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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: ΠΑΘΛΗΤΗΣ 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 Ἰρκανός, καὶ σφόδρα ὑπ' αὐτῶν ἠγαπάτο, *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 (*ὁν ἠγάπα αὐτόν ὁ Ἰησοῦς*)' 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 (*γνῶσις*) 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, *Hypotyposes* 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’ (στῦλοι; 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 Aejmelaes, *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’s 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.

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 other's 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 Thomazine 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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