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THE BELOVED DISCIPLE IN CONFLICT?

REVISITING THE GOSPELS
of JOHN and THOMAS



ISMO DUNDERBERG

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Preface

This book is based upon articles I have written over the last decade on the Gospel of John and its relationship to the *Gospel of Thomas*. In preparing this book, however, I re-edited those earlier materials to some degree. This process not only made it possible to add some important updates and reflections, but also to eliminate overlap between the original publications, to relocate material, and to formulate some points more clearly than I had previously.

My book offers a critical review of the current theory, held by a few American scholars, that John and *Thomas* were gospels in conflict, but this is neither its only nor most important purpose. I have also tried to develop my own view of the relationship between these gospels. To put it very briefly, my suggestion is that they were written at about the same time—at the turn of the first century—and that they were often part of the wider early Christian discussion about certain topics but were unaware of each other's distinct positions in these debates. In addition, in this book I will discuss different views of the Johannine figure of the Beloved Disciple, and try to situate him more clearly in the context of similar figures in other early Christian texts.

I am indebted to many people who have supported me in various stages of writing this book. I am especially grateful to Risto Uro and Antti Marjanen who, more than a decade

ago, invited me to join their research project on the *Gospel of Thomas*. Most of the materials in this book have undergone their critical review, some more than once, and their remarks and suggestions have contributed much more than can ever be indicated in the footnotes of this book. I am also grateful to Raimo Hakola and Heikki Räisänen for their insightful comments on my views about the Beloved Disciple. Comments from several other scholars have encouraged me to realize the plan to put my prior publications together in the form of a book. I would especially like to mention Tjitze Baarda, Adela Yarbro Collins, April DeConick, Karen King, Anne McGuire, Elaine Pagels, Philip Sellew, John Turner, and Urban von Wahlde. The two anonymous readers of Oxford University Press gave many valuable suggestions on the contents of this book; above all, their comments made me formulate my theory of the Beloved Disciple and James more forcefully than I did in the original publication.

In addition, I would express my heartfelt thanks to Jon Ma. Asgeirsson (now in Reykjavik), Jonathan and Annette Reed, James Robinson, Tammi Schneider, and Karen Torjesen for the hospitality and friendship they offered to me and to my family during our five-month visit in 1995 to the Institute for Antiquity and Christianity (Claremont, California), where I was able to conduct research related to the issues discussed in this book.

My appointment as Research Fellow of the Academy of Finland enabled my long-term concentration on this research. I am grateful to Raija Sollamo, the Head of the Department of Biblical Studies at the University of Helsinki, where I currently work, for ensuring that I have been able to

devote some time to scholarship, despite the flood of administrative duties at our university.

Being a non-native English speaker and writer, I am grateful to all those who have made my 'Finglish' more readable: Ralph Carlson, Milton Moreland, and Christopher Tuckett. The final version of this book was revised by Margot Stout Whiting, whose comments were often seasoned with shrewd remarks about its contents, too. The staff of Oxford University Press, especially Lucy Qureshi, Amanda Greenley and Elizabeth Robottom and copy editor Kristi Long have been of great help in the final editing of this book. The indexes were compiled by Timo Vanhoja.

Finally, my wife Päivi Salmesvuori has been my beloved one and true companion. She has been unbelievably consistent in supporting me whenever I have been speaking about my plans, or doubts, either concerning this book or my research in general. Of all the people to whom I have every reason to be thankful, Päivi and our three dear children, Fanni, Linus, and Olga, have been by far the greatest support to me all these years.

I.D.

In my brief discussion of the *Secret Gospel of Mark* (pp. 178–79), I approach this text as a *possibly* authentic early Christian writing. This view should be now reconsidered in light of Stephen C. Carlson's new book *The Gospel Hoax: Morton Smith's Invention of Secret Mark* (Waco, Texas: Baylor University Press, 2005), in which it is argued that the *Secret Mark* is a modern hoax. Unfortunately, I got access to this important study, the main conclusion of which seems convincing to me for now, so late that I was no longer able to rewrite my assessment of this text.

Acknowledgments

I wish to express my gratitude for the publishers' permission to republish the following materials (in a modified form) as parts of my book:

Ismo Dunderberg, 'John and Thomas in Conflict?' Published originally in *The Nag Hammadi Library after Fifty Years: Proceedings of the Society of Biblical Literature Commemoration*. Edited by Anne McGuire and John D. Turner. NHMS 44. Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1997, 361–80. © Brill Academic Publishers, Leiden, The Netherlands, 1997.

Ismo Dunderberg, 'The Beloved Disciple in John: Ideal Figure in an Early Christian Controversy'. Published originally in *Fair Play: Diversity and Conflicts in Early Christianity*. Edited by Ismo Dunderberg, Christopher Tuckett, and Kari Syreeni. Leiden: E. J. Brill, 2001. © Brill Academic Publishers, Leiden, The Netherlands, 2001.

Ismo Dunderberg, 'Thomas' I-Sayings and the Gospel of John', and 'Thomas and the Beloved Disciple'. Published originally in *Thomas at the Crossroads*. Edited by Risto Uro. Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1998, 33–88.

All quotations from the *Gospel of Thomas* and the biblical texts are my own translations unless otherwise noted.

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Tables

Table 1 1 John 1:1 in the Muratorian Canon and 1
Cor. 2:9//*Gos. Thom.* 17

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Abbreviations

AAAbO	Acta Academiae Aboensis
AASF	Acta Academiae Scientiarum Fennicae
AB	Anchor Bible
ABD	<i>Anchor Bible Dictionary</i> (ed. David N. Freedman; 6 vols.; New York: Doubleday, 1992)
AGSJU	Arbeiten zur Geschichte des Spätjudentums und Urchristentums
ANRW	<i>Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt: Geschichte und Kultur Roms im Spiegel der neueren Forschung</i> (ed. Hildegard Temporini and Wolfgang Haase; Berlin: de Gruyter, 1972–)
BAA	Walter Bauer, Kurt Aland, and Barbara Aland, <i>Griechisch-Deutsches Wörterbuch zu den Schriften des Neuen Testaments und der frühchristlichen Literatur</i> (6th ed.; Berlin: de Gruyter, 1988)
BASP	<i>Bulletin of the American Society of Papyrologists</i>
BETL	Bibliotheca ephemeridum theologiarum lovaniensium
<i>Bib</i>	<i>Biblica</i>
BU	Biblische Untersuchungen
BZ	<i>Biblische Zeitschrift</i>
BZNW	Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft
CCD	Walter Ewing Crum, <i>A Coptic Dictionary</i> (Oxford: Clarendon, 1939; repr. 2000: Sandpiper Books)
CH	Corpus Hermeticum

<i>ETL</i>	<i>Ephemerides theologicae lovanienses</i>
<i>EvT</i>	<i>Evangelische Theologie</i>
<i>EWNT</i>	<i>Exegetisches Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament</i> (ed. Horst Balz and Gerhard Schneider; 3 vols.; 2nd ed.; Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1992)
HTKNT	Herders Theologischer Kommentar zum Neuen Testament
<i>HTR</i>	<i>Harvard Theological Review</i>
HTS	Harvard Theological Studies
<i>Int</i>	<i>Interpretation</i>
<i>JBL</i>	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
<i>JECS</i>	<i>Journal of Early Christian Studies</i>
<i>JHG</i>	<i>Journal of Higher Criticism</i>
<i>JSNT</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of the New Testament</i>
JSNTSup	Journal for the Study of the New Testament: Supplement Series
<i>JTS</i>	<i>Journal of Theological Studies</i>
KEK	Kritisch-exegetischer Kommentar über das Neue Testament (Meyer-Kommentar)
<i>LPGL</i>	G. W. H. Lampe, <i>A Patristic Greek Lexicon</i> (10th impression; Oxford: Clarendon, 1991)
<i>LSJ</i>	Henry George Liddell and Robert Scott, <i>Greek-English Lexicon with a Revised Supplement</i> (9th ed.; rev. Henry Stuart Jones and Roderick McKenzie; Oxford: Clarendon, 1996).
NHMS	Nag Hammadi and Manichean Studies
NHS	Nag Hammadi Studies
NovTSup	Novum Testamentum Supplements
<i>NTA</i>	<i>New Testament Apocrypha</i> (ed. Edgar Hennecke and Wilhelm Schneemelcher; English transl. ed. by R. McL. Wilson; 2 vols.; Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1963–65)

NTAbh	Neutestamentliche Abhandlungen
NTS	<i>New Testament Studies</i>
NTTS	New Testament Tools and Studies
ÖTKNT	Ökumenischer Taschenbuchkommentar zum Neuen Testament
SBB	Stuttgarter biblische Beiträge
SBLDS	Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series
SBLSCS	Society of Biblical Literature Septuagint and Cognate Studies
<i>SBLSP</i>	<i>Society of Biblical Literature Seminar Papers</i>
SBS	Stuttgarter Bibelstudien
SD	Studies and Documents
<i>SecCent</i>	<i>Second Century</i>
SNTSMS	Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series
SUNT	Studien zur Umwelt des Neuen Testaments
<i>TDNT</i>	<i>Theological Dictionary of the New Testament</i> (ed. Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich; trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley; 10 vols.; Grand Rapids, 1964–76)
<i>VigChr</i>	<i>Vigiliae Christianae</i>
VigChrSup	Vigiliae Christianae Supplements
WUNT	Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament
ZNW	<i>Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft und die Kunde der älteren Kirche</i>

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Introduction

One noteworthy change in recent scholarship on the *Gospel of Thomas* has been the shift from comparing this text to the synoptic gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke) to studying its relationship to the Gospel of John. For decades, scholars were primarily concerned with the question of whether the traditions of Jesus' sayings in *Thomas* could be independent from, and earlier than, those in the synoptic gospels. Scholars are divided into two groups: those who see in *Thomas* the earliest gospel, written around the 50s CE, and those who regard it as a relatively late compilation, from 150 CE or later.

At the same time, the relationship of the *Gospel of Thomas* to the Gospel of John attracted far less attention. Most scholars would agree that the Gospel of John offers a later theological interpretation of Jesus. Thus, as long as the essential question in Thomasine scholarship was whether the *Gospel of Thomas* provided the earliest layer of the sayings of Jesus or not, contacts between *Thomas* and John were of secondary importance.

This, however, is perhaps not the only reason why the relationship between John and *Thomas* was a neglected issue

for such a long time. There is no denying the fact that *Thomas* is, in many respects, closer to the synoptic traditions of the sayings of Jesus than to the Gospel of John. There are numerous close verbal parallels between *Thomas* and the synoptic sayings tradition,¹ and they employ similar literary forms, such as parables, short stories concluding with Jesus' wise answers (*chriae*), and brief discussions with the disciples ('school discussions'). These forms are largely absent in John; the dominant literary form for its sayings tradition is that of a long thematic discourse (for example, John 3; 5–8; 10).

Nevertheless, the relationship between John and *Thomas* has occupied a more prominent place on the scholarly agenda in the last ten years. What has launched a new wave of interest in their relationship is the theory that the two gospels are in conflict with each other. Several American specialists on *Thomas*, including Gregory Riley, April DeConick, Elaine Pagels, Harold Attridge, Stephen Johnson, and Richard Valantasis, have argued for this theory, although they offer significantly different explanations as to what exactly occasioned this conflict.

The theory of a conflict between John and *Thomas* presupposes a shift in Thomasine scholarship from questions pertaining to the historical Jesus to issues related to the community in which the *Gospel of Thomas* was produced

¹ For the parallels between the synoptic gospels and the *Gospel of Thomas* see, for example, the thorough listing by Helmut Koester, Introduction to the *Gospel According to Thomas*, in *Nag Hammadi Codex II, 2–7 together with XIII, 2**, *Brit. Lib. Or. 4926(1)*, and *P.Oxy. 1*, 654, 655, vol. 1 (ed. Bentley Layton; NHS 20; Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1989), 38–49.

and used. For many of the scholars mentioned above, *Thomas* is no longer primarily a hoard of possibly authentic sayings of Jesus, as it was for an earlier generation of scholars, nor is its relationship to gnosticism of primary importance. Instead, they approach *Thomas* as bearing witness to an early Christian community that had a distinctive profile of its own on theological issues. Considerable efforts have been made by these scholars to elucidate the intellectual background of Thomasine Christianity, including Hermetic and Jewish mystic traditions (DeConick), contemporary Greco-Roman thought (Riley), and Hellenistic Jewish exegesis of Genesis (Pagels).

Despite having added several fruitful insights to Thomasine studies, the theory of a conflict between John and *Thomas* has also generated criticism. I have been on the critical side of this discussion since 1995. In chapter two, section three I will offer an updated version of my earlier critique of the conflict theory in which I take into account more recent versions of this theory—above all, the new studies by DeConick and Pagels. My impression is that, regardless of methodological precision and the introduction of new historical aspects into the discussion, these new studies have not managed to make the conflict theory any more persuasive than it was originally. Although the theory of a conflict would make the relationship between John and *Thomas* seem more exciting than it would be otherwise, I am still not convinced that the scholars mentioned above have managed to bring forth decisive arguments for the possibility that the communities behind John and *Thomas* were engaged in a mutual debate. Their studies, I believe, have

helped us to see more clearly where *Thomas* and John differ from each other, and have thus clarified the distinct theological profiles of these gospels. Nevertheless, I have so far failed to see any compelling reason to interpret these differences as signs of a mutual conflict between Johannine and Thomasine Christians.

In addition to my earlier comments, critical voices concerning the conflict theory can now be heard from Ron Cameron, Larry Hurtado, Karen King, Enno Edzard Popkes, Philip Sellew, and Risto Uro.² King, in fact, has put very succinctly the point which I have tried to make concerning the relationship between John and *Thomas*: ‘too often the recognition of early Christian multiformity has led scholars to posit “communities in conflict.” The mere fact of theological difference is not, however, sufficient to posit a conflict relationship.’³ Even if John and *Thomas* have conflicting views, as they certainly do, this does not show yet that they

² Ron Cameron, ‘Ancient Myths and Modern Theories of the Gospel of Thomas and Christian Origins’, *Method & Theory in the Study of Religion* 11 (1999), 236–57, esp. 239–44; Larry Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ: Devotion to Jesus in Earliest Christianity* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmanns, 2003), 474–79; Enno Edzard Popkes, “‘Ich bin das Licht’—Erwägungen zur Verhältnisbestimmung des Thomasevangeliums und der johanneischen Schriften anhand der Lichtmetaphorik’, in *Kontexte des Johannesevangeliums: Das vierte Evangelium in religions- und traditionsgeschichtlicher Perspektive* (ed. Jörg Frey, Udo Schnelle, and Juliane Schlegel; WUNT 175; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2004), 641–74, esp. 666, 674; Philip Sellew, ‘Thomas Christianity: Scholars in Quest of a Community’, in *The Apocryphal Acts of Thomas* (ed. Jan N. Bremmer; Leuven: Peeters, 2001), 11–35, esp. 27–29; Risto Uro, *Thomas: Seeking the Historical Context of the Gospel of Thomas* (London: T. & T. Clark, 2003), 25.

³ Karen L. King, *What is Gnosticism?* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2003), 284–85.

were in a situation of conflict. It is also possible, and for me this seems to be the more plausible solution, that the two gospels were part of more general discussions about certain issues and took different stances on them without knowing each other's positions at all.

Notably, the theory of a conflict between John and *Thomas* is almost completely restricted to American scholars, whereas European scholars have remained remarkably inactive in this discussion.⁴ This may be due to the belief, still widely held among the latter, that the *Gospel of Thomas* is both Gnostic and considerably later than the gospels in the New Testament. If so, the whole idea of John being written in response to *Thomas* would not make much sense. For the reasons mentioned later in this study, I would like to emphasize that I neither subscribe to the very late dating of *Thomas*—which would make this gospel by and large irrelevant to New Testament scholarship—nor do I think that *Thomas* is a 'Gnostic' text in any meaningful sense of the term. In fact, my estimation is that *Thomas* and John are roughly contemporary with each other. Although it is impossible to date either of them with absolute certainty, the dating at the turn of the first century has much to recommend itself for both gospels.⁵

Even though I do not subscribe to the theory that John and *Thomas* were in conflict, I believe that they share a

⁴ Popkes' careful study on the metaphor of light in John and the *Gospel of Thomas* is a noteworthy exception; cf. Popkes, 'Erwägungen'.

⁵ Cf. Richard Valantasis, *The Gospel of Thomas* (London: Routledge, 1997), 13–19, 21; Uro, *Thomas*, 134–36. This conclusion is supported by some of my text analyses; see chapter four, section nine below.

number of common ideas that are worthy of closer examination. It may even be that these ideas have unnecessarily been overshadowed by, and neglected in, the recent attempts to construct a direct conflict between John and *Thomas*. Differences in literary style aside, John and *Thomas* do share many ideas that make their symbolic worlds look quite similar to each other. John and *Thomas* are, as Riley has correctly pointed out, ‘much closer to each other in spirit than either is to the Synoptics.’⁶ Their common ideas include the following:

- Jesus is portrayed as pre-existent and associated with the origin of all things (*Gos. Thom.* 77; John 1:3; 8:58).
- Both gospels speak of Jesus’ incarnation and contrast it to human ignorance (*Gos. Thom.* 28; John 1:9–11, 14).
- Words of Jesus are linked with a promise of immortality, resulting either from understanding (*Gos. Thom.* 1; 19) or obeying them (John 8:31, 51–52).
- Discipleship is based upon election (*Gos. Thom.* 49–50; John 6:70; 13:18; 15:16,19).
- Both gospels anticipate persecution, either spiritual or physical, of Jesus’ followers (*Gos. Thom.* 68–69; John 16:1–4).
- The world is denounced in both gospels (*Gos. Thom.* 21; 56; 80; John 14:30; 15:19; 17:16).
- Both gospels bear witness to a dualism of light and dark (*Gos. Thom.* 24; 61; John 1:5; 8:12; 9:4; 11:9–10; 12:35).

⁶ Gregory J. Riley, *Resurrection Reconsidered: Thomas and John in Controversy* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995), 3.

- Both gospels represent ‘realized eschatology’ (although the term itself has proven problematic).⁷ In other words, present aspects of salvation outweigh the future ones, and concepts traditionally connected with future events are used in a non-apocalyptic fashion. In the *Gospel of Thomas*, the ‘kingdom’ (*Gos. Thom.* 3; 113), the ‘end’ (*Gos. Thom.* 18), and ‘the repose of the dead’ (*Gos. Thom.* 51) are present realities. In John, realized eschatology can be seen, for example, in how the resurrection of the dead (John 5:24–26; 11:24–27) and the final judgement (John 3:18–19, 36; 5:27; 12:31) are interpreted.⁸
- Both gospels display similar attitudes towards the Hebrew Bible:⁹ they affirm that studying the scriptures may distract one from recognizing Jesus (*Gos. Thom.* 52; John 5:39).
- Jews are characterized by their misunderstanding. In John, this is a recurring feature (e.g., John 6:41, 52; 8:48, 52–53). In *Thomas*, Jesus blames the disciples who have misunderstood him by saying that they ‘have become like Jews’ (*Gos. Thom.* 43).

⁷ Karen King notes that, with regard to the kingdom language of the *Gospel of Thomas*, it is not quite accurate to speak of ‘realized eschatology’ since the gospel employs the term ‘kingdom’ in a non-apocalyptic way; cf. Karen L. King, ‘Kingdom in the Gospel of Thomas’, *Forum* 3:1 (1987), 48–97, esp. 50–52; see also Risto Uro, ‘Is *Thomas* an Encratite Gospel?’ in *Thomas at the Crossroads* (ed. Risto Uro; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1998), 140–62.

⁸ Cf. George Richter, ‘Präsentische und futurische Eschatologie im 4. Evangelium’, in idem, *Studien zum Johannesevangelium* (ed. Josef Hainz; BU 13; Regensburg: Friedrich Pustet, 1977), 346–82, esp. 367–68.

⁹ For *Thomas*’s opinions about Jews, their scripture and customs, see Antti Marjanen, ‘*Thomas* and Jewish Religious Practices’, in Uro, *Thomas at the Crossroads*, 163–82.

- Attitudes towards Jewish customs are similar. In *Thomas*, bodily circumcision is ridiculed (*Gos. Thom.* 53), whereas the Johannine Jesus speaks about circumcision and Mosaic Law as an outsider would (John 7:19–24; 10:34–36 and 15:25), calling it ‘your law’—as Pilate, another outsider, does in the Johannine narrative (John 18:31).¹⁰
- In contrast to any of the synoptic gospels, both John and *Thomas* claim to have been written by a disciple of Jesus (*Gos. Thom.* incipit; John 21:24).

The similarities between *Thomas* and John listed above are abundant enough to raise a question about their mutual relationship, regardless of what one thinks of the merits and drawbacks of the theory that the two gospels were in conflict. Several methodological difficulties are involved, however, in examining their relationship. The conflict theory contains problems of its own to be discussed below; here I will confine myself to more general methodological considerations.

¹⁰ Interestingly enough, in the Gospel of John, the outsider’s attitude towards Jewish law does not prevent the author from making positive use of Jewish scriptures. Not only are they frequently quoted but they can also be regarded as witnessing to Jesus or as finding their fulfillment in him (cf. John 1:45; 5:39; 15:25). For different aspects of the use of the Jewish scriptures in John, see Wayne A. Meeks, *The Prophet-King: Moses Traditions and the Johannine Christology* (NovTSup 14; Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1967), 287–91; Markku Kotila, *Der umstrittene Zeuge: Studien zur Stellung des Gesetzes in der johanneischen Theologiegeschichte* (Annales Academiae Scientiarum Fennicae: Dissertationes humanarum litterarum 48; Helsinki: The Finnish Academy of Science and Letters, 1988).

To begin with, it cannot be known with certainty which of the two gospels antedates the other.¹¹ It would be unwarranted to assume that the *Gospel of Thomas* was written later than the Gospel of John, or vice versa. Moreover, since neither gospel presents quotations from the other, conclusions about their relationship can be drawn only by comparing their contents to each other. Conclusions from such comparisons are, however, difficult to draw with any certainty because of great differences in genre. For example, the principles of ordering Jesus' words are entirely different in the two gospels. In John, Jesus' sayings are parts of larger thematic discourses, whereas they are treated as individual, small units in *Thomas*.¹²

This substantial difference in the literary form of both gospels needs to be taken into account when comparing them to each other. Since *Thomas* is a sayings collection, it is unlikely that it would contain numerous references to the Johannine narrative order. Lengthy Johannine discourses would have been unsuitable in the literary genre of *Thomas*, too. Thus, if the author(s) of *Thomas* knew the Gospel of John, the most likely strategy of using it would have been

¹¹ As regards the dating of the Fourth Gospel, the traditional dating of P⁵² (c. 125 CE) has been questioned by Armin Schmidt, who argues that this papyrus dates no earlier than 170 CE; cf. Armin Schmidt, 'Zwei Anmerkungen zu P.Ryl III', *Archiv für Papyrusforschung* 35 (1989), 11–12.

¹² Even though there are, without doubt, central themes in the *Gospel of Thomas* (such as the kingdom, solitariness, and immortality), the sayings concerning these themes are usually dispersed in different parts of the gospel instead of being collected into larger thematical units. Cf. Koester, 'Introduction', 41: 'Apart from the introduction (sayings 1–2), central section (sayings 49–61) and conclusion (sayings 113–114), there are no thematic arrangements.'

selecting single elements and presenting them as individual sayings. On the other hand, if the Johannine author(s) knew *Thomas*, short sayings derived from it would most likely have been intergrated into larger textual units given as Jesus' discourses. In consequence, the argument of order cannot play as important a role as it does, for example, in the study of the relationships among the synoptic gospels.

Another crucial problem is related to difficulties in tracing the redaction histories of John and *Thomas*. It is commonly acknowledged that the *Gospel of Thomas* can be considered to be dependent on the synoptics only if clear redactional traces of them can be found in it. To be sure, even this generally accepted principle has not guaranteed unanimous results concerning *Thomas's* relationship to the synoptic gospels.¹³ It is, in any case, far more difficult to make use of conclusions based on redaction histories in comparing *Thomas* to John because the redaction histories of both gospels are still unsettled issues.

¹³ Schrage's view, repeated more recently by Fieger, is that a large number of synoptic redactional traits or even traits of the Sahidic translations of the New Testament can be found in the extant *Gospel of Thomas*; cf. Wolfgang Schrage, *Das Verhältnis des Thomas-Evangeliums zur synoptischen Tradition und zu den koptischen Evangelienübersetzungen: Zugleich ein Beitrag zur gnostischen Synoptikerdeutung* (BZNW 29; Berlin: Alfred Töpelmann, 1964); Michael Fieger, *Das Thomasevangelium: Einleitung, Kommentar und Systematik* (NTAbh, n.F. 22; Münster: Aschendorff, 1991). Many scholars have reached the opposite conclusion; cf., for example, John H. Sieber, 'A Redactional Analysis of the Synoptic Gospels with Regard to the Question of the Sources of the Gospel According to Thomas' (Ph.D. Diss., Claremont Graduate School, 1965); Stephen J. Patterson, *The Gospel of Thomas and Jesus* (Foundations and Facets: Reference Series; Sonoma: Polebridge Press, 1993).

None of the theories concerning the sources of John has gained a dominant position comparable to that of the Two Source Theory in the study of the synoptic gospels.¹⁴ The redaction history of the *Gospel of Thomas* is, if possible, even more cloudy than that of the Gospel of John. Differences between Greek fragments and the extant Coptic manuscript of *Thomas* (such as the placement of *Gos. Thom.* 30 and 77), as well as quotations from this gospel by the patristic authors, show that different versions of *Thomas* were in circulation from early on.¹⁵ The great variety in the transmission is most likely due to the genre of *Thomas*: it was probably not too difficult to add new sayings to, or to remove earlier sayings from, a collection like this.¹⁶ The available evidence for different versions of *Thomas* is, however, too sparse to warrant a consequent theory of its literary development. In fact, each saying in *Thomas* can have a tradition history of its own, and it is possible that this

¹⁴ John 21 is often regarded as a secondary appendix to the gospel, but even those who are in favor of this view disagree as to whether this chapter stands alone or whether it represents a larger redactional layer also visible elsewhere in the gospel.

¹⁵ Cf. Miroslav Marcovich, 'Textual Criticism on the Gospel of Thomas', *JTS* 20 (1969), 53–74.

¹⁶ Cf. Francis T. Fallon and Ron Cameron, 'The Gospel of Thomas: A Forschungsbericht and Analysis', *ANRW* II 25.6: 4195–251 (p. 4203: 'Gos. Thom. was subject to redaction as it was transmitted'); James M. Robinson, 'Die Bedeutung der gnostischen Nag Hammadi Texte für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft', in *Religious Propaganda and Missionary Competition in the New Testament World* (ed. Lukas Bormann, Kelly Del Tredici, and Angela Standhartinger; *NovTSup* 74; Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1994), 23–41, esp. 30–31; Valantasis, *The Gospel of Thomas*, 12–13.

text shows variation in its relationship to the canonical gospels.¹⁷

In consequence, concentration solely on a literary relationship between *Thomas* and John does not recommend itself. This approach needs to be complemented by a broader comparison with other early Christian literature. This broader approach is also needed for evaluating the claim that John and *Thomas* were gospels in conflict. It is necessary to clarify whether the affinities between John and *Thomas* imply a particular connection, or whether the ideas they share with each other were more commonly attested in early Christian literature.

Many of the aforementioned issues that bring John and *Thomas* close to each other will be discussed in the course of this study, while some of them I have dealt with elsewhere.¹⁸ My analysis of I-sayings in *Thomas* and their relationship to John (chapter four of this book) is an attempt to show that the comparison between the two gospels is worthwhile even if one does not assume any direct link between them—either a literary dependence in one way or another or two communities engaged in a debate with each other.

¹⁷ Cf. Kenneth V. Neller, 'Diversity in the Gospel of Thomas: Clues for a New Direction?', *SecCent* 7 (1989–90), 1–18, esp. 15–18; Klyne N. Snodgrass, 'The Gospel of Thomas: A Secondary Gospel', *SecCent* 7 (1989–90), 19–38, esp. 19. Snodgrass, however, only offers examples of sayings in *Thomas* which he claims to be secondary to the synoptic tradition.

¹⁸ Views about immortality in John and *Thomas* are discussed in Ismo Dunderberg, 'From Thomas to Valentinus: Genesis Exegesis in Valentinus's Fragment 4 and Its Relationship to the *Gospel of Thomas*', in *Thomasine Traditions in Antiquity: The Gospel of Thomas and Its Relatives* (ed. Jon Ma. Asgeirsson, April D. DeConick, and Risto Uro; NHMS 59; Leiden: Brill, 2006), 220–37.

The second main part of this study (chapters five, six, and seven) is devoted to the figures of the Beloved Disciple in John and Thomas as portrayed in the *Gospel of Thomas*. It seems to me that Thomas and the Beloved Disciple are used to authenticate these gospels in strikingly different manners. My discussion is, however, not confined to the Beloved Disciple and Thomas, but I will take into account other figures used for similar purposes elsewhere. Special emphasis will be placed on other beloved disciples of Jesus portrayed in early Christian texts. Although I do not see John and *Thomas* as gospels in conflict, I do find it possible that the figure of the Beloved Disciple in John was created as part of an early Christian debate over the authority of Jesus' family.

2

John and *Thomas* in Conflict—about What?

The theory of a conflict between John and *Thomas* has dominated most recent discussions about the relationship between these gospels. Nevertheless, at least two major solutions to this puzzle were already offered before the conflict theory was coined. At an early stage of research, it was suggested that *Thomas* is either directly or indirectly dependent on John. Another theory, which, in fact, paved the way for the conflict theory, was that the affinities between John and *Thomas* go back to some common traditions. As will become apparent, there has been surprisingly little discussion between the proponents of the different views. In outlining the history of research in some detail below, my goal is to engage myself in critical discussion with the previously suggested models instead of simply leaving aside the views with which I do not agree.¹

¹ In her new study, April DeConick offers a brief research history that runs partially parallel to my account; cf. April D. DeConick, *Voices of the Mystics: Early Christian Discourse in the Gospels of John and Thomas and Other Ancient Christian Literature* (JSNTSup 157; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic

1. THOMAS IS DEPENDENT ON JOHN

In the early 1960s, Raymond Brown devoted a lengthy article to the relationship between the Johannine writings and the *Gospel of Thomas* in which he concluded that the latter is ‘ultimately (but still indirectly) dependent on John itself.’² ‘Indirectly’ meant that, in Brown’s view, there was a Gnostic, or Gnostic-like, source that functioned as an intermediary between John and *Thomas*.³ What made this suggestion necessary was Brown’s observation that he was unable to find any clear quotations from John in *Thomas*, although he saw in the latter several allusions to the Johannine writings.

In his article, Brown examined a number of possible points of contact in *Thomas* and the Johannine writings and classified them into what he designated as ‘remote’ and ‘close’ parallels. The remote parallels were, according to Brown, ‘so tenuous that they would be of significance only after a clear relationship between John and GTh had already been established.’⁴ Thus, only the close parallels were really conclusive.

Press, 2001), 26–30. My account of the research history is, however, not based upon hers, but on my own earlier survey published prior to DeConick’s book; cf. Ismo Dunderberg, ‘Thomas’ I-Sayings and the Gospel of John’, in *Thomas at the Crossroads* (ed. Risto Uro; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1998), 33–64, esp. 35–40.

² Raymond E. Brown, ‘The Gospel of Thomas and St John’s Gospel’, *NTS* 9 (1962–63), 155–77 (176).

³ Brown, ‘Gospel of Thomas and St John’s Gospel’, 177.

⁴ Brown, ‘The Gospel of Thomas and John’s Gospel’, 174. The remote parallels include *Gos. Thom.* 2; 4; 6; 11; 15; 21–22; 23; 29; 30; 40; 42; 49; 52; 55–56; 64; 76; 90; 101; 104; 105; 110; 114.

Brown argued that the close parallels between *Thomas* and John accumulate in the latter in two passages (John 7:37–8:59; 13–17). It is likely that such lengthy passages in John are literary compositions by the Johannine author. Hence the importance of Brown's observation that what he regarded as the close parallels between *Thomas* and John were scattered in different parts of these Johannine passages.⁵ For Brown, this observation suggested that *Thomas* not only shared some traditions with John, but also presupposed the way these materials were arranged by the Johannine author. Thus, Brown concluded that *Thomas* is dependent on the Gospel of John in its final literary form rather than on some common traditions behind these texts.⁶

Brown's argument was based upon presuppositions of early Thomasine scholarship that can no longer be taken for granted. First, Brown obviously assumed that the *Gospel of Thomas* is a later writing than the canonical gospels, including John. This can be seen in the fact that he does not at all raise the question of whether John could be dependent on *Thomas*. At present, however, there is an ongoing debate about the date of *Thomas*, and the early dating has received considerable support from several scholars.

Brown's second presupposition was that *Thomas* is Gnostic in character.⁷ Whether or not *Thomas* is 'Gnostic'

⁵ Brown, 'Gospel of Thomas and St John's Gospel', 175: John 7:37–8:52/*Gos. Thom.* Prologue, 1; 18; 19; 24; 28; 38; 43; 59; 61; 69:1; 77; 78; 91; 108; 111; John 13–17/*Gos. Thom.* 12; 13; 24; 27; 37; 43; 50; 51; 61; 69:1; 92; 100.

⁶ Brown, 'Gospel of Thomas and St John's Gospel', 175–76.

⁷ Cf. Stevan L. Davies, *The Gospel of Thomas and Christian Wisdom* (New York: The Seabury Press, 1983), 106–7.

depends completely, of course, on how 'Gnosticism' itself is defined. This, in turn, has proved to be a vexing problem. In light of recent studies, it seems very difficult to give a satisfactory definition of Gnosticism that would not carry along, in one way or another, biased generalizations inherited from early Christian polemics.

It is not possible to reproduce here the entire recent discussion about the term Gnosticism and its usefulness as a scholarly category. Yet it needs to be pointed out that specialists on the Nag Hammadi texts have become increasingly critical of using the term Gnosticism. Michael Williams has suggested that the term should be discarded because it gives a misleading impression of a relatively unified movement while, in reality, the extant evidence for 'what used to be called Gnosticism' shows great diversity and effectively resists all attempts at an incontrovertible definition of 'Gnosticism'.⁸

In addition, Karen King has demonstrated that 'Gnosticism' and 'Gnostic' are not neutral terms in scholarly usage, but they are regularly employed to construct 'the other' to which the 'true' and 'genuine' Christianity is then compared.⁹ To characterize *Thomas* as 'Gnostic' has no doubt served the purpose of constructing this text as the dubious other, that which does not belong to the true Christianity represented by the canonized gospels of the New Testament.

⁸ Michael A. Williams, *Rethinking 'Gnosticism': An Argument for Dismantling a Dubious Category* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996).

⁹ Karen L. King, *What is Gnosticism?* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003).

The way Bertil Gärtner defined *Thomas* as ‘Gnostic’ in his study in the 1960s showed this bias well: he employed ‘Gnosticism’ as an umbrella term for everything that was different from what he called ‘the main traditions of the Great Church.’¹⁰ The same idea is operative in Brown’s analysis of *Thomas*. He apparently took the Gnostic character of *Thomas* for granted, for he never explained the reasons for designating the intermediating source he posited between John and *Thomas* as ‘Gnostic.’

It is, however, quite unclear what qualities would make *Thomas* ‘Gnostic’ in any meaningful sense of the word. Suffice it to say that there are no clear references in *Thomas* to two features which many would still consider characteristic of the distinctly ‘Gnostic’ myth: neither the tale of Wisdom’s fall in the divine realm nor the figure of the ignorant creator-God is mentioned in this gospel.¹¹

Moreover, the cumulative force of Brown’s analysis is weakened by the fact that he included the Book of Revelation in the same group of Johannine writings as the Gospel and the Epistles of John. A number of the parallels Brown mentioned in his article were between *Thomas* and Revelation. The inclusion of Revelation into the corpus of

¹⁰ Bertil Gärtner, *Ett nytt evangelium? Thomasevangeliets hemliga Jesusord* (Stockholm: Diakonistyrelse 1960), 9. ‘The Great Church’ (‘den stora kyrkan’) was omitted in the English translation of Gärtner’s book: *The Theology of the Gospel of Thomas* (trans. E. J. Sharpe; London: Collins, 1961), 12.

¹¹ Cf. April D. DeConick, *Seek to See Him: Ascent and Vision Mysticism in the Gospel of Thomas* (VigChrSup 33; Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1996), 16–27; Antti Marjanen, ‘Is *Thomas* a Gnostic Gospel’, in Uro, *Thomas at the Crossroads*, 107–39.

Johannine writings is, however, far from certain, and Brown himself discarded this view later.¹²

In addition, the way Brown used what he regarded as the 'close parallels' does not seem very convincing. First, he did not explain the criteria by which he differentiated between 'close' and 'remote' parallels. Second, his key argument that the 'close' parallels between John and *Thomas* appear in different parts of two Johannine discourses and thus speak in favour of *Thomas's* dependence on John is not very strong. In fact, it would work only if we could be absolutely sure that *Thomas* is later than John. Otherwise, the argument can easily be turned upside down. Brown did not give a second thought to the fact that his 'close parallels' between John and *Thomas* are not only dispersed in different parts of certain Johannine passages, but they are also scattered in different parts of *Thomas*. Thus, by using the same argument as Brown did, one could also conclude that the Gospel of John presupposes *Thomas* in its final form because John contains echoes of different parts of *Thomas*.

This reversibility shows that the dispersion of parallels in different parts of certain Johannine passages (or in *Thomas*) is no conclusive argument. In fact, there are similar materials in the two gospels, but they are neither arranged in a similar manner, nor are there any clear cases where the order

¹² Raymond E. Brown, *The Community of the Beloved Disciple* (New York: Paulist Press, 1979), 6 n.5. That Revelation could stem from the Johannine circle after all has recently been suggested by Jörg Frey, 'Appendix: Erwägungen zum Verhältnis der Johannesapokalypse zu den übrigen Schriften des Corpus Johanneum', in Martin Hengel, *Die johanneische Frage: Ein Lösungsversuch* (WUNT 67; Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1993), 326–429.

of sayings in *Thomas* follows the Johannine arrangement of traditional materials.

Brown's arguments were accepted and developed by Jesse Sell and Klyne Snodgrass. Sell parted company with Brown only in that he found the intermediary between John and *Thomas* suggested by Brown unnecessary. Sell insisted that *Thomas* is directly dependent on John.¹³ In Sell's opinion, there are at least eight sayings in *Thomas* that 'display the sort of echoes of Johannine ideas and vocabulary which lay the burden of proof on one who would deny the probability of some direct influence of "John itself" on (the Gospel of Thomas).'¹⁴ In these eight sayings, Sell found 'echoes of fifty-three verses, from seventeen different chapters of John.'¹⁵ If Brown's intermediary source existed, Sell claimed, it must have 'had to represent nearly the complete structure of the present Gospel (of John).'¹⁶ As I previously suggested, this argument is not convincing; the number of parallels as such does not betray knowledge of the Johannine literary structure in *Thomas* (or vice versa).

Snodgrass added little to the discussion. He seems to maintain—without saying it very clearly—that the coming together of 'Synoptic and Johannine type sayings' in *Thomas* speak for the latter's (indirect) dependence on the canonical gospels.¹⁷

¹³ Jesse Sell, 'Johannine Traditions in Logion 61 of the Gospel of Thomas', *Perspectives in Religious Studies* 7 (1980), 24–37.

¹⁴ These eight passages are *Gos. Thom.* prologue; 8; 13; 28; 38; 43; 91 and 92. Sell, 'Johannine Traditions', 25.

¹⁵ *Ibid.* 27.

¹⁶ *Ibid.* 28.

¹⁷ Snodgrass, 'The Gospel of Thomas', 25.

Miroslav Marcovich has also argued that the *Gospel of Thomas* is dependent on John. His suggestion was based upon only one saying in *Thomas*. Marcovich maintained that the latter part of *Gospel of Thomas* 11 ('In the days when you ate what is dead, you made it alive. When you will be in the light, what will you do?') was, both in the Coptic and the Greek version (Hippolytus, *Refutatio* 5.8.32), inspired by the Gospel of John. In the Coptic version, Marcovich saw in the sentence 'whensoever you are in the light' (Marcovich's translation) allusions to several Johannine passages (John 12:36; 1 John 1:7; 2:9). Moreover, Marcovich thought that the phrase 'to eat living' (ζῶντα φαγεῖν) in the Greek version of *Thomas* 11 recalls the 'predominantly eucharistic homily' in John 6:31–58.¹⁸ Again, it remains unclear why these resemblances should indicate a literary relationship between John and *Thomas*. The imagery of light is far too common to warrant *Thomas's* dependency on John, and the affinity between 'to eat living' in *Thomas* 11 and what is said in the Johannine discourse of the living bread (John 6:31–58) does not seem very close after all.

Tjitze Baarda has suggested that, taken together, the sayings 42 and 43 in *Thomas* presuppose the narrative sequence in John 8:30–48. Baarda's view, however, presupposes his particular interpretation of *Thomas* 42, which is that the 'passers-by' mentioned in this saying should be understood as 'Hebrews', and that the saying should be read together with the subsequent saying. In *Thomas* 42, in Baarda's opinion,

¹⁸ Miroslav Marcovich, 'Textual Criticism on the Gospel of Thomas', *JTS* 20 (1969), 53–74, esp. 72–74.

Jesus invites his audience to become ‘Hebrews’. This, in turn, raises among the audience the question of Jesus’ authority to make such a demand, and leads finally to his comment that his listeners have become like the Jews.¹⁹

In my view, Baarda insists correctly that *Thomas* 43 refers to something that has been said previously. Yet it is not clear that reference is made only to the previous saying. The plural form employed in *Thomas* 43 (ΕΚΧΩ ΝΗΝΑΙ ΝΑΝ, ‘you are saying *these* to us’) indicates, rather, that the saying refers to a larger group of the teachings of Jesus or to his teachings in general. Moreover, the linkage to the Johannine context remains vague, since *Thomas* 43 implies an audience that does not consist of ‘Jews’, as in John 8:30–48, but of those who are in danger of becoming like them.

Finally, James Charlesworth and Craig Evans have argued in favor of the dependence of *Thomas* on all four gospels in the New Testament. In their view, ‘the presence of M, L, and Johannine elements in *Thomas* indicate that the latter, at least in its extant Coptic form, has been influenced by the New Testament gospels.’ This argument is clearly inconclusive; for it mentions special traditions found only in certain gospels (M = material found only in Matthew; L = material found only in Luke), but does not specify whether these materials were traditional in these gospels or whether they were created by the authors of these gospels. Only in the latter case can one assume that *Thomas* derived these ele-

¹⁹ Tjitze Baarda, ‘“Jesus Said: Be Passers-by”: On the Meaning and Origin of Logion 42 of the Gospel of Thomas’, in id., *Early Transmission of Words of Jesus: Thomas, Tatian and the Text of the New Testament* (Amsterdam: VU, 1983), 179–205, esp. 196–97.

ments from other gospels. As to the relationship between John and *Thomas*, Charlesworth and Evans simply offer a brief list of what they consider parallels without qualifying them in any detail. In fact, Charlesworth and Evans ended up with differing conclusions concerning *Thomas's* dependence on the canonical gospels; Evans is more positive while Charlesworth remains undecided.²⁰

2. JOHN AND THOMAS ARE DEPENDENT ON COMMON SAYINGS TRADITIONS

If a literary dependence between John and *Thomas* is difficult to prove, one obvious alternative is to assume that their affinities go back to early traditions of Jesus' sayings. This was suggested by Gilles Quispel, who argued that the two gospels drew upon a common source of Jesus' sayings. Quispel maintained, in addition, that the author of John could have been familiar with some distinctively Palestinian traditions represented by the *Gospel of Thomas*.²¹

²⁰ James H. Charlesworth and Craig E. Evans, 'Jesus in the Agrapha and Apocryphal Gospels', in *Studying the Historical Jesus: Evaluations of the State of Current Research* (ed. Bruce Chilton and Craig E. Evans; NTTTS 19; Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1994), 479–533 (498–99). The affinities they mention between John and *Thomas* are the following: John 1:9/*Gos. Thom.* 24; John 1:14/*Gos. Thom.* 28; John 4:13–15/*Gos. Thom.* 13; John 7:32–36/*Gos. Thom.* 38; John 8:12; 9:5/*Gos. Thom.* 77.

²¹ Gilles Quispel, 'Qumran, John and Jewish Christianity', in *John and the Dead Sea Scrolls* (ed. by James Charlesworth; New York: Crossroad, 1991), 137–55, esp. 139–40, 144–46. Quispel's view on the sayings source behind the Gospel of John is based on Bengt Noack, *Zur johanneischen Tradition:*

Helmut Koester has argued on several occasions that the sayings traditions in John are related to those attested in *Thomas*. Furthermore, he has traced similar sayings traditions in two other Nag Hammadi texts, the *Dialogue of the Savior* and the *Apocryphon of James*.²² Koester believes that these writings enable us to clarify the tradition history of Johannine discourses: 'The Johannine speeches frequently contain sentences that can be clearly identified, with the help of the new texts from Nag Hammadi, as sayings that were originally isolated sayings.'²³ In fact, Koester believes that the *Gospel of Thomas* and the *Dialogue of the Savior* bear witness to earlier stages of the sayings tradition than the Gospel of John: 'The *Gospel of Thomas* exhibits the first stage of transition from sayings collection to dialogue. The *Dialogue of the Savior* shows the initial stages of larger compositions. . . . The Gospel of John contains fully developed dialogues and discourses.'²⁴

Beiträge zur Kritik an der literarkritischen Analyse des vierten Evangeliums (Copenhagen: Rosenkilde og Bager, 1954).

²² Helmut Koester, 'Dialog und Sprachüberlieferung in den gnostischen Texten von Nag Hammadi', *EvT* 39 (1979), 532–56; id., 'Gnostic Writings as Witnesses for the Development of the Sayings Tradition', in *The Rediscovery of Gnosticism*, vol. 1: *The School of Valentinus* (ed. Bentley Layton; Studies in the History of Religions 41; Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1980), 238–61; id., *Introduction to the New Testament*, vol. 2: *History and Literature of Early Christianity* (Philadelphia: Fortress; Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1982), 178–80; id., 'Gnostic Sayings and Controversy Traditions in John 8:12–59', in *Nag Hammadi, Gnosticism, and Early Christianity* (ed. Charles W. Hedrick and Robert Hodgson; Peabody: Hendrickson, 1986), 97–110; id., *Ancient Christian Gospels: Their History and Development* (London/Philadelphia: SCM/Trinity Press International, 1990), 256–63.

²³ Koester, *Introduction*, 179–80; cf. id., *Ancient Christian Gospels*, 257.

²⁴ Koester, 'Gnostic Writings', 253.

Koester's work can also be regarded as a precursor to the theory that John and *Thomas* are in conflict with each other. In his study of the sayings tradition in John 8:12–59,²⁵ he already argued that there was a tension between the pre-Johannine sayings tradition behind this passage and the Johannine author; while the tradition visible in *Thomas* represented a 'Gnostic understanding of salvation', this understanding was dismissed by the Johannine author.²⁶

Koester discussed the relationship between *Thomas* and John only in connection with his broader view of the development of sayings traditions.²⁷ This overall view determines both his method and his results. Koester provided lengthy lists of parallels to support his contention, but did not examine these parallels one by one. A closer qualification of them would have been desirable, however, since scholars whose conclusions are squarely opposed to Koester's, such as Charlesworth and Evans, have supported their view with quite similar lists of parallels between John and *Thomas*. Moreover, Koester does not take seriously the possibility that the *Gospel of Thomas* has run through several editorial stages. Although I find Koester's view that the form of a sayings gospel was more archaic than that of the lengthy Johannine discourses persuasive, it does not necessarily follow from this that *all* materials in *Thomas*, as it now stands, would be earlier than John.

A fascinating, but very speculative, version of the common sayings traditions theory was developed by Stevan

²⁵ Koester, 'Gnostic Sayings.'

²⁶ Koester, *Ancient Christian Gospels*, 263.

²⁷ Cf. Koester, 'Gnostic Writings', 251.

Davies. His suggestion was that the *Gospel of Thomas* had its origins in the Johannine community before the Gospel of John was written. According to Davies, this theory of the origin of *Thomas* would explain several things:

Indeed, the hypothesis that the Gospel of Thomas is a sayings collection from an early stage of the Johannine communities accounts for the fact that Thomas contains no quotations from the as yet unwritten Gospel and Letters of John, accounts for the use of both Johannine vocabulary and synoptic-style sayings, and to a certain extent accounts for the fact that the ideas of Thomas are less well conceptualized than the ideas in John.²⁸

Davies builds his hypothesis upon three observations. First, there is a similar usage of sapiential motifs in John and *Thomas*, including the pre-existence of Jesus, a dualism of light and darkness, Jesus' descent to earth and his teaching activity, a return of believers to the original state of creation (an idea which, in my opinion, is not evident in John), and the division among human beings that is accomplished by Jesus.²⁹ Second, there are certain other theological similarities, such as present eschatology and the double sense of the 'world'.³⁰ Third, Davies supports his contention with his view of an oral tradition behind the Gospel of John. Unfortunately, this part of Davies's argument remains utterly speculative, as the following quotation may show:

²⁸ Stevan Davies, *The Gospel of Thomas and Christian Wisdom* (New York: The Seabury Press), 116.

²⁹ Davies, *The Gospel of Thomas*, 107–12.

³⁰ Davies, *The Gospel of Thomas*, 112–13.

If we assume that the sayings of Jesus in the Gospel of John were in part derived from sayings of Jesus such as are found in the synoptics, then the oral preaching of the early Johannine community must have contained sayings of Jesus modified in a Johannine way, but less modified than the sayings now preserved in John. One would expect then that a document which remained from the period of the oral preaching of the Johannine communities and which Thomas used would have been a sayings collection, as Thomas is. It probably would have contained some sayings closer to synoptic sayings than are the discourses in John, and would show signs of early development of the Johannine tendencies... [I]f we try to imagine what a sayings collection underlying Thomas from an early stage of the Johannine community would look like, it would look very much like Thomas itself.³¹

Davies's argument is based upon several wild guesses at this point, and it also raises more questions than it answers. For example, Davies does not try to explain why it should be assumed that an earlier sayings collection of the Johannine community was more closely related to the synoptic traditions than the extant Johannine discourses are. Moreover, he does not explain why the synoptic-like sayings tradition that had already established its position in the Johannine community would have gone virtually unnoticed when the Gospel of John was written.³² In other words, Davies offers no explanation for the eclipse of an earlier sayings tradition in the Johannine community that must be taken for granted in his theory. In sum, Davies's theory suffers from too many unproven assumptions concerning the early history of the

³¹ Davies, *The Gospel of Thomas*, 115–16.

³² Cf. Snodgrass, 'The Gospel of Thomas', 24.

Johannine community. This, however, should not distract us from his otherwise sensitive remarks on theological similarities between the Gospel of John and the *Gospel of Thomas*. For example, Davies has offered the best inventory thus far of the sapiential motifs common to John and *Thomas*.

3. JOHN AND THOMAS: THE GOSPELS IN CONFLICT

While Koester had already paved the way for theories of a conflict between John and *Thomas*, it was his student, Gregory Riley, who was the first scholar to argue distinctly for this view. He did this in his book *Resurrection Reconsidered* (1995), which was based upon his Harvard dissertation supervised by Koester.³³ Although Riley affirmed that John and *Thomas* are close to each other in spirit, he argued that the communities behind these gospels were engaged in a mutual controversy over a number of issues, including the importance of faith, the divinity of Christ, and, above all, physical resurrection. Riley maintained that Thomasine Christians denied the resurrection of the body while Johannine Christians believed in it. The struggle that became one decisive factor in defining Christian orthodoxy and heresy in later centuries was, according to this view, anticipated by an earlier debate over the same issue between Johannine and Thomasine Christians.

³³ Gregory J. Riley, *Resurrection Reconsidered: Thomas and John in Controversy* (Minneapolis: Fortress 1995).

After Riley, other scholars have posited a conflict between John and *Thomas*, too, but they have sought reasons for it elsewhere. April DeConick already hinted in her study, *Seek to See Him* (1996), at the possibility that John and *Thomas* were engaged in a debate about ascent mysticism and *visio dei*³⁴ which, according to her, formed the key to the correct interpretation of *Thomas*. DeConick's more recent book, *Voices of the Mystics* (2001), is devoted to making a more thorough argument for the conflict theory.³⁵ Elaine Pagels, in an important article that now forms the core of her best-selling book, *Beyond Belief: The Secret Gospel of Thomas* (2003), traced two strikingly different interpretations of Genesis in John and *Thomas*, and maintained that the two gospels were in conflict with each other over this issue.³⁶ In their studies on smaller textual units, Stephen Johnson and Harold Attridge have explained differences between John and *Thomas* as being due to their mutual controversy,³⁷ and Richard Valantasis has voiced agreement with the

³⁴ DeConick, *Seek to See Him*, 72–73.

³⁵ See also April D. DeConick, 'The Original Gospel of Thomas', *VigChr* 56 (2002), 167–99, esp. 187, 196; ead., 'John Rivals Thomas: From Community Conflict to Gospel Narrative', in *Jesus in Johannine Tradition* (ed. Robert T. Fortna and Thomas Thatcher; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001), 303–11.

³⁶ Elaine Pagels, 'Exegesis of Genesis 1 in the Gospels of Thomas and John', *JBL* 118 (1999), 477–96; ead., *Beyond Belief: The Secret Gospel of Thomas* (New York: Random House, 2003), 30–73.

³⁷ Harold A. Attridge, "'Seeking" and "Asking" in Q, *Thomas*, and John', in *From Quest to Q* (ed. Jon Ma. Asgeirsson, Kirstin de Troyer and Marvin W. Meyer; BETL 146; Leuven: Leuven University Press—Peeters, 2000), 295–302; Stephen R. Johnson, 'The *Gospel of Thomas* 76:3 and Canonical Parallels: Three Segments in the Tradition History of the Saying', in *The Nag Hammadi*

conflict theory in his commentary on the *Gospel of Thomas*.³⁸ The conflict theory even made headlines in *Time* magazine (22 December 2003), where Pagels was quoted as follows: 'I'm not saying that [John] was responding to *Thomas* as written, because there may have not been a written text [yet]... But it is inconceivable that the *Gospel of John* is not responding to some of these ideas.'

In fact, a few years before Riley's study, the Japanese New Testament scholar Takashi Onuki had already argued that Jesus' saying now attested in *Gospel of Thomas* 17 was circulated among the opponents of the author of 1 John, who then denounced their claims by reversing the original saying at the beginning of his letter (1 John 1:1).³⁹ Surprisingly, Onuki's study is not mentioned by any of the scholars mentioned above, though his conclusion is largely similar to theirs.

Library After Fifty Years: Proceedings of the 1995 Society of Biblical Literature Commemoration (ed. John D. Turner and Anne McGuire; NHMS 44; Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1997), 308–26, esp. 322–24. Johnson points out that the phrase 'taste death' occurs in John 8:51–52 only in a reply by the Jews whereas Jesus himself speaks of 'seeing death'. According to Johnson, this feature demonstrates a Johannine reaction against the Thomazine version of the promise of immortality. It seems more likely to me, however, that what is misunderstood by the Jews in John 8:51–52 is not the *wording* of Jesus' promise but his *authority* to make this promise.

³⁸ Valantasis, *The Gospel of Thomas*, 19: 'Riley is...persuasive that the communities represented by Thomas and John are communities in a competitive relationship.'

³⁹ Takashi Onuki, 'Traditionsgeschichte von Thomasevangelium 17 und ihre christologische Relevanz', now in id., *Heil und Erlösung: Studien zum Neuen Testament und Gnosis* (WUNT 165; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2004), 221–39.

I will discuss Onuki's analysis of *Gospel of Thomas* 17 more thoroughly later in this study.⁴⁰ In what follows, I will review more closely the views of Riley, DeConick, and Pagels, whom I consider the most important representatives of the conflict theory at the moment.

Riley insists that, while Johannine Christians accepted the resurrection of body, Thomasine Christians denied it, and that the two groups were engaged in a battle over this issue.⁴¹ According to Riley, the disagreement was mutual. Not only does it become visible in how the disciple Thomas is portrayed in John, but also in the saying of the destruction of 'this house' in *Thomas* (*Gos. Thom.* 71). The latter shows, according to Riley, a Thomasine response to the Johannine interpretation of the temple saying (John 2:18–22).

Riley's scenario of the conflict between the gospels of John and *Thomas* raises the question of whether the author of John knew the *Gospel of Thomas*. Riley's answer is a cautious 'yes':

The elements present and positions countered in the pericope [of the Doubting Thomas] cohere well with those in the *Gospel of Thomas*, and lead to the conclusion that the *Gospel of Thomas* itself was already *at some stage of completion*, either written or oral, and that its contents were known to the author of John, probably through verbal contact with members of this rival community.⁴²

⁴⁰ See below chapter four, section three.

⁴¹ Riley, *Resurrection*, 5; cf. id., 'The Gospel of Thomas in Recent Scholarship', *Currents in Research: Biblical Studies* 2 (1994), 227–52, esp. 240.

⁴² Riley, *Resurrection*, 178 (emphasis added).

While his own view as to whether the contacts between John and *Thomas* are literal or oral remains somewhat vague, Riley rejects vigorously Brown's suggestion that *Thomas* could be dependent on John. This is only a 'desperate solution', according to Riley.⁴³ Instead of really arguing against Brown, Riley simply affirms his own position:

'Dependency' of Thomas on John is not only not demonstrable, it is indeed nothing more than a presupposition of some early Thomas scholarship to which Brown and others subscribed, which obscured the actual relationship of the text.⁴⁴

Riley's evaluation of Brown's position seems basically correct to me, but what is surprising is that Riley's outright rejection of the possibility that *Thomas* is dependent on John is not in keeping with his own interpretation of *Thomas* 71. In fact, his reading of this saying presupposes that it is a reaction to the Johannine *author's* interpretation of the temple saying in John 2:21.⁴⁵ Riley's study, thus, does not clarify what 'the actual relationship of the text' he is referring to in his condemnation of Brown's views really is.

Be that as it may, Riley argues that the Gospel of John was not only addressed to the Johannine community but also to Thomasine Christians.⁴⁶ Riley does not speculate about how persuasive the Gospel of John would have seemed in the eyes of the latter. Nevertheless, the author of John could scarcely have entertained any hopes of great success for his writing

⁴³ Riley, *Resurrection*, 2.

⁴⁴ Riley, *Resurrection*, 3.

⁴⁵ For Riley's interpretation of *Thomas* 71, see below, chapter four, section six.

⁴⁶ Riley, *Resurrection*, 178.

among them, if they saw his portrayal of the disciple Thomas as negatively as Riley does, and read this portrayal as the complete refutation of their views.

DeConick reads the *Gospel of Thomas* as advocating vision mysticism, where salvation is acquired by seeking and by ascension to the divine realm, leading to a *visio dei*.⁴⁷ Moreover, DeConick argues that not only are there passages in John that were ‘written as an attack against some form of Jewish mystical ascent theology’,⁴⁸ but the Johannine author was engaged in a debate with Thomasine Christians over this issue.⁴⁹ The same position can be found in DeConick’s earlier case study, in which she examined the Johannine sayings of seeking and finding (John 7:33–34; 8:21; 13:33), concluding that ‘John is arguing against the type of insistence found in *Thomas* that one must actively seek to ascend to the place where Jesus was.’⁵⁰

In her *Voices of the Mystics*, DeConick, like Riley, considers the Johannine figure of Thomas to be the spokesman for the beliefs of Thomasine Christians. Her understanding of what Thomas stands for in the Johannine story is, however, completely different from Riley’s. Her view about a conflict between John and *Thomas* is based upon four key arguments.

⁴⁷ DeConick, *Seek to See Him*, passim; *Voices*, 86–108; cf. also April D. DeConick and Jarl Fossum, ‘Stripped Before God: A New Interpretation of Logion 37 in the Gospel of Thomas’, *VigChr* 45 (1991), 123–50, esp. pp. 135–39. DeConick’s view of mystical ascension in the *Gospel of Thomas* is based on her detailed study of *Gospel of Thomas* 50 (*Seek to See Him*, 43–96).

⁴⁸ DeConick, *Voices*, 40.

⁴⁹ DeConick, *Seek to See Him*, 73; *Voices*, passim.

⁵⁰ De Conick, *Seek to See Him*, 72–73.

(1) According to *Thomas*, salvation is acquired through heavenly journeys prior to death. During these journeys, the believer will see God and experience transformation: ‘... the Thomasine Christians were mystics seeking visions of God for the purpose of immortalization.’⁵¹

(2) In *John*, the idea of heavenly journeys is rebutted: ‘According to the Johannine polemic, salvation could not be wrought by personally ascending into heaven in order to see the deity and thus become deified.’⁵² Instead, ‘the vision of Jesus on earth substitutes for the vision of the Father in heaven.’⁵³ There are no heavenly journeys either, but Jesus’ resurrected body is ‘the new heavenly Temple which believers are able to enter at the end of time.’⁵⁴ *John* replaces vision mysticism with ‘faith mysticism’, which is ‘a polemical response to the mystical ascent soteriology such as that found in the Gospel of Thomas.’⁵⁵ The Johannine faith mysticism also promised transformation, but one that is achieved by means of sacraments instead of mystical ascent.⁵⁶

(3) The negative portrayal of *Thomas* in *John* shows that the Johannine author is critical of Thomasine Christians and their views of salvation in particular: ‘Thomas’s misunderstanding is that he believes that in order to achieve life, one must seek the “way” to Jesus, the route of ascent into heaven, and a *visio dei*.’⁵⁷

⁵¹ DeConick, *Voices*, 107.

⁵² DeConick, *Voices*, 131.

⁵³ DeConick, *Voices*, 116.

⁵⁴ DeConick, *Voices*, 124.

⁵⁵ DeConick, *Voices*, 131, cf. 125–27.

⁵⁶ DeConick, *Voices*, 128–31.

⁵⁷ DeConick, *Voices*, 85.

(4) The controversy between John and *Thomas* continued and can be seen in later texts of Syrian origin (*Preachings of John*; the *Gospel of the Savior*; the *Apocryphon of James*; the *Ascension of Isaiah*; the *Dialogue of the Savior*). These texts, unlike *Thomas*, reckon with the possibility that a *visio dei* takes place only after death.⁵⁸

In my view, the most convincing part in DeConick's argument is point (2). The author of John emphasizes that nobody (John 1:18), or the Son only (John 5:19), has seen the Father. The clearest indication of the Johannine critique of vision mysticism is the discussion between Jesus and Philip in John 14:8–9. When Philip asks Jesus to 'show us the Father', he is criticized and corrected by Jesus: 'Have I been with you all this time, Philip, and you still do not know me? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father.' Yet the fact that it is Philip who wants to see the Father fits poorly with DeConick's solution. Thomas does not raise this issue in his question to Jesus (John 14:5). (Should we assume, then, that there was yet another early Christian group that propagated vision mysticism but subscribed to Philip's authority instead of Thomas's?)

The greatest difficulties in DeConick's arguments are, in my view, related to points (1) and (3). The *Gospel of Thomas* no doubt considers transformation to divine status possible (cf. *Gos. Thom.* 108). It remains doubtful, however, whether this transformation was really thought to be acquired through heavenly journeys, for the *Gospel of Thomas*

⁵⁸ DeConick, *Voices*, 162–63.

contains no direct descriptions of such journeys. Even *Gospel of Thomas* 50, upon which DeConick's overall interpretation of the Thomasine vision mysticism is built,⁵⁹ does not mention a journey to, or visit in, heaven. DeConick's interpretation is deduced from parallels to this saying, not from the saying itself. Her comprehensive tradition-historical analysis demonstrates that the closest parallels to *Thomas* 50 are indeed connected with either the post-mortem or mystic ascension of the believer. However, strictly speaking, the ascension terminology itself ('to go/come above') does not occur in this saying.

In addition, *Thomas* contains passages that can be understood as a critique of heavenly journeys; these passages are not discussed at all by DeConick. One such critique is visible in *Thomas* 3: 'If your leaders say to you, "Behold, the kingdom is in heaven", then the birds of heaven will precede you. If they say to you, "It is in the sea", then the fish will precede you. The kingdom is, however, inside of you and it is outside of you.'⁶⁰

Moreover, DeConick herself shows that mystical journeys were often prepared for 'by certain ascetic behaviors like celibacy, fasting, and other dietary restrictions.'⁶¹ It is odd that she nowhere discusses the fact that fasting and dietary restrictions are *not* recommended in *Thomas*; instead, their

⁵⁹ Cf. DeConick, *Seek to See Him*, 64–96; *Voices*, 93.

⁶⁰ This point was made by Elaine Pagels in her response to DeConick, *Voices*, at the Thomas Christianity Group, The Society of Biblical Literature Annual Meeting, Nashville, TN, November 2000.

⁶¹ DeConick, *Voices*, 53.

importance is downplayed (*Gos. Thom.* 6, 14).⁶² Read in the light of *Gospel of Thomas* 3, these sayings could be understood as part of a critique of heavenly journeys.

Another crucial difficulty is related to DeConick's interpretation of the figure of Thomas in John. She does not make any effort to discuss the objections I had earlier made as to Riley's interpretation of the Johannine portrait of Thomas, but continues to interpret this portrait in a manner similar to Riley's. This makes her interpretation subject to the same criticism that I earlier levelled against Riley.⁶³

When it comes to the position the disciple Thomas represents in John, however, DeConick's view is opposed to that of Riley's. She maintains, against Riley, that 'the intent of (John) 20.24–29 is not to confirm a fleshly resurrection but to criticize visionary experience in favor of faith. . . .'⁶⁴ Thomas is, thus, portrayed in John as a representative of vision mysticism. DeConick adduces John 20:24, where Thomas insists that he wants to see the Lord, in support of her view. Moreover, Jesus rebukes Thomas in John 20:27, 'because Thomas confesses his belief that Jesus is God on the basis of his vision of Jesus. . . .'⁶⁵ In addition, Thomas's question about the way in John 14:5 'reflects the popular association of *ὁδός* with proleptic heavenly ascents.'⁶⁶

The disagreement between Riley and DeConick about what ideas are embodied in the Johannine figure of Thomas

⁶² Cf. Antti Marjanen, 'Thomas and Jewish Religious Practices', in Uro, *Thomas at the Crossroads*, 163–82, esp. 166–75.

⁶³ See chapter three of this book.

⁶⁴ DeConick, *Voices*, 83.

⁶⁵ DeConick, *Voices*, 82.

⁶⁶ DeConick, *Voices*, 73.

shows, better than any other argument, that this figure remains too vague to admit of any far-fetched conclusions as to positions he may or may not represent in the Johannine story of the Doubting Thomas.

DeConick's new study also demonstrates in other ways how difficult it is to prove that the author of John reacted against Thomasine Christians and their views. DeConick counters my earlier complaint, that there are no clear signs of a controversy between John and *Thomas*, by maintaining that this lack only shows that their controversy was 'of the "hidden" variety.'⁶⁷ Few would deny DeConick's claim that 'controversies between actual communities are often fictionalized and recorded as dramas in their literature rather than related in terms of verbatim dialogue.'⁶⁸ I fail to see, however, why this claim would negate the demand for clearer evidence. 'Often' is not 'always' (and I am not even quite sure about 'often', either); thus it may or may not be that the texts in question reflect 'controversies between actual communities'. This is not a matter of course, but needs demonstration.

Moreover, DeConick admits that hidden controversy is 'more difficult to demonstrate explicitly' than open controversy, in which the opponents and their views would be mentioned directly.⁶⁹ Hidden controversy as DeConick defines it, I would like to add, is not very informative either,

⁶⁷ DeConick, *Voices*, 31.

⁶⁸ DeConick, *Voices*, 31.

⁶⁹ DeConick, *Voices*, 31. DeConick recalls the distinction made between open and hidden controversy by Marc G. Hirshman, *A Rivalry of Genius: Jewish and Christian Biblical Interpretation in Late Antiquity* (trans. Batya Stein; Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996), 126.

for it is almost impossible to prove or disprove such controversy in ancient texts. In hidden controversy, DeConick says, the rejected ideology can simply be ignored, or the author 'can insist on the status quo, or conceal any material that might be helpful to his opponents.'⁷⁰ If the author chose not to mention the conflicting ideology at all, this leaves us with the question of how we can possibly know this ideology to begin with.

DeConick, however, mentions other strategies of hidden controversy, too: 'the author might modify the disagreeable ideology, condemn it outright, or provide an alternative model.'⁷¹ These strategies are plausible as such and can be detected, if we could be sure what ideology the author was opposed to; but they are not valid as proofs for the alleged existence of the opposed ideology. The crucial question is how to differentiate between the positions the author deliberately ignored or concealed, and those that were not there because the author did not know them or because the author did not find them interesting or useful.

The same critique can be raised concerning the term 'intertraditions', which DeConick suggests should be added to the socio-rhetorical model coined by Vernon Robbins.⁷² According to DeConick, 'intertraditions' form 'an arena where *specific language connections cannot be identified*, but where we can see that people appear to be consciously talking to one another in their texts. The authors are using

⁷⁰ DeConick, *Voices*, 31.

⁷¹ DeConick, *Voices*, 31.

⁷² For socio-rhetorical method, see Vernon K. Robbins, *The Tapestry of Early Christian Discourse: Rhetoric, Society and Ideology* (London: Routledge, 1996).

texts to dramatize actual dialogues which were engaging their communities.⁷³ This definition, again, begs the question of how we can see people ‘consciously talking to one another in their texts’ to begin with, if there are no ‘specific language connections’ that would demonstrate such discussions.

Both Riley and DeConick take the figure of Thomas in John as a mirror image of the community subscribing to the authority of Thomas. To what extent the mirror reading of John, as reflecting the situation in which it was written, is justified in general, however, is a matter of debate. Riley and DeConick build upon Raymond Brown’s and J. Louis Martyn’s theories concerning the Johannine community that can be detected behind the fourth Gospel.⁷⁴ Brown thought that we can detect no less than five separate stages in the history of the Johannine community,⁷⁵ whereas Martyn approached the Gospel of John as a two-level drama, that is, describing not only the drama of Jesus but also that of the Johannine community.⁷⁶

In light of recent studies, however, we should be cautious in attempting a mirror reading of John and the historical reconstruction of the Johannine community based upon it. This is not to say that the experiences of the community could not have any impact on how the story of Jesus was

⁷³ DeConick, *Voices*, 20 (emphasis added).

⁷⁴ Cf. Riley, *Resurrection*, 73 (the Johannine characters ‘represent facets of John’s religious worlds’); DeConick, *Voices*, 23–25; for a similar assessment, see now Pagels, *Beyond Belief*, 63–64.

⁷⁵ Brown, *The Community of the Beloved Disciple*, passim.

⁷⁶ J. Louis Martyn, *History and Theology in the Fourth Gospel* (New York: Harper & Row, 1968).

told in John, but it is very difficult, if not impossible, to reconstruct these experiences on the basis of the Johannine story. As Raimo Hakola points out in his recent study, ‘the careless leap from the narrative of the gospel to the historical reality behind it has resulted in distorted views of the early rabbinic movement, and these views cannot be sustained in light of recent studies.’⁷⁷

The strategy of mirror reading has often produced neo-allegorical interpretations of narrative figures in John. Martyn argued that the lame man in John 5 represents an informer on Johannine Christians, and that John 9 was really an account of Jewish interrogations of Johannine Christians.⁷⁸ Riley’s and DeConick’s interpretations of the figure of Thomas in the Gospel of John follow the same strategy of reading this text. The underlying interpretive presupposition that the Gospel of John should be read as an allegory of what Johannine Christians went through is, however, far from self-evident.

In her study of the interpretations of Genesis 1 in John and *Thomas*, Pagels avoided the difficulties embedded in mirror reading, as she did not place so much importance on the figure of Thomas in John.⁷⁹ At the same time,

⁷⁷ Raimo Hakola, *Identity Matters: John, the Jews and Jewishness* (NovTSup 118; Leiden: E. J. Brill, 2005), 22. Hakola introduces several Johannine specialists who have recently criticized Martyn’s two-level reading of the Gospel of John, including Margaret Davies, Marinus de Jonge, Joachim Kügler, and Adele Reinhartz (ibid. 18–21).

⁷⁸ Cf. Martyn, *History and Theology*, 52–57.

⁷⁹ Elaine Pagels, ‘Exegesis of Genesis 1.’ For an interpretation of Genesis 1–2 in *Thomas*, see also Stevan Davies, ‘Christology and Protology of the *Gospel of Thomas*’, *JBL* 111 (1992), 663–82, esp. 663–74. For Jewish views

however, the evidence she offered in this study for a real conflict between the two gospels remains thin. (Perhaps it is for this reason that in her new book Pagels now rehearses the same arguments concerning the portrayal of Thomas in the Gospel of John as did Riley and DeConick to support her conclusion that John and *Thomas* are gospels in conflict.)⁸⁰

In her article, Pagels pointed out that *Thomas* makes extensive use of Genesis 1:26–27 ‘to show that the divine image implanted at creation enables humankind to find...the way back to its origin in the mystery of the primordial creation.’⁸¹ The ideal state for human beings in *Thomas* is ‘that people restore themselves to the condition of the image of God’, and ‘the cluster of logia that interpret Genesis 1 directs those who seek access to God toward the divine image given in creation.’⁸² According to Pagels, the Johannine interpretation of Genesis goes in another direction. What is considered common to all humankind in *Thomas* is restricted to Jesus in John:

John, interpreting Gen 1:1–3, insists that the primordial divine light—far from being accessible through the ‘image of God’ implicitly present in human nature—resides exclusively in the *logos*

about Adam visible in *Thomas*, see Martha Lelyveld, *Les logia de la vie dans l'Évangile selon Thomas: à la recherche d'une tradition et d'une rédaction* (NHS 34; Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1987), esp. 27–30, 38–43, 49–54.

⁸⁰ Pagels, *Beyond Belief*, 69–72.

⁸¹ Pagels, ‘Exegesis of Genesis 1’, 488, building upon Hans-Martin Schenke, *Der Gott ‘Mensch’ in der Gnosis: Ein religionsgeschichtlicher Beitrag zur Diskussion über die paulinische Anschauung von der Kirche als Leib Christi* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1962).

⁸² Pagels, ‘Exegesis of Genesis 1’, 487.

(cf. John 1:3) and becomes perceptible to humankind exclusively through the *logos* incarnate.⁸³

In my view, Pagels has seen a noteworthy difference in the interpretations of the primordial divine light in John and *Thomas*.⁸⁴ However, her case for a conflict between these gospels is less persuasive. Pagels herself admits that ‘the basic pattern of Thomas’s Genesis exegesis was widely known,’⁸⁵ and that ‘John differs not only from Thomas, but from all other exegesis that derives from mainstream Jewish Genesis speculation.’⁸⁶ Hence, Pagels’s own conclusion remains quite vague after all: ‘John apparently points polemics against a type of Genesis exegesis used by a wide range of readers, both Jewish and Christian, and perhaps even pagan as well.’⁸⁷

In light of this conclusion, which seems sound to me, I do not see any compelling reason to assume that John’s interpretation of Genesis was a polemic against Thomasine Christians in particular. The author of John could have written against any of the groups and traditions mentioned by Pagels (Thomas, Hellenistic Jewish authors, Hermetic texts), or, as seems the most plausible explanation to me, John and *Thomas* employed a similar tradition in two different manners. The former made use of Genesis traditions to emphasize the unique status of Jesus; the latter to show the

⁸³ Pagels, ‘Exegesis of Genesis 1’, 481.

⁸⁴ Cf. Dunderberg, ‘From Thomas to Valentinus.’

⁸⁵ Pagels, ‘Exegesis of Genesis 1’, 479.

⁸⁶ Pagels, ‘Exegesis of Genesis 1’, 489.

⁸⁷ Pagels, ‘Exegesis of Genesis 1’, 492.

way to salvation open to all human beings. It does not seem necessary to assume that one interpretation emerged as a reaction to the other. The two interpretations could easily have come into existence independently of each other.

4. CONCLUSION

The early stages of research outlined in the first two parts of this chapter show how clearly scholars' presuppositions concerning *Thomas* have determined their conclusions. I believe this is also the case for the theory of a conflict between John and *Thomas* in its different forms. Proponents of this theory have their own views about what the *Gospel of Thomas* is all about, and then find a confirmation, in the form of opposition, for their particular views about the *Gospel of Thomas* in the Gospel of John. The evidence derived from John proves very flexible in the usage of these scholars. They have constructed quite different, and mutually exclusive, pictures of the Thomasine position rebutted in John. In my view, this demonstrates that the Johannine story world remains too vague to justify any particular form of the conflict theory. A number of allegedly Thomasine positions have been seen as condemned in the Gospel of John, but the question remains how persuasive this way of reading John is in the light of the results achieved by it.

In my opinion, Riley, DeConick, and Pagels have managed to show several points where John and *Thomas* differ from each other, and may even have opposing views. But

how can it be shown that these gospels, or communities behind them, were really in debate with each other? Riley, DeConick, and Pagels have found the necessary proof in the Johannine characterization of the disciple Thomas. He is interpreted as a mirror, reflecting ideas attributed to a rival group of Christians leaning on the authority of Thomas. Thus, a focal point in their argument is the Johannine story of Doubting Thomas (John 20:24–29). Both Riley and DeConick maintain that Thomas is portrayed as a fool in this story, and that the Johannine author characterized Thomas in this way to combat ideas characteristic of Thomasine Christians.

Yet Riley's and DeConick's interpretations as to what the disciple Thomas stands for in John were strikingly different from each other. Is the Thomasine position refuted in John 20:24–29 the denial of physical resurrection, as Riley believes, or is it vision mysticism, as DeConick argues? Both views cannot both be right. In fact, DeConick disagrees with Riley's interpretation of that story while Riley has questioned a crucial element in DeConick's argument for the importance of *visio dei* in *Thomas*.⁸⁸

For me, the fact that Riley and DeConick cannot agree upon the cause of the conflict between John and *Thomas*

⁸⁸ For DeConick's disagreement with Riley, see DeConick, *Voices*, 30, 83. Riley has raised doubts concerning DeConick and Fossum's interpretation of *Gospel of Thomas* 37 as promoting *visio dei*. Riley argues against their position by proposing the reading $\tau\omicron\tau[\epsilon\ \tau\epsilon\tau]\bar{\eta}[\eta]\eta\gamma$ ('then you will come') instead of $\tau\omicron\tau[\epsilon\ \tau\epsilon\tau]\bar{\eta}\alpha\eta\gamma$ ('then you will see'). In that case, the saying would no longer bear witness to vision mysticism in *Thomas*, as DeConick and Fossum suggested. Cf. Gregory J. Riley, 'A Note on the Text of *Gospel of Thomas* 37', *HTR* 88 (1995), 179–81.

shows that their readings have not been able to do away with the usual difficulties involved in the mirror reading of the gospels. If both Riley's and DeConick's contrasting interpretations can be projected onto the figure of Thomas in John, this figure is apparently too vague to permit definite conclusions as to what was going on behind the scenes when the Gospel of John was written. This point will be worked out in more detail in the following chapter devoted to the narrative figure of Thomas in John.

3

The Figure of Thomas in the Gospel of John

The Johannine portrait of the disciple Thomas has been used as the essential argument for the theory that the communities behind the gospels of John and Thomas were in conflict with each other. Nevertheless, there is a striking disagreement as to what Thomas represents in the Gospel of John. Does he represent denial of the resurrection of the body, as Riley suggested, or is he portrayed as a vision mystic rejected by the Johannine Jesus, as DeConick argued?

Within the New Testament, John is the only gospel to display any close interest in Thomas. In John, there are four passages in which Thomas plays a role (John 11:16; 14:5; 20:24–29; 21:2), while in the synoptic gospels he is mentioned only in a list of the disciples (Mark 3:18//Matt. 10:3//Luke 6:15). In John, the picture drawn of Thomas is not very favourable. At the end of the gospel, he is even called an ‘unbeliever’ (*ἄπιστος*) by Jesus (John 20:27).

At the same time, there are early Christian texts in which Thomas is the key figure and the basis for their authority. He

assumes this role in the *Gospel of Thomas*, the *Book of Thomas (the Contender)*, and the *Acts of Thomas*. These texts together form what is usually called the 'Thomas literature.' It is uncertain whether this body of literature bears witness to one distinct form within early Christianity or to many groups submitting to the authority of Thomas.¹ In any case, the question can be raised whether there is a specific relationship between the negative image painted of Thomas in John and the great appreciation of him in the Thomas literature.

Although their pictures of the conflict between John and *Thomas* were otherwise quite different, Riley and DeConick agreed that Thomas is portrayed as a fool in John and that this portrayal is part of the Johannine campaign against Thomas Christians. Therefore, Riley and DeConick have devoted intensive work to the interpretation of the Johannine passages in which Thomas appears.² Nevertheless, if one takes a closer look at the Johannine characterization of Thomas and other disciples, the link between the Gospel of John and Thomas Christianity remains dubious. Moreover, there is little to suggest that the author of John knew the Judas Thomas tradition visible in the Thomasine literature.

¹ Cf. Uro, *Thomas*, 26: 'the hypothesis that all three Thomasine works (or even two of them) derive from the same "community" is much more speculative than the hypothesis that there existed a group which produced and transmitted the Johannine writings.'

² Cf. Riley, *Resurrection*, 78–126; DeConick, *Voices*, 77–85.

1. THE SYRIAN JUDAS THOMAS TRADITION AND THE GOSPEL OF JOHN

In the Thomasine literature, Thomas is identified with Judas and usually known as Judas Thomas.³ This Judas is not Judas Iscariot, the betrayer of Jesus, but some other follower of Jesus. Another Judas among the disciples of Jesus is mentioned in Luke-Acts ('Judas son of James,' Luke 6:17; Acts 1:13),⁴ and John ('Judas not Iscariot,' 14:22). One of the brothers of Jesus was also called Judas (Mark 6:3; Matt. 13:55), but he is not identical to 'Judas son of James' in Luke. The Letter of Jude presents itself as having been written by 'Judas, the servant of Christ and the brother of James' (v. 1). Since one of the brothers of Jesus was called James, the author of this letter identified himself indirectly with Judas, the brother of Jesus.⁵

Whereas the double name Judas Thomas appears nowhere in the New Testament, it is characteristic of Syrian Thomas traditions. One part of the Thomas literature derives with certainty (the *Acts of Thomas*), and other parts with great likelihood (the *Gospel of Thomas* and the *Book of*

³ *Gos. Thom.* prologue; *Thom. Cont.* 138; *Acts of Thomas* 1.

⁴ Literally, Luke 6:17 reads 'Judas of Jacob', which should probably be understood that Judas was son of Jacob. As Bovon maintains, 'this Jacob (James) is neither the son of Zebedaeus nor the brother of the Lord nor the son of Alphaeus.' François Bovon, *Das Evangelium nach Lukas* (3 vols.; EKKNT 3; Zürich—Neukirchen-Vluyn: Benziger/Neukirchener, 1989–2001), 1.284 n. 39.

⁵ Cf. Raymond E. Brown, *An Introduction to the New Testament* (New York: Doubleday, 1997), 748.

Thomas), from eastern Syria.⁶ In addition to the Thomas literature, Thomas is called Judas Thomas in other early Christian texts of Syrian origin.⁷ The identification of Judas with Thomas can also be seen in early Syriac translations of John 14:22, in which ‘Judas not Iscariot’ is replaced with ‘Thomas.’

Another feature peculiar to the Thomas literature is that Judas Thomas is portrayed as the twin brother of Jesus.⁸ This identification plays upon the fact that the Aramaic noun תאומא (*t’wmā*, whence the name Thomas) means ‘twin’. The idea that Thomas is the twin of Jesus is, however, unevenly attested in the Thomas literature. It occurs in the *Book of Thomas* and the *Acts of Thomas* but not in the *Gospel of Thomas*.⁹ It may seem conceivable that where Judas Thomas

⁶ Cf. Helmut Koester, *Introduction*, 2.7. For a recent survey of ideological affinities between the *Gospel of Thomas* and early Syrian Christianity, see Uro, *Thomas*, 26–30.

⁷ Cf. Uro, *Thomas*, 10, with references to the Abgar legend (Eusebius, *Church History*, 1.13.10; *Doctrine of Addai* 5) and Ephraem, *Sermons of Faith* 7.11.3.

⁸ Cf. Bruce Chilton, ‘The Gospel According to Thomas as a Source of Jesus’ Teaching’, in *Gospel Perspectives: The Jesus Tradition outside the Gospels* (ed. David Wendham; Sheffield: JSOT 1985), 155–75, esp. 156. In maintaining that Judas Thomas is identified as Jesus’ twin only in the *Acts of Thomas*, Chilton, however, ignores the evidence for this view in the *Book of Thomas*.

⁹ *Thom. Cont.* 138; *Acts of Thomas* 11, 31, 39. As for the *Gospel of Thomas*, Riley (*Resurrection*, 113) suggests that Thomas could have been identified as the twin of Jesus in one of the three secret words of Jesus in *Gos. Thom.* 13. This suggestion is based upon the three epithets used of Thomas by Jesus in the *Book of Thomas*: ‘my twin and my true companion... my brother’ (ΠΑΣΟΕΙΩ ΛΥΩ ΠΑΦΒΡΨΙΝΗΕ... ΠΑΣΟΝ, *Thom. Cont.* 138.7–8). However, this theory remains as conjectural as any other suggestion on the three secret words in *Gos. Thom.* 13 (for other suggestions, see chapter six, section one below). John Turner also sees in the *Gospel of Thomas* the idea that Thomas

is portrayed as the twin of Jesus, he is identified with Judas, the brother of Jesus. This is, however, not the case. Although portrayed as the twin of Jesus in the *Acts of Thomas*, Judas Thomas is distinguished in this text from Judas, the brother of Jesus (*Acts of Thomas*, 1).

There is variation in how Thomas is named in different versions of the *Gospel of Thomas*. In the Greek fragment of the opening words of this text (*incipit*), Thomas was most likely called '[Judas, who] is also Thomas [*Ἰούδα ὁ καὶ Θωμᾶ*]' (P. Oxy. 654.1–2). In the Coptic version of the same passage, we find added the Greek word *δίδυμος*, which means 'twin': 'The Twin Judas Thomas (*ΔΙΔΥΜΟΣ ἸΟΥΔΑΣ ΘΩΜΑΣ*).'

The placement of *didymos* at the beginning of the name Judas Thomas suggests that *didymos* was not offered as a translation of 'Thomas', but as an additional designation by which Thomas was identified. Moreover, the lack of *didymos* in the Greek version indicates that this word did not appear in the original *incipit* of the *Gospel of Thomas*, but was added to it at some later stage. This conclusion is supported by the fact that, in a later transmission of the New Testament text, the designation *didymos* was also attached to Thomas in places where it did not appear originally.¹⁰

was the twin of Jesus; cf. John D. Turner, 'A New Link in the Syrian Judas Thomas Tradition', in *Essays on the Nag Hammadi Texts in Honour of Alexander Böhlig* (ed. M. Krause; NHS 3; Leiden: E. J. Brill 1972), 109–19, esp. 117.

¹⁰ In manuscript D, *didymos* is added to the name of Thomas in Luke 6:15 and in John 14:6.

Like the Judas Thomas tradition, the author of John uses the designation of Thomas as ‘the one called Twin’ (ὁ λεγόμενος Δίδυμος, John 11:16; 20:24; 21:2). The expression functions, on the one hand, as a translation, like a similar phrase ‘the one called Christ’ in John 4:25, which offers a Greek translation for ‘Messiah’. On the other, the repeated use of *didymos* in connection with Thomas in John shows that when this gospel was written *didymos* was already a traditional epithet attached to Thomas. It may be that the whole expression, ‘the one called Twin’, is traditional, since the passive voice of this expression corresponds to the beginning of the *Book of Thomas*, where Jesus says to Thomas (*Thom. Cont.* 138): ‘It is said that you are my twin.’

The Gospel of John, however, betrays no knowledge of two other characteristic features attached to Thomas in the Thomas literature. In John, Thomas is not called ‘Judas Thomas’ or portrayed as the twin of Jesus. The lack of these features in John makes it difficult to posit a specific link between the Gospel of John and the Syrian Judas Thomas tradition. In fact, Thomas is not even connected with the brothers of Jesus, who are not only mentioned in John, but also described as unbelievers (7:2–9). If the author of John had intended to combat a tradition in which Thomas was portrayed as the twin of Jesus, as Riley and DeConick assume, one could expect Thomas to be included among the brothers of Jesus.¹¹ That this is not the case speaks, in my

¹¹ Disbelief is attributed both to Jesus’ brothers and to Thomas; the crucial difference is that this is all that has been said of Jesus’ brothers, whereas Thomas, encouraged by Jesus to overcome his lack of faith, finally confesses his belief (John 20:28).

view, strongly against the Johannine author's knowledge of the Judas Thomas tradition.

While no direct links to the Judas Thomas tradition can be found in John, scholars have detected more subtle allusions to that tradition. To begin with, it has been suggested that the expression 'the one called' (ὁ λεγόμενος) attached to the name *didymos* in John could be understood in a pejorative sense 'so-called'.¹² This would, then, indicate the author's intention to refute some other people's view of Thomas as a twin. This reading is not very likely, since, as was mentioned above, the same expression 'the one called' is used in John 4:25, without any pejorative sense, in connection with 'Christ.'

Riley has proposed that the Johannine author may have wanted to create an intrinsic link between Thomas and Judas the Betrayer by describing Thomas as 'one of the Twelve' (εἷς ἐκ τῶν δώδεκα, John 20:24). Riley thinks that there must be some particular reason for the author's usage of the expression 'one of the Twelve,' for 'anyone at all familiar with the tradition knew that Thomas was one of the Twelve.'¹³ Riley sees a connection between this description and that of Judas the Betrayer, who was earlier in John singled out by Jesus as being one of the Twelve: 'Did I not choose you the twelve? And one of you is a devil (οὐκ ἐγὼ ὑμᾶς τοὺς δώδεκα ἐξελεξάμην; καὶ ἐξ ὑμῶν εἷς διάβολος ἐστίν, John 6:70).' Riley concludes: 'Thus "Judas the One Who Betrays" and "Judas the One Who Denies" are both and

¹² This suggestion is attributed to Paul Morrisette and reported by Riley, *Resurrection*, 114 n. 46.

¹³ Riley, *Resurrection*, 109.

uniquely designated in John by the same expression, “one of the twelve”, the second use here recalling the first.¹⁴

Riley’s designation of Thomas as ‘Judas the One Who Denies’ elides the fact that nowhere in the Gospel of John is Thomas called Judas. It seems likely, therefore, that the author of this gospel did not know about the identification of Thomas with Judas. In that case, the link drawn by Riley between Thomas and Judas the Betrayer in John remains quite unpersuasive. Second, the Johannine author’s usage of the expression ‘one of the Twelve’ in connection with Thomas does not seem more peculiar than the description of Andrew as ‘one of his disciples’ in John 6:8, although it had already been affirmed in the narrative that he was Jesus’ disciple (John 1:40). In fact, the phrase ‘one of the Twelve’ seems completely interchangeable with phrases like ‘one of his disciples’ (εἰς ἐκ τῶν μαθητῶν αὐτοῦ) or ‘two of his disciples,’ which are frequently used in John in connection with the disciples—*Judas* included (John 12:6; cf. 1:35; 6:8; 13:23; 21:2).¹⁵ Third, the affinity in terminology is not very close. The phrase ‘one of the Twelve’ is used of Thomas but not of Judas; Judas is called by Jesus ‘one of you.’ Fourth, only Judas is called ‘a devil’ by Jesus in John. Since this designation is not attached to Thomas, he is, in fact, on the better side of the Twelve in the Johannine narrative.

¹⁴ Riley, *Resurrection*, 110. A similar link between Thomas and Judas the Betrayer in John has been suggested by Eugen Ruckstuhl, ‘Θωμάς’, *EWNT* 1.407–9, esp. 408.

¹⁵ Cf. Rudolph Schnackenburg, *Das Johannesevangelium* (4 vols.; HTKNT 4; Freiburg—Basel—Wien: Herder, 1975), 3.392.

It has also been suggested that since the name Thomas means ‘twin’, it was not a real name to begin with, but only a nickname given to Judas, a brother of Jesus.¹⁶ Hence the possibility that the expression ‘the one called Twin’ in John refers to an early Judas Thomas tradition. This possibility cannot be excluded. In that case, however, it should be concluded that the author of John knew that Thomas was called *didymos* but did not know why.¹⁷ Otherwise, it would be difficult to explain why the Johannine author did not associate Thomas with the brothers of Jesus. Moreover, the use of תאמ as a name is attested in at least one Semitic inscription.¹⁸ Therefore, Thomas does not have to be only a nickname,¹⁹ and we cannot be completely sure

¹⁶ Cf. Helmut Koester, ‘GNOMAI DIAPHOROI: The Origin and Nature of Diversification in the History of Early Christianity’, in James M. Robinson and Helmut Koester, *Trajectories through Early Christianity* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1971), 114–57, esp. 134; id., *Introduction* 2.152; id. ‘Introduction’, 39; cf. Davies, *Wisdom* 18–19; Stephen J. Patterson, ‘Introduction to the Gospel of Thomas’, in John S. Kloppenborg et al., *Q-Thomas Reader* (Sonoma: Polebridge, 1990), 77–123, esp. 90–91; Riley, *Resurrection* 110–12. Patterson (‘Introduction’, 91) also provides the alternative that ‘... in Syria, the figure of Judas, the brother of Jesus came to be identified with the apostle Thomas, perhaps since both were known in some circles as “the Twin”’.

¹⁷ Cf. Riley, *Resurrection*, 114: ‘It is enticing to speculate that John knew that the Thomas community, at least, was calling Thomas the “twin”, but because of their esotericism, did not yet know why.’

¹⁸ *CIS* I.46.3; cf. M. Lidzbarski, *Handbuch der Nordsemitischen Epigraphik nebst ausgewählten Inschriften* (2 vols., Hildesheim: Georg Olms, 1962) 1.383. The inscription is Phoenician, as is another one where the same name probably occurs (*CIS* I.66.1: *tw[m]*).

¹⁹ Cf. *BAA* s.v. *θωμάς*. It should be noted, however, that evidence offered for the use of Thomas as a name in this entry remains meagre: it offers only a reference to the Greek prologue of *Gos. Thom.* Otherwise, as far as I have been

that, as Riley maintains, ‘the given name of Thomas was “Judas”’.²⁰

DeConick sees a link to the Judas Thomas tradition in John 14:22 where ‘Judas not Iscariot’ is introduced: ‘The identity of this “Judas” is arguably linked with the Syrian Thomas tradition.’²¹ Thus, she concludes: ‘It is plausible that Jn 14.22 represents a very early layer belonging to the Johannine community about the disciple “Judas Thomas.”’²² DeConick does not discuss the possibility, which I find more likely, that the Judas mentioned in John 14:22 is identical to the ‘Judas son of James’ mentioned in Luke-Acts (Luke 6:17; Acts 1:13). Moreover, her solution creates a new difficulty: If Judas and Thomas were identified in the Johannine tradition, why did the author of John separate them? In John 14, if we follow the Greek text and not the Syriac translations, Judas and Thomas are two distinct figures. Finally, I do not find conclusive DeConick’s argument that ‘the Johannine author has assigned the same role to Judas in Jn 14.22 as he does to Thomas in Jn 14.5 and... Jn 20.25: that of a fool who misunderstands salvation as ascent and vision mysticism.’²³ This brings us to the question of how the characterization of Thomas is related to that of other figures in the Johannine narrative.

able to check, Thomas appears as a Greek name only in papyri that are considerably later than the NT.

²⁰ Riley, *Resurrection*, 110.

²¹ DeConick, *Voices*, 74.

²² DeConick, *Voices*, 76.

²³ DeConick, *Voices*, 77.

2. THOMAS AND OTHER CHARACTERS IN JOHN

I have argued that terminological connections between the Gospel of John and the Judas Thomas tradition remain vague. The negative characterization of Thomas in John, however, is undeniable. The problem is whether his portrait in John justifies a leap from the story world to the real-life situation of the communities. This leap is especially difficult if it is based upon narrative figures in John, since almost all of them are described in negative terms. It does not seem feasible to assume that each of these figures is a representative of a distinct group of believers with whom the author of John was in conflict. Much is dependent, therefore, on the question of *how* negative the picture drawn of Thomas in John is. Is it clearly more negative than those of other figures in the story?

Riley is no doubt right in insisting that ‘as a character in John, Thomas is cast as one who is wrong, ignorant and unbelieving.’²⁴ But this does not make Thomas a peculiar figure in John; most other characters in John are portrayed in the same way. Peter is shown to be wrong (John 13:37–38), Philip remains stubbornly ignorant of Jesus’ true identity (John 14:8–9), and Martha, in spite of her full-blown confession, is rebuked by Jesus as if she did not believe at all (John 11:27, 40). It is true that the question Jesus poses to Thomas after his confession (John 20:29) is sarcastic, yet

²⁴ Riley, *Resurrection*, 79.

sarcasm is a conventional feature used whenever the Johannine Jesus encounters a confession of faith or understanding (cf. John 1:50; 16:31–32).²⁵

Thomas is, thus, not an exceptional figure in the Johannine story world. He is associated with—rather than dissociated from—the other followers of Jesus. He is occasionally portrayed as a representative of all the disciples in the story. He speaks on behalf of them (John 11:16; John 14:5), as do Peter (John 6:68–69), Philip (John 14:8), and Judas ‘not Iscariot’ (John 14:22). Thomas also expresses attitudes common to all Jesus’ disciples. His exhortation in John 11:16 (‘Let us also go, that we may die with him’) is addressed to all the disciples and in effect repeats a concern they all share—that Jesus will be in danger in Judea (John 11:8). It is not clear whether Thomas is ‘shown to be wrong’ in John 11, as Riley argues,²⁶ for the Johannine author connects the raising of Lazarus with the death of Jesus (John 11:47–53), and hints elsewhere at the possibility that the followers of Jesus are in danger of being killed by Jews (John 12:9–11; 16:1–4).

In John 14, Thomas is one of the interlocutors who do not understand Jesus. According to DeConick, the Johannine author describes Thomas in John 14:3–7 as ‘a fool’

²⁵ Even in John 6:66–71 Jesus does not (unlike in Matt. 16:17) praise Peter’s confession, made on behalf of all the disciples, but counters it by referring to the betrayer among them.

²⁶ Riley, *Resurrection*, 78–79. Later in his study, Riley interprets John 11:16 differently: Thomas’ remark does not refer to the death of Jesus, but to that of Lazarus (Riley, *Resurrection*, 118).

and thus ‘condemns the hero of the Thomas Christians.’²⁷ Thomas does not know where Jesus is going, nor does he know the way (John 14:5). Nonetheless, this portrayal does not separate Thomas from the other disciples. In the Johannine Last Supper scene, of which John 14 is a part, misunderstanding is ascribed to all the disciples (John 13:28–29; cf. also 16:16–20). In fact, Thomas fares better in John 14 than does Philip: Jesus does not rebuke Thomas’s question, as he does Philip’s (John 14:8–9). Jesus answers Thomas not with a rebuke but with a promise (John 14:7): ‘If you (pl.) know me, you (pl.) will know my Father also. From now on you (pl.) do know him and have seen him.’ Jesus’ answer is addressed to all the disciples, which emphasizes Thomas’s role as their spokesman. Moreover, Jesus does not blame Thomas here,²⁸ nor is Thomas excluded from those who know the Father ‘from now on’. Therefore, there is no solid basis for the claim that Thomas is portrayed as a fool in John 14.

3. DOUBTING THOMAS

In the story of the Doubting Thomas (John 20:24–29), Thomas is indeed singled out as the one who was not present when Jesus appeared to his disciples, and as the one who demands better proof of the resurrection of Jesus. Is the Johannine author’s point in John 20:24–29, then, ‘to

²⁷ DeConick, *Voices*, 73.

²⁸ This interpretation is suggested by Riley, *Resurrection*, 123.

criticize visionary experience in favor of faith,' as DeConick contended?²⁹

DeConick maintained that Thomas is portrayed as a false hero 'who insists that a *visio dei* is necessary.'³⁰ This interpretation seems far-fetched to me. It is true that the story ends with Jesus' blessing of those 'who have not seen and yet believe' (John 20:29), but I fail to see what makes Thomas a representative of vision mysticism in John. Even in this passage, the figure of Thomas corresponds to the general characterization of the disciples of Jesus. There is a strong parallelism between the story of the Doubting Thomas and the preceding story of Jesus' appearance to the other disciples (John 20:19–23). Both passages begin with an eyewitness testimony addressed to those who have not yet seen the risen Lord: 'I have seen the Lord' (Mary in John 20:18); 'We have seen the Lord' (other disciples in John 20:25). In neither story, however, do the addressees believe this testimony. Mary's testimony in John 20:18 remains curiously ineffective: no reaction of the disciples to it is related by the narrator. 'All of the disciples had to see to believe,' says Riley,³¹ and I see no reason to disagree. In John, Thomas is no more closely linked with a *visio dei* than Mary in John 20:18, or other disciples in John 20:20 and 20:25.

The repeated sequence of eyewitness testimony and its verification in John 20:19–29 underscores the reliability of that testimony for the intended audience of the gospel. The blessing of those believing without seeing (John 20:29) is the

²⁹ DeConick, *Voices*, 83.

³⁰ DeConick, *Voices*, 83.

³¹ Riley, *Resurrection*, 125.

author's transition from the generation of eyewitnesses to this audience, which is addressed directly at the closure of this text (John 20:30–31). Jesus' rebuke of Thomas ('Did you believe because you saw me?') and the blessing of those believing without seeing is a suitable conclusion to the whole passage. This blessing does not seem to be addressed to a distinct group (like Thomas Christians), but to all 'later believers who, unlike the first disciples, can no longer experience the appearance of the Risen One and nevertheless should believe.'³² In John, the blessing of those believing without seeing does not negate the value of the eyewitness testimony. They are blessed insofar as they believe in the gospel's story that presents itself as the reliable testimony of an eyewitness.

Riley's reading of John 20:24–29 is closely related to his idea that the body and physical resurrection were denounced in the Thomas literature. Riley demonstrates that a plausible trajectory through the Thomas literature can be drawn on this basis. In addition, Riley suggests that interpretations of the temple saying in John 2:19–21 and in *Gospel of Thomas* 71 reflect distinct views as regards the resurrection of Jesus.³³ If so, it may be that the Johannine and Thomasine Christians also had different opinions concerning the future resurrection of believers. Given this overall view, it may seem reasonable to maintain, as Riley does, that in John, Thomas 'doubts the possibility of bodily resurrection.'³⁴ According to Riley, 'Thomas . . . will not believe

³² Schnackenburg, *Johannesevangelium*, 3.391.

³³ Riley, *Resurrection*, 146–56.

³⁴ Riley, *Resurrection*, 119.

in the physical nature of the resurrection, and must touch the body of Jesus.³⁵ However, the opposition to physical resurrection is not entirely clear in the *Gospel of Thomas*. The temple saying in *Thomas* 71 will be discussed later in this study. Suffice it to say here that Riley's interpretation of this saying is not self-evident; it is far from clear to what the 'house' mentioned in that saying refers.³⁶

Moreover, it is affirmed in the Greek fragment of *Gospel of Thomas* 5: '[For there is nothing] hidden which [will] not become manifest, nor buried that [will not be raised] (*καὶ θεθαμμένον ὃ οὐκ ἐγεροθήσεται*)'.³⁷ The latter portion, which does not appear in the Coptic version, no doubt presupposes the future resurrection. The lacunae in the text may admit other emendations as well, but Riley accepts the text in this form. He argues that the sentence 'nor buried that will not be raised' is a secondary addition to *Thomas*.³⁸ The sentence is missing from the Coptic version of *Thomas*, and it may seem secondary to the synoptic versions of the same saying (Mark 4:22//Matt. 10:26//Luke 8:17; 12:22). This does not prove, however, that the sentence was added secondarily to *Thomas*. I find it more likely that the Greek version provides the original reading of the saying, which

³⁵ Riley, *Resurrection*, 104–5. It is, in fact, not said that Thomas touched Jesus, as Riley's comment implies. Thomas is invited by Jesus to touch him, but it is not reported that he really did so; even for Thomas, seeing the risen Jesus offers sufficient evidence for believing.

³⁶ See chapter four, section six below.

³⁷ P. Oxy. 654.31. I follow Attridge's emendations to and translation of this passage.

³⁸ Riley, *Resurrection*, 165–66.

was then edited at a later stage to conform to the anti-eschatological stance characteristic of *Thomas*.

Finally, the story of Doubting Thomas allows for an alternative reading that is supported by Riley's incisive observations of how appearances of the dead are described in ancient texts. Taking the Johannine story as it stands, Thomas doubts the claim of the other disciples that they have *seen* the Lord (John 20:25).³⁹ Instead of a mere vision, Thomas demands more concrete proof; he is a 'realist more than doubter.'⁴⁰ Of course, the proofs demanded by Thomas were already provided to other disciples (and to the gospel's audience), but it is not said in the narrative that the other disciples had related this evidence to Thomas. This narrative strategy enables the Johannine author to provide the audience with a double verification of Jesus' resurrection.

At first sight, it may seem that Thomas requires evidence for the physical resurrection of Jesus. However, Riley's survey of Greco-Roman views about post-mortem existence shows that the dead were often envisioned as having scars and even being palpable.⁴¹ People were customarily identified by their scars in ancient texts of different sorts. Thus, scars in accounts of the appearances of the dead are no

³⁹ According to Riley, the demand for physical proofs indicates that 'John meant the disciples to say, "We have seen the Lord in the same physical body he had before his death"' (Riley, *Resurrection*, 115; emphasis added.)

⁴⁰ R. Alan Culpepper, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel: A Study in Literary Design* (2nd ed.; Philadelphia, PA: Fortress, 1987), 124.

⁴¹ Riley, *Resurrection*, 50–58. Riley's comparison between Homer and Virgil is especially informative. Riley (*ibid.* 55) demonstrates well that 'the "life" in the underworld had by his [Virgil's] time become far more substantial, and the dead had become correspondingly more tangible.'

doubt mentioned for the purpose of identification. Against this background, Thomas's demand to see the scars of Jesus and to touch him is indicative of a doubt concerning the *identification* of the risen Jesus rather than a doubt concerning the form in which Jesus was raised.⁴² This interpretation is supported by a strong emphasis placed on the identification of the risen Jesus in other resurrection stories in John:⁴³ Mary Magdalene did not recognize Jesus immediately (John 20:14), nor did the disciples by the Sea of Tiberias (John 21:4). In both stories, it is important to affirm that the risen Jesus was identified in a specific manner.

In addition, Riley's study reminds us that the most concrete features connected with the resurrection of Jesus are missing in John. The contrast drawn in Luke between a 'spirit that has no flesh and bones' and the risen Jesus⁴⁴ does not occur in John, nor does its author maintain that Jesus ate after his resurrection, like the author of Luke⁴⁵—not even in John 21, where Jesus is described as having prepared a meal for the disciples.

It is striking that the Johannine author not only includes Thomas in the group of believers but also attributes to him a full-blown confession of Jesus. Thomas's confession 'My lord and my God' (John 20:28) is unique in the Gospel of John, since his words form an inclusion to, and confirmation

⁴² At this point, I completely agree with DeConick, *Voices*, 80–81, who states with references to *Odyssey*, 19.357–60, 388–89, 392–94, 464–75: 'A common *topos* in ancient Greek literature is the identification of a character through the exposure of his wounds and the touching of his body.'

⁴³ Cf. Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ*, 476.

⁴⁴ Luke 24:39; cf. Ignatius, *Smyrn.* 3:2.

⁴⁵ Luke 24:41–42; cf. Ignatius, *Smyrn.* 3:3.

of, what was said in the Prologue of this gospel: '... and the Word was God...' (John 1:1, 1:18). Thus, there is no doubt that Thomas's confession is presented as paradigmatic to the audience of the Gospel of John. If there was an ongoing, contentious debate between Johannine and Thomasine Christians, would it not have been confusing to the Johannine audience that it is Thomas, the hero of the rival community, who performs the paradigmatic confession?

While we cannot know how the first readers of the Gospel of John took the presentation of Thomas, there is evidence to the effect that later Thomas Christians were not offended by it. This can be seen in the fact that the confession ascribed to Thomas in John 20 is repeated twice in the *Acts of Thomas* (10; 166). The Johannine portrayal of the Doubting Thomas, thus, was entirely acceptable to those who held Thomas in high regard. Apparently, they did not think that the Johannine portrayal of him denigrated his authority. It is equally striking that, in the *Acts of John* 90, the exhortation of Jesus addressed to Thomas in John 20:27 ('Do not doubt but believe,' NRSV) is now addressed to John, the main hero of the text. The real-reader responses, to which these texts bear witness, show that neither Thomasine nor later Johannine Christians considered the portrayal of Thomas in John 20:24–29 offensive.

4. CONCLUSION

Riley and DeConick took the portrayal of Thomas in the Gospel of John as crucial evidence for their respective views

about the conflict between Thomasine and Johannine Christians. However, there proved to be several problems with this approach. First, the Johannine terminology used for Thomas does not reveal any close familiarity with that used in Thomas literature. Second, the Johannine picture of Thomas is negative, but in a manner similar to that of most other figures of the Johannine story world. Thomas is not the only follower of Jesus in John who understands him poorly; most other characters do this as well. Should we, then, posit early Christian groups behind all other followers of Jesus rebuked by him? If the characters of the Johannine story are representatives of communities, should we assume that Johannine Christians were in conflict not only with Thomasine Christians, but also with 'Philip Christians', or with 'Martha Christians'? In my view, Thomas, Philip, and Martha are, above all, necessary actors in the Johannine narrative, and it would be unwarranted to reconstruct communities behind each of them.

It proved especially difficult to identify the distinct theological position that Thomas might represent in John. This difficulty is best demonstrated by the conflicting interpretations of this position by Riley and DeConick. In my view, it is far from clear that Thomas represents the denial of the resurrection of the body, as Riley suggested; it seems more likely that Thomas is simply portrayed as wanting additional proof of Jesus' identity. DeConick's suggestion that Thomas is portrayed and criticized as a representative of vision mysticism does not seem much more plausible; in John, it is Philip rather than Thomas who is portrayed as the one who wanted to see the Father. Finally, the early reception

history of the story of the Doubting Thomas in the *Acts of Thomas* and in the *Acts of John* speaks against the interpretation that Thomas was portrayed as a fool in the Johannine story; or, if this was the author's intention, he or she did not succeed very well in light of how this story was read and used by later Thomasine and Johannine Christians.

Finally, if there were a conflict between Johannine and Thomasine Christians over theological issues, one could expect to see more visible signs of it. For example, neither John nor *Thomas* leave any doubts about their opposition to the Jews. Moreover, the *Gospel of Thomas* is clearly opposed to 'those who lead you' (NETCOK ZHT THYTĪN, *Gos. Thom.* 3).⁴⁶ Why, then, would any conflict between Johannine and Thomasine Christians have been expressed in a less direct manner in these gospels? For example, the *Gospel of Philip* bears witness to an open conflict with other Christian interpretations introduced with the phrases 'some said/those who say... are in error (or: deceive)' (*Gos. Phil.* 55:23–24; 56:15–17; 67:35–37; 73:1–3). Whatever the relationship between John and *Thomas* was, it is not characterized by such unmistakable indications of controversy.

⁴⁶ On Thomas's critical attitude towards authority and leadership, see Uro, *Thomas*, 80–105.

4

Jesus' I-Sayings in *Thomas* and their Relationship to Johannine Traditions

As I pointed out in the introduction, there are no explicit signs of a literary relationship, such as quotation or identification of the other gospel by name between the Gospel of John and the *Gospel of Thomas*. The difference in genre and the lack of consensus about the editorial layers of these gospels make it difficult to apply traditional methods of biblical scholarship, such as redaction history, to prove or disprove literary dependency between John and *Thomas*. Moreover, I argued in chapters two and three that it does not seem plausible to assume a conflict between these gospels or the communities behind them. In consequence, it seems advisable to approach the relationship between the two gospels from a broader perspective.

What I understand by a 'broader perspective' will be evident in the course of this and subsequent chapters. The most important task is to isolate and analyze points where *Thomas* and John seem to be dealing with the same or similar issues, although we should not assume that they were necessarily engaged in a mutual discussion of these issues.

In this chapter I have chosen to focus on the I-sayings of Jesus in the *Gospel of Thomas* and their relationship to Johannine traditions. This group of sayings recommends itself as a test case for several reasons. These sayings constitute a relatively large amount of evidence in *Thomas*, and, as prominent expressions of Thomasine Christology, they are theologically relevant as well. Moreover, since the self-definition of Jesus is also a central issue in John, it is easy to trace a number of Johannine parallels, both formal and theological, to these sayings in *Thomas*.

1. JESUS' I-SAYINGS IN THOMAS

Sayings in which Jesus refers to himself occur frequently in the *Gospel of Thomas*. To begin with, there is a relatively small group of *identification sayings*. In this group, there are two sayings consisting of nominal sentences with an identification (ΑΝΟΚ ΠΕ, 'It is I, 'I am') and a subsequent predicate (*Gos. Thom.* 61; *Gos. Thom.* 77). A negative nominal sentence occurs in *Gospel of Thomas* 13 ('I am not your master'), while a verbal sentence is employed in another negative identification saying (*Gos. Thom.* 72: 'I am not a divider, am I?').

The positive identification sayings in *Thomas* resemble the Johannine 'I am' sayings with predicate nominatives (John 6:35, 51; 8:12; 9:5; 10:7, 9, 11, 14; 11:25; 14:6; 15:1, 5).¹ In the gospels of the New Testament, such identification sayings

¹ These Johannine sayings are, with one exception (John 9:5), rendered in Sahidic versions with nominal sentences similar to *Gos. Thom.* 61 and 77.

occur only in John, and only in Revelation (1:8, 17; 2:23) elsewhere in the New Testament.² In terms of content, however, there is only one 'I am' saying common to both John and *Thomas*; this is the saying identifying Jesus with light (John 8:12; *Gos. Thom.* 77). Jesus' words to Salome, that he is the one 'who comes from what is equal' (*Gos. Thom.* 61), have no parallel within the Johannine 'I am' sayings, but they are linked with the Johannine narrator's claim that Jesus 'made himself equal to God' (John 5:18). As to the negative identification sayings of the *Gospel of Thomas*, Johannine parallels can be found to *Gospel of Thomas* 13, but not to *Gospel Thomas* 72.

Many I-sayings in *Thomas* are exhortations (*Gos. Thom.* 90; 100), promises (*Gos. Thom.* 30; 99), and sayings expressing conditions of discipleship (19; 55; 101). Strikingly enough, there are no close Johannine parallels to these sayings. They are all characterized by a synoptic-like terminology. This cannot be due to a lack of similar material in John, for John does employ similar forms in relation to Jesus' own person (e.g. John 4:14; 5:24; 6:35; 7:37–38;

² In his short survey of I-sayings in *Thomas*, Koester contends that *Gos. Thom.* 61 and 77 are 'examples of "I am" as an identification formula', whereas 'the "I am" sayings in the Gospel of John are instances of the recognition formula...'; Helmut Koester, 'One Jesus and Four Primitive Gospels', in James M. Robinson and Helmut Koester, *Trajectories through Early Christianity* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1971), 158–204 (178). Koester's distinction between the formulae of identification and those of recognition is derived from Bultmann's analysis of the 'I am' sayings; cf. Rudolph Bultmann, *Das Evangelium des Johannes* (21st ed.; KEK 2; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1986), 167 n. 2. However, a clear distinction between these categories is not self-evident; cf., e.g., Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel according to John: Introduction, Translation, and Notes* (2 vols.; AB 29–29A; Garden City NJ: Doubleday, 1966–70), 1.534.

8:31–32; 12:26, 44–48). The lack of similarity indicates, rather, that Thomasine and Johannine sayings traditions are not dependent on each other at this point.

In addition, there are a number of I-sayings in *Thomas* in which Jesus speaks of his actions or emotions (*Gos. Thom.* 10; 16; 17; 23; 28; 29; 71; 104; 108; 114). There are only a few Johannine parallels to this group. Onuki's suggestion that the author of 1 John knew a saying like *Thomas* 17 and offered a reversed form of it will be discussed later in this chapter. The election of the disciples (cf. John 6:70; 15:16) is mentioned in *Gospel of Thomas* 23, and Jesus' incarnation (cf. John 1:14) is mentioned in *Gospel of Thomas* 28. Moreover, the 'temple' saying is common to both John (2:22) and *Thomas* (71).

Finally, there is a group of I-sayings in *Thomas* in which Jesus emphasizes the importance of his own words (*Gos. Thom.* 38; 43; 46; 62). *Gospel of Thomas* 92 is an affirmation of this teaching in the form of negation: Jesus would now be willing to disclose his teaching, but his followers are no longer seeking it. In a similar manner, Jesus is portrayed in John as underscoring the significance of his words (cf. John 3:11; 5:24; 8:31–52; 12:48; 14:23–24; 15:3, 20). Nevertheless, in spite of their shared interest in this issue, there are no close verbal similarities between *Thomas* and John at this point either.

This brief survey of the I-sayings in *Thomas* already suggests that the way this gospel presents Jesus' self-predication is, in essence, independent from the Gospel of John. However, there are some significant parallels, including 'I am' sayings (*Gos. Thom.* 61; 77), as well as some other sayings (*Gos. Thom.* 13, 17, 23, 28, 43, 71, and 104) that need to be examined more closely.

2. IS GOSPEL OF THOMAS 13 DEPENDENT ON JOHN?

Gospel of Thomas 13 provides a good starting point for the survey of I-sayings in *Thomas* and their relationship to John, since Brown maintained that 'there are some strong Johannine parallels for parts of this saying in GTh.'³ This saying is, thus, one of the 'close' parallels upon which Brown built his theory that the *Gospel of Thomas* is dependent, albeit indirectly, on John. *Thomas* 13 is also relevant to the characterization of Thomas in the *Gospel of Thomas*, but I will reserve this issue for a later discussion in chapter six. At this point, I will concentrate on the question of whether *Thomas* 13 can be proven to be dependent on John, as Brown suggested; in my view, this is not the case.

The narrative outline of *Thomas* 13 is similar to the synoptic account of Peter's confession (Mark 8:27–33// Matt. 16:13–23// Luke 9:18–22). The saying begins with a question Jesus addressed to his disciples concerning his identity, and they give different answers. While Peter compares Jesus to 'a just angel', and Matthew to 'a wise philosopher' (ΟΥΡΩΜΕ ΜΦΙΛΟΣΟΦΟΣ ΝΡΗΝΖΗΤ), Thomas confesses that he is unable to compare Jesus to anyone else. While the synoptic account is closed with a scene in which Peter takes Jesus aside and rebukes him in private (Mark 8:32), in *Thomas* 13 Jesus takes Thomas aside and supplies him

³ Brown, 'The Gospel of Thomas and St John's Gospel', 162.

with 'three secret words', which Thomas refuses to tell to the other disciples.⁴

The Johannine version of Peter's confession (John 6:66–71) offers a more remote parallel to *Thomas* 13. In fact, the very elements that link *Thomas* 13 with the synoptic version of Peter's confession are missing in John 6:66–71. In John, Peter's confession is not preceded by different identifications of Jesus, nor is the confession followed by a private discussion between Jesus and one of his disciples, as in the synoptic versions and in *Thomas*.

Both John 6:66–71 and *Thomas* 13 are related to the synoptic versions of Peter's confession, but in different ways. In *Thomas* 13, the narrative outline is similar to that of the synoptic stories (different opinions of Jesus, the correct answer, praise by Jesus, discussion in private). John 6:66–71, in turn, is similar to the synoptic accounts only insofar as Peter's confession is followed by the identification of the 'devil' among the disciples.⁵ There is no overlap between *Thomas* and John that would bring them especially close to each other.

⁴ To be more exact, these features link *Thomas* 13 with the version of Peter's confession in Mark and Matthew, for no private discussion is mentioned in Luke 9:18–22.

⁵ Conclusions about the relationship of both texts to Mark 8:27–33 depend on the question of whether this pericope is a traditional unit or a redactional composition by the second Evangelist. I have argued elsewhere for the latter possibility; cf. Ismo Dunderberg, *Johannes und die Synoptiker: Studien zu Joh 1–9* (AASF Diss. hum. litt. 69; Helsinki: The Finnish Academy of Science and Letters, 1994), 165–72. If this view of Mark 8:27–33 is correct, the similarity in composition in *Thomas* 13 would mean that this passage in *Thomas* is, either directly or indirectly, dependent on the Gospel of Mark. *Thomas* 13 has also been used as evidence for the opposite view, i.e., that Mark 8:27–33 is a traditional unit; see, e.g., Ulrich Luz, 'Das Geheimnismotiv und die markinische Christologie', *ZNW* 56 (1965), 9–30, esp. 21 n. 59.

Brown's further interpretations in support of a literary dependence between the *Gospel of Thomas* 13 and the Gospel of John remain vague. First, Brown maintained that there is an 'ascending insight of the disciples' affirmed both in *Thomas* 13 ('angel,' 'philosopher,' and unutterable) and in John 1:35–51 (rabbi, Messiah, a prophet like Moses, Son of God).⁶ This alleged similarity is not particularly convincing. As Brown himself admitted, 'there is no similarity of the titles.'⁷ Moreover, it is not evident that there is an 'ascending insight of the disciples' either in *Thomas* 13 or in John 1:35–51. It is unlikely that the 'philosopher' mentioned in the second place in *Thomas* 13 would be superior to the 'angel' mentioned first. Rather, it appears that both titles are equally inferior in comparison to Thomas's insight that Jesus cannot be compared to anyone else. A similar problem appears in John 1:35–51: I find no reason to assume that that 'the prophet' would be superior to 'Messiah' mentioned earlier in this passage.

Second, Brown regarded Jesus' words 'I am not your master' in *Thomas* 13 as 'at least an ideological parallel to John xv. 15...: "No longer do I call you servants."⁸ The ideological affinity, however, does not seem close enough to justify any conclusions about the *literary* relationship between the two gospels. The wording of John 15:15 is too remote from *Thomas* 13 to demonstrate any specific Johannine influence on this saying.

⁶ Brown, 'The Gospel of Thomas and St John's Gospel', 162.

⁷ Brown, 'The Gospel of Thomas and St John's Gospel', 162.

⁸ Brown, 'The Gospel of Thomas and St John's Gospel', 162.

Third, Brown maintained that the 'bubbling spring' and 'measuring' mentioned in *Thomas* 13 recall Johannine passages in which the Spirit is associated with water (John 3:34; 4:14; 7:38–39). A closer comparison reveals, however, that no specific Johannine traits can be found in *Thomas* 13. The Coptic vocabulary employed for the 'bubbling spring' in *Thomas* 13 indicates no close relationship to John 4:14.⁹ In *Thomas* 13, the verb used for 'bubbling' is ⲃⲠⲃⲣⲉ. The basic meaning of this verb is 'to boil'. Thus it would be an unexpected translation of the Greek verb ἄλλεσθαι used in John 4:14. In Coptic, ἄλλεσθαι is usually translated with the verbs Ⲓⲟⲩⲉ and ⲡⲏⲏ; the former is employed in the Sahidic translations of John 4:14. It seems likely, therefore, that John and *Thomas* independently derived the spring imagery from Jewish traditions where the metaphor of a spring was often employed for God's Wisdom (e.g., Prov. 16:22; 18:4; 1 Bar. 3:12; cf. Philo, *Poster. C.* 138).¹⁰

What is said about 'measuring' in *Thomas* 13 and in John suggests no close affinity between them, either. It would be next to impossible to explain how and why the Johannine saying that 'the Spirit is not given by measure' (John 3:34) would have turned into the Thomasine notion that Jesus has measured out the bubbling spring.

⁹ No instance of translating ἄλλεσθαι with ⲃⲠⲃⲠ is mentioned in *CCD* 42, 260, 625–27.

¹⁰ For the spring imagery in connection with divine Wisdom, see Burton Mack, *Logos und Sophia: Untersuchungen zur Weisheitstheologie im hellenistischen Judentum* (SUNT 10; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1973), 171–74; Karl-Gustav Sandelin, *Wisdom as Nourisher: A Study of an Old Testament Theme, Its Development within Early Judaism and Its Impact on Early Christianity* (AAAbO, 64:3; Åbo: Åbo Akademi, 1986), 94–96.

In sum, it does not seem tenable to maintain that *Thomas* 13 is dependent on the Gospel of John. Their common elements are too vague to suggest a literary dependence between these writings.

3. THE GOSPEL OF THOMAS 17 AND 1 JOHN 1:1–3

As I mentioned above, Onuki has suggested that the author of 1 John was opposed to a group of people circulating a saying now attested in *Gospel of Thomas* 17. Onuki argued that the Johannine author reversed this saying in order to refute his opponents, who were utilizing this saying.¹¹ In my view, however, there is no definitive evidence for this possible contact between 1 John and *Thomas*.

The relevant passages in *Thomas* and 1 John run as follows:

Jesus said, 'I shall give you what an eye has not seen, what an ear has not heard, what a hand has not touched, and what has never crossed the human mind.' (*Gos. Thom.* 17)

We declare to you what was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the world of life—this life was revealed, and we have seen it and testify to it, and declare to you the eternal life that was with the Father and was revealed to us—we declare to you what we have seen and heard so that you also may have fellowship with us. . . . (1 John 1:1–3; NRSV)

¹¹ Onuki, 'Traditionsgeschichte.'

Gospel of Thomas 17 is a 'wandering saying' (*Wanderlogion*) in the truest sense of the term. In addition to 1 Corinthians 2:9, the saying is widely distributed outside the New Testament. Interestingly, the clause 'what no hand has touched' in *Thomas* 17 is missing in most parallels.¹² In 1 John 1:1, however, the 'touching with hands' is mentioned in addition to 'hearing' and 'seeing.' *Thomas* 17 seems, thus, to be 'the exact reverse of 1 John 1:1.'¹³ Onuki goes one step beyond this observation in claiming that the reverse form of *Thomas* 17 was intentionally produced by the author of 1 John.

Paul had already introduced the saying as deriving from scripture ('but as it has been written', ἀλλὰ καθὼς γέγραπται, 1 Cor. 2:9), but no exact reference to one particular verse in the Hebrew Bible can be given. The saying refers at least to two passages in the Hebrew Bible (Isa. 64:3; 65:16), but it is not a combination of them. The beginning of the saying in 1 Corinthians 2:9 differs from Isaiah 64:3 ('What no eye has seen nor an ear heard', 1 Cor. 2:9// 'We have not heard nor did our eyes see God', Isa. 64:3 LXX), while the genitive 'of human being' (ἀνθρώπου) does not appear in Isaiah 65:16 LXX. Moreover, a similar form of the saying occurs not only in the texts that are, or can be, dependent on Paul,¹⁴ but also

¹² The clause appears in Manichean Turfanfragment Nr. 789, but this text is most likely influenced by the *Gospel of Thomas* 17 (Onuki, 'Traditions-geschichte', 230).

¹³ Robert M. Grant and David N. Freedman, *The Secret Sayings of Jesus* (London—Glasgow: Collins Fontana Books, 1960), 131.

¹⁴ 1 Clem. 34:8; 2 Clem. 11:7; *Acts of Thomas*, 36; *Acts of Peter*, 39; Hippolytus, *Refutation*, 5.24.1; 5.26.16; 5.27.2; 6.24.4; Clement, *Exc. Theod.* 10.5; *Dial. Sav.* 57 (140.2–4).

in texts that are most likely independent of him.¹⁵ Given the multiple forms of the saying, it is impossible to state with certainty whether *Thomas* 17 was originally based upon 1 Corinthians 2:9 or on some other version of the saying. The latter possibility seems more likely to me, since *Thomas* 17 contains no reference to the Pauline conclusion, 'what God has prepared for those who love him'.

Thomas 17 differs from 1 Corinthians 2:9 most significantly in the temporal aspect. Paul connected the saying with something that has been hidden thus far but has now been made manifest ('... God revealed to us', ἡμῖν δὲ ἀπεκάλυψεν ὁ θεός, 1 Cor. 2:10). This distinction between past and present is missing in *Thomas*. Instead, in its version of the saying, revelation lies in the future and will be made by Jesus: 'I shall give you ... (†𐤏𐤍𐤁† 𐤏𐤇𐤏𐤍)'. It remains unclear whether the promise is expected to be fulfilled in the near future or whether it waits for an eschatological fulfillment. In the former case, Jesus' promise could simply be understood as an inducement to read the *Gospel of Thomas* further: the subsequent sayings will provide the reader with 'what no eye has seen, what no ear has heard.' In the latter case, the promise in *Thomas* 17 could be understood as denoting the final share of the believers in the divine realm.

Like most other versions of the saying, *Thomas* 17 contends that divine reality is beyond human experience. However, it is not clear whether the saying means that the things which Jesus

¹⁵ A similar beginning of the saying appears, e.g., in Pseudo-Philo, *Ant. Bibl.* 26.13 and (the Syriac) *Apocalypse of Daniel*, 6.4–5; cf. Klaus Berger, 'Zur Diskussion über die Herkunft von I Kor 11.9', *NTS* 24 (1978), 271–83, esp. 272–73.

promises to give have not *yet* been perceptible to the senses—but will be revealed to them later—or whether it speaks of a divine reality that cannot be perceived with the senses at all.

The grammatical structure in *Thomas* 17 is similar to that of another saying of Jesus in *Thomas* 88: 'The angels and the prophets come to you, and they will give you what you (already) have.' In both sayings, a similar expression is used of future revelation: 'I shall give you (pl.)... (†NAT NHTN̄)', 'they will give you (pl.)... (CENAT NHTN̄)'. Taken together, the two structurally similar sayings create a contrast between old and new wisdom: while the angels and the prophets will only give the addressees what they already have, Jesus will provide them with something new that 'has not arisen in the human heart.'

A closer interpretation of this contrast depends on the identification of 'the angels and the prophets' in *Thomas* 88. Ménard suggested that the expression referred to early Christian preachers,¹⁶ but his proof-texts in the *Didache* (11:3–6; 13) speak of 'apostles' instead of 'angels.' It seems more likely that 'the angels and the prophets' are a reference to the Hebrew Bible. 'Prophets' are used in *Gospel of Thomas* 52 to designate the books of the Hebrew Bible, for their number, 'twenty-four', is tantamount to the traditional reckoning of the number of writings in the Hebrew Bible (4 Ezra 14:45).¹⁷ The tradition stating that the *Torah* was given at

¹⁶ Jacques É. Ménard, *L'Évangile selon Thomas* (NHS 5; Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1975), 189.

¹⁷ This reckoning also appears in the Talmudic traditions; cf., e.g., Gärtner, *Ett nytt evangelium?*, 139; Marjanen, 'Thomas and Jewish Religious Practices', 163–82.

Sinai by means of angels, on the other hand, is widely attested by both Jewish and Christian authors.¹⁸ *Gospel of Thomas* 88 is, thus, best understood as giving expression to a similar, critical view of the Hebrew Bible as does *Gospel of Thomas* 52. In that case, the distinction between what the angels and prophets will give (*Gos. Thom.* 88) and what Jesus will give (*Gos. Thom.* 17) can be seen as part of an attempt made in *Thomas* to contrast the Hebrew Bible and the words of Jesus.

Thomas 17 is likely to be an independent version of a more widely distributed saying. But was the author of 1 John familiar with this particular version when composing the beginning of his letter, as Onuki suggested? The main difficulty with Onuki's proposal is that it presupposes a very complicated theory about the origins of the prologue of 1 John. According to Onuki, 1 John 1:1–2 displays no less than three subsequent phases of composition. Originally, the prologue consisted only of 1 John 1:1a. At some later point, the author expanded the original version by adding 1 John 1:1b–e (ὁ ἀκηκόαμεν . . . ἐψηλάφησαν). It is this second stage of composition that, according to Onuki, indicates the Johannine author's knowledge of a tradition similar to *Thomas* 17. Finally, the author of the epistle made yet another addition consisting of 1 John 1:1f–2

¹⁸ There are parallels to this view in Gal. 3:19. Heikki Räisänen, *Paul and the Law* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986), 133 n. 29; 140 n. 61, mentions the following parallels: Deut. 33:2 LXX; Josephus, *Ant.* 15,136; Jub. 1:29; T. Dan. 6:2; Philo. *Somn.* 1,141ff.; Acts 7:38, 53; Heb. 2:2; *Apoc. Mos.* 1; *PesiqR* 21, and Epiphanius, *Panarion* 28,1,3 (as an opinion of Cerinthus).

(περὶ τοῦ λόγου τῆς ζωῆς κτλ.).¹⁹ The different stages of composition would be as follows:

- (Stage 1) We declare to you what was from the beginning,
 (Stage 2) what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes,
 what we have looked at and touched with our hands,
 (Stage 3) concerning the world of life—this life was revealed, and
 we have seen it and testify to it, and declare to you the eternal life
 that was with the Father and was revealed to us—we declare to
 you what we have seen and heard. . . .

Onuki's analysis of the layers in 1 John 1:1–3 is problematic for several reasons. First, it does not seem very likely that the author simply expanded the original version of the prologue several times without rewriting the passage as a whole. Second, does the author of 1 John 1:1 really disagree with what is said in *Thomas* 17? The Johannine author affirms that Jesus was touched by eyewitnesses, and the author includes himself in that group. Yet these statements do not really counter the claim made in *Thomas* 17 that Jesus promised to offer to his followers something that had not been revealed previously.

Third, is it necessary to assume that the author of 1 John reacted here against *Thomas* 17, or could the affinity between them be a mere coincidence? The essential issue is the notion of touching that brings together the Thomasine version of the saying and the prologue of 1 John. In 1 John, emphasis is laid on the incarnation of Jesus (1 John 4:1: Ἰησοῦν Χριστὸν ἐν σαρκὶ ἐληλυθότα). The affirmation at the

¹⁹ Onuki, 'Traditionsgeschichte', 234–36 (orig. 410–11).

beginning of 1 John, that Jesus was touched by his followers, can sufficiently be explained as related to this emphasis. In addition, emphasis put on the tactility of Jesus is in line with a more general tendency visible in a variety of early Christian texts.²⁰ Thus, it is not necessary to assume that the touching of Jesus was affirmed in 1 John because of a saying like *Thomas* 17, and it seems even less likely that 1 John 1:1 could have been understood as a rejection of this saying, for *Thomas* 17 and 1 John 1:1 seem to speak of different issues.

Finally, it can be noted that the way 1 John 1:1 is quoted by the *Muratorian Canon* brings this text essentially closer to *Gospel of Thomas* 17 than it originally was (cf. Table 1).²¹ The following similarities are shared by the *Muratorian* quotation of 1 John 1:1 and *Gospel of Thomas* 17 but not the earlier text of 1 John 1:1:

- (1) The *Muratorian Canon* reverses the order of 'seeing' and 'hearing'.
- (2) In contrast to 1 John 1:1, the *Muratorian Canon* mentions 'ears'.
- (3) The reference to 'hearing' is introduced in the *Muratorian Canon* with 'et', which is equivalent to the use of $\alpha\upsilon\omega$ ('and') in *Gospel of Thomas* 17.

²⁰ Cf., e.g., Ignatius, *Smyrn.* 3:2; *Gos. Truth* 30.26–32.

²¹ The edition of the *Muratorian Canon* followed here is Heinz Lietzmann (ed.), *Das Muratorische Fragment und die monarchianischen Prologe zu den Evangelien* (KIT 1; 2nd ed.; Berlin: de Gruyter, 1933). The *Muratorian Canon* is usually dated about 200 CE and located in Rome; for a short overview of these questions, see Bruce M. Metzger, *The Canon of the New Testament: Its Origin, Development, and Significance* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1987), 193–94.

- (4) The *Muratorian Canon* omits a second reference to the seeing in 1 John 1:1 (ἐθεασάμεθα).

Table 1. 1 John 1:1 in the *Muratorian Canon* and 1 Cor. 2:9//*Gos. Thom.* 17

1 John 1:1	The <i>Muratorian Canon</i> , ll. 29–31	1 Cor. 2:9	<i>Gos. Thom.</i> 17
ὁ ἀκηκόαμεν, ὁ ἑώρακάμεν τοῖς ὀφθαλμοῖς ἡμῶν, ὁ ἐθεασάμεθα	quae vidimus oculis nostris	ὃ ὀφθαλμὸς οὐκ εἶδεν	†‡‡‡ † †‡‡‡ ‡‡‡‡‡‡ ‡‡‡‡‡‡‡‡‡ ‡‡‡‡ ‡‡‡‡
καὶ αἱ χεῖρες ἡμῶν ἐψηλάφησαν	et <i>auribus</i> audivimus et manus nostrae palpaverunt	καὶ οὐδὲ οὐκ ἤκουσεν καὶ ἐπὶ καρδίαν ἀνθρώπου οὐκ ἀνέβη	‡‡‡‡ ‡‡‡‡ ‡‡‡‡‡‡‡‡‡ ‡‡‡‡‡‡‡‡ ‡‡‡‡ ‡‡‡‡ ‡‡‡‡‡‡‡‡ ‡‡‡‡‡‡‡‡ ‡‡‡‡ ‡‡‡‡‡‡‡ ‡‡‡‡ ‡‡ ‡‡‡‡ ‡‡‡‡‡‡

This list is not to suggest that *Thomas* 17 might be dependent on the text of 1 John 1:1 in the *Muratorian Canon* or vice versa. The differences between 1 John 1:1 and the *Muratorian Canon* are most likely the result of free translation in the latter.²² Some differences may even suggest the influence of 1 Cor. 2:9 and its parallels in the Hebrew

²² Cf. Theodor Zahn, *Geschichte des neutestamentlichen Kanons* (2 vols.; Erlangen: Deichert, 1890), 2.51.

Bible on this textual variant of 1 John 1:1.²³ If the 'negative' form of the saying could have had an impact on the 'positive' form in 1 John 1:1, it is also basically possible that the latter form had some impact on the 'negative' one.

It is, in principle, possible that the sentence 'what no hand has touched', which seemed to be a Thomasine expansion of the more traditional saying, was inspired by the 'positive' counterpart of the saying in 1 John 1:1. However, this possibility cannot be proven with any more certainty than Onuki's theory. We do not need 1 John 1:1 to explain why the touching with hands is mentioned in *Thomas* 17 since it does not seem very surprising that yet another aspect related to senses (hands/touching) was added to the traditional saying where two similar aspects (eyes/seeing and ears/hearing) were already mentioned. In consequence, it is entirely possible that the particular form of the saying in *Thomas* 17 was created independently of 1 John 1:1—and that the latter was created without any close relationship to *Thomas* 17.

4. JESUS' INCARNATION (*GOS. THOM.* 28)

Gospel of Thomas 28 is connected to the Gospel of John not only because it speaks of the incarnation of Jesus ('I stood in the midst of the world, and I appeared to them in flesh') but also because his incarnation is linked with human ignorance

²³ Isaiah 64:3 mentions 'hearing' and 'seeing with eyes' whereas 1 Corinthians 2:9 reverses the order to seeing and hearing, and adds 'ear' to Isa. 64:3.

in both gospels. While expressions of the latter motif are different (intoxication in *Gos. Thom.* 28; rejection in John 1:11), there are close Johannine parallels for the beginning of *Thomas* 28. The sentence 'I stood in the midst of the world' is similar to the Baptist's statement about Jesus in John 1:26 ('...but in the midst of you is standing one whom you do not know'), and the sentence 'I appeared to them in flesh' is similar to the Johannine affirmation that 'the Word became flesh' (John 1:14).

There is also a Greek version available for *Thomas* 28 (P. Oxy. 1.11–12) that shows that the affinity between John 1:26 and the beginning of the Thomasine saying was even closer than it may seem on the basis of the Coptic text. John 1:26 and the Greek version of *Thomas* 28 have in common the verb ἵστημι and the expression μέσος/ἐν μέσῳ. The phrase 'to stand in the midst of' is used of the hidden Messiah in *Thomas* 28 and John 1:26.²⁴

In John 1:26, the sentence 'among you stands one whom you do not know' (μέσος ὑμῶν ἕστηκεν ὃν οὐκ οἴδατε) seems to be a Johannine addition to the more traditional form of the Baptist's saying. The sentence does not occur in Synoptic parallels (Mark 1:7–8; Q 3:16), and it is in accordance with the Johannine theology. It was already affirmed in John 1:10 that 'the world did not know' Jesus, and only a few lines later John the Baptist admits that even he did not know Jesus to begin with (John 1:31).²⁵

²⁴ Cf. Quispel, 'Qumran, John and Jewish Christianity', 145.

²⁵ Cf. Dunderberg, *Johannes und die Synoptiker*, 56; Harry Fleddermann, 'John and the Coming One (Matt 3:11–12/Lk 3:16–17)', *SBLSP* 23 (1984), 377–84, esp. 384.

If the sentence ‘among you stands one whom you do not know’ was created by the Johannine author, as it seems, could it be concluded that *Thomas* 28 is dependent on the Johannine form of the Baptist’s saying? This possibility remains uncertain. The phrase ‘to stand in the midst of’, which connects *Thomas* 28 and John 1:26, is not unique in early Christian literature (e.g., Luke 24:36; John 20:19), and Jesus’ incarnation is expressed in different ways in John and *Thomas*. In John 1:14, it is said that ‘the Word *became* flesh (καὶ ὁ λόγος σὰρξ ἐγένετο)’ while, according to *Thomas* 28, Jesus ‘*appeared* in flesh to them’ (ΑΓΩ ΛΕΙΟΥΩΝΖ ΕΒΟΛ ΝΑΥ ΖΝ ΣΑΡΞ/καὶ ἐν σαρκ[[ε]] ἰ ᾧφθην αὐτοῖς, P. Oxy. 1.13–14).

Gärtner maintained that *Thomas* 28 speaks of the celestial Christ who inhabited the earthly Jesus. In support of his view, Gärtner points out that, in the New Testament, the term ᾧφθην is used of ‘somebody or something that belongs to a sphere above the world’ (Mark 9:4 pars; Luke 1:11; 22:43; 24:34; Acts 9:17; 13:31; 26:16; 1 Cor. 15:5ff.). Thus, according to Gärtner, *Thomas* 28 expresses the view that Jesus assumed a human form which people were able to understand, but that this form was only an ostensible one.²⁶

However, Gärtner’s interpretation fails to account for the fact that, in *Thomas* 28, Jesus’ human form does *not* make him more understandable to human beings. Rather, when in human form, Jesus became faced with the fact that all human beings were intoxicated. Moreover, neither this saying nor the *Gospel of Thomas* as a whole contains any clear

²⁶ Gärtner, *Ett nytt evangelium*, 128–29; cf. Ménard, *L’évangile selon Thomas*, 123.

references to the distinction between the celestial Christ and the earthly Jesus. This distinction is adopted from other sources and read into the Thomasine saying by Gärtner. Finally, Gärtner's view that the expression ἐν σαρκὶ ὠφθην would be 'impossible in the NT'²⁷ is problematic in light of what is said in 1 Tim. 3:16: 'He was revealed in the flesh, vindicated in spirit, seen (ὠφθην) by angels' (NRSV). Admittedly, ὠφθην is here used of Jesus' appearance to the angels, whereas his appearance in the flesh is described with another verb (ἐφανερώθη). However, there is hardly any distinct difference between the meanings of the two verbs since they are employed in a parallel manner in 1 Timothy 3:16.²⁸ Thus it would not seem convincing to maintain that the appearance terminology (ὠφθην) reflects a docetic Christology in *Thomas* 28, whereas ἐφανερώθη in 1 Tim. 3:16 does not.

Within early Christian literature, there were a variety of ways of expressing Jesus' incarnation.²⁹ Paul avowed that God sent his Son 'in the likeness of sinful flesh' (ἐν ὁμοιώματι σαρκὸς ἁμαρτίας, Rom. 8:3). In the deutero-Pauline epistles, the flesh of Jesus was mentioned in connection with his death on the cross (Col. 1:22; Eph. 2:14). The connection between Jesus' flesh and his suffering was also maintained by other early Christian authors (1 Pet.

²⁷ Gärtner, *Ett nytt evangelium*, 128.

²⁸ In the Sahidic New Testament, both verbs are translated with the same verb **ⲟⲩⲱⲛⲉ̅̅ⲉⲃⲟⲕ**; cf. Brown, 'Gospel of Thomas and St John's Gospel', 165 n. 5.

²⁹ In what follows, cf. Eduard Schweizer, 'σάρξ κτλ (E & F)', *TDNT* 7.124–51. The term 'incarnation' is used in this context in a broad sense, meaning different ways of connecting 'flesh' and Jesus in early Christian writings.

4:1,18; *Barn.* 5:1,12–3; 6:3; 7:5; Ignatius, *Smyrn.* 1:2). In a number of early Christian texts from the turn of the first century CE, however, Jesus' flesh denotes his earthly life in general (1 Tim. 3:16; Heb. 2:14; 5:7; 1 *Clem.* 32:2; Ignatius, *Smyrn.* 1:1; *Eph.* 20:2; *Magn.* 13:2).³⁰

John 1:14 and *Thomas* 28 apparently share the latter understanding of incarnation, for neither one refers directly to Jesus' death. Still, there are significant differences in terminology between the two gospels which indicate that they are based on different traditions. *Thomas* 28 is closely related to other early Christian texts which speak of Jesus' appearance in the flesh (in addition to 1 Tim. 3:16; *Barn.* 5:6; 6:7–16). The closest terminological parallels for John 1:14 can be found in Ignatius (*ἐν σαρκὶ γινόμενος θεός*, *Eph.* 7:2), and in the *Second Epistle of Clement* (*εἰς Χριστός... ἐγένετο σὰρξ*, 2 *Clem.* 9:5). In other Johannine writings, the expression *ἔρχεσθαι ἐν σαρκί* is used instead of the phrase *σὰρξ γίνεσθαι* (1 John 4:2; 2 John 7; cf. also Ignatius, *Pol.* 7:1; *Barn.* 5:10–11; *Gos. Truth* 31:4–5), but the appearance terminology is missing in them.

Although there are traces of Wisdom traditions in both John 1:14 and *Thomas* 28, details derived from these traditions are different. John 1:14 is connected with the Jewish Wisdom traditions by the remark that Jesus tabernacled (*ἐσκήνωσεν*) among human beings (cf. Sir. 24:8; a similar adaptation of the Wisdom myth occurs also in *Barn.* 5:14). The appearance terminology employed in *Thomas* 28 (*ὠφθην, λειογωνῶ*) hints at another tradition, according

³⁰ Schweizer, 'σὰρξ', 137.

to which Wisdom 'appeared upon earth and lived among men' (μετὰ τοῦτο ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς ὤφθη καὶ ἐν τοῖς ἀνθρώποις συναεστράφη, 1 Bar. 3:38).

In light of these differences between *Thomas* 28 and John, it does not seem likely that the former was dependent on the latter. Moreover, the analysis above speaks against Davies's hypothesis that the *Gospel of Thomas* had its origins in the Johannine community³¹ since there were no terminological affinities in the use of Wisdom traditions in John and *Thomas* 28. Nonetheless, the views of Jesus' incarnation in *Thomas* 28 and John 1:14 hint at a similar, relatively late development within early Christian Christology. The closest parallels to their shared understanding of the flesh of Jesus as denoting his entire earthly life cannot be found in the earliest writings of the New Testament, but in later writings such as 1 Timothy, Hebrews, and the texts written by (or ascribed to) Clement of Rome and Ignatius of Antioch at the end of the first century CE.

5. EQUALITY IS DIVINE (GOS. THOM. 61)

Thomas 61 is certainly one of the most obscure sayings in the *Gospel of Thomas*. Several emendations have been suggested to clarify its contents. A generally accepted emendation in the final part of the saying proposes that, instead of **ἔφθην** ('being destroyed'), one should read **ἔφθην**

³¹ For Davies's solution, see above, chapter two, section two.

(‘being equal’).³² This emendation is supported by the immediate context, since the same verb **ἴσῳ** is used at the beginning of Jesus’ answer to Salome. This reading also provides a better counterpart to the sentence ‘if one is divided.’³³ Thus, the emendation is well grounded, and I follow it in my interpretation of the saying. Another point in the saying where emendations have been suggested is that of the expression **ἑξ ἑνὸς** (‘as from one’) in Salome’s question.³⁴ I will argue below, however, that here no emendation is necessary; the text can be understood as it stands. Following my interpretation, *Thomas* 61 can be translated as follows:

Jesus said, ‘Two will rest on a bed: one will die, another will live.’
Salome said, ‘Who are you, man? As being from One, you have come up on my couch and eaten from my table.’

³² This emendation is usually accepted; see, e.g., Guillaumont et al. (eds.), *The Gospel According to Thomas*; Layton’s text edition, and his own translation in id., *The Gnostic Scriptures* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1987), 391; Meyer, *Gospel of Thomas*; Marjanen, *The Woman Jesus Loved*, 41 n. 30; id., ‘Women Disciples in the *Gospel of Thomas*’, 91 n. 6. Lambdin’s translation (‘if he is *destroyed*’), however, presupposes the reading **εἰσῳη**.

³³ In fact, *Paraph. Shem* 39,23–26 attests a similar contrast between equality and division by associating the division of the clouds (**πῖπῳε ἵκκλωσε**; cf. *Gos. Thom.* 61: **εἰπῳε**) with a description that they are ‘not equal’ (**σεῳη** **λῑ**).

³⁴ In the *editio princeps* of the *Gospel of Thomas* it was assumed that the Greek original was **ὡς ἐκ τίνος** (‘as from whom’) which was read by the translator as **ὡς ἐκ τινός** (‘as from somebody’). This assumption results in a translation ‘and (ὡς) whose (son)?’ Cf. A. Guillaumont et al. (eds.), *The Gospel According to Thomas: The Coptic Text Established and Translated* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1959), 35. Bentley Layton’s translation (‘like a stranger [?]’) follows Polotsky’s suggestion that the original was **ὡς ξένος**, which the ancient translator misunderstood as **ὡς ἐξ ἑνός**; cf. Layton, *The Gnostic Scriptures*, 391. This view has also been adopted by Valantasis, *The Gospel of Thomas*, 138.

Jesus said to her, 'I am from the equal one. I was supplied with from what belongs to my Father.'

<...> 'I am your disciple.'

<...> 'Because of this I say: "If one is <equal>, that one will be filled with light, but if one is divided, that one will be filled with darkness."'

It is the language of equality in Jesus' self-revelation that brings *Thomas* 61 close to Johannine Christology. The idea of equality may be lost in most modern translations of the saying, but it is visible in the Coptic text, where Jesus identifies himself as the one who exists from what is called **ⲡⲈⲦⲱⲛⲟⲩⲥⲟⲩ** is the stative form of the verb **ⲱⲩⲱ**, which means 'to make equal, level, straight.'³⁵ The stative form means, thus, 'to be equal, level, straight.' **ⲱⲛⲟⲩ** is frequently used as a translation of a Greek expression ἴσος εἶναι, 'to be equal.'³⁶ Thus, I prefer the translation of **ⲡⲈⲦⲱⲛⲟⲩⲥⲟⲩ** as 'the one who is equal' (Sell) or 'what is equal' to 'the undivided' (Lambdin), or to 'what is whole' (Meyer).³⁷

Sell argued that the expression 'one who is equal' recalls the Johannine statement that Jesus made himself equal to God (John 5:18). Moreover, Sell contended that the latter part of Jesus' words in *Thomas* 61 ('Some of the things of my

³⁵ Cf. CCD 606; Antti Marjanen, *The Woman Jesus Loved: Mary Magdalene in the Nag Hammadi Library and Related Documents* (NHMS 40; Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1996), 41 n. 30; id., 'Women Disciples in the Gospel of Thomas' in Uro, *Thomas at the Crossroads*, 89–106.

³⁶ Sell, 'Johannine Traditions', 30. For a similar view, see Valantasis, *The Gospel of Thomas*, 138.

³⁷ Marvin W. Meyer, *The Gospel of Thomas: The Hidden Sayings of Jesus* (San Francisco: Harper, 1992), 47.

father were given to me') reflects John 5:19–23 where Jesus depicts his relation to the Father.³⁸ Hence Sell's conclusion that *Thomas* 61 presupposes the literary composition in John 5:18–23 and thus reflects knowledge of the Gospel of John.

This conclusion, however, is far from convincing. One obvious shortcoming in Sell's analysis is that he did not take into account other close parallels to *Thomas* 61. In fact, the Q saying in Matthew 11:27 and Luke 10:22 offers a far closer parallel to *Thomas* 61 than does John 5:19–23. Above all, it is the passive voice that brings together *Thomas* and Q versions of the saying:

<i>Thomas</i> 61	Q 10:22
אַיִן נָאֵי עֲבֹלָה זֶיִן נָא פֶּאֶרְעִיבֵי 'I was supplied from what belongs to my Father.'	πάντα μοι παρεδόθη ὑπὸ τοῦ πατρὸς μου 'All things were given to me by my Father.'

Instead of the passive expression common to *Thomas* 61 and Q 10:22 ('were given to me'), John prefers active forms in describing the Father's relationship to the Son in John 5:19–23 (cf. also John 6:37; 17:24). In addition, all the specific Johannine features of John 5:19–23, such as apprentice imagery, the love relationship between the Father and the Son, and the promise of the raising of the dead, are missing in *Thomas* 61. Thus, Sell's hypothesis that *Thomas* 61 draws upon John 5:19–23 seems highly unlikely.

³⁸ Sell, 'Johannine Traditions', 32.

The language of equality does not show *Thomas's* indebtedness to John either, for the theme of 'being equal to God' was already raised in connection with Christ in Philippians 2:6–7, which is part of a pre-Pauline hymn. Thus, the idea of Christ's equality with God in John goes back to a very early tradition, and it is possible that *Thomas* 61 mirrors the same tradition without any knowledge of the Gospel of John.

Scholars dispute whether what is said about Christ's equality with God in Philippians 2:6 should be understood as referring to his pre-existence or to an early version of Adam Christology. In the former case, Christ's equality with God would go together with 'the form of God', denoting the divine status which Christ had earlier but abandoned in incarnation. In the latter case, 'being equal to God' could be an allusion to Adam's temptation to be equal to God (cf. Gen. 3:5), which Christ, as the antitype of Adam, was able to resist.³⁹ Regardless of which alternative is correct here, Philippians 2:6 argues that, as a human being, Christ was not equal to God: either he was but abandoned this state temporarily, or he was not, but was promoted to the Son of God at the resurrection. Either way, what is said in Philippians 2:6 is in contradiction with John 5:18, where Jesus claims equality with God during his earthly life.⁴⁰

³⁹ James D. G. Dunn, *Christology in the Making: A New Testament Inquiry into the Origins of the Doctrine of Incarnation* (London: SCM, 1980), 115. For a similar view see, e.g., Charles H. Talbert, 'The Problem of Pre-existence in Philippians 2:6–11', *JBL* 86 (1967), 141–53, esp. 151.

⁴⁰ Cf. Wayne A. Meeks, 'Equal to God', in *The Conversation Continues: Studies in Paul and John* (ed. Robert T. Fortna and Beverly R. Gaventa; Nashville: Abingdon, 1990), 309–21, esp. 309.

It is not easy to determine where *Thomas* 61 stands in this discussion, or whether it is part of it at all. It is, in fact, very difficult to give any clear-cut explanation as to how this saying as a whole should be construed. Difficulties of interpretation begin with Salome's question. As I mentioned above, there is no need to emend the words 'as being from one' (ⲉⲟⲩ ⲉⲃⲟⲗ ⲉⲛ ⲟⲩⲁ) in it. The text can be taken as it now stands, but as such, it can be interpreted in different ways.

Harold Attridge has suggested that 'one' (ⲟⲩⲁ) in *Thomas* 61 is a translation of a Greek indefinite pronoun, which can also be used in the sense of 'someone special.' The expression 'as from one' in *Thomas* 61 should therefore be translated 'as if you were from someone special.'⁴¹ Another possibility is that 'one' (ⲟⲩⲁ) refers to God understood as the primordial unity ('as from One'),⁴² yet Attridge rejects this interpretation on grammatical grounds: 'If ⲟⲩⲁ is indeed a translation of a Greek *ένός*, used in this metaphysical sense, we would certainly not expect it to be anarthrous in either language.'⁴³

Attridge's argument against the 'metaphysical sense' of 'one' in *Thomas* 61 can, however, be disputed on the basis of another early Christian text where *ένός* is used in the same

⁴¹ Harold W. Attridge, 'Greek Equivalents of Two Coptic Phrases: CG I,1.65,9–10 and CG II,2.43.26', *BASP* 18 (1981), 27–32, esp. 31–32. His suggestion has been taken up by Meyer, *Gospel of Thomas*, 47.

⁴² Lambdin's first translation 'as though from the One' in *The Nag Hammadi Library in English* (ed. James M. Robinson; Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1977), 124–25, was based on this understanding of the text. In the third edition of the same book, however, Lambdin abandoned this translation; cf. *The Nag Hammadi Library in English* (3d ed.; ed. James M. Robinson; Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1988), 133, and in the apparatus of his translation in Layton, *Nag Hammadi Codex II, 2–7*, he states that the text of *Thomas* 61 is erroneous at this point.

⁴³ Attridge, 'Greek Equivalents', 31.

manner as referring to God. In his *Excerpts from Theodotus*, Clement of Alexandria recorded the Valentinian teaching that the angels were created in the primordial unity and that they are one, 'as coming forth from One (ὡς ἀπὸ ἐνὸς προελθόντες, 36.1).' Although ἐνός appears here without the definite article, it is doubtless used in the metaphysical sense meaning God. This passage shows, in other words, that the metaphysical sense of 'one' in *Thomas* 61 cannot be excluded on grammatical grounds.

The evidence offered here leaves us with at least two different possibilities for understanding Salome's question, which, in turn, influence our interpretation of the equality mentioned in Jesus' answers to her. First, *Excerpts from Theodotus* showed that the expression 'as (...) from one' can be employed to refer to divine messengers coming from God. In that case, the latter part of Salome's question could be construed as expressing bewilderment at the incarnation of Jesus: 'You are of divine origin, and yet you act like a human being: you're reclining on my couch and eating at my table.' Or it could be that Salome questions Jesus' divine origin on the basis of his human behaviour: 'You claim that you are of divine origin, but you don't seem to act like it.'

The second possibility is that the expression 'as being from one' refers to Jesus being part of humankind created by one God. This understanding of 'being from one' could be supported by Hebrews 2:11 where it is stated that '... the one who sanctifies and those who are sanctified are from one (ἐξ ἐνός)', that is, they all have the same Father. In that case, Salome's question in *Thomas* 61 should be understood in a completely different manner. She regards Jesus as a normal

human being, and questions his claim to be anything more than that: 'You are of the same origin as all of us, so who are you to teach us?'

Finally, there is yet a third possibility for interpreting Salome's question: she doubts whether Jesus (as an itinerant prophet?)⁴⁴ is entitled to the hospitality she shows him. This interpretation is not as far-fetched as it may seem at first sight, for Salome's question implies the setting of a common meal provided by her ('my couch', 'my table'). Sharing a meal was a sign of friendship, and friendship was often considered possible only among those equal to each other. Thus, this interpretation could explain why Jesus begins to speak about equality in response to Salome's question.

However Salome's words should be understood, it is clear that in his reply to her Jesus begins to speak about his origin, and that equality is somehow connected with this origin. Parallels from the Sahidic New Testament suggest that behind the Coptic phrase **ⲱⲠⲡⲉ ⲈⲐⲠⲟⲗ ⲒⲚ̅** in *Thomas* 61 lay the Greek expression *εἶναι ἐκ τινος*, which is used to denote one's origin ('to be from...', cf. John 1:46; 3:31; 18:37).⁴⁵ Sahidic translations of John 3:31 and 18:37 show, moreover, that the substantivized sentence **ⲡⲈⲤⲱⲠⲠⲉ ⲈⲐⲠⲟⲗ ⲒⲚ̅** is used to translate a Greek participle sentence *ὁ ὢν ἐκ κτλ.*⁴⁶ Thus, in the Greek original of *Thomas* 61, the beginning of Jesus' answer to Salome could have begun *ἐγὼ εἶμι ὁ*

⁴⁴ For itinerant prophets and the *Gospel of Thomas*, see Patterson, *The Gospel of Thomas and Jesus*, 196–214.

⁴⁵ LSJ 488; BAA 454.

⁴⁶ John 3:31: *ὁ ὢν ἐκ τῆς γῆς* = **ⲡⲈⲤⲱⲠⲠⲉ ⲈⲐⲠⲟⲗ ⲒⲚ̅ ⲠⲕⲁⲒ** John 18:37: *παῦς ὁ ὢν ἐκ τῆς ἀληθείας* = **ⲠⲘⲠⲟⲛ ⲚⲒⲘ ⲈⲤⲱⲠⲠⲉ ⲈⲐⲠⲟⲗ ⲒⲚ̅ ⲤⲚⲈ**.

ὦν ἐκ κτλ. Hence my translation of the Coptic text: 'I am from....'

Moreover, it seems clear that in his response to Salome Jesus refers to his divine origin. This is indicated by the fact that he goes on to speak about what he has received from his Father. In this connection, it seems likely that **πετωηω**, which means either 'one who is equal' or 'what is equal', should be understood as referring to God.⁴⁷ However, what is awkward in *Thomas* 61 is that 'being equal' is maintained without defining the point of comparison (*to whom* is one equal?). Jesus does not claim here that he is equal to God, as he did according to John 5:18, nor does he seem to say that he and Salome are equals,⁴⁸ though this idea could be supported by some other sayings in *Thomas* (13, 108).

In connection with God, the point of the absolute use of 'being equal' can hardly be anything other than a claim that equality as such is one of God's characteristic features. Similar views can be found in early Christian texts that are some decades later than the *Gospel of Thomas*. In the Valentinian *Tripartite Tractate* (from the beginning of the third century CE), 'equality' is described as one aspect of the Father which he did not reveal 'to those who had come forth from him' (*Tri. Trac.* 67.36–37).

It may be that the idea of equality as one of God's essential features arose from the notion attested in Philo that God is

⁴⁷ Valantasis prefers the latter understanding ('what is equal'), as can be seen in his translation 'the one who exists in equality' (*The Gospel of Thomas*, 139). In this translation, the reference made in the Coptic text to the origin (**εβωλ 2ḿ!**) of Jesus is lost.

⁴⁸ For this interpretation, see Valantasis, *The Gospel of Thomas*, 139.

equal and similar only to himself (*Aet. Mund.* 43; *Sacr. Ac.* 10). Yet the affirmation of God's equality in *Thomas* seems to say more than that God cannot be compared to anyone else. This can be seen in the fact that some early Christians portrayed equality as a feature that characterized the whole divine realm. Affirming 'equality' was one way to express the peaceful harmony in that abode. There were Valentinians who emphasized that aeons were equal to each other,⁴⁹ and Clement of Alexandria argued that the works of seven leading angels express 'unity, equality (*ἰσότητα*) and similarity.'⁵⁰ An equation of unity and equality similar to Clement's is implied in *Thomas* 61 where the state of 'being equal' is contrasted with that of 'being divided'.

In *Thomas* 61, the language of equality is of special importance because of the conclusion of the saying, which shows the significance of this issue at a pragmatic level. The state of equality is not restricted to God, but is also expanded to include the followers of Jesus. The theme of discipleship is raised by Salome ('I am your disciple'), and Jesus' second comment shows that not only God, but also the ideal disciple is characterized by equality ('if one is equal, that one will be filled with light'). This conclusion can be read as an

⁴⁹ Irenaeus, *Adv. haer.* 1.2.6; cf. Ménard, *L'évangile selon Thomas*, 162. Menard considers *Gos. Truth* 25.8, too, to be a parallel to *Gos. Thom.* 61, but the verb *ϣωϣ* is used with another meaning, in that of 'scattering', in this passage of the *Gospel of Truth*; cf. Harold W. Attridge and George W. MacRae, 'The Gospel of Truth', *Nag Hammadi Codex I (The Jung Codex)* (2 vols; NHS 22–23; Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1985) 1.55–117; 2.39–135, esp. 1.95.

⁵⁰ For the attribution of this passage to Clement, see Robert P. Casey, Introduction to *The Excerpta ex Theodoto of Clement of Alexandria* (ed. Robert P. Casey; SD 1; London: Christophers, 1934), 30–33.

exhortation to equality and unity, instead of division, among the followers of Jesus.⁵¹

Again, the Valentinians referred to by Clement in the *Excerpts from Theodotus* had a quite similar view of the connection between the divine unity and the ideal state of humankind. They contrasted the primordial unity with the division among human beings, but looked forward to the elimination of this division 'in order that we, though we are many, may become one again (ἵνα ἡμεῖς οἱ πολλοὶ ἐν γενόμενοι).'⁵² Though this view is of a later date than *Thomas*, the Valentinian analogy serves to show what ideas could be connected with the language of equality in early Christian discourse.⁵³

⁵¹ The connection between equality and light on the one hand, and that between division and darkness on the other, brings to mind *Thomas* 24, in which it was affirmed that 'an enlightened person' does have light, but is in danger of being darkness if she or he does not shine the light. Here the context is clearly paraenetic, and supports the conclusion that the closure of *Thomas* 61 is paraenetic as well.

⁵² Clement, *Exc. Theod.* 36.2.

⁵³ It is not plausible to assume that *Thomas* 61 would be based upon Valentinian theology, for all the characteristically Valentinian features, such as a three-fold division between 'earthly', 'psychic', and 'pneumatic' natures (e.g., *Exc. Theod.* 54–56) as well as the references to the Pleroma and the Ogdoad (e.g., *Exc. Theod.* 26; 34–35; 63.2), are absent in *Thomas*. It is, however, possible that the *Gospel of Thomas* was read by some Valentinians and that it had an impact on their beliefs. Martha Turner has identified a large section of Thomasinic sayings in the *Gospel of Philip*, which is a collection of mainly Valentinian teachings; cf. Martha Turner, *The Gospel According to Philip: The Sources and Coherence of an Early Christian Collection* (NHMS 38; Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1996). Layton, in *The Gnostic Scriptures*, has suggested, but not really argued, that Valentinians made use of Thomasinic traditions. There are also striking affinities between the beginning of the *Gospel of Thomas* and Valentinus, fragment 4, which I have discussed elsewhere; cf. Dunderberg, 'From Thomas to Valentinus'.

The hope of becoming one again is clearly demonstrated in the *Gospel of Thomas*, too (*Gos. Thom.* 4; 11; 22–23; 106).⁵⁴ It is in this context that equality as the ideal state of a believer is best understood; the state of equality is one consequence of restitution of the divine harmony in the human being. In that case, one could also understand the awkward words ‘as being from one’ in Salome’s question to Jesus as indicating that he represents the primordial unity among human beings, and Jesus affirms this view by referring to his origin in God characterized by equality.

In conclusion, the language of equality is used in *Thomas* 61 in a manner that is clearly distinct from its use in John 5:18. While in John 5:18 the crucial issue was Christ’s equality with God, in *Thomas* 61 equality is a feature characteristic of God and of the ideal state of Jesus’ followers alike. They can participate in the equality which is characteristic of God and the divine realm. As the conclusion of the saying shows, God’s equality is connected with the ideal of equality among the followers of Jesus. This is, in fact, in keeping with the Thomazine critique of those claiming authority over others (e.g., *Gos. Thom.* 3).⁵⁵ *Thomas* 61 could be read, thus, as suggesting that the hierarchical structure based upon authority should be replaced with equality among those ‘filled with light’.

In fact, similar tendencies can also be detected in John, but they are not expressed using the language of equality, as in *Thomas*. The unity between the Father and the Son is

⁵⁴ For the motif of ‘becoming one’, see Uro, ‘Is *Thomas* an Encratite Gospel?’ in Uro, *Thomas at the Crossroads*, 140–62.

⁵⁵ Cf. Uro, *Thomas*, 100–2.

presented in John as paradigmatic for believers (John 17:11, 23–24), but only as a model for the mutual unity of believers. In John 15:15, Jesus calls his disciples ‘friends’ instead of ‘servants’, but it is noteworthy that friendship is not defined here in terms of equality but in terms of revelation (as in John 10:35). Jesus calls the disciples ‘friends’ not because they would be equal to him, but because they form the receptive audience for his message.

6. THE ‘TEMPLE’ SAYING (*GOS. THOM. 71*)

In chapter 2 I pointed out that Riley saw in *Thomas 71* (‘I shall [destroy] this house, and there is no one who would be able to build it [...]’) a reaction against the distinctly Johannine interpretation of the temple saying of Jesus. According to him, the different views of Jesus’ body expressed in *Thomas 71* and John 2:19–22 indicate that the communities behind these texts ‘are here in debate, each employing the saying in similar, but opposing ways, distinct from the uses of the other gospel writers; they are responding to each other.’⁵⁶

In both *Thomas 71* and John 2:19, this saying is attributed to Jesus himself, while in the synoptic gospels and in Acts, it is attributed to false witnesses (Mark 14:57–58; Matt. 26:60–61; Acts 6:13–14).⁵⁷ In John, the temple saying is interpreted as referring to the resurrection of Jesus’ body (John 2:21–22).

⁵⁶ Riley, *Resurrection Reconsidered*, 156.

⁵⁷ For these versions of the saying and its original meaning, cf. Riley, *Resurrection Reconsidered*, 134–46.

Many scholars, in addition to Riley, hold that the same association is implicit in *Thomas* 71. Bertil Gärtner's analysis of this saying has proved influential; it is also a point of departure for Riley's interpretation. Gärtner assumed that the 'house' mentioned in this saying is a metaphor for Jesus' body, and interpreted the conclusion of the saying ('there is no one who would be able to build it') as a Gnostic polemic against the resurrection of the body of Jesus.⁵⁸

Gärtner's view was adopted by Lloyd Gaston in characterizing the 'the Gnostic editor' of *Thomas*. Gaston argued that this editor employed the saying as 'a polemic against the concept of bodily resurrection.'⁵⁹ Nevertheless, Gaston claimed that, at an earlier stage, the house mentioned in the saying referred to the temple in Jerusalem. The saying, thus, 'goes back to a tradition which knew the temple saying only in the sense of destruction.'⁶⁰

Gärtner's reading of *Thomas* 71 was based on his presupposition that the *Gospel of Thomas* is a Gnostic text. For Gärtner, however, 'Gnosticism' denoted everything that differed from 'the main traditions of the Great Church.'⁶¹ This definition is far too broad to be useful for scholarly analysis. Gärtner's second presupposition is that the author of *Thomas* 71 not only knew the temple saying in its Johannine form (John 2:19), but also knew the Johannine interpretation of

⁵⁸ Gärtner, *Ett nytt evangelium*, 158.

⁵⁹ Lloyd Gaston, *No Stone on Another: Studies in the Significance of the Fall of Jerusalem in the Synoptic Gospels* (NovTSup 23; Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1970), 152.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶¹ Gärtner, *Ett nytt evangelium*, 9.

the saying, which connected it with the resurrection of Jesus' body (John 2:21–22). Only this presupposition enabled Gärtner to combine *Thomas* 71 with the destruction of the body; the saying itself does not mention Jesus' body at all.

The adoption of Gärtner's interpretation of *Thomas* 71 led Riley to a confusing assessment of the relationship between John and *Thomas*: he both rejected (against Brown) and accepted (because of *Thomas* 71) the view that the author of *Thomas* may have known the Gospel of John.⁶²

Riley sought evidence for the idea that the 'house' denotes the body not only in John but also elsewhere in the *Gospel of Thomas*. This evidence (*Gos. Thom.* 21, 48, 98), however, remains ambiguous. As for *Thomas* 98, Riley suggested that 'the sword is the (ascetic) will and power of the individual soul, which is tested against the "house" of body.' In *Thomas* 48, 'the "house" is the body in which the soul and heavenly counterpart are to be united', and *Thomas* 21 should be understood as referring to 'individuals, pictured as souls indwelling their bodies as a householder dwells in a house.'⁶³ The basic difficulty with this evidence is that the association of the 'house' with the body is not spelled out in any of these three sayings, but it is, in every case, the result of Riley's allegorical reading of them. Moreover, it is not a matter of course that 'house' would refer to 'body' in *Thomas* or elsewhere. In his response to Riley's interpretation of

⁶² Cf. chapter two, section three above.

⁶³ Riley, *Resurrection Reconsidered*, 152–53. For a similar criticism of Riley's interpretation of *Gos. Thom.* 71, see Cameron, 'Myths and Theories', 242; Stevan Davies, Review of Riley, *Resurrection Reconsidered*, *JBL* 116 (1997), 147–48.

Thomas 71, Cameron has listed more than a dozen possible referents for 'house' that can be found in early Jewish and Christian texts:

... the heavenly dwelling place of the soul (e.g., *Exeg. Soul* 128.36; 129.5; 132.21; 137.11), the created world (e.g., *Bar* 3:24), the abode of wisdom (e.g., *Prov.* 9:1; *Sir.* 14:24), the body (e.g., *2 Cor* 5:1), the self (e.g., *Gos. Truth* 25.23), a people (e.g., *Matt* 10:6; 15:24), the structure of the family (e.g., *Gos. Thom.* 16, 48), one's household goods (e.g., *Josephus, Bell.* 6.5.2 § 282), a building (e.g., *CMC* 92.15), a royal palace (e.g., *Matt* 11:8), one's ancestral lineage (e.g., *Luke* 1:27, 69), a scribal school (e.g., *Sir* 51:23), the church (e.g., *Herm. Sim.* 9.14.1), the city of Jerusalem (e.g., *Q* 13:35), or the Temple in Jerusalem (e.g., *John* 2:16).⁶⁴

Thomas 71 describes the destruction of the 'house' as Jesus' own action; in this sense, the saying is closer to the synoptic tradition than to the Johannine, where the Jews are told by Jesus to destroy the temple (*λύσατε τὸν ναὸν τοῦτον*, *John* 2:19). The Johannine reformulation of the saying made it better suited to the subsequent interpretation that 'this temple' is the body of Jesus.⁶⁵ The fact that there are no traces of the distinctly Johannine form of the temple saying in *Thomas* 71 speaks against Gärtner's and Riley's contention that the saying is a reaction against the Johannine view about the resurrection of the body of Jesus expressed in *John* 1:19–23.

⁶⁴ Cameron, 'Myths and Theories', 242.

⁶⁵ Cf. Gaston, *No Stone on Another*, 71; E. P. Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism* (2nd ed.; London: SCM, 1987), 73.

Moreover, it is not necessary to assume that *Thomas* 71 should be understood allegorically at all. It is equally possible that the saying really refers to the actual destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem. The Temple was called a 'house' in early Christian texts (e.g., Mark 11:17//Matt. 21:13//Luke 19:46 [= Isa. 56:7]; John 2:16–17), and the non-apocalyptic bias prevalent in *Thomas* does not exclude the identification of the 'house' mentioned in *Thomas* 71 with the Temple.⁶⁶

There were, no doubt, early Christians whose eschatological hopes were connected with the destruction of the Temple. Matti Myllykoski has argued, I believe convincingly, that the temple saying was originally circulated by Christians who thought that Jesus would return immediately after the destruction of the Temple, and that Mark reacted against this view by ascribing the saying to false witnesses.⁶⁷ The author of John took another course by giving an allegorical interpretation of the saying. The statement 'no one will rebuild it' in *Thomas* 71 can be seen as yet another attempt to denounce eschatological expectations connected with the destruction and eventual rebuilding of the Temple. This conception of *Thomas* 71 can be supported with the anti-eschatological stance attested in *Thomas* 3 and 113. Moreover, since the restitution of the Temple was a common Jewish hope, the rejection of this hope in *Thomas* ('no one will rebuild this house' = 'no one will rebuild the Temple')

⁶⁶ Pace Riley, *Resurrection Reconsidered*, 151.

⁶⁷ Matti Myllykoski, *Die letzten Tage Jesu: Markus, Johannes, ihre Traditionen und die historische Frage* (2 vols.; AASF Ser. B 256, 272; Helsinki: The Finnish Academy of Science and Letters, 1991–94) 1.53–7, 119–21; 2.183.

would be completely in accordance with the rejection of Jewish religious practices in this gospel. Thomasine Christians might have had their reasons, either religious or political, for welcoming the destruction of the Temple, but they did not link any eschatological hopes to this event.⁶⁸

In conclusion, *Thomas* 71 provides no explicit indication of a conflict between Thomasine and Johannine Christians concerning the resurrection of the body. It is possible that both *Thomas* 71 and John 2:19–22 voice criticism against eschatological hopes linked with the destruction of the Temple, the former by an anti-eschatological interpretation ('no one will rebuild it'), the latter through an allegorizing interpretation (the temple = Jesus' body). Both interpretations are best placed chronologically after the Jewish War, when the Temple was destroyed by the Romans, and the hope of its restitution had already begun to fade.⁶⁹

7. 'I AM THE LIGHT' (GOS. THOM. 77)

In both *Gospel of Thomas* 77 and in John (8:12; 9:5), Jesus identifies himself with light. This is part of a light–dark dualism prevalent in both gospels (John 1:5; 3:19; *Gos.*

⁶⁸ Cf. Patterson, *Gospel of Thomas*, 149–50.

⁶⁹ For this reason, I find it very improbable that *Thomas* 71 would provide us with the original form of the temple saying; pace John D. Crossan, *The Historical Jesus: The Life of a Mediterranean Jewish Peasant* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1991), 356.

Thom. 24; 61).⁷⁰ Both also describe how the light illuminates the entire world (John 1:9; *Gos. Thom.* 24). Yet there are also considerable differences in the use of light imagery in these gospels. In John, light is closely connected with Jesus' earthly existence (1:9; 3:19; 9:5; 12:46) and with believing in him (12:36, 46). Moreover, light imagery is connected with lifestyle, either with good and bad actions (3:20–21), or with walking in light or darkness (8:12; 11:9–10; 12:35). In *Thomas*, light denotes a sphere whence the believers have come and where they will return (*Gos. Thom.* 11; 50). In addition, light can be found inside human beings, but there is also a possibility of being 'in' or 'filled with' darkness (*Gos. Thom.* 24; 61).

Light imagery is, thus, too different in John and *Thomas* to warrant postulating any particular relationship between the two gospels. The few coincidences between them at this point reflect widely-held commonplaces about light. It is neither exceptional that divine figures identify themselves with light (e.g., *CH* 1.6), nor is a light–dark dualism restricted to these two gospels; it is found, for example, in writings of the Qumran community (e.g., *IQS* 3.20–21) and in Pauline and deutero-Pauline letters (1 Thess. 5:5; 2 Cor. 6:14; Eph. 5:8–14).

In *Thomas* 77, it is not entirely clear whether or not Jesus is portrayed as the agent of the creation of the world. Jesus speaks of himself as the originator and goal of 'the all'

⁷⁰ For a more thorough review of light imagery in Johannine writings and in the Gospel of Thomas, see Popkes, 'Erwägungen', 647–63.

(ΠΤΗΡΩ), but it cannot be known with certainty whether 'the all' refers to believers (and thus to their divine origin, as in *Gos. Thom.* 50) or to the visible world.⁷¹ The latter view is at least possible when compared to 1 Corinthians 8:6, in which τὰ πάντα, translated in the Sahidic New Testament with a singular form ΠΤΗΡΩ (as it is in Rom. 11:36), is used to refer to the world. If *Thomas* 77 refers to the creation of the world by Jesus, its content would coincide with what is said about him in John 1:3, 10. Even in this case, however, a lack of close verbal parallels speaks against a literary relationship between the two gospels. This similarity between them could be due to independent adaptations of Jewish Wisdom traditions in which Wisdom was given the creator role (e.g., Prov. 3:19; Wisd. of Sol. 8:6; Philo, *Det. pot. ins.* 54; *Fug.* 109).⁷²

Moreover, the closest New Testament parallels to *Thomas* 77 are found not in John but in the Pauline epistles. Jesus' self-identification in *Thomas* 77 is similar to hymnic statements about Christ in 1 Corinthians 8:6, Romans 11:36, and Colossians 1:16.⁷³ However, there is some variation amongst these passages. In 1 Corinthians 8:6, *God* is regarded as both the originator and as the goal of the all, while Christ is the mediator. All three aspects are associated with God in

⁷¹ On the interpretation of this part of *Gos. Thom.* 77, see Marjanen, 'Is *Thomas* a Gnostic Gospel?', 121–24.

⁷² Cf. Dunn, *Christology*, 165.

⁷³ A Stoic parallel to these statements is provided by Marcus Aurelius Antoninus, *Meditations*, 4.23 (ἐκ σοῦ τὰ πάντα, ἐν σοὶ τὰ πάντα, εἰς σέ πάντα); cf. C. H. Dodd, *The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1960), 188; Bo Reicke, 'πᾶς (B.3–4)', *TDNT* 5.892–93.

Romans 11:36, whereas Colossians 1:16 presents Christ as both the mediator and as the goal.

In contrast to all these passages, *Thomas 77* identifies Jesus as the originator and does not mention him being the mediator. Hence, the Wisdom Christology reflected by this saying is unlikely to have been derived directly from Paul or his successors. Nevertheless, it is noteworthy that only in this saying and in Colossians 1:16 is Jesus (or Christ) portrayed as the *goal* of the all. This suggests that *Thomas 77* is related to a deutero-Pauline development of Wisdom Christology. To be sure, this possibility cannot be proposed with certainty. Although Colossians is probably a post-Pauline letter, the hymnic section to which Colossians 1:16 belongs might harbour traditions that are significantly older than the letter itself.

In sum, the similarities between *Thomas 77* and John are, in all probability, due to their common background in Wisdom traditions.⁷⁴ There is, moreover, a significant conceptual difference between them with regard to Jesus' role. By using the preposition *διὰ*, John identifies Jesus as the mediator of the creation, as do also 1 Corinthians 8:6 and Colossians 1:16. This nuance does not appear in *Thomas 77*.

⁷⁴ Popkes suggests that *Gos. Thom. 77* might be a later addition to the *Gospel of Thomas* and that it would be based upon *relecture* of the Gospel of John ('Erwägungen', 673–74). I am not, however, convinced that *Thomas 77* was added at some later stage, and I do not find it necessary to see in this saying a later reflection of distinctly Johannine language, since imagery of light was so broadly prevalent in Jewish Wisdom traditions.

8. OTHER PARALLELS (GOS. THOM. 23, 43,
AND 104)

Thomas 23 is, as Brown pointed out, linked with the Gospel of John by the idea of election.⁷⁵ Again, however, this affinity does not suggest any distinct relationship between *Thomas* and John, as Brown asserted, because the notion that the disciples are chosen by Jesus also occurs elsewhere (e.g. Luke 6:13; *Barn.* 5:9). Ephesians 1:4 even proposes the idea that the entire Christian community was already elected before the foundation of the world.

In John, election is accompanied by two other features that do not occur in *Thomas* 23. First, it is mentioned in John in the sections in which Jesus speaks of a traitor among the disciples (John 6:70; 13:18). Second, the choosing of the disciples by Jesus is connected with the opposition they have to face in the world (John 15:16, 19).⁷⁶ In *Thomas* 23, on the other hand, election is understood as a future event ('I shall choose') and associated with the ideal of becoming one. Moreover, the saying states that the number of the elect will be limited. At this point, *Thomas* 23 is significantly closer to a parallel passage in Matthew (22:14 'For many are called but few are chosen') than to anything in John.⁷⁷ *Thomas* 23 and the Gospel of John are, thus, representatives of different traditions of election.

⁷⁵ Cf. Brown, 'Gospel of Thomas and St John's Gospel', 164.

⁷⁶ Cf. Gottlob Schrenk, 'ἐκλέγομαι (C-E)', *TDNT* 4.168–76, esp. 172–74.

⁷⁷ Cf. Ménard, *L'évangile selon Thomas*, 116.

In John 8:25, Jews are portrayed as raising the question of Jesus' identity ('who are you?', *σὺ τίς εἶ*). When the disciples pose the same question to Jesus in *Thomas* 43, he answers that they 'have become like the Jews.' This combination of ideas in *Thomas* makes it difficult to accept Koester's hypothesis on the sayings traditions behind John 8:12–59. According to him, the Johannine author put together traditional sayings of Jesus, attested by parallels from the Nag Hammadi writings, including the *Gospel of Thomas*, and another source attested by *Papyrus Egerton*,⁷⁸ in which an account of Jesus' controversy with the Jews could be found. That the Jews are mentioned in *Thomas* 43, however, fits badly with Koester's theory of the sources behind John 8.⁷⁹ According to this theory, the Jews were mentioned in the source describing the controversy between Jesus and the Jews, not in the sayings tradition common to John and *Thomas*. This, however, is apparently not the case; thus, *Thomas* 43 makes Koester's theory questionable.

⁷⁸ Koester, 'Gnostic Sayings', 106. To be sure, the value of *Papyrus Egerton* 2 as a witness to the pre-Johannine tradition is debatable. The possibility of a late dating of the papyrus (150–200 CE) is increased by a recent identification of P. Köln 255 as a part of it; cf. Michael Gronewald, 'Unbekanntes Evangelium oder Evangelienharmonie (Fragment aus dem 'Evangelium Egerton')', *Kölner Papyri* 6 (1987), 136–37; Dieter Lührmann, 'Das neue Fragment des PEgerton (PKöln 255)', in *The Four Gospels* (ed. F. Van Segbroeck et al.; BETL 100; Leuven: Leuven University Press/Peeters, 1992), 2239–55, esp. 2246–47; Frans Neirynck, 'The Apocryphal Gospels and the Gospel of Mark', in id., *Evangelica II: 1982–1991* (BETL 99; Leuven: Leuven University Press/Peeters, 1991), 715–72, esp. 754. Nevertheless, it may well be that the papyrus still incorporates earlier Jewish-Christian traditions which are independent of John; cf. Kurt Erlemann, 'Papyrus Egerton 2: "Missing Link" zwischen synoptischer und johanneischer Tradition', *NTS* 42 (1996), 12–34.

⁷⁹ Cf. chapter two, section two above.

In fact, the affinities between John 8:25 and *Thomas* 43 do not suggest any kind of mutual relationship between the two passages. The accusation that the Jews misunderstand Jesus does not indicate a literary dependence in one way or another, for this feature is in accordance with the negative picture of Judaism evident in both gospels. Moreover, the question of Jesus' identity ('Who are you?') also appears in the *Gospel of Thomas* independently from the Gospel of John (*Gos. Thom.* 61).

In *Thomas* 104 and in John 8:46, it is said that Jesus is sinless. However, the narrative contexts are too different to suggest a direct literary dependence in either direction. *Thomas* 104 contains Jesus' reply to those who ask him to pray and fast: 'What sin have I done, or in what way have I been defeated?' John 8:46, on the other hand, belongs to a section where Jesus blames his Jewish opponents for not having believed in him.

Moreover, there is evidence for a broader discussion of Jesus' sinlessness in early Christian literature. The topic is touched upon in Hebrews 4:15,⁸⁰ and in Matthew's account of Jesus' baptism, where John the Baptist initially refuses to baptize Jesus with the baptism of repentance, and finally consents only in order to 'fulfill all righteousness' (Matt. 3:14–15). The *Gospel of the Nazoreans* was part of the same 'apologetic process'⁸¹ as the Gospel of Matthew, but it went one step further by maintaining that, as his mother and brothers were going to be baptized by John the Baptist,

⁸⁰ Cf. Brown, *The Gospel According to John*, 1.358.

⁸¹ Crossan, *The Historical Jesus*, 233.

Jesus refused to join them because he was not in need of a baptism 'unto the remission of sins' (*Gos. Naz. 2*).⁸² In consequence, it is not necessary to assume a direct contact between *Thomas* 104 and John 8:46 on the basis of that treatment of Jesus' sinlessness. The most likely explanation is, again, that they were part of a discussion about a common topic without knowing each other's positions in that discussion.

9. CONCLUSION

The first conclusion to be drawn from the materials discussed in this chapter is that they offered no obvious cases of literary dependence between *Thomas* and the Johannine texts. Rather, each of them employed similar Jewish and Christian traditions in quite different ways. This result speaks strongly against any view presupposing a close contact between the *Gospel of Thomas* and the Johannine writings: either that *Thomas* was used by the Johannine community at an early stage, or that the communities behind these texts were engaged in a mutual controversy.

However, evidence examined in this chapter offered a number of points at which John and *Thomas* were part of a discussion about the same topics, although their authors

⁸² This fragment provides, in fact, the closest parallel to *Gos. Thom.* 104. Each passage is an apophthegm in which Jesus is required by someone to partake in an action of cultic relevance, and Jesus declines to do so by posing a rhetorical question that shows his sinlessness.

did not know each other's positions. Some observations made above suggest that these shared topics do not go back to the oldest traditions of the sayings of Jesus. Rather, both gospels seem to reflect later developments in the transmission of these sayings. This points to the possibility that John and *Thomas* could have been written at about the same time. In the light of the evidence discussed above, the period between 70 CE to 100 CE would offer the most probable date for both gospels. This suggestion can be supported with three points made above:

(1) John and *Thomas* had in common the idea that the 'flesh' (σάρξ) of Jesus denotes not only his suffering, but his earthly life in its entirety; the closest analogies to this view could be found in 1 Timothy, Hebrews, and the texts of the Apostolic Fathers.

(2) Although the Temple saying appeared in different versions in John 2:19 and *Thomas* 71, their interpretations of the saying presupposed a post-Jewish War setting (as probably did Mark 14:57–58), in which the rebuilding of the destroyed temple in Jerusalem no longer seemed possible.

(3) The sinlessness of Jesus is discussed, in addition to *Thomas* 104 and John 8:46, in texts that are no earlier than the time span between 70 CE to 100 CE suggested above: Hebrews (4:15); Matthew (3:14–15), and the *Gospel of Nazoreans* (ch. 2).

In addition, Jesus was described in the same manner—as the goal of the all—in *Thomas* 77 and in the deutero-Pauline Colossians (1:16). The manner in which equality was described as a quality of either God or the divine realm in

Thomas 61 offered only a very remote parallel to John 5:18, if any; what was absent in *Thomas* was the Johannine claim that Jesus is equal to God. The closest analogy to the way equality is spoken of in *Thomas* 61 was, in fact, found in texts bearing witness to Valentinian Christianity from the latter half of the second century onwards (Clement's *Excerpts from Theodotus*; the *Tripartite Tractate*). It cannot be concluded from this, however, that *Thomas* would presuppose Valentinian theology and, thus, be of much later origin, for it is possible that Valentinians had access to the *Gospel of Thomas* or traditions now embedded in it.

The Beloved Disciple in the Gospel of John

The next three chapters in this book are devoted to the enigmatic ‘disciple whom Jesus loved’, who is simultaneously a figure of great importance and a very elusive character in the Gospel of John. He is introduced not only as one of Jesus’ closest followers, but also as the author of this gospel (John 21:24). In spite of his crucial role, he is mentioned only in certain passages in John (13:21–30; 19:25–27; 20:2–10; 21:7, 20–25, and probably 19:35–36), and his appearance even in these passages is abrupt: nothing in the Johannine story has paved the way for his presence, nor is his disappearance from the scene told to the audience of the gospel.¹ Moreover, the Beloved Disciple does not appear at

¹ I find the identification of the Beloved Disciple with one of the two disciples mentioned in John 1:35–37 unlikely; for this issue, see especially Frans Neiryck, ‘The Anonymous Disciple in John 1’, in id., *Evangelica II: 1982–1991 Collected Essays* (BETL 99; Leuven: Leuven University Press/Peeters, 1991), 617–49; cf. also R. Alan Culpepper, *John, the Son of Zebedee: The Life of a Legend* (Studies on Personalities of the New Testament; Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1994), 59; Joachim Kügler, *Der Jünger, den Jesus liebte: Literarische, theologische und historische Untersuchungen zu*

all in the synoptic gospels, not even in the synoptic parallels to the passages in John where he is mentioned.

The elusiveness of the Beloved Disciple in John and his absence in other sources has led most scholars to the assumption that this figure has been added secondarily to the earlier traditions available to the author of the Gospel of John. I myself am in agreement with the scholars who believe that the passages in John where the Beloved Disciple is mentioned are dependent on the synoptic gospels. For example, the Johannine note that Satan went into Judas (John 13:27) seems to presuppose Luke 22:3, which is likely to be Luke's editorial addition to Mark 14:10, and John 20:2–10 can be seen as a narrative elaboration of the short account of Peter's visit to the tomb of Jesus in Luke 24:12.² In fact, I find Kügler's position, that all the passages where the Beloved Disciple appears in John belong to the same Johannine layer as John 21, and that the author of this layer knew the synoptic gospels, to be convincing.³

There is, however, considerable disagreement over these issues. Some scholars insist that the passages introducing the Beloved Disciple are not dependent on the synoptics, but even they usually accept that the figure of the Beloved Disciple did not appear in earlier traditions used by the

einer Schlüsselgestalt johanneischer Theologie und Geschichte; mit einem Exkurs über die Brotrede in Joh 6 (SBB 16; Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1988), 421–24.

² Cf. Frans Neirynek, 'John and the Synoptics: The Empty Tomb Stories', in id., *Evangelica II*, 571–600, esp. 582–95.

³ Kügler, *Der Jünger, den Jesus liebte*, 157–79, 298–306, 340–49. I am, of course, easily persuaded by Kügler's argument, for it coincides with my own conclusions in Dunderberg, *Johannes und die Synoptiker*, passim.

Johannine author(s).⁴ The question of whether the underlying sources for the passages mentioning the Beloved Disciple in John were the Synoptic gospels or separate traditions independent of them is not of primary importance to my argument.

It is also intriguing that the Beloved Disciple remains anonymous in John. The only designation used for him in John is ‘the disciple whom Jesus loved.’ The anonymity of this central figure has led to a plethora of attempts at identification, including John the Elder, John Mark (cf. Acts 12:12), Lazarus (cf. John 11:3, 5), Matthias (cf. Acts 1:15–26), the rich youth (cf. Mark 10:17–22), Paul (cf. Gal. 2:20), Thomas, Mary Magdalene, and Andrew.⁵ While this

⁴ E.g., Jürgen Becker, who does not think that John was dependent on the synoptics, ascribes all references to the Beloved Disciple in John to the final editorial layer of this gospel; Jürgen Becker, *Das Evangelium des Johannes* (2 vols.; 3rd ed.; ÖTKNT 4; Gütersloh and Würzburg: Gütersloher Verlagshaus and Echter Verlag, 1991), 1.518–19. For a similar view, see Marinus de Jonge, ‘The Beloved Disciple and the Date of the Gospel of John’, in *Text and Interpretation: Studies in the New Testament Presented to Matthew Black* (ed. Ernest Best and R. McL. Wilson; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 99–114, esp. 107–8; Culpepper, *John, the Son of Zebedee*, 72.

⁵ I do not find it necessary to discuss all these identifications, for they have been sufficiently analyzed in other recent studies of the Beloved Disciple; cf. Kügler, *Der Jünger, den Jesus liebte*, 439–48; Culpepper, *John, the Son of Zebedee*, 72–84; James H. Charlesworth, *The Beloved Disciple: Whose Witness Validates the Gospel of John?* (Valley Forge, Pennsylvania: Trinity Press International, 1995), 127–224. Mary Magdalene has been suggested by Ramon K. Jusino, ‘Mary Magdalene, author of the Fourth Gospel’ [<http://www.BelovedDisciple.org>, viewed 14 October 2005], and by Esther A. de Boer, ‘The Gospel of Mary: Beyond a Gnostic and a Biblical Mary Magdalene’ (Th. D. Diss. Theologische Universiteit, Kampen, 2002), 169–79; ead., ‘Mary Magdalene and the Disciple Jesus Loved.’ *Lectio difficilior* 1/2000 [<http://www.lectio.unibe.ch>, viewed 14 October 2005]. That the Beloved Disciple is Andrew is suggested by Klaus Berger, *Im Anfang war Johannes: Datierung und Theologie des vierten Evangeliums* (Stuttgart: Quell, 1997), 96–109.

issue was set aside for a time in scholarly works, renewed interest is signalled by the full-scale monographs by Martin Hengel and James Charlesworth, and recent suggestions by other scholars.

The new search for the Beloved Disciple's identity has also been linked with the relationship between John and *Thomas*, for Charlesworth posits, like DeConick and Riley, a link between the Syrian Judas Thomas tradition and the Gospel of John, although he does not subscribe to their theory that John and *Thomas* were gospels in conflict. In fact, the main thrust of Charlesworth's book is to demonstrate that the Johannine Beloved Disciple should be identified with Thomas.

Charlesworth's theory will be discussed in more detail in chapter seven, where I will undertake a closer comparison between the figures of the Beloved Disciple in John and Thomas in the *Gospel of Thomas*. In chapter eight, I will focus on other beloved disciples of Jesus portrayed in early Christian texts to see how they complement our understanding of the picture drawn of the Beloved Disciple in John. In the present chapter, I will concentrate on the Johannine portrait of the Beloved Disciple.

1. CAN THE BELOVED DISCIPLE BE IDENTIFIED?

In Hengel's study of the Beloved Disciple, the identity of this figure is *the* Johannine question that needs to be answered. Hengel's suggestion is that the editors of the Gospel of John

deliberately gave a double identity to the Beloved Disciple: his present figure contains features of two famous Johns, John the son of Zebedee and John the Elder.⁶ Charlesworth, in turn, insists that the Beloved Disciple should be identified with Thomas.⁷ What brings these two otherwise different suggestions together is that they presuppose ‘a veiled way’,⁸

⁶ Martin Hengel, *The Johannine Question* (trans. John Bowden; London/Philadelphia: SCM Press/Trinity Press International, 1989); id., *Die johanneische Frage: Ein Lösungsversuch* (WUNT 67; Tübingen: Mohr, 1993). Hengel supports his view of the two Johns behind the Fourth Gospel by arguing that the present title of this text (*εὐαγγέλιον κατὰ Ἰωάννην*) stems from its editors (*The Johannine Question*, 74–76; *Die johanneische Frage*, 204–9). This theory, however, is untenable, as Hartwig Thyen and Michael Theobald have shown. The titles of the gospels most likely became necessary during the process of their canonization, when these gospels needed to be distinguished from each other. Moreover, Theobald refers to Turner’s assessment that even in P66 (Papyrus Bodmer II), on which Hengel largely builds his case, the title ‘seems to be a later addition.’ Cf. Hartwig Thyen, ‘Noch einmal: Johannes 21 und ‘der Jünger, den Jesus liebte’, in *Texts and Contexts: Biblical Texts in their Textual and Situational Contexts* (FS Lars Hartman; ed. Torn Fornberg and David Hellholm; Oslo etc.: Scandinavian University Press, 1995), 147–89 (157 n. 29); Michael Theobald, ‘Der Jünger, den Jesus liebte: Beobachtungen zum narrativen Konzept der johanneischen Redaktion’, in *Geschichte—Tradition—Reflexion* (FS Martin Hengel), vol. 3: *Frühes Christentum* (ed. Hubert Cancik, Hermann Lichtenberger, and Peter Schäfer; Tübingen: Mohr, 1996), 219–55 (251). Moreover, Hengel’s use of patristic witnesses has been criticized; cf. Culpepper, *John, the Son of Zebedee*, 307: ‘The linchpin of the argument—the identification of the Elder John (from one single reference in Papias) with the elder of 2 John 1 and 3 John 1—will not bear the weight of the argument that is built on it.’ For a more detailed discussion of Hengel’s problematic use of patristic evidence, see Randar Tasmuth, ‘The Disciple with Many Faces: Martin Hengel’s and James H. Charlesworth’s Theories Concerning the Beloved Disciple’ (Th.D. Diss., University of Helsinki, 2004), 71–112.

⁷ Charlesworth, *The Beloved Disciple*, *passim*.

⁸ Hengel, *The Johannine Question*, 132 (= *Die johanneische Frage*, 321).

or ‘extremely subtle ways’,⁹ in which the correct solution was hinted by the author (or the editors) of the gospel to what are called ‘perceptive readers.’¹⁰ (Apparently, if you’re unable to agree with these theories, this only shows *your* lack of perception!)

A similar strategy of persuasion is also required in Esther de Boer’s recent attempt to identify the Beloved Disciple with Mary Magdalene. The obvious difficulty with this suggestion is that masculine articles and pronouns are used in John in referring to the Beloved Disciple. De Boer explains this, untenably in my opinion, as an attempt not to make the female identity of the Beloved Disciple too obvious:

... if the anonymity in the case of the disciple Jesus loved (and other anonymous disciples) was so important to the author of *John*, would the use of masculine grammar guarantee the anonymity in a better way than the use of feminine grammar, which would obviously reveal to the readers at least one important feature of the disciple, namely that she is a woman.¹¹

⁹ Charlesworth, *The Beloved Disciple*, 21.

¹⁰ Charlesworth, *The Beloved Disciple*, 21.

¹¹ De Boer, ‘The Gospel of Mary’, 174. What makes it difficult to identify Mary with the Beloved Disciple is, in addition to grammatical references, that he is called ‘son’ by Jesus in John 19:26 (cf. Charlesworth, *The Beloved Disciple*, 5–6). The parallelism between the sentences ‘behold your son’ and ‘behold your mother’ in this verse makes untenable de Boer’s suggestion that the ‘son’ would refer here to Jesus himself. Moreover, Mary Magdalene and the Beloved Disciple are portrayed as distinct persons in John 20:2. De Boer’s theory that the expression ‘the *other* disciple Jesus loved’ in this verse ‘leaves the option open that either Mary Magdalene or Peter could be the disciple Jesus loved... who is mentioned earlier in 19,25–27’ (‘The Gospel of Mary’, 173) seems strained. The more natural way of reading John 20:2 is that

The mere fact that Hengel, Charlesworth, and de Boer end up with such different theories about the identity of the Beloved Disciple shows that their ‘in-a-subtle-way’ argument does not produce results that would convince other scholars. It is unlikely, therefore, that these new theories would bring the new quest for the Beloved Disciple’s identity to an end. At the same time, they hardly do away the sweeping doubts expressed in other recent studies concerning the legitimacy of the whole enterprise of trying to identify the Beloved Disciple. As Kevin Quast puts it in his study of this figure, ‘If centuries of intense and wide ranging search for the Beloved Disciple have not satisfied anyone, then perhaps it is time to ask different questions of the text.’¹²

2. THE FOUNDER AND LEADER OF THE JOHANNINE COMMUNITY?

Even scholars who do not find it possible to identify the Beloved Disciple think that he was a historical figure of great importance to the Johannine community. This view

Mary went to two disciples of Jesus, of whom the *already known* (note the definite article τόν in John 20:2) Beloved Disciple was the other one.

¹² Kevin Quast, *Peter and the Beloved Disciple: Figures for a Community in Crisis* (JSNTSup 32; Sheffield: JSOT Press/Sheffield Academic Press, 1989), 12. Kügler also points out that in all attempts to disclose the Beloved Disciple’s identity, ‘the anonymity established by the text is always regarded as something negative that needs to be resolved and destroyed.’ (Kügler, *Der Jünger, den Jesus liebte*, 448; cf. also Thyen, ‘Johannes 21’, 156–57.)

is usually inferred from the conclusion of the Gospel of John, which includes a description stating that a rumour was spread ‘among the brothers’ that ‘this disciple would not die’ (John 21:22–23). In my view, however, the value of this passage for scholarly constructions of the Johannine community is greatly exaggerated.

The Johannine narrator explains this rumour as a misconception about what Jesus said (John 21:23). Most scholars regard this passage as not only bearing witness that the Beloved Disciple was a historical figure, but also see in it evidence for his role as the founder and leader of the Johannine community. This scholarly consensus could be demonstrated with a number of quotations, but two recent assessments sufficiently illustrate the major arguments for this view:

...by referring to the death of the Beloved Disciple, John 21 makes clear that he was indeed a historical person....From John 21.20–23 we can gather that the Johannine community was confronted with the unexpected death of the Beloved Disciple and the accompanying threat to their communal faith and identity.¹³

Solutions that interpret the Beloved Disciple solely as a symbolic figure do not satisfactorily explain the concern in John 21:20–23 over the death of the Beloved Disciple. As has often been remarked, symbolic figures do not die. What we have then is a historical figure who has been given an idealized role in the crucial scenes of the farewell discourse, trial, death, and resurrection of Jesus.¹⁴

¹³ Quast, *Peter and the Beloved Disciple*, 150.

¹⁴ Culpepper, *John, the Son of Zebedee*, 70; cf. id., *The Johannine School*, 269; *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel*, 47.

Such statements about John 21:20–23 could easily be multiplied.¹⁵ What is common to them is the assumption that (a) the Johannine text refers to the death of the Beloved Disciple, and (b) that this proves that he must have been a historical figure. Neither assumption is, however, clearly warranted. First, it must be noted that (b) does not necessarily follow from (a): an account of a person's death offers no sure proof for his or her historicity;¹⁶ fictional characters can die, too. (At least I would not argue from the accounts of their deaths that Adam, Moses, or Agamemnon were historical persons.)

There is a second, more serious problem related to assumption (a): the death of the Beloved Disciple is not explicitly mentioned in John 21:20–23. In contrast to the eloquent comments of its modern interpreters, the Johannine text contains no description of sweeping despair occasioned by the death of this disciple in the Johannine community,¹⁷ nor is there any hint at his 'advanced age'

¹⁵ Cf., e.g., Raymond E. Brown, *The Community of the Beloved Disciple* (New York: Paulist Press, 1979), 31; Charlesworth, *The Beloved Disciple*, xiv, xviii, 5, 13, 18, 20, 47, 65, etc.; Theo K. Heckel, *Vom Evangelium des Markus zum viergestaltigen Evangelium* (WUNT, 120; Tübingen: Mohr, 1999), 175, 180; Hengel, *Die johanneische Frage*, 213–14; de Jonge, 'The Beloved Disciple', 101; Hartwig Thyen, 'Entwicklungen innerhalb der johanneischen Theologie und Kirche im Spiegel von Joh. 21 und der Lieblingsjüngertexte des Evangeliums', in *L'Évangile de Jean: Sources, redaction, théologie* (ed. Marinus de Jonge; BETL 44; Leuven: University Press, 1977), 259–99, esp. 293; id., 'Johannes 21', 162–64.

¹⁶ Although Kügler considers the Beloved Disciple a fictional figure, he thinks that John 21:20–23 speaks about his death; Kügler, *Der Jünger, den Jesus liebte*, 481–84.

¹⁷ Cf. Theobald, 'Der Jünger, den Jesus liebte', 250: '21,20–23 dient nicht der Aufarbeitung eines vermeintlichen Schocks, den die Gemeinde wegen

that would have triggered the rumour that he would not die at all.¹⁸ The text does not speak of ‘the *natural death* of the community’s founder and chief authority’,¹⁹ nor does it say that he ‘died a mysterious death.’²⁰ All these details are scholarly inventions based on the rumour of the Beloved Disciple’s immortality in John.

In fact, it is not necessary to assume that it was the death of the Beloved Disciple that triggered reflections concerning his immortality in John 21:20–23. The passage can also be interpreted as dealing with the problems caused by the delayed Parousia. In this case, the emphasis is on the conditional phrasing of Jesus’ words (‘If I will’, *ἐὰν θέλω*). This emphasis on the conditional expression of the hope of immortality forms a striking contrast to the more affirmative version of Jesus’ promise of immortality in Mark 9:1: ‘Truly, I say to you, there are some standing here who will not taste death before they see the kingdom of God come with power.’

The Johannine author explains the expectation of immortality (*οὐκ ἀποθνήσκει*, John 21:23) indicated by the

seines Sterbens erlitten hätte.’ [John 21, 20–23 does not enable the community to process the shock that it would have suffered because of his death.] Nevertheless, Theobald, too, thinks that the text presupposes the death of the Beloved Disciple (ibid. 249).

¹⁸ The advanced age of the Beloved Disciple is particularly crucial for Hengel (e.g., *The Johannine Question*, 134), but it is assumed by other scholars, too; cf., e.g., Stephen R. Johnson, ‘The Identity and Significance of the *Neaniskos* in Mark’, *Forum* 8 (1992), 123–39 (136); Pagels, *Beyond Belief*, 59; Theobald, ‘Der Jünger, den Jesus liebte’, 250.

¹⁹ Thus Terence V. Smith, *Petrine Controversies in Early Christianity: Attitudes towards Peter in Christian Writings of the First Two Centuries* (WUNT 2/15; Tübingen: Mohr, 1985), 150.

²⁰ Tom Thatcher, ‘The Legend of the Beloved Disciple’, in *Jesus in Johannine Tradition* (ed. Robert T. Fortna and Tom Thatcher; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001), 91–99 (99).

traditions like Mark 9:1 as a false interpretation of Jesus' words. This statement is of special importance at the end of John since it is in this gospel that immortality is often promised to the believers (John 6:51, 58; 8:51; 11:25–26). It is possible to read John 21:22–23 as a warning against a possible misunderstanding of these passages.²¹ Thus, John 21 can be read as saying that even the Beloved Disciple was *subject to death*—given that Jesus does not want this disciple to remain alive until he returns. From this the reader can conclude that the promises of immortality elsewhere in the gospel are not to be understood in terms of avoiding physical death.

This point may seem self-evident to us, but it was not necessarily so in the early Christian period. Patristic accounts of Menander show that immortality and the avoidance of physical death were not always neatly distinguished from each other. Menander is said to have promised his followers immortality in the sense of avoiding physical death if they were baptized into him.²² Such beliefs could have made it necessary to clarify that physical death and immortality are two separate issues. The Gospel of Luke certainly tends in this direction. In this gospel, a note is added to Mark 12:25 that those who have their part in the resurrection 'cannot die any more' (Luke 20:36). In Luke's version, thus, it is clearly stated that immortality should be understood as a future quality that does not exclude physical death.

²¹ Cf. Kügler, *Der Jünger, den Jesus liebte*, 483.

²² Justin, *1. Apol.* 26.4; Irenaeus, *Haer.* 1.23.5. It is impossible to say whether this really was Menander's authentic teaching or his opponents' malevolent interpretation of this teaching.

It is possible to understand the Johannine sayings of immortality and the affirmation that even the Beloved Disciple was subject to death against this background. It does not have to be assumed that the Johannine passage was written as a reaction against Menander and his followers, but remaining evidence suggests that the idea of immortality as avoidance of physical death was in circulation and needed to be combatted at the turn of the first century CE, when the Gospel of John was written. This setting offers, in my view, a sufficient rationale for introducing the rumour that the Beloved Disciple would not die; the widely held assumption that it was his unexpected death that triggered the whole discussion about this saying of Jesus is not necessary.

John 21:21–23 does not supply us with rock-solid evidence for the Beloved Disciple's role as the founder or leader of the Johannine community, either. His relation to this community is simply not described in the text; it is not said that he was the founder and/or the leader of the Johannine group. Moreover, it is striking that the Beloved Disciple is never mentioned in the Johannine epistles. If he were a figure of such great importance for the Johannine community, as scholars usually assume, the fact that the Johannine epistles are silent about him is more than surprising.

While most scholars ignore this difficulty completely, Culpepper has made an effort to resolve it. His suggestion is that the Beloved Disciple was not mentioned in 1 John because the *opponents* referred to in this letter 'were claiming his authority.'²³ Unfortunately, there is absolutely no

²³ Culpepper, *The Johannine School*, 282.

evidence in 1 John for this view. Nowhere can we find the claim that those who had left the community called upon the authority of the Beloved Disciple, nor is he associated with them in any other way. Evidence for the historical figure of the Beloved Disciple as the founder and/or leader of the Johannine community (or communities) remains, thus, very thin after all.²⁴

3. IDEAL IS NOT ALWAYS PARADIGMATIC

The characterization of the Beloved Disciple in the Johannine narrative can be discussed with more confidence than his identity or his role in the Johannine community. Scholars usually depict him as an ‘ideal’ character, but this designation can create quite different understandings of the Beloved Disciple. Some scholars use it to mean that the Beloved Disciple is merely a literary figure. When Bacon described the Beloved Disciple as ‘a purely ideal figure’,²⁵ he meant that this figure is simply ‘no disciple of flesh and blood.’²⁶

²⁴ At this point I concur with Kügler, *Der Jünger, den Jesus liebte*, 478–88.

²⁵ B. W. Bacon, *The Fourth Gospel in Research and Debate: A Series of Essays on Problems Concerning the Origin and Value of the Anonymous Writings Attributed to the Apostle John* (London—Leipzig: T. Fisher Unwin, 1910), 320.

²⁶ Bacon, *The Fourth Gospel*, 317, 319. Bacon was not very consistent, however, for he also claimed that ‘[t]he “disciple whom Jesus loved” is something more than a purely ideal figure. A very real man has sat for the portrait. . . .’ This ‘very real man’ was, in Bacon’s opinion, Paul, and it was only a later Johannine editor who confused the Beloved Disciple with John the son of Zebedee (*ibid.* 325–26).

Most scholars nowadays, however, no longer accept this interpretation, but understand 'ideal' in connection with the Beloved Disciple in a different way. As was seen above, he is usually (albeit in my view less convincingly) considered a figure of importance in the Johannine community, who nevertheless did not belong to the inner circle of Jesus' closest followers, although this is what the Gospel of John claims. Thus, these scholars assume that the gospel's picture of the Beloved Disciple is 'idealized' in the sense that it is not completely reliable historically, but the Beloved Disciple himself was a historical person: 'it may be that the Beloved Disciple in the current (fourth Gospel) is a legendary expansion of a real person who was a key player early in the Johannine tradition.'²⁷ Finally, the term 'ideal' is often associated with the claim that the Beloved Disciple is the disciple *par excellence*: he is portrayed as being more perceptive to what Jesus says and more inclined to believe in him (John 20:8) than the other disciples are. Closely related to this view is the assumption that the Beloved Disciple is a paradigmatic figure, who was used to set the standard of true discipleship for the audience of the gospel.²⁸

These different connotations attached to the term 'ideal' in connection with the Beloved Disciple are not mutually exclusive. Rather, they merge into each other in scholarly

²⁷ Thatcher, 'The Legend of the Beloved Disciple', 96. Cf., e.g., Thorwald Lorenzen, *Der Lieblingsjünger im Johannesevangelium* (SBS 55; Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1971), 82, 107–8; R. Alan Culpepper, *The Johannine School: An Evaluation of the Johannine-School Hypothesis Based on an Investigation of the Nature of Ancient Schools* (SBLDS 26; Missoula, Mont.: Scholars Press, 1975), 265, 270.

²⁸ Cf., e.g., Theobald, 'Der Jünger, den Jesus liebte', 243.

opinions of the Beloved Disciple. This merging has sometimes led to shaky conclusions. For example, the interpretation of the Beloved Disciple as a role model cannot be taken for granted, though it is usually considered a self-evident consequence of his being an 'ideal' figure. In ancient texts, ideal figures assumed a multitude of different functions; the portrayal of an ideal figure as a model of behaviour was only one of them.

In their classification of ideal figures in ancient Jewish texts, John Collins and George Nickelsburg have distinguished four different roles attributed to such characters. Indeed, (1) 'a number of the figures lend themselves readily enough as examples to be imitated; they are paradigmatic.'²⁹ Yet the paradigmatic function fails to fit the presentation of ideal figures in some Jewish texts. In visionary literature, for instance, ideal figures were used (2) 'to lend weight to and authenticate the content of the revelation.'³⁰ Likewise, (3) miracle workers and (4) eschatological figures portrayed in ancient Jewish texts are not paradigms of right conduct, but have their own respective functions:

The miracle working of Hanina ben Dosa . . . would scarcely have admitted of imitation in any case. Tales of miracles are, rather, designed to inspire awe and respect for the miracle worker and lend a supernatural aura to his way of life. The eschatological

²⁹ John J. Collins and George W. E. Nickelsburg, Introduction to *Ideal Figures in Ancient Judaism: Profiles and Paradigms* (ed. John J. Collins and George W. E. Nickelsburg; SBLSCS 12; Chico, Calif.: Scholars Press, 1980), 7.

³⁰ Collins and Nickelsburg, 'Introduction', 8.

figures, again, are not models for direct imitation, but they give expression to ideals which influence behavior.³¹

This variety in the functions attributed to ideal figures in ancient Jewish writings suggests that the 'ideal' aspects of the Beloved Disciple and their functions in the Johannine narrative need to be delineated with greater precision than is usual.

To some degree, this reconsideration has already taken place in Richard Bauckham's analysis of the Beloved Disciple. Bauckham criticizes the prevalent scholarly consensus that the Beloved Disciple 'represents, as a model for others, the ideal of discipleship.'³² Instead, Bauckham suggests, '... the beloved disciple is portrayed in the Gospel narrative in such a way as to show that he is ideally qualified to be the author of the Gospel.'³³

This point merits attention, though Bauckham himself employs it in support of an overly confident view about the historical reliability of the Gospel of John. Among other things, Bauckham claims that the Gospel of John 'correctly presents the author as a personal disciple of Jesus and eyewitness of some of the events of the Gospel story.'³⁴ What poses the greatest challenge to this conclusion is the absence of the Beloved Disciple in the synoptic accounts that run parallel to the Johannine passages where he is

³¹ Collins and Nickelsburg, 'Introduction', 8.

³² Richard Bauckham, 'The Beloved Disciple as Ideal Author', *JSNT* 49 (1993), 21–44 (33).

³³ Bauckham, 'The Beloved Disciple', 24.

³⁴ Bauckham, 'The Beloved Disciple', 32.

mentioned, and Bauckham does little to resolve this difficulty.³⁵

Nevertheless, Bauckham has demonstrated that ideal features attached to the Beloved Disciple are closely connected with his role as the one lending authenticity to this gospel, and that it is not necessary to assume that he is an 'ideal' figure in every other possible meaning of the word as well.

4. JESUS' CLOSEST DISCIPLE

I believe that Bauckham has correctly pointed out that there are many aspects of the Johannine portrait of the Beloved Disciple that cannot be considered exemplary for the audience of the text. His position on Jesus' bosom at the Last Supper, his presence at the cross, and his visit to the empty tomb are all unique features that cannot be imitated by the audience.³⁶

The Beloved Disciple is often portrayed as being superior to other characters in John. His special affinity to Jesus is emphasized in several ways. He is introduced to the audience as 'one of his disciples... whom Jesus loved' (John 13:23), and this is the only designation given to him in the

³⁵ Bauckham is content with general affirmations of the reliability of the Johannine account, such as: 'If the figure of the beloved disciple is due to the redactor, he cannot have been mistaken in supposing that the author had been a personal disciple of Jesus who witnessed significant events in the Gospel story.' (Bauckham, 'The Beloved Disciple', 32.)

³⁶ Bauckham, 'The Beloved Disciple', 33.

entire narrative (John 19:26; 20:3; 21:7, 20). The designation is not, however, necessarily a traditionally fixed expression for a well-known figure, because two different forms of the expression ‘the disciple Jesus loved’ are used in the gospel (*ὁν ἠγάπα*, John 13:23; 19:26; 21:7, 20; *ὁν ἐφίλει*, John 20:2). Nevertheless, this designation makes the Beloved Disciple a distinguished follower of Jesus in the Johannine narrative, since this or a similar designation is used of no other disciple in John.

The Beloved Disciple’s special closeness to Jesus is also indicated by the narrator’s remark that he rested ‘on the bosom of Jesus’ (*ἐν τῷ κόλπῳ τοῦ Ἰησοῦ*) at the Last Supper (John 13:23). This remark shows that the Beloved Disciple had a position of honour at this meal.³⁷ This is apparently an emphasized aspect in the characterization of the Beloved Disciple since it is repeated twice in John (13:25; 21:20). In the story of the Last Supper, the intimate position of the Beloved Disciple prepares the way for his role as a mediator between other disciples and Jesus when the disciples are puzzled by Jesus’ words about the betrayer (John 13:23–25). Emphasis is placed on this aspect too, as can be seen in the fact that it is recalled in John 21:20.

³⁷ Sief van Tilborg, *Imaginative Love in John* (Biblical Interpretation Series 2; Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1993), 89, interprets ‘bosom’ mentioned in connection with the Beloved Disciple as hinting at ‘marital sexual relations’ and ‘the protective love for a child in the womb.’ In his opinion, the usage of this word, among other things, speaks in favour of his contention that the Johannine story of the Beloved Disciple should be understood in terms of ‘the classical idea of the *παιδραστία*.’ What van Tilborg does not mention is that, in the situation of a meal, the expression ‘on the bosom of’ can simply denote ‘the place of the guest of honour’ (Rudolph Meyer, ‘κόλπος’, *TDNT* 3.824–26).

More features that make the Beloved Disciple a distinctive figure are introduced in the Johannine Passion narrative (John 18–19). It is not entirely certain whether ‘the other disciple’ mentioned in John 18:15 is the Beloved Disciple.³⁸ If he is, as seems likely,³⁹ a contrast could be drawn in the Johannine narrative between him and Peter: as the Beloved Disciple escorted Jesus to the courtyard, Peter denied Jesus (John 18:17–18, 25–27). However, the potential of this contrast is not fully exploited in John since the admission of the Beloved Disciple to the courtyard is not explained in terms of his courage (as contrasted to Peter’s denial), but ‘simply’ as a consequence of his acquaintance with the high priest.

At the crucifixion, the Beloved Disciple is portrayed as the only disciple present and as the one to whom Jesus assigns the care of his mother (John 19:25–27).⁴⁰ The Beloved Disciple, in fact, is here made to take over the task of

³⁸ For a thorough survey of this issue, see Frans Neiryck, “‘The Other Disciple’” in Jn 18,15–16’, in id., *Evangelica: Gospel Studies—Études d’Évangile: Collected Essays* (BETL 60; Leuven: Leuven University Press/Peeters, 1982), 335–64, esp. 335–48.

³⁹ ‘The other disciple’ appears together with Peter in John 18, as the Beloved Disciple customarily does (John 13:23–24; 20:2–10 and 21:1–14, 20–22); the Beloved Disciple is called ‘the other disciple’ in John 20:2; and the identification of the ‘other disciple’ in John 18:15 with the Beloved Disciple would account for the latter’s presence at the crucifixion (John 19:25–27, 35–37). Admittedly, the last argument can be used only with some caution, for it is peculiar to the Johannine depiction of the Beloved Disciple that he shows up abruptly in different passages. Given his ‘incidental character’ (thus Neiryck, “‘The Other Disciple’”, 363), the Beloved Disciple *could* be portrayed as being present at the cross without an indication that he first followed Jesus to the courtyard and then to the cross.

⁴⁰ John possibly draws on Luke here. While according to Mark, all the disciples left Jesus at Gethsemane, it is stated in Luke 23:49 that many of his friends (*γυνωστοί*) were present at the crucifixion.

being her guardian. Since this task would have belonged to the brothers of Jesus, the Beloved Disciple is described as becoming their replacement.⁴¹ This interpretation is congruent with the negative picture drawn of Jesus' brothers in John 7, where it was said they did not believe in him, and, by implication, that they were representatives of the world hostile to Jesus (John 7:5–7).⁴² The implicit contrast between the Beloved Disciple and the brothers of Jesus in John 19:25–27 hints, as will be argued below, at a historical setting in which a figure like the Beloved Disciple became necessary.

The claim that the Beloved Disciple became the guardian of Jesus' mother is not directly connected to his role as the author of the Gospel of John. Nevertheless, this scene adds to the picture that he is the most trustworthy disciple of Jesus, which, in turn, contributes to the basis of his portrayal as the reliable author of the gospel. Thus, John 19:25–27 no

⁴¹ Cf. Anton Dauer, 'Das Wort des Gekreuzigten an seine Mutter und den "Jünger den er liebte": Eine traditionsgeschichtliche und theologische Untersuchung zu Joh 19,25–27', *BZ* 11 (1967), 222–239; *BZ* 12 (1968), 80–93, esp. 12.81–82; see also Tilborg, *Imaginative Love*, 94 (also expressing some reservations as to Dauer's arguments), and Marinus Rese, 'Das Selbstzeugnis des Johannesevangeliums über seinen Verfasser', *ETL* 72 (1996), 75–111, esp. 95.

⁴² John Painter remarks correctly that 'the treatment of the brothers of Jesus must be read against the tendency to exalt the Beloved Disciple'; John Painter, *Just James: The Brother of Jesus in History and Tradition* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1999), 15. Yet his suggestion that the brothers of Jesus 'are portrayed as "fallible followers" rather than outright unbelievers' (*ibid.* 17) is less convincing. It is said of no other 'fallible followers' of Jesus that they did not believe in Jesus, as is done in John 7:5; in fact, their faith is affirmed in John 12:42. Moreover, it is noteworthy that in John 7:5, the unbelief of the brothers of Jesus is expressed by using exactly the same phrase ('they did not believe', *οὐκ ἐπίστευον*) that appears in a more generalizing statement of the unbelief of the Jews in John 12:38.

doubt serves ‘as a kind of legitimation of the Beloved Disciple’, and the mother of Jesus ‘assumes in certain manner the role of the protector of the Johannine tradition.’⁴³

The story of the Beloved Disciple at the empty tomb of Jesus in John 20:2–10 is based either directly on the short account of Peter’s visit in Luke 24:12,⁴⁴ or on a tradition similar to it.⁴⁵ Either way, the Beloved Disciple probably did not appear in the earliest story, but was added to it by a Johannine author.

As to the relationship between the Beloved Disciple and Peter, I do not find it necessary to posit a rivalry between Johannine and ‘Petrine’ Christians behind this story, as many do;⁴⁶ at least, such a rivalry is hardly indicated by their race to the empty tomb (John 20:3–4). There is no debate between Peter and the Beloved Disciple described in John (as there is, for example, between Peter and Mary Magdalene in the *Gospel of Mary*).⁴⁷ Nevertheless, the Beloved Disciple’s faith in John 20:8 seems to make him superior to Peter, whose faith is not mentioned in this connection. What makes the interpretation of this verse

⁴³ Heikki Räisänen, *Die Mutter Jesu im Neuen Testament* (AASF Ser. B, 158; Helsinki: The Finnish Academy of Science and Letters, 1969), 179–80.

⁴⁴ Thus Neiryneck in several articles published in Neiryneck, *Evangelica*, 365–455 (esp. 390–96, 399, 432–40, 452–55). Neiryneck’s view is adopted by Kügler, *Der Jünger, den Jesus liebte*, 346–49.

⁴⁵ E.g., Lorenzen, *Der Lieblingsjünger*, 28–29, 31–32; Quast, *Peter and the Beloved Disciple*, 107.

⁴⁶ Cf., e.g., Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John* (2 vols.; AB 29–29A; Garden City NJ: Doubleday, 1966/1970), 1004–7; Quast, *Peter and the Beloved Disciple*, 119. For a summary of interpretations concerning the relationship of Peter and the Beloved Disciple as reflecting a rivalry between early Christian groups, see Smith, *Petrine Controversies*, 146–48.

⁴⁷ For Mary in the *Gospel of Mary*, see chapter seven, section three, below.

notoriously difficult, however, is the following narrative aside, where it is pointed out that both disciples were equally ignorant of scripture: 'for as yet they did not understand the scripture, that he must rise from the dead' (John 20:9 NRSV).

Some scholars interpret this comment as a positive confirmation of the Beloved Disciple's exceptional faith. In that case, the purpose of John 20:9 would be to say that 'a lack of insight into scripture by both disciples is...replaced by seeing as the basis of the faith in the resurrection.'⁴⁸ This suggestion evokes, however, a contrast between faith and scripture that is untenable in John. For elsewhere in this gospel, the correct understanding of scripture is always presented as a positive consequence of the resurrection of Jesus (John 2:22; 12:16). In fact, the positive evaluation of scripture is visible in John 20:9, too. The divine $\delta\epsilon\iota$ is used here to affirm that scripture, correctly understood, shows that the resurrection of Jesus was inevitable. Moreover, the word $\text{o}\dot{\upsilon}\delta\acute{\epsilon}\pi\omega$ ('not yet') anticipates here, as in John 2:22 and 12:16, that scripture will be understood correctly by the disciples in future.

One solution to the difficult juxtaposition of John 20:8 and 20:9 would be to assume that John 20:8 does not refer to the resurrection faith of the Beloved Disciple. In its narrative context, the statement of the Beloved Disciple's faith could be understood as simply meaning that he became convinced

⁴⁸ Kügler, *Der Jünger, den Jesus liebte*, 330. For similar views, see Robert G. Maccini, *Her Testimony is True: Women as Witnesses According to John* (JSNTSup 125; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996), 211; Rese, 'Selbstzeugnis', 96; Theobald, 'Der Jünger, den Jesus liebte', 245–46.

of what Mary had said to him and Peter—that the tomb of Jesus was empty (John 20:2).⁴⁹ This interpretation would account for the fact that the narrator mentions no after-effects of the Beloved Disciple’s faith: this part of the story ends with the simple conclusion that he and Peter ‘returned to their homes’ (20:10 NRSV).⁵⁰

What this theory fails to explain, however, is the absolute use of the verb πιστεύειν in John 20:8. This usage suggests that the Beloved Disciple’s faith must be understood in a fuller sense (cf. John 19:35; 20:25, 29).⁵¹ Yet it is not clear whether John 20:8 denotes the full-blown resurrection faith of the Beloved Disciple.⁵² If one takes into account what is said in John 20:9, it is perhaps best to conclude that ‘his faith, like Martha’s ([John] 11,27.39), did not entail full comprehension.’⁵³ The fact that faith based upon seeing regularly calls forth critical comments in John (cf. John 4:48; 6:14–15) speaks for this interpretation. Most importantly, in the following story of Doubting Thomas (John 20:24–29), his faith based on seeing is contrasted with a blessing of those who believe without seeing. This contrast hardly means a complete rejection of the eyewitnesses’ faith,

⁴⁹ To the proponents of this view listed in Kügler, *Der Jünger, den Jesus liebte*, 331 n. 2, can now be added Charlesworth, *The Beloved Disciple* (on 79, 83, 94).

⁵⁰ Cf. Paul S. Minear, “‘We don’t know where...’: John 20:2,” *Int* 30 (1976), 125–39, esp. 127.

⁵¹ Theobald, ‘Der Jünger, den Jesus liebte’, 235 n. 89; cf. also Kügler, *Der Jünger, den Jesus liebte*, 331; Graig Koester, ‘Hearing, Seeing, and Believing in the Gospel of John’, *Bib* 70 (1989), 327–48, esp. 344.

⁵² Notably, the verb πιστεύειν is used absolutely in John 4:53 without a reference to Jesus’ resurrection.

⁵³ Koester, ‘Hearing’, 344.

given the weight placed upon their testimony throughout the Gospel of John, starting from ‘we saw’ (*ἑθεασάμεθα*) in John 1:14. However, the blessing of those who believe without seeing adds an important aspect to the eyewitnesses’ faith. The purpose of this blessing is to show that, in comparison to the characters in the Johannine narrative, the audience of the gospel, though no longer able to see Jesus, have an equal, if not even a better, opportunity to believe in him.

This aspect helps us to understand the odd juxtaposition of faith and scripture in John 20:8–9. While the figures in the narrative were able to inspect the tomb, this is no longer an option for the audience of the gospel. Hence the narrator’s claim that scripture contained sufficient proof for the resurrection. To see the empty tomb is not necessary for believing, but it adds to the credibility of the resurrection. In this case, there is no stark contrast between the Beloved Disciple’s faith based upon what he saw and that of the implied readers of the gospel based upon their knowledge and correct interpretation of scripture. In John 20:8–9, the narrator affirms that both the Beloved Disciple and scripture bear witness to the same thing, the resurrection of Jesus. Understood in this manner, the Beloved Disciple’s faith can be regarded as exemplary for the audience of the gospel. But even here, the Beloved Disciple is not obviously cast as a role model for the implied readers. Rather, the narrator emphasizes the importance of scripture as the true basis of their faith.

In John 21:1–14, the Beloved Disciple is portrayed as the one who recognizes the risen Jesus before the other disciples do (John 21:7). However, it remains unclear whether this

recognition really implies his better understanding of, or superior faith in, Jesus. The narrator does not pay any specific attention to this issue.

The claim that the Beloved Disciple wrote the Gospel of John is made at the conclusion of this text (21:24–25). This claim is closely related to his portrayal as an eyewitness to Jesus. The reliability of his testimony is emphasized in the same manner when it comes to his role as an eyewitness and to that as the author (John 19:35; 21:24). In addition, the function assigned to his eyewitness testimony in John 19:35 is identical with the goal of the whole gospel (John 20:30–31): the purpose of both is to evoke faith in the recipients of the gospel.⁵⁴

5. THE BELOVED DISCIPLE, THE PARACLETE, AND JESUS

It has often been suggested that, in John, the portrayal of the Beloved Disciple is closely related to that of the Paraclete,⁵⁵ but this connection remains surprisingly vague in the text

⁵⁴ Cf. Bernhard Bonsack, 'Der Presbyter des dritten Briefes und der geliebte Jünger des Evangeliums nach Johannes', *ZNW* 79 (1988), 45–62, esp. 52–53. This goal is a relatively common feature in John; it is also stated with reference to John the Baptist (John 1:7) and to Jesus himself (John 11:15, 42; 14:29; 17:21).

⁵⁵ e.g., Culpepper, *The Johannine School*, 267–70; Kügler, *Der Jünger, den Jesus liebte*, 435–38.

itself.⁵⁶ The Beloved Disciple shares only one of the features attributed to the Paraclete: both he and the Paraclete bear witness to Jesus.⁵⁷ This similarity, however, creates no specific link between the two, since elsewhere in John all disciples are told to bear witness to Jesus (15:27). There are no other verbal connections between the Beloved Disciple and the Paraclete that would suggest a specific affinity between them.

In fact, the Beloved Disciple's portrayal is more closely related to that of Jesus than to that of the Paraclete in the Johannine narrative. The designation 'the disciple whom Jesus loved' is similar to the Johannine affirmation that the Father loves the Son (John 3:35; 5:20; 10:17; 15:19; 17:23–26). Moreover, the expression 'on the bosom of Jesus' used of the Beloved Disciple recalls the depiction of Jesus 'in the bosom of Father' in John 1:18.⁵⁸ Both the Beloved Disciple and Jesus are also portrayed as eyewitnesses: Jesus is the one who has seen the Father (John 5:19–20, 37; 6:46), and the Beloved Disciple has seen Jesus; as Jesus bears witness to the Father, so does the Beloved Disciple bear witness to Jesus. Finally, the reliability of Jesus' witness

⁵⁶ Cf. Heckel, *Evangelium*, 82.

⁵⁷ In addition to bearing witness to Jesus (John 15:26), the functions ascribed to the Paraclete include glorifying Jesus (16:14), teaching and recalling his words (14:26), and guiding the disciples to the truth (14:16; 16:13).

⁵⁸ This affinity between Jesus and the Beloved Disciple, which was already noticed by Origen (*In Ioa.* 32.20.264), has been pointed out by virtually all modern interpreters of John 13:23; cf., e.g., Charlesworth, *The Beloved Disciple*, 54; Dauer, 'Das Wort des Gekreuzigten', 237; Kügler, *Der Jünger, den Jesus liebte*, 147 (with a thorough list of references to earlier literature); Quast, *Peter and the Beloved Disciple*, 58; Rese, 'Selbstzeugnis', 91.

is described in a manner similar to that of the Beloved Disciple's testimony (John 3:11, 32; 8:38).

The similarity between the portrayal of Jesus and the Beloved Disciple is strong enough for us to assume that it is a deliberate literary device. It enables us to posit a tripartite hierarchy of revelation in John. This hierarchy is based upon (1) what the Father has taught and shown to the beloved Son; (2) the Father's teaching was revealed by the son to his disciples; and (3) the revelation was reliably documented and transmitted to the audience of the gospel by the Beloved Disciple. What is emphasized by means of this 'hierarchy of revelation' is that there is an unbroken chain of transmission extending from the Father through the Son and the Beloved Disciple to the audience of the gospel.

The Beloved Disciple's role in this communication process accounts, in part, for the designation used for him in John. Given that there was the beloved Son who bore witness to his Father in front of his disciples, there *must* also be the Beloved Disciple, who reliably passes on the Son's testimony. The expression, 'the disciple Jesus loved', is, therefore, closely related to the function of this disciple as the one who legitimates the contents of the Gospel of John. The fact that he is left anonymous suggests that it is not his name but his *status* as the closest disciple of Jesus that is of importance. The anonymity, thus, emphasizes his role as the guarantor of this gospel.⁵⁹

⁵⁹ In this regard, the Johannine Beloved Disciple is similar to the anonymous Elder of 3 John; cf. Bonsack, 'Der Presbyter', 52.

This much, I believe, can be concluded as regards the designation ‘the disciple whom Jesus loved’ from the Johannine narrative. I will suggest, however, in chapter seven that there were other, extratextual reasons for introducing this figure as well. Before turning to that issue, however, the popular notion that the Beloved Disciple shows a better understanding or secret knowledge of what Jesus says needs to be discussed briefly. In my view, this aspect is far from explicit in John. This is an important point, for it is precisely here that I would see the most crucial difference between the Beloved Disciple in John and the favourite disciples of Jesus as described in other early Christian writings.

6. THE PERCEPTIVE DISCIPLE?

It has often been suggested that the Beloved Disciple could be regarded as an *interpreter* of Jesus, as Jesus is described in John 1:18 as the one who ‘interpreted’ (ἐξηγήσατο) the Father. If this role could be extended to the Beloved Disciple, one could see in him a figure similar to the Teacher of Righteousness in the Qumran community.⁶⁰ In addition, many scholars think that the Beloved Disciple is portrayed as a particularly perceptive character in John, one who believes in Jesus sooner, understands him better than the

⁶⁰ Cf. Jürgen Roloff, ‘Der johanneische “Lieblingsjünger” und der Lehrer der Gerechtigkeit’, *NTS* 15 (1968/69), 129–51.

other disciples do (cf. John 20:8 and 21:7), and acts as his confidant.⁶¹

There is, however, little textual evidence for these characterizations of the Beloved Disciple. Whereas Jesus is presented as the Father's interpreter in John 1:18, no similar statement is made of the Beloved Disciple. As was seen above, his function in John is above all the *transmission* of Jesus' interpretation of the Father.

The view that the Beloved Disciple is Jesus' confidant often appears in scholarly explanations of the Johannine Last Supper scene (John 13:21–30). This passage is customarily read so as to suggest that Jesus revealed the identity of the betrayer only to the Beloved Disciple, who, for some reason, withheld this information from the other disciples. This reading of the story presupposes that Jesus and the Beloved Disciple shared a secret at the table while the other disciples remained completely ignorant of what was going on (John 13:28). Yet this reading seems flawed. I agree with Quast, who maintains that 'this text cannot be understood as introducing the Beloved Disciple as "having a special knowledge of Jesus"'.⁶² It is not said in the text that only the Beloved Disciple heard Jesus' answer,⁶³ nor does the text

⁶¹ Cf., e.g., Dauer, 'Das Wort des Gekreuzigten', 11.237; David J. Hawkin, 'The Function of the Beloved Disciple Motif in the Johannine Redaction', *Laval théologique et philosophique* 33 (1977), 135–50, esp. 150; Pagels, *Beyond Belief*, 66 ('... "the beloved disciple" surpassed Peter in spiritual understanding'); Tilborg, *Imaginative Love*, 91.

⁶² Thus Quast, *Peter and the Beloved Disciple*, 63, making a reference to Hawkin's interpretation ('The Function of the Beloved Disciple Motif', 143).

⁶³ Jesus' answer in John 13:26 is not confined to the Beloved Disciple; it is introduced without defining the addressees at all (*ἀποκρίνεται Ἰησοῦς*).

contain any other clear hint at a secret either here or later in the narrative, as is claimed, for example, by de Jonge: 'the Beloved Disciple is allowed to know that Judas will betray his master.... The Beloved Disciple does not share his knowledge with his fellow disciples....'⁶⁴ The text does not say, for instance, that Jesus and the Beloved Disciple conversed with each other in a 'quiet manner', though this is the way some commentators read this scene in John 13.⁶⁵ If the author had intended to emphasize that the Beloved Disciple and Jesus shared a secret, one could also expect that this issue would have been brought up again later in the story. John 21:20, for example, would have provided a good opportunity to disclose that the exchange between Jesus and the Beloved Disciple was kept secret from the others, since this verse contains other references to the Beloved Disciple at the Last Supper too.

In my view, John 13:21–30 should be read as a typical Johannine story of the disciples' misunderstanding. In John, their misunderstandings are usually related to the issues pertaining to Jesus' death and glorification,⁶⁶ and this seems to be the case here too. Jesus could not have been

⁶⁴ de Jonge, 'The Beloved Disciple', 103.

⁶⁵ Thus Quast, *Peter and the Beloved Disciple*, 64: 'Jesus was giving an answer to the Beloved Disciple in the same quiet manner in which the question was asked.' It is somewhat surprising that Quast here supports this view, for elsewhere he rejected the theory of secrecy in interpreting John 13:23–30.

⁶⁶ Cf. R. Alan Culpepper, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel: A Study in Literary Design* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983), 163: 'The theme that appears most frequently in the misunderstandings is Jesus' death/resurrection/glorification (eight times: 2:19–21; 6:51–53; 7:33–36; 8:21–22; 12:32–34; 13:36–38; 14:4–6; 16:16–19).'

more explicit in identifying his betrayer. First he said he will dip a morsel and give it to the betrayer; then he dipped the morsel and gave it to Judas (John 13:26–27). How much more clarity could there possibly be? In spite of that, the disciples fail to recognize the betrayer and start to ponder ‘earthly’ explanations for Judas’ departure (John 13:29). The narrator, then, confirms that ‘*no one* at the table’ understood Jesus’ words to Judas (John 13:28).

The idea of a private exchange between Jesus and the Beloved Disciple at the table would be at odds with this reading of John 13:21–30 as a story of the disciples’ misunderstanding, which seems to be the most natural interpretation of this passage. If only Jesus and the Beloved Disciple knew the identity of the betrayer, there would be no misunderstanding at all, for in that case, other disciples were simply not informed about the betrayer.

Thus, I find the conclusion that in John 13 the narrator intended to show that the Beloved Disciple knew more or was more perceptive than the other disciples dubious.⁶⁷ Nothing in the text justifies the contention that ‘the evangelist is in 13:28 no longer *thinking* of the anonymous disciple in 13:23–25.’⁶⁸ Rather, in this passage, the Beloved Disciple is ‘as ignorant as the rest of the disciples, he displays no special knowledge of Jesus and after asking the disciples’

⁶⁷ Similarly Quast, *Peter and the Beloved Disciple*, 64; see also Charlesworth, *The Beloved Disciple*, 54.

⁶⁸ Robert Mahoney, *The Two Disciples at the Tomb: The Background and Message of John 20.1–10* (Theologie und Wirklichkeit 6; Bern: Herbert Lang—Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1974), 93; for similar views, see, e.g., Lorenzen, *Der Lieblingsjünger*, 17; Theobald, ‘Der Jünger, den Jesus liebte’, 229; Roloff, ‘Der johanneische “Lieblingsjünger”’, 133 n. 1.

question, he appears to remain as ignorant as he was before.⁶⁹ The Johannine narrator points out elsewhere that the disciples understood Jesus only after his resurrection (John 2:22; 12:16);⁷⁰ even the Beloved Disciple seems to be no exception to this rule. He is *not* characterized in terms of his better understanding in John.

7. CONCLUSION

The analysis above has shown that two historical, or historicizing, approaches have fallen short of explaining the enigma of the Beloved Disciple. First, attempts at his identification have not yielded any generally convincing results. Second, John offers little, if any, evidence for the theory that the Beloved Disciple was the founder and/or leader of the Johannine community. The Beloved Disciple is first and foremost a character in the Johannine narrative, and should be approached as such. All attempts to jump from the narrative world to the social world behind the text on the basis of the assumption that the Beloved Disciple is to be identified

⁶⁹ Quast, *Peter and the Beloved Disciple*, 160–61. Since this contention is squarely in opposition to Mahoney's view quoted above, it seems surprising that Quast voices agreement with that view elsewhere in his study (*Peter and the Beloved Disciple*, 67).

⁷⁰ What is striking in John is that the narrator is apparently hesitant to give up misunderstanding stories even after the resurrection of Jesus. Contrary to what might be expected in light of John 2:22 and 12:16, the disciples do not show much more understanding in the Johannine resurrection narratives (John 20–21) than they did in earlier parts of the narrative.

with some historical figure (either a named character or an anonymous figure of importance) seem equally hazardous.

The Gospel of John offers a more solid ground for examining the literary figure of the Beloved Disciple. Although he is an elusive narrative character, he assumes several important features. Above all, the reliability of his witness is emphasized at every possible turn in John. This aspect of his character prepares the way for his identification as the author of John at the end of this gospel. The features that make the Beloved Disciple an ideal figure in John are connected with his authorship. Thus, his ideal features serve first and foremost to authenticate and legitimate the contents of this gospel. His function as a role model, or as a figure who was more sensitive than the other disciples to what Jesus taught, is much less conspicuous in the Johannine narrative.

As was discussed above, the Beloved Disciple in John is by no means unique in early Christian literature; similar portraits of other disciples are drawn in many extracanonical accounts of Jesus' followers, and they call for comparison to be undertaken in the following two chapters. While these accounts are often neglected, in my view, they do help us to see more clearly some distinct features in the literary portrayal of the Beloved Disciple and to understand better the historical context behind this portrayal.

The Beloved Disciple and Thomas

In the previous chapter, I mentioned that Charlesworth made use of the Syrian Judas Thomas tradition in his attempt to identify the Johannine Beloved Disciple with Thomas. A similar view was developed prior to Charlesworth by Hans-Martin Schenke, who suggested that the Syrian Judas Thomas tradition provided the historical model for the figure of the Beloved Disciple.¹ Charlesworth and Schenke differ from each other, however, in their assessments of whether the Beloved Disciple was a historical figure. Schenke considered the Beloved Disciple to be ‘a redactional fiction who functions to give the Fourth Gospel the appearance of being authenticated and written by an eyewitness.’² For Charlesworth, the Beloved Disciple is a historical figure,

¹ Hans-Martin Schenke, ‘The Function and Background of the Beloved Disciple in the Gospel of John’, in *Nag Hammadi, Gnosticism, and Early Christianity* (ed. Charles W. Hedrick and Robert Hodgson; Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1986), 111–25.

² Schenke, ‘Function and Background’, 116. This assessment concurs with my view argued in chapter five, above.

for he identified this disciple with Thomas, who was one of the twelve disciples of Jesus.³

However, Schenke's stance on the identification of Thomas with the Beloved Disciple remains somewhat confusing. On the one hand, he understood Thomas merely as 'the historical model (in terms of history of traditions) for the Beloved Disciple figure of the Fourth Gospel.'⁴ On the other hand, Schenke's other comments imply that he, like Charlesworth, identified the Beloved Disciple with Thomas. In the conclusion of his study, Schenke affirmed:

If this suggestion be [sic] correct, the redactor of the Fourth Gospel would in fact have doubled the figure of Thomas. For Thomas appears in the Gospel of John also under his own name, especially in the part of the gospel written by the Evangelist, and then *reappears* in the part of the gospel added by the editor as the anonymous Beloved Disciple.⁵

I will argue in this chapter that there is no sufficient proof for Schenke's view that Thomas was *the* historical model for the Beloved Disciple, let alone for the identification of the two figures proposed by Charlesworth. This is not to deny, however, that there are striking similarities between the roles ascribed to Thomas in the *Gospel of Thomas* and to the Beloved Disciple in John. Most importantly, both figures are introduced as the authors of the respective gospels.

³ Charlesworth, *The Beloved Disciple*, 418–19. The main reason for this conviction is John 21 which, according to Charlesworth, 'indicates that the Beloved Disciple has died' (ibid. 419). As popular as this view is among scholars, it is far from being certain (see above, chapter five, section two).

⁴ Schenke, 'Function and Background', 123.

⁵ Schenke, 'Function and Background', 124, emphasis added.

While the Gospel of John is attributed to the Beloved Disciple in the conclusion of this text (John 21:24), the *Gospel of Thomas* begins with a prologue claiming that this text was written by Thomas: ‘These are the secret words (ἱερὰ ῥήματα) which the living Jesus spoke and which Didymus Judas Thomas wrote down.’

Moreover, Thomas in the *Gospel of Thomas* and the Beloved Disciple in John are depicted as possessing a unique relationship with Jesus. As was mentioned in the previous chapter, the Beloved Disciple appears in John as reclining on the bosom of Jesus (John 13:23) at the Last Supper, as the only disciple present at Jesus’ cross (John 19:25–27), as one of the three first witnesses to the resurrection of Jesus (John 20:1–12), as the disciple who recognizes the risen Jesus before other disciples at the Sea of Galilee (John 21:7), and as the disciple whose eventual death is of special concern for Jesus at the end of the gospel (John 21:20–23). In the *Gospel of Thomas*, Thomas is portrayed as having an especially close relationship to Jesus. Jesus acknowledges his special insight and relates to him ‘three secret words’ in privacy (*Gos. Thom.* 13).

The similarities between the pictures drawn of Thomas and the Beloved Disciple raise two important issues for discussion. First, their presentation as the authors of the respective texts (‘authorial fiction’) is of great importance in respect to how these texts were intended to be read. Second, since both disciples also appear as narrative figures in the gospels attributed to them, this raises the question of how the claims of authorship are related to their roles as actors in the story.

1. WAS JUDAS THOMAS (THE MODEL FOR) THE BELOVED DISCIPLE?

In Schenke's theory, that traditions of Thomas had an impact on the figure of the Beloved Disciple in John, it must be assumed that such traditions flourished before the Gospel of John was written. This is not an untenable hypothesis as such since Thomas is mentioned in the Gospel of John (11:16; 20:24–29). It is, however, more difficult to join Schenke in calling these traditions 'the entire Syrian Judas Thomas tradition.'⁶ This difficulty is due to the fact, already pointed out in this study, that the clearest identification mark of this tradition, the double name 'Judas Thomas,' is not present in John.⁷

A more crucial question related to Schenke's theory is this: What makes Thomas the best candidate for being the historical model behind the Beloved Disciple? In his article, Schenke mentioned in passing several other figures, such as Mary Magdalene and James, who are depicted as having assumed a unique relationship to Jesus in other early Christian texts.⁸ Why is Thomas, and not one of these other followers of Jesus, thought to have functioned as 'the model' for the Beloved Disciple?

In my view, Schenke did not manage to substantiate his view that there was a specific link between the Syrian tradi-

⁶ Schenke, 'Function and Background', 122.

⁷ For this issue, see chapter three, section one, above.

⁸ Cf. Schenke, 'Function and Background', 122. These figures will be discussed more closely below in chapter seven.

tions of Thomas and the Beloved Disciple in John. Schenke offered three arguments to support this view, but not one of them is really conclusive. First, Schenke pointed out that, in the *Book of Thomas* (NHC II, 7), Jesus addresses Thomas as ‘my twin and my true friend’ (138.7–8). Schenke suggested that the Greek original behind ‘my true friend’ (ΠΑΦΒΡ̄ΜΗΕ) could have been ‘you are my true friend’ (σὺ εἶ . . . ὁ φίλος μου ὁ ἀληθινός). This conjecture is entirely plausible, but it does not yet prove any connection between the Syrian Judas Thomas tradition and the Beloved Disciple. Thus, Schenke wove together a more complicated argument: ‘Transposed into a form parallel with that of the Gospel of John, this would read “you are the one I truly love,” or, in the third person singular, “he is the one whom Jesus truly loved.”’⁹ At this point, Schenke’s argument turns into a speculation that not only is difficult to verify, but also blurs a clear difference between the texts themselves. The *Book of Thomas* uses the noun ‘friend’ for Thomas, while the Gospel of John employs a verbal phrase ‘the disciple whom Jesus loved’ for the Beloved Disciple. Schenke’s solution fails to explain why the Johannine author preferred to avoid the noun ‘friend’ if it was part of a fixed tradition. This author had no qualms about using this noun for other figures—Jesus calls Lazarus ‘our friend’ in John 11:11—but it is never used in connection with the Beloved Disciple.

Second, Schenke maintained that both Thomas and the Beloved Disciple are affiliated with Jesus’ family, the former as the twin brother of Jesus in the Judas Thomas tradition,

⁹ Schenke, ‘Function and Background’, 123.

the latter as the one to whom ‘Jesus entrusts his mother.’¹⁰ This is a crucial affinity in the portrayals of Thomas and the Beloved Disciple, but it implies no specific linkage between these figures; other prominent figures were also associated with Jesus’ family in early Christian writings. Moreover, it seems on the basis of John 19:26–27 that the Beloved Disciple is not portrayed as a member of Jesus’ family in John, but as a replacement for the brothers of Jesus.¹¹

Third, and most importantly, Schenke suggested ‘that Jesus promised Thomas that he [Thomas] would tarry till he [Jesus] comes, i.e. that he would not die before the return of Christ.’¹² If this contention could be proven, it would certainly create an impressive link to what is said about the Beloved Disciple at the end of the Gospel of John (John 21:22). Unfortunately, there is no clear textual evidence for this suggestion; it is based on a wild guess of the contents of the enigmatic ‘three secret words’ in *Thomas* 13:

It does not require much to imagine that one of these three ‘words’ could have been something like: ‘You will remain until I come’ or ‘you will not experience death until I come.’ At any rate a promise of this sort would lead understandably to the anticipated jealousy of the other disciples.¹³

A number of intriguing theories about the ‘three secret words’ of *Thomas* 13 have been suggested,¹⁴ but none of

¹⁰ Schenke, ‘Function and Background’, 123.

¹¹ See chapter five, section four, above.

¹² Schenke, ‘Function and Background’, 124. ¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ To mention only a few suggestions, Gunther argues that the three secret words were ‘Didymus Judas Thomas’; Riley opts for the words derived from the *Book of Thomas*: **ΠΑΣΟΕΙΩ, ΠΑΨΩΡ ̄ΜΙΕ** [sic!], **ΠΑΣΟΝ** (‘my twin, my true

them can be considered definitive; Schenke's suggestion does not hold up any better than its alternatives. According to *Thomas* 13, the secret words were only spoken to Thomas; they were not revealed to the other disciples, or to the audience of the *Gospel of Thomas*. As Davies put it: 'It is easy to make clever guesses about the identity of the three mysterious words, or logia, but it will be best to refrain from such guesswork. Thomas has been given "what no ear has heard" (17), but we have not.'¹⁵

As for Schenke's proposal in particular, it does not explain why the other disciples would have stoned Thomas if he revealed the secret words to them. Whatever the three secret words were, the stoning connected with their disclosure suggests that other disciples would have regarded them as a serious offence against the legislation in the Hebrew Bible. This offence may have been blasphemy,¹⁶ but there are also a number of other possibilities:

companion, and my brother'), DeConick speaks in favour of 'God's secret divine name consisting of three words, אהיה אשר אהיה (Exod. 3:14)', and Wayment follows Frenchkowski's suggestion that the three secret words were 'I am you'. Cf. John J. Gunther, 'The Meaning and Origin of the Name "Judas Thomas"', *Muséon* 93 (1980), 113–48 (114, 125); Riley, *Resurrection Reconsidered*, 112–13; DeConick, *Seek to See Him*, 112–13; Thomas A. Wayment, 'Christian Teachers in Matthew and Thomas: The Possibility of Becoming a "Master"', *J ECS* 12 (2004), 289–311 (305), with reference to Marco Frenchkowski, 'The Enigma of the Three Words of Jesus in the Gospel of Thomas Logion 13', *JHG* 1 (1994), 73–84.

¹⁵ Davies, *The Gospel of Thomas*, 92. In light of this comment, one is surprised to find that, in his more recent article, Davies himself entertains a theory about the three secret words, arguing that they were 'the first three commands of Gos. Thom. 14: Do not fast; do not pray; do not give alms.' (Davies, 'Christology and Protology', 676.)

¹⁶ Thus Davies, 'Christology and Protology', 676; DeConick, *Seek to See Him*, 112.

Where the Bible specifies the method of execution, the most common is stoning: for apostasy (Lev 20:2; Deut 13:11; 17:5), blasphemy (Lev 24:14, 16, 23; 1 Sam 21:10), sorcery (Lev 20:27), sabbath violation (Num 15:35–36), disobedient son (Deut 21:21), and adultery by an inchoate wife (Deut 22:21,24; cf. Ezek 16:40; 23,47).¹⁷

Schenke argued, in addition, that ‘logion 1 of the *Gospel of Thomas* . . . could easily be taken to be a transformation (like John 21:23b) of “Jesus had said to Thomas: Since *you* have found the explanation of my sayings, *you* will not experience death.”’¹⁸ This way of linking John and *Thomas* with each other is strained and remains too speculative to carry conviction. In addition, although in *Thomas* 1 the promise of immortality is associated with the interpretation of the subsequent secret words, it does not follow that one of the three secret words mentioned in *Thomas* 13 would have been the promise of immortality mentioned in *Thomas* 1.

Charlesworth’s identification of Thomas with the Beloved Disciple is even more problematic than Schenke’s argument. The major problem with Charlesworth’s hypothesis is that nowhere in John is Thomas directly identified with the Beloved Disciple. If this identification were nevertheless intended, one can only wonder what reason the Johannine author could possibly have had to express this idea in such a cryptic (or ‘subtle’, as Charlesworth puts it) manner.

In spite of this general difficulty, two of Charlesworth’s twelve arguments merit closer attention. First, he points out

¹⁷ Raymond Westbrook, ‘Punishments and Crimes’, *ABD* 5.546–56 (555).

¹⁸ Schenke, ‘Function and Background’, 124.

that in John 20:27, Thomas's demand to see the pierced side of Jesus presupposes knowledge of what took place during the crucifixion. The only witness to the piercing of Jesus' side by a Roman soldier was the Beloved Disciple (John 19:34–35). Thus it seems that, in the Johannine narrative, Thomas knew something that only the Beloved Disciple could know. This, according to Charlesworth, shows that Thomas should be identified with the Beloved Disciple.

This is a point worth considering, but it does not make the identification of Thomas with the Beloved Disciple inevitable. Charlesworth relies too heavily on what is simply a blank in the Johannine narrative. There is, in fact, another similar case of a blank in the Johannine Passion narrative. According to John 19:38–42, Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus were the only persons present when Jesus was buried. Thus, only they knew the place of the tomb of Jesus. Nevertheless, in the following scene, Mary Magdalene knows her way to the tomb (John 20:1), even though the narrator nowhere related that Joseph and Nicodemus informed her of the whereabouts of the tomb. If we follow Charlesworth's way of arguing here, we would end up identifying Mary either with Joseph or Nicodemus! The more likely explanation in both cases is that the Johannine author was not preoccupied with providing the audience with a meticulous account of who told what to whom; hence the blanks in the story.¹⁹ The Johannine Passion story is no historical record;

¹⁹ For an insightful discussion of gaps and blanks in the narrative, see Petri Merenlahti, *Poetics for the Gospels: Rethinking Narrative Criticism* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 2003), 65–66. Merenlahti reminds us that narratives often contain blanks, i.e., 'what is omitted for lack of interest' (ibid. 66, with

what matters in the understanding of this story is that its audience knows about the pierced side of Jesus (and about the burial of Jesus) and is therefore able to follow the the author's intentions.

Another clever but likewise unconvincing point in Charlesworth's argument is the claim that Thomas's absence during the first appearance of the resurrected Jesus to his disciples (John 20:19–23) was due to his ritual impurity caused by a visit to Jesus' tomb (as the Beloved Disciple, John 20:2–10).²⁰ Were this the reason for Thomas' absence, one would expect that this would have been indicated more clearly by the author. By way of comparison, in John 2:6 the author mentions that 'there were six stone water jars for the Jewish rites of purification' (NRSV). The latter remark shows that the author does *not* presuppose the audience's knowledge of Jewish purification rites. As for the implied reader of the Gospel of John, Alan Culpepper maintains correctly (in light of John 2:6; 4:9; 18:28 and 19:40): 'Some Jewish beliefs and practices do require explanation, however. *Matters pertaining to the practice of ritual purity are particularly obscure.*'²¹ Moreover, Charlesworth's theory fails to explain why only Thomas's absence is mentioned in John 20:24, since Peter went into the tomb of Jesus too (John 20:6). Why was Peter not also absent from the group of the disciples like Thomas/the Beloved Disciple was? In fact,

reference to Sternberg's distinction between more meaningful 'gaps' and less meaningful 'blanks').

²⁰ Charlesworth, *The Beloved Disciple*, 283–85.

²¹ Culpepper, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel*, 221 (emphasis added).

Charlesworth is aware of this difficulty connected with his interpretation but does not suggest any solution.²²

2. DIFFERENCES IN THE NARRATIVE CHARACTERS OF THOMAS AND THE BELOVED DISCIPLE

While both Schenke and Charlesworth assumed a specific affinity between the figures of Thomas and the Beloved Disciple, the following analysis suggests the opposite: except for their close relationship to Jesus and the claims of authorship connected with them, these distinguished disciples are depicted in entirely different ways.

Although both the Gospel of John and the *Gospel of Thomas* make the claim of having been written by a disciple whose relationship to Jesus was especially close, their manner of presenting these figures is different. The most conspicuous difference is that Thomas's relationship to Jesus is not expressed in terms of a love relationship in the *Gospel of Thomas*; he is nowhere called 'the disciple whom Jesus loved.' Closer analogies to this designation are to be found in other early Christian texts which will be discussed in the following chapter.²³

²² Charlesworth, *The Beloved Disciple*, 283 n. 189.

²³ Admittedly, in the *Book of Thomas* Jesus addresses Thomas as 'my true friend', but even this provides no linkage between Thomas and the Beloved Disciple (cf. above). In this light, Charlesworth's claim that 'the School of

Another obvious difference is the secrecy motif linked with Thomas and the absence of this motif in the case of the Beloved Disciple. In the incipit of the *Gospel of Thomas*, Judas Thomas is characterized as the one who wrote down Jesus' secret words. In *Thomas* 13, the same motif takes an even more exclusive form: the three secret words of Jesus were addressed only to Thomas who, for whatever reason, refused to transmit them to the other disciples. As I pointed out in the previous chapter, many scholars have seen a similar secrecy motif connected with the Beloved Disciple in John 13:21–30, supposing that Jesus related the identity of his betrayer only to the Beloved Disciple. I argued above, however, that this interpretation is not clearly supported by the Johannine text; it seemed more likely that the Johannine author did *not* intend to characterize the Beloved Disciple in terms of secrecy in this passage.²⁴

In *Thomas* 13, Thomas's special status is underlined by highlighting his particularly judicious understanding. Thomas shows special understanding in confessing that he is unable to compare Jesus to anyone else. This confession is met with approval by Jesus, who then transmits three secret words to Thomas in private. As portrayed in *Thomas* 13, it is Thomas, rather than the Beloved Disciple, who would deserve to be described as 'the confidant of Jesus, whom the Lord recognizes as understanding him well' and as 'having a special knowledge of Jesus.'²⁵

Thomas perceived Thomas to be none other than the Beloved Disciple' (*The Beloved Disciple*, 328) remains dubious.

²⁴ See chapter five, section six, above.

²⁵ Hawkin, 'The Function of the Beloved Disciple Motif', 143, 150.

Unlike Thomas in the *Gospel of Thomas*—and some other distinguished disciples of Jesus in the early Christian texts to be discussed in the following chapter—nowhere in John is the Beloved Disciple praised by Jesus for his special understanding. Other features that could indicate the deeper insight of the Beloved Disciple remain quite vague in the Johannine narrative too, as I argued in chapter five. Greater emphasis is laid on his trustworthiness as an eyewitness than on his perception.

The paradigmatic function of the figure of the Beloved Disciple also proved less clear in John than scholars usually assume. Thomas, in contrast, is obviously presented as a paradigmatic figure in the *Gospel of Thomas*. As Stephen Patterson put it, ‘Thom 13 makes Thomas, in a sense, the prototypical Thomas Christian. . . .’²⁶ This interpretation is supported by a close linkage between *Thomas* 13 and *Thomas* 108.²⁷ The two sayings share with each other the metaphor of drinking and the motif of disclosing secrets. In *Thomas* 108, these features are associated with the ideal of becoming equal to Jesus: who drinks from his mouth will become like Jesus, and Jesus himself will become that person, and for this reason secrets will be disclosed to the latter—as they were to Thomas (*Thomas* 13).

In fact, the close relationship between sayings 13 and 108 in the *Gospel of Thomas* could have contributed to the

²⁶ Patterson, *The Gospel of Thomas and Jesus*, 206.

²⁷ The connection between *Thomas* 13 and 108 has been noted by many scholars in addition to Patterson; cf., e.g., Davies, *Gospel of Thomas*, 91–94; idem, ‘Christology and Protology’, 675; Marjanen, *The Woman Jesus Loved*, 42–43; Wayment, ‘Christian Teachers’, 305.

emergence of the tradition in which Thomas came to be portrayed as the twin brother of Jesus. This idea is not spelled out in the *Gospel of Thomas*, but it is attested in the *Book of Thomas* (138.10) and in the *Acts of Thomas*.²⁸ This idea could have emerged from reading *Thomas* 13 and *Thomas* 108 side by side. For if *Thomas* 13 is read in the light of *Thomas* 108, the most obvious conclusion is that Thomas—as the paradigm of Jesus’ true follower—has already become like Jesus; hence, possibly, the idea that he is the twin of Jesus. This idea is not directly stated in the *Gospel of Thomas*, but its ramifications are visible in the *Book of Thomas* and the *Acts of Thomas*.²⁹

Be that as it may, it can be safely concluded that in *Thomas* 13, Thomas is cast as the paradigm to be followed by the audience. His experience of and insight into Jesus are not unique in the sense that others could not achieve them.

²⁸ For this notion and its corollaries in the *Acts of Thomas*, see Paul-Hubert Poirier, ‘Évangile de Thomas, Actes de Thomas, Livre de Thomas: Une tradition et ses transformations’, *Apocrypha* 7 (1996), 9–26, esp. 20–22. Gunther also argues that ‘a fully developed theory of how Thomas uniquely resembled Jesus appears in the Acts of Thomas, ch. 11–12, 31, 34, 39, 45, 47–48, 57, 147–53’ (‘The Meaning and Origin of the Name “Judas Thomas”’, 113).

²⁹ Poirier has made an interesting suggestion that only the *Gospel of Thomas* and the *Acts of Thomas* are ‘authentically Thomasine’, whereas the *Book of Thomas* ‘presupposes knowledge and use of the elements of the literary Thomasine tradition.’ Among other things, Poirier points out that the prologue of the *Book of Thomas* (138.4–21) speaks of Thomas in terms attested elsewhere only in the *Acts of Thomas* (‘brother’, ‘twin’, and ‘companion’). The way these common elements are introduced in the *Book of Thomas* (‘it has been said that you are my twin and my true companion . . .’, ‘since you are called my brother . . .’, etc.) suggests, according to Poirier, that the redactor of this writing employs ‘a known theme to authenticate the following dialogue’ (Poirier, ‘Une tradition et ses transformations’, 23–25).

For in *Thomas* 108 the audience of the gospel is encouraged to seek a relationship to Jesus that is similar to that which Thomas had already achieved.

Finally, the Beloved Disciple and Thomas are associated with the family of Jesus in different ways. In some traditions, Thomas is described as the twin of Jesus. The Beloved Disciple, in turn, is portrayed as the new guardian of Jesus' mother (John 19:25–27), who took over a task which was the legal responsibility of Jesus' brothers (who are depicted as unbelievers in John 7:2–9). The Beloved Disciple is not called Jesus' brother, much less his twin.³⁰ In fact, this designation is also unevenly attested in Thomas literature. Although the Aramaic name 'Thomas' as well as the Greek 'Didymos' both mean 'twin', the *Gospel of Thomas* does not claim that Thomas was the twin of Jesus. This idea is only expressed in the *Book of Thomas* and in the *Acts of Thomas*, and may reflect a later development of Thomas traditions.

3. CONCLUSION

In light of the previous analysis, we can conclude that there is no specific connecting link between Thomasine traditions and the Johannine figure of the Beloved Disciple. Neither Schenke's suggestion that Thomas (as portrayed in Syrian traditions) was the historical model for the literary figure of

³⁰ In John 20:17 Jesus calls all disciples his 'brothers', but even here the term is not confined to the Beloved Disciple in particular.

the Beloved Disciple nor Charlesworth's identification of Thomas with the Beloved Disciple proved tenable. Schenke's view was based on too many unproven conjectures about what could have been said in versions of the *Gospel of Thomas* (but wasn't),³¹ whereas Charlesworth made too much of simple blanks in the Johannine narrative.

The Beloved Disciple and Thomas are, in fact, depicted in different ways and for different purposes in the respective gospels. Although both the Gospel of John and the *Gospel of Thomas* claim to have been written by a distinguished disciple, this similarity does not suffice to demonstrate a specific relationship between the two gospels or the figures of Thomas and the Beloved Disciple.

Nevertheless, the fact that both writings are ascribed to disciples who are characterized by their close relationship to Jesus possibly hints at a situation within early Christianity where it had become increasingly necessary to promote new writings using such figures. In this regard, John and *Thomas* are by no means unique in early Christian literature. This leads us to the broader issues to be discussed in the next chapter: How were the disciples of Jesus used to lend the aura of authenticity to early Christian texts, and where do the distinguished disciples portrayed in the gospels of *Thomas* and John belong among these figures?

³¹ Meyer points out that Schenke's suggestion seems to be based on 'a forced reading and interpretation of texts on Thomas'; see Marvin Meyer, *Secret Gospels: Essays on Thomas and the Secret Gospel of Mark* (Harrisburg, Penn.: Trinity Press International, 2003), 146.

The Beloved Disciple in Context

Although there is no indication of a specific connection between the Johannine Beloved Disciple and Syrian Thomas traditions, a more comparative approach will shed light on the effect of the introduction of these figures in the Gospel of John and in the *Gospel of Thomas*. Since the attribution of early Christian texts to the disciples of Jesus is by no means restricted to these two gospels, the first two parts of this chapter explore a variety of other examples where ‘authorial fiction’ is created by introducing the disciples as writers. These analogies provide us with a context that helps us to grasp both common and distinct features in the Johannine portrayal of the Beloved Disciple.

There are several other early Christian texts in which the distinguished disciples of Jesus are called, as in John, his beloved ones. In the third part of this chapter, I will compare the pictures drawn of these disciples to that of the Beloved Disciple in John. I have already pointed out that his portrait differs from that painted of Thomas in Thomasine traditions, especially at one point: it is not his greater understanding that makes the Beloved Disciple the distinguished

disciple in John, but his reliability as a witness. Thomas in the *Gospel of Thomas* was much more clearly described in terms of his superior insight than the Beloved Disciple in John. The same conclusion, I will argue, can be drawn when the Johannine figure of the Beloved Disciple is compared to other disciples of Jesus portrayed as authors of certain texts and/or his beloved ones.

In the final part of this chapter, I will discuss the relationship between the Johannine Beloved Disciple and James the brother of Jesus, since the latter is portrayed as Jesus' beloved in many texts. My suggestion will be that a figure like the Beloved Disciple in John became necessary in the midst of debates concerning the family members of Jesus and their claim to special authority among early Christians. The figure of the Beloved Disciple in John could have been one way to combat such claims.

1. AUTHORIAL FICTION AND HERMENEUTIC

In his seminal study on the genre of Q, John Kloppenborg pointed out the importance of authorial fiction to the hermeneutic of ancient instruction collections.¹ He defined authorial fiction in this body of literature as 'the way in which the instruction represents its mode of production or

¹ John S. Kloppenborg, *The Formation of Q: Trajectories in Ancient Wisdom Collections* (Studies in Antiquity and Christianity; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987), 263–316 f.

creation.² The crucial role of authorial fiction, of course, is not restricted to the instruction genre discussed by Kloppenborg but is a broader phenomenon. For example, authorial fiction is of great importance in the Jewish-Christian collection of *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs*, although it belongs to the testament literature rather than strictly to the instruction genre (despite containing elements of the latter). This collection is, in fact, largely presented in the form of parental instruction, which was the prevalent mode of presentation in ancient instruction collections, too.³

Each individual 'book' in the *Testaments* begins with an account of a patriarch addressing his last words of instruction to his sons and grandsons. Each 'testament' begins with the note that it presents 'a copy of the testament of . . .' This statement puts emphasis on the written form of an 'ancient' text. That the author mentions a 'copy' indicates that it was important to give the impression that the texts allegedly dating from the time of the patriarchs were in the written form from the beginning. The written form of texts situated in the past is also often affirmed in early Christian texts.

² Kloppenborg, *The Formation of Q*, 274. I find the term 'authorial fiction' a more accurate description for the explicit claim of authorship in John than 'implied author' (thus Culpepper, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel*, 47), for the former term focuses on the question of what a writing itself says about its author. The use of the term 'implied author' in this connection may create confusion in light of Culpepper's definition of the 'implied author' as 'a sum of choices visible in the text' (ibid. 14–15). Every text thus has an 'implied author' whereas there are texts without an 'authorial fiction', i.e., an explicit account of the text's mode of production.

³ See Kloppenborg, *The Formation of Q*, 274, 284.

Identification of the author is a very prominent aspect within Jewish and Christian apocalyptic literature as well.⁴ In addition, emphasis is placed on the act of writing itself. In the Book of Revelation, John is commanded to write down what he sees (Rev 1:11).⁵ The Jewish apocalypses ascribed to Enoch not only state that the visionary wrote down something (e.g., *1 Enoch* 92:1, in which the 'Book of Enoch's epistles' is ascribed to Enoch), but also tell of how he was provided with a pen and other writing instruments in order to record the divine revelation immediately (*2 Enoch* 22–23).

Kloppenborg regards as typical for the instruction collections that 'the teaching is never considered to be the *creation* of the sage. On the contrary, it is something which he transmits and which his own experience confirms.'⁶ This observation also applies to other ancient genres. Enoch in Enoch literature, the Beloved Disciple in John, and Thomas in Thomasine texts are equally associated with the *transmission* of the teachings of a divine revealer rather than with innovators or interpreters of this revelation. Strikingly, in the *Gospel of Thomas* 13, Thomas is described as understanding something that makes him special, but it is *not* related to the audience what his insight was.

The most obvious function of authorial fiction in various genres of ancient literature is that of authentication. Klop-

⁴ Cf., e.g., Philip Vielhauer and Georg Strecker, Introduction to 'Apocalypses and Related Subjects', in *NTA* 2, 542–68, esp. 545.

⁵ Cf. other instances in the Book of Revelation of the divine writing command (Rev 1:19; 2:1,8,12,18; 3:1,7,14; 15:13; 19:9; 21:5) and the prohibitive command (Rev 10:4).

⁶ Kloppenborg, *The Formation of Q*, 275.

penborg clearly demonstrates ‘the requirement of the genre for an authoritative guarantor of the sayings’ in the Egyptian instruction collections.⁷ Similarly, as was pointed out in chapter five, in Jewish visionary literature ideal figures are used to authenticate the divine revelation.⁸ The technical side of the transmission of revelations in the form of a text is often emphasized in this genre. In Enoch literature, for example, the visionary affirms the reliability of his scribal activity (*2 Enoch* 23:4; 40), and the reliable transmission of his text is certified by claiming that the original manuscript was divinely safeguarded even from the Flood (*2 Enoch* 33:8–12)!

The Beloved Disciple in John serves a function similar to that of Enoch elsewhere. The Beloved Disciple is not only identified with one of Jesus’ disciples, which makes him an eyewitness, but the reliability of his eyewitness testimony is repeatedly pointed out (John 19:35; 21:24). The *Gospel of Thomas* is less explicit on this point, but the fact that Thomas is introduced as the one who wrote down Jesus’ secret words (*Gos. Thom.* incipit) indicates that he is used as the guarantor of the reliable transmission of Jesus’ teachings.

2. JESUS’ DISCIPLES AS AUTHORS

In addition to the gospels of John and *Thomas*, there are several early Christian texts attributed to the disciples of

⁷ Kloppenborg, *The Formation of Q*, 275.

⁸ See above chapter five, section three.

Jesus. Some texts present themselves as narrated by Jesus' disciples (e.g., the *Gospel of Peter*, the *Apocryphon of John*, the *Apocalypse of Peter*), while some other texts claim to have been written by them (e.g., the *Infancy Story of Thomas*; the *Protevangelium of James*). In addition to the documents which were allegedly written by Jesus' disciples, some texts are attributed to Jesus, either completely (*Epistula apostolorum*) or in part (Jesus' letter to Abgar included in the *Abgar Legend*).⁹ In fact, the Book of Revelation begins with what are presented as the letters of Jesus to seven Christian communities in Asia Minor which John wrote down (Rev. 2–3); John portrays himself merely as the scribe of these letters.

In addition to the attribution of certain texts to the disciples of Jesus, some of these texts contain increasingly detailed accounts of their modes of production. The *Book of Thomas* and *Pistis Sophia* are prime examples of this tendency. The *Book of Thomas* not only identifies its author, Mathaias, but it also describes an incident in which he heard Jesus' discussion with Thomas recorded in this text (138.1–4): 'The secret words that the savior spoke to Judas Thomas which I, Mathaias, wrote down. I was walking, as I heard them speaking with one another'.¹⁰

⁹ Further evidence for the circulation of writings allegedly written by Jesus is provided by Wolfgang Speyer, 'Religiöse Pseudepigraphie und literarische Fälschung im Altertum', in *Pseudepigraphie in der heidnischen und jüdisch-christlichen Antike* (ed. Norbert Brox; Wege der Forschung 484; Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1977), 195–271.

¹⁰ The translation I follow here (with modification) is that of John D. Turner in Layton, *Nag Hammadi Codex II*, 2–7, 2.181.

The *Book of Thomas* differs from the *Gospel of Thomas* in making a clear distinction between the recipient of Jesus' teaching (Thomas) and the scribe (Mathaias). This distinction blurs, however, at the end of this text, where it is called 'The Book of Thomas' (145.17).¹¹ Although the double ascription of the writing to Mathaias and to Thomas has led some scholars to see multiple layers in the *Book of Thomas*,¹² the tension between the incipit and the title is

¹¹ As Schenke has pointed out, the writing defines itself as the 'Book of Thomas' rather than the 'Book of Thomas the Contender', for the 'contender' is the subject of the following circumstantial sentence (145.18–19: ΠΑΘΗΤΗΣ ΕΦΕΖΑΙ ΝΝΤΕΛΕΙΟΣ, 'the contender writing to the perfect ones'); cf. Hans-Martin Schenke, *Das Thomasbuch (Nag Hammadi-Codex II,7)* (TU 138; Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1989), 193–95. Yet in the present closing of the writing, 'the contender' must also refer to Thomas, so it is not completely incorrect to speak of the 'Book of Thomas the Contender.' The strict distinction Schenke makes between the 'Book of Thomas' and the following circumstantial sentence ('The contender writing to the perfect') is connected with his view that the latter had its original place at the beginning of an epistle (ibid. 194). Moreover, Schenke argues that, in platonizing Jewish Wisdom literature, there was only one contender, Jacob the patriarch (ibid. 196). Thus, Schenke identifies a source behind the present *Book of Thomas* which he defined as 'a (pseudepigraphic) epistle of (Jacob) the Contender to the perfect', or as 'an apocryphal letter of Jacob', which was originally a *non-Christian* document (ibid. 196–97). Schenke's suggestion remains very problematic since in the *Book of Thomas*, Jacob of the Hebrew Bible is not mentioned by name, nor are there any allusions to any part of the Jacob narrative of the Hebrew Bible.

¹² Robinson regards the title of the *Book of Thomas* as secondary to its introduction. Turner, in turn, has argued that the *Book of Thomas* comprises a collection of Jesus' sayings ascribed to Mathaias and a dialogue of Thomas with the Savior. In this case, the beginning of the *Book of Thomas* (excluding the references to Thomas) would originally have been an introduction to the sayings collection, and the closing of the writing could have been the title of the dialogue. Cf. James M. Robinson, 'LOGOI SOPHON: On the Gattung of Q', in James M. Robinson and Helmut Koester, *Trajectories through Early Christianity* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1971), 71–113, esp. 81–83; Turner, *The Book of Thomas the Contender*, 108–9. Criticism with regard to Turner's

quite superficial. The title, 'The Book of Thomas', indicates only that, as the interlocutor and recipient of revelation, Thomas was a more prominent figure than Mathaias the scribe; hence the attribution of the book to Thomas at the end.

A very similar authorial fiction can be found in *Pistis Sophia*, usually dated in the third century CE.¹³ In it, Jesus himself assigns the task of writing down his words to several disciples, including Philip, Matthew, and Thomas (*PS* 71.18–72).¹⁴ The most detailed account of the disciples' scribal activity is given of Philip; he is the only disciple whose act of writing is described within the narrative itself:

It happened now when Jesus heard these words which Philip said, he said to him: 'Excellent, Philip, you beloved one. Come now at this time, sit and write your part of every word which I shall say, and what shall I do, and everything which you will see.' And immediately Philip sat down and wrote (*PS* 75.1–6).¹⁵

source theory has been voiced by Uro, *Thomas*, 18: '... at least as possible is the hypothesis that the form of homiletical discourse was in the beginning and the discourse was appended to the dialogue between Thomas and Jesus at some stage of redaction.'

¹³ Cf. Marjanen, *The Woman Jesus Loved*, 171–72: 'There is general agreement that both works of *Pistis Sophia* [i.e. I–III and IV] date from the third century.... There is no doubt that both parts of *Pistis Sophia* are Gnostic works. They seem to presuppose a myth resembling that of the *Apocryphon of John*.' A similar, or even later, dating (the third or fourth century CE) is suggested by PHEME PERKINS, 'Pistis Sophia', *ABD* 5.375–76.

¹⁴ Cf. Wolfgang A. Bienert, 'The Picture of the Apostle in Early Christian Tradition', in *NTA* 2.5–27, esp. 18.

¹⁵ I follow (with some modification) the translation of *Pistis Sophia* as given in Carl Schmidt (ed.) and Violet MacDermot (trans.), *Pistis Sophia* (NHS 9; Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1978).

In comparison with the accounts of authorship in the *Book of Thomas* and *Pistis Sophia*, authorial fiction is less detailed in both the Gospel of John and the *Gospel of Thomas*. They do not contain any account of the *circumstances* in which these gospels were written by the disciples of Jesus.

Could the less detailed accounts of the mode of production in John and *Thomas* be used as an argument for their being earlier than the texts with more detailed accounts of how they were produced? Admittedly, different forms of authorial fiction provide us with no absolute indication for dating early Christian writings, since authorial fictions could already be very detailed in Jewish visionary literature dating from the first century CE or earlier (*1 and 2 Enoch*), and in the Book of Revelation (ca. 90–100 CE).

Nevertheless, authorial fiction might be a helpful tool in locating the place of the Gospel of John and the *Gospel of Thomas* within early Christianity. It seems that authorial fiction gradually took increasingly concrete forms in early Christian literature. In addition to the examples mentioned above, it has been noted that, while in the earliest gospels of the New Testament ‘I’ or ‘we’ are not used by the narrator, this feature frequently appears in later gospels.¹⁶ Descriptions of the mode of production become increasingly detailed in later acts of apostles, too.¹⁷

¹⁶ Cf. Wolfgang Speyer, *Die literarische Fälschung im heidnischen und christlichen Altertum: Ein Versuch ihrer Deutung* (Munich: C. H. Beck, 1971), 51, 262. As Speyer notes, this feature is also typical of the later representatives of acts literature. This observation does not, strictly speaking, apply to John (cf. 1:14; 21:24), but it certainly applies to Thomas.

¹⁷ Cf. Speyer, *Literarische Fälschung*, 51.

Moreover, the gospels included in the New Testament already point to the growing necessity for authentication. The gospels usually considered to be the earliest ones (Mark and Matthew) do not give any account of the mode of their production, whereas the Gospel of Luke begins with a note emphasizing its reliability (Luke 1:1–4), and the Gospel of John not only introduces the Beloved Disciple in order to authenticate its contents, but also adds a group of ‘us’ for the same purpose (John 1:18; 21:24; cf. 1 John 1:1–3).

Interestingly enough, the Johannine passages where the Beloved Disciple occurs as a narrative figure have close synoptic parallels (John 13:21–30; 19:25–27; 20:1–10; 21:1–14). If these passages betray knowledge of the synoptic gospels,¹⁸ the Beloved Disciple’s authenticating function becomes even more apparent. In that case, the Johannine author *added* the figure of the Beloved Disciple to these passages to bolster the claim for authenticity even more effectively. This author, it seems, chose an approach to earlier source materials that is different from that of the author of the Gospel of Luke, who mentioned the existence and use of previous sources at the beginning (Luke 1:1–4). Although authorial fiction in the Gospel of John is less detailed than in many early Christian writings, a crucial step was taken towards a very concrete authorial fiction, as this gospel introduced an author-disciple who was supposed to be present as the narrated events took place.

The authorial fiction in *Thomas* is somewhat less detailed than that in John. In John, the reliability of the alleged

¹⁸ See above, chapter five.

author is underscored with specific remarks (John 19:35; 21:24). Similar remarks are missing in *Thomas*. On the other hand, the fact that the emphasis of the *Gospel of Thomas* lies in Jesus' *secret* sayings can presuppose a situation in which his 'public' teaching was already in circulation and commonly known. Thus, in their distinctive ways, both John and *Thomas* indicate awareness of the existence of other Jesus traditions, and this competitive situation may have made necessary the use of Jesus' disciples as authenticating figures.

3. OTHER BELOVED DISCIPLES OF JESUS

The claim made in the Gospel of John, that the text was written by Jesus' closest disciple, is not unique in early Christian literature. Thomas was portrayed as the author of the *Gospel of Thomas* and as the favourite disciple of Jesus (*Gos. Thom.* 13). What is missing in this portrait of Thomas in comparison to that of the Johannine Beloved Disciple, however, is the designation 'the disciple Jesus loved'. Yet this feature is common elsewhere. Distinguished disciples were often characterized in terms of love between themselves and their teachers. A non-Christian example can be taken from Josephus, who mentions that John Hyrcanus (High Priest and ethnarch during the years 135/4 and 104 BCE) was, before his clash with the Pharisees, 'their disciple who was loved very much by them' (μαθητῆς δὲ αὐτῶν ἦν καὶ Ὑρκανός, καὶ σφόδρα ὑπ' αὐτῶν ἠγαπᾶτο, *Ant.* 13.289).

In addition, love is often mentioned in the descriptions of close affinity between teachers and their best students in Greek philosophical schools. The teacher was frequently defined as a ‘lover’ (ἐραστής) and the disciple as his ‘beloved’ (ἐρώμενος). In particular, the term ‘beloved’ was used of those students who became ‘successors to their teachers in a certain school.’¹⁹ In fact, Plutarch detested the usage of love terminology in this connection because it implied an overly affectionate or erotic relationship between the teacher and his student.²⁰

The lack of the specific terms ἐραστής and ἐρώμενος in John indicates, in my view, that the Greek texts speaking of the love between teachers and their special disciples in ancient schools of thought offer no particularly close parallel to the Johannine portrayal of the Beloved Disciple.²¹ Closer

¹⁹ Cf. van Tilborg, *Imaginative Love in John*, 85–87, quoting Diogenes Laertius, 4.19.21–22.29.32.

²⁰ Cf. Plutarch, *Moralia* 448E: ‘So again, when young men happen upon their cultivated teachers, they follow them and admire them at first because of their usefulness; but later they come to feel affection for them also, and in place of familiar companions and pupils (μαθητῶν) they are called lovers (ἐρασταί) and are actually so’ (trans. Helmbold, LCL). Plutarch regards this kind of a love relationship between the teacher and the student as one sign of human irrationality (*Moralia*, 448D). On the other hand, Plutarch does not condemn homoerotic relationships as such, but speaks of them in positive terms—insofar as they do not involve ‘flashing with desire’ (*Moralia*, 751, referred to by Tilborg, *Imaginative Love*, 80–81). It is impossible to discuss here various aspects of same-sex relationships in Greek society and literature; for a concise survey of this issue, see Martti Nissinen, *Homoeroticism in the Biblical World: A Historical Perspective* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1998), 57–69.

²¹ Thus van Tilborg’s interpretation of the Johannine portrait of the Beloved Disciple seems far-fetched. Van Tilborg maintains (*Imaginative Love*, 247–48) that this portrait should be understood as lending expression to ‘imaginary homosexual behaviour’, which, however, ‘is not an expression

parallels can be found in other early Christian texts, where several disciples of Jesus are called either ‘the disciple Jesus loved’ or his ‘beloved.’²² In these texts, love is usually connected with the disciples having some specific knowledge of Jesus’ teachings.

Linked with this idea, secrecy is, more often than not, an essential part of the characterization of the beloved disciples of Jesus. The motif of secrecy can be used either in an inclusive or an exclusive manner. In the former case, the beloved disciple reveals his or her secret knowledge to other figures in the narrative, while in the latter case he or she refuses to do so (as did Thomas, according to *Thomas* 13).

Mary Magdalene, as portrayed in the *Gospel of Philip* and the *Gospel of Mary*, belongs to the ‘inclusive’ group of the beloved disciples of Jesus.²³ In the *Gospel of Philip*, the other disciples raise the question of why Jesus loved Mary more than the rest of them. Her specific affinity to Jesus is also shown in the statement that Jesus used to kiss her often (*Gos. Phil.* 63.32–64.9). Similarly, it is said in the *Gospel of Mary* that the Saviour loved Mary more than other disciples and other women. The close relationship between the

of homosexuality. It is an expression of *παιδεραστία*, the love for *παῖς* as the perfect entrance into the knowledge of God’s love for his son and consequently of God’s love for the cosmos.’

²² Schenke, ‘The Function and Background of the Beloved Disciple’, mentioned many of the examples discussed below, albeit only in passing, since he was mostly interested in presenting support for his thesis that Thomas is a historical model for the Beloved Disciple (for this theory, see chapter six section one, above).

²³ On Mary Magdalene in these writings, see Marjanen, *The Woman Jesus Loved*, 94–121, 147–69.

Saviour and Mary is used in this text to explain why revelation was given by Jesus to Mary and transmitted by her to the other disciples (*Gos. Mary* 10.1–6; 18.14–15).

Although some scholars have identified Mary with the Johannine Beloved Disciple, there is, in my view, no solid basis for this suggestion.²⁴ There are, nevertheless, other aspects in her character that call for comparison. The function Mary has in the *Gospel of Mary* is no doubt similar to that of the Beloved Disciple in John: the relationship of love is affirmed in order to authenticate the contents of the respective texts.

In the *Gospel of Mary*, it is also said that the other disciples raised doubts about Mary's vision (*Gos. Mary* 17.10–19.2). This passage anticipates resistance to the teachings included in it,²⁵ which made the authentication of the text by means of a 'beloved disciple' necessary. What makes Mary different from the Johannine Beloved Disciple is, however, that she is portrayed as the one who knows more than the other disciples because of her private vision of Jesus (*Gos. Mary* 10.10 ff.).

An anonymous youth called 'the one Jesus loved ($\delta\upsilon\nu\ \eta\gamma\acute{\alpha}\pi\alpha\ \alpha\upsilon\tau\acute{\omicron}\nu\ \delta\ \text{'}\text{I}\eta\sigma\omicron\upsilon\varsigma\text{'}$)' in the *Secret Gospel of Mark* (3.15–16) represents the 'exclusive' group of distinguished followers of Jesus. The problems related to this text are well known: both its authenticity and its relationship to the

²⁴ For this issue, see above, chapter five, section one.

²⁵ Cf. Marjanen, *The Woman Jesus Loved*, 113–14, 119–21; Karen L. King, *The Gospel of Mary of Magdala: Jesus and the First Woman Apostle* (Santa Rosa, Calif.: Polebridge, 2003), 5.

gospels in the New Testament are debated.²⁶ Nevertheless, since the text may be of early Christian origin, it deserves our attention. In this text, love between Jesus and the youth is connected with the latter's initiation into 'the secret of the kingdom of God' (τὸ μυστήριον τῆς βασιλείας τοῦ θεοῦ, 30: 10). As far as can be inferred from the extant fragments of *Secret Mark*, this secret is not disclosed to other figures in the narrative or to the audience of the text. The exclusivity characteristic of *Secret Mark* also becomes visible in Jesus' outright rejection of the women accompanying the anonymous youth in this document.²⁷ Moreover, it is noteworthy that *Secret Mark* depicts a *reciprocal* love relationship between Jesus and the youth. It is not only said that Jesus loved the youth, but also that the youth loved Jesus. The latter aspect makes the youth described in *Secret Mark* different from the Johannine Beloved Disciple, for nowhere in John is it mentioned that the Beloved Disciple loved Jesus.

In addition to these texts, there are several writings in which Jesus addresses his disciples as his 'beloved'. This designation occurs frequently in the *Questions of Bartholomew* (from the 3rd century CE?) when Jesus addresses Bartholomew (*Quest. Barth.* 1:5, 8, 26; 4:67). Bartholomew is described in this text as a recipient of mysteries, but he is also told by Jesus to 'entrust them to all who are faithful and keep them for themselves' (*Quest. Barth.* 4:67, *NTA*), and to 'preach this (secret) word to everyone who wishes it' (*Quest. Barth.* 5:6, *NTA*). Thus, as in the *Gospel of Mary*, secrecy is

²⁶ For a short account of the discovery of, and subsequent debates about, the *Secret Gospel of Mark*, see Meyer, *Secret Gospels*, 109–10, 114–19, 135–37.

²⁷ Cf. Meyer, *Secret Gospels*, 125.

connected with the reception of revelation, but does not require that this revelation should not be revealed to others. As in John, and in *Thomas*, eternal life is promised to those who believe in the message guaranteed by the distinguished disciple of Jesus (*Quest. Barth.* 5:6).

In *Pistis Sophia*, the epithet ‘beloved’ (ΠΜΕΡΙΤ) is used of several followers of Jesus: Philip (*PS* 44), John (*PS* 64), Matthew (*PS* 72), and James (*PS* 68, 78). In addition, all the disciples are collectively addressed by Jesus as ‘my beloved ones’ (*PS* 138). Thus, this term no longer denotes one favourite disciple of Jesus but is associated with a larger group of his followers. This coincides with the observation that, in *Pistis Sophia*, ‘all the disciples who engage themselves in conversation with Jesus seem to understand Jesus’ instruction well.’²⁸ The ‘beloved’ interlocutors are constantly praised by Jesus with the words ‘excellent’ (ΕΥΓΕ), ‘well done’ (ΚΑΛΩΣ), and ‘blessed’ (ΜΑΚΑΡΙΟΣ).

4. JAMES AS JESUS’ BELOVED

Among the followers of Jesus called his ‘beloved’, his brother James figures prominently. The designation ‘beloved’ is frequently attached to James in those Nag Hammadi texts in which he plays a major role. The James texts of this collection certainly contain some very early traditions. Ron

²⁸ Marjanen, *The Woman Jesus Loved*, 175.

Cameron has demonstrated that there are early traditions of the sayings of Jesus in the *Apocryphon of James*, and Charles Hedrick has pointed out that, in the (*Second*) *Apocalypse of James*, ‘the absence of allusions to the later developed gnostic systems, the issues to which the author addresses himself . . . , and the almost total absence of allusions to the New Testament tradition suggest an early date for the origin of the tractate.’²⁹ In addition, Wilhelm Pratscher has detected in these texts several traits of the same Jewish-Christian tradition of the martyrdom of James that was used by Hegesippus (quoted in Eusebius, *Church History* 2.23. 8–18).³⁰ The (*First*) *Apocalypse of James* has affinities with Valentinian teaching, which suggests a later origin, but it

²⁹ Ron Cameron, *Sayings Traditions in the Apocryphon of James* (HTS 34; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984); Charles W. Hedrick, Introduction to ‘The (*Second*) *Apocalypse of James*’, in *Nag Hammadi Codices V, 2–5 with Papyrus Berolinensis 8502, 1 and 4* (ed. Douglas M. Parrott; NHS 11; Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1979) 105–9 (108).

³⁰ Cf. Wilhelm Pratscher, *Der Herrenbruder Jakobus und die Jakobustradition* (FRLANT, 139; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1987), 238–55. Bauckham argues convincingly that the references to the martyrdom of James in the (*Second*) *Apocalypse of James* do *not* show the dependence of this text on Hegesippus’s account; rather, they are both ‘dependent on a common Jewish Christian source’; cf. Richard Bauckham, ‘For What Offence was James Put to Death?’, in *James the Just and Christian Origins* (ed. Bruce Chilton and Craig A. Evans; NovTSup, 98; Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1999), 199–232, esp. 200–6. Bauckham combats, thus, the opposing theory that was suggested by Stanley Jones, ‘The Martyrdom of James in Hegesippus, Clement of Alexandria, and Christian Apocrypha, Including Nag Hammadi: A Study of Textual Relations’, in *Society of Biblical Literature 1990 Seminar Papers* (ed. David J. Lull; SBLSP 29; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1990), 323–27.

also exhibits knowledge of the Jewish-Christian traditions of the death of James (*1 Apoc. Jas.* 36.16–19).³¹

James is called ‘my beloved’ by Jesus in the (*Second*) *Apocalypse of James* and the *Apocryphon of James*. The picture drawn of him in these texts is similar to that of the group of disciples in *Pistis Sophia* and of Mary in the *Gospel of Mary* and the *Gospel of Philip*. The status of James as Jesus’ beloved is connected with a special revelation addressed to him: ‘My beloved (ΠΑΜΕΡΙΤ)! Behold, I shall reveal to you what neither [the] heavens nor their archons have known. Behold, I shall reveal to you what he did not know, he who boasted . . .’ (*2 Apoc. Jas.* 56.16–23).³²

Like the Beloved Disciple in John, James is connected with authorial fiction in the texts in which he plays the crucial role. He appears as the author of the *Apocryphon of James*, the story of his vision is related in the first person in the (*First*) *Apocalypse of James* (*1 Apoc. Jas.* 24.11),³³ and the (*Second*) *Apocalypse of James* presents itself as his discourse (*2 Apoc. Jas.* 44.1). James has also several recurring traits of the favourite disciples of Jesus. Like Mary, he is kissed by Jesus (*2 Apoc. Jas.* 56.14–16), but it is also said that James embraced and kissed Jesus (*1 Apoc. Jas.* 31.4–5). Like Mary in the *Gospel of Mary* and in the *Gospel of Philip* and Thomas

³¹ Cf. Alexander Böhlig, ‘Der judenchristliche Hintergrund in gnostischen Schriften der Nag Hammadi’, in idem, *Mysterion und Wahrheit: Gesammelte Beiträge zur spätantiken Religionsgeschichte* (AGSJU 6; Leiden: E. J. Brill 1968) 102–11, esp. 110; William R. Schoedel, ‘The (First) Apocalypse of James [Introduction]’, in Parrott, *Nag Hammadi Codices V*, 2–5, 65–67, esp. 66.

³² Trans. Hedrick, with modification.

³³ However, the authorial fiction of *1. Apoc. Jas.* is that this text was written down by Addai (*1 Apoc. Jas.* 36.20–24).

in the *Gospel of Thomas*, James is praised for his understanding of Jesus' words (1 *Apoc. Jas.* 29.4–5; 40.9–10).

Like Thomas in the *Book of Thomas* and *Acts of Thomas*, James is portrayed as the brother of Jesus (1 *Apoc. Jas.* 24.14–16; 2 *Apoc. Jas.* 50.11–23). As far as James is concerned, this designation stems from the early Jewish-Christian tradition (as does the designation 'just').³⁴ Notably, however, the authors of these texts found it important to add that Jesus and James were not completely alike. It is emphasized that James is only called the brother of Jesus (1 *Apoc. Jas.* 24.14–16),³⁵ and that Jesus had another father, even though he and James were nourished with the same milk (2 *Apoc. Jas.* 50.11–23)—I take the latter reference to mean that they had the same mother.³⁶

James is similar to the Johannine Beloved Disciple and to Bartholomew in the *Questions of Bartholomew* in that the purpose of Jesus' revelation to him is to evoke faith (1 *Apoc. Jas.* 29.19–28):

The Lord said: 'James, after these things I shall reveal to you everything, not for your sake alone but for the sake of [the]

³⁴ Among the Nag Hammadi texts, the epithet 'just' is attached to James in *Gos. Thom.* 12; 1 *Apoc. Jas.* 32; 2 *Apoc. Jas.* 44; cf. Pratscher, *Der Herrenbruder*, 163–64, 167–68, 177.

³⁵ Cf. similar assessments about James made in Eusebius (*Hist. eccl.* 1.12.5; 2.1.2; cf. Painter, *Just James*, 111), and about Thomas in *Thom. Cont.* 138.10.

³⁶ Pratscher suggests that in (*First Apocalypse of James*, 'Jesus and James are probably understood as cousins' (*Der Herrenbruder*, 168). However, I find it more likely that the reference to 'the same milk' indicates that they were portrayed as brothers having the same mother.

unbelief of men, so that the [faith] may exist in them. For a multitude will [attain] to faith, [and] they will increase [in . . .]³⁷

In addition, as in John, a linkage is made between the beloved Son of God and his beloved disciple in the (*Second Apocalypse of James*). Here it is not only James who is called 'beloved', but the same designation is used of Jesus too (49.8).³⁸

In the *Apocryphon of James*, the term 'beloved' is used in reference to both James and Peter. Again, the love Jesus shows to these disciples is associated with a life-giving function: 'You are the beloved; you are they who will be the cause of life in many' (*Ap. Jas.* 10; trans. Williams). Love also involves the possibility of becoming equal to Jesus:³⁹

If you do his (i.e., the Father's) will, I [say] that he will love you, and make you equal to me, and reckon [you] to have become beloved through his providence by your own choice (*Ap. Jas.* 4–5, trans. Williams).

³⁷ Trans. Schoedel.

³⁸ The whole section of 2 *Apoc. Jas.* 49.8–15 is reminiscent of the Christological language of the Gospel of John. Nonetheless, as will be seen below, it cannot be taken for granted that 2 *Apoc. Jas.* made use of the New Testament traditions.

³⁹ The hope of becoming equal to Jesus is visible not only in *Gospel of Thomas* 13 and 108, but it is more widely attested in early Christian writings. In addition to *Gos. Thom.* 108, Williams cites the following examples: 1 John 3:2; Irenaeus, *Haer.* 1.25.1; Tertullian, *De Anima* 32; *Gos. Phil.* 61.30–31; 67.21–27; *Pistis Sophia* 96; Frank E. Williams, '[Notes to] The Apocryphon of James', in Harold W. Attridge (ed.), *Nag Hammadi Codex I (The Jung Codex)*, vol. 2: *Notes* (NHS 23; E. J. Brill: Leiden 1985) 7–37, esp. 15.

In the *Apocryphon of James*, the term ‘beloved’ is not restricted to the two favorite disciples of Jesus. It is also used for all those who will be saved (or who belong to the divine realm already) (*Ap. Jas.* 16). Nevertheless, this text bears witness to the exclusive form of a secrecy motif: it is pointed out that James and Peter did not give a full account of their revelation to the other disciples (*Ap. Jas.* 15–16)—but reserved it for future generations.⁴⁰

In his study of James, Pratscher suggests that there is a connection between the term ‘beloved’ used of James in the Nag Hammadi texts and the figure of the Beloved Disciple in John. According to Pratscher, the ‘gnostic’ figure of James as the beloved one of Jesus was a later development in comparison to the Beloved Disciple in John: ‘From the anonymous Beloved Disciple of the Gospel of John would then have come the well-known beloved disciple of a certain gnostic group.’⁴¹ To me, however, it seems that the picture of James as Jesus’ beloved could well have emerged independently of John’s portrayal of the Beloved Disciple. The Coptic term **ΜΕΡΙΤ** (e.g., *2. Apoc. Jas.* 56.15–16; *PS* 68 etc.) presupposes the Greek word *ἀγαπητός* rather than the verbal phrases used of the Beloved Disciple in John (*ὃν ἠγάπα/ἐφίλει*). In addition, there are strong indications that the term ‘beloved’ could have been part of Jewish-Christian traditions of

⁴⁰ A notable contrast to this description of James can be found in a quotation attributed to Clement of Alexandria by Eusebius. In this passage, James (together with Peter and John) is depicted as a recipient of ‘the higher knowledge’, but it is also emphasized that ‘they imparted it to the other apostles’ (*Church History* 2.1.4; cf. Painter, *Just James*, 111, 115–16).

⁴¹ Pratscher, *Der Herrenbruder*, 169.

James. The term occurs in a similar form in the LXX and Jewish pseudepigrapha (e.g., Gen. 22:2, 12, 16; Isa. 26:17; Tob. 10:13; *T. Levi* 18:13; *T. Benj.* 11:2). In some of these texts, the term ‘beloved’ can be associated with the revelation of secrets, as the *Apocalypse of Abraham* (which possibly dates from the first or second century CE) demonstrates. In this text, the apocalyptic revealer addresses Abraham as his beloved (*Apoc. Abraham* 9:6): ‘I will announce to you guarded things and you will see great things which you have not seen, because you desired to search for me, and I called you my beloved.’⁴²

It is probable that, from early on, James was understood to have experienced a vision of Christ (cf. 1 Cor. 15:7; *Gos. Hebr.* 7), and his claim to authority among early Christians was not solely based upon his family ties with Jesus but also on his vision.⁴³ In early Christian traditions, the role of James as a transmitter of divine revelations was connected with his vision.⁴⁴ For example, Clement of Alexandria still knew of the tradition that ‘after his resurrection the Lord gave knowledge (*γνώσις*) to James the Just, John, and Peter; they transmitted it to the other apostles, the other apostles to the seventy to whom Barnabas belonged too.’⁴⁵

The same tradition of James as an intermediary of revelation is visible in the portrayals of him in the Nag Ham-

⁴² Trans. Rubinkiewicz and Lunt, *OTP*.

⁴³ Cf. Pratscher, *Der Herrenbruder*, 29–48.

⁴⁴ For James’s role as the mediator of the revelation of Jesus, see especially Pratscher, *Der Herrenbruder*, 158–65.

⁴⁵ Clement, *Hypotyposeis* 7 (according to Eusebius, *Church History* 2.1.4–5); cf. Martin Hengel, ‘Jakobus der Herrenbruder—der erste “Papst”?’; in id., *Paulus und Jakobus: Kleine Schriften* III (WUNT 141; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2002), 549–82, esp. 563.

madi texts mentioned above.⁴⁶ In light of the *Apocalypse of Abraham*, the designation 'beloved' connected with James can be part of an early Jewish-Christian tradition. There is, thus, no compelling reason to assume, as Pratscher does, that the Johannine Beloved Disciple formed the model for the portrayal of James in certain texts as the beloved one of Jesus. This designation could plausibly have been part of earlier traditions of James.

5. THE JOHANNINE BELOVED DISCIPLE: AN ANTI-JAMES?

While it seems unlikely that the figure of James in the Nag Hammadi texts was modelled on the Johannine Beloved Disciple, I find it possible that the traditional image of James had an impact on the creation of the Beloved Disciple in John. It was pointed out above that the figure of the Beloved Disciple is connected with the Johannine polemic against the brothers of Jesus. While they were described as unbelievers in John 7:2–9, the Beloved Disciple was authorized by Jesus to become the guardian of his mother (John 19:26–27). In the Johannine narrative, thus, this disciple takes over what, in terms of jurisdiction, was the legal responsibility of the brothers of Jesus.⁴⁷

This picture would be hostile towards anyone claiming to be a brother of Jesus. In light of the evidence discussed

⁴⁶ Cf. Hengel, 'Jakobus der Herrenbruder', 563–66.

⁴⁷ See chapter five, section four above.

above, the prime candidates for making such claims would be Thomas and James. However, it seems unlikely that Thomas would be the target of the Johannine polemic against the brothers of Jesus since the Gospel of John seems unaware of the tradition where Thomas was called the twin of Jesus. In John, Thomas is simply portrayed as one of the disciples of Jesus.

James needs more consideration.⁴⁸ In the New Testament there are only a few passages mentioning him (Mark 6:3; Acts 12:17; 15:13–21; 21:18; 1 Cor. 15:7; Gal. 1:19; 2:9, 12; James 1:1; Jude 1). In addition, he can be included in the passages mentioning the brothers of Jesus (Mark 3:31–35// Matt. 12:46–50// Luke 8:19–21; Mark 6:3// Matt. 13:55; John 2:12; 7:2–10; Acts 1:14; 1 Cor. 9:5) or his relatives (Mark 3:21). The scattered references to James in the New Testament, however, hardly correspond to his historical importance as the leader of the earliest Jewish Christian community in Jerusalem. It is generally agreed that the texts canonized in the New Testament display a tendency to downplay the importance of James as the leader of the earliest Jewish-Christian community.⁴⁹ The picture drawn of the brothers of Jesus in all four canonical gospels is strikingly negative. This picture can be related to James in particular: ‘The Gospels, when they refer to James at all, do so with no great sympathy.’⁵⁰

⁴⁸ Cf. Rese, ‘Selbstzeugnis’, 95 n. 65.

⁴⁹ Cf., e.g., Hengel, ‘Jakobus der Herrenbruder’, 550; Scot McKnight, ‘A Parting within the Way: Jesus and James on Israel and Purity’, in Chilton and Evans, *James the Just*, 83–129, esp. 101.

⁵⁰ Bruce Chilton, Introduction to Chilton and Evans, *James the Just*, 7–8.

There is, however, evidence, even in the New Testament, to suggest that James was a man of authority in the earliest Christian congregation in Jerusalem.⁵¹ Paul mentions him as the first of three ‘pillars’ (στυλοὶ; the other two were Peter and John) of that community (Gal. 2:9), and the envoys sent from James made Peter and other Jewish Christians withdraw from common meals with non-Jewish Christians in Antioch (Gal. 2:11–14).

In Acts, it is James who delivers a speech outlining the guidelines of practice to be followed by non-Jewish Christians (Acts 15:13–21), and these instructions are sent in the form of a letter to the Christians in Antioch, Syria, and Cilicia (Acts 15:22–29). Though the speech of James in Acts 15, as all other speeches in Acts,⁵² is probably a free creation of the author of Luke-Acts, its core may be historical. The instruction attributed to James that non-Jewish Christians should abstain from meat offered to idols, blood, and fornication seems to be based upon the regulations in the Hebrew Bible extended to apply to ‘resident aliens’ (Lev. 17–18). Thus, it is conceivable that the lifestyle recommended to all Christians in Acts 15:13–29 does indeed reflect a decision made in the Christian community of Jerusalem that non-Jews can be included in this community

⁵¹ James’ leadership of the Christian community in Jerusalem is assumed in virtually all studies of him; for one example, see Painter, *Just James*, 44, 54–56.

⁵² For speeches in the Acts as Lukan compositions, see Lars Aejmelaeus, *Die Rezeption der Paulusbriefe in der Miletrede (Apg 20:18–35)* (AASF Ser. B 232; Helsinki: Academia Scientiarum Fennica, 1987), 23–28.

as the ‘resident aliens’ described in Torah and should be treated accordingly.⁵³

It is scarcely any coincidence that it is James who is described in Acts 15 as paving the way for this decision, with which ‘the apostles, the elders, and the entire congregation’ in Jerusalem subsequently agreed (Acts 15:22), since he is portrayed as a man of primary importance elsewhere in Acts. After being rescued from prison, Peter sends a message to James (12:17), and, during his visit to Jerusalem described in Acts 21, Paul is said to have given an account of his activities to James (21:18). Although these stories are not historical records in the strict sense, they are based upon the recognition of James as the leader of the early Christian community in Jerusalem, whose authority was not only recognized in Jerusalem but also by Jewish Christians in Antioch. That James was a brother of Jesus no doubt added to his authority and to the reverence shown to him by early Christians. Paul had already designated him as ‘James the brother of Jesus’ (Gal. 1:19; cf. 1 Cor. 9:5).

It is possible that James shared Jesus’ vision of the restoration of Israel.⁵⁴ There is a remarkable similarity in the processes leading to their deaths: in both cases, the high priest in Jerusalem played an important role in bringing charges against them.⁵⁵ The active involvement of the high

⁵³ Cf., e.g., Markus Bockmuehl, ‘Antioch and James the Just’, in Chilton and Evans, *James the Just*, 155–98, esp. 187; Pratscher, *Der Herrenbruder*, 73; McKnight, ‘A Parting within the Way’, 102 n. 44, 108.

⁵⁴ Cf. McKnight, ‘A Parting within the Way’, 109.

⁵⁵ The earliest account of the death of James can be found in Josephus, *Ant.* 20.9.1 § 197–203; for this story, see Pratscher, *Der Herrenbruder*, 230–38;

priest can indicate that ‘Jesus and James may very well have advanced the same agenda over against the temple establishment. . . .’⁵⁶

The account of the death of James in Josephus shows, in addition, that the decision to put him to death by the high priest Ananus II aroused opposition even among those Jews who ‘were the most uneasy at the breach of the laws. . . .’ (*Ant.* 20.9.1). This suggests that the accusation that James was breaking the law was considered erroneous by other Jews—probably Pharisees—⁵⁷and the whole process was taken as an instance of the unjust rule of Ananus II.⁵⁸ Thus, the story of the execution of James in Josephus coincides with the general picture derived from Galatians and Acts—that James himself remained observant of the Torah.⁵⁹

Hengel, ‘Jakobus der Herrenbruder’, 551–53; Richard Bauckham, ‘For What Offence Was James Put to Death?’.

⁵⁶ Craig A. Evans, ‘Jesus and James: Martyrs of the Temple’, in Chilton and Evans, *James the Just*, 233–49 (249).

⁵⁷ Bauckham, ‘For What Offence’, 222.

⁵⁸ To confirm this point was, in fact, the only reason why Josephus chose to write about the death of James to begin with: it served as an example of Josephus’ judgement that Ananus II was ‘a bold man in his temper, and very insolent’. According to Josephus, the protests raised against the execution of James led to Ananus’ dismissal from his office. For Josephus’ tendencies in his account of the death of James, see James S. McLaren, ‘Ananus, James, and Earliest Christianity: Josephus’ Account of the Death of James’, *JTS* 52 (2001), 1–25.

⁵⁹ I find it possible that the charge of breaking the law was brought against James because of his contacts with Christians like Paul, who no longer considered observance of the Torah necessary for non-Jewish Christians. Another possibility is that the accusation was based upon the inclusion of non-Jewish Christians in the community of Jewish Christians. In that case, temple priests did not accept the argument developed in that community

There is, thus, no doubt that James was the symbol of early Jewish Christianity. It is notable that his role, either historical or symbolic (this varies from case to case), was also debated, as can be seen in Paul's description of James' intervention that led to the conflict in Antioch. The synoptic gospels do not mention James by name, but they tell of how Jesus rejected his mother and his brothers, who thought that he was out of his mind and tried to take him into custody.

Gospel of Thomas 12 offers a peculiar combination of homage to and critique of James. In this saying, the disciples want to know who will be their leader after Jesus' departure, and his answer is that they should go to 'James the Just for whose sake heaven and earth came into being.' The reference to the creation in this saying is a traditional Jewish honorary title,⁶⁰ and the fact that it is attached to James makes it likely that the saying was rooted in Jewish Christian traditions showing reverence to him.⁶¹

Yet it seems that the original intention of the saying as a legitimation of the leadership of James was reversed when the saying was included in the *Gospel of Thomas*.⁶² The

(perhaps by James, as Acts suggests) that non-Jewish Christians should be treated as 'resident aliens'. Cf. Pratscher, *Der Herrenbruder*, 259: 'James's position was . . . endangered because of a connection with pagan Christianity, especially with Paul.'

⁶⁰ Cf. Marjanen, 'Is Thomas a Gnostic Gospel?', 119, pointing out that 'a similar phrase is used as an honorific epithet of Israel in 4 Ezra 7.11, of patriarchs, David, and the Messiah in rabbinic writings, and of the Christian church in the *Shepherd of Hermas* (1.1.6; 2.4.1).' For further Jewish parallels, see Pratscher, *Der Herrenbruder*, 154–56.

⁶¹ Cf. Pratscher, *Der Herrenbruder*, 154.

⁶² On what follows, cf. Valantasis, *The Gospel of Thomas*, 73–74; Uro, *Thomas*, 84–86, 93–95.

interpretive frame for understanding this saying within this gospel is offered in *Thomas* 3, where the teachings of ‘your leaders’ are ridiculed. This shows *Thomas*’s negative stance towards those claiming authority, and James is portrayed as one of these people in *Thomas* 12. In addition, the reference to the creation in the honorific used of James is undermined by the subsequent statements that ‘this heaven will pass away’ (*Gos. Thom.* 11), and that ‘the heavens and earth will roll up in front of you’ (*Gos. Thom.* 111).

In my view, what has not been taken into account in most recent interpretations of *Thomas* 12 is that the story portraying the brothers of Jesus in a dubious light in the synoptic gospels is also included in *Thomas* (99). *Thomas* also displays a critical attitude towards the observance of the Law represented by James according to other sources (rejection of circumcision: *Thomas* 53; that of praying and fasting: *Thomas* 104). All these sayings suggest that in its contemporary literary context, *Thomas* 12 should be understood as an ironic comment on James’ claim to leadership,⁶³ whereas *Thomas* 13 shows that even the hierarchy between the teacher and the student disappears in the true discipleship represented by *Thomas*.⁶⁴

⁶³ Cf. Valantasis, *The Gospel of Thomas*, 74: ‘The context of the entire collection points to the deficiency of such a need for leadership, and the appeal to James represents a sign of weakness.’

⁶⁴ Wayment, ‘Christian Teachers’, 298 (with reference to Patterson, *Thomas and Jesus*, 116–17), sees in the tension between *Gos. Thom.* 12 and 13 an indication suggesting that ‘one of the two sayings was added as the community sought to develop a more earthly model for the community to replace the cosmological image of James.’ I am not fully convinced about this theory since it still begs the question of the final author’s intention in putting the two

In John, James is not mentioned by name, but the brothers of Jesus are condemned *en bloc* as unbelievers. Moreover, in John it is possible to see criticism of not only Jews, Jewish beliefs, and practices, but also of Jewish Christians, whose icon James no doubt was.⁶⁵ It is striking that the harshest accusation of the Johannine Jesus against the Jews is, in fact, levelled against ‘the Jews who believed in him’ (John 8:31). It is this group of Jews who only a few verses later begin to quarrel with Jesus, who are blamed for an attempt to kill Jesus (8:40), and of whom Jesus finally says (8:44 NRSV): ‘You are from your father the devil and you choose to do your father’s desires.’ It would be very difficult not to read this passage as showing some critical attitude not only towards Jews in general but also towards Jewish Christians in particular.⁶⁶

In addition, there are other references in John to believing Jews. In John 6, they are described as turning away from Jesus.⁶⁷ It seems that they are offended by Jesus’ ‘realistic’ teaching of the eucharist. Since this is a description of the

sayings side by side. I think that the assumption that *Thomas 12* was originally a separate saying of Jewish-Christian origin is a sufficient source-critical hypothesis here.

⁶⁵ For possible references to Jewish Christians in the Gospel of John, see the judicious discussion in Brown, *The Community of the Beloved Disciple*, 73–81.

⁶⁶ Cf. Brown, *The Community of the Beloved Disciple*, 76–77. For other representatives of this view, see Hakola, *Identity Matters*, 183 n. 23. Hakola himself remains cautious with regard to this interpretation, pointing out correctly that the believing Jews in John 8 are ‘lumped together with other Jews’ in John (184). Yet Hakola does not deny altogether the possibility that the believing Jews would refer to Jewish Christians; some of his comments, in fact, presuppose this identification.

⁶⁷ Cf. Hakola, *Identity Matters*, 186–87.

Jews believing in Jesus, it seems likely that, as Brown maintains, ‘here John refers to Jewish Christians who are no longer to be considered true believers because they do not share John’s view of the eucharist.’⁶⁸

In addition, the author of John seems to undermine many beliefs and practices that could have been valued by Jewish Christians. In John, Jesus is made to speak of Jewish practices as an outsider (‘your circumcision’, John 7:19–24),⁶⁹ there are critical remarks about the Torah (1:17; 5:39), and the brothers of Jesus appear as unbelievers (John 7:2–9). While Thomas missed the first opportunity to see Jesus after the resurrection, but was allowed to see the risen Lord later, nothing comparable is said about the brothers of Jesus in John (nor in any other of the canonical gospels). This is especially striking if we take into account that James was elsewhere considered one of the most important witnesses of the resurrection.⁷⁰

It seems, thus, that ‘the disciple whom Jesus loved’ in John was not only created because a figure like this was necessary in the Johannine chain of transmission (Father/the Beloved Son/the Beloved Disciple/the audience of the gospel), as I argued in chapter five. In light of the broader context described above, introducing this character could also have been an attempt to debunk Jewish-Christian claims to authority based upon James’s close relationship

⁶⁸ Brown, *The Community of the Beloved Disciple*, 74.

⁶⁹ For a careful interpretation of this passage, see Hakola, *Identity Matters*, 130–42. His conclusion is that ‘the Johannine Christians did not regard circumcision as a central marker of their identity’ (144).

⁷⁰ Cf. Brown, *The Community of the Beloved Disciple*, 75.

to Jesus. This view seems especially likely, if the term ‘beloved’ was already attached to James in the Jewish-Christian tradition. In that case, it could be assumed that the beloved brother of Jesus and the well-known symbol of Jewish Christianity, James, was replaced in John with another, anonymous beloved disciple.

There is other support for this possibility. According to Pratscher, there was a significant growth of Jewish-Christian traditions about James between 80 and 140CE.⁷¹ This development would have, thus, taken place at the same time that the Gospel of John was written. In addition, Pratscher suggested that one characteristic of this second wave of James traditions was the emphasis placed upon parallels between the lives of Jesus and James.⁷² This emphasis corresponds to that found in the Johannine portrayal of the Beloved Disciple: he is, in certain respects, described as being very comparable to Jesus (e.g., his position on the bosom of Jesus, 13:23, which recalled that of Jesus in the bosom of the Father, John 1:18). In addition, the Beloved Disciple is described in John as one of the first witnesses to the resurrection, as James is in other sources; and the Beloved Disciple is connected with the transmission of Jesus’ teaching, as James is in traditions focusing on him. These affinities between James and the Beloved Disciple would find a plausible explanation in

⁷¹ Pratscher, *Der Herrenbruder*, 121.

⁷² Pratscher, *Der Herrenbruder*, 121. Analogies between the life of Jesus and that of James are especially drawn in the Jewish-Christian tradition recorded in Hegesippus’s *Accounts* (ὑπομνήματα) (Eusebius, *Church History* 2.23.4–18; 4.22.4) (ibid. 118).

the assumption that the Johannine Beloved Disciple was created to function as a sort of 'anti-James'.

6. CONCLUSION

The most important point of the first two parts of this chapter is the recognition of the fact that the Johannine Beloved Disciple is not an isolated phenomenon; similar figures of authentication are introduced in several other Jewish and Christian texts. Several early Christian texts are ascribed to the followers of Jesus, and many of them are called his 'beloved'. The Johannine Beloved Disciple differed from similar figures in one respect, however: his affinity with Jesus is not linked with his better understanding, as was the case with all other distinguished followers of Jesus portrayed in the early Christian texts discussed above.

It is especially noteworthy that James the brother of Jesus was one these followers of Jesus called his beloved. This epithet appeared in the texts from the Nag Hammadi Library paying homage to James. These texts are arguably indebted to early Jewish-Christian traditions, and it seems likely that his designation as the beloved one of Jesus was part of these traditions. On the other hand, there are signs of a polemical attitude towards Jewish Christianity in the Gospel of John. Not only are the brothers of Jesus described as unbelievers (John 7:2–9), but also the Jews believing in Jesus are bitterly criticized for their lack of true faith (John 6:66; 8:31).

If we add to this picture the fact that, in John 19:25–27, the Beloved Disciple is portrayed as authorized by Jesus to become a replacement for the brothers of Jesus, it seems arguable that this figure was created as part of John’s polemic against Jewish Christians. His designation as the disciple whom Jesus loved, thus, is not only an intratextual device needed to express the Johannine view of the reliable transmission of Jesus’ words, as I argued in chapter five, but also a designation that emphasizes his role as the replacement for the brothers of Jesus. In this context, the Johannine claim could be understood as follows: it was not James who was the beloved follower of Jesus and the transmitter of his teachings. Instead, there was another figure, an anonymous disciple whom Jesus loved and who guaranteed the reliable transmission of his words.

The tendency to downplay the authority attributed to the brothers of Jesus, and especially to James, is well attested in a number of early Christian texts, but the strategies adopted in these texts were strikingly different. The portrayal of the brothers of Jesus in the Gospel of John and that of James in the *Gospel of Thomas* are only two examples of this disparagement. Again, the two gospels were part of a broader discussion among early Christians, but did not know each other’s positions.

Conclusion

The various results of this study have already been summarized at the end of each individual chapter, so a brief review will suffice. In addition, I will make some broader reflections related to the topic of my study. The comparison between John and *Thomas* naturally raises the question of how much the existence of the New Testament canon has affected both the approaches to and the results of the study of their relationship. This issue, which I consider to be of more importance than is usually acknowledged, will be addressed briefly in the latter part of this chapter.

1. SUMMARY OF THE RESULTS

In chapters two and three I argued that none of the theories presupposing an especially close connection between the Gospel of John and the *Gospel of Thomas* seems very compelling. The parallels presented by Brown and Sell were too accidental to warrant the conclusion that *Thomas* would be

either directly (Sell) or indirectly (Brown) dependent on the Gospel of John. The lack of close parallels between the two gospels also formed the major obstacle for Davies' suggestion that the *Gospel of Thomas*, or a very similar text, was in use in the Johannine community before the Gospel of John was written.

Concerning different versions of the theory that *Thomas* and John are gospels in conflict, difficulties accumulated in the interpretations of the Johannine portrayal of Thomas. Practically all proponents of this theory agreed that Thomas embodies a refuted 'Thomasine' point of view in the Johannine narrative, but they could not agree on what that viewpoint was. Instead, they read different and sometimes mutually exclusive theological positions into the Johannine figure of Thomas. This suggests that socio-historical conclusions based upon this literary portrait are quite problematic.

In addition, the proponents of the conflict theory have not taken seriously enough the negative picture drawn of the other followers of Jesus in John. It would be overreaching to see refuted theological positions and other early Christian groups lurking behind every follower of Jesus to whom the author of John has attached some negative features (Nicodemus, Martha, Philip, Thomas, Peter, Judas, etc.). The situation may be different in the case of the brothers of Jesus. The claim that they were not at all followers of Jesus is unusually harsh, even for John, and is in contradiction with the picture drawn of James in the earliest Christian sources.

The analysis of the I-sayings of Jesus in *Thomas* and their parallels to the Gospel of John (chapter four) provided no

signs of a close mutual relationship, either. In fact, this analysis offered many instances where *Thomas* and John were part of a wider early Christian discussion of the same issues, but without showing any sign of awareness of the others' positions. Thus, on the one hand, this chapter supported the conclusion that John and *Thomas* are independent of each other. On the other hand, some affinities between them suggested a common intellectual and theological background for both gospels at the turn of the first century which, thus, probably offers the most plausible date for them.

The three chapters devoted to the Johannine figure of the Beloved Disciple (chapters five through seven) led to several conclusions that are of importance for the interpretation of the Gospel of John. First, the evidence for the Beloved Disciple as someone other than a narrative character remained surprisingly thin. Second, my analysis suggests that his major function in the Johannine story is to lend authenticity to this gospel. Third, this function is not confined to the Beloved Disciple, but is attached to a number of the early followers of Jesus in other early Christian texts; prime examples being Mary Magdalene, Thomas, and James. The comparison between the Beloved Disciple and these other disciples showed that he is not characterized in terms of his distinct understanding of the teachings of Jesus, as the other figures are. Rather, the texts concerning the Beloved Disciple emphasize his reliability as an eyewitness. Fourth, the designation 'the disciple whom Jesus loved' functions, in the Johannine text world, as an indication of the status of this figure as an important link in the chain of transmission extending from the Father to the audience of

the gospel. However, the designation could also be connected with the social reality of the Johannine author. The Beloved Disciple could have been part of the author's debate with Jewish Christians, in whose traditions James was described as the beloved one of Jesus. If so, the author not only denigrated the brothers of Jesus and Jewish Christians, but also replaced their icon, James, with another, anonymous disciple.

The evidence discussed in chapters five through seven uncovered no additional support for the theory that John and *Thomas* were gospels in conflict. Rather, the gospels' claims for apostolic authorship should be seen within a more general development in early Christian texts. Not only were there several later writings ascribed to Jesus' disciples (or to Jesus himself) but, as is commonly acknowledged, secondary claims to apostolic authorship were already made in the New Testament.¹ Later writings stemming from the school of Paul were ascribed to him (e.g., the Pastoral Epistles), whereas other epistles introduce disciples or relatives of Jesus as their authors (Peter, Jude, James) and/or claim to have been written by an eyewitness (1 John 1:1–4; 2 Pet. 1:16–18).²

Moreover, 'secondary authorial fiction' emerged in the second century: identities were created for the originally unknown authors of the canonical gospels. The authors of the New Testament gospels were identified either as Jesus' disciples (Matthew, John) or their close associates (Mark as Peter's interpreter, and Luke as Paul's fellow-worker). At the

¹ Cf. Lorenzen, *Der Lieblingsjünger*, 102.

² For later instances of using 'eyewitness testimonies' in authenticating Christian writings, see Speyer, *Literarische Fälschung*, 51–56.

same time, the question of apostolic succession became increasingly important. This issue is reflected, for example, in the famous fragment of Papias, which drew a distinction between the more valuable living and abiding voice' of Jesus, transmitted through Jesus' own disciples, and the less valuable written accounts.³ Only a few decades later, claims for apostolic succession were apparently of equal importance to Christian teachers having very different views, such as Irenaeus on the one hand and Basilides and Valentinus on the other.⁴

It is this widely prevalent tendency of claiming apostolic authority during the later generations of early Christianity that offers the most plausible context for creating and using authenticating figures such as the Beloved Disciple in John and Thomas in the *Gospel of Thomas*. The more aware early Christian writers became of the diversity within early Christian traditions, the more important it became to convince their audiences that the specific branch of tradition they were representing was the most reliable. Attribution of their writings to Jesus' disciples was one, apparently effective, means of authenticating these traditions, as can be seen in its increasing popularity.

³ Eusebius, *Church History* 3.39.3–4.

⁴ Irenaeus: *Adv. haer.* 3.3.4; Basilides and Valentinus: Clement, *Strom.* 7.106.3–4. Cf. Christoph Marksches, *Valentinus Gnosticus? Untersuchungen zur valentinianischen Gnosis mit einem Kommentar zu den Fragmenten Valentins* (WUNT 65; Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr Paul Siebeck] 1992), 298–302. According to Clement, Basilides relied on Glaucias, Peter's interpreter, whereas Valentinus claimed to have heard Theodas, Paul's disciple (γνώριμος).

My conclusions on the relationship between the Gospel of John and the *Gospel of Thomas* lend support to the view that neither of these gospels, at least in their extant forms, can be dated very early in the first century CE. The way authenticating figures are presented in these gospels connects them with Christian writings that are later than the earliest gospels, in which such ascriptions are missing. However, in John and *Thomas* authorial fiction took less concrete forms than in some other early Christian writings. This indicates that they still stood at the threshold of this development, which gradually led to the increasingly detailed authentication of early Christian pseudepigraphical texts.

2. CONCLUDING REFLECTIONS: JOHN, THOMAS, AND THE CANON OF THE NEW TESTAMENT

In his account of the research history of the relationship between John and the Synoptics, D. Moody Smith has pointed out the impact that the existence of the New Testament canon has had on the study of this issue: the fact that the Gospel of John now stands in a canon of Scripture with the three other Gospels, partly parallel and partly quite different, affects our view of their relationship.⁵ As obvious as the impact of the New Testament canon on our approach

⁵ D. Moody Smith, *John among the Gospels: The Relationship in Twentieth-Century Research* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992), 191. The new, second edition of this book was, unfortunately, not available to me when writing this study.

to early Christian texts is, it may blur the historical relationships between the texts that were originally produced for individual communities. Smith speaks about a 'canonical assumption' that may have led scholars to historically unwarranted conclusions:

It is all too easy and natural to make the canonical assumption, and therefore to treat John as if the author must have known the Synoptics, and, if he did, to assume that he would have written his own gospel out of some dominant relationship to them, whether one of interpretation, supplementation, or opposition. . . . Modern views of the relationship between John and the Synoptics are thus all too easily determined by their canonical status.⁶

I have found this point important in my previous study on John and the Synoptics, although my own view of their relationship differs from that of Smith's.⁷ I do find this caution to be equally important for our discussion about the relationship between the Gospel of John and the *Gospel of Thomas*. The 'canonical assumption' mentioned by Smith is not only implicit in many current views about John and the Synoptics, but it can also be seen behind different theories of *Thomas* and its relationship to John. In light of this study, it seems that there is a tendency to bring the *Gospel of Thomas* into closer contact with the Gospel of John than the evidence

⁶ Smith, *John among the Gospels*, 192.

⁷ Cf. Ismo Dunderberg, 'Johannine Anomalies and the Synoptics' in *New Readings in John: Literary and Theological Perspectives* (ed. Johannes Nissen and Sigfried Petersen; JSNTSup 182; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), 108–25, esp. 123. I am more inclined than Smith to assume that the Johannine author or editor knew the synoptic gospels, but I agree with Smith that the Gospel of John was not written 'out of some dominant relationship to them'

really admits. This tendency is no doubt due to the fact that the Gospel of John is one of the four canonical gospels in the New Testament. The results of Thomasine scholarship may seem more impressive and significant if a direct link between *Thomas* and the canonical gospels can be established.

The need to create a close connection between John and *Thomas* has become visible in two ways. Scholars have either tried to show that the *Gospel of Thomas* is clearly later than, and dependent upon, the canonical Gospel of John, or they have attempted to create a conflict between the canonized John and the non-canonical *Thomas*. It is especially intriguing that the issues in the alleged conflict between the two gospels are often identical to later doctrinal debates in the Church about the divinity of Christ, or about the resurrection of the body and the immortality of the soul. The debate between John and *Thomas* is made more significant by claims that it anticipated later ecclesiastical controversies. Moreover, the Gospel of John is seen in these theories as an early representative of what later became the position of Christian orthodoxy (e.g., accepting the resurrection of the body), while *Thomas* represents an early version of what was later denounced as heresy by the Church.

On the one hand, the theory of a conflict between John and *Thomas* has indicated a welcome attempt to take non-canonical texts seriously for the study of early Christianity and questioned the usefulness of the canon as a boundary for historical study of this period. On the other, paradoxically, the resulting picture of the conflict between the two gospels sustains the very dichotomy between orthodoxy and heresy, or that between the canon and non-canonical

texts.⁸ This dichotomy is problematic, even if the ‘heretical’ and ‘non-canonical’ position is portrayed with greater sympathy than previously, as Pagels especially does, and the orthodox position, which the canonized John and its later advocates allegedly represent, is read through more critical lenses than formerly.

If a non-canonical and a canonical text were connected by means of their mutual debate, this would certainly offer a much more exciting story and the results derived from such a hypothesis would seem more relevant to us than my suggestion that John and Thomas were part of the same discussion, but without knowing each other’s positions.

Although the canon of the New Testament should form no boundary for the historical analysis of the *Gospel of Thomas*, it seems that scholars have always been, and most likely will be, preoccupied first and foremost with the question of the relationship of this text to the gospels in the New Testament. This is no doubt connected with our present situation, in which the New Testament canon and the questions pertaining to what texts were included and omitted—and why—still matter to us in one way or another. In my study, I have tried to be careful not to take one stance or another on this point, which is theological rather than historical. I have tried to approach both John and *Thomas* as bearing witness to early Christian views expressed at approximately the same time, but also tried to avoid the creation of a story that would bring them too close to each other.

⁸ For this problem in the study of Gnosticism, see King, *What is Gnosticism?* (e.g., 147–48, 179).

The New Testament canon can also form a restriction for the study of the texts included in it. One example of this is the ease with which so many scholars have approached the Beloved Disciple as if his figure in John is a completely isolated phenomenon, and have leaped directly from the Johannine narrative to hypotheses about the social situation behind it. In my view, these scholars have failed to recognize other early Christian texts outside the New Testament canon, above all the still relatively new evidence from the Nag Hammadi Library. Had more attention been paid to the broader literary context offered by these texts, there may not have been so many (futile) attempts to identify the anonymous Beloved Disciple or (unnecessary) speculation about his position in the administration of the Johannine community. Were the Gospel of John not in the canon, the whole industry of making learned guesses about the Beloved Disciple's identity or his leadership of an early Christian community would hardly be considered any more significant than, say, theories about Bartholomew's connection to the group behind the *Questions of Bartholomew*.

But since the Gospel of John is in the canon, it is unlikely that any critical review of the previous theories of the Beloved Disciple (like mine) would put an end to the emergence of new suggestions seeking to solve his enigma. And perhaps someone some day will manage to come up with a bright solution to this problem that will be considered satisfactory by the majority of scholars. But this apparently was not my lot in this study—nor was it my goal.

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