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Judaism and the Word

Rudolph Bultmann discerned a source of miraculous signs in the Gospel of John. He believed that this source was related closely to Gnosticism. Bultmann saw Jesus as the “authentic revealer.” C.H. Dodd leveled convincing criticism against Bultmann’s claims to Gnostic sources. Gnosticism taught salvation through revelation knowledge, often with a sharp dualistic view of the world. Jesus, however, related the new birth to the work of the Spirit, which is like the wind, not to be controlled and unpredictable: “The wind blows where it wills, and even though you hear the sound of it, you do not know where it comes from and where it is going. So is everyone who is born of the Spirit” (3:8). The word for Spirit, *ruach* in Hebrew, is the same as the word for wind. In the Talmud, the person from a non-Jewish background, who chooses the one true God by faith and commits to live as a Jewish believer, is said to be born again like a newborn child. Bultmann’s approach fails because it separates the Gospel of John from ancient Judaism, and then roots the origins of the book in the Gnostic religion. The Gnostic system split God Almighty into two deities. The evil God of creation who made the material universe is contrasted to the good God of the spiritual realm who is light and spirit. This notion rebels against the Jewish teachings that God is one. He is light. He is incorporeal. The explanations of the miraculous signs in the Gospel are embedded into the source itself and are designed to inspire faith. The created universe in John’s Gospel is good. Darkness does not gain mastery over light. Good will triumph. The dualism between light and darkness is not the sole property of Gnosticism, but is also related to Jewish apocalyptic thought. The logos in the prologue (John 1:1), “In the beginning was the word [*logos*],” not only appears in Greek literature, but also in Jewish midrash. The words “In the

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beginning” refer to the creation account in Genesis 1:1. God Himself and His creative energy is connected to the Word. In an early Jewish commentary on the book of Exodus (Mekhilta), the rabbis teach, “This comes to teach you that everyone who believes in the Shepherd of Yisrael, it is as though that individual believed in the Word [Meamar], Who spoke and the world came to be.” The pre-existence of Torah, wisdom, and the name of the Messiah are accepted in Jewish thought. Psalm 33:6 teaches, “By the word of the LORD the heavens were made....”