

JOHANNINE DOMINICAL SAYINGS  
AS METATEXTS OF SYNOPTIC SAYINGS OF JESUS:  
REFLECTIONS ON A NEW CATEGORY  
WITHIN RECEPTION HISTORY\*

*Michael Theobald*

There's no denying that the Johannine Jesus speaks entirely differently from the Synoptic Jesus. Whereas the latter proclaims the kingdom of God, the former continuously speaks of *himself*: "I am the bread of life" (John 6:35); "I have come that you might have life" (John 10:10); "I have come from the Father into the world, I will leave the world again and go to the Father" (John 16:27).<sup>1</sup> This persistent, penetrating "I" seems to have little to do with the simple statements about God by the Synoptic Jesus, which scholars have taken to be more likely to be historical. Further, vast portions of the Synoptic sayings tradition are absent in the Fourth Gospel. The words of the Sermon on the Mount of Matthew and the Sermon on the Plain in Luke are virtually absent and together with them the specific ethos of Jesus that culminates in the command to love one's neighbor. The Synoptic parables of Jesus are also unknown in John; what the Gospel of John offers by way of imagery and parables spoken by Jesus are hardly recognizable as deriving from the ingenious storyteller, who was both restricted to and sensitive of the situation of his hearers in Galilee (see Theissen and Merz 1996, 286–310). The Johannine Jesus is much more a "revealer" of deep religious insights around whom "students" or "initiates" gather, not a popular preacher who wants to gather all Israel. The relationship of the Gospel of John to the Synoptic Jesus tradition thus remains an unresolved

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1. Unless otherwise stated, all biblical translations are my own.

puzzle, as does the relationship of the Johannine Jesus to the presumed historical Jesus, the characteristics of whom one rightly seeks to uncover primarily through Synoptic channels—Q, the Gospel of Mark, and special Matthean and Lukan material—and less so through John.<sup>2</sup>

At the same time, the numerous references to particular places in the Fourth Gospel (references not offered in the Synoptics) are regularly—and rightly—referred to in secondary literature as indicators of historicity. Whereas the Fourth Evangelist gives concrete names and descriptions of locations, the Gospel of Mark remains strikingly austere in this respect. The local color of the Fourth Gospel seems to rest on *direct* knowledge of these places, and archaeology impressively confirms a number of these statements (see, e.g., von Wahlde 2006a; Anderson 2006a). This is especially clear in John's emphasis on Jerusalem, with its places, traditions, and people. In addition to the names of Jerusalemites already known from the Synoptics (Joseph of Arimathea, etc.), the Fourth Evangelist offers some new ones, such as Nicodemus (John 3:1–8; 7:50–52; 19:39) and Clopas (John 19:25; see Theobald 2010b). It is apparent that one encounters memories here—memories of “Jewish Christians” whose spiritual center was in Jerusalem. Such memories shed light on these “Jewish Christians” themselves, for example, their association of the pools of Bethesda with healing, before these sites were destroyed by the Romans. Whether light is also shed on Jesus is an entirely different question.<sup>3</sup>

This observation brings us to the difficult topic of “memory,” currently being closely examined in a number of disciplines and considerably utilized for the construction of various theories (see, e.g., J. Assmann 1988, 9–19; 1992; A. Assmann 2003; Straub 1998). While space does not permit a thorough discussion of this research, it serves here as a backdrop to the question: How did Johannine memory take shape? Did it suppress or omit certain features of Jesus tradition intentionally, or did its tradents merely

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2. Also perennially controversial is the question of whether the Fourth Evangelist knew and used the Synoptic Gospels, or at least one or two of them, as sources. I am convinced, on the basis of all of the material discussed here, that he did *not* use the Synoptic Gospels, but rather wrote his book (which betrays no knowledge of the term “gospel”) *independently* of the Synoptics. See further Theobald 2009, 76–81; 2010c; Anderson 2006b.

3. In my estimate, the Fourth Gospel derives these concrete details, such as the local Palestinian color, either from its own independent tradition or from the so-called “signs source.” See Theobald 2009, 1, 32–42.

lack access to Synoptic traditional material, perhaps due to external factors such as insufficient communication between early Christian communities in different regions? Both factors likely contributed: in Johannine circles, certain features of Jesus were purposefully suppressed, while others were simply unknown. The scholarly consensus is, at any rate, that Johannine memory is distinguished by its “creativity” in dealing with early Jesus traditions (see, e.g., Zumstein 2004). But what exactly does “creativity” mean? How can one measure it? What gains and losses result from it?

In the discussion to follow, I will test a new category for describing reception history: the “metatext.”<sup>4</sup> The idea of a metatext can, in my opinion, help better distinguish the processes through which Johannine material took shape. My thesis is that Johannine dominical sayings can be described as metatexts of Synoptic sayings of Jesus, although the relation between pretext and metatext can vary considerably. I will first define the term metatext and its methodological implications, then apply the concept examples from the Synoptic tradition and the Gospel of Thomas before turning to the Gospel of John.

### Defining and Identifying Metatexts

Before considering the diachronic compositional process that lies behind the Gospel of John, it seems reasonable to first consider “Johannine creativity” in light of inner-Johannine relationships. This includes the phenomenon of the intratextual redaction of the Gospel, which has received intensive treatment in recent years, especially in the study of the so-called “Farewell Discourses.” To the first Farewell Discourse (John 13:31–14:31) are attached further Farewell Discourses: two further discourses appear in John 15:1–16:4a and 16:4b–33, followed by a long prayer in John 17. Andreas Dettwiler speaks of this phenomenon in terms of rereading (*relecture*) and distinguishes between the first Farewell Discourse as “reference text” (*Bezugstext*) and the following discourses as “reception texts” (*Rezeptionstexte*; Dettwiler 1995, esp. 46–52). The latter do not replace the former, nor are they written into a redacted form of it.<sup>5</sup> The model employed is not one of substitution, but of *Fortschreibung*—perpetuation.

4. See Genette (1982, 10), who, on the category of “métatextualité,” writes, “C’est, par excellence, la relation critique.”

5. The exception being John 13:34–35, which Dettwiler (1995, 63, 129, also 74–79), together with other exegetes, understands as a “*spätere Einfügung*.”

It has to do not with supersession but with continuity, the intent being to explicate the base text. The motivation for this is to be found in the new experiences of the Johannine community and was also prompted by discussions within the Johannine “school,” which find expression in the additional discourses, as well.<sup>6</sup>

Such processes of rereading are literary in nature. The Fourth Gospel was read at the gatherings of the Johannine community, was the object of theological controversy, and was redacted until it ultimately obtained its full form that we know from the study of its textual history. The situation is different, however, when we ask about the origins of the Johannine lines of tradition. Here one finds not only *continuity* but also *discontinuity*, and with some of John’s distinctive features, the latter seem to have dominated. This tendency, not with the intent of “investigating *everything* carefully from the very first” (Luke 1:3), but rather to deliberately filter the tradition: cutting out that which was deemed unfit, adding variety and also collapsing similar material. In what follows, I proceed from the assumption, more comprehensively set forth and defended in my book, *Herrenworte im Johannesevangelium* (2002), that the lengthy monologues and dialogues of the Fourth Gospel are based upon core sayings (*Kernworten*) that derive from the oral tradition of the Johannine communities. Insofar as such traditions cohere with a Synoptic background, they yield information about the Johannine process of transformation. Note that I use the term “Synoptic background” to distinguish this pre-Synoptic tradition from its current embodiment in the Synoptic Gospels.

As to whether these Johannine sayings are authentic sayings of Jesus (in such an investigation they are the first to be called into question), I am highly skeptical. If I were to arrange these core sayings (*Kernworte*) by likelihood of authenticity into the categories proposed by Paul Anderson (“possible,” “plausible,” “likely,” “certain”; Anderson 2009b), I know of only a few that would fall on the positive side of the scale. Things would look different, however, if it were possible to identify Johannine sayings as metatexts of Synoptic-like tradition. That would allow one to understand them at least as *Fortschreibungen* of these traditions. But *Fortschreibungen* in what way?

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6. Dettweiler (1995, 46–52) differentiates “die Entfaltungsbedürftigkeit des Glaubens selbst” that prompts relecture (following Hans Weder) from “eine veränderte geschichtliche Situation auf seiten der ersten Rezipienten der joh. Texte.”

Over against the literary processes of intratextual redaction mentioned earlier, the phenomenon under discussion here is to be distinguished as *substitution* of a specific pretext with a metatext, not merely a *Fortschreibung*—more an innovative new creation than the preservation of an old logion. By “pretext” I mean a fixed, stable saying tradition such as we know from the Synoptics. By “metatext,” I mean a Johannine (oral) unit that stands in relation to a pretext. This relationship can encompass transformations of any sort: adding depth and explication, but also criticism of and even the reversal of the pretext into its opposite. The determining factor is that the pretext is replaced by the new unit and is no longer passed on (see Genette 1982, 10), and some of this can be seen in Matthew’s and Luke’s adaptations of Mark.

### Metatexts in Other Early Christian Literature

It is difficult to define precise criteria by which the pretext underlying a Johannine unit can be identified. The challenge can be demonstrated by examples from the Synoptic tradition and other early Christian literature.<sup>7</sup>

#### Metatexts and the Synoptic Tradition

There is little wonder that the Synoptic tradition offers only scattered examples of metatext in the sense described above, in view of the generally more (than John) faithful transmission of Jesus sayings that it offers. The Synoptics generally do not substitute Q or the core sayings of Jesus, but rather arrange the sayings and append “commentary sayings” to them (see here Wanke 1980; 1981). Despite an innovative redactional process, continuity dominates. There are, nevertheless, examples of metatexts in the Synoptic tradition, several of which may be reviewed here.

The first example to be discussed here is the parable of the Wheat and the Tares (Matt 13:24–30), which can be thought of as a metatext to the parable of the Seed Growing Secretly (Mark 4:26–29). That the latter is found in neither Matthew nor Luke has long prompted discussion. A

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7. Of course, it would be ideal if a metatext were to make explicit reference to its *Vorlage*, but such is not the case in the Gospel of John—with the exception of the frequent “self-citations” of Jesus and other figures in the narrative. These self-citations are typical of the Gospel of John (see Theobald 2002, 23–41) and are, as a rule, intratextual in nature. At the same time, they may evidence a broader awareness of *Fortschreibung*.

plausible assumption is that the narrative of this apparently passive peasant, who sits idly by instead of doing something, was offensive to, and therefore dropped by, both evangelists, so much so that Luke does not even replace it.<sup>8</sup> The parable that replaces it in Matthew sounds like a *Gegengeschichte* to Mark's optimistic parable (see Luz 1990, 322; Klauck 1978, 227). In Matthew, the kingdom of heaven does not come automatically; it will come about, but there are also powers set against it, specifically the evil enemy.

Mark 4:26–27: The *kingdom* of God is as if *someone* [ἄνθρωπος] would scatter *seed* on the ground, and would *sleep* and rise night and day, and the seed would *sprout* and grow, he does not know how ...

Matt 13:24–30: The *kingdom* of heaven may be compared to *someone* [ἄνθρωπος], who sowed good *seed* in his field; but while everybody was *asleep*, an enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and then went away. So when the plants *sprouted* and bore grain ...

Both the identical sequence of important keywords and the corresponding beginnings of both parables support the hypothesis that the Matthean narrative is indeed based upon the Markan narrative. In Matthew's rendering, Mark's version is replaced and given an entirely new form "based on the experience that, despite the 'sowing' of the kingdom of God, evil remains truly active" (Luz 1990, 323). The background for this change is likely concern about the "emergence of evil" itself "in the community" (325). The facts that linguistic factors speak against Matthean authorship and that the allusions to Mark 4:26–29 are constitutive of the narrative strongly support the thesis that it was "formed" in the Matthean community as a way of passing on, in "a deeper or critical" way, the parable in Mark and was then utilized by the Evangelist in the composition of his Gospel.<sup>9</sup> We are deal-

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8. Bovon (1989, 418) discusses possible reasons why Luke did not reproduce the Markan parable and concludes that "Der Terminus ἀνθρώματος störte ihn (sc. Luke) wie auch Matthäus, der dieses Gleichnis symptomatisch durch das vom Unkraut im Weizen 'ersetzte' (Mt 13:24–30)."

9. Moreover, one may reasonably detect a difference between the parable and its subsequent interpretation in Matt 13:36–43; each, however, quite certainly goes back to the Matthean community (see Luz 1990, 323). This reading assumes that the Gospel of Mark was, first and foremost, read *critically* in the Matthean community, perhaps principally by the "teachers," and this before it was completely transformed by the

ing here, then, not with an authentic parable of Jesus, but with a metatext of one, namely, the Parable of the Seed Growing Secretly.

A second and entirely differently situated example is found in the story of the Great Catch of Fish (Luke 5:1–11; par. John 21:1–11), which culminates in Luke with Jesus's statement to Peter, "Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching people" (Luke 5:10). Here we likely have a single, isolated tradition that was transformed secondarily into a postresurrection narrative in John 21, while in Luke it was combined with the narrative of the calling of the first pairs of brothers known from the Gospel of Mark (Mark 1:16–20). The Markan narrative of the call of Simon and his brother Andrew likewise culminates with the words "fishers of men" (Mark 1:17 // Matt 4:19). What can one say about the origin of the *Geschenkwunder* of the great catch? First, it is notable that already in Mark Jesus saw Simon and Andrew while fishing. Second, the metaphorical command is also the dimax of the miracle story. It is therefore plausible that "the miracle story can be best described as midrash or a further development of the already existing traditional saying" (Bovon 1989, 234).<sup>10</sup> We have here a metatext, this time with a transformation of the genre: a saying of Jesus is transformed into a miracle story that develops Jesus's fishing metaphor in a narrative context.

### Metatexts and the Gospel of Thomas

As is well known, the relationships between traditions in the Gospel of Thomas are very complex. This realization begins already with the question of which text of Thomas one will consult, the Coptic text or the Greek text preserved in the Oxyrhynchus papyri. Contrary to popular opinion, the two are by no means identical, as has been convincingly shown most recently in a study by Wilfried Eisele (2010), who offers

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Evangelist, who joined other sources to it. Also read critically was, for example, the opening of the Gospel of Mark with the baptism of Jesus, which indirectly reveals the basis for the so-called "infancy narrative" in Matthew.

10. "Der Wunderbericht lässt sich am ehesten als Midrasch oder als Weiterentwicklung der vorliegenden Wortüberlieferung beschreiben" (Bovon 1989, 234). Similarly, Bultmann (1995, 232) proposes "das Wunder dürfte ... aus dem Wort von den 'Menschenfischern' (V. 10) herausgesponnen sein als dessen symbolische Vordarstellung." Then again, it could also be that Luke has conflated the calling narrative in Mark with the catch of fish miracle of John (see Anderson 2010a).

numerous examples of sayings that are to be explained as *Fortschreibungen* of other sayings, produced under new circumstances. As regards its relationship to the canonical Gospels, the Gospel of Thomas contains logia whose form may be older than those preserved in the Synoptics, but also logia for which the opposite is true. The same is true of the relationship between the Gospel of Thomas and John (see Nordsieck 2006; Plisch 2007). Here I wish simply to compare the presumed processes of transformation in the Johannine tradition with those in the sayings tradition of the Gospel of Thomas (see also Theobald 2002, 260 n. 70, 445–48, 503–4, 538–44; Popkes 2004, 641–74). That the Gospel of Thomas contains metatexts in the sense identified above is obvious, as may be illustrated by two examples.

The motif “seek and find” occurs not only many times in John, but also in the Gospel of Thomas (2, 92, 94; see Attridge 2000, 294–302). The Gospel of Thomas 2, for which there are also parallels in patristic literature, is possibly an elaborated version of the saying in Luke 11:9–10 // Matt 7:7–8 (i.e., Q material).<sup>11</sup> While the saying in Q consists of synonymous parallelism together with corresponding reasons for the injunctions, the saying in the Gospel of Thomas takes the form of a chain of inferences (Eisele 2010, 79–81). The Thomasine version is contemplative and indicates that “finding” produces not only joy (cf. Matt 13:44) but also astonishment and wonder.

Gos. Thom. 2 (NHC II, 2, 32:14–19)<sup>12</sup>: He who *seeks* [ὁ ζητῶν] must not stop *seeking* [ζητεῖν] until he *finds* [εὑρηγ]; and when he finds, he will be bewildered; and if he is bewildered, he will marvel, and will be king over the All.

Q 11:9c (10b): *Search* [ζητεῖτε], and you will *find* [εὑρήσετε].

A second example, Gos. Thom. 30, is beset with many textual problems (see Eisele 2010, 149–71; Englezakis 1979). The discussion here follows the Greek version, as reconstructed by Attridge (1979).

11. So H. Koester 1980, 239; Patterson 1993, 19; contra Nordsieck, who writes that the saying could “durchaus Jesus nahestehen” (2006, 37). On patristic parallels to Gos. Thom. 2, see Eisele 2010, 69–99.

12. According to Eisele 2010, 96–99, the Greek version here is older and served as the *Vorlage* of the Coptic.



Gos. Thom. 30 (P. Oxy 1.23–24): Where [*three*] are, [they are] without God. And where there is only one— I say: *I am* [ἐγὼ εἰμι] with him.

Matt 18:20: Where two or *three* are gathered [συνηγμένοι] in my name, *I am* there [ἐκεῖ εἰμι] among them.

The pretext of Gos. Thom. 30 is, without doubt, the dominical saying in Matt 18:20 (see also Luz 1997, 41). Since the previous verse, Matt 18:19, promises an answer to the concordant prayer of two people, it is clear that verse 20 refers to the gathering of two or three in the Christian worship service (Gnilka 1988, 140). It is in this context that the saying promises the presence of the exalted Christ. In Gos. Thom. 30, however, the situation is entirely different. The Gospel of Thomas adds to the Synoptic dominical saying but also turns it around, producing the opposite meaning: “Each gathering—even of Christians—is, as such, without God, since Jesus promised his presence exclusively to those who are alone” (Eisele 2010, 165; also Nordsieck 2006, 133). In this case, the metatext entirely does away with its pretext, while at the same time reclaiming the authority of the pretext for its own purposes by introducing the saying with “Jesus says.” It apparently also found recognition as a (new) saying of Jesus.<sup>13</sup> Through this discontinuity, the author of the saying sought to affirm what he believed to be the true intention of Jesus.

### Metatexts in the Gospel of John

Numerically, the Gospel of John offers few sayings of Jesus that are closely related to Synoptic parallels. The following, however, may be mentioned (see further Theobald 2002, 60–196).

Saying/Theme	Fourth Gospel	Parallels
entering the kingdom of God	John 3:3, 5	Matt 18:3; Mark 10:15; Luke 18:17

13. Eisele (2010, 161) refers to (Ps-)Ephrem’s *Commentary on the Diatessaron* (14.24), where reference is made to the final line of the saying and where it is without question regarded as a saying of Jesus: “Just as the Anointed looks after his flock in all things that they need, so he also bestows comfort to counter the sorrow that being alone brings, when he says, ‘Where one is, there I am also.’ In order that all who are alone will be comforted.”

prophets being without honor in their own country	John 4:44	Mark 6:4; Matt 13:57; Luke 4:24; Gos. Thom. 31 (P. Oxy 1.30–35)
keeping/losing one's life and following Jesus	John 12:25–26	Mark 8:34–35 // Luke 14:27; 17:33
the messengers/servants of Jesus and their reception	John 13:16	Matt 10:24; Luke 6:40
	John 13:20; 15:20–21	Matt 10:40; Luke 10:16; Mark 9:37 parr.
the answer to prayer “in the name” of Jesus	John 14:12–14	Mark 11:24; Luke 11:9–10
the forgiveness of sins	John 20:23	Matt 16:19b–c; 18:18

Beyond these sayings, there are also further reflections of Synoptic tradition of various kinds in the Fourth Gospel, “reflections” in the sense that the parallels may be detected on the levels of form and content. Among the former are to be counted dominical oratorical forms that live on in Johannine tradition, such as the introductory formula “Amen (amen), I say to you” (see Theobald 2002, 50–53) and statements built on the ἤλθον-sayings model (“I have come ...”; e.g., John 5:43; 10:10; 12:46–47; Mark 2:17; 10:45; Luke 19:10). Shared genres such as aphorisms, parables, or christological wisdom sayings should also be included in this category. On the level of content, the spectrum is just as wide, ranging from parallel motifs and motif clusters that have found their way from older Synoptic tradition into Johannine dominical sayings to genuine metatexts that wholly transform Synoptic sayings. The following discussion will illustrate this phenomenon with a few select examples from across the spectrum. The categorization, however, is not always unambiguous, since there are several borderline cases.

### Johannine Transformation of Synoptic Motifs

Three Johannine dominical sayings motifs that perhaps have a specific Synoptic background will be discussed here: the “gathering” of Israel; “casting out,” a judgment theme; and Jesus as the “wisdom” of God. All three also possess, as would be expected, roots in early Jewish literature.

The “gathering” of *Israel*, the restoration of the twelve tribes, and the return of Jews scattered throughout the whole world are themes that play

an important role in early Jewish literature.<sup>14</sup> *Συνάγειν* is one of the Greek terms used to represent these ideas (see LXX Ezek 28:25; 29:13), and it appears also in the Synoptic tradition and thrice in John. John first introduces this sayings motif in the imagery of the “harvest” in John 4:36: “The reaper is already receiving wages and is gathering fruit for eternal life.” It reappears in the directive of Jesus at the end of the feeding narrative, “Gather up the fragments left over, so that nothing may be lost” (John 6:12), and finally in the comment at John 11:51–52, “Jesus was about to die for the nation, and not for the nation only, but to *gather* into one the *dispersed* children of God.” The motif of eschatological gathering is also evident in the parable of the Shepherd and His Sheep in John 10:1–5, as well as in John 10:16 (see also John 11:51–52; see Theobald 2002, 353–80). The call of Jesus to gather the left-over pieces of bread (John 6) is without parallel in the Synoptics and may possess a deeper meaning: in that the collected remnants fill twelve baskets (John 6:13) and the Twelve remain faithful at the end of the narrative (6:67–71), the command of Jesus likely refers to the eschatological “gathering” of the full number of the elect (see Theobald 2009, 435–36). A connection with the motif of election or predestination appears to be characteristic of the use of the theme of “gathering” in the Fourth Gospel.

When one asks whence the Fourth Gospel derives this motif, one is first led to pre-Johannine tradition, especially the imagery now found in John 4:35–36b. Though this sayings unit may go back to Jesus, it is perhaps more likely a pre-Johannine *Fortsschreibung* of Luke 10:2 // Matt 9:37–38 in that it reflects a very developed debate on the question of when the awaited end time will come.<sup>15</sup> Here, the image of gathering fruit “for eternal life” also represents an understanding of mission as gathering together the chosen ones. This naturally brings the Synoptic tradition into consideration; there, one encounters the motif of eschatological gathering both in Matthew’s special material as well as in Q (e.g., Matt 12:30 // Luke 11:23, “Whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather

14. See, e.g., Bar 4:37; Pss. Sol. 11.2; 17.44; and Amidah, or The Eighteen Benedictions (Shemoneh Esreh) 10 (see Strack and Billerbeck 4:212). The messiah “will gather Israel” in Pss. Sol. 17.26; see also, e.g., Matt 23:37 and 24:31.

15. This debate is echoed in the way the Johannine Jesus sets the two ideas against one another: “*Do you not say: ‘Four months more, then comes the harvest?’ But I tell you, look around you, and see how the fields are ripe for harvesting.*”

with me scatters”).<sup>16</sup> Granted, the originally independent saying does not explicitly speak of Israel, but it is to be understood that the anticipated “gathering” of the people will take place in Jesus, though in unexpected ways. Moreover, traces in the oldest Jesus traditions indicate that the gathering of Israel—under the banner of the advent of the βασιλεία—was central to his message.

Is, then, the similarly-themed Johannine motif connected to these traditions? Though possible, this cannot be demonstrated with certainty, in that the parable of the Shepherd in John 10 is also found in the Ezekiel tradition. The Johannine transformation of the motif cannot, at any rate, be overlooked. The core of the motif is now not the gathering of those in Israel who are willing to convert, but rather the gathering of the chosen, be they Jews or Gentiles, into the community of the saved (see John 10:16; 11:51–52).

To take a second example, “to cast out” ([ἐκ]βάλλειν [ἔξω]) is used in the Synoptics and the Johannine Literature with three different senses: socially, in the sense of “ban,” “withdraw,” “excommunicate” (Luke 6:22; see John 9:34–35; 3 John 10); in the context of exorcisms, where it means “drive out” (e.g., Mark 1:34, 39, 43; Luke 11:14–15, 18–20); and as a term of judgment, as in “cast out (into outer darkness),” for which the last saying of Isaiah (66:24) serves as background (see Reiser 1990, 222–24). The discussion here will focus on the use of (ἐκ)βάλλειν ἔξω as a term of judgment.

The phrase is found in two Jesus sayings in Q that are widely considered to be authentic. One of these is the statement of judgment found in Matt 8:11 // Luke 13:28. Here, Jesus very provocatively proclaims that the gentiles will come to the eschatological meal with the patriarchs of Israel, while “the sons of the kingdom” will be “cast out” (to the place of the damned, which in Jewish tradition was represented by the Valley of Hinnom opposite Mount Zion). In addition, the parable of the Salt in Luke 14:34 // Matt 5:13 could have read, in Q, as follows: “Salt is good; but if salt has lost its taste, how can it be used for seasoning? It is fit neither for the soil nor for the manure heap; *they throw it away* [ἔξω βάλλουσιν].” Though the tone of the passage is already one of judgment, Matthew strengthens

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16. The theme of eschatological gathering is found especially in the parables of Matthew’s special material (see Matt 13:30, 47). In Q, one encounters the gather/scatter contrast only in the saying preserved in Matt 12:30 // Luke 11:23 (cf. John 11:51–52). The authenticity of the logion is, however, uncertain; see here Luz 1990, 256 (“kaum eine Aussage möglich”).

this element by having the salt “thrown out and trampled under foot” (Matt 5:13). In fact, (ἐκ)βάλλειν ἔξω often appears in Matthew in the context of judgment (see 3:10; 5:13; 7:19; 22:13; and 25:30).

This phrase also appears thrice in the Fourth Gospel as a term of judgment, each time in pieces of tradition that have been subject to redaction. The presumably pre-Johannine saying in John 6:37 offers the motif in its characteristically negative form: “Everything that the Father gives me will come to me, and anyone who comes to me I will never *drive away* [οὐ μὴ ἐκβάλω ἔξω]”—in other words, “I will not judge the chosen ones” (cf. John 3:17–21). In John 12:31, perhaps a metatext of the saying of Jesus regarding the fall of Satan from heaven (Luke 10:18, 20), judgment is directed exclusively towards the “ruler of this world”: “Now is the judgment of this world; now the ruler of this world will be *driven out* [ἐκβληθήσεται ἔξω]” (see Theobald 2005). Finally, a parenetic aspect is inherent in the imagery of the vine in John 15:6: “Whoever does not abide in me is thrown away [ἐβλήθη ἔξω] like a branch and withers.” Again, one can ask whether this phrase derives from older Jesus traditions. The answer, again, is that it is possible, but it cannot be demonstrated conclusively.

The final example to be discussed here relates to a specific logion reflecting a “wisdom Christology.” A synopsis of John 7:33–34; 8:21; and 13:33 shows that these three passages are based upon one and the same dominical saying, the original form of which is most likely evident in 7:33–34 (see further Theobald 2002, 424–55):

I will be with you a little while longer,  
 then I am going ....  
 You will *search* for me,  
 but you will not *find* me.  
 And where I am,  
 you cannot come.

This logion identifies Jesus with the preexistent Wisdom that comes from heaven, is visiting Earth, and will return again to its heavenly home. The point of the saying is the announcement that time is limited: people must make a decision, because it will soon be too late. One will search for Jesus, but no longer be able to find him. By implication, there is also a season during which the offer of salvation given in Jesus can be accepted.

Is this Johannine logion perhaps a revision of an earlier saying of Jesus, perhaps Luke 11:9–10 // Matt 7:7–8 (“Seek, and you shall find”)? If so, does the Johannine logion reverse the unconditional promise of Jesus

on the basis of negative experience of its opposite: “You will search for me, but you will *not* find me”? Such a link between the Johannine logion and this saying of Jesus can, I submit, be ruled out. Both the motif “seeking and finding” and its opposite (“seeking and *not* finding”) are well established in early Jewish literature, and it seems more cogent to suggest that the Johannine logion drew the motif from this literature.<sup>17</sup> Certainly it can be said that the Johannine logion revises an already established genre of Jesus tradition, namely, logia that reflect wisdom Christology, in which Jesus and Wisdom are connected. Such sayings are found already in Q (see Q 10:22; 11:31; 11:49–51) and were then further developed by Luke and particularly Matthew.<sup>18</sup>

### From Redacted Words of Jesus to Johannine Metatexts

Thus far, we have considered only the reception in Johannine sayings of *motifs* that can be connected to Jesus and have shown how difficult it is to identify these unambiguously. We shall now turn to the reception of *sayings* of Jesus in the Johannine communities. The select examples that follow are organized based on the degree of freedom employed in reworking them. First to be examined are Johannine sayings whose Synoptic pretext is still recognizable in form and content. These are followed here by sayings whose Synoptic pretexts are recognizable only through an unaltered signature motif. The Johannine creativity in dealing with sayings of Jesus will thereby be evident, showing that the move toward developing entirely new sayings of Jesus in the Johannine tradition was indeed a very small step.

The first sample saying to be considered here, on the theme of “entering the Kingdom of God,” appears in John 3:3, 5. The saying on “becoming like a child” is found in the Synoptic tradition as embodied in Mark 10:15

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17. On “seeking and *not* finding,” see Prov 1:28; Hos 5:6; Amos 8:11–12; and 4 Ezra 5:10; on “seeking and finding,” see Deut 4:29; Jer 29:11–14a; Isa 55:6; Prov 8:17, 35–36; Sir 6:27; 51:13–14, 26–27; Wis 6:12–14, 16a. Parables based on the motif cluster “seeking and finding” are also found in the Jesus tradition; see Matt 13:44, 45–46; 18:12–14 // Luke 15:3–7, 8–10, 11–32.

18. That Matthew replaced the introduction of the saying in Q 11:49–51 (“therefore also the Wisdom of God said”) with the “I” (ἐγώ) of Jesus could indicate a Matthean identification of Jesus with Wisdom (see, e.g., Suggs 1970; contra Luz 1997, 370–71).

// Luke 18:17 and Matt 18:3. A careful, tradition-critical analysis of these texts reveals that the oldest form of the logion is probably that preserved in Matt 18:3 (see Theobald 2002, 61–97). John 3:3, 5 betrays the existence of an alternate version that is also known from patristic sources. The form in Justin Martyr (*1 Apol.* 61.4–5) is probably independent of the Gospel of John and derived, rather, from a baptismal catechesis.<sup>19</sup> The Fourth Evangelist redacted the saying and utilized it as a core saying in his dialog between Jesus and Nicodemus. In so doing, and in keeping with his “dualism,” he transformed the motif of being “born again” to one of being “born from above,” a variant found only here.

Matt 18:3: *Amen, I tell you:* Unless you ... become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.

John 3:3, 5: *Amen, (amen), I tell you:* If someone is not born again [ἀνα-γεννηθῆ] of water and spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.

A comparison of these two versions shows that Matthew preserves the oldest form, of which the pre-Johannine tradition is to be regarded as a further development. The simple imagery of Jesus on “becoming like children” is transformed by John into the symbolic new birth of baptismal theology.

In this case, the nature of the *Fortschreibung* is noteworthy. The pre-Johannine version and the pretext deriving from Jesus are of the same genre (an “initiation saying,” or *Einlaß-Spruch*), the same form (a conditional clause), and use the same terminology (“kingdom of God/heaven”). The changes to the saying do not deviate from these general features. In this case, then, the Johannine *Fortschreibung* shows itself to be rather moderate and conservative. That a pretext can also be more radically recast is shown in the next two examples.

A second example appears in a Johannine “lifted up” saying. John 3:14–15 is no ad hoc creation of the Evangelist; rather, it stems from the

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19. Justin, *1 Apol.* 61.4, “Unless you are reborn you shall not enter the kingdom of heaven.” See here Minns and Parvis 2009, 239 n. 4: “Apart from the lack of exact linguistic parallels between Justin and John, it is difficult to understand why Justin would not have quoted John 3:5 directly, if it was available to him. For the phrase ‘unless someone is reborn of water’ equates the notions of rebirth and of baptism, whereas Justin here seems able only to juxtapose them.”

Johannine dominical saying tradition, out of which it was formed as a metatext of the old Synoptic logion of the Suffering Son of Man (see Theobald 2002, 201–23). This hypothesis assumes that the three Son of Man sayings in Mark 8:31; 9:31; and 10:33–34 are based on an oral *Urfassung* that is utilized by Mark in three variant forms, the oldest of which is probably preserved in Mark 8:31 (see Hoffmann 1995b). The saying was known in the pre-Johannine tradition and was there transformed into the new saying in John 3:14–15.

Mark 8:31	John 3:14–15
1	And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness,
2 The Son of Man must	so <i>must the Son of Man</i>
3 undergo great suffering,	
4 [and be rejected	
by the elders,	
the chief priests,	
and the scribes,]	
5 and be killed,	
6 and after three days rise.	be lifted up,
7	that whoever believes may have eternal life in him.

The central statement that “*the Son of Man must*” (line 2), combined with a statement that he is fated for death, is identical in both sayings. This would also have formed the nucleus of the presumed oldest version of the saying, combined with a statement about the Son of Man being “killed” and “raised” (as in Mark 8:31). The secondary pre-Johannine version subsumed this sequence of the death and resurrection of the Son of Man under the discourse dealing with his “exaltation” (itself inspired by Isa 52:13) and affixed a soteriological statement (line 7). That the original saying spoke of the “necessity” of the suffering of the Son of Man invited the explanation of this “necessity” on the basis of Scripture.<sup>20</sup> While the

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20. Note the parallels between the prediction of the suffering, death, and resurrection of the Son of Man in Mark (Mark 8:31; 9:31; 10:34) and the listing up of the Son of Man in John (John 3:14; 8:28; 12:32–33). Are these two different ways of saying basically the same thing between these two traditions?



oldest version employed the *passio-iusti* tradition, which Mark strengthened by adding line 4 (with an allusion to Ps 118:22), the pre-Johannine tradition chose the path of a typological comparison of the exaltation of the Son of Man and the lifting up of the serpent in the wilderness by Moses (Num 2:14–19). Mark and John here reflect different biblical theologies, and these very differences support the independence of the Fourth from the Second Evangelist.

The pre-Johannine *Fortschreibung* of the older saying would have looked like this: the nucleus of the saying was preserved, offering the insight that God willed the death of Jesus (i.e., that it was “necessary”), but this insight was subject to a deeper justification from the Scriptures and combined with contemplation upon the soteriological purpose of the death of Jesus (line 7). The form of the old saying was entirely refashioned and transformed into a new type of saying with an “eschatological correlative,” a correlation of the events of the end time with those in the past (see R. Edwards 1969; Sato 1988, 278–87; see also Luke 11:30 // Matt 12:40; Luke 17:24 // Matt 24:27; Luke 17:26–27 // Matt 24:37–39; Luke 17:28–32).

The third and final sample saying to be considered here relates to the promise that prayers offered “in the name” of Jesus will be answered. The promise of Jesus that every request (*αἰτεῖν*) will also be answered (Mark 11:24; Q 11:9–10) is widely echoed in early Christian authors (see Theobald 2002, 152–74). That they have worked so very intensively with this promise speaks for its authenticity. The reason for Jesus’s “unstinting and—with its unconditionality—downright bold certainty” that prayer will be answered is doubtless his picture of God the Father: the Father’s reign has begun and he is determined to save; those who barrage him with prayer will receive an answer.<sup>21</sup>

The promise is found twice in the Synoptic tradition, once in Mark in the context of the instructions on how to pray (Mark 11:22–25) and once in Q as a prelude to the double saying on seeking and finding/knocking and having the door opened. The Gospel of Thomas knows only this double saying on seeking and knocking (92 and 94); therefore, it cannot be excluded that the “aphorism” on the answering of prayers was originally transmitted independently.<sup>22</sup> Mark 11:24 as well as John 14:13–14 favor

21. Cullmann (1997, 42) speaks of Jesus’s “unbegrenzten und in ihrer Absolutheit geradezu kühnen Gewißheit” that prayer will be answered; Piper (1982, 413) observes that “the optimism of these maxims is of course striking.”

22. Plisch (2007, 221, 224–25) observes that “Klopfet an, und es wird euch geöff-

this conjecture. That all three versions begin with an “I tell you” could suggest that the aphorism was based upon the authority of Jesus all along.

	Mark 11:24	Q 11:9–10	John 14:12–14
1	So <i>I tell you</i> :	[And <i>I tell you</i> .]	Amen, amen, <i>I tell you</i> :
2			The one who believes in me will also do the <i>works</i> that I do,
3			and will do greater (works) than these, because I am going to the Father.
4	Everything for which you pray		
5	and <i>ask</i> for—,	<i>Ask</i> ,	and whatever you <i>ask</i> in my name,
6	believe		
7	that you have received it,		
8	and it will be yours.	and it will be given you ....	I will do it,
9			so that the Father may be glorified in the Son;
10		For everyone who <i>asks</i>	if you <i>ask</i> me for any- thing in my name,
11		receives ....	I will do it.

This aphorism of Jesus is utilized many times in the Johannine corpus, first in John 14:12–14 and thereafter in John 15:7–8, 16; 16:23–24, 26–27; 1 John 3:21–22; 1 John 5:14–15.<sup>23</sup> The following framework is key: “Amen, amen, I tell you: The one who believes in me will also *do* the works that *I do*, and will *do* greater (works) than these, because I am going to the Father.”

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net werden” could be thought of “als Missionsregel ..., die umherziehenden Wandermissionaren—prinzipiell—ein Nachtlager verheißt. Im Horizont des orientalischen Gastrechtes dürfte sich eine solche Verheißung auch häufig mit der Wirklichkeitserfahrung der Missionare gedeckt haben.”

23. See also John 11:22, 42; see here Theobald 2009, 733, 742–43; North 2001.

The “greater (works)” that the disciples will “do” are probably meant to refer to the worldwide dissemination of true life through post-Easter proclamation (cf. John 20:22–23), behind which—having gone to the Father—Jesus stands as the true agent. The appended statement about the answer to prayer makes this clear: it has to do not with the content of the prayers, but rather—in keeping with the context of the works—with what Jesus, on the basis of the prayer of the disciples, will himself do through them. In the process, two further points are established. First, the post-Easter ministry of the disciples is bound on the whole to their prayer and therewith to the exalted Jesus. Second, prayer accrues a christological dimension: it is no longer directed only to the Father (lines 3, 9), but also to Jesus. The proper object, of course, remains the glorification of the Father in the Son.

The creativity of this Johannine *Fortschreibung* is astounding. Though the aphorism from Jesus does indeed remain the nucleus, it is elaborated upon and made to be an entirely new saying of Jesus and one of significant theological moment.

We turn now to several examples of Johannine sayings whose Synoptic pretexts are recognizable only through an unaltered signature motif. The first of these to be considered relates to the door imagery of John 10:9, which may be viewed as a metatext of Q 13:24. In terms of their current form, the Johannine “I am”-sayings certainly cannot be considered to go back to the historical Jesus. They are, with their connection to the Old Testament revelatory formula rooted in Exodus 3:14 (see Deut 32:39; Isa 41:4; 43:10–11; 43:25; 46:4; 48:12), far too christologically loaded (as observed by Dodd 1953, 93–96). Some sayings of this type are probably derived from early Christian worship, especially considering that the Apocalypse of John also evinces similar sayings (e.g., Rev 1:17–18; 2:23; 22:13; 22:16; see Theobald 2002, 322–29). It cannot, however, be ruled out that in particular cases their larger themes pass on sayings of Jesus, as appears to be the case in the door imagery of John 10:9.

	Q 13:24 (Luke 13:24; cf. Matt 7:13)	John 10:9
1	Enter	
2	through the narrow door,	I am the gate.
3		By me—whoever enters,
4		will be saved
5	for many will seek to enter	

6 and few are those who enter through  
it.

7 [and will come in and go out

8 and find pasture.]

Note: The reconstruction of Q 13:24 used here is that found in Robinson, Hoffmann, and Kloppenborg 2000, 406–7.

From the context, it seems clear that the door metaphor here refers to the door to the sheepfold (see lines 7 and 8). This is, however, not a unified saying, and when one recognizes that an originally independent “I am” saying in verse 9b–d (lines 2–4) has been incorporated into the context of the Shepherd Discourse, the question of the meaning of the imagery must be asked anew (so Bultmann 1986, 288 n. 7). Originally, the gates of heaven were probably meant, insofar as “to enter through” certainly means “to be saved.” The appended element of the pasture, which one finds by going outside, again through the “door,” introduces no insignificant disruption of the imagery. When one asks whence the original “I am” saying derived the door metaphor, one thinks of the instruction found in Q 13:24. This was likely an authentic saying of Jesus, a “call to repentance, the opportunity to take advantage of the current eschatological hour. The ‘narrow’ gate is a symbol of the gravity of the required decision. The call is motivated by the warning that it will soon be too late” (Hoffman 1995a, 143). If one reads the pre-Johannine door saying in light of this saying of Jesus in Q, the former can be understood as a postresurrection christological reworking of the latter (so Hahn 1979, 19–20). The way to salvation, that is, to partaking in eternal life, leads only through *one* door, said to be Jesus Christ; the door is narrow in that salvation now exclusively depends on him.

John 10:9b–d is only recognizable as a metatext of Q 13:24 by the common imagery of the door, but the connection is clear. The motif carries the same meaning in both sayings: in both cases, the door to the divine world is meant, and the use of the verb εἰσελθεῖν (“enter”) reminds one of the sayings about entering the kingdom of God (Hahn 1979, 191 n. 16; Schwarz 1970, 230).

A second instance in which a Johannine saying may be identified as a metatext based on its correlation to a Synoptic theme relates to the “Our Father” tradition. It is debated to what degree the Our Father has left traces in early Christian literature outside of Matthew, Luke, and the Didache. It

was, however, perhaps known in the Johannine communities in that both Jesus's call to God in John 12:28 (following the pericope concerning the Greeks) as well as the formulation of his "high priestly" prayer in John 17 can be understood as transformations of individual elements from the Our Father (see Dodd 1963, 333–34; Schenk 1992).

Prayer of Jesus after the Pericope about the Greeks  
(the Johannine "Mount of Olives" Scene)

John 12:28	Father, glorify <i>your name</i>	Luke 11:2	Father, hallowed be <i>your name</i>
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The "High Priestly" Prayer of Jesus

John 17:1	Father	Luke 11:2 Matt 6:9	Father
John 17:11	Holy Father, protect them in your name	Luke 11:2 Matt 6:9	Father ..., hallowed be your name
John 17:17	Sanctify them in the truth		Hallowed be your name
John 17:15	I ask you to protect them from the evil one	Matt 6:13	but rescue us from the evil one

The various aspects of the potential relation of these two Johannine prayers to the Our Father cannot be discussed in detail here (see further Theobald 2002, 223–32). If, however, the Our Father served as the background for the two prayers, then we would have—particularly for John 17—a remarkable example of a Johannine metatext. Just as the Our Father was thought by Matthew and Luke to be normative for all Christians, so too the prayer in John 17—in its own way—fulfills this function. "This prayer of Jesus—at the outset of his 'going to the Father'—is the source and center of all Christian prayer in the post-Easter church," and "God indeed is to be called upon as Father only because he is originally the Father of Jesus—and therefore in Jesus's name (14:13–14; 15:16; 16:23–24, 26)."<sup>24</sup> Most significant here is what John 17 entirely leaves out of the Our Father: Jesus's petition for the kingdom of God to come. As in John 3, this central symbol of Jesus's proclamation is replaced with talk of "eternal life," here at

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24. See Wilckens (1998, 269): "dieses Gebet Jesu zu Beginn seines 'Hingehens zum Vater' (ist) der Ursprung und die Mitte alles Betens der Christen der nachösterlichen Kirche" and "ist doch Gott nur darum als Vater anzurufen, weil er ursprünglich der Vater Jesu ist—in Jesu Namen also (14:13f.; 15:16; 16:23f., 26)."

the very beginning of the final prayer (John 17:2–3). With its strongly realized eschatology, conceived of on the basis of the paschal mystery (though admittedly not lacking a view of the future; see John 17:24), in the dialogue of Jesus there is no longer a place for the kingdom of God.

The “high priestly” prayer is not a midrash of the Our Father in that it portends well beyond the authority of the Our Father.<sup>25</sup> It presents a prayer of Jesus that actually puts into words for the first time his intent in the face of death. Seen in this way, John 17 offers an example of a metatext that critically does away with its predecessor.

### Continuity and Discontinuity: On the Johannine Treatment of the Sayings Tradition

This paper has expounded only a few examples of Johannine metatexts of older Synoptic traditions. Others could easily be listed as well. Though some must necessarily remain hypothetical, taken together these observations yield a picture of astounding creativity in the Johannine handling of tradition. I close with three observations that seem to me to be important for the John, Jesus, and History Project.

First, in light of the complex processes of transformation in the Johannine communities, it seems to me too simple to ask about the historical authenticity of Johannine core sayings, particularly to arrange them along a scale of probability. In my judgment, the results one could expect from such an endeavor would not alter the current academic consensus, according to which the Gospel of John contributes only very few verbatim sayings of the historical Jesus in comparison with the Synoptic Gospels.

Second, and related to the first point, it seems to me more promising to study more closely the transformation processes that certainly took place in the Johannine communities. The following categories will prove helpful in this analysis: redactional reworking, the formation of metatexts, the *Fortschreibung*—perpetuation of genres that are characteristic of Jesus, and the creation of entirely new sayings of Jesus. Analyzing the processes of transformation by using these categories discloses not only something about the situation of the Johannine communities, but also something about their understanding of living tradition, the ongoing relevance of

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25. Contra W. Walker (1982, 238), who writes that “the High Priestly Prayer represents a type of ‘midrash’ on the Matthean version of the Lord’s Prayer.”

which is demonstrated precisely by its *Fortschreibung*. It is noteworthy that the basis of Johannine Christology and eschatology (for example, the poignant use of “Son” or “eternal life”) already appears in the dominical sayings of the Johannine community.

Third and finally here, it would be disastrous to narrow the question of the “truth” of the message of Jesus as it is conveyed in the Gospel of John down to the question of the historicity of the sayings passed on in it. Maurice Casey (1996, 229), for example, does this very thing when he declares that “the fourth Gospel is profoundly untrue. It consists to a large extent of inaccurate stories and words wrongly attributed to people.” If one attempts to go the other direction and try to “save” as many sayings of the Gospel as possible by attributing them to the historical Jesus, there is likewise the danger of undermining the question of truth. Though it proclaims Jesus differently from the Synoptics, one can see the truth of the sayings in the Gospel of John in the very fact that their meanings (literally, their *significance*) are transformed for new situations and as new ways of addressing problems, thus revealing their enduring significance. This also means that one must acknowledge that the Fourth Gospel belongs to a particular period in history, from which its anti-Jewish side emerges—within intra-Jewish sets of engagements in which each side claims the mantle of authentic Judaism. Those who wish to view the Gospel as the Word of God for today are therefore required to critically scrutinize its message from a critical distance, even while maintaining its abiding truth.