

## What is ‘New Testament Study’? The New Testament and Early Christianity\*

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The article addresses the question ‘What is “New Testament Study”?’, considering as possible alternatives ‘Theology’ or ‘Religious Studies’. The issue may be critically determined by who is doing the study, and in what context; but in the context of the SNTS, it is argued that a non-confessional approach is more appropriate today. Part of the distinction between the two approaches may lie in one’s attitude to non-canonical literature. In the second part of the article the question is raised as to what difference study of non-canonical texts might make in understanding the NT documents. Examples of the passion narrative in Q, and beliefs about the resurrection of the body (by Paul and other early Christians), are examined. Such issues raise questions about the NT canon, which are briefly addressed in a final section.

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Over the sixty years or so of the existence of the SNTS, Presidential Addresses have varied considerably, in both scope and content. Some have been given on very narrowly focused detailed topics; others have been more expansive and wide-ranging. One such notable Presidential Address in recent years was that of Professor Wayne Meeks in Barcelona in 2004, with the title ‘Why Study the New Testament?’<sup>1</sup> I cannot match Meeks’ erudition or breadth of learning, but, for better or worse, I have ventured to prepare something along similar lines.

Meeks started his address by referring to the constitution of the Society, which states that ‘its aim shall be the furtherance of New Testament studies’. (An amendment at the Barcelona meeting added the word ‘internationally’ to this statement of the Society’s (sole!) aim.) He then went on to raise the question of ‘why’ such

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<sup>1</sup> W. A. Meeks, ‘Why Study the New Testament?’, *NTS* 51 (2005) 155–70.

studies should be furthered. Part of Meeks' point was that such a question would in the past have been regarded as one that barely needed serious thought to be answered adequately or appropriately: the answer was 'obvious'. However, in the early twenty-first century, such blithe optimism is no longer possible. The question I would like to address is similar in one way to Meeks' question, but slightly different (though, as I shall take it, it does overlap with it). It is simply 'What is New Testament study'; and how does the work of our Society, which takes its name from such endeavour,<sup>2</sup> relate to such activity?

### 1. What is 'New Testament Study'?

In one way the answer to such a question is transparently obvious: 'New Testament study' is study of the documents of the New Testament; and even if there may be some doubt about what precisely constitutes 'the New Testament' – and certainly there have been debates in the past about the precise limits of this collection of texts – such details probably do not affect things in a significant way.

Yet this (apparently) 'obvious' answer to the question does not fully match the work of our Society. It is true that a great deal of the work undertaken under the auspices of the Society (papers presented at annual meetings, the subjects of the seminar groups at annual meetings, and articles published in 'our' journal *New Testament Studies*) would come under such a rubric. But, equally, other things would not. We have papers, even Presidential Addresses, on e.g. Philo, 4 Maccabees, the *Didache*, Nag Hammadi texts etc.; we have too papers and seminars about Jesus, even though Jesus wrote none of the texts of the New Testament; and we discuss not only the evidence from the New Testament texts about Jesus and earliest Christianity, but also evidence from non-canonical sources (Josephus, Tacitus, the *Gospel of Thomas* etc.). Indeed, quite apart from full-scale stand-alone treatments of texts and topics such as these, it would be accepted by all that some (considerable) knowledge of non-canonical texts (such as Qumran, Josephus, Plutarch, Thucydides etc.) is a *sine qua non* for any contemporary discussion of NT texts themselves. If we are to place the NT texts within their broader social, cultural, linguistic and ideological context, it is essential that we pay attention to other texts of the period in which they were written, whether canonical or non-canonical. In this sense, any kind of 'canonical criticism' which claims that methodologically one *must* focus on other 'biblical' texts as the *only* legitimate comparator, and context, for analysing NT texts has not often found a place within modern NT studies.<sup>3</sup>

2 We are a 'Society for New Testament Studies' (given in Latin to provide perhaps added gravitas!).

3 For 'canonical criticism', I have in mind the approach of Brevard Childs, who has probably made more impact on studies of the Hebrew Bible/'Old Testament' than on NT studies.

So what exactly is 'the study of the New Testament' which this Society is seeking to promote? It is clearly study of *more than just* 'the New Testament', even when the NT texts form the primary focus of attention. I would however like to raise initially a slightly different question: *how* are we to study, or how should we be studying, this material? And as one set of alternatives, I have in mind the distinction which is sometimes evoked in various ways under the rubric of 'Theology' versus 'Religious Studies'. How does our work in this Society relate to that?

As soon as one raises the issue, there are thorny, and much disputed, problems of definition, before one even begins to try to address the question. What exactly is 'Theology' in this context? What is 'Religious Studies'? And as the two are often paired as almost binary opposites, what exactly is the nature of the distinction between them? There are no clear right/wrong answers to these questions (which in turn makes it difficult to determine where 'New Testament Studies' might fit within such a divide). Like all language, each of those terms may well mean different things in what are at times very diverse social, educational, institutional and cultural contexts in different countries and indeed within a single country.<sup>4</sup> So if I take the words concerned one way, I am fully aware that this may not command universal agreement and that others might use the terms in different ways.

One, perhaps simplistic, way in which the terms are used (at least in the English of some parts of the UK (my own home context)) is by distinguishing the subject matter being studied: 'Theology' is taken to refer to study of

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The closest might perhaps be the approach of those promoting a 'Biblical Theology', claiming that a background in Jewish scripture for interpreting the NT writings is primary (even if there might be debate about the precise form of Jewish scripture which is part of this 'Bible': is it the Hebrew Bible or the Septuagint?), almost on the basis of an a priori theological presumption. Others might of course claim that a 'biblical' background should be the primary background for interpreting e.g. Paul, but with this presented logically as a *result* of an exercise implicitly comparing different possible 'backgrounds' and claiming that this is the most plausible in historical terms, not as an a priori assumption. See for example the Presidential Address of M. Hengel, 'Aufgaben der neutestamentlichen Wissenschaft', *NTS* 40 (1994) 321–57, arguing for the vital importance of the Jewish background, but equally emphasising the importance of studying Judaism *from the 4th century BCE onwards* as the critical background for NT texts (346).

<sup>4</sup> When one adds in the complexities of trying to consider the distinction represented by (virtual) transliterations of the words in other languages, the problems are multiplied yet more. Thus a 'Theology/Religious Studies' divide in England is perhaps related to (but not quite identical with) the divide involving the same (or similar) words in North America, in Australia, in Scandinavia, and in turn this might be similar to (but again not identical with) the divide between 'Theologie' and 'Religionswissenschaft' (or 'Religionsgeschichte') in a German-speaking context.

Christianity, 'Religious Studies' to refer to study of religions and religious traditions other than Christian.<sup>5</sup> (Although by a strange quirk, study of ancient Judaism, i.e. the 'Hebrew Bible' or 'Old Testament', is usually placed on the 'Theology' side of the great divide!)<sup>6</sup>

However, I am not sure that this is quite what was intended when the discipline of 'Religious Studies'<sup>7</sup> was founded, or when its status is discussed today. For many others, the distinction lies in the point of view of the person doing the study, not the subject matter studied. Thus 'Theology' is taken as study (usually of Christianity) from a point of view of positive religious commitment; 'Religious Studies' is study that is religiously neutral and undertaken from an avowedly non-committed (though perhaps 'interested', and hence sympathetic) standpoint. 'Theology' thus requires the commitment of the student to the subject matter, expecting positive assent to at least some of the 'theology' of the writers being studied; 'Religious Studies' is purely phenomenological, and makes no value judgements either way about the truth claims of what is said in the texts.<sup>8</sup>

5 Cf. what may have been a chance remark, but nonetheless revealing, by N. Smart, 'Religion as Discipline', *Concept and Empathy: Essays in the Study of Religion* (New York: New York University Press, 1986) 158 (writing about university departments of 'Theology'): 'In the very nomenclature – Departments of Theology – it is tacitly implied that studies are devoted to Christian theology.' Cf. too A. D. Galloway, 'Theology and Religious Studies – The Unity of our Discipline', *RS* 11 (1975) 157–65, at 162: such language is a vestige from past history, but we may be stuck with it.

6 My own Faculty has recently changed its name from 'Theology' to 'Theology and Religion'. And in a public forum recently referring to the change, the chair of the Faculty Board stated (perhaps slightly apologetically) that, although this change had been made, this did not mean that Oxford was relinquishing or changing its commitment to study of 'core subjects studying the Christian tradition' (e.g. New Testament, Patristics etc.) The implication was I think clear: 'Theology' meant study of Christianity and/or the Christian tradition; 'Religion' meant study of things other than Christianity. So too in many school and undergraduate contexts, 'Theology' is taken as study of Christianity (alone), whereas 'Religious Studies' is taken as study of a wider range of world religions. Hence school leavers in the UK interested in studying a wide range of world religions in an undergraduate degree course would typically be encouraged to look for an institution that offered 'Religious Studies' or 'Religion', rather than 'Theology' or 'Divinity'.

7 I am very aware that the name varies: 'Comparative Religion', 'History of Religions', 'Study of Religion', 'Religious Studies', to name just some of the options in English!

8 See the survey of views presented by D. Wiebe, 'Religious Studies', *The Routledge Companion to the Study of Religion* (ed. J. R. Hinnells; Abingdon: Routledge, 2010) 125–44; for a definition, see pp. 125–7, e.g. citing on p. 127 Alan Olson in the *Encyclopaedia of Religious Education* (1990): 'religious studies is meant to identify an objective, scientific, non-biased study of religion as distinct from 'theological' and/or 'confessional' study for the purpose of increasing the faith, understanding, and institutional commitment of individual degree candidates in a particular religion' (549–50). Cf. too N. Smart, 'The Exploration of Religion in Education', *Concept and Empathy*, 220–1, referring to a 'phenomenological' approach, and 'the suspension of disbelief or belief'; also the programmatic statement of Max Müller, often taken as the 'founder' of

However, both these ‘descriptions’ (i.e. ‘Theology’ as committed, ‘Religious Studies’ as neutral) may be somewhat misleading, and are disputed by many at various levels.

From the side of ‘Religious Studies’, some have argued that the discipline has failed to live up to its fundamental aims and principles. Thus Wiebe, in a famous essay, refers to the ‘failure of nerve’ on the part of practitioners of Religious Studies, partly by effectively allowing some kind of ‘religious’ belief component in by the back door in studies of ‘religious’ phenomena.<sup>9</sup> If students of a religious tradition empathise with the tradition enough to allow the presence of some ‘sacred’ element and/or entity in the phenomena under investigation, and thereby exclude all totally intra-human (‘reductionist’) explanations of the phenomena, then a quasi-‘religious’ commitment has been smuggled into the system and one cannot claim any longer to be strictly neutral, or ‘scientific’, in one’s investigations.<sup>10</sup> But from almost the opposite side, others (from within an avowedly ‘Religious Studies’ paradigm) have questioned whether a refusal to accommodate an ‘insider’s’ perspective is necessarily a good thing for anyone seeking to understand aspects of a ‘religion’ or a religious tradition.<sup>11</sup>

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the discipline, referring to the ‘Science of Religion’ (German ‘Religionswissenschaft’) as ‘an impartial and truly scientific comparison of all ... religions of mankind’ (*Introduction to the Science of Religion* (1873) 34f. (emphasis mine: the issue of what might count as ‘scientific’ is hugely debated!))

It is then in my view unfortunate when, in some contexts in the UK at least, these two very different ideas of what constitutes ‘Theology’ and ‘Religious Studies’ are elided, so that it is presumed that any study of Christianity (‘Theology’ in the first sense above) *ipso facto* presupposes religious commitment on the part of the student and perhaps teacher (‘Theology’ in the second sense); and hence any phenomenological, or religiously neutral, approach cannot include study of Christianity.

- 9 D. Wiebe, ‘The Failure of Nerve in the Academic Study of Religion’, *SR* 13 (1984) 401–22, repr. in D. Wiebe, *The Politics of Religious Studies: The Continuing Conflict with Theology in the Academy* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1999) 141–62. For Wiebe, only what is physical or observable can be the subject matter of the academic study of religion. For a critical overview of debates about the nature and state of ‘Religious Studies’, see Wiebe, ‘Religious Studies’. More briefly, see H. Räisänen, *Neutestamentliche Theologie?* (Stuttgart: KBW, 2000) 67–73 (on the differences between ‘empiricists’ and ‘transcendentalists’); also E. J. Sharpe, *Comparative Religion* (London: Duckworth, 1986<sup>2</sup>) 296, 313.
- 10 Wiebe’s criticisms are directed against the view of those who would encourage, if not almost demand, an element of ‘empathy’ on the part of the Religious Studies practitioner by accepting some idea of the ‘sacred’ in a general sense in the religious beliefs of others.
- 11 See e.g. R. L. Wilken, ‘Who will Speak for the Religious Tradition?’, *JAAR* 57 (1989) 699–717; also N. Smart, ‘The Principles and Meaning of the Study of Religion’, *Concept and Empathy*, 195–206 (see the carefully nuanced discussion on p. 197, emphasising the importance of ‘imaginative participation’ and allowing the importance of an insider’s perspective, even if in the end arguing that such is not absolutely necessary in order to understand).

From the side of 'Theology', there might be different, but nonetheless very real, questions to raise about a 'definition' as proposed above, at least as the name of an academic discipline. In some institutions ('seminaries' in a broad sense) an explicitly 'committed' religious stance is indeed a prerequisite. However, many other institutions where 'Theology' is studied would not overtly demand that students or teachers be religiously committed. Indeed, many would explicitly require that any such prerequisite must be positively *excluded* (certainly if deemed to be 'necessary' in any way).<sup>12</sup> The subject matter of study may well be the religious commitment of others, and often others within the Christian tradition. But it is of others, not of oneself: one is studying not perhaps 'theology' but the *history of 'theology'*.<sup>13</sup> Such study can then be just as 'phenomenological' in its approach as similar study of Jewish or Islamic writers or Buddhist philosophers. In terms of Anselm's famous terminology, 'Theology in this sense is not "faith seeking understanding" but rather "understanding" "faith seeking understanding";<sup>14</sup> and in this, an alleged approach of 'Theology' may be very similar to one of 'Religious Studies'.<sup>15</sup> This might then be particularly the case in relation to the more 'historical' disciplines within the broad umbrella term of 'Theology', including NT studies.<sup>16</sup>

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Wilken's article represents a Presidential Address to the AAR; Smart's essay is his inaugural address (in 1968) on taking up his post as Professor of Religious Studies in the (then new) Department of Religious Studies in the University of Lancaster.

- 12 That would certainly be the case in England, and much of the UK. My own university (Oxford), under the rubric of freedom of thought, would regard as unacceptable any making of a specific faith commitment on the part of any student or teacher as a necessary precondition for study or employment.
- 13 See G. Flood, *Beyond Phenomenology: Rethinking the Study of Religion* (London: Cassel, 1999), esp. 18–28, who distinguishes what he calls a 'primary theology' from a 'secondary theology'. In the former one might investigate one's own committed (often Christian) standpoint from within; in the latter one studies the standpoint of others. For a very similar distinction, see J. Barr, 'Does Biblical Study still Belong to Theology?', *Explorations in Theology* 7 (London: SCM, 1980) 18–29, esp. 21–2.
- 14 Flood, *Beyond Phenomenology*, 23; he goes on to say that this 'is a particular form of religionist's "understanding religion". In the sense of academic disciplines, both theology and religious studies stand outside the narratives upon which they can offer critiques.'
- 15 See e.g. W. Stegemann, 'Much Ado about Nothing? Sceptical Inquiries into the Alternatives "Theology" or "Religious Studies"', *Moving beyond New Testament Theology? Essays in Conversation with Heikki Räisänen* (ed. T. Penner and C. Vander Stichele; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2005) 221–42.
- 16 Stegemann, 'Much Ado', 242: 'Scholarly theology, particularly its historical disciplines (like church history, the Old and New Testaments), can also be viewed as a form of religious studies that focuses on the history of Christianity.' For others, however, such a use of 'Theology' might still be inappropriate to use for such a (potentially) uncommitted stance on the part of the modern scholar.

Within the discipline of 'New Testament Studies', too, the word 'theology' can be, and is, used in a number of different ways – at times slightly bewilderingly. It can, for example, (simply) refer to the subject matter being investigated. Study of 'the theology of Paul', or 'the theology of the NT', is at one level study of the 'theological' (usually very broadly taken) ideas of Paul, the NT writers, or whoever.<sup>17</sup> But the word 'theology' can also be used to refer to the stance of the modern scholar, so that 'New Testament theology' is taken as an approach to the text from a position of positive religious (almost always Christian) commitment.<sup>18</sup> But this raises the question whether in order to undertake study of 'theology' (of the NT, of Paul or whoever) in the first sense one has to adopt a stance of 'theology' in the second sense with a personal commitment to the subject matter. Can one 'really' 'understand' someone like Paul if one does not share some of his core beliefs?

The issue is not unrelated to Krister Stendahl's famous distinction between determining 'what a text meant' and 'what a text means', with the claim that it is the biblical scholar's duty primarily to determine (as far as possible) the former and not the latter.<sup>19</sup> Stendahl's views have been heavily criticised, partly on the basis of claims to the effect that no interpreter can 'really' understand what a text meant without some idea of what it means. The act of interpretation entails the existential involvement of the interpreter quite as much as the text; strictly neutral, uninvolved interpretation is simply not possible.<sup>20</sup>

17 I leave aside here the question of how far a 'theology' in this sense (whether of an individual such as Paul, or of the NT as a collection) has to be a coherent, unified system of thought. For example, some might wish to question whether we ever find such a system, or unified coherence, in a figure such as Paul, let alone in the diverse collection of texts which now constitute the NT. Hence some would prefer to talk about the 'religion', rather than the 'theology', of a figure such as Paul. Certainly in relation to a 'theology of the NT', there are large debates about where such a unity might lie, or even whether it exists.

18 Cf. e.g. R. Morgan, 'Introduction', in R. Bultmann's *Theology of the New Testament: With a New Introduction by Robert Morgan* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2007). Confusion can arise in this context where, in a phrase (or book title) such as 'The Theology of the New Testament', the words are taken by some as a reference to the subject matter under discussion (the 'theological' ideas found in the NT), but also by others as a reference to a 'discipline', and a particular stance of the modern author. In a real sense, a number of such books (of which e.g. Bultmann's *Theology of the New Testament* is a classic example) do serve both functions, since their authors develop their own theological positions in the form of what are (at one level) descriptions of the theologies of others (e.g. Paul): cf. Morgan, 'Introduction', xxi: 'Bultmann is writing contemporary theology in and through his historical account of early Christianity.'

19 K. Stendahl's essay in the *Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, 1962, reprinted in K. Stendahl, *Meanings: The Bible as Document and Guide* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984) 12–22, which has been much discussed.

20 See N. Lash, 'What might Martyrdom Mean?', *Suffering and Martyrdom in the New Testament* (ed. W. Horbury and B. McNeil; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981) 183–98, repr.

However, while accepting that a strictly neutral, uninvolved stance on the part of any interpreter may be impossible,<sup>21</sup> I am not convinced that any 'existential involvement' has to be positive and ('religiously') affirming of (some or all of) the subject matter being interpreted in order to do justice to the material under consideration. 'Existential involvement' need not mean 'positive religious commitment implying agreement with what is said'.<sup>22</sup> Such a stance is not, as far as I am aware, adopted in any other field of academic study. I do not have to be a believer in Stoic philosophy to be qualified to undertake descriptions of, and perhaps critical engagement with, the views of ancient Stoic philosophers. (If this were a necessary precondition, the circle of those studying ancient Stoicism might be quite small!). And the same goes for study of Josephus, Thucydides, Nazi ideology, bipolar disorder or Buddhist philosophy. It is surely not impossible in principle to provide a fully 'sympathetic' description of 'what a text meant', while also making a value judgement that 'what it means' in the present is nothing at all of any positive value. I can hopefully describe Stoic ideas, or seek to untangle Gnostic mythologies (perhaps too trying to understand what has led their 'authors' to develop such ideas in the first place), and enter into the social and ideological world of their adherents (insofar as this is possible given the distance in time), while at the same time refusing to affirm most (if not all) of their views myself.<sup>23</sup> We do *not* have to agree with texts we study in

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(with slight changes) in N. Lash, *Theology on the Road to Emmaus* (London: SCM, 1986) 75–92. For a strongly worded argument about a confessional Christian 'church' context as being the primary reading community context for interpreting the NT, see e.g. F. Watson, *Text, Church and World: Biblical Interpretation in Theological Context* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1994). For those advocating a 'theological' interpretation of the NT, see e.g. the essays (and introduction) in M. Bockmuehl, ed., *Scripture's Doctrine and Theology's Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2008), and many others.

There are though considerable problems here in making such a claim into a reality: what would count as a 'church' context? Given that different people might have different ideas about what is essential and what is peripheral in identifying a 'religion' or a 'religious tradition', it is not easy to decide whether one is 'in' or 'out', or indeed what criteria one might use in making such decisions. If one adds to this the issue of chronologically distant phenomena, and the realisation that 'religions' may change over the course of time, it is by no means clear what it might mean to claim that one is working from an 'emic' perspective in relation to a figure of the past such as Paul. See the discussion of Smart, 'Principles and Meaning'. For other criticisms of any attempt to tie biblical studies (though focused on OT rather than NT) to a confessional context, see also J. Barton, 'The Future of Old Testament Study', *The Old Testament: Canon, Literature and Theology* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007) 157–68, esp. 165.

21 Classically expressed in H. G. Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (London: Sheed & Ward, 1989<sup>2</sup>).

22 To be fair, this is explicitly denied by Lash, 'Martyrdom', 189.

23 Closer to home, I hope that I could give a lecture course on the letter to the Hebrews (I never have had to do so!) that seeks to be as 'sympathetic' as possible, while at the same time not



order to interpret them and understand them. 'It is altogether possible to understand and to say no.'<sup>24</sup>

Indeed it is precisely this kind of *negative* ('theological') value judgement that has often had a place even within some kind of 'theological' interpretations of the NT, notably in the work of 'theological' interpreters (and former SNTS Presidents!) such as Rudolf Bultmann or Ernst Käsemann. Both clearly had in one way a vested theological interest in affirming the truth claims of *some parts* of the NT. But equally, both were also highly critical of other parts.<sup>25</sup>

Yet the issue of the religious commitment (or otherwise) of an interpreter of the NT is only one side of the fence. All our interpretations involve the production of a 'text' of our own, whether written or oral. And every text that is received involves a 'reader' as well as an author. Thus our interpretations of texts, insofar as they themselves are in turn new 'texts', involve others as those who read what we write and/or listen to what we say. Interpretation is an enterprise involving both speakers and hearers, writers and readers. Thus the issue of how far we can/should be (explicitly)<sup>26</sup> 'theological' (i.e. religiously committed) in

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wishing to affirm many of the ideas implied in the text (e.g. about the necessity of sacrifice) myself.

- 24 Meeks, 'Why Study the New Testament?', 169 (referring to C. M. Wood, *The Formation of Christian Understanding: An Essay in Theological Hermeneutics* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1981): 'Important as it is to relate understanding and use, it is crucial not to identify them in such a way as to imply that to understand a text is to agree with it ...'). Cf. too, from the side of one generally positive about a 'theological' (i.e. committed) approach to the NT, P. F. Esler, *New Testament Theology: Communion and Community* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2005) 68: 'We may well wish to learn from our ancestors in some areas, while maintaining a critical distance in others ... Agreement is not a necessary precondition for communion between persons.' Also p. 42: 'The existence of cultural distance reminds us that at times we will need to be *critical* of what our biblical ancestors are saying' (emphasis original). See too Barr, 'Does Biblical Study still Belong to Theology?', 26: 'Empathy and personal involvement are not to be identified with the *acceptance* of the theological or ideological position of the matter studied' (emphasis original).
- 25 For Bultmann, most things outside Paul and John; for Käsemann, Luke, perhaps John. See e.g. Robert Morgan, 'Introduction: The Nature of New Testament Theology', *The Nature of New Testament Theology* (London: SCM, 1973), esp. pp. 46–52, on 'Sachkritik'.
- 26 Morgan has pointed out that so much of so-called 'New Testament theology' (in the sense of the *discipline* of undertaking NT studies with a 'theological' agenda in mind) is actually only 'implicit', in that the agenda remains slightly hidden behind the surface presentation of the interpretation as a description of what writers in the past have said (with reference to Barrett and Käsemann): this is then accessible to, and can be engaged with, by those who are not 'theological'. See R. Morgan, 'Biblical Hermeneutics and Critical Responsibility', *The Future of Biblical Interpretation: Responsible Plurality in Biblical Hermeneutics* (ed. S. E. Porter & M. R. Malcolm; Exeter: Paternoster, forthcoming). I am grateful to the author for making this available to me in advance of publication.

our work may depend quite as much on our intended ('implied') audience as on ourselves alone. The *context* in which we undertake study of the NT may thus have a critical bearing on what is appropriate and/or desirable for those who write.<sup>27</sup>

Who our intended readers and/or audience are will vary from person to person, and (insofar as we may operate within different institutions) from one institution to another.<sup>28</sup> In his 2004 Presidential address, Meeks argued that it had often been assumed without question that 'our' primary audience ('we' being members of SNTS and/or the guild of NT interpreters) were clergy, ministers, or certainly Christians. I wonder if that was the case then, whether it is the case now, and perhaps above all whether it should be the case (which is not quite the same thing). Certainly many of 'us' do operate within an 'ecclesiastical', or 'confessional', institutional setting, and that is perfectly possible, legitimate and appropriate. And within such a setting, it is then not unreasonable to presume that our audience is confessionally aligned. But that only applies in some instances. In other instances, any explicit *institutional* confessional alignment is explicitly ruled out of court.<sup>29</sup> In such instances, our own confessional alignment is of course possible: if freedom of thought is enjoined, I am free to be confessional! But we cannot necessarily presume that our audience will share the same confessional commitment. And we have no right to do so.

Above all, I would suggest, this applies in the case of this Society. There is nothing in the Society's Constitution which mentions religious commitment at all. The name of the Society refers to 'study' of the NT; the overall aim of the Society is simply the 'furtherance of New Testament studies internationally'. Nothing more is said. The one point at which more might be said is the conditions for membership; but the Constitution simply refers to the necessity for a potential new member to be proposed by two existing members, and the criteria mentioned include reference simply to 'a high standard of scholarship', academic degrees and/or scholarly publications. There is no mention in the Constitution of the religious affiliation (Christian or otherwise) of the Society itself, or of any possible

27 One should also distinguish between those for whom we think we write (our 'implied', or intended, readers) and those who actually read what we write. The two may be very different! Hence an interpretation which was never intended to be 'theological' (in the sense of coming from a position of broad agreement with what is said in the text) may, quite legitimately, be taken 'theologically' by a *reader* (as expressing something of the nature of God or a 'gospel' which the reader then wishes to identify with).

28 Many of 'us' occupy more than one context at different times: e.g. we may inhabit both an academic context *and* an ecclesiastical, or religious, context. Sometimes the two may overlap or even coincide, but not always! Further, our intended readers and our actual readers may be different (see previous note).

29 Cf. above on my own institution of the University of Oxford, which demands freedom of expression and thought by both teachers and students, speakers and hearers.

members.<sup>30</sup> Our Society is not, and should not be, a Christian enclave. It is one where ‘study’ is primary (and our sole constitutional ‘aim’); but such study is ‘international’, both in terms of geography, ethnicity *and* religious commitment. Thus, while religious commitment on the part of individuals within the Society is neither surprising nor in the slightest sense reprehensible, we cannot assume that all others within our Society share the religious commitments which any one of us might hold. There have been, and hopefully will continue to be, Christian, Jewish, agnostic and atheist members of the SNTS.<sup>31</sup> We can, and many of us do, present papers, write articles and produce arguments from a specifically religious standpoint; but within this Society we should not presume such a viewpoint is necessarily shared by any readership or audience within the Society. Our *implied* readership must remain international and potentially untied to any particular religious faith group.<sup>32</sup>

In many respects, none of this is new. The distinctions referred to here were already under debate at the start of the twentieth century in discussions about the nature and task of New Testament Theology. I presume everyone here will pick up the (deliberate) echo of the title of William Wrede’s epoch-making essay.<sup>33</sup> In that essay, Wrede argued that study of ‘(so-called) New Testament Theology’ should be replaced by a ‘History of Early Christian Religion’. The debate associated with Wrede’s name has continued ever since, with arguments and debates about the appropriateness or otherwise of ‘theological’ approaches to the NT.

In more recent discussions, the names associated particularly with championing a Wrede-style approach have included Heikki Räisänen, with his programmatic suggestions about going ‘Beyond New Testament Theology’,<sup>34</sup> as well as the

30 I wonder too if the same is implicit in the extension of the aim of Society, inaugurated in 2004, to refer to the furtherance of NT studies ‘internationally’. It could of course be taken as implying an extension from a (presumed Christian) limited context (in e.g. Europe and North America) to a wider (but still presumed Christian) context globally. But it could (and I would like to suggest should) be taken as implying an awareness that the context(s) in which we seek to ‘further’ NT studies are not confined by geographical areas, national boundaries, *or* any religious boundaries.

31 I am not aware of Muslim or Buddhist SNTS members, though it would be excellent if there were!

32 Cf. too Meeks, ‘Why Study the New Testament?’, 167–9, on the *varied* audiences which ‘we’ should now be addressing; also H. Räisänen, *Beyond New Testament Theology* (London: SCM, 2000<sup>2</sup>) 151–6, on the need to look beyond an ecclesial audience. All this is of course not to deny that a substantial number of our *actual* readers (if there are any!) may well be tied to one particular faith community.

33 W. Wrede, ‘The Tasks and Methods of “New Testament Theology”’ (1897), repr. in English translation in Morgan, *Nature of New Testament Theology*, 68–116. For the broader history of interpretation and context from which Wrede came, see Morgan’s Introduction in the same volume; also Hengel, ‘Aufgaben’, 327–8.

34 Räisänen, *Beyond New Testament Theology*.

works of those such as Berger, Theissen, Zeller and others.<sup>35</sup> The issue has provoked considerable debate and discussion. There may be debate about how far such an exercise is intended to replace the writing of synthesising works entitled 'New Testament Theology', and how far it is intended to affect all NT exegesis.<sup>36</sup> But insofar as 'New Testament Theology' refers to a 'discipline' (cf. above), and the overall perspective of the exegete (rather than to the subject matter of the study in question), that would refer to NT exegesis more widely.

But if there is any justification in the suggestion that, at least within this Society, a non-confessional approach is more appropriate within our own 'title deeds', it may be worth reminding ourselves of some of the specific ways in which a Wrede-like exercise might be distinguished from a more 'theological' approach. One of the most important is the insistence that a study of early Christianity should not remain tied to the limits of the canon:<sup>37</sup> a 'History of Christian Religion' approach should be ready and open to include discussion of all documents and evidence, canonical or non-canonical, from early Christianity.<sup>38</sup> Thus the question of 'how' we study the NT may determine also 'what' we study.

35 See G. Theissen, *A Theory of Primitive Christian Religion* (London: SCM, 1999); K. Berger, *Theologiegeschichte des Urchristentums: Theologie des Neuen Testaments* (Tübingen: Francke, 1994); D. Zeller, 'Einführung', in D. Zeller, ed., *Christentum* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2002) and also the first two major sections of the work as a whole (on the early stages of the Christian movement within history).

36 Despite some earlier statements which could be read in other ways, Räisänen has claimed that his proposals (to go 'beyond' New Testament Theology) are not necessarily a manifesto for all kinds of NT studies, but simply aim to propose an alternative to the writing of synthesising studies specifically entitled 'New Testament Theology': cf. Räisänen, *Beyond New Testament Theology*, xiv; also his 'What I Meant and What it might Mean: An Attempt at Responding', in Penner and Vander Stichele, *Moving Beyond New Testament Theology?*, 404, with reference to his own earlier writings, e.g. *Beyond New Testament Theology*, 153-4. However, others have made a similar move, slipping quietly from discussions of 'New Testament Theology' to 'New Testament Studies' or New Testament exegesis (apparently *in toto*): see e.g. J. Schröter, 'Religionsgeschichte des Urchristentums statt Theologie des Neuen Testaments? Begründungsprobleme in der neutestamentlichen Wissenschaft', *BTZ* 16 (1999) 3-20, at 18: 'Eine Theologie des Neuen Testaments kann somit nicht durch eine Religionsgeschichte des Urchristentums ersetzt werden, da es die bleibende Aufgabe der neutestamentlichen Exegese ist, die kanonisch gewordenen Schriften auszulegen, die für das Christentum in aller historischen Relativität Orientierung und bleibender Maßstab sind' (my emphasis). Schröter had spent most of the earlier part of the essay discussing how one should write a 'New Testament Theology', not how to undertake NT exegesis in all contexts (though of course, at one level, Schröter's point - that 'NT exegesis' must exegete the NT texts - is self-evidently true).

37 See Wrede, 'Tasks', 70-2. Cf. Hengel, 'Aufgaben', 327-8, for the debates provoked by F. C. Baur, both for and against, and the way in which these ignored any limits imposed by the NT canon.

38 It is perhaps worth noting that, in one sense, a decision to ignore, or to respect, the limits of the canon is by no means identical with a 'History of Christian Religion' vs 'New Testament

In several ways, the canonical nature of the NT texts cannot be ignored. The very fact that these texts were (subsequently) taken as part of a 'canon' of 'scripture' of a major world religion has meant that they have been read, and now studied, far more widely and extensively than other texts of the time, even other Christian texts. In terms of modern scholarship, the secondary literature which these texts have generated is now enormous and far greater than for any other contemporary texts.<sup>39</sup> Similarly, the fact that these texts were canonised has meant that they were copied in antiquity far more frequently than non-canonical texts; hence the manuscript evidence for them is far more extensive and complex than for non-canonical texts. Equally, the 'history of influence' of these texts is correspondingly far more extensive than other texts: by virtue of being canonical, the biblical texts have influenced others – and broader society – in ways that are far greater than is the case with other Christian texts from roughly the same period. Whatever our own view of the rights or wrongs of (later) ecclesiastical decisions which led to the canonising of this body of Christian literature as part of a 'New Testament', the very fact that it happened is something which cannot be ignored.<sup>40</sup>

On the other hand, there are strong grounds for not allowing these decisions to be too determinative! The reasons for adopting an approach of methodological 'blindness' to the limits of the NT canon are scarcely novel. Any decisions about the precise boundaries of the NT canon are relatively late in relation to the writing of the NT texts themselves. 'No New Testament writing was born with the predicate "canonical" attached.'<sup>41</sup> The early Christians of course had a widely accepted body of 'scripture', i.e. the Jewish

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Theology' divide. Perhaps the most 'theological' *New Testament Theology* of recent times, viz. that of R. Bultmann, adopted a stance which also ignored the limits of the canon. While putting Paul (and John) on a theological pedestal, he proceeded to consider (and criticise!) a whole range of other early Christian texts, both inside and outside the canon. For this aspect of Bultmann's work, adopting precisely the approach to the canon recommended by Wrede, see Schröter, 'Religionsgeschichte', 7; Morgan, 'Introduction', xxi.

39 Compare the amount of space occupied on our library shelves by commentaries or books on e.g. James or 2 Peter, compared with books on the *Didache* or 2 *Clement*!

40 Cf. J. Barr, *The Bible in the Modern World* (London: SCM, 1973) 117, 153, referring to the 'facticity' of the status of the Bible as biblical. See Hengel, 'Aufgaben', 332; also Meeks, 'Why Study the New Testament?', 167: the religious uses of the NT texts in the past, and the influence they have had on societies which have been nominally 'Christian', then perhaps justifies the inordinate attention we still devote to them, despite their tiny compass. Moreover, the canonical status of these texts has been a significant factor in the creations of departments and faculties of biblical studies in many of our universities. Hence many of us owe our jobs and livelihoods to the canonical status of these texts!

41 Wrede, 'Tasks', 70. Cf. conversely the title of the recent book of D. Lührmann, *Die apokryphen gewordenen Evangelien* (Leiden: Brill, 2004): non-canonical, or 'apocryphal', gospels only

scriptures.<sup>42</sup> Whether the new Christian movement in the first century (or anyone in it at the time) ever thought that this would, and/or should, be expanded by the addition of further, new 'Christian' texts is surely highly debatable. No doubt various individuals within the earliest Christian movement believed that some things said, or written (in the case of Paul), carried authority and were to be taken very seriously.<sup>43</sup> But whether anyone thought that such claims to a level of 'authority' implied that the authority in question was comparable to that of (Jewish) scripture is surely very doubtful.<sup>44</sup>

As already noted, it is widely accepted within NT scholarship today that one must take seriously the evidence of other ancient texts, whether they are scriptural or not. It is standard orthodoxy now to take fully into account evidence available to us from Qumran, Philo, Josephus, and other Jewish texts, as well as numerous non-Jewish texts, as providing us with evidence for the broader thought-world in which the NT texts were written and which is essential if we are to make sense of them.

But what of the place of non-canonical *Christian* literature in this context? How far can/should we take note of this material in 'study of the NT' and how is our understanding of the NT texts, and/or of Christian origins, affected by such a broader perspective? As one who has devoted a considerable period of time over a 'scholarly' career investigating non-canonical texts (Q, non-canonical gospels, apostolic fathers etc.), it may be appropriate for me to consider in the second half of this paper what contribution such texts might make to so-called 'New Testament Studies' and our understanding of NT texts.

## 2. The New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature

There are a number of reasons why we might wish to study non-canonical early Christian texts alongside those of the NT. Sometimes it seems all too easy to dismiss the value of such texts as all 'late' (relatively!), or 'Gnostic', or theologically

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*became* 'apocryphal' in the course of subsequent history (though this applies only to the earlier 'apocryphal' gospels).

42 Whether the so-called 'Septuagint' or the bible in Hebrew.

43 Cf. e.g. Paul's argument in 1 Corinthians 7, and his final assertion at the end of this discussion that he claims to have the Spirit of God (cf. v. 40), so that his 'opinion' is to be taken with the utmost seriousness; but he does not claim that his writings are *ipso facto* on a par with the writings of Jewish scripture and as such claim an equivalent authority. The authority Paul claims is that of himself as one who has the Spirit, or (elsewhere) as one whose life reflects the cross-centred gospel he proclaims; he does not claim that his letters are divinely inspired texts.

44 Within the NT, perhaps only the claim made at the end of the book of Revelation not to add to, or take away from, anything written in the book (Rev 22.18-19) comes close to this.

trivial and/or worthless.<sup>45</sup> In some contexts, of course, such decisions might be appropriate;<sup>46</sup> in other contexts, such value judgements might appear less convincing.

- At one level we can study such texts simply 'because they are there'. Intellectual curiosity, for its own sake, is still a valuable commodity!
- We can study such texts bearing in mind that the very fact that they were not made canonical has meant that they have aroused far less interest, both in antiquity and in modern study (cf. above). Hence they offer potential for perhaps new insights and new findings in a way that canonical texts, which as such have been pored over in minute detail for centuries, may not.
- They may also enable us to place the NT texts into a broader context - not only a broader Jewish, or Greco-Roman, context, but also a broader Christian context. This may then enable us to see more clearly what key issues for early Christians may have been (and which may not be the same as those which interest us!) And in such an exercise, the NT texts may emerge as typical within early Christianity in some respects, perhaps rather atypical in others.
- Insofar as some (many?) of the non-canonical texts presuppose, and reflect on, NT texts, they represent part of the 'history of influence' of the NT. As such they throw light on the ways in which some early readers of NT texts read them (whether as scriptural or not); and this in turn may highlight for us possibilities in reading NT texts which we might otherwise miss.<sup>47</sup>

45 Cf. the comments of I. Dunderberg, 'New Testament Theology and the Challenge of Practice', *Voces Clamantium in Deserto: Essays in Honor of Kari Syreeni* (ed. S.-O. Back and M. Kamkaammieni; Åbo: Åbo Akademi, 2012) 14-35, at 23-8, on the ways in which the potential value of non-canonical texts is devalued or sidelined by a number of writers on so-called 'New Testament Theology'; also for claims that the decisions made by early Christians about what to include in the NT canon are theologically highly appropriate since these texts are inherently 'better' than possible competitors (in relation to Stuhlmacher, perhaps too Theissen; also Hengel, 'Aufgaben', 332).

46 E.g. in relation to study of the historical Jesus, the possible late date of such texts, in comparison with other early texts, might be an important factor.

47 Conversely, for some, attention to the history of influence may act as a guard against claimed new interpretations of NT texts: if a proposed 'new' interpretation does not show up at all in the past history of interpretation, this might be taken as an indication that it is unlikely and/or implausible. For the importance of a consideration of *Wirkungsgeschichte* in general, see e.g. U. Luz, 'The Contribution of Reception History to a Theology of the New Testament', *The Nature of New Testament Theology: Essays in Honour of Robert Morgan* (ed. C. C. Rowland and C. M. Tuckett; Oxford: Blackwell, 2006) 123-34; also Luz's own Presidential Address to this Society: 'Kann die Bibel heute noch die Grundlage für die Kirche sein? Über die Aufgabe der Exegese in einer religiös-pluralistischen Gesellschaft', *NTS* 44 (1998) 317-39, esp. 331-4.

- Non-canonical texts may also give us a valuable insight into the rich variety of early Christian piety and ‘religious’ life and thought.<sup>48</sup>

If we do extend the range of ‘New Testament Studies’ to encompass ‘early Christian writings’ outside the NT, how do we define ‘early’? One can put a specific *terminus ad quem* on texts to be considered. However, any such date is both arbitrary and also difficult to enforce, partly because any proposed dividing line will inevitably be artificial, partly because so many of the texts in question cannot be dated accurately.<sup>49</sup> Further, we have to distinguish between texts, manuscripts and traditions. Clearly no actual manuscript of *any* early Christian text, canonical or non-canonical, dates from the first century. All manuscripts, including those for NT texts, are quite a bit later. The date of composition of many texts is uncertain. Further, we might well be interested in some texts, not just for the texts themselves, but also for possible earlier traditions which they might contain.<sup>50</sup> Clearly for the present purposes, some kind of cut-off, either in terms of kinds of text, or perhaps in terms of date, is desirable if one is to keep any discussion within manageable limits. Certainly if one is considering the ‘history of influence’ of NT texts, the field is almost infinite without some restrictions.

In what follows, I consider aspects of some ‘Jesus traditions’ and also Paul, taking into account other texts and traditions which might date from roughly the first two centuries CE, though I am aware that the datings may be questionable, and even within this timeframe one cannot provide a comprehensive coverage.

There are here a number of different types of evidence which can come into consideration. There are extant texts, which could have claims to be relatively early, or to contain early traditions, and hence might illuminate our knowledge and understanding of the earliest Christian movement. In this category might be some of the texts of the so-called ‘Apostolic Fathers’,<sup>51</sup> as well as other

48 In a number of recent publications, F. Bovon has emphasised that so-called ‘apocryphal’ writings were not necessarily be seen as ‘rejected’ and theologically or spiritually worthless. Many non-canonical texts were still regarded positively and as valuable for piety: they were ‘useful for the soul’. See e.g. his ‘Beyond the Canonical and Apocryphal Books, the Presence of Third Category: The Books Useful for the Soul’, *HTR* 105 (2012) 125–137.

49 See the discussion already in Wrede, ‘Tasks’, 101–3. Wrede proposed a rough and ready dividing line in the work of the Apologists, but was fully aware that this may well not be entirely defensible. Bousset, in his study of early Christian Christology, proposed going up to Irenaeus.

50 Cf. especially the *Gospel of Thomas*. But the same might well apply in relation to the canonical gospels as well!

51 Some of these were evidently regarded as canonical by some by being included within biblical/NT codices: 1 & 2 *Clement* are included in the texts reproduced in codex A, as are *Barnabas* and *Hermas* in  $\kappa$ . Whether other texts were considered and explicitly rejected is simply not known. One suspects that some of the reasons given later for not including some texts (in writers such as Origen or Eusebius) are rationalisations after the event.



non-canonical texts such as the *Gospel of Thomas*.<sup>52</sup> Other texts might include those which are not extant,<sup>53</sup> but whose existence might be deduced from other evidence.<sup>54</sup> In other instances, we might have no actual texts at all, explicit or implicit. However, there might be streams of thought, or ideas or people within ‘early Christianity’ who have not left any written record, but whose activity and influence were evidently real and significant. For example, there are the people with whom Paul engages in his Corinthian letters or in Galatians. Paul’s ideas and ‘theological’ utterances are worked out in conversation, or ‘dialogue’, with others. Within the guild of ‘NT studies’, we focus frequently on Paul; should we perhaps focus as much on Paul’s ‘dialogue’ partners?<sup>55</sup>

### 2.1 *Jesus Tradition*<sup>56</sup>

It is well known that the main texts in the NT comprising ‘Jesus traditions’, viz. the four gospels, form only a small part of a much wider body of such texts. Some of these texts are extant (other ‘gospels’, or texts claiming to be ‘gospels’, e.g. in their titles),<sup>57</sup> whether as full texts or in fragmentary form. Others we do not have, but their existence is evidenced from quotations by later Church Fathers. Further, evidence from some ‘gospels’ we have might suggest the existence of sources used by later writers.<sup>58</sup>

It is widely agreed that, although these texts purport to give information about Jesus, most of them are probably historically worthless for that purpose.<sup>59</sup>

52 For a comprehensive collection of ‘gospel’ texts from an enormous chronological period, see C. Marksches and J. Schröter, eds., *Antike christliche Apokryphen in deutscher Übersetzung. I. Band: Evangelien und Verwandtes* (2 vols.; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2012). Cf. too J. K. Elliott, *The Apocryphal New Testament* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993).

53 An intermediary category would be texts which have survived only in fragmentary form, and hence we often do not have enough evidence to be able to reconstruct their ideas or beliefs with any certainty. Cf. a number of the non-canonical ‘gospel’ texts of which only small fragments survive, e.g. *P. Oxy.* 840, or *P. Egerton* 2. See e.g. the texts collected in Marksches and Schröter, *Apokryphen*, 343–99; also T. Nicklas, M. Kruger, T. J. Kraus, *Gospel Fragments* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).

54 See below on Q, or Jewish Christian gospels.

55 In one way we do, but normally simply to try to gain insight into Paul; but should perhaps the Corinthian Christians addressed in 1 Corinthians, or the Galatian ‘agitators’, be considered for their own sake and on their own terms?

56 I take ‘Jesus traditions’ to be simply traditions which claim to report things said or done by Jesus.

57 I do not discuss here the vexed question of how one should define a ‘gospel’. But whatever one may decide, it is clear that various writers (or later scribes) claim the term for a number of (variegated) texts.

58 For the former, cf. the so-called ‘Jewish Christian gospels’; for the latter, cf. Q (on which see below), or a possible ‘Cross Gospel’ (lying behind the *Gospel of Peter*, according to Crossan).

59 For texts apart from the *Gospel of Thomas*, see T. Nicklas, ‘Traditions about Jesus in Apocryphal Gospels (with the Exception of the Gospel of Thomas)’, *Handbook for the Study of the Historical Jesus* (ed. T. Holmén and S. E. Porter; 4 vols.; Leiden: Brill, 2011)

Nevertheless, ever since Wrede's work on the messianic secret in Mark,<sup>60</sup> we have realised that 'gospel' texts (including canonical gospel texts) may not always tell us so much, if anything, about the historical Jesus, but they do tell us about aspects of early Christianity (whether the evangelists themselves or earlier traditions and sources that they used). I turn then briefly to Q.

### 2.1.1 Q

Issues about Q are well known. It is widely (though not unanimously) agreed that agreements between Matthew and Luke which are not explicable as due to dependence on Mark are due to their use of common earlier tradition(s), commonly referred to as Q. It is also agreed by many (though not all) that Q may have been a single written text.<sup>61</sup> For some, the importance of Q lies in its very early date (*ipso facto* it must be earlier than Matthew and Luke), and hence the possible access it might provide to give us reliable information about Jesus and Jesus' teaching. I have discussed this elsewhere, as indeed have others. Suffice it to say here that, just as the earliest extant gospel (Mark) does not necessarily give us immediate access to the historical Jesus, the same is almost certainly true of Q. The Jesus tradition in Q has already been mediated by early Christian communities, and we cannot simply equate Q (or even 'early Q', a Q<sup>1</sup>) with the historical Jesus without remainder.<sup>62</sup>

Thus many recent studies have attempted to apply a 'redaction-critical' approach (very broadly speaking) to Q to identify a possible distinctive and/or characteristic outlook and/or 'theology' of Q. Although such attempts have

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2081–2118. (I am fully aware that what is said above is something of a sweeping generalisation: a number of scholars have argued that there might be dominical material in e.g. the *Apocryphon of James* and other texts. These are discussed fully in Nicklas's essay.) For the *Gospel of Thomas*, the situation is much debated. For a positive assessment of the possibility of recovering information about Jesus from *Thomas*, see E. K. Broadhead, 'The Thomas-Jesus Connection', in Holmén and Porter, *Handbook*, 2059–80; for a more negative assessment, see C. M. Tuckett, 'The Gospel of Thomas: Evidence for Jesus?', *NTT* 52 (1998) 17–32.

60 W. Wrede, *The Messianic Secret in Mark* (ET London: Clarke, 1971; German original 1901).

61 For this, see my *Q and the History of Early Christianity* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996); also J. S. Kloppenborg, *Excavating Q* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2000).

62 See my 'Q and the Historical Jesus', in J. Schröter & R. Brucker, eds., *Der historische Jesus: Tendenzen und Perspektiven der gegenwärtigen Forschung* (BZNW 114; Berlin: De Gruyter, 2002), 213–41; also 'Jesus Tradition in non-Markan Material common to Matthew and Luke', in Holmén and Porter, *Handbook*, 1853–74. The theory that one can identify different strata within Q is associated above all with the work of John Kloppenborg: cf. his seminal *The Formation of Q* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1987), and his later *Excavating Q*. However, whatever one makes of such theories (for a critique, see my *Q and the History*, 70–3; in more detail in my 'On the Stratification of Q', *Semeia* 55 (1991) 213–22), one cannot simply equate the earliest stratum in Q with the historical Jesus without remainder, as Kloppenborg himself has repeatedly asserted: see e.g. his *Formation*, 245.

been heavily criticised by some, it is in my view a justifiable approach to adopt, and indeed one in which possible answers might affect our understanding of early Christianity in a significant way.

Several aspects of Q are then striking. I focus here on one feature: the absence of a passion narrative in Q. It is widely agreed (by those who accept the Q hypothesis in some shape or form) that Q contained no passion narrative. This does not necessarily imply that Q had no interest in the death of Jesus. But any such interest is rather differently configured from what is perhaps implied and/or presupposed in the canonical gospels. It may also be rather different from the strong focus which emerges from many other NT writings, especially the letters of Paul and (at least some of) the canonical gospels.<sup>63</sup> It is very unlikely that the death of Jesus was ignored by Q. Sayings such as Q 14.27 suggest that the compiler(s) of Q was/were fully aware of the fact of Jesus' death on a cross.<sup>64</sup> Further, it would be surprising if Q did not make some attempt to 'explain' this in some way: there is not necessarily a full-blown theology of atonement; but there is a schema whereby the 'suffering', or 'persecution', endured by followers of Jesus is placed in a wider context and seen as part of the suffering and violence experienced by a whole series of God's prophetic messengers in the past (cf. Q 6.23; 11.49; 13.34). As part of this, it is highly likely that Q placed the death of Jesus in that same series of acts of violence suffered by prophets. The death of Jesus is thus 'interpreted' in one way, in that it is placed in an interpretative framework, seeking to make some kind of sense within a broader 'theological' perspective; but it is not apparently 'vicarious': it is not so clear that it is 'for us' in the way that e.g. Paul claims.<sup>65</sup> It seems that Q makes sense of Jesus' death in terms that relate to the past suffering of Israel's prophets as well as to its present (some kind of ongoing 'suffering' and 'persecution' being endured by Jesus' followers).

63 Also in Hebrews, but not e.g. in James. The case of the canonical gospels is perhaps more complex, and these gospels may not present an entirely unified picture in this respect. Mark and John do clearly have a very powerful focus on the death of Jesus (though equally it is not easy to find much direct evidence for explicit (theological) interpretation of the death itself: e.g. in Mark, only 10.45b and 14.24 seem to provide such evidence). For Matthew and Luke, it may be that the focus on Jesus' death itself is less strong, with more emphasis on the resurrection. And it is well known that Luke has little if any reference to any positive evaluation of the cross. (Mark 10.45b is not paralleled; the saying over the cup at the Last Supper in Luke may also lack a reference to any kind of atonement idea (depending on the text chosen), and Acts is notoriously (all but) silent on this.)

64 The saying is about the necessity of followers of Jesus to 'take up [their] cross'; but such violent verbal imagery is scarcely imaginable without awareness of Jesus' crucifixion.

65 Whether this is the case for the canonical evangelists is also debatable. Sayings in the canonical gospels which give any kind of 'interpretation' of Jesus' death are notorious by their rarity: see above.

### 2.1.2 Other 'gospel' texts

A very similar phenomenon arises in relation to a number of other non-canonical 'gospel' texts. As with Q, it is striking how little interest these texts appear to show in the death of Jesus.<sup>66</sup> The canonical gospels' intense focus on the passion narratives (to a greater or lesser extent present in all four gospels), leading to Kähler's famous description of them as 'passion narratives with extended introductions',<sup>67</sup> scarcely applies if one look beyond the (later) limits of the NT canon.

The group of non-canonical 'gospel' texts is by no means a uniform one: such texts form a very 'mixed bag'. Some are in some sense 'G/gnostic', or stemming from 'G/gnostic' groups.<sup>68</sup> Gnostic interpretations of the death of Jesus were very varied, though there is little evidence that much intrinsic significance was read into the death itself. Partly as a reflection of that, Gnostic texts which claim to provide information about Jesus often focus on the period after Jesus' death to report teaching allegedly given (usually to a chosen inner circle) by the risen Jesus. They are 'resurrection dialogues'.<sup>69</sup> As such, they provide little or no 'passion narrative',<sup>70</sup> nor indeed much evidence that their authors laid any positive stress on Jesus' death.

66 I say 'appear to show' in light of the fact that so many of these texts are not extant in full: hence we do not have evidence from a complete text about the ideas they may contain. Further, their very nature as 'gospel' texts, i.e. purporting to record things said by a figure of the past (rather than an author giving an account of his/her own views directly), means that any evidence of their 'ideas' or 'interests' must inevitably be uncertain.

67 M. Kähler, *The So-Called Historical Jesus and the Historic Biblical Christ* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1964) 80 (German original 1892).

68 I am fully aware of the dangers of using the category of 'G/gnostic' at all; however, for some attempt at justification for still using the category, see my *The Gospel of Mary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007) 42–52. Hereafter, I use here the word Gnostic with a capital G, and without inverted commas, simply for convenience.

69 See Marksches and Schröter, *Apokryphen*, 1051–1238, there under the rubric of 'Dialogische Evangelien', and recognising that texts other than Gnostic ones may come into this category, e.g. the *Epistula Apostolorum*. Conversely, some Gnostic gospels do not fit this pattern: cf. the *Gospel of Judas*. Whether the *Gospel of Thomas* fits into this genre is much debated. However, the fact that the teaching is given by the 'living Jesus', whose sayings (almost) all have an introductory 'Jesus says' (present tense), may suggest that the speaker is thought of as the risen Jesus speaking in the present, rather than the pre-Easter Jesus speaking in the past. But in any case, the teaching given by *Thomas*' Jesus scarcely focuses at all on Jesus' death as in any way significant. (The hearers are to lay aside their clothing: but that at most seems to imply a model of Jesus' followers simply dying to escape the present world and its environment). *Thomas* has often been proposed as a stock example to place alongside Q as a possible 'gospel' without a passion narrative. Whether *Thomas* should be regarded as 'Gnostic' or not (a matter of considerable debate), the fact remains that there are a number of 'gospel' texts which, like Q and *Thomas*, present forms of Jesus traditions but without including a passion narrative.

70 One possible exception to this might be the motif which appears in a few Gnostic texts, where the 'living' Jesus is taken to be distinct from the 'fleshy' one and stands by the cross 'laughing'

The situation is similar with the ‘infancy gospels’, where the focus of attention is Jesus’ birth and childhood. Here, over the course of time, a rich flowering of texts was produced.<sup>71</sup> But again, there is no explicit interest in any narrative account of the death of Jesus, let alone an attempt to make theological sense of it.

Among possibly early texts, one exception in this respect is the *Gospel of Peter* which, in the section of the text which survives, has a version of a passion – and resurrection – narrative.<sup>72</sup> There is then a focus here on the story of the death of Jesus. But just as the canonical gospels give at most only small, occasional hints about any positive *interpretation* of the death of Jesus,<sup>73</sup> the same applies even more to the *Gospel of Peter*. There is little if any hint of positive significance shown in the death of Jesus here, and far more stress is given to Jesus’ resurrection. In the account of the passion, there are of course a number of motifs, including the increased stress laid on Jewish involvement in, and/or responsibility for, the crucifixion.<sup>74</sup> But there is no hint of an idea of Jesus’ death being in some way ‘beneficial’, let alone vicarious.

All this ties in with other evidence we have from the (relatively) early period of Christianity. In the writings of the Apostolic Fathers, Jesus tradition is sometimes mined, alluded to and occasionally ‘quoted’. However, the material most frequently cited, or alluded to, is that of the teaching of Jesus, usually in relation to ethics. This is certainly the case in texts such as the *Didache*, *2 Clement*, *1 Clement* etc. References to any details of a passion narrative are not frequent.<sup>75</sup>

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while the other figure is crucified: cf. e.g. *Apoc. Pet.* (NHC 7.3) 81.4–24. This is then some kind of ‘narrative’ of the passion events. But even that is relatively rare.

71 See Marksches & Schröter, *Apokryphen*, 884–1050 (‘Kindheitsevangelien’); also Elliott, *Apocryphal New Testament*, 46–122. The best-known texts in this category are the *Protevangelium of James* and the *Infancy Gospel of Thomas*.

72 How much else the text contained, and hence how central the account of the passion was within the wider whole, we clearly do not know. Focus on the passion narrative comes to the fore in later traditions about Pilate: see the *Acts of Pilate* (and/or the *Gospel of Nicodemus*): Marksches & Schröter, *Apokryphen*, 231–79; Elliott, *Apocryphal New Testament*, 164–228. It is just possible that some account of a passion ‘narrative’ is witnessed in the tiny fragment *P.Vindob. G.* 2325 (sometimes called the ‘Fayum Gospel’). This tiny fragment appears to have a version of a text similar to that in Mark 14.27, 29. As such it might then represent a version of the passion narrative. But the fragment is very small and it is impossible to be sure of the wider context. For discussion, see the edition and commentary by Thomas Kraus, in T. Nicklas, M. J. Kruger, T. J. Kraus, eds., *Gospel Fragments* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009) 219–27 (more briefly in Marksches & Schröter, *Apokryphen*, 375–6).

73 See above.

74 On this, see J. Verheyden, ‘Some Reflections on Determining the Purpose of the “Gospel of Peter”’, *Das Evangelium nach Petrus: Text, Kontexte, Intertexte* (ed. T. J. Kraus & T. Nicklas; Berlin: De Gruyter, 2007) 281–300.

75 Even in the extended passage in *Barn.* 5–8, where there is a long section on the meaning and significance of Jesus’ death, there is virtually no explicit appeal to texts from the passion

Further, although the *fact* of Jesus' death is important for someone such as Ignatius (arguing again possible 'docetic' opponents, cf. e.g. *Trall.* 10), there are only a few references to that death being 'salvific'.<sup>76</sup>

Against the background of our present NT, a text such as Q, containing exclusively Jesus traditions but no passion narrative, looks very unusual. Within the broader perspective of early Christianity, Q looks rather less idiosyncratic in this respect; and gospel texts such as Mark and John may appear slightly less typical than is sometimes thought.

## 2.2 Paul

Methodologically one could approach the general theme of 'Paul and non-canonical literature' in a number of different ways. One can, for example, ask how apocryphal, or non-canonical, literature has focused on the figure of Paul explicitly. This could be via an analysis of the ways in which Paul's name was adopted as the fictitious author in pseudonymous writings;<sup>77</sup> it could be via a consideration of the ways in which Paul has been explicitly referred to, and appealed to, as an authority, either in direct citations of his letters or in more general ways.<sup>78</sup> Alternatively, one could simply consider the way in which Paul's ideas might fit in with others writing on the same or similar topics in an 'early' period. I offer one brief example here (which may or may not be typical) of the last possibility, though also bringing in other aspects as well.

Paul's discussion of the resurrection of Christians has been much discussed. His indebtedness to Jewish language and ideas for the very notion of 'resurrection' is well known and well documented.<sup>79</sup> So too his (and others') somewhat distinctive claim about the resurrection of Jesus, as an 'event' which is both part of, but also chronologically separate from, the general resurrection of all, or all the righteous, is a well-known peculiarly Christian 'mutation' in Jewish expectations of

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narratives (at least in the form that we have them in the present canonical gospels): the story is told almost exclusively in terms of citations and allusions to passages in Jewish scripture (e.g. the suffering servant passages in Isa 50, 53, or Ps 22), rather than to versions of the narrative of Jesus' death as such. See the discussion in E. B. Allen, *Jesus' Death in Early Christian Memory: The Poetics of the Passion* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2004) ch. 3.

76 There is a brief mention, almost in passing, in 2 *Clem.* 1.2; also Ign. *Smyrn.* 7.1. *Barn.* 5–8, as noted above, gives a more extensive treatment.

77 This would then almost certainly include a number of canonical texts as well! In some ways this would be analogous to the treatment of Jesus traditions above.

78 Cf. 2 Pet 3.15–16 for this as evidently a common practice among early Christians.

79 Cf. A. J. M. Wedderburn, *Baptism and Resurrection* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1987); N. T. Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God* (London: SPCK, 2003).

resurrection. What though of the nature of the resurrection life to which Christians, according to Paul, can look forward?

Paul addresses this question explicitly in 1 Corinthians 15, a chapter which gives rise to enormous exegetical debates about many details. Further, it is uncertain whether Paul remained consistent throughout his letter-writing period in relation to his expectations about the future.<sup>80</sup> However, if one stays with 1 Corinthians 15, the picture is, in some respects at least, clear. Christians will indeed be 'raised'. Further, this resurrection life, which remains future for all, will involve some kind of 'body': a life without a σῶμα is inconceivable for Paul. Yet it is clear from 1 Corinthians 15 that the body which will be the possession of Christians in the future resurrection life is *not* the same as the present physical body. This is the point of the discussion in vv. 35ff., to show that there are *different* kinds of 'bodies', and hence Paul seeks to justify his claim that the future (πνευματικός) body is *not* the same as the present (ψυχικός) body. Hence the conclusion in v. 51: 'we shall not all die, but we shall all be changed'. The same is probably said in the preceding verse: 'flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God' (v. 50). Here, 'flesh and blood' probably refers to those who are living now,<sup>81</sup> and hence 'flesh' (and blood) is probably all but identical with the present physical body which will have to be surrendered and which cannot participate in new resurrection life.<sup>82</sup>

In striking contrast with this are the claims made by the author of *2 Clement*. In *2 Clement* 9, the author explicitly states: 'Let none of you say that this flesh is not judged and does not rise again' (9.1). The author is emphatic that resurrection life, which (like Paul in 1 Corinthians 15 at least) is assumed to be still future, *will* involve the same 'flesh' as present existence. Between this life and future resurrection life, there is no qualitative difference at all: 'As you were called in the flesh, you shall also come in the flesh' (9.4). Whether the author of *2 Clement* knew Paul is debated.<sup>83</sup> But in any case, in relation to this issue, the writer of *2 Clement* affirms precisely what Paul denies. Moreover, this is not something that one could explain as an off-the-cuff remark by either author: both make this issue the main one they are discussing. Nor is it a matter of different writers using the same word(s) (here σάρξ or σῶμα) in different ways: for Paul it is vital in his argument in 1 Corinthians 15 to assert *discontinuity* in the form

80 Theories about a possible 'development' in Paul's thought have classically focused on his eschatological expectations.

81 The classic essay on this remains J. Jeremias, "Flesh and Blood cannot inherit the Kingdom of God", *NTS* 2 (1956) 151–9. The issue is discussed in all the commentaries.

82 'Flesh' (σάρξ) here thus probably does not have the highly charged negative overtones of passages such as Gal 5.16–21; but then Paul's use of σάρξ, σῶμα etc. can be notoriously variable and imprecise.

83 For myself I am not convinced that he did: see my *2 Clement* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012) 43–5.

of existence, the giving up of the present 'body' and receiving a new 'body'; whereas for the writer of *2 Clement*, the whole point of his argument is to assert continuity between this life and a life to come, with the *same* body involved in both.<sup>84</sup>

One could of course dismiss the argument of *2 Clement* as an 'aberration', a let-down from the canonical text and one which 'mistakes' the 'true' representation, i.e. that of Paul.<sup>85</sup> However, when one looks further afield within early Christianity, it is striking that it is not *2 Clement* that seems to be the odd one out, but rather Paul.

The story has been told many times before.<sup>86</sup> But it is clear that a range of early writers align closely with the author of *2 Clement* in insisting that the Christian hope for the future is indeed in the resurrection of the present 'flesh', or the present body in all its materiality. Certainly by the end of the second century, 'resurrection' had become *the* feature that is claimed to distinguish Christianity from other possible 'competitors'.<sup>87</sup> Hence the apologists regularly seek to distance the Christian claims about resurrection from any ideas of the immortality of the soul.<sup>88</sup> So too it becomes a standard feature of Christian argument, seeking to make claims about resurrection 'reasonable', to appeal to analogies which are

84 His argument (perhaps not very persuasive!) is that, as there is this continuity, ethical behaviour involving the present body is vitally important. On the latter point Paul would not disagree! But the part of the argument involving the present 'flesh' proceeds quite differently.

85 A verdict often passed, in my view unfairly, on *2 Clement*: see my essay '2 Clement and Paul', *Paulus – Werk und Wirkung. Festschrift für Andreas Lindemann zum 70. Geburtstag* (ed. P.-G. Klumbies and D. S. Du Toit; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2013) 529–45.

86 See, among others, C. W. Bynum, *The Resurrection of the Body in Western Christianity: 200–1336* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995); the twin articles by R. M. Grant, 'The Resurrection of the Body', *JR* 28 (1948) 120–30, 188–208, are still very valuable, especially for discussion of patristic evidence.

87 See the two articles of W. C. Van Unnik, 'The Newly Discovered "Epistle to Rheginos" on the Resurrection: I & II', *JEH* 15 (1964) 141–52, 153–67 (especially the second). The recent study by M. Vinzent, *Christ's Resurrection in Early Christianity and the Making of the New Testament* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011), questioning how central resurrection was for early Christians (and arguing that this theme only emerges strongly as a reaction to Marcion), suffers from some weaknesses, not least because of some questionable assumptions and/or circular arguments about the dating of some of the relevant texts: see the full discussion and critique by J. Carleton Paget, 'Marcion and the Resurrection: Some Thoughts on a Recent Book', *JSNT* 35 (2012) 74–102.

88 Justin explicitly affirms that his claims are quite distinct from claims about the immortality of a soul: he writes of other people (Christians?) 'who say that there is no resurrection of the dead, and that their souls, when they die, are taken to heaven' (*Dial.* 80.4). Cf. too Tatian, *Orat.* 13; Theophilus, *Ad Autol.* 1.13 (referring to Autolycus's refusal to believe in resurrection, even though he probably accepted some kind of immortality of the soul), also 1.7 (on the claim that God 'will raise your flesh immortal with your soul'). Tertullian devotes a whole treatise to the idea (*De Res.*), arguing that belief in the resurrection is *the* distinguishing feature of the Christian: 'the Christian confidence is the resurrection of the dead. By it we



'in line' with processes in the natural order: hence resurrection is 'natural' (and thereby 'reasonable' and credible) in being analogous to the process of day following night, or a plant emerging from a seed.<sup>89</sup> In one way, such appeals are similar to Paul's use of 'seed' language in 1 Cor 15.36, 42-4. However, the use made of the analogy is quite different in later writers: for Paul it is part of his argument to stress the discontinuity between the present 'body' and the future resurrection 'body'; for later writers it is precisely to stress continuity and/or material identity.<sup>90</sup>

In line with this, such arguments regularly and insistently seek to claim that resurrection will be of the present 'flesh' (or 'body') with no material change at all.<sup>91</sup> For Irenaeus, it was a key part of his argument against the Gnostics that denial of the resurrection of the flesh means denial of the value of God's creation;<sup>92</sup> and at one point he explicitly accuses his opponents of 'perverting' Paul's words in 1 Cor 15.50 ('flesh and blood will not inherit the Kingdom of God') as implying that 'the handiwork of God is not saved' (AH 5.9.1). The importance of the Christian claims specifically about resurrection of the flesh were thus seen as vital in guarding against other (Gnostic) claims questioning the value of the created order. Belief in resurrection (and not just in an immortality of a soul) was seen as an integral part of belief in the value of the creation.

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are believers' (ch. 1); later he asserts: 'In proving that the flesh shall rise again, we prove that no other flesh will partake of the resurrection than that which is in question ...' (ch. 55).

89 See e.g. 1 Clem. 24 (day following night; seed being sown leading to crops); Theophilus, *Ad Autol.* 1.13 (the seasons of the moon, or human beings recovering from illness); Athenagoras, *Res.* 16 (sleep and awakening); Justin, 1 *Apol.* 19 (human beings growing from human 'seeds'). See further Grant, 'Resurrection', 193-4; Bynum, *Resurrection*, 28-33. At other times, Christian writers claim (perhaps in slight contradiction to what is referred to in the preceding note) that Christian resurrection belief is fully supported by what is found in the teaching(s) of Greek philosopher(s): cf. Justin, 1 *Apol.* 20; Ps.-Justin, *Res.* 6; Athenagoras, *Plea* 36.

90 See Bynum, *Resurrection*, 24.

91 Already in Ign. *Smyrn.* 3 (on the resurrection of Jesus); then see further a range of texts including 3 *Cor* 5, 24-35; *Ep. Apost.* 21, 24; Tertullian, *De Res.* 55: 'In proving that the flesh shall rise again, we prove that no other flesh will partake of the resurrection than that which is in question.' The evidence from 3 *Corinthians* is perhaps striking: the author has to use the name of Paul himself effectively to 'correct' (or give the correct interpretation of) the canonical Paul. But then perhaps the author of 3 *Corinthians* is doing no more or less than the author(s) of the Pastorals.

92 'Vain are the disciples of Valentinus ... they exclude the flesh from salvation and cast aside what God has fashioned' (AH 5.1.2). 'Vain are they who despise the entire dispensation of God, and disallow the salvation of the flesh and treat with contempt its regeneration' (5.2.2). 'Our bodies ... shall rise at their appointed time, the Word of God granting them resurrection to the glory of God, even the Father who freely gives to this mortal immortality and to this corruptible incorruption' (5.2.2).

On the other side, however, Irenaeus' claim about others' use of Paul's assertion in 1 Cor 15.50 is well illustrated by the *Gospel of Philip*. The writer of that gospel explicitly cites these words of Paul as part of his own argument that (at least one kind of) 'flesh' is *not* to be thought of as being raised (even though, somewhat confusingly, another type – the flesh of Jesus – is).<sup>93</sup> Paul may be rather closer to the *Gospel of Philip* in this respect than he is to other more 'orthodox' writers,<sup>94</sup> and certainly too Irenaeus and Tertullian have some difficulty in interpreting 1 Cor 15.50 themselves.<sup>95</sup>

Whether strong affirmations about the resurrection of the flesh originate in the context of debates and arguments with Gnostics is uncertain. As noted already, such a claim is already present in Ignatius, arguing against some kind of 'docetic' claims,<sup>96</sup> and a similar situation may already be present in some of the NT resurrection stories as well.<sup>97</sup> Others have claimed that a context of martyrdom was very significant in the developing Christian claims about the resurrection of the present body in all its materiality,<sup>98</sup> as indeed a significant part of similar resurrection language developed within Judaism in such a context (cf. 2 Maccabees 7). On the other hand, it is notable that at least some of the debates do not reflect a specific context of martyrdom or threatening martyrdom.<sup>99</sup> But for whatever reason, it seems that many early Christian writers on resurrection show a significant level of discontinuity with Paul on this issue.

If then one asks who is the 'odd one out' on this issue, at least among those who became dominant within early Christianity, it seems to be Paul rather than

93 *Gos. Phil.* (NHC 2.3) 56.31ff. See A. Lindemann, *Paulus im ältesten Christentum* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1979) 325–6. I have not, however, been able to find much other clear evidence of use of this verse by other Gnostic writers. Lindemann, *Paulus*, 308 mentions a possible allusion in Hippolytus' description of the Ophites in *Ref.* 1.30. See also E. Pagels, *The Gnostic Paul: Gnostic Exegesis of the Pauline Letters* (Philadelphia: TPI, 1992) 85–6, on Gnostic use of 1 Cor 15.50, though with reference primarily to evidence from Tertullian and Irenaeus.

94 See R. McL. Wilson, 'The New Testament in the Nag Hammadi Gospel of Philip', *NTS* 9 (1963) 291–4, at 294: the use made here of Paul represents 'a sufficiently faithful reproduction of the Pauline doctrine to explain why in the second century the Church departed from Paul and emphasized, with such writers as Justin and Tertullian, the resurrection of the flesh. Paul's teaching lent itself too readily to adaptation in a Gnostic interest.'

95 Irenaeus argues that 'flesh (and blood)' here does not mean all physical flesh, but only flesh without the Spirit which gives life (*AH* 5.9.2–4); Tertullian appeals to the fact that the verse in 1 Corinthians 15 talks about inheriting the kingdom, and hence (he argues) does not exclude the resurrection of the physical flesh for judgement: only those who (also) have the Spirit will be able to inherit the kingdom (*De Res.* 50). Such interpretation is surely somewhat forced at best!

96 The nature of possible 'opponents' in Ignatius is debated.

97 Cf. Luke 24.39.

98 See Bynum, *Resurrection of the Body*, 43–51.

99 2 *Clement*; also perhaps Irenaeus, at least in this context. See too Bynum, *Resurrection of the Body*, 47–8, for the way in which even Tertullian does not correlate claims about resurrection with exhortations to martyrdom directly.

the author of 2 *Clement*. Or rather, Paul's positive 'influence' in the subsequent history of influence of the text was not among the eventual 'winners' in any ecclesiastical political and/or religious disputes.

### 3. Concluding Unscientific (or Theological?) Postscript

What then are 'we' to do with such observations about aspects of early Christianity and/or the place of NT writers within that broader spectrum? The issues I have highlighted represent two instances where NT writers are not perhaps typical of a number of their (rough) contemporaries within early Christianity. But what do we do with such a result?

- We can note, perhaps even celebrate, the plurality and wide diversity of thought within 'early' Christianity on a number of issues.
- We could argue that the issues where diversity is apparent are relatively trivial and do not matter too much.
- We can rejoice in, or bemoan, the decisions about the canon which led to some writings, and hence some viewpoints, being canonised and others being effectively rejected. Hence we could welcome, or abhor, the decision that canonised Mark and John with their strong emphasis on the cross but did not canonise Q or *Thomas*, or the decision that canonised 1 Corinthians but not 2 *Clement*. But either way, if we do so, we should perhaps raise the question - why?

We might have differing views on the decision-making process itself in relation to the canon. We might decide that such a process was if not quite divinely inspired (and hence to be accepted whatever the actual decisions), then at least determined by the inherent quality of the NT texts themselves;<sup>100</sup> or we might decide that such a process was innately human, perhaps governed by 'social' and/or 'political' factors of the time (and hence the actual decisions could in principle be questioned). But if we address the results themselves, and make value judgements about them, whether positive or negative, we are presumably doing so on the basis of criteria that are external to the canonising process itself.<sup>101</sup> If we welcome, or question, a decision that e.g. accepts Mark but rejects *Thomas*,

100 Cf. n. 45 above, for some claiming that the present content of the NT canon is in some way or other justified because of the inherent quality and/or 'theological' superiority of the texts included. (For Hengel, 'Aufgaben', 332, this is also coupled with claims about their chronological priority over potential alternatives. Hengel though does also suggest that the theological superiority in some sense is what justifies the existence of this Society: others might venture to question this!)

101 We can perhaps say that texts are 'good' because they are canonical; but if we want to claim that in some sense texts might be justifiably canonical because they are 'good', then

our very act of welcoming or questioning presupposes the use of criteria external to the canonising process as such, and more integrally related to the contents of the texts in question.

We are then driven inexorably to some kind of ‘canon within the canon’,<sup>102</sup> however we may wish to label it. And we may be driven to try to determine *why* individual Christian authors argued as they did, to seek to understand not only the surface claims made but also the possible underlying causes driving them, if we wish to make any assessment, or value judgement, about them. It does also mean that, in any such process, the NT texts themselves cannot *ipso facto* be exempt from possible (‘theological’) critique and questioning. Hence some kind of ‘Sachkritik’ is inevitable.

It is, I believe, partly for this reason that a focus wider than one simply on the NT texts alone, bringing into play the broad spread of early Christianity in all its diversity, is vital to the health of our discipline. It exposes us to the breadth of early Christian life and thought. As such, it may challenge us to think through, and to rethink, what might be our response to the claims made by these texts, whatever our background, our prior or current beliefs, or our ‘religious’ persuasions. And that is perhaps why the subject we are privileged to study here in this Society remains so fascinating and compelling.<sup>103</sup>

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we must have some criterion outside that of canonicity itself if the argument is not to become tautologous and/or circular.

102 Cf. E. Käsemann, ed., *Das Neue Testament als Kanon* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1970). Theissen, *Theory*, 271–85 talks of ‘the grammar of primitive Christian faith’ (‘Die Grammatik des urchristlichen Glaubens’) as ‘the inner canon within the canon’ (though Theissen is rather more open to the positive religious value of a number of early non-canonical texts (e.g. some Jewish Christian texts and the *Gospel of Thomas*), but also claiming that Gnostic texts are excluded because of their failure to hold together the twin ‘rules’ of the ‘grammar’ of early Christian faith, above all the twin axioms of monotheism and belief in the redeemer).

103 I am very grateful to Professors Christopher Rowland, Heikki Räisänen, Ismo Dunderberg and Robert Morgan for reading through earlier drafts of this paper. None of them agreed with all the views expressed here, but I am grateful to them for their challenging questions and comments.