WHAT IS TRUTH?

SEMANTIC DENSITY AND THE LANGUAGE OF THE JOHANNINE EPISTLES
(WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO 2 JOHN)

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ABSTRACT

In this essay the infrequently discussed phenomenon of deliberate ambiguity is explored in relation to the Johannine Epistles, 2 John in particular. It is referred to as 'semantic density' (SD) to more adequately reflect its nature and function, namely, a progressive coalescence of complementary concepts, effected by the intentional reiteration of a cluster of key terms, which are thereby merged into a more comprehensive thematic notion. SD is thus distinguished from 'ambiguity', on the one hand, and 'obscurity' on the other. Several types of discourse analysis are employed to demonstrate the likely presence of SD in 2 John, and the principle is then applied to explain two disputed 'ambiguous' expressions in verses 6 and 9 respectively, each of which pertains to the author's central message concerning the 'truth'. Finally, the implications of SD for biblical exposition and translation are pointed out.

A SENSUS LITERALIS UNUS EST

In reaction to the common medieval practice of allegorising the biblical text during the practice of interpretation, the early Reformers emphasised the clarity and simplicity of the Scriptures. For example, 'Luther insisted that the primary or grammatical meaning of the Bible was clear (claritas Scripturae) rather than obscure, while Calvin urged that the meaning of a passage was one (simpexus) rather than many' (Ferguson 1988:295). This basic hermeneutical principle has been maintained by most conservative Protestant exegetes and dogmatics right up until the present day. Two typical restatements of this position are as follows:

It must be maintained that Scripture, no matter how many significations the separate words may have, has but one proper sense.

(Berkhof [Reformed] 1950:57)

'Sensus literalis unus est.' A Scripture text can have but one divinely intended sense and meaning.

(Koehler [Lutheran] 1952:2)

While figurative or symbolical meanings are not ignored, these must always be based upon the single literal sense conveyed by the words in the passage concerned (Berkhof 1950:59). So fundamental is the principle of sensus literalis that some would go so far as to maintain that 'to have two
meanings is equivalent to having no meaning' (Mennicke 1947:54). And from this the conclusion may be drawn that 'only a deceiver writes so that his words have more than one meaning, and only a deceiver imputes more than one meaning to a passage of Scripture' (Mennicke 1947:55).

However well-intentioned (i e a concern for the 'truth' of Scripture) and generally valid such observations are, it is quite possible to understand and apply them also in an incorrect or inappropriate manner. If they are put into practice too strictly or indiscriminately, the interpreter can easily lock himself into a 'hermeneutical box', as it were. Thus in his singleminded search for the semantic 'pearl of great price' (i e the one and only correct sense of some biblical expression), he fails to recognise first of all that in a significant number of instances the original text, whether in the Old or the New Testament, cannot be pinned down with such certainty. For one reason or another — a hapax legomenon, a complex rhetorical figure, a textual corruption or variant reading, or simply the lack of sufficient extralinguistic background information concerning the situation of use — the honest and competent exegete finds it difficult, if not impossible, to specify a single 'correct' meaning. Rather, the best he can do is to rank the several possibilities according to the relative amount of evidence — grammatical or lexical, textual or extratextual — that each commands (cf Leech 1974:78-79).

Secondly, and more relevant to our concerns in the present study, a monolithic approach toward meaning in literary texts, which definitely include the Holy Scriptures, tends to blind one to the possible intentional use on the part of the original author of individual words or syntactic constructions in more than one sense. Does this necessarily result in 'no meaning', as Mennicke (above) claims, or worse, should it lead one to consider the writer — or the interpreter — a deliberate 'deceiver' or distorter of biblical truth? We think not, and during the course of our investigation of 2 John in particular, we will support the suggestion that, on the contrary, the author may well have employed semantic equivocacy, or better 'density', as a key stylistic device in order to enhance the communicative effectiveness (depth, impact, and appeal) of his Epistle to 'the elect lady and her children.'

B.1 SEMANTIC AMBIGUITY OR DENSITY?
The linguistic/literary phenomenon under examination here has often been termed 'ambiguity' (we will not be concerned with 'non-linguistic' ambiguity; cf Lyons 1977:398). There are, however, several different kinds that scholars have taken note of. Empson (1955), for example, distinguishes 'seven types of ambiguity' in his study of English verse. Caird specifies four 'areas of ambiguity', namely: phonetic, lexical, grammatical, and functional (1980:95-102), along with three 'causes of ambiguity': accidental, historical, and deliberate (Caird 1980:102ff). Similarly, Silva in his 'introduction to lexical semantics' calls attention to the 'difference between what he calls 'deliberate' and 'unintended' ambiguity (1983:149-156). In the case of the former, which is the focus of this study, 'an author will deliberately choose equivocal terms and constructions for a variety of purposes': (149, Silva's emphasis). Caird breaks this rather amorphous category down into five general sub-types: oracular, ironic, parabolic, exploratory, and associative (1980:103-108).
Non-deliberate ambiguity, on the other hand, is regarded as being 'accidental', an unintentional violation of the basic 'cooperative principle' of communication (Levinson 1983:101-102). And wherever it appears in a text, interpreters 'face the sometimes difficult task of deciding which meaning was intended by the author' (Silva 1983:151). This process normally involves extensive use of the extralinguistic setting (if this is known) and the linguistic context in order to 'disambiguate' the particular form in question and possibly also the utterance as a whole (Leech 1974:78). The total linguistic context, which is consciously or unconsciously 'determined' by the writer during composition (Hirsch 1967:47-48), usually carries enough semantic clues and redundancy of meaning to make his intended meaning plain, at least for his original readership. Unfortunately, however, this is not always the case, especially for a contemporary constituency, and hence a communication breakdown occurs.

B.1.1 Generally there has been a tendency to deny or downplay the possible incidence and importance of deliberate ambiguity in modern biblical interpretation. Certainly it has not been given much serious attention in the literature. Many theologians oppose the possibility due to their adherence to the precept of sensus literalis mentioned earlier. Linguists and literary analysts, too, are frequently skeptical, basing their aversion on the occurrence of common semantic phenomena as homonymy, polysemy, double entendre, contextual specification, and so forth, which would eliminate the need to bring ambiguity into the picture. Suspicion is also generated in reaction to a number of erroneous and misleading applications of this and related principles in earlier lexical studies, such as Kittel's Theological Dictionary (abridged and translated into English by Bromiley, 1985). James Barr (1961) was one of the first to call attention to some of the prejudices and false presuppositions of these methodologies, which were typically distorted by excessive etymologising and the misguided attempt to specify significant differences between the Hebrew versus the Greek 'mind' as revealed by certain prominent features of their respective languages. Arguing against the likelihood of multiple meaning or ambiguity - in the nature of convergent polysemy - within a given biblical context, Barr coined the term 'illegitimate totality transfer', which he defines as 'the error that arises when the "meaning" of a word (understood as the total series of semantic relations into which it enters within a given corpus of literature) is read into a particular case as its sense and implication there' (1961:218). However, he does not discuss the possibility of several (as opposed to the sum total of), complementary (versus mutually exclusive) senses of a word being equally relevant in a certain passage according to the conscious design of the author.

Even the term 'ambiguity' itself would seem to prejudice scholars against giving the phenomenon a fair treatment in their analysis of the literature of Scripture. Any neutral technical definition of the word 'ambiguous', for example 'having two or more possible meanings' (Webster), is normally overshadowed by the much stronger associated negative connotation of popular usage, namely: 'not clear; indefinite; uncertain; vague' (Webster). Alternative designations for what is being referred to here are no improvement. Thiselton, for example, uses 'polymorphous' (1980:407ff) and occasionally 'multiform' (1980:444), but these terms are not very satisf-
factory since they focus attention upon the form of lexical items rather than their meaning, which is at issue here. 'Polysemy', or 'one symbol with several senses' (Silva 1983:114), does not really fit either since this applies to several different contexts rather than the single lexical setting in which ambiguity arises — or is deliberately occasioned by the author.

Then there is 'obscurity' or vagueness. However, such terms are usually employed to refer to a rather different literary technique, namely, an intentional lack of specificity in lexical usage (Thiselton 1977:94). Vagueness can, of course, also be unintended, the product of either a lack of sufficient background information (on the part of receptors) or simply poor literary technique (on the part of the author). Deliberate obscurity, which is characteristic of cabalistic or occult literature, presents the reader (or listener) with a number of hermeneutical possibilities, with no single interpretation being more obvious or probable than any of the others — except perhaps to the initiated or inspired 'oracle'.

8.1.2 In distinction from the preceding, the term (semantic) 'density' is being suggested both for greater precision and as a connotatively more neutral alternative to 'ambiguity' (cf Caird's 'exploratory ambiguity' [1980:105]). This would apply in situations where equivocation appears to be employed as a deliberate literary device by the author, whether for stylistic (form-oriented), thematic (content-oriented), or rhetorical (effect-oriented) purposes. By way of analogy, the concept of density also serves to give one an idea of how the technique itself operates within literary discourse. In the realm of physical science, the density of an object or substance is defined as the ratio of its mass to its volume, that is \[ \text{Density} = \frac{\text{Mass}}{\text{Volume}} \]. Applying this notion metaphorically to the field of lexical-semantics, the 'mass', or matter, of a certain word is comprised of the number of distinct senses, or meanings, that it has in the language. The 'volume', or space, refers to its semantic range, that is, the number of diverse contexts in which these different senses are found and their relative frequency of occurrence. Thus, a key lexical item manifesting several compatible senses in a given context would be semantically more 'dense', or conceptually 'heavy', at that point in relation to both its normal usage elsewhere and also the words with which it co-occurs in the text.

In the case of deliberate ambiguity then, a writer goes contrary to general, expected compositional practice and intends two (or more) meanings of a focal term to be activated within a single literary environment. Alternatively, that lexical item is used on a number of occasions within a text and is foregrounded in such a way that it carries with it in any instance some of the important associations which are attached to it in the other contexts, especially those derived from proximate, thematically-related words. Thus for a given occurrence, the semantic 'mass' of the expression is augmented while its contextual 'volume' is compressed, and this results in an increase in its 'density' of meaning and consequently also the conceptual 'weight' of the larger message at that juncture. Its meaning is therefore defined not only by the verbal signs with which it collocates (Nida & Wendland 1985:29), but also by the significant terms to which it is related ideationally in the wider context of the discourse. We
will examine several prominent instances of this phenomenon in the second Epistle of John, especially with respect to the concept of 'truth', in order to illustrate how the technique of creating such density contributes toward the effectiveness of the communication process as a whole.

B.2 THE FACTORS OF PERSPECTIVE AND PROBABILITY

In the process of trying to decide among the alternatives of obscurity (many possible senses with none obvious), ambiguity (several probable senses with only one intended), and density (several probable senses with more than one intended), the analyst must first of all determine the particular perspective according to which the issue is being viewed. There are two possibilities, namely, the point-of-view of the original (biblical) receptors, or a contemporary one — that of readers and listeners today, whatever their specific language-culture (i.e. one cannot assume that the predominant viewpoint of Western scholarship prevails everywhere — in Africa, for example). In other words, a given expression in a text of Scripture may be either obscure or ambiguous to interpreters today simply due to a lack of sufficient extratextual background information regarding the original setting and situation of communication. The matter of semantic density is somewhat different in that it is more of a textual phenomenon. Thus one might be tempted to posit its occurrence on the basis of too small a corpus of related texts. Were more literature from the period extant, whether by the same author or others writing in a similar vein, the operation of a greater measure of 'intertextuality' might well indicate that a singular, rather than a compound (i.e. 'dense'), sense was actually intended in a given instance.

Speaking from a current perspective, therefore, an analyst can never be absolutely certain with regard to any interpretation of Scripture in cases where obscurity, ambiguity, or density are involved. It is rather a matter of a greater or lesser degree of probability that explanation A is to be preferred over explanation B (or X, Y, or Z). There are thus levels of indeterminacy of meaning pertaining to any problematic or disputed explanation of the biblical text, depending on the type of linguistic (literary) and extra — linguistic criteria that are used to support the various possibilities and also the skill of the exegete both in clarifying the competing alternatives and in exploiting the evidence at his disposal in favor of one reading as opposed to another. It is up to his contemporaries, in turn, to evaluate his methodology as well as his results in order to determine the relative probability of his proposal(s) for solving the alleged equivocalness of the original. It is in this light that the present postulation of semantic density in John should be viewed, namely, as another hermeneutical possibility which has not as yet been duly considered.

B.3 SEMANTIC DENSITY IN THE JOHANNINE WRITINGS

It is a basic tenet of communication in general and exegesis in particular that a person 'should assume one meaning [i.e. of a given word] unless there are strong exegetical (literary, contextual) grounds to the contrary' (Silva 1983:151, Silva’s emphasis). A corollary to this assumption is that the single meaning concerned is the literal, or unmarked, one (Nida & Wendland 1985:28). These guidelines may be derived from a more general
one, namely, Martin Joos' 'first theorem in semantics': 'the best meaning is the least meaning,' in other words, the sense that contributes the least semantically to the verbal context in which it is found (Joos 1972). In view of these established principles, it would be unwise to posit the notion of semantic density too frequently in textual analysis, that is, without a sufficient amount of convincing evidence in support of such an interpretation. The purpose of this paper is to advance such evidence with respect to some of the central concepts of the Johannine corpus in general and 2 John in particular.

Many biblical scholars have called attention to the penchant of the author of John's gospel to utilise various semantic plays, both simple and elaborate, to heighten the communicative value of many of the central theological terms and concepts that he employs. There is, for example, at the very beginning of the gospel the expanding significance attributed to 'light' [φως], a notion that resonates back to the primordial light of Genesis one (1:5) and is ultimately personified as a reference to the divine Logos who spiritually 'enlights' [φωτιζει] all people (1:9). Enigma, double entendre, dramatic irony - the regular recurrence of such devices acts as a subtle but effective reminder that appearances can be deceiving, especially where the will and ways of God are concerned, for example the need for every person to be 'born again/from above [ἀνανεωθεί] (3:3,5,7).

Deliberate ambiguity is very prominent also in the first Johannine Epistle, notably in the crucial thematic phrase 'the love of God' [ἡ οἰκονομία τοῦ θεοῦ]. In 5:3 this is clearly an objective genitive, but in 2:5 and elsewhere (including similar expressions, e.g. 'the love of the Father') the expression may be interpreted equally well in a subjective sense (e.g. 2:5,15; 3:17; 4:12). In the latter instances, a case could be made for viewing both possibilities as being equally applicable in the context, one being intentionally played off the other to heighten their mutual interaction in the Christian's life: love for God is manifested by love for one another, which in turn realises God's all-encompassing love for humanity (4:7-12).

There are a number of expressions in 2 John which are more or less ambiguous (or obscure) from the point-of-view of current biblical scholarship. In other words, at least two quite different interpretations may be assigned to each, with one or the other being regarded as contextually more 'probable', depending on the criteria used by the exegete. A classic case occurs in the first line of the letter with the enigmatic phrase, 'the elect lady', that is to say 'she' a real person or the personification of a prominent local church (cf 'your elect sister' in v13)? In terms of illocutionary force, should the verb of the salutation, that is ἔρχεται, lit: 'it will be' (v3), be regarded as a confident, future-directed affirmation, or as a more typical wish, or even a prayer? Is the demonstrative 'this one' [ὁ ὁδότης] in v7 to be treated as a collective reference to all false teachers who deny the incarnation or should it be individualised to designate the epitome of all deceiving opponents of Christ, namely, 'the Antichrist'? Does 'full reward' [μισθόν πλήρω] (v8) refer simply to salvation/eternal life or something in addition to this, that is the special reward of faithful service (cf Mk 9:41; Lk 19:16-19)? Does 'the one going on ahead' [ὁ προερχόμενος] (v9) mean a person who wishes to set himself up as a leader in the church, a type of 'anti-Christ', or is this an ironic, anti-
Gnostic appellation for someone who thought his superior 'knowledge' enabled him to proceed beyond the gospel to something better? And finally, does the formulaic \( \lambda \gamma \varepsilon \varsigma \chi \alpha \rho \varepsilon \varepsilon \nu \) lit. 'speak rejoicing' (vv10-11), function as a word of fraternal/sororal greeting, as a corresponding farewell, or more significantly, as an acknowledgement of Christian fellowship?

The preceding has been a sample of some of the expressions from the 13 verses of 2 John that could be understood in more than one way. Most of the instances cited above probably illustrate what was previously termed 'accidental' ambiguity, that is, they were not actually intended by the author to be equivocal in meaning. The original recipients of the letter, 'the elect lady and her children', undoubtedly knew him personally and were therefore familiar with his usage, including such stylistic idiosyncrasies or stereotypes as the designation just cited. They were fully aware of the specific situations, whether threatening or encouraging, to which he was referring in his Epistle. Twentieth century readers, on the other hand, cannot be so certain. New research findings and analytical techniques in the fields of Hellenistic Greek, literary criticism, and sociological analysis as these relate to the biblical text on the one hand and the first century (Christian) world on the other help to give new weight to one exposition over against another. But due to the lack of a complete understanding of the relevant sociocultural milieu and situation al setting, many passages remain debatable and their interpretation continues to be a matter of (more or less) probability, rather than even a relative degree of certainty.

Several of the earlier examples may in all likelihood be construed as instances of 'deliberate' ambiguity, or as we are calling it here, 'semantic density', for example the 'advanced ones' of verse 9. The author of the Johannine corpus gives abundant evidence of a 'concentrated' style, a manner of composition in which the message is simultaneously condensed (in form) and expanded (in meaning) through various literary techniques. On the textual surface, his writing is very basic and seemingly readily apparent. Thus every reader, no matter how limited in linguistic and/or exegetical competence, is able to derive something from what he has to say. It is when one digs more deeply, however, that one begins to suspect that much more may be present than meets the eye or the ear. Now is this due to the text's present obscurity, or has the author in fact intended a deeper level of theological meaning and/or practical significance? The remainder of this paper is devoted to an exploration of what are considered to be several more key items of semantic density, in particular, those related to the central notion of 'truth'. We wish to investigate in fuller fashion what constitutes this device, how it is realised and can be recognised (more certainly) in the text, how it affects our understanding of the message of 2 John, in particular, and what are the implications for a contemporary hermeneutical application of this Epistle.

B.4 How does one determine 'density'?
We have stressed the fact that a responsible exegete does not cite instances of semantic density lightly, that is, without some convincing evidence in support of such a claim. Otherwise, he lays himself open to the charge of equivocalness — of being unable to make a decision with regard to a
particular interpretation — or worse, of incompetence — of not knowing what the 'real meaning' is at all. As already suggested, there are two major sources for obtaining this evidence, namely, textual and extratextual. Both types are important and must always be considered in conjunction with one another. Substantiation from the text itself has generally been appealed to more frequently and extensively in exegetical studies, as in the present instance, simply because it is more apparent and abundant. But any investigation that ignores extratextual confirmation, where available and reliable, is headed down the sure path of error and irrelevance. It should also be noted that the current study is entirely synchronic in nature, that is, it takes the complete textual world of meaning as it stands at a single point in time. Diachronic lexical analysis, whether general (i.e., pertaining to a historical process of etymological development) or specific (i.e., tracing an author's alleged shift in usage over time), is a considerably less helpful procedure. This is especially true in the case of New Testament literature, where the meaning of most words has been fairly reliably established (cf. Silva 1983: ch 1).

B.4.1 Extratextual evidence is nonverbal and pertains either to the physical (i.e., environmental/ecological) or sociocultural setting in which a particular piece of literature was composed. The latter is especially important, for it relates to the social, economic, political, educational, artistic, or religious background of the text. Such factors most certainly had an influence on not only the author's general theme and purpose, but also upon his particular rhetorical strategy for carrying these out, including the specific selection, arrangement, and foregrounding of linguistic features on all levels of discourse. For example, some definite Christological controversy, whether incipient or advanced, internal or external, most likely had considerable bearing on the verbal formulation of 2 John, and the potential significance of this adverse stimulus will be pointed out later.

B.4.2 Textual evidence, then, is the mainstay of interpretation. It is of two types, intra- and intertextual. The latter pertains to texts other than the one which contains the specific passage(s) under consideration, both related (additional texts by the same author) and non-related. A hypothetical gradient of affinity enables one to evaluate the degree of reliability and/or relevance of non-related textual evidence. This determination may be based upon various factors such as similarity of genre, topical correspondence, canonicity (versus apocryphal, rabbinic, or secular source), and so forth. Intratextual evidence may be classified in different ways, for example: immediate, proximate, or remote (referring to the relative spatial distance from the item under examination); micro- or macrostructural (i.e., roughly, below or above the sentence level of discourse organisation); and syntagmatic (related by linear contiguity) or paradigmatic (related by non-linear affinity, i.e., similarity or contrast).

Our examination of density with respect to lexical meaning in 2 John will rely primarily upon intratextual confirmation, and it will presuppose an 'Nth' reading of the text as opposed to an initial one. In other words, we will not approach a given passage as if we were encountering it for the first time. Instead, we shall interpret it as an 'informed' reader, that
is, with the whole letter as well as the other Johannine Epistles in mind. This distinction is important, for it affects one's procedure for handling especially the initial occurrence(s) of certain key terms which are repeated several times within a given composition. Accordingly, 'truth', for example, in 2 John turns out to be a definite, if complex, concept rather than some abstract or adverbial notion (e.g., 'reality', 'truly' or 'genuinely') — even, we would argue, at the very beginning of the Epistle in verse one.

B.4.3 During the course of our investigation, all of the analytical distinctions just mentioned will be illustrated, implicitly if not by overt mention. They are summarised on the diagram below:

As Silva observes in connection with the relative weighting of contextual evidence: 'the smaller the circle [i.e., in terms of the closeness of verbal or nonverbal correspondence to the pertinent setting], the more likely it is to affect the disputed passage' (1983:156). One must also consider the convergence, or mutual reinforcement, of evidence of different types. This is important for both revealing and evaluating the possible incidence of semantic density in Johannine style, as will be shown below.

C THE HERMENEUTICAL CRUX OF 2 JOHN
The term 'crux' in the headline above is itself an illustration of what has been referred to as 'semantic density'. The word is polysemous, having three distinct primary meanings according to Webster: (a) a cross, (b) a difficult, puzzling problem, and (c) the essential or deciding point of some issue. Both senses (b) and (c) are relevant in this instance since the two phrases to be discussed below do present considerable problems for the interpreter of 2 John. Generally they are considered to be somehow related to each other, but more or less ambiguous or otherwise explicable only in terms of a choice of one sense out of several possible ones. Furthermore, these expressions are crucial to one's understanding of the entire Epistle, for the concepts to which they refer comprise its essential thematic nucleus.

The double crux under consideration occurs in the central core of John's exhortation to 'the elect lady'. The first occurrence is found at the end of verse 6 in the demonstrative pronoun ἡ τῇ ἀδελφῇ, that is 'in order
that you (pl) should walk in it.’ Most commentators (e.g., the New International Commentary) and versions (RSV, GNB, LB, NIV) take the antecedent of this feminine form to be ‘love’ (δισακη), which is stated at the beginning of the verse. Several counterparts (e.g., the International Critical Commentary; NEB, Phillips) view the pronoun as referring back to the nearest concrete feminine noun (also in v6), namely, ‘commandment’ (ἐνοτολημα). It is the position of the present analysis, however, that αυτη constitutes an instance of deliberate ambiguity — semantic density, in other words. The expanded scope of its frame of reference thus includes both ‘love’ as well as ‘commandment’, which are already closely interconnected in the passage. But a case could be made for extending the semantic net of αυτη even wider by positing its primary antecedent, one which incorporates the other two, as ‘truth’ (ἀληθεια). The latter is mentioned earlier in a very similar construction in verse 4: ‘walking in truth’. Further support for this more inclusive interpretation is offered below.

The second and related crux interpretum appears twice in verse 9: ‘in the doctrine of Christ’ (ἐν τη δισακη του εχριστου). The exegetical questions which this expression raises are as follows: is the genitive, ‘of Christ’, objective (i.e., ‘about/concerning Christ’), subjective (i.e., ‘what Christ himself taught’), or possibly qualitative (i.e., Christ’s manner of instruction). If the subjective option is preferred, which specific teaching of our Lord is being indicated here? A majority of commentators (e.g., the UBS Translator’s Handbook) and versions do favor a subjective reading, for example ‘Christ’s teaching’ (Living Bible). A few commentaries (e.g., NIC) but not a single English translation (that I could locate) opts for the objective interpretation. But there is another possibility, namely, one which allows for SD. Thus the author may have consciously intended both meanings — not because he wished to be esoteric or obscure (cf Nida & Wendland 1985:29), but simply because both teachings were important to him, as indeed unto Christ himself (cf Jn 14:23-24; 15:26-27).

Thus, to confess the fact that Jesus Christ had come in the flesh, that is that he was indeed the incarnate God-man (v7), was fundamental to the faith. But so was our Lord’s command to love one another (v5). To manifest the former requires that we unfailingly practice the latter. And furthermore, an added nuance is that both actions are proof that one is ‘walking in the “truth”’ (cf vs4/6, as interpreted above)! In fact, from a synchronic perspective, the focal ‘it’ of verse 6 could well be construed in addition as an indirect proleptic, or cataphoric, reference to the ‘teaching’ in question, that is δισακη (v9, which is also a feminine noun). Doctrinal and practical concerns thus reflect off of one another to communicate a conceptual whole that is greater than the sum of its parts. This is typical of the Johannine corpus as a whole: for every ethical imperative there is an underlying theological presupposition, and every theological principle carries with it a definite ethical implication.

C.1 LEXICAL (SEMANTIC) CHAINING IN 2 JOHN
Appendix (hereafter, Apx) B presents, within the framework of a strict literal English translation, a schematic overview of the discourse of John 2 as it is organised syntagmatically into a recursive lexical pattern (the several degrees of indentation give a rough indication of syntactic dependency). In addition to the overall symmetrical arrangement, notice the
progressive unfolding and the overlapping or interlocking nature of the sequence of key thematic motifs (in bold type). The three most important of these terms are introduced immediately in the opening verses of the Epistle. 'Love' ['δικαίωμα'] comes first (Ap 1:2), but then 'truth' ['ἀλήθεια'] takes over, occurring five times in the first four verses. The concept of 'fellowship' is developed more by implication, but none the less definitely, through the inclusion of expressions such as: 'not only I...but also all'; 'remaining in us'; 'Father...Christ/Son'. The prevalence of 'truth' would seem to provide an initial indication of its thematic prominence in the Epistle as a whole. This conclusion is apparently contradicted, however, by the fact that the word is not mentioned again after that. So what is one to make of this?

The lexical patterning that one observes here (as in the other Johannine writings) would suggest that the absence of any overt reference to 'truth' does not necessarily mean that the concept itself has been abandoned or even relegated to the background of attention. On the contrary, one could argue that the notion is continued implicitly and developed 'incrementally', as it were (a semantic 'snowball effect'), by means of its collocation with other key terms which are gradually introduced into the discourse. The 'children' of the 'elect lady' (cf 1:1), for example, are commended for 'walking in the truth' (4:3), and this activity is associated, in turn, with a 'command' ['ἐντολή] from the Father (4:4). The command, one that has applied since the beginning ['απ' αὑτοῦ'] (5:3), is then further specified as involving the need to 'love' ['δικαίωμα'] one another' (5:4 and 6:1-2), a notion which was associated with 'truth' already twice in the introduction to the Epistle (i.e. 1.2 and 3.4). At this point a reiteration of the 'command' (6.3) is connected both with 'the beginning' (6.4), and by implication also 'love' (cf 5.3-4), as well as with the necessity of 'walking in it' (6.5). Therefore, one cannot exclude the possibility that the antecedent of ωτη in verse 6 is 'truth' (cf 4.3).

So what is the 'it' — love, command, or truth — that the author exhorts his readers to 'walk in'? The position taken here is that all three meanings are inextricably bound together, with a certain primacy, however, being accorded to the concept of 'truth' in view of the situational (polemical) setting of this Epistle. In other words, the sphere of reference of ἀλήθεια, which is supported by the overall discourse structure (see below), may be seen as encompassing those of 'love' as well as 'command'. It would have been easy enough for the writer to specify one or the other of these ideas had he wanted to do so simply by inserting the required nominal. But he did not, and therefore we may conclude that he wanted to convey a much richer, more comprehensive, notion at this critical juncture in the overall development of his Epistle. The demonstrative 'it' thus does triple duty by incorporating each of these three seminal ideas into a unified, but multifaceted, conceptual whole which constitutes the thematic core of the entire letter.

This semantic cluster is then immediately made situationally concrete in the subsequent warning against 'deceivers' who were denying the incarnation of Jesus Christ (v7). Doctrinal 'truth', along with its accompanying ethical implications of 'love' for the brethren and obedience to the divine 'command', now becomes a matter of overt confession with respect to the Truth. This pertains to the reality of the person of Christ as a true
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(genuine) human being, yet at the same time true God, one with 'the Father' (9.5). This 'doctrine of Christ' (v9) was so central to the faith that it was to determine even the most basic of interpersonal relationships, namely those governing the common customs of hospitality among Christians (v10-11). Thus an important way of practicing the 'command' — or 'teaching' (for these turn out to be the same) — of Christ, namely, to show 'love' to fellow believers (cf v6), was overruled, as it were, in the case of any and all who diluted or distorted the established apostolic position on the incarnation and the nature of Christos (cf Jn 1:14; Phil 2:6-8).

The idea of fellowship (cf vv1-2) and its opposite (alienation), with respect to both God and man, is foregrounded in the final verses of the letter (i.e. vv9 and 10-13). This is effected by means of another chain of related concepts, for example 'remaining in' (9.2/4), 'having' (9.3/5), 'receiving' (10.3), 'greeting' (10.4), 'sharing' (11.2), 'with you' (12.3), 'mouth-to-mouth' (12.4), 'the children of your sister' (13.1). Such divine and human communion is the blessed, practical outcome of 'walking/remaining in the truth/teaching of Christ' (6.5/9.2).

D SOME INTERTEXTUAL IMPLICATIONS

The notion of 'truth' has been proposed as being the focal node in the semantic network of key concepts that comprise the central message of 2 John. It is necessary to examine this supposition more closely in the light of evidence from other relevant texts. In their definitive Greek-English Lexicon (vol 2, p673; cf vol 1, p9), Louw and Nida posit a single principal sense for ἀληθεία, namely, 'the content of that which is true and thus in accordance with what actually happened.' This basic meaning may be modified by the term's context of occurrence in the New Testament to encompass a number of sub-senses or pertinent implications. Six of these are especially relevant in the Johannine corpus, as noted in various other lexicons (for a sample, see 'References') and also in Louw and Nida under the related adjectives ἁληθικός and ἀληθινός (vol 1, p10): (a) factuality, that is corresponding with the facts of a matter [Jn 4:18; 10:24] (b) reliability, trustworthiness, or faithfulness, in keeping with OT usage [2 Jn :1; 3 Jn :1] (c) reality or genuineness, as opposed to what is false or counterfeit [Jn 4:23-24; 6:55; 15:1] (d) revelation, in contrast to what is hidden [Jn 8:32; 14:17; 1 Jn 4:6] (e) validity, what has been attested or testified to [Jn 5:31-32; 14:6] (f) body of genuine/valid/revealed/etcetera doctrine, that is the 'faith' [2 Jn :4; 3 Jn :3].

The preceding distinctions are intended merely to illustrate something of the concept's broad range of meaning within the general framework of factivity, or consistency in relation to externally verifiable facts. The list certainly does not mean to imply that the different nuances may each be neatly distinguished in the passages cited (or in any others for that matter). Rather, in accordance with the principle of semantic density, it seems likely, especially in the Johannine writings, that more than one implication would generally apply in any given instance, for example, in the key expression 'walking in the truth' (2 Jn :4), where one might justifiably argue for the appropriateness of sub-senses (b) and/or (c) in addition to (f).

But more to the point, it is important never to leave any biblical (Old
or New Testament) definition or interpretation of 'truth' in the abstract. It will invariably be colored with specific semantic overtones both by the context in which it occurs (immediate, proximate), as well as by the wider usage of the author in the document at hand (i.e., the remote context). Is there any external evidence then for associating 'truth' with additional Christological concepts such as 'love', 'command', 'teaching', and 'fellowship' as outlined above with reference to 2 John? The following passages selected from the Johannine corpus are just a small sample of pertinent intertextual material which would lend support to such a conclusion. Each one demonstrates a particular convergence, with mutual complementation, of the distinct senses of the key terms in question. One or the other may be focal in a certain context, but the point is that in 'John', as distinct perhaps from other NT writers, the ideas appear to be deliberately conjoined with one another in order to create notions that are semantically and thematically multi-valent, or dense, rather than simplex and disparate (all citations are from the NIV):

a) fellowship/love/truth
   'The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth' (Jn 1:14).

b) teaching/fellowship/truth
   'If you hold to my teaching, you are really [lit 'truly'] my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free' (Jn 8:31-32).

c) command/truth/love/fellowship
   'The man who says, "I know him", but does not do what he command is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But if anyone obeys his word, God's love is truly made complete in him. This is how we know we are in him' (1 Jn 2:4-5).

d) truth/command/love/fellowship
   'This then is how we know that we belong to the truth, and how we set our heart at rest in his presence... And this is his command: to believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and to love one another as he commanded us. Those who obey his commands live in him and he in them' (1 Jn 3:19,23-24).

e) teaching/fellowship/love
   'If anyone acknowledges that Jesus is the Son of God, God lives in him and he in God... God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in him' (1 Jn 4:15-16).

f) teaching/fellowship/love/command/truth
   'Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and everyone who loves the Father loves his child as well. This is how we know that we love the children of God: by loving God and carrying out his commands... And it is the Spirit who testifies, because the Spirit is the truth' (1 Jn 5:1-2,6).
truth/fellowship/love
'I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth. Dear friend, you are faithful in what you are doing for the brothers....They have told the church about your love' (3 Jn:4-6).

Most of these passages (and many others like them) bear a striking resemblance to corresponding verses found in 2 John. It would seem probable then that the author has essentially the same urgent message to get across to his readers. This thematic kernel may be expressed in summary form as an answer to the question: 'What is [the] truth?'

TRUTH in the sense of reality, genuineness, validity, reliability, revelation, fidelity, and Christological doctrine (whatever shading happens to apply in a given Johannine passage) is basically an active, concrete concept, one that focuses on the facts of a matter. It is manifested in two chief ways: a true personal confession of faith in Christ as the incarnate God-man (i.e. TEACHING), and an active LOVE for fellow believers. The result is an unbreakable bond of FELLOWSHIP with both God and man; that reaches its consummation in Spiritual LIFE, both now and in the eternal hereafter.

The last key term, namely 'life' (ζωή), though not explicitly mentioned in 2 John, may be implied in such expressions as 'with us forever' [v3] and 'receive a full reward' [v8]. This concept is also prominent of course in John's gospel (e.g. 1:4, 11:25, 14:6) as well as in the first Epistle (e.g. 5:11-13). These (and other) passages convey the additional notion that Christ is himself the 'Truth', the very personification of a concrete reality/revelation, to be lived and a consequent 'life' to be enjoyed in its fullness forever (Jn 14:6; 2 Jn:3,8).

E AN EXTRATEXTUAL SURVEY
In the earlier outline of the various levels of contextual relevance, it was pointed out that during the course of any complete exegetical study there is also need for considering the non-verbal, situational setting of a given composition (or more precisely, perhaps, the 'contextual history' reconstructed from a letter's 'narrative world' [Petersen 1985:9]). No communication ever occurs in a vacuum, though certain commentators have been prone to treat the texts of Scripture in that way — in sacred isolation, as it were, from possible contamination by erronious human motives, methods, or messages. The biblical books, however, were obviously penned in highly specific, true-to-life situations in order to accomplish definite communicative objectives, both within the more restricted framework of the immediate context and also having an unlimited scope with reference to succeeding generations εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα (v2), however long that might be. In many cases, therefore, the prevailing sociocultural circumstances, especially those of a religious nature, had an influence upon the compositional process, with regard to form, content, as well as intent. Unfortunately, we are not always in a position to specify what these influences were. But wherever there is some extratextual evidence, no matter how fragmentary, it behooves the exegete to take this into consideration in
his interpretation, as long as it is backed by at least a reasonable degree of probability and he in turn does not base some elaborate hypothesis upon a minimum of proof.

There are certain obvious stylistic and thematic correspondences which would lead one to conclude that the situational background of the three Johannine Epistles is relatively similar. These would include such features as: a syntactically simple, overlapping and reiterative manner of composition; an incremental progression of basic theological concepts, alternating with brief segments of paraenetic admonition; and periodic emotive marking by means of sharp contrasts as well as personal appeals. Although their brevity and the relative paucity of specific details makes it impossible to pinpoint their respective situations with absolute certainty, the basic message of the Johannine Epistles is similar, and this common thread can give us a pretty fair idea of why they were written.

All three, but the latter two in particular, were evidently composed in direct opposition to a schismatic group of errorists and apostates, whom 'John' regarded as being a serious threat to the people of God (1 Jn 3:7-8; 2 Jn :11). Some of these men were itinerant teachers (2 Jn :10), variously described as 'false prophets' (1 Jn 4:1), 'liars' (1 Jn 2:22), 'deceivers', 'antichrists' (2 Jn :7), and 'of the world' (1 Jn 4:5). Such heretics had apparently once been numbered among the faithful (1 Jn 2:19), but were now attempting to lead believers astray (1 Jn 2:26) and were even removing them from congregational fellowship (3 Jn:10). Traditional scholarship has generally identified the trouble makers as proponents of some early form of Gnosticism, either the Docetic variety, which completely denied Christ's humanity, or the Cerinthian variant, which maintained that the divine Christ joined himself to the man Jesus only for a short time, namely during the period from his baptism up until just before his death. In any case, both taught that matter (body) was inherently evil and that salvation consisted in transcending this limitation by means of a supposedly superior, but extremely self-serving, 'knowledge' (γνῶσις, 1 Jn 4:7-8), special spiritual illumination (1 Jn 4:1-6), and/or ascetic practices (cf Col 2:21-23), which paradoxically made certain allowances for licentious living (1 Jn 2:16; 3:4,9).

Modern biblical historians are not agreed on the Gnostic hypothesis. While some still support it in principle, others are of the opinion that the schism being dealt with in the Epistles is more of internal than external origin, as the several references to opposing 'brothers' would suggest (e.g 1 Jn 1:1; 3:10,14). Thus the conflict may have been due to loveless libertines within the group, or perhaps it was occasioned by secessionists from rather than infiltrators among the faithful (cf 1 Jn 2:19). Dodd has proposed that the latter were probably individuals or cliques who were influenced in both thought and terminology by the teachings of 'higher paganism', which were being popularised by the many evangelistic and pietistic religious movements circulating in Asia Minor during the first centuries (Barker 1981: 296). In the process, then, of 'transculturizing' the gospel message in order to make it 'relevant' for those of widely differing philosophical and religious backgrounds in the Hellenistic world, a syncretistic compromise with current situational relevance and human reason was effected. The result was that something quite essential got left behind, namely, the distinctive, yet undoubtedly controver-
sial, doctrines regarding the person and work of Jesus the Christ.

Whether the heresy itself was identifiably Gnostic or, as Vorster (1975) cogently argues, simply a form of docetic Christology, the motive for writing 2 John is made crystal clear in verse 7. It had to do with the 'truth' as this concerned both teaching (i.e., about the divine, yet also human, Christ) and living (i.e., with love, or the withholding of it, as a mark of spiritual fellowship, or the lack of it). Readers are therefore encouraged to demonstrate their 'knowledge of the truth' (v1 — this fundamental phrase may have been chosen specifically to oppose either false Gnostic notions about Christ's humanity or antinomian intellectuals who felt that Christ's life had no relevance for their own [cf Vorster 1975:92]).

Accordingly, 'the elect lady and her children' are exhorted to actively put into practice the personal relationship which they had with their Lord and Savior (vv2,9). This had to be done by sincerely and strictly (i.e., 'truly') 'walking in obedience to his commands' (v6, NIV), namely, by demonstrating a loving concern for fellow Christians (v5) and conversely, by completely separating themselves from anyone who did not 'bring this doctrine' (v10). Adherence to such 'truth' was not in the least an abstract or esoteric intellectual activity, but it was an issue of life-or-death, with nothing less than the 'full reward' and 'fulfilled rejoicing' of eternity at stake (v8,12).

F STRUCTURAL SUPPORT FOR THE TRUTH:
From microlinguistic we turn now to some macrolinguistic concerns in order to see what relevance an analysis of the larger discourse structure has for the interpretation offered above, especially with regard to the two passages identified as being points of deliberate ambiguity (i.e., 6.5 and 9.2). In general rhetorical-thematic terms, John 2 appears to be symmetrically organised according to the principle of a simple positive-negative opposition, with each half being divided into two roughly equal parts. First of all, in the opening salutation, the notion of fellowship in 'truth' and 'love' is foregrounded (vv1-3). This is then developed in the next major portion of the Epistle (vv4-6) as the author reinforces the ethical implications of 'walking in truth/love'.

Having reached the half-way point of his message, 'John' goes on to contrast the former ideal with a deadly heresy that had arisen in the church, one which constituted an outright denial of the truth about the humanity of Christ (vv7-9). Next, a practical, if somewhat drastic, plan for dealing with the crisis is suggested, namely, a withdrawal of fraternal fellowship and love (such a prominent characteristic of the early Christian communities [cf 3 Jn]). This is to apply to all perverters of the truth in order to underscore the seriousness of their offense and, no doubt, also to ensure some degree of insulation from unwanted exposure to the theological infection that they were transmitting (vv10-11). So as not to conclude on a negative note, 'the elder' rounds out his letter by reminding his readers of the close spiritual fellowship which he had with them and which he intended to renew in person (i.e., 'truly') in the near future (vv12-13, which form an inclusio with vv1-2).
of the segments which comprise this Epistle are bounded by its crucial Christological terms, as shown below [cf Apx Bl, and such boundaries are generally points of thematic prominence, either of a primary or a secondary nature:

[+]  
1. 'the ones knowing the truth'
2. '[blessing] in truth and love'
3. 'walking in the truth'// 'command from the Father'
4. 'his commands'// 'walk in it [i.e. truth-love]'

[-]  
5. 'not confessing Jesus Christ'
6. 'not remaining in the teaching of Christ'
7. 'he does not bring this teaching'
8. 'he shares in his wicked [not righteous] works'

As is clear from the preceding summary, the critical (potential) ambiguity occurs at the structural midpoint of the discourse, in the very heart of the message (i.e. the end of v6), where there is a sudden shift from a positive to a negative tone. Now centers, too, are highly significant in biblical literature, in both Hebrew as well as Greek texts. They often convey some information of special relevance to the overall message, and in order to emphasize this, they are typically composed of expressions that are semantically concentrated, or 'dense', in relation to the composition as a whole. Certainly that would seem to be the case here, as was pointed out earlier with respect to the foregrounded demonstrative (ἁότη), which most likely incorporates the concepts of both 'truth' and 'love' — and perhaps also the logically related ideas of 'commandment' and 'teaching', which are themselves referentially corresponding terms. This entire thematic network is immediately, and rather dramatically (i.e. at the very onset of v7), contrasted then with the contradictory notions of the 'many deceivers' (πολλοὶ πλάνοι).

F.2 In addition to syntactic sequence, Appendix B also gives one a rough idea of the pragmatic structure of 2 John, that is, the succession of major illocutionary implications which reflect the shifting dynamics of the interpersonal aspect of this sample of epistolary communication. Each 'illocution' is attached to one or more predications/propositions of the text. It provides an abstract representation of what the writer (in this case) intended to do with his discourse at that point in relation to his reader(s). This indication of authorial intention is of course a reconstruction, based upon evidence such as the linguistic and stylistic characteristics of the text itself, including its overall organization, intertextual correspondences, features typical of the genre of composition, as well as suggestions derived from its situational background (as nearly as the latter can be determined).

The unfolding illocutionary series comprising John 2 is presented in capital letters along the right side of Apx B. This is a tentative and rather informal proposal which is intended to give merely a broad overview of the argument. It shows that the paraenetic appeal, which constitutes the central core of this Epistle (verses 4 through 11), is divided essentially into two parts, that is 4.1-6.5 and 7.1-11.2, each of which is ex-
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 Explicitly marked as to its hortatory nature, that is 'And now I request you, O lady' [5.1]; 'Watch out for yourselves' [8.1], both expressions being situated in the center of their respective sub-sections. This corresponds with the major break in the thematic structure as noted above (i.e. between verses 6 and 7). The sequence also reveals an emphasis that shifts from command with explanation in part one to warning with motivation in part two. The latter illocutions are of course firmly based upon the former, which eminate directly from the Father (4.4). We might suggest that the explanation and the motivation elements serve to ameliorate the commands and warnings which the author lays, both explicitly and implicitly, upon his readers. Here we have another illustration of the intricate interlocking of the concepts as well as the intentions of this letter, for they are all united under one general purpose, which is to promote the doctrinal and ethical aspects of the 'truth' concerning Jesus Christ.

F.3 The preceding fabrication of the discourse as shown by the syntactic and pragmatic structures is confirmed also by a propositional display of the semantic organisation of John 2. An outline of this third syntagmatic arrangement is found in Appendix A (the terminology used there is based upon Beekman, Callow, and Kopesec 1981:ch 8). This structural framework is stated in the form of a hierarchical arrangement of paired semantic relationships which indicates the way in which one proposition, or propositional cluster, is linked to another. The assumed primary, or dominant, relation is distinguished by capital letters (note: 'HEAD' refers to a generic base proposition, or cluster, with which another, dependent or secondary one is associated). Now the validity of a binary representation of the higher, more inclusive levels of textual structure may be questioned. Indeed, the terms used to describe these relations are of a very general nature. Nevertheless, this propositional organisation is supported in large measure by the letter's overall syntactic arrangement (Apx B), and it does give a suggestion at least as to how its larger segments of form and content are related to one another and to the composition as a whole.

The discourse display of John 2 reveals five principal propositional clusters, namely: 1a-3g, 4a-6f, 7a-9f, 10a-11c, and 12a-13b, which may in turn be combined at a higher level of organisation (cf the right-hand lines of linkage) to form the traditional introduction, body, and conclusion of the composition, that is verses 1-3, 4-11, and 12-13. These divisions correspond with those demarcated earlier with respect to the other two structures discussed, and thus one reinforces the other in order to articulate, as well as to clarify and highlight, the development of the complete text.

Considering the message of the Epistle as a whole, there will no doubt be some minor differences of opinion concerning the arrangement of propositions and the specification of their relationships on the lower levels of textual organisation (as shown in Apx A). However, it is important to reach a certain measure of agreement with regard to linkages at the higher levels, for these clearly affect one's perception of the author's overall argument. For example, we observe that at the penultimate level of composition a relation of grounds-HEAD (S) has been proposed to join the propositional clusters 4a-6f and 7a-11c respectively. To explain: the former section, in which the thematic complex of truth-love-command is set forth,
serves as the general basis (a 'rational' grounds, which Beekman et al [1981:107] do not distinguish) upon which a more specific exhortation (i.e. the 'head' — in this case, an implication) is made, namely, to uphold the teaching both about Christ (the God-man incarnate) and secondarily also of Christ, that is love for the fellowship. The two are integrally connected, for where the first is violated, the second cannot be effected. That is the particular emphasis of 2 John. 1 John focuses upon the converse: where mutual love among Christians is lacking, the truth about who Christ is (and what he has done for us) is meaningless.

On the immediately lower level of semantic arrangement, it will be seen that cluster 10a-11c is associated with 7a-9f by the relationship of specific GENERIC (T'). That is to say, in the former the writer enjoins his readers from even customary associations with false teachers as a dramatic way of putting into practice his admonition to 'guard themselves' so that they did not lose their 'full reward' (v8). At first reading, verse 8 might seem somewhat out of place, for it appears to break up a contrastive characterisation of the 'deceivers', which is found in verses 7 and 9. Indeed, as shown on the propositional display, 8a-f has been analysed as functioning as the HEAD of a split 'grounds' relation (Q'), that is 7a-e and 9a-f, which are in turn linked by the relationship of HEAD-amplification (P', i.e. an expansion of the notion of 'deceiver' or 'anti-christ' 7d-e).

As is suggested below, however, verse 8 is not necessarily 'misplaced' as far as the structure of this Epistle is concerned. In any case, the present position of the passage does provide a certain degree of rhetorical emphasis within the discourse progression. Furthermore, it tends to support the minority interpretation which holds that the 'reward' being referred to is in fact salvation itself, or eternal life (cf Haas et al 1972:146), and not merely a 'partial loss of reward' (Marshall 1978:72) for 'faithfulness and perseverance ... according to [one's] labor' (Barker 1981:365). Certainly any compromise concerning the 'truth' about Jesus Christ, which is the foundation of the gospel message, would result in a severance of all fellowship with God (9c) as well as a complete loss of everything that Christ had won for them and for which the apostles had so steadfastly worked (the reading [εἰργασμένα] fits better with the interpretation being proposed here; see also below). And presumably that is why John's prohibition against hospitality is stated in such bold, uncompromising terms (vv10-11). Christological 'truth' is both exclusive in essence and excluding in practice, namely, with respect to those who patently refuse to conform to it.

F.4 Now there is some additional textual evidence to suggest that verse 8 is not out of place at all, but rather fills a very important position in the overall structure of 2 John. In fact, it may be viewed as functioning as the interactional/emotive high point (or 'climax') of the entire Epistle and the hub of a concentric pattern which is developed concurrently with the linear ones discussed above. An outline of this discourse-spanning introversion is given in Appendix C. Thus, having mentioned the specific warning of his letter to the 'elect lady', namely, against 'anti-christ[s]' (v7), John immediately adds a fervent appeal to hold fast to the truth which they have been taught lest they 'lose' their spiritual re-
ward. A vivid interpersonal element is interjected in the middle of the verse by means of an unexpected shift to the first person plural pronoun in the verb 'we have worked'. This demonstrates the writer's close personal involvement in the controversy at hand and his concern over how it would be resolved. The expanded notion of 'truth', which in this case is implied, encompasses such matters as the readers' profession of faith, their life of love according to the divine command, and indeed, personal fellowship with the One who is the sole Truth, their Savior Jesus Christ (cf vv2/8).

It is not unusual to find that this text manifests a paradigmatic arrangement of semantic elements to complement the normal syntagmatic progression. Whether this particular instance is by accident or by literary design of course cannot be proven, but it is not an isolated occurrence in the Scriptures (for several other examples, see Wendland 1985 and 1988). Furthermore, such a concentric structure is definitely not foreign to the Johannine letters. 2 John itself is filled with chiastic constructions which serve to demarcate the discourse as well as to give it an underlying unity and depth of both form and content, that is, with respect to its basic grammatical organisation and also its interlocking thematic concepts. For example, the complex interweaving of key ideas revolving around [the] 'truth', which joins the opening salvation (vsl-2) with the subsequent benediction (v3) and sets the tone for the entire Epistle, is also diagrammed in Apx C. Another introversion that supports our understanding of a broad conception of ἀληθεία as being the referent of the demonstrative pronoun αὐτῇ at the end of verse 6 is included there as well.

G ON THE HERMENEUTIC IMPLICATIONS OF THE SEMANTIC DENSITY
This essay has been written in response to a commonly expressed exegetical principle which may be stated as follows:

In any one context a lexical unit is likely to have one meaning rather than several. Normally, the only exception to this principle is a context in which a lexical unit is marked (though sometimes subtly so) as having two or more meanings.

(Nida & de Waard 1986:140, emphasis mine)

Under the concept of 'semantic density' as it pertains to the Johannine literature, we have examined some possible special cases which would fall within this general interpretive rule of thumb. With respect to 2 John in particular, it has been suggested that the author may well have employed deliberate ambiguity, which is 'marked' by the organisation and arrangement of the discourse as a whole, as a stylistic device to enhance the effectiveness of his vital message. He thus attaches several related ideas to the central notion of 'truth' — namely, love, command, fellowship, and teaching — in order to create a thematic composite that communicates on a deeper, more comprehensive and cohesive level than the distinct constituent units would do individually and in simple sequence. Such treatment, which is especially prevalent in John's writings, would seem to be justified both by the inclusiveness as well as the importance of his subject, namely, 'the teaching of/about Christ'.

Further research is obviously necessary to determine the validity.
first of all, and also the prevalence of this supposed technique in biblical literature. Perhaps for too long now exegetes have been polemically straining to discover the single 'correct' sense of certain key terms and passages in which the original author really intended to convey a theologically or ethically much richer impression of divine 'truth'. Mutually contradictory or thematically disparate interpretations would naturally be excluded from consideration. The pertinent questions are: where (in the text), why, and how often does writer [X] actually utilise two or more complementary meanings to communicate along planes more paradigmatic in orientation than we are accustomed to (in our literature) and have heretofore been willing to consider, or even to recognise, in the Scriptures?

G.1 The practical, hermeneutic implications of allowing for the occurrence of semantic density, at least in certain, clearly defined instances, are quite considerable. On a general level, this option will undoubtedly affect how one conceives of the construction of a complete discourse. The various structural analyses cited earlier demonstrate how intricately the second Epistle of John is arranged in terms of its major themes and emphases. This understanding should, where possible, influence the manner in which the global aspects of the text are formatted on the printed page. How can the typographical resources available be capitalised on to clarify this larger structural-thematic framework for the reader? One would like, for example, to highlight in some way (e.g. indentation, spacing, type size/style, etc) recognised points of topical significance, as indicated by the density of meaning that is manifested both formally and semantically in such positions. Existing versions do not often give much assistance in this regard. One preliminary suggestion along these lines is presented in Appendix D. Notice how relatively easy it is to scan this experimental text, prepared with only a limited number of typographical features on a half-page format.

G.2 More specifically then, consider the two examples singled out for special attention in 2 John: 'you should walk in . it' (6.5), and 'teaching of Christ' (9.2). Even if one limits the meaning potential to just the two most probable senses in their respective contexts, one is still faced with the problem of how to handle them. Commentators and Bible expositors (e.g. in sermons, study guides, devotional booklets, etc) should have the least difficulty, though initially they may be reluctant to allow for more than one understanding of a given expression. Such flexibility might make it appear (at least to them) that they do not know the correct interpretation, and after all, are they not expected to have a definite, conclusive answer for everything?! But fidelity to the original text would seem to dictate that the presence of a convergence of senses be indicated at least as another possible exposition of the passage(s) in question.

Bible translators, whether into English or any other language, will face greater problems in dealing with such cases of composite meaning. Generally speaking, they have three basic options, the choice being determined by such factors as the language concerned, the specific textual context, the nature of the translation (e.g. a liturgical versus a popular rendition), the level of literary sophistication of the receptor constituency, the exegetical skills of the translators, and so forth. In the first
place, they can elect to **preserve the ambiguity** of the original. This solution will work, however, only in situations where the receptor language really does permit the two (or more) possibilities and where these are readily, and correctly, available to the 'average' reader (as determined by valid testing procedures). In some languages this simply cannot be done, for example, in many of those of the Bantu group, which feature an extensive noun phrase concordial copy system that makes it difficult to achieve a controlled, 'indefinite' or 'inclusive' reference (see Appendix E). Either a single, exclusive meaning will be denoted (e.g. by a demonstrative), or another nominal will be included as a possible antecedent, one not intended by the original.

Secondly, **explanatory footnotes** may be utilised to provide the alternative choice where the primary or focal one is given in the text itself. The linguistic nature and thematic significance of the case in question may also be elaborated upon in the comment, for example that it involves 'density' (a complementary addition), not 'ambiguity' (a replacement), of meaning. This will no doubt be the most acceptable course to follow in the majority of instances.

And finally, where skilled translators are involved, an attempt can be made to **incorporate both relevant interpretive possibilities into the text**, if this can be done naturally and economically. For example, the NIV rendering of the two passages mentioned above might be altered to read as follows (each modification is underlined):

v6 — As you have heard from the beginning, his command is that you walk in **truth and love**.

v8 — Anyone who runs ahead and does not continue in the teaching of Christ and about him does not have God.

Though it may be the most controversial, this last proposal — if carried out discreetly, efficiently, and on the basis of sound exegetical procedures — probably comes the closest to conveying the full 'truth' actually intended by the biblical author to be made 'known' to and lived by all those to whom he was making his appeal (2 Jn :1/4).

**WORKS CONSULTED**

Barker, G 1981. 1, 2, 3 John, in Gaebelin, F E (ed), The expositor's Bible commentary. Grand Rapids: Zondervan.


APPENDIX A

Propositional Display of 2 John (Semantic Structure)

(Note: every boldfaced capital is placed at the junction of two propositions. The twofold semantic relation to which it refers is given in a column along the right margin with the prior element in the sequence being mentioned first and the major relation being indicated by capital letters [except in the case of the additive/coordinate relations involving a 'base +...'].)

1a [I am] the elder
A
1b [I] [write] to the lady
and to her children B

1c [God] elected [her]
1d I love [them] in truth
1e and not only I [love] [them]
1f but also all [people] [love] [them]
1g [they] have known, the truth C

2a [we] [love] [them] because of the truth D
2b [the truth] abides in us E
2c and [it] will be with us unto the age F

3a God [is] the Father G
3b and Jesus Christ [is] the Son H
of the Father

3c [they] will be gracious to us I
3d [they] will be merciful to us J
3e [they] will give us peace K
3f [they] [will do] [this] in truth L
3g and [they] [will do] [this] in love M

K base-addition (conjoined)
L base-addition (2) (conjoined)
M identification-CONCEPT
N base-addition (conjoined)
O HEAD-attendant circumstance

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4a I rejoiced greatly because I have found that some of your children are living in the truth just as the Father commanded us.

5a and now, dear lady, I ask you that we [all] love one another. I am not writing a new command to you but we had this one from the beginning.

6a and this love means that we should live as he has commanded [us].

6b this command is that we should live in it (truth/love) just as you heard [it] from the beginning.

7a for many deceivers have gone out into the world.

7b they do not confess that Jesus Christ comes in the flesh.

7c such a one is a deceiver [such a one] [is] opposing Christ.

8a guard yourselves that you do not lose what we have worked for but that you might receive a reward [the reward] [is] full/complete.
9a everyone who goes on ahead
9b and he does not abide in the teaching of Christ
9c he does not have God
9d he who remains in the teaching
9e this one has the Father
9f and [this one] has the Son

10a if someone comes to you
10b and he does not bring this teaching
10c do not receive him into [your] house
10d and do not welcome him

11a for if someone welcomes him
11b he shares in his doings
11c [what he does] is evil

12a I have many things to tell you
12b but I do not want [to do this]
    with paper and ink
12c rather I am hoping
12d I will come to you
12d then I will speak [to you] face to face
12e so that we will be completely happy

13a the children of your sister greet you
13b [God] has chosen [her]
APPENDIX B

Predicational Display of 2 John (Syntactic Structure)  
and provisional Sequence of Illocutions (Pragmatic Structure)

1.1 the elder to-the-lady the chosen one  
and to her children

1.2 whom I love in truth

1.3 and not I only

1.4 but also all those-having-come-to-know the truth

2.1 because-of the truth

2.2 which remains in us

2.3 and with us it-will-be unto the age

3.1 there-will-be with us grace, mercy, peace

3.2 from God the-Father

3.3 and from Jesus Christ the Son of-the Father

3.4 in truth and love

4.1 I-rejoiced greatly

4.2 because I-have-found

4.3 some-of your children walking in [the]-truth

4.4 just-as a command we-received from the Father

5.1 And now I-request you, O-lady

5.2 not as a command writing to-you a-new-one

5.3 but one-which we-had from [the]-beginning

5.4 that we-should-love one-another

6.1 and this is (the) love

6.2 that we-should-walk according-to his commands

6.3 this is the command

6.4 just-as you-heard from [the]-beginning

ILLOCUTIONS

ADDRESS-SALUTATION

AFFIRMATION-ENCOURAGEMENT

ENCOURAGEMENT

WISH

(BENEDICTION)
6.5 that in it you-should-walk
7.1 because many deceivers went-out into the world
7.2 those not confessing
7.3 Jesus Christ coming in [the]-flesh
7.4 this-one is the deceiver and the antichrist
8.1 look-to yourselves
8.2 that you-do not -lose
8.3 what-things we-have-worked-for
8.4 but [that] a-full reward you-might-receive
9.1 everyone going-ahead
9.2 and not remaining in the teaching of Christ
9.3 God he-does- not - have
9.4 the-one remaining in the teaching
9.5 this-one both the Father and the Son he-has
10.1 if anyone comes to you
10.2 and this teaching he-does- not -bring
10.3 do- not -receive him into [the]-house
10.4 and a-greeting to-him do- not -speak
11.1 for he-who-speaks to-him a-greeting
11.2 he-shares-in his evil-works
12.1 many-things having to-you to-write
12.2 I-did- not -wish [to do this]
   by-means-of paper and ink
12.3 but I-hope to-be with you
12.4 and mouth to mouth to-speak
12.5 so-that our joy having-become-full might-be
13.1 they-greet you the-children of your sister
   the-chosen-one
APPENDIX C

Concentric Patterns in 2 John (Lexical-Thematic Structure)

a) the entire discourse [single introverted span with a focus on the central core]:

A (1-3) salutation—the elect lady and her children'

B (4) thanksgiving—a cause for ‘rejoicing’

C (5-6) prescription—walk together in love and truth

D (7) characterisation—the ‘deceivers’ and ‘antichrists’

E (8) admonition—do not disobey the ‘command’

(i.e. love one another/confess the truth) so you don’t lose the ‘full reward’

D’ (9) characterisation—those ‘who do not abide in the teaching of/about Christ’

C’ (10-11) proscription—do not show love (fellowship) to those who deny the truth/‘teaching’

B’ (12) wish—to effect an occasion for ‘rejoicing’

A’ (13) salutation—‘the children of your elect sister’

b) verses 1-3 (cf Apx B) [three lexical chiasms inside an outer one, with an emphasis on the eschatological age]:

1.2 whom I love (a) in truth (b)

1.3-4 and not I alone but also all (c) those who know the truth (d)

2.1-3 because of the truth (d’) which remains in us and with us (c’)

2.3 and with us (e) it will be (f) UNTO THE AGE

3.1 there will be (f’) with us (e’) grace, mercy, and peace

3.2 from God the Father (g) and from Jesus Christ (h)

3.3 the Son (h’) of the Father (g’)

3.4 in truth (b’) and love (a’)

c) verses 4-6 [lexical introversion highlighting the concepts of ‘love’ (inners) and ‘truth’ (outers)]
4.3 (I have found) some of your children walking (a) in the truth (b)
4.4/5.2 just as a command we received...not as a command (c)
5.4 that we should love one another (d)
6.1 and this is love (d')
6.2-3 according to his commands, this is the command (c')
6.5 that in it (b') you should walk (a')

d) verses 7/9 [double parallelism at the beginning and ending of the pericope, focusing on the Christological controversy]

7.1 many deceivers
7.2-3 not confessing Jesus Christ
7.4 the deceiver
7.4 the antichrist

9.1-2 one not remaining in the teaching of Christ
9.3 God he does not have
9.4 one remaining in the teaching [positive contrast
9.5 both the Father and the Son he has concludes unit]
e) verses 10-11 [balanced lexical introversion with equal emphasis on crime, command (negative), and consequence]:

w' this teaching he does not bring
x' do not receive him (-fellowship)
y' a greeting to him
z' he who speaks
y' to him a greeting
x' he shares in (fellowship)
w' his evil works (i.e. false teaching)
APPENDIX D

Formatting the Text (modified NIV) (Typographical Structure)

(According to natural utterance groupings, relative degrees of prominence, key concepts, and distinct elements of structure)

[1] The elder,
to the chosen lady and her children,
whom I love in the truth—
and not I only,
but also all who know the truth—

[2] because of the truth
which lives in us
and will be with us forever:

from God the Father
and from Jesus Christ, the Father's Son.
will be with us in truth and love.

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

[5] And now, dear lady, I am not writing you a new command,
but one we had from the beginning.
I ask that we love one another.

[6] And this is love:
that we walk in obedience to his commands.
As you have heard from the beginning,
his command is that you walk in truth and love.

[7] Many deceivers have gone out into the world.
They do not acknowledge
that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh.
Any such person is the deceiver
and the antichrist.

[8] WATCH OUT that you do not lose
what we have worked for,
but that you may be rewarded fully!

[9] Anyone who runs ahead
and does not continue
in the teaching of Christ and about him
does not have God.
But whoever continues in this teaching
has both the Father and the Son.
If anyone comes to you
and does not bring this teaching,
do not take him into your house
or welcome him.

Anyone who welcomes him
shares in his wicked work.

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

The children of your chosen sister send their greetings.

APPENDIX E

What is ‘truth’ in Chichewa?

Chichewa, a major Bantu language spoken in many parts of south-central Africa, is one of those languages in which one cannot often remain ambiguous when it comes to the usage of pronominals and demonstratives. Instead, the dependent form has to be marked by way of a distinctive prefix that agrees ‘concordially’ with the noun to which it refers, and there are seventeen classes into which nominals may be grouped. So when the translator encounters either an ambiguous or a semantically dense word such as [awɔtɔ] ‘it’ in verse 6, he cannot remain exegetically neutral or sit on the fence. A decision has to be made in favor of one antecedent or another, and in this case there are at least six different concordial possibilities, depending on how one construes the pronoun. For the sake of illustration, we will initially retain a literal demonstrative form as the item to be translated, that is ‘[in] it’ = ‘this one’ (proximate reference):

a) ili (class 5) -- referent = lamulo, ‘command’
b) awa (class 6) -- referent = malamulo, ‘commands’ (i.e. since several were actually mentioned previously)
c) ici (class 7) -- referent = cikondi, ‘love’ or coonadi, ‘truth’
d) izi (class 8) -- referent = zoonadi, ‘truths’ (i.e. since the plural may be more natural)
e) uku (class 16) -- referent = kukonda, ‘loving’ (i.e. if a verbal form was used in the antecedent)
f) umu (class 17) -- referent = mu- ‘in(side)’ (i.e. with an certain emphasis upon a complete devotion to whatever concept is being referred to.)

The problem here is compounded due to the fact that in the present context, the use of such a pronoun would probably turn out to be unnatural in the language, necessitating its replacement by the actual referent concerned. At first glance, one might think that a solution in favor of ambi-
guity is possible since the form íci [example c] can refer to either 'love' or 'truth'. But in fact, all readers/hearers would understand this as a reference to 'love', which is its nearest possible antecedent. In this instance, the only way to convey something of the semantic density of the original is to go with a phrasal translation which incorporates both essential notions (along with some flavor of the original figure), that is

...kuti tikhale ndi moyo wotsata njira ya cikondi ndiponso coonadi = 'that we live a life following the path of love and truth.'

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