to make personal connections a priority in their congregation. He noticed that relationships suffered greatly during the

pandemic because online ministry did not have the same relational dynamic. He said, "So if we're not going to have fellowship with one another, I think we become deprived of what God really wanted for us." With that in mind, he encourages people to reach out and make personal connection, both before and after services. While other churches maintain a reverent atmosphere before the beginning of worship, he urges his people to engage with one another, viewing that as a form of worship.

A few also shared about the redemptive aspect of making personal relationships that they observed. Pastor William explained that community is important, especially for those who come from broken homes. Relationships serve to facilitate healing. Pastor Mark shared about how connecting through relationships provided needed support for a discouraged pastor in his section. He was greatly heartened by the caring of other pastors who prayed with him. Pastor Randy told how close relationships he had with several pastors in his section allowed him to partner with them to facilitate racial reconciliation. Pastor Stephen offered this fitting observation: "Community is caring about each other."

Many other participants identified unity around common beliefs as another catalyst for biblical community. Pastor Nathan made the point that he and his people were unified around the goal of cultivating a closer relationship with Christ. A key point of agreement among some was the importance of doctrinal unity. For Pastor Bob, that agreement included a common faith, common doctrine, common observance to the teaching, and a common hope. Pastor Ryan added that being with people of "like precious faith" who speak into his life helps his relationship with God. Pastor Roger also affirmed the importance of a common beliefs shared among congregants, something Pastor Bob referred to as the basis for Christian fellowship. For Pastor Andrew, unity around doctrine is a must. In fact, he sees it as a key to effectiveness in ministry. He mentioned, "If you're having division within the body, you can't be a powerful witness to the world around you. So, when people see a unified front, biblically, then lives get changed." He illustrated his point with an example of effective ministry he experienced when bringing in four different evangelists to do some outreach during the COVID-19 pandemic; their like-

mindedness made their ministry productive. Pastor Randy emphasized the importance of the Bible as the centerpiece of common beliefs. Pastor Arlen, who received Christ in an underground church, stressed the necessity of commitment to a common belief, especially because it could present a life-or-death challenge.

Just as common belief is an important factor in facilitating spiritual community, discipleship is also crucial because it is the primary vehicle through which the church's belief system is taught. Pastor Stephen highlighted the community aspect of discipleship, saying that the learning process is strengthened when people see others living out their beliefs. He explained it this way: "It's speaking into lives, it's modeling. It's living in such a way that you can actually say—which is bold, but it's where we should be—'Follow me as I follow Christ.'" He also pointed out the priority of God's Word in the discipleship process. Pastor Randy also mentioned the importance of teaching on authority. For Pastor Ryan, an important part of the discipleship process is the interaction that people share around God's Word. This is how he discovers whether someone may possibly be embracing error. By creating an atmosphere in which people feel comfortable to share their thoughts, he has used such instances to correct the effects of erroneous teaching. Pastor Ryan emphasized that although it is important to study the Scriptures diligently, it is equally important to not be judgmental. Pastor Andrew also noted that the result of good discipleship is the church's having a positive reputation among outsiders.

One key for many of the participants lies with maintaining a sense of unity, even though they lead people in their churches and sections from very diverse backgrounds and cultures. For example, Pastor William noted that although he recognizes the various subcultures that exist under his leadership, he endeavors to keep the primary focus on Christ. The cross of Christ is the great unifier that brings people from diverse backgrounds together. This sentiment was echoed by others as well. As Pastor Roger pointed out, some people have the mistaken idea that Christians should agree on everything, including politics; however, he observed, "I don't think unity means agreement on everything. But unity means agreeing on important things." Pastor Randy cited that he makes it a point to reach out to people

with different backgrounds to better understand them. In this way, he cultivates trust, while seeing a broader view of life, making it possible to achieve a sense of unity with people from different walks of life. As he remarked, it is not necessarily those who share his same outlook on life who are the most aligned with him and his leadership, but they share the same heart attitude, a heart for the things of God. Pastor Bob also came to the same realization by reaching out to people with different perspectives to better understand them and relate to them. This has helped him to see beyond the limits of his own experience. For Pastor Mark, bridging differences in culture extends beyond race and ethnicity. He also recognized the differences in organizational culture. For example, larger churches have a very different culture than smaller churches. He regularly faces the challenges of bringing people with that kind of diversity together. He described his approach as follows: "You do various and sundry things to bring various and sundry people together. That's the only way it works."

Another way that some participants recognized as effective in generating community among their followers is by staying focused on their common mission. Pastors Roger, Andrew, and Mark told of the need to have people focused on the same goal, which can be difficult at times. The key, for Pastor William, is keeping the focus on their common spiritual purpose: "This is not a social club, we're together because Somebody saved us.… So, keep the main thing, the main thing." Pastor Arlen remarked about the power of having that unified purpose in the underground church. He explained, "You cannot afford to 'play religion or churchianity,' because it could cost your life." For some, bringing people together in unity is linked with the need for physical accessibility. Pastor Ryan found that during the COVID-19 lockdowns, it was very difficult to maintain a sense of community because people needed to be together in one place. In fact, he proposed that the more the church relies on technology to create virtual community, it could eventually undermine the fabric of genuine relational connections in the body of Christ. Pastor Randy also experienced the same challenge during the pandemic, concluding, "I think people need to be convinced that people with people, that

community, is so important. Physical attendance, is I guess the term I would want to say."

Three primary ways that participants identified as effective ways to create physical accessibility among followers are connecting through events, eating together, and small groups. Some, like Pastors Ryan and Randy, stated that they opt for connecting with people and bringing them together by way of events, as a matter of personal preference. For Pastor Randy, sectional and district events provide opportunity to reach out to people and build relationships. Those connections allow him access to his followers, allowing him to establish trust. Pastor Roger also uses events as a means of bringing people together. He described one activity at his church that brought people together around a common purpose, while also getting them together for fellowship. He also identified mission trips as a valuable way of creating relational bonds between people: "You really get to know someone when you're with them for 10 days, and you're staying in the same hotel or dorm and eating together. So, I see that as a great way to build community and discipleship."

Pastor Roger also tries to capitalize on opportunities for people to eat together: "Everyone needs to eat, and, you know, eating together is a thing." One way he does that is by utilizing the services of a person in his congregation who is a gourmet cook, stating that "She always cooks breakfast and makes something funky. And, so, they love that!" Pastor Andrew, recognizing the potential for food to bring people together, makes it a priority to have good food at his sectional events as a way of drawing people together. And Pastor Randy also highlighted the unique impact that eating together can make in relationships. He remarked, "I don't know why it is. If I can just eat a meal with somebody, just eat a meal with them, it changes my whole perspective on them, especially if I can eat it in their house."

Small groups also have the potential to bring people together and create a sense of community. Pastors Roger, Randy, and Nathan all use small groups as part of their ministry initiatives. Pastor Nathan uses small groups for serving, accountability, and for Bible study. Pastor Stephen has also found small groups to be effective in several different ministry contexts that he has ministered. "We

always had small groups because I really felt that there was a lot of community that was nurtured there and practiced there," he explained. Pastor Arlen proposed that the appeal of small groups may stem from a divine origin. He offered this thought: "The first 'cell group' happened in heaven. The Father, God, the Son, and the Holy Spirit pioneered the first 'cell group,' and they said, 'Let's come together, bring our thoughts together and our hearts together.'"

Characteristics of Community. The characteristics of community category has seven codes: shared with God and others (9), culture based on Scripture (7), called out from society (4), accountability in community (7), learning from others (5), serving others (5), and divine synergy (3). As Pastor William pointed out, genuine biblical community has a horizontal and vertical relational element, which means that the relational connection is shared simultaneously with God and among other believers. Pastor William explained further that the Father, as the originator of the divine family (Eph. 3:14–15), is the source of the community shared among God and his people. Pastor Stephen also highlighted the simultaneous horizontal and vertical relational connection. Pastor Arlen added that the synergistic union in fellowship shared with God and his people prepares the way for the supernatural. As reflected in 1 John 1:1–4, Pastor Bob emphasized the power of personal, intimate experience as part of the shared relationship. Also, Pastor Ryan suggested that believers can only really experience the fullness of fellowship with God in the context of relationships with one another. Pastor Nathan added that through collective fellowship one with another, believers engage in a collaborative relationship with the Father in heaven.

An important distinction to make about biblical community highlighted by some participants was the uniqueness that separates it from other forms of community. Specifically, biblical community is, first and foremost, biblical. As Pastor Stephen noted, the model for biblical community has its origins in Scripture, beginning with the Old Testament and extending to the New Testament. As such, the culture could be described as a kingdom culture, according to Pastor William, with the foundational elements being the cross of Christ and the empowerment of the Holy Spirit. Pastor Randy added that biblical authority is another important

element. Pastor Fred likewise affirmed the priority of Scripture in determining the culture that forms the biblical community. Pastor Andrew also emphasized that the Bible, not societal culture, should be the defining factor that shapes the biblical community, which reflects the conviction that the church is a group called out from the culture at large. In an underground church setting, like that described by Pastor Arlen, the distinction between the church culture and societal culture is very clear. Still, as Pastor Stephen remarked, being part of the church is itself a calling out from the rest of society, in a manner of speaking, to live in community with other believers according to biblical teaching.

Some of the participants also spoke of the importance of accountability as a characteristic of community. Although they admit that people do not always welcome accountability, they consider it to be a vital part of biblical community. For example, Pastor Stephen explained the nature of accountability this way: "You've got to be close with people. You have to interact. You need people to 'read your mail.' You've got to be honest and accessible, vulnerable." He added that such outcomes, although difficult at times, are entirely biblical. Pastor Nathan also mentioned that although sometimes he may receive some resistance (especially among some older people), mutual submission and accountability are nevertheless an important aspect of biblical community. Pastor Randy also mentioned that it is essential for the long-term well-being of the church and its people. Because he values accountability, Pastor Ryan endeavors to create a culture that makes it a natural part of their church life. In this way, people find it more acceptable.

Pastor Ryan also mentioned some ways that he learned from others in the church, another valuable characteristic of biblical community. In addition to lessons passed on by his Sunday school teacher, he reported to have learned from others in the church by observing how they lived their lives and went through the difficulties they encountered. He concluded, "That spoke volumes to me, even though we didn't have a relationship. So, I found the body of Christ speaks sometimes in their own silence." Likewise, Pastors Roger and Randy also shared about the learning aspect of life in the church community.

Serving others and the divine synergy that takes place in the cooperative efforts of God's people are also characteristics of community. Pastor Randy highlighted the significance of service when he mentioned the satisfaction he feels when people recognize the importance of service. That happens "when a person sees that serving is more important than being served. And, so, I'm feeling like those who get biblical community the best are those who serve the best." Pastors Nathan and Mark also recognized the values of service in biblical community. For Pastor Mark, it may be by providing support for a weak brother or ministering to a fellow church member in need. For Pastors Arlen and Andrew, when the efforts of God's people are aligned with God's activity and their common purpose, they see the potential for an exponential impact.

Table 4

Theme 2 Codes and Categories

Code	Category	Frequency of Occurrence
Facilitated through the Spirit	Catalysts for Community	7
Importance of Relationships	Catalysts for Community	23
United around Common Beliefs	Catalysts for Community	12
Discipleship Central to Community	Catalysts for Community	11
Finding Unity in Diversity	Catalysts for Community	9
Staying Focused on Mission	Catalysts for Community	5
Accessibility to Community	Catalysts for Community	6
Connecting through Events	Catalysts for Community	4
Eating Together	Catalysts for Community	4
Gathering in Small Groups	Catalysts for Community	5
Shared with God and Others	Characteristics of Community	9
Culture Based on Scripture	Characteristics of Community	7
Called out from Society	Characteristics of Community	4

Code	Category	Frequency of Occurrence
Accountability in Community	Characteristics of Community	7
Learning from Others	Characteristics of Community	5
Serving Others	Characteristics of Community	5
Divine Synergy	Characteristics of Community	3

Theme 3: Community Stability Comes Through an Organizational Culture Based Upon Shared Values

Two categories emerged from questions about establishing community stability through an organizational culture based on shared values: prioritizing organizational values and maintaining organizational stability. The frequencies for each category and code are listed in Table 5. The category of prioritizing organizational values had four codes: foundation of sound teaching (25), partnership of the Spirit (12), commitment to prayer (3), and examining discipleship effectiveness (5).

Prioritizing Organizational Values. Most of the participants emphasized the importance of sound biblical teaching as a significant part of prioritizing their organizational values. Generally, the beginning point in this effort centers around teaching the Bible. As Pastor Bob put it, God's Word, shared in the power of the Spirit, is the best safeguard against false teaching. For him, the focus lies in teaching the truth. Pastor Andrew similarly endeavors to maintain the same focus. Pastor Ryan also recognized the stabilizing effect of biblical teaching. Likewise, Pastor Nathan, in teaching the Bible, addresses issues of contemporary significance to counteract cultural influences.

One way some of them make sound doctrine a priority is by teaching and regularly revisiting the Statement of Fundamental Truths, the 16 foundational doctrinal statements that are a centerpiece of Assemblies of God theology. Pastor Fred incorporates them into his teaching. Even though some are very basic, they represent essentials that AG people should know well. In fact, the Statement of Fundamental Truths is what initially attracted Pastor Arlen to the Assemblies of

God. Having systematic doctrine reassured him of the doctrinal stability of the denomination. Pastor Mark also credits the 16 Fundamental Truths as a means of providing clear direction for teaching sound doctrine. With that, Pastors Fred and Ryan also expressed confidence in the Assemblies of God resources available through Gospel Publishing House, the organization's official publisher.

Several of the participants shared their practices for maintaining sound doctrine in their fellowships. Pastor Roger includes foundational teaching in his membership classes and devotes messages at the beginning of each year on primary doctrines and the church's vision and values. He also instructs his teachers to exercise vigilance in preventing the spread of false doctrines. Pastor Randy sets high doctrinal standards for his congregation, even though it may mean retaining fewer people, because it is a way to preclude potential problems. He also requires all people going through membership class to read *A Tale of Three Kings* by Gene Edwards in order to establish a biblical foundation for understanding authority. Pastor Nathan also leads his congregation each year through the church's vision and values, while also occasionally devoting a series to the 16 Fundamental Truths. Overall, these leaders, although they are aware of trends involving erroneous doctrine and take steps as needed, make sound, biblical teaching their primary emphasis.

Another significant part of their values that some participants emphasized was relying on the partnership of the Spirit in their ministries. For Pastor Mark, the Holy Spirit is a source of guidance as well as a focal point of his teaching. Pastor William also highlighted the unifying presence of the Holy Spirit that draws his people together. Pastor Fred likewise looks to the Spirit for direction and help in building and strengthening his people. Pastor Arlen especially focused on the importance of the Holy Spirit in his ministry. As mentioned before, he came from an underground church, so that experience naturally gives him a heightened sense of awareness for the need to partner with the Spirit. He said, "The reason why underground churches thrive so much is because of signs, wonders and miracles. Not much because of the organization, but signs and wonders—they attract people to the point that they can risk their lives following Jesus." He went on to say that in

western culture, focus on organizational excellence will sometimes overshadow a dependency on the Holy Spirit. Although excellence is important, it will sometimes allow people who lack patience to substitute such results for dependency on the Spirit. Still, he observed that with greater ministry responsibility comes a greater need for the presence of God to equip the spiritual leader. He uses spiritual retreats to allow for extended time to allow the Spirit to operate in the lives of his members.

A commitment to prayer is another organizational value that some participants noted. Pastor Arlen stated that the prayer and intercession group in his church is probably the most forceful and robust group he is involved in because its members carry a great sense of urgency with their task. Pastor Mark also remarked on the importance of prayer in his section as well as in his church, explaining that without prayer, their ministries have little hope for effectiveness. Pastor William discussed the unifying effect that prayer has in his ministry, bringing people together in agreement.

Some participants also talked of the need to evaluate their discipleship efforts in prioritizing their values. Pastor William recognized a need to promote biblical inerrancy as part of strengthening discipleship efforts. Pastor Ryan also stated that he monitors the effectiveness of discipleship in his church. He prefers to allow people flexibility in their teaching. Yet, he also makes sure they adhere to the essentials also. Pastor Fred examines the spiritual climate and responds to the needs that he discerns accordingly. For example, at one point, he sensed that his church was not fully equipped to offer a suitable defense in support of the faith. As a result of his personal evaluation, he planned a series of messages designed to meet that perceived need. Still, a key part of maintaining a sharp discipleship edge in his ministry means making his own growth and development a priority.

Maintaining Organizational Stability. The category maintaining organizational stability contains four codes: uniting around common purpose (12), clearly defined boundaries (3), building and developing others (11), and sharing responsibility with others (4). Uniting around a common purpose is another way some participants prioritize their organizational values. Pastors Nathan and Roger both highlighted the necessity to be intentional and focused on working toward a

common goal. Pastor William expressed the same conviction. Referring to their spiritual purpose, this pastor noted, "I would say the stability comes from those things. Again, it really emphasizes why we're together.… So, people understand this is different than the Rotary Club. This is different than your YMCA and stuff like that." Pastor Andrew referenced the level of commitment that he observed by those who agreed with their purpose. Some demonstrated that commitment by traveling great distances to attend services during the COVID-19 pandemic. Pastor Randy mentioned the emphasis he places on obedience to God and maintaining a commensurate level of commitment as disciples. Pastor Bob and his leadership team grew together, so they share a likeminded outlook that makes leadership a partnership, especially when dealing with difficult issues.

Having clearly defined boundaries is another way that some participants maintain organizational stability. The salient factor that makes this significant is the way it helps leaders to clearly distinguish between acceptable and unacceptable behavior and/or doctrine. Pastor Nathan explained how having protective boundaries provides guidelines regarding involvement in activities that are incompatible with biblical teaching. For example, he noted that his church declined participation in a local event because of its association with pro-LGBTQ causes, which are in violation of the AG's standards on sexual purity. Likewise, Pastors Mark and Bob expressed similar appreciation for guidelines that clarify appropriate behavioral and doctrinal standards that they uphold in their ministries.

Several participants maintain organizational stability by focusing on building and developing others. The participants take a pastoral approach to the way they help their people grow. In some instances, as with Pastors Ryan and Mark, they combine it with a coaching style. Pastor Ryan stated that he values giving people opportunity to grow on the job. Pastor Mark walks people through a process, very much like a guide, while Pastors William and Fred concentrate more on developing a culture of nurture and support that invests in people. As mentioned earlier, Pastor Bob has grown with his people, having built a network of leadership around himself through shared experience. This leads to another way that participants help their people grow: by sharing responsibility with them. For

example, because Pastor Bob had a strong shared leadership base, they partner with him in facing difficult situations. He shared that when some people tried to redirect some ministry practices in the church, Pastor Bob and his team addressed the issue together. For Pastor Fred, he admits his need for the support of his people, and they respond by stepping up and taking responsibility.

Table 5

Theme 3 Codes and Categories

Code	Category	Frequency of Occurrence
Foundation of Sound Teaching	Prioritizing Organizational Values	25
Partnership of the Spirit	Prioritizing Organizational Values	12
Commitment to Prayer	Prioritizing Organizational Values	3
Examining Discipleship Effectiveness	Prioritizing Organizational Values	5
Uniting around Common Purpose	Maintaining Organizational Stability	12
Clearly Defined Boundaries	Maintaining Organizational Stability	3
Building and Developing Others	Maintaining Organizational Stability	11
Sharing Responsibility with Others	Maintaining Organizational Stability	4

Theme 4: Love is the Distinguishing Characteristic of the Biblical Community

Interview questions that addressed love as a distinguishing characteristic of the biblical community led to the development of codes that fall into two categories: motivation to love and demonstrations of love. The frequencies for each category and their corresponding codes are listed in Table 6. The category motivation to love had five codes: inspired by the Spirit (8), biblical mandate to

love (12), teaching the Greatest Commandment (11), desperate need for love (13), and characteristic of a healthy church (8)

Motivation to Love. Because the Bible says that God Himself is love (1 Jn. 4:8; 16), some participants recognized the Holy Spirit as a divine source of love. Pastor Arlen explained how God made that realization come alive to him. Through Romans 5:5b, which states that "the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit, who was given to us" (*New King James Version*, 1982), he came to understand that God provided the love that he felt. With that understanding, he described his mindset this way: "As long as I'm open to the work of God, my heart will always be filled with that love, mercy, and compassion. If I stop being an open heart to God, I'll stop loving people." Pastor Fred explained how pursuing the presence of God is how he and his congregation experience the love of God. They make it a priority to take time seeking God, and they also receive evidence of God's love through various gifts of the Holy Spirit. Pastor William expressed something similar, stating that seeking the presence of God is how they experience God's love tangibly. Pastor Bob shared an experience that the Spirit worked through him as an expression of love to some people in need. A family in the community was in great distress because their mother was missing for several days. When the rescue workers were ready to give up the search, the family asked Pastor Bob if he would pray. At the very moment they finished praying, their phone rang, indicating that the mother had been found!

Some of the participants called attention to the biblical mandate to love. Because the church is the instrument through which God reaches humanity, Christians have an obligation to love others. Pastor Arlen described this as a gradual process by which, through persistence, people will grant access to the various layers of their lives. For this reason, Pastor Arlen emphasizes this practice to his people so that they may experience the richness of *koinonia*. Similarly, Pastors Bob, Fred, and Stephen also pointed out the importance of the divine mandate to love others. Pastor Bob mentioned that growing in their understanding of one another is a way to apply the principles of love. Pastor Stephen added, "We really have to model this love as leaders. Love defines, as far as Paul was

concerned. And I think John the same way, he's speaking that God is quintessential…He is love itself. God is love."

The biblical mandate to love has its origin in the Great Commandment (Mk. 12:29–31), which some participants referenced as well as other biblical imperatives to love. Pastors Nathan and Andrew make it a point to regularly include love in their messages. Likewise, Pastor Roger has a message about love that he preaches often in his church, reminding the people of Jesus' commandment to love each other so that all would know that they are Christ's disciples. Pastor Stephen also emphasizes Paul's teaching in 1 Corinthians 13. As for Pastor Fred, he also preaches the Great Commandment, urging his people to put it into practice.

The urgency associated with their preaching and teaching on love is related to the desperate need for love that many of the participants observed in the many people they encounter. Several of the presbyters recognized the overwhelming need that people have for love. Pastors Fred and William highlighted the cry for love and acceptance that they have observed in people. Pastor Arlen recalled how Christ came to earth to share God's love with a broken humanity. He observed further that the church's needs today are just as profound as ever, even in a middle-class suburban setting. Because their crises can sometimes be hidden behind the trappings of success, Pastor Arlen prays for an occasion to minister to them in their brokenness. Pastor Randy added that the love of Christ provides the impetus to reach out and love people who would otherwise be rejected, seeing them as eternal souls. Pastor Andrew offered, "I think the world recognizes genuine love and forgiveness. That's the thing that the world needs and recognizes the most." In fact, Pastor Andrew shared an instance in which he ministered to a transgendered individual who came seeking help but fearing rejection. Instead, he welcomed them and talked to them, offering hope, acceptance, and encouragement through the gospel. He concluded, "God still looks at the soul and the spirit, so He can redeem anyone. And it's not like they're going to ever be able to really change back, but on the inside, they can be redeemed."

Several participants noted that love is a mark of a healthy church. Pastor Roger shared that he thinks people visit his church to see if they really live out their

mission statement to love God and love people, so it remains a challenge for them to keep. Pastors Ryan, Stephen, and William described the characteristics that they have observed among their people that they find great joy in spending time with one another and engaging one another. Pastor Ryan expressed, "They're just so joyous, it's contagious, you know, and you want that kind of experience. So that's the kind of experience that will bring people back…. if people are in love with God, that actually just flows through." Furthermore, As Pastor Stephen observed, there is a willingness to provide love, support, and care for each other during their difficulties also. In describing the love that he has observed in his church, Pastor Bob offered, "They simply love God, and they simply love one another. And I'm grateful to be a part of a fellowship that sees love that simply."

Demonstrations of Love. The category demonstrations of love yielded 5 codes: choosing to show love (31), showing Christ's compassion (24), service to the community (17), support for other ministries (4), and accountability a facet of love (5). The most profound exercise of love recorded among most of the participants was simply the result of making a choice to show love. Several of the participants expressed the idea that love is a verb, a conscious choice that flows from deeply held values, rather than generated by feelings. Pastor Randy declared, "But love has to have an action, or it's just a word." Pastor William expressed a similar sentiment, maintaining that genuine love must show itself with tangible behavior. Pastor Fred equated loving others with loving God, while also highlighting his personal responsibility to model the love that he teaches his people to demonstrate. Several shared instances in which they and/or their people chose to demonstrate love in a particular instance and the positive impact that resulted. Pastor Mark shared how he saw love demonstrated in his church when they raise money for a teen in their congregation and paid for his drum lessons. Pastor Fred witnessed his congregation show loving support and prayer for both a wife and husband (who was suffering from kidney disease) as she provided full-time care for him. Pastor Bob spoke with gratitude for the way his congregation cared for four different families experiencing very difficult funerals during the previous December. In describing the love and support they demonstrated, he said, "The

body reached out, and they were like superheroes!" Pastor Andrew summarized the attitude that most encourage their followers to adopt: "And so, most Sundays, I say, 'As you enter the mission field of your lives, make sure that you take the opportunity to show genuine love and mercy and grace.'"

A significant way that most of the participants said that they saw love demonstrated in their churches and toward their communities was through compassion ministries. Several told about how their churches operated food pantries or other feeding programs in their local neighborhood. Some, like Pastors William and Randy, reached out to nearby urban communities to minister to under-resourced people there. As Pastor Randy shared, just because he did not have under-resourced people in his church's community did not mean they could not reach out to other areas to minister to those in need. Food distribution was not the only way of ministering compassion that these participants described. Pastor William described that sometimes their men's ministry would help single moms who needed projects done. Pastors Roger's church raises money annually to give away to single moms and widows at Christmas. Likewise, Pastor Mark's church give out Christmas gifts to children in a nearby urban community. He also recalled how his congregation supported a man in their congregation who had lost a leg. The people served him and raised money to pay his rent. Pastor Andrew's congregation also opened their church for a senior center. These are just a few of the various ways the pastors shared about how their congregations demonstrated love through compassion.

Community service is yet another way that participants show love toward others. For example, Pastor Roger described several community service initiatives that his church provides. Each year, his church holds a "serve the city" day, during which their volunteers clean the community and parks and plant flowers. This has gotten the attention of the mayor, who has expressed appreciation. Pastor Roger said, "I've told the town council, 'If you ever need a thing, you know, we'd be glad to help. We're here to serve.'" He and his associate pastor also function as police chaplains, helping with such difficult situations as delivering death notifications. Their church opens their building for various community functions such as a voting

and graduations. As Pastor Roger noted, "So, they know we're here, and they really like us. We are easily the most active church in town in terms of helping the town, I think. You know, everybody at town hall knows that."

Pastor Andrew has also done weddings and funerals as a community service. Pastor Randy's church has provided children's recreation programs and a MOPS (Mothers of Pre-Schoolers) outreach. Pastor Nathan maintains awareness of needs in the community that his church can meet. Likewise, Pastor Bob and his church have made themselves available in a variety of circumstances. For example, during a devastating hurricane in which their community was especially hard-hit, the church was one of only two buildings that had power, so they opened to people who needed a place to stay out of the cold, while feeding approximately 70 people daily for about 2 weeks. Pastor Bob also provided needed support for the families of two boys in their community who drowned in a nearby lake. Because his church has regularly demonstrated a willingness to help the community, the mayor has enlisted the church's help on several occasions. In relating his church's desire to serve, Pastor Bob said, "It's us being willing to do anything that needs to be done."

Two less obvious ways some participants said that they and their ministries demonstrated love are through helping and supporting other ministries and by holding people accountable. Pastor Roger described how his church supports local home mission congregations financially to encourage those who have started new churches. His congregation also joined recently with a Chinese congregation to worship together in a show of unity. He also invites other neighboring pastors to his church to interview them and give his congregation an opportunity to get to know them better. Pastor Mark also takes an open view regarding people who leave his congregation to attend other churches while welcoming in others from different fellowships. Recognizing that the needs of people may shift, he can see a justification behind a need to change where they worship. By trying to adopt a posture of love, he can view such transitions in a more redemptive way.

Providing accountability is another demonstration of love that a few participants highlighted. According to Pastor Stephen, part of loving is having to also correct people from time to time. Such accountability, however, is viewed

quite positively as a feature of healthy biblical community life. Pastor Nathan also recognized that love means having to speak hard truth at times, even though it may be initially painful. As he put it, "Speaking truth in love is love. Withholding truth is not love." Likewise, Pastor Andrew also administers truth in a redemptive way to offer correction without condemnation.

Table 6

Theme 4 Codes and Categories

Code	Category	Frequency of Occurrence
Inspired by the Spirit	Motivation to Love	8
Biblical Mandate to Love	Motivation to Love	12
Teaching the Greatest Commandment	Motivation to Love	11
Desperate Need for Love	Motivation to Love	13
Characteristic of a Healthy Church	Motivation to Love	8
Choosing to Show Love	Demonstrations of Love	31
Showing Christ's Compassion	Demonstrations of Love	24
Service to the Community	Demonstrations of Love	17
Support for Other Ministries	Demonstrations of Love	4
Accountability a Facet of Love	Demonstrations of Love	5

Theme 5: Conflicting Organizational Standards and Values Will Undermine the Unity and Stability of the Biblical Community

The categories that developed from questions dealing with conflicting organizational standards and values and their impact on biblical community are challenges to organizational values and practices that reinforce organizational values. The frequencies for each category and code appear in Table 7. The category

challenges to organizational values has three codes: influences of societal culture (11), facing opposition over doctrine (13), and people with an agenda (10).

Challenges to Organizational Values. Some participants indicated that the influences of societal culture are causing a conflict with the church's values. Pastor William mentioned that the perceptions people have of their local government can sometimes influence the way they view authority structures in the church, making them more independent and suspicious of leadership. Pastors Ryan, Roger, and Randy communicated, however, that the biggest challenge to the values in their ministries is due to a lack of biblical literacy among believers, especially in the younger people in their churches. According to Pastor Ryan, the youth are much more enamored with popular culture and appear to be more highly influenced by social media than biblical teaching. Likewise, some people embrace worldly behaviors (e.g., social drinking) that are out of alignment with the church's value system. Pastor Roger has also noticed some resistance from younger people who identify more with cultural norms, mostly because they remain ignorant of biblical teaching. They more readily consult their feelings, rather than the Bible, in relation to moral and ethical issues. Pastor Randy has also observed the effects of society at large to discourage biblical Christianity, which has influenced the perceptions of some believers regarding the church's Scriptural values.

Another area that some participants have identified as a challenge to their organization's values comes through opposition over doctrine. In some instances, as in the case of Pastors Ryan and Nathan, they have encountered self-proclaimed prophets who supposedly have a word for the congregation that is not in alignment with the church's teaching. Pastor Stephen has had people tell him that he is going to hell because of doctrinal disagreements over issues such as baptism and sabbath observance. Several pastors also reported problems related to people bringing in teaching from prior church experiences or other ministries. Such teaching conflicts with the church's doctrine and becomes a source of conflict. For Pastor Roger, the wide availability of different kinds of teaching is sometimes a source of doctrinal disagreement. He also noticed a division among his people regarding social issues

such as race. Some think the church should talk more about racial issues, while other think they should focus less on such matters.

A problem somewhat related to doctrinal issues, according to some participants, is people who have their own agenda. Pastor Roger highlighted instances both in the church and in his section in which a person with a charismatic personality causes trouble through doctrinal error or faulty practice. Pastor Randy had individuals come into his church insisting that they be allowed to preach and teach; he did not give them a forum to promote their personal agenda. Pastor Nathan has also observed how such people with personal agendas cause problems for leaders on a state level also, which causes them to focus on problem solving rather than leading with vision. Pastor Andrew had also experienced people who are large donors that attempt to exert undue influence. Having encountered people who attempted to lead his church in a different direction, Pastor Bob mentioned that leaders must be discerning regarding "red flags" that indicate that someone has a personal agenda.

Practices that Reinforce Organizational Values. The category practices that reinforce organizational values has five codes: returning to biblical doctrine (6), emphasis on biblical teaching (12), contending for biblical truth (18), vigilance regarding worldly teaching (6), and correcting those in opposition (14). Two areas that are closely related to each other that were reported to reinforce organizational values are a return to biblical doctrine and placing an emphasis on biblical teaching. In some instances, the pastors have had to call people back to beliefs and practices that were once common among them but have slipped over time. Pastor Fred emphasized the importance of calling people back to the centrality of Christ and a foundation of sound doctrine. Pastor William also highlighted the need to see a restoration of teaching and practices that were once typically embraced by the church. Pastor Mark explained some of the resistance that he encountered when trying to restore the Pentecostal ministry of the Spirit in his church.

Others mentioned the way they have appreciated the positive effects of biblical teaching in their ministries. Pastor Stephen has noticed a genuine hunger in his people, especially because he endeavors to lead them to study Scripture

inductively. Rather than just giving them proof texts of beliefs, he prefers to let them discover what the Bible reveals as they learn to compare Scripture with Scripture. This approach has promoted greater understanding and maturity. Pastor Randy also endeavors to use the Bible responsibly in guiding people to right behavior, rather than make people feel that he is targeting them over recent issues. Pastor Arlen gives regular attention to doctrines that are of particular importance in his congregation. Pastor Nathan remarked with surprise over the number of people who commend him for preaching from the Bible. He noted, "And it's such a confusing comment to me because what else would you use?" But such comments come from people who formerly attended churches that did not prioritize Bible teaching. He realized that sound, Scriptural teaching is not something to be taken for granted.

That observation helps to contextualize the importance of the next factor that some credit with reinforcing their organizational values, which is contending for biblical truth. Pastor William highlighted the necessity to firmly adhere to scriptural principles and communicate them with grace to provide clarity in a morally confused societal culture. Pastor Fred also advocated holding fast to biblical truth as a corrective to the relativism embraced by the culture at large. Pastor Ryan similarly affirmed the need to focus on Scriptural teaching and not deviate from sound Bible doctrine to prevent the spread of error. This is vital, especially because—as he put it—some Christian publishers are more concerned with profits than with adhering to orthodox biblical teaching. Pastor Roger has also had to instruct his pastoral staff members to be vigilant to identify any doctrines contrary to his church's teaching that may find their way into the church through various curriculum materials. He also requires that they monitor the worship songs so that they do not inadvertently promote doctrines with what he described as questionable theology. Pastor Nathan has had to address some whose Charismatic practices do not align with Scripture. Likewise, Pastor Andrew has received opposition from those who disagree with his teaching. In such instances, he is careful to rely on the Scriptures exclusively to provide support for his theology.

Some participants discussed how they needed to show vigilance regarding worldly teaching that is also trying to infiltrate the church. Pastor Fred explained that when people—especially younger Christians—lack a well-formed Christian worldview, they become influenced by worldly pursuits and make goals based on the allurements of the worldly societal culture. Pastor Andrew explained that biblical truth is undermined when people place more emphasis on the culture and its values than on the Scriptures. He counters that trend with an emphasis on the inerrancy of God's Word. Pastor Nathan proposed that just because someone claims to be a pastor, it does not automatically mean their teaching is sound. He makes it a point to expose what he calls "shallow Christianity." Likewise, Pastor Roger recalled an instance in which a pastor was teaching so-called "sex therapy" that was questionable and sexually explicit. He offered this as an example of the type of worldly teaching that discerning leaders needed to avoid.

When faced with doctrinal error or worldly influences, several participants have expressed the need to correct those in opposition. Some of the pastors indicated facing a variety of issues that has required that address opponents to restore ministry stability. For example, Pastor Bob explained that he had to "put his foot down" regarding those in his church trying to usurp authority. He also encountered board members from other churches who, during a pastoral vacancy, have resisted his leadership as presbyter. He had to face such challenges by acting in the best interests of the church and appealing to his opponents to do the same. He has had mixed reactions to such attempts. Pastor Ryan had to confront some who tried to promote unconditional eternal security, others who opposed the church's teaching on the baptism in the Holy Spirit, and some who insisted that sick people who did not received healing in answer to prayer lacked faith. In each of these situations, he had to take a firm stand regarding the church's teaching to maintain stability.

Table 7

Theme 5 Codes and Categories

Code	Category	Frequency of Occurrence
Influences of Societal Culture	Challenges to Organizational Values	11
Facing Opposition Over Doctrine	Challenges to Organizational Values	13
People with an Agenda	Challenges to Organizational Values	10
Returning to Biblical Doctrine	Practices that Reinforce Organizational Values	6
Emphasis on Biblical Teaching	Practices that Reinforce Organizational Values	12
Contending for Biblical Truth	Practices that Reinforce Organizational Values	18
Vigilance regarding Worldly Teaching	Practices that Reinforce Organizational Values	6
Correcting Those in Opposition	Practices that Reinforce Organizational Values	14

Theme 6: Conflicting Societal Standards and Values Place Biblical Community at Odds With Societal Culture

The participants' responses to the interview questions related to conflicting societal standards and their impact on biblical community yielded two categories: challenges from societal culture and protective measures to uphold values. The frequencies for each category and code are listed in Table 8. The category challenges from societal culture has six codes: antichrist influence in societal culture (15), error of postmodernism (4), destructive worldly cultural influences (18), unbiblical sexual standards and practices (13), political and cultural divisions (18), and indifference toward the church (13).

Challenges from Societal Culture. A significant challenge from societal culture that several participants identified is the antichrist influence in the culture at large. As Pastor Bob expressed, "It is definitely the spirit of antichrist that is in the

world today. It is completely overwhelming our people and their thinking, and it's not just individual thoughts. It's the paradigm of thought." Several pastors gave indications of that spirit at work in modern society, including unbiblical views regarding sexuality and gender and other social issues that oppose a biblical worldview. As Pastor Stephen observed, "But we seem to be a post, if not anti, Christian nation today.…So, there is a very antichrist move right now, in our nation. We are functionally atheist." Pastor Fred also acknowledged what he sees as antichrist influence at work in academia and other segments of public life. For this reason, Pastor William advocated that Christians should integrate a biblical ethic in their approach to the moral issues of the day.

Another challenge Christians face from societal culture is the error of postmodernism. As Pastor Stephen described it, "Postmodernism sees no narrator and no metanarrative. It sees no God whose story we're living. No God to answer to. I write my own story. It is hyper existentialism. I am the measure of my own reality." Pastor Nathan also identified the moral corruption that results from a society that believes in no absolute truth. Instead, people create their own truth. Pastor Roger likewise proposed that the youth are the ones most negatively affected by such ideas because they do not know what to believe, creating a moral crisis for them.

Another challenge presented by societal culture that some participants highlighted are what they view as destructive worldly cultural influences. One such influence that Pastor William spoke about is a consumer mentality that has affected some people in the church. Rather than see their responsibility as servants of Christ who should have an impact on the culture for God's kingdom, they view church from a consumer perspective, expecting it to provide comfort and satisfaction. Pastor Stephen mentioned the lack of a biblical worldview in today's culture. It has had an influence on believers, especially younger Christians. Although they say they believe in God, they are still very heavily influenced by the culture at large. Pastor Roger also called attention to the breakdown of the family. This cultural phenomenon has had an impact on the church, most notably in the rise of divorces

and single-parent households. Pastor Nathan identified the influence of social media and how it is undermining genuine community among God's people.

Several participants listed unbiblical sexual standards and practices as another challenge presented by the culture at large. Specifically, several pastors indicated the conflict presented by issues of gender and sexuality as embraced by the LGBTQ community. Pastor Fred explained that the movement was ultimately a natural development of the sexual revolution that started in the 1960s and 70s and continued to move society away from a biblical view of sexuality. Pastor Roger also has had to address numerous questions regarding sexual issues, which is prompting him to teach a series on biblical sexuality. Although he expects some resistance, he intends to adhere to a Scriptural view of sexuality. He mentioned a relative of his, who is also a pastor, who had a message that he preached on homosexuality removed from YouTube. Although Pastor Nathan also called attention to the LGBTQ agenda, he thinks that a lot of what is seen in public life, especially corporations jumping on the "pride bandwagon," so to speak, is just posturing for public opinion. He also expects a backlash from younger people who accept the LGBTQ agenda; yet, they reject the aggressive position taken by some LGBTQ activists. Pastors Bob and Mark have also identified this issue as a concern. Pastor Mark suggested that some Christians are more actively influenced by TV and the internet than Scripture, which presents a challenge for the church. Pastor Andrew also expressed concerns about pornography and the problems that it has caused for some in his congregation.

Several participants viewed divisions over politics as another challenge from the culture at large. Many have observed a political divine among Christians, which provides evidence that the culture is having too much influence on believers and their relationship one with another. As Pastor Roger noted, "I've had various people who didn't agree politically with the church or with others in the church or were bothered that others didn't agree with them and have left." Several pastors stated that issues involving race, especially related to the organization Black Lives Matter, have also caused some division. Although Christians support racial reconciliation and oppose various forms of racism, many are reluctant to support an

organization they view as promoting several unscriptural positions on moral and political issues. As a result, some feel that the church is not engaging in enough activism, which is further dividing people who would otherwise agree. Although Pastor William has advocated for some action to oppose government overreach (identifying churches as nonessential, for example), most of the pastors themselves avoid preaching politics; however, people still have strong feeling about these matters. As Pastor Bob described it, "They get angry. I've had some people leave the church over it. I've learned this: people abandoned Christ over the politics before they abandoned their politics over Christ." This offense over matters of politics is something Pastor Bob found deeply disturbing. He explained, "We are not populist conservatives. We are born-again Christians, and [some Christians are] losing their identity in conservatism, not in biblical truth."

A few of the participants identified a challenge from societal culture in the form of apathy and indifference. Pastor Nathan identified this as a cultural problem, stating that at one time, the church occupied a much higher priority in people's lives, but has now become one option among many. Pastor Arlen also viewed this as a problem, stating, "It's the challenge of being irrelevant.…My biggest concern about the body of Christ right now is the disengaged attitude of the church and the irrelevance." Pastors Roger and Randy also noticed this as a serious concern. As Pastor Randy observed, "It's not a matter that the church has been opposed, it's just been ignored, which is in a way opposing. It's just it's not, you know, it's not even there."

Protective Measures to Uphold Values. One code emerged from the category protective measures to uphold values: standing for biblical truth (14). Ultimately, the one way that stood out as a protective measure to uphold their values among many participants was taking a stand for biblical truth. For Pastors William and Ryan, standing for biblical truth is important to offset any attempt by the government to close churches again, as was the case during the COVID-19 pandemic. In some instances, biblical proclamation has had some positive response. Pastor Stephen shared, "Any Christian that's willing to care enough to interact with somebody, most of the time, people will want to hear, will want to understand

more. They're not actually so resistant." He recalled that in response to his homeless outreach, he was invited by a Jewish atheist to share his views on his radio program which aired on a classic rock station. He was given two 30-minute segments and was very positively received by the host. Conversely, Pastor Bob talked about some fierce opposition he received while serving on his town's equity task force. In one instance, he was opposed by another clergy member because he did not support teaching LGBTQ material to kindergarten children. He described her response as visceral and angry, calling him a "hater." His reply was, "This is what the Bible says. I have to obey God more than I have to obey men. Not that I don't have mercy for you. But this is what the Bible says." Pastor Andrew talked about some resistance he received from a young lesbian girl who objected to his preaching on sexuality. She returned sometime later to say that she realized that he was not being judgmental or harsh; he was merely preaching what the Bible says about the issue.

Table 8

Theme 6 Codes and Categories

Code	Category	Frequency of Occurrence
Antichrist Influence in Societal Culture	Challenges from Societal Culture	15
Error of Postmodernism	Challenges from Societal Culture	4
Destructive Worldly Cultural Influences	Challenges from Societal Culture	18
Unbiblical Sexual Standards and Practices	Challenges from Societal Culture	13
Political and Cultural Divisions	Challenges from Societal Culture	18
Indifference Toward the Church	Challenges from Societal Culture	13
Standing for Biblical Truth	Protective Measures to Uphold Values	14

Theme 7: A Spiritual Leader Must Confront the Internal and External Challenges to Biblical Community

The categories generated by questions dealing with a spiritual leader's need to address internal and external challenges are problems arising from opposition and confronting challenges to leadership. The frequencies for each category and code appear in Table 9. The category problems arising from opposition had three codes: criticism of pastoral leadership (20), enduring pain associated with opposition (5), and dealing with fallout from opposition (8).

Problems Arising from Opposition. A notable problem that many of the participants listed related to opposition was criticism of their pastoral leadership. They cited a wide variety of reasons why people found fault with their pastoral ministry. Some, like Pastors Andrew, Ryan, and Fred, were criticized for their preaching content and style. For example, Pastor Fred was told he did not preach on sin enough and needed to come down harder on people. Others, who had initially elevated him in their opinion, later rejected him because he did not affirm a historically inaccurate claim that they made. Pastor Ryan also received criticism for not being more confrontational with someone in the church. He also had a family that would sit in judgment of his messages and offer criticism of his sermons to others in the church. Pastor Roger was criticized for disagreeing with a pastor in his section who was often combative and uncooperative, while Pastor Nathan received disapproval for his refusal to preach politics from the pulpit and for not endorsing candidates. Pastor Bob was told that he was hateful for opposing the Equality Act and accused of being intolerant for holding pro-life views. Pastor Mark was attacked for his desire to protect the church's privacy by denying access to their property by some celebrities who were once part of the church. He was widely criticized by their fans also.

Another problem associated with opposition is the pain that some have experienced. Pastor Ryan shared a few instances in which he was hurt in his ministry. In some instances, he wept and cried because of painful experiences associated with people who caused problems. In another situation, he recalls the stress that he experienced because of an uncooperative staff member. He eventually

had to dismiss that person. Pastor William endured a very painful circumstance when a former staff member caused a split in his church and started another church down the road. He recalled the feeling of betrayal that he felt over the matter. Pastor Randy also grieves when people criticize his leaders because he knows that they are people of integrity, and the criticism is often unfair or inaccurate.

Some have had to deal with the fallout that people have caused. Pastor Ryan had to work for weeks to undo the damage that a guest minister had caused by preaching error. Pastor Bob shared about having to deal with the difficulty of people who embraced error. He described it this way: "I allowed a lot of things that I shouldn't have allowed. And I would say it hurt. It hurt me personally, and it also hurt the church a little bit." In the end, however, these instances served as valuable learning experiences for him.

Confronting Challenges to Leadership. The category confronting challenges to leadership yielded eight categories: necessity of biblical convictions (7), confronting doctrinal error and rebellion (14), correcting evil behavior (9), praying through opposition (3), avoiding unproductive arguments (9), showing love toward adversaries (15), resolving various differences (11), and reflection and self-examination (3).

Some of the pastors discussed the need to have firm convictions in ministry, especially as it relates to biblical truth. As Pastor William remarked, "I'm gonna live this, and it's not about feelings, it's not about opinions. This is about what you believe to be true. And you're gonna need to lead from that. And so that's where I found my strength." Pastor Mark shared a similar belief about the necessity to have one's values firmly rooted in the Bible. He noted, "I think being firm number one is the key part. You can't just waver about it. You can't be wishy washy about it. You have to be firm in what you believe." Pastor Bob explained that when people challenge him about his biblical beliefs, he challenges them back: "Is it hate telling someone that that they're sick? Is it hate telling someone that they're going to die? Is it hate warning someone that they have a problem?" He concluded, "Disagreeing with someone is not hating them."

Some of the pastors described instances in which they had to confront error and rebellion. In one instance, Pastor Ryan had to discipline a woman who was promoting gross error and was very disorderly, describing this as a very painful ordeal. When he removed her from membership, however, the congregation stood and applauded. Pastor Nathan is currently having to confront a church in his section that is embracing doctrinal error by placing the church under supervision. Pastor Randy shared about having to correct a man who embraced wrong teaching concerning sin, saying that there was no need for confessing sins because Jesus died for them all. It was especially difficult because this man was so vocal about his beliefs. Pastor Bob recalled a time when he had to ask 18 people to leave the church because they had an agenda and were causing division. He shared the lessons he learned from that experience: "Don't be afraid to tell them to leave. The shepherd has a staff, and that's what the staff is for. And so, I realized, I am not protecting my church by allowing these people who are unrepentant [to remain]."

At times some of the participants shared instances in which they had to correct people who had done wrong. Pastor Roger had to administer correction to a pastor in his section who engaged in fiscally irresponsible behavior. He reacted with anger and shouting in response. Eventually, his ministerial credentials were taken away. Pastor Nathan had to correct a teen who described herself as a "social justice warrior" for going on social media and criticizing the church's youth pastor for his biblical views on sexuality.

Even though participants have faced opposition to their leadership, several have described redemptive ways that they have endeavored to resolve those difficulties. One way some have dealt with challenges to their leadership is to pray through the problem. Pastor Arlen explained how prayer during the COVID-19 pandemic facilitated breakthrough in his ministry because of the way it mobilized people to pray in response to their struggles. Pastor Mark has also experienced positive results in his section by mobilizing prayer efforts to pray through difficulties that churches have faced. In response to government policies that are unbiblical, Pastor Roger has mobilized prayer outside the governor's house to seek a spiritual solution for those issues.

Another redemptive approach to the leadership challenges that some participants highlighted is an effort to avoid conflict whenever possible. For example, Pastor Nathan does not respond to arguments on social media because it will not convince people to change their minds. If anything, he will risk being mischaracterized by people who are already willing to believe the worst. Pastor Bob also makes it a point to avoid arguments, especially over political and social issues because it will likely work against his redemptive goals. He explained, "I don't argue with people. I have learned a long time ago, I can win the argument, and I can lose their soul. And so again, I try to use words of truth that will penetrate their hearts." Pastor Arlen expressed a similar rationale for choosing to avoid arguments when dealing with a difficult person in public. He reasoned, "If I lose it here, I said, I not only lose my relationship with this person that is going against me, but with this other eight people that are looking at me." Pastor Andrew found that by refusing to engage a person who is looking for an argument, it disarms them and makes it harder for them to escalate the conflict.

Another positive way that some participants confront challenges to their leadership is to show love toward people in opposition. Some shared how they choose to respond with love, even when facing disagreement or hostility. Pastor Mark makes it a point to address differences with love. When attacked, he said, "I talk to them in a way that is loving." Pastor Roger also takes that approach. He explained how he responded with love and Christlike spirit to the community, even when faced with opposition to their building proposal. Pastor William suggested that it is possible to disagree with respect. He said further, "The Lord of vindicates those who he calls. And I think the challenge is just to bless and to love to walk with those people who are hurting because people do hurt." Pastor Andrew also made the point that just because others may act with hostility, he does not have to respond in kind.

Some of the participants explained that they address challenges to their leadership by making efforts to resolve differences with people. For example, Pastors William is willing to make concessions with people in pursuit of the greater good. Several others also try to talk through their differences with people. Pastor

Randy admitted that even if they cannot agree with each other, the effort can still build trust and good will. Pastors Roger, Nathan, and Andrew also appreciate the value of working through differences one-on-one. A valuable part of the process for some is also engaging in reflection and self-examination. Pastor William explained how he learns from such encounters and thinks about how he could handle things better. Pastor Mark also assesses his own responses. Pastor Arlen admitted that such self-reflection had led him to realize when he was wrong and proved to be a valuable learning experience.

Table 9

Theme 7 Codes and Categories

Code	Category	Frequency of Occurrence
Criticism of Pastoral Leadership	Problems Arising from Opposition	20
Enduring Pain Associated with Opposition	Problems Arising from Opposition	5
Dealing with Fallout from Opposition	Problems Arising from Opposition	8
Necessity of Biblical Convictions	Confronting Challenges to Leadership	7
Confronting Doctrinal Error and Rebellion	Confronting Challenges to Leadership	14
Correcting Evil Behavior	Confronting Challenges to Leadership	9
Praying through Opposition	Confronting Challenges to Leadership	3
Avoiding Unproductive Arguments	Confronting Challenges to Leadership	9
Showing Love toward Adversaries	Confronting Challenges to Leadership	15
Resolving Various Differences	Confronting Challenges to Leadership	11
Reflection and Self-Examination	Confronting Challenges to Leadership	3

Summary

As stated earlier, the purpose of this study is to analyze the leadership of the Apostle John as demonstrated in his New Testament epistles (1–3 John) in view of SLT (Fry, 2003; Fry & Matherly, 2006; Fry & Whittington, 2014) for developing a biblical OC in the local church (characterized by *koinonia*) while navigating the challenges of an adversarial societal culture. A thorough exegetical analysis of the those epistles yielded seven themes that formed the basis of further qualitative inquiry: (a) effective spiritual leadership flows from divine fellowship, (b) unity with God and others is essential for biblical community, (c) community stability comes through an organizational culture based upon shared values, (d) love is the distinguishing characteristic of the biblical community, (e) conflicting organizational standards and values will undermine the unity and stability of the biblical community, (f) conflicting societal standards and values place biblical community at odds with societal culture, and (g) a spiritual leader must confront the internal and external challenges to biblical community.

These themes were used to develop 11 in-depth interview questions that were asked to Assemblies of God presbyters to better understand their lived experiences related to the central phenomenon. From these interviews, process coding and values coding generated the following categories: (a) spiritual dimension, (b) personal growth, (c) ministry development, (d) catalysts for community, (e) descriptions of community, (f) prioritizing organizational values, (g) maintaining organizational stability, (h) motivation to love, (i) demonstrations of love, (j) challenges to organizational values, (k) practices that reinforce organizational values, (l) challenges from societal culture, (m) protective measures to uphold values, (n) problems arising from opposition, and (o) confronting challenges to leadership.

Chapter 5 – Discussion

The current researcher conducted an analysis of the leadership of the Apostle John as demonstrated in his New Testament epistles (1–3 John). The researcher also conducted in-depth interviews with 11 Assemblies of God presbyters to examine their lived experiences in view of the scriptural principles found in John's epistles. The themes developed from the exegetical analysis served as the basis for questions that examined the participants' experiences as compared with the biblical text. The data from the interviews were analyzed to develop categories that related the biblical themes with the practical experiences of the participants resulting in the development of categories that further clarified the results of analysis.

The final chapter contains answers to the proposed research questions and a discussion of the leadership of the Apostle John. An examination of the biblical themes derived from the exegesis and data from in-depth interviews is compared and contrasted with spiritual leadership theory (Fry, 2003) and organizational culture as defined by Schein (1988) and Cameron and Quinn (2011). This examination is done with a view toward the development of biblical community as characterized by *koinonia*.

Answers to the Research Questions

The answers to Research Questions 1–4 reveal the leadership themes developed from the findings generated by exegetical analysis that identify leadership characteristics demonstrated by the Apostle John. These characteristics provide a basis for comparison with principles represented in the SLT and OC leadership paradigms. Answers to Research Questions 5–8 were devised from the in-depth interview data describing the lived experiences of the participants. In this section, these experiences are examined with respect to the leadership constructs under consideration.

Research Question 1

The first research question asked: What characteristics defined the leadership demonstrated by the Apostle John? A careful examination of John's epistles reveals qualities of leadership that characterize a distinctive Johannine style. One distinguishing quality of leadership that John exemplified was a deep spiritual capacity (Pastori & Henson, 2022). The depth of intimate fellowship with God that John experienced on a regular basis provided the spiritual authority that gave his leadership a sense of mystical gravitas (Pawar, 2014). John's personal relationship with the Lord was a part of the spiritual legacy that he sought to pass on to his followers by inviting them to experience shared fellowship with the Father, the Son, and the body of Christ (1 Jn. 1:3–7).

Another immediate quality of leadership that emerges is how John exhibits a pastoral heart (Pastori & Henson, 2022). Each of the Johannine epistles exudes a pastoral tone, especially in the way in which John exhibited concern for the fellowship that was divided because of false teaching (Akin, 2001; Hiebert, 1991; Marshall, 1978; Westcott, 1902). Because of the concern for the well-being of the flock under his care, John took protective action against doctrines and influences that threatened *koinonia* in the church through a focus on sound teaching (Hiebert, 1991; Kruse, 2020; Smalley, 1984).

The Apostle also communicated a clearly defined values system (Pastori & Henson, 2022). Using language rich with vibrant images and intense emotions, John taught his followers the importance of valuing truth (1 Jn. 2:21; 2 Jn. 3–4; 3 Jn. 3–4), living in the light (1 Jn. 1:5, 7; 2:8), observing God's commandments (1 Jn. 2:3; 3:24; 2 Jn. 6), exercising spiritual discernment (1 Jn. 2:20, 27; 4:1–3), promoting unity in fellowship (1 Jn. 1:1–7; 3 Jn. 5–8), and prioritizing love in all things (1 Jn. 4:7–21; 2 Jn. 5–6). An emphasis on such values would infuse the community with a distinctively Johannine character.

Another characteristic that 1 John highlighted about John's leadership is his presentation of a compelling vision (Pastori & Henson, 2022). John conveyed a vibrant description of the joy and fulfillment of fellowship with God the Father, the Son, and the community of faith (1 Jn. 1:1–7). He also created a vivid sense of

expectation associated with the possibility of a community that had love as its foundational distinctive (1 Jn. 3:10–23; 4:7–21). The sense that John gives followers is that even in a world that has the spirit of antichrist as its governing principle, the church can create a culture that inspires believers to overcome the various challenges they face as they experience a shared bit of heaven on earth.

Research Question 2

The second research question was: How do the leadership principles exhibited by John compare and contrast with spiritual leadership theory? Spiritual leadership theory is first spiritual, and therefore recognizes the value of spirituality in the exercise of leadership (Fry, 2003), which aligns well with the leadership demonstrated by the Apostle John (Pastori & Henson, 2022). John's inspirational example sets the tone for the organization as it inspires believers to grow and develop in their own spiritual lives (Baykal, 2019; Fry, 2009; P. V. Nguyen et al., 2018; Sweeney & Fry, 2012). John appealed to followers to experience the shared joy of fellowship with the Father, the Son and one another (1 Jn. 1:3–7). Such fellowship would serve as factor that contributes to organizational unity.

John's pastoral care for his followers demonstrated a concern for their well-being that aligns well with spiritual leadership theory (Pastori & Henson, 2022; Sweeney & Fry, 2012). John's compassionate pastoral supervision exemplified altruistic love, which represented a central priority of John's teaching (Benefiel et al., 2014; Sweeney & Fry, 2012). As Fry (2003) proposed, an important goal of SLT is "establishing a social/organizational culture based on altruistic love whereby leaders and followers have genuine care, concern, and appreciation for both self and others" (p. 695). This objective is an important component of developing a biblical culture characterized by *koinonia* (Fry, 2005).

John's clearly defined values system also finds compatibility with SLT's objectives (Pastori & Henson, 2022). Fry (2003) defined spiritual leadership as "comprising the values, attitudes, and behaviors that are necessary to intrinsically motivate one's self and others so that they have a sense of spiritual survival through calling and membership" (pp. 694–695). John's values system encouraged practices that promote unity and foster a common bond of Christian identity (Fry, 2003;

Sweeney & Fry, 2012; Yang & Fry, 2018). Fry (2003) advocated that leaders identify their own core values and communicate them to their followers "though vision, values, and personal actions" (p. 696). In addition to the items mentioned earlier in John's values system (i.e., embracing truth, living in the light, following God's commandments, exercising spiritual discernment, promoting unity in fellowship, and prioritizing love), John's teachings embody the principles of hope/faith, vision, and altruistic love that Fry (2003) proposes.

In advancing SLT, Fry (2003) also highlighted the importance of inspiring a shared vision (Kouzes & Posner, 2012), a quality that John also demonstrated in his leadership (Pastori & Henson, 2022). By creating a compelling vision of biblical community as characterized by *koinonia*, John appealed to a sense of calling and membership in his followers that would foster loyalty and dedication among members (Fry, 2003, 2009). Such expectations contribute to the further growth and development of altruistic love as a characteristic of the spiritual community (Fry, 2003).

Research Question 3

The third research question asked: How do the principles of biblical community in the epistles of John compare and contrast with the theory of organizational culture? As a fledgling organization, the church had some basic shared experiences which enabled it to establish a common culture (Acts 2:42–47). The initial homogeneity and the relative smaller number of people in the early church made culture a much simpler concern (Schein, 1988). As the church became established and grew, its culture became somewhat more defined as it faced internal and external pressures and had to adapt to changing social situations (Cameron & Quinn, 2011; Schein, 1986; Serrano, 2022). For example, in Acts 15, the church had to address the cultural implications of incorporating Gentiles into the worship community, which challenged the basic underlying assumptions of the fledgling organization (Cameron & Quinn, 2011). By the end of the first century, part of the growing process for the church was dealing with more shifts occurring both internally and externally, which highlighted a need for a more mature, developed social learning process. John faced a growing number of false teachers

infiltrating the church with new doctrinal heresies, such as the growing development of Gnosticism in its various forms. Likewise, the church also faced increasing pressure from a societal culture that demonstrated varying levels of hostility. Therefore, some of the taken-for-granted assumptions and values were again being challenged (Cameron & Quinn, 2011).

According to Schein (1986), a group of people must have a measure of stability and a shared history to establish a more developed social learning process. As time goes by, the culture develops as the group grows in the accumulation of learning in its shared experiences (Schein, 1988). The challenges John faced were, in part, due to the discomfort or "growing pains" of helping the church to develop a values system that would define accepted behavior in the biblical community. As Schein (1986) explained, "One of the most painful situations that groups face is the discomfort of not having a common language and conceptual system, a common set of rules for relating to the environment and each other" (p. 31). By clarifying a values system that would direct behavior in the organization, John was establishing a standard of accepted behavior that would define biblical community that embodied *koinonia*. Once established, newcomers could be educated about the cultural norms to better understand expectations associated with membership. It also gave members a standard by which they could address aberrations from the cultural norm (Schein, 1988).

As the church has grown and made its adaptations to the varying changes in circumstances (both internal and external), the principles of organizational culture theory have had significant implications. As John addressed such challenges, the application of underlying organizational cultural principles was of particular importance. Therefore, as applied to the biblical community in the Johannine epistles, the theoretical principles of organizational culture as described by Schein (1986, 1988) and Cameron and Quinn (2011) align well with the circumstances described.

Research Question 4

The fourth research question was: How did John handle the leadership challenges facing his ministry? John demonstrated a discerning intuitive sense

through pastoral supervision. He perceived the nature of the error that caused division in the church and dealt with the foundational issues accordingly. The fundamental root issues were errors concerning either the deity or the humanity of Jesus. Such misunderstandings regarding Christ would naturally give rise to erroneous beliefs and practices. The Apostle also discerned the spirit of antichrist at work in the world and recognized its attempt to infiltrate the church through false teachers. He likewise discerned the threats that worldly influences posed to the church and equipped the Christian community to recognize these temptations (1 Jn. 2:15–17).

This quality of discernment that John demonstrated also highlighted a determination to dispel and correct error through authoritative instruction (1 Jn. 2:1; 1 Jn. 2:18–19; 1 Jn. 4:1–3). John identified those who advocated heterodox teaching and exposed them as liars. He effectively did this through offering ways that believers could identify false doctrine. By use of such indicators as "by this we know" (1 Jn. 2:3, 5; 3:16, 19, 24; 4:6, 13) and "whoever" statements (e.g., "whoever denies the Son" [1 Jn. 2:23], "whoever commits sin" [1 Jn. 3:4], "whoever sins" [1 Jn. 3:6b], "whoever does not practice" [1 Jn. 3:10b], "whoever hates" [1 Jn. 3:15], "whoever transgresses" [2 Jn. 9]), the Apostle offered clear identifiers that guided believers in distinguishing truth from error.

Another characteristic of John's leadership was a willingness to confront rebellion with decisive intervention. John confronted those who spread error and caused division through the spirit of antichrist (1 Jn. 2:18–23). He also took a confrontational posture against anyone whose hatred disrupted the *koinonia* among God's people (1 Jn. 3:4–15). He also advocated a firm stand against anyone who tried to infiltrate the church with false doctrine (2 Jn. 7–11). Likewise, he confronted the ungodly, dictatorial behavior of Diotrephes (3 Jn. 9–10). As a pastoral figure, John also corrected and confronted with a view toward redemptive restoration (1 Jn. 1:9; 2:1; 5:14–15).

Research Question 5

The fifth research question inquired: What approaches have contemporary pastors used to develop a healthy New Testament biblical community while

engaging a post-Christian culture? The qualitative data provided by the participants revealed the methods of building biblical community in their congregations. Four primary approaches emerged that the presbyters utilized in building biblical community. As biblical community involves a spiritual dynamic, they recognized the role of the Holy Spirit in facilitating fellowship and community in the church, and they recognized that the Spirit must be the ultimate catalyst in creating a sense of *koinonia*. For this reason, they generally look for empowerment through the anointing of the Holy Spirit on their various ministry effort. Likewise, they relied on the Spirit to give them creative ideas regarding ways of bringing believers together, which leads to the next broad approach.

Because the pastors recognized the all-important aspect of relationships in building spiritual community, they employed a variety of ways to engage people and bring them together. A key element that they recognized was proximity, which became even more obvious as the churches came through COVID-19 lockdowns. The lack of physical presence in fellowship during the pandemic further convinced them about the need and priority of gathering people together. Whether in the form of special ministry events, fellowship gatherings, meals, or regular weekly worship gatherings, building relationships emerged as a centerpiece of building and maintaining biblical community.

The qualitative data suggested another broad approach that the participants used to develop healthy spiritual community. Specifically, they united around common beliefs and a common purpose. By focusing on the things that brought them together, they were able to maintain a sense of spiritual identity. A focus on Scripture was paramount in this endeavor, as the pastors recognized the importance of being Scripture-centered, and they made sound doctrinal teaching a priority. A key part of that was in finding stability in the central doctrines of their denomination, the Assemblies of God. Belief in the Assemblies of God's central teachings was a nonnegotiable for all participants. Although they may have differences of opinions regarding peripheral theological issues, their common purpose in adherence to the essentials remained an important point of unity. That

included teaching love as a fundamental aspect of the Christian faith, which leads to the next broad approach.

Various demonstrations of love were a key part of creating unity among the church's members, while also giving them a heart to reach out to their local communities. Because of the Bible's central focus on love and the mandate for believers to love outsiders as well as their fellow Christians, love emerged as a factor that governed church activities as well as outreach initiatives. This focus on the need to express love in tangible ways made service a key manifestation of love both inside and outside the church. This was especially significant in equipping them to reach and engage the community at large, whether they were receptive to the church or not. Each of the leaders shared a variety of way that they loved their communities through compassion ministries and sought opportunities to serve outsiders through various means to demonstrate the love of God.

Research Question 6

The sixth research question was: What methods have contemporary pastors used to gauge the status of biblical community? Although none of the participants referenced any formal tools to evaluate biblical community empirically, two primary ways were identified in the data that gave an indication how the participants gauged its general status. One important way in which they gauged the condition of biblical community was through reading the response to their Bible teaching and discipleship initiatives. By getting a sense of their followers' engagement with Scripture, adherence to sound doctrine, evidence of biblical application in their lives, and spiritual growth and maturity (i.e., what could be described as the fruit of the Spirit, as listed in Gal. 5:22–23) the pastors would determine the overall condition of their fellowship, much like a physician would check the vital signs of a patient.

The other overall way they used to gauge the status of spiritual community was pastoral instinct and intuition. Through observation of several factors, the presbyters relied on pastoral instincts and discernment to assess the quality of spiritual life and fellowship among the members of their congregations. If they sensed a concern that needed to be addressed, an issue that required instruction and

clarification, or a conflict that must be resolved, they took steps to address the need. They would do so through a combination of biblical application, guidance from the Holy Spirit, personal experience, and their own instinctive sense, what some would describe as "a gut feeling." These components comprise the overall of concept pastoral instinct and intuition. Based on this personal guidance, they would take whatever steps they deemed appropriate in the service of their organizations.

Research Question 7

The seventh research question asked: What aspects of post-Christian culture do contemporary pastors perceive to pose a threat to biblical community? The collected data showed that the participants viewed threats to biblical community in a post-Christ culture as coming from two sources: internal and external. In each instance, the effects of a post-Christian culture work in ways that pastors must address with vigilance. Internally, pastors noted the general challenge coming from a lack of biblical literacy and commitment to biblical inerrancy. Inasmuch as believers deprioritize the Bible, other influences fill the vacuum. In some cases, people allow worldly influences to inform their worldview, which presents an open door to corruption. With others, their lack of proper interpretation of the Bible leaves them open to error, causing them to embrace doctrines that threaten the spiritual health and unity of the community. In yet other instances, some people interpret the Bible through a cultural filter, thereby undermining the ability of the Scriptures to speak with authority regarding contemporary issues. Instead, biblical principles are subordinated to the shifting sands of modern worldly opinions. As such, these tendencies increase the likelihood that the church will face internal divisions over political, moral, and sexual issues. Regardless, these influence cause an erosion of biblical standard from within that undermine the spiritual community and disrupt *koinonia*.

Externally, the spirit of antichrist at work in the culture at large is creating increasing tension between the church and society. The tendency toward lawlessness associate with postmodernism and other unbiblical beliefs and attitudes contributes further to the cultural divide between the church and the world. As a post-Christian culture moves steadily away from the biblical values that formed the

Judeo-Christian ethic, it sets the stage for an increase in divisions over moral, ethical, and sexual standards and practices between the church and society at large. The result is an ever-increasing polarization that is causing Christians with biblical views to fall out of favor. The experiences of these presbyters show that they have already felt such tensions and anticipate that they will increase if the current trend continues. Ultimately, these pastors expect that persecution in some form will follow.

Research Question 8

The final research question was as follows: How do the methods of contemporary pastors compare and contrast to the theoretical constructs of spiritual leadership theory and organizational culture? Considerable alignment exists between the methods these participants use and the theoretical constructs of spiritual leadership theory and organizational culture theory. In most cases, that alignment is not by design. The application of organizational values means that behind their strategies and practices lie sound theoretical elements. According to SLT (Fry, 2003), it consists of a system of values, attitudes, and behaviors that together contribute toward intrinsic motivation to create a sense of calling and membership, what Fry referred to as "spiritual survival" (p. 711). These qualities are at work in each of the participants in this study. They all expressed very clear values system that promotes the attitudes and behaviors that creates a culture that their followers readily identify with and that motivates them to unite around a common purpose.

Furthermore, SLT (Fry, 2003) encourages the development of intrinsic motivation through organizational paradigms that incorporate vision, faith/hope, and altruistic love. These virtues are biblical qualities that the participants model and teach as part of their biblical worldview. As Fry (2003) hypothesized, "by incorporating calling and membership as two key dimensions of spiritual survival, spiritual leadership theory also is inclusive of the religious and ethics and values-based approaches to leadership" (p. 696). Also, another positive aspect of SLT, as Fry (2003) suggested, is that "it is more conceptually distinct, parsimonious, and

less conceptually confounded" (p. 694). This makes SLT a good prospect for general applicability in a spiritual organization.

Initially, SLT (Fry, 2003) was developed to be nonsectarian so that it could be used in a nonreligious marketplace setting. The thrust of SLT lies in the encouragement of people in the organization to recognize and embrace the spiritual element as an important aspect of creating a positive organizational culture that relies on values to create a motivational and ethical framework. The strength of SLT, as Fry described it, is that it recognizes that people are spiritual beings, so it meets the higher order spiritual needs they bring (Arsenich, 2018; Fry, 2003). As Henson (2015) observed, SLT lacks a component for the development of morality and ethics. Still, what SLT may lack, a religious organization should be able to provide from its own moral, ethical, and spiritual framework. Because the unity of the organizational cultures these pastors lead relies on a high level of religious and doctrinal unity, it falls to them to create the moral and ethical framework to foster unity. In the cases presented in this study, that was certainly the case. As such, SLT provided a suitable model for comparison.

Organizational culture theory, as defined by Schein (1986, 1988) and Cameron and Quinn (2011), also provided a useful theoretical model for this study. The methods that the presbyters in this study used to build and nurture biblical community found explanation in the elements that comprise an organizational culture. Schein (1990) noted that an organizational culture consists of observable artifacts, values, and basic underlying assumptions that the people have in common. Cameron and Quinn (2011) explained that this culture "represents 'how things are done around here.' It represents the prevailing ideology that people carry inside their heads" (p. 19). In view of this understanding, the current researcher could easily identify that each pastor has worked to build and maintain an organizational culture that aligns with the teaching of Scripture. Each church has its artifacts that are observable through everything including the church's facilities, forms and expression of worship, teaching and discipleship, relational dynamics, and spiritual atmosphere, to name a few. They all have clearly articulated values, which are based on Scripture, that form the basis of an implied contract among its

members (Cameron & Quinn, 2011). They also have underlying assumptions that people bring. When those assumptions are in alignment, they create a sense of unity in fellowship. When they lack agreement, it results in discord, which the pastors work to resolve. Ultimately, these factors work together and create the explicit behaviors that manifest themselves in the organization. The participants described how they utilize these elements to promote a culture that facilitates *koinonia* among its members. Therefore, the organizational culture theoretical framework has been useful in better understanding the dynamics of biblical culture and the factors that contribute to its development and maintenance.

Discussion of Biblical Themes

After answering the research questions, the researcher will now discuss relevant issues that concern ministry application. This section is a consideration of the biblical themes that developed from 1–3 John and how they integrate with theory (in particular, the theorical constructs related to SLT and OC) and practical application, as observed in the lived experiences of the participants. In this way, it will provide a useful guide for contemporary pastors by drawing from eternal scriptural principles and organizational leadership theory to inform their practice.

Theme 1: Effective Spiritual Leadership Flows from Divine Fellowship

The Apostle John drew inspiration from his deep spiritual capacity to call his followers to mutual fellowship shared among believers with God the Father and God the Son (1 Jn. 1:1–4). This created the basis for biblical community as characterized by *koinonia* (1 Jn. 1:3–7). As the disciple "whom Jesus loved" (Jn. 13:23–27; 19:26–27; 20:2; 21:7, 20–22), he had a close relationship with God that spoke of a deep spiritual connection from which he operated. His intimate fellowship with God served as the fountainhead from which his spiritual authority flowed.

John's spiritual experience would find an application in SLT. Fry (2003) stated, "Spirituality reflects the presence of a relationship with a higher power or being that affects the way in which one operates in the world" (p. 705). Fry explained further that this connection with God serves as the source of core values

that a leader uses to inspire others through a vision and actions that motivate in followers a sense of calling and membership. This pursuit of spiritual survival motivates people to unite around a common purpose in fulfillment of the will of God. This takes place in the context of a community in which believers feel understood and appreciated. In this way, believers experience *koinonia* that is reflected in biblical community.

Each of the presbyters participating in this study communicated the central priority that they place on their relationship with God. They shared about the various ways in which they spend personal time with God and seek God through study of Scripture, prayer, and worship. They also shared how God communicated with them and gave them a witness through the Holy Spirit that they were connected with Him. Likewise, they received personal direction and inspiration from God. In each case, they spoke of a relationship that is uniquely intimate and personal. They all attributed this spiritual connection with God as an absolute essential for the fulfillment of their divine calling.

Theme 2: Unity with God and Others is Essential for Biblical Community

A key task undertaken by John in his three epistles was to restore the unity in the fellowship that has been disrupted by false teaching and secessionists who divided the body of Christ (1 Jn. 1:6–10; 1 Jn. 2:18–19; 4:1–6; 2 Jn. 1–10; 3 Jn. 9–10). To promote unity and counteract the effects of division, the Apostle placed special focus on the centrality of love in the body of Christ and denounced anything that worked against the common bond of fellowship (worldliness, 1 Jn. 2:15–17; sin, 1 Jn. 3:4–6; hatred, 1 Jn. 3:10–15; and the spirit of antichrist, 1 Jn. 4:1–6). In this way, he endeavored to restore the unity that would bring God's people together and create a culture that invited the blessing and the presence of God.

SLT likewise proposed to establish an organizational culture founded on altruistic love that gives members a feeling of belonging and appreciation (Adebiyi, 2016; Fry, 2003). The practitioners of SLT view people as uniquely gifted individuals who are motivated when they experience a sense of transcendence associated with their personal contributions to the organization (Fry & Matherly, 2006). This sense of contribution further enhances organizational outcomes and the

development of a positive organizational culture that inspires commitment (Adebiyi, 2016; Alimudin et al., 2017; Çimen & Karadağ, 2019; Yang & Fry, 2018).

The participants in this study engaged in several practices by which they encouraged unity among their members. Because they recognized the value of relationship, they prioritized ministries and activities that brought people together to build those relationships in the bonds of Christian love. Although they have diverse congregations from different backgrounds, they made it a goal to focus on their common organizational mission to facilitate unity. In so doing, they experienced the blessings of biblical community that allowed them to experience God's presence together, learn from one another, hold one another accountable, and witness a divine synergy as they served others for the glory of God.

Theme 3: Community Stability Comes Through an Organizational Culture Based Upon Shared Values

As highlighted earlier, John acted in a pastoral capacity when he established clear values that were intended as guidelines for living in the biblical community. John's values system included embracing truth, living in the light, following God's commandments, exercising spiritual discernment, promoting unity in fellowship, and prioritizing love. The value system he taught was what he saw Jesus model, which he also exemplified. By making these standards a priority for believers to put into practice, the Apostle emphasized the importance of uniting around their shared values. Through his teaching, John set the moral, ethical, and spiritual tone for the biblical community.

Fry and Cohen (2009) asserted, "Leaders play a major role in creating and sustaining an organization's culture. They are originally the source of beliefs and values that organizational members use to deal with problems relating to external adaptation and internal integration" (p. 267). Eventually, culture is formed as the group develops an accumulated body of learning that includes common assumptions, which develop into accepted patterns of behavior (Schein, 1990). The resulting culture is the product of learning and provides stability for the organization (Schein, 1990, 2017). This results in unity around a common purpose,

positive organizational citizenship behaviors, and a shared values system, which for believers has its basis in Scripture (Chen & Yang, 2012; Serrano, 2022; Struecker, 2015).

A defining characteristic of each presbyter's ministry was a focus on biblical teaching. This served as the foundation of their organizational values system. Furthermore, they also adhered to a set of organizational doctrinal statements (which were also based on Scripture) that enhanced the sense of unity around their shared values. By teaching and prioritizing their scriptural values, they established and maintained a culture that clarified behavioral expectations in the biblical community. This values system also provided a point around which believers could unite. These factors worked together to create organizational stability.

Theme 4: Love is the Distinguishing Characteristic of the Biblical Community

The message in John's epistles makes love the central focus of the biblical community (1 Jn. 4:7–21). Just as the heart of New Testament teaching could be summarized in the Great Commandment to love God with all one's heart, soul, mind, and strength and to love one's neighbor as themselves (Mk. 12:29–31), the primary emphasis for the spiritual community in John's epistles is the command to love. As John expounded, it is an old commandment, yet it is ever new (1 Jn. 2:7–8). The Apostle taught the importance of love because it was the essence of God, His very nature (1 Jn. 4:8, 16). It was the very quality that God demonstrated by sending his Son Jesus to provide the atoning sacrifice for humanity's sins (1 Jn. 4:9–10), and it was the love of God that taught people how to respond in love (1 Jn. 4:19). The message of God's love represents the very heart of the gospel (Jn. 3:16).

One of the distinguishing features of SLT is its focus on developing an organizational culture motivated by altruistic love and mutual concern among its members (Fry, 2003; Washington, 2016). Fry (2003) proposed, "For spiritual leadership theory, altruistic love is defined as a sense of wholeness, harmony, and well-being produced through care, concern, and appreciation for both self and others" (p. 712). This corresponds well to love as characterized in the Bible. The Greek word for love that John uses is ἀγάπη (*agape*), which means "the quality of

warm regard for and interest in another, esteem, affection, regard, love" (Danker et al., 2000, p. 6). Fry (2003) considered altruistic love the common link between spirituality and religion. Fry also maintained that love has the power to overcome destructive influences such as fear, anger, a sense of failure, and pride. Likewise, the Apostle highlighted the power of love, declaring, "There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear" (*New King James Version*, 1982, 1 Jn. 4:18a–b).

The study's participants demonstrated the priority they place on love in the various aspect of their ministries. They make it a point to teach the importance of love as a central message of the New Testament. Furthermore, they also actively work to build a biblical culture that features love prominently. This is apparent by the many ways each ministry tangible demonstrates love through showing love and support one for another, compassion ministries that attempt to meet the needs of hurting people in the community, and other deeds of community service that communicate the love of God to their neighbors. Ultimately, the believers in each of these ministries make a conscious choice to demonstrate the love of God.

Theme 5: Conflicting Organizational Standards and Values Will Undermine the Unity and Stability of the Biblical Community

A major problem that John addressed was the proliferation of false teachings that plagued his congregation, such as Docetism, Gnosticism, and Cerinthianism (Pate, 2011). Each of these false teachings promoted some errors regarding the nature of Christ (1 Jn. 2:22–23; 1 Jn. 4:1–6). The results of their teaching led to division and eventually to a separation, with some people leaving the church (1 Jn. 2:19). These things threatened the unity and stability of the biblical community, and it was John's responsibility to solve this problem. He responded to the challenge with sound, biblical teaching, relying on the power of God's Word (2 Cor. 10:4–5; Eph. 6:17; 2 Tim. 3:16–17; Heb. 4:12).

One of the advantages of organizational culture is that it equips a group over time to work through problems of internal integration of the community's values (Schein, 1990). In this way, an organization can deal with problems of discord regarding conflicts that arise from disagreement over essentials. According to Schein (1990), "Systems tend toward some kind of equilibrium, attempt to

reduce dissonance, and thus bring basic categories or assumptions into alignment with each other" (p. 111). The challenge of church leadership is to call people who cause division to repentance in the hope of facilitating restoration, yet maintaining an awareness that separation may result (Henson, 2015). Ultimately, the leader is responsible to exert positive influence on the culture (S. B. Sanders, 2014). One way to achieve this is to teach and enforce the values that become the organizations set of assumptions (Schein, 1986).

Each of the presbyters in this study faced challenges that threatened to disrupt the unity and stability of their spiritual communities. They addressed various internal problems that tested their doctrinal standards and organizational values. They had to deal with the corrupting influences of societal culture creeping in, contentions over doctrinal issues, and people who had their own selfish designs. They maintained their organizational equilibrium, however, by adhering to a focus on biblical teaching and opposing any doctrine that threatened to undermine the unity and stability of the fellowship. They administered correction with a view toward redemption; yet, they made it a priority to uphold biblical truth, even when it meant taking an unpopular stand.

Theme 6: Conflicting Societal Standards and Values Place Biblical Community at Odds With Societal Culture

Like all spiritual leaders, John had to deal with a societal culture that was adversarial at times. The primary problem had to do with the two incompatible systems that warred against one another. The church organizational culture had biblical foundations; as such, it honored the Lordship of God the Father and Jesus Christ (1 Jn. 2:22–24; 3:22–24). John testified, however, that whole world is under Satan's domain (1 Jn. 5:19) and the spirit of antichrist is the dominant influence at work in societal culture (1 Jn. 2:18; 4:3). This meant that John, like all spiritual leaders, had to build and maintain a biblical church culture while operating in and engaging with an antichrist societal culture. This meant that persecution was always a possibility.

Schein (2017) recognized that every organizational culture operates within a larger societal culture that can potentially exert influence over it. In fact, Cameron

and Quinn (2011) identified several levels of culture extending even to global culture that can have an impact on an organization. According to Crowther (2012), "In many ways, the church follows the culture. However, the church needs to lead and critique culture, not simply follow it" (p. 173). Crowther maintained that the church must remain a counterculture rather than follow the lead of societal culture. Through exerting biblical leadership, Crowther proposed that the church could take the lead in influencing the culture rather than vice versa. Williams (2020) acknowledged that in spite of the growing antagonism of a post-Christian culture, believers can take a missional approach in reaching and influencing the culture as ambassadors for the kingdom of God. Furthermore, according to Serrano (2022), the church has the capability to impact culture on a societal level by uniting behind the gospel message and delivering that message in unison, backed with united action in service to humanity.

The participants in the current study expressed awareness that the culture at large is antichrist and presents a challenge to the church. If they did not exercise vigilance, then societal culture would influence the church and undermine the quality of biblical culture. In recognizing the various threats that societal culture presented (e.g., postmodernist thought, unbiblical views on sex and gender, political divisions, and growing hostility to the Christian worldview, to name a few), they still maintained a steadfast commitment to teaching and upholding biblical truth. Although they professed a heart for compassion outreach and service toward the community, regardless of the response, they maintained that they could not compromise biblical truth regardless of consequences. They were fiercely committed to declaring the Word of God.

Theme 7: A Spiritual Leader Must Confront the Internal and External Challenges to Biblical Community

The Apostle John had an obligation to confront the challenges that worked against biblical community (1 Jn. 2:18–23; 2 Jn. 9–11; 3 Jn. 9–10). Moreover, he had a sense of urgency associated with this responsibility (2 Jn. 7–8). The Christian spiritual community was at risk from internal error causing divisions (1 Jn. 1:5–2:2; 2:18–19) and external societal pressures from the allurements of the world (1 Jn.

2:15–17; 4:5; 5:4) and opposition from the spirit of antichrist (1 Jn. 2:18; 4:1–3; 5:19). To preserve the *koinonia* at the heart of the biblical community, John had to confront those challenges. Yet, he did so as a pastor, with a view toward redemption and restoration if possible. Still, he also demonstrated the capability to draw sharp distinctions in the interests of bold responsive action (1 Jn. 2:20–27; 4:1–6). After all, the well-being of the spiritual community was at stake.

Because leaders play a principal role in defining the culture of an organization, they carry a responsibility to direct in shaping or maintaining culture (Meyerson & Martin, 1987; Struecker, 2015). Leaders have a options they can exercise in the fulfillment of their culture management task, which may involve personal changes as well as organizational change initiatives (Cameron & Quinn, 2011; Fry et al., 2005; Schein, 1990). One such change is organizational realignment and/or restructuring, which would involve changes in personnel. Yet, a positive impact on organizational citizenship behaviors is often a welcome outcome of STL in action (Arsenich, 2018; Chen & Yang, 2012). Still, opposition in various forms is a reality that the church must address (Keener, 2009). Although a redemptive course always represents the preferred option, if possible, the reality exists that irreconcilable differences may result in a parting of ways. Therefore, the spiritual leader must keep options open in addressing internal and external opposition.

The presbyters in this study all faced internal and external opposition in various forms. Criticism of their spiritual leadership is a reality that comes with the call to ministry, and they readily accept that consequence. They have dealt with pain, and—like the Apostle John—they have experienced the unfortunate results of various forms of ministry opposition. Even so, they have risen to the challenge of facing both internal and external opposition when necessary. They generally preferred to take a redemptive approach to conflict resolution, yet indicated that they would adopt a confrontational posture if necessary. Still, regardless of the posture adopted by their adversaries, they have endeavored to show love in response. Several also expressed an awareness that trends in societal culture indicate that they may face increasing hostility and the possibility of persecution.

Still, they gave no indication of backing down from their biblical positions on cultural issues. On the contrary, they are preparing to stand for their beliefs, come what may.

Theoretical Implications

Although this study considered exegetical analysis of 1–3 John and conducted qualitative analysis of contemporary presbyters in view of spiritual leadership theory and organizational culture theory, other ethical leadership constructs could also be at work in these and other texts and contexts. Although their practices were in line with SLT, the participants may also have exhibited other leadership approaches. The reality for most leaders is that they usually employ a variety of leadership approaches in response to the needs of the situation (Goleman et al., 2013). For this reason, SLT remains an attractive leadership approach which merits consideration on its own or when combined with other valid leadership constructs with which it has demonstrated compatibility, including authentic leadership authentic leadership (Fry & Whittington, 2005; Hannah et al., 2011; Henson, 2015), servant leadership (Fry et al., 2007), and transformational leadership (Washington, 2016). Moreover, SLT has a growing body of empirical research with associated positive outcomes (Adebiyi, 2016; Egel & Fry, 2015; Fachrunnisa & Adhiatma, 2014; Fry & Matherly, 2006; Fu et al., 2019; Milliman & Ferguson, 2008; Mubasher et al., 2017; P. V. Nguyen et al., 2018; Yang & Fry, 2018).

Furthermore, SLT offers a leadership approach with a universal appeal (Hunsaker, 2012). Therefore, it has value as a leadership paradigm that fits a variety of organizational contexts (Primeau, 2018). Even though Fry (2003) developed SLT to be used in a secular, nonsectarian environment, the construct has particular value in a religious setting because it includes leadership dimensions that align well with a religious organizational context. Furthermore, most religious organizations have their own moral, ethical, and doctrinal components which would lend clarity and focus to their organizational mission (Henson, 2015). For this reason, SLT presents a preferred leadership approach for consideration in

religious contexts, especially if combined with other leadership constructs (Washington, 2016).

The study of organizational culture also has implications for the church. Schein (2017) proposed that organizational culture should be examined with a view toward the history of the organization and the culture from which it developed. For the church, as an organization founded by Jesus Christ (Matt. 16:16–18) and developed by the apostles (Acts 2:42–47), any consideration of church organizational culture should prioritize its biblical foundations. Schein (1988) suggested, "It is my opinion that at this stage of the evolution of our field, clinical research is the most appropriate basis for trying to understand the concept of culture" (p. 6). As the study of church organizational culture represents a unique organizational cultural expression, Schein's proposal would apply. Therefore, more empirical research into the various aspect of church organizational culture would better equip scholars and practitioners with a more precise understanding of organizational culture theory that could be developed addressing the uniqueness of biblical culture in the church.

Practical Implications

In practical terms, the findings of this study confirm the leadership approach that will serve as a viable model for pastors facing uncertain times. All current cultural indications point toward an increase in tension between the church and the culture at large over a variety of issues that place the church and society at odds with one another. This comes as no surprise, as the struggle between the church and the community at large represents a conflict of spiritual kingdoms that will ultimately be resolved at the end of the age. A thorough exegetical analysis of 1–3 John and a careful examination of the lived experiences of the seasoned church leaders in this study signify that the reality for church leaders means always having to live with this tension while embracing ministry opportunities that arise.

One unmistakable practical observation that this study highlights is the need for pastors and church leaders to adhere firmly and unapologetically to biblical truth as a way of maintaining biblical community in post-Christian culture (Crowther, 2012). As the culture grows more adversarial, the importance of

Scripture grows because it offers the ultimate solutions to the spiritual problems that torment humanity and offers a powerful hope to those in the culture at large who would embrace its message. In this way, the church has an opportunity to influence the culture by taking a united stand in proclaiming the gospel message without compromise (Crowther, 2012; Serrano, 2022). Just as John refused to compromise the biblical truth entrusted to him, so the pastors in this study communicated their commitment to biblical truth regardless of the trends in societal culture. Furthermore, just as nothing would discourage their commitment to biblical truth, they also demonstrated a steadfast commitment to advance God's kingdom through ministry both in the church among the biblical community and in the community at large.

This leads to another unmistakable practical conclusion of the current study, which is the importance of adopting a missional approach to biblical community (P. S. Williams, 2020). This means extending the biblical community through compassion outreach and community service (Serrano, 2022; P. S. Williams, 2020). The Apostle John advocated showing tangible demonstrations of love as an expression of the reality of God, who is the very embodiment of love. The presbyters in this study also confirmed that they prioritized the importance of showing love to their communities through compassion outreach and various forms of support and service. In this way, they gained favor and credibility with members of the community at large, while also demonstrating in very practical ways the love that is a central component of the biblical community.

Limitations

One limitation of this study is the need for greater cultural diversity of the participants. Although the presbyters serve very diverse constituencies, they were mostly (but not exclusively) a homogeneous unit—not only ethnically and culturally, but also geographically, as they were all from the mid-Atlantic region of the United States. In addition, because the participants were presbyters, they generally represent the elders of the movement, who are chosen because of their extensive experience gained from their years in ministry. Consequently, most of the participants in this study came from older generations (specifically, Baby Boomers

and Generation X), so this study lacks a more multigenerational perspective related to the unique concerns and challenges that believers from the next generation face.

Similarly, because all participants served in the same denomination (the Assemblies of God), they represent just one slice of Christian experience—specifically, Evangelical Pentecostal. In addition, even though the participants could draw from their rich experience as presbyters who serve as local pastors with additional supervisory responsibility over other pastors and churches, they represent just one form of leadership among the variety of church leaders who serve as deacons, elders, local church pastors, evangelists, parachurch leaders, and denominational executives, to name a few.

Although the participants in this study experienced some measure of opposition, their circumstances could not compare with the level of antagonism that Christian leaders face in some other nations where Christianity is an underground movement and Christians face serious forms of persecution which include various forms of injustice which could include economic sanctions, imprisonment, or even death. Historically, Christianity has been a movement whose followers have often been rejected by society at large, and that is still the case even today in many other locations around the world.

Suggestions for Future Research

Future researchers interested in this topic and seeking to replicate or extend this study could focus on including a greater racial, ethnic, geographic, and cultural diversity. An expanded study, even in the Assemblies of God alone, could yield a much richer diversity of participants. The General Council of the Assemblies of God (USA) and the World Assemblies of God is the largest Pentecostal fellowship in the world, representing over 69 million members globally (General Council of the Assemblies of God, n.d.). This includes many church leaders who serve in underground churches in various nations.

Also, future research could give attention to understanding the different generational perspectives, especially millennials and Generation Z. To better engage the next generation with biblical truth, it is important to know the unique challenges they face, their concerns, and ways they perceive threats from a post-

Christian societal culture. In this way, church leaders can develop more effective ways of engaging the next generation with biblical truth in a way that is meaningful and relevant to them, while also adhering to the timeless principles of God's eternal Word.

Another suggestion for future research is to study other Christian denominations and/or movements. As stated earlier in this study, many of today's Christian denominations are facing serious divisions over cultural issues. Future research could focus on different Christian organizations or perhaps even include a broader selection of leaders from various organizations. This would provide a greater opportunity at exposure to a diversity of experiences.

Summary

The scope of this study included an exegetical analysis of the New Testament epistles of 1–3 John and a phenomenological study of contemporary church leaders (Assemblies of God presbyters) as a model for developing biblical community through spiritual leadership principles in a post-Christian culture. The exegetical analysis produced seven broad leadership themes: (a) effective spiritual leadership flows from divine fellowship, (b) unity with God and others is essential for biblical community, (c) community stability comes through an organizational culture based upon shared values, (d) love is the distinguishing characteristic of the biblical community, (e) conflicting organizational standards and values will undermine the unity and stability of the biblical community, (f) conflicting societal standards and values place biblical community at odds with societal culture, and (g) a spiritual leader must confront the internal and external challenges to biblical community.

The biblical themes formed the basis for in-depth interview questions used for qualitative inquiry conducted with 11 Assemblies of God presbyters. The resulting research provided answers to the research questions, and the themes from exegetical analysis were then integrated with spiritual leadership theory and organizational culture theory and the phenomenological findings to better understand the relationship between Scripture, theory, and practical application.

The results may serve as a guide for contemporary church leaders who are endeavoring to build and maintain biblical community in a post-Christian society.

References

Adebiyi, M. B. (2016). *Evaluating Fry's spiritual leadership theory in Nigeria* [Doctoral dissertation, Regent University]. ProQuest Dissertations & Theses.

Adhar, R. T. (2013). Is secularism neutral? *Ratio Juris*, *26*(3), 404–429. https://doi.org/10.1111/raju.12020

Adhar, R. T. (2014). A real threat or a mere shadow? School chaplaincy programs and the secular state. *University of Queensland Law Journal*, *33*(1), 29–41. https://law.uq.edu.au/uq-law-journal

Akin, D. L. (2001). *1, 2, 3 John* (Vol. 38). Broadman & Holman Publishers.

Alimudin, A., Septian, D., Sasono, A. D., & Wulandari, A. (2017). Effect of spiritual leadership to organizational culture and employee's loyalty. *Jurnal Terapan Manajemen Dan Bisnis*, *3*(2), 76. https://doi.org/10.26737/jtmb.v3i2.210

Arnett, J. J. (2015). *Emerging adulthood: The winding road from the late teens through the twenties* (2nd ed.). Oxford University Press.

Arsenich, V. A. (2018). *The relationship between workplace spirituality and organizational citizenship behavior among receptionists (GPRs)* [Doctoral dissertation, Capella University]. ProQuest Dissertations & Theses.

Avolio, B. J., Gardner, W. L., Walumbwa, F. O., Luthans, F., & May, D. R. (2004). Unlocking the mask: A look at the process by which authentic leaders impact follower attitudes and behaviors. *Leadership Quarterly*, *15*(6), 801–823. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.leaqua.2004.09.003

Babyak, A. T. (2013). *Biblical leadership at work scale development* [Doctoral dissertation, Regent University]. ProQuest Dissertations & Theses.

Babyak, A. T. (2018). Toward a theory of biblical leadership. *Journal of Biblical Integration in Business*, *21*(1), Article 1. https://cbfa-jbib.org/index.php/jbib/article/view/493

Bailey, S. P. (2021a, June 12). Secret recordings, leaked letters: Explosive secrets rocking the Southern Baptist Convention. *Washington Post*. https://www.washingtonpost.com/religion/2021/06/12/southern-baptist-convention-secret-infighting-meeting/

Bailey, S. P. (2021b, June 16). Southern Baptists elect Ed Litton as their president, a defeat for the hard right. *Washington Post*. https://www.washingtonpost.com/religion/2021/06/15/southern-baptists-elect-president/

Barclay, W. (1976). *The letters of John and Jude* (Rev. ed.). Westminster John Knox Press.

Bass, B. M., & Riggio, R. E. (2016). The transformational model of leadership. In G. R. Hickman (Ed.), *Leading organizations: Perspectives for a new era* (3rd ed., pp. 76–86). SAGE.

Bateman, C. G. (2017). The hermeneutics of sovereignty: The written word, state sovereignty, and freedom of religion in the late antiquity Roman empire. *Jurisprudence*, *34*, 311–332. https://www.tandfonline.com/toc/rjpn20/current

Bates, W. H. (1911). The world: An inductive exegesis and an exposition. *Bibliotheca Sacra*, *68*. https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/pdf/bsac/1911_105.pdf

Baykal, E. (2019). Creating organizational commitment through spiritual leadership: Mediating effect of meaning at work. *Business & Management Studies: An International Journal*, *7*(2), 837–855. http://dx.doi.org.seu.idm.oclc.org/10.15295/bmij.v7i2.1113

Beasley-Murray, G. R. (1999). John. In B. M. Metzger, D. A. Hubbard, & G. W. Barker (Eds.), *Word biblical commentary* (2nd ed., Vol. 36). Word Books.

Bekker, C. J. (2006). *The Philippians Hymn (2:5–11) as an early mimetic Christological model of Christian leadership in Roman Philippi*. https://www.semanticscholar.org/paper/The-Philippians-Hymn-(2%3A5–11)-as-an-early-mimetic-Bekker-Litt/ad63f28866edc729cdd8990999d7f366a68e3588

Bekker, C. J. (2012). Foreword. In K. A. Michel, D. A. Miles, J. Miller, C. C. Gibson, J. B. Holloway, & C. Gilligan (Eds.), *Divine empowerment: A transformational study of Christian leadership development*. Sentient Publishing.

Benefiel, M. (2005). The second half of the journey: Spiritual leadership for organizational transformation. *Leadership Quarterly*, *16*(5), 723–747. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.leaqua.2005.07.005

Benefiel, M., Fry, L. W., & Geigle, D. (2014). Spirituality and religion in the workplace: History, theory, and research. *Psychology of Religion and Spirituality*, *6*, 175–187. https://doi.org/10.1037/a0036597

Bennett, T. A. (2021). *1–3 John*. William B. Eerdmans.

Bigalke, R. J. (2013a). Identity of the first epistle of John: Context, style, and structure. *Journal of Dispensational Theology*, *17*(50), 7–44. https://tyndale.edu/jodt/

Bigalke, R. J. (2013b). Unravelling the structure of First John: Exegetical analysis, Part 1. *HTS Teologiese Studies / Theological Studies*, *69*. https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v69i1.2023

Bilezikian, G. (2002). Biblical community versus gender-based hierarchy: Understanding God's definition of the church as a community of oneness. *Priscilla Papers*, *16*(3), 3–10. https://www.cbeinternational.org/content/priscilla-papers-academic-journal

Blackaby, H. T., & Blackaby, R. (2011). *Spiritual leadership*. B & H Publishing Group.

Blumhofer, E. L. (1985). *The Assemblies of God: A popular history*. Radiant Books.

Blumhofer, E. L. (2003). Assemblies of God. In E. Fahlbusch, J. M. Lochman, J. Mbiti, J. Pelikan, L. Vischer, & D. B. Barrett (Eds.), & G. W. Bromiley (Trans.), *The encyclopedia of Christianity: Vol. Vols. 1–3* (pp. 143–146). William B. Eerdmans.

Boeve, L. (2018). Symbols of who we are called to become: Sacraments in a post-secular and post-Christian society. *Studia Liturgica*, *48*(1–2), 147–163. https://journals.sagepub.com/home/stl

Bonhoeffer, D. (2015). *Life together* (G. B. Kelly, Trans.). Fortress Press. (Original work published 1954)

Brooke, A. E. (2004). *A critical and exegetical commentary on the Johannine epistles*. T & T Clark International.

Brown, M. E., Treviño, L. K., & Harrison, D. A. (2005). Ethical leadership: A social learning perspective for construct development and testing. *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes*, *97*(2), 117–134. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.obhdp.2005.03.002

Brown, R. E. (1982). *The epistles of John: Translated with introduction, notes, and commentary* (Vol. 30). Yale University Press.

Buber, M. (1970). *I and thou: A new translation with a prologue and notes* (W. Kaufman, Trans.). Charles Scribner's Sons. (Original work published 1923)

Bultmann, R. (1973). *The Johannine epistles* (R. W. Funk, Ed.; R. P. O'Hara, L. C. McGaughy, & R. W. Funk, Trans.; Vol. 1–33). Augsburg Fortress.

Burge, G. M. (1997). Letters of John. In R. P. Martin & P. H. Davids (Eds.), *Dictionary of the later New Testament and its developments* (pp. 587–599). InterVarsity Press.

Burge, G. M. (1998). *The letters of John*. Zondervan.

Burns, J. M. (1978). *Leadership*. Open Road Integrated Media.

Burns, J. S., Shoup, J. R., & Simmons, D. C. (Eds.). (2014). *Organizational leadership: Foundations and practices for Christians*. InterVarsity Press.

Cameron, K. S., & Quinn, R. E. (2011). *Diagnosing and changing organizational culture: Based on the Competing Values Framework* (3rd ed.). Jossey-Bass.

Carson, D. A. (1981). Historical tradition in the fourth Gospel: After Dodd, what? In R. T. France & D. Wenham (Eds.), *Gospel perspectives: Studies of history and tradition of the four Gospels: Vol. II* (pp. 83–145). JSOT Press.

Carson, D. A. (1984). *Exegetical Fallacies*. Baker Book House.

Carson, D. A., Moo, D. J., & Morris, L. (1992). *An introduction to the New Testament*. Zondervan.

Carter, N., Bryant-Lukosius, D., DiCenso, A., Blythe, J., & Neville, A. J. (2014). The use of triangulation in qualitative research. *Oncology Nursing Forum*, *41*(5), 545–547. https://doi.org/10.1188/14.ONF.545-547

Chen, C., & Yang, C. (2012). The impact of spiritual leadership on organizational citizenship behavior: A multi-sample analysis. *Journal of Business Ethics*, *105*(1), 107–114. http://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-011-0953-3

Choi, G. (2016). *A theology of missional leadership in the Book of Revelation* [Doctoral dissertation, Andrews University]. ProQuest Dissertations & Theses.

Çimen, B., & Karadağ, E. (2019). Spiritual leadership, organizational culture, organizational silence and academic success of the school. *Educational Administration: Theory and Practice*, *25*(1), 1–50. https://doi.org/10.14527/kuey.2019.001

Comfort, P. W., & Hawley, W. C. (2007a). 1 John. In P. W. Comfort (Ed.), *The Gospel of John and 1–3 John* (Vol. 13, pp. 315–376). Tyndale House.

Comfort, P. W., & Hawley, W. C. (2007b). 2 and 3 John. In P. W. Comfort (Ed.), *The Gospel of John and 1–3 John* (Vol. 13, pp. 377–403). Tyndale House.

Conway, B. (2011). The vanishing Catholic priest. *Contexts: Understanding People in Their Social Worlds*, *10*(2), 64–65. http://dx.doi.org.seu.idm.oclc.org/10.1177/1536504211408910

Coombes, M. (2009). A different approach to the structure of 1 John. *Australian EJournal of Theology*, *14*(1), 1–30. http://www.journals4free.com/link.jsp?l=31078094

Cornette, C. S. (2017). *Five practical steps for increasing church membership: A case study of First Baptist Church of Venice, Florida* [Doctoral dissertation, Liberty University]. ProQuest Dissertations & Theses.

Crary, D. (2021, April 20). Southern Baptists divided over politics, race, LGBTQ policy. *AP News.* https://apnews.com/article/capitol-siege-donald-trump-baptist-southern-baptist-convention-sexual-abuse-by-clergy-1b4bce88b58067f341e6e8eef259307f

Creswell, J. W. (2015). *Educational research: Planning, conducting, and evaluating quantitative and qualitative research* (5th ed.). Pearson.

Creswell, J. W., & Creswell, J. D. (2018). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches* (5th ed.). SAGE.

Creswell, J. W., & Poth, C. N. (2018). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches* (4th ed.). SAGE.

Crowther, S. S. (2012). *An examination of leadership principles in 1 Peter in comparison to authentic and kenotic models of leadership* [Doctoral dissertation, Regent University]. ProQuest Dissertations & Theses.

Culpepper, R. A. (1994). *John, the son of Zebedee: The life of a legend*. University of South Carolina Press.

Culpepper, R. A. (1998). *The Gospel and letters of John*. Abingdon Press.

Danker, F. W., Bauer, W., Arndt, W. F., & Gingrich, F. W. (2000). *A Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament and other early Christian literature* (3rd ed.). University of Chicago Press. (Original work published 1957)

Davis, J. J. (2012). Practising ministry in the presence of God and in partnership with God. *Evangelical Review of Theology*, *36*(2), 115–136. https://theology.worldea.org/evangelical-review-of-theology/

Dawn, M. J. (1989). *Keeping the sabbath wholly: Ceasing, resting, embracing, feasting*. William B. Eerdmans.

DeGirolami, M. O. (2016, September 27). The U.S. Commission on abolishing religious freedom. *Law & Liberty*. https://lawliberty.org/the-u-s-commission-on-abolishing-religious-freedom/

DeNeal, D. A. (2019). *Level 5 leadership and pastoral effectiveness: A study of lead pastors' level 5 leadership score to church growth indicators* [Doctoral dissertation, Johnson University]. ProQuest Dissertations & Theses.

Deneen, P. J. (2021, November 17). Abandoning defensive crouch conservatism [Substack newsletter]. *Postliberal Order*. https://postliberalorder.substack.com/p/abandoning-defensive-crouch-conservatism

Dodd, C. H. (1946). *The Johannine epistles*. Harper & Brothers.

Dufault-Hunter, E. (2008). Secularism. In W. A. Dyrness, V.-M. Kärkkäinen, J. F. Martinez, & S. Chan (Eds.), *Global dictionary of theology* (pp. 802–804). IVP Academic.

Duvall, J. S., & Hays, J. D. (2012). *Grasping God's word (enhanced edition): A hands-on approach to reading, interpreting, and applying the Bible* (3rd ed.). Zondervan.

Ebersole, S. E., & Woods, R. (2001). Virtual community: Koinonia or compromise? Theological implications of community in cyberspace. *Christian Scholar's Review*, *31*(2), 185–216. https://christianscholars.com/

Edwards, R. B. (2001). *The Johannine epistles* (Vol. 1–44). Sheffield Academic Press.

Egel, E., & Fry, L. W. (2015). Impact of spiritual leadership on team creativity. *Academy of Management Proceedings*, *2015*, 1–30. https://doi.org/10.5465/ambpp.2015.13237abstract

Enis, L. L. (2018). 1 Corinthians 8:1–13. *Interpretation: A Journal of Bible & Theology*, *72*(1), 56–57. https://doi.org/10.1177/0020964317731329

Epstein, R. A. (2016, September 26). The government's civil rights bullies [Text]. *Hoover Institution.* https://www.hoover.org/research/governments-civil-rights-bullies

Fachrunnisa, O., & Adhiatma, A. (2014). The role of work place spirituality and employee engagement to enhance job satisfaction and performance. *International Journal of Organizational Innovation*, *7*(1), 15–35. https://www.ijoi-online.org/

Fairholm, G. W. (1997). *Capturing the heart of leadership: Spirituality and community in the new American workplace*. Praeger.

Fairholm, G. W. (2000). *Perspectives on leadership*. Praeger.

Fairholm, G. W. (2001). *Mastering inner leadership*. Quorum Books.

Family Research Council. (2015). *A clear and present danger: The threat to religious liberty in the military*. Author.

Family Research Council. (2017a). *Hostility to religion: The growing threat to religious liberty in the United States* (pp. 1–66). https://downloads.frc.org/EF/EF17F51.pdf

Family Research Council. (2017b). *A clear and present danger: The threat to religious liberty in the military* (Volume II; pp. 1–12). Author.

Fee, D. A. (2018). *Developing a membership and assimilation process for Summerlin Community Baptist Church, Las Vegas, Nevada* [Doctoral dissertation, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary]. ProQuest Dissertations & Theses.

Fee, G. D., & Stuart, D. (2003). *How to read the Bible for all its worth* (3rd ed.). Zondervan.

Ferguson, J. (2004). Reproducing biblical community. In T. Jones (Ed.), *Church planting from the ground up* (pp. 281–294). College Press.

Fouard, C. (1905). *Saint John and the close of the apostolic age*. Longmans, Green & Co.

Fry, L. W. (2003). Toward a theory of spiritual leadership. *Leadership Quarterly*, *14*(6), 693–727. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.leaqua.2003.09.001

Fry, L. W. (2005). Toward a theory of ethical and spiritual well-being, and corporate social responsibilitry through spiritual leadership. In R. A. Giacalone, C. L. Jurkiewicz, & C. Dunn (Eds.), *Positive psychology in business ethics and corporate responsibility* (pp. 47–83). Information Age.

Fry, L. W. (2009). Spiritual leadership as a model for student inner development. *Journal of Leadership Studies*, *3*, 79–82. https://doi.org/10.1002/jls.20127

Fry, L. W. (2016). Spiritual leadership. In *Global encyclopedia of public administration, public policy, and governance* (pp. 1–6). https://doi.org/10.1007/978–3-319–31816-5_2353–1

Fry, L. W., & Cohen, M. P. (2009). Spiritual leadership as a paradigm for
    organizational transformation and recovery from extended work hours
    cultures. *Journal of Business Ethics*, *84*, 265–278.
    http://dx.doi.org.seu.idm.oclc.org/10.1007/s10551-008-9695–2

Fry, L. W., & Matherly, L. L. (2006). *Spiritual leadership and organizational
    performance: An exploratory study*. Proceedings of the 2006 Academy of
    Management Meeting, Atlanta, Georgia.

Fry, L. W., Matherly, L. L., & Ouimet, J.-R. (2010). The spiritual leadership
    balanced scorecard business model: The case of the Cordon Bleu-Tomasso
    Corporation. *Journal of Management, Spirituality & Religion*, *7*(4), 283–
    314. https://doi.org/10.1080/14766086.2010.524983

Fry, L. W., Matherly, L. L., Whittington, J. L., & Winston, B. E. (2007). Spiritual
    leadership as an integrating paradigm for servant leadership. In S. Singh-
    Sengupta & D. Fields (Eds.), *Integrating spirituality and organizational
    leadership* (pp. 70–82). Macmillan India.

Fry, L. W., Vitucci, S., & Cedillo, M. (2005). Spiritual leadership and army
    transformation: Theory, measurement, and establishing a baseline.
    Leadership Quarterly, *16*(5), 835–862.
    https://doi.org/10.1016/j.leaqua.2005.07.012

Fry, L. W., & Whittington, J. L. (2005). In search of authenticity: Spiritual
    leadership theory as a source for future theory, research, and practice on
    authentic leadership. In W. L. Gardner, B. J. Avolio, & F. O. Walumbwa
    (Eds.), *Authentic leadership theory and practice: Origins, effects, and
    development* (Vol. 3, pp. 183–200). Elsevier.

Fry, L. W., & Whittington, J. L. (2014). Spiritual leadership as a paradigm for
    organization transformation and development. *ResearchGate.*
    https://www.researchgate.net/publication/228389283_Spiritual_leadership_
    as_a_paradigm_for_organization_transformation_and_development

Fu, Y., Liu, J., Wang, Z., & Zhang, Y. (2019). Feeling Energized: A multilevel model of spiritual leadership, leader integrity, relational energy, and job performance. *Journal of Business Ethics*, *158*(4), 983–997. http://dx.doi.org.seu.idm.oclc.org/10.1007/s10551-017-3713-1

Gangel, K. O. (1989). *Feeding and leading*. Victor Books.

Gangel, K. O. (2001). Marks of a healthy church. *Bibliotheca Sacra*, *158*(632), 467–477. New Testament Abstracts.

Gardner, W. L., Cogliser, C. C., Davis, K. M., & Dickens, M. P. (2011). Authentic leadership: A review of the literature and research agenda. *Leadership Quarterly*, *22*(6), 1120–1145. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.leaqua.2011.09.007

Garrison, A. (2015). *A Spirit-empowered church: An Acts 2 ministry model*. Influence Resources.

Gasser, W. W. (2002). What is a healthy church? *Journal of Ministry and Theology*, *6*(1), 104–120. https://www.galaxie.com/article/jmat

General Council of the Assemblies of God. (n.d.). *About the AG*. https://ag.org/About/About-the-AG

Giacalone, R. A., & Jurkiewicz, C. L. (2010). The science of workplace spirituality. In R. A. Giacalone & C. L. Jurkiewicz (Eds.), *Handbook of workplace spirituality and organizational performance* (2nd ed., pp. 3–26). M.E. Sharp.

Golafshani, N. (2015). Understanding reliability and validity in qualitative research. *Qualitative Report*. https://doi.org/10.46743/2160-3715/2003.1870

Goleman, D., Boyatzis, R., & McKee, A. (2013). *Primal leadership: Unleashing the power of emotional intelligence*. Harvard Business Review Press.

Goodall, W. I. (2006). *Conflict management for church leaders*. Global University.

Gowler, D. B. (2010). Socio-rhetorical interpretation: Textures of a text and its reception. *Journal for the Study of the New Testament*, *33*(2), 191–206. https://doi.org/10.1177/0142064X10385857

Greenleaf, R. K. (2002). *Servant leadership: A journey into the nature of legitimate power and greatness* (L. C. Spears, Ed.; 25th Anniversary). Paulist Press. (Original work published 1977)

Gregory, C. R. (1907). Critical note. *American Journal of Theology*, *11*(1), 131–138. https://www.jstor.org/journal/amerjtheo

Hallowell, B. (2020, August 11). "Not the America I've known": Pastor John MacArthur doubles down on COVID-19 defiance. *Christian Post.* https://www.christianpost.com/news/not-the-america-ive-known-pastor-john-macarthur-doubles-down-on-covid-19-defiance.html

Hannah, S. T., Walumbwa, F. O., & Fry, L. W. (2011). Leadership in action teams: Team leader and members' authenticity, authenticity strength, and team outcomes. *Personnel Psychology*, *64*(3), 771–802. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1744-6570.2011.01225.x

Hattingh, M. (2019). *Considering the impact of leadership succession in Hebrews 13:7–19: A study of global Christian leaders* [Doctoral dissertation., Regent University]. ProQuest Dissertations & Theses.

Hawkin, D. J. (2002). Revelation and truth in Johanninte theology. *Churchman*, *116*(2), 105–112. https://www.churchsociety.org/resources/churchman/

Hayes, D. A. (1917). *John and his writings*. Methodist Book Concern.

Hayes, E. L. (1999). *The Church: The body of Christ in the world today*. Thomas Nelson.

Haynes, C. C. (2016, September 16). Opinion: The deeply troubling federal report targeting religious freedom. *Washington Post*. https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/acts-of-faith/wp/2016/09/16/the-deeply-troubling-federal-report-highlighting-religious-freedom/

Henson, J. D. (2014). Getting God's house in order: An intertexture analysis of Titus 1. *Journal of Biblical Perspectives in Leadership*, *6*(1), 176–200. https://www.regent.edu/acad/global/publications/jbpl/

Henson, J. D. (2015). *An examination of the role of spirituality in the development of the moral component of authentic leadership through a sociorhetorical analysis of Paul's letter to Titus* [Doctoral dissertation, Regent University]. ProQuest Dissertations & Theses.

Henson, J. D., Crowther, S. S., & Huizing, R. L. (2020). *Exegetical analysis: A practical guide for applying biblical research to the social sciences*. Kendall Hunt.

Hester, J. A. (2017). *Stress and longevity in pastoral ministry: A phenomenological study* [Doctoral dissertation, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary]. ProQuest Dissertations & Theses.

Hewit, A. F. (1895). *The teaching of St. John the Apostle to the churches of Asia and the world*. Catholic Book Exchange.

Hiebert, D. E. (1991). *The epistles of John: An expositional commentary*. Bob Jones University Press.

Hodges, Z. C. (1983). 1 John. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible knowledge commentary: An exposition of the Scriptures by Dallas Theological Seminary* (Old Testament and New Testament ed., Vol. 2, pp. 880–904). Victor Books.

Holmes, M. W. (Ed.). (1999). *The apostolic fathers: English translations* (Rev. ed.). Baker Books.

House, R. J., Hanges, P. J., Javidan, M., Dorfman, P. W., & Gupta, V. (Eds.). (2004). *Culture, leadership, and organizations: The GLOBE study of 62 societies*. SAGE.

Hovsepian, A.-M. (2012). Canada's prodigal province: Quebec's evangelicals pursue a fresh hearing for the gospel in their post-Christian culture. *Christianity Today*, *56*(5), 15–17. https://www.christianitytoday.com/

Howson, J. S. (1877). Introduction. In J. M. MacDonald (Ed.), *The life and writings of St. John*. Scribner, Armstrong & Co.

Hunsaker, W. D. (2012). *Spiritual leadership as a universal construct: An empirical study of Fry's (2003) model of spiritual leadership in a South Korean context* [Doctoral dissertation, Regent University]. ProQuest Dissertations & Theses.

Hunt, S. (2013). Negotiating equality in the Equality Act 2010 (United Kingdom): Church-state relations in a post-Christian society. *Journal of Church and State*, *55*(4), 690–711. https://doi.org/10.1093/jcs/css078

Jackman, D. (1988). *The message of John's letters: Living in the love of God* (J. R. W. Stott, J. A. Motyer, & D. Tidball, Eds.). InterVarsity Press.

Jewison, N. (Director). (1971). *Fiddler on the roof* [Musical].

Jobes, K. H. (2014). *1, 2, & 3 John* (C. E. Arnold, Ed.). Zondervan.

Johnson, Y. N. (2020). *Does spiritual leadership predict organizational citizenship behavior in Christians* [Doctoral dissertation, Grand Canyon University]. ProQuest Dissertations & Theses.

Jones, G. W. (2012). *A theological comparison between social science models and a biblcal perspective of servant leadership* [Doctoral dissertation, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary]. ProQuest Dissertations & Theses.

Jones, J. M. (2021, March 29). U.S. church membership falls below majority for first time. *Gallup News*. https://news.gallup.com/poll/341963/church-membership-falls-below-majority-first-time.aspx

Karadağ, E. (2009). Spiritual leadership and organizational culture: A study of structural equation modeling. *Educational Sciences: Theory and Practice*, *9*(3), 1391–1405. https://jestp.com/index.php/estp

Karadağ, M., Altınay Aksal, F., Altınay Gazi, Z., & Dağli, G. (2020). Effect size of spiritual leadership: In the process of school culture and academic success. *SAGE Open*, *10*(1), 2158244020914638. https://doi.org/10.1177/2158244020914638

Keener, C. S. (1993). *The IVP Bible background commentary*. InterVarsity Press.

Keener, C. S. (2009). *The Gospel of Matthew: A socio-rhetorical commentary*. William B. Eerdmans.

Keinath, T. W. (2018). *Conquest and glory: A pastor's journey through the book of Revelation*. Equip Press.

Kessler, V. (2013). Pitfalls in "Biblical" leadership. *Verbum et Ecclesia*, *34*(1), 7. https://doi.org/10.4102/ve.v34i1.721

Kinnaman, D., & Hawkins, A. (2011). *You lost me: Why young Christians are leaving church... And rethinking faith*. Baker Books.

Kirsanow, P. (2016). Commissioner Peter Kirsanow statement. In *Peaceful coexistence report.* New American Civil Rights Project.

Kistemaker, S. J. (1986). *Exposition of James and the epistles of John* (Vol. 14). Baker Books.

Klenke, K. (2007). Authentic leadership: A self, leader, and spiritual identity perspective. *International Journal of Leadership Studies*, *3*(1), 68–97. https://www.regent.edu/acad/global/publications/ijls/new/home.htm

Kotter, J. P. (1996). *Leading change*. Harvard Business School Press.

Kouzes, J. M., & Posner, B. Z. (2012). *The leadership challenge: How to make extraordinary things happen in organizations* (5th ed.). Jossey-Bass.

Kruger, L. J., Rodgers, R. F., Long, S. J., & Lowy, A. S. (2019). Individual interviews or focus groups? Interview format and women's self-disclosure. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, *22*(3), 245–255. https://doi.org/10.1080/13645579.2018.1518857

Kruse, C. G. (2020). *The letters of John* (2nd ed., Vol. 1–17). William B. Eerdmans.

Ladd, G. E. (1993). *A theology of the New Testament* (D. A. Hagner, Ed.). William B. Eerdmans.

Lambert, S. D., & Loiselle, C. G. (2008). Combining individual interviews and focus groups to enhance data richness. *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, *62*(2), 228–237. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1365–2648.2007.04559.x

Langer, R. (2014). Toward a Biblical theology of leadership. In J. S. Burns, J. R. Shoup, & D. C. Simmons (Eds.), *Organizational leadership: Foundations & practices for Christians*. InterVarsity Press.

Lawson, J. G. (2013). *Patterns of discipleship in the new testament as evidenced by Jesus and Peter* [Doctoral dissertation, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary]. ProQuest Dissertations & Theses.

Leavy, P. (2017). *Research design: Quantitative, qualitative, mixed methods, arts-based, and community-based participatory research approaches*. Guildford Press.

Lenski, R. C. H. (1966). *The interpretation of the epistles of St. Peter, St. John, and St. Jude*. Augsburg Publishing House.

Little, B. A. (2018). Evangelism in a post-Christian society. *Southeastern Theological Review*, *9*(2), 3–14. https://www.southeasternreview.com/

Lovett, I. (2017, February 20). Rifts among Southern Baptists lead to churches withholding funds. *Wall Street Journal*. https://www.wsj.com/articles/rifts-among-southern-baptists-lead-to-churches-withholding-funds-1487539426

Lovett, I. (2021, June 11). "Our Lord isn't woke": Southern Baptists clash over their future. *Wall Street Journal*. https://www.wsj.com/articles/our-lord-isnt-woke-southern-baptists-clash-over-their-future-11623439486

Lubold, G., & Lucey, C. (2020, May 22). Trump says places of worship are essential services. *Wall Street Journal*. https://www.wsj.com/articles/trump-calls-places-of-worship-essential-11590172336

Luthans, F., & Avolio, B. J. (2003). Authentic leadership development. In K. S. Cameron, J. E. Dutton, & R. E. Quinn (Eds.), *Positive organizational scholarship: Foundations of a new displine* (pp. 241–258). Berrett-Koehler.

MacArthur, J. F. (1998). *In the footsteps of faith: Lessons from the lives of great men and women of the Bible*. Crossway Books.

Macchia, S. A. (1999). *Becoming a healthy church: Ten traits of a vital ministry*. Baker Books.

MacDonald, J. M. (1877). *The life and writings of St. John*. Scribner, Armstrong & Co.

Marberry, T., Pugh, G., & Shaw, C. (2010). *1, 2, 3 John and Revelation* (R. E. Picirilli & H. D. Harrison, Eds.; 1st ed., Vol. 9). Randall House.

Marlowe, M. (2009). New King James Version. *Bible Research*. http://bible-researcher.com/nkjv.html

Marlowe, M. (2012). Against the theory of dynamic equivalence. *Bible Research.* http://bible-researcher.com/dynamic-equivalence.html

Marshall, I. H. (1978). *The epistles of John*. William B. Eerdmans.

Martens, E. A. (2008). Community. In W. A. Dyrness, V.-M. Kärkkäinen, J. F. Martinez, & S. Chan (Eds.), *Global dictionary of theology* (pp. 189–191). IVP Academic.

McDowell, E. A. (1972). 1–2–3 John. In C. J. Allen (Ed.), *The Broadman Bible commentary: Hebrews-Revelation* (Vol. 12, pp. 188–231). Broadman Press.

McNeal, R. (2011). *A work of the heart: Understanding how God shapes spiritual leaders*. Jossey-Bass.

Meyerson, D., & Martin, J. (1987). Cultural change: An integration of three different views. *Journal of Management Studies*, *24*(6), 623–647. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-6486.1987.tb00466.x

Mikėnė, S., Gaižauskaitė, I., & Valavičienė, N. (2013). Qualitative interviewing: Field-work realities. *Social Inquiry Into Well-Being*, *12*(1), 49–62. https://ojs.mruni.eu/ojs/social-inquiry-into-well-being

Milena, Z. R., Dainora, G., & Alin, S. (2008). Qualitative research methods: A comparison between focus-group and in-depth interview. *Annals of University of Oradea*, *17*(4), 1279–1283. https://doaj.org/toc/1582-5450

Miller, E. M. (2021, July 2). Presbyterian Church in America leaders say those who identify as gay are not qualified for ordination. *Washington Post*. https://www.washingtonpost.com/religion/presbyterian-church-in-america-leaders-say-those-who-identify-as-gay-are-not-qualified-for-ordination/2021/07/02/1023d52a-db8b-11eb-8c87-ad6f27918c78_story.html

Milliman, J., & Ferguson, J. (2008). In search of the "spiritual" in spiritual leadership: A case study of entrepreneur Steve Bigari. *Business Renaissance Quarterly*, *3*(1), 19–40. https://publons.com/wos-op/journal/28343/business-renaissance-quarterly/

Morse, J. M. (2000). Determining sample size. *Qualitative Health Research*, *10*(1), 3–5. https://doi.org/10.1177/104973200129118183

Mosley, C., & Matviuk, S. (2010). Impact of leadership on identifying right organizational designs for turbulent times. *IUP Journal of Soft Skills*, *4*(1/2), 57–67. https://www.iupindia.in/307/ijss.asp

Mubasher, U.-F., Salman, Y., Irfan, S., & Jabeen, N. (2017). Spiritual leadership in organizational context: A research gap in South Asia. *South Asian Studies*, *32*(1), 209–222. https://www.tandfonline.com/toc/csas20/current

Nave, M. N. (2018). *An analysis of women's perception of biblical community within the environment of Facebook: A mixed method study* [Doctoral dissertation, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary]. ProQuest Dissertations & Theses.

Nee, W. (2012). *What shall this man do? Discovering your place in ministry*. CLC Publications. (Original work published 1961)

Nestle, E., Nestle, E., Aland, K., Aland, B., Karavidopoulos, J., Martini, C. M., & Metzger, B. M. (Eds.). (2012). *Nestle-Aland Novum Testamentum Graece* (28th Rev. ed.). Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft. (Original work published 1898)

New American Standard Bible. (2020). Lockman Foundation. (Original work published 1971)

Nguyen, A. W. (2018). African American elders, mental health, and the role of the church. *Generations*, *42*(2), 61–67. https://www.jstor.org/stable/26556362

Nguyen, P. V., Tran, K. T., Dao, K. H., & Dinh, H. P. (2018). The role of leader's spiritual leadership on organisation outcomes. *Asian Academy of Management Journal*, *23*(2), 45–68. https://doi.org/10.21315/aamj2018.23.2.3

Niebuhr, H. R. (1951). *Christ and culture*. Harper Torchbooks.

Niewold, J. (2007). Beyond servant leadership. *Journal of Biblical Perspectives in Leadership*, *1*(2), 17. https://www.regent.edu/acad/global/publications/jbpl/

Noel, B. T. (2015). *Pentecostalism, secularism, and post christendom*. Wipf and Stock.

Ogereau, J. M. (2009). Apostolic authority and pastoral leadership in the Johannine epistles. *Asian Journal of Pentecostal Studies*, *12*(2), 210–230. https://www.aptspress.org/asian-journal-of-pentecostal-studies/

O'Leary, D. (2016, October 25). US Civil Rights Commission targets religious liberty. *Crisis Magazine*. http://www.crisismagazine.com/2016/us-civil-rights-commission-targets-religious-liberty

Osborne, G. R. (2006). *The hermeneutical spiral: A comprehensive introduction to biblical interpretation*. IVP Academic.

Osborne, G. R. (2007). The Gospel of John. In P. W. Comfort (Ed.), *The Gospel of John and 1–3 John* (Vol. 13, pp. 1–313). Tyndale House.

Overdorf, D. (2012). *What the Bible says about the church: Rediscovering community*. College Press.

Paas, S. (2012). Religious consciousness in a post-Christian culture: J.H. Bavinck's Religious Consciousness and Christian Faith (1949), sixty years later. *Journal of Reformed Theology*, *6*(1), 35–55. https://doi.org/10.1163/156973112X644001

Painter, J. (2002). *1, 2, and 3 John* (Vol. 18). Liturgical Press.

Panikulam, G. (1979). *Koinōnia in the New Testament: A dynamic expression of the Christian life*. Biblical Institute Press.

Papias. (1885). Fragments of Papias. In A. Roberts, J. Donaldson, & A. C. Coxe (Eds.), *The Ante-Nicene fathers: The writings of the fathers down to A.D. 325* (Vol. 1). Christian Literature Co.

Pastori, J., & Henson, J. D. (2022). Creating Spiritual Community: An analysis of 1 John 1:1–10. In J. D. Henson (Ed.), *Biblical organizational spirituality: New Testament foundations for leaders and organizations* (pp. 449–480). Springer International.

Pate, C. M. (2011). *The writings of John: A survey of the Gospel, epistles, and Apocalypse*. Zondervan.

Patterson, K. A. (2003). *Servant leadership: A theoretical model* [Doctoral dissertation, Regent University]. ProQuest Dissertations & Theses.

Patterson, S. E. (2017). Biblical foundations of Christian leadership, part 2. *Journal of Applied Christian Leadership*, *11*(1), 80–94. https://digitalcommons.andrews.edu/jacl/

Patton, M. Q. (1999). Enhancing the quality and credibility of qualitative analysis. *Health Services Research*, *34*(5 Pt 2), 1189–1208. https://www.hsr.org/

Patton, M. Q. (2015). *Qualitative research and evaluation methods* (4th ed.). SAGE.

Paulsen, M. S. (2012). Disaster: The worst religious freedom case in fifty years. *Regent University Law Review*, *24*, 283–309. https://www.regentuniversitylawreview.com/

Pawar, B. S. (2014). Leadership spiritual behaviors toward subordinates: An empirical examination of the effects of a leader's individual spirituality and organizational spirituality. *Journal of Business Ethics*, *122*(3), 439–452. http://dx.doi.org.seu.idm.oclc.org/10.1007/s10551-013–1772-5

Perkins, P. (1983). Koinönia in 1 John 1:3–7: The social context of division in the Johannine letters. *Catholic Bible Quarterly*, *45*(4), 631–641. https://www.catholicbiblical.org/catholic-biblical-quarterly-cbq

Perkins, P. W. (2012). *The manifestation of biblical community understanding in a Facebook community: A qualitative study among Christian college students* [Doctoral dissertation, Liberty University]. ProQuest Dissertations & Theses.

Peters, C. E. (2018). *Recapturing the transformational power of the church: Moving beyond consumerism and individualism to experiencing life-changing Christian community* [Doctoral dissertation, Northeastern Seminary]. ProQuest Dissertations & Theses.

Philo of Alexandria. (1995). *The works of Philo: Complete and unabridged* (C. D. Yonge, Trans.). Hendrickson Publishers.

Plummer, A. (1909a). 1 John: Introduction. In H. D. M. Spence & J. S. Exell (Eds.), *1 John* (New ed., pp. i–xii). Funk & Wagnalls.

Plummer, A. (1909b). 2 John: Exposition. In H. D. M. Spence & J. S. Exell (Eds.), *1 John* (New ed., pp. 1–4). Funk & Wagnalls.

Plummer, A. (1909c). 3 John: Exposition. In H. D. M. Spence & J. S. Exell (Eds.), *1 John* (New ed., pp. 1–3). Funk & Wagnalls.

Poon, R. (2006). John 21: A Johannine model of leadership. *Journal of Biblical Perspectives in Leadership*, *1*(1), 49–70. https://www.regent.edu/acad/global/publications/jbpl/

Poppinga, A., Larson, M. H., & Shady, S. L. H. (2019). Building bridges across faith lines: Responsible Christian education in a post-Christian society. *Christian Higher Education*, *18*(1–2), 98–110. https://doi.org/10.1080/15363759.2018.1542906

Powell, K., Mulder, J., Griffin, B., & Greenway, T. S. (2017). Growing young: Six core commitments of churches effectively engaging young people. *Journal of Youth Ministry*, *15*(2), 5–33. https://www.aymeducators.org/journal-youth-ministry/

Preface to the New King James Version. (1982). In *The Holy Bible, New King James Version*. Thomas Nelson.

Primeau, P. P. (2018). *Developing successful leaders using spirituality in the workplace* [Doctoral dissertation, Baker College]. ProQuest Dissertations & Theses.

Rainer, T. S., & Rainer, S. S. I. (2008). *Essential church: Reclaiming a generation of dropouts*. B & H Publishing Group.

Rensberger, D. (2001). *The epistles of John* (P. D. Miller & D. L. Bartlett, Eds.). Westminster John Knox Press.

Rensberger, D. (2006). Conflict and community in the Johannine letters. *Interpretation: A Journal of Bible and Theology*, *60*(3), 278–291, 244. https://journals.sagepub.com/home/int

Robbins, V. K. (n.d.). *Dictionary of sociorhetorical terms: C definitions*. http://www.religion.emory.edu/faculty/robbins/SRI/defns/c_defns.cfm

Robbins, V. K. (1996a). *Exploring the texture of texts: A guide to socio-rhetorical interpretation*. Trinity Press International.

Robbins, V. K. (1996b). *The tapestry of early Christian discourse: Rhetoric, society, and ideology*. Routledge.

Robertson, A. T. (1935). *Epochs in the life of the Apostle John*. Fleming H. Revell Co.

Robinson, G. G. (2018). Bow ties and blue jeans: Philosophers and missionaries partnering to evangelize in a post-Christian culture. *Southeastern Theological Review*, *9*(2), 15–20. https://www.southeasternreview.com/

Robinson, M. A., & Pierpont, W. G. (Eds.). (2005). *The New Testament in the original Greek: Byzantine textform*. Chilton Book Publishing.

Ryken, L. (2002). *The word of God in English: Criteria for excellence in Bible translation*. Crossway Books.

Saldaña, J. (2021). *The coding manual for qualitative researchers* (4th ed.). SAGE.

Saldaña, J., & Omasta, M. (2018). *Qualitative research: Analyzing life*. SAGE.

Sanders, J. O. (2007). *Spiritual leadership*. Moody Press. (Original work published 1967)

Sanders, S. B. (2014). *The relationship between leadership spirituality and ethical behavior: An explanatory model* [Doctoral dissertation, Capella University]. ProQuest Dissertations & Theses.

Sasse, B. (2016, September 15). *Sasse: Don't euthanize religious liberty*. https://public/index.cfm/2016/9/sasse-don-t-euthanize-religious-liberty

Schaff, P., & Wace, H. (Eds.). (1890). *A select library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene fathers of the Christian Church: Translated into English with prolegomena and explanatory notes* (Vol. 1). Christian Literature Co.

Schein, E. H. (1986). What you need to know about organizational culture. *Training & Development Journal*, *40*(1), 30–33. https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/journal/14682419

Schein, E. H. (1988). *Organizational culture* (Working Paper). Sloan School of Management, Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

Schein, E. H. (1990). Organizational culture. *American Psychologist*, *45*(2), 109–119. https://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.45.2.109

Schein, E. H. (2017). *Organizational culture and leadership* (5th ed.). John Wiley & Sons.

Scorgie, G. G., & Reimer, K. S. (2011). Spirituality in Community. In G. G. Scorgie, S. Chan, G. T. Smith, & J. D. I. Smith (Eds.), *Zondervan dictionary of Christian spirituality* (pp. 77–83). Zondervan.

Senge, P. M. (2006). *The fifth discipline: The art and practice of the learning organization* (Rev. ed.). Currency. (Original work published 1990)

Sengupta, S. S., & Sinha, J. B. P. (2005). Perceived dimensions of societal and organizational cultures and their impact on managerial work behavior. *Journal of Management Research*, *5*(3), 143–172. https://www.macrothink.org/journal/index.php/jmr

Senz, N. (2016, September 19). Obama administration says you're a bigot if you live your religion. *Federalist.* https://thefederalist.com/2016/09/19/obama-administration-says-youre-bigot-live-religion/

Serrano, C. A. (2022). Organizational spirituality as the rebalancing of society: An analysis of Acts 4. In J. D. Henson (Ed.), *Biblical organizational spirituality: New Testament foundations for leaders and organizations* (pp. 119–135). Springer International.

Shackelford, K., & Bufferfield, J. (Eds.). (2017a). *Undeniable: The survey of hostility to religion in America* (pp. 1–419). First Liberty Institute.

Shackelford, K., & Bufferfield, J. (Eds.). (2017b). *Undeniable: The survey of hostility to religion in America—Military Edition* (pp. 1–33). First Liberty Institute.

Shackelford, K., Mateer, J., Bufferfield, J., Lundquist, C., Hennighausen, J., & Phillips, S. (Eds.). (2016). *Undeniable: The survey of hostility to religion in America* (pp. 1–373). First Liberty Institute.

Slade, S. (2016, September 20). U.S. Commission on Civil Rights wants to subjugate the First Amendment. *Reason.* https://reason.com/2016/09/20/us-commission-on-civil-rights-wants-to-s/

Smalley, S. S. (1984). *1, 2, 3 John* (Vol. 51). Word Books.

Smith, C., & Snell, P. (2009). *Souls in transition: The religious and spiritual lives of emerging adults*. Oxford University Press.

Smith, D. M. (1991). *First, Second, and Third John*. John Knox Press.

Smith, K. M. (2019). *Examining the roles of sacrifice, spirituality, and stewardship in ethical leadership theory from a socio-rhetorical analysis of 1 Corinthians 9* [Doctoral dissertation, Regent University]. ProQuest Dissertations & Theses.

Spyker, S. K. (2013). *Technology and spirituality: How the information revolution affects our spiritual lives* (1st Digital ed.). SkyLight Paths.

Stallard, M. (2003). Gender-neutral translations: The controversy over the TNIV. *Journal of Ministry and Theology*, *7*(1), 5–26. https://baptistseminary.clarkssummitu.edu/resources/the-journal-of-ministry-and-theology/

Stephanus, R. (Ed.). (2002). *Stephen's 1550 Textus Receptus with morphology*. Logos Bible Software. (Original work published 1550)

Stetzer, E. (2006). *Planting missional churches*. Broadman & Holman Publishers.

Stetzer, E. (2018). *Christians in an age of outrage: How to bring out the best when the world is at its worst*. Tyndale Momentum.

Stott, J. R. W. (1988). *The letters of John: An introduction and commentary* (2nd ed., Vol. 19). InterVarsity Press. (Original work published 1964)

Strecker, G. (1996). *The Johannine Letters: A commentary on 1, 2, and 3 John* (H. Attridge, Ed.; L. M. Maloney, Trans.). Augsburg Fortress.

Streeter, B. H. (1924). *The four gospels: A study of origins treating of the manuscript tradition, sources, authorship, and dates*. Macmillan and Co.

Struecker, J. (2015). *Change the culture, change the church: A concise biblical and theological examination of the role of the pastor in leading cultural change in Southern Baptist churches* [Doctoral dissertation, Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary]. ProQuest Dissertations & Theses.

Sweeney, P., & Fry, L. (2012). Character development through spiritual leadership. *Consulting Psychology Journal: Practice and Research*, *64*, 89–107. https://doi.org/10.1037/a0028966

Taylor, K. C. (2003). *Church health and church growth in the Western Canadian District of the Christian and Missionary Alliance in Canada* [Doctoral dissertation, Asbury Theological Seminary]. ProQuest Dissertations & Theses.

Thatcher, T. (2006). 1, 2, 3 John. In T. I. Longman & D. E. Garland (Eds.), *Hebrews-Revelation* (Revised ed., Vol. 13, pp. 413–538). Zondervan.

The Holy Bible, English Standard Version. (2016). Crossway Bibles. (Original work published 2001)

The Holy Bible: King James Version with Apocrypha (Pure Cambridge Edition). (1900). (Original work published 1611)

The Holy Bible, New King James Version. (1982). Thomas Nelson.

Thomas, R. L. (2004). *How to choose a Bible version: An introductory guide to English translations*. Mentor.

Thompson, M. (2017). The need for spiritual leadership. *Journal of Applied Christian Leadership*, *11*(2), 78–82. https://digitalcommons.andrews.edu/jacl/

Tushnet, M. (2016, May 16). Abandoning defensive crouch liberal constitutionalism. *Balkinization*. https://balkin.blogspot.com/2016/05/abandoning-defensive-crouch-liberal.html

U.S. Commission on Civil Rights. (2016). *Peaceful coexistence: Reconciling non-descrimination principles with civil liberties* (pp. 1–296). U.S. Commission on Civil Rights.

van der Merwe, D. G. (2018). The author of 1 John uses the multiple references to his "writing" as a mechanism to establish different affects and effects. *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies*, *74*(3), 12. https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v74i3.5086

Van Staden, P. J. (1991). The debate on the structure of 1 John. *HTS Teologiese Studies / Theological Studies*, *47*. https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v47i2.2407

Wamble, C. D. (2019). *Emotional and spiritual enablers for building trust within churches for organizational effectiveness* [Doctoral dissertation, Walden University]. ProQuest Dissertations & Theses.

Washington, K. S. (2016). *Spiritual leadership in religious organizations: A grounded theory study* [Doctoral dissertation, University of the Rockies]. In ProQuest Dissertations & Theses.

Water, M. (Ed.). (2001). *The new encyclopedia of Christian martyrs*. John Hunt Publishing.

Water, M. (2002). *The Christian book of records*. John Hunt Publishing.

Watson, D. F. (1989). 1 John 2:12–14 as distributio, conduplicatio, and expolitio: A rhetorical understanding. *Journal for the Study of the New Testament*, *11*(35), 97–110. https://journals.sagepub.com/home/jnt

Watson, D. F. (1993). Amplification techniques in 1 John: The interaction of rhetorical style and invention. *Journal for the Study of the New Testament*, *16*(51), 99–123. https://journals.sagepub.com/home/jnt

Westcott, B. F. (1902). *The epistles of St. John: Notes and essays on the Greek text* (4th ed.). Macmillan. (Original work published 1883)

Whittington, J. L., Pitts, T. M., Kageler, W. V., & Goodwin, V. L. (2005). Legacy leadership: The leadership wisdom of the Apostle Paul. *Leadership Quarterly*, *16*(5), 749–770. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.leaqua.2005.07.006

Williams, D. H. (2019). The tradition of Christian persecution. *Pro Ecclesia*, *28*(4), 403–417. https://www.pro-ecclesia.org/

Williams, P. S. (2020). *Exiles on mission: How Christians can thrive in a post-Christian world*. Brazos Press.

Witherington, B. I. (2006). *Letters and homilies for Hellenized Christians: A socio-rhetorical commentary on Titus, 1–2 Timothy, and 1–3 John* (Vol. 1). IVP Academic.

Witherington, B. I. (2009). *What's in the word: Rethinking the socio-rhetorical character of the New Testament*. Baylor University Press.

Wright, N. T. (2006). *Simply Christian*. Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge.

Yancey, G., & Williamson, D. A. (2015). *So many Christians, so few lions: Is there Christianophobia in the United States?* Rowman & Littlefield.

Yancey, J. J. (2020). *Spiritual leadership in education and training: A case study of organizational education* [Doctoral dissertation, Trident University International]. ProQuest Dissertations & Theses.

Yang, M., & Fry, L. W. (2018). The role of spiritual leadership in reducing healthcare worker burnout. *Journal of Management, Spirituality & Religion*, *15*(4), 305–324. https://doi.org/10.1080/14766086.2018.1482562

Yarbrough, R. W. (2008). *1–3 John*. Baker Academic.

Zuckerman, P. (2015, May 12). Christianity declining, secularism rising: More Americans are leaving the fold. *Psychology Today.* https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/the-secular-life/201505/christianity-declining-secularism-rising

Appendix A

Inner Texture Repetitive Patterns in 1 John 1:1–10

Unit A	Which/ Message	Was	We/Us	Heard	Seen/ Looked	Word	Life	Manifest	Testify/ Proclaim	You	Father/ God/ He/Him	Fellowship	Son Jesus	Light	No/Not	Darkness	If	Say	Walk	Lie	Truth	Cleanse/ Forgive	Sin/Sins/ Unright- eousness
1	That which / Which / Which / Which	Was	We / We / We	Heard	Seen / Eyes / Looked upon	Word	Life																
2	which	Was / Was / Was	We / Us		Seen		Life / Life	Manifest / Manifest	Testify / Proclaim	You	Father												
3	That which		We / We / Us	Heard	Seen				Proclaim	You / You / You	Father	Fellowship / Fellowship	Son Jesus Christ										
4			We																				
Unit B																							
5	Message		We	Heard					Proclaim	You	Him / God / Him			Light	No	Darkness							
6			We / We / We / We								Him	Fellowship			Not	Darkness	If	Say	Walk	Lie	Truth		
7			We / We / Us								He	Fellowship	Jesus Son	Light / Light				If		Walk			Cleanses	Sin
8			We / We / We / Us												No / Not		If	Say		Deceive	Truth		Sin
9			We / Us / Us								He							If	Confess				Faithful / Just	Forgive / Cleanse	Sins / Sins / Unright- eousness
10			We / We / We / Us			Word					Him				Not / Not		If	Say		Liar			Sinned
Number of Occurences	7	4	28	3	4	2	3	2	4	4	9	4	2	3	6	2	5	4	2	3	2	3	6

Appendix B

Chiastic Structure of 1 John 4:7–21

Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. (1 John 4:7)

He who does not love does not know God, for God is love. (1 John 4:8)

In this the love of God was manifested toward us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him. (1 John 4:9)

In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins. (1 John 4:10)

Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. (1 John 4:11)

No one has seen God at any time. If we love one another, God abides in us, and His love has been perfected in us. (1 John 4:12)

By this we know that we abide in Him, and He in us, because He has given us of His Spirit. (1 John 4:13)

And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent the Son as Savior of the world. (1 John 4:14)

Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God. (1 John 4:15)

| Commanded to love | Command disobeyed | God's love toward all | Right standing in love | Free to love all | Abiding in love | Abiding in God |

And we have known and believed the love that God has for us. God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God in him. (1 John 4:16)

Love has been perfected among us in this: that we may have boldness in the day of judgment; because as He is, so are we in this world. (1 John 4:17)

There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves torment. But he who fears has not been made perfect in love. (1 John 4:18)

We love Him because He first loved us. (1 John 4:19)

If someone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen? (1 John 4:20)

And this commandment we have from Him: that he who loves God must love his brother also. (1 John 4:21)

Appendix C

Interview Protocol

Introduction

Good morning/evening, God bless you, and welcome! Thank you for taking time to participate in this online interview. I know you are very busy, so it means a lot to me that you are willing to take time from your busy schedule for this session. At the same time, I hope that you will find participation a rewarding experience for you, if for no other reason than that it will give you an opportunity to share your ideas about what you value in ministry.

As you know, I am currently working on my Ph.D. at Southeastern University. This interview is part of research that I'm conducting for my doctoral dissertation. I expect that my research will help pastors like you to advance God's kingdom through building biblical community while engaging the culture at large. Ultimately, the goal of this research is to support and serve pastors and churches in our Assemblies of God fellowship as well as other pastors and churches that are endeavoring to fulfill the Great Commission and the Great Commandment.

Your participation is vitally important because of the wealth of experience you bring to this study. You serve as an Assemblies of God presbyter. This gives you very broad experience in dealing with pastors and churches from diverse backgrounds. It has also given you exposure to a variety of church cultures and their ministry contexts. Furthermore, you also function as a local church pastor. This has given you opportunity to build relationships with the people in your congregation, providing a foundation for healthy New Testament spiritual

community. It has also given you the opportunity to build relationships with the

residents and neighbors in your area, while also getting to know key leaders in the

community at large as well.

Allow me to point out some guidelines that will provide direction for our

time together. Please be aware that I will be recording today's session. However,

the recording is for my own data analysis, to promote integrity and maintain the

accuracy of my observations. The information, including your names and other

information related to you and your ministry, will remain confidential.

This is a semi-structured interview. Allow me to emphasize that there are no

right or wrong answers. The goal of this interview is to discover your experience

and observations as it relates to the topic of discussion. I will ask you a series of

open-ended questions related to this topic. At some point I may have to interrupt

your comment for the sake of time or to move the discussion to another topic, so

please don't take it personally. Because you bring rich experience and a wealth of

information, I encourage you to offer your thoughts as candidly as possible.

Likewise, I may ask for your input on a particular question or topic. If for any

reason you feel uncomfortable answering a question or with the interview, you are

welcome to decline to answer or you may leave the meeting, if you feel the need. I

can assure you I will not offer any criticism.

One other thing, remember that your role as a presbyter is important. So,

when I ask you questions about your observations and/or experiences in the church,

it also applies to your role as a presbyter and the various pastors, ministries, and

churches you have observed. So, remember, your broad experience as a leader is

important here, not just your experience as a local church pastor.

Interview Protocol

Q#	Type of Question	Question	Format, Timing, Instructions
1	Opening	Read 1 John 1:1–10	Ask participant to have Bible open to the text and read/follow along
	Introductory Experience/Behavior	How would you describe your relationship with God?	3 minutes
2	Key Experience/Behavior	What personal witness or indications have you received that assure you of a personal, intimate connection with God?	3 minutes
3	Key Experience/Behavior	How would you say that your relationship with God impacts your leadership?	3 minutes
4	Transition Knowledge Opinions/Values	Based on your reading of Reading of 1 John 1:1–10, how would you define biblical community?	2 minutes
5	Key Behaviors/Experience Background	What approaches have you taken to build and promote biblical community in your congregation?	4 minutes
6	Opinion/Values Feeling	How important is unity to building biblical community?	2 minutes

Q#	Type of Question	Question	Format, Timing, Instructions
7	Key Behaviors/Experience Knowledge	What examples of biblical community have you observed in your church?	4 minutes
8	Transition Behaviors/Experience Background	What strategies have helped you maintain your values and doctrinal standards as a church?	2 minutes
9	Key Behaviors/Experiences	How have these practices helped you to maintain stability in your ministry?	2 minutes
10	Transition Behaviors/Experiences Feelings/Emotions	How have you seen love tangibly demonstrated in your church?	3 minutes
11	Transition Behaviors/Experiences Feelings/Emotions	In what ways do you encourage your people to make love a defining characteristic of your ministry?	2 minutes
12	Key Behaviors/Experience Knowledge	In what ways has your congregation shared God's love with your community?	3 minutes
13	Transition Behaviors/Experience Opinion/Values	What challenges to your teaching, doctrine, and values have you encountered from inside the church?	3 minutes
14	Key Behaviors/Experience Feelings/Emotions	What other types of conflict that threaten the unity of the church have you encountered?	2 minutes
15	Transition Knowledge Opinion/Values	What aspects of today's culture do you think pose a threat to biblical community?	3 minutes
16	Key Behaviors/Experience Feelings/Emotions	Have you (or any churches you know) experienced any opposition to your (or their)	3 minutes

Q#	Type of Question	Question	Format, Timing, Instructions
		church's ministry? Where did it come from? What prompted it?	
17	Key Behaviors/Experience Feelings/Emotions	Have you (or any pastors and/or churches you know) encountered any hostility or threats from those in opposition? What forms did it take?	3 minutes
18	Transition Behaviors/Experience Opinions/Values	In what ways have you confronted the challenges you faced from within the church?	4 minutes
19	Key Behaviors/Experience Opinions/Values	In what ways have you confronted the opposition and/or hostility you encountered from outside the church?	3 minutes
20	Key Behaviors/Experience	Can you recall any other instances when your leadership was challenged and what approach you took to confront those challenges?	4 minutes
21	Ending	Summarize the main points of the discussion. Do you have anything else to add?	2 minutes
Total Time			**60 minutes (estimated)**