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Studies in Honor of Peder Borgen

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REREADING GENESIS IN THE PROLOGUE OF JOHN?

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Peder Borgen was one of the first people I came to know through the Studiorum Novi Testamenti Societas. At these meetings, in various cities around the world, I came to know and value, in particular, his work on John and Philo. It seemed fitting, in this essay in his honor, to revisit an area of Peder’s early work on the Prologue. In this work he drew on Jewish exegetical methods to illuminate the Prologue. Naturally, Philo’s contribution was not overlooked in these studies. Writing in the early 1970’s, it was inevitable that he would begin with issues raised by Rudolf Bultmann’s contribution to the study of the Prologue.

1. Bultmann and the Wisdom Tradition

In his 1923 essay on the background of the Prologue, Bultmann drew attention to the question of the relation of the Prologue to the Gospel as a whole and the integrity of the Prologue as a uniform composition.\(^1\) On these questions Bultmann declared himself to be in agreement with Julius Wellhausen. Bultmann agreed that the Prologue was based on an independent source and that verses 6–8 and 15 were redactional additions. Indeed, he considered that the evangelist was responsible for other parts of the Prologue also. His judgement was based on stylistic, linguistic-grammatical and ideological criteria.

In 1970 and 1972 Peder Borgen wrote two studies on the Prologue.\(^2\) One of his aims was to show that the attempt to analyze the Prologue

\(^1\) See “Der religionsgeschichtliche Hintergrund des Prolog zum Johannes-Evangelium” in Eucharistia: Festschrift für H. Oepke, 2 Teil (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1923) 3–26. There is, of course, also Bultmann’s subsequent commentary on John, Der Evangelium des Johannes (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1941). Prior to publication in 1941, fascicles of the commentary had been published as Bultmann completed sections of the commentary.

on the basis of the distinction between the poetic and prose sections was unconvincing. In fact, this aspect is but a small part of Bultmann's article, though it is important for his approach to the Prologue and the Gospel as a whole. But style was just one of the criteria he used for the identification of the sources of the Gospel. An underlying aim of Borgen's papers was to demonstrate that the identification of passages as stylistically different as the poetry and prose of the Prologue does not undermine its unity. Certainly Borgen makes a strong case for the unity of the Prologue. But it is less clear that this precludes the evangelist's use of sources in composing it. Whether or not the evangelist used literary sources, the ideas and motifs have a history of religions background. The purpose of Bultmann's article was to illuminate this. Here it may be that Bultmann and Borgen are not as far apart as at first seems to be the case.

Bultmann found the history of religions background of the Prologue in Hellenistic Judaism where the figure of lady Wisdom was identified with the Logos. What made this identification necessary was John's use of Logos in the Prologue, though Bultmann found the history of religions background for this use in the myth that finds expression in Israel's tradition of Lady Wisdom. The literary parallels concern Wisdom and are drawn from Israel's Wisdom Literature. Consequently, although Bultmann refers to Genesis 1, it is not here that he finds a precedent for the hypostatization of the heavenly Logos. Therefore, it is unlikely that Genesis itself suggested the motif of creation by the heavenly Logos or the substitution of Logos to replace the hypostatization of Lady Wisdom.

2. The Targumic Character of the Prologue

On the other hand, Borgen argues that the Prologue is the result of a Targumic interpretation of Genesis 1:1–5. He describes this kind of interpretation in terms of paraphrasing expansions in which words and phrases replace and interpret words and phrases in Genesis 1:1–5. In particular he notes that the use of Logos in John 1:1, 18 is probably an interpretation and replacement of the phrase “and God said” (Gen 1:3). Borgen also thinks that the explicit identification of the Logos with the light implies that Gen 1:3 provides the exegetical basis because “and God said” is connected with light and, for the Prologue of John, the Logos was the true light. Borgen provides
ample evidence from Jewish sources in support of his reading. The result is his analysis of the Prologue as a composition in two parts, each of which has three sections. Each of the three sections of part one picks up words from Genesis. Some of these words, and no others from Genesis 1, are picked up in part two, though the order of treatment in the sections of part one is reversed in the elaboration of part two.  

Section a) is found in 1:1–2 and 1:14–18 where the words λόγος and Θεός are repeated;
Section b) is found in 1:3 and 1:10–13 that treat the creation (ἐγένετο) of all things/the world;
Section c) is found in 1:4–5 and 1:6–9 where the common word from Genesis is “light”.

An alternative description might seem to be a chiastic structure. In this case the two sections marked c) would be combined as the midpoint of the chiasm. But this does not suit Borgen’s analysis because the two parts represent two different epochs, the primordial time of creation and the historic moment of the coming of the historic revealer in the Logos made flesh. At this point Borgen makes a significant contrast between the two parts. He also contrasts the first part with Genesis. For the Prologue, light, not darkness, is the original state of the creation. Thus, in 1:5, reference to the light shining in the darkness implies nightfall and this, Borgen thinks, is confirmed by the use of κατέλαβεν. He appeals to the use of this verb in 12:35 and other sources outside the NT to show that nightfall is a symbol for the Fall in the sin of Adam and the first generations. He

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3 Borgen (in an Attached Note in Philo, John and Paul, Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1987, 95), responding to Alan Culpepper’s critique of his essays, observes that “no material from Gen 1:1–5 is used in John 1:6–18 apart from repetition of the terms and the interpretative phrases already utilized in John 1:1–5. . . . John 1:1–5 is the basic exposition of Gen 1:1–5, while John 1:6–18 draws upon terms, phrases and ideas from John 1:1–5, and relates them to the appearance of Jesus Christ (the incarnational event).”

4 See R. Alan Culpepper, “The Pivot of St John’s Prologue,” VT 27 (1977) 1–31. Having made these comments I subsequently turned to Borgen’s synthesis of his two earlier articles in collection of essays, Philo, John and Paul: New Perspectives on Judaism and Early Christianity, Brown Judaic Studies 131 (Atlanta: Scholars, 1987) 75–101. At the end of this paper Borgen responds to Alan Culpepper’s criticism of his proposal. Most seriously Borgen notes that Culpepper’s provides no support for his chiastic structure from the ancient sources and ignores the place of Genesis so clearly indicated by the opening words of the Prologue.
argues that “In John 1:5b it is stated that nightfall seeks to overcome the light of day, and darkness here seems to be identified with man’s sin. Jewish texts support the hypothesis that John is here referring to Adam’s Fall, and eventually the first generation’s Fall as well. . . .” Borgen concludes that reference to the coming of the light in Jesus (1:9; 12:46) implies the primordial light had been removed along with the original life in the coming of “nightfall.” Jewish interpretative traditions teach that light and life were lost in the Fall and John teaches that they were brought back by the coming of Jesus. But, against this interpretation, according to 1:5b, the light was not overcome by the darkness. It nowhere suggests that the light was withdrawn.

Borgen has convincingly argued that the Prologue is to be understood as an exposition of Gen 1:1ff. and that the Logos and light in the Prologue are connected on the basis of Gen 1:3. Less clear is his view that (in John 1:5ff.) the primordial light was followed by darkness and the reappearance of the light in a new age (in Jesus). Certainly, the Logos incarnate in Jesus was the true light coming into the world. But John 1:5b surely does not support the view of the withdrawal of the light. Here the use of ὤ κατέλαβεν has the meaning of the failure to suppress. It asserts that the darkness did not

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5 See “Logos was the True Light,” 128. See also 130, “καταλαμβάνειν in John 1:5b means ‘seize’, ‘overcome’, in an undesirable or hostile manner. The conception of nightfall in this verse can be understood against the background of Jewish conceptions of the removal of light, and the coming of the darkness of night with Adam’s and the first generation’s sin. John seems to say implicitly that light and life were removed at the Fall, in order to be brought back into the world by the coming of Jesus.”

6 Earlier I had leaned to multiple levels of meaning for ὤ κατέλαβεν in 1:5. See my The Quest for the Messiah (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1991; 2nd ed.; Nashville: Abingdon, 1993) 154. I now think that a mistake. I think that, in 1:5, the compound κατέλαβεν is more aggressive in meaning than παρέλαβεν that is used to convey the transmission/reception of tradition. In John the darkness and the light are antithetical. Each excludes the other. In Johannine terms the darkness cannot receive the light. It can only pass away in its presence. See 1 John 2:8. The impossible alternative is that the darkness might “smell out” the light. This John 1:5 denies. In support of this view see Thomas H. Tobin, “The Prologue of John and Hellenistic Jewish Speculation,” CBQ 32 (1990), 262. Tobin writes, “Yet there are two elements found in John 1:1-5 which move beyond Gen 1:2-5 of which they are interpretations. First, light and darkness in John 1:1-5 are antithetical. The phrase, ‘and the darkness did not overcome κατέλαβεν it (John 1:5), suggests an underlying conflict and hostility between light and darkness.” Here Tobin adds a footnote on the use of κατέλαβεν in 12:35 and says, “It is also consistent with the contrast between light and darkness in Johannine thought in general . . . This is also the interpretation of Origen (Comm. in Jo II.27 . . .) and most of the Greek Fathers . . .”
suppress (overcome) the light, implying the ongoing presence of the light in the world. This is supported by a variety of references: to Abraham who (proleptically?) rejoiced to see the day of the Messiah (8:56); to Moses who wrote of and bore witness to Jesus (5:39, 45-47); and Isaiah, who saw his (the Logos') glory (2:41). The appeal to scripture throughout the Gospel confirms the activity of the light of the Logos in the world prior to the coming of the Logos made flesh in Jesus. But if the light of the Logos continued to be present according to 1:5b, how do we account for reference to the coming of the light into the world in 1:9? The answer seems to be that the light was coming into the world in a new way. If the Logos was the true light, the incarnation of the Logos involved the presence of the light continuously in the life of Jesus. Just how this is to be understood is a task for the exegesis of the Gospel as a whole.

3. Genesis and the Wisdom Tradition

If Borgen rightly notes the importance of Genesis 1 for the interpretation of the Prologue, he gives insufficient attention to the literary parallels in Wisdom tradition.\(^7\) This is given concentrated attention by Bultmann but without adequate attention to role of Genesis 1. It is true that Bultmann says:

I think it probable that he [the evangelist] intends his Prologue to correspond to the beginning of the sacred book of the Jews, but that Gen 1 should have prompted him to substitute Logos for Sophia, wisdom is

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\(^7\) Bultmann’s article provides ample evidence as does the more recent study by Thomas H. Tobin, “The Prologue of John and Hellenistic Jewish Speculation,” *CBQ* 52 (1990): 272-269. Naturally, this is an area that has been widely treated by J. R. Harris, *The Origin of the Prologue of St John* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1917) and C. H. Dodd, *Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1953). Tobin notes that, although Wisdom sometimes appears in parallel with Logos in the Wisdom literature, this provides no precedent for the displacement of Wisdom by Logos that we find in the Prologue. Bultmann also notes that Genesis 1 does not suggest this substitution either. He suggests that the parallel use of Wisdom and Logos in Philo provides a basis for understanding the Prologue. Bultmann does not suggest that John or his source drew on Philo. Rather he appeals to the more general influence of Hellenistic Judaism of which Philo is a prime example. Tobin (“Prologue,” 262, 266) also supports this position. Both Tobin and Bultmann note that the Middle Platonist understanding of Logos found in Hellenistic Judaism (especially in Alexandria) provided features of the Johannine Logos not to be found in the Wisdom tradition.
highly unlikely—the more so because there is at best an indirect allu-
sion to the "Word" in Gen 1.8

Bultmann had already observed:

Rabbinical exegesis actually finds wisdom in Gen 1:1, by combining
"in the beginning" (b'reshith) with Prov 8:22, where wisdom is called resit
"nachalo," "the beginning of his way." Similarly the Jerusalem targum ren-
ders Gen 1:1 "in wisdom he created."9

He rightly notes that this is informed by the view of Wisdom as an
independent divine being, God's companion, such as is found in
Prov 8:30; Wis 8:3; 9:4, 9. Such an understanding does not, itself,
have any bearing on the question of the formative influence of Genesis
1 on the use of Logos in the Prologue.

The opening words of the Prologue are enough to alert the reader
to the underlying importance of Gen 1. But, as Bultmann observes,
overwhelmingly the literary parallels of the Prologue are to the
Wisdom literature. The most important evidence used to demon-
strate a basis for the substitution of Logos for Wisdom is to be found
in the writings of Philo. Bultmann treats Philo as a representative
of Hellenistic Judaism in which the role of Wisdom is interpreted in
terms of the Logos, second god and mediator between God and cre-
ation. For Bultmann, there is no suggestion that the Prologue is
directly dependent on Philo. Rather, Philo is representative of Hellenistic
Judaism10 in which Wisdom and Logos are understood in the parallel-
ism of the Wisdom literature such as Sirach and Wisdom.11

Bultmann uses this overlapping of Wisdom and Logos in the Wisdom
literature and in Philo to shift the focus from Genesis, rather than
to show how Gen 1:1–5 might have been read in terms of creation
by the Logos. Psalm 33:6 apparently understands the recurrent "and
God said" as an indication of the role of "the word of the Lord" and
applies that role to the initial act of the creation of the heav-
ens and the earth. But there is no suggestion in the Psalm of the
Logos as a divine hypostasis such as we find in the Prologue and the
writings of Philo. Such a first century reader of Genesis as Philo
presupposed an identification of the role of Wisdom with Logos in

8 "Der religionsgeschichtliche Hintergrund des Prolog," part IV.
9 "Der religionsgeschichtliche Hintergrund des Prolog," part III.
10 See "Der religionsgeschichtliche Hintergrund des Prolog," part IV.
11 See "Der religionsgeschichtliche Hintergrund des Prolog," part III.
the work of creation, and Philo provides strong evidence for the preference of Logos in this context. This use of Logos introduced motifs associated with the Logos of Middle Platonism, some of which overlapped Wisdom motifs. In this way the Wisdom tradition was creatively developed as well as enriching the already rich tradition of the Logos motif.

Part of that enrichment is a consequence of the identification of Wisdom with Torah, in such texts as Sirach 24 and Baruch 4:1. With this, the identification of Wisdom with Logos is implied. For Judaism, the word of God is enshrined in Torah. Thus in the great Torah liturgy of Psalm 119 (verse 105) the Psalmist writes, “Your word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path.” Once this is done, all the attributes of the Wisdom tradition are attributed to Torah and can also be spoken of in terms of the Logos. Further, once Logos is understood in terms of Torah, elements of the Greek philosophical tradition are also attributed to Torah. Some of these overlap and expand attributes of the Wisdom tradition. For our understanding of this, Philo is invaluable. But as both Bultmann and Borgen note, Philo writes in a way that suggests that he expects his readers to be familiar with his use of the Logos tradition. Thus none of this evidence implies John’s dependence on Philo, who reflects a much stronger philosophical outlook than John. What it means is that the Wisdom/Torah/Logos tradition found in Philo provides the presuppositions for the hermeneutic John uses in his interpretation of Genesis in the Prologue.

4. Genesis and the Prologue

What are we to make of the influence of Genesis 1 on the shape of the Prologue? Borgen has made a case for understanding the Prologue as a targumic elaboration of Gen 1:1–5 where 1:3 functions as a basic text. I find the overall argument persuasive, though I would stress that it presupposes the hermeneutic that combines Wisdom/Torah/Logos in the Johannine Logos and identifies “and God said” in Gen 1:3 with the divine Logos. According to Borgen, there are two parts to the Prologue, A. 1:1–5 and B. 1:6–18. While Borgen has made a case formally for treating B. as the elaboration of A., he also recognizes that there is a temporal sequence between A. and B. Thus, materially, B. follows A. rather than being an exposition of
A. It is, I think, questionable that 1:1–5 refers only to primordial time. Given Borgen’s analysis, it makes better sense to me if 1:1–5 relates to the time prior to the incarnation of the Logos. That being the case, the introduction of the historical witness to the true light in 1:6–8 signals the temporal change from the light of the imminent Logos to the coming of the light in the Logos made flesh. But Borgen is persuaded to restrict 1:1–5 to primordial time because he finds support in the Jewish sources for withdrawal of the light because of the sin of Adam and the succeeding generation. Borgen describes different approaches in Judaism to the understanding of the relationship of sin and the darkness. Against this background, his understanding of the Prologue is in terms of “light as their original possession, with the ensuing Fall and darkness.” “John 1:4–9 should be understood against the background of Jewish traditions of primordial light which was followed by darkness in primordial time, thus to reappear later in history, or in the coming aeon.” Contrary to this view, both Gen 1:3 and the Prologue provide a basis for understanding the introduction of the light into the darkness (“the light shines in the darkness,” 1:5a) in the word of God, the Logos. John speaks of the continuing struggle between the light and the darkness, but this provides no solution to the question of the origin of the darkness any more than does Gen 1:2. The difference is that Genesis 1:1–5 implies no struggle between the light and the darkness. Rather there is a harmony in the sequence of day and night.

There is evidence that Genesis 1 attracted a good deal of attention in the period in which John wrote. Genesis 1 was subject to imaginative readings in such works as the Hermetic tractate Poimandres. Recently there has been a concentration of studies dealing with texts developing a significant exegesis of the opening chapters of Genesis such as Poimandres, Gospel of Thomas, The Writing without Title (On the Origin of the World), Eugnostos, the Apocryphon of John, Trismorph Protenon, Odes of Solomon and the Prologue of the Gospel of John. In addition,  

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discussions in Jewish sources such as Philo and the Rabbinic writings as well as Early Christian Fathers such as Irenaeus enrich the context in which the interpretation of Genesis in John is understood.

5. Exegesis of Genesis 1

One important study by Elaine H. Pagels is entitled, “Exegesis of Genesis 1 in the Gospels of Thomas and John.” The point of this essay is to argue that Thomas provides a perspective representative of Jewish, “pagan” and other Christian texts that are in contrast to the Gospel of John. A cluster of sayings is identified in Thomas (logia 4, 11, 18, 19, 37, 49, 50, 77, 83, 84, 85 and also in log. 1, 2, 3, 22, 24, 61, 70) that relate the creation of the figure of light on day one of the Genesis creation story in 1:3 to the image of God of 1:26–27. Pagels notes that Thomas identifies the figure of light with Jesus as well as the image within all people. The primordial light was present in creation, and potentially the image is to be discovered in all people and is also identified with Jesus. Thomas teaches that the light is in all things as well as manifest in a succession of those who have come to know the light, of which Jesus is a significant representative. The light is recovered in the image of Gen 1:26–27a.

52 (1990) 252–269, establishes a pattern in texts from Hellenistic Judaism, especially associated with Alexandria, which have important points of contact with Thomas and provide a precedent for the use of Logos in the Prologue of John. Sevan Davies, “The Christology and Protology of the Gospel of Thomas,” JBL 111 (1992) 665, writes, “Thomas seems to derive from the same milieu as does Philo—Hellenistic Judaism, which produced its vocabulary largely through allegorical exegesis, especially of Genesis 1 and 2.”

14 Thomas Tobin, “Prologue” 267, says, “This assimilation in Hellenistic Judaism of the logos to the figure of the heavenly man may have served as an important step in the kind of reflection that led to the identification of the logos with a particular human being, Jesus of Nazareth, in the hymn in the Prologue of John. Philo and Hellenistic Jewish exegetes of like mind would certainly have found such an identification impossible. Nevertheless, a tradition of interpretation in which the logos was identified with the figure of the heavenly man does make the identification of the logos with a particular man more understandable within such a tradition of interpretation. The identification of the logos with the heavenly man of Gen 1:27 provides the middle term, if you will, between the logos and Jesus of Nazareth: logos—‘heavenly man’—particular man (Jesus of Nazareth).”

15 Thomas Tobin, “Prologue” 267, comes to a similar conclusion concerning Philo’s reading of Genesis. “An important development has taken place in the Hellenistic Jewish interpretation of the logos in connection with interpretations of texts from Genesis 1–3. The reasons for this assimilation of the figure of the logos
The image is understood to be undivided, the single one, so that
the division into male and female is seen in terms of a fall away
from the original, primordial creation. For *Thomas* the transforma-
tion back to the primordial creation takes place through the initia-
tion of baptism. The transformation appears to be one of perception.
The world does not change but the way of perceiving it does.

Pagels argues that whatever else *John* might be opposing, the
Prologue is opposed to this view found in *Thomas* and a host of
works Jewish, Christian, and pagan. In defence of *Thomas*, Pagels
affirms that the views found there derive “from mainstream Jewish
Genesis speculation, evinced in sources ranging from Philo and
*Poeinandres* to the *Odes of Solomon and The Writing without Title.*” Here
the argument counteracts the evaluation of *Thomas* as a Gnostic text.
Rather it is defended as coming out of mainstream Judaism. It should
be remembered that Bultmann argued that the Gnostic views came
to the evangelist via Judaism, whether we classify the views as main-
stream Jewish or not.

At the same time Pagels observes that the views are found in texts
Jewish, Christian and pagan, including probably Gentile Hermetic
practice and exegesis in *Poeinandres.* While it is argued that the
exegetical pattern of *Thomas* was widespread, it is also said “perhaps
especially among Jewish circles in Egypt.” The question is, what is
“mainstream Jewish Genesis speculation”? Pagels uses the concept
to provide an alternative to a Gnostic proposal. An alternative is to
find a home for Gnosticism in “mainstream Jewish Genesis specu-
lation.” It is notable that the description is of Genesis *speculation.*
What is it that drives this speculation? The speculation includes dis-
tinguishing the first spiritual Adam of the first day from the second

and the heavenly man are undoubtedly complex and reflect developments in the
history of Hellenistic Jewish biblical interpretation. Two reasons, however, were cer-
tainly involved. First, the heavenly man [Gen 1:27], as the paradigm for the fash-
ioning of the earthly man [2:7], was for Philo and his tradition one of the many
paradigms found in the *logos* (e.g., *Opif.* 20). Second, and perhaps more importantly,
both the *logos* and the heavenly man came to function in very similar if not iden-
tical ways. Both served as paradigms for earthly creation (one for the whole and
the other for human beings); both came to serve an anagogic function in that they
were guiding divine powers by which the human mind was enabled to ascend
towards God.”

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8 See “Exegesis of Genesis 1” 489. Cf. 491.
9 See “Exegesis of Genesis 1” 492. Cf. 479.
10 See “Exegesis of Genesis 1” 492. Cf. 480.
psychic Adam of the sixth day and the third earthly Adam of the eighth day.\textsuperscript{19} The pattern may be derived from Genesis but does not seem to be suggested by the text of Genesis. What is the source of the hermeneutic that leads to this Genesis speculation? Pagels does not ask this question. It seems to be enough that it is found in a variety of Jewish sources, even if especially among Jewish circles in Egypt where Hellenistic influence is strongly attested. At the same time, the views are attested outside Jewish sources. For Bultmann, the views that he called Gnostic are found in Jewish sources. But, in terms of the history of ideas, the question can be asked concerning where the views originated and how they entered Judaism and came to influence early Christianity.

The name used to describe the views driving this Genesis speculation is somewhat arbitrary. Certainly the term “Gnosticism” is somewhat anachronistic though its usefulness is justified if the views involved are coherent and not restricted to Jewish or Christian or pagan sources but are found across a wide range of texts. The term “Gnostic” becomes pejorative only because it was excluded by the views that became dominant in Judaism and Christianity from the second century onwards. The analysis of this Genesis speculation is one thing. The negative evaluation is another. One paradox is observed by Pagels. The “exegesis” of Genesis 1 in John 1 is analyzed in terms that show it to be opposed to the Genesis speculation found in Thomas. At the same time, she observes “the Gospel of John remains so evocative that followers of Valentinus would read it—even, or especially, its prologue—as a source of their theology.”\textsuperscript{20}

6. Interpreting the Prologue

Pagels’ analysis of the Prologue of John shares important points of agreement with the analysis of Peder Borgen. She sees the Prologue, like Thomas, as a drama in two Acts. For Thomas, Act 1 is the appearance of the primordial light (Gen 1:3), and Act 2 the creation of humankind in its image (Gen 1:26). Down through the ages the divine light was manifest successfully in the cosmos and creation. For John, Act 1 begins with the creation of all things by the Logos

\textsuperscript{19} See “Exegesis of Genesis 1” 484.
\textsuperscript{20} See “Exegesis of Genesis 1” 491.
and continues from the revelation of the primordial light to the time of John the Baptist preparing the way for Act 2. Act 2 involves the incarnation of the Logos (1:14) which is the culmination of the final drama, the successful revelation of the divine. Prior to Act 2 the revelation of the light met with failure, rejection and incomprehension (1:5); lack of recognition (1:10); outright rejection (1:11). Thus, between the two Acts Pagels notes the “three negations” of John 1:5, 10, 11 which express the “stunning failure” of the revelation prior to the incarnation.21

Like Borgen’s analysis, Pagels sees rejection of the light as the response to the first part. The two differ in that Borgen begins part two at 1:6 while Pagels begins Act 2 at 1:14. The three negations include 1:5, 10, 11 and come between what Pagels calls Act 1 (1:1–5) and Act 2 (1:14–18). Thus 1:5 belongs to Borgen’s first part, but the two negations of 1:10, 11 belong to the second part.22 Is the negation of 1:5 a formal parallel to 1:11–12? If it is, this might be relevant to an understanding of 1:5. In 1:5, 11, 12 the aorist active of the verb λαμβάνειν is used. In 1:11 the compound form is used with negative (οὐ παρέλαβον) to indicate that “his own did not receive him” while in 1:12 ἔλαβον describes the action of those who “received” him. Thus both the simple form of the verb and the compound form παρέλαβον here mean “receive”. But the compound verb used with the negative in 1:5 is κατέλαβεν. It is arguable that this form of the verb, as used in 1:5, has a more aggressive meaning, “to overcome,” or “to suppress.” Used with the negative, 1:5b asserts that the darkness did not overcome or suppress the light.

That more aggressive sense is apparent in 12:35, where the same compound verb is used with reference to people being overtaken by the darkness in a context which speaks of the presence of the light. The action of the verb is not directed against the light as it is in 1:5. Nevertheless, the verb (aorist subjunctive following ἐνα) is used in a context which involves the presence of the light and has the aggressive sense of overtaking (and overcoming?) those who do not

21 See “Exegesis of Genesis 1” 489–90.
22 Thus, for Borgen, the whole weight of argument for rejection prior to the incarnation rests on οὐ κατέλαβεν in 1:5. By combining 1:5 with the negations of 1:10–11 Pagels adds some weight to the argument for taking οὐ κατέλαβεν as indicating the rejection of the light. But there are significant differences between the use and context of οὐ κατέλαβεν in 1:5 and οὐ παρέλαβον in 1:11.
walk in the light. The reference supports the antithetical nature of light and darkness. The darkness does not overcome the light but does overcome those who do not walk in the light. This suggests that the meaning in 1:5 is that the darkness did not overcome the light.23 Because the darkness did not for one moment suppress the light, the manifestation of the light can be traced through history down to the incarnation of the Logos in whom the light continues to shine. If the darkness did not overcome the light (1:5), nevertheless, not everyone received the Logos (1:11). It may be implied that those who did not receive him were overcome by the darkness. But this did not overcome the light and there were those who received the Logos (1:12).

Further, in 1:5 the light (neuter accusative ὁμίτο), is the object of the action ὁ κατέλαβεν (third person singular, aorist indicative active), and the darkness is the active agent. Although 1:9 refers to the coming of the light into the world, reference in 1:10–12 is to the Logos, not directly to the light.24 More important, those receiving or not receiving in 1:11, 12 are people (the verbs are third person plural). The distinct compound verb used in 1:5 and the definitive antithetical use of light and darkness in John exclude the sense of “receive.” The meaning must be that the darkness did not overcome the light.

Finally, 1:11–12 does not only assert rejection of the Logos by his own. It asserts that as many as received him, who believe in his name, become children of God. If these verses are taken as relevant to the time between Act 1 and Act 2, as Pagels argues, they do not support the view that the revelation prior to Act 2 was a failure. The background of 1:10–12 is the tradition of the rejection of Wisdom/Torah by the nations (1 Enoch 42:1–3). This is related to the tradition that Israel received Wisdom/Torah. An alternative favors the tradition that Wisdom “passes into holy souls and makes them friends of God and prophets” (Wis 7:27–28), or in Johannine terms, “children of God.” This hardly reads like total rejection. But Borgen’s

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23 See the discussion, in support of the continuing presence of the light as a result of the failure of the darkness to suppress it, above in the section outlining Borgen’s position. See also, Tobin, “Prologue of John” 262 and note 29.

24 This is clear from the use of the masculine accusative singular ὁμίτο in 1:10, 11, 12. The transition from light to Logos is possible because it is the light of the Logos, or to use Borgen’s formulation, the Logos was the true light.
position is surely correct. The placing of the witness of John Baptist at 1:6–8 firmly signals the transition from primordial history to the time of the evangelist and the story of the incarnate Logos. Thus 1:9–13 already speaks of the coming of the light of the incarnate Logos into the world and the story of rejection and limited success is the story of the incarnate Logos. Although Pagels agrees with C. H. Dodd that “the thought of the incarnation is already in the evangelist’s mind, and the propositions of verses 9–12 refer to Christ as incarnate,” she places the negations of 1:10, 11 between the two Acts, prior to the incarnation of the Logos. The parallels between John 1:10–12 and Wisdom tradition cannot bear the weight of this exegesis, and 1:5 by itself does not indicate the rejection of the light. Rather it affirms that the darkness could not suppress the light.

7. John and Thomas

At this point the critical response of Arthur Droge is relevant. His critique takes as its point of departure the question of the suitability of the category “incarnation” to describe the σάρξ ἐγένετο of John 1:14. His view is developed along lines adopted by Raymond Brown, especially in his commentary on the Johannine Epistles. Brown argues that the group opposed to the author of 1 John, that he prefers to call “the secessionists” (1 John 2:19), probably did not find any salvific significance in the human life of Jesus. This modifies the implied accusation of 1 John 4:2–3 that the secessionists refused to confess Jesus Christ having come in the flesh. Brown has two grounds for softening the substance of the criticism. Some distortion is to be expected in the words of the arch opponent of the secessionists and their views. Because their views were based on the Gospel of John, they are unlikely to have blatantly rejected the teaching of the Gospel. Thus Brown allows that the Gospel does not clearly establish the importance of Jesus’ human life and death for the Gospel. Droge adopts this view and has his own reasons for his reservations about

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25 “Exegesis of Genesis 1” 491 quoting Dodd, Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel 268.
27 Raymond E. Brown, The Epistles of John (AB 30; Garden City: Doubleday, 1982).
interpretations of the “so called incarnation” in John. He notes that the Gnostic teachers of the second century found the Gospel appealing and, as Pagels notes, they were especially attracted to the Prologue.38 Interestingly, this did not lead Pagels to modify her view of the Johannine understanding of the incarnation and its role in separating John from Thomas and later Gnosticism. But Droge attributes to John a view similar to Brown’s secessionists. He also notes that John, like Thomas, has no emphasis on the “apparent death and resurrection” of Jesus. In both Gospels individuals “actualize their light” simply on the basis of an encounter with the Revealer. Nevertheless, John features Jesus’ signs39 and this marks an important difference from Thomas because they “have a catalytic effect in bringing recognition about.”

Droge indicates that his understanding of Thomas and John is the reverse of the views expressed by Pagels. Droge understands John’s teaching that, just as the Logos (Wisdom) had been manifest in the lives of those who had come to knowledge down through the ages, the Logos was now manifest in Jesus. John 1:5 is not a negation but an expression of the superiority of the light over the darkness. Further, 1:9 indicates that the “primordial divine light” was not exclusive to the Logos but is found in people (“the light of people,” 1:4 and, “the light which enlightens every person,” 1:9) as the image of God. John 1:9–13 does not express failure but limited success prior to the coming of the Logos in Jesus.

In contrast to Pagels, Droge thinks that, in Thomas, Jesus brings a new understanding of the way things are. He draws on the work of Stevan Davies who outlines his position succinctly:40

In the following essay I argue that Jesus, as Thomas portrays him, insists that the world ought to be considered to be in the condition of Gen 1:1–2:4 and, accordingly, that people should restore themselves to the condition of the image of God. They will then live in this world with the rest and immortality proper to the seventh day of creation.

Davies also goes on to say of those who restore themselves:

38 See “Exegesis of Genesis 1” 491.
39 Amongst these Droge includes “the hero’s apparent death and resurrection.”
They will know themselves to be sons of the living Father (saying 3)—that is, the image of God, no longer male or female and, having made the male and female into a single one, they will enter the kingdom of heaven (saying 22).

Droge, following Davies, also finds significant differences in the cosmologies of John and Thomas. He rightly notes that the darkness in John is altogether darker and more deadly than in Thomas. John’s view of the world is radically dualistic. It is characterized by the tyrannical rule of the “Archon of this Age” (12:31) who manifests the power of darkness. Though all things were created by the Logos, the struggle between the light and the darkness continues (note 1:5). For John the struggle with evil is real and evil remains to be overcome in a world in which darkness has not been completely reduced and rectified. The emphasis on the signs of Jesus in John has no counterpart in Thomas where the words of Jesus are enough to bring a transformation of consciousness to an awareness of having actualized the primordial androgynous state of the sabbath rest. What is at stake for Thomas is the perception or understanding of the world. As Davies writes:

John’s Gospel contrasts this world with another world from which Jesus comes (cf., e.g., 8:23; 17:13–19). Thomas is not dualistic in this sense. For Thomas there is no contrast between this world and another world; rather Thomas contrasts this world as apprehended properly with this world not apprehended properly. Thomas is replete with sayings contrasting the condition of people who do and do not apprehend the world through the primordial light of the beginning.31

Droge argues that, for John, the reality is that the “darkness has not been completely reduced and rectified.” Hence the “sabbath condition,” to use the terms of Thomas, has not been achieved because creation remains incomplete. I believe that Droge correctly evaluates the situation according to John. For support he appeals to the incident in John 5 and the text of 5:17.32 He also bases his argument on the LXX reading of Gen 2:2, which does not substantially differ from the Hebrew text. The point made is that the text indi-

31 Davies, “Christology and Protology” 671.
icates that God completed his work on the seventh day and rested from his completed work. The argument is that God worked on the seventh day until creation was finished and then blessed the sabbath. Thus Jesus’ work on the seventh day (sabbath?) was not a violation of the sabbath because creation was not complete and the sabbath rest had not yet begun. This argument does not seem to be convincing for a number of reasons. Even if in the primordial seven days the creative work continued on to the seventh day, at some point on that seventh day the creation was declared complete and the sabbath was instituted. Even on Droge’s reading of Genesis 2:2, that point has passed. The logic of his argument is only that the sabbath begins at some point after the beginning of the seventh day. It seems rather that the assertion that God’s creative work is incomplete stands in tension with Genesis and the proclamation of the completion of creation.

8. Contrasting Genesis and John

If, according to Genesis, the first state of the creation was darkness, the great creative act of the first day is the word, ‘Let there be light!’ But the darkness was not altogether dispelled. Rather it was brought under God’s control and ordered into day and night. Indeed, on the fourth day God creates two lights, the greater to rule the day and the lesser light to rule the night. Thus, even though God has called the darkness night, he has created a lesser light to rule it. All of this suggests a harmony of light and darkness, day and night in the Genesis creation story. This harmony is reflected in one of the great creation Psalms (104:19–24).

You have made the moon to mark the seasons;
the sun knows its time for setting.
You make darkness, and it is night,
when all the beasts of the forest creep forth,
The young lions roar for their prey,
seeking their food from God.
When the sun rises, they get them away
and lie down in their dens.
Man goes forth to his work
and to his labour until the evening.
O Lord, how manifold are your works!
In wisdom you have made them all;
the earth is full of your creatures.
The situation is quite different in John. John 1:4–5 reflects the great creative word of Genesis 1:3 which brings light where once there was only darkness. Although John mentions the light before the darkness, it is not self-evident that light was the original state of the creation. In 1:5 the present tense is used to describe, “the light shines in the darkness.” This implies that the darkness is the context in which the eternal light shines. If Gen 1:3 is the basis of John 1:5, the word that splits the darkness sets the light into mortal combat with the darkness. Indeed, it is clear that the darkness seeks to overcome and extinguish the light. This it could not do. But the text of John also makes clear that the light has not dispelled the darkness. The Johannine story is one of the mortal struggle of the light with the darkness. In the story of Jesus, John provides a paradigm for understanding the assurance of the victory of the light in the midst of the struggle with the darkness.

9. The Prologue, its Context and Underlying Tradition

One puzzling question concerns the context addressed by the Prologue. The language of the Prologue implies a context within Hellenistic Judaism influenced by Wisdom speculation, Genesis interpretation, and Logos theology. While texts from Alexandria, especially the writings of Philo, provide important evidence of the context, it is likely that this evidence is representative of Judaism more widely than that city. The antithetical language that first appears in the Prologue (1:5) and dominates the Gospel as a whole, finds its closest parallels in some of the texts from Qumran (e.g., 1QS 3.13–4.26 and 1QM). This provides a caution against dismissing Judean connections of the Gospel. At the same time it needs to be remembered that the texts from Qumran are also evidence of Hellenistic Judaism. The dualism of John and Qumran has no comparable parallel in Jewish sources prior to the Hellenistic period. But there is no comparable Logos theology in the Qumran texts to what is found in the Prologue. What is to be made of this?

It is possible that we should think of the preliminary shaping of the Johannine tradition in Judea prior to the Jewish war (66–73 ce).

33 See my *Qest* (1993) 35–52.
and the final shaping in some major city in the diaspora where Greek was the primary language. The Gospel was written in Greek, although it reflects intra Jewish issues, debates and conflicts. Nothing in the Gospel implies a strong Gentile presence in the Johannine community or orientation of the Gospel.

The Prologue assumes a context in which Logos has subsumed Wisdom tradition and its identification with Torah. This is implied by the literary parallels from Wisdom tradition used in the Prologue to describe the role of the Logos, including texts that identified Wisdom with Torah. At the same time, the Logos that becomes incarnate in Jesus is set over against the law (Torah). This antithesis is also implied by 1:14. In the Jewish tradition the law (spoken of in the role of Wisdom) pitched her tent (σκηνή) and dwelt in the midst of Israel, in the Tabernacle/ Temple (Sir 24:8, 10; Wis 9:10; Bar 3:37; Prov 8:31). But John says, “the Logos became flesh and dwelt (ἐσκήνωσεν) among us,” 1:14. What John says about the hēsed and enēth of God revealed in the glory of the Logos echoes what was said of the revelation at the giving of the law in Exodus (33:18–20). That the revelation in the Logos made flesh replaces the other is implied by Jesus’ teaching about the new Temple in 2:13–22 and 4:19–24. A more radical position might be stated in the antithetical statement of 1:17, “The law was given by Moses, grace and truth came by Jesus Christ.” This could be taken as a rejection of the Exodus tradition or an interpretation of it as a witness to hēsed and enēth without actualizing effect. This came in Jesus Christ. The latter seems to be the Johannine position which accepts the witness of Torah (5:39, 45–47) and affirms a new development in the Logos made flesh.

Nevertheless, 1:17 implies a certain negativity in relation to the law, a negativity that is reflected in those dialogues in which Jesus speaks to the Jews of “your law,” apparently distancing himself from it (see e.g., 8:17; 10:34 and cf. 7:19; 15:24). As noted, the Jesus of John also appeals to Moses as a witness to him, as one who wrote of him (5:39, 45–47). Even here Jesus recognizes that the appeal to Moses is controversial because “the Jews” (5:16, 18) think the law is on their side against Jesus. This is even clearer in the dialogues of John 9. The once blind man appeals to the evidence of Jesus’ sign, which gave him sight, as evidence that Jesus is from God. But

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31 See my *Quest* (1993) 145–149.
the Pharisees/Jews appeal to the breaking of the sabbath law (Moses) to demonstrate that Jesus is a sinner, not from God (9:16, 24, 28–29).

The distance separating Jesus from the “Jews” is reflected in the way the Gospel speaks of “the Jews,” often seeming to imply that Jesus and his disciples are not Jews. The use of the term “Jews” is the language of the narrator (e.g., 1:19; 2:6, 13, 20; 3:1; 4:9c etc.). It is also the language of the Samaritan woman (4:9a, cf., 4:20) and of Pilate (19:19–22). In response to the Samaritan woman’s identification of him as a Jew, Jesus responds using her idiom, “salvation is of the Jews,” (4:22). But the internal language of Galilean and Judean “Jews” uses the term “Israelite,” as Jesus does to Nathanael (1:47), and Nathanael refers to Jesus as king of Israel (1:49). Contrast Pilate’s title for Jesus as “king of the Jews” (19:19–22). In the same vein, when speaking to Nicodemus, who is referred to by the narrator as “a ruler of the Jews” (3:1), Jesus calls him “the teacher of Israel” (3:10).

A partial solution to this language problem is to recognize the term “Jew, Jews” as the language of the Roman empire derived from the province of Judea. But the name was not restricted to those dwelling in the province. Rome recognized the allegiance to the temple in Jerusalem of Jewish dwellers throughout the empire so that the religion of the Jews was recognized as a legal ethnic religion. The term religion was not applied to cults of personal salvation, which were described as superstition and banned. Jews living in diaspora tended to use the language of the empire as did the people of the empire, including Samaritans. Only in the land of Israel was the language of Israel and Israelite the common description. This of course means that the narrator of John, in speaking of “Jews,” adopts the language of the empire. This could mean that the narrator reflects the usage of a diaspora Jewish author (or Gentile?) or an author who has adapted his language to a diaspora context for diaspora readers.

The language of the narrator not only implies a diaspora perspective. It reflects a distancing of the believers from Jews who do not believe in Jesus. Even in the Prologue, the language of rejection is used, not only of the world (1:10), but also of “his (Jesus’) own

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people” (1:11). In the body of the Gospel that rejection is filled out in terms of the attempt to arrest (7:30 etc.) and to kill Jesus (5:18 etc.). It is also extended in the theme of the rejection of the followers of Jesus, especially signaled by in the language concerning the casting out of the believers from the synagogue (ἀποστολεῖς) by the Jews (9:22, 34; 12:42; 16:2). This suggests that the Prologue is to be understood in a context where believers were in conflict with other Jews in the diaspora. Conflict is expressed in terms of the rejection of Jesus and those who believe in him. In the midst of an overwhelming theme of rejection (1:10–11), the Prologue introduces an account of those who receive the incarnate Logos, who believe in him, in his name (1:12).

Clearly, in the Prologue reception and belief are presented as the exception, not the dominant response. This is also the perspective of the body of the Gospel as a whole and of the Farewell discourses in particular. The response of the Prologue, and the body of the Gospel, is to proclaim the superiority of the new and the replacement of the old in the Logos made flesh (1:14–18). If the old age had seen a minority response to the shining of the light of the eternal Logos, in what way did the coming of the Logos made flesh change the situation for the better? A receiving response continued to be the exception (1:11–12), and the Gospel as a whole describes only a small number of believers. One advance might be understood in terms of the new understanding of God and its implications for believing community. The latter is more evident in the body of the Gospel (13:34–35).

The Prologue draws on a general Wisdom tradition and a Logos theology influenced by Hellenistic philosophy. It also suggests that a particular tradition is being modified or rejected. The initial response to the Logos made flesh is described in terms of the response to Wisdom in the Wisdom literature. Rejected by the world but received by Israel? Certainly rejected by the world but also rejected by his own, by Israel (1:10–11). It is said of Wisdom, “in every generation she passes into holy souls and makes them friends of God and prophets” (Wis 7:27; cf. Sir 6:20–22; 15:7). This seems to be the tradition that is used in the Prologue to proclaim the incarnation of the Logos and to describe the response to that event.

The tradition of Wisdom 7 (which is echoed in other texts) describes a succession of those into whom Wisdom passed, making them friends of God and prophets. In other words, Wisdom is embodied in this
succession. But the Prologue takes this tradition and uses it to express the response to the *Logos* made flesh. Does this imply that John 1:14 is to be understood in terms of Wisdom 7:27? That would mean that John 1:14 is to be understood as a continuing example of the embodiment of Wisdom in a succession of holy souls. But this does not take account of the fact that the reasons for using this tradition in the Prologue exclusively to refer to the response to the *Logos* made flesh.

Because the Wisdom literature is rich in literary parallels (to John 1:10–12) that depict the role of Wisdom in the world, in Israel and in those she makes friends of God and prophets, many scholars read John 1:9–13 in relation to the role of the *Logos* prior to the incarnation. Additional support for this view is found in the impression that John 1:14 announces the incarnation. The placement of the witness of the Baptist at 1:6–8 disturbs this reading but is itself problematic. It is the first of three introductions of the witness of the Baptist in John 1 (1:6–8, 15, 19f.). There is a suspicion that 1:6–8 has been inserted into an existing composition. The suspicion is not based primarily on the distinction between poetry and prose, though this might be viewed as confirmation of the suspicion.

Read without 1:6–8, everything prior to 1:14 refers to the situation prior to the incarnation. Consequently 1:12 might refer to a succession of those who embodied the *Logos*, and reference to the *Logos* made flesh in Jesus (1:14) can be understood as part of the succession. Those embodying the *Logos* prior to Jesus are then described in terms similar to those who believe in Jesus. They are born of God, children of God. From this perspective the succession prior to Jesus and those who believe in Jesus become like Jesus. On this reading, the source used in the Prologue is understood in terms quite similar to the Gospel of *Thomas*.

From this perspective, the reason for the introduction of 1:6–8 is not to repudiate role of the Baptist but to signal that all that follows concerns the *Logos* made flesh. The role of the *Logos* made flesh is distinguished more sharply from those who preceded him than in the source. The Prologue opposes a Christological view that understood Jesus to be part of a succession of those in whom Wisdom, or the *Logos*, was embodied. The Prologue also distinguishes Jesus from those who followed after him. Here there is a need to discuss how “children of God,” those “born of God,” are to be distinguished from the *Logos* made flesh, the only begotten God who is in the
bosom of the Father (1:14, 18). For the Prologue those begotten of God are those who believe in the name of his son Jesus Christ. Christocentricity ensures that believers are not understood to be exactly the same as the Logos made flesh. One reason why this cannot be is that, for John, Christocentricity is Theocentricity. Essential to the Prologue is the affirmation, “the Logos was God.” The role of the Logos made flesh is to reveal God and the Prologue and the Gospel as a whole speak of the Logos made flesh at points where the traditional view of God is expanded or modified. This distinguishes the Logos made flesh from those who believe in his name.