

living water flow from the heart of Jesus or of the believer) is deliberate and provides "a rich microcosm of a much larger reality" (319): life flows from Jesus to the believer, and from the believer to others. See also John 4:13-14.

33. Cf. John 16:8-11, and see Rev. 5:6, where the seven spirits of God (= the Holy Spirit; see above) are "sent out into all the earth" in the context of taking the scrolls of judgment.

34. See Smalley, *Thunder and Love*, 127.

35. See further *ibid.*, 152-54.

36. So *ibid.*, 40-50.

37. Brown, "The Paraclete in the Fourth Gospel," 119-26.

38. For teaching about the Spirit in John's letters, see Smalley, *1, 2, 3 John*, xxvii-xxx, 280-87, et passim.

James D. G. Dunn

17

John and the Synoptics as a Theological Question

INTRODUCTION

The most obvious and striking feature when John and the Synoptics are compared is the difference between the two. For all their individual distinctiveness, the portrayal of Jesus in the Synoptics is remarkably consistent in content and character. In contrast, John's portrayal of Jesus seems to move on a quite different plane, as consistently different from the Synoptics in content and character as they are consistently similar to each other.¹ Throughout most of the twentieth century, this difference has been discussed chiefly as a question of literary relationship: Did John know and use the Synoptics? Resolution of the question has been sought through comparison of genre and content, with a final judgment of dependence or independence (or somewhere in between) usually regarded as a sufficient conclusion. This whole dimension of the subject has been thoroughly explored in recent years,² and the history of the debate through the twentieth century has been most helpfully reviewed by one of the current doyens of Johannine study, Moody Smith himself.³ On this aspect of the subject, I have nothing new to add to such monumental labors.⁴

Too much neglected in recent years, however, have been the theological dimensions of the subject.⁵ For the difference between John and the Synoptics is not merely a historical or literary question. Underlying these questions is a theological issue.⁶ At the historical and literary levels the difference in itself may sustain only academic interest as a historical accident or curiosity. But at the theological level the difference is a *problem*. The earlier discussions, between (as we might say) the contributions of Baur and Bullmann, saw the problem clearly but focused it almost exclusively on the question of whether John counts as history or theology.⁷ But the theological ramifications are much more extensive. Does this difference not indicate a fundamental inconsistency in the basic testimony regarding the central figure of the Christian faith? Does it not indicate the importation into the earliest Christian tradition of some new and strange elements, which may have distorted the earliest witness? More fundamentally, what is the significance of this difference for any Christian claim to a definitive revelation in and through Jesus?

What effect should this difference have on the critical evaluation of the theological claims made by these documents? What are the consequences of this difference for the celebration and expression of the faith that has canonized, and been canonized by, these four Gospels? A finding of literary and historical dependence or independence has far-reaching theological corollaries, and while the theological implications should not be allowed to drive the historical and literary analysis, they cannot be ignored.

It is with such theological ramifications that this little birthday offering in honor of Moody is concerned. There are various aspects to this topic, but here we have space to deal with only three: continuity, development, and diversity.

CONTINUITY

The theological problem posed by the difference between John and the Synoptics is, in the first place, *the problem of discontinuity*. Whereas a clear interrelationship among the Synoptics can be readily discerned and a plausible line of dependence posited from a historically recognizable Jesus to the Synoptic tradition, the quantum leap from the Synoptics to John seems to speak more of discontinuity than of continuity. It is a problem, obviously, because Christian faith is focused to such a high degree on Jesus of Nazareth and on the revelation and redemption he is claimed to have brought, to have embodied, and to have enacted in his ministry, death, and resurrection. That claim ties Christianity—in uncomfortable measure, for the historical critic—to what happened, in word and action, within a specific three-or-so-year span of human history and within a particular social context. That is why the Gospels have always been at the center of Christian faith: the theological rationale being that they guarantee the continuity and consistency between that focal person and period within history, and the ongoing Christian faith and church. When that claim to continuity is challenged, the authenticity of the end product is put under question, explicitly or implicitly, and it becomes a theological imperative to recognize and to address that challenge.

We should not forget that such theological concerns lay behind the emergence and development of the whole enterprise of source criticism, the "invisible hand" that motivated and sustained the Synoptic analysis of documents and papyrus. The quest for sources of the Gospels was, in part at least, an attempt to counter the destructive effects of an Enlightenment criticism that opened up the gap between the Jesus of history and the Christ of faith. One major reason why the hypothesis of Markan priority gained such a sway was that it provided a theological answer to the challenge of F. C. Baur's conclusion regarding the unhistoricality of John's Gospel, the earliness of Mark securing a continuity that could no longer be comfortably affirmed for John. So, too, it is hardly accidental that the Q-hypothesis (namely, that of a primitive source lacking miracle stories) proved so attractive, since it provided a theological response to the problem of miracle so sharply

posed by D. F. Strauss by allowing Jesus to be seen primarily as a teacher rather than as a miracle worker.⁸ In each case the dominant theological instinct was to get back as closely as possible to Jesus of Nazareth and to the initial impact he made, the assumption being that historical proximity to the *fons et origo* of Christianity was the guarantee of authenticity. To the perceived challenge that foreign elements had entered the tradition at some secondary stage, the only satisfying answer could be the demonstration of continuity between Jesus and the Gospels.

It is the same theological issue that lies behind the twentieth-century preoccupation with the sources for John's Gospel. For if John's Christology has been fundamentally determined by Mandaean sources or by the Gnostic redeemer myth, then that indicates a major element of discontinuity with the earliest traditions about Jesus.⁹ Bultmann could live at theological ease with that conclusion by virtue of his Christian existentialist disregard for and distrust in history.¹⁰ But for others a more substantial continuity (*Was* as well as *Dass*) was a theological necessity. It was precisely this concern that motivated the new quest of the historical Jesus, as Ernst Käsemann's famous essay clearly demonstrates.¹¹ In the case of John, not surprisingly, the theological answer was provided by affirmation of a closer relationship between John and the Synoptics and by the assertion, in particular, that John knew and was dependent on one or more of the Synoptics or on Synoptic-like tradition.¹²

In recent years the debate about John's *religionsgeschichtlich* context and dependency has raised the issue with fresh vigor and with a new twist, particularly in the work of Helmut Koester.¹³ At first the issue seems to be the same: whether the Johannine dialogues are fundamentally dependent on Gnostic traditions such as we find in *The Dialogue of the Savior* and *The Apocryphon of James*; that is, whether an originally ungnostic Gospel has been radically altered by importation of foreign elements. But Koester's hypothesis is that these Gnostic documents embody older materials that actually predate John's Gospel, so that the Fourth Gospel in effect brings them into what became the mainstream of Christian tradition by John's modification of them.¹⁴ The twist is that the theological logic of "early = original = authentic" has been radically subverted. Whereas C. H. Dodd's definition of "traditional (Christian) materials" was limited to the Synoptic Gospels, so that his findings could be regarded as a sufficient response to Bultmann's hypothesis of John's dependence on a Gnostic revelation discourse source, with Koester the Synoptics provide only one kind of traditional (Christian) materials.¹⁵ The literary and historical hypothesis thus poses a fresh theological challenge: that the revelation/redemption, perceived in Christ, was from the first grasped and expressed in terms more diverse than those of the Synoptic tradition, so that continuity with primitive source material becomes a questionable criterion of authenticity, and the category of authenticity itself becomes problematic.¹⁶ Once again, it is the theological corollary that gives the historical hypothesis its cutting edge.

In fact, however, it appears that Koester's hypothesis is only a little more credible than Bullmann's; its theological edge may not be so sharp after all, for it has to be said that the postulated links are slender indeed. First, such similarities as there are between *Dialogue of the Savior* 25–30 and John 14:2–12 (Koester's chief example) are open to a variety of explanations, of which the suggestion that the former is more original is hardly compelling. Moreover, the argument that the *Dialogue* is baptismal instruction which is closely related to early Christian documents of about 100 C.E., so that the *Dialogue* itself can be dated to the beginning of the second century, begs too many questions¹⁷ to be worthy of much credence. Second and similarly, the suggestion that John 16:26 ("I do not say that I will ask the Father on your behalf") is a polemical formulation which rejects the more common belief that Jesus intercedes for his own, as expressed in *Apocryphon of James* 11.4–6 (Koester's most explicit claim in this section of his argument),¹⁸ completely ignores the internal dynamic of John's theology at this point.¹⁹ It is true that the *Apocryphon* looks like a dialogue based on traditional sayings of Jesus²⁰ and is thus like the Fourth Gospel in character (at least in its dialogues), but there is really nothing which gives clear indication that any of the *Apocryphon*'s versions of these sayings, or any of the interpretations given them by the *Apocryphon*, predate the material in John's Gospel.²¹

In comparison with such flimsy and tendentious arguments, the relationship between John and the Synoptics can be maintained on a manifestly much sounder basis. We need only recall that John was able to draw on early narrative material regarding, for example, John the Baptist and the discovery of the empty tomb (cf. John 20:1–10 with Luke 24:22–24), as well as Synoptic-like sayings on which the Johannine dialogues are often clearly based.²² Moreover, the *religionsgeschichtlich* context of the theology of John's Gospel is much more obviously Jewish apocalyptic and mystical preoccupation with revelation, just as its social context is more obviously that of a recent split with local Jewish synagogues, than anything that as yet properly warrants the title "Gnostic."²³ The point is that the character and content of John's Gospel can be fully and adequately explained in these terms, without any need to resort to a Gnostic hypothesis (à la Bullmann or Koester). As a historical judgment it remains much more probable that the Gnostic documents represent a later reworking of the Jesus tradition, with the detail of the earlier form of individual traditions, thus reworked, difficult if not impossible to reconstruct with any confidence. The relation of those individual traditions to their canonical forms is thus, at best, speculative in the extreme.

In the light of such a historical conclusion, the theological issue becomes less pressing. For if John's Jesus tradition in its earlier form was indeed homogeneous with the Synoptic tradition, then that would confirm that the earliest recollection of and witness to Jesus was of a piece overall. And that would mean both a consistency within earliest Christian self-understanding and a continuity, from earliest to latest, of the canonical Gospel material. The theological corollary, con-

cerning the essentially Jewish character of the earliest gospel and its integral coherence as a criterion of authenticity for Christian self-definition, does not determine the historical conclusion, but it does ensure that the historical debate has a more than merely antiquarian significance.

DEVELOPMENT

If the first issue with heavy theological overtones is the question of continuity, the second is that of *development*. For although continuity between John and the Synoptics can readily be affirmed as we have just seen, the more dominant impression remains one of difference. And if the difference is not to be explained by asserting discontinuity, it has to be explained in terms of development.

The character of that development can be easily instanced. For some reason John has developed the Baptist tradition to reduce the Baptist's role to that of witness to Christ, while enlarging that role itself. For some reason John has developed the tradition of Jesus' miracles by ignoring the exorcisms and focusing the tradition in seven signs. For some reason John has largely excised the tradition of Jesus as a preacher of the kingdom of God. For some reason John has developed the tradition of Jesus' teaching in wisdom sayings and parables into lengthy and convoluted dialogues. Above all, for some reason John has developed the tradition of a Jesus who spoke little of himself into a full-scale self-testimony of one who knows himself to be God's only Son, sent down from heaven to present himself as the revealer of God.

And so the theological problem reemerges, for the development seems to be so extensive and so radical, creating that difference between John and the Synoptics which continues to catch the eye.²⁴ Even if we cannot say that the development is the result of an internally Gnostic character or tendency already present within the Jesus tradition prior to John, is not the Johannine development itself Gnostic in orientation and direction, as the subsequent use of John by the Gnostics may be said to confirm?²⁵ In which case, does not John's development of the Jesus of Synoptic tradition actually validate the subsequent Gnostic use of John—with all that that means in theological terms of a dualism between creation and salvation and a docetic Christology? Käsemann, in his description of John's "naïve docetism," was not the only one to point up the sharpness of the theological issue posed by John's development of the Jesus tradition.²⁶ Whatever the historical and literary factors, does the difference between John and the Synoptics not indicate a theological development taken too far?

Here again, however, the relationship between John and the Synoptics helps us to see the theological problem in better focus. For John's portrayal of Jesus, for all its distinctive development, can still be seen as a continuation of various trends already active in the Synoptics. In particular, it is no accident that Mark and John can both be understood as responding to a portrayal of Jesus in too straightforward and

triumphalist terms as a miracle worker. On the one hand, Mark continues to play up Jesus as miracle worker in the first half of his Gospel but, in the second, balances that presentation by his emphasis on Jesus as the suffering Son of Man, whereas John, if he did take over a miracle source (the most plausible of the sources postulated for John), took it over critically by warning against a faith too dependent on miracles (2:11, 23–25; 4:48, 53; 6:25–36).²⁷ Again, John's portrayal of Jesus' divine sonship as already preexisting in heaven can be seen as a continuation of the trend in the birth narratives of Matthew and Luke to push Jesus' sonship back to his beginning.²⁸ And the transition from Jesus as ambassador of Wisdom (in Q) to Jesus as Wisdom embodied, God with us (in Matthew), is already more than halfway towards John's full-blown incarnation Christology.²⁹

Most important of all is the fact that John retains the Gospel format already established by Mark. This is what sets John apart both from the earlier Q-material (assuming that Q did not contain a passion narrative) and from the later Gnostic Gospels.³⁰ For all the weight that John puts upon Jesus as revealer and as teaching by dialogue, these aspects can never be separated in John from the central fact that Jesus fulfilled his heavenly mission by dying and rising again. This motif is so persistent and so pervasive that it dominates the whole: for example, the persistent, drumbeat references to the hour of his approaching death; the repeated motifs of his glorification, ascension, and uplifting on the cross; the Lamb that takes away the sin of the world; the flesh, given for the life of the world, which must be eaten and the blood, drunk; and so forth. What Mark established as Gospel format,³¹ what Matthew and Luke confirmed by their integration of Q-material into Mark's Gospel format, John continued to affirm as fundamental by retaining his development of the Jesus tradition within the same Gospel format.³²

The theological corollary is clear: From its earliest format a "Gospel" was "a passion narrative with extended introduction" (M. Kähler), the teaching and activities of Jesus set within a framework provided by the story of the cross and resurrection as climax,³³ so much so that it becomes at once questionable whether any "Gospel" lacking that framework deserves the title "Gospel." Insofar as it was a single document, Q, properly speaking, is a collection of Jesus' teaching; it only became a "Gospel" when merged within the Markan Gospel framework in Matthew and Luke. As taken up in an independent trajectory described by the *Gospel of Thomas* and later dialogues, Q is still no "Gospel." And though the later Gospels lay claim to belong to the genre of "Gospel," the climactic character of the passion narrative in the earliest Gospels had already provided a theological criterion of what a "Gospel" is, which proved decisive in the second and third centuries.³⁴ It is the coherence of the Fourth Gospel with the Synoptics on this vital point that makes it possible to draw out such a definitive theological corollary.

Nevertheless, the difference persists. The fact remains that in relation to the Synoptics, John's Gospel is a considerably developed form of Gospel—a development, it would appear, largely determined by the social and religious context in

John and the Synoptics as a Theological Question

which it received its definitive shape. We need not pursue the details of that development, since others have offered plausible and fruitful speculation on the basis of what indications there are.³⁵ The theological point is that "Gospel" was not a static category but allowed quite a substantial development of content. If John's Gospel *format* can be said to validate such a crucial theological definition of "Gospel," then we must acknowledge also that John's developed *content* validates an adventuresome use of that format: in this case, evidently, a portrayal of Jesus angled to catch and satisfy the interest of those eager for genuine revelation from above—and, indeed, to validate even a dangerous use as "Gospel," since that same portrayal seems to have given scope to those who pushed Christology in a docetic direction.³⁶ At all events, the difference between John and the Synoptics quite quickly gives substance and guidelines to a theology of development.

DIVERSITY

Talk of development among the Gospels leads us already into the final theological dimension to be outlined here: that of *diversity*, or in terms of Cullman's article, still valuable after fifty years, the plurality of the Gospels as a theological issue.³⁷ For it remains an astonishing fact, too little appreciated because of its familiarity, that the New Testament canonizes not simply one but no less than *four* Gospels.³⁸ The immediate parallel that may come to mind, the Pentateuch, is not close enough, since the five books are all attributed in tradition to one and the same author (Moses) and since the differences within the Pentateuch are more equivalent to those within the Synoptics than those between the Synoptics and John.

That the early churches were aware of the theological implications and potential problems of embracing four Gospels is sufficiently indicated by the titles that became attached to the four: not "The Gospel of Matthew," and so on, as though there were indeed four different gospels, but the gospel "according to [κατὰ] Matthew," and so on, indicating that the four Gospels are but four versions of the one gospel. Hengel notes that the κατὰ-formulation in a book's title was highly unusual for this period,³⁹ so we may deduce that the choice of terms was highly deliberate and constituted a deliberate theological assertion.⁴⁰ It is true that we cannot be sure of the date when the formulation first appeared (Hengel may be too sanguine on the point); but its very usage and the evidently equally deliberate avoidance of the plural, "Gospels" (ἐὐαγγέλια),⁴¹ are sufficient to confirm that an issue of theological importance was discerned here more or less from the first. It is true that several of the noncanonical Gospels also used the κατὰ-formula.⁴² That fact, however, simply indicates a claim to "Gospel" status on the pattern of one or more of the canonical four and thus amounts to an affirmation of their already normative status; it is insufficient to sustain a claim that the earliest forms of the one "gospel" in written form were more inchoate and diverse.

Given this emphasis on the oneness of the written gospel, the fact that the one

gospel came from the earliest witnesses in four forms is all the more striking. It is a fact of theological weight that any or all attempts to reduce the fourfold Gospel to a single, universal, fixed form (the one gospel definitively formulated in one Gospel) failed to gain widespread acceptance. To be sure, Matthew probably intended to replace Mark; his almost complete absorption of Mark within his Gospel may well indicate an assumption that in consequence Mark was no longer necessary. Luke's initial justification of his enterprise (Luke 1:1) presumably indicates some dissatisfaction with his predecessors. And John no doubt wanted to produce a self-sufficient Gospel, despite his allusion to "many other signs" that he had not recorded.⁴³ But the fact remains that whereas Q as such was allowed to disappear (assuming it did once exist as a single document), Mark was not, despite its apparent redundancy.⁴⁴ Likewise, later attempts, such as that of Marcion to reduce the Gospel to one (redacted Luke) or of Tatian to combine the four into a single form (the *Diatessaron*), also failed to overthrow the pattern, even if its formal recognition only came with Irenaeus.⁴⁵

Equally striking is the fact that the early church as a whole did not perceive the difference between John and the Synoptics as so much of a problem that John had to be sacrificed. It would no doubt have been an attractive option for some to defend the oneness of the gospel by clinging only to the majority, the homogeneous Synoptics. Indeed, we may deduce from the infrequency of reference to John's Gospel in the early Fathers and from the copious use of it by the Valentines,⁴⁶ that John's Gospel was in some danger of being taken over by the Gnostics and thus lost to the emerging Great Church. Here again it was probably Irenaeus who stemmed the tide and demonstrated John's authenticity as a statement of the one gospel. Whatever the precise course of events, the fourfold character of the written gospel was retained, with John's Gospel understood as integral to that fourfold unity.

The theological corollary is once again clear: namely, that within the framework of the written gospel and integral to the Gospel format is an inevitable and necessary diversity. The fact of the fourfold Gospel, and particularly of John's Gospel within the oneness of the gospel, constitutes both a warning against any attempt to freeze the gospel traditions into a single form or to insist on uniformity or close conformity in presentation of the one gospel, and an encouragement to recognize the adaptability of the one gospel to different times and circumstances, to meet changing needs and challenges. The fact that the one gospel is preserved for later generations as "the Gospel according to" four different names is a clear enough indication that no one individual—or church or tradition, for that matter—can reproduce the gospel in its completeness. Such individuals, churches, and traditions can remain faithful to the four-in-one only by recognizing that different forms of the gospel today, even those containing emphases and tendencies divergent from their own, may still be expressions of the one gospel in accordance with the pattern of John's difference and divergence from the Synoptics. The fact that the one

John and the Synoptics as a Theological Question

gospel is normatively embodied in four diverse Gospels is a standing reminder that the gospel is only expressible and graspable in concrete, contextualized, circumstance-oriented form. To grasp after some more fundamental canonical norm, although some purer form of the gospel could be abstracted from the four Gospels would fly in the face of the canonical facts and would amount to transforming the icon of four context-specific Gospels into a humanly contrived idol.⁴⁷

In short, the diversity that John in particular brings into the understanding of the one, fourfold Gospel should be given more recognition in view of its theological significance.⁴⁸ Indeed, we may sharpen the point by noting that the character of this fourfold oneness is much clearer (since we have all four Gospels to hand) than the character of the threefold oneness of the Trinity can ever be, so that the four-in-oneness of the gospel can and presumably should have more influence on contemporary expression of Christian faith and theology than the three-in-oneness of God!

CONCLUSION

All aspects of the above discussion require, of course, much more detailed treatment: the meaning of "gospel," the idea of canon and the relation of the canonical Gospels to certain apocryphal and Gnostic texts, various christological issues, and so on. But enough has been said, it may be hoped, to show how the theological dimension in any question of the relation of John and the Synoptics is fundamental. The more that theological questions are ignored, the more pressing it becomes to expose them, since they often provide the hidden agenda behind both radical and more traditional theses regarding the relation of the four Gospels. Indeed, it is an axiom of critical scholarship that theological *Tendenzen* should be exposed to clear view, wherever they are operative. At the same time it is the theological dimensions of such investigations and discussions that give the more focused historical and literary analyses their wider usefulness to both theology and church. In both directions the relation of and difference between John and the Synoptics as a theological question needs further debate and should prove to be of continuing fruitfulness.

NOTES

1. See, for example, D. Moody Smith's outline of the differences in his *John among the Gospels: The Relationship in Twentieth-Century Research* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992), 4-6.
2. See particularly John and the Synoptics, ed. Adelbert Denaux, BETL 101 (Leuven: Leuven University Press/Peeters, 1992).
3. Smith, *John among the Gospels*; see also his earlier essays collected in *Johannine Christianity: Essays on Its Setting, Sources, and Theology* (Columbia, S.C.: University

of South Carolina Press, 1984). Smith defines the problem thus: "The problem of John and the Synoptics is, then, how to account for John's extensive differences from the other Gospels within a generally similar overall framework" (*John among the Gospels*, 6).

4. My own pennyworth contribution to the debate is contained in "Let John Be John: A Gospel for Its Time," in *The Gospel and the Gospels*, ed. Peter Stuhlmacher (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 293–322; see also "John and the Oral Gospel Tradition," in *Jesus and the Oral Gospel Tradition*, ed. Henry Wansbrough, JSNTSup 64 (Sheffield: JSOT, 1991), 351–79. I remain convinced that the important role of oral forms of the Jesus tradition has been given insufficient scope in discussions on the relationship between John and the Synoptics. We certainly cannot assume that the written Gospels gave the teachers within most churches their first knowledge of many traditions or made redundant the (variant?) oral versions that it had been their responsibility to retain and retell. In "John and the Synoptics: 1975–1990" (in Denaux, ed., *John and the Synoptics*, 3–62, esp. 55–59), Frans Neirynck critiques my essay on "Oral Gospel Tradition" by juxtaposing my individual observations against those of my predecessor at Durham, C. K. Barrett.

5. Compare, in particular, Frans Neirynck, "John and the Synoptics," in *L'Évangile de Jean: Sources, rédaction, théologie*, ed. Marinus de Jonge, BETL 44 (Gembloux: Ducolot, 1977), 73–106; also idem, "John and the Synoptics: 1975–1990" (see above, n. 4).

6. Toward the end of his *John among the Gospels*, Smith notes how the question of relationships opens up as soon as we ask, "Why these differences?" (185, 188–89), and points to issues (191–93) similar to those discussed in what follows.

7. See Edwyn Clement Hoskyns, *The Fourth Gospel*, ed. Francis Noel Davy (London: Faber & Faber, 21947), 17–135; John Ashton, *Understanding the Fourth Gospel* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1991), 9–43.

8. For more details of these developments, see Werner Georg Kimmel, *The New Testament: The History of the Investigation of Its Problems* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1972), 120–205.

9. See, for example, Rudolf Bultmann's *Theology of the New Testament*, vol. 2 (New York: Scribner's, 1955), particularly 10–14.

10. Ashton, *Understanding the Fourth Gospel*, 44–66, gives a sympathetic treatment of Bultmann's own highly theological interpretation of John.

11. Ernst Käsemann, "The Problem of the Historical Jesus," in *Essays on New Testament Themes* (London: SCM, 1964), 15–47.

12. Most important here has undoubtedly been C. H. Dodd, *Historical Tradition in the Fourth Gospel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1963). In this context the conclusion that John builds on early Jesus tradition is more important than the suggestion that specific dependence on one or more of the Synoptics as such can be affirmed only for a late stage of redaction of John's Gospel.

13. Helmut Koester, "One Jesus and Four Primitive Gospels," in James M. Robinson and Helmut Koester, *Trajectories through Early Christianity* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1971), 158–204; see also Koester, *Introduction to the New Testament*, vol. 2: *History and Literature of Early Christianity* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1982), 178–98, and idem, *Ancient Christian Gospels: Their History and Development* (Philadelphia and London: Trinity Press International/SCM, 1990), 173–271.

14. See, for example, Koester, *Introduction to the New Testament*, 2, 185.

John and the Synoptics as a Theological Question

15. This is Koester's own observation (*Ancient Christian Gospels*, 256).

16. *Ibid.*, 179–80.

17. See, for example, my *Unity and Diversity in the New Testament: An Inquiry into the Character of Earliest Christianity* (London: SCM, 1977, 21990), 141–47.

18. Koester, *Ancient Christian Gospels*, 195–96. (Koester cites the reference as *Apoc. Jos. 9.4–6*.)

19. It was well perceived by Bultmann, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1971), 588–89.

20. Thus Koester, *Ancient Christian Gospels*, 189.

21. Contrast the discussion by Pheme Perkins, *The Gnostic Dialogue: The Early Church and the Crisis of Gnosticism*, Theological Inquiries (New York and Ramsey, N.J., and Toronto: Paulist, 1980), 107–12, 145–56; see also idem, *Gnosticism and the New Testament* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993), 122–42. D. Moody Smith, "The Problem of John and the Synoptics in Light of the Relation between Apocryphal and Canonical Gospels," in Denaux, ed., *John and the Synoptics*, 147–62 (here, 147–52), provides a useful review of the debate on that relationship, occasioned by the conversation between Koester and John Dominic Crossan. For additional bibliography, see Richard J. Bauckham, "Gospels (Apocryphal)," in *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, ed. Joel B. Green and Scot McKnight (Downers Grove, Ill., and Leicester, England: InterVarsity, 1992), 286–91 (here, 291). It is, of course, a methodological non sequitur that absence of evidence of influence from canonical traditions is sufficient proof that the variant tradition is as early as, or even earlier than, the canonical versions (see further Perkins, *Gnosticism and the New Testament*, 130–31). Smith comments appositely: the apocryphal Gospels "are pre-canonical, not in the sense that they pre-date the canonical gospels individually, but in the sense that the apocryphal gospels pre-date the establishment of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John as an authoritative canon of scripture" ("The Problem of John and the Synoptics," 155).

22. See Dodd, *Historical Tradition in the Fourth Gospel*; Dunn, "John and the Oral Gospel Tradition."

23. See further, for example, my "Let John Be John," also idem, *The Parings of the Ways between Christianity and Judaism and their Significance for the Character of Christianity* (London and Philadelphia: SCM/Trinity Press International, 1991), 220–29.

24. Smith can even ask whether John should be called "the first apocryphal gospel" ("The Problem of John and the Synoptics," 156).

25. As is well known, the first commentary written on the Gospel was by Heraclion, a Valentinian; see Elaine H. Pagels, *The Johannine Gospel in Gnostic Exegesis: Heraclion's Commentary on John*, SBLMS 17 (Nashville: Abingdon, 1973).

26. Ernst Käsemann, *The Testament of Jesus: A Study of the Gospel of John in the Light of John 17* (London and Philadelphia: SCM/Fortress, 1968).

27. See, for example, my *Unity and Diversity in the New Testament*, 302–3, and Koester, *Ancient Christian Gospels*, 251–53.

28. See Raymond E. Brown, *The Birth of the Messiah: A Commentary on the Infancy Narratives in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke*, new updated ed. (New York: Doubleday, 1993), 141.

29. See M. Jack Suggs, *Wisdom, Christology, and Law in Matthew's Gospel* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1970). It should occasion no surprise that one of the central pieces of Matthew's wisdom Christology is the so-called "Johannine thunderbolt" of Matt. 11:27.

30. Thus D. Moody Smith, "John and the Synoptics and the Question of Gospel Genre," in *The Four Gospels 1992: Festschrift Frans Neirynck*, ed. F. Van Segbroeck, C. M. Tuckett, G. Van Belle, and J. Verheyden, vol. 3, BETL 100 (Leuven: Leuven University Press/Peeters, 1992), 1783–97 (here, 1784). So far as the *Gospel of Peter* is concerned, see particularly Raymond E. Brown, "The *Gospel of Peter* and Canonical Gospel Priority," *NTS* 33 (1987): 321–43.
31. The use of ἐναγγέλιον ("gospel") in Mark 1:1 was probably sufficient to establish this as the title of the book written by Mark and, thus, as the title of the genre; see particularly Robert Guelich, "The Gospel Genre," in Stuhlmacher, ed., *The Gospel and the Gospels*, 173–208 (here, 195); Martin Hengel, "The Titles of the Gospels and the Gospel of Mark," in *Studies in the Gospel of Mark* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985), 64–84 + 162–83 (here, 83–84). Otherwise, contrast Koester, *Ancient Christian Gospels*, 13–14.
32. Cf. the conclusion of Udo Schnelle, "Johannes und die Synoptiker," in Van Segbroeck et al., eds., *The Four Gospels 1992: Festschrift Frans Neirynck*, 3.1799–1814 (here, 1814). But pace Schnelle and Smith, *John among the Gospels*, 179–80, John's use of what had evidently become a widely recognized Gospel genre does not necessarily imply his knowledge of Mark in particular.
33. Pace Koester, *Ancient Christian Gospels*, 45, the buildup to the passion narrative in all three of the subsequent canonical Gospels constitutes "a fundamental structural element" in their composition.
34. Cf. Guelich, "The Gospel Genre," in Stuhlmacher, ed., *The Gospel and the Gospels*, 204–5.
35. Raymond E. Brown, *The Community of the Beloved Disciple* (New York, Ramsey, N.J., and Toronto: Paulist, 1979); J. Louis Martyn, "Glimpses into the History of the Johannine Community," in de Jonge, ed., *L'Evangile de Jean*, 149–75, reprinted in Martyn's *The Gospel of John in Christian History: Essays for Interpreters*, Theological Inquiries (New York, Ramsey, N.J., and Toronto: Paulist, 1979), 90–121.
36. Brown, *The Community of the Beloved Disciple*, 110–20.
37. Oscar Cullmann, "Die Pluralität der Evangelien als theologisches Problem im Altertum," *ZZ* 1 (1945): 23–42 = "The Plurality of the Gospels as a Theological Problem in Antiquity," in idem, *The Early Church: Studies in Early Christian History and Theology*, ed. A.J.B. Higgins (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1956) 37–54.
38. Harnack made similar observations nearly a hundred years ago, as cited in Hengel, "The Titles of the Gospels and the Gospel of Mark" (*Studies in the Gospel of Mark*, 64).
39. "[O]nly a few very late instances" (Hengel, *ibid.*, 65, et passim).
40. Ign. *Smyrn.* 5.1: 7.2; *Did.* 15.3–4, and 2 *Clem.* 8.5 may provide further indication that written Gospels were already known as "the gospel"; see the discussion in Hengel, *ibid.*, 71, 167 nn. 41–45, and Koester, *Ancient Christian Gospels*, 14–20.
41. Hengel, "The Titles of the Gospels and the Gospel of Mark," 67–72.
42. See, e.g., *New Testament Apocrypha*, vol. 1: *Gospels and Related Writings*, rev. ed., ed. Wilhelm Schneemelcher, ET ed. R. McL. Wilson (Cambridge and Louisville, Ky.: James Clarke and Westminster/John Knox, 1991), 136.
43. Cullmann, "The Plurality of the Gospels as a Theological Problem," 43–44. Cf. Martin Hengel, *The Johannine Question* (Philadelphia and London: Trinity Press International/SCM, 1989), 194 n. 8: "the editors [of John] hardly wanted to 'suppress' the Synoptics but rather to correct them and 'surpass' them."

44. See, for example, C. K. Barrett, "The Place of John and the Synoptics within the Early History of Christian Thought," in Denaux, ed., *John and the Synoptics*, 63–79 (here, 75–79).
45. See, again, Cullmann, "The Plurality of the Gospels as a Theological Problem," 47–52.
46. See Joseph Newbold Sanders, *The Fourth Gospel in the Early Church: Its Origin and Influence on Christian Theology up to Irenaeus* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1943), 55–66. Smith, *Johannine Christianity*, 4–6, briefly reviews discussion on the point since Sanders.
47. See, further, the conclusion to my *Unity and Diversity in the New Testament*, 376–85.
48. See also Smith, *John among the Gospels*, 193: "The emerging gospel, and New Testament, canon bends to accommodate the Gospel of John and in doing so deepens and changes its character."