TO SHOW THE DIFFERENCE BY COMPARISON: THE *NEW WETTSTEIN AND CLEANTHES’ HYMN*1

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προύργον δὲ φύσην καὶ τοῖς παρ’ Ἑλλησιν ὄνομαστότατοις γεγενημένοις νομοθέταις τοὺς ἡμετέρους παρεξετάσαι, τοὺς ἀλλιέας λέγω καὶ τὸν σκυτοτόμον καὶ τοὺς τελώνας, καὶ δειξάει πάλιν εἰκ ξυγκρίσεως τὸ διάφορον.

I thought it useful also to examine our lawgivers (I mean the fishermen, the leather-worker, and the tax collectors) in comparison to those who have become most famous among the Greeks, and to show again the difference by comparison….

(Theodoret, *Graec. affect. cur. praef.* 12, ed. Canivet)

Despite its many potential and actual abuses, the comparison of New Testament (NT) texts with Greek and Latin material remains indispensable for the historical study of the NT: it illuminates the historical context in which the NT authors and its first recipients lived by assisting in the reconstruction of the encyclopedia of knowledge, the linguistic and conceptual frameworks, the worldviews, and the social settings of these authors and readers; it helps us determine the *differentia* distinguishing early Christian traditions from other moral and religious movements of the time; and it is invaluable for identifying the dynamic and developmental relationships between early Christianity and other religions.2

1 I am grateful for this opportunity to honor Robert Grant for all that I have learned from him, but especially to read ancient texts, including early Christian material, critically and without preconceived ideas, and to make *sense* of these texts within their intellectual and social contexts.

Most NT students and scholars will find it difficult to navigate their way through the extensive extant corpora of Greek and Latin texts. A collection of comparative material, judiciously selected to illustrate the aspects mentioned above, can therefore be an important tool to guide them through these sources. One of the most ambitious recent collections of this nature is the *New Wettstein*.3

1. The *New Wettstein*: A Brief Description

The *New Wettstein* project, to be published in two (or three) volumes with seven or eight parts, started out under the leadership of Georg Strecker at Göttingen in 1986 and has since 1993 been directed by Udo Schnelle at Halle.4 The aim of the *New Wettstein* is to provide a “reader” ("Lesebuch")5 containing passages with substantive parallels ("inhaltliche Parallelen") to NT texts, especially regarding rituals and institutions; texts explaining realia found in the NT; texts illuminating important concepts or scarce words; texts illustrating the reception horizon ("Rezeptionshorizont") of ancient readers; and texts explaining fixed word combinations (epithets, word pairs, phrases).6 As the title

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3 A similar collection, but much less extensive is Klaus Berger and Carsten Colpe, eds., *Religionsgeschichtliches Textbuch zum Neuen Testament* (NTD, Textreihe 1; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1987); an English translation with additional material is provided by M. Eugene Boring, et al., *Hellenistic Commentary to the New Testament* (Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon, 1995).


5 Cf. Lang, “Geschichte und Programm,” § 2.3: “Wie (Strack/)Billerbeck so will auch der Neue Wettstein ein Lesebuch sein, um zur weiteren Lektüre des entsprechenden Materials anzuregen und so selbst das eigene Verstehen zu fördern.”

6 See Gerald Seelig, “Einführung,” in *Texte zur Brieffilatur und zur Johanneseapokalypse* (ed. G. Strecker and U. Schnelle; vol. 2.1 of *Neuer Wettstein: Texte zum Neuen Testament*