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Frey, Jörg

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The Impact of the Qumran and Nag Hammadi Discoveries on New Testament Scholarship: Dualism in John and Jesus's Eschatology as Paradigms

Jörg Frey

In the aftermath of World War II, two textual discoveries were made which can aptly be considered, even more than 70 years later, the most important textual discoveries related to biblical scholarship in the twentieth century: the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls in eleven caves near Khirbet Qumran from 1947 to 1956 and the discovery of the Nag Hammadi Codices in Upper Egypt in 1945. Both corpora have provided scholarship and the greater public with an enormous amount of hitherto unknown sources, and with them an even greater number of new problems and persistent riddles. They have piqued the interest of journalists and novelists, and even stimulated various and strange conspiracy theories. Both discoveries have stirred up new waves of research and inaugurated a new period in scholarship. Although their primary impact was not entirely in the same fields of biblical research, New Testament scholarship in particular was affected by both waves of research. In some ways, the influences from Qumran and Nag Hammadi research were opposed to each other. So it is a good opportunity and a rarely undertaken move in scholarship¹ to juxtapose the influence of both corpora and the related research on New Testament scholarship. The organizers of the Berlin conference deserve thanks for providing such an opportunity.

In order to describe the impact and perhaps even interference of both discoveries on New Testament scholarship, we will first (1) call to mind a few general aspects of comparison between the two discoveries, before (2) having a brief look at the scholarly situation in New Testament debates at the time the discoveries were made and initially evaluated. In the main part of the paper, I will focus on two test cases for the scholarly impact of both corpora: (3) the

¹ Mention should be made of a more popular presentation of the discoveries from Qumran and Nag Hammadi, together with other textual discoveries, such as El-Amarna and Ugarit, in Ekschmitt, *Ugarit—Qumran—Nag Hammadi*.

issue of the history-of-religions background of the Gospel of John, in particular its dualistic language and (4) the discussion on the eschatology of Jesus and a 'non-eschatological' Jesus. Finally, (5) the essay will conclude with a few reflections regarding the hermeneutics of history-of-religions work.

1 Some Common Circumstances of the Discoveries and Their Evaluation

Two textual discoveries, made roughly at the same time, at hidden places in the Middle East which were, at that time, still calm and almost untouched by modernity, invite scholars to make comparisons between their various aspects and circumstances.

(a) First of all, the stories of how the two corpora were discovered bear striking similarities;² they even invite the suggestion that there might be a kind of common literary 'genre' of a discovery 'legend.'³ Both stories sound mysterious and are full of riddles: there are unknown writings in a cave or under a rock, hidden in jars, and found by locals, and only later do they receive scholarly attention. The writings are brought to clergymen and shown around to various people to be sold. Parts of the discoveries were purchased by national authorities or international institutions, but some portions remain hidden or in private collections. Then, there is the complicated process of bringing the material in its entirety under scholarly control. In both cases, there have been problems of inadequate treatment of the artefacts, resulting in the loss of textual material by people making sandals out them or burning them, and the texts have also suffered decay from exposure to light or storage in bank safes or fridges. In both cases, issues of ownership of the material remains and the intellectual property of its evaluation were raised which have changed the scholarly attitude toward such artefacts and their scholarly treatment.⁴ In this respect, both discoveries have changed scholarship in various fields and also

2 On the discovery stories, see the early report in Burrows, *The Dead Sea Scrolls*, and the more extensive story by Trever, *The Untold Story of Qumran*; see also Fields, *The Dead Sea Scrolls*. For Nag Hammadi, see the comprehensive history by Robinson, *The Nag Hammadi Story*, as well as the earliest account by Doresse, *Les livres secrets des Gnostiques d'Égypte* (English translation: *The Secret Books of the Egyptian Gnostics*).

3 See the contribution by Christoph Marksches in the present volume. Consult also Goodacre, "How Reliable is the Story of the Nag Hammadi Discovery?"; Denzey Lewis and Blount, "Rethinking the Origins."

4 For Qumran, the legal case Qimron vs. Shanks about the intellectual property of the editorial and reconstruction work was crucial; see Macqueen, "The Scrolls and the Legal Definition of Authorship."

the way we deal with archaeological and textual discoveries today, although—fortunately—the materials discovered and investigated in the 1950s were not yet suspected to be modern forgeries, and a ‘forgery industry,’ as we have had during the last one or two decades, did not yet exist. In both cases (but more in the case of Qumran), the artefacts gained relevance with regard to the religious history of the places of their discovery and also with regard to the ownership of the material remains.

Both cases also stimulated a dynamic among the broader public which was influenced by the idea that the church and established scholarship were caught in ‘majority views’ which were decisively questioned by the new discoveries. Qumran scholarship since the 1950s was confronted with the suspicion that the church (i.e., first and foremost, the Vatican) or a clique of scholars were hiding information that might question the traditional views about Jesus and the early Christians. Likewise, the Nag Hammadi corpus was used to launch the idea that apart from the canonical gospels, there were a large number of other gospels of equal value which were suppressed or forbidden by the dogmatic powerplay of shadowy clergymen. Such suspicions were particularly effective for engaging a greater critical public and—especially—selling books.

(b) But apart from these various analogies in the circumstances of the discoveries and their evaluation, there is also a striking analogy with regard to their scholarly relevance: for the first time, the Qumran discovery brought to light a relevant number of Hebrew and Aramaic Jewish texts from the turn of the era, thus bridging the gap between the latest texts from the Hebrew Bible and the Mishnah.⁵ Previously, scholarship on Second Temple Judaism and the Jewish world around the New Testament was almost totally dependent on Greek texts (by Flavius Josephus and Philo) and some pseudepigraphic texts transmitted mostly in secondary translations (Latin, Slavonic, Old Ethiopic, etc.). Since the Qumran discoveries, scholarship can draw on texts that can much better illuminate the language and thought of Palestinian Judaism of that period (including the early Jesus movement) and demonstrate that a number of terms, phrases, and ideas which had been considered un-Jewish, Hellenistic, or even Gnostic were actually attested within (at least parts of) the Judaism of the time.⁶

5 The only major Hebrew text known from the period before the Qumran discoveries was the *Nash Papyrus* with a compilation of some biblical passages, which before 1947 was considered the oldest biblical manuscript.

6 On the general relevance of the Qumran discoveries, see Frey, “Die Bedeutung der Qumran-Funde”; idem, “The Impact of the Dead Sea Scrolls”; idem, “Die Textfunde von Qumran und die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft”; idem, “Qumran.”

Likewise, the Nag Hammadi Codices brought to light a large collection of Gnostic or related original writings, though mostly not in their original language but in a translated version, so that the accounts of ancient heresiologists such as Irenaeus, Epiphanius, etc. could now be contextualized and compared with views articulated by authors from that variegated movement. Whereas before the Nag Hammadi discovery, only three Coptic Gnostic codices were known,⁷ and scholarship was almost totally dependent on the accounts by the ancient heresiologists when describing the views of Gnostic groups, scholars could now draw their pictures of emerging Gnosticism more precisely and in critical distance from the mostly negative depictions of those authors. The scholarly views about the origins and development of Gnosticism could be revised on a completely new basis of sources.

(c) The impact of these discoveries, however, was felt in different fields of biblical studies. Whereas the Qumran discoveries have changed Hebrew Bible and New Testament studies, and—even more—the study of Early Judaism, Hebrew and Aramaic language studies, etc., the Nag Hammadi corpus is relevant for the study of the New Testament, but mostly as a source for the reception of biblical texts (particularly with respect to creation accounts, gospels, apostolic texts) within developments in the second and third century. A direct relation to New Testament texts could only be discussed with regard to the *Gospel of Thomas* and, to a lesser degree, to some other texts—if one presupposed daring source-critical theories.

(d) There were notable differences with regard to the history of publication. The Nag Hammadi Corpus was published and introduced into scholarship quite quickly, codex after codex, with a comprehensive English edition published in 1977, just 32 years after the first discoveries. This was not only to the merit of the international teams and their collaboration but was also possible due to the fact that the problems of lacunae and textual restoration were not as complicated as with the thousands of Qumran fragments. The Qumran corpus had a much more difficult publication history. Six of the seven big and relatively well-preserved scrolls from Cave 1 were published quickly in the early 1950s,⁸ and these texts determined the way of scholarship in the early years. But the vast majority of small fragments from the other caves, in particular Cave 4, posed tremendous problems regarding identification, preservation,

7 These codices are Codex Brucianus (Bruce Codex), purchased in 1769 in Egypt and eventually brought to the Bodleian Library; Codex Askewianus, of unclear provenance in Egypt, purchased in 1785 by the British Museum; and Codex Berolinensis Gnosticus 8502, purchased in 1896 by Carl Schmidt in Egypt.

8 Burrows, *The Dead Sea Scrolls of St. Mark's Monastery*; Sukenik, *The Dead Sea Scrolls of the Hebrew University*.

and editing. Other factors, including the political situation after the 1967 war, slowed down the publication process, so that only since the late 1980s and early 1990s, the bulk of the material became known to a wider public in scholarship. Therefore, the inner diversity of the library and the majority of halachic, calendric, sapiential, and liturgical texts could be appreciated and factored into scholarly discourse only with a considerable delay. By that time, however, the interpretations developed in the 1950s and 1960s had already become common, so that the scholarly views on the character of the library and the related groups had to be revised in the last two or three decades in the light of that 'new,' or belatedly published, evidence.

2 The Situation of New Testament Scholarship in the Middle of the Twentieth Century

It is important to briefly look at the situation of New Testament scholarship in the time shortly after World War II, when the discoveries were made public.⁹ At that time, critical biblical scholarship was still dominated by Protestant theology, whereas Roman Catholics were still restricted in their participation in the critical examination of biblical texts. Biblical scholarship was still dominated by German and British scholars, with a change in German scholarship due to the war, during which (or shortly thereafter) a number of important scholars died,¹⁰ whereas others dropped out of the international debate due to their involvement in ideological exegesis in the Nazi period.¹¹ After the war, Rudolf Bultmann and his school dominated the field in Germany.¹²

9 For the following paragraphs, see the more extensive treatment in Frey, "Qumran Research and Biblical Scholarship in Germany," 529–34.

10 Thus Hans Lietzmann (in 1942), Hans von Soden (in 1945), Ernst Lohmeyer (murdered by Russian occupation troops in 1946), Martin Dibelius (in 1947), and Julius Schniewind (in 1948).

11 Thus, e.g., Gerhard Kittel (1888–1948), who had inaugurated the *Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament*, and his student Walter Grundmann (1906–1976) who had both been intensely involved in anti-Jewish writing, with Grundmann explicitly speculating about a non-Jewish (i.e., "Aryan") descent of Jesus. Grundmann, however, stayed active in East Germany church service, writing influential commentaries on the Synoptics and, together with Johannes Leipoldt, an influential textbook on the *Umwelt* of the New Testament.

12 The school included, e.g., Ernst Käsemann, Philipp Vielhauer, Herbert Braun, Erich Grässer, Günter Klein, but also the young Helmut Koester who moved in 1950 to North America to become one of the major figures in the evaluation of the Nag Hammadi texts.

Bultmann's views had been shaped by the history-of-religions school with a focus on the Hellenistic-oriental and allegedly Gnostic background of the New Testament, but a notable lack of interest in contemporary Judaism. Perceiving Gnosticism as an all-encompassing worldview, he used texts from Philo or the Jewish Wisdom tradition as sources for Gnostic thought and (re)constructed a 'Gnostic redeemer myth' from a range of very different sources, from Philo to late Manichaean and Mandaean texts.¹³ Unlike some of his students, Bultmann rejected the question of the Historical Jesus as theologically irrelevant, focusing instead on the post-Easter 'kerygma'—mainly on Paul and John, who were considered the only real theologians in the New Testament. Bultmann interpreted both authors from the perspective of an alleged pre-Christian Gnostic worldview and with an existentialist hermeneutic inspired by the philosophy of the early Martin Heidegger.¹⁴ Whereas Paul was still considered to express the kerygma with a Jewish veneer, John was considered the clearest expression of the Christian (= "eschatological") awareness. Historically, Bultmann proposed that the Johannine language originated in pre-Christian Gnostic baptismal circles, and that in particular the typical Johannine 'dualism' (of light and darkness, life and death) had adopted the philosophical worldview of Gnosticism. Here, Bultmann wanted to find a *cosmic dualism* that includes the awareness that a soteriological revelation is needed: an adoption and transformation of a (pre-Christian) *redeemer myth*. In his view, the achievement of the evangelist was that he adopted the general redeemer myth with his revelation-sensitive language, which was now "historicized" ("vergeschichtlicht") and "demythologized" by being related to the human figure of Jesus. Thus, the evangelist himself could appear as a forerunner of the existential interpretation Bultmann considered necessary with regard to early Christian myth and history. We can see, thus, that the assumption of a Gnostic background was of primary importance for Bultmann's interpretation of the Fourth Gospel. Here, in the Johannine 'kerygma,' cosmic dualism was transformed into a dualism of decision that confronts readers with the kerygma and, in that confrontation, with the presence of life and judgment.

Of course, Bultmann's views had many critics. British scholarship never accepted his history-of-religions constructions which were too obviously shaped to fit into a dogmatic and existential framework. Furthermore, more conservative scholarship, interested in the historical value of the gospels or

13 On the reconstruction of Bultmann's redeemer myth, see Frey, *Die johanneische Eschatologie I*, 133–40. Cf. the criticism by Colpe, *Die religionsgeschichtliche Schule*.

14 On Bultmann's systematic views of eschatology, cf. Frey, *Die johanneische Eschatologie I*, 85–118; idem, "Johannine Christology and Eschatology."

also in the Jewish tradition and background of Christianity, remained skeptical. Nevertheless, the impressive edifice of Bultmann's hermeneutical construct and his elegant combination of source-critical work and interpretation left little space for critics to question his views.

In this scholarly context, the Qumran discoveries could appear as a gift from heaven. The discovery of hitherto unknown Jewish documents could direct the interest of scholars to the field almost totally neglected by Bultmann, to the Jewish world around Jesus and the New Testament. It could also point to the importance of real historical backgrounds which had been so easily dismissed by Bultmann in favor of merely existential constructions. Thus, the Qumran discoveries could provide a framework for an alternative interpretation of the Fourth Gospel, its history-of-religions background, and its dualism, which was considered the central element of Johannine language.

3 Johannine Studies under the Influence of Qumran and Nag Hammadi

3.1 *Qumran and the Background of Johannine Dualism*¹⁵

The texts from Qumran Cave 1, especially the *Community Rule* (1QS) and the *War Rule* (1QM), brought to light examples of a thorough dualism hitherto unknown in ancient Judaism and also unparalleled in the Hebrew Bible. This dualism seemed to provide a historically closer parallel to the type of dualism found in the Johannine writings (the Gospel and the Epistles) than the parallels adduced by Bultmann from later texts from Manichaeism and Mandaism. While Bultmann had neglected chronological issues when compiling his redeemer myth from various earlier and later sources, now there was a dualism at hand that was undoubtedly pre-Christian and belonged to the world in which the gospels are originally rooted.

The dualism found in the Qumran documents also differed from what was found in apocalyptic sources, and even more from later Rabbinic thought. In the early years, scholars were uncertain how to locate the Dead Sea 'sect' and its background, and it was an open question whether the views found in Qumran could be attributed to a type of "Jewish Gnosticism" or at least derived from Iranian thought. Thus, one of the first scholars to link the new texts with the

15 In the following paragraphs I draw on research presented more extensively in Frey, "Auf der Suche nach dem Kontext des Johannesevangeliums"; idem, "Licht aus den Höhlen?"; idem, "Recent Perspectives on Johannine Dualism and its Background"; idem, "Dualism and the World in the Gospel and Letters of John."

New Testament, the German Orientalist Karl-Georg Kuhn,¹⁶ emphasized that the New Testament views were now paralleled in a “non-orthodox” (i.e., neither Pharisaic nor Rabbinic) type of Judaism, and that this non-orthodox type of Judaism was the “native soil” of Johannine language and thought.¹⁷ Kuhn even concluded that the Essene sect was the door through which Zoroastrian ideas were transmitted into the world of Early Christianity. In this reconstruction, the Qumran paradigm replaced the leading Gnostic paradigm.¹⁸ Consequently, the focus of history-of-religions scholarship on John shifted from Hellenism or Gnosticism to Judaism, albeit—at first—to an allegedly ‘sectarian’ or ‘heterodox’ type.

The long-term impact of the Qumran discoveries on Johannine scholarship was in fact the shift from a predominantly Hellenistic or Gnostic contextualization to a more thorough reconsideration of its Jewish roots and linguistic features. Some interpreters assembled lists of parallels between John and the Qumran sectarian texts¹⁹ and concluded that John was rooted in Palestinian Judaism, or even more boldly that the evangelist had Qumranic roots, was a former member of the sect, or had memorized the *Community Rule*.²⁰ Other scholars even concluded that since the gospel of John was rooted in Jewish Palestine, it was therefore more historically reliable than Bultmann and the predominant critical research had assumed.²¹

Some of these claims are still upheld and repeated by a number of scholars, but in general, scholarship has become more cautious with regard to any claims of direct links between New Testament texts and the Qumran group and its in-group texts. Such caution is also caused by more recent developments in Qumran scholarship. In the 1990s, with the growing insight in the inner diversity of the Qumran library, scholars also noticed that the dualisms, e.g., in the *Treatise on the Two Spirits* and in the *War Rule* (1QM), are not

16 On Kuhn's dark history of engaging within Nazi ideology and anti-Judaism, see Frey, “Qumran Research and Biblical Scholarship in Germany,” 541–44.

17 Kuhn, “Die in Palästina gefundenen hebräischen Texte,” 210: “Wir bekommen in diesen neuen Texten den Mutterboden des Johannesevangeliums zu fassen, und dieser Mutterboden ist palästinisch-jüdisch, ist aber nicht das pharisäisch-rabbinische Judentum, sondern ist eine palästinisch-jüdische Sektenfrömmigkeit gnostischer Struktur.”

18 See also Frey, “Auf der Suche nach dem Kontext des Johannesevangeliums,” 69–70.

19 Cf. Brown, “The Qumran Scrolls and the Johannine Gospel and Epistles”; Charlesworth, “A Critical Comparison.”

20 Thus Ashton, *Understanding the Fourth Gospel*, 237: “the evangelist had dualism in his bones ... [and] may well have started life as one of those Essenes who were to be found, according to Josephus, ‘in large numbers in every town.’” See also Charlesworth, “A Critical Comparison”; and idem, “The Dead Sea Scrolls and the Gospel according to John.”

21 Cf. Albright, “Recent Discoveries in Palestine and the Gospel of St. John.”

identical, but represent different types of dualism, and that not all texts from the Scrolls are shaped by such a thorough cosmic dualism.²² It has, therefore, become more difficult to define the precise counterpart of the dualistic language in the New Testament.

The diversity among the Qumran texts, between 'sectarian' texts (composed within the group or movement of the 'Qumran community') and other texts composed elsewhere and merely copied, stored, and read by the Qumran group, has led to a modification of the scholarly questions. Now, it is no longer a question whether the evangelist was a former member of the sect or even read the 'sectarian' documents. He was not and he most likely had not. Furthermore, the various elements of dualistic language, such as eschatological opponents and terminological oppositions (e.g., light vs. darkness, truth vs. deceit, life vs. death, or also community vs. world), cannot be derived directly from Qumran, but are partly rooted in Jewish apocalyptic traditions and earlier biblical traditions, partly also in paralleled Diaspora Jewish texts such as *Joseph and Aseneth*, but always shaped according to John's narrative interests.²³ The consequence is that the dualistic language in the Fourth Gospel is not to be interpreted as a mere adoption from a certain religious milieu (neither Qumran nor Gnosticism), but the background of terms can be found mostly in Jewish texts, from Palestinian apocalypticism to the Diaspora. It was indeed the effect of the Qumran discoveries that they helped to draw scholarly attention back to the Jewish background of the Gospel, but this Jewish background is much wider than the ideology of a certain faction or 'sect.' In the meantime, the Qumran library itself has been perceived as a wide and variegated mirror of the literary production of Judaism between the third century BCE and the first century CE. Johannine scholarship has, therefore, abandoned one-sided views of the dependence on certain texts, or factions, and even the Judaism-Hellenism divide has been abandoned. Instead terms such as the 'logos' are read within the context of a variety of meanings and usages, from the Septuagint through Hellenistic-Jewish wisdom to Greek philosophy, that is if we can assume that the evangelist was aware of such a variety and deliberately chose the term because of its variegated meanings in order to lead readers to the right perception of Christ.²⁴

22 Cf. the overview in Frey, "Different Patterns of Dualistic Thought."

23 On these issues, see, in addition to the publications mentioned above, Bauckham, "Qumran and the Fourth Gospel"; idem, "The Qumran Community and the Gospel of John"; Aune, "Dualism in the Fourth Gospel and the Dead Sea Scrolls."

24 Cf. recently Frey, "Between Torah and Stoa."

3.2 *The Impact of the Nag Hammadi Discoveries on Johannine Scholarship: Gnosticizing Reception or Glimpses into the Background of the Fourth Gospel?*

But what about the impact of the Nag Hammadi discoveries on Johannine research? The first scholarly articles that note the importance of some Nag Hammadi writings for New Testament scholarship only occurred when some Johannine scholars had already started to read the Fourth Gospel more in a Jewish context, rather than against the background of Gnosticism. Furthermore, the diversity within the Nag Hammadi Library was obvious from the very beginning, so that scholars were only capable of analyzing and working with individual texts, instead of treating all the texts as a corpus and assuming a unified ideology of a community behind them.

In the late 1950s and early 1960s, when scholars began comparing the newly discovered writings with New Testament texts, looking for conceptual similarities (e.g., the vocabulary of the *Gospel of Truth* [NHC I,3; XII,2] with the Fourth Gospel,²⁵ and in particular the *Apocryphon of John* [NHC II,1 and par.]) they asked whether these texts attested to a Gnosticizing tendency within the Johannine tradition. If so, these texts provide scholars with a link—at least in the history of reception—between John and Gnosticism.²⁶ Other comparisons include the *Three Forms of First Thought* (NHC XIII,1^{*})²⁷ the *Dialogue of the Savior* (NHC III,5)²⁸ and of course the *Gospel of Thomas* (NHC II,2).²⁹ Although the impact of all these comparisons on Johannine research has been quite limited, some aspects are interesting, at least from a methodological point of view. They illustrate how the relationship between the Gnostic writings and the Gospel of John could be (re)constructed in scholarship.

25 Thus, e.g., van Unnik, “The ‘Gospel of Truth’ and the New Testament”; Gärtner, “Evangelium Veritatis och Nya Testamentet”; and Barrett, “The Theological Vocabulary of the Fourth Gospel.”

26 Cf. Hengel, *Die johanneische Frage*; Nagel, *Die Rezeption des Johannesevangeliums*; idem, “Die Gnostizierung der johanneischen Tradition.”

27 Cf. Berliner Arbeitskreis (G. Schenke), “Die dreigestaltige Protennoia”; Robinson (*olim* Schenke), “The Trimorphic Protennoia and the Prologue of the Gospel of John”; differently Janssens, “The Trimorphic Protennoia and the Fourth Gospel”; Yamauchi, “Jewish Gnosticism?”; Helderma, “In ihren Zelten”; Luttikhuisen, “Johannine Vocabulary.”

28 Cf. Koester, *Ancient Christian Gospels*; DeConick, “The Dialogue of the Savior.”

29 See Koester, *Ancient Christian Gospels*, 113–24. A ‘dispute’ between Johannine and ‘Thomasine’ Christians has been suggested by DeConick, *Voices of the Mystics*; eadem, “From Community Conflict to Gospel Narrative”; differently Dunderberg, “John and Thomas in Conflict?”; Popkes, “Ich bin das Licht.”

Here it is interesting that the patterns of Bultmann's hermeneutics found some continuation, in particular in the Berliner Arbeitskreis für Koptisch-Gnostische Schriften. The most interesting example of that hermeneutical 'experiment' is the work with the *Three Forms of First Thought* (a text from the middle or later second century) which was understood as a close parallel to the Prologue of John (in its alleged pre-Johannine form). In an article from 1974, the authors within the circle (and later Gesine Robinson, *olim* Schenke, as an individual author) interpreted the parallels between the two texts in terms of a tradition-historical dependence, but notably in reversal of the chronology of the extant texts. According to their suggestion, the *Three Forms of First Thought* presented the relevant parallels "in their natural context," whereas in John's prologue they were "used in the service of an actually alien purpose."³⁰ The terminology raises suspicion: What is 'natural,' and how is 'actually alien' to be determined? At least, these are not purely historical categories. In a later article written under her own authorial responsibility, Gesine Robinson wanted to identify the Sethian baptism ritual as the common ground of the Johannine Prologue (or, rather, the hymn she considered its source) and the third revelation discourse in the *Three Forms of First Thought*.³¹

In this construction, Bultmann's hypothesis that the Johannine Prologue was shaped from an underlying hymn originating in Gnostic baptismal circles was now renewed in a modified form, with the Sethians replacing the former Gnostic baptismal circles.³² But the hypothetical construction surpasses even Bultmann in its boldness: not a reconstructable text, a pre-Johannine hymn, but only a ritual, a phenomenon (which is more difficult to verify or falsify) is now considered the background behind the Johannine text. The gain of the construction is, certainly, that the Gnostic views assumed behind the Fourth Gospel are now taken from a Nag Hammadi text that could be dated to the second century, not from the much later Manichaean or Mandaeen texts, as in Bultmann's construction. Other scholars, from Carsten Colpe³³ to James Robinson,³⁴ only assumed a common reception of Jewish wisdom speculation in John and the *Three Forms*. Yvonne Janssens even reckoned with a reception of John's prologue in the *Three Forms of First Thought*,³⁵ and Robert M. Wilson

30 Berliner Arbeitskreis (Schenke), "Die dreigestaltige Protennoia," 734: "künstlich einem ihnen eigentlich fremden Zweck dienstbar gemacht."

31 Thus Robinson, "The Trimorphic Protennoia and the Prologue of the Gospel of John," 50.

32 Cf. Nagel, *Die Rezeption des Johannesevangeliums im 2. Jahrhundert*, 449 n. 1541.

33 Colpe, "Heidnische, jüdische und christliche Überlieferung," 119–24.

34 Robinson, "Sethians and Johannine Thought," 650–62.

35 Janssens, "Une source gnostique du Prologue?"; cf. also Yamauchi, "Jewish Gnosticism?," 480–84; Helderman, "In ihren Zelten," 181; Luttikhuisen, "Johannine Vocabulary," 181.

spoke of a “de-Christianization” of Christian tradition in that work.³⁶ The redactional analysis of the *Three Forms of First Thought* by its editor John Turner³⁷ makes things even more complicated: A reception of John can only be ascertained in the final redaction of the work, but not all alleged parallels between the *Three Forms* and the Johannine Prologue allow for the assumption of a tradition-historical or literary dependence.

The hermeneutical pattern, however, as applied by the Berliner Arbeitskreis—not only in this case—is obvious, and it was openly expressed by Hans-Martin Schenke in a paper from the 1991 meeting of the “Alte Marburger,” the scholarly association dedicated to the heritage of Bultmann’s theology. In that paper Schenke quite optimistically suggested that the Nag Hammadi texts could now replace the late Mandaean and Manichaean sources adduced by Bultmann for reconstructing his redeemer myth.³⁸ It is open to discussion whether this is a philologically sound option or, rather, a hermeneutical abuse of the texts in order to support a hermeneutical construct that scholars would like to maintain.

These views—and the related hermeneutical pattern—found the clearest imprint in Johannine studies in Helmut Koester’s work in *Ancient Christian Gospels*. With regard to Nag Hammadi studies and early Christian history, the Harvard professor and former student of Bultmann has become famous through his daringly early dating of the *Gospel of Thomas*³⁹ and of further alleged sources behind other Nag Hammadi writings. He has also trained an influential guild of students who were guided (and, as some say, also pressed) to subscribe to and spread his views. But it is often neglected, especially in the American context, that Koester was still strongly influenced by the theological hermeneutics he had adopted as a student of Bultmann in the 1950s in Germany, making him perhaps the most influential Bultmannian in North America.⁴⁰

These hermeneutical premises are most openly expressed in an article from 1964 on “Heretics in Primitive Christianity as a Theological Problem” dedicated to Bultmann in his *Festschrift*.⁴¹ According to Koester, “orthodoxy” is not

36 Wilson, “The Trimorphic Protennoia,” 52.

37 Turner, “Introduction NHC XIII,1,” 393–401. See also Poirier, “The Trimorphic Protennoia (NHC XIII,1) and the Johannine Prologue.”

38 Schenke, “Die Rolle der Gnosis in Bultmanns Kommentar,” 725–32; idem, “The Work of the Berliner Arbeitskreis,” 63.

39 Koester, “Introduction: The Gospel According to Thomas.”

40 Other mediators of ‘Bultmannian’ theology to North American scholarship were James Robinson, Norman Perrin (in the interpretation of the parables), and Hans Dieter Betz.

41 Koester, “Häretiker im Urchristentum” (revised English version, “The Theological Aspects of Early Christian Heresy”).

granted in the repetition of a traditional formula or in the reference to canonical writings, but only in the criterion of the cross, which is “der kritische Maßstab des historischen Geschehens ‘Jesus,’ an dem sich erweist, ob die Existenz der Glaubenden radikal geschichtlich verstanden, oder ob der Mythos der überlieferten Sprache letztlich der Maßstab geblieben ist.”⁴² In other words, it is not Jesus’s act or words but only their truly existential understanding that make up true belief. While heresy is rooted in the “failure of demythologization in primitive Christianity,”⁴³ orthodoxy, or true faith, is possible where demythologization is successfully practiced.⁴⁴ It is this ‘Bultmannian’ program that also guided Koester in his historical verdicts, in the search for sources behind the historical narratives of the canonical gospels or a more original expression of faith in trajectories of sayings or revelation dialogues before their consolidation in the historical narrative of the gospels, because that consolidation could already be considered a failure of demythologization.

The continuation of Bultmannian views is most clearly visible in Koester’s works on the Fourth Gospel. Among Johannine interpreters, Koester most closely follows Bultmann’s source hypothesis,⁴⁵ accepting the hymn behind the Prologue, the signs source, the passion source, and, instead of Bultmann’s revelation discourses, a plurality of sayings and dialogues which make up the basis of the Johannine discourses. Methodologically, Koester’s views are guided by classical form criticism,⁴⁶ with the result that he prioritizes form-critical arguments over chronological issues or exact textual comparisons. Thus, Koester gives sayings collections (such as Q and the *Gospel of Thomas*) chronological priority over the developed ‘historical’ narrative of the Jesus story—a move which corresponds to the hermeneutical premise that history is unimportant in comparison with the kerygma, which does not need a narrative or a support from historical ‘facts.’ Likewise, dialogue gospels are given priority over against fully developed discourses, so that the missing link between the sayings of Jesus in the earlier tradition and the Johannine discourses can be seen in the dialogue gospels from Nag Hammadi. The hermeneutical pattern

42 Koester, “Häretiker im Urchristentum,” 71.

43 Koester, “Häretiker im Urchristentum,” 73.

44 Cf. Koester, “Häretiker im Urchristentum,” 74: The interpreter should ask “ob die Entmythologisierung gelungen ist, oder ob die entscheidenden Kriterien den mythologischen Inhalten der vorgegebenen Sprache entnommen sind, statt sich am Skandalon des historischen Ursprungs der Offenbarung zu orientieren.”

45 Cf. Koester, “Johannesevangelium,” 841–42; see also idem, *Ancient Christian Gospels*, 244–72.

46 Cf. also the principles of his *Einführung*, which are in some accordance with Vielhauer, *Geschichte der urchristlichen Literatur*; see also Koester, “Formgeschichte / Formenkritik.”

is visible in his view of the alleged source behind the *Dialogue of the Savior*, dated quite daringly to the last decades of the first century.⁴⁷ This principle is also visible in his view that sayings from a wisdom myth are incorporated in the *Apocryphon of James*,⁴⁸ where Koester—following his former student Ron Cameron⁴⁹—explicitly states that in the *Apocryphon of James* (NHC I,2), those sayings represent an original myth which is interpreted by the author of John “in a reversal of the Gnostic pattern.”⁵⁰ While the allegedly ‘original’ sayings find the assurance of salvation in the religious experience of a vision of God, this assurance is now based on the love of God or of Jesus and the mutual love of the disciples, i.e., based on a christological and implicitly also ethical doctrine. Again, the general myth is given priority over against concrete, christological or ‘doctrinal’ expression in the Fourth Gospel.

Thus, Koester’s way of reconstructing (or, rather, constructing) the composition history of John is an exact reproduction of Bultmann’s pattern with mythological (Gnostic) ‘sources’ and a demythologizing evangelist. The question is open whether this kind of demythologizing is valued positively as a theological achievement of the evangelist or whether it is considered an inappropriate ‘doctrinalization’ or ‘historization’ of the mystical religious experience.⁵¹ But it is obvious that there is a hermeneutical pattern that influences—or even determines—the historical or literary constructions, and the systematic or hermeneutical interests (which are not necessarily shared by Koester’s students) should be noticed in the background of the constructions.

47 Koester, *Ancient Christian Gospels*, 173–87; on the dating of the alleged source, see 174 and 187; for criticism, see Frey, *Die johanneische Eschatologie I*, 377–78. See also Létourneau, “The *Dialogue of the Savior* as a Witness to the Late Valentinian Tradition”; Lundhaug, “The *Dialogue of the Savior* (NHC III,5) as a Monastic Text.”

48 Koester, *Ancient Christian Gospels*, 187–201.

49 Cameron, *Sayings Traditions in the Apocryphon of James*, 116–20; see also Koester, *Ancient Christian Gospels*, 267.

50 Koester, *Ancient Christian Gospels*, 267.

51 Such a reading is cautiously suggested in two German monographs written in a certain continuity with the Berliner Arbeitskreis and the ideas of the late Hans-Martin Schenke: Hartenstein, *Charakterisierung im Dialog*, suggests that John draws on images of the four disciple figures which are partly presented in a more original manner in apocryphal traditions, in particular Mary Magdalene (the *Gospel of Mary*) and Thomas (the *Gospel of Thomas*). Petersen, *Brot, Licht und Weinstock*, 280–81, considers the relationship between the light metaphors in John and the ideas about light in Gnostic texts, without deciding on the historical or logical priority, but definitely with the implication that there is at least a possibility that the Gnostic texts may have chronological priority to the Gospel of John.

4 The Eschatology of Jesus in the Light of Nag Hammadi and Qumran

A second test case for the influence of Nag Hammadi and Qumran on New Testament scholarship, which can only be discussed briefly, is their impact on the historical Jesus and his eschatology.⁵² The possible relation of new textual discoveries to the figure of Jesus and the hope for new or more original material about him has stimulated scholarly and public interest in the Qumran and Nag Hammadi discoveries from the very beginning. The comparison of these corpora with Jesus led to bold claims early on which eventually had to be abandoned after more thorough investigations.

4.1 *Nag Hammadi, the Gospel of Thomas, and the Non-Eschatological Jesus*

From the Nag Hammadi corpus, the *Gospel of Thomas* in particular was quickly incorporated into the quest for the Historical Jesus and the original shape of his sayings. As early as around 1900, the Greek fragments of the *Gospel of Thomas* from the Oxyrhynchus Papyri entered the vivid debate on the so-called “Agrapha,” the non-scriptural sayings of Jesus, and the search for more original sayings of Jesus among those testimonies.⁵³ With the publication of the Coptic version of the *Gospel of Thomas*, scholars soon speculated about the possibility that some of its sayings, or even the genre of a collection of sayings (similar to the Synoptic Sayings Source Q) were transmitted here in a form earlier than the canonical Gospels. Scholars such as Gilles Quispel,⁵⁴ Helmut Koester and his students,⁵⁵ or more recently April DeConick⁵⁶ claimed (with various patterns of reasoning) that the *Gospel of Thomas*, although transmitted only in a secondary version, provides glimpses at the earliest Jesus tradition. In particular, the so-called “Jesus Seminar” with its noteworthy scholarly method of casting ballots about the authenticity of Jesus’s sayings was willing to acknowledge the authenticity of numerous sayings and parables in the version transmitted

52 On these issues, I can refer to more thorough discussion in Frey, “Jesus und die Apokalyptik”; idem, “Die Bedeutung der Qumran-Funde”; idem, “Die Lilien und das Gewand”; Frey and Schröter, “Jesus in apokryphen Evangelienüberlieferungen.”

53 On that early debate and the search for more original sayings of Jesus, see Frey, “Die Lilien und das Gewand,” 124–26.

54 See the account of research in Frey, “Die Lilien und das Gewand,” 128–30.

55 Frey, “Die Lilien und das Gewand,” 132–37. Cf. in particular Koester, “One Jesus and Four Primitive Gospels”; Robinson, “LOGOI SOPHON”; see also Koester, *Ancient Christian Gospels*, 75–127; and Patterson, *The Gospel of Thomas and Jesus*.

56 See the account of research in Frey, “Die Lilien und das Gewand,” 140–43. See in particular DeConick, *Recovering the Original Gospel of Thomas*.

in the *Gospel of Thomas*,⁵⁷ rather than in their Synoptic form. The plea for the independence and historical source value of the *Gospel of Thomas* has been repeated since then by a number of interpreters, not only for reading the text in its own right,⁵⁸ but also with regard to the Historical Jesus.⁵⁹ In the last decade, however, there has been a shift in *Thomas* scholarship, and an increasing majority of specialists called for more caution in the issues of reconstruction and dating,⁶⁰ favoring the view of the work as a deliberate reinterpretation or 'esoterization' of the Jesus tradition.⁶¹

Thus, the *Gospel of Thomas* became a distinctly influential Nag Hammadi text with regard to Historical Jesus research, in particular inspiring the construction of the image of a 'non-apocalyptic' or 'non-eschatological' Jesus. It is no coincidence that this tendency is linked with the decidedly 'enlightenment-oriented' interests programmatically expressed by the Jesus Seminar.⁶² In the background is the modern or post-modern preference for 'mysticism' and individualism and, perhaps in particular, the North American 'culture wars' between liberal exegetes and more 'apocalyptic-oriented' evangelicals with their social and political influence. Against the traditional image of an apocalyptic Jesus, the *Gospel of Thomas'* lack of references to the death (and resurrection) of Jesus or to the apocalyptic term "Son of Man," along with its apparently 'realized' and individualized language of the 'kingdom,'⁶³ could help reconstruct a different Jesus, a purely 'sapiential' teacher who encourages mysticism and individualism, but does not preach a coming judgment, nor call for belief in the effect of his death or in the atonement for sins. Thus, the Jesus reconstructed by the Jesus Seminar is, as a reviewer has insightfully phrased it, predominantly "a hero of our times."⁶⁴ But in their enthusiasm for a

57 Cf. the edition according to the constructions of the Seminar: Funk and Hoover, *The Five Gospels: What Did Jesus Really Say?*

58 Cf. also Zöckler, *Jesu Lehren im Thomasevangelium*; Nordsieck, *Das Thomas-Evangelium*; cf. for criticism the review by Schröter in *TRu* (2005).

59 Borg, "A Temperate Case for a Non-Eschatological Jesus"; idem, *Jesus in Contemporary Scholarship*; see already the interpretation of Jesus's parables in line with Bultmann's concept of time in Perrin, *Rediscovering the Teachings of Jesus*; idem, *Jesus and the Language of the Kingdom*.

60 Cf. Schröter and Bethge, "Das Evangelium nach Thomas (NHC II,2)"; Schröter, "Das Evangelium nach Thomas," 492–98; Goodacre, *Thomas and the Gospels*; Gathercole, *The Gospel of Thomas*.

61 Cf. Popkes, "Die Umdeutung des Todes Jesu"; idem, "Von der Eschatologie zur Protologie."

62 Cf. the references to Charles Darwin, Thomas Jefferson, and David Friedrich Strauss in the preface to Funk and Hoover, *The Five Gospels* (pp. 1–3).

63 Cf. Zöckler, *Jesu Lehren im Thomasevangelium*, 164–80.

64 Betz, review of Funk and Hoover, *The Five Gospels*, in *TLZ* (1994); cf. Frey, *Jesus und die Apokalypik*, 118–20.

new and different 'real' Jesus, the substantial problems, e.g., of reconstructing a first-century CE Greek or even Aramaic text from a Coptic version of the fourth century (which differs from the earliest Greek fragments), and of drawing a relatively non-Jewish image of Jesus, have been dismissed all too easily. This is where more precise information about the possibilities within Palestinian Judaism during the time of Jesus is needed, and here, in particular, the impact of the Qumran discoveries can be considered.

4.2 *Wisdom and Eschatology in the Qumran Texts and the Relevance of the Qumran Discoveries for Jesus Research*⁶⁵

How did the Qumran corpus and its evaluation affect these debates? We can leave aside here all the premature speculations about immediate connections between Jesus and his circle and Qumran or the Qumran community. All those ideas about Jesus as an Essene, Christian texts in the Qumran library, or direct connections between Essenes and the primitive community in Jerusalem cannot be substantiated by any reliable evidence.⁶⁶ The actual contribution of the Qumran library for the understanding of Jesus and the early Jesus tradition is that it has fundamentally changed our sources for understanding the Jewish world and thought world around Jesus and his earliest followers. This includes, e.g., a vast number of scriptural interpretations; a hitherto unexpected plurality of messianic and eschatological expectations that can now help us understand the origins of Christology from Jewish roots;⁶⁷ invaluable glimpses into the origins and early stages of Jewish apocalypticism;⁶⁸ and also numerous terms, phrases, and literary forms that appear within the gospel tradition. With regard to the eschatology of Jesus and his expectation of the 'Kingdom of God,' the Qumran sectarian texts provide the important analogy of a 'double eschatology' in which the awareness of present salvation and the expectation of a final eschatological period or end are not contradictions. As a result, the slogan in earlier Jesus research "either eschatological or non-eschatological" has become implausible for the Palestinian-Jewish context of that time, although the precise reasons for the awareness of present salvation differ between the

65 On the relevance of the Qumran discoveries for the understanding of Jesus, see the more extensive discussion in Frey, "Neutestamentliche Wissenschaft und antikes Judentum"; idem, "Jesus, Paulus und die Texte vom Toten Meer"; idem, "Die Textfunde von Qumran und die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft."

66 Cf. Frey, "The Impact of the Dead Sea Scrolls," 419–38.

67 Cf. Frey, "Der historische Jesus und der Christus der Evangelien," 299–313.

68 For the following passages, I draw on research presented already in Frey, "Die Bedeutung der Qumran-Funde."

Qumranites and Jesus.⁶⁹ Whereas large parts of New Testament research—triggered by the early rationalist critique of eschatological expectation⁷⁰—considered the simultaneity of expressions of the “already present” kingdom and the “not yet” a contradiction and, therefore, pressed for its dissolution (either in the sense of the presence of the kingdom or in the sense of a consistent, eschatological view), the observations in the Qumran texts indicate that such an alternative derives from theological interests and is not historically grounded. For the Qumran authors, no irreconcilable contradiction can be discerned between the (self-evidently held) end-time expectation and the certainty of participating in the fellowship with the angels already in the present. Not only the widely accepted alternative between ‘apocalypticism’ and (non-apocalyptic) ‘eschatology,’ but also the alternative between (mythological) ‘futuristic’ and (more highly esteemed) ‘present’ eschatology are historically inappropriate. This affects the construction of a coherently eschatological Jesus and also the construction of a completely non-eschatological Jesus: the ‘double eschatology’ in the Jesus tradition is historically the most plausible way of understanding the notion of the ‘kingdom of God’ and the eschatology of the Jesus of history.

But while these insights were already known in the 1960s,⁷¹ the release of the hitherto unpublished fragments in the 1990s brought further revolutionary insights. In particular the sapiential texts from Qumran have brought to light a hitherto unknown type of sapiential thought in Palestinian Judaism⁷² that differs from Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, or also the Wisdom of Solomon. In compositions such as *Instruction* and the *Book of Mysteries* which are most probably not the product of the Qumran community but originate in a wider range of sapiential thought of the late third or early second century BCE, we can see an early interweaving of wisdom and apocalyptic traditions. Thus, the image of the wisdom traditions that has been presupposed for Judaism around the turn of the era has changed decisively. The thesis that the Jewish wisdom tradition lacked an eschatological character (or even had an “eschatological disinterest”) based on the texts available at the time before the Qumran discoveries (primarily Ecclesiastes and the Wisdom of Solomon) can no longer be upheld in view of the new findings. This is of crucial relevance for the reconstruction of the earliest Jesus traditions. The scholarly attempt to present a

69 See Frey, “Die Bedeutung der Qumran-Funde,” 60–61.

70 On the early impulses for the criticism, cf. Frey, *Die johanneische Eschatologie* 1, 10–47.

71 See already the important work by Kuhn, *Enderwartung und gegenwärtiges Heil*, 189–204.

72 On these texts, cf. my remarks in Frey, “Different Patterns of Dualistic Thought”; Frey, “Flesh and Spirit.”

hypothetical, oldest substratum of the Sayings Source (Q), consisting of pure, non-eschatological wisdom material, and thus to characterize the 'true' historical Jesus as a wholly unapocalyptic wisdom teacher or popular philosopher must now appear quite implausible within the context of Palestinian Judaism around the turn of the era.⁷³ The often assumed incompatibility and alternative between wisdom and apocalyptic thought or between the genre of wisdom (such as the postulated genre of "Logoi Sophōn" for the Sayings Source) and apocalyptic forms of speech cannot be proved from the sources.⁷⁴ In view of the new insights into the Jewish wisdom tradition, some of the arguments put forward in favor of an 'unapocalyptic' Jesus or an 'unapocalyptic' earliest logia tradition appear to need revision. This is one of the most striking insights from the Qumran discoveries, in particular from the evaluation of the discoveries that became possible only since the release of the numerous fragments in the 1990s, and, interestingly, these insights largely contradict some of the speculations uttered in view of the texts from Nag Hammadi, in particular the Coptic *Gospel of Thomas*.

5 Concluding Reflections

It has become clear that both textual discoveries have substantially influenced New Testament scholarship, but to a different degree and in a different manner.

(a) Due to their chronological priority, the influence of the Dead Sea Scrolls has been much more intense and thoroughgoing than the influence from the Nag Hammadi discoveries. Qumran discoveries have led to a much more precise perception of the Jewish context and background of early Christian language and thought, although any kind of pan-Qumranism must be dismissed, and New Testament scholarship has to perceive the Jewish roots *and* the Greco-Roman contexts of the early Jesus movement, whereas a one-sided prioritization of the Jewish aspects has been rightly criticized.

The Nag Hammadi discoveries have influenced New Testament scholarship only in a more indirect manner. The Greek texts underlying the Coptic versions, even in the case of the *Gospel of Thomas*, can at earliest be dated to the second century, and only occasionally, the texts from Nag Hammadi (or their reconstructed *Vorlage*) can offer information about the time of the formation of the New Testament texts. The majority of texts, instead, point to later and

73 For further discussion, see Collins, "Wisdom, Apocalypticism and Generic Compatibility"; see also the detailed discussion in Frey, "Jesus und die Apokalypik."

74 Cf. Robinson, "LOGOI SOPHON."

different situations and intellectual climates, so that the primary relevance of the Nag Hammadi texts is in illuminating the reception of biblical and early Christian traditions and the developments of thought in early Christian and Christian Gnostic traditions. If phenomenological comparisons without consideration of the chronological relations must be considered problematic, it appears hardly possible to continue Bultmann's pattern of interpretation by replacing the Mandaean and Manichaean sources with Nag Hammadi texts or their assumed sources.

(b) The debates have also shown that historical work is never a purely objective and 'uninterested' endeavor, but is always, more or less, influenced by issues of wider interest, of relevance, or philosophical/theological perspectives. Scholarship must be aware of the paradigms and patterns effective in the evaluation of texts, even in quite strictly philological and historical debates about the interrelation of different traditions or issues of textual dependence.

In Qumran studies, those issues include the hermeneutical question of the relationship between Jewish and "Christian" traditions. What is at stake for Jewish interpreters to claim even the New Testament writings to be a part of Second Temple Judaism, what was at stake for Christian interpreters when stressing the difference between the 'heterodox' character of the Qumran writings as the 'native soil' of early Christian thought, in its difference from Pharisaic or Rabbinic 'orthodoxy'? Is it 'dangerous' for Christian theology if some of its ideas are proven to be rooted or prefigured in Jewish traditions, or is it necessary (or maybe politically correct) to stress their Jewish character? How Jewish are Christian texts, and to what extent do we allow them to be Jewish? What is gained hermeneutically if, e.g., the Gospel of John is Jewish? Does this mean that it can be 'saved' from the allegation of Anti-Judaism, or that it can be considered more historically valid, or less influenced by 'alien,' pagan, syncretistic elements?

And what is at stake if there are parallels between New Testament texts and allegedly Gnostic texts? How can we deal with the dogmatic borders drawn by early Christian heresiologists? Can we overturn or simply neglect them—or are they still effective even where we would like to dismiss them? Whether we interpret John as 'anti-Gnostic' or 'anti-docetic' (as did Bultmann) or see the gospel on the way to a Gnosticizing tradition (as did some of his former students, e.g., Ernst Käsemann or Luise Schottroff) or rather as a tendency of increased dogmatism is not only important for determining John's place in the Christian canon. It is also a mirror of the author's own understanding of concepts of conservative/orthodox Christians or liberal advocates of original plurality and diversity within the Christian tradition—with various positions in between.

In view of the history of research, I suppose that with regard to subjects that have had a major effect in the past and in the present, any claim to have complete neutrality or objectivity is naïve. We would rather discuss the patterns involved in our historical work, the way of relating texts and textual corpora with each other, and also, honestly, the way we relate ourselves to the texts and the traditions involved. Hopefully, the trails blazed—together with the impasses—of the past seventy years of Qumran and Nag Hammadi studies will make us wise for the future.

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