CONCLUSION AND PERSPECTIVES

Two core strategies of the New Testament conversation with the Jewish Scripture have been discussed in this book. The first, which has received most of the attention, strives to establish itself as sharing with the relevant Jewish milieu not only a veneration of Scripture but also current patterns of exegesis. It is this “hermeneutical belonging” that is time and again presented as the leading argument for the truth of either Jesus’ or the Jesus movement’s preaching. It is upon these shared hermeneutical grounds that the innovations of, *inter alia*, messianic exegesis of the *kerygma* build.

The period was one of intensive exegetical activity, and from the surviving traditions it may be surmised that this exegesis—even within the Land of Israel—was of an extremely variegated nature, with particular end-results of the hermeneutical process reflecting the tendencies and approach of certain teachers or groups. Thus it is mostly not these particularities of interpretation but rather the appeal to basic patterns of hermeneutical procedure, shared by the creators of the New Testament tradition with broader Jewish tradition, that was supposed to give them polemical credibility vis-à-vis their Jewish reference groups. It is to these general hermeneutical patterns that they seem to have felt obliged. The described strategy, then, differed substantially from that of a later stage, the one aiming at “waterproof partition”, at establishing a clear-cut demarcation line, with the “custom control” of emerging orthodoxy armed with a self-imposed mandate to prevent infiltration of those “dangerous in between”. It is this observed strategy that constitutes the raison d’être of this volume’s primary focus on mapping the instances in the New Testament conversation with Scripture that possibly mirror/bear witness to patterns of contemporaneous Jewish exegesis.

An attempt was also made to find out what exactly such New Testament traditions—sometimes the only early witnesses to exegetical tendencies otherwise attested only in later rabbinic sources—possibly reflect: current trends of wide circulation or those characteristic of only certain Jewish groups. This in turn may allow us to define more precisely the nature of nascent Christianity’s Jewish milieu(s). New Testament traditions are thus presented as witnesses for “broader Judaism”, not so
much in the polemical invectives they contain against contemporaneous Jewish groups and practices but also, and even predominantly, in what seems to be a positive internalization and appropriation of patterns current in the relevant Jewish milieus.

The second core strategy discussed in the book, most prominently in its concluding chapter, emphasizes instead the basic novelty of the propagated, previously unheard of, (messianic) exegesis, conditioning its availability on prophetic-like inspiration of the Spirit. It is emphatically this inspiration and not being rooted in accepted hermeneutical patterns that is presented by Paul in 2 Corinthians—to a Gentile audience but implicitly also to his Jewish opponents (within the Jesus movement?)—as the true source of authority. This latter strategy, proudly advertising the novelty of its insights, is admittedly very different from the former one. Yet it turns out that its conscious emphasis on the previously hidden dramatic reinterpretation of the Scripture, revealed exclusively to the adepts of the Jesus movement, combined with presenting this reinterpretation as the foundational element of the new covenant, follows a hermeneutical pattern already established in Qumran. Thus in this case also, a New Testament tradition provides a key corroborative witness for the existence and currency of such a pattern in the first century ce, while again the differences of outlook find expression in the differing content of the dramatic reinterpretation.

It is clear that the success of the endeavor of mapping the New Testament as a witness for wider Jewish hermeneutical trends depends to a great extent on one’s ability to distinguish the rhema of a peculiar “Christian input” from the thema of the shared exegetical background reflected in the New Testament tradition in question. An attempt has been made in the book to solve the conundrum with regard to the variety of instances found in different layers of the New Testament corpus: Synoptics, Acts, Pauline epistles. A number of reasonable procedures that make it possible to perform the division have been suggested, with intuition—hopefully, of an informed kind—retaining its centrality.

It goes without saying that this book has only made initial inroads into the task of mapping; Paul’s writings especially, but not exclusively, are in need of further exploration. And, of course, the same reasoning that made it possible to approach the New Testament as an important source of information on wider late Second Temple patterns of Jewish exegesis may be applied, with some modifications, to notions, practices and beliefs reflected in the earliest Christian writings outside strictly exegetical modes of discourse. Scholars of Qumran have developed