ISMO DUNDERBERG

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347

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* * *

The chapters in this book are, with one exception, previously published. I have made only a few modifications to the original publications, and only when I felt there was something obviously wrong in the original.

The articles are republished here with due permission from the publishers of the original publications, which are as follows:

Chapter 1: *New Testament Studies* 59 (2013): 247–67.

Chapter 2: Pages 201–21 in *The Codex Judas Papers: Proceedings of the International Congress on the Tchachos Codex held at Rice University, Houston Texas, March 13±16, 2008.* Edited by April D. DeConick. Nag Hammadi and Manichean Series 71. Leiden: Brill, 2009.

Chapter 3: Pages 419–40 in *The Rise and Expansion of Christianity in the First Three Centuries of the Common Era.* Edited by Clare K. Rothschild and Jens Schröter. Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament 301. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2013.

Chapter 4: Pages 383–96 in *The Oxford Handbook of the Reception History of the Bible*. Edited by Michael Lieb, Emma Mason, Jonathan Roberts and Christopher Rowland. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011.

Chapter 5: Pages 67–93 in *The Apocryphal Gospels within the Context of Early Christian Theology.* Edited by Jens Schröter. Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Theologicarum Lovaniensium 260. Leuven: Peeters.

Chapter 6: Pages 220–38 in *Stoicism in Early Christianity*. Edited by Tuomas Rasimus, Troels Engberg-Pedersen and Ismo Dunderberg. Grand Rapids, MI: BakerAcademic, 2010.

Chapter 7: Pages 113–28 in *Zugänge zur Gnosis*. Edited by Christoph Markschies and Johannes van Oort. Leuven: Peeters, 2013.

Chapter 8 is previously unpublished but will also appear in the conference volume of a Valentinian Conference held in Rome, October 2013 (ed. Einar Thomassen; Nag Hammadi and Manichean Series; Leiden: Brill).

Chapter 9: Pages 14–36 in *Voces Clamantium in Deserto: Essays in Honor of Kari Syreeni*. Edited by Sven-Olav Back and Matti Kankaanniemi. Studier i exegetik vid judaistik utgivna av Teologiska fakulteten vid Åbo Akademi. Turku: Åbo Akademi, 2012.

Chapter 10: Pages 347–66 in *Beyond the Gnostic Gospels: Studies Building on the Work of Elaine Pagels*. Edited by Eduard Iricinschi, Lance Jenott, Nicola Denzey Lewis and Philippa Townsend. Studien und Texte zu Antike und Christentu 82. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2013.

For the names of Nag Hammadi texts, I follow those used in *The Nag Hammadi Scriptures: The International Edition* (ed. Marvin Meyer; New York: HarperOne, 2007). For my references to the Nag Hammadi texts, I always give the codex pages, but I mention the line numbers only when I discuss more technical details and individual expressions in those texts.

The abbreviations of other source texts and in bibliographical entries follow those given in *The SBL Handbook of Style* (ed. Patrick H. Alexander et alii; Peabody, MS: Hendrickson, 1999).

Table of Contents

Introduction

The chapters in this book were written after my study on second-century Valentinian Christianity,[1] and they, in one way or another, reflect themes that arose in the course of writing that book. When it was out, I had in mind making a prompt return to New Testament studies. The New Testament professorship I received at my home university in Helsinki seemed to lend added urgency to this decision. I thought that my days in second-century studies were numbered and that the book I had written would simultaneously remain my rookie work in and swansong to this field.

It turned out, however, that there was some demand for second-century perspectives at conferences, seminars and workshops arranged by my New Testament colleagues, and this demand has kept me occupied with second-century Christianity until now. Most chapters in this book go back to research papers I was asked to deliver on such occasions. I used these presentations as venues, not only to beat the drum for some perspectives in my study on the Valentinians that I considered to be of more general interest, but also to further explore points that I had touched upon but not fully elaborated in that study. Thus, to those familiar with my previous work, the studies collected in this book offer a mixture of old and new.

I

One of the roles my New Testament colleagues expected of me was that of an expert on the second-century reception history of the scriptures. I should have anticipated this expectation, but I did not, nor was I well prepared for that role. Although my scholarly training had been in New Testament studies, reception history played little role in my work on the school of Valentinus since I found some other issues that I considered to be more crucial than reception history. Therefore, it was a welcome opportunity for me (for which I probably was not

[1] Ismo Dunderberg, *Beyond Gnosticism: Myth, Lifestyle, and Society in the School of Valentinus* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008).

duly grateful when the invitations came) that I was asked to work on this issue as well. Three chapters published here (4, 5, and 8) go back to such invitations.

In writing these studies, I also began to resuscitate my interest, which I had developed when I earlier worked on the *Gospel of Thomas*,[2] in topics pertaining to the New Testament canon. What I now found especially fascinating, and sometimes frustrating, were some New Testament colleagues' beliefs and strong value judgments related to canonical and noncanonical texts. It seemed a matter of course that some theologically conservative scholars of Christian origins were both adamant and predictable in their dismissal of all noncanonical gospels and the forms of "alternative" Christianities to which these gospels bore witness. Such alternatives might be easily conceived of as rivals to the form of Christianity that won the day in the Roman Empire in the fourth century (cf. chapter 10), and hence the energetic dismissal of these gospels.

It was more of a surprise to realize that more critical scholars of Christian origins also made quite strong theological claims about the formation of the New Testament canon. It also seemed customary among some of them to take *our* New Testament as a given (cf. chapter 9). There was very little historical reflection as to what texts the New Testament is comprised of (although the selection varies in the earliest manuscripts of the entire New Testament!), and there was hardly any reflection as to why this collection was needed and by whom (for these issues, see chapter 5).

In my take on the canon issue in this book, I aim at steering away from any deterministic theories in which it is assumed that the canon generated itself. I am ready to confess that I (unlike some of my colleagues) feel very much unable to assess whether and in what way the early Christian texts outside the New Testament are of poorer quality than those in it. Such assessments often seem matters of theological taste rather than results of careful argumentation, and their real goal is to reaffirm the New Testament as the default position and debunk everything else as deviations from that position.

In working on the chapters related to the canon issue, I became increasingly aware of the simple fact that even the collection we call "the New Testament" is a cultural construct, not a historical given. This applies even to the best scientific New Testament edition, Nestle-Aland's *Novum Testamentum Graece*. It does not provide us with all the texts present in the earliest New Testament manuscripts; it only contains critical editions of the twenty-seven books that comprise *our* New Testament. The critical edition does not contain the *Epistle of Barnabas*, nor the *Shepherd of Hermas*, nor *1±2 Clement*, although these texts are known to us for the very reason that they were included in some of the earliest manuscripts of the New Testament. Their inclusion in New Testament manuscripts

[2] Cf. Ismo Dunderberg, *The Beloved Disciple in Conflict?: Revisiting the Gospels of John and Thomas* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

shows that those who copied them "considered these writings to form part of the sacred Scriptures."[3]

The omission of these texts from the critical editions of the New Testament may be one reason why even more critical New Testament scholars often so effortlessly separate the "New Testament" from other bodies of early Christian literature, such as the "Apostolic Fathers," where *Barnabas*, *Shepherd,* and *1±2 Clement* are now conveniently placed. We all know (or should know) that the collection called the "Apostolic Fathers" did not exist in antiquity (the first version of this collection appeared in the 17th century), nor is there any clear definition which texts belong to this collection, nor were individual texts included in this collection clearly separated from those in the "New Testament" in the early Christian period.[4] Nevertheless, both in teaching and in scholarship, it is customary to neatly separate the "Apostolic Fathers" from the "New Testament," and this distinction continues to determine the way we conceptualize the different "phases" of Christian origins.

As Daniel Boyarin points out, boundaries between groups of people (or those between countries, ideologies, etc.) do not simply *exist*, those boundaries are always *drawn* by someone,[5] and, as the present political situation reminds us, the boundaries are also constantly negotiated and redrawn, either in subtle ways or with brute force. The intention of an active drawing of the boundaries (instead of simply trying to define something that has always "been there") is clear, as Boyarin further argues, in early Christian and Jewish heresiology, but it is equally clear that modern scholars are also often, more or less intentionally, engaged in boundary drawing with the research they produce. The case with "the New Testament" and "the Apostolic Fathers" is one example of how the boundaries, once drawn by someone, can gradually become "naturalized" in scholarly usage. The same problem, of course, pertains to other "naturalized" categories as well, such as "gnosticism."

II

It might be difficult for scholars devoting themselves to scriptures to understand what other issues could possibly be more interesting in second-century studies than the reception of and the debates revolving around the texts that became

[3] Bart Ehrman, Introduction to *The Apostolic Fathers* (ed. and trans. Bart Ehrman; LCL 24; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), 3.

[4] For an account how this collection has evolved from the seventeeth century onwards, see Ehrman, "Introduction."

[5] Daniel Boyarin, *Border Lines: The Partition of Judaeo-Christianity* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004).

holy scripture for Christians. I do not want to repeat too much what I outlined in greater detail in my study on the Valentinians,[6] but I shall very briefly reiterate the crucial points of interest since they lay the basis for my perspective and approach in most chapters of this book, including those where Valentinians are not mentioned at all.

All chapters in this book are about, or touch upon, people and texts that, in someone's book, are "gnostic." There are obviously varying degrees of this assessment in different cases. Most specialists place Valentinian and Sethian forms of Christianity under the rubric "gnosticism." Opinions are more divided as to whether some other texts discussed in this book, such as the *Gospel of Thomas*, the *Gospel of Mary*, the *Authoritative Teaching* and the *Exegesis on the Soul* are "gnostic" or not (cf. chapters 1 and 5).

The main difference between these two sets of evidence is that Valentinians and Sethians were mythmakers, who found it important to attribute the creation of the world to an inferior creator-God, whereas the texts in the latter group show little or no interest in creation stories and do not posit the existence of a separate creator-God. In consequence, if one is willing to argue (as many still are) that the texts in the latter group are also "gnostic," one must seek in those texts very subtle, and often barely visible, hints at the "gnostic" mythology that allegedly underlies them.

This poses an obvious problem in interpreting the texts of the latter type. As soon as their "mythic" undercurrent is "uncovered," they are prone to be interpreted first and foremost against this background. This yields to dubious explanations since it is, then, assumed (1) that the myth in the background was what really mattered to the authors of these texts, and (2) that these authors for one reason or another wanted to keep secret that "real thing" from those for whom they were writing. In other words, these texts are interpreted in light of their alleged hidden agenda. The locus of explanation is shifted from what the text says to what it does *not* say. The old accusation brought against early Christian mythmakers, that they sought to dupe their audiences and only laid bare their true teaching to those they managed to deceive, still persists in modern scholarship, though this suspicion is now usually more politely formulated (e.g, by using the language of "exoteric" and "esoteric").

Many specialists of the Nag Hammadi and other Coptic texts are moving away from classifying the texts of the latter type as "gnostic" ones and now use other categories to describe their intellectual context. For instance, the same scholars who originally detected gnostic features in the *Gospel of Thomas* and *The Book of Thomas* now classify these texts as "Platonic."[7] Those still claiming that the *Gospel of Thomas* is a gnostic work often seem to have some other than purely

[6] Dunderberg, *Beyond Gnosticism*, 1–31.
[7] Cf. chapter 1, note 9 below.

academic reasons for doing so (cf. chapter 10). Designating the *Gospel of Thomas* a gnostic gospel is more often than not part of the argument to the effect that this gospel is of secondary value in comparison to those in the New Testament and, thus, does not merit the attention it has received in gospel studies. The gnostic provenance of the *Gospel of Thomas* is more often stated than carefully argued, and such statements customarily first and foremost serve the purpose of the exclusion of any "alternatives" to the canonical gospels rather than reflect careful scrutiny of the gospel itself.

As will be seen below, I do not designate any of the texts in this latter group as "gnostic." In chapter 1, I call these texts "nondemiurgical" to simply distinguish them from texts where the myth of the inferior creator-God (demiurge) occupies a crucial place.

III

The terms of "gnostic" and "gnosticism" are no less problematic in connection with the early Christian "demiurgists,"[8] that is, the mythmakers who assumed the existence of an inferior creator-God in their new stories of the creation.

Just like "the Apostolic Fathers," the term "gnosticism" does not occur in early sources but originates the 17th century.[9] The main problem with that term, however, is not its late date but the fact that it creates the impression that the early Christian mythmakers discussed in this book formed a relatively united front that was opposed to some other united front in early Christianity. This impression persists, even though all agree that these mythmakers never formed a unified group in history. Their attitudes towards the body, society, other Christians, and the entire visible world differed greatly. More recent studies have abundantly demonstrated that there was no "gnostic spirit" that would have been common to all these mythmakers. Their teachings betray no shared "sense of alienation" in the world,[10] nor did these people univocally promote "hatred of the body."

[8] This term goes back to Michael A. Williams, *Rethinking "Gnosticism": An Argument for Dismantling a Dubious Category* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996). Williams proposes that, instead of "gnosticism," it would be more advisable to speak of "biblical demiurgical traditions." This designation would refer to the two most important ingredients in the myths of the early Christian mythmakers discussed in this book: the retelling of the biblical creation story, and the Platonic assumption of a separate creator-God (demiurge).

[9] Cf. Bentley Layton, "Prolegomena to the Study of Ancient Gnosticism," in *The Social World of the First Christians: Essays in Honor of Wayne A. Meeks* (ed. L. Michael White and O. Larry Yarbrough; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995), 334–50.

[10] The quest for the "gnostic spirit" is characteristic of the work of Hans Jonas, who defined as his goal in the study of "gnostic" sources "to understand the spirit speaking through these voices and in its light to restore an intelligible unity to the baffling multiplicity of its expression"; Hans Jonas, *The Gnostic Religion: The Message of the Alien God and the Beginnings of*

A sense of social alienation can be felt in some parts of the "gnostic" evidence; there are dismissive remarks on the body in some of the evidence, and some texts lend voice to a hostile attitude towards other Christians or the Roman society or both. None of such views, however, is universally attested in the evidence related to these early Christian mythmakers.[11] That they are portrayed as extremists in thought and practice is the result of scholarly generalization, based upon very selective usage of the available evidence.

The diversity among early Christian mythmakers is often accepted in principle but not in practice. What I found striking in my study on Valentinians was the scholarly tendency to cherry-pick from the available evidence the most negative statements concerning the body, other Christians and the visible world, and to ignore those bearing witness to more moderate sentiments. One very typical example is the lumping together of the Valentinians, most of whom had a relatively positive view of their contemporary world, and the Sethians, most of whom adopted a far more critical stance to that world, as representing the same group of "gnostics." In such cases, the evidence is more often than not taken from the Sethians since their more austere views about the body, society and other Christians better serve to illustrate the scholar's conception of "the gnostic spirit" – as opposed the true "Christian" one. The Valentinian evidence is less useful for this purpose since it comes very close at many points to what is conceived of as "true" (read: "our") Christianity.

One of the points I sought to make in my study on Valentinians and still do here is this: the deviation of these mythmakers from what later became the orthodox Christian belief in one God has become a more distinct group denominator in modern academic scholarship than it was in history. I may have become oversensitive to this issue but my gut feeling is that when scholars of the New Testament and the early church are reporting "gnostic views," you can expect to hear soon how the things were conceived "in the church," and that latter position is usually clearly distinguished from the "gnostic" one.[12] The same sense of superiority that characterized some scholarly assessments of canonical gospels as opposed to noncanonical ones can also be felt in modern researchers'

Christianity (2nd ed.; Boston: Beacon Press, 1958), xvii. For a critical rejoinder to Jonas, see now Nicola Denzey Lewis, *Cosmology and Fate in Gnosticism and Graeco-Roman Antiquity: Under Pitiless Skies* (NHMS 81; Leiden: Brill, 2013).

[11] Cf. Williams, *Rethinking "Gnosticism."*

[12] For some recent examples, see Frances Young, "Creation of Human Being: Forging of a Distinct Christian Discourse," *Studia Patristica* 44 (2010): 334–48, esp. 341 ("The dogma ['out of nothing'] arose, then, in the second century, when not only was the apologetic enterprise engaging with philosophy, but cosmogony was a key element in the debate with gnosticism"); Christopher T. Bounds, "Competing Doctrines of Perfection: The Primary Issue in Irenaeus' Refutation of Gnosticism," *Studia Patristica* 45 (2010): 403–8 (where the analysis is divided into "the Gnostic doctrine" [403–5], and "the Church doctrine" [405–7]); D. Jeffrey Bingham, "Irenaeus on Gnostic Biblical Interpretation," *Studia Patristica* 40 (2006): 367–79.

evaluations of "gnostic" views. One surprising fact is how sharp, condemnatory, and even emotional, these evaluations often are. A leading authority of ancient philosophy calls "the Gnostics" "the magpies of the intellectual world of the second century."[13] A renowned sociologist of religion oozes a disdain for both ancient "gnostics" and the modern scholars studying them.[14] Those working on the reception history of New Testament texts in the second century are often quick to disparage the "gnostic" interpretations as "perverting," "abusing," and "distorting" the true meaning of these texts.[15] One prolific writer on the New Testament and early Christianity is even concerned that the academic study of gnosticism opens the door to demons[16] – the reader beware!

Such scholarly claims both presuppose and reinforce the dualistic conception of early Christianity as fundamentally divided into two opposed poles, with the early church at the one end, and the "gnostics" at the other.[17] This model obviously presupposes too much unity at both ends, at the "church" end as well as in that of "the gnostics." It also ignores the fact that the alternative cosmic myth and the teaching of the second god were not the only issues on the table when early Christian teachers discussed and debated with each other. The cosmic myth aside, the Valentinians stood on many other issues closer to Clement and Origen of Alexandria than to the Sethians. The sense of affinity among Valentinians, Clement and Origen is also sometimes acknowledged in Clement's and Origen's works. For instance, Clement *supported* his own teaching about self-control by quoting Valentinus' bizarre illustration of Jesus' unique self-control over his body – that Jesus ate and drank but did not defecate.[18] Origen often seriously reflects on, and occasionally approves of, Heracleon's allegorical interpretations of John's gospel.[19] Such instances of blurring the boundaries, ancient and modern alike, tend to remain in the shadows in scholarly literature, however. This may

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[13] John Dillon "Monotheism in Gnostic Tradition," in *Pagan Monotheism in Late Antiquity* (ed. P. Athanassiadi and M. Frede; Oxford: Clarendon, 1999), 69–79, p. 74.

[14] Rodney Stark, *Cities of God* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2006), 154.

[15] Cf. below chapter 5 n. 3 (Charles Hill); chapter 8 (Andreas Lindemann); for yet another representative of this attitude, see Hans-Friedrich Weiss, *Frühes Christentum und Gnosis: Eine rezeptionsgeschichtliche Studie* (WUNT 225; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008), e. g. 210, 253–9, 301–2, 308, 386–8; 493–500; cf. Ismo Dunderberg, Review of Weiss, *Frühes Christentum und Gnosis*, *RBL* (2011) [http://www.bookreviews.org/pdf/7365_8026.pdf].

[16] Cf. chapter 10 n. 2 (Ben Witherington).

[17] Cf. Karen L. King, *What is Gnosticism?* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2003).

[18] Valentinus, frag. 3 = Clement, *Misc.* 3.59.3. Valentinus' teaching was probably not as bizarre as it may seem to us since similar stories were also told about legendary Greek sages (cf. Dunderberg, *Beyond Gnosticism*, 22). Clement clearly took no offense at this teaching of Valentinus.

[19] Cf. Harold W. Attridge, *Essays on John and Hebrews* (WUNT 264; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010), 193–207; Ansgar Wucherpfennig, *Heracleon Philologus: Gnostische Johannesexegese im zweiten Jahrhundert* (WUNT 142; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2002), 26.

indicate that our scholarly discourse is "conflict-driven": we as scholars find "conflicts" to be more relevant – and no doubt more exciting – than instances of peaceful coexistence and mutual learning.

Another, related problem is that "gnosticism," as a category of difference and exclusion, tends to predetermine the scholar's focus: it is set on what is conceived of as being different from something else. Deviation from the norm is what truly matters in this picture, and the essence of the other (in this case "gnosticism") is searched in difference. Points of shared convictions seem either non-interesting, and thus not worth studying, or dangerous, in which case the scholar may feel the call to reaffirm the existence of the boundary between the two poles. The most prominent, and suspect, explanation in the latter case is that those "gnostics" who seem to come especially close to the boundary were not sincere but have put on the cloak of a true Christian only for strategic reasons, that is, in order to win new converts to their gnostic cause.

In consequence, I avoid the language of "gnosticism" in my own usage – with two exceptions which are the titles of this book and chapter 5. (In the latter case, I confess I just could not come up with any better shorthand for the materials discussed in that study. Within the chapter itself, however, I try to be as clear as possible on the problems pertaining to the terminology of "gnosticism," and on the broad variety of positions on the Hebrew Bible in these materials.)

My rationale for not using the terms "gnosticism" and "gnostic" in my own analysis is that it would be very difficult to use these terms without falling into the incorrect polarities described above. The usage of these terms unavoidably creates the impression that the people grouped under this term somehow belonged together and somehow as a group differed from some people, no matter what term is chosen to designate the beliefs of those in the latter group: "orthodoxy," "proto-orthodoxy," "the Great Church," or "mainstream." Such polarities eschew the rich diversity of early Christian groups and views.

The usage of the G-word would also add little to my analysis since I have not found as my calling to lay bare in any of these studies the distinct "core" of "gnostic thought" that made it different from everything else in the second century. I rather seek to make sense of individual early Christian teachers and texts by placing them in a dialogue with other contemporary teachers and texts, both Christian and non-Christian.

The purpose of some of the studies presented here, unsurprisingly, is to shake the foundations of the great wall between the church and gnosticism. This endeavor is most clearly visible in my study on early Christian martyrdom and its critics (chapter 3). I wrote it in dialogue with, and opposition to, the usual generalization that those in the church embraced martyrdom, whereas those on the gnostic front sought to avoid it. The same goal is pursued in chapter 4 on the Genesis interpretations of early Christian mythmakers: this study seeks to delineate different ways of using and evaluating traditions stemming from the

Book of Genesis, but it does *not* seek to exhume a unifying core underneath these varied usages of the Hebrew Bible.

Instead of searching for *the* "gnostic" ideology and its distinct markers, I classify the evidence by using more specific group designations that are relatively well established in gnostic studies. It goes without saying that Valentinus and his followers figure prominently in the chapters of this book, but in many chapters I also refer to the views of "Sethians."

Both designations are subject to debate in more recent literature. In my opinion, the Valentinians are well attested in ancient sources as a distinct early Christian group. They had opponents who found them important enough to be disagreed with and who for this reason wrote lengthy polemical treatises against them.[20] The case with "Sethians" seems less secure since the external evidence for them is not so prominent as that for Valentinians. Sethian theology is first and foremost a scholarly construct based on ideological affinities between a group of Nag Hammadi texts and the views described at some length in Irenaeus' *Against Heresies* 1.29–31. While some scholars find in Sethianism the "classical" form of ancient gnosticism,[21] others have considerably modified or even abandoned

[20] This scholarly consensus on the Valentinians has come under critical scrutiny. Geoffrey Smith, *Guilt by Association: Heresy Catalogues in Early Christianity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), argues that "the school of Valentinus" was a heresiological construct rather than a historically accurate designation. Hugo Lundhaug finds unnecessary the usual hypothesis of Valentinian provenance of some Nag Hammadi texts, such as the *Gospel of Philip* (NHC II, 3) and the *Liturgical Fragments* (at the end of NHC XI). Lundhaug argues that the Nag Hammadi texts make the best sense when placed in the Egyptian monastic context of the fourth and fifth centuries, but he does not explain how the references to a lower creator-god in a number of these texts would fit in that context. For example, the statement in the *Gospel of Philip* that "the world came into being because of a false step (ⲡⲁⲣⲁⲡⲧⲱⲙⲁ)" since the creator-god failed in his attempt to make it "imperishable and immortal" (*Gos. Phil.* 75:2–11 // § 99) is not mentioned at all in Lundhaug's otherwise thorough study of this text: Hugo Lundhaug, *Images of Rebirth: Cognitive Poetics and Transformational Soteriology in the Gospel of Philip and the Exegesis on the Soul* (NHMS 73; Leiden: Brill, 2010); cf. idem, "Evidence of 'Valentinian' Ritual Practice? The Liturgical Fragments of Nag Hammadi Codex XI (NHC XI,2a–e)," in *Gnosticism, Platonism and the Late Ancient World: Essays in Honour of John D. Turner* (ed. Kevin Corrigan and Tuomas Rasimus; NHMS 82; Leiden: Brill, 2013), 225–243; idem, "'Gnostisisme' og 'Valentinianisme': To problematiske kategorier i studiet av Nag Hammadi-biblioteket og tidlig kristendom ["Gnosticism" and "Valentinianism:" Two Problematic Categories in the study of the Nag Hammadi Library and Early Christianity]," *Chaos* 36 (2001): 27–43. The theory about the monastic context of the Nag Hammadi Library is debated among coptologists; for an extended critical review of the "Pachomian monastic hypothesis," see now Stephen Emmel, "The Coptic Gnostic Texts as Witnesses to the Production and Transmission of Gnostic (and Other) Traditions," in *Thomasevangelium: Entstehung ± Rezeption ± Theologie* (ed. Jörg Frey, Enno Edzard Popkes and Jens Schröter; BZNW 157; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2008), 33–49.

[21] Cf. David Brakke, *The Gnostics: Myth, Ritual and Diversity in Early Christianity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010); Bentley Layton, "Prolegomena to the Study of Ancient Gnosticism."

the Sethian hypothesis.[22] I still see the Sethian hypothesis as resting on the solid observation that there are notable and distinct affinities in the set of texts now classified as "Sethian" ones. The affinities are largely of an ideological nature, however, so it may be advisable to speak of "Sethianism" as referring to shared myths and beliefs, and not to make farfetched assumptions on "Sethians" as a group (or groups) of people brought together by these shared teachings.[23]

IV

As the title of this book suggests, issues related to morality are crucial in most studies published here. I am especially interested in clarifying what kind of ethical ideals and moral guidance, either explicit or implicit, the texts discussed in this book offer.

This perspective is connected with the claim that these texts should not be taken as reflections of a distinct "gnostic" spirit. Rather, these texts belong to those written by educated early Christians, who became more and more inspired by and oriented towards philosophy from the second century onwards. Ancient philosophy, in turn, was not all about "systems of thought," it was also about putting philosophy into practice ("doing philosophy"). In other words, ancient philosophers provided their adherents with a way of life, which the adherents were expected to follow.[24]

Comparisons between philosophers and the early Christian evidence discussed here are nothing new as such. Most previous comparisons, however, have been often focused on theory. That is, the focus has been set on the great traditions, especially those issuing from Plato, and they are approached as "systems of thought." In consequence, the ultimate goal has often been to compare philosophers' systems of thought with those of the "gnostics." Less attention have been paid on issues related to morality and lifestyle, although these issues were probably of primary relevance to "average" students in any of these educated groups.

The moral concern is often linked with the rise of "moral philosophers" in the Hellenistic and Greco-Roman periods, but this concern already looms large in Plato's dialogues (cf. chapter 1). What ancient philosophers provided their

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[22] Cf. Alastair H.B. Logan, *Gnostic Truth and Christian Heresy: A Study in the History of Gnosticism* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1996); Tuomas Rasimus, *Paradise Reconsidered in Gnostic Mythmaking: Rethinking Sethianism in Light of the Ophite Myth and Ritual* (NHMS 68; Leiden: Brill, 2009).

[23] Michael A. Williams, "Sethianism," in *A Companion to Second Century Christian "Heretics"* (ed. Antti Marjanen and Petri Luomanen; VigChrSup 76; Leiden: Brill, 2005), 32–63.

[24] For this perspective on ancient philosophy, see especially Pierre Hadot, *What is Ancient Philosophy?* (trans. Michael Case; Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2002).

students with was instruction that led to calmness (ἀταραξία) and true happiness (εὐδαιμονία). The ancient moral literature certainly includes detailed instructions about things to do and those to avoid, and reflections about principles of ethical decision making. Much of the ancient philosophers' ethical instruction, however, revolved around one's *inner reactions* towards the impulses stemming either from within (one's body) or from the surrounding world (objects of delight, pain, desire and fear). Ethical reflection was focused on how one is able to keep calm and rational, and not to give rein to the false beliefs connected with passions. There were differences between schools regarding how much emotions need to be suppressed but all schools insisted on the great importance of self-control as the means of achieving true happiness.

The importance of ancient moral philosophy began to dawn on me when I was working with Valentinian tales of the creation. Some narrative details, which I had first thought of as poetic embellishments of creation stories, turned out to be much more than that when they were placed in the context of ancient philosophy. For example, in the Valentinian story about Wisdom, abandoned outside the divine realm, her entanglement in emotions (distress, fear, anxiety) and her way out of that state were painstakingly described (cf. chapter 6.2). In the myth, the Savior is introduced as visiting Wisdom from above in order to offer her a cure for those emotions. The role assigned to the Savior in this myth, thus, was similar to that of ancient philosophers who presented themselves as doctors of the soul.[25] I realized that Valentinians shared some common ground with moral philosophers, and the recognition of that common ground helped me better understand the Valentinian sources I was working with.

In consequence, perspectives gleaned from ancient moral philosophy began to play an increasingly crucial role in my approach to the Valentinians and other early Christian intellectuals. In addition to the philosophers' theories about emotions, their discussions about the perfect human (ὁ τέλειος) and other types of humans (some of whom aimed at moral progress, whereas some others did not) called for comparisons since similar categorizations of classes of humankind were present in the philosophers' works and in my primary sources. It seems obvious that the early Christian texts discussed in chapter 1 belong to this pool of thoughts. The *Gospel of Judas* and moral philosophers may seem more unexpected bedfellows but I seek to show that a link between them can also be made (chapter 2). My interpretations of the Valentinian views about the classes of humankind in chapters 6–8 are also closely linked with the ancient philosophers' views about moral progress.

It may be debated how essential the link to ancient moral philosophers is for understanding the sources discussed in this book. I probably take this connection further than most other specialists in the field would do. One of the benefits I

[25] This is a brief summary of what I argued in Dunderberg, *Beyond Gnosticism*, 95–118.

see in this choice is that it enables us to better see connections between this body of evidence and Jewish and early Christian teachers. In addition to Hellenistic and Greco-Roman philosophers, I often resort to Philo, Clement and Origen as points of comparison since it seems to me that they are engaged in discussions about the very same issues that occupied Valentinians and other Christians discussed in this book. This perspective also serves to undermine the great church-gnosticism divide. For example, the sense of spiritual superiority, which is sometimes taken as being part and parcel of the "gnostic" thought, seems less distinct when compared with Clement's views about the perfect human (whom he called "the gnostic") and especially with Origen's (sometimes quite nasty) descriptions of "simple" Christians.[26]

V

One issue one might expect to find discussed in a book on gnostic morality is the accusation of immorality of the early Christian mythmakers in their opponents' works. This, however, is not a primary concern in the studies collected in this book. Suffice it to say that the Nag Hammadi Library radically changed the picture of the "Gnostics Behaving Badly."[27]

The doyen of church history in England, Henry Chadwick, was among the first to note this change. He rightly recognized the ascetic orientation of the Nag Hammadi texts, and their potential for use in Egyptian monastic communities; this approach has more recently become a notable trend in Nag Hammadi studies.[28] Chadwick, however, was strikingly reluctant to completely abandon the picture of immoral gnostics. The new picture of "gnostic" morality, which Chadwick designated as "the domestication of Gnosis," did not yield to a critical review of the heresiologists' image of libertine gnostics, giving themselves license to indulge in every possible kind of sexual misconduct. Chadwick resorted to a general argument in support of the heresiologists. In his opinion, there is so much evidence for excessive sexual behavior taking place in all kinds of religious communities in the course of history that it is entirely plausible that such behavior also took place in gnostic communities.[29]

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[26] For a comprehensive account of Origen's views about lower-class Christians, see Gunnar af Hällström, *Fides Simpliciorum According to Origen of Alexandria* (Commentationes Humanarum Litterarum 76; Helsinki: The Finnish Society of Sciences and Letters, 1984).

[27] For the most comprehensive analysis of this issue, see Williams, *Rethinking "Gnosticism,"* 139–88.

[28] Cf. n. 20 above.

[29] Henry Chadwick, "The Domestication of Gnosis," in *The Rediscovery of Gnosticism* (2 vols; ed. Bentley Layton; SHR 41; Leiden: Brill, 1981) 1.3–16.

This argument overlooks that the evidence for the libertinism of early Christian mythmakers comes solely from hostile sources, and that tarnishing the opponents with such accusations was common coinage in ancient polemics of all varieties. Rumors of sexual immoderation (as opposed to moderation among "us") and wild orgies were regularly spread concerning all kinds of groups of people not belonging to "us."[30]

Another theme neglected in this book are the scholarly claims about individual New Testament texts and gnostic morality. It is fascinating to see how stubbornly the gnostic position, regardless of how it is defined in each case, is associated with the *opponents* of New Testament authors. The new picture emerging from Nag Hammadi texts may change the way the "gnostic" position is defined. Regardless of how that position is defined, however, it is always (or most often) on the wrong side. By way of example, there has been a long-standing tendency to link the confusing remarks about sin and sinlessness in 1 John with "gnostic" opponents whom the author wanted to refute. The author's opponents can be denounced as "heretics," who denied Christ's incarnation and thus "the salvific truth of faith,"[31] and it can be assumed that those who claimed to be sinless promoted "heretical perfectionism" – as opposed to the author's "orthodox perfectionism."

If one then takes a closer look at what distinguishes the two types of perfectionism, the wrong variety seems practically identical to the Valentinian teaching as reported in the hostile sources. It is assumed in the theory of the two types of perfectionism that the author of 1 John and the alleged opponents agreed that being sinless is possible (though the author does not seem very consistent on this point), but the opponents believe so for the wrong reasons. Just like the Valentinians according to the hostile sources, the opponents of 1 John according to this theory denied the possibility of sinning because it is incompatible with one's divine nature, whereas the author's orthodox variety of perfectionism takes seriously the possibility that Christians can sin and addresses this problem.[32] The problem with this theory is obvious: given that 1 John was written prior to the Valentinians, it is difficult to find any compelling evidence for the alleged "heterodox perfectionism," based upon the notion of "salvation because of nature," that would predate 1 John.

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[30] Cf. Jennifer Wright Knust, *Abandoned to Lust: Sexual Slander and Ancient Christianity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006).

[31] Peter Stuhlmacher, *Biblische Theologie des Neuen Testaments* (2 vols; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1992–99), 2.272–74.

[32] John L. Bogart, *Orthodox and Heretical Perfectionism in the Johannine Community* (SBLDS 33; Missoula, MT: Scholars, 1977); for a critique of Bogart's antignostic interpretation of 1 John, see, e.g., John Painter, *1, 2, and 3 John* (Sacra Pagina Series 18; Collegeville, MA: Liturgical Press, 2002), 162–64. The antignostic interpretation of 1 John still persists, however; for one recent example, see Robert H. Gundry, *Commentary on First, Second, and Third John* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2010).

Similar problems pertain to Pauline studies. There still seem to be passages raising the impression that in them "Paul speaks like a gnostic." One key passage for this contention is usually 1 Corinthians 2:6–16, where Paul claims to be one of those speaking the divine wisdom "among the perfect ones," then distinguishes between two kinds of Christians, the spiritual ones (οἱ πνευματικοί) and the animate ones (οἱ ψυχικοί), and then affirms the lack of insight among the latter. It is surprising how the image persists that Paul here suddenly "speaks like a gnostic"[33] (cf. chapter 8). Of course he does. For the distinction between the spiritual and animate Christians is best attested for Valentinians, and they read and interpreted Paul's letters! The Valentinian evidence, however, is sheerly inconclusive when it comes to the question of where Paul adopted this distinction from, and this Valentinian evidence certainly does not do for the evidence that either Paul or his opponents in Corinth had some "gnostic" tendencies. Philosophical discussions in Hellenistic Judaism offer a far more plausible context for understanding Paul at this point.[34]

VI

Since so many of the studies published here revolve around similar themes, I experienced some difficulty in trying to put them into a reasonable order. I decided to start with five "non-Valentinian" articles, then to move on to three solely devoted to Valentinian themes, and to conclude with two articles with some more general remarks on the study of the New Testament from the perspective of a New Testament scholar with a foot in the camp of second-century Christianity.

In chapter 1, I seek to show how the Platonic imagery of the soul, drawn between mind and matter, evolved into two different kinds of stories about the soul in Nag Hammadi texts. Instead of classifying those texts into "gnostic" and "nongnostic" ones, I divide them into "demiurgical" and "non-demiurgical" ones, depending on whether the story of the soul involves an inferior creator-god or not. Instead of trying to find hidden clues of a "demiurgical" myth in the "non-demiurgical" ones, I intend to turn the whole mode of explanation upside down: the demiurgical versions are one way of telling the traditional story of the

[33] Cf. Weiss, *Frühes Christentum und Gnosis*, 418 (with references to Walter Schmithals, Ulrich Wilckens); see also ibid. 421 (with reference to Hans Windisch on 2 Cor 4:4).

[34] Cf., e. g., Birger A. Pearson, *The Pneumatikos-Psychikos Terminology in First Corinthians: A Study in the Theology of the Corinthian Opponents of Paul and Its Relation to Gnosticism* (SBLDS 12; Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1973); Karl-Gustav Sandelin, *Die Auseinandersetzung mit der Weisheit in 1. Korinther 15* (Meddelanden från Stifteltens för Åbo Akademi Forskningsinstitut, 12; Turku: Åbo Akademi, 1976); Gerhard Sellin, *Der Streit um die Auferstehung der Toten: Eine religionsgeschichtliche und exegetische Untersuchung von 1 Korinther 15* (FRLANT 138; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1986).

soul drawn into two directions, "up" and "down." Moreover, I pay special attention to the moral aspects reflected in these stories. One of the discoveries new to me in working on this chapter was that luxury is at least as much of a problem as is excessive sexual desire in these texts.

It is claimed in chapter 2 that ancient philosophers' views about anger and anger control help us better understand the *Gospel of Judas* and other Sethian texts, such as the *Secret Book of John*. What I found particularly fascinating in working on in this essay were ancient theories of "morality ladders," so I tried to figure out where Judas, as portrayed in the *Gospel of Judas*, would stand on those ladders. The *Gospel of Judas* is certainly no moral philosophical treatise, yet I believe there are some clues inviting this kind of comparisons – such as Jesus urging his disciples to bring forth the "perfect human." This was a stock designation for those (very few) on the highest step in the morality ladder in the philosophical discourse.[35]

I already mentioned above that chapter 3 is the one chapter most clearly written to question the church-gnosticism divide. I seek to demonstrate that there was no uniform "gnostic" avoidance of persecutions, nor was there a uniform "ecclesiastical" approval of martyrdom. The beauty of martyrdom was, by and large, in the eye of the beholder. All parties regarded their own martyrs as heroes of the faith but in different ways devalued the martyrdom experienced by other kinds of Christians, those who did not belong to "us." One personal reflection I left out of this essay is how easily scholars adopt insider terminology in talking about this issue. The most shocking illustration is that the new phase in the history of the church in the fourth century is often designated "the end of persecution." This designation is only *very* partially true. This new phase meant relief for some Christians but not for all of them: the persecution of those Christians who ended up on the wrong side of the orthodoxy-heresy divide continued, and sometimes with greater intensity than before.

Chapters 4 and 5 are related to the reception history of the scripture, but these chapters are different from each other in terms of topic, scope and approach. The study on Valentinian, Sethian and other kinds of interpretations of the Book of Genesis in chapter 4 was originally written for a handbook and is, thus, more of an introductory nature. For this very reason, this chapter may best serve as a follow-up of some issues touched upon in this preface. The broader conclusion is not new among the specialists: there are considerable differences in the interpretations of the Hebrew Bible in the sources discussed here; there was no shared

[35] One detail needs to be added to this essay: the new fragments of Codex Tchachos that became available after this study was written make it clear that it is Jesus (and not Judas) who enters the cloud in *Gos. Jud.* 57–58. (In my conclusion to chapter 2 this issue was left open.) Professor Gregor Wurst has kindly made the relevant material available online: http://www.kthf.uni-augsburg.de/prof_doz/hist_theol/wurst/forschung_downloads/Neue_Fragmente_IV.pdf (last visited September 25, 2014).

"gnostic" take on biblical hermeneutics. One minor point, which I found both intriguing and challenging, was the way the Book of Genesis is both dismissed and acknowledged as sacred tradition in the *Secret Book of John*. My suggestion is that when Moses himself is denounced in this text as representing an incorrect interpretation of the Book of Genesis, he stands for a literalist understanding of that book (instead of the allegorical interpretation of this book, offered in *Secret John*).

Chapter 5, where I discuss relationships among the gospels of John, Thomas and Mary, is more "scholarly" in scope than chapter 4. As regards the relationship between the gospels of John and Thomas, I largely reaffirmed my earlier conclusion that the latter is not literally dependent on the former. One point of broader interest which I did not fully elaborate in that study is the question of where this conclusion places the *Gospel of Thomas* in early Christian literature. If it is true that *Thomas* is (either directly on indirectly) dependent on the synoptic gospels,[36] but is not dependent on John, *Thomas* cannot be pushed very late in the second century; this collection of Jesus' sayings must have emerged either prior to or roughly at the same time as John's gospel. Given the notable theological affinities between John and *Thomas*, it would make no sense that *Thomas* knew John's gospel (say, as one of the four canonical gospels) but left it aside and preferred the synoptics.

The analysis of the gospels of John and Mary in the latter part of chapter 5 does not go back to my own previous work, but it reflects (more than the former part) the more general interest in early Christian moral discourse in this book. My viewpoint is also here informed by ancient moral philosophy, which led me to recognize how important the themes of fear and the control thereof are in both gospels.[37] The entire storyline of the *Gospel of Mary*, in fact, is built around the issue of fear: the text portrays the disciples as paralyzed by fear, and Mary as urging them to overcome this state.

The three subsequent chapters on Valentinian themes are, more than any other chapters here, mixtures of old and new. In my previous study on Valentinians, I already often resorted to Stoic philosophers' views. Some parts in chapter 6 on Valentinians and Stoics summarize my previous findings but some other parts are new, such as the discussion of Stoic (and other) theories of condensation, dissolution and blending, which I think might help us understand Valentinian theories about the relationships between flesh, soul, and spirit. Chapter 7 summarizes

[36] This conclusion is common to two most recent studies on *Thomas* and the synoptics; cf. Simon Gathercole, *The Composition of the Gospel of Thomas: Original Language and Influences* (SNTSMS 151; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012); Mark Goodacre, *Thomas and the Gospels: The Case for Thomas's Familiarity with the Synoptics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2012).

[37] As my references to previous scholarship will show, I am not the first to realize the importance of this topic in the *Gospel of Mary*.

and elaborates my take on Valentinian anthropology; the part on Heracleon specifically is more extensive than in my previous study on the Valentinians. This chapter also contains, in a nutshell, one new theory which I more fully explore in chapter 8. While this chapter deals with Valentinian interpretations of Paul, it also brings the data discussed there very close to the viewpoint developed in chapter 1. Two types of stories of the soul in Nag Hammadi texts were delineated in chapter 1; in chapter 8, I suggest that the famous description in the *Excerpts from Theodotus* of the unification of the spiritual and animate (psychic) beings at the end of time can be added to those stories. My proposal is that the eschatological myth was here used to illustrate, not Valentinian expectations of a distant future, but the union of spirit and the soul as a prerequisite for *visio dei*.

The two final chapters differ from the rest insofar as they are more clearly devoted to the interpretation of the New Testament as it now stands. Chapter 9 goes back to a paper I was once asked to deliver on the question "What is 'theology' in New Testament studies?" The question explains and determines the approach: I describe and review some prominent answers to this question. My reflections are, of course, colored by my work on noncanonical early Christian literature, but I also offer here some glimpses of my academic formation in Helsinki, where pros and cons of biblical theology were sometimes hotly debated. In addition, I return here to the canon issue that I also touched upon chapter 5, but now from a different angle. In respect to the canon, the order of these two chapters could have been other way around since in chapter 10 some problems in scholarly assessments about the canon are noted, whereas perspectives that are more firmly rooted in history are delineated in chapter 5 (following and building on David Brakke's brilliant analysis of varied social contexts where different kinds of approaches to "canon" evolved).

Chapter 10 also comes back to issues already dealt with in chapter 5. This final chapter comprises a critical review of recent attempts to reclaim John's gospel as a reliable source for the historical Jesus. I seek to argue that proponents of this theory consistently avoid discussing some very basic problems that hamper the confidence in John's reliability in this regard. The tone adopted in this chapter is a bit more relaxed (or poignant, if you like) than in other chapters, but the concerns expressed in it are real: some conclusions based upon the renewed confidence in John's reliability you might expect to hear (in an unfortunate case!) from a preacher's pulpit, but to see them argued in and framed as "academic" studies makes you (or at least me) feel, not only uneasy, but also worried. My concern is that such studies, although they are, and hopefully will remain, marginal, may put academic theology as a whole in jeopardy. The unabashedly faith-based arguments in these studies, some examples of which are mentioned in this chapter, could offer welcome ammunition to those thinking and seeking to show that theology does not belong in the academia.

Chapter 1

Moral Progress in Early Christian Stories of the Soul[1]

A great number of the texts in the Nag Hammadi Library[2] pay considerable attention to describing the soul's plight in the present world, the things that lure it away from what is genuinely good, and the ways of escaping from these inferior attractions. In this collection, the soul's condition is usually explored in the form of narratives. This issue not only stands in focus in labyrinthine stories of how the world was created by an ignorant creator-god. There are also plainer stories of the soul, in which its present plight and the difficulties it experiences on its way back are narrated without adducing any account of the creation of the world.

In what follows, I will call the more mythical variety "demiurgical" and the plainer variety "nondemiurgical." The clearest representatives of the nondemiurgical variety are the *Exegesis on the Soul* in Nag Hammadi Codex II and the *Authoritative Discourse* in Nag Hammadi Codex VI. In addition to them, I will discuss here three demiurgical texts in Nag Hammadi Codex II: *The Secret Book of John, The Nature of the Rulers* and *On the Origin of the World*. I seek to demonstrate that, in both types of stories, ethical concerns are intrinsically linked with the portraits painted of the soul's present condition in the state of forgetfulness, and its transformation, described in terms of its awakening and ascent.

Although specialists have addressed the philosophical background of moral teachings in Nag Hammadi texts for quite some time, these texts have not yet gained the attention they merit in the study of early Christianity and ancient philosophy. To mention only one example, a valuable new collection of essays

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[1] This chapter is based upon a main paper read at the 65th SNTS General Meeting, Leuven 2012. My thanks for many helpful comments go to the present "Gnostic" team in Helsinki (Antti Marjanen, Risto Auvinen, Outi Lehtipuu, Ivan Miroshnikov, Ulla Tervahauta); Barbara Aland; John Barclay; Tua Korhonen; Heikki Räisänen; Gregory Snyder; Risto Uro, and Margot Whiting. The clear-sighted observations and suggestions by the anonymous reader of *NTS* proved valuable for making this essay, I hope, more focused on the subject matter than it was originally.

[2] The term "library" is potentially misleading in this connection since the Nag Hammadi hoard comprises a number of smaller collections of texts. For different views about which individual codices originally belonged together, see, e.g., Alexandr Khosroyev, *Die Bibliothek von Nag Hammadi: Einige Probleme des Christentums in Ägypten während der ersten Jahrhunderte* (ASKÄ 7; Altenberge: Oros, 1995), 20–22; Michael A. Williams, *Rethinking "Gnosticism": An Argument for Dismantling a Dubious Category* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996), 242–44.

related to the topic of this study contains three chapters on Paul and one on Clement of Alexandria, but none on Nag Hammadi texts.[3] And yet these texts contain lots of evidence on these issues, as has been amply demonstrated already in the studies by Takashi Onuki, Clemens Scholten, and Michael Williams, all published in the 1980's.[4] One of the claims I seek to make here is that the Nag Hammadi texts are no less relevant than Paul and Clement in the big picture of how early Christians adopted and adapted philosophical traditions related to moral progress.

It has been suggested that the two nondemiurgical texts to be discussed here presuppose a demiurgical myth but do not want to lay it bare to less advanced audiences. In the most recent English translation of the Nag Hammadi Library, *The Nag Hammadi Scriptures*, the *Exegesis on the Soul* is introduced as an attempt "to explain the doctrine of gnosis in a rather simple and attractive form" and "to communicate the message to a wider public and not only to the members of a Gnostic group."[5] In like manner, the *Authoritative Discourse* is described as "a tractate written with the goal of simplifying and proclaiming the Gnostic myth of the soul."[6]

The more general problems connected with the term "Gnosticism" (and with the discourse of orthodoxy and heresy the usage of this term maintains) have

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[3] John T. Fitzgerald (ed.), *Passions and Moral Progress in Greco-Roman thought* (London: Routledge, 2008).

[4] Takashi Onuki, *Gnosis und Stoa* (NTOA 9; Freiburg, Switzerland: Universitätsverlag, 1989); Clemens Scholten, *Martyrium und Sophiamythos im Gnostizismus nach den Texten von Nag Hammadi* (JACE 14; Münster: Aschendorffsche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1987), 120–33; Michael A. Williams, *The Immovable Race: A Gnostic Designation and the Theme of Stability in Late Antiquity* (NHS 29; Leiden: Brill, 1985), 127–29.

[5] Madeleine Scopello, "The *Exegesis on the Soul* (NHC II, 6): Introduction," in *The Nag Hammadi Scriptures: The International Edition* (ed. Marvin Meyer; New York: HarperOne, 2007), 223–26, esp. 224, 226. For other scholars maintaining that *Exegesis* should be understood as a Gnostic text, see, e. g., Barbara Aland, *Was ist Gnosis: Studien zum frühen Christentum, zu Marcion und zur kaiserzeitlichen Philosophie* (WUNT 239; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck), 39; Jean-Marie Sevrin (ed.), *L'Exégèse de l'Âme (NH II, 6)* (BCNHÉ 9; Québec: Les Presses de l'Université Laval, 1983), 39–41. For scholars affirming that *Exegesis* is not a Gnostic text, see Cornelia Kulawik, *Die Erzählung über die Seele (Nag-Hammadi-Codex II, 6)* (TU 155; Berlin: de Gruyter), 7–9; Hugo Lundhaug, *Images of Rebirth: Cognitive Poetics and Transformational Soteriology in the* Gospel of Philip and *the* Exegesis of the Soul (NHMS 73; Leiden: Brill, 2010), 134–40. Instead of a Gnostic reading of *Exeg. Soul*, Lundhaug proposes that this text "would also have been amenable to the interests of the Pachomians and even to those of Shenoute's monastic community." (149)

[6] Madeleine Scopello, "*The Authoritative Discourse* (NHC VI, 3): Introduction," in Meyer (ed.), *The Nag Hammadi Scriptures* 379–82, esp. 382; cf. also eadem, *Femme, Gnose et Manichéisme: De l'espace mythique au territoire du réel* (NHMS 53; Leiden: Brill, 2005), 155. For non-Gnostic interpretations of the *Auth. Disc.*, see Roelof van den Broek, *Studies in Gnosticism and Alexandrian Christianity* (NHMS 39; Leiden: Brill, 1996), 206–34; Ulla Tervahauta, "A Story of the Soul's Journey in the Nag Hammadi Library: A Study of Authentikos Logos (NHC VI,3)" (Th. D. thesis, University of Helsinki, 2013).

already been addressed often enough and need not be discussed here.[7] Suffice it to say that the exoteric interpretation of the *Exegesis on the Soul* and the *Authoritative Discourse* finds little support in these two texts themselves: unlike Ptolemaeus in his *Letter to Flora* (and unlike John's gospel, for that matter),[8] nowhere do their authors promise subsequent, and more advanced, teaching.

The alternative model I seek to develop here is that the plain, nondemiurgical stories of the soul, and the more complicated demiurgical stories are narrative variations on one and the same basic "script":[9] both sets of myths are used to address, in narrative form, the soul's ideal state, the obstacles that hinder it from reaching this state, and the necessity for its conversion. The basic script can be rehearsed in different narrative contexts, and sometimes the basic storyline is repeated several times within one text alone.

1. Philosophical Antecedents

Some elements in the "script" underlying different kinds of early Christian stories of the soul may seem intuitive – such as the notion of the soul's movement up and down – but most of them are culturally conditioned. The metaphors Plato used in his dialogues to illustrate the soul's condition set the scene for subsequent discussions on this issue; stories of the soul in Nag Hammadi texts are no exception.

Considerable variation in Plato's different accounts of the soul suggests that his point in discussing this issue was ethical rather than doctrinal. The ethical aspects of his views about the soul become especially clear in his simpler accounts of the soul in *Phaedo* and *Phaedrus*.[10]

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[7] For critical analyses of the scholarly usage of the term "Gnosticism," from two different perspectives, see Williams, *Rethinking ª Gnosticismº*; Karen L. King, *What is Gnosticism?* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2003); for my summary of this discussion and how it should change our understanding of the school of Valentinus, see Ismo Dunderberg, *Beyond Gnosticism: Myth, Lifestyle, and Society in the School of Valentinus* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), 14–31.

[8] John 16.12, 25; Ptolemaeus, *Letter to Flora* 33.7.8–10.

[9] For such "scripts," both in theory and as applied to early Christian literature, see István Czachesz, "Rewriting and Textual Fluidity in Antiquity: Exploring the Socio-Cultural and Psychological Context of Earliest Christian Literacy," in *Myths, Martyrs, and Modernity: Studies in the History of Religions in Honour of Jan N. Bremmer* (ed. J. Dijkstra, J. Kroesen and Y. Kuiper; Leiden: Brill, 2010), 426–41.

[10] It goes without saying that Plato's other dialogues, most prominently *Timaeus,* contain a large number of passages which are also reflected in some of the texts to be discussed below, especially in the *Secret Book of John*; I will add references to these other dialogues in the course of my analysis below. For most comprehensive surveys of allusions to Plato's dialogues in Sethian texts, see John D. Turner, *Sethian Gnosticism and the Platonic Tradition* (BCNHÉ 6; Québec: Les Presses de l'Université Laval, 2001); Karen L. King, *The Secret Revelation of*

The picture Plato paints in *Phaedo* of what the soul should do is quite plain. The soul should turn inwards (83a) and devote itself to intellectual reflection concerning things divine. This activity makes the soul lighter and thus gradually enables its ascent to the divine realm. In company with the gods, the soul becomes "happy, and free from error, lack of understanding, fear, all-consuming love" (80e). Attachment to the body, in contrast, weighs the soul down since the body is "burdensome, heavy, earthly and visible" (81c). Grave misconduct – "gluttony, debauchery, and drinking" – makes the soul so heavy that it will enter an animal's body in its next reincarnation (81e). It follows that the soul should seek to escape the body. In this way, it "departs pure, dragging with it nothing of the body" (80e).

In *Phaedrus*, the core narrative is similar to that in *Phaedo*: the soul committed to seeking the vision of the divine becomes lighter and ascends, whereas the soul clinging to visible things becomes heavy and falls down. In *Phaedrus*, however, Plato offers a more detailed account of the stages the soul must go through on its way up. The soul focused on the divine is "free from harm until the next cycle." The soul can repeat its success time and again, but lapses are always possible: "it may happen" that even a progressing soul "is filled with forgetfulness (λήθη) and evil (κακία)," becomes heavy, loses its wings, and "falls to the earth (ἐπὶ τὴν γὴν πέσῃ)."[11] Failure in one cycle, however, does not entail full degradation; it only takes the soul one step down in the next reincarnation.[12] Progress and degradation are possible in each reincarnation: "Now in all these states, one who lives justly (ὃς … ἂν δικαίως διαγάγῃ) obtains a better lot, while one living unjustly

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John (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006), 191–214. For a recent analysis of the Platonic ingredient in the *Gospel of Thomas*, see Stephen J. Patterson, "Jesus Meets Plato: The Theology of the *Gospel of Thomas* and Middle Platonism," in *Das Thomasevangelium: Entstehung ± Rezeption ± Theologie* (ed. Jörg Frey, Enno Edzard Popkes, and Jens Schröter; BZNW 157; Berlin: de Gruyter), 181–205: "*Thomas*' distinctive voice, which I have at times called 'Gnostic' or 'gnosticizing,' and at other times, more vaguely, 'esoteric,' can be characterized more precisely as Platonic." (183). For a similar shift from a Gnostic to a Platonic interpretation in the study of the *Book of Thomas* (NHC II, 7), see John D. Turner, "The Book of Thomas and the Platonic Jesus," in L'Évangile Selon Thomas *et les textes de Nag Hammadi* (ed. Louis Painchaud and Paul-Hubert Poirier; BCNHÉ 8; Québec: Les Presses de l'Université Laval, 2007), 599–633.

[11] *Phaedr.* 248d. Plato's image of the soul's loss of its wings became persistent among later interpreters of different bents; cf., e. g., Plutarch, *Virt. prof.* 77b; Plotinus, *Enneads* 4.8.1; Tatian, *Graec.* 13–14: "When one becomes obedient to Wisdom," God's spirit draws near and makes the soul immortal, "giving it wings with which to fly heavenward to God" (cf. Patterson, "Jesus," 188); *Book Thom.* 140 (cf. Turner, "The Book of Thomas," 612–17).

[12] Plato portrays a hierarchy of no less than nine classes of people where the soul can end up before it is downgraded into the bodies of animals (*Phaedr.* 248c–e): 1) philosopher; lover of beauty; a musical or loving person; 2) lawful king; warlike ruler; 3) politician; merchant; financier; 4) gymnast; medical doctor; 5) prophet; leader of mystic rites; 6) poet; artist; 7) craftsman; farmer; 8) sophist; demagogue; 9) tyrant. In *Timaeus*, Plato infamously lists only three stages: men, women and animals (42bc).

receives a worse one." (248e) One either progresses or slips back. Therefore, one must constantly aim at moral improvement.[13]

Plato used stories of the soul as an invitation to a philosophical way of life,[14] which he promoted as a bargain: "doing philosophy without guile" reduces the time needed for the soul's release from the cycle of incarnations by 7000 years (from 10,000 to 3000).[15] In addition, it is at the philosopher stage that the soul is again supplied with its wings, which it had lost on its way down. These wings are needed for the soul's ascent to, and recollection of, divine reality.[16]

More immediate gains in living the life of a philosopher are that it brings about freedom from emotions, and removes the fear of death. Plato considered emotions the most pernicious evil since the soul is attached to the body through them. Emotions dupe the soul into believing that their objects are "most splendid and true."[17] In other words, the soul deceived by emotions accepts as truth what the body claims to be true. Reliance on wrong messages sent by bodily senses deceives the soul, making it "confused and dizzy like a drunk."[18]

The bad habits the deceived soul develops in this life keep it in the cycle of reincarnation, because this soul is so fond of the body that it seeks to find a new one as quickly as possible.[19] Accordingly, "the true philosopher" steers away from delight, desire, distress, and fear.[20] The method is contemplation of the divine things, which "brings about calm" in the storm of emotions. Consequently, a person in the know is no longer afraid of the destruction of his soul at death since his soul will continue doing what it already started on earth, that is, contemplating divine things. The only difference is that the soul is now "released from human calamities."[21]

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[13] Cf. *Phaedo* 84a: it is not acceptable that the philosopher's soul is first made free, and then it slips back into "delight and distress" (ἡδοναῖς καὶ λύπαις).

[14] For a similar emphasis in Plutarch's works, see now Lieve van Hoof, *Plutarch's Practical Ethics: The Social Dynamics of Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 22–23.

[15] This looks like a tongue-in-cheek argument. The comments Socrates makes later in *Phaedrus* (265b–266a) on his narrative illustrations of the soul's origin and goal should caution us against taking too literally any of the stories Plato uses to make his teaching more accessible. (I owe this remark to Tua Korhonen.)

[16] *Phaedr.* 249a, 249c.

[17] *Phaedo* 83.

[18] *Phaedo* 79c.

[19] *Phaedo* 83c–e; cf. Ingvil Sælid Gilhus, *Animals, Gods, and Humans: Changing Attitudes to Animals in Greek, Roman, and Early Christian Texts* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2006), 86–87. The soul's love of the body is one of the explanations for its fall mentioned in Albinus, *Didask.* 25; other possible reasons he discusses are "the will of God," and "wantoness"; cf. John Dillon, "The Descent of the Soul in Middle Platonic and Gnostic Theory," in *The Rediscovery of Gnosticism* (2 vols; ed. Bentley Layton; SHR 41; Leiden: Brill, 1981), 1.357–64.

[20] *Phaedo* 83b.

[21] *Phaedo* 84a–b.

After Plato, emotions became subject to intensive scrutiny in moral philosophy.[22] Particularly, Stoic philosophers developed subtle categorizations, in which dozens of emotions were grouped under the four emotions already mentioned by Plato.[23] Like Plato, the Stoics viewed emotions as based upon faulty reasoning that attaches value to external things. The control of emotions, thus, became a major issue in the philosophers' discussions about moral progress. Obnoxious emotions became designated as the sickness of the soul, and the philosopher as the physician offering the cure: a person entangled with emotions could be cured by identifying and correcting the wrong thought patterns underlying them.[24] In theory, it was debated whether the goal should be complete extirpation of emotions (*apatheia*) or their moderation (*metriopatheia*), but in practice most parties agreed that the latter is the only viable option for most humans.[25]

2. *Authoritative Discourse* (NHC VI, 3)

In addition to the fact that the *Authoritative Discourse* does not present itself as an exoteric text, as was mentioned above, the present context of this text in Nag Hammadi Codex VI offers little support for a "Gnostic" reading of this text. The demiurgical myth assumes a very marginal role in this codex: there is only one passage in the entire codex referring to a distinction between the true God and an inferior creator-God.[26]

The selection of texts in Nag Hammadi Codex VI is especially puzzling since it contains both more or less openly Christian texts[27] and works that are clearly of non-Christian origin, including Plato's *Republic* and some Hermetic texts.[28]

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[22] This aspect of ancient philosophy has become subject to intense scholarship in recent years; cf., e.g., Martha Nussbaum, *The Therapy of Desire: Theory and Practice in Hellenistic Ethics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994); Simo Knuuttila, *Emotions in Ancient and Medieval Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004); for a concise introduction to this theme, see now John T. Fitzgerald, "The Passions and Moral Progress: An Introduction," in Fitzgerald (ed.), *Passions and Moral Progress*, 1–25.

[23] For a synoptic comparison of the main sources of the Stoic classification of emotions, see Onuki, *Gnosis und Stoa*, 35–38.

[24] Nussbaum (*The Therapy of Desire*) has been essential in demonstrating the importance of the soul's healing in all ancient schools of philosophy.

[25] Cf. Troels Engberg-Pedersen, "The Concept of Paraenesis," in *Early Christian Paraenesis in Context* (ed. James M. Starr and Troels Engberg-Pedersen; BZNW 125; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2004), 47–72, esp. 54–59.

[26] *Perf. Disc.* 75–76. The distinction between the creator-God Zeus and "the one who truly is" is made clearer in this version than in the parallel text preserved in *Asclepius* (27).

[27] To this group belong at least the *Acts of Peter and 12 Apostles*, the *Authoritative Discourse* and the *Concept of Our Great Power.*

[28] It would seem that *Thunder*, in which a divine revealer is introduced by using the same style of "I am"-sayings as one finds in Isis aretalogies, could be placed in this group. Never-

One of the recurring features in different tractates of this codex, however, is the healing of the soul. Concern for the soul's sickness and healing, thus, is one of the common themes that may explain why these diverse texts were put together.[29]

In the *Authoritative Discourse*, "word" is described as "a medicine," applied on, and healing, the soul's blind eyes.[30] In the opening tractate of Codex VI, the *Acts of Peter and 12 Disciples*, Christ not only appears to his disciples in "the form of a doctor with a medicine bag," but he also gives this bag to his disciples, urging them to "heal all the people of the city who are sick and believe in my name."[31] The disciples are commissioned to heal both body and soul, but what really matters is the cure they offer to the soul: "the doctors of this world heal what is of the world, but the doctors of souls heal the heart." Healing of the body is only of instrumental value:[32] the purpose of the healing is to convince people that the disciples "also have the power to heal sicknesses of the heart."[33] The final text in the codex, an excerpt from the Hermetic *Perfect Discourse*, also emphasizes the necessity of healing the emotions: "Knowledge of what is right is truly healing for the passions of material existence. … God has perfected learning and knowledge … so that by means of learning and knowledge (human beings) might restrain passions and vices."[34]

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theless, this text also draws upon Jewish sapiental traditions; thus, most recently, Tilde Bak Halvgaard, "Linguistic Manifestations of Divine Thought: An Investigation of the Use of Stoic and Platonic Dialetics in the Trimorphic Protennoia (NHC XIII, 1) and the Thunder: Perfect Mind (NHC VI, 2)" (Ph. D. dissertation; University of Copenhagen, 2012), 115–17.

[29] Cf. Michael A. Williams and Lance Jenott, "Inside the Covers of Codex VI," in *Coptica ± Gnostica ± Manichaiaca: Mélanges offerts à Wolf-Peter Funk* (ed. Louis Painchaud and Paul-Hubert Poirier; BCNHÉ 7; Québec: Les Presses de l'Université Laval, 2006), 1025–52; see also Williams, *Rethinking ª Gnosticism*,º 257–59.

[30] *Auth. Disc.* 22, 27–28.

[31] For the healing metaphor used in this text, see Andrea Lorenzo Molinari, *The Acts of Peter and the Twelve Apostles (NHC 6,1): Allegory, Ascent, and Ministry in the Wake of the Decian Persecution* (SBLDS 174; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2000), 214–29.

[32] At this point, my understanding of the text differs from Molinari's. He maintains that the healing of the body and that of the soul are of equal importance in this text. This interpretation is essential to his claim that *Acts* can be dated to the Decian persecution: "The two types of healing by our text (body and soul) may refer to the community's task in the wake of the Decian persecution: 1) caring for the sick … and 2) healing the hearts of those who apostasized." (226) As far as I can see, the text contains no clear references to persecution, nor to apostasy. The theme of healing is too universal to qualify as a proof for this setting.

[33] *Acts Pet. 12 Ap.* 8, 10–11.

[34] *Perf. Disc.* 66, 67. The idea of healing of emotions is more emphatically present in the Nag Hammadi version of the *Perfect Discourse* than in the parallel of this passage in *Asclepius* 22. The latter speaks of "vices" instead of "passions." Nevertheless, healing is also referred to in *Asclepius*: "Scorn for the vices – and *a cure for those vices* – comes from understanding the divine plan upon which all things have been based. … Tainted and corrupted by (the vices), the soul grows inflamed as if poisoned – except the souls of those who have the sovereign *remedy* of learning and understanding" (trans. Brian Copenhaver, emphasis added).

The story of the soul's plight and rescue in the *Authoritative Discourse* follows in essence the two-way pattern set in Plato's dialogues:[35]

(1) The soul's descent: the spiritual soul is "cast down into a body," becomes subject to emotions,[36] and succumbs to wine-drinking, debauchery, and gluttony. These things cause the soul's memory loss concerning the things divine: "The soul forgets her siblings and her father, and sweet pleasures deceive her." While Plato taught that the soul filled with evil will end up in an animal's body in the next cycle, this text teaches "realized reincarnation": the deceived soul lives an "animal life" already in the here and now (23–24).

(2) The ascent: the soul "flees upwards" from its "enemies" (28) – which probably can be identified with "fleeting sweet passions" the soul is said to abandon (31). Rehearsing the Platonic ideal, the people adopting this lifestyle are no longer attached to "created things" but their hearts are focused on "what truly is" (27). Accordingly, the enlightened soul renounces its attachment to this world and to the body: "The soul returned the body to those who had given it to her." (32) This may point to the separation of soul and body at death, yet the new attitude towards the body means hard times for the soul already in this life since those who have adopted this lifestyle wander in this world hungry, thirsty, sick, weak and in pain (27).

The author of this text not only speaks of "desire (ⲉⲡⲓⲑⲩⲙⲓⲁ), hatred (ⲙⲟⲥⲧⲉ) and envy (ⲕⲱϩ)" on a general level.[37] The transformation of the spiritual soul into a "material soul" (ⲯⲩⲭⲏ ⲛ̄ϩⲩⲗⲓⲕⲏ) also means that the soul is attached to "external companions" (ⲛ̄ⲱⲣ ⲙ̄ⲡⲟⲗ), comprising "grand passions, the pleasures of life, envy filled with hatred, bragging, talking nonsense, accusations."[38] The author is even more graphic in condemning "the desire for a piece of clothing (ⲧⲉⲡⲓⲑⲩⲙⲓⲁ ⲛ̄ⲟⲩⲱϯⲛ)," and a number of other similar things: "love of money, pride, arrogance, one kind of envy being envious of another kind of envy, bodily beauty, leading people astray."[39] Wine and food are also an issue: the author regards wine as the source of debauchery,[40] and warns against gluttony.[41] In addition, food is one of the metaphors illustrating the devil's attempts to misguide people.[42]

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[35] In his seminal study on *Auth. Disc.* (above n. 6), van den Broek traces a number of close contacts between this text and Middle Platonist teachings. His observations are mainly related to terminological affinities in cosmology and anthropology, while he pays less attention to the ethical aspects, which are in focus of my analysis.

[36] For emotions in *Auth. Disc.*, see also Scholten, *Martyrium und Sophiamythos*, 120–25.

[37] *Auth. Disc.* 23:15–16.

[38] *Auth. Disc.* 23:29–34.

[39] *Auth. Disc.* 30:34–31:5.

[40] *Auth. Disc.* 24:14–16.

[41] *Auth. Disc.* 25:9–10.

[42] This usage is prominent in the passage based upon fishing metaphors (including fish, baits, hook, and good-smelling food) in *Auth. Disc.* 29–31; cf. Tervahauta, "A Story of the Soul's Journey," Ch. 6.1.2.

The descriptions of the errors of the soul succumbing to matter may be understood as being directed against other Christians who have adopted an erroneous lifestyle. For the author expresses strong disapproval of some people whom he considers fools, and who are not seeking God; these ignoramuses are most likely wrong kinds of Christian since the author deems them to be worse than "pagans." (33)[43]

The wrong lifestyle described in the text is no doubt a thing to be avoided. Nevertheless, there is little room for explicit moral exhortation in this text. One is either in the know or outside it. The "fools" seem to have no hope of moral improvement. Their ascent is not only hindered by ignorance but also by "the demon of deception" (ⲡⲇⲁⲓⲙⲱⲛ ⲛ̄ⲧⲡⲗⲁⲛⲏ). At this point, however, the text sends a mixed message since the author is also confident that the knowledge of what is evil is sufficient to bring about change for the better: it is this knowledge that makes the soul adopt "a new kind of conduct" (ⲟⲩⲡⲟⲗⲓⲧⲉⲓⲁ ⲛ̄ⲃ̄ⲣⲣⲉ) (31).

The way the soul's story is told in the *Authoritative Discourse* leans mainly on Platonic tradition, but it also offers a glimpse of a demiurgical myth at one passage: the "merchants of body (ⲛ̄ⲡⲣⲁⲅⲙⲁⲧⲉⲩⲧⲏⲥ ⲛ̄ⲛ̄ⲥⲱⲙⲁ)," [44] to whom the soul returns its body, are described in the same way as are the angels responsible for the creation of Adam's body in demiurgical sources: they created the body in order to "bring down" the soul, and yet they were unaware that it already had "an invisible spiritual body" (32–33).[45] This one passage does not make the whole text a demiurgical one, but it shows that the demiurgical myth belonged to the pool of traditions from which the author drew inspiration for his own account of the soul.[46]

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[43] Tervahauta's detailed reading of this passage suggests that the author is here in fact critical of two different kinds of Christian, that is, the ignorant ones who "do not take their quest seriously enough and aim at hindering others," and the foolish ones, "who are too lazy make a serious effort in worship and lifestyle"; cf. Ulla Tervahauta, "Ignorant People, Foolish Persons and Pagans in *Authentikos Logos* (NHC VI,3): Intra-Christian Polemic and Portrayal of the Other from Nag Hammadi Library," forthcoming in *"Others" and the Construction of Christian Identity* (ed. Raimo Hakola and Maijastina Kahlos; Helsinki: Finnish Exegetical Society, 2014).

[44] As Tervahauta ("A Story of the Soul's Journey," ch. 6.2.1) details, this unusual phrase can be understood as referring to slave traders.

[45] Tervahauta ("A Story of the Soul's Journey," ch. 6.2.1) points out that, while this term is unique in the Nag Hammadi Library, close analogies to it can be found in Clement (*Strom.* 7.14; *Exc. Theod.* 14) and Origen (*Cels.* 4.57). Tervahauta maintains that the invisible spiritual body should be understood as "a go-between that enables the ascent of the immaterial soul after it discards its material body."

[46] Cf. Tervahauta, "A Story of the Soul's Journey," ch. 6.2.1.

3. The *Exegesis on the Soul* (NHC II, 6)

The *Exegesis on the Soul* is placed in Nag Hammadi Codex II, which is more demiurgical in its outlook than Codex VI: demiurgical myths are related in three of its seven tractates, and one additional text, the *Gospel of Philip*, mentions the ignorant creator-god in passing (NHC II 75). Nevertheless, there are also three nondemiurgical texts in this codex. In addition, the arrangement of texts may suggest that the demiurgical myth was not the major issue even in this codex. There is no development of argument from nondemiurgical works to demiurgical ones, or vice versa.[47] The codex opens with a demiurgical text (*Secret John*), but closes with two nondemiurgical texts (*Exegesis on the Soul*; *Book of Thomas*). In addition, the three demiurgical texts are not grouped together, but two nondemiurgical texts are placed between *Secret John* and *Rulers*.[48] It seems that whoever put these texts together did *not* do that in an attempt to create a unified demiurgical corpus, which would serve as a foundation, in light of which the other texts should be interpreted.

What brings all these three texts together is, again, concern for the soul. The first and last texts even contain similar discussions between Jesus and his disciples about the fates of different kinds of souls.[49] In addition, the emphasis placed upon the mastery of emotions in *Secret John* may be one of the reasons why this text was placed at the beginning of Codex II.[50]

In the *Exegesis on the Soul*, explicit sexual imagery is used to illustrate the soul's plight in the body. *Porneia* is one of the key metaphors in the text. Alluding to explicit language used in the Book of Ezekiel (ch. 16) to portray Jerusalem's unholy alliances with the nations, the author of *Exegesis* describes the soul as playing the whore (ⲁⲥⲡⲟⲣⲛⲉⲩⲉ) and sleeping with everyone it meets (128; cf. Ez.

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[47] Cf. Jutta Leonhardt-Balzer, "On the redactional and theological relationship between the *Gospel of Thomas* and the *Apocryphon of John,*" in Frey et alii (ed.), *Das Thomasevangelium,* 251–71: "There appears to be a double arrangement cosmology – human life; cosmology – human life." (255) Leonhardt-Balzer also points out that, in comparison with the other representative of the long version of *Secret John* in Codex IV, there is added "interest in the application of the myth" in the Codex II version of this text (262).

[48] The arrangement of the two latter demiurgical texts, *Rulers* and *Origin*, next to each other implies a special sense of their belonging together, which quickly comes to mind in light of a number of close affinities between them; large parts of *Origin* can be read like an expanded version of the story told in *Rulers*.

[49] *Secr. John* II 25–26; *Book Thom.* 142–43. Khosroyev leaves such thematic connections unmentioned, when he suggests that the *Book of Thomas* was included in Codex II simply because it was of the right length to be fitted into the remaining final pages of the codex; cf. Khosroyev, *Die Bibliothek von Nag Hammadi*, 14–15.

[50] Thus Eduard Iricinschi, "The Scribes and Readers of Nag Hammadi Codex II: Book Production and Monastic *Paideia* in Fourth-Century Egypt" (Ph.D. thesis; Princeton University, 2009), 163 (cf. also 203). (I am grateful to Dr Iricinschi for providing me with a copy of his exceptionally well-argued and informative doctoral thesis.)

16:25, 32). In keeping with this imagery, the soul's inner enemies are described as "adulterers," and the soul as seeking, and finally finding, its true husband: at a later point of the story God sends the soul from above its male counterpart (ⲛ̄ⲡⲉⲥϩⲟⲟⲩⲧ), also described as its "brother" (ⲥⲟⲛ) and "bridegroom" (ⲣⲙ̄ⲙⲉⲗⲉⲉⲧ) (132). This implies that the soul, which was originally androgynous, did not fall down completely: its other half remained with God, and can now be reunited with the fallen part.[51]

This text describes the soul's descent in a Platonic fashion: the soul "fell down into the body," where it ended up in the hands of "many robbers" (ⲛ̄ϩⲁϩ ⲛ̄ⲗⲏⲥⲧⲏⲥ) and "unruly men" (ⲛ̄ϩⲩⲃⲣⲓⲥⲧⲏⲥ). The latter term recalls, most likely intentionally, "the unruly horse" in Plato. Plato used this term to illustrate the desiring part of the soul, which the charioteer must train to obedience by restraining it by force time and time again.[52]

This allusion is one of the many indications that what is stake here in *Exegesis* is the poor state of affairs *within* the soul prior to its conversion: the robbers and unruly men are powers active inside the soul. Also in keeping with the Platonic tradition, the soul is described as suffering from memory loss, this time combined with the notion of the soul's bridegroom: "She did not know what he looked like, she no longer remembers since the time she fell from her father's house." (132)

The soul's ascent is mentioned in *Exegesis*, but this is only one of the many ways of describing the soul's restitution; other descriptions include resurrection, redemption from captivity, and rebirth (134). A clear modification of Plato's two-way pattern is the role God plays in the whole process: the soul, which

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[51] For the Christian usage of kinship language to denote the soul's true origin, see also Tatian, *Graec.* 13.2 (συζυγία); 20.2–3 (συγγένεια); both terms express the need for the soul's reunion with the spirit; cf. David M. Reis, "Thinking with Soul: Psychē and Psychikos in the Construction of Early Christian Identities." *JECS* 17/4 (2009): 563–603, esp. 577–81. The way the soul's story is related in *Exegesis* helps us see similar features in other texts included in Codex II. The bridal imagery looms large both in the *Gospel of Thomas* and in the *Gospel of Philip*. In light of *Exegesis*, the passage in *Philip* describing the attempts of "ignorant" women and men to mingle with, and defile, the people they see sitting alone (65:3–26) could be easily understood as an allegory of the evil powers threatening the soul from within. Just like the soul is united with its male counterpart in *Exegesis*, in *Philip* the man and wife standing together illustrate the soul's ideal state that makes it immune to the attacks of evil spirits. The subsequent passage in *Philip* steers the discussion to one's mastery over emotions – desire, fear, envy are specifically mentioned – , and then the discussion again turns to the threats posed by unclean spirits and demons. This combination suggests that emotions are *the* method the demons use in trying to affix the soul to the "flesh." In addition, it is affirmed in this passage that the soul cannot resist the demons on its own but must be aided by the Spirit: "If they had the holy spirit, no clean spirit would cleave to them" (*Gos. Phil.* 64–65). This affirmation also suggests that the previous description of a married couple standing strong against adulterers should be understood as a metaphor for the soul joined with the divine spirit.

[52] *Phaedr.* 254b–e. In *Republic* 588–89, this unruly horse is identified with desire (ἐπιθυμία); cf. Gilhus, *Animals, Gods, and Humans*, 205.

recognizes its situation, does not immediately ascend to God but God must visit it from above (128).

It almost feels inappropriate to pose the question of the method enabling the soul to ascend since the author so vehemently denies that any exists: neither "words of training" (ⲛ̄ϣⲁϫⲉ ⲛ̄ⲥⲕⲏⲥⲓⲥ), nor "skills," nor "book wisdom" are of any help (134).[53] It all boils down to the mercy God shows in response to true repentance,[54] demonstrated by sighing, weeping, confession of sins, "mourning for ourselves," and "hating ourselves because of our condition." (135) The author has no qualms about emotions shown for right reasons: "Repentance takes place in distress (ϫⲩⲡⲏ) and the pain of heart (ⲙ̄ⲕⲁϩ ⲛ̄ϩⲏⲧ)."

Rituals seem to play little role in the soul's conversion according to this text. The author's view of baptism is a fully spiritualized one. The author is emphatic that it is the soul's return to its original nature that should be regarded as the true baptism,[55] taking place when the soul "turns inwards" and becomes "cleansed of external pollution." (131–32.)

Although the author quotes and interprets biblical passages referring to prostitution, illicit sex is not a primary moral concern in this text.[56] It is made very clear that the *porneia* the author speaks about should not be understood literally but metaphorically. The author emphasizes that, in prohibiting visits to prostitutes in 1 Corinthians, Paul "was not only speaking of the fornication of the body, but *first and foremost* (ⲛ̄ϩⲟⲟⲩⲟ) of that pertaining to the soul."

Leaning on Ephesians 6:12, the author maintains that the real battle the soul must wage is that against "the cosmic rulers of this darkness and the spirits of

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[53] The negative stance towards books this passage betrays is somewhat unexpected in Nag Hammadi Codex II, where positive value is often attached to other books; for a detailed analysis of the "bookish" orientation in this codex, see Iricinschi, "The Scribes and Readers of Nag Hammadi Codex II," 99–113.

[54] Cf. Lundhaug, *Images of Rebirth*, 132–34. The importance of God's mercy in this text is correctly emphasized by Aland, *Was ist Gnosis*, 41, yet I believe she does not sufficiently emphasize the importance of a person's repentance as evoking this mercy. Tervahauta ("A Story of the Soul's Journey," ch. 1.3) sees here a crucial difference between *Exeg. Soul* and *Auth. Disc.*: the latter "puts more emphasis on the soul's progress, whereas in the *Exegesis on the Soul*, repentance and the aid received from the heavenly father or bridegroom is more emphatic."

[55] Cf. Frederik Wisse, "On Exegeting 'the Exegesis of the Soul,'" in *Les Textes de Nag Hammadi* (ed. Jacques É. Ménard; NHS 7; Leiden: Brill, 1975), 68–81, esp. 79; Guy G. Stroumsa, *Barbarian Philosophy: The Religious Revolution of Early Christianity* (WUNT 112; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1999), 274; *pace* Kulawik (*Die Erzählung über die Seele*, 169), who assumes that the reference to baptism at this point is to that with water; for a carefully nuanced discussion also pointing in this direction, see Lundhaug, *Images of Rebirth*, 94–95, 128–29. In my opinion, the text's concern with purity does not necessarily imply the importance of a baptismal ritual for the soul's ascent. As Kulawik (ibid. 166) points out, Plato already emphasized the soul's purity (e.g., *Phaed.* 67), which he defined in intellectual rather than ritual terms. Plato also linked together the ideas of the soul's purity and the soul's turning inside; cf. Erwin Rohde, *Psyche: Seelenkult und Unsterblichkeitsglaube bei den Griechen* (2 vols; 2nd ed.; Freiburg 1898; repr. Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1991), 2.282–89.

[56] Cf. Lundhaug, *Images of Rebirth*, 84–86.

wickedness." (130–31.) The reference in Ezekiel 16:26 to "the sons of Egypt, … men of great flesh" is explained, not as denoting sexual desire, as one could expect, but as referring to all "things related to flesh, sensual perception, and earth, by which the soul is defiled."

Strikingly, sex is not included in the author's list of earthly matters at all; the items that are mentioned are "wine, olive oil, clothing, and other kinds of external follies used to cover the body, these things that the soul thinks it needs" (130). Biblical and philosophical traditions shake hands again: most items mentioned here are drawn from the portrayal of the lewd Jerusalem in Ezekiel 16 (esp. vv. 15–22), but the point made with them is unmistakably philosophical: it is the soul's erroneous value judgement that glues it to the visible things.

4. *The Secret Book of John* (NHC II, 1)[57]

The soul is a major theme in the second main part of the *Secret Book of John*, which offers an elaborate account of the creation of humankind, based upon a radical rewriting of the first chapters of Genesis.

Unlike in Plato, the soul itself is not the link connecting human beings to the divine realm in *Secret John*. The soul was produced by inferior "angels and demons," involved in Adam's creation. They first created a body consisting only of the soul (ⲯⲩⲭⲓⲕⲟⲛ ⲛ̄ⲥⲱⲙⲁ) for Adam,[58] but this proved a failure: this creature "remained completely inactive and motionless" (II 19). This is another deviation from Plato, who described the soul as invisibly moving the body.[59] What made the "body consisting of soul" stand up and move, according to *Secret John*, is the divine spirit, transmitted to the soul when the creator-god Yaldabaoth "blew into its face."[60] The presence of the divine spirit also made the soul "radiant,"

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[57] My comments on this text are based upon the long version available in NHC II. The very fragmentary version of this text in NHC IV, 1 stands close to that in NHC II, whereas considerably shorter versions are offered in two other available manuscripts including this text (NHC III, 1; BG 8502, 2).

[58] As van den Broek (*Studies in Gnosticism and Alexandrian Christianity*, 74–77) demonstrates, *Secret John's* detailed account of different powers contributing to the creation of Adam's *soul* follows very closely Plato's account of the composition of the human *body* in *Timaeus* 73b–76e.

[59] *Phaedr.* 245c–246a, 246c; for the importance of this idea for Plato's view about the soul, see Michael Davis, *The Soul of the Greeks: An Inquiry* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2012), 194–95. Plato offers a more "pessimistic" version of the same idea in *Timaeus*, where it is described how the body moved by the soul staggers, so training is needed to make this human being "sound and faultless" (44b–c); cf. Patterson, "Jesus," 202–3.

[60] "Standing up" is a crucial detail since the erect posture differentiates humans from animals: "Man is the only animal that stands upright, and this is because his nature and essence are divine" (Aristotle, *Parts of Animals*, 686a; cf. Gilhus, *Animals, Gods, and Humans*, 38–39).

"naked as regards evil," superior in thinking – and the subject of its creators' envy (II 19–20).

The events in the subsequent story are narrative variations on one theme: the soul is sent into a downward movement by the cosmic rulers, and yet, at each new stage of its descent, the soul is provided with a divine instructor that shows the way back. The instructor's teaching is summarized in a Platonic fashion: it teaches Adam's soul "about the descent of his offspring and about the way of ascent (which is) the way it came down" (II 20). Adam is here clearly a paradigmatic character, as is demonstrated by the account of the divine Providence concluding the long version of *Secret John*: this character offers similar instruction to a human being awakened from the state of ignorance (II 30–31).[61]

The subsequent stages in *Secret John's* account of Adam's creation illustrate, in the form of mythic narration, the obstacles preventing the soul's ascent. The text taps into well-established Platonic imagery, not only in describing how the creator angels created a body of flesh for Adam out of fire, earth, and water (II 20–21), but also in describing this body as "the tomb" and "fetter of forgetfulness" (II 21).[62]

A crucial juncture in the story is the introduction of the excessive desire for procreation (ⲟⲩⲥⲡⲟⲣⲁ ⲛ̄ⲉⲡⲓⲑⲩⲙⲓⲁ) and sexual intercourse (ⲧⲥⲩⲛⲟⲩⲥⲓⲁ), by which means Yaldabaoth succeeds in lulling humankind into the state of forgetfulness (II 24–25). Nevertheless, even sexual desire did not completely work in the way Yaldabaoth wanted. The ensuing account of how Adam "knew the likeness of his own foreknowledge" and then begot Seth (*Secr. John* II 24–25) may imply that sexual intercourse took place between Adam and Eve, and that something good resulted from it.[63]

Sexual desire, thus, is one of the stages in the story of how humankind were cast into darkness, but even this stage did not bring about complete detachment from the divine realm. Hence the need for yet another deception: luxury. The story of the sons of God taking human wives in Genesis 6 reappears in *Secret John* as a story of angels luring humankind with "gold, silver, gift, copper, iron, metal and all kinds of appearances (ⲅⲉⲛⲟⲥ ⲛⲓⲙ ⲛ̄ⲧⲉ ⲛⲓⲉⲓⲗⲟⲥ)."[64] This account in

[61] This passage also emphasizes that awakening is only possible with the help of divine instruction. Not only is Providence identified with "the remembrance" of the divine reality, but it also awakens humans "from the deep sleep," and urges them to be on guard "against the angels of poverty, the demons of chaos, and all those who ensnare you."

[62] Cf. Plato, *Timaeus* 31b, 32b.

[63] Cf. Karen L. King, "Reading Sex and Gender in the *Secret Revelation of John*," *JECS* 19/4 (2011): 519–38, esp. 525–26. It is notable, however, that sexual intercourse between Adam and Eve is not directly mentioned in this passage. Hence it is also possible to understand the text as saying that "Adam produced Seth, apparently without Eve's help"; thus Iricinschi, "The Scribes and Readers of Nag Hammadi Codex II," 218.

[64] *Secr. John* II 29–30. In their critical edition of the text, Waldstein and Wisse translated ⲛⲓⲉⲓⲗⲟⲥ (29:33) as "things"; cf. Michael Waldstein and Frederik Wisse, The Apocryphon of John: *Synopsis of Nag Hammadi Codices* II,*1;* III,*1; and* IV,*1 with* BG *8502,2* (NHMS 33;

Secret John is doubtless indebted to a traditional Jewish lore, in which all kinds of crafts, including production of swords, knives, and shields, are ascribed to the fallen sons of God, mentioned in Genesis 6 (1 Enoch 7–8; cf. also Gen. 4:22).[65] The author of *Secret John* retells the story in a way that leaves no doubt that his point is not so much aetiological as it is ethical: the traditional story turns into one in which the evil angels dupe humans "into great trouble" with luxury metals.[66] *Secret John*'s version of the story, thus, lends itself to a Platonic interpretation: the luxury items are, or illustrate, one way in which the world of appearances distracts the soul from what really matters, that is, "the true God."[67]

Control of emotions is an important aspect in the soul's battle against the demons, although this theme is not systematically worked out in *Secret John*. In one passage, contained only in the long version, four basic emotions (distress, delight, desire and fear) are ascribed to a gang of four chief demons (II 18). The listing of subcategories of emotions, arranged under each of the four main ones, betrays an academic interest in the topic since this passage closely follows a fixed Stoic classification of emotions.[68]

The meticulous Stoic classification of emotions, however, remains an oddly isolated piece of tradition since this passage is not called upon later in the story. One later passage, however, shows that *Secret John* subscribes to the Stoic ideal of *apatheia*. In the description of the perfect souls, the most concrete indication of their advanced status is their freedom from emotions, including anger (ⲟⲣⲅⲏ), envy (ⲕⲱⲃ), jealousy (ⲫⲑⲟⲛⲟⲥ), desire (ⲉⲡⲓⲑⲩⲙⲓⲁ), and their "lack of unsatisfied needs" (ⲧⲏ̄ⲛ̄ⲧⲁⲧⲥⲓ)" (II, 25). This latter listing of emotions is probably more original in *Secret John* since it is also included in the two short versions of the text, while the fourfold classification in the earlier part is only present in the long version of the text. In any case, in the long version of *Secret John*, the link drawn between the emotions listed in this latter passage and the earlier listing of the four primeval demons responsible for them is clear. Control of emotions is in this version identified as *the* method with which the soul wages war against the demons.

In addition to the perfect souls, *Secret John* also mentions (1) less advanced people who can become endowed with the spirit, but are still in danger of suc-

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Leiden: Brill, 1995). This translation hides what seems to be a deliberate Platonic allusion to the allure of "visible things."

[65] Cf. Birger A. Pearson, "*1 Enoch* in the *Apocryphon of John*," in *Texts and Contexts: Biblical Texts in Their Textual and Situational Contexts* (FS Lars Hartman; ed. Tord Fornberg and David Hellholm; Oslo: Scandinavian University Press, 1995) 355–67, esp. 363. Pearson remains puzzled "why this detail is found in *Ap. John*"; a full recognition of this text's ethical concern, going back to a longstanding philosophical tradition, probably offers the answer.

[66] Cf. King, *The Secret Revelation of John*, 109.

[67] Cf. Plato, *Republic* 9.579: the soul's most inferior (*epithumia*) part seeks money and pleasures and the "willing" middle part seeks honor, whereas the rational part seeks knowledge.

[68] Cf. Michel Tardieu, *Codex de Berlin* (Écrits Gnostiques 1; Paris: Cerf, 1984) 313–16; Onuki, *Gnosis und Stoa*, 30–46.The author of this passage in the long version of *Secret John* implies that the classification comes from a literary source, identified as the *Book of Zoroaster*.

cumbing to "the counterfeit spirit," and (2) the deceived souls, which end up in new cycles of reincarnation.[69] These poor souls are described in terms derived from Platonic tradition: the wrong spirit makes them "heavy" and draws them towards "the works of evil." The soul belonging to this latter group is thus bound to reenact the same events that Adam went through in the mythic past, until it finally "awakens from forgetfulness and acquires knowledge."[70] The only group for whom there is no hope of salvation whatsoever are apostates: those "who knew and turned away" will be taken to a "place where there is no repentance." (II 26–27).

5. Two Other Demiurgical Texts in Nag Hammadi Codex II

The myths narrated in *The Nature of the Rulers* (NHC II, 4) and *On the Origin of the World* (NHC II, 5) resemble closely that related in *Secret John*.[71] The powers involved in the creation of the first humans are as much characterized by unruly sexual desire as they are in *Secret John*. Just like in *Secret John*, the object of these powers' desire is Adam's spiritual instructor, who, notably, is in the two texts called his "physician" (ⲧⲥⲟⲉⲓⲛ).[72] What these two texts add into the mix are new characters, who are, as I seek to argue below, illustrations of the soul's battle against desire.

Rulers runs a story of Norea, described as the fourth child of Adam and Eve, and as one who repels the rulers' sexual advances. She resorts to two methods. The first one is that she calls upon her true nature: "I am from the world above." The second one is prayer: She asks the true God to rescue her from the rulers' hands. The whole episode looks like a narrative dramatization of the soul drawn between earthly and heavenly things, and making the right choice. If one follows

[69] Reincarnation is *not* a distinctly Gnostic idea in early Christian literature; as Gilhus (*Animals, Gods, and Humans*, 89) points out, Origen also flirted with this idea.

[70] The Platonic metaphors are, again, used here to describe both the soul's poor condition and its salvation.

[71] *Nat. Rul.* 88; *Orig. World* 114–5. There are notable differences in details. While in *Secret John* Yaldabaoth transmits the spirit into a body (consisting of soul) by blowing into its face, in *Rulers* Adam receives only a soul at this point (the Spirit descends upon him later), and in *Origin* it is "Sophia Zoe" who breathes onto Adam who had no soul. While in *Secret John* the presence of the divine Spirit in Adam not only mobilizes him but also makes him radiant, in *Origin* the divine breath just barely enables Adam to move: "He began to crawl on the ground, but he could not stand up." Even Adam's lowly posture, however, suffices to trigger the powers' agitation and admiration in front of him. The latter difference between *Secret John* and *Origin* suggests that they draw upon the two different Platonic traditions described above: *Secret John* builds upon the *Phaedrus* version, in which the soul simply activates the body, whereas *Origin* follows the *Timaeus* version, according to which the body bestowed with a soul staggers and therefore needs instruction.

[72] *Nat. Rul.* 89:16; *Orig. World* 114:10.

this course of interpretation, one can recognize a subtle point made in the form of narrative: Norea's affirmation of her being "from above" does not yet stop the unruly powers requesting sexual favors from her; it is only after her prayer that they leave her alone.[73] The text, thus, finds value in refreshing the memory of the soul's true origin, but does not consider this sufficient to extinguish the urges issuing from the body; prayer and divine help are also needed to rescue the soul from those urges.

The most important new element in the myth related in both *Rulers* and *Origin* is the story of Yaldabaoth's dethronement and the ensuing conversion and enthronement of his son Sabaoth.[74] This story, just like that of Norea, can be understood as an allegory of the soul making the right choice.

The story in *Rulers* describes Sabaoth as undergoing conversion: he first "repents" (ⲁⲫⲙⲉⲧⲁⲛⲟⲉⲓ), and then "condemns his father and matter (ⲟⲩⲗⲏ), his mother." Such details would make little sense, if the point were only to report a change in the cosmic administration, whereas they make perfect sense as illustrating a repenting soul that renounces its attachment to the material world. In *Exegesis* the soul was described as playing the whore, and then repenting. The same storyline finds here a more mythic expression: Sabaoth was one of the lustful powers in his former life, and he now repents. Sabaoth is also described in terms making him similar to Adam: just like Adam, Sabaoth is provided with divine instructors, Wisdom and Life, and they raise him up: they "took him up over the seventh heaven, below the curtain between what is above and what is below." (95) The story thus reproduces the same two-stage pattern of detachment and ascent as Plato's myth of the soul.[75]

One noteworthy by-product of this story about Sabaoth is that, stripped of his cosmic power, the dethroned creator-god Yaldabaoth can only pester humans with less powerful means – with passions. The brief remark in *Rulers* (96) that Yaldabaoth's envy of Sabaoth brought about death[76] is further elaborated in *Origin* (106–7).[77]

This text also provides a detailed list of the male and female names of death's offspring: "These are the names of the males: envy, wrath, weeping, roar, grief,

[73] *Nat. Rul.* 92–93.

[74] *Nat. Rul.* 95–96; *Orig. World* 103–6.

[75] The ensuing remark on Sabaoth's "four-faced chariot of cherubim" is certainly based upon Jewish tradition; cf. Francis T. Fallon, *The Enthronement of Sabaoth: Jewish Elements in Gnostic Creation Myths* (NHS 10; Leiden, Brill, 1978), 57–59. Nevertheless, in this particular context describing Sabaoth's ascent, the remark may also evoke the image of the chariot of Zeus, which Plato used in his discussion about the soul's ascent (*Phaedr.* 246e).

[76] Crislip compellingly proposes that the sequence from envy to death in the Sabaoth myth goes back to Wis. 2:24 ("through the devil's envy death entered the world"); cf. Andrew Crislip, "Envy and Anger at the World's Creation and Destruction in the *Treatise without Title `On the Origin of the World'* (NHC II,5)," *VigChr* 65 (2011): 285–310, esp. 303.

[77] The tendency towards narrative expansion is typical of *Origin's* version in comparison to that of *Rulers*; cf. Fallon, *The Enthronement of Sabaoth*, 24, 121.

loud shouting, sobbing. These are the names of the females: anger, pain, lust, sighs, curses, bitterness, strife." What is especially striking in this passage is the list of "male" names, in which five of the seven displays of emotions are related to mourning. The image evoked by these names seems to be that of ritual lamentation at funerals. The image of ritual lament seems very appropriate here because of its obvious connection to death. In addition, the question of whether one is entitled to display emotions at funerals, and if so, to what extent, was a classic issue of debate among philosophers. Rites of mourning were also controversial among early Christians. As Antigone Samellas details, early Christian leaders systematically sought to tone down what they considered excessive displays of grief by condemning them as theatrical, feminine, barbarian and ultimately going back to Satan.[78] Although the literary context, in which this issue is referred to in *Origin*, is very different from the texts discussed by Samellas, the author of this text shares the educated persons' disapproval of excessive displays of grief, explaining them as subversion of true masculinity, and as stemming from the true God's adversary.[79]

It is more difficult to tease out from *Origin* a clear idea of what kind of behavior is expected of people of the right persuasion. Humans are divided into the spirit-endowed, the soul-endowed, and the material ones, but no ethical qualities are attached to these groups. The only more practical thing one learns here is that different sorts of baptisms (by spirit, fire, and water) are needed for different groups (122).

If the story of Sabaoth is intended as an illustration of the soul making the right choice, as I have argued, then repentance and avoidance of unruly desire would be self-evident requirements that need not be separately stated. Given the link drawn in this text between emotions and the lesser gods, it stands to reason that the condemnation of these gods "by blessed spirits" (123) also involves control of emotions, but this is also not spelled out. What is clear is that the author of this text, just like the author of *Exegesis*, does not fully endorse *apatheia* since he approves of one kind of anger, that shown towards the rulers of darkness (121) – a view that links this text with the Peripatetic tradition rather than with the Stoic one.[80]

[78] Antigone Samellas, *Death in the Eastern Mediterranean (50–600 A.D.): The Christianization of the East: An Interpretation* (STAC 12; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2002), 72–81, concluding: "The wailing of women belied the promises of Jesus and rendered the consolations of priests redundant. Their mourning was incompatible with the Christian experience of grief, as this was defined by the bishops." Women were often described as being more prone to excessive display of emotions than men; cf., e. g., Plutarch, *Mor*. 113a; 139; for further examples, see Petra von Gemünden, *Affekt und Glaube: Studien zur Historischen Psychologie des Frühjudentums und Urchristentums* (NTOA 73; Göttingen: Vandehoeck & Ruprecht, 2009), 139–41.

[79] The affinity between the powers and emotions is also illustrated in the description of the powers' sentimental lament over their defeat in *Orig. World* 125–26.

[80] An excursus discussing why "the excessive desire for sexual intercourse" (ⲧⲉⲡⲓⲑⲩⲙⲓⲁ ⲛ̄ⲧⲥⲩⲛⲟⲩⲥⲓⲁ) is aroused by wine drinking, how this desire was triggered by Eros, and how all beings, including "the first soul," fell in love with this god (*Orig. World* 109–11), probably

Conclusion

The texts I have discussed above show that the story of the soul's descent and ascent can be placed into quite different narrative contexts. There are certain culturally conditioned key elements that simply seem to belong to this story, regardless of the context in which it is placed. (1) It goes without saying that the story provides an occasion for exploring the soul's relationship to the body – with one exception, which is the story of Sabaoth's conversion. However the soul's ascent is described, it always involves detachment from the body and material world. (2) The image of the soul's forgetfulness and the recovery of its memory of its divine origin is reproduced in different ways. (3) Emotions are a recurrent element in these stories. One sign of the sense that they are intrinsic to the soul's story is the amplification of this aspect by expansions that can be detected in the long version of *Secret John*, and in the *Origin of the World*.

The core narrative of the soul's descent and ascent functions like a magnet, drawing to itself new metaphors, some of which become more permanent features and are in turn expanded by means of mythmaking. The idea of a divine instructor or companion, needed as the soul's guide, can be expressed in a number of different ways, most prominently with marital imagery (Adam and "ur-Eve"; husband and wife; bridal chamber).

The guiding principle in such descriptions is that the soul cannot save itself; it needs help from outside.[81] This view is expressed in different ways: the soul cannot move by itself but must be animated by the divine breath; only the soul

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suggests that this desire is a thing to be avoided, but the text is not very explicit about this either. The only passage in this section containing what looks like a real argument against sexual desire is a reference to "the tree of knowledge," identified as Adam's "female companion similar to him" (тєчѡвр̄єιиє). Whereas he loved this true companion, he "condemned and loathed other kinds of copies." The relevant section (110.29–111.2) is introduced as stemming from the (otherwise unknown) *Holy Book*. The section is part of a larger whole (*Orig. World* 109–11) that may be of Manichaean origin; cf. Takashi Onuki, "Das Logion 77 des koptischen *Thomasevangeliums* und der gnostische Animismus," in Frey et alii (ed.), *Das Thomasevangelium*, 294–317, esp. 313–14.

[81] The soul's need for help from outside may seem an addition to Plato's description of the soul's ascent, but this aspect does not place the texts discussed here outside Platonic tradition. As Gregory Shaw details, later Platonists were divided over this issue. According to Plotinus, the soul's fall was not complete; a part of it remains stored in the divine reality. Hence the soul's recollection of that reality can be refreshed through intellectual contemplation. Iamblichus assumed a more radical break. Since he taught that the soul fell in its entirety, it follows that the soul has no natural ability to restore the lost connection. Therefore, what is needed for the soul's ascent is divine revelation and participation in rituals, adjusted to the different stages of its return. Cf. Gregory Shaw, "The Soul's Innate Gnosis of the Gods: Revelation in Iamblichean Theory," in *Revelation, Literature, and Community in Late Antiquity* (ed. Philippa Townsend and Moulie Vidas; TSAJ 146; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011), 117–29. In consequence, the emphasis on the need for divine instruction in Nag Hammadi stories of the soul places them, not outside the Platonic spectrum, but at one end of it.

joined with the spirit can stand strong against the attacks of evil spirits; or the coming together of the soul and spirit makes one able to experience *visio dei*.[82]

It is by no means surprising that the two sets of stories of the soul discussed here did not stand in isolation from each other as regards these issues. It is only to be expected that some articulations of the soul's present plight floated freely from one kind of story to another.

The authors of the texts I have discussed above were not interested in the soul's plight and salvation as theoretical issues only; one can also trace more mundane concerns in these texts. It may come as surprise that control of sexual desire does not seem to be the greatest moral concern in them. Perhaps the implied audiences of these works had already gained mastery over this issue? However that may be, these audiences' battle against the demons gluing them to the visible world is far from over.[83] The demons are now resorting to less dramatic, and hence more devious means, including seduction by wine, olive oil, fancy clothing, luxury metals, love of money, pride and arrogance.[84] How alien indeed is the moral landscape painted in these texts from the moral challenges we face today …

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[82] For this interpretation, based upon a Valentinian eschatological myth preserved in Clement, *Exc. Theod.* 63–64, see Ismo Dunderberg, "Valentinian Theories on Classes of Humankind," in *Zugänge zur Gnosis* (ed. Christoph Markschies; Leuven: Peeters, 2013), 113–28 [= chapter 7 below].

[83] For a similar point that becoming free from most tangible passions does not mean that you have conquered all passions, see Seneca, *Ep.* 75: there are people who have already become free of some passions, such as sensual desire and avarice, but who are still troubled by some other passions, including fear, ambition, and pain.

[84] Most things listed here (except for olive oil) are stock items in early Jewish and Christian moral discourse (which, of course, does not mean that these things didn't matter!). For Clement's teaching on how meat and wine make the soul heavy, dull and prone to evil thoughts (*Paed.* 2.1.11 etc.), and for his critical remarks on too luxurious lifestyles, see Theresa M. Shaw, *The Burden of Flesh: Fasting and Sexuality in Early Christianity* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1998), 51–52; for similar examples in Evagrius, see David Brakke, *Demons and the Making of the Monk: Spiritual Combat in Early Christianity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006), 52–70. Another body of literature where similar concerns are expressed is the *Testaments of 12 Patriarchs.* The texts included in this collection customarily include warnings against desire, envy, wine, debauchery, greed and luxury; cf., e.g., *Test. Reuben* 2–6 (promiscuity; insatiability of stomach; strife; flattery and trickery; arrogance; lying; injustice); *Test. Simeon* 3 (deceit; envy; promiscuity); *Test. Levi* 9 (promiscuity); *Test. Judah* 12–18 (excessive wine-drinking; promiscuity; love of money; beautiful women); *Test. Issachar* 4–7 (gold; fancy foods; fine clothes; envy; avarice; excessive wine-drinking; beautiful women); *Test. Dan* 3–4 (anger); *Test. Gad* 3–6 (hatred, slander; arrogance); *Test. Benjamin* 5–8 (wealth; hatred; promiscuity). One also finds in this corpus of texts a similar emphasis on repentance as the key moment of moral improvement; e.g., *Test. Simeon* 2:13 (repentance; weeping; prayer); *Test. Gad* 5: "What it has not learned from human agency, it understands through repentance."

Chapter 2

Judas' Anger and the Perfect Human

Anger and "the perfect human" are prominent issues in the *Gospel of Judas*, although they have attracted relatively little attention in the quite numerous studies published on this text thus far.[1] The two topics are intertwined, as can already be seen at the beginning of the *Gospel of Judas*. Here it is told how the disciples become angry at Jesus because he scoffs at their Jewish customs, and how he, in response, challenges them to bring forth "the perfect human." Yet all of them fail miserably – except for Judas Iscariot, but even he is unable look Jesus in the eye.[2]

Because this passage implies that Judas, unlike the other disciples, did not succumb to anger, it strikes one as odd that also he is described later in the text as being filled with anger. After having revealed Judas' role as the traitor, Jesus says to him, "Your horn is already raised up, you are filled with rage (ⲁⲩⲱ ⲡⲉⲕⲥⲱⲛⲧ ⲁϥⲙⲟⲩϩ̅), your star went by, and your heart became [violent (?)]."[3] Notably, Judas is described here, not as *becoming* angry, but already *being* angry. This point in the story marks a remarkable shift in the role of Judas, who has been portrayed earlier in the *Gospel of Judas* as the only disciple who understood the true identity of Jesus and whom Jesus taught in private. While the other disciples lost their temper as soon as Jesus laughed at them, Judas did not show even the sligthest irritation when Jesus laughed and heaped scorn at him by calling him as "the thirteenth *daimōn.*"[4] Why then is Judas now suddenly described as

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[1] While Pagels and King describe the *author* of the *Gospel of Judas* as being angry, there is little discussion even in their book as to what this author says about anger; cf. Elaine Pagels and Karen L. King, *Reading Judas: The Gospel of Judas and the Shaping of Christianity* (London/New York: Allen Lane, 2007), xiii–xvi, 49–50, 99–100. For their analysis of "the perfect human," which is the most comprehensive one thus far, see ibid. 78–81, 131–32.

[2] *Gos. Jud.* 34–35.

[3] *Gos. Jud.* 56:21–24.

[4] *Gos. Jud.* 34:2, 18–22; 44:18–21. The latter is one of the key passages for the "revisionist interpretation" (for the proponents, see n. 7 below), which maintains that the word *daimōn* here means "demon." This interpretation is possible but not entirely certain; in any case, the Judas of the *Gospel of Judas* is quite different from the demons described in the New Testament. It is true that, in the synoptic gospels, demons know who Jesus is (e. g., Mark 1:24; 3:11; 5:7), but it is hardly adequate to compare their "confessions" to that of Judas in the *Gospel of Judas* 35:15–20. Jesus teaches none of the demons mentioned in the synoptic gospels in private, as he is said to have taught Judas in the *Gospel of Judas* in consequence of the latter's confession, and nothing similar to the praise of Judas' intellectual capacity in the *Gospel of Judas* ("since

irascible,[5] and how does this description fit in with his role as the only disciple who was able to bring forth the perfect human and whom Jesus chose to teach in private?

In addressing this dilemma, I seek to strike a balance between the positive and negative features of the portrayal of Judas in the *Gospel of Judas*. I have not yet been able to fully convince myself of the validity of "the revisionist interpretation,"[6] according to which, even in his own gospel, Judas is portrayed as a negative, demonic being, or as "poor Judas."[7] This interpretation has corrected the initial interpretation of the text on a number of points, but the major problem with this reading is that its proponents have not yet seriously addressed any of the undeniably *positive* features attached to Judas in the *Gospel of Judas*. One of the questions the revisionists have thus far left unanswered is this: if Judas is *only* a demon according to this gospel, how is it possible that the text also implies that the perfect human resides in him?

What the present debate between the two conflicting interpretations of the *Gospel of Judas* has demonstrated is, rather, that the text's portrait of Judas is much more complex and ambiguous than was originally thought. One of the

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Jesus knew that Judas thought something else that was exalted …," *Gos. Jud.* 35:19–23) is said of any of the demons mentioned in the synoptic gospels.

[5] DeConick insists that Judas already protests against Jesus' teaching in *Gos. Jud.* 46:5–7. What she designates as "the corrected translation" of this passage runs as follows: "Teacher, enough! At no time may my seed control the Archons!" Cf. April D. DeConick, *The Thirteenth Apostle: What the Gospel of Judas Really Says* (London/New York: Continuum 2007), 53. This is one of the points where I think DeConick offers a plausible *alternative* to the editors' reading of the text, but I still fail to see convincing proof that the latter is based upon an entirely wrong or impossible interpretation of the text, as DeConick claims.

[6] This term was first used in this connection by Marvin Meyer, "The Thirteenth Daimon: Judas and Sophia in the *Gospel of Judas*," which offers an extended response to DeConick's sweeping critique of the National Geographic editorial team's interpretation of the *Gospel of Judas*. The paper is available at [https://www.chapman.edu/wilkinson/religious-studies/_files/marv-meyer/13th_daimon_FINAL-11408.pdf] (last visited September 25, 2014).

[7] This interpretation was first proposed by Louis Painchaud, "À propos de la (re)découverte de l'Évangile de Judas," *LTP* 62 (2006): 553–68; cf. idem, "Polemical Aspects in the *Gospel of Judas*," in *The Gospel of Judas in Context* (ed. Madeleine Scopello; NHMS 62; Leiden: Brill, 2008), 171–86. It has been now adopted by a number of other specialists; cf., e. g., DeConick, *The Thirteenth Apostle*; eadem, "The Mystery of Betrayal: What Does the *Gospel of Judas* Really Say?" in Scopello (ed.), *The Gospel of Judas in Context*, 239–64, esp. 251–64; Birger Pearson, "Judas Iscariot in the *Gospel of Judas*," in *The Codex Judas Papers* (ed. April D. DeConick; NHMS 71; Leiden: Brill), 137–52; Gesine Schenke Robinson, "The Gospel of Judas: Its Protagonist, Its Composition, and Its Community," in DeConick (ed.), *The Codex Judas Papers*, 75–94, esp. 86–87; Einar Thomassen, "Is Judas Really the Hero of the *Gospel of Judas*?" in Scopello (ed.), *The Gospel of Judas in Context*, 157–70; idem, "*Judasevangeliet* og gnosticismen," in *Mellem venner og fjender: En folgebog om Judasevangeliet, tidlig kristendom og gnosis* (ed. Anders Klostergaard Petersen, Jesper Hyldahl and Einar Thomassen; Antiken og Kristendommen 6; Copenhagen: Anis, 2008), 143–66, esp. 165–66; John D. Turner, "The Place of the *Gospel of Judas* in Sethian Tradition," in Scopello (ed.), *The Gospel of Judas in Context*, 187–237, esp. 214–23.

ambiguities in the gospel's picture of Judas is the tension between the perfect human residing in him and his assent to anger. The implicit ambiguity between these two features becomes increasingly visible, if we take a look at ancient moral philosophy. The use of the concept of "the perfect human" was widespread among philosophers, but their prevalent view was that the perfect human is completely free of anger.[8] Judas, thus, would not qualify for the group of perfect humans according to ancient philosophers. However, because the perfect human was considered to be a very rare species, the philosophers also devised subtle categorizations for those on lower steps of the morality ladder. My suggestion is that taking these theories into account help us move beyond the polarized hero-or-villain debate about the figure of Judas in the *Gospel of Judas*.

1. An Aristotelian View of Anger in the *Gospel of Judas*?

Let me begin my analysis with briefly discussing one theory which I initially considered a possible solution but which I finally discarded. My initial working hypothesis was that the author of the *Gospel of Judas* thought that anger can, in certain situations, be justified. Although this position can already be found in Plato,[9] it was in antiquity usually associated with Aristotle and his followers.[10] Cicero maintains that the Peripatetics "have many words of praise for anger … and they say that one who does not know how to become angry cannot be considered a real man."[11] Seneca calls Aristotle "the defender of anger"[12] and attributes to him the teaching that "anger is necessary, and no battle can be won without it."[13] In addition, in the light of Gerard Luttikhuizen's recent attempt

[8] Cf., e.g., Cicero, *Tusc. Disp.* 3:19: "The wise person never gets angry" (trans. Graves).

[9] Plato, *Laws*, 731b; cf. William V. Harris, *Restraining Rage: The Ideology of Anger Control in Classical Antiquity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001), 92. Harris points out that Plato speaks here of "*thumos*-anger" instead of "*orge*-anger." The former indicates "anger in appropriate form and quantity," (ibid.), while the latter usually denotes "rage," uncontrolled outbursts of anger.

[10] For Aristotle's position on anger, see Harris, *Restraining Rage*, 94–98. Epicureans did not completely disapprove of anger, either; for the distinction between natural anger (ὀργή) and empty anger (θυμός) in Philodemus, see Voula Tsouna, "Philodemus on Emotions," in *Greek and Roman Philosophy 100 BC-200 AD* (ed. Richard Sorabji and Robert W. Sharples; London: Institute of Classical Studies, University of London, 2007), 213–41, esp. 221–22, 226. Tsouna concludes (226) that, for Philodemus, "natural anger is the anger of the wise man, whereas rage is the anger of the fool."

[11] Cicero, *Tusc. Disp.* 4.43 (trans. Graves).

[12] Seneca, *On Anger*, 3.3.1.

[13] Seneca, *On Anger*, 1.9.2; cf. 1.17.1. This position was also accepted for certain situations by some early Christians, including the author of the Gospel of Mark, who did not hesitate to describe even Jesus as being angry (Mark 3:5), and Evagrius, who regarded anger as permis-

to trace Aristotelian ideas in the *Secret Book of John*,[14] with which the cosmogonic myth in the *Gospel of Judas* has much in common, it did not seem too far-fetched to assume that Aristotelian philosophy had some impact upon the *Gospel of Judas* as well.

My initial "Aristotelian" hypothesis was that while the other disciples got angry for the wrong reasons in the *Gospel of Judas*, Judas becomes angry for the right reason and for a purpose. The author of the gospel obviously took for granted that Jesus had to be sacrificed and that Judas had a part to play in the events leading to the death of Jesus. Consequently, if the author was familiar with the Aristotelian theory of anger, he might have thought that Judas *had to get angry* to be able to do what he was supposed to do, or that anger supplied Judas with the *courage* he needed to betray Jesus.[15]

However, it was for a number of reasons that I finally dismissed this explanation. First, both Plato and Aristotle consider anger acceptable only insofar as it is needed to prevent or correct *injustice*. This aspect does not seem to be present in the *Gospel of Judas*. It does not refer to any injustice Judas tried to prevent or correct by betraying Jesus, and it would be difficult to see what such injustice could be. Rather, the author of the gospel probably regarded what Judas did to Jesus as injustice. As the revisionists have pointed out, the sacrificial language used in this connection ("you will sacrifice the man carrying me") supports their interpretation since sacrifices, especially human sacrifices, are strictly condemned earlier in the *Gospel of Judas.*[16]

Second, I believe the revisionist interpretation is correct in maintaining that the role played by the stars in the *Gospel of Judas* is entirely negative. It can be thus inferred from the fact that Judas's anger is mentioned in connection with his star ("you are filled with anger, and your star reached you," 56:23) that the author of this gospel disapproved of anger as well. Thirdly, and most importantly, Sethians, by whose views the author of the *Gospel of Judas* was obviously inspired,[17]

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sible in the battle against Satan and demons (cf. Andrew Louth, "Evagrius on Anger," a paper read at Fifteenth International Conference of Patristic Studies, Oxford, August 6–11, 2007).

[14] Gerard P. Luttikhuizen, *Gnostic Revisions of Genesis Stories and Early Jesus Traditions* (NHMS 58; Leiden: Brill, 2006), 29–43.

[15] For the link Aristotle posited between anger ("*thumos*-anger") and courage, see *Nic. Eth.* 3.8.1116b23–1117a9; cf. Harris, *Restraining Rage*, 98.

[16] *Gos. Jud.* 38–41.

[17] Whereas most interpreters agree upon seeing the *Gospel of Judas* as a Sethian text, John Turner, the leading expert on Sethianism, modifies this view by affirming that "the *Gospel of Judas* clearly trades on well-attested Sethian mythology, but it is a Sethian apocalypse without a Sethian soteriology … For both Judas and non-Sethian readers of this text, the Sethian myth is incidental, interesting perhaps but of no value in attaining salvation … " (Turner, "The Place of the *Gospel of Judas*," 226–28). For similar views about the relationship between Sethianism and the *Gospel of Judas*, see Schenke Robinson, "The *Gospel of Judas*," 88, 93. For a more positive evaluation of their relationship, see Lance Jenott, *The* Gospel of Judas: *Coptic Text, Translation, and Historical Interpretation of the `Betrayer's Gospel'* (STAC 64; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011), esp. 70–101.

preferred the Stoic ideal of *apatheia*, the complete freedom from emotions, to the Aristotelian ideal of *metriopatheia*, which allows for a moderate display of emotions in certain situations and for right purposes.[18] This general picture makes *metriopatheia* an unlikely option for the author of the *Gospel of Judas*. This all leaves little room for any positive value attached to anger in the *Gospel of Judas*.

2. The Perfect Human and "Morality Ladders" in Antiquity

While the Aristotelian theory of anger does not seem to offer a credible solution to the ambiguity posed by the coexistence of the perfect human and anger in Judas, ancient theories of moral progress may help us understand this feature. The concept of "the perfect human" looms large in the works of ancient philosophers as indicating the ultimate goal of moral progress. The most prominent characteristic of the perfect human is freedom: this figure is free of emotions, of all worldly concerns, and, as Seneca summarizes, of the fear of humans and gods.[19] What is more, the perfect human no longer needs instruction because this person intuitively knows what to do in each particular situation.[20]

For ancient philosophers, "the perfect human" was first and foremost a pedagogical device. This concept lends an expression to the ideal human condition that set for those aiming at perfection a high standard, so high that it was in fact practically impossible to achieve. Nonetheless, we learn from Plutarch how this ideal served one's moral improvement. According to him, the progressing one should constantly compare himself "with the deeds and conduct of the good and perfect man (ἀνδρὸς ἀγαθοῦ καὶ τελείου)." One concrete way of doing this, Plutarch says, is to pose to oneself the question, "what would have Plato done in this case?"[21]

It was universally agreed that the vast majority of humankind – in fact, all humans except for the very rare exceptions which can be counted with the fingers of one hand (Socrates, Diogenes, and, for Philo, Moses) – will never advance far

[18] The ideal of *metriopatheia* was also shared by those who did not belong to the Peripatetics. Though not being an Aristotelian in a strict sense, Plutarch recommends *metriopatheia* as opposed to the Stoic *apatheia*, arguing that "when the vice of those who are making progress is transformed into more suitable emotions (εἰς ἐπιεικέστερα πάθη μεθισταμένη), it is being gradually plotted out" (*Progress in Virtue* 84a).

[19] Seneca, *Epistles* 75.

[20] This was obviously a matter of debate. The Epicurean philosopher Philodemus argued that even the sages should submit themselves to frank criticism, which clearly presupposes that "they too are fallible and feel the need to confess" (Tsouna, "Philodemus on Emotions," 215).

[21] Plutarch, *Progress in Virtue* 85a; for the same advice in a different context, see Epictetus, *Handbook*, 33.12: "When you are about to meet somebody, in particular when it is one of those men who are held in very high esteem, propose to yourself the question, 'What would Socrates or Zeno have done under these circumstances?'" (trans. Oldfather).

enough to reach this goal. Early Christians made the ideal more accessible: Paul says that he discusses the wisdom of God "among the perfect" (ἐν τοῖς τελείοις, 1 Cor 2:6–7), thus claiming this elevated designation both for himself and for some of his fellow believers. The authors of Hebrews and the *Book of Thomas* (see below) bear witness to a similar tendency of making perfection available to a wider group of people than was traditionally assumed.

Since "the perfect human" was usually considered a rarity, moral philosophers also classified other humans into different moral categories, including those who have already come very close to perfection; those who are still further away from virtue; and those who show complete disdain for virtue. In what follows, I take examples of such divisions from Seneca, Philo, and the *Book of Thomas*, before I discuss more thoroughly the idea of the perfect human in the *Secret Book of John*. In this way, I wish to demonstrate that the idea of the morality ladder, where the level of the perfect human was the ultimate step, was well known and had impact on the views of Jewish and early Christian teachers, including Sethians. The list could be easily expanded; others have demonstrated the relevance of these distinctions to the interpretation of the Gospel of John, Paul, and Pastoral Epistles,[22] and I have suggested elsewhere that the Valentinian tripartite anthropology can be interpreted against the same background.[23]

The Stoics drew a strict distinction between the sage, that is, one who is truly wise, and all other humans, whom they considered to be merely "fools."[24] Nevertheless, there are different varieties of the fools according to the Stoic analysis; some fools have made more progress in virtue than others.[25] Seneca divides the progressing ones into three groups.[26] Closest to perfection are those "who have already laid aside all passions and vices, who have learned what things are to be embraced." These people are those who are already in the know; what is still lacking is that their endurance has not yet been tested in practice. Seneca, how-

[22] For Paul, see Troels Engberg-Pedersen, *Paul and the Stoics* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark/Louisville, KY: John Knox, 2000), 70–72; esp. 55; for Philo and the Gospel of John, see Gitte Buch-Hansen, *"It Is the Spirit That Gives Life:" A Stoic Understanding on Pneûma in John* (BZNW 173; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2010), esp. 138–52. As for the Pastoral Epistles, their moral philosophical background is thoroughly discussed from this perspective by Risto Saarinen, *The Pastoral Epistles with Philemon and Jude* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos, 2008).

[23] Cf. Ismo Dunderberg, *Beyond Gnosticism: Myth, Lifestyle, and Society in the School of Valentinus* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), 250n7.

[24] For a polemical (and therefore probably biased) description of the Stoic dichotomy, see Plutarch, *Progress in Virtue*, 76a. Plutarch says that the absolute distinction the Stoics drew between the sage and all other humans "would assign all humankind to a general category of badness with the single exception of the absolutely perfect human." This description may be correct in principle, but in light of Seneca's more subtle analysis of this issue (see above), it offers a too rigid picture of the Stoics' teaching.

[25] Cf. Troels Engberg-Pedersen, "The Concept of Paraenesis," in *Early Christian Paraenesis in Context* (ed. James M. Starr and Troels Engberg-Pedersen; BZNW 125; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2004), 47–72.

[26] Seneca, *Epistles* 75.

ever, is confident that it is impossible for those who have reached this level to regress – even though they themselves do not yet know this. The second group consists of those who have already left behind the worst diseases and passions of the soul but who are, unlike the first group, still in danger of slipping back. Those in the third division have become free of the worst vices but not of all vices. One of the especially persistent vices is anger. Seneca says of those belonging to the third group: "For example, they have escaped avarice, but they still feel anger; they no longer are troubled by sensual desire, but they are still troubled by ambition; they have no desire any more, but they are still afraid. … They scorn death, but they are still in terror of pain." In addition to the three divisions among those who make progress described by Seneca, there are, by implication, two other groups at the opposite ends of the morality ladder: the truly wise at its uppermost end and, at its lowest level, those who are not at all concerned with progress in virtue.

In his treatise *On Anger*, Seneca offers numerous examples of the little things that drive people crazy; these include "manuscripts written in too small a script," and "a less honourable place at the table."[27] Yet Seneca is not only poking fun at petty people getting angry too easily, but his point is to argue that "anger is contrary to nature."[28] He resolutely disapproves of all arguments seeking to justify anger and angry behavior in some situations,[29] for example, in battle, after one's father is murdered, and when people need to be punished.[30] Seneca even maintains, chillingly, that when Roman fathers ("we") drown their children with disabilities, "it is not anger but reason that separates the harmful from the sound."[31] The only concession Seneca is ready to make is that orators sometimes need to *pretend* to be angry when delivering their speeches.[32] But, Seneca says, "anger in itself has nothing of the strong or the heroic, but shallow minds are affected by it."[33] Hence it is a matter of course that the truly wise person neither feels nor shows anger, not even towards sinners (*peccantibus*).[34] Seneca's recipe for anger management is simple: "not to fall in anger, and in anger to do no wrong."[35] He

[27] Seneca, *Anger* 2.26.2; 3.37.4. Descriptions of little irritating things were obviously stock materials for moral philosophers; for a similar account, see Plutarch, *Control of Anger* 454a.

[28] Seneca, *Anger* 1.6.5.

[29] Cf. Cicero, *Tusc. Disp.* 4.48–54.

[30] Seneca, *Anger* 1.9.2; 1.12.1; 1.16.6.

[31] Seneca, *Anger* 1.15.2.

[32] Seneca, *Anger* 2.17.2. The same argument is made by Cicero in *Tusc. Disp.* 4.55. The usefulness of simulated anger was more widely accepted: the Epicurean Philodemus maintains that teachers can, for the purposes of philosophical therapy, feign anger (Philodemus, *On Anger* XXXIV.18–20; cf. Tsouna, "Philodemus on Emotions," 225).

[33] Seneca, *Anger* 2.10.6.

[34] Seneca, *Anger* 2.10.6.

[35] Seneca, *Anger* 2.18.1.

also recommends suspension of revenge ("the best cure for anger is waiting," and withdrawal, instructing that "if someone strikes you, step back."[36]

In his work *Allegorical Interpretation*, Philo coins a distinctly Jewish version of the morality ladder. The fact that *all* groups in his classification are described as being obedient to the law, for one reason or another, shows that this model applies to Jews only. Philo's model, thus, leaves out at least one more group, that is, those who do not pay heed to the law at all (either pagans or non-practicing Jews).

Philo divides the law-abiding Jews into three moral categories on the basis of why they obey the law and of what kind of instruction they need.[37] First, there is the perfect human who "possesses the virtue instinctively," and, consequently, needs no instruction at all. The opposite pole is represented by the bad human, who needs both injunction and prohibition. Between the two poles is the human being "in the middle," who is neither bad nor truly good. Those belonging to this group do not need prohibition or injunction, like the bad ones, but like children they need exhortation and teaching.[38]

Philo's division between the perfect human and those "in the middle" is linked with his allegorical interpretation of the Book of Genesis. He considers the perfect human to be identical with the original idea of the human being, who was created in the image of God. Philo identifies the human being in the middle, who is neither good nor bad, with the earthly Adam, who is knowledgeable (being able "to give names and to understand") but who remains ignorant of himself and his own nature. This is a noteworthy point since a very similar idea recurs in the *Secret Book of John* (see below).

In another part of the *Allegorical Interpretation*, Philo distinguishes three different categories of human beings, which are the perfect one, the progressing one (ὁ προκόπτων), and the lover of delight (ὁ φιλήδονος).[39] The perfect human, represented by Moses, is one whose only concern is to achieve *apatheia*, the complete lack of harmful emotions. This person "has cut off all passions." The progressing one, represented by Aaron, aims at and is content with *metriopatheia*. This per-

[36] Seneca, *Anger* 3.12.4; 2.34.5. These remedies were also common coin for representatives of different schools of thought; for similar advice to delay revenge, see Plutarch, *Control of Anger* 455e.

[37] Philo, *All. Int.* 1.91–94. Buch-Hansen (*The Spirit*, 150–52) sees in the relevant passage of Philo's *Allegorical Interpretation* references to no less than five different groups of people.

[38] My reading of this passage in Philo is that "the good" (σπουδαῖος) is identical with "the perfect" and "the child" is identical with "the human being in the middle." Buch-Hansen (cf. n. 37 above) regards both groups as separate categories; hence her division into five instead of three categories.

[39] Philo, *All. Int.* 3.159. The division forms the core of his lengthy explanation of Genesis 3:14 (3.114–181). Philo associates the "breast" and "belly" mentioned in this verse with the Platonic theory of the tripartite soul consisisting of a reason-part, a *thumos*-part (which Philo identies with "breast") and a desiring (*epithumētikon*) part, which Philo identifies with "belly" – as denoting both the abdomen and the belly as the sources of desire.

son is waging war against passions but not with the same devotion as the perfect one.[40] One more difference between the perfect human and the progressing one is that the former has received perfection as a gift from God and therefore practices it "free from toil," while the progressing one "acquires virtue by toil" and therefore lacks full perfection.[41]

Just as for Seneca, anger (θυμός) is for Philo a crucial point where the difference between the perfect human and the progressing one becomes visible. While the irascible element (θυμικόν) was a *necessary* part of Plato's tripartite soul, Philo maintains that Moses, the perfect human, was able to cut out this part of his soul, "loving not moderation (μετριοπαθεία) but only the complete lack of passion (ἀπαθεία)."[42] While the progressing one is unable to cut out the soul's irascible part completely, he or she can control it with reason.[43] It is "reason, the clarity of reason, and the truth of reason" that provides an antidote to the *thumos*-anger.[44]

What is striking here is that, in principle, Philo agrees with the Stoic ideal that the perfect human is completely free of emotions. He allots the Platonic virtue of controlling the lower parts of the soul with reason only to the progressing one, that is, to those on a lower step of the morality ladder. In practice, however, Philo is mainly concerned with these less virtuous people. Moses the perfect man, who has laid off passion entirely and practices virtue instinctively ("free from toil"), is an exceptional figure; most (or all) other people belong either to the progressing ones or to the lovers of pleasure. While the perfect human is able to renounce pleasures completely, "the progressing one" must be content with "welcoming simple and unavoidable delight, while declining what is excessive."[45] While the perfect human declines the pleasures of the belly "spontaneously and unbidden" and practices virtue instinctively, the progressing one "acts under orders" and needs guidance in practicing virtue.[46] The fact that Philo described the persons "in the middle" in the same way shows that those "in the middle" and the progressing ones are two different designations for the same, intermediate category between the truly good and evil persons.

Finally, according to Philo, even the perfect human is unable to get entirely free from the constraints of the body. Although the perfect sage has become com-

[40] Philo, *All. Int.* 3.129, 131–34.

[41] Philo, *All. Int.* 3.135.

[42] Philo, *All. Int.* 3.129, cf. 3.131. Philo supports his view of Moses by referring to Leviticus 8:29, according to which "Moses took away the breast part (τὸ στηθύνιον ἀφείλεν)" of a ram he sacrificed. Philo explains this verse as meaning that Moses seized "the breast, that is, *thumos*, and took it away and cut it off" (*All. Int.* 3.129–130).

[43] Philo, *All. Int.* 3.128, As evidence for this idea, Philo refers to the tablet put on Aaron's breast (Exod 28:30); this tablet contained "urim and tummim," which in the Greek translation used by Philo were understood as meaning "explanation and truth."

[44] Philo, *All. Int.* 3.124.

[45] Philo, *All. Int.* 3.140.

[46] Philo, *All. Int.* 3.144.

pletely free from *thumos*-anger, nature (φύσις) still requires necessary amounts of food and drink for the preservation of his or her body.[47] As will be seen below, a similar restriction appears in the *Secret Book of John's* description of the perfect ones.

The divisions of humankind in the *Book of Thomas* (NHC II, 7) are basically similar to Seneca's and Philo's. This text presents itself as a teaching addressed to "the perfect" both in the main body of the text[48] and in the full title given at the end of this document ("The Book of Thomas: The Contender Writing to the Perfect"). The teachings of Jesus in this text, however, are mostly addressed to those who have *not* yet reached "the greatness of perfection."[49] The author of this text makes a distinction between the perfect and an inferior group, the latter being called either "disciples" (ϩⲉⲛⲥⲃⲟⲩⲉⲓ) or "little children" (ϩⲉⲛⲕⲟⲩⲉⲓ).[50] It is striking that Thomas himself is placed in the *latter* group. Not only does he not understand visible and invisible things, but he also has difficulties in doing the right thing: "it is difficult," he admits, "to perform the truth before humans."[51]

Another related distinction in the *Book of Thomas* is that between the wise person (ⲣⲙ̄ⲡϩⲙⲧ) and the fool (ⲥⲟϭ).[52] The fools, who are also called "the blind" and "the ignorant," are utterly incapable of moral reasoning: they are unable to tell good from bad. The fire inside them supplies them with "an illusion of truth" and deceives them with beauty, pleasure and desire. The author of the *Book of Thomas* reckons thus with at least three kinds of people: the perfect, those who make progress ("the little children"), and the fools. While the "little children" show some inclination to progress and recognize their faults, the boundary between the wise person and the fool – also called "the ignorant" and "the blind" – is insurmountable: " … it is impossible for the wise person to dwell with a fool."[53]

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[47] Philo, *All. Int.* 3.147. The pragmatic goal of Philo's argumentation becomes visible later in his treatise, where he teaches how it is possible to avoid excessive eating at banquets if one comes to these occasions well-prepared, that is, having reason as one's companion (*All. Int.* 3.155–59). This is meant as an advice for the progressing ones, in which group Philo includes himself as well.

[48] *Thom. Cont.* 140:10–11.

[49] *Thom. Cont.* 138:35–36.

[50] *Thom. Cont.* 138:35; 139:12.

[51] *Thom. Cont.* 138:26–27.

[52] *Thom. Cont.* 140:10–11.

[53] *Thom. Cont.* 140:11. John Turner has recently suggested that the *Book of Thomas* categorizes *four* groups of people, arguing that the text makes a further difference between benevolent fools (141:22–26) and those who scoff at the teachings of the Savior and his followers (143:21–23). Cf. John D. Turner, "The Book of Thomas and the Platonic Jesus," in L'Évangile selon Thomas *et les Textes de Nag Hammadi* (ed. Louis Painchaud and Paul-Hubert Poirier; Québec/Louvain: Les Presses de l'Université Laval/Peeters, 2007), 599–633, esp. 605 n. 8, 612–21. Turner further suggests that this division in the *Book of Thomas* roughly corresponds to the Valentinian tripartite anthropology. The match, however, is not especially close since the Valentinian distinction between "spiritual," "psychic" and "hylic" essences and persons

Although Thomas is Jesus' favorite disciple in the *Book of Thomas*, Thomas is not placed in the group of the perfect ones but in the second group, consisting of those who still must be taught by Jesus. This means that the idea in the *Gospel of Judas* that Judas does not belong to the "holy generation," even though he is described as Jesus' closest disciple, is not an entirely unique feature in early Christian revelation dialogues. Not only does Thomas fall outside the group of the perfect in the *Book of Thomas*, but something similar also happens to James in the *First Apocalypse of James*: Jesus accuses him of being ignorant, and also points out that James, just like the other disciples in the *Gospel of Judas,* has served the wrong god.[54] Like Thomas in the *Book of Thomas*, James also readily confesses his lack of perfection: "I am not perfect (ⲁⲛⲕ ⲟ[ⲩ]ⲧⲉⲗⲓⲟⲥ ⲁ[ⲛ]) in knowledge."[55] In fact, it should not come as a surprise to us that the disciples in revelation dialogues are often portrayed as being ignorant, confused, fearful and anxious. A revelation dialogue between the Savior and a disciple who is already perfect would be a contradiction in terms because the perfect one no longer needs instruction but knows the truth intuitively and acts accordingly. Hence, it is only such imperfect disciples that are in need of the instruction, encouragment and comfort Jesus offers in these dialogues. What is more, Jesus is sometimes described as a harsh teacher in early Christian texts. Not only does he call Judas "the thirteenth *daimōn*" in the *Gospel of Judas* and accuse Thomas and James of ignorance in the texts portraying these men as his favorite followers, but he also calls Peter "Satan" in the Gospel of Mark.[56] These texts take away some of the edge that has been seen in the designation of Judas as a "demon" – if this

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is absent in the *Book of Thomas*. I would argue, rather, that the divisions used in the *Book of Thomas* were borrowed from moral philosophy. As was mentioned above, "the perfect" is customarily reserved for those very few persons (like Socrates and Diogenes or Moses) who have reached the highest level on the morality ladder and no longer need instruction but know and do the right thing instinctively. "Little children," and related metaphors, like that of those who still need milk instead of solid food for their nourishment, are used in the New Testament (1 Cor 3:2; Hebr 5:12–14), in other early Christian writings, and in other ancient texts for those who are at a less advanced stage in their progress in virtue; cf. Denise Kimber Buell, *Making Christians: Clement of Alexandria and the Rhetoric of Legitimacy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999), 127–129, with an informative survey of Philo's views of education (with references to *Every Good Man is Free*, 160; *On the Preliminary Studies*, 19; *On Agriculture*, 9); and those of Clement of Alexandria (in *Misc.* 5.48.8–9). Finally, while Turner points out a number of striking affinities between the *Book of Thomas* and Plato's dialogues, a closer examination of the text's relationship to other Greco-Roman philosophical traditions would seem worthwhile. For example, the idea of "the winged soul" (*Thom. Cont.* 140) appears not only in Plato's *Phaedrus* (246c–249c), but Plutarch also uses the metaphor of "the person provided with wings" for those whom philosophy has helped advance in virtue (*Progress in Virtue*, 77b).

[54] *1 Apoc. Jas.* CT 10:5–6; 18.

[55] *1 Apoc. Jas.* CT 15:12.

[56] Mark 8:33.

was really what the author of the *Gospel of Judas* intended by using the word *daimōn* for Judas.

3. The Sethian Perfect Human: *The Secret Book of John*

The *Secret Book of John* shows how crucial the concept of "the perfect human," which Jesus tries to tease out from his disciples in the *Gospel of Judas*, was in Sethian thought. In fact, the perfect human is one of the most dominant themes in the entire *Secret Book of John*. At its outset, the perfect human is specified as one of the concepts that need to be taught to John by the Savior, and the implied audience of this text is defined as the offspring of the perfect human.[57] The creation myth told later in the text revolves largely around the question of what happens to the perfect human residing inside Adam, and the subsequent exchange between Jesus and John about the fates of different groups of people begins with an account of the salvation of those who "will become perfect."

The perfect human is introduced in the *Secret Book of John* as one of the eternal beings evolving in the divine realm and praising the invisible Spirit.[58] What lends a distinct characteristic to the perfect human being is the cognitive language used to describe it. The perfect human is said to have come into being by means of *revelation*, and this figure differs from other eternal beings insofar as only its praise of the invisible Spirit is fully described in the text. What is more, the perfect human is not only characterized by the right behavior – that of praise – in response to the divine revelation but also by the ability to formulate the right confession: "Because of you (= the invisible Spirit) the All emerged and to you the All will return."

The perfect human is called, variably in different versions of the *Secret Book of John*, Adam, Adamas, and Pigera-Adamas.[59] All these names show an intrinsic link between this figure and the first human. After a story of how Yaldabaoth and his ilk came into being, the text in NHC II 14–15 relates how they were faced with a truly divine revelation, saw the image of the true God, created an essence (ⲉⲅⲡⲓⲟⲥⲧⲁⲥⲓⲥ)[60] imitating "the perfect first human," and gave to this creation the name "Adam." (The author of this story does not specify whether the lesser gods were instructed or knew instinctively that the perfect human being in the divine realm had a similar name.)

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[57] *Secr. John* BG 22:8–10, 15–16.

[58] *Secr. John* NHC II 8–9.

[59] *Secr. John* BG 35:5 (Adam); NHC III 13:4; Irenaeus, *Heresies* 1.29 (Adamas); NHC II 8:34–35 (Pigera-Adamas).

[60] *Secr. John* .

After this, a sequence of stories follow in which it is repeatedly described how the creators realize Adam's superior intelligence and either seek to destroy him in one way or another or to steal his divine essence. Yet he is time and again miraculously saved by the divine intervention and revelation. The creators first enwrap the image of the perfect human in a soul-body.[61] This body should probably be understood as consisting of a "fine" or "invisible matter" as distinct from the "heavy matter" (ϩγλн) mentioned later in the text.[62]

n the long version of the *Secret Book of John John*, emotions form an essential part of the soul-body.[63] The author of this version literally demonizes the emotions by linking them with four primeval demons (Ephememphi, Yoko, Nenentophni and Blaomen). The underlying idea is certainly that it is demons who stir up humans' emotions, thus causing confusion and anxiety in them. At this point, the author offers a lengthy classification of emotions, which goes back to a Stoic source.[64] Notably, "anger" (оргн) and "wrath" (ѳωнт< – θυμός?) are mentioned in this passage as subcategories of desire.[65] This not only creates a connection with the theme of anger addressed in the *Gospel of Judas*, but it also paves the way for a subsequent discussion of different groups of people and their salvation at the end of the *Secret Book of John*.

As Yaldabaoth finally manages to make Adam alive by breathing the spirit of life into him, Adam proves to be both intelligent and virtuous. The long version of the *Secret Book of John* plays with the idea of Adam's nakedness in paradise, explaining that he was "naked as regards evil" (ϥкнк ѧϩнγ ⲛ̄ткакια).[66] Adam's virtue, however, is now going to be tested in a number of different ways. The creators, jealous of his intelligence, first deport him to the region of "heavy matter" (ϩγλн). Then they create for him the visible body, "the fetter of forgetfulness," and try to lull him into ignorance in the idleness of paradise.[67] Finally, by seduc-

[61] *Secr. John* NHC II 15–19.

[62] Cf. Hans-Martin Schenke, *Der Gott ª Mensch° in der Gnosis: Ein religionsgeschichtlicher Beitrag zur Diskussion über die paulinische Anschauung von der Kirche als Leib Christi* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1962), 65–66.

[63] *Secr. John* NHC II 18:14–31.

[64] The author of the long version not only follows the Stoic fourfold division of *pathos* (delight, desire, pain and fear), but also offers a detailed list of the subcategories of these four main emotions that is strikingly similar to that in Pseudo-Andronicus, *On Passions* 2–5 (for a similar list of definitions, see also Cicero, *Tusc. Disp.* 4:16–21); cf. Michel Tardieu, *Codex de Berlin* (Écrits Gnostiques 1; Paris: Cerf, 1984), 313–316; Takashi Onuki, *Gnosis und Stoa* (NTOA 9; Freiburg: Universitätsverlag, 1989), 30–46.

[65] *Secr. John* NHC II 18:27.

[66] *Secr. John* NHC II 20:7. The reference to Genesis gets lost in Wisse and Waldstein's translation "he was free from wickedness." The allegory may be secondary because the short version affirms at this point (BG 52:14–15; NHC III 24:22–23) only that Adam "went to light."

[67] *Secr. John* NHC II 21.

ing Eve, the powers infect humankind with sexual desire. This finally seems to do the trick: "Sexual intercourse has continued until now due to the head ruler."[68]

The things in which the lesser gods enwrap the perfect human according to the *Secret Book of John* are, thus, emotions, exile, body and sexual desire. It is probably no coincidence that the philosophers often discussed the same threats in connection with the perfect human. In their view, the ideal person neither yields to the tyranny of emotions, nor succumbs to bodily pain or pleasure, nor lets exile disturb her or his peace of mind,[69] nor is going to be "carried away" with or go mad because of sexual desire.[70] Instead, the perfect human remains constantly alert to all these threats, and controls his or her inner self in all situations by means of reason. In a similar manner, the *Secret Book of John* describes how Adam is safeguarded in all his tribulations by his *cognitive capacity*: he has "the bright intelligence" (ⲧⲉⲡⲓⲛⲟⲓⲁ ⲛ̄ⲛⲟⲩⲟⲉⲓⲛ)[71] inside him. Despite their repeated attempts, the lesser gods prove unable to deprive Adam of this essence, his divine teacher, who instructs him about the descent and ascent of his offspring and awakens him from forgetfulness.[72]

The idea of the morality ladder appears in the *Secret Book of John's* subsequent discussion of the different fates of humankind. No less than five divisions are outlined in this text. The uppermost group consists of those who "will … become perfect (ⲛ̄ⲥⲉϣⲱⲡⲉ ⲛ̄ⲧⲉⲗⲉⲓⲟⲥ)."[73] They are the ones who reclaim the lost innocence of Adam: just as he was naked as regards evil, they will be free from evil. Their state involves *apatheia* but this state is conditioned – just like in Philo – by their being in the body: the perfect ones are "not affected by anything, except for their being in the flesh, which they carry (ⲉⲓⲛⲏⲧⲓ ⲁⲧϩⲩⲡⲟⲥⲧⲁⲥⲓⲥ ⲟⲩⲁⲁⲧϥ̄ ⲛ̄ⲧⲥⲁⲣⲝ ⲧⲁⲓ ⲉⲧⲟⲩⲫⲟⲣⲉⲓ ⲙ̄ⲙⲟⲥ), waiting for the time when they will be met by the receivers. For they endure everything and bear everything."[74] Notably, still in the body, the perfect ones will already be "without rage and zeal."[75] This implies that one can in this life already become free from anger, which was given to the soul-prototype of the primeval human being along with other emotions before the creation of the visible body.

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[68] *Secr. John* NHC II 24. [For my later modification of this conclusion, see chapter 1.4. above.]

[69] Cf. Epictetus, *Discourses* 1.29.6–8; 3.22.22.

[70] Cf., e. g., Cicero, *Tusc. Disp.* 4.68–76.

[71] *Secr. John* NHC II 20:25.

[72] *Secr. John* NHC II 20, 21, 23. The long version of *Secret John* identifies the divine teacher as Jesus; in the hymnic conclusion of this version, Jesus presents himself as "the perfect providence," who awakens people from their deep sleep of ignorance (II 30–31).

[73] *Secr. John* NHC II 25:23–26:7.

[74] The description of this group comes close to the way Jesus himself is described in the *Gospel of Judas* – he keeps himself completely calm although he knows that "the man who carries" him is going to be sacrificed by Judas – and to the Stoic sage who has become completely free of emotions and other worldly concerns.

[75] *Secr. John* NHC II 25:31.

The second group in the *Secret Book of John* consists of those who have received the Spirit but have not acted accordingly.[76] This group seems similar to Seneca's "second-best" group, which consisted of those who are almost there but whose endurance has not yet been truly tested, but the description of this group also recalls the way Thomas, in the *Book of Thomas*, was made to represent those who have not yet put their knowledge into practice. In the *Secret Book of John*, Jesus generously promises that these underperformers will also "be completely saved" and "change," and promises that the Spirit saves them from being deceived. The idea seems to be here that once you have received the Spirit you *cannot* avoid making progress, though you may fall short of true perfection.

Thirdly, the *Secret Book of John* reckons with the possibility of post-mortem improvement: the souls of those who have already "come away from their flesh" will gain strength and "flee from evil" – obviously after their death. The subsequent fourth group consists of those who have been unable to resist the lures of the opposing spirit. The text promises post-mortem perfection even to these people. Thus, on the one hand, the *Secret Book of John* insists that salvation is not possible without perfection, but, on the other, it grants the opportunity of becoming perfect to *all* humanity, either in this life or in the world to come.[77] There is one exception, though, and that is the apostates. The text gives no hope of salvation for "those who were in the know but turned away" but insists that they will receive eternal punishment.[78] It may emphasize the social threat posed by apostasy to a community that, even though the eschatological model cast in the *Secret Book of John* is unusually inclusive, those in danger of falling away from the ingroup are warned with the worst imaginable punishment.

Conclusion

Concerning the picture drawn of Judas in the *Gospel of Judas*, the crucial facts are the following: (1) the perfect human resides in him; (2) he nonetheless belongs to the mortal humans who have no access to the holy generation; (3) he will be persecuted but finally vindicated as the ruler over the other disciples; (4) he succumbs to anger and is deceived by his star; and (5) Jesus calls him "the thirteenth *daimōn.*"

[76] *Secr. John* NHC II 26:2–22.

[77] This is in keeping with the *Secret Book of John's* teaching that the divine power "will descend on every human being" (NHC II 26:12–13par). This point is emphasized by Luttikhuizen (*Gnostic Revisions of Genesis Stories*, e.g. 30, 71, 91), who convincingly argues that the dwelling of the divine essene in all humans must be understood in terms of a potential which needs to be activated and which people realize to various degrees; cf. also Williams, *Rethinking ª Gnosticism,º* 196.

[78] *Secr. John* NHC II 27:24–30.

The first conclusion from these facts seems quite clear to me: even if the term *daimōn* did mean "demon" in the *Gospel of Judas* (which is possible but not entirely clear), Judas cannot be *merely* a demon in this text since he also has access to the perfect human inside him. In Sethian theology, "the perfect human" stands for the divine essence deposited in all *humankind* – but not in demons! If the author of the *Gospel of Judas* wanted to claim that Judas was a demon, in whom the perfect human nevertheless could reside, the gospel would not be a "Sethian parody"[79] but a grave parody of Sethian theology itself.

A better explanation that, in my view, takes *all* the aforementioned facts into account would be that the perfect human and demons wage war against each other in Judas, just like they do in all other human beings. It remains unclear, however, how the story continues for Judas: does he overcome his anger or is it in the state of anger that he betrays Jesus? The puzzling account of the bright cloud, which Judas saw (*Gos. Jud.* 57:21–23), does not help us resolve this problem in one way or another since it is far from clear *who* enters the cloud (Judas or Jesus?) and *which* luminous cloud is meant here – that in the divine realm (*Gos. Jud.* 47–48, 50), or the place from which the lesser deities emerged (*Gos. Jud.* 51)?[80]

If we seek to place Judas on the morality ladders described above, it seems clear that his anger prevents him from qualifying for the uppermost group of the perfect humans. It is more difficult to say on which one of the lower steps he would belong. Following Seneca's classification, Judas could be placed in Group 3, consisting of those who have taken some initial steps in the direction of virtue but who still succumb to some grave passions, including anger. In Philo's three divisions (the perfect human, the progressing ones and the lovers of delight), Judas might belong to the second group, for those in this group are in need of instruction, just like Judas is, and have not yet cut off anger, which is obviously

[79] The designation "a Sethian parody" for the *Gospel of Judas* does not seem particularly happy to me. I am in agreement with the interpretation, first suggested in the excellent short article by Philippa Townsend, Eduard Iricinschi, and Lance Jenott, "The Betrayer's Gospel," *The New York Review* (June 8, 2006): 32–37, and now further elaborated by Pagels and King, *Reading Judas*, that the author of this gospel was seriously concerned about the eagerness with which some early Christians embraced the prospect of martyrdom. (Antti Marjanen and I, independently of Pagels and King's work, argued for the same interpretation in our book, published in Finnish, on the *Gospel of Judas*; cf. Antti Marjanen and Ismo Dunderberg, *Juudaksen evankeliumi: Johdanto, käännös ja tulkinta* [The Gospel of Judas: Introduction, Translation and Interpretation] (Helsinki: WSOY, 2006), 87–89.) The label "parody" for the *Gospel of Judas* is misleading because it blurs the seriousness of the author's tone throughout this text.

[80] The revisionist interpretation is alarmingly flexible at this point: if it is Judas who enters the cloud, then the cloud is that inhabitated by the inferior angels; if it is Jesus who enters, then the cloud is that in the divine realm; thus DeConick, *The Thirteenth Apostle*, 119; Turner, "The Place of the *Gospel of Judas* in Sethian Tradition." Whoever enters the cloud and whichever cloud is intended, one thing is certain: the identification of the cloud cannot be decided on the basis of who is thought to enter it. Pagels and King, *Reading Judas*, 81, infer from this passage that "Judas finally understands Jesus's teaching," but this is not very clearly indicated in what is left of the text at this point either. [For an update on this note, see Introduction, n. 33.]

the case with Judas as well. If, however, Judas is thought of as betraying Jesus in the state of anger, which is possible but not certain, he falls short of the ideal of moderation, which Philo recommends to this group "in the middle."

As for early Christian revelation dialogues, Judas assumes the similar role of a man "in the middle" as do Thomas in the *Book of Thomas* and James in the *First Revelation of James*. Both texts assume, just like the *Gospel of Judas* seems to do, that there will be a more perceptive generation that will understand the teachings of Jesus better than his first followers.

Finally, one wonders where the authors of the *Secret Book of John* would place Judas. (If the question ever occurred to any of them, of course, remains unknown.) Once again, it is clear that his anger disqualifies him from the perfect ones, who have rid themselves of this emotion. But would Judas be one of those who had the knowledge but did not put it into practice (Group 2)? Or does he rather belong to those who will gain perfection in the hereafter (Groups 3 & 4)? Or is he one of the apostates who were in the know but then turned away (Group 5)? The last option may be a tempting choice for a traitor, especially for the one to whom Jesus revealed "the secrets of the kingdom," but Judas's vindication promised in the *Gospel of Judas* seems to rule out this alternative.

While Judas's exact position on ancient morality ladders remains unclear, the most important aspect shown by the theories related to this theme is that, in the light of them, the bipolarized "either-a-good-guy-or-a-bad-guy" debate, which characterizes the present debate about the *Gospel of Judas*, seems too far too dualistic. The morality ladders described above allow for much more flexibility and nuances in estimating people's virtue and vice. This flexibility is needed if we want to account for all sides of the character of Judas in the *Gospel of Judas*, without turning a blind eye either to the negative or the positive aspects.

One possible explanation for a more nuanced assessment of Judas' role in the Gospel of Judas is, in fact, hinted at but not fully eloborated by April DeConick. Like other revisionists, she points out that "the thirteenth realm," to which Judas is connected, is usually Yaldabaoth's abode in the Sethian texts. Hence her conclusion that Judas *either* replaces *or* co-rules with Yaldabaoth.[81] While DeConick pays little attention to how these alternatives differ from each other, I think the difference is quite remarkable indeed. If Judas becomes a co-ruler with Yaldabaoth, he is certainly a negative figure in Sethian imagery. But if he is supposed to *replace* Yaldabaoth, then he is a much more positive figure. In the latter case, Judas would be a figure similar to Sabaoth, the son of Yaldabaoth, described in *On the Origin of the World* (NHC II, 5).[82] According to this text, Sabaoth repented, was provided "with great authority against all the forces of chaos,"

[81] DeConick, *The Thirteenth Apostle*, 113.

[82] This interpretation has been proposed by René Falkenberg, "Kongerigets Hemmeligheder: et forsøg på en fortolkning af *Judasevangeliet*," in Klostergaard Petersen et alii (ed.), *Mellem venner og fjender*, 119–42, esp. 139–40.

became "the Lord of the Forces," and was admitted to "dwell above the twelve gods of chaos."[83] The repentant Sabaoth, thus, is promoted to a place between the divine realm and that of Yaldabaoth.[84] A similar notion of repentance could be presupposed for the *Gospel of Judas*, especially if its author was familiar with Matthew's account of Judas' repentance (Matth 27:3–9). [85]

Although Judas will have no access to the divine realm in the *Gospel of Judas*, he will be promoted as high as is possible for those belonging to mortal humanity, and he will become the new ruler of the realm below the holy generation. This picture of the persecuted Judas, who will ultimately rule over his tormenters, evokes a Jewish tradition of vindication of the righteous: the roles of the harrassing disciples and harrassed Judas will be reversed, just like it was promised in Jewish texts that the persecuted righteous will become judges of their persecutors at the end of times. By promising vindication to its suffering protagonist, the *Gospel of Judas*, in my view, offers good news to Judas after all;[86] perhaps "good news" in a limited sense, but definitely "good" rather than "bad."

This interpretation, obviously, raises the question of why Judas is then denied access to the divine realm. My suggestion (for now) is that this was the point where the author of the *Gospel of Judas* came to the "limits of maneuver." Although he felt free to considerably modify the more traditional picture of Judas, he accepted the tradition that Judas indeed betrayed Jesus. It may have seemed impossible to this author, who strictly condemned murder, that, having stained his hands with the blood of an innocent man (cf. Matth 27:4), Judas could enter the divine realm.

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[83] *Orig. World* 103–4.

[84] The storyline in this account makes it quite similar to that in the stories of Wisdom's repentance and restitution, which Meyer linked with the portrayal of Judas in the *Gospel of Judas*; cf. Marvin Meyer, "The Thirteenth Daimon"; idem, "When the Sethians Were Young: The *Gospel of Judas* in the Second Century," in DeConick (ed.), *The Codex Judas Papers*, 57–73. In my view, however, the theme of ruling, to which the *Gospel of Judas* refers in describing Judas' future, is more dominantly present in the story of Sabaoth than in those of Wisdom.

[85] For the possibility that the *Gospel of Judas* is dependent on the Gospel of Matthew, see Simon Gathercole, *The Gospel of Judas: Rewriting Early Christianity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 134–38. Judas' repentance was emphasized by Origen, who gathered from Matthew's story that, despite his flaws, Judas was not entirely wicked. Origen took Judas' remorse as a sign of "what effect the teaching of Jesus could have on a sinner like Judas, the thief and traitor, who could not utterly despise what he had learnt from Jesus" (Origen, *Contra Celsum*, 11; trans. Chadwick; for the same position attested in other works of Origen, see Chadwick's note to this passage). Strikingly, I have seen no references to this relatively sympathetic view of Judas, which challenges the neat dichotomy drawn between the "orthodox/hostile" and "heterodox/favorable" pictures of Judas, in any of the books published on the *Gospel of Judas* thus far.

[86] It should be noted here (cf. chapter 3 below) that the language of persecution makes Judas, not "poor Judas," but one of "us" (from the perspective of the implied audience of this gospel) for whenever early Christian texts speak about persecutions, they are referring to the *insiders*' sufferings, that is, what has happened to some of "us."

Chapter 3

Early Christian Critics of Martyrdom

Before the emperor Constantine made Christianity a privileged religion in the Roman world at the beginning of the fourth century, Christians had experienced a long history of being subject to coercion exercised by state officials. From the state's point of view, this was simply a disciplinary action against people who not only did not participate the traditional cults but were also vehemently critical of them. From the Christians' point of view, the actions the officials took were cases of unjustified persecution that caused suffering to people innocent of any wrongdoing.

Few other historical events have shaped Christian self-understanding as strongly as persecutions. The theme of, and concerns related to, persecution and suffering are already pervasive in the texts included in the New Testament. James Kelhoffer argues in his thorough study on these texts that being subject to persecution could be profitable as regards one's status among early Christians: "in much of the NT withstanding persecution constitutes a form of cultural capital that can be translated into social capital, namely standing, or even a position of leadership, within the church community."[1] In early Christian tradition, Christian martyrs were portrayed as following the example set by Christ himself, and salvific value was attached to their deaths as well.[2] It was also commonly held that the unyielding courage Christian martyrs showed in courts and arenas impressed outsiders, and thus were won new converts to Christianity; hence the view that the martyrs contributed to the unexpected rise and expansion of Christianity in the Roman Empire. Justin admired Christians' contempt for death, which may have contributed to his conversion to Christianity,[3] and Tertullian famously called the martyrs the "seed of the church."[4] In around 400 CE, the Donatist

[1] James A. Kelhoffer, *Persecution, Persuasion and Power: Readiness to Withstand Hardship as a Corroboration of Legitimacy in the New Testament* (WUNT 270; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010), 11. The proposal is based upon Bourdieu's theory of cultural and social capital (ibid. 9–25; for Kelhoffer's well-articulated criticism of Bourdieu's notion of "religious capital" as a distinct category, see ibid. 19–23).

[2] Cf. Candida R. Moss, *The Other Christs: Imitating Jesus in Ancient Christian Ideologies of Martyrdom* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010).

[3] Justin, *2. Apol.* 12.

[4] Tertullian, *Apol.* 50.

Petilianus argues the same way (against other kinds of Christians persecuting them): "Christianity makes progress by the deaths of its followers."[5]

More recent scholarship, however, has been more critical of the view that the Christian martyrs slaughtered in arenas made Christianity attractive. It is true that, in addition to Justin, there were other educated pagans who admired Christians because they were ready to die for what they believed.[6] Admiration, however, could easily turn into contempt and scorn. Justin had to defend Christians against those mocking them, saying "Go then all of you and kill yourselves, and pass even now to God, and do not trouble us."[7] A proconsul in Asia, faced with a large number of Christians denouncing themselves, executed only a few of them, and said to the rest: "If you want to die, you wretches, you can use ropes or precipices."[8] Marcus Aurelius (assuming that the relevant sentences in his *Meditations* are not a later gloss) maintained that people should be at all times "ready to face extinction," yet *not* in the manner of the Christians who, in their willingness to die, were "prompted by mere contumacy."[9]

It also seems less likely that many people joined Christianity because it offered the opportunity for a heroic death.[10] It stands to reason that most of those who converted to Christianity did this *in spite* of persecutions rather than because of them. Ramsay MacMullen attributes the success of Christianity among the masses neither to the martyrs nor to Christian intellectuals but to miracle workers, especially the exorcists, whose "manhandling of demons made physically (or dramatically) visible the superiority of the Christian's patron Power over all others."[11]

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[5] Augustine, *Against the Letters of Petilian*, 2.89 (trans. King); the text is quoted in *Creeds, Councils and Controversies: Documents Illustrating the History of the Church, AD 337±461* (ed. J. Stevenson & W.H.C. Frend; London: SPCK, 1989), 223.

[6] Galen granted that Christians, in showing "contempt for death," were "sometimes acting in the same way as those practising philosophy"; § 119 in *A New Eusebius* (ed. J. Stevenson & W.H.C. Frend; London: SPCK, 1987); cf. Judith Perkins, *The Suffering Self: Pain and Narrative Representation in the Early Christian Era* (London: Routledge, 1995), 19.

[7] Justin, *2. Apol.* 4.

[8] Tertullian, *Scap.* 5.1.; cf. G.E.M. de Ste. Croix, *Christian Persecution, Martyrdom, and Orthodoxy* (ed. Michael Whitby and Joseph Streeter; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 167 (The article published in this book originally appeared in 1963.); Perkins, *The Suffering Self*, 21.

[9] Marcus Aurelius *Meditations*, 11.3 (trans. Staniforth); for doubts concerning the authenticity of the latter statement, see the discussion in the *LCL* edition of this text.

[10] Cf. Robin Lane Fox, *Pagans and Christians* (London: Penguin Books, 1986), 441: the martyrs' "public endurance perhaps did more to convey their faith's intensity than to propagate it."

[11] Ramsay MacMullen, *Christianizing the Roman Empire (AD 100±400)* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1984), 28. Perkins, *The Suffering Self*, 20–21, is right in cautioning against MacMullen "that if Christianity was known at all, it was known for its adherents' attitude towards death and suffering." Nevertheless, the examples she offers do not substantiate the claim that the masses converted to Christianity because of their admiration for the Christian martyrs, and even less because Christianity offered an opportunity for suffering and public elimination. Peregrinus, whom Perkins mentions in this connection, probably was of

Rodney Stark, in turn, approaches the persecutions of Christians as a "stigma," that is, as a form of social deviance joining together the members of a religious group. According to Stark, persecutions as deviant behavior posed a costly demand, which served the cohesion of early Christian groups in two ways, first by creating "a barrier to group entry" over and against "free-riders," whose commitment to the group would have been low, and second, by increasing the intensity of participation of those joining the group.[12] It would follow from Stark's analysis that persecutions prevented rather than encouraged people, at least the less dedicated ones among the wanna-be Christians, from joining Christian groups.[13] Accordingly, Stark finds the success factors of early Christianity elsewhere, including effective use of existing social networks; works of charity; adoption of abandoned children; and the greater than usual fertility and birth rates of Christian women.

An essential problem with Stark's interpretation of the persecutions as a costly demand, which effectively prevented the free-riders from joining the flock, is that his model seems to be based upon the traditional image of all early Christians readily embracing martyrdom, if the opportunity offered itself. A closer scrutiny of historical data demonstrates that there were large numbers of free-riders in Christian communities, perhaps even the vast majority of the membership. While the memory of martyrs is cherished in the Christian tradition, there is also abundant evidence for Christians seeking to avoid martyrdom by one means or another. Even prominent leaders and teachers, who in their writings admired and exhorted martyrs, fled persecutions themselves.[14] Ordinary Christians found other strategies to avoid martyrdom. For example, during the Decian persecutions, when all citizens were required to publicly sacrifice to gods in front of state officials, some Christians purchased forged certificates to prove that they had done this.[15]

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this variety, but he was such an extraordinary character that he can hardly be used as evidence for what made Christianity attractive to most converts.

[12] Rodney Stark, *The Rise of Christianity* (San Francisco: HarperSanFranscisco, 1997), 176–77.

[13] Notably, persecutions are nowhere mentioned in Stark's more recent discussion of the expansion of Christianity in the Roman world; cf. Rodney Stark, *Cities of God* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2006), 63–83.

[14] For Cyprian, see Lane Fox, *Pagans and Christians*, 458–9. As for other prominent examples, Eusebius (*Church History*, 6.2.3–5) relates that the young Origen wanted to suffer a martyr's death, but his mother prevented him by hiding his clothes, thus forcing him to stay home. While Origen was later tried in the Decian persecutions (ibid. 6.39.5), Dionysius, the bishop of Alexandria, escaped – against his will, as he later emphasized in defending himself – from the city during them (ibid. 6.40.1–9). Dionysius spoke highly of the martyrs (ibid. 6.41–42), but he also recommended leniency towards the deserters (e. g., ibid. 6.42.5).

[15] Cf. Lane Fox, *Pagans and Christians*, 455–59; Daniel Boyarin, *Dying for God: Martyrdom and the Making of Christianity and Judaism* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999), 56.

The dismissive attitude to martyrdom and the ensuing desire to escape persecutions have been considered to be part and parcel of the "Gnostic" stance towards martyrdom. The heresiologists claimed that the heretics were not only not persecuted but they also actively promoted their views among the "weak" Christians, who were afraid of persecutions. Such accusations seem to be substantiated by firsthand sources, to be discussed below, including Basilides's discussion about the martyrs' hidden sins, and the fierce polemic in the *Gospel of Judas* against human sacrifices conducted in the name of Jesus.

What I seek to maintain here, however, is that martyrdom is one of the issues where the binary opposition between "Gnosticism" and other varieties of Christianity is not only unfruitful but also historically misleading.[16] There is evidence that Christians branded as "the Gnostics" by scholars also suffered persecution, and there is evidence that all kinds of Christians could be unfavorably disposed towards martyrdom, if it was experienced by someone not belonging to their own in-group. Harnack, in fact, already made a point of this polarity in early Christian assessments of martyrdom: "one should not forget …, how disparagingly the Christians condemned the martyrs, when the martyrs did not belong to their own ecclesiastical party."[17]

1. Insiders and Outsiders

The early Christian discourse on martyrdom and persecutions is colored by a clear insider-outsider perspective. In fact, the term "persecution" itself carries this perspective with it. "Persecution" is something that happens to "us," and the true martyrs are those belonging to our group. The violence experienced by those not in our group may be similar to ours in physical terms, but their sufferings do not qualify as "persecution" or "martyrdom" in the true sense. The

[16] Essential for delineating the problems related to scholarly constructs of "Gnosticism" are Karen L. King, *What is Gnosticism?* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2003), and Michael A. Williams, *Rethinking ª Gnosticismº: An Argument for Dismantling a Dubious Category* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996). For a summary of how I believe the new stance should change the way we approach early Christian groups formerly identifed as "Gnostic," see Ismo Dunderberg, *Beyond Gnosticism: Myth, Lifestyle, and Society in the School of Valentinus* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), 14–31; for another case study in a similar vein, see Lance W. Jenott, The Gospel of Judas: *Coptic Text, Translation, and Historical Interpretation of the ª Betrayer's Gospelº* (STAC; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011). I am grateful to Dr Jenott for kindly providing me with an advance copy of this important and, in many ways, groundbreaking study on *Judas*. In addition, I am thankful for his perspicacious comments on the penultimate draft of this study, which led me to rethink some of my assessments and to reformulate my conclusions.

[17] Adolf von Harnack, *Die Mission und Ausbreitung des Christentums in den ersten drei Jahrhunderten* (4th ed.; Leipzig: Hinrichs'sche Buchhandlung, 1924), 505–6n3.

outsiders' endurance of suffering neither has demonstrative value nor does it deserve any admiration.

By way of example, while the author of Luke-Acts is keen on emphasizing the sufferings of Christians at the hands of the Jews and pagans,[18] he shows total lack of sympathy in describing how Sosthenes, the head of a local synagogue, fell victim to mob violence under a proconsul's eye.[19] Luke's concluding remark that the proconsul Gallio "paid no attention to any of these things," is not exactly a cry for greater justice for those injustly suffering (Acts 18:12–17).

A similar picture of insiders and outsiders emerges from a second-century anti-Montanist work, from which Eusebius offers long quotations in his *Church History*, Book Five.[20] The author of this early work reports that, in support of their teaching, the Montanists called upon the martyrs among them. The author, however, resolutely combats the claims to credibility that are based upon martyrdom suffered by wrong kinds of Christians:

> When, then, they are at a loss because refuted in all the discussion, they try to take refuge with the martyrs, saying that they have many martyrs and that this is a trustworthy proof of the power of the so-called prophetic spirit among them. But this, indeed, as it appears, is more untrue than anything. For, some of the other heresies have a very large numbers of martyrs, and surely we shall not agree with them on this account, nor admit that they possess the truth. First of all, the so-called Marcionists of the heresy of Marcion say that they have a very large number of martyrs, yet they do not confess Christ himself according to the truth.[21]

In a second quotation from the same work, the author extols the Christians of the right persuasion for their integrity because, imprisoned and headed for martyrdom, they refused to speak with the Montanists in the same situation:

> Wherefore whenever those of the Church who have been called to martyrdom for the faith according to truth meet with some of the so-called martyrs of the Phrygian heresy [= the Montanists], they separate from them and achieve perfection without associating with them, because of their unwillingness to agree with the spirit in Montanus and the women.[22]

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[18] The theme of persecution runs throught the whole of the Acts; for a recent analysis of all relevant texts, see Kelhoffer, *Persecution, Persuasion and Power*, 293–351.

[19] Those who beat Sosthenes are not identified in Luke's story but it seems conceivable that they were gentiles; thus Richard I. Pervo, *Acts* (Hermeneia; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2009), 454. It is seems less likely that the idea in the story was that Sosthenes was beaten by other Jews, although this is often suggested. It remains unclear why the Jews would have done this. Joseph Fitzmyer, *Acts of the Apostles* (AncB 31; New York: Random House, 1998), 630–31, speculates that Sosthenes was beaten by his own people because "he may have been the leader of the Jewish delegation that has failed its way to get its way with Gallio." Some other possible reasons are proposed by Kelhoffer, *Persecution, Persuasion and Power,* 320–21; for other proponents for the view that Sosthenes was beaten by the Jews, see ibid. 321n146.

[20] Eusebius, *Church History* 5.16.1–2, places the author, whose identity he does not reveal, in the same period as Apollinarius of Hierapolis, who wrote an apology of the Christian faith addressed to the emperor Marcus Aurelius.

[21] Eusebius, *Church History* 5.16.20 (trans. Deferrari).

[22] Eusebius, *Church History* 5.16.21 (trans. Deferrari).

Thus is defined a clear boundary between true martyrdom, that is, "martyrdom for the faith according to truth," and fake martyrdom, that is, "the so-called martyrs of the Phrygian heresy." The author of this early history of the church shows approval only of the martyrdom experienced by the right kinds of Christians, but dismisses all other varieties of martyrdom suffered by Christians of wrong persuasions. The martyrdom that true believers suffer is subject to profound admiration, but that suffered by other kinds of Christians only calls forth contempt.

Augustine's polemics against the Donatists about 200 years later shows a very similar stance towards the violence experienced by the Other. As Joyce Salisbury cogently summarizes, "Augustine defined a martyr as only one who suffered for the Catholic faith. He dismissed Circumcellions as lunatics, 'inflamed by wine and madness.'"[23] Augustine also denigrated the value of the Donatists' martyrdom by describing them as death seekers. Not only did the Donatists try to provoke other Christians in killing them, but they also committed suicide in all imaginable ways. As we have already seen, however, the Donatists placed their martyrs in the same continuum as the Christian martyrs of earlier generations. In their surviving letters, they not only ascribed the success of Christianity to martyrs, but also maintained that the strong faith of these martyrs made them immune to the pain caused by torture. Just as Ignatius and others before them, the Donatists also interpreted the blood of their martyrs "as a sacrifice 'in imitation of the Lord's passion.'"[24]

These examples suffice to show how, on the one hand, different kinds of Christian groups called upon martyrs among them as a definite proof of the truth they proclaimed, and, on the other hand, how easily such claims could be dismissed by those not willing to be persuaded. Specifically, there is a thin line between a voluntary death praised as a heroic act and a voluntary death scathed for seeking martyrdom too eagerly. Clement of Alexandria maintained that one "who presents himself for capture" becomes "an accomplice in the crime of the persecutor," and one who provokes the officials "is wholly guilty."[25] Christians, thus, did not believe without qualification in the proof of martyrdom they so eagerly embraced. What is more, in combatting each other's martyrs, they resorted to the same arguments non-Christians used against Christian martyrs: the wrong kinds of martyrs were voluntarily and too eagerly rushing to an unnecessary death.

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[23] Joyce Salisbury, *The Blood of Martyrs: Unintended Consequences of Ancient Violence* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 159.

[24] Salisbury, *The Blood of Martyrs*, 162.

[25] Clement, *Misc.* 4.10; cf. Boyarin, *Dying for God, 63.*

2. "The Gnostics" and Avoidance of Persecution

The claim that the Gnostics *en bloc* avoided persecution is often read in scholarly literature. This claim goes back to the heresiologists' accusations, levelled against all kinds of heretics. Irenaeus called upon the great numbers of martyrs in his own group, and claimed that his opponents had hardly any:

> … the Church does in every place, because of that love which she cherishes towards God, send forward throughout all time a multitude of martyrs to the Father, while all others not only have nothing of the kind to point to among themselves, but even maintain that such witness-bearing is not necessary and that their system of doctrines is the true witness [for Christ]. Except that perhaps one or two of them, during the whole time which has elapsed since the Lord appeared on earth, have occasionally, borne the reproach of the name, as if he too had obtained mercy, and have been led forth with them [to death], being as it were a sort of retinue granted unto them.[26]

Tertullian took the same accusation one step further by claiming that a group he calls "the Gnostics" and other Christians he condemns not only avoided persecution themselves, but also took advantage of the fear Christians experienced at the prospect of persecution:

> This among Christians is a season of persecution. When, therefore, faith is greatly agitated, and the Church burning, as represented by the bush [Exod. 3:2], then the Gnostics break out, then the Valentinians creep out, then all the opponents of martyrdom bubble up, being themselves also hot to strike, penetrate, kill.[27]

Scholars have taken such accusations derived from hostile sources at face value. The historian Geoffrey de Ste. Croix described the Gnostic avoidance of persecution as follows:

> … there is what I believe to have been the complete immunity from persecution of most of the Gnostic sects. … The reason can only be that the Gnostics did not think it necessary to be exclusive, like the orthodox, and refuse to pay outward respect to the pagan gods when the necessity arose. … It appears, then, that although the tenets of the Gnostics must have appeared to the Roman governing class to be very similar to those of the orthodox, the Gnostics escaped persecutions precisely because they consented to take part in pagan religious ceremonies on demand, when the orthodox refused to do so.[28]

Ste. Croix' views may be based upon the theologian William Frend's influential article "The Gnostic Sects and the Roman Empire," published in 1954.[29] Frend

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[26] Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, 4.33.9 (trans. *ANF*).

[27] Tertullian, *Scorp.* 1 (trans. *ANF*).

[28] Ste. Croix, *Christian Persecution, Martyrdom, and Orthodoxy*, 140. Lane Fox takes as a given a similar view of "Gnostics" seeking to avoid persecution (*Pagans and Christians,* 439, 441).

[29] W. H. C. Frend, "The Gnostic Sects and the Roman Empire," *JEH* 5 (1954): 25–37; reprinted in idem, *Religion Popular and Unpopular in the Early Christian Centuries* (London: Variorum Reprints, 1976).

claimed that neither "the great gnostic leaders in Egypt, Basilides, Valentinus, and Heracleon" nor Marcus and "his fellow Gnostics" in Lyons suffered persecution.[30] To explain how these people avoided persecution, Frend constructed an archetype of "the Gnostic," based upon an unlikely amalgam of heresiological and scholarly stereotypes. According to Frend, "the Gnostic" was in lesser danger of being persecuted both because "his was a school rather than a church," *and* because "his message … was one of personal salvation obtained through successive initiations into mysteries." Moreover, Frend's "Gnostic … shared to the full the religious syncreticism of the age. In fact, he is the embodiment of it." Accordingly, conversion to the gnostic groups "did not oblige the believer to put away pagan philosophy and to study only the Bible."[31]

Frend concluded his article with an uncritical acclaim of the orthodox church's triumph, which falls little short of the style of the heresiologists' works:

> But the future lay with the Church of the Martyrs. The Gnostics, like their Manichean successors, could make individual converts but they lacked the organisation of the Catholic Church. They spread the name of Christ widely but thinly. … What was worse, the other great Christian virtues in the eyes of the people, alms-giving and charity, were, as Ignatius so tellingly pointed out, the fruit of orthodoxy.[32]

In his later book, Frend reiterates his position on "the Gnostics" and martyrdom: "If called upon to sacrifice to the pagan gods, they would do so, for such an action would be a matter of indifference."[33]

It is neither possible nor advisable for me to detail here all the points where I believe Frend's picture of "the Gnostic" (and, by implication, of "the Orthodox") vis-à-vis Roman society is erroneous. His anti-Gnostic bias and his way of building arguments based upon sweeping generalizations should have become clear by now from my quotations of his works.[34] Three points deserve to be

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[30] Frend, "The Gnostic Sects and the Roman Empire," 27. It is striking that Frend nowhere mentions the Valentinian Ptolemaeus. I wonder if this is a deliberate omission since Justin (*2 Apology* 2) mentions a Christian martyr, who had the same name and was an early Christian teacher, just as the Valentinian Ptolemaeus was. The possibility that the latter was identical with Justin's Ptolemaeus can neither be excluded nor affirmed with certainty; for a brief summary of the discussion, cf. Ismo Dunderberg, "The School of Valentinus," in *A Companion to Second-Century Christian "Heretics"* (ed. Antti Marjanen and Petri Luomanen; VigChrSup 76; Leiden: Brill, 2005), 64–99, esp. 76–77.

[31] I wonder whether Frend really meant, as his formulation implies, that all early Christians except for the Gnostics studied nothing else but the Bible.

[32] Frend, "The Gnostic Sects and the Roman Empire," 36; cf. Rodney Stark, *Cities of God*, 154: one of the great many faults Stark finds with "the Gnostics" (cf. below n. 35) is that they did not "seem to understand how to create sturdy organizations."

[33] W. H. C. Frend, *The Rise of Christianity* (London: Darton, Langman and Dodd, 1984), 200.

[34] For a similar bias, see now the oddly judgmental account of Gnosticism by Stark, *Cities of God*, 141–81: the opponents' polemical accusations, especially those related to sexual immorality, are taken at face value (e. g., 151); modern scholars of Gnosticism are haphazardly discredited as being Gnostics themselves (ibid. 154: "Pagels and other 'Ivy League' Gnostics");

mentioned, however. First, both Frend and de Ste. Croix, as well as many others, completely ignore Irenaeus' caveat that "perhaps one or two of them," that is, some of the Christians he was opposed to, had also suffered martyrdom. Unlike Frend and de Ste. Croix, Irenaeus did *not* claim that his opponents escaped persecution completely.[35]

Second, while Frend used the term "the Gnostic" as an umbrella term for a wide variety of early Christian dissidents, Tertullian regarded in the afore-mentioned passage "the Gnostics" and "the Valentinians" as two separate groups, though with similar aspirations. Tertullian used the term "the Gnostics" in the narrow sense as referring to one particular early Christian group that is distinct from Valentinians; the same distinction was already drawn by Irenaeus.[36] This alone should make one cautious of Frend's usage of Valentinian sources as evidence for what he presented as "the Gnostic's" stance towards persecution.[37]

Third, and most importantly, it should not be forgotten that Frend's article appeared before the new texts from the Nag Hammadi Library were generally available. Some of these texts challenge his conclusions.[38] For example, the persecuted church is an essential part of the Christian identity constructed in the

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the heretics are described as being "mostly gadflies," who could be "easily turned away" (180), their doctrines as "bizarre" (181), and their texts as forgeries (142), which were "rejected for good reason: they constitute idiosyncratic, often lurid personal visions reported by scholarly mystics, ambitious pretenders, and various outsiders who found their life's calling in dissent" (154).

[35] Cf. Karen L. King, "Martyrdom and Its Discontents in the Tchacos Codex," in *The Codex Judas Papers* (ed. April D. DeConick; NHMS 71; Leiden: Brill, 2009), 23–42, esp. 40–41.

[36] For this "Gnostic school of thought" (Irenaeus, *Her.* 1.11.1; cf. ibid. 1.29–30), whose teachings are closely affiliated with those attested in the Sethian texts of the Nag Hammadi Library, see David Brakke, *The Gnostics: Myth, Ritual, and Diversity in Early Christianity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010), esp. 29–89; cf. also Bentley Layton, "Prolegomena to the Study of Ancient Gnosticism," in *The Social World of the First Christians* (FS Wayne A. Meeks; ed. L. Michael White and O. Larry Yarbrough; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995), 334–50.

[37] Stark fails to note the distinction drawn between "the Gnostics" and "the Valentinians" in Irenaeus, *Her.* 1.11, as he claims that "the term *Gnostic* was applied by Irenaeus … to the writings and followers of Valentinus." (*Cities of God*, 143.)

[38] For other relevant texts in addition to the two discussed here, see King, "Martyrdom and Its Discontents." King demonstrates how important the issue of persecution is in three texts included in Codex Tchacos: the *Letter of Peter to Philip* (CT 1; also NHC VIII, 2), the *First Revelation of James* (CT 2; also NHC V, 3), and the *Gospel of Judas* (CT 3). King compellingly argues for "the possibility of reading these three works as offering what we might call 'preparation for martyrdom.'" (24) For other related texts sharing the same concern, see the *Secret Book of James* (NHC I, 2), 5–6; the *Gospel of Mary* (BG), 9. For the theme of suffering and persecution in Nag Hammadi texts, see Clemens Scholten, *Martyrium und Sophiamythos im Gnostizismus nach den Texten von Nag Hammadi* (JAC 14; Münster: Aschendorffsche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1987), e. g., 45–46 (on *Secret Jas.*), 52–55 (on *2 Rev. Jas.*); 63–68 (on *Ep. Pet. Phil.*); 73–80 (on *1 Rev. Jas.*).

Tripartite Tracate.[39] In this lengthy compendium of Valentinian theology, those persecuting the church are associated with an inferior order of cosmic powers "on the left side":

> … there is the road to error for those who stem from the order of those on the left side. For they did not only reject the Lord and made an evil plot against him, but their hatred, zeal and ill-will are also directed towards the church. For this reason, those who have moved and started the attempts against the church are condemned.[40]

The church is also portrayed in the *Tripartite Tractate* as subject to "sicknesses" and "sufferings," and Christians ("the saints") as suffering from "persecutions" and "oppression."[41] Although we cannot necessarily infer from such passages that the *Tripartite Tractate* was addressed to Christians under acute persecution,[42] it is noteworthy that the Valentinian author of this text found so much value in the common representation of Christians as sufferers.

What makes persecution an especially important topic in the *Tripartite Tractate* is that it is connected with issues pertaining to power, which is one of the leading themes in the whole text. In the first part of the text, the origin of power is described in the form of a cosmic myth: lust for power was a result of the primeval fall of the divine Word (Logos), and for this reason all beings have this desire.[43] Accordingly, the Logos had to arrange the cosmos in a way that all beings, from cosmic powers to earthly rulers, are both commanders and commanded by someone else at the same time.[44]

What this myth was needed for was to offer an explanation of why Christians suffer in this world: persecution of the church is seen here a consequence of the vicious lust for power, which permeates the entire universe. Yet, the author of the *Tripartite Tractate* did not consider the situation totally hopeless. The text implies that the cosmic order based upon hierarchies was created to keep the lust for power in check. What is more, the author reckons with the possibility that some of those persecuting the church will convert and then will participate in its suffering.[45]

A second example of the Nag Hammadi texts adopting the self-portrayal of Christians as sufferers comes from the text called *The Second Discourse of Great Seth*:

> When we left our home and came down to this world and became embodied in the world, we were hated and persecuted both by those who are ignorant and by those who claim to

[39] For a more detailed analysis of this issue in the *Tripartite Tractate*, see Dunderberg, *Beyond Gnosticism*, 161–73.
[40] *Tri. Trac.* 121–2 (trans. Thomassen).
[41] *Tri. Trac.* 135.
[42] Cf. Dunderberg, *Beyond Gnosticism*, 168–69.
[43] *Tri. Trac.* 78–80, 83–85.
[44] *Tri. Trac.* 99–100.
[45] *Tri. Trac.* 119–22.

be enriched with the name of Christ, though they are vain and ignorant. Like irrational animals they do not know who they are. They hate and persecute those whom I have liberated. … You, however, will be winners in everything, in combat, fights, and schism with jealousy and anger. In the uprightness of our love, we are innocent, poor, and good, and we have the mind of God in an ineffable mystery.[46]

This text teaches that the true Christians are being persecuted both by complete outsiders ("those who are ignorant") and by other Christians professing to know Christ. Like many other early Christian authors, the *Great Seth* employs the persecution discourse to draw a boundary between "us" and the wrong kinds of Christians. The latter "proclaim the doctrine of a dead man," "bind themselves to fear and slavery and earthly concerns and improper forms of worship," and their teachings "mock the freedom and purity of the perfect assembly."[47]

The historical situation behind the *Great Seth* remains obscure since the author does not describe in more precise terms by whom and in what manner his group was persecuted. It can be gathered, however, that the Christians condemned in this text probably emphasized the crucifixion of Jesus, emphasized their own authority and the importance of the law,[48] and followed the food laws that they thought were issued by angels.[49] The description would fit well with Christian groups where the bishop's authority was emphasized and Jewish food laws were still obeyed. The Christian communities in Lyons are a case in point,[50] but there were probably similar groups in other parts of the Roman world as well, including Asia Minor, where practices adopted in Gallic churches probably originated.[51]

3. Responses from the Learned: Basilides, Heracleon and Clement

Although Tertullian's portrayal of his opponents is overtly hostile most of the time, in *Scorpiace* he offers what to me seems a plausible summary of arguments these opponents used against martyrdom. His list of such arguments consists of seven items:[52]

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[46] *2 Seth* 59–60 (trans. Meyer).

[47] *2 Seth* 60 (trans. Meyer).

[48] *2 Seth* 61.

[49] *2 Seth* 64.

[50] Cf. W. H. C. Frend, *Martyrdom and Persecution in the Early Church: A Study of a Conflict from the Maccabees to Donatus* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1965), 18 (with reference to the *Martyrs of Lyons*, apud Eusebius, *Church History*, 5.1.26).

[51] Frend, *Martyrdom and Persecution*, 3, designates Asia Minor "the spiritual home of the two Churches" in Gaul, that is, those in Lyons and Vienne.

[52] Tertullian, *Scorp.* 1 (trans. *ANF*). For another, more concise summary of arguments used against martyrdom, see Clement, *Misc.* 4.4.16: "the true martyrdom is the knowledge of the

[1] "Men are perishing without a reason."
[2] "If [God] kills me, how will it be his duty to preserve me?"
[3] "Once for all Christ died for us, once for all he was slain that we might not be slain."
[4] "If he demands the like from me in return, does he also look for salvation from my death by violence."
[5] "Or does God importune for the blood of men, especially if he refuses that of bulls and he-goats?"
[6] "Assuredly he had rather have the repentance than the death of the sinner?" (cf. Ez. 33:11)
[7] "And how is he eager for the death of those who are not sinners?"

Tertullian also insinuates that the heretics advised the Christians not to confess their faith because this would give a wrong impression of God. He, therefore, urges Christians to be resistant, "if even then a Prodicus or Valentinus stood by, suggesting that one must not confess on the earth before men, and must do so the less in truth, that God may not (seem to) thirst for blood, and Christ for a repayment of suffering …"[53]

Whereas Tertullian only offers a summary of his opponents' arguments against martyrdom, fragments surviving from the works of Basilides and the Valentinian Heracleon show in greater detail how persuasion in this matter took place.

One of the earliest Christian critics of martyrdom, Basilides built his case upon the conviction that no human being, not even the martyr, suffers innocently. [54] The idea of innocent suffering would both question our confidence in the providence of God and compromise the belief that God alone is righteous.

Basilides conceded that the martyrs are not guilty of the charges they are accused of by the officials. Nevertheless, he maintained that since innocent suffering is impossible, the martyrs have either committed secret sins,[55] or at least

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only true God … and one who makes confession by death commits suicide" (trans. *ANF*, with modification). Clement agrees with the first point, and his following discussion shows that he is critical of those he considers fake martyrs: "those who have rushed on death – (for there are some, not belonging to us, but sharing the name merely, who are in haste to give themselves up, the poor wretches dying through hatred to the Creator) – these, we say, banish themselves without being martyrs, even though they are punished publicly. For they do not preserve the characteristic mark of believing martyrdom, inasmuch as they have not known the only true God, but give themselves up to a vain death, as the Gymnosophists of the Indians to useless fire" (trans. *ANF*).

[53] Tertullian, *Scorp.*15 (trans. *ANF*).

[54] Clement, *Misc.* 4.81.1.-83.1. The fragment comes from Basilides' *Exegetica*, Chapter 23; for the Greek text of, and an extensive commentary on, this text, see Winrich A. Löhr, *Basilides und seine Schule: Eine Studie zur Theologie- und Kirchengeschichte des zweiten Jahrhunderts* (WUNT 83; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck 1996), 122–51.

[55] Bentley Layton, "The Significance of Basilides in Ancient Christian Thought," *Representations* 28 (1989): 135–51, interprets Basilides as having reincarnation in mind here: "someone who did not commit sin in the present life may nevertheless have sinned in a previous one" (140). The idea of the reincarnation of the souls is attested for Basilides (Origenes, *Comm. 5.1 in Rom.*; cf. Löhr, *Basilides und seine Schule*, 212–18, who remains undecided if this passage comes from Basilides or his followers). Nevertheless, since reincarnation is not mentioned

they, like all humans, have the inclination to do so; hence, the martyrs deserve the punishment they have received. Basilides' smartest move was the claim that it is God's special token of mercy that the sins and desires for which the martyrs really suffer are kept hidden and that they are publicly accused of being Christians. Basilides' carefully crafted argument deserves to be quoted at length:

> I claim that all those who have fallen victims to the aforementioned sufferings are brought to this good thing, because they have secretly committed other errors. Because their leader is good, however, they are accused of entirely different crimes, so that they do not suffer because of confessed evil deeds, like criminals, and are not rebuked like an adulterer or a murderer, but they suffer because they are Christians. This is such a great comfort that they do not seem to suffer at all.
>
> It is very rare that someone must suffer without having sinned at all. Even this person will not suffer because of some power's evil plot but he suffers like a child who seems to have not sinned. … A child, who has not previously sinned, or who has at least not actively committed any sins, nevertheless has in itself the capacity to sin. The child draws benefit from becoming subject to suffering, because this saves the child from many difficulties. In the same manner, the perfect human, who suffers without seeming to have committed any sinful deeds, suffers this like a child. This person has the inclination to sin (τὸ ἁμαρτητικόν) but has not committed any sins since there has not been any good opportunity to sin. This person thus deserves no merit for not having sinned.
>
> For one who wants to commit adultery is an adulterer even if this person has not yet committed adultery, and one who wants to murder is a murderer even if this person has not yet committed a murder. In the same way, if I see the sinless person, of whom I speak here, suffering without having done anything evil, I claim that this person is evil because he wants to sin. For I would say anything else rather than claim that providence is evil. …
>
> You can of course ignore all these arguments and seek to put me to shame because of some persons and may say: "So-and-so has thus sinned, because so-and-so suffered." If you allow, I would say that this person did not sin but was similar to a suffering child. If you, however, really push me to the limit, I would say that any human you can name is only a human, while God alone is righteous, just as someone said: "No one is pure from uncleanness" (cf. Job 14:4).

Some certainly found preposterous Basilides' claim that the martyrs were sinners, just as all other humans, and were punished either for their sins or at least for the sinful inclination abiding in them. Basilides' opponents claimed that he did not even care, if one denied his or her faith in persecutions.[56] This is what people heard Basilides saying, but this is not what he taught, not at least in the passage quoted above. He did not urge Christians to deny their faith.[57] He only

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in Basilides' teaching on the martyrs' sufferings, it remains unclear if the "secret sins" really stand for those committed in one's previous life, or simply for those committed in thoughts.

[56] This claim comes from Agrippa Castor, whose account of Basilides (referred to as Testimonium 1 by Löhr, *Basilides und seine Schule*, 5) is summarized in Eusebius, *Church History* 4.7.5–8; cf. also Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 1.24.6: Basilideans teach that those in the know "are not even able to suffer for the sake of a name."

[57] Cf. Löhr, *Basilides und seine Schule*, 9: "the authentic Basilides certainly did not teach denial in the time of persecution."

says that Christians should understand persecution as divine education, delivered in a form that saves Christians from the humiliation that would follow, if the real causes of their suffering would be exposed to all.

As offensive as Basilides' arguments could sound, they were not unique. While the passage quoted above concludes with an allusion to Job 14:4, Basilides could have also called upon other books in the Septuagint in support of his idea that the martyrs are not innocent but suffer for their sins. In Second Maccabees, two of the seven martyr brothers explain their suffering as due to sins:[58]

> [Brother 6:] For we are suffering these things on our own account, because of our sins against our God. Therefore astounding things have happened." (2 Macc. 7:18, NRSV.)
>
> [Brother 7:] For we are suffering because of our own sins. And if our living Lord is angry for a little while, to rebuke and discipline us, he will again be reconciled with his own servants. … I … give up body and life … through me and my brothers to bring to an end the wrath of the Almighty that has justly fallen on our whole nation. (2 Macc 7:32–38.)

The idea of hidden sins as the cause of persecution persisted in later Jewish traditions. There is a story of Rabbi Eli'ezer who was summoned to a Roman court under suspecion of being Christian. After being freed of the charges, Eli'ezer began to wonder why he was summoned to the court in the first place. Then he understood the reason: he had heard from a Christian called Jacob a saying of Jesus and found it pleasant.[59] Eli'ezer, in other words, ended up in the court because of his secret – and already forgotten! – sympathies with Christianity.

Augustine made use of a very similar argument to denigrate the famous Lucretia who committed suicide after being raped. While the Romans had traditionally seen in Lucretia's behavior an unrivalled heroic act, Augustine shockingly speculated that perhaps Lucretia "was betrayed by the pleasure of the act and gave some consent"; hence it can be that she committed suicide not because she was innocent but because she was "conscious of guilt," and thinking that "death alone can expiate her sin."[60]

Basilides' caveat that martyrs die because of their hidden sins, thus, does not represent a distinctly "gnostic" take on martyrdom; one finds similar warrants expressed in other Jewish and Christian traditions. A positive version of such teaching is attested in Second Maccabees, where the celebrated heroes confess their sins, while the rabbinic story of Eli'ezer and Augustine's comments on Lucretia display a critical distance towards one's being subject to persecution or violence: one suffers either for being inclined towards wrong thoughts (Eli'ezer), or due belonging to the wrong group of people (Lucretia).

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[58] Strikingly, but perhaps not so surprisingly, the confessions of sins of the two brothers were erased from the otherwise expanded version of the seven brothers' martyrdom in Fourth Maccabees.

[59] *Tosefta Ḥullin* 2.24, quoted and discussed in Boyarin, *Dying for God*, 27–28.

[60] Augustine, *City of God*, 1.19; cf. Salisbury, *The Blood of Martyrs*, 201.

Heracleon, according to Clement, downplayed the demonstrative value of martyrdom by teaching that hypocrites can also publicly confess to being Christians. There can be people who, "though they confess him with the voice, yet deny him, not confessing him in their conduct." What Heracleon found more essential than public confession, thus, was "a confession by faith and conduct." The oral confession is only a "partial" one, while the "universal" one also entails faith and good behavior that is in accordance with this faith. Heracleon did not encourage people to seek to avoid martyrdom. Instead, he taught that the right kind of public confession before the authorities may sometimes be needed.[61] What really matters, however, is the right attitude from which one's confession emerges: "For one who has first confessed by his disposition will also confess in the correct manner."[62]

Heracleon's position here is not a distinctly "Gnostic" or "heretic" one. It is, in fact, very close to Clement's own view, as Clement readily admits.[63] Like Heracleon, Clement also emphasizes the importance of one's lifestyle: the true gnostic martyrdom first and foremost means one's ability to renounce family, wealth and passions.[64] Just like Heracleon, Clement taught that "those who witness in their life by deed, and at the tribunal by word, whether entertaining hope or surmising fear, are better than those who confess salvation by their salvation alone." What Clement adds is that the perfect martyr does not act out of fear or in the hope of future rewards[65] but out of love: "But if one ascend also to love, he is a really blessed and true martyr, having confessed perfectly."[66]

While Heracleon and Clement agree that one whose conduct is blameless should also be ready to experience martyrdom, if necessary, the Elchasaites adopted a more radical stance. Origen briefly remarked that, according to them, a reasonable person can deny one's faith publicly ("by mouth") but not internally ("in the heart").[67] If this is not just a malevolent rumor, the rationale behind it may be similar to that argued by Heracleon and Clement: conduct is more important than the confession of one's faith in court. There is also evidence for

[61] Here Heracleon's argument comes very close to that in Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities*, 12.6.3: Josephus finds it important that souls are trained to die for the laws, "if necessary." It seems that, for Josephus, it was more important to be prepared for death than to really suffer a heroic death; Josephus famously sought to dissuade his compatriots from committing mass suicide in Jotapata (*The Jewish War*, 3.8.5). My attention to these passages and the tension between them was drawn by Anna-Liisa Tolonen, who discusses them in her unpublished MA thesis on Maccabean martyrs (Helsinki 2011). As for Josephus, Tolonen remarks that "although he embraced the ideology of martyrdom, he could not live it."

[62] Clement, *Misc.* 4.9.

[63] Clement, *Misc.* 4.9: "He seems to be of the same sentiments with us in this section."

[64] Clement, *Misc.* 4.4.

[65] Cf. Clement, *Misc.* 4.6: fear and desire belong to initial stages on one's way to salvation, whereas "love, as is fitting, perfects, by training now according to knowledge."

[66] Clement, *Misc.* 4.9.

[67] Origen apud Eusebius, *Church History*, 6.38; for this group, see Gerard P. Luttikhuizen, "Elchasaites and their Book," in Marjanen and Luomanen (ed.), *A Companion to Second-Century Christian "Heretics,"* 335–63.

a Jewish rabbi accepting sacrifices brought to the Roman gods, if this was necessary to save one's life, and if the whole affair takes place privately; if the request to serve the idols is made publicly, one must refuse to obey.[68] Stories of Jewish rabbis summoned to Roman courts often display a similar attitude; as Daniel Boyarin comments these stories, "Any sort of deception is legitimate, as long as it gets you off the hook with the oppressor, because his rule is absolutely illegitimate."[69]

4. The *Gospel of Judas*

My final remarks are on the *Gospel of Judas*, where human sacrifice plays an important part in the polemic launched against the wrong kind of Christianity. While there is an ongoing debate whether Judas is a hero or a villain in this text,[70] there is no mistaking of the negative stance it shows towards the other disciples and their followers. In the first part of the text, the disciples describe to Jesus the vision they had seen of wicked priests at a temple: "[Some] sacrifice their own children, others their wives, while praising and blaming each other. Some

[68] This opinion is ascribed to Rabbi Ishma'el in *Sifra* 86b/194.16; for a translation, see Jacob Neusner, *Sifra: An Analytical Translation* (3 vols; Brown Judaic Studies 138–40; Atlanta: Scholars, 1988), 3.80. The scriptural proof comes from Leviticus 18:5: "You shall keep my statutes and my ordinances; by doing so one shall live." Ishma'el justifies his view by pointing out that the passage does *not* say that "one shall die" because of God's statutes. For a similar policy, see *Y. Shebi`it* 4.2: "one may violate all laws to save life," but "only if one is alone, or if less than ten men are present"; quoted according to C. G. Montefiore & H. Loewe, *A Rabbinic Anthology* (London: MacMillan, 1938), 255. This text, however, disagrees with Ishma'el since it specifies idolatry as one of the three cases where even the private violation of the laws to save one's life is not permitted; the other two cases are unchastity and murder.

[69] Boyarin, *Dying for God*, 55. This, of course, was not the whole picture; for Jewish hardliners, most prominently Rabbi Akiva, see ibid. 102–14.

[70] Although the *Gospel of Judas* was first said to promote the former view, a majority of specialists have now adopted the latter one; cf., e. g., Johanna Brankaer & Hans-Gebhard Bethge (ed.), *Codex Tchachos: Texte und Analyse* (TU 161; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2007), 260, 368–69; April D. DeConick, *The Thirteenth Apostle: What the Gospel of Judas Really Says* (2d ed.; London: Continuum, 2009), esp. 124–28; Louis Painchaud, "Polemical Aspects of the *Gospel of Judas*," in *The Gospel of Judas in Context* (ed. Madeleine Scopello; NHMS 62; Leiden: Brill, 2008), 171–86, esp. 177–85; Birger Pearson, "Judas Iscariot in the *Gospel of Judas*," in DeConick (ed.), *The Codex Judas Papers*, 137–52; Gesine Schenke Robinson, "The Gospel of Judas: Its Protagonist, Its Composition, and Its Community," in DeConick (ed.), *The Codex Judas Papers*, 75–94, esp. 86; Einar Thomassen, "Is Judas Really the Hero of the *Gospel of Judas*," in Scopello (ed.), *The Gospel of Judas in Context*, 157–70, esp. 166–69. There is not a complete consensus, however; for more recent dissenting voices, see, e. g., Ismo Dunderberg, "Judas' Anger and the Perfect Human," in DeConick (ed.), *The Codex Judas Papers*, 201–21; Antti Marjanen, "Does the Gospel of Judas Rehabilitate Judas Iscariot?" in *Gelitten, Gestorben, Auferstanden: Passions- und Ostertraditionen im antiken Christentum* (ed. Tobias Nicklas, Andreas Merkt and Joseph Verheyden; Tübingen: WUNT II/273; Mohr Siebeck, 2010), 209–24.

have sex with men. Some perform acts of [murder]. Some commit all sorts of sins and lawless deeds. And the men who stand [before] the altar call upon your name …"[71] In his explanation of the dream, Jesus shockingly identifies his own followers with the wicked priests: it is the disciples who present these offerings to the God they serve, and they bring in people like cattle to be sacrificed at the altar for the satisfaction of their God.[72]

Most charges levelled in the *Gospel of Judas* against the apostles' Christianity, including men sleeping with men, murders, and "all kinds of lawless deeds," are stock accusations in ancient polemical rhetoric. The accusation that the apostles endorse and perform human sacrifice could also come from that stock.[73] Sacrifice, however, seems to be a greater concern to the author of this text since, at the end of the relevant passage in *Judas*, Jesus urges the disciples to "stop sacrificing."[74]

It would not seem to require too much imagination to see in the description of women and children brought to the altar in the temple a reference to Christians headed for martyrdom at the insistence of their leaders. However, this interpretation, which was proposed by a number of scholars in the first wave of publications on *Judas*,[75] has become contested in more recent studies on this text. It now seems clear that human sacrifice is not the author's only concern, but it is only one of the many errors of the opposed form of Christianity. The opening scene of *Judas*, in which Jesus derides the disciples' prayers of thanksgiving,[76] can be read as a counter-story to more traditional accounts of the institution of the Eucharist, in which Jesus himself gives thanks over bread (thus 1 Cor 11:24–26), or over wine (thus Mark 14:22–25par).[77] This could make the Eucharist the primary target of *Judas*' polemics against other Christians.[78]

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[71] *Gos. Jud.* 38 (trans. Meyer).

[72] *Gos. Jud.* 39–40.

[73] For the usage of stock accusations in *Gos. Jud.* 38–40, see Jenott, *The Gospel of Judas*, 58–60; Anna Van den Kerchove, "La maison, l'autel et les sacrifices: Quelques remarques sur la polemique dans *l'Évangile de Judas*," in Scopello (ed.), *The Gospel of Judas in Context*, 311–29, esp. 322–26.

[74] *Gos. Jud.* 42.

[75] Most prominently, this aspect is emphasized in Elaine Pagels and Karen L. King, *Reading Judas: The Gospel of Judas and the Shaping of Christianity* (London: Allen Lane, 2007), esp. 49–51, 59–75; cf. also Philippa Townsend, Eduard Iricinschi and Lance Jenott, "The Betrayer's Gospel," *The New York Review* (June 8, 2006): 32–37; Antti Marjanen and Ismo Dunderberg, *Juudaksen evankeliumi: Johdanto, käännös ja tulkinta* [The Gospel of Judas: Introduction, Translation, and Interpretation] (Helsinki: WSOY, 2006), 87–89.

[76] *Gos. Jud.* 33–34.

[77] Cf. Frank Williams, "The Gospel of Judas: Its Polemic, its Exegesis, and its Place in Church History," *VigChr* 62 (2008): 371–403. It should be noted that the dividing line is here not one between the *Gospel of Judas* and the New Testament. John's story of the footwashing (John 13) is also an alternative to the more traditional story of Jesus instituting the Eucharist. The lack of the latter story in John is all the more striking because the eucharistic imagery in John 6:51–58 implies that Johannine Christians knew well, and probably performed, the Eucharist.

[78] Williams maintains that *Judas* totally condemns the Eucharist ("The Gospel of Judas," 372). Jenott, *The Gospel of Judas*, 40–41, however, argues that the problem was not the Eucha-

It has also been proposed that *Judas* first and foremost polemicizes against Christian baptism "as a re-enactment of Jesus' own 'passover'."[79] In support of this thesis, Bas van Os lists a number of details in *Judas*' description of human sacrifices that he thinks are mismatched with historical facts about persecutions: "a multitude" of those sacrificed would go too far since only a relatively small number of Christians were killed in persecutions; children were not persecuted by Roman authorities; and given that persecutions were usually confined to religious leaders, "it is rather strange … that the church leaders in the *Gospel of Judas* can stand completely at ease at the altar of the supposed persecution." Moreover, "we would expect that *Roman* priests would kill the victims. But in the *Gospel of Judas*, the twelve apostles are the ones who do the slaughtering."[80]

In my estimation, these arguments against the view that *Judas* polemicizes against martyrdom are not compelling. The discrepancies van Os sees between *Judas* and the historical reality of persecutions are significant only if we assume that the account of human sacrifice in *Judas* should have a one-to-one equivalence to historical events.[81] It seems clear that this is not the case: it is unlikely that the author of *Judas* wanted to provide his readership with a report of historical facts. The account of human sacrifice in Judas is clearly a poetic one, and written in a form that presupposes that readers are able to decipher what lies beneath the poetic language. For example, although it is true that the disciples did not slaughter any Christians, it is still conceivable that, in *Judas*, they are portrayed as symbols of those Christians urging each other to embrace martyrdom in the name of Jesus. In my view, van Os requires too much historical accuracy in demanding that the wicked priests should be "Roman priests"[82] to warrant the

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rist itself but that it was performed by the wrong people (the clergy) to the wrong god (the Jewish god): "It was not the observance or even the theological interpretation of the Eucharist that was contested, but the question of which Christians had the right to conduct it at all. … The target of the *Gospel of Judas's* criticism is neither the Eucharist, nor the ideology of sacrifice, nor the sacrificial interpretation of Jesus' death, but the twelve disciples and their corrupt moral character." The latter interpretation, however, finds no positive proof in *Judas*. Its author only mocks one kind of a eucharistic meal but nowhere offers a more constructive view of how the eucharist should be performed in the right way.

[79] Bas van Os, "Stop Sacrificing: The Metaphor of sacrifice in the *Gospel of Judas*," in DeConick (ed.), *The Codex Judas Papers*, 367–86, esp. 368.

[80] van Os, "Stop Sacrificing," 375–78.

[81] It should be added that some of the incongruities van Os sees between *Judas*' account and what really happened (or at least what Christians conceived as happening) in persecutions are debatable. As for the claim that children were not hunted down, Clement of Alexandria, for one, decribed how all kinds of Christians, regardless of their gender, age, or social class, had died in persecutions: "both the old man, the young, and the servant will live faithfully, and if need be, die. … So we know that both children, and women, and servants have often, against their fathers', and masters', and husbands' will, reached the highest degree of excellence" (Clement, *Misc.* 4.8.68; trans. *ANF*).

[82] Of course, even that would not be accurate enough since it was not Roman priests who killed Christians, and Christians were not killed on the altars of Roman temples.

anti-martyrdom reading of *Judas*. *Judas* was written against other Christians, not against Roman officials. It does not seem too far-fetched to assume that ancient Christian readers, who must have been aware of persecutions and familiar with stories of martyrs, could have seen a connection between these stories and *Judas*' account of human sacrifices performed in the name of Jesus.[83] The link between human sacrifice and baptism seems far less obvious, and it would thus require a very high degree of sophistication on the part of the audience to be able to make this connection.[84]

In *Judas*, human sacrifice takes place in an imaginary space. Instead of an arena, the *Gospel of Judas* evokes an image of a temple as the space where the priests oversee the performance of sacrificial rituals at an altar. The same shift from arena to temple can be seen in Ignatius's epistles.[85] Ignatius not only eagerly awaited wild animals gnawing him "like God's wheat" so that he "may be found the pure bread of Christ,"[86] but he also urged his readers to grant him the opportunity "to be poured out as a libation as long as the altar is prepared."[87]

The positive imagery of the arena as an altar in God's temple is effectively reversed in the *Gospel of Judas*. The term θυσιαστήριον, used for "altar" in *Judas*, can be predominantly found in Jewish and Christian authors, who most often used the term for the altar in the temple of Jerusalem.[88] Hence, the choice of this word in *Judas* suggests that the imaginary space created in this gospel is the

[83] The importance of the sacrificial imagery in the early Christian discourse on martyrdom is well demonstrated by Elizabeth Castelli, *Martyrdom and Memory: Early Christian Culture Making* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 50–68; cf. also Moss, *The Other Christs*, 77–87. For only one text to show how natural the link between martyrdom, human sacrifice, priests, and altar must have seemed in early Christian imagination, see Origen, *Exhort. Mart.* 30: it is argued here that, just as Christ sacrificed himself as the High Priest, the Christians as "the priests … of whom He is the High Priest offer themselves as a sacrifice. This is why they are seen near the altar as near their own place" (trans. Greer; quoted and discussed in Castelli, ibid., 52).

[84] For example, the link van Os ("Stop Sacrificing," 380) posits between "the fruitless trees" mentioned in *Judas* and Paul's notion that those baptized are "planted together" (σύμφυτοι) with Christ (Rom. 6:4–5) is far from being immediately evident. There is also a great jump from the Pauline idea that believers die in baptism to the portrayal in *Judas* of women and children brought as human sacrifices (ibid.). The link between Passover as "a fitting day for baptism" and the Passover setting of the *Gospel of Judas* (ibid. 381) does not seem overly blatant either. In fact, van Os demands a clearer one-to-one relationship for *Judas*' allusions to persecution but he accepts less strict allusions to baptism. If one would apply the same critical stance toward his baptismal interpretation as he adopts towards the martyrdom interpretation, one could point out that baptisms were usually not performed on an altar, and they were not confined to the wives and children of the clergy, as *Judas*, read in this way, would presuppose, as it speaks in this connection of "their wives and children."

[85] *Judas* and Ignatius are placed in dialogue with each other, e. g., by Marjanen and Dunderberg, *Juudaksen evankeliumi*, 87–88; Pagels and King, *Reading Judas*, 53–54.

[86] Ignatius, *Rom.* 4:1–2.

[87] Ignatius, *Rom.* 2:2.

[88] Cf. *LSJ* s. v.; the results of a search I ran for this term in *TLG* almost entirely come from Jewish and Christian authors.

temple in Jerusalem. Accordingly, this part of the story told in *Judas* could be read as a counterstory, based upon a brief remark in Luke's gospel that, after the resurrection of Jesus, the disciples "were continually in the temple blessing God" (Luke 24:53). If so, the arena becomes the altar of the temple of the wrong God, and human sacrifices conducted in the name of Jesus are placed on the same list of grave sins as sexual misconduct, murder and other forms of lawlessness.

The critique of martyrdom in *Judas* seems far more intense than that of Tertullian's opponents mentioned above. While the latter argued that submitting oneself to a martyr's death gives the wrong impression of God as being bloodthirsty, *Judas* is not worried about wrong impressions but portrays the martyrs as sacrifices to be offered to the wrong God. The wicked priests accepting human sacrifice are no better than murderers, men sleeping with men, and childkillers. To underline the urgency of Jesus' command to stop the sacrifices, the author resorts to an apocalyptic imagery of the constant increase of evil in the world until the last day, when the wicked priests and their followers will "be put to shame."[89]

Finally, just as in *Great Seth*, there is a reference to Christians persecuting Christians in *Judas*. Judas relates to Jesus his vision, in which "the twelve disciples were stoning me and treating me [harshly]."[90] Jesus interprets the vision as meaning that Judas "will go through a great deal of grief" and "be cursed by the other generation, but eventually you will rule over them."[91] I have argued above that, in early Christian texts, only the insiders are described as being subject to persecution. What is more, the text promises apocalyptic vindication to Judas after his being mistreated by those belonging to "the other generations."[92] It would follow that the way Judas is described as a sufferer in the *Gospel of Judas* implies that he is treated as an insider. This aspect in Judas' character, as portrayed in the *Gospel of Judas*, has not yet been taken seriously enough by those who argue that Judas is no less evil in this gospel than he is in other early Christian gospels.

[89] *Gos. Jud.* 40.
[90] *Gos. Jud.* 44–45.
[91] *Gos. Jud.* 46.
[92] The nature of Judas' vindication remains ambiguous since he is denied access to the divine realm (*Gos. Jud.* 45). One possibility is that Judas is vindicated as the replacement of the evil creator-God Yaldabaoth, in the same manner as this god's son Sabaoth is described in *Hyp. Arch.* (NHC II, 4) 95; *Orig. World* (NHC II, 5), 103–4; cf. Dunderberg, "Judas' Anger," 219–20; Rene Falkenberg, "Kongerigets hemmeligheder: et forsøg på en fortolkning af *Judasevangeliet*," in *Mellem venner og fjender: En folgebok om Judasevangeliet, tidlig kristendom og gnosis* (ed. Anders Klostergaard Pedersen, Jesper Hyldahl and Einar Thomassen; Copenhagen: Anis, 2008), 119–42, esp. 139–40; Jenott, *The Gospel of Judas*, 207.

Conclusion

It seems reasonable to assume that, as James Kelhoffer has argued, endurance in the face of suffering amassed "symbolic capital" for early Christians. The cases discussed in this essay, however, show that the value of that capital was not a given but was constantly, and often critically, negotiated by early Christians.[93] Unlike in the fiscal domain, currency rates in the particular case of martyrdom largely depended on *who* used the currency: the same course of action can be rated as praiseworthy or reprehensible, depending on who suffers. It is especially noteworthy how quickly the same dismissive remarks outsiders used against Christian martyrs were adopted by Christians themselves in commenting on the sufferings experienced by those they considered the wrong kinds of Christians.

The texts discussed here should be seen in the context where persecutions posed great ethical challenges to Christians. One of the most important questions was doubtless whether self-sacrifice is a reasonable course of action. Is it really worthwhile to remain steadfast in front of the Roman authorities and face death, or would it be better to escape (cf. Mark 13:14), or even to lie to save one's life, as some Christians (and Jews) advised. None of the texts discussed above recommend these strategies, but their critical comments can be, and were, read as questioning the hardliners' views.We cannot be sure if Basilides accepted the denial of one's faith under persecution, as his opponents claimed, but his argument that martyrs suffered for their own sins certainly took away some of the glory attached to them, made them look less heroic and thus less suitable as role models for other Christians. In my view, the *Gospel of Judas* aims at the same goal, although its polemical stance is far sharper than that of Basilides.

Finally, the evidence discussed above demonstrates that early Christians not only dismissed martyrdom suffered by the wrong people and for wrong reasons, but the claims of fake martyrdom were used to construct images of the Other. This latter aspect must be taken into account in assessing all this evidence. For instance, while it still seems to me valid that *Judas* polemicizes against pro-martyrdom Christians, what I have learned from more recent literature on this text is that this view must be qualified by adding that human sacrifice is not the only wrong thing in the denounced form of Christianity. From the author's perspective, *everything* is wrong with the Christians he is opposed to. This is the text's basic claim; human sacrifice is the most prominent illustration, but, at the end of the day, it serves the same purpose as the mocking reference to the Eucharist, celebrated by the disciples in honor of the wrong God, and the references to

[93] Cf. Kelhoffer, *Persecution, Persuasion and Power*, 24: "the value of withstanding persecution as a form of cultural capital is not self-evident. On the contrary, such assertions of value are built upon numerous judgments and, as such, are subject to redefinition or even rejoinder from others."

"murderers" and "men sleeping with men." The author of *Judas* resorts to the same rhetorical strategy as many of his Christian and non-Christian contemporaries in describing the suffering experienced by the Other as senseless.

Chapter 4

Gnostic Interpretations of Genesis[1]

One noteworthy development in second-century Christianity was the emergence of teachers and groups claiming that the god described in the Hebrew Bible is not the supreme deity but only an inferior Creator-God (demiurge). The Jewish God was demoted by a considerable number of early Christians, including Marcion; Basilides and Valentinus (both early Christian teachers from Egypt) and their followers; "Sethians" (who regarded Seth, the third son of Adam and Eve, as their spiritual ancestor); Justin "the Gnostic"; and several less well-known groups described in the works of Irenaeus of Lyons, Hippolytus of Rome, Tertullian of Carthage, and Epiphanius of Salamis.

1. Variety of Interpretations

The distinction between the perfect, unknown God and the inferior creator-God, who was identified with the God described in the Hebrew Bible, is usually regarded as one of the main tenets of "Gnosticism."[2] This term, however, may create a misleading impression of a unified "heretical" front as opposed to "the early church."[3] Not only did those Christians, who questioned the Jewish belief in one God, not form a single social body, but there is also a great variety in the exegetical methods they used and in their precise assessments of the creator-God.

For example, in his work known as *Antitheses*, Marcion simply listed items where Jesus" teaching about God and the way God is described in the Hebrew Bible seemed to be in an irreconcilable tension with each other. In this way, Marcion wanted to show that the perfect God Jesus proclaimed cannot be identical with the Jewish God, who is described in scripture as prone to anger, injustice,

[1] I wish to thank Antti Marjanen and Tuomas Rasimus for their useful comments on the first draft of this study, which made me rethink and reformulate a number of issues, and saved me from some embarrasing errors. I am of course responsible for those remaining.

[2] Cf. Antti Marjanen, "Gnosticism," in *The Oxford Handbook of Early Christian Studies* (ed. Susan Ashbrook Harvey and David G. Hunter; Oxford: Oxfrod University Press, 2008), 203–20.

[3] Karen L. King, *What is Gnosticism?* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2003).

vengeance, and error.[4] While Marcion's method was "literalist," Sethians, Valentinians, and others interpreted the Book of Genesis allegorically and created new mythic tales based upon this text. Their interpretations were also more heavily indebted to Platonic philosophy than Marcion's: they thought that the visible world was created as an image of the truly divine realm, and they described the creator-God's actions in terms borrowed from, or alluding to, Plato's *Timaeus*.

These early Christian mythmakers agreed with each other that humans – either all or some of them – are relatives of the supreme God and for this reason superior to the creator-God, but they differed from each other in their precise assessments of the Jewish God. While the Valentinians usually considered this god ignorant but benevolent towards humankind, and towards Christians in particular, in Sethian and related myths the Jewish God becomes a satanic being whose main features are deceit, rampant sexual lust, and relentless hostility towards the divine essence deposited in humankind.

The conflicting views about the creator-God among the early Christian mythmakers go hand in hand with their equally divergent theories about the Hebrew Bible. There are some clear instances of "protest exegesis": in some texts, the Jewish God and other protagonists of the Hebrew Bible are condemned or the roles attributed to them and their adversaries are radically reversed. Although protest exegesis is often considered to be part and parcel of the "Gnostic" attitude towards the Hebrew Bible,[5] this view fails to do justice to the available evidence in its entirety. It has become abundantly clear that "there is no single 'gnostic exegesis.'"[6] The relevant sources bear witness to a bewildering spectrum of interpretive strategies applied to the Book of Genesis, including not only rejection, but also (partial) acceptance, allegorical commentary, paraphrase, abbreviation, expansion, variation, creation of new tales and characters, parody, and mockery, to list just a few.[7]

This variety may be more readily understood in light of modern theories of intertextuality that draw attention to "the ways in which the new texts *appropriate* previous material, establishing a complex system of relationships of

[4] Heikki Räisänen, "Marcion," in *A Companion to Second-Century Christian "Heretics"* (ed. Antti Marjanen and Petri Luomanen; VigChrSup 76; Leiden: Brill, 2005), 100–24, here 107–9; for similar views of Apelles, Marcion's follower, see Hendrick S. Benjamins, "Paradisiacal Life: The Story of Paradise in the Early Church," in *Paradise Interpreted: Representations of Biblical Paradise in Judaism and Christianity* (ed. Gerard. P. Luttikhuizen; Themes in Biblical Narrative 2; Leiden: Brill, 1999), 153–77, esp. 160–62.

[5] E.g. Birger Pearson, *Gnosticism, Judaism, and Egyptian Christianity* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990), 37–40.

[6] Michael A. Williams, *Rethinking "Gnosticism": An Argument for Dismantling a Dubious Category* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996), 78.

[7] Cf. Peter Nagel, "Die Auslegung der Paradieserzählung in der Gnosis," in *Altes Testament ± Frühjudentum ± Gnosis.* (ed. Karl-Wolfgang Tröger; Berlin: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 1980), 49–70.

opposition, agreement, partial agreement and reformulation."[8] An intertextual approach may also help us see with greater clarity why authors want to discuss texts with which they partially or completely disagree: "In order to achieve credibility, a new text must show that the pertinent issues are being considered … even rejected ideas may be acknowledged and disputed rather than ignored."[9] In other words, Valentinians, Sethians, and other early Christian "demiurgists"[10] were part of a cultural context, where it was important enough to disagree with the Book of Genesis!

It is debated whether the groups critical of the Hebrew Bible originally emerged from heterodox Judaism,[11] or whether their teaching presupposes Christian teaching,[12] in which Mosaic law was downgraded in different ways (e.g., as the opposite of grace, John 1:17). The debate may remain unresolved but it has made two facts clear: 1) These groups knew, and were conversant with, various strands of Jewish traditions of interpreting Genesis;[13] 2) most of the evidence for the views of these groups comes from sources that, as they now stand, presuppose a Christian self-understanding.

The Genesis exegesis of these groups often sought to resolve intellectual dilemmas posed by suspect aspects of God (especially anthropomorphisms and emotions) in the Hebrew Bible.[14] However, critical reflection on the Book of Genesis was not only an intellectual enterprise. Instead, new social identities were created through exegesis. This was one way of drawing a boundary between these groups and the Jews, and also other Christians of lesser understanding, who subscribed to the Jewish belief in one God.

2. Valentinian Interpretations

In the second century, the school of Valentinus was one of the most important new groups offering the mental freedom needed for a critical approach to the

[8] Patricia K. Tull, "Rhetorical Criticism and Intertextuality," in *To Each Its Own Meaning: An Introduction to Biblical Criticisms and their Application* (ed. Steven L. McKenzie and Stephen R. Haynes; 2nd ed.; Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox, 1999), 156–79, esp. 169.

[9] Tull, "Rhetorical Criticism and Intertextuality," 170.

[10] For this term, see Williams, *Rethinking "Gnosticism,"* 51–52.

[11] E.g. Pearson, *Gnosticism, Judaism, and Egyptian Christianity*; Kurt Rudolph, *Gnosis und Spätantike Religionsgeschichte: Gesammelte Aufsätze* (NHMS 42; Leiden, Brill, 1997), 144–69; the suggested alternatives include the "extreme" Jewish allegorizers, politically disappointed Jews, and disillusioned Jewish messianists.

[12] Thus, e.g., Gerard P. Luttikhuizen, *Gnostic Revisions of Genesis Stories and Early Jesus Traditions* (NHMS 58; Leiden, Brill, 2006).

[13] Pearson, *Gnosticism, Judaism, and Egyptian Christianity.*

[14] Williams, *Rethinking "Gnosticism."*

Hebrew Bible to develop.[15] Valentinus came from Egypt to Rome around 130 and attracted a significant number of followers there. His writings have not survived, except for less than a dozen brief quotations preserved in the works of his adversaries. The fragments, however, suffice to show Valentinus' keen interest in Genesis. Some of his allegorical explanations were quite conventional, such as the view that the "leathern garments" mentioned in Genesis 3:21 denote human flesh (Valentinus, Frag. 11 = Hippolytus, *Ref.* 10.13.4). The same idea can be found in Philo, Origen, and rabbinic texts.[16]

A brief excerpt from Valentinus' teaching of immortality illustrates the way he used allusions to Genesis in his sermons: "You are immortal from the beginning, and you are the children of eternal life. You wanted that death will be bestowed upon you in order that you use it up and waste it, so that death would die in you and through you. For when you, on the one hand, nullify the world, but, on the other, will not be dissolved, you rule over creation and the entire corruption" (Valentinus, Frag. 4 = Clement of Alexandria, *Strom.* 4.89.2–3).[17] Valentinus' way of addressing his audience as those who "are immortal from the beginning" recalls the original state of the first human beings in the paradise. The subsequent references to death in the next sentence allude to their loss of immortality (Gen. 3:19, 22–24), whereas the final part recalls Adam and Eve's birthright to rule over the world created by God (Gen. 1:28; cf. 2:19–20).

By Valentinus' time, both Jewish and Christian interpreters usually thought that Adam and Eve were immortal before the fall. It was also commonplace to believe that *all* humans were immortal to begin with but have chosen death in the same manner as Adam and Eve. Valentinus, however, disagrees with the latter conclusion. His usage of the present tense ("you *are* immortal … you *are* the children of eternal life") shows that he conceives of his addressees as having not lost their immortality (unlike Adam and Eve).

Moreover, unlike most of his Jewish and Christian contemporaries, Valentinus did not regard death as a punishment but explained it as serving a pedagogic purpose: his addressees must face death in order to learn how to destroy it. Valentinus probably understood "death" and "immortality" in terms of lifestyle rather than in terms of physical death or the lack thereof. For Hellenistic Jewish writers, such as Philo and the author of the Book of Wisdom, immortality meant

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[15] The school of Valentinus was not necessarily exclusivistic in its relationship to other Christians. Many Valentinians – perhaps the majority of them – also retained their membership in the broader Christian community and took part in its ritual life together with Christians of other persuasions.

[16] Christoph Markschies, *Valentinus Gnosticus?: Untersuchungen zur valentinianischen Gnosis; mit einem Kommentar zu den Fragmenten Valentins* (WUNT 65; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1992), 286–87; Ismo Dunderberg, *Beyond Gnosticism: Myth, Lifestyle and Society in the School of Valentinus* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), 229n.62; for other Valentinian sources, see Irenaeus, *Her.* 1.5.5; Clement, *Exc. Theod.* 55.

[17] Cf. Dunderberg, *Beyond Gnosticism,* 37–39.

first and foremost that one should hold to the correct way of life in obedience to the Torah. Likewise, death was a moral category rather than a physical fact: a person who has adopted the wrong lifestyle is, though physically alive, already spiritually dead. There is also a moral side to Valentinus' teaching: he promises that his addressees will become rulers over creation when they learn to "nullify" the world. "Ruling" is not meant here in the political or in the eschatological sense, but in an ethical one. Valentinus' teaching probably reflects a long philosophical tradition, in which the language of ruling was used to denote a person's perfect command of his or her inner self, especially one's ability not to give in to any irrational urges arising from the soul.

Another fragment of Valentinus shows a more critical stance towards Genesis. This fragment describes a primeval clash between Adam and the creator angels. There is a divine essence secretly deposited in Adam, which expresses itself in his frank speech. As soon as the angels recognize the "preexistent human being" in Adam, they panic and try to destroy him (Valentinus, Frag. 1 = Clement, *Misc.* 2.36.2–4). This interpretation is based upon traditions similar to those in the Sethian *Secret Book of John* (see below). A new element in Valentinus' teaching is that the angels' fear was triggered by Adam's frank speech (*parrhēsia*). This addition creates a link to the philosophical tradition, where uncensored freedom of speech was one of the most important values. Frank speech was considered to be the philosopher's right and task in society. This context lends a new twist to Valentinus' interpretation: Adam shows towards his creators the same attitude of candour as philosophers did towards the tyrants in popular imagination, and the angels wanted to strike Adam dumb in the same manner as the tyrants sought to silence their critics.[18] The intertextual fabric becomes, thus, especially thick here: first, Valentinus' interpretation is based not upon the story of Adam's creation as it stands in Genesis, but upon a Sethian recasting of this story; and second, the result of his modification of the Sethian tradition is a new story that takes on new meanings in the historical and cultural context of his audience.

Other teachers associated with the school of Valentinus were also active in interpreting Genesis. Valentinians were known for their division of humankind into three distinct classes, and they supported this view with an expanded version of Adam's creation. Irenaeus relates that, according to Valentinians, the creator-God formed the first human from "diffused and unsettled matter (*hulē*)" and breathed (cf. Gen. 2:7) his own soul-essence into this being. At the same time, the divine Wisdom secretly supplied the first human with a spiritual essence, which should grow in humans like a fetus and finally enable "the reception of what is perfect" (Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 1.5.5–6). The first human, thus, consisted of three different essences: matter, soul, and spirit. This division was also the lens through which Valentinians looked at the world: in their classifica-

[18] Cf. Dunderberg, *Beyond Gnosticism,* 52–55.

tion, pagans were of the material essence doomed to perdition, whereas most Christians, and sometimes Jews, belonged to the "soul-group" in the middle, and only some Christians could reach the most advanced, spiritual level. The division was also essential for the Valentinian theology of revelation. Valentinians maintained that there have always existed spiritual persons. Although the creator-God was ignorant of their essence, he showed special affection towards them and appointed them "prophets, priests and kings" (Irenaeus, *Her.* 1.7.3). For this reason, the voice of the spiritual race can still be heard in the Hebrew Bible. However, the Bible also contains teaching stemming from the creator-God and humans. Therefore, while Valentinians did not abandon the Hebrew Bible altogether, they thought that critical analysis was needed to identify the different voices speaking in it.[19]

Excerpts from Theodotus, Clement of Alexandria's collection of Valentinian teachings, bears witness to more detailed interpretations of the story of Adam, Eve, and the paradise. Theodotus explained the sentence "male and female he created them" (Gen. 1:27) as denoting the angelic order ("male") and the human one ("female"). Just as Eve was separated from Adam, the two orders live now in separation, but the church (*ekklēsia*) of humans will finally be reunited with the angels (*Exc. Theod.* 21). This interpretation is based upon the idea that the original first human was neither male nor female but androgynous, and expresses the hope of salvation in terms of one's return to this original state; the same idea is also reflected in the *Gospel of Thomas* (22, 114), and possibly by Paul in Galatians 3:27–28.[20]

Adam's sleep is interpreted in the *Excerpts*, just like in the Sethian texts to be discussed below, as an allegory for the soul's forgetting. Yet, this text also offers a positive allegorical interpretation of Adam's sleep: this story denotes how the divine word sowed "the male seed" into a sleeping soul. This seed enables the soul's awakening by the Saviour (*Exc. Theod.* 2–3). Concerning Adam's words, "this is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh" (Gen. 2:23), the "bone" refers to the divine soul which is the hard essence hidden in the flesh, whereas the "flesh" refers to the material soul waging war against the divine one. Moral exhortation follows: instead of strengthening the material soul with sins, one should struggle it and see to the dissolution of this soul (*Exc. Theod.* 51–53).

Adam's three sons stand for the three natures of humankind: the irrational (Cain), the rational and righteous (Abel), and the spiritual (Seth). One sign of

[19] A compact masterpiece of such an analysis is Ptolemaeus' *Letter to Flora* (quoted in Epiphanius, *Panarion* 33.3.1–7.10), in which the biblical law is divided into the creator-God's own legislation and human additions stemming from Moses and the elders. For a similar explanation applied to the prophets of the Hebrew Bible, see *Tri. Trac.* 113.

[20] Wayne A. Meeks, "The Image of the Androgyne: Some Uses of a Symbol in Earliest Christianity," in idem, *In Search of the Early Christians* (ed. Allen R. Hilton and H. Gregory Snyder; New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2002), 3–54 [original publication: *History of Religions* 13 (1974): 165–208.].

Seth's special status is that he "neither tends flocks nor tills the soil but produces a child" (*Exc. Theod.* 54, trans. Casey). It cannot be inferred from this interpretation that Valentinians despised physical work, but instead it reflects the ancient notion of a perfect human who does the right thing intuitively, without effort or having to be taught, instructed, or commanded.

Yet another reference to the spiritual race was seen in the biblical figure of Jacob-Israel since "Israel is an allegory for the spiritual person who will see God" (*Exc. Theod.* 56). The allegory is based upon a (mistaken) understanding of the word "Israel" as meaning "a man who sees God", which we also encounter in the works of Philo of Alexandria; this is one of the clearest indications that Valentinians were familiar with, and inspired by, Hellenistic Jewish exegesis of the Book of Genesis.

Interpretations of the first chapters of Genesis also loom large in another collection of Valentinian teachings, the *Gospel of Philip* (NHC II, 3). The gospel probably recalls Valentinus' own teaching in describing how Adam irritated the cosmic powers with his speech (70 [§ 80]). On the other hand, the gospel portrays Adam as the antitype of Christ (cf. Rom. 5:12–21; 1 Cor. 15:45–48). It describes Adam as being born of "two virgins, from the spirit and the virgin earth." It must be assumed that Adam, probably due to the earthly part in him, was subject to fall since the author continues that Christ had to be born of a virgin "to mend the fall that took place in the beginning" (71 [§ 83]).

As in the *Excerpts from Theodotus*, Eve's creation is interpreted as an act of separation in the *Gospel of Philip*. The consequence of separation is death, but one's return to his or her original state obliterates death (68 [§ 71]). Christ's role is defined accordingly: his task is "to repair the primeval separation, reunite the two, to give life to those who died as a result of the separation, and to unite them." The reunion takes place in a "bridal chamber" (70 [§ 78]); scholars debate whether this term refers to a distinct Valentinian ritual, or whether it should be rather understood less literally, for example, as denoting "an implied aspect in the process of initiation."[21]

The paradise described in Genesis is portrayed in the *Gospel of Philip* as an entirely negative domain, characterized by commands and prohibitions ("[eat] this, do not eat"), while the tree of knowledge is located in another place where "I can eat everything." This tree is not identical with the tree of knowledge in the biblical paradise. The tree in paradise is identified with the Old Testament law, which supplied Adam with the knowledge of good and evil but could not save him from evil. The Old Testament law is, according to this passage, the cause of death for all those who ate from this tree of knowledge. In fact, death came into being not because of Adam's transgression but because, in paradise, God commanded to eat

[21] Thus, Einar Thomassen, *The Spiritual Seed: The Church of the "Valentinians"* (NHMS 60; Leiden: Brill, 2006), 100.

of some trees and not to eat of others (73–74 [§ 94]). This allegorical intepretation of paradise builds upon Paul's most negative comments about the law (as being ineffective, Gal. 3:21, and the indirect cause of death, Rom. 7:9–13).

Finally, the *Gospel of Philip* alludes to Cain, called "the son of the serpent," and maintains that fratricide took place because he was born of adultery (60–61 [§ 41–42]; cf. John 8:44; 1 John 3:12, 15). The passage is based upon a Jewish tradition that Cain's father was not Adam but the devil, identified with the serpent in paradise.[22] In the *Gospel of Philip*, this tradition is used to warn against intercourse between those who are of unequal status; "intercourse" should be probably understood metaphorically in this context rather than as "sexual intercourse."[23]

The *Tripartite Tractate* (NHC I, 5) draws a much gloomier picture of the creator-God than most other Valentinian sources. Accordingly, paradise is described in this text as a place of empty pleasure. The creator-God and his angels threaten Adam with death, and allow him to eat "only the food of the bad trees," whereas they do not allow him to eat either from the tree of knowledge ("that tree which had the double character") or from the tree of life. The serpent is evaluated in two different ways: on the one hand, it is itself an "evil power", but on the other, the transgression it brought about and the subsequent expulsion of the first human beings from the paradise were "a work of providence", for in this manner the humans learned how ephemeral the pleasures offered in paradise were when "compared with the eternal existence of the place of rest" (*Tri. Trac.* 106–7; trans. Thomassen).

3. Sethian and Related Texts

One of the groundbreaking contributions of Nag Hammadi scholarship has been Hans-Martin Schenke's identification of a large group of texts bearing witness to "Sethian" theology.[24] The term "Sethian" was never used as a self-

[22] For references, see Tuomas Rasimus, *Paradise Reconsidered in Gnostic Mythmaking: Rethinking Sethianism in Light of the Ophite Myth and Ritual* (NHMS 68; Leiden: Brill, 2009), ch. 2.3.

[23] Thus Marvin Meyer's translation in *The Nag Hammadi Scriptures: The International Edition* (ed. Marvin Meyer; New York: HarperOne, 2007).

[24] E.g. Hans-Martin Schenke, "The Phenomenon and Significance of Gnostic Sethianism," in *The Rediscovery of Gnosticism* (2 vols; ed. Bentley Layton; SHR 41; Leiden: Brill, 1978), 2.588–616; for Sethianism, see also John D. Turner, *Sethian Gnosticism and Platonic Tradition* (BCNHÉ 6; Quebec: Les Presses de L'Université Laval, 2001); Michael A. Williams, "Sethianism," in Marjanen and Luomanen (ed.), *A Companion to Second Century Christian ª Heretics,º* 32–63. For a critical review and substantial modification of the Sethian hypothesis, see Rasimus, *Paradise Reconsidered,* ch. 1, who suggests that "we replace Schenke's category

designation, but there were groups that designated themselves as the offspring of Seth, Adam's third son. While the Sethians probably did not form a unified social organization, they had a distinct set of beliefs and exegetical approaches in common.[25] One prominent mode of their literary activity was the creation of new etiological tales in critical dialogue with the Book of Genesis.

Sethian mythmakers envisaged the visible world as a reflection of the divine realm. Although defective, this reflection is clear enough to warrant continuity between the two worlds. What is more, the divine realm already hosts a "human population", including Adamas, Seth, and the offspring of Seth. Adamas is the model that the lesser deities imitate in fashioning the earthly Adam, and the earthly Seth bears a resemblance to the heavenly Seth. Although humankind, which the inferior gods created, is imperfect, the fact that the first humans were modelled in the image of the pre-existing "divine humans" means that the humans on earth have in themselves the potential for perfection and should strive for it.[26]

Sethians rewrote Genesis, on the one hand, to affirm that this potential exists in all human beings, and, on the other, to describe impediments that may prevent one from reaching the goal. What gives a particular flavour to the Sethian Genesis exegesis is the claim that these impediments were brought about by the Creator-God, called "Yaldabaoth" in the Sethian and related traditions, and his lackeys. Yaldabaoth is identified with the Jewish God: just like the God of the Hebrew Bible (cf. Isa 45:5; 46:9), Yaldabaoth claims to be the only god. In the Sethian and related traditions, however, this claim is considered to be empty boasting that needs to be corrected from above (e. g., *Secr. John* NHC II 11)

One of the most prominent Sethian texts is the *Secret Book of John.* The largest block of the Saviour's teaching in it comprises a radically rewritten version of Genesis. The text opens with a description of how the divine realm evolved and how the lesser deities, who created the world, came into being. This part of the story already contains numerous allusions to Genesis, such as the references to "light", "living water", "image", all linked with the Father of All (II 4), and the idea that "everything was created by the word" (II 7, trans. Meyer).[27]

The subsequent part of *Secret John*, which is focussed on the creation of humankind, follows closely the narrative outline of Genesis 1–6:[28]

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of Sethianism … with a wider one that includes texts that draw upon … Barbeloite, Sethite, and Ophite materials."

[25] Williams, "Sethianism."

[26] Cf. Williams, "Sethianism," 39–40.

[27] Cf. Karen L. King, *The Secret Revelation of John* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006), 222–23; for a similar usage of Genesis traditions in the Sethian *Trimorphic Protennoia*, see Nicola Frances Denzey, "Genesis Traditions in Conflict: The Use of Some Exegetical Traditions in the Trimorphic Protennoia and the Johannes Prologue," *VigChr* 55 (2001): 20–44.

[28] The *Secret Book of John* is known in four different versions, which can be divided into long and short recensions. My references are to the version in Nag Hammadi Codex II, which

1) The first creation of Adam (*Secr. John* II 15–20)
2) The second creation of Adam (II 20–21)
3) Paradise (II 21)
4) Adam's sleep (II 22)
5) The creation of Eve (II 22–23)
6) The births of Cain, Abel, and Seth (II 24–25)
7) The flood (II 28–29)
8) Angels and women (II 29–30)

While the sequence of events in *Secret John* follows that in Genesis, each passage involves a substantial amount of creative mythmaking: new figures and events are introduced, and old ones are interpreted from a new perspective. One example of the new figures is the long list of the names of the angels responsible for different parts in Adam's "soul-body" in the long version of *Secret John* (II 15–19). Moreover, the crucial moments of the biblical creation story are retold from another perspective. *Secret John* follows Genesis in affirming that the creator-God breathed the divine spirit into Adam, but adds that Yaldabaoth simultaneously lost this spirit (II 19). The text also describes how Adam's intelligence made him superior to his creators, and how they became envious and created him anew from "fire, earth, water" and "four fiery winds." (II 20–21). Paradise is described, as in the *Tripartite Tractate*, as a place of empty pleasures, by means of which the lesser deities try to lull Adam into ignorance. The Saviour, in turn, identifies himself as the one who instructed Adam and Eve to eat from the tree of knowledge (II 22). Eve's creation is turned into a story of how the divine intellect wakes up humans (II 22–23), while the subsequent story relates how Yaldabaoth "defiled Eve" and conceived two sons, Elohim and Yahweh, a.k.a Cain and Abel (II 23–24). The text follows Genesis in attributing the flood to the creator-God, who "regretted everything that had happened through him", but it is added that it was due to the divine Forethought that Noah was rescued (II 28; trans. Meyer).

While the biblical creation story was subject to considerable expansion also in ancient Jewish texts (e. g., *1 Enoch*), the stance towards Genesis in *Secret John* is radically different from them. In this text, the Saviour expressly urges John *not* to believe what Moses "said in his first book" (II 22); similar comments on Moses abound in the text. This raises the question of how Genesis can be used at all, if such fundamental doubts are expressed concerning its alleged author. A closer look at the passages mentioning Moses in *Secret John* shows that he

is one of the two texts representing the long recension. Moreover, Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 1.29 contains materials that are either derived from the *Secret Book of John* or traditions that are very similar to those in it. For the best synopsis of all four versions and the parallels in Irenaeus, see Michael Waldstein and Frederik Wisse, *The Apocryphon of John: Synopsis of Nag Hammadi Codices II,1; III,1; and IV,1 with BG 8502,2* (NHMS 33; Leiden: Brill, 1995).

always stands for a *literal* interpretation of the Book of Genesis, as opposed to the allegorical reading promoted in *Secret John*. What is more, the literalistic "Moses" interpretation is presented as the tradition known to the addressees of this text ("It is not as Moses wrote and *you heard* …," II 22). The allegorical interpretation in *Secret John* is, thus, offered as a *new* revelation to them. The audience should abandon the literal "Moses" interpretation and understand that the notion of God's spirit moving over the waters (Gen. 1:1) refers to Wisdom's agitation after she saw what Yaldabaoth, her son, did (II 13); that Adam's sleep (Gen. 2:21) denotes ignorance (II 22); that what was removed from Adam was the divine intellect residing in him, not his rib (Gen. 2:21; II 22–23); and that Noah and other representatives of an "immovable race" did not hide in the ark but found rescue "in a bright cloud." (II 29)

The Nature of the Rulers (NHC II, 4) offers a number of intepretations similar to those in *Secret John.* In this text, the serpent is clearly a positive figure instructing Adam and Eve that it was out of jealousy that Yaldabaoth, also called "Samael" ("the blind god"), did not allow them to eat from the tree of knowledge (89–90). The text also introduces a new child of Adam and Eve, Norea. She is a powerful female figure who replaces Seth as the ancestor of the spiritual race.[29] Large sections of the *Nature of the Rulers* run parallel to a non-Sethian text called *On the Origin of the World* (NHC II, 5), which shows the popularity such mythmaking enjoyed among early Christians.[30]

The *Revelation of Adam* offers yet another example of Sethian rewriting of the biblical narrative (NHC V, 5). The text presents itself as Adam's secret teaching to his son Seth (64, 67), who then transmitted it to his offspring (85). "Adam" retells, in first person, stories derived from Genesis, including Adam and Eve's creation; Adam's sleep; and stories related to Noah and his sons. This part ends with an allusion to the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah (75), which is interpreted as the Creator-God's attempt to destroy Seth's spiritual offspring (75; the same view is also attested in the Sethian *Holy Book of the Great Invisible Spirit*, NHC III 56). Similar to Valentinian interpretations, the *Revelation of Adam* maintains that Adam and Eve formed a primordial unity before the angry creator-God divided them into two sexes. The result of their separation from each other was that the knowledge of the true God escaped them.

While Noah belonged to the immovable race in *Secret John*, in the *Revelation of Adam* he appears on the side of the inferior God whom his sons are urged to "serve … in fear and subservience." (72) A similar vacillation occurs in Sethian and related texts regarding the serpent's role: in some texts, the serpent plays a positive role, in others a negative one.[31] Such differences show that there was no

[29] For Norea, see Pearson, *Gnosticism, Judaism, and Egyptian Christianity,* 84–94.
[30] For a closer comparison between these texts, see Rasimus, *Paradise Reconsidered.*
[31] Cf. Rasimus, *Paradise Reconsidered,* ch. 2.

normative form of Sethian Genesis exegesis.[32] Instead, mythmaking in Sethian and related texts is innovative and constantly in flux; hence the great variation in details.

4. Radical Rejection of the Hebrew Bible

Although there were already numerous instances of protest exegesis in Valentinian, Sethian, and related sources referred to above, the Book of Genesis still retains its value in them as a text that was relevant enough for allegorical interpretation and narrative expansion.[33] However radical the results thus achieved were, the umbilical cord to the Hebrew Bible is not completely cut in these sources.

In only a few Nag Hammadi texts is the Hebrew Bible condemned in its entirety. One example of the radical rejection is a text called *The Second Discourse of Great Seth* (NHC VII, 2). Its author rehashes a conventional Sethian tale of origin (52–53) but, unlike Sethians, does not see any continuity between the figures mentioned in the Hebrew Bible and the recipients of the true wisdom proclaimed by Jesus. While Sethians thought that the spiritual essence was deposited in Adam, the author of *Great Seth* mocks him as being merely "a joke," and the same goes for Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, David, Solomon, the twelve prophets, Moses, and the creator-God. The author of *Great Seth* considers the gap between the old and the new covenant insurmountable. He insists that no one knew of Christ in advance, neither Moses nor anyone else: "He did not know me, and none of those before him, from Adam to Moses and John the Baptizer, knew me or my siblings." (*Great Seth*, 63–64, trans. Meyer.) The author's aggressive polemic is directed against the Jews, characterized by their observation of dietary laws and what the author calls "bitter slavery." And yet, although the author affirms that "they never knew truth and they never will", he seems to entertain the hope that Jews may convert to Christianity: "… they can never find a mind of freedom to know, until they come know the Son of Humanity" (64, trans. Meyer).

Another text radically opposed to the Hebrew Bible is *The Testimony of Truth* (NHC IX, 3). Its author offers an abbreviated version of the story of Adam and Eve's fall and expulsion from paradise, and then continues with sweeping criticism of the god who did not allow Adam to eat from the tree of knowledge nor knew where Adam was in paradise after the fall. The conclusion: this god "has certainly shown himself to be a malicious grudger." Hence "those who read

[32] For a graphic illustration of this diversity, see the tables in Williams, *Rethinking "Gnosticism,"* 61–62.

[33] Cf. Rudolph, *Gnosis und Spätantike Religionsgeschichte*, 201.

such things" are accused of great blindness (47, trans. Pearson). The paraphrase of Genesis builds upon Jewish haggadic traditions,[34] but the author's own attitude towards this story is similar to that of some other early Christians towards Greek myths. He clearly thinks that no benefits can be gleaned from reading the Hebrew Bible. The fact that, in the subsequent paragraph, the author needs to introduce the name of the Book of Exodus to his readers suggests that they were not very familiar with the Hebrew Bible. Whereas the author of *Great Seth* was opposed to the Jews, the *Testimony of Truth* bears witness to an inner-Christian conflict over "who Christ really is" (32). In this conflict, the rebuttal of the Hebrew Bible is part of the boundary drawing against the "ignorant" Christians who spoke in favour of martyrdom and physical resurrection (31–35).

Finally, mention should be made of Irenaeus' claim that some early Christians thought highly of the biblical anti-heros, such as Cain, Esau, Core, the Sodomites – and Judas, the betrayer of Jesus. This would imply a deliberate reversal in assessing all the biblical traditions. One sign of this would be the *Gospel of Judas* which these Christians composed according to Irenaeus (*Her.* 1.31.1). Doubts have been voiced as regards the existence of a distinct sect of "Cainites" and a distinct "Cainite" system of thought.[35] Be that as it may, Irenaeus' report cannot be only a figment of his imagination: two of the Nag Hammadi writings mentioned above (the *Revelation of Adam* and the *Holy Book of the Great Invisible Spirit*) provide first-hand evidence for a positive attitude towards the Sodomites (as Seth's offspring), and as we now know, an early Christian text called the *Gospel of Judas* really existed.[36]

[34] Pearson, *Gnosticism, Judaism, and Egyptian Christianity*, 39–51.

[35] Pearson, *Gnosticism, Judaism, and Egyptian Christianity*, 105; Rasimus, *Paradise Reconsidered*, chs. 8.4–5.

[36] *Pace* Pearson, *Gnosticism, Judaism, and Egyptian Christianity*, 106n43.

Chapter 5

Johannine Traditions and Apocryphal Gospels

The reception of John's gospel in the early church has come under intense scrutiny in recent years, most extensively in the works by Titus Nagel and Charles Hill.[1] They both argue that the earliest signs of the reception of John's gospel come from the early second century (Ignatius, Papias). In addition, Hill seeks to demolish the theory he dubs as "the orthodox Johannophobia," that is, the view that orthodox Christians avoided John's gospel because of its popularity among the heretics. It is no surprise that the closer we move to the beginning of the second century, the less secure the evidence for the reception of John's gospel becomes,[2] but I believe Hill has made a solid case that the rejection of John's gospel was a relatively marginal phenomenon in the second century.[3]

In this study, I will address John's relationship to two well-known early Christian gospels, which do not figure prominently in the studies by Hill and Nagel. The first one is the *Gospel of Thomas*, which, in my view, is not depedent on John, and the second is the *Gospel of Mary*, which possibly draws upon John's

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[1] Charles E. Hill, *The Johannine Corpus in the Early Church* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004); Titus Nagel, *Die Rezeption des Johannesevangeliums im 2. Jahrhundert: Studien zu vorirenäischen Aneignung und Auslegung des vierten Evangeliums in christlicher und christlich-gnostischer Literatur* (ABG 2; Berlin: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2000).

[2] Hill's maximalist view on the use of John's gospel in the Apostolic Fathers has not gone unchallenged; cf. Andrew F. Gregory and Christopher M. Tuckett (ed.), *The Reception of the New Testament in the Apostolic Fathers* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005). The contributors to this collection find no irrefutable signs of the usage of John's gospel in Ignatius (P. Foster, 184); Polycarp's *Letter to Philippians* (M. F. Holmes, 199); the *Letter of Barnabas* (J. Carleton Paget, 237–38); *1 Clement*, (A. F. Gregory, 139–40); *2 Clement* (A. F. Gregory & C. M. Tuckett, 253), nor in *Didache* (C. M. Tuckett, 93–94).

[3] His general conclusion notwithstanding, Hill finds in a number of what he designates as "heterodox works" (= *Gos. Thom.; Tri. Prot.; 2 Apoc. Jas.; Apocr. Jas; Acts of John; Gos. Tru.*) "a predominantly antagonistic – a Johannophobic – rather than congenial 'reception.'" (Hill, *The Johannine Corpus in the Early Church*, 277; the idea is repeated on 279, 280, 293.) Later in his study, Hill also speaks of "gnostic exegetical exploitation" (285; cf. also 288 n. 319), and claims that "Valentinians … 'spoiled' John's prologue" (286). In fact, it is impossible to find a single point where Hill would grant that a "heretic" interpretation of John's gospel is in any manner justified. Clement of Alexandria, for one, showed a more tolerant attitude towards his Valentinian opponents. Though he mostly disagreed with them, he was also open-minded enough to be able to use one passage stemming from Valentinus to *support* his own argument (*Misc.* 3.59); cf. Christoph Markschies, *Valentinus Gnosticus?: Untersuchungen zur valentinianischen Gnosis, mit einem Kommentar zu den Fragmenten Valentins* (WUNT 65; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1992), 87–88.

gospel to a greater extent than is often recognized. Nagel devotes only one footnote to the *Gospel of Thomas* in his massive study,[4] and finds the affinities between the gospels of Mary and John quite superficial.[5] Hill does not discuss the *Gospel of Mary* at all, and is, as I will detail later, uncharacteristically hazy on the relationship between John and *Thomas*.

1. Different Approaches to the Canon among Early Christians

It is difficult to completely avoid the distinction between "canonical" and "noncanonical" or "apocryphal" gospels in contexts like this, but one should be aware of the intellectual baggage that comes along with it. It may be wishful thinking that the term "noncanonical" can be used in the neutral sense of "not included in the canon," since, in that usage, the canon is already made the watershed that divides early Christian gospels into two separate groups. It takes only a little step from this division to a more essentializing distinction between two different sets of gospels, the early and important ones that are inside the canon, and the late and (historically and/or theologically) less worthy ones that are outside the canon.[6]

The distinction between "canonical" and "noncanonical" may also cause us, as scholars of these texts, to be focused on seeking in noncanonical gospels traces of reactions to the canonical ones. It is, however, not self-evident that all second-century Christians composing and reading new gospels displayed "canonical awareness" in the same manner. David Brakke has helpfully clarified the issue by delineating a typology of three different kinds of early Christian scriptural practices and their social contexts, which are study and contemplation; revelation and continued inspiration; and communal worship and edification.[7] The first setting was characteristic of "academic" Christians who came together to carefully study, evaluate, and edit texts, and probed into their "true" meaning, sometimes by means of allegorical commentary.[8] For these people, "the canons … were flexible, often consisting of a central core of truly authoritative works and then a shifting body of other significant and learned literature." As for the second

[4] Nagel, *Die Rezeption des Johannesevangeliums*, 48n167.

[5] See below sub-chapter 3.

[6] For only one illustration of this sentiment, see Simon Gathercole, *The Gospel of Judas: Rewriting Early Christian History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 141–49.

[7] David Brakke, "Scriptural Practices in Early Christianity:Towards a New History of the New Testament Canon," in *Invention, Rewriting, Usurpation: Discursive Fights over Religious Traditions in Antiquity* (ed. Jörg Ulrich, Anders-Christian Jacobsen and David Brakke; Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2012), 263–80.

[8] Brakke includes in this group Marcion, Justin, Clement of Alexandria, Valentinus, Origen, and most intriguingly, Eusebius of Caesarea.

group, that is, the Christians who experienced new revelations, "the 'canons' … were not only flexible but also expanding." For these Christians, "received scriptures provided the materials for the writing of new revelations, as visionary accounts were recycled or narratives were simply rewritten." It was in the third setting of communal worship that a closed canon became most important since this setting required clear decisions, usually made by bishops, as to what texts could be publicly read in the assembly. The decisive issue in this context was to have a limited set of generally approved texts that were considered to promote faith, understood in the sense of "holding basic orthodox doctrines." As the famous incident of the bishop Serapion's wavering between acceptance and rejection of the *Gospel of Peter* demonstrates,[9] texts were sometimes approved even without reading them, and decisions could be retracted afterwards based upon more detailed information about the contents of such texts.

The *Gospel of Mary* seems to belong to Brakke's group #2 since it presents itself as a new revelation, some parts of which even the disciples did not know previously. This is also probably the best category for the *Gospel of Thomas*, introduced as a collection of the secret teachings of Jesus.[10] In consequence, these texts should not be evaluated with categories based upon the idea of a fixed canon. A canonical mode of explanation may be a tempting option to New Testament scholars; it may be argued that the authors of non-canonical gospels used details derived from the canonical gospels for the purpose of self-legitimation,[11] of making converts of more "canonical" Christians,[12] or of disputing them. It is implied in all such explanations that the non-canonical gospels were written "under some sort of canonical constraint."[13] This mode of explanation not only produces unnecessarily flat, deterministic and predictable interpretations as to

[9] Eusebius, *Church History*, 6.13.3.

[10] This conclusion can be supported with Larry Hurtado's recent reexamination of the Greek fragments of *Thomas*; cf. Larry Hurtado, "The Greek Fragments of the Gospel of Thomas as Artefacts: Papyrological Observations on Papyrus Oxyrhynchus 1, Papyrus Oxyrhynchus 654, and Papyrus Oxyrhynchus 655," in *Das Thomasevangelium: Entstehung ± Rezeption ± Theologie* (ed. Jörg Frey, Enno Edzard Popkes and Jens Schröter; BZNW 157; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2008), 19–32. Hurtado infers from the layout of these fragments that they come from copies intended for private study. The same conclusion can probably be made as regards the two Greek fragments of the *Gospel of Mary*: the hands in the extant copies are of relatively poor quality, which could make them less suitable for public reading.

[11] E. g., Hill, *The Johannine Corpus in the Early Church*, 269.

[12] Thus, e. g., Hill, *The Johannine Corpus in the Early Church*, 258, on the *Apocryphon of James*: "The apocryphon's repetition of certain Johannine concepts shows that these concepts were simply part of the playing field for anyone wanting to compete for adherents from among orthodox Church members. Certain things had to be taken for granted – at least ostensibly."

[13] D. Moody Smith, *John Among the Gospels* (2nd ed.; Columbia, SC; The University of South Carolina Press, 2001), 192 (on the relationship between John and the Synoptics). This summarizes his fuller discussion in idem, "The Problem of John and the Synoptics in Light of the Relation between Apocryphal and Canonical Gospels," in *John and the Synoptics* (ed. Adelbert Denaux; BETL 101; Leuven: Leuven University Press/Peeters, 1992), 148–62.

why materials derived from earlier gospels were used in later ones, but it also does not pay sufficient attention to the independent manner these materials are employed in the non-canonical gospels. We should not too easily take the potential references in the latter gospels to the already existing ones as statements issued in the great canon debate.

2. John and the *Gospel of Thomas*: The Gospels in Conflict?

The relationship between John's gospel and the *Gospel of Thomas* attracted relatively little attention until the 1990's.[14] What then moved the topic into greater prominence was the suggestion that these gospels bear witness to two early Christian communities in conflict over a number of theologically important issues, including the bodily resurrection,[15] the possibility and salvific value of humans' mystical ascent to God,[16] and the conflicting views as to whether the primordial, divine light finds residence in all humans or only in Jesus.[17] It should be added that although these views have been energetically discussed among Nag Hammadi scholars, they have had little impact on Johannine scholarship in general.[18]

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[14] My account of the relationship between John and *Thomas* draws upon Ismo Dunderberg, *The Beloved Disciple in Conflict?: Revisiting the Gospels of John and Thomas* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

[15] Gregory J. Riley, *Resurrection Reconsidered: Thomas and John in Controversy* (Minneapolis, Minn: Fortress, 1995).

[16] April D. DeConick, *Voices of the Mystics: Early Christian Discourse in the Gospels of John and Thomas and Other Ancient Christian Literature* (JSNTSup 157; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001); cf. eadem, *Seek to See Him: Ascent and Vision Mysticism in the Gospel of Thomas* (VigChrSup 33; Leiden: Brill, 1996).

[17] Elaine Pagels, "Exegesis of Genesis 1 in the Gospels of Thomas and John," *JBL* 118 (1999): 477–96; cf. also eadem, *Beyond Belief: The Secret Gospel of Thomas* (New York: Random House, 2003).

[18] By way of illustration, a massive commentary on John, promoted as containing "over 20,000 ancient extra-biblical references," features only four references to individual sayings of the *Gospel of Thomas*: Craig S. Keener, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary* (2 vols.; Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2003). Keener does not completely reject the possibility that John's gospel contains polemics against "traditions that later became the *Gospel of Thomas*" (1209). If Keener is willing to admit that much, the tiny number of his references to *Thomas* becomes especially striking. Keener's lack of interest in *Thomas* is probably due to his conviction that this gospel is both secondary and "gnostic." Keener (36) maintains that "most scholars today agree … that even the *Gospel of Thomas* in its present form … is gnostic." This position has never been the consensus, and it has been in past fifteen years repeatedly challenged by specialists working with this text; cf., e.g., DeConick, *Seek to See Him*, 16–27; Antti Marjanen, "Is *Thomas* a Gnostic Gospel?," in *Thomas at the Crossroads: Essays on the Gospel of Thomas* (ed. Risto Uro; Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1998), 107–39; Stephen J. Patterson, "Jesus Meets Plato: The Theology of the Gospel of Thomas," in Frey et alii (ed.), *Das Thomasevangelium*, 181–205.

The striking fact is that, on the one hand, the *Gospel of Thomas* shares a good deal of common ground with John's gospel in terms of ideas, and yet, on the other hand, there are astonishingly few verbal affinities between these two like-minded gospels. Concerning the similarities, it is claimed in both gospels that they were written down by a disciple whose relationship to Jesus was especially close: John introduces the enigmatic character of "the disciple whom Jesus loved" and, in the final section, attributes the entire gospel to him (John 21:24–25), whereas *Thomas* begins by stating that the words of Jesus in this collection are "the hidden sayings that the living Jesus uttered and Judas Thomas Didymos wrote down" (*Gos. Thom. incipit*). Both gospels describe Jesus as the ultimate origin of all things and portray his sojourn in the world as taking place in the "flesh."[19] Most of humankind, especially the Jews, but also the disciples, are in a state of ignorance and constantly misunderstand the person, words, and intentions of Jesus according to both gospels.[20] Both gospels attest to a dualism of light and dark, and let Jesus identify himself as "the light." Although this light shines in the darkness, "the world" remains a threating place, in which the true disciples of Jesus are outsiders and subject to hostility and persecution.[21]

While themes stemming from the Hebrew Bible are adopted and elaborated in John and *Thomas*, they also posit a contrast between the Jewish scripture and the revelation brought about by Jesus.[22] Similar teachings are ascribed to him in both gospels. For example, the traditional promise that some followers of Jesus "will not taste death … until the kingdom of God has come with power" (Mark 9:1, NRSV) is rephrased in both gospels in ways that drop the reference to God's imminent kingdom and underline the importance of listening, understanding, and obeying the words of Jesus to bring about immortality.[23]

Consequently, both gospels embrace what we might call, in want of a better term, "realized eschatology": events that were traditionally expected to happen at the end of time are portrayed as having already taken place. According to John,

[19] Origin of all things: John 1:1–3; *Gos. Thom.* 77; incarnation: John 1:14; *Gos. Thom.* 28.

[20] Ignorance of humankind: John 1:5, 10; *Gos. Thom.* 28. *Thomas* takes for granted that the Jews misunderstand Jesus (*Gos. Thom.* 43); in John, this theme is elaborated throughout the story, especially in chapters 5–10.

[21] E. g., John 15:18–19; 16:1–4; *Gos. Thom.* 21, 68. *Gos. Thom.* 69 places a different emphasis by pronouncing a blessing for those "persecuted in their hearts." This does not have to mean that Thomasine Christians were only concerned with "inner" tortures but were not faced with, or worried about, persecutions of Christians in the Roman Empire.

[22] E. g., John 1:17; *Gos. Thom.* 52.

[23] John 8:51–52; *Gos. Thom.* 1; cf. also *Gos. Thom.* 19, where the promise of immortality is connected with knowledge of "five trees in paradise" that never change. The trees of paradise should in this context probably be taken as a metaphor for the words of Jesus. This interpretation is suggested not only by the repetition of the promise of immortality, which in *Gos. Thom.* 1 was already linked with the words of Jesus, but also by the immediate context in *Gos. Thom.* 19: the saying of the trees of paradise follows immediately after one emphasizing the importance of the words of Jesus: "If you become my followers *and listen to my words,* these stones will serve you."

the verdict on the unbelievers is already pronounced (3:18), the dead are already being raised (5:25), and the believers will never die (11:26). According to *Thomas,* one should understand that God's kingdom, the repose of the dead, and the new world are not waiting for one in the future but are already present (3, 51, 113).[24]

Moreover, John and *Thomas* are engaged with similar kinds of exegetical traditions. Above all, both of them are indebted to Hellenistic Jewish exegesis of the book of Genesis, though in quite different ways. In John, Jesus is identified both with the divine Word, through whom God created the world in the beginning, and with "the true light," who came from above to the world below (1:1, 9; 12:35–36). *Thomas* offers a more "democratic" interpretation of the primordial light dwelling among humans: the followers of Jesus should also conceive of themselves as coming from – and on their way back to – the realm of light.[25] In addition, *Thomas* displays a keen interest in issues arising from the first chapters of Genesis, including the trees of paradise (*Gos. Thom.* 19), Adam's condition (*Gos. Thom.* 85), and "images" (*Gos. Thom.* 83–84). The promise that one who finds "will rule over all" (*Gos. Thom.* 3) not only coincides with a well-established philosophical tradition, but also reclaims the birthright of the first human beings to rule over creation (Gen. 1:26–28).[26] The hope of returning to a state where there is "neither male nor female" implies that salvation is envisioned in *Thomas* as involving one's return to the original human state, reaching back to a time when the first human being was not yet divided to become two sexes.[27]

The different interpretations of the Book of Genesis in John and *Thomas* illustrate a broader problem pertaining to their relationship. In spite of their shared interest in Genesis exegesis, their interpretations do not coincide. John's gospel does not display any interest in Adam, paradise and the primordial unity of sexes, all of which are significant themes in *Thomas*' special material. In fact, Paul would offer a far greater amount of materials related to *Thomas*' Genesis exegesis than John (e. g. 1 Cor 15). *Thomas*' exegesis of the book of Genesis, thus, is based upon some other traditions than those attested in John. The same goes for the idea of "realized eschatology" embraced in both gospels: they agree in principle but express the idea differently. The only thing the two gospels have in common as for their claims of authorship, is the idea that the author was a disciple whose relationship to Jesus was especially close; the author's intimacy to Jesus is stated in different ways. Thomas is not described as "the disciple whom Jesus loved," but as one who understood Jesus better than the others (*Gos. Thom.* 13). In John,

[24] In neither gospel does "realized eschatology" rule out the expectation of an eschatological turn still lying in the future; cf. John 5:28–29; *Gos. Thom.* 11, 111.

[25] *Gos. Thom.* 49–50; cf. also *Gos. Thom.* 24: "There is light in a human of light, and it gives light to the whole world."

[26] Cf. Pagels, "Exegesis of Genesis 1."

[27] For the importance of Genesis exegesis in *Thomas* see, e. g., (in addition to Pagels' studies mentioned above), Marghareta Lelyveld, *Les logia de la vie dans l'Évangile selon Thomas: à la recherche d'une tradition et d'une rédaction* (NHS 34; Leiden: Brill, 1987).

a figure introduced as "the disciple whom Jesus loved" is placed closest to Jesus at the Last Supper, and featured as an eyewitness to the key points in John's story of the passion and resurrection of Jesus. If there was a desire to emphasize this disciple's special insight into Jesus, this aspect is very weakly indicated in John's gospel; it is the beloved disciple's character as a reliable eyewitness that provides the legitimation for his account.[28]

Thus, while it is true that John and *Thomas* are "much closer to each other in spirit than either is to the Synoptics,"[29] they are essentially independent from each other as texts. There are only a handful of cases where a literary relationship between them can be seriously considered, and even in these cases the evidence remains quite weak. While there are a number of scholars who insist that *Thomas* is dependent on John's gospel, the estimations as to how many sayings in *Thomas* offer decisive proof for this view have gone down dramatically, from the two dozen that Raymond Brown found conclusive in his pioneering article of 1963,[30] to only two sayings discussed by Titus Nagel.[31] Charles Hill, as I mentioned above, is hazy on this issue: he refers to "the parallels often cited which do demonstrate that the author [of the *Gospel of Thomas*] knew the Fourth Gospel," but does not specify what parallels he has in mind.[32] Hill follows Nicholas Perrin in claiming that *Thomas* is dependent on Tatian's *Diatessaron* and was originally composed in Syriac only "some years before 200."[33] This view, which from a more critical perspective would only seem a conscious attempt to push *Thomas* as late as the evidence possibly admits, underlies Hill's proposal (for which he adduces no proof!) that the Johannine parallels in *Thomas* "come, as likely as not, only from the *Diatessaron*."[34]

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[28] Cf. Richard Bauckham, "The Beloved Disciple as Ideal Author," *JSNT* 49 (1993): 21–44; Dunderberg, *The Beloved Disciple in Conflict?*, 143–47.

[29] Riley, *Resurrection Reconsidered*, 3.

[30] Raymond E. Brown, "The Gospel of Thomas and St John's Gospel," *NTS* 9 (1962–1963): 155–77.

[31] See n. 4 above. For a more generous counting, see Craig A. Evans, Robert Leslie Webb and Richard A. Wiebe, *The Nag Hammadi Texts & the Bible: A Synopsis & Index* (NTTS 28; Leiden, Brill, 1993), 87–144, in which almost three dozen Johannine parallels to *Thomas* are cited, thus indicating "the reasonable probability that there is some form of influence between the Scripture and the text of the Nag Hammadi tractates" (xviii). While "between" in this formulation appears to leave open the direction of the influence, the editors' subsequent comments on different forms of that influence unmistakably show that what they have in mind is one-way traffic from scripture to the Nag Hammadi tracates (ibid. xviii–xix).

[32] Hill, *The Johannine Corpus in the Early Church,* 270–77. Hill only offers a set of three sayings as illustrations of what he considers "the important divergences between John and *Thomas*" (275–76): *Gos. Thom.* 49//John 16:28; *Gos. Thom.* 50a//John 1:9; 8:12; 19:8–9; *Gos. Thom.* 19a//John 8:58. He offers no closer justification for, or analysis of, these cases.

[33] Hill, *The Johannine Corpus in the Early Church,* 272; cf. Nicholas Perrin, *Thomas and Tatian: The Relationship between* the Gospel of Thomas *and the* Diatessaron (SBLAB 5; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2002). Perrin restates his view in a more popular format in idem, *Thomas, the Other Gospel* (London: SPCK, 2007).

[34] Hill, *The Johannine Corpus in the Early Church,* 274.

Leaving aside the heavy criticism Perrin's work has attracted in most quarters,[35] Hill's conclusion based upon this work only begs the question. Granted that John's gospel was reproduced almost in its entirety in the *Diatessaron*, the paucity of Johannine sayings and the predominance of synoptic ones in *Thomas* would only appear even more perplexing than it already is. If the author of *Thomas* knew and used the *Diatessaron*, we should conclude that he carefully identified in, and picked up from, this source a large number of synoptic sayings, and as carefully identified and almost completely left out the Johannine sayings materials available in the same source.[36] Such an approach would seem inconceivable for an author whose many theological views obviously stand closer to those in John's gospel than to those in the synoptics.

I understand the rationale behind Hill's reasoning that the later we push the composition of the *Gospel of Thomas*, the more likely it becomes that its author(s), knew John's gospel (either directly or through an intermediary). However, the argument should probably be turned upside down: The later one dates *Thomas*, the more difficult it becomes to explain the paucity of Johannine sayings in it.

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[35] As Tony Burke points out, Perrin's views on *Thomas* have found acclaim among evangelical NT scholars; cf. Tony Burke, "Heresy Hunting in the New Millennium," *Sciences Religieuses* 39(3) (2010): 405–20, esp. 414. Other New Testament scholars and, most significantly, specialists on Syriac literature have been extremely critical of Perrin's analysis and conclusions; for the latters' damning reviews of his work, see Jan Joosten, Review of Perrin, *Thomas and Tatian, Aramaic Studies* 2 (2004): 126–30 ("I would not recommend the book to anyone," 130); Paul-Hubert Poirier, Review of Perrin, *Thomas and Tatian*, *Hugoye* 6/2 (2003) [http://www.bethmardutho.org/images/hugoye/volume6/hv6n2prpoirier.pdf] (last visited September 25, 2014); Peter J. Williams, Review of Perrin, *Thomas and Tatian*, *EJT* 13 (2004): 139–40; for a more detailed reexamination of Perrin's case, see Peter J. Williams, "Alleged Syriac Catchwords in the Gospel of Thomas," *VigChr* 63 (2009): 71–82: "Perrin has not provided a compelling basis for his dating of the Gospel of Thomas to the late second century." (82) Unfortunately, Perrin has not responded to any of the criticism levelled against his earlier work in his later publications. One critical detail is Perrin's claim that the whole of the *Gospel of Thomas*, as it now stands in Coptic translation, was originally composed in one go. This view does not take due notice of the fact that, in P. Oxy. 1, saying 77b is joined directly to saying 30, which alone should indicate that the Coptic *Thomas* is not necessarily simply a translation of an "original" *Thomas* (if such a thing ever existed). In his more recent book Perrin pushes the date of *Thomas* even later than before by suggesting that *Thomas* 13, in which he sees hidden references to three canonical gospels (Mark, Matthew and John), was written in response to Serapion's "list of banned books" (Perrin, *Thomas, the Other Gospel,* 116–17). In that case, it should be assumed that *Thomas* was not written soon after the *Diatessaron*, as Perrin previously argued, but only a few years before 200, which makes the span of time needed for its translation, copying and transportation into Egypt even narrower. In addition, Perrin's interpretation of *Thomas* 13 is 1) speculative because we only know of Serapion's stance toward the *Gospel of Peter*; 2) spurious because the identification of "Peter" with Mark's gospel and "Matthew" with Matthew's in Thomas 13 is far from evident; and 3) odd because it makes little sense for an author using the *Diatessaron* as his source to wage war on individual canonical gospels.

[36] Strikingly, one faces the same problem with the suggestion that *Thomas* comes from an early stage of the Johannine community (cf. Stevan L. Davies, *The Gospel of Thomas and Christian Wisdom* [New York: Seabury Press, 1983]): the paucity of distinctly Johannine sayings in *Thomas* is very difficult to explain also in this case.

It is often too easily assumed that all kinds of traits in *Thomas* with even the faintest resemblance to something said in John's gospel are signs that *Thomas* is dependent on John. A closer look at individual cases shows how thin the evidence in most cases is. Since it is not possible to analyze here individually all instances presented as supporting the view that *Thomas* depends on John's gospel, I have chosen to discuss the set of five examples James Charlesworth and Craig Evans have presented to this effect,[37] assuming that theirs is a short list of the best candidates. Since two items in their list are related to the usage of light imagery, I will divide my discussion into the following four items:

1) the metaphor of a spring (*Gos. Thom.* 13; John 4:13–15; cf. also John 7:38);
2) the incarnation of Jesus (*Gos. Thom.* 28; John 1:14);
3) the saying of seeking and not finding (*Gos. Thom.* 38; John 7:32–36); and
4) the imagery of light: Jesus' self-identification as "the Light" (*Gos. Thom.* 77/ John 8:12; cf. 9:5), and the light shining in the world (*Gos. Thom.* 24; John 1:9).

1. The metaphor of a spring (*Gos. Thom.* 13; John 4:13–15; cf. also John 7:38).
Although the spring metaphor used in both gospels is customarily referred to in scholarly literature discussing their relationship,[38] the parallel itself is very remote and thus inconclusive. The only thing the two passages have in common is the metaphor itself; the ways the metaphor is used in each gospel are completely independent. Even the motion of water in the spring is described differently: John describes water gushing up from a spring (πηγὴ ὕδατος ἁλλομένου, John 4:14), while *Thomas* speaks of a "bubbling spring" (ⲧⲡⲏⲏⲩ ⲉⲧⲃⲣ̄ⲃⲣⲉ). Since the spring metaphor is common coinage in the Wisdom tradition (cf. Prov. 16:22; 18:4; 1. Bar. 3:12), and in the absence of any closer verbal links between John and *Thomas* at this point, there is simply not a sufficient textual basis for the assumption that *Thomas* 13 draws upon John 4:13–15.[39]

2. The incarnation (Gos. Thom. 28 // John 1:14).
What brings the two gospels together at this point is the idea of the incarnation itself. The idea is expressed in two strikingly different ways, which, again, renders the view that *Thomas* is dependent on John unlikely. While it is said in John that Jesus "became flesh" (John 1:14), the saying attributed to Jesus in *Thomas* 28 prefers the language of becoming visible: "I appeared to them in the flesh (ϫⲉⲓⲟⲩⲱⲛϩ ⲉⲃⲟⲗ ⲛⲁⲩ ⲉ̄ⲛ̄ ⲥⲁⲣⲝ̄)."

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[37] James H. Charlesworth and Craig E. Evans, "Jesus in the Agrapha and Apocryphal Gospels," in *Studying the Historical Jesus: Evaluations of the State of Current Research* (ed. Bruce Chilton and Craig A. Evans; NTTS 19; Leiden: Brill, 1994), 479–533, esp. 498–99.

[38] The most recent example is Perrin, *Thomas, the Other Gospel*, 112, who takes it for granted that the common metaphor is a sign of *Thomas's* usage of John's gospel.

[39] For a further discussion of other minor details allegedly indicating the dependence of *Thomas* 13 on John, I refer to Dunderberg, *The Beloved Disciple in Conflict?*, 72–76.

The verb form ὤφθην, used in the extant Greek fragment of *Thomas* 28 (P. Oxy. 1.11–12), confirms the impression that the Thomasine saying stands closer to other traditions, such as that recorded in 1 Timothy 3:16 ("He was revealed in the flesh, vindicated in spirit, seen [ὤφθη] by angels"), than to John's gospel. It does not have to be assumed, however, that *Thomas* 28 draws upon 1 Timothy either since the language of appearance was already used in 1 Baruch to describe the divine Wisdom: she "appeared (ὤφθη) on earth, and lived among humans" (1 Bar. 3:38). This tradition was adopted and combined with the idea of incarnation in *Thomas*. John also resorts to the Wisdom tradition in describing the incarnation but the term he derives from this tradition (ἐσκήνωσεν, John 1:14; cf. Sir 24:8; Barn 5:14) does not coincide with that in *Thomas*. It would seem too farfetched to assume that the author of *Thomas* 28 was inspired by the idea of incarnation as asserted in John 1:14, but wanted to create a completely unidentifiable version of this passage and for some reason also wanted to replace the reference the Johannine passage contained to Wisdom literature with an allusion to another New Testament text belonging to that same tradition. It seems more probable that John and *Thomas* describe the incarnation of Jesus in terms derived from Jewish Wisdom literature but independently of each other.[40]

3. Seeking and not finding Jesus (*Gos. Thom.* 38; John 7:32–36). This is one of the two instances where there is a close verbal parallel between *Thomas* and John:[41]

Gos. Thom. 38:	John 7:34, 36
The days will come when you will seek me and you will not find me.	
ογῆ ϩῆϩοογ ναϣωπε ñτετñϣιne ñcωει τετναϩε αν εροει	ζητήσετέ με καὶ οὐχ εὑρήσετέ [με], καὶ ὅπου εἰμὶ ἐγὼ ὑμεῖς οὐ δύνασθε ἐλθεῖν. τετναϣιne ñcωι ñτετñτñϩε εροι αγω πηα ανοκ ϵϯ ñηοϥ ñτωτñ ñτετναϣει αν εροϥ.

While in John the saying is addressed to the Jews, the addressees are left unspecified in *Thomas*; the context, which may be secondary, suggests that the saying is addressed to the disciples.[42] The saying is not a later addition to *Thomas* since

[40] The expression "stand in the midst of," used in *Thomas* 28 and John 1:26 remains inconclusive since it is also used elsewhere in the gospels (Luke 24:36; John 20:19).

[41] *Thomas* 38 is one of the two cases discussed by Nagel, *Die Rezeption des Johannesevangeliums*, 48 n. 167. Cf. also Harold W. Attridge, "'Seeking' and 'Asking' in Q, Thomas and John," in *From Quest to Q* (ed. Jon Ma. Asgeirsson, Kristin de Troyer and Marvin W. Meyer; BETL 146; Leuven: Leuven University Press/Peeters, 2000), 295–302.

[42] The disciples are mentioned in the previous saying, and their presence is implied in the following one, in which a distinction is made between the Pharisees and "you."

it was, in all likelihood, included in one of the Greek fragments (P. Oxy. 655), although the text is severely damaged at this point.

On the one hand, the repetition of the saying by the Jews in John would make this feature more easily memorable, which could explain the adoption of the saying in *Thomas*. On the other hand, *Thomas* does not have the latter part of the saying in John, which has a more distinctly "Johannine" ring to it (ὅπου εἰμὶ ἐγώ = John 12:26; 14:3; 17:24; cf. ὅπου ἐγὼ ὑπάγω, John 8:21–22; 13:33; 14:4). What is more, the saying in *Thomas* starts with the prophetic expression "the days will come," which points to an earlier tradition of the sayings of Jesus (cf. Mark 2:20par.).[43] It is noteworthy that *Thomas* uses this expression and not its Johannine equivalent ἔρχεται ὥρα (John 4:21, 23; 5:25, 28; 16:2, 25, 32; cf. 12:23; 13:1; 16:4, 21), and that the expression appears in *Thomas* in a form different from the Coptic New Testament, where another verb and tense are used (ογⲛ ϩⲉⲛϩⲟⲟⲩ ⲛⲛⲩ, Luke 17:22; 21:6). *Thomas* is thus not dependent on the Coptic translation of the synoptic gospels here.

Though certainty can rarely be achieved in cases like this, it is far from obvious that *Thomas* depends on John here. A similar saying is ascribed to the divine Wisdom in Proverbs 1:28 (LXX ζητήσουσιν με κακοὶ καὶ οὐκ εὑρήσουσιν),[44] and the distinctly Johannine elements added to this saying are absent in *Thomas*. Hence, it is likely that the part of the saying that is common to both gospels goes back to an earlier tradition of the words of Jesus where he was already identified with the divine Wisdom. It is conceivable that, in John, the saying formed a traditional kernel, which the Johannine author then expanded into a typical scene with the Jews perplexed over, and therefore repeating, the core saying (cf., e. g., John 6:42).

4. Jesus identified as the light of the world (*Gos. Thom.* 77//John 8:12; cf. 9:5)

Gos. Thom. 77	John 8:12
I am the light over all things. I am all. From me has all come from and all comes close to me. Split a piece of wood: I am there. Lift up a stone, and you will find me there.	
Coptic *Thomas*:	
ⲁⲛⲟⲕ ⲡⲉ ⲡⲟⲩⲉⲓⲛ ⲫⲁⲉⲓ ⲉⲧⲥⲓϫⲱⲟⲩ ⲧⲏⲣⲟⲩ	ἐγώ εἰμι τὸ φῶς τοῦ κόσμου ⲁⲛⲟⲕ ⲡⲉ ⲡⲟⲩⲉⲓⲛ ⲙ̄ⲡⲕⲟⲥⲙⲟⲥ.

[43] The use of the expression in Luke is redactional with certainty in 21:6 (cf. Mark 13:2), and possibly Luke 17:22 (for which there is no parallel in Matthew). The expression does not occur in John.

[44] The background of John 7:34 in Jewish Wisdom theology is generally acknowledged; cf., e. g., Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John I±XII* (AncB 29; New Haven, CT: Yale University Press [orig. New York: Doubleday], 1966), 318.

Gos. Thom. 77	John 8:12

ⲁⲛⲟⲕ ⲡⲉ ⲡⲧⲏⲣϥ ⲛ̄ⲧⲁⲡⲧⲏⲣϥ ⲉⲓ ⲉⲃⲟⲗ ϧⲉⲛ ⲧⲏⲣⲧ ⲁⲩⲱ
ⲛ̄ⲧⲁⲡⲧⲏⲣϥ ⲡⲱϩ ϣⲁⲣⲟⲉⲓ
ⲡⲱϩ ⲛ̄ⲛⲟⲩϣⲉ ⲁⲛⲟⲕ ⲫ̄ⲙⲁⲩ
ⲫⲓ ⲛ̄ⲡⲱⲙⲉ ⲉϩⲣⲁⲓ ⲁⲩⲱ ⲧⲉⲧⲛⲁϩⲉ ⲉⲣⲟⲉⲓ ⲙ̄ⲙⲁⲩ

P. Oxy. 1:27–30
ἔγει[ρ]ον τὸν λίθον κἀκεῖ εὑρήσεις με· σχίσον
τὸ ξύλον κἀγὼ ἐκεῖ εἰμι.
Lift up a stone and you will find me; split
a piece of wood, and I am there.

The most important affinity here is the self-identification of Jesus as the light.[45] The I-Am saying itself is not an undisputable sign of *Thomas*' dependence on John, since John neither invented this form,[46] nor was he the only author to ascribe such sayings to Jesus.[47] This much said, the possibility that *Thomas* 77 depends on John cannot be excluded.[48] What is striking is the absence of the I-Am saying in one of the extant Greek fragments of *Thomas*, where the latter part of *Thomas* 77 follows immediately after *Thomas* 30. The difference between the Greek and the Coptic versions may, as Enno Edzard Popkes has recently affirmed, indicate that the first half of *Thomas* 77 is, in its entirety, a late addition to *Thomas*.[49] The odds are that the two halves of the saying were combined

[45] The portrayal of Jesus as the origin of all things, affirmed in different ways in John and *Thomas*, is yet another piece of the theology inspired by Wisdom traditions. The language of "all" brings *Thomas* closer to Pauline tradition (cf. 1 Cor. 8:6; Rom. 11:36; Col. 1:16) than to John.

[46] For similar I-Am sayings in Isis aretalogies, the existence of which sometimes tends to be forgotten in Johannine scholarship, see now Silke Petersen, *Brot, Licht und Weinstock: Intertextuelle Analysen johanneischer Ich-Bin-Worte* (NovTSup 127; Leiden: Brill, 2008), 181–94.

[47] Cf. Pseudo-Clement, *Hom.* 2.52.2–3 ("I am the gate of life."); 3.53.3 ("I am he of whom Moses prophesied saying, 'The Lord our God will raise from your brothers a prophet like me. You should listen to him in all matters; who does not hear that prophet shall be killed'"). While it cannot be excluded that the former saying is dependent on John (cf. John 10:9), the latter seems independent and bears witness to what seems to be a very archaic christology, based upon Deut. 18:15–16 (cf. Acts 3:22–23; 7:37).

[48] I here modify the position I took in my earlier study (Dunderberg, *The Beloved Disciple in Conflict?*, 106–9) in light of Enno Popkes, "'Ich bin das Licht:' Erwägungen zur Verhältnisbestimmung des Thomasevangeliums und der johanneischen Schriften anhand der Lichtmetaphorik," in *Kontexte des Johannesevangeliums: Das vierte Evangelium in religions- und traditionsgeschichtlicher Perspektive* (ed. Jörg Frey, Udo Schnelle and Juliane Schlegel; WUNT 175; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2004), 641–74; idem, *Das Menschenbild des Thomasevangeliums: Untersuchungen zu seiner religionsgeschichtlichen und chronologischen Einordnung* (WUNT 206; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2007), 98–100.

[49] Popkes (*Das Menschenbild des Thomasevangeliums*, 137) finds it conceivable that the saying "I am the light" was added to *Thomas* at the latest possible stage: Popkes maintains that the saying was added by the compilers of the Nag Hammadi codices to make *Thomas* more compatible with the *Secret Book of John*, which precedes *Thomas* in NHC II. This conclusion, which would push the date of the addition to the middle of the fourth century, cannot be

only when the gospel was being translated into Coptic since the juxtaposition produces a catchword association that only works in Coptic. The text as it now stands creates a pun based upon two meanings of the Coptic verb ⲡⲱϩ: "to reach, come close, approach" on the one hand, and "to split" on the other.

If the first half of *Thomas* 77 became part of this gospel at a very late stage, that is, in the late third century at the earliest, then it may seem inconceivable that it came into being without any knowledge of John's gospel. In my view, however, we cannot be completely sure about the late origin of the first half of *Thomas* 77. What the absence of the I-Am saying in the Greek version and the pun based upon the Coptic language prove is that the *combination* of the two halves in *Thomas* 77 is late. This does not exclude the possibility that the former part of the saying could have been elsewhere in the Greek *Thomas* and was joined with the latter part of *Thomas* 77 when the gospel was translated into Coptic. Unfortunately, it is not possible to offer solid proof for one theory or another. Since the extant Greek fragments of *Thomas* only reach up to saying 39, it is impossible to reach secure conclusions about earlier versions of *Thomas* after this point – unless we assume that all remaining sayings, that is, 40–114, are later additions, but this probably would go too far.

The results of the four cases I have discussed above are thus meager: three of four cases contain no clear evidence that *Thomas* draws upon John, and even in the final fourth example, the case for *Thomas*' dependence is not so much based upon the textual affinity itself as it is on the reasoning that the saying "I am the light" was so late an addition to *Thomas* that ignorance of John's gospel no longer seems to be an option.

I hope to be excused for not discussing here in any great detail the theories based on the assumption that John and *Thomas* bear witness to two Christian communities engaged in a mutual conflict. I shall only briefly recapitulate the position I have sought to demonstrate elsewhere:[50] It is true that John and *Thomas* disagree on a number of issues but the disagreements between them do not necessarily mean that they were in conflict with each other. There can be other reasons for their differences in opinion. It may be that the authors of the two gospels took different stances on the same issues without even being aware of each other's opinions or existence. This, in fact, is the direction in which I believe the evidence I have discussed above points: the authors of both gospels drew upon the same pool of ideas, inspired by early Christian variations based on Jewish Wisdom theology, but they did this without being in touch with each other's interpretations.

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excluded but it is not the only option either. It is also possible that the shared imagery of light (including the self-predication of the revealer as the light, cf. *Secr. John* [NHC II, 1], 30–31), that was already available in both texts, was one of the reasons that they were put next to each other in NHC II.

[50] Cf. Dunderberg, *The Beloved Disciple in Conflict?*, 28–46.

It may be tempting to see in the Johannine figure of the doubting Thomas reflections, or remnants, of a more direct debate Johannine Christians held with their fellow-believers who showed special reverence to Thomas as their spiritual guide. However, the competing theories as to exactly what position Thomas stands for in John demonstrate how utterly inconclusive his portrait in John is for a mirror reading taking Thomas as an embodiment of the beliefs of some other Christians that the Johannine author wanted to combat.[51] The nagging question is, If there was a conflict between Johannine and Thomasine Christians, why was it not more clearly indicated in John? The suggestion that the struggle with Thomasine Christians waged in John's gospel was of a "hidden variety"[52] underlines rather than resolves the problem.

3. John and *the Gospel of Mary*[53]

With the *Gospel of Mary*, we move to a different ground. The text is more consciously philosophical than *Thomas*, probably stems from a later point in the second century than *Thomas*, and is most likely dependent on John's gospel.

The *Gospel of Mary* contains two revelation dialogues of the Savior with his followers. The first part, describing his discussion with the disciples, ends with an account of how the disciples were left in a state of grief and pain after Jesus' departure. In the ensuing second act, Mary comforts the disciples and relates the hidden teaching of the Savior imparted to her in a vision. The vision triggers a debate among the disciples whether Mary's vision should be trusted or not. The text shows awareness that the hidden teaching it promotes could be regarded as the "other kind of thoughts" (ⲉⲛⲕⲉⲙⲉⲉⲩⲉ, 17.15; [ετε]ρογνωμονειν, P. Ryl. 463.9–10).

[51] In my critical rejoinder to the theories presupposing a conflict between the communities behind John and *Thomas*, I have insisted that the portrayal of Thomas is not significantly more critical in John than those of some other characters, such as Martha, who, inspite of her full-blown confession (John 11:27), is cast as not really believing in Jesus (cf. John 11:39–40); cf. Dunderberg, *The Beloved Disciple in Conflict?*, 57–59. For a similar conclusion, supported with a much more extensive analysis of Johannine characterization, see now Christopher W. Skinner, *John and Thomas ± Gospels in Conflict? Johannine Characterization and the Thomas Question* (Princeton Theological Monograph Series; Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2009). Concerning the usage of the Johannine character of Thomas in support of the conflict theories, Skinner concludes: "This leads to a truncated reading of the Johannine narrative that drastically overemphasizes the significance of one minor character. … a consistent literary analysis reveals a pattern where uncomprehending characters provide the Johannine Jesus with opportunities to speak authoritatively to the literary audience. Thomas is one of these characters, and should not be regarded as the target of a Johannine polemic; nor should he be regarded as the impetus for the Fourth Gospel's composition." (231–33).

[52] Thus DeConick, *Voices of the Mystics*, 31.

[53] I wish to thank Karen King, Antti Marjanen and Ulla Tervahauta for their helpful comments on earlier versions of my interpretation of the *Gospel of Mary*.

It is not detailed what exactly was considered to be the problem in the Savior's teaching related by Mary. Andrew disputes this teaching in its entirety, and Peter joins the opposition. Peter, thus, is portrayed as a turncoat because it was he who had urged Mary to relate the secret words of the Savior to begin with (10:1–6), and yet he is here, at the end of the gospel, presented as doubting whether the Savior spoke "secretly with a woman, without our knowing" (17:16–23).

The textual problems vitiating the interpretation of the *Gospel of Mary* are well known: several pages of the Coptic manuscript, which contained the entire gospel, are lost.[54] The two extant Greek fragments from the third century (P. Oxy. 3525; P. Ryl. 463) bear witness to the popularity of this gospel and provide a number of noteworthy variant readings in comparison to the Coptic version,[55] but they do not add to our knowledge about the contents of the missing pages.

The *Gospel of Mary* probably stems from the middle or the latter part of the second century. The strongest indication for this dating is the gospel's philosophical outlook. The surviving Coptic version of the gospel begins with the question posed by the disciples whether matter (ὕλη) is destructible or not (7:1–2). The nature of matter was a distinctly philosophical topic that began to attract the attention of educated Christians in the middle of the second century; these Christians included not only Sethian and Valentinian mythmakers, but also the apologists Justin and Athenagoras (both of whom thought that matter is inoriginate, not created).[56]

Another feature with a distinctly philosophical flavor in the *Gospel of Mary* is its concern over emotions. This issue is especially prominent in the gospel's portrayal of the ascending soul as being tried by desire, ignorance, and anger (*Gos. Mary* 15–17).[57] The identification of the soul's interrogators as emotions makes the gospel's account of the soul's ascent different from early Christian accounts describing how the departed are being interrogated in the hereafter by the

[54] Pages 11–14 of the gospel are certainly missing. If the Berlin Codex began with the *Gospel of Mary*, the first quarter of the text (pages 1–6) is also lost. However, we cannot be sure whether the codex began with this text or if there was some other text preceding it. The gospel must have started earlier in the codex since the extant text begins in the middle of the disciples' question to the Savior on page 7, but it remains uncertain how much of the beginning of the gospel is lost.

[55] For the Greek fragments of the *Gospel of Mary*, see Christopher M. Tuckett, *The Gospel of Mary* (Oxford Early Christian Gospel Texts; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 7–11, 81–85, 110–11, 116–18.

[56] Cf. Gerhard May, *Creatio ex Nihilo: The Doctrine of ª Creation out of Nothingº in Early Christian Thought* (trans. A.S. Worrall; Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1994, 122 (with reference to Justin, *1 Apol.* 1.10.2); 138–39 (with reference to Athenagoras, *Apol.* 22.2).

[57] For a similar list of the soul's tormenters, see *CH* 13.7, where a list of twelve torments of the soul is provided; the items mentioned in the *Gospel of Mary* (desire, ignorance, anger) are all included on this list: "This ignorance, my child, is the first torment; the second is grief; the third is lack of self-constraint; the fourth, lust; the fifth, injustice; the sixth, greed; the seventh, deceit; the eighth, envy; the ninth, treachery; the tenth, anger; the eleventh, recklessness; the twelfth, malice" (trans. Copenhaver, with modification).

creator-God and his lackeys.[58] The affirmation of the victorious soul at the end of the *Gospel of Mary*, that "my desire has come to an end" (16:19–20), subscribes to the Stoic idea of *apatheia* as the ideal state of mind.[59] A link drawn between emotions and matter in an earlier part of the gospel (8:2–3) brings the text close to a Valentinian myth, according to which matter was created out of the noxious emotions that the divine Wisdom experienced after being banished outside the divine realm.[60] The *Gospel of Mary* differs from the Valentinian myth in stating that emotions stem from matter, not the other way around as in the Valentinian myth.[61] Nevertheless, the juxtaposition of matter and emotions in both sources is indicative of a shared intellectual context, in which the soul's inclination to matter had become a central issue that had to be explained in one way or another.

The exhortation at the end of the *Gospel of Mary* (18:15–16), that one should put on the "perfect human," fits remarkably well in the gospel's intellectual context. There had already been a long-standing philosophical tradition, in which the term "perfect human" was used to denote an ideal person, who neither succumbs to emotions nor needs exhortation or prescriptions to do the right thing but knows intuitively what course of action one must take in each individual situation.[62] The *Gospel of Mary* agrees on both accounts. Not only does it speak in favor of the full extirpation of wrong kinds of emotions, but it also promotes freedom from the law and added rules: "Do not lay down any rules in addition to those I gave, and do not issue any law in the same way as the legislator, lest you be detained by it." (*Gos. Mary* 8:22–9:4; the same principle is recalled at the end of the gospel: 18:19–21.)

The sample of ideas and concepts derived from Greco-Roman philosophies in the *Gospel of Mary*, thus, is best understood in the context of an increasingly

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[58] Cf. Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, 1.21.5.

[59] Cf. Esther de Boer, "A Stoic Reading of the *Gospel of Mary*: The Meaning of "Matter" and "Nature" in Gospel of Mary 7.1–8.11," in *Stoicism in Early Christianity*, (ed. Tuomas Rasimus, Troels Engberg-Pedersen, and Ismo Dunderberg; Grand Rapids, MI: BakerAcademic, 2010), 199–219, esp. 208–9; eadem, *The Gospel of Mary: Listening to the Beloved Disciple* (London: T & T Clark, 2004), 37–49; Karen L. King, *The Gospel of Mary of Magdala: Jesus and the First Woman Apostle* (Santa Rosa, CA: Polebridge Press, 2003), 42–47.

[60] For an analysis of the Valentinian potrayal of Wisdom's emotions and its links to philosophers' views about the therapy of emotions, see Ismo Dunderberg, *Beyond Gnosticism: Myth, Lifestyle and Society in the School of Valentinus* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), 95–118.

[61] For the Valentinian teaching on this issue, see Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, 1.4.1–2, 5.

[62] For a summary (with references to other literature) of the concept and functions of the perfect human in philosophical works, see Ismo Dunderberg, "Judas' Anger and the Perfect Human," in *The Codex Judas Papers* (ed. April D. DeConick; NHMS 71; Leiden: Brill, 2009), 201–21, esp. 205–17 (= chapter 2 above in this book). The view elaborated there builds upon the fine analysis of the views about the perfect human and "progressive fools" in ancient philosophy by Troels Engberg-Pedersen, "The Concept of Paraenesis" in *Early Christian Paraenesis in Context* (ed. James M. Starr and Troels Engberg-Pedersen; BZNW 125; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2004), 47–72.

"academic" orientation on the part of educated Christians.[63] It would not seem farfetched to assume that John's gospel was known in the circles of such people in the latter part of the second century, when the *Gospel of Mary* was probably composed. There are indeed some striking affinities between the two gospels, from which recent interpreters almost unanimously infer that the *Gospel of Mary* is either directly or indirectly dependent on John's gospel.[64]

Most of the affinities between the two gospels are related to the portrayals of Mary of Magdala. In John's gospel, Mary proclaims to the disciples "I have seen the Lord" (John 20:18); in the *Gospel of Mary*, she starts her speech to the disciples by proclaiming "I have seen the Lord in a vision" (*Gos. Mary* 10:10–11). In both gospels, Mary is presented as weeping (John 20:11–15; *Gos. Mary* 18:1), though for completely different reasons and in completely different narrative contexts. Finally, the description of Mary in the *Gospel of Mary* as having been loved by the Savior, not only "more than any other woman" (10:2–3), but also more than (the rest of?) the disciples (18:14–15), makes her a figure similar to that of the beloved disciple in John's gospel. This affinity, however, remains somewhat vague since there are no close verbal agreements in the ways the special status of the beloved disciple is affirmed in both gospels: in its portrayal of Mary, the *Gospel of Mary* does not call upon any narrative details said about the beloved disciple in John's gospel (such as his presence in the last supper, at the crucifixion, at the empty tomb, and at the Sea of Galilee, or the claim that he wrote down that gospel).

Other similarities include the distinctly Johannine expression "my peace" (John 14:27), that also occurs in the Savior's salutation of peace in the *Gospel of Mary* ("Peace be with you, my peace receive for yourselves," 8:14–15),[65] and

[63] It is true that all ideas with philosophical flavor in the *Gospel of Mary* were already available in the philosophical discourse long before the middle of the second century, where I would date this gospel. The middle of the second century, nevertheless, is the point when Christians begun to address all those issues to which the *Gospel of Mary* refers. Most importantly, there is little evidence for Christians interested in the nature of matter prior to this time.

[64] E.g., Judith Hartenstein, *Die zweite Lehre: Erscheinungen des Auferstandenen als Rahmenerzählung frühchristlicher Dialoge* (TU 146; Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2000); King, *The Gospel of Mary*, 129–33; Nagel, *Die Rezeption des Johannesevangeliums*, 465–69; Anne Pasquier, *L'Évangile selon Marie (BG 1)* (BCNH, Textes 10; Quebec, Les Presses de l'Université Laval, 1983), 57; Silke Petersen, *ª Zerstört die Werke der Weiblichkeit:º Maria Magdalena, Salome & andere Jüngerinnen Jesu in christlich-gnostischen Schriften* (NHMS 48; Leiden: Brill, 1999), 141–42; Tuckett, *The Gospel of Mary*; Michel Tardieu, *Codex de Berlin* (Écrits gnostiques) (Paris: Cerf, 1984), 226, 228, 230 etc. For one exception from the consensus, see De Boer, *The Gospel of Mary*, 208: "… the portrayal of Mary Magdalene in the Gospel of Mary most likely does not depend on the New Testament Gospels, but rather on earlier tradition about Mary Magdalene." As far as I can see, De Boer's conclusion is implicit rather than explicitly argued in the chapters where she discussed similarities and differences in the portrayals of Mary in the *Gospel of Mary* and the New Testament gospels.

[65] Cf. Antti Marjanen, *The Woman Jesus Loved: Mary Magdalene in the Nag Hammadi Library and Related Documents* (NHMS 40; Leiden: Brill, 1996), 98n.19.

the phrase "the sin of the world," which is used in John 1:29, and for which Peter asks further eludication from the Savior in the *Gospel of Mary* (7:10–13): "Since you have taught us everything, tell us one more thing: what is the sin of the world?" Here it almost looks as though the *Gospel of Mary* responds to and expands on issues briefly mentioned in John.

Some recent commentators, however, regard the affinities between John and *Mary* as insubstantial and not permitting any far-reaching conclusions as to the relationship between the two gospels. The prospect of any in-depth intertextual reading may seem gloomy in the light of the following assessments by Judith Hartenstein and Titus Nagel:

> The most of these parallels to John are so unspecific that it cannot be safely assumed that allusions are intended.[66]

> The completely marginal usage of the Gospel of John and the gnostic application of John 3:8b indicate that this gospel's contents could not be received in Christian gnostic circles, in the context of which the Gospel of Mary came into existence.[67]

Christopher Tuckett also adopts a cautionary stance on the issue in his new edition of the *Gospel of Mary*. He includes only one item from John (the expression "my peace") in the group of "clear echos or allusions",[68] and only one in that of "less clear parallels" (the phrase "the sin of the world"),[69] while he discusses all other potential affinities between the two gospels, such as Mary's weeping and her role as the beloved disciple, under a less definitive title "other parallels."[70]

In spite of all these scholarly caveats, other specialists have posited a more substantial relationship between the gospels of John and Mary. Karen King and Silke Petersen have demonstrated that, in addition to isolated points of shared

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[66] Hartenstein, *Die zweite Lehre*, 158: "Von diesen Parallelen zu Joh sind die meisten so wenig spezifisch, dass nicht sicher von bewussten Anspielungen ausgegangen werden kann."

[67] Nagel, *Die Rezeption des Johannesevangeliums*, 469: "Die insgesamt spärliche Benutuzung des JohEv sowie die gnostische Applikation von Joh 3,8b spricht für dessen mangelnde inhaltliche Rezeptabilität für den christlich-gnostischen Kreise, in dessen Umfeld das EvMar enstanden ist." Nagel (466–67) argues that the question posed to the ascending soul in *Gos. Mary* 16:14–16 ("where do you come from, killer of humans, or where are you going, destroyer of space") is inspired by the description of the spirit in John 3:8. However, other accounts of the interrogation of the soul (*1 Apoc. Jas.* [NHC V, 3] 32–36; Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, 1.21.5; possibly also *Gos. Thom.* 50) provide far closer parallels to this passage in the *Gospel of Mary* than John 3:8; for these parallels, see King, *The Gospel of Mary*, 75–76. In addition, it is debated whether the *Gospel of Mary* is a "gnostic" gospel or not; for a recent summary of *status quaestionis*, see Tuckett, *The Gospel of Mary*, 42–54.

[68] Tuckett, *The Gospel of Mary*, 58: "Thus it may be that the author is here taking up words known from John's gospel and putting them on the lips of Jesus with perhaps a change of meaning at the same time …"

[69] Tuckett, *The Gospel of Mary*, 67–68: "The phrase may simply have become part of common parlance in the circles in which the *Gospel of Mary* was circulating. Its ultimate origin in this context *may* have been the Gospel of John, but it is hard to say more with any great certainty."

[70] Tuckett, *The Gospel of Mary*, 57–72.

terminology, there are also a number of thematic links connecting the two gospels. King points out that Mary comforts the disciples in the *Gospel of Mary*, just as Jesus does in John's gospel (e. g., John 14:27). Moreover, King also draws attention to a similar situation described in both gospels: "the savior is departing and his followers will face persecution."[71] As Petersen cogently notes, the disciples' situation described in the *Gospel of Mary* is, in fact, very much the same as that anticipated in the Johannine farewell discourse. In John's gospel, Jesus predicts that the disciples will weep, lament and experience pain (κλαύσετε καὶ θρηνήσετε ὑμεῖς … ὑμεῖς λυπηθήσεσθε, John 16:20) after his departure. This is precisely the disciples' condition described in the *Gospel of Mary*: after Jesus had departed, "they were in pain and wept profusely" (ⲛⲉⲩⲣ̄ⲗⲩⲡⲉⲓ ⲁⲩⲣⲓⲙⲉ ⲙ̄ⲡⲙⲁ, 9:5–6).

Moreover, while King emphasizes similarities in the roles attributed to Jesus in John's gospel and to Mary in the *Gospel of Mary*, Petersen points out that, in the *Gospel of Mary*, Mary fulfils the role of the paraclete promised in John's gospel: she comforts and encourages the disciples with the teaching of Jesus previously hidden from them.[72] The disciples' limited capacity for receiving the teaching of Jesus, which makes subsequent teaching by the paraclete necessary, is affirmed in John 16:12: "I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now." Moreover, one of the most crucial tasks assigned to the paraclete in John's gospel is that this figure will remind the disciples of what Jesus had taught (John 14:26). The aspect of memory is, in turn, emphatically present in the *Gospel of Mary*, where Peter urges Mary to relate the words of Jesus that she remembers (*Gos. Mary* 10:5–6). The extant Greek fragment adds strength to this point by repeating it in Mary's response to Peter (P. Oxy. 3525:17): "[I will proclaim to you everything that] *I remember* (ἀπομνημονεύω) but has escaped [your notice]."[73] The closing remark after Mary's vision in the *Gospel of Mary* is also noteworthy: "After having said this, Mary fell silent since the Savior had spoken with her up to this point" (17:7–9). This remark concurs with the Johannine promise that the spirit of truth "will not speak on its own" but will only reveal what it hears (16:13).[74]

I agree with King and Petersen that, in light of the aforementioned thematic links between the two gospels, ideas and themes going back to John's gospel play a much more significant role in the *Gospel of Mary* than is usually recognized. King proposes an intertextual reading in which the active role assigned to Mary

[71] King, *The Gospel of Mary*, 129.

[72] Petersen, *Die Werke der Weiblichkeit*, 141.

[73] The reference to memory is dropped in the Coptic version of Mary's response: "I will proclaim to you what is hidden from you" (*Gos. Mary* 10:8–9).

[74] It does not have to be assumed that Mary is fully identified with the paraclete in the *Gospel of Mary*. It is possible to read the text in a way that she assumes this role on this particular occasion and for the particular purpose of comforting the fearful disciples. The text does *not* maintain that some person other than Mary could not become the embodiment of the paraclete on some other occasion.

in the *Gospel of Mary* lays bare a critical point in John's portrayal of Mary: comparison to the *Gospel of Mary* reveals how her "status is diminished in the Gospel of John" and her portrayal in John 20 "works to subordinate Mary's authority as a resurrection witness to that of the male disciples, especially by limiting her commission to bear witness only to the other disciples."[75]

In my view, this reading may offer too dark a picture of how Mary is portrayed in John's gospel. It is not immediately clear that her role is really limited in this way in John 20. It is not entirely obvious, either, if the *Gospel of Mary* attributes to Mary a more active role in proclaiming the good news to the world. She plays a crucial role in comforting the disciples, but it remains uncertain if she is one of those commissioned to preach the good news. Even the more inclusive closure of the gospel, that "*they* began to go out to [preach]," does not necessarily include Mary. The problem addressed in the narrative is with the disciples who are, out of fear, hesitant to obey Jesus' command to preach the gospel (*Gos. Mary* 9:5–13). It seems that, at least here, Mary is not one of the those entangled in fear since she is able to exhort them not to be afraid. Notably, Mary does not say "let *us* not weep and grieve," but she addresses "her brothers" in the second person plural: "Do not weep and do not grieve …" Placed in this framework, the inclusive closure in the Coptic version can be read as meaning that the disciples, who first were afraid, finally, at Mary's instigation, became ready to follow Jesus' command. In this reading, the role assigned to Mary in the *Gospel of Mary* would seem very similar to that assigned to her in John 20.

It seems, thus, that the relationship between John's gospel and the *Gospel of Mary* should be first and foremost understood in terms of continuity. The narrative situation described in the *Gospel of Mary* coincides with that predicted in John 16, and the role assigned to Mary in the *Gospel of Mary* makes her look like an embodiment of the paraclete, promised by Jesus in John's gospel. In other words, it seems that the *Gospel of Mary* builds upon and creatively elaborates ideas stemming from John's gospel.

How do these Johannine details fit in the mix in the *Gospel of Mary*? It may seem striking that this gospel with an undeniable philosophical orientation does not make use of what is probably the clearest philosophical trait in John's gospel, that is, the identification of Jesus with the divine Logos. Instead, it is the disciples' anxiety and Mary's role as the medium of revelation that are described in Johannine terms in the *Gospel of Mary*. Although there are similar portrayals of the disciples' anguish in other revelation dialogues,[76] the theme is more thoroughly integrated in the narrative flow in the *Gospel of Mary* than in other comparable texts.

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[75] King, *The Gospel of Mary*, 131.

[76] E. g., *Secr. Jas.* (NHC I, 2) 5–6, 12; *Secr. John* (NHC II, 1) 1–2 (parr).

The description of the disciples' mental state in the *Gospel of Mary* should, therefore, not be dismissed as being merely a traditional topos. The anxious disciples, faced with the prospect of persecution, set the stage for Mary's revelation teaching of the soul's ascent. The disciples are portrayed as being paralyzed by distress and the fear of persecution. Their state of mind is especially disastrous because it makes them unable to fulfil Jesus' command to spread the good news: "How shall we go to the nations and preach the good news about the kingdom of the Son of Man? If they did not spare him, how will they spare us?" (*Gos. Mary* 9:7–12.)

The story of the soul's ascent in the latter part of the gospel, in turn, shows the way out of the disciples' situation described in the first part. The purpose of the story is to assure the disciples that they should not be afraid of persecution since the soul can reach the state of tranquility, in which the sufferings inflicted on the body no longer matter.[77] This condition defines the final stage in the victorious soul's ascent: "What binds me has been killed, and what surrounds me has been overcome …" Furthermore, it is affirmed that this victory from the body can already be achieved in one's lifetime: "It is in a world that I have been released from a world" (*Gos. Mary* 16:17–17:1).[78]

The disciples' pain and fear are, thus, of vital importance as fundamental elements of the rhetorical situation constructed in the *Gospel of Mary*. The rhetorical situation, however, is not necessarily identical with that of the audience. It is indeed possible that some audiences took the text as teaching preparation for martyrdom.[79] In this reading, philosophy is subordinated to the theme of persecution. Philosophical ideas about the soul are needed to assure the audience that they should not be afraid of persecutions, since it is possible for them to develop mental strength that makes their souls indifferent to the pain inflicted on the body.

It is, however, also possible to read the *Gospel of Mary* from a more philosophical perspective, in which case the text's primary concern is not so much endurance under persecution but the soul's condition in general. In this reading, the disciples' fear of persecution functions as an illustration of the soul's disease,[80] for

[77] Cf. King, *The Gospel of Mary*, 109: "Since attachment to the body is the source of suffering and death …, separation from that attachment frees them …"

[78] Antti Marjanen points out to me that the text can also be understood in another sense: "it is by means of a world that I have been released from a world." In this case the former "world" must refer to the heavenly world as providing the model of salvation. This does not dispute the main point that redemption has already taken place.

[79] Essential for this approach to revelation dialogues is the analysis by Karen L. King, "Martyrdom and Its Discontents in the Tchachos Codex," in DeConick (ed.), *The Codex Judas Papers*, 23–42, esp. 25–27.

[80] For ancient portrayals of the soul's disease and of philosophers as the doctors offering the cure to this disease, see Martha Nussbaum, *The Therapy of Desire: Theory and Practice in Hellenistic Ethics* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994).

which Mary's vision then offers the cure by painting an ideal picture of a victorious soul no longer attached to "material" concerns brought about by body and emotions.[81] Read from this perspective, the disciples' doubtful reaction to Mary's vision underlines the severity of their weak mental condition: they refuse the medicine Mary offers to them. It is not quite clear whether the story ends with a resolution or not. It is stated at the end of the gospel that the Savior's command to preach the gospel to the nations was finally followed, which implies that the moment of fear was overcome, but it remains unclear by whom. Was it only Levi who went to preach (thus the Greek version: P. Ryl. 463:14–16), or was it all the disciples, as the plural formulation "they started to go to preach and proclaim" in the Coptic text could suggest?[82]

The two readings of the *Gospel of Mary* I have constructed are not mutually exclusive. For example, it is conceivable that the prospect of persecution, described in the first part of the *Gospel of Mary*, lends greater urgency to its teaching of the soul's ascent. The underlying theory would in that case be that the soul must first prove victorious in the battle against desire and ignorance, and only then is it ready to face the seven appearances of wrath, the ultimate enemy; the soul trained in this way no longer needs to worry what happens to the body.[83] It probably largely depended on the different situations of the real audiences how the gospel was understood and which parts of it were deemed most important. We should not too readily deduce the audience's situation from the rhetorical situation constructed and addressed in the text.[84]

Conclusion

I have sought to illustrate with the two examples discussed above two different modes of the relationship between John's gospel and apocryphal gospels. The first point is that it cannot be taken for granted that apocryphal gospels, as a general rule, are later than, and secondary to, those in the New Testament.

[81] This aspect is emphasized in King, *The Gospel of Mary*, passim.

[82] I argued above why this might be the best way to understand the plural in the closure of the Coptic version. Nevertheless, it cannot be excluded that the plural only refers to Levi and Mary.

[83] If the text is understood in this way, it would coincide with Clement of Alexandria's teaching of how the perfect person ("the gnostic" in Clement's terminology) is prepared for martyrdom; cf. Clement, *Misc.* 4.

[84] 4 Maccabees is a good example of how stories of persecution could be used as a foil for philosophical teaching. This text is much more graphic in its descriptions of the martyrs' sufferings than its precursor 2 Maccabees, and yet the point it wants to bring home with all these extremely violent (and sometimes literally unbelievable) versions of more traditionals stories is simply the importance of self-control.

Greater differentiation is obviously needed. For example, it may well be that some individual sayings in *Thomas* are (directly or indirectly) dependent on the Synoptic gospels,[85] but it cannot be inferred from this that its author(s) knew the Gospel of John as well; the knowledge of one or more gospels now included in the New Testament is not a sign of knowledge of the fourfold gospel canon. Moreover, if it is true that, as I have insisted above, the *Gospel of Thomas* is independent of John's gospel but attests to a number of ideas also attested in the latter, then *Thomas* also deserves increased attention in our accounts of early Christian theologies.[86]

The *Gospel of Mary*, in one way, defies Brakke's tripartite categorization of different approaches to the canon since it *both* presents itself as a new revelation (Brakke's category #2) *and* shows indisputable signs of an "academic" orientation (Brakke's category #1). When it comes to this gospel's relationship to John's, however, the reading offered above and similar readings by other scholars largely confirm Brakke's proposal: the rhetorical situation constructed in *Mary* builds upon the Johannine predictions of the disciples' troubled future. At the same time, the affinities discussed above do not necessarily point to a carefully calculated use of John's gospel. For example, no Johannine sayings are quoted verbatim in the *Gospel of Mary*. In fact, most Johannine traits in the *Gospel of Mary* are details that seem relatively easy to remember.[87] The prediction of the disciples' anguish after the departure of Jesus in John 16 is not only unusually emotional but it is also introduced with the formula "Truly I say to you," which puts special emphasis on this particular teaching. Both these features could have served to make the prediction more memorable.[88] The same point is also underlined in the

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[85] For some carefully argued case studies pointing in this direction, see Jörg Frey, "Die Lilien und das Gewand: *EvThom* 36 und 37 als Paradigma für das Verhältnis des Thomasevangeliums zur synoptischen Überlieferung," in Frey et alii (ed.), *Das Thomasevangelium*, 122–80 (on *Gos. Thom.* 36–37); C. M. Tuckett, "Thomas and the Synoptics," in *NovT* 30 (1988): 132–57 (on *Gos. Thom.* 5, 9, 16, 20, 55); Risto Uro, *Thomas: Seeking the Historical Context of the Gospel of Thomas* (London: T & T Clark, 2003), 131–32 (on *Gos. Thom.* 64–66); idem, "*Thomas* and Oral Gospel Tradition," in idem (ed.), *Thomas at the Crossroads*, 8–32 (on *Gos. Thom.* 14).

[86] For one positive example in this regard, see the careful discussion of *Thomas*' christology in Larry Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ: Devotion to Jesus in Earliest Christianity*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2003), 452–79.

[87] For the importance of the issue of what kind of details were memorable, see István Czachesz, "Rewriting and Textual Fluidity in Antiquity: Exploring the Socio-Cultural and Psychological Context of Earliest Christian Literacy," in *Myths, Martyrs, and Modernity* (FS Jan N. Bremmer; ed. Jitse Dijkstra, Justin Kroesen and Yme Kuiper; Leiden: Brill, 2010), 426–41. Among other things, Czachesz points out that the capacity of short-term memory, activated in listening to a text recited, is limited (430), which makes it important to reassess how texts were remembered in antiquity. Czachesz also devotes attention to narrative "scripts" or "schemata" needed to activate memory processes (432–35). To apply this view to the particular case discussed above, it would seem that the Johannine portrayal of frightened disciples had become one such script, and this script is activated in the *Gospel of Mary*.

[88] For the importance of evoking emotions in memory activation, see Czachesz, "Rewriting and Textual Fluidity in Antiquity," 438–39, concluding: "It is to be expected that the

subsequent Johannine account of the disciples behind the closed doors, unable to act because of their fear of the Jews (20:19–23). In fact, it is nowhere stated in the Johannine appearance stories that the disciples started to proclaim the resurrection of Jesus and the forgiveness of sins (cf. John 20:22)! Mary's weeping also seems a memorable fact both because it is emotional and because it is repeated no less than three times in John 20:11–15; and her words "I have seen the Lord," also repeated in the *Gospel of Mary*, are placed at a crucial juncture in John's gospel as the first testimony to an encounter with the risen Jesus.

It does not seem necessary, therefore, to assume that the author of the *Gospel of Mary* carefully went through John's gospel and selected precisely these features to function as a narrative backbone for the new gospel.[89] It is equally possible that such details ultimately going back to John's gospel were already imprinted in the "social memory" of early Christians when the *Gospel of Mary* was composed.[90] The *Gospel of Mary* does not display "canonical awareness" in the sense that it would seek to amplify its message with references to John's gospel. It seems that Johannine traits are there in the *Gospel of Mary*, not because of where they come from, but because they fit well with what this gospel purported to say to its audiences.

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deep involvement of memory in rewriting and retelling will favour, in the long run, ideas that minimally violate innate ontological expectations, or ones that mobilize emotional reactions."

[89] Cf. Czachesz, "Rewriting and Textual Fluidity in Antiquity," 435: "Biblical scholars have routinely explained such phenomena by referring to the editorial work of the authors, who, it is assumed, rephrased their sources according to their own theological views. I suggest that in many cases the relation between texts is better explained if we think about it in terms of oral transmission and memory …"; cf. also King, *The Gospel of Mary*, 97: "we should not imagine that the author of the *Gospel of Mary* sat down and read the New Testament gospels and letters, and from those sources generated its interpretation of the Jesus tradition."

[90] King, *The Gospel of Mary*, 133, voices a similar caveat as regards the real audience of the *Gospel of Mary*: "It is not clear whether the author of the *Gospel of Mary* would have expected readers to connect the appearance accounts in the *Gospel of John* and the *Gospel of Mary* …" King maintains, though, that a reader familiar with John's gospel would recognize how the *Gospel of Mary* "would … work to 'correct' any imputation in the *Gospel of John* that Mary was less than entirely worthy of her commission as 'apostle to the apostles.'" As I have said above, this reading of John's portrayal of Mary's encounter with Jesus seems too critical. For one thing, the Johannine author does not seem to display any substantial doubts about women as reliable – and even successful! – witnesses to Jesus (cf. John 4:28–30).

Chapter 6

Stoic Traditions in the School of Valentinus[1]

Hippolytus of Rome is known for his attempt to connect all early Christian heretics with particular strands of ancient philosophy. While his efforts in this field are strained in most cases,[2] few would disagree with his claim that Valentinus, Heracleon, Ptolemaeus, and "their entire school" were "disciples of Pythagoras and Plato."[3] In fact, all those early Christians, who distinguished between the perfect God and an inferior creator-God, were heavily indebted to Platonic philosophy. The Platonic influence can be seen, above all, in their teaching that the world is an inferior copy of the eternal realm.[4]

Nevertheless, there is reason to believe that other philosophical currents, including Stoicism, had impact on these Christians as well. Ideas stemming from ancient schools of thought have been especially traced in recent studies on the Sethian *Secret Book of John*. Takashi Onuki sees in this text signs of a critical dialogue with Sethianism,[5] Gerard Luttikhuizen emphasizes affinities between *Secret John* and Aristotelianism,[6] and Slatko Pleše has recently demonstrated

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[1] I wish to thank Troels Engberg-Pedersen, Tuomas Rasimus, Niko Huttunen and Risto Auvinen for their careful reading of, and helpful comments on, an earlier draft of this study.

[2] Cf., e.g., Jaap Mansfeld, *Heresiography in Context: Hippolytus' Elenchos as a Source for Greek Philosophy* (Philosophia Antiqua 56; Leiden: Brill, 1992).

[3] Hippolytus, *Ref.* 6.29.1. Hippolytus makes this claim repeatedly in his account of Valentinian theology (*Ref.* 6, preface; 6.21.1–3; 6.22.1–3; 6.37.1, 5–6). Links between Valentinians and Plato were already created already by Irenaeus (*Her.* 2.14.3–4; 2.33.2), and Tertullian designated Valentinus "the apostate, and heretic, and Platonist" (*Carn.* 20).

[4] Some of these Christians also adopted the Platonic designations of the body as "prison" and "cave," from which one's true self should be liberated; cf. Michael A. Williams, *Rethinking "Gnosticism": An Argument for Dismantling a Dubious Category* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996), 116–21, with references to the Sethian *Secret Book of John* (NHC II,1) 21, 31.

[5] Takashi Onuki, *Gnosis und Stoa: Eine Untersuchung zum Apokryphon des Johannes*. (NTOA 9; Freiburg, Switzerland: Universitätsverlag, 1989); cf. idem, "Critical Reception of the Stoic Theory of Passions in the *Apocryphon of John*," in *Stoicism in Early Christianity* (ed. Tuomas Rasimus, Troels Engberg-Pedersen and Ismo Dunderberg; Grand Rapids, MI: BakerAcademic, 2010), 239–56. For other scholars who have seen affinities between Stoics and Sethians, see Onuki, *Gnosis und Stoa*, 4–5.

[6] Gerard P. Luttikhuizen *Gnostic Revisions of Genesis Stories and Early Jesus Traditions* (NHMS 58; Leiden, Brill, 2006).

that there are hints at all kinds of philosophical currents, including Stoicism, in this text.[7]

While Einar Thomassen has made a strong case for the influence of Neopythagorean theories on Valentinian myths of origin,[8] the relationship between Valentinians and Stoics has attracted less attention.[9] One noteworthy exception is Bentley Layton's suggestion that the Valentinian *Gospel of Truth* (NHC I, 3) draws upon Stoic ideas:

> … the basic world view of [the Gospel of Truth] is not simply Platonist. Rather, the cosmological model of [the Gospel of Truth] is provided by Stoic monism and by astronomy. God (the father) is held to be uncontained and to contain all things. Individuals within him are also said to contain god; thus god permeates, or can permeate, all individual things.

Layton adds that there are also some striking differences between the *Gospel of Truth* and Stoicism: "unlike Stoic cosmology, the system of [the Gospel of Truth] is strongly antimaterialist, even illusionist, as regards the reality of material structures."[10] Unfortunately, Layton does not offer any detailed argumentation in support of his Stoic reading of the *Gospel of Truth*. The problem with his proposal as it now stands is that the Stoic ingredient described in it is not distinct enough. The notion of God, who is uncontained but contains, or encircles, everything, was commonplace among ancient philosophers of all different types since the pre-Socratics.[11] That God "permeates, or can permeate all individual things" may sound more unmistakably Stoic, but this statement is not explicitly made in the *Gospel of Truth*; it is rather Layton's own inference from the text.

I will discuss in this essay four cases where we may be entitled to see Valentinian adaptations of ideas stemming from Stoic philosophy. My initial working hypothesis was cautious: I assumed that such cases can be due to the relatively

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[7] Zlatko Pleše, *Poetics of the Gnostic Universe: Narrative und Cosmology in the Apocryphon of John* (NHMS 52; Leiden: Brill, 2006); for Stoic ideas in *Secret John*, see esp. 58–59, 95–105, 199.

[8] Einar Thomassen, *The Spiritual Seed: The Church of the "Valentinians"* (NHMS 60; Leiden: Brill, 2006), 270–312.

[9] For a brief analysis devoted to this issue, see François L. M. M. Sagnard, *La gnose valentinienne et le témoignage de Saint Irénée* (Études de philosophie médiévale 36; Paris: Vrin, 1947), 579–85.

[10] Bentley Layton, *The Gnostic Scriptures: A New Translation with Annotations and Introductions* (Anchor Bible Reference Library; Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1987), 250.

[11] For analogies derived from Aristotle, Philo, Hermetists, and the Shepherd of Hermas (*Mand.* 1.1), see William R. Schoedel, "Enclosing, Not Enclosed: The Early Christian Doctrine of God," in *Early Christian Literature and the Classical Intellectual Tradition* (ed. William R. Schoedel and Robert L. Wilken; Théologie historique 53; Paris: Beauchesne, 1979), 75–76; idem, "Gnostic Monism and the Gospel of Truth," in *Rediscovery of Gnosticism* (2 vols; ed. Bentley Layton; NumenSup 41; Leiden: Brill, 1980), 1.380–81. This was also one of the points which Irenaeus and his Valentinian opponents agreed upon. Irenaeus used this theologumenon to rebut the Valentinian idea of the void outside the divine realm; for analysis and discussion, see Rowan Greer "The Dog and the Mushrooms: Irenaeus' View of the Valentinians Assessed," in Layton (ed.) *The Rediscovery of Gnosticism*, 1.146–71.

broad dissemination of Stoic ideas in the Greco-Roman intellectual world.[12] In consequence, even if certain details in Valentinian sources ultimately go back to Stoicism, this does not have to mean that Valentinian teachers or their audiences were immersed in Stoic philosophy.

Yet, as the result of my analysis, I am inclined to state my case more forcefully: my claim is that the audiences with knowledge of Stoic philosophy were in a better position to understand Valentinian teachings than those who lacked this knowledge. Hence, I am no longer content with the idea that hints at Stoic thought in Valentinian sources were merely due to freely floating traditions with philosophical flavor, which Valentinians used simply because they happened to be available. I rather take these hints as invitations to recognize how Valentinian teachers, through adoption, selection and modification, made creative use of ideas borrowed from Stoic philosophy.

1. Condensation and Dissolution

One of the few surviving fragments of Valentinus' own works is a poem entitled *Harvest*.[13] It eloquently describes a cosmic chain, which reaches from "flesh" to "aether" and is held together by the Spirit:

I see that all is suspended by the Spirit,
I understand that all is carried by the Spirit:
flesh, hanging from soul,
soul, <depending on> air,
air, hanging from aether,
fruits borne from the depth,
a babe brought forth from the womb.

In affirming that all things are "suspended by the Spirit (κρεμάμενα πνεύματι)" and "carried by the spirit (ὀχούμενα πνεύματι)," Valentinus clearly alludes to the Stoic doctrine of the all-pervasive spirit (or "breath", πνεῦμα), which holds together the entire universe.[14]

It is possible that Valentinus was also familiar with allegorical interpretations of the traditional lore of Zeus hanging a golden cord from heaven to encircle all

[12] For example, Lapidge shows that, in the Roman era, Stoic cosmological views well known to, and often adopted by, non-Stoics; cf. Michael Lapidge, "Stoic Cosmology and Roman Literature, First to Third Centuries A.D," *ANRW* 2.36.3 (1989), 1379–429.

[13] Hippolytus, *Ref.* 6.37.7. The subsequent commentary explaining the poem in terms of full-blown Valentinian theology can be set aside here because practically all interpreters agree that it does not come from Valentinus, but from his later followers.

[14] Cf. Christoph Markschies, *Valentinus Gnosticus?: Untersuchungen zur valentinianischen Gnosis; mit einem Kommentar zu den Fragmenten Valentins* (WUNT 65; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1992), 240–41.

other gods and goddesses (*Iliad* 8.19). This story was often explained as referring to cosmic structures, or to all kinds of bonds that are keeping the universe from falling apart.[15]

In particular, the colden cord of Zeus was connected with the Stoic theory of four elements (fire, air, water, and earth) and their mutual relationships. The fact that Valentinus mentions four items in the cosmic chain may thus be indicative of his indebtedness to Stoic physics. In addition, like Stoics (but unlike Aristotelians), Valentinus includes "aether" in the group of four elements.[16] For Stoics, "aether" was synonymous with "fire." The distinctive characteristic of this substance is hotness, whereas "air" was considered to be the cold element, "water" the moist one, and "earth" the dry one.[17]

Stoics called these four substances "elements" (στοιχεῖα) since everything else emerges from them. In consequence, it was assumed that some or all of the four elements (τὰ τέσσαρα στοιχεῖα) are present in all things. While earthly things consist of all four elements, the moon was regarded as a combound only of fire and air, and the sun as "pure fire."

The Stoic theory held that the elements can, and constantly do, change into other ones in two ways, that is, by condensation and dissolution. The more subtle elements can turn into coarser ones (fire -> air -> water -> earth) by acquiring a greater degree of density (κατὰ σύστασιν).[18] A reversed process of transformation from the coarse to the subtle elements (earth -> water -> air -> fire) takes place by liquefaction and evaporization.[19]

An obvious point of difference between Valentinus and the Stoic theory of the elements is that, instead of water and earth, Valentinus mentions "flesh" and "soul" as the two lowest items in the cosmic chain. The shift from the physical theory to anthropological concepts suggests that Valentinus was more preoccupied with the human condition than with theoretical discussion about natural science.

Valentinus' choice of the terms "soul" and "flesh" probably goes back to Paul.[20] This, however, does not resolve the question of how Valentinus conceived of the relationship between the four "elements" mentioned in *Harvest.* While the link between flesh and soul, on the one hand, and that between air and aether, on the other, may have seemed self-evident to most ancient readers, the link between the soul and air requires a closer analysis.

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[15] Markschies, *Valentinus Gnosticus*, 233–37.

[16] Aristotelians regarded "aether" as the fifth, divine, element distinct from, and outside the system of, the four basic elements. For this difference between Aristotelian and Stoic physics, see Anthony A. Long and David N. Sedley, *The Hellenistic Philosophers* (2 vols; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 1.286–87.

[17] DL 7.137.2 = Long and Sedley § 47B.

[18] For the word σύστασις in the sense of "density" and "degree of solidity," cf. *LSJ* s. v., B 3.

[19] Stobaeus 1.129.2–130.13 = Long and Sedley § 47A.

[20] Cf. Markschies, *Valentinus Gnosticus*, 239.

Markschies suggests that the four items in *Harvest* imply a dichotomy between the upper (air/aether) and the lower (soul/flesh) world.[21] What makes this explanation problematic is that no clear distinction between the two worlds is indicated in the poem itself. Valentinus uses a similar language of dependence in describing the relationships between all four "elements." There no greater rupture between "air" and "soul" than there is between "soul" and "flesh."

My suggestion is that the hierarchy of the four elements in *Harvest* reflects the Stoic theory of the transformation of the elements and the ways this theory was applied to the human soul. A popular ancient etymology for the Greek word for "soul" (ψυχή) was that it is related to, or derives from, the Greek words meaning "cold" (ψῦχος, ψυχρός), "cooling" (ψῦξις), and "to make cold" (ψύχω). This etymology called forth philosophical and theological speculation about the soul's nature and fate.

Leaning on the Stoic conception of air as the cold element, Philo of Alexandria explained how the soul could be envisioned as having undergone "cooling down" in the air. In this process, "the warm nature within us" (i. e., mind, νοῦς) was strengthened by the cold air in the same manner as hot iron is hardened by plunging it into cold water.[22] The soul, thus, is the result of the cooling down of the mind in the air.

Origen shared Philo's idea of the soul as a chilled mind,[23] and saw in it justification for his theory of the fall of preexistent souls. Origen also resorted to this idea to explain the differences between angels, astral souls, and humans: the souls of humans are inferior to those of other beings with souls since human souls have cooled down more than the souls of other intellectual beings.[24]

These Jewish and Christian variations on the idea that the soul emerged as the result of the mind's chilling in the cold air, provide the intellectual framework in which the shift from "air" to "soul" in Valentinus' *Harvest* becomes reasonable: Valentinus can say that the soul "depends" on the air because he thought that the soul came into being, when the divine essence was mixed with the cold air. What is more, the placement of the soul between air and the flesh implies that, for Valentinus, the soul is the penultimate state in the process of condensation of the divine essence. The ultimate state of this process is, by consequence, "flesh."

This reading of *Harvest* implies that Valentinus did not conceive of the soul and the flesh as morally "neutral" elements in the cosmic chain.[25] For the gradual

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[21] Markschies, *Valentinus Gnosticus*, 240.

[22] Philo, *Somn.* 1.31.

[23] Origen, *Princ.* 2.8.3; cf. Holger Strutwolf, *Gnosis als System: Zur Rezeption der valentinianischen Gnosis bei Origenes* (FKDG 56; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1993), 250.

[24] Strutwolf, *Gnosis als System*, 251–53.

[25] In fact, it would be very surprising if Valentinus would have regarded the soul as a completely neutral element since he was inspired by Paul, who used the term "soul" as denoting either limited understanding or complete lack thereof. Paul insisted that "a psychic person (ψυχικὸς … ἄνθρωπος) cannot understand that which pertains to God's spirit," while "the

condensation of the divine element also marks increased alienation from one's original state. It should be noted that, according to Valentinus, the flesh will not be saved.[26] Therefore, we are entitled to assume that he found a reverse process of dissolution – from flesh to soul to air to aether – necessary for salvation.

This interpretation is clearly attested in the Valentinian *Gospel of Truth*. Its author makes use of the Stoic theory of condensation and evaporization in describing the transformation of believers.[27] The author calls the children of the Father his "fragrance" (ϲⲧⲁⲓ), and describes how this fragrance "grew cold in psychical form (ⲟⲩⲡⲗⲁϲⲙⲁ ⲙ̄ⲯⲩⲭⲓⲕⲟⲛ)."[28] There is no doubt that this passage evokes the idea of the soul having come into being as a result of the chilling of the divine essence.

The Stoic theory of the constant transformation of elements was particularly adaptable for theological interpretation because of the two directions it involved: there was a downward movement, i. e., condensation from subtle to coarse, and an upward movement, i. e., diffusion from coarse to subtle. Just as Jewish and Christian interpreters were able to explain the fall of the souls in terms of condensation, the theory of diffusion provided a suitable framework for their understanding what takes place in spiritual progress.

Both aspects are present in the *Gospel of Truth*. Its author not only compares the offspring of the Father to "cold water" sunk on earth (condensation), but he also explains how "the water evaporates when the wind draws it up, and it becomes warm" (evaporization). "Wind" (ⲛⲓⲫⲉ) is an especially appropriate metaphor here since it also evokes the idea of the divine breath warming up the chilled souls.[29] In the author's application, faith is defined as leading to "the warm fullness of love," which entails complete absence of coldness.[30]

Similar imagery is attested in the Valentinian *Gospel of Philip*. In one passage, which may be an excerpt from baptismal catechesis, it is affirmed that when "the spirit of the world … blows, winter comes. When the Holy Spirit blows, sum-

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spiritual person (ὁ … πνευματικός) examines all things" (1 Cor 2:14–15). In the same vein, Valentinus' followers saw the "psychic persons" (ψυχικοί) as forming the middle ground between the truly spiritual ones and those people who are completely material (see below). Although there is no clear evidence for this tripartite anthropology in the fragments of Valentinus, his view of the soul as belonging to the lower levels of the cosmic ladder may have paved the way for that theory.

[26] Valentinus, Frag. 11 = Hippolytus, *Ref.* 10.13.4. While Markschies (*Valentinus Gnosticus*, 278–80) remains undecided regarding the authenticity of this fragment, in my opinion it fits well with the picture we get from other fragments by Valentinus cf. Ismo Dunderberg, *Beyond Gnosticism: Myth, Lifestyle and Society in the School of Valentinus* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), 66–67.

[27] Cf. Strutwolf, *Gnosis als System*, 250.

[28] *Gos. Tru.* (NHC I, 3) 34.

[29] The author of the *Gospel of Truth* here plays intertextually with the description of God's spirit moving above the primeval water in Genesis 1:2.

[30] *Gos. Tru.* 34–35; trans. Einar Thomassen in *The Nag Hammadi Scriptures: The International Edition* (ed. Marvin Meyer; New York: HarperOne), 44.

mer comes."[31] In another passage of *Philip*, "this world" is compared to "winter" and the eternal realm to "summer."[32] In both passages, it is implied that "winter" and "summer" denote the two states into which the soul can change: it can either cool down more and more and become "worldly" (or "fleshy"), or it can allow the Holy Spirit to warm it up.[33] There is a practical application for this theory: the latter passage in *Philip* ends with the warning that "we should not pray in winter." By implication, the right ("warm") condition of the soul is a prerequisite for an effective prayer.[34]

2. Emotions

The Sethian *Secret Book of John* follows a distinct Stoic tradition not only in naming the four basic emotions (delight, desire, distress, and fear) but also in specifying their subcategories.[35] This text links the emotions with "the four chief demons" engaged in creation of the soul of the human being.

Emotions also play a crucial role in Valentinian myths of origin, but they occur in a different context. Instead of being linked with primeval demons, emotions loom large in Valentinian tales of the divine Wisdom (Σοφία), whose ill-advised action in the divine realm led to the creation of the visible world. In different versions of the Valentinian myth, it is variably described how Wisdom, unlike other divine beings, could not control her desire; how she – or the emotional part of her – experienced distress and fear after being deported outside the divine realm; how her emotions were healed by Christ visiting her from the divine realm, and how her misery and joy contributed to the structure of the world. Valentinians even used the tale of Wisdom entangled in emotions to explain the origins of certain natural phenomena (such as the seas, the springs, and the rivers, which they maintained stem from the tears of the abandoned Wisdom).[36]

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[31] *Gos. Phil.* § 109 (NHC II 77), trans. Marvin Meyer in Meyer (ed.), *The Nag Hammadi Scriptures*, 180.

[32] *Gos. Phil.* § 7–8 (NHC II 52).

[33] For similar ideas in other Valentinian texts, see Valentinus, Frag. 2 (= Clement of Alexandria, *Misc.* 2.114.3–6); Hippolytus, *Ref.* 6.34.6. Valentinus compared the heart to an inn since it is either inhabitated by demons or it will be purified and made holy by God. In the Valentinian interpretation recorded by Hippolytus, the soul is likewise compared to an inn: the soul can stand completely alone, but it can also be a dwelling place for either divine "words" (λόγοι) or for demons.

[34] I would see here a connection to the caution made in the *Gospel of Philip* (§ 59 [p. 64]) that it is possible to become baptized "without receiving anything," even if the initiated says "I am a Christian." Only one who has received the Holy Spirit is entitled to this name "as a gift." In other words, the ritual is effective only for those whose inner condition is up to it.

[35] *Secr. John* (NHC II, 1) 18.

[36] Irenaeus, *Her.* 1.4.3.

Such details may easily be mistaken for being poetic embellishments of a mythic story, but a closer look at them shows that more is at stake.[37] The story of Wisdom, who was fully entangled in emotions and then healed by Christ, was clearly of paradigmatic value to Valentinian Christians. Not only was Christ the healer of Wisdom's emotions, but he is also portrayed as the healer of *our* emotions in Valentinian sources.[38]

The Valentinians' stories of Wisdom and Christ, thus, show how important a notion the therapy of emotions was for them. At this point, their interests coincided with those of ancient philosophers, who advised their students both in theory and in practice how to cope with emotions pestering them.[39] The question that needs to be addressed here is whether there are any specific links between the Valentinian Wisdom myth and Stoic theories about emotions.

The case is less clear than in *Secret John*. In Valentinian descriptions of Wisdom's sufferings outside the divine realm, four emotions are customarily mentioned, just like in Stoic sources. However, only two of them – distress (λύπη) and fear (φόβος) – are the same as in the Stoic analysis, whereas the other two Stoic main categories of the emotions, that is, desire (ἐπιθυμία) and delight (ἡδονή), are not mentioned in Valentinian accounts of Wisdom. Instead of desire and delight, we encounter in Valentinian sources a number of other mental states Wisdom was subject to: "perplexity" (ἀπορία), "ignorance" (ἄγνοια), "consternation" (ἔκπληξις), "entreaty" (δέησις, ἱκετεία), and "to be distracted" (ἐκστῆναι).[40]

It is striking that the two Stoic emotions not mentioned in Valentinian sources are those which, according to the Stoic analysis, involve a belief that something *good* is present (delight), or within one's reach in the future (desire). The two emotions retained in the Valentinian accounts of Wisdom are the ones that involve a belief that something *evil* is present (distress) or to be expected in the future (fear). Other Valentinian qualifications of Wisdom's mental state, putting additional emphasis on her anxiety (perplexity, consternation, and consternation), seem like expansions of distress and fear.[41]

The difference between the Valentinian and the Stoic classification of emotions does not necessarily disprove a link between these two strands of thought. The

[37] This part of my essay builds upon my more thorough analysis of Valentinian views about emotions in Dunderberg, *Beyond Gnosticism*, 95–118.

[38] Clement, *Exc. Theod.* 67.2.

[39] Cf. Martha Nussbaum, *The Therapy of Desire: Theory and Practice in Hellenistic Ethics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994). For emotions in Greco-Roman philosophy see also, e.g., Simo Knuuttila, *Emotions in Ancient Medieval Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004) and *The Emotions in Hellenistic Philosophy* (ed. Juha Sihvola and Troels Engberg-Pedersen; New Synthese Historical Library 46; Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1998).

[40] Irenaeus, *Her.* 1.2.3; 1.4.1; Hippolytus, *Ref.* 6.32.5; for a synopsis, see Dunderberg, *Beyond Gnosticism*, 112.

[41] Of these emotions describing Wisdom's anxiety, "consternation" (ἔκπληξις) may have been derived from Stoic tradition where it was allocated as a sub-category of fear (*SVF* 3.407–9 = DL 7.112; Stobaeus, *Ecl.* 2.92; Pseudo-Andronicus 3; cf. Onuki *Gnosis und Stoa*, 38).

difference indicates that Valentinians refocused the discussion about emotions. For them, delight and desire were less pertinent problems than anxiety and ignorance. The latter two are especially important since what the Valentinian teachers had to offer were counterparts to these mental states. First, as the counterpart of "anxiety," Valentinians promoted "the gospel of truth," which brings about "joy."[42] The fact that "joy" is mentioned as the consequence of the proclamation of the gospel creates yet another link to the Stoic analysis of emotions in which "joy" was one of the three "good emotions" (εὐπάθειαι). Second, as the counterpart of ignorance, Valentinians emphasized the importance of "knowledge," which together with baptism should bring about freedom.[43]

Moreover, in Valentinian theology, ignorance not only constitutes the human condition after creation but it is already present in the divine realm. One version of the Valentinian myth describes how Wisdom was first filled with love towards the Father of All, which then turned to agony when she realized that the Father is inscrutable.[44] What is noteworthy in this portrayal is that Wisdom differs from other eternal beings in the divine realm not because of her desire to know the Father but because she *yielded* to this desire. While it is described how all eternal beings "quietly" wanted to see the Father, it is said of Wisdom that she "drove herself exceedingly far … and experienced a passion."[45]

This brief passage recalls three essential aspects of the Stoic theory of emotions: 1) passion results from an excessive impulse (ὁρμὴ πλεονάζουσα) which a person (erroneously) believes to be something that cannot be avoided; 2) assent to that impulse leads the soul into movement (κίνησις ψυχῆς) than can no longer be stopped;[46] 3) even truly wise persons are subject to "stings of passion", that is, preliminary physical states which may lead to emotions. Yet, the wise persons recognize these states before they develop into full-blown emotions and are thus able to resist the impulse inherent in these "pre-passions."[47] The Valentinian portrayal of the eternal beings, who wanted to know the Father, can be understood as a reflection of this last aspect: while all eternal beings were subject to "stings of passion" in that they had the wish to know the Father, it is only Wisdom who

[42] *Gos. Tru.* 16.

[43] Clement, *Exc. Theod.* 78.2.

[44] Irenaeus, *Her.* 1.2.2. The Greek version of this passage, stemming from Epiphanius' lengthy quotation of book one of Irenaeus' work (*Pan.* 31.9–32), uses the word ἀγών, which means "struggle," for the mental state of Wisdom; the word has also the sense of "a mental struggle, anxiety." Nevertheless, it is possible that the word used in the original Greek version was ἀγωνία ("agony, anguish") since this Greek word occurs in the Latin translation of *Her.* 1.2.2 ("in magna agonia"). While the word ἀγών does not appear in Stoic catalogs of emotions, ἀγωνία is listed in them as a subspecies of fear (*SVF* 3.407–409 = DL 7.112; Pseudo-Andronicus 3; Stobaeus, *Ecl.* 2.92).

[45] Irenaeus, *Her.* 1.2.1.

[46] Long and Sedley § 65A = Stobaeus 2.88.8; for the aspect of movement, cf. also, e. g., Seneca, *On Anger*, 2.3.1–2 (Long and Sedley § 65X).

[47] Cf., e. g., Epictetus, Frag. 9 (Long and Sedley § 65Y).

yielded to that impulse, lost control, and acted to fulfill her wish. When these things happen, therapy of emotions is needed.

The healing of passion is offered at different points in the subsequent story of Wisdom and her role in the creation of the worlds. First, it is related how a new eternal being, called Limit (ὅρος), was created to teach Wisdom that the Father cannot be understood. What takes place at this stage of the myth is extirpation of emotions: the heavenly Christ visits Wisdom and supplies her with complete lack of passion (ἀπαθῆ κατεσκεύασεν),[48] which makes Wisdom able to abandon the passion that followed from her misguided intention.[49] This part of the Valentinian myth, thus, shares the essentially Stoic ideal of *apatheia*.[50]

However, the Valentinian myth does not completely subcribe to the Stoic standard of *apatheia*. As the story goes on, it becomes clear that the emotions extirpated from the heavenly Wisdom did not simply disappear, but they had to be removed from the divine realm. The expelled passions of Wisdom are personified in Valentinian myth as a lower Wisdom, also called "Achamoth" (derived from the plural חכמות of the Hebrew word חכמה, "wisdom"). This Wisdom outside the divine realm is now "completely entangled" in the emotions mentioned above (distress, fear, perplexity, etc.). For example, she feels distress due to her inability to understand the light the heavenly Christ left behind, and she is afraid of death.[51] Again, an account of healing of emotions follows: the eternal beings in the divine realm send the Savior down to the lower Wisdom, and he "provided the cure of passions by extirpating them" and by turning them into "incorporeal matter (ὕλη)."[52]

Physics and the theory of passions are at this point combined in a manner that may have seemed odd to those familiar with Stoic philosophy, not least because the Stoics taught that matter is eternal, having neither a beginning nor an end. No less suprising for learned audiences would have been the claim that matter stems from emotions. On the other hand, such audiences may have realized that the way Valentinians told the story adds to the urgency of the theme of emotions: if the "stuff," from which the word was created, stems from emotions, the consequence is that this world is in its entirety wound around with passion. It may be difficult to see how this view contributes to discussions about physical theory, but the claim inherent in it, that passion is not only an individual problem but one with cosmic dimensions, certainly lends additional weight to the Valentinians' message that people need to be set free from passion by Christ.[53] Another

[48] Clement of Alexandria, *Exc. Theod.* 45.1–2.

[49] Irenaeus, *Her.* 1.2.2.

[50] Strikingly, the same set of ideas recurs in a Valentinian description of how the heavenly Christ raised the dead body of Jesus after it "had put off emotions" (Clement, *Exc. Theod.* 61.7).

[51] Irenaeus, *Her.* 1.4.1.

[52] Irenaeus, *Her.* 1.4.5; cf. Hippolytus, *Ref.* 6.32.5–6.

[53] Clement, *Exc. Theod.* 67.2.

possible function of the juxtaposition of passion and matter in the Valentinian myth of Wisdom is that this combination explained why passions drag people *down*, towards material things, and thus stand in the way of their upward movement.

However that might be, the Valentinian view that matter consists of passion is clearly different from the Stoic view that matter is what God acts upon, or mixes with, in creating and sustaining the world.[54] Matter is not linked with passions in Stoic natural philosophy as it is in Valentinian myth. Thus, if we assume that Valentinians were familiar with Stoic teaching about emotions, as I think we can do, we should also see how bold they were in bringing together these theories with elements of physical theory, all discussed in a mythic framework.

3. Moral Progress

One key claim in Irenaeus' campaign against Valentinians was that they considered themselves "the spiritual ones" (οἱ πνευματικοί), whereas they relegated all other Christians to an inferior category of those whose essence is determined by the soul (οἱ ψυχικοί), and non-Christian humankind into the lowest category of "the material ones" (οἱ ὑλικοί). According to Irenaeus, Valentinians thought they will be saved "not because of what they do but because they are spiritual beings by nature," whereas faith and good conduct were required of other Christians.[55]

Irenaeus describes the Valentinian distinction between the two classes as predetermined and fixed: there was no danger of being downgraded for the spiritual ones, no matter what they did, and there was no prospect of promotion for other Christians. However, Irenaeus paints the fixed picture of Valentinian anthropology for a reason. This picture serves his attempt at preventing his audience from joining the Valentinians – there would obviously be little point in joining a group that does not grant newcomers full membership, nor even a prospect of it!

Other sources suggest that Valentinian anthropology was more flexible, more aimed at the transformation of the soul, and more concerned with good conduct than Irenaeus was willing to admit. My suggestion is that Valentinian theories of two kinds of Christians can be better understood in light of Stoic theories about "the wise person" and moral progress than in terms of a predetermined distinction between two real-life groups of Christians.

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[54] Cf., e. g., Seneca, *Epistles* 65.2 (Long and Sedley § 55E); Alexander, *On Mixture* 225.1 (Long and Sedley § 45H).

[55] Irenaeus, *Her.* 1.6.1–2; for the accusation that Valentinians claimed for themselves the status of spiritual beings, saved by nature, see also Clement of Alexandria, *Misc.* 2.10.2; *Exc. Theod.* 56.

Stoics made a strict distinction between the sage (σοφός), who was "the perfect one" (ὁ τέλειος), and "fools," that is, all other humans regardless of how morally advanced they might be.[56] The wise person "does everything well," since this person accomplishes "everything in accordance with right reason and in accordance with virtue." On the other hand, "the inferior man does everything that he does badly and in accordance with all the vices."[57] In other words, there is an essential gap between the wise and the fools, just as there is between virtue and vice. You either have all virtues or you have none of them.[58] For this reason, even the "progressing ones" (οἱ προκόπτοντες),[59] who "are getting close to virtue, are no less in a state of vice as those who are far from it." They "remain foolish and vicious right up to their attaiment of virtue."[60]

Yet another point of difference between the wise and the fools in Stoic analysis is that doing the right thing comes naturally and effortlessly to the wise, whereas the fools need someone telling them what to do and what to avoid. Precepts and injunctions are effective since they strengthen one's natural character, which "is concealed and weighed down." This kind of instruction is needed until the person finally becomes cabable of judging reliably and independently what "he should do in every matter."[61] It should be added that becoming "the perfect one" was a theoretical option rather than a realistic goal for Stoics. There may have been no more than "one or two good men" who have attained this level of perfection.[62] In practice, all humans belong to the inferior group of fools.

From this perspective, the Valentinian distinction between the spiritual ones, who are not in need of any ethical guidance, and all other Christians, who are "uncultured and ignoramuses,"[63] looks very similar to the Stoic distinction between the wise and the fools. What is more, just as the Stoics affirmed that wise persons are very rare, Valentinians are on record as stating that there are only a few spiritual persons.[64]

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[56] My analysis of Stoic theories of the "perfect human" and moral progress is in particular indebted to Troels Engberg-Pedersen, "The Concept of Paraenesis," in *Early Christian Paraenesis in Context* (ed. James M. Starr and Troels Engberg-Pedersen. Berlin: DeGryuter, 2004); for an incisive application of these views to the Gospel of John, cf. Gitte Buch-Hansen, *"It Is the Spirit That Gives Life": A Stoic Understanding on Pneûma in John* (BZNW 173; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2010). For my suggestion that these distinctions may be useful also for understanding the *Gospel of Judas*, see chapter 2 above.

[57] Long and Sedley § 61G = Stobaeus, *Ecl.* 2.66.14–67.4.

[58] Cf. Long and Sedley § 61F = Plutarch, *On Stoic Self-Contradictions* 1046e–f.

[59] Plutarch, *On Common Conceptions* 1063b = Long and Sedley § 61T.

[60] Long and Sedley § 61T = Plutarch, *On Common Conceptions* 1063a–b. Stoic philosophers and those writing under their influence apparently used the words ὁ πρόκοπτων and προκοπή as technical terms in moral discourse; cf., e.g., Epictetus, *Disc.* 1.4 (entitled "Of Progress"); Philo, *Leg.* 3.159.

[61] Long and Sedley § 66I = Seneca, *Epistles* 94.

[62] Long and Sedley § 61N = Alexander, *On Fate* 199.14–22.

[63] Irenaeus, *Her.* 1.6.4.

[64] Clement, *Exc. Theod.* 55–56.

It is less clear what ethical implications Valentinians drew from their distinction between two kinds of Christians. Irenaeus claims that they took gross liberties due to their self-understanding as the spiritual Christians: they ate food offered to idols without scruple, attended gladiatorial shows, and, most alarmingly, seduced and defiled Christian women – the wives of rich Christians were especially in danger. At the same time, the Valentinians demanded of other Christians "continence and good conduct."[65]

However, Irenaeus' description of Valentinians behaving badly is certainly biased, and there is much evidence to refute it.[66] It is not even clear that all Valentinians claimed the status of "the spiritual ones" for themselves (although some of them may have done so). The Valentinian *Interpretation of Knowledge* (NHC XI, 1), addresses the situation of a rift in a community between those who have "the spiritual gift" and those who have not. Strikingly, it is those who belong to the *former* group who are said to "make progress in the Word" (ⲣ̄ⲡⲣⲟⲕⲟⲡⲧⲉ ⲉⲙ̄ ⲡⲗⲟⲅⲟⲥ).[67] In Stoic discourse, the verb προκοπτείν was a technical term applied to those seriously seeking moral improvement (see above). The use of this verb in the *Interpretation* suggests that its author was familiar with the Stoic distinction between the wise person and "the progressing ones," who have not yet attained perfection.

One consequence of this affinity is that we should not be too hasty to identify "the "advancing ones" mentioned in the *Interpretation of Knowledge* with "the spiritual ones" mentioned in other sources of Valentinian theology. It is true that, in *Interpretation*, "the advancing ones" form a privileged group, for only they are entitled to speak in the community's gatherings.[68] Nevertheless, the instruction the author of this text addresses to his entire audience[69] shows that even those belonging to this superior group are not yet the perfect ones who would know how to do the right thing without any guidance from others.

To sum up, it seems possible that Valentinians understood the category of "spiritual ones" as the ultimate goal of moral progress in the same manner as Stoics used the category of "the wise person." Just as the Stoic sage (or Isaac and Moses in Philo's works), the Valentinian "spiritual one" no longer needs precepts, instruction, or even reflection to do the right thing. This person acts in the right manner (that is, in the way best suited to each particular situation) spontaneously, due to his or her very nature – hence Irenaeus' polemical allegation that Valentinians disregarded all rules.

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[65] Irenaeus, *Her.* 1.6.3; cf. 13.5.3–5 (on Marcus).

[66] Most strikingly, Irenaeus himself admits that there were Valentinians whose moral conduct was irreproachable (*Her.* 3.15.2)!

[67] *Int. Knowl.* 16:31.

[68] Cf. *Int. Knowl.* 16:34–35.

[69] Cf., e. g., the author's summary of the Savior's ethical instruction in *Int. Knowl.* 9:27–37.

However, those on the lower steps of the moral ladder need deliberation, admonition, precepts, and rehearsal – hence Irenaeus' claim that all other Christians needed "good works" to be saved. While Irenaeus claims that Valentinians regarded themselves as the spiritual ones and felt themselves recklessly free from all codes of decent behavior, the *Interpretation of Knowledge* demonstrates that, just like the Stoic Seneca, Valentinians rather saw themselves as belonging to the category of the advancing ones who still needed instruction and practice in doing the right thing.

This interpretation finds support in Ptolemaeus' interpretation of the ritual laws in the Hebrew Bible. His *Letter to Flora* was addressed to a novice in Valentinian theology, but in detailing "the spiritual sense" (τὸ πνευματικόν) of the ritual law, he constantly refers to an ingroup ("us").[70] That is, Ptolemaeus does not claim that the ingroup members no longer need any rules of behavior. Moreover, "the spiritual sense" for Ptolemaeus is all about lifestyle: "offerings" become realized in worship, in fellowship with others, and in good deeds; "keeping the Sabbath" means withdrawal from evil works; and the true, or spiritual, fasting means abstinence from bad deeds.[71] "The spiritual sense" of scripture outlined by Ptolemaeus is, thus, entirely practical: it becomes realized in one's way of life. Ptolemaeus' approach is squarely opposed to what we read in Irenaeus, who accused Valentinians of using their spiritual status as an excuse for moral indifference, but it is in keeping with the ethical orientation of all ancient schools of thought.

4. Blending

Valentinians probably shared common ground with Stoics also in theories of mixture.[72] This issue was a matter of special interest to Chrysippus, one of the founding figures of Stoicism. He distinguished between three different kinds of mixtures, i. e., juxtaposition (παράθεσις), fusion (σύγχυσις), and blending (κρᾶσις).

Chrysippus's category of "blending" seems very similar to the compound of the "psychic" and the "spiritual" essences in Valentinian analysis.[73] In Chrysip-

[70] I take this ingroup to be Christians in general, not Valentinian Christians in particular. Ptolemaeus obviously has in mind a broader group of people with different lifestyles, as can be seen in his reference that "there are also some among us who practice visible fasting" (*Flor.* 33.5.13).

[71] Ptolemaeus, *Flor.* 33.5.10–12.

[72] Cf. Long and Sedley § 48A–F. It was Buch-Hansen's fine summary of the Stoic theory of blending (Buch-Hansen, *It Is the Spirit That Makes Alive*, 75–84) that drew my attention to this issue and made me think of the potential ramifications of this theory for Valentinian theology.

[73] For the possible impact of the Stoic theory of blending on the views of Sethians, see Pleše, *Poetics of the Gnostic Universe*, 265–66.

pus's theory, "blending" differs from the two other forms of mixture insofar as in this particular form the original substances are completely mixed with each other and "pass through one another, so that no part among them fails to participate in everything contained in such a blended mixture." Blending, however, differs from a complete fusion in that "the original substances and their qualities [are] preserved" in blending,[74] while they disappear completely in fusion. Since the distinct properties of the constituents are preserved in blending, the obvious implication is that the constituents of blending can also be separated from each other.[75]

For Stoics, the soul, conceived of as pervading the whole body and yet preserving its own substance, constituted a prime example of the type of mixture blending involves.[76] For my analysis below, it is also important to note that Stoics used the language of blending and repose in connection with eschatological events: Seneca describes how Zeus "reposes in himself," when the world, after the conflagration, "is dissolved and gods have been blended together into one."[77]

Unlike some other parts of Stoic physics (such as the Stoic view of conflagration), the Stoic theory of blending was *not* commonly accepted by ancient philosophers of other persuasions.[78] Therefore, if it can be shown that Valentinians made use of this theory, this could be an instance of a more specific affinity between their teaching and Stoic traditions.

We can be sure that blending was discussed by some Valentinians, for Clement attributes to them the teaching that "Jesus, the church and Wisdom form a powerful and complete blending of bodies (κρᾶσις τῶν σωμάτων)." It is quite clear that these Valentinians knew ancient philosophical theories about blending since they illustrated their view with the mixture of water and wine,[79] which was a clas-

[74] As Risto Auvinen remarked in his comments on a previous draft of this chapter, this point makes the Stoic theory of blending different from Aristotle's. Aristotle argued that both constituents change in blending, becoming "that which is intermediate and common" (Aristotle, *Gen. et corr.* I 328a; Harry A.Wolfson, *Faith, Trinity, Incarnation* (Vol. 1 of the *Philosophy of the Church Fathers*; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1956), 375. Wolfson (ibid. 381) points out that "… according to Aristotle, the resultant mixture is a *tertium quid*, which is neither one nor the other of its constituent parts."

[75] Cf. Long and Sedley, *The Hellenistic Philosophers,* 1.293. The Stoics and Aristotle agreed on this point; Aristotle also maintained that the constituents of a blending can be resolved to their original natures (*Gen. et corr.* I 327b; Wolfson, *Faith, Trinity, Incarnation*, 376).

[76] Long and Sedley § 48C = Alexander, *On Mixture* 216.14–218.6.

[77] Seneca, *Epistles* 9.16 (Long and Sedley § 46O). I assume that Seneca here speaks of the gods' blending (instead of fusion) with each other since he presupposes that the gods preserve their distinct natures even in the state of repose, and can be again separated from each other when the new cosmic cycle will start all over again after the conflagration.

[78] For critics of the Stoic theory of blending, see Long and Sedley § 48E (Plutarch, *On Common Conceptions* 1078b–d), and 48F (Themistius, *On Aristotle's Physics* 104.9–19).

[79] Clement of Alexandria, *Exc. Theod.* 17.1.

sic example in philosophical discussions of blending, attested both in Aristotle and in Stoic sources.[80]

There are three other cases in Valentinian data where theories of blending seem operative. All three instances are related to the distinction between the spiritual and the psychic essence. First, Valentinians taught that the spiritual substance "cannot take on corruption."[81] This teaching is clarified with comparison to gold which, even when it lies in in mud, "does not lose its beauty, but preserves its own nature."[82] This implies that Valentinians conceived of the spirit's presence in humans in a way similar to Stoics thought of blending: although the spirit permeates the whole body (cf. Valentinus' teaching discussed above), this does not change the spirit into something else – as would happen in fusion, or in "Aristotelian" blending, but it retains its own distinct nature.[83]

The second case of blending in Valentinian sources comes from the *Tripartite Tractate*. It contains a lengthy account of how two different orders of powers came into being as the result of Word's (unintended) break with the divine realm and his conversion.[84] As the two orders were then engaged in a struggle for power, they became completely intermingled with each other. In the battle, even the more virtuous of the two parties became infected by the lust for power, which was characteristic of the inferior party to begin with. As the result of this cosmic battle, those belonging to the more virtuous party became as ignorant of the true divinity as those against whom they were fighting.[85] Nevertheless, the mixture of the two orders is only temporary. For when the divine Son appears to both groups "like a flash of lightning" (good Barthian imagery!), their responses are divided. Those belonging to the superior order "greeted his revelation and bowed down before him," whereas those in the inferior one only became frightened, without showing any signs of true conversion.[86]

The *Tripartite Tractate* describes here a mixture which Stoics would probably have defined as blending (rather than juxtaposition or fusion): there are two constituents that are, at one point, completely intermingled with each other, and yet

[80] For Aristotle, see *Gen. et corr.* I 321a–322a, 328a (Wolfson, *Faith, Trinity, Incarnation*, 377–78); for Stoics, see the examples collected in Long and Sedley § 48A-D (Diogenes Laertius 7.151; Plutarch, *Common Conceptions* 1078e; Alexander, *On Mixture* 216.14–218.6; Stobaeus 1.155.5–11).

[81] Irenaeus, *Her.* 1.6.2. I take the following comment ("regardless of what practices they may have engaged in") to be Irenaeus' own comment.

[82] Ibid.

[83] Alexander of Aphrodisias also mentions gold as an example in his discussion of the Stoic theory of blending (Long and Sedley § 48C), but in a way that is completely different from the Valentinian teaching reported by Irenaeus. There is, thus, no reason to suppose that the Valentinian saying concerning gold in mud was inspired by Stoic teaching.

[84] In the *Tripartite Tractate*, Word (Λόγος) assumes the role reserved for Wisdom in other Valentinian sources.

[85] *Tri. Trac.* 83–85.

[86] *Tri. Trac.* 89–90.

they preserve their distinct natures. This can be seen in the fact that they can be separated from each other at any given point. What gives this description a characteristically Valentinian twist is the idea that it is the Son's revelation that affects the separation and make one's true nature known.[87] This case, however, is not as clearly "Stoic" as the first one, for the blending of the better and the worse party in the *Tripartite Tractate* results in a *tertium quid*, which was the characteristic feature of the Aristotelian theory of blending: the better party took over some features of the other constituent, and thus became something new in the mixture.

My third case is a famous *crux interpretum* of Valentinian scholarship. Clement of Alexandria reports that Valentinians waited for an eschatological wedding banquet, to which two kinds of souls, that is, the souls of spiritual beings and the "other faithful souls" (αἱ … ἄλλαι πισταὶ ψυχαί), will be summoned. In the wedding feast, the distinction between the spiritual and the psychic souls will disappear: the feast will be "common to all, until all are made equal to each other and <know each other>."[88] And yet, the great equalitarian banquet ends with a renewed separation of the spirit and the soul: the spiritual elements (τὰ πνευματικά) discard the souls and proceed to the truly divine realm, where they are granted the vision of the Father. The souls remain in the Ogdoad, the region of intermediate salvation, where the wedding feast took place.[89]

What is striking here is the idea that, before the banquet, the spiritual elements, waiting for the final consummation of salvation in the state of repose (ἀνάπαυσις), are still wearing souls as their "garments" (ἐνδύματα). In other words, Valentinians did not think of the soul and the spirit as two mutually exclusive features: the humans endowed with the spirit do have souls as well.[90] In addition, this passage suggests that at least some Valentinians envisaged one salvation for all: the souls of the spiritual ones and those of the faithful will remain in one and the same region of intermediate salvation. Notably, it is not "the spiritual *persons*" (οἱ πνευματικοί) who will be summoned to the divine realm, but it is "the spiritual *elements*" (τὰ πνευματικά) which, after the eschatological banquet, will return to their place of origin.

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[87] This idea, in my opinion, is also the bottom line in Heracleon's interpretation of the Johannine stories of the Samaritan Woman (John 4:1–42) and the Son of the Royal Officer (John 4:46–54) (Heracleon, Frags. 17–40).

[88] The expression "know each other" is based upon emendation of the Greek original text.

[89] Clement, *Exc. Theod.* 63–64.

[90] Cf. also Irenaeus, *Her.* 1.7.5: the divine seed is planted in just souls (δικαίαις ψυχαῖς), so that it, through being educated in the world, becomes "worthy of perfection." However, the view about the "just souls" is in this passage different from that in Clement: these souls are those in possession of the divine seed, that is, the spiritual ones, and not the second best group like in Clement. It is impossible to tell whether this difference is due to variety in Valentinian teaching, or to Irenaeus' and Clement's different ways of interpreting Valentinian materials at their disposal.

This whole imagery of the coming together of different kinds of souls, and the following image of the final separation of the spiritual essence and the souls (of both groups!), is best understood as a theological application of the Stoic theory of blending. The spiritual essence is conceived of as something that can be mixed with the soul having the right inclination. Yet, neither the spirit nor the soul disappears or loses its distinct nature in the ensuing mixture, which means that they can be separated from each other.

Let us now return to Seneca's depiction of the gods' blending as part of their return to their original state and the image of Zeus "reposing in himself" as the result. This Stoic description of what happens at the end of a cosmic cycle is strikingly similar to the Valentinian eschatological imagery in which the spiritual beings are in the state of repose, the souls of different varieties are made equal to each other, and the spiritual element returns to the divine realm. On the basis of these affinities, it seems feasible that Stoic eschatological tradition, such as that in Seneca, may have inspired Valentinians' imagination as to what happens at the end of time.

Nevertheless, it is clear that Valentinians did not completely buy into Stoic cosmology and eschatology. One obvious disagreement is that most Valentinians ascribed to matter both a beginning and an end,[91] whereas the Stoics thought that matter is as eternal as God. Not only did Valentinians maintain that matter stems from Wisdom's emotions, but they also thought that matter will be completely destroyed in the eschatological conflagration.[92] This leaves little room for renewal of the cosmos in the Valentinian system of thought. Accordingly, Valentinians probably thought that the great eschatological blending in the Ogdoad will take place only once, not time after time.

Conclusion

It is plausible to assume that Valentinian teachers, who must have had some sort of philosophical education, might have known Stoic philosophy, at least in a rudimentary form. It may seem more difficult to demonstrate that their teaching was directly influenced by Stoicism. There are other options that could also explain affinities between Stoicism and Valentinianism. Although I do not think

[91] The only possible exception among Valentinians is the heterodox teacher combatted in Methodius, *On Free Will*, and identified as Valentinus in the *Dialogue on the True Faith in God*, which rehashes large parts of Methodius' dialogue. This teacher argues that the pre-existence of matter explains the fact that the world is not perfect. While most recent commentators are doubtful concerning the identification of the heterodox teacher with Valentinus, I have argued that a good case for this identification could indeed be made (cf. Dunderberg, *Beyond Gnosticism*, 67–72).

[92] Irenaeus, *Her.* 1.7.1.

John Dillon is fair in branding "the Gnostics" as "the magpies of the intellectual world of the second century,"[93] Valentinians were probably as selective in their usage of philosophical traditions as most other early Christians who had developed taste for philosophy. Moreover, it is possible that Valentinians derived ideas, which we can classify as "Stoic," from popular philosophy, or religiosity, of their time without having advanced education in Stoicism or by Stoics. Finally, it could be argued that Valentinians were familiar with a similar mixture of Platonism and Stoicism as Philo and other so-called "middle Platonists" were.

Where do the examples discussed in this essay leave us in regard to these options? One could at least assume that a Stoically oriented ancient reader would have been able to see a number of reflections of, and allusions to, Stoic teaching in Valentinian texts. Perhaps this Stoic reader may even have understood certain points in these texts more readily than readers with different sorts of intellectual backgrounds. I would even go one step further and claim that a "Stoic" reading sometimes helps us make *better* sense of the cases discussed above than some other approaches to them. Hence my assumption that Valentinians knew more than just the rudiments of Stoic philosophy and made innovative use of some ideas borrowed from that philosophy.

Unlike Philo, Valentinians did not confine themselves to the interpretation of scripture in light of Platonic and Stoic traditions. They were more innovative in creating new mythic tales of origin and the end, in which these learned traditions play a part. In this sense of "philosophical myths," Valentinians provide us with a Christian counterpart to Hermetic writings, where we are faced with similar mixture of ideas derived from Platonic and Stoic philosophies, all embedded in tales of origin (e.g., *Poimandres*) or other instances of "sacred discourse."[94]

Such combinations of myth and philosophy pose intriguing questions and interpretive challenges to modern interpreters. E.g., Why was mythic discourse preferred to philosophical treatises in these groups? Were these myths originally composed for religious usage? Or were they rather intended as tools for philosophical reflection? Or was the genre of myth chosen because of educational purposes? These questions are still far from being adequately addressed.

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[93] John M. Dillon, "Monotheism in Gnostic Tradition," in *Pagan Monotheism in Late Antiquity* (ed. Polymnia Athanassiadi and Michael Frede; Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999), 74; for this and Dillon's other denigrating comments on Gnostics and Valentinians, see Dunderberg, *Beyond Gnosticism*, 17–18.

[94] The numerous allusions to Platonic and Stoic ideas in *Corpus Hermeticum* are meticulously traced in Arthur Darby Nock and Andre-Jean Festugière (ed.), *Corpus Hermeticum* (4 vols; Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1945–1954).

Chapter 7

Valentinian Theories on Classes of Humankind[1]

The best-known Valentinian theory of humankind is the division into three fixed groups of people, the spiritual (οἱ πνευματικοί), the animate (οἱ ψυχικοί),[2] and the material (οἱ ὑλικοί) ones. This division is based upon the notion that Adam as the first human was endowed with all three qualities,[3] but they were unevenly distributed among his offspring. For this reason, "there are many material ones, not so many animate ones, and only a few are spiritual ones."[4]

Irenaeus claims that the Valentinians made this distinction to divide *Christians* into two classes, identifying themselves as the advanced "spiritual" ones and placing all other Christians in the inferior class of "the animate ones." I do not want to dispute Irenaeus' report completely but the point I want to make in this study that there was no unified Valentinian anthropology based upon the three classes of humankind. Not only did those Valentinians, who embraced the tripartite division, hold different views as to who belongs to what group, but we also have evidence for a simpler, "bipartite" theory among Valentinians. In this theory, the soul is conceived of as a middle category in a different sense: it is the locus where the choice between good and bad, or one's orientation towards the spirit or matter is made.

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[1] This chapter goes back to a brief summary I was invited to present at the Berlin 2011 meeting of the Patristische Arbeitsgemeinschaft. The original purpose of that presentation was only to set the stage for the ensuing discussion with Professor Einar Thomassen. This article is an expanded version of the paper I read in the meeting, but I have left the original form (with a limited set of statements) unaltered, and have kept the bibliographical references to a minimum. For a fuller discussion of the views presented here, cf. Ismo Dunderberg, *Beyond Gnosticism: Myth, Lifestyle, and Society in the School of Valentinus* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008).

[2] It is difficult to find a good English translation for the term ψυχικός. "Psychic" obviously evokes the wrong kinds of associations (of a person with supernatural abilities, such as clairvoyance or soothsaying). The NRSV translation of ψυχικός as "those who are unspiritual" (1 Corinthians 2:14) is misleading since the connection to "the soul" is completely lost. In their translation of Irenaeus' *Against Heresies,* book 1, Unger and Dillon use the term "ensouled" which seems accurate ("endowed with soul") but the word does not seem to be in wide usage. The translation "animate ones," which I have preferred here, is adopted from David Brakke, *The Gnostics: Myth, Ritual, and Diversity in Early Christianity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010), 116.

[3] Irenaeus, *Her.* 1.5.6.

[4] Clement of Alexandria, *Exc. Theod.* 56.2.

1. Two Kinds of Christians

Some Valentinians were obviously inspired by the distinction Paul had drawn between "the spiritual one" and "the animate one."[5] Paul already used these designations to describe Christians on two levels of insight. In 1 Corinthians, Paul portrayed "the animate person" (ψυχικὸς ἄνθρωπος) as a person who lacks proper understanding of the things divine, whereas the spiritual person (ὁ πνευματικός) "discerns all things" (1. Cor. 2:14–15). Against this background, it is feasible that there were, as Irenaeus claims, Valentinians who used *pneumatikos* as a self-designation and regarded other Christians as "the animate ones."[6]

Since the Valentinians thought highly of Paul, it stands to reason that they took over the spiritual-animate distinction from him and elaborated it. It does not seem necessary to assume that the distinction in Paul would go back to an earlier "Gnostic" tradition, which would also become visible in Valentinian teaching. The impression that, in 1 Corinthians 2, Paul "suddenly begins to speak like a Gnostic"[7] is probably largely due to an image of "Gnostic" teaching based upon Valentinian evidence. It would seem, however, far too complicated to assume that Paul's opponents in Corinth had already used "Gnostic" (or "gnosticizing") language, that Paul adopted their language for tactical reasons, and that Valentinians, despite their great respect for Paul, had some immediate knowledge of his opponents' views or of similar ideas derived from elsewhere. In addition, one is hard-pressed to find early Christian evidence for the distinction between "spiritual" and "animate" persons where Paul's influence could be excluded.[8]

While it seems feasible that some Valentinians divided Christians into two groups, as Irenaeus claims, one should be more critical concerning his claims about his opponents' lewd morality. Irenaeus maintains that the Valentinians set different standards of behavior for themselves versus other Christians. This is Irenaeus' picture: Believing that their spiritual nature is indestructible no matter what they did, the Valentinians gave themselves license to practice all possible

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[5] For a recent account of scholarly positions, see Hans-Friedrich Weiss, *Frühes Christentum und Gnosis: Eine rezeptionsgeschichtliche Studie* (WUNT 225; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008), 416–427. Weiss agrees with the scholars who place Paul in the trajectory from Jewish Wisdom theology to "Gnostic speculation on Sophia" (425).

[6] Irenaeus, *Her.* 1.6.1–2.

[7] Cf. Weiss, *Frühes Christentum und Gnosis*, 418, 421 (with references to Ulrich Wilckens and Hans Windisch).

[8] The distinction also appears in Sethian texts, but even here Paul's influence seems undisputable; cf. *Nat. Rulers* (NHC II, 4) 87.17–18: "For the animate ones (ⲛ̄ⲯⲩⲭⲓⲕⲟⲥ) cannot comprehend the spiritual ones (ⲛ̄ⲡⲛⲉⲩⲙⲁⲧⲓⲕⲟⲥ)." It seems obvious that this aside draws upon 1 Corinthians 2:14 ("The animate person does not perceive the things pertaining to the spirit of God"). The Pauline influence on this text, as it now stands, is also clearly indicated by the quotations of Colossians 1:13 and Ephesians 6:12 in the introductory paragraph of this text (*Nat. Rulers* 86.20–25); these quotations are attributed to "the great apostle (ⲡⲛⲟⲩ ⲛ̄ⲁⲡⲟⲥⲧⲟⲗⲟⲥ)."

sorts of immorality while they prescribed higher standards of good conduct for their less advanced cobelievers.

> Because of this doctrine, the most perfect among them shamelessly do all the forbidden things … Food sacrificed to idols they eat without scruple, thinking they in no way defile themselves by it. And they are the first to assemble at every heathen festival held in honor of the idols for the sake of pleasure … Others give themselves up to carnal pleasures immoderately … Some secretly defile those women who are being taught this doctrine by them. … for us whom they call ensouled persons and claim are of the world, continence and good things are necessary. (*Her.* 1.6.3–4, trans. Unger & Dillon.)

Although some other scholars are more willing to believe him on such points,[9] I insist that Irenaeus' accusations of his opponents' moral faults should be first and foremost understood in light of ancient conventions of damnation (*vilificatio*); specifically, claims of one's opponents' excessive and offensive sexual behavior were firmly rooted in the rhetorical tradition.[10] Irenaeus describes his opponents' loose morality as directly stemming from Valentinian doctrine: since the Valentinians think they will be saved because of their spiritual nature, "they … neither suffer harm nor lose their spiritual substance regardless of what material practices they may be engaged in."[11] Obviously, however, this was not the whole truth. It often goes unnoticed that Irenaeus himself admits that some Valentinians had exemplary lives.[12] This concession, coming from a fierce opponent, indicates that the Valentinians Irenaeus knew did *not* regard immoral acts as an automatic consequence of one's belonging to the group of spiritual persons.

I have proposed that ancient philosophical theories related to moral progress can help us go behind Irenaeus' polemical picture of Valentinians as self-professed (and morally suspect) spiritual ones. The idea that, at least in theory, there are (or have been) persons who need no moral instruction but can do the right thing intuitively was widespread among philosophers of different persuasions. This was how the Stoics defined "the perfect human," and the influence of their view can be seen, for instance, in Philo's portrayal of Moses as the perfect person (who has reached the level of immunity to passions), and of Aaron as a paradigm

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[9] For recent support for the reliability of Irenaeus' claims about the sexual immorality of his opponents, see Charles E. Hill, "Silencing the Bishop: The Ugly Irenaeus," *Reconsiderations* 10/1 (2010): 1–4, 7. It is disappointing that Hill does not mention the rhetoric of vilification at all. I also wonder whether he, as the spirit of fair play would require, would be willing to give similar credence to non-Christians accusing Christians (in general!) of celebrating "Thyestean dinners" (anthropophagy) and "Oedipean marriage (incest; cf. Athenagoras, *Leg.* 3; *Martyrs of Lyons* 14).

[10] Cf. Dunderberg, *Beyond Gnosticism*, 137–38; cf. idem, "The School of Valentinus," in *A Companion to Second-Century Christian "Heretics"* (ed. Antti Marjanen and Petri Luomanen; VigChrSup 76; Leiden: Brill, 2005), 64–99, esp. 70, 83; for accusations of sexual misbehavior in antiquity, see especially Jennifer Wright Knust, *Abandoned to Lust: Sexual Slander and Ancient Christianity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006).

[11] Irenaeus, *Her.* 1.6.2.

[12] Irenaeus, *Her.* 3.15.2.

of persons whose moral improvement must be supported with exhortation and prescriptions (*Leg.* 3.128–135). The Valentinian distinction between the spiritual ones, who are free to do what they want, and the animate ones, who need moral guidelines, is basically similar to that between the perfect sage and the "progressing ones" in Stoic philosophy. The Stoic view even included the idea that the perfect man, due to his special insight into what cause of action each particular situation requires, can sometimes act against the usual moral standards.[13] Another distinct feature of the truly wise person is that he acts in the right manner *effortlessly*. This can idea can be seen in Philo's affirmation that Moses practiced virtue "free from toil."[14] In Valentinian exegesis, Seth, Adam's third son and the forefather of the spiritual offspring is portrayed in a similar way, as one who "neither tends flocks nor tills the soil but produces a child, as spiritual things do."[15] This passage, in my view, suggests that Valentinians knew, and made use of, philosophers' theories of people at different levels of moral progress.

One version of the relationship between the spiritual Christians and other Christians is set out in the *Interpretation of Knowledge* (NHC XI, 1). This text envisions an ideal community where those having the spiritual gift are entitled to teach while other members should remain silent. A structure of this kind is prone to create jealousy in the latter group, and this is the problem discussed in the text. The author employs the ancient rhetoric of concord to urge the spiritually wanting members in the communal body to accept their lower status and cease feeling animosity towards those who are spiritually well-off.[16]

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[13] This probably explains why Zeno and Chrysippus, the two founding fathers of Stoicism, accepted incest and cannibalism in their works; their (theoretical?) reflections led to the stock accusation that Stoics accepted immorality (e.g., Sextus Empiricus, *Math.* 190–194; Diogenes Laertius, 7.188); cf. David E. Hahm, "Diogenes Laertius VII: On the Stoics," *ANRW* 2.36.6 (1992): 4076–4182, 4131ff. A similar case in early Christian literature is Epiphanes's text *On Justice* (Clement, *Misc.* 3.6.1.-9.3). Löhr compellingly argues that Epiphanes's case for sharing wives is theoretical one rather than evidence for libertinism among Carpocratians; cf. Winrich A. Löhr, "Epiphanes' Schrift 'Περὶ δικαιοσύνης' (= Clemens Alexandrinus, Str. III,6,1–9,3)," in *Logos* (FS Luise Abramowski; ed. Hans Christof Bennecke, Ernst Ludwig Grasmück and Christoph Markschies; BZNW 67; Berlin, 1993), 12–29.

[14] Philo, *Leg.* 3.140.

[15] Clement, *Exc. Theod.* 54.3.

[16] For a fuller discussion, see Dunderberg, *Beyond Gnosticism*, 147–58. Thomassen dismisses this part of my analysis as imposing too much hierarchy on "a clearly charismatically based community"; cf. Einar Thomassen, Review of Ismo Dunderberg, *Beyond Gnosticism*, *Journal of Religion in Europe* 3 (2010): 191–93, esp. 192. The starting point of my analysis, however, was not a preconceived idea of how "a charismatically based community" is structured in general, but simply the concerns expressed in the text. Who is entitled to speak and who is not is clearly one issue, and it is dealt with in a fashion that creates a hierarchy (between those who are spiritually well-off and those who are not). On a more general level, I think it is too idealistic a notion that a "charismatic" group would have no "hierarchy." The decisive issue is rather what constitutes hierarchy in different kinds of groups (e.g, is it possession of charismatic gifts, such as prophecy and speaking in tongues, or the more formal offices of "bishop," "deacon," or "elder"?).

It may seem that those described as having the spiritual gift in this text confirm Irenaeus' picture of arrogant Valentinians who only regarded themselves as the spiritual ones. However, the picture painted of those belonging to this class is essentially different from that in Irenaeus on one essential point: the spiritually gifted members are described as those who "make progress in the Word" (ⲡ̄]ⲡⲣⲟⲕⲟⲡⲧⲉ ⲉ̄ⲙ̄ ⲡⲗⲟⲅⲟⲥ, 16.32). "Making progress" was a technical term in Stoic philosophy for those who were below the category of "the perfect human" but who seriously aimed at moral improvement; for persons at this level, precepts and advice were still necessary while the perfect human no longer needed them.[17] Whereas we would assume on the basis of Irenaeus that Valentinians thought they had already reached the status of the perfect human (since they obeyed no rules of decent behavior), *Interpretation* suggests that Valentinians instead placed themselves on a level where moral progress was still both possible and necessary.

2. The Tripartite Division and Ethnic Reasoning

While the picture we gain from Irenaeus (and which is partially confirmed by the Interpretation of Knowledge) is that the Valentinians used the tripartite anthropology to divide Christians into two classes, other sources show that the tripartite division was also used for ethnic reasoning. According to Heracleon, for instance, the three classes of humankind were

(1) the Gentiles, who worship the devil and his material world;

(2) the Jews, who worship the Creator-God (or the world he created), and

(3) the spiritual ones, who worship the Father "in spirit and truth."[18]

The ethnic aspect of Heracleon's argument is strengthened with the quotation from *Peter's Proclamations* (*Kerygmata Petrou)* he uses to amplify his teaching: "We should neither worship like the Greeks, accepting the works of matter and worshipping wood and stone, nor should we worship the divine like the Jews do. Although they think they alone know God, they are ignorant of him, and worship angels, months and the moon." Thus, Heracleon identified *the Jews* with the animate ones, and placed (all?) Christians in the spiritual class. (It does not seem likely that Heracleon regarded non-Valentinian Christians as belonging to "the Jews." The specific claim that those in the second class worshipped "angels, months and the moon" fits well with an outsider's view of Jewish worship,[19] whereas it would be ill-suited for a description of other Christians' worship.)

[17] See chapters 2 and 4 above.

[18] Heracleon, Frag. 21, on John 4:22.

[19] I emphasize the "outsider" aspect since it is not clear whether there were really Jews worshipping angels and the moon. In Jewish sources, such practices are prohibited (e. g., t. Hul. 2:18). It is debated whether one should or should not infer from these prohibitions that there

The division between "the material ones" and "the animate ones" is also that between the Greeks and the Jews in the *Tripartite Tractate* (NHC I, 5). The Greeks and the Hebrews in this text represent the material and animate essences that were mixed with each other in the beginning.[20] There is an outspoken ethical dimension to the whole distinction: "The essences of the three kinds can each be known from its fruit."[21] The different ways humans respond to the Savior show what group they belong to (spiritual: immediate acceptance; animate: hesitant acceptance; material: hatred of the Savior).[22] The idea of a primeval mixture of the material and the animate essences is used to explain why some people convert and "give glory to the Lord of glory," while some others do not;[23] fluidity in practice (the possibility of conversion) is explained in terms of fixity in theory (conversion based upon one's primeval nature).[24]

The system described above is not entirely fixed, however. Although it is affirmed in the *Tripartite Tractate* that the three essences bestowed on humans became known "only when the Savior came to them,"[25] the text implies that some kind of separation between the material and the animate ones had already taken place before the Savior's arrival. While the Greeks are inseparably allied with the "material powers," "the Hebrews" have developed some insight into spiritual matters, and their scripture shows a true "anticipation of hope."[26] This means that Jewish scripture already demonstrates a rudimentary tendency towards, or anticipation of, the separation between the material and the animate essence.

The latter idea is carefully nuanced: the author on the one hand subscribes to the usual Christian conviction that that "the coming of the Savior" was predicted in Jewish scripture, and yet, on the other, he is also aware of the problem that the prophets' predictions of the Savior were very imprecise: "none of them understood where he would come from or by whom he would be born. Instead,

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were Jews worshipping angels, the sun, the moon, and stars; for a succinct account of this debate, see Larry Hurtado, *One God, One Lord: Early Christian Devotion and Ancient Jewish Monotheism* (2nd ed.; London: Continuum, 1998), 31–33. Whether historically reliable or not, the image of Jews worshipping angels was widespread among non-Jewish authors, both Christian and gentile (cf. ibid. 33–34).

[20] *Tri. Trac.* 84.

[21] *Tri. Trac.* 118. The translations of the *Tripartite Tractate* in this passage are those by Einar Thomassen in *The Nag Hammadi Scriptures: The International Edition* (ed. Marvin Meyer; New York: HarperOne, 2007).

[22] *Tri. Trac.* 118–19.

[23] *Tri. Trac.* 120–21.

[24] For the constant interplay between fluidity and fixity in early Christian constructs of ethnic identities, see especially Denis Kimber Buell, *Why This New Race: Ethnic Reasoning in Early Christianity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005).

[25] *Tri. Trac.* 118.

[26] *Tri. Trac.* 109–112.

they were granted to say only this: he would be born and would suffer."[27] The preexistence and incarnation of the Savior "did not enter into their thoughts."[28]

3. Fixed Categories in Heracleon?

One of the points where Einar Thomassen and I are clearly on opposite sides is the debate as to whether Heracleon subscribed to a fixed division into the spiritual, the animate and the material people or not.[29] Thomassen, together with the majority of scholars, argues that Heracleon interpreted the story of the Samaritan woman (John 4:1–42) as describing a spiritual person's conversion and that of the healing of the royal officer's son (John 4:46–54) as a paradigm of an animate person's salvation. In my view, this reading of the respective fragments is too much based upon a general impression of what a Valentinian teacher should teach and pays too little attention to the views attested for Heracleon himself.

The best argument for the view that Heracleon has two different kinds of conversion in mind is his emphasis that the Samaritan woman showed an immediate and positive response to Jesus: "He also extols the Samaritan woman as exhibiting unhesitant faith appropriate to her nature, *because she did not doubt what he was saying to her*."[30] The unhesitant reaction seems to coincide with the affirmation in the *Tripartite Tractate* that "the spiritual kind" "received knowledge straightaway from the revelation."[31]

This argument, however, has not put an end to the debate between the two options. There are a number of caveats related to Heracleon's interpretation:[32]

1) As claimed above, it was the Jews, not the "lower-class" Christians, whom Heracleon placed in the middle class between the spiritual and the material one (cf. above).

2) The distinction between the spiritual and the animate ones is not clearly made in the respective fragments of Heracleon: he neither calls the Samaritan

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[27] The idea that the prophets did not know where the Savior came from probably draws upon John's portrayal of the Jews being ignorant of Jesus' true origin (esp. John 7:41–42; cf. also 6:42; 7:27).

[28] *Tri. Trac.* 113–114.

[29] Thomassen calls the position I (and some others, including Ekkehard Muehlenberg and Ansgar Wucherpfennig) have argued for "a blind alley"; cf. Einar Thomassen, "Heracleon," in *The Legacy of John: Second-Century Reception of the Fourth Gospel* (ed. Tuomas Rasimus; NovTSup 132; Leiden: Brill, 2009), 173–210, 187 n. 59.

[30] Heracleon, Frag. 17.

[31] *Tri. Trac.* 118.

[32] For a similar set of caveats, see Ansgar Wucherpfennig, *Heracleon Philologus: Gnostische Johannesexegese im zweiten Jahrhundert* (WUNT 142; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2002), 336–57.

woman "a spiritual person," nor the healed son of the royal officer "an animate person."

3) Heracleon did not describe the reaction of the royal officer's son. This means that the evidence at our disposal contains no clear evidence for the idea that Heracleon distinguished between the Samaritan woman's unhesitant response and the son's guarded response.

4) Heracleon describes the Samaritan woman's response to Jesus as "faith." This would be unsuitable for a spiritual person (if we take for granted Irenaeus' claim that Valentinians prescribed faith only for the animate ones).

5) The Samaritan woman's response to Jesus is *not* that of immediate acceptance in Heracleon's analysis. His reading of John 4:33 ("Did someone bring him something to eat?") shows that, in his view, the woman had also first succumbed to a literal understanding of Jesus' words: "Heracleon takes this as said by the disciples in a corporate (= concrete) manner: The disciples understood in a low way, imitating the Samaritan woman, who said, 'Sir, you have no bucket, and the well is deep.'"[33] Moreover, Heracleon thinks that the woman is portrayed as neither lying about her immorality nor directly acknowledging it.[34] This is taken as a sign that the woman behaved in a manner that "suited her nature," which in turn makes it difficult to believe that "nature" here would mean the woman's spiritual nature.

6) Heracleon describes the condition of the Samaritan woman and the royal officer's son in the same way. Both are characterized by being entangled with matter: the mountain where the Samaritans worship represents the material world ruled by the devil,[35] and it is "in the depth of matter" that the Father's kin is lost.[36] As regards the royal officer's son, the city where he is, Capernaum, represents matter; like the Samaritan woman's, the son's condition before the Savior's intervention is that of ignorance and sin, and contrary to his "nature."[37] It is not said here that the son's nature was different from that of the Samaritan woman.

7) There would be little point in describing the salvation of an animate person since Heracleon taught (unlike other Valentinians) that the soul itself is desctructible: "the soul is not immortal but only has a disposition towards salvation. … the soul is the perishable which puts on imperishability and the mortal which puts on immortality, when its death was swallowed in victory."[38] Hence the only hope of salvation for the soul is that it will be transformed into something else.[39]

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[33] Heracleon, Frag. 30.
[34] Heracleon, Frag. 19.
[35] Heracleon, Frag. 20.
[36] Heracleon, Frag. 23.
[37] Heracleon, Frag. 40.
[38] Heracleon, Frag. 40.
[39] For a similar emphasis paid on transformation, see also Heracleon, Frag. 5.

8) Heracleon's conclusions on the royal officer's son are formulated in a manner that seems to include *all* humans:

> He interprets the servants of the royal officer (John 4:51) as the angels of the Demiurge. They proclaim "Your child lives," because he is now behaving properly and rightly, no longer doing what is unsuitable. He thinks that the servants proclaimed to the royal officer the news about the son's salvation, because he believes that the angels are the first to observe the actions of humans on earth to see if they live in good health and as good citizens since the Savior's arrival.[40]

There are no restrictions here as to the people concerned; Heracleon speaks generally of "humans on earth." It is not claimed in the text (and it would seem strange to assume) that the angels only observe the animate ones but not the spiritual ones. It should be noted that Heracleon has no qualms about the angels of the creator-God;[41] he only describes their role in positive terms as those who keep track of the moral conduct of human beings. Furthermore, it is not stated in the text that the description of one's life after conversion ("in good health and as good citizens") is limited only to the lower-class Christians and not to the those forming the more advanced group. In fact, the Samaritan woman also seeks moral improvement: "She wanted to learn in what way, and pleasing whom, and worshipping God, she might escape fornication."[42]

Nevertheless, there may be a middle ground in the debate between the two squarely opposed readings of Heracleon's fragments. Some details in his interpretation of the royal officer's son become more significant than is usually acknowledged, if we take seriously the ethnic perspective in Heracleon's interpretation of John's gospel. Heracleon offers a distinctly Pauline interpretation of the sickness of the royal officer's son, explaining the son's fatal condition as a reference to Jewish law; the son is about to die because "the end of the law was death (Rom. 7:13); the law kills through sins." What we have here, thus, is a Christian construct of a Jew, who is not only suffering under the law, but also sinning because of it, and therefore subject to death (cf. Rom 7:7–11). Therefore, there is the possibility that Heracleon interpreted the healing of the royal officer's son as a paradigm of *Jewish* conversion to Christianity.

Heracleon's subsequent comments support this reading: the Creator-God's "own humans," whose condition Heracleon discusses here, are described as "the children of the kingdom" who will be abandoned to the outer darkness (Matth 8:12) and the ones concerning whom "Isaiah prophesied, 'I begot and raised up sons, but they set me aside."' (Isa 1:2, 4; 5:1).[43] This reading is also in line with Heracleon's view that the Jews are "the devil's children" (John 8:44), not "by

[40] Heracleon, Frag. 40.

[41] Here Heracleon's view is different from that of Valentinus, who portrayed the creator angels as opposed to, and afraid of, Adam (Valentinus, Frag. 1).

[42] Heracleon, Frag. 19.

[43] Heracleon, Frag. 40.

nature" (φύσει), but only "by arbitrary determination" or "by adoption" (θέσει).[44] The Jews, in Heracleon's view, are not "natural" children of the devil but have attained this status by what they have done: "they have loved the devil's desires and perform them."[45]

4. The Soul's Double Orientation

The idea of the soul's double orientation, which I mentioned above as an alternative to the tripartite anthropology of some Valentinians, is much more prominent in Valentinian evidence than is usually realized. Irenaeus himself also informs us of a Valentinian teaching, in which humans are divided only into two groups, the good and the bad. In this model, the soul is the locus where the spiritual seed can or cannot be sown, depending on the soul's capacity: "Again, subdividing the souls, they say that some are good by nature and some evil by nature. The good are those that are capable of receiving the 'seed,' whereas those evil by nature are never capable of receiving that 'seed.'"[46]

This view of the soul with a double inclination was commonplace in antiquity. For example, Plutarch portrayed the soul as a domain which partakes of the mind on the one hand but is subject to "the flesh and passions" on the other. In Plutarch's view, the souls can be mixed with mind and body in different ways: some souls "sink into the body" and "are their whole lifelong disrupted by passions," whereas some other souls are a little more advanced but still "leave outside their purest element." This purest element is one's mind or divine daemon, which is completely "free from corruption."[47]

There is ample Valentinian evidence for the idea that the soul is dragged in two opposite directions, up and down. In one summary of Valentinian theology, it is stated: "If the soul becomes similar to the things above, the Ogdoad, it becomes

[44] For the opposition between θέσει and φύσει in philosophical discourse, see LSJ s. v. (V. 3). Attridge translates θέσει as "social convention" in his recent analysis of Heracleon's fragments; cf. Harold W. Attridge, *Essays on John and Hebrews* (WUNT 264; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010), 193–207, esp. 206. Attridge insists that, if one reads Heracleon's teaching "against the background of an assumed Valentinian anthropology," this results in "a reading in which the most negative group of those who reject the Revealer are in an 'intermediate' position." This reading, however, becomes more intelligent, if one takes into account the ethnic aspect of Heracleon's reasoning: he indeed places the Jews in the intermediate group (Frag. 21), but there is obviously a way leading from this group down to the most negative group.

[45] Heracleon, Frag. 46. Buell's conclusion regarding the *Tripartite Tractate* fits especially well with Heracleon's view about the Jews (*Why This New Race*, 128): "But if actions determine essence … it is not behavior that reveals one's nature, but behavior that *produces* one's nature …"

[46] Irenaeus, *Her.* 1.7.5.; trans. Unger & Dillon.

[47] Plutarch, *Socr.* 591d–f.

immortal and ascends to the Ogdoad, which is 'the heavenly Jerusalem'; if it becomes similar to matter, that is, the material passions, it becomes corruptible and will be destroyed."[48] This picture of the soul torn between the options of immortality and corruption is essentially similar to the view expressed in Plutarch.

In another source of Valentinian teaching, the soul-essence (τὸ ψυχικόν) is characterized by "free will": "While the spiritual nature is saved by nature, the animate nature has free will, and has, *according to its own choice*, the capacity for faith and incorruptibility, as well as that for unbelief and corruption."[49]

A slightly different bipartite distinction is drawn between "the divine soul" and "the material soul" in the same source,[50] but the point is essentially the same. Here one finds a more elaborated description of how the two kinds of souls are related to each other: "the divine soul" is "hidden in the flesh." This means that the divine soul is enveloped by the material soul, which "is the body of the divine soul."[51] Again, there is no mistaking the ethical aspect inherent in this division between two kinds of souls. The material soul is described in strongly negative terms: it is the "adversary" Jesus talked about (Matth 5:25) and "the law warring against the law of my mind," which Paul had mentioned in Romans (7:23). The conclusion is that the material soul should not be nourished "by the power of sin" but must be "put to death."[52] One's goal in life should obviously be to ignore the temptations issued by the material soul, and to get in touch with one's divine soul.

There are more examples reflecting a similar understanding of the soul with a double orientation. Some Valentinians compared the material human to an inn, in which the soul lives alone, or with demons, or with the divine *logoi*.[53] This teaching implies that the soul's condition is not static but depends on which powers are allowed to rule over the soul. Valentinus himself used the same metaphor of an inn to describe *the heart* as the dwelling place of demons; the heart's impurity can be only removed by the Father.[54]

These two passages show that these Valentinians did not simply adopt the philosophers' view of the soul's double inclination up (towards *nous*) and down

[48] Hippolytus, *Ref.* 6.32.9.

[49] Clement, *Exc. Theod.* 56.3.

[50] Clement, *Exc. Theod.* 51.2–3.

[51] "The divine soul" falls between the bipartite and the tripartite division. This soul, identified with the "bone" mentioned in Genesis 2:23, is supplied with the spiritual seed in order that this "bone nature, that is, the reasonable and heavenly soul, would not remain empty but would be filled with spiritual marrow." (*Exc. Theod.* 53:5.) Risto Auvinen points out in his forthcoming dissertation ("Philo and the Valentinians") that Casey's translation of this passage ("that it [a spiritual seed] might be 'the bone,' the reasonable and heavenly soul which is not empty but full of spiritual marrow") is misleading. The idea is rather that the soul, though it already is reasonable and of divine origin ("heavenly"), still needs to be strengthened by the spirit, identified with the marrow inside the bone.

[52] Clement, *Exc. Theod.* 52.

[53] Hippolytus, *Ref.* 6.34.6.

[54] Valentinus, Frag. 2.

(towards matter)[55] as such but expanded this notion with the explanation that the soul's downward movement is caused by evil demons inhabiting the soul.[56]

Conclusion

I have sought to point out here that Valentinians had at least two different anthropological theories, a bipartite one based upon the idea of the soul's double inclination, and a tripartite one, based upon the idea of an uneven distribution of the spirit in humans. The former idea is more dynamic in the sense that it places emphasis on the soul's own decision, whereas the latter view seems more deterministic and allied with a discourse of fixed categories.

The existence of two theories is not necessarily a sign of an ongoing debate on this issue among Valentinians. The two theories could rather be understood as offering two different perspectives that were not mutually exclusive. The theories apparently have different functions: the soul's double orientation is useful in urging people to make right choices, whereas the tripartite model (with its emphasis on one's origins) is useful in affirming who "we" are versus "others," either in connection with other Christian groups, or in constructing a separate Christian identity in the middle of other, competing identities (such as those of "the Jews" and "Greeks").

Even where the language of "fixed origins" was operative in theory, a great deal of fluidity was allowed in practice. For example, it was a common idea that one's origins could be changed,[57] or that a person can behave contrary to what his or her inborn "nature" requires and in this way damages the inner self.[58] Regardless of how deterministic the system may seem in theory, there is usually enough room for one's personal responsibility and for the choices to be made in one's soul.

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[55] For these directions envisaged for the soul, see chapter 1 above.

[56] For the significance of demonology among early Christian teachers of philosophical bent see David Brakke, *Demons and the Making of the Monk: Spiritual Combat in Early Christianity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006); for Valentinus in specific (and for some striking affinities between his views and those of Antony), see ibid. 17–19.

[57] This is one of the major results in Buell, *Why This New Race*; for an early precursor of her viewpoint, I would mention Rudolf Bultmann's view of determinism based upon decision (*Entscheidungsdualismus*), and his explanation of how the whole concept of the believers' divine origin in 1 John presupposes that one's origin can be changed "afterwards"; cf. Bultmann, *Theologie des Neuen Testaments* (9th ed.; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1984), 373–75; idem, *Die drei Johannesbriefe* (KEK 14; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1967), 49–52 (though I do not agree with his description of the "Gnostic" position as opposed to the one in 1 John).

[58] For a Stoic debate concerning whether virtue can be lost, see Diogenes Laertius 7.127: While Chrysippus thought this can happen, Cleanthes considered virtue "irremovable."

Chapter 8

Paul and Valentinian Morality

Paul's letters represented sacred tradition and source of authority to Valentinians. Most prominently, Paul was the source of inspiration to those Valentinians who saw themselves as being in the possession of the spiritual gift. This view was of vital importance since it was used to authorize their activity as teachers of other Christians. Valentinians also placed Valentinus himself in a chain of tradition issuing from Paul. The claim linking Valentinus with an otherwise unknown Theudas, who in turn was Paul's disciple (γνώριμος),[1] is likely to stem from the followers of Valentinus, not his opponents. Yet another dimension of the reverence shown towards Paul is the fact that some Valentinians wrote new texts under his name.

This much said, scholarly estimations about the Valentinian interpretations of Paul are strikingly diverse. Elaine Pagels, in her study *The Gnostic Paul* (1975), delineated two conflicting versions of Pauline exegesis in the second century: Irenaeus and his followers developed an image of an "anti-Gnostic" Paul in opposition to "the gnostic Paul" of the Valentinians. Pagels was critical of both sides: "each of these opposing images of Paul (and each of the hermeneutical systems they imply) to some extent distorts the reading of the texts."[2]

In his 1979 study on Paul in the early church, Andreas Lindemann adopted a much harsher stance towards Valentinian exegesis: "It cannot be claimed that Paul's theology was fundamental for the thought [of the school of Valentinus]. One has never the impression that the Pauline text formed the basis for a gnostic statement. It is even less correct to say that the Valentinians were occupied with the 'interpretation' of Paul's epistles." Lindemann especially chided the Valentinian Theodotus for lacking insight into Paul's thought: "it can hardly be said that Theodotus, despite all his formal admiration of Paul, understood Paul's theology."[3]

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[1] Clement of Alexandria, *Misc.* 7.106.4.

[2] Elaine Pagels, *The Gnostic Paul: Gnostic Exegesis of the Pauline Letters* (Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1992 [orig. 1975]), 163–4.

[3] "Dass die Theologie des Paulus für ihr [der valentinianischen Schule] Denken aber konstitutiv gewesen wäre, kann man nicht behaupten. Man hat nirgends den Eindruck, dass der paulinische Text die Grundlage für die gnostische Aussage sei. Noch weniger kann man sagen, dass die Valentinianer sich um die 'Auslegung' der Paulusbriefe bemüht hätten. … dass bei aller formalen Wertschätzung des Paulus von einem Verstehen seiner Theologie bei Theodot kaum gesprochen werden kann." Andreas Lindemann, *Paulus im ältesten Christentum: Das Bild*

Fortunately, a much more positive view on Valentinian interpretations of Paul has gained ground. A number of specialists on Nag Hammadi texts and other early Christian sources have confirmed that Valentinians drew real inspiration from Paul and based their theological views on his. Michel Desjardins has shown that "… the Valentinian understanding of sin is fundamentally Christian in nature, and … it emerges naturally out of Pauline speculations about sin."[4] Philip Tite has more recently adopted and expanded Desjardins' line of thought in his methodologically sophisticated analysis of the moral exhortation in the *Gospel of Truth* and the *Interpretation of Knowledge*.[5] Judith Kovacs notes "the great importance of Paul's letters to Valentinian theologians,"[6] arguing that "these early exegetes listened hard when they heard Paul proclaiming: 'By the grace of God I am what I am' (1 Cor. 15:10)."[7] Minna Heimola devotes one full chapter to the reception of Paul in her study on the *Gospel of Philip*.[8] She details how Paul's teaching on love, freedom and those in the know, that was related to the eating of meat offered to idols in 1 Corinthians 8, is in *Philip* "connected to the more general concept of sinning; thus the passage seem to refer to all actions and not just eating."[9] More importantly, *Philip* subscribes to the Pauline idea that one's freedom, brought about by knowledge, is limited by love towards others: "Whoever is free through knowledge is a slave because of love for those who do not yet have freedom of knowledge."[10] Heimola rightly infers from this passage that "'those who have the knowledge' … still need ethical exhortation." The whole

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des Apostels und die Rezeption der paulinischen Theologie in der frühchristlichen Literatur bis Marcion (BHT 58; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1979), 300–1.

[4] Michel R. Desjardins, *Sin in Valentinianism* (SBLDS 108; Atlanta: Scholars, 1990), 131. Desjardins also emphasizes, correctly in my view, that "Valentinian ethics in general reflect the gospel injunctions in the NT, notably those in Matthew's Sermon on the Mount."

[5] Philip L. Tite, "An Exploration of Valentinian Paraenesis: Rethinking Gnostic Ethics in the Interpretation of Knowledge (NHC XI, 1)," *HTR* 97 (2004): 275–304; idem, *Valentinian Ethics and Paraenetic Discourse Determining the Social Function of Moral Exhortation in Valentinian Christianity* (NHMS 67; Leiden: Brill, 2007).

[6] Judith L. Kovacs, "Grace and Works: Clement of Alexandria's Response to Valentinian Exegesis of Paul," in *Ancient Perspectives on Paul* (ed. Tobias Nicklas, Andreas Merkt and Joseph Verheyden; NTOA 102; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht 2013), 191–210, esp. 210.

[7] Judith L. Kovacs, "The Language of Grace: Valentinian Reflection on New Testament Imagery," in *Radical Christian Voices and Practice* (FS Christopher Rowland; ed. Zoë Bennett and David B. Gowler; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 69–85, esp. 84; cf. eadem, "Concealment and Gnostic Exegesis: Clement of Alexandria's Interpretation of the Tabernacle," *Studia Patristica* 31 (1997): 414–37; eadem, "Echoes of Valentinian Exegesis in Clement of Alexandria and Origen: The Interpretation of 1 Cor 3.1–3," in *Origeniana Octava* (ed. Lorenzo Perrone; Leuven: Peeters, 2004), 317–29; eadem, "Clement of Alexandria and Valentinian Exegesis in the *Excerpts from Theodotus*," *Studia Patristica* 41 (2006): 187–200.

[8] Minna Heimola, *Christian Identity in the Gospel of Philip* (PFES 102; Helsinki: The Finnish Exegetical Society, 2011), 93–102; for a recent review of Heimola's study, see David Brakke, *CBQ* 75 (2013): 572–3.

[9] Heimola, *Christian Identity*, 95.

[10] *Gos. Phil.* 77.

idea of being a slave because of love in this passage builds on Paul's view that Christians, "having been set free from sin, have become slaves of righteousness" (Romans 6:18).[11] In addition, Heimola shows that it is possible to hear many other Pauline – and deutero-Pauline – voices as the source of inspiration when it comes to *Philip's* teaching about present resurrection, Adam, and the original, androgynous state of humankind.[12]

These studies also shake the traditional assumption of a binary opposition between the "ecclesiastical" (or "orthodox," or "mainstream") and Valentinian (often understood as representing the "gnostic" pole in general)[13] interpretations of scripture.[14] The boundaries between these two were far less obvious than is often allowed. Kovacs, for example, points out that there is an interesting difference between Clement of Alexandria's two works, *Paidagogos* and *Miscellanies*: in the former work, Clement rejects the Valentinian ideas "in strongly polemical statements," whereas in the latter he shows "how the insights of Valentinian exegetes can be incorporated into the true, ecclesiastical γνῶσις."[15]

We have numerous quotations from, and more or less clear allusions to, Paul's letters in Valentinian sources of all varieties. The corpus of Paul's letters in these sources includes the deutero-Pauline epistles to Ephesians and Colossians, but one is hard-pressed to find indisputable signs of the Pastoral epistles there.[16]

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[11] Heimola, *Christian Identity*, 97 (accrediting this insight to Desjardins, *Sin in Valentinianism*, 98).

[12] Heimola, *Christian Identity*, 98–102.

[13] For one recent example of this approach to Valentinianism, see Hans-Friedrich Weiss, *Frühes Christentum und Gnosis: Eine rezeptionsgeschichtliche Studie* (WUNT 225; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2007). It is characteristic of his lengthy analysis of the reception history of Paul (399–490) that the evidence related to Valentinian teachers is treated as bearing witness to the "gnostic" position in general. For a more detailed discussion of this aspect in Weiss' work, see Ismo Dunderberg, Review of Weiss, *Frühes Christentum und Gnosis*, *RBL* 04/2011.

[14] This whole development in the field, commencing in 1990's, is oddly (but perhaps intentionally?) ignored by Nicholas Perrin, "Paul and Valentinian Interpretation," in *Paul and the Second Century* (ed. Michael F. Bird and Joseph R. Dodson; London: T & T Clark, 2011), 126–39. For Perrin, Valentinianism continues to be one of the "gnostic sects," characterized by "a radical metaphysical dualism, which separated mind and body, spirit and matter." (127) No effort is made here to qualify Valentinian "dualism" as being different from and more moderate than (see below n. 18) in the teachings of some other early Christian groups, such as Sethians. Such petty details obviously don't matter, when one hunts for the perceived "essence" of "gnostic" thought as opposed to "the creedal trajectory of the Great church" (ibid.).

[15] Judith L. Kovacs, "Concealment and Gnostic Exegesis," 431.

[16] Cf. Jacqueline A. Williams, *Biblical Interpretation in the Gnostic Gospel of Truth from Nag Hammadi* (SBLDS 79; Atlanta: Scholars, 1988). According to her, the Pauline epistles that may be referred to in the *Gospel of Truth* include Romans; 1–2 Corinthians; Ephesians; Philippians; Colossians, and 2 Timothy. There is, however, no secure evidence that the author of the *Gospel of Truth* knew the Pastoral epistles in general. Williams correctly places the only potential reference to 2 Timothy (*Gos. Tru.* 25:25–35/2 Tim. 2:20–21) into the category of dubious cases. Perrin ("Paul and Valentinian Interpretation," 130–32) is not only more confident about the influence of 2 Timothy on the *Gospel of Truth* (and thus on Valentinus in his view) but he

In addition to the textual evidence, there is one potential glimpse of a non-textual reception of Paul's teaching among Valentinians. Irenaeus reports, with unmasked schadenfreude, that some Valentinian men attempted to live together "chastely" with their female cobelievers but failed: "Others … who in the beginning feigned to dwell chastely with them as sisters, were exposed as time went on when the 'sister' became pregnant by the 'brother.'"[17] Granted that "dwelling chastely" here means "living together without sexual benefits," the best, and perhaps the only imaginable, source of inspiration for this practice is Paul, who in 1 Corinthians 7 instructed those, who felt themselves strong enough, not to consummate marriage with their virgin fiancées (1 Cor. 7:36–38).

The available evidence is too large to be discussed here in its entirety.[18] Instead of seeking to offer a systematic overview of all such aspects related to the Valentinian reception of Paul's teachings, I will focus here on three issues:

1) Paul's special (or legendary) status in the Valentinian imagination;

2) the way Paul meets philosophers in Valentinus' fragments; and

3) the use of Pauline *pneumatikos-psychikos* terminology in other Valentinian sources, especially in the *Excerpts from Theodotus*.

I have sought to argue elsewhere that Valentinian teachers can be approached as early Christian intellectuals who, just like non-Christian philosophers, provided their students with guidance towards the right way of life.[19] Accordingly, I will here draw special attention to moral ramifications – both direct and potential – of Valentinians' teachings based upon their interpretations of Paul.[20]

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also finds here evidence adding to the possibility "that 2 Timothy was circulating broadly in the mid-second century and that it was broadly credited to Paul."

[17] Irenaeus, *Her*. 1.6.3.

[18] For one recent summary, which I think captures remarkably well different aspects of Valentinian interpretation of Paul, see Richard I. Pervo, *The Making of Paul: Constructions of the Apostle in Early Christianity* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2010) 210–19. My only qualm with his account is that, though familiar with critical discussion about these points, he continues to define "Gnosticism" as "a radical movement of alienation" (207). This stereotype is especially ill-suited to Valentinianism, where most examples Pervo discusses come from. Most Valentinians seem to have held a relatively positive attitude towards the world: true, the world was created by an inferior god, but he was secretly guided by the divine Wisdom; and in most of the Valentinian sources this god is described as ignorant but not hostile towards humankind as in Sethian texts. The Valentinians even taught that the creator-God (without knowing why) loved the spiritual offspring of the supreme God more than others. All this means that not much is left of the allegedly "Gnostic" anticosmic attitude in the teachings of Valentinians. Paul and the authors of the Gospel of John and the Book of Revelation would, in fact, represent a far more "radical alienation" from the world than the Valentinians.

[19] Ismo Dunderberg, *Beyond Gnosticism: Myth, Lifestyle, and Society in the School of Valentinus* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008).

[20] In retrospect, the reception of Paul as the backbone of Valentinian theology would have merited more attention than I have offered in my previous study on Valentinians. The present essay, thus, not only summarizes my previous arguments but also seeks to complement the picture I have painted of Valentinians. One particular point where my former analysis was indeed focused on the reception of Paul was my take on the use of body metaphors in the

1. Paul – More than a Man?

Paul assumes a special role in Valentinian thought, not only as a scriptural authority whose letters Valentinian teachers quoted and explained, but also as a more mythical figure under whose name new texts were composed and whose role was linked with the period preceding the creation of the world.[21] This latter aspect is most prominent in the *Revelation of Paul* (NHC V, 2), which portrays Paul as relating his journey in the heavens four to ten.[22]

The moral aspect figures prominently in the story related in the *Revelation of Paul*. The account of Paul's ascent through the heavens is used to address, and warn against, wrong kinds of behavior. The soul, whose interrogation and judgment Paul witnesses in the fourth heaven, is accused of anger, rage and envy ([ογбωнт̄ [нн̄] ογвϣ[λ]ϧ̣ м[н̄ о]γкωϩ), as well as of murders (мιϩωтв̄) and "sins" in general (мєиовє) (21.1–14).[23] Another crucial point in the story is the mythical affirmation of Paul's divine commission: supported by the Spirit, Paul boldly claims in front of the creator-God ("an old man") that his task is to go "down to the world of the dead" and bring to an end "the Babylonian captivity" (23).

The narrative sequence from point one (the wretched soul in the hereafter) to point two (Paul's mission) implies the following conclusion: Paul became an apostle *because* he saw the souls tormented at the gates of the fourth heaven. It is not spelled out in what way Paul planned to help the souls in (and out of?) "the Babylonian captivity." The context suggests that the method was Paul's exhortation to avoidance of the moral errors – "all these lawless things (н̄нєїѧноні[ѧ] тнроγ)" – that the punished soul had committed in "the land of the dead" (20.18–20.)

The Prayer of the Apostle Paul (NHC I, 1) provides us with another example of Paul in the Valentinian imagination. This Paul is recognizable through the use of language derived from Paul's letters: leaning on the language used in Philip-

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Interpretation of Knowledge (Dunderberg, *Beyond Gnosticism*, 147–58). There I sought to argue that while Paul turned upside down the usual usage of the body metaphor for society (as supporting the cause of those who are well-off), the author of *Interpretation* returned to the more traditional usage by describing the have-nots as posing the problem and urging them to accept their lesser role in the meetings of the congregation.

[21] The two texts treated below are also discussed by Perrin, "Paul and Valentinian Interpretation," 135–39, with very different emphases.

[22] For a compelling argument for the Valentinian provenance of this text, see Michael Kaler, *Flora Tells a Story: The Apocalypse of Paul and Its Contexts* (Waterloo, ON: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2008), 69–73.

[23] This portrayal of the wretched soul, examined and condemned in the hereafter, is common coinage in Nag Hammadi and related texts. For a discussion of some similar presentations, see Ismo Dunderberg, "Moral Progress in Early Christian Stories of the Soul," *NTS* 59 (2013): 247–67 [= chapter 1 above].

pians 2:9, Paul utters his prayer "in the name exalted above every name, through Jesus Christ, [Lord] of lords, King of the eternal realm." (A. 11–12.)

The more distinctly Valentinian character of Paul becomes visible in the *Prayer's* expanded form of 1 Corinthians 2:9:

1 Corinthians 2:8–10	*The Prayer of the Apostle Paul* (NHC I, 1, A.25–33)	
But none of the rulers of this age (οὐδεὶς τῶν ἀρχόντων τοῦ αἰῶνος τούτου) understood this; for if they had, they would not have cruficied the Lord of glory.		Cf. *Gos. Thom.* 17: Jesus said,
But, as it is written,	Grant	"I shall give you
"What no eye has seen	what no eye <u>of angels</u> has [seen]	what no eye has seen
nor ear heard	nor ear <u>of rulers</u> heard,	nor ear heard nor hand touched
nor the human heart conceived,	nor the human heart conceived.	nor the human heart conceived."
what God has prepared for those who love him,	It became angelic,	
these things God has revealed to us through the Spirit."	made after the fashion of the ensouled God,	
	when it was formed in the beginning.	

The saying used here is a *Wanderlogion* in the truest sense of the word,[24] and the parallel in the *Gospel of Thomas* shows that it also circulated as a dominical saying. The *Prayer* (unlike *Thomas*) clearly draws upon the Pauline version of this saying. The expanded version of 1 Corinthians 2:9 in the *Prayer* suggests that "the hidden wisdom" Paul referred to in 1 Corinthians 2:6–10 was understood as containing teaching about the demiurge and the creation of humankind.

The first addition in the *Prayer*, mentioning "eye *of angels*" and "ear *of rulers,*" is faithful to Paul's own intention since he used this saying to explain why the cosmic rulers did not recognize "the Lord of glory" and crucified him (1 Cor. 2:8). The second addition in the *Prayer* is more distinct in describing "the human heart" as being of an "angelic" nature and made "after the fashion of the ensouled God (ⲕⲁⲧⲁ ⲡⲓⲙⲟⲩⲧⲉ ⲛ̄ⲯⲩⲭⲓⲕⲟⲥ)." While these qualifications bring in a good deal of Valentinian mythic speculation, they also respond to a question left open in Paul's text. For what Paul did not explain in 1 Corinthians 2:8–10 was *why* the human heart lacks understanding; the amplified version in the *Prayer* explains this lack as due to the heart's conformity with the creator-God.

[24] For evidence, see Klaus Berger, "Zur Diskussion über die Herkunft von 1 Kor 2.9," *NTS* 24 (1978): 271–83.

Whereas the soul-nature is here, like in 1 Corinthians, linked with an inferior level of understanding, the *Prayer* also mentions another kind of soul, one allied with the "spirit": Paul asks the Savior to "rescue my luminous, eternal soul (ⲛ̄ⲧⲁ ϥⲩⲭⲏ ⲛ̄ⲟⲩⲁⲉⲓⲛ [ϣⲁ ⲉ]ⲛⲏⲣⲉ) and my spirit" (A.1). The soul, thus, can be – but is not necessarily – of inferior quality. There is also a soul of the right quality, which can and will experience salvation together with the spirit. This view about the soul's double inclination comes very close to what we have in other Valentinian sources, to be discussed below.[25]

Kaler adds one passage in the *Excerpts of Theodotus* where Paul also occupies a special place.[26] The passage first describes how, "due to the aeons' goodwill" Jesus was created and sent as a powerful supporter ("paraclete") to the transgressed aeon. Then the text moves on to Paul:

> In the same fashion as the Paraclete (ἐν τύπῳ δὲ Παρακλήτου), Paul became the apostle of the resurrection. He was also sent to preach immediately after the Lord's passion. Therefore, he preached the Savior in these two ways: as begotten and passible for the sake of those on the left, because being able to recognize him in this position they have become afraid of him, and in the spiritual manner stemming from the Holy Spirit and a virgin, as the angels on the right know him. For each one knows the Lord after his own fashion, and not all in the same way. (*Exc. Theod.* 23.2–4.)

Paul is mentioned in this passage in connection with the cosmic drama. Does this mean that Valentinians really thought Paul played a role at this level? Kaler thinks so: "Paul is an actor in that mythological drama. … Paul is identified as a type of the Pleromatic Paraclete – in other words, a figure whose role is to represent and suggest a celestial archetype."[27] I am hesitant to go this far on the basis of this passage in the *Excerpts*. The text, instead, seems to describe Paul's mission (as the apostle of the resurrection) as being similar to the role Jesus had already played in the cosmic drama. In my reading of the text, Paul is not an archetype pointing to the Paraclete, but his mission bears a resemblance to that of Jesus-Paraclete.

In this passage, the similarity between Jesus-Paraclete and Paul is in this passage based upon keywords rather than on a systematic one-to-one equation. One

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[25] For the emphasis on the soul's double inclination in other Nag Hammadi and related texts, see chapter 1 above.

[26] Cf. also Weiss, *Frühes Christentum und Gnosis*, 402–3; Perrin, "Paul and Valentinian Interpretation," 132–35. For some reason, Perrin seems to identify the position laid out in this passage with that of Valentinus (134), although Valentinus is not mentioned in the relevant passage at all. In discussing what he conceives to be Valentinus' view ("for Valentinus textual meaning lies hidden beneath any ostensible meaning; true meaning was accessible through the portholes of words and phrases," 135), Perrin is eager to posit affinities between "modern post-structuralism" and Valentinus, whose hermeneutics allegedly "took for granted the instability of the linguistic sign." It is strange that Perrin makes no links to allegorical interpretations of early Jews and Christians in this connection.

[27] Kaler, *Flora Tells a Story*, 71.

part of the equation is "passion": the Lord's passion (as suffering) and Wisdom's suffering are linked to each other – but Paul was not sent to the suffering Lord like Jesus-Paraclete was sent to the suffering Wisdom. The point that Paul proclaimed the Savior in two different ways does not seem to follow from the equation either, but this only emphasizes the importance of that point. The notion that Paul taught at two different levels is probably based on the distinction he drew between the "hidden wisdom," reserved for the perfect ones, and the more introductory "milk-education" (1 Cor. 3:1–3; cf. Hebr. 5:12–13).[28] The new – but by no means unique – element in the *Excerpts* is the idea that the less advanced teaching is for those who believe out of fear. Clement and Origen shared this view: "Both authors also distinguish between simple Christians motivated by fear and more advanced, spiritual Christians motivated no longer by fear but by love."[29]

2. Paul in the Fragments of Valentinus

Given the alleged chain from Paul through Theudas to Valentinus, it is surprising that Paul does not occupy any special place of honor in the surviving fragments of Valentinus's works. Those willing to attribute the *Gospel of Truth* to Valentinus might find a considerably larger set of Pauline allusions in this text,[30] yet that attribution is untenable,[31] and the number of allusions to Paul in that text is subject to debate.[32]

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[28] For the importance of this distinction for educated early Christians (cf. Hebrews, especially Clement of Alexandria, see Kovacs, "Echoes of Valentinian Exegesis"; for a thorough account of the reception of this Pauline metaphor in Clement of Alexandria, see Denise Kimber Buell, *Making Christians: Clement of Alexandria and the Rhetoric of Legitimacy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999), 136–48.

[29] Joseph W. Trigg, *Origen* (London: Routledge, 1998), 9. For Origen's discussion of this topic, see ibid. 31 (*Homily on Jeremiah* 20), 47 (*Commentary on the Song of Songs*, prol. 2.43); 56 (*Against Celsus* 5,15–16).

[30] Perrin's analysis of Valentinus' use of Paul is solely based upon examples derived from the *Gospel of Truth* ("Paul and Valentinian Interpretation," 128–32). Perrin does not mention the fragments of Valentinus, which form the starting point here.

[31] Cf. Markschies, *Valentinus Gnosticus?*, 339–56. The view ascribing the *Gospel of Truth* to Valentinus is *not* "broadly attested," and this claim of authorship is *not* made in Irenaeus, *Her.* 3.11.9 (*pace* Perrin, "Paul and Valentinian Interpretation," 128).

[32] Jacqueline Williams, in her detailed study on the *Gospel of Truth*, discusses a total of 73 cases where she and/or other scholars have detected allusions to the scriptures; 24 of them are to the Paulines (28, if we include Hebrews). Williams divides the proposed references to the Paulines into "probable" (10), "possible" (8) and "dubious" (6) cases (for a convenient summary, see Williams, *Gnostic Interpretation*, 179–83). It is hardly possible to determine the precise criteria for "probable" and "possible" usage. By way of comparison, in the footnotes to my Finnish translation of the *Gospel of Truth*, I gave only three references to the Paulines: Phil. 2:6–8 (for "drawing himself down to death," *Gos. Tru.* 20; Williams #15: "possible");

It can be pondered whether Valentinus built his self-image on the Valentinian legendary figure of Paul. One fragment comprises Valentinus's account of his visionary encounter with the Logos.[33] Both the Logos described in this fragment and Paul's spiritual adviser in the *Revelation of Paul* are described as a little child (cf. *Rev. Paul* 18–19). It is, however, difficult to know for sure whether Valentinus sought to be linked with Paul in this way. This would presuppose that the story about the little child advising Paul on his heavenly journey was already there prior to Valentinus. Another possibility is that the common element was at some point moved from a story about Valentinus to one about Paul.

Other fragments of Valentinus contain two clear allusions to Paul's letters. First, Valentinus drew upon Romans 2:15 in speaking of "the law written in the heart." Valentinus used this allusion to support an open-minded view towards non-Christian culture. He maintained that there is much common ground between non-Christian texts ("the books distributed in public," ἐν ταῖς δημοσίαις βίβλοις) and those "written in the church of God" (γεγραμμένα ἐν τῇ ἐκκλησίᾳ τοῦ θεοῦ). What brings these two varieties of books together are "the words stemming from heart," and it is these words that are "the law written in the heart."[34] In addition to Romans 2:15, Valentinus may have been inspired by the preceding verse, Romans 2:14, in which Paul describes how the nations, without knowing it, fulfill the Torah's requirements because they are naturally inclined to do so.

Valentinus put into practice the cultural program he supported by referring to Romans 2:14–15. This can be seen in his poem *Harvest*, which belongs to the same stream of tradition as Stoic allegorical interpretations of the golden cord by which Zeus, according to Homer (*Iliad* 8.19), encircled the entire world. In addition, it is worth noting that, in Adamantius' *Dialogue of the True Faith in God*, Valentinus (or a Valentinian) is presented as an admirer of the truths expressed in Greek tragedies and as honing his teaching with quotations from Homer and Plato.[35]

Rom. 8:29–30 ("those whose names he foreknew" *Gos. Tru.* 21; Williams #19: "probable"); and Phil. 2:6–7 (the Son described as "having served" in the world, *Gos. Tru.* 24; not included by Williams); cf. Ismo Dunderberg, "Totuuden evankeliumi (NHK I, 16–43): Johdanto, käännös ja selitykset [The Gospel of Truth: Introduction, translation and annotations]," in *Nag Hammadin kätketty viisaus: Gnostilaisia ja muita varhaiskristillisiä tekstejä* [The Hidden Wisdom of Nag Hammadi: Gnostic and other Early Christian Texts] (ed. Ismo Dunderberg and Antti Marjanen; Helsinki: WSOY, 2001), 113–43. While all cases Williams classifies as "probable" are not equally convincing (e.g., #14: *Gos. Tru* 20.23–27/Col. 2:14 is in my view "possible" at best), I would now expand the references I gave in my translation with what seem to be relatively clear allusions to Colossians (e.g., *Gos. Tru.* 18.11–18/Col. 1:25–27).

[33] Valentinus, Fragment 7 (= Hippolytus, *Ref.* 6.42.2).

[34] Valentinus, Fragment 6 (= Clement, *Misc.* 6.52.3).

[35] The passage attributed to Valentinus or a Valentinian in this text stems in its entirety from Methodius of Olympus' dialogue *On Free Will*, describing his debate with a heterodox early Christian teacher. Contrary to what most scholars think, I am inclined to believe that the author of *On the True Faith* may have been right in identifying the heterodox teacher in Methodius' dialogue as Valentinus; cf. Dunderberg, *Beyond Gnosticism*, 67–72.

The second clear allusion to the Pauline epistles comes from Hippolytus' brief comment on Valentinus' view of the body: "(Valentinus) supposes that flesh will not be saved and calls it 'the garment of skin' and 'the corrupt human being.'"[36] "The corrupt human being" alludes to Ephesians 4:22. In that passage, "the old corrupt human being" was used to describe the former way of life of Christians, who were subject to "the deception brought about by desires" before their conversion. It would be wrong to deduce from this teaching that Valentinus advocated hatred of the body.[37] He does, however, advocate a Pauline view here: Valentinus' teaching that the body of flesh will not be saved is in keeping with what Paul says in 1 Corinthians 15:50: "flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, and corruption (φθορά) cannot inherit incorruptibility (ἀφθαρσία)."[38]

3. The *Pneumatikos* ± *Psychikos* Language

The most debated point in the Valentinians' reception of Paul was, and is, their distinction between spiritual and soul-endowed persons. Paul used the term πνευματικός for those who had reached spiritual maturity, among whom secret wisdom could be imparted, and who "inquire into all things but are themselves not subject to anyone's inquiry" (1 Cor. 2:6–16). The soul-endowed person (ὁ ψυχικός), in contrast, is still in need of introductory teaching, "milk" instead of "solid food" (cf. Hebr. 5:12–13; 1 Pet. 2:2). Frustrated by the slow progress of the *psychikoi*, Paul nevertheless expects that they can rise to the level of spiritual understanding (1 Cor. 3:1–3).

There must be some special link between the *psychikos* and "flesh" in Paul's thought since he, at the beginning of 1 Corinthians 3, easily switches from using

[36] Valentinus, Fragment 11 (= Hippolytus, *Ref.* 10.13.4). The possibility that this passage may be included in the fragments of Valentinus was first suggested by Christoph Markschies, *Valentinus Gnosticus? Untersuchungen zur valentinianischen Gnosis; mit einem Kommentar zu den Fragmenten Valentins* (WUNT 65; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1992), 276–90. Markschies left it undecided whether the fragment is authentic or not; I lean towards accepting it as authentic (cf. Dunderberg, *Beyond Gnosticism*, 67).

[37] "Hatred of the body," becoming visible either in the form of extreme asceticism or in that of uncontrolled libertinism, is one of the most popular features attached to modern constructs of "Gnosticism." For a sweeping critique of the use of this aspect as an essential characteristic of "Gnosticism," see Michael A. Williams, *Rethinking ª Gnosticismº: An Argument for Dismantling a Dubious Category* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996), 116–88.

[38] The placement of flesh on the lowest level in the cosmic hierarchy in Valentinus' poem *Harvest* (Valentinus, Fragment 8 = Hippolytus, *Ref.* 6.37.7) can be easily combined with his teaching that flesh is subject to corruption. For a discussion of this poem and the four "elements" mentioned in it, see Ismo Dunderberg, "Stoic Traditions in the School of Valentinus," in *Stoicism in Early Christianity* (ed. Tuomas Rasimus, Troels Engberg-Pedersen and Ismo Dunderberg; Grand Rapids, MI: BakerAcademic 2010), 220–38 [= chapter 5 above], esp. 222–25.

the term *psychikos* to "those of flesh" (σαρκικοί/σαρκινοί) in describing the same people with limited understanding. The link between soul and flesh can be better understood in light of Plutarch's remarks on the soul. He described the soul as a domain which partook of the mind on the one hand but was also subject to "the flesh and passions" on the other, and had a tendency to become "irrational." The souls can be mixed with the mind and body in different ways: some of them "sink into the body" and "are their whole lifelong disrupted by passions," whereas some other souls are a little more advanced but still "leave outside their purest element." Plutarch relates that "many" call the pure part, which is "free from corruption," mind, though he sees in this part one's divine "daemon."[39]

This passage from Plutarch shows that the potential threats connected with the soul – its inclination to irrationality and its ability to ally with the body instead of the mind – were a commonplace in Greco-Roman philosophy.[40] It is not necessary to here recourse to a "Gnostic" mythology to explain why Paul chose to use the term *psychikos* for those lacking real insight.[41] It suffices to explain Paul's usage of this term that he, like Plutarch and other philosophers, associated *psyche* with *sarx* and irrationality.

The point where Paul and Valentinians differ from the philosophers is their designation of the higher element in humans as "the spirit" instead of "the mind." Paul used the term *pneumatikos* as a designation for a special group of people, who were able to pronounce judgments about all things. If we follow Irenaeus, the Valentinians en bloc adopted this designation for themselves. Irenaeus claims that Valentinians were self-professed *pneumatikoi*, whereas they treated all other Christians as *psychikoi*. According to Irenaeus, Valentinians also set double moral standards for themselves versus other Christians. While faith and good works were required of the *psychikoi* for salvation, the *pneumatikoi* were saved simply because of their divine nature. Irenaeus accuses Valentinians of acts of grave misconduct that were based upon their self-understanding as members of the spiritual class. While Paul found progress possible for the *psychikoi* possible, Irenaeus maintains that the boundaries between the *psychikoi* and the *pneumatikoi* were insurmountable in the Valentinian teaching: promotion from the

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[39] Plutarch, *Socr.* 591d–f. The passage is quoted and discussed in Birger A. Pearson, *The Pneumatikos-Psychikos Terminology in First Corinthians: A Study in the Theology of the Corinthian Opponents of Paul and Its Relation to Gnosticism* (SBLDS 12; Missoula, MT: Scholars, 1973), 10–11.

[40] Thus Pearson, ibid.

[41] While my argument above is based upon Pearson's remarks, he himself insists that the *pneumatikos-psychikos* terminology of Valentinians does *not* go back to Paul, although the Valentinians themselves apparently thought so (cf. Irenaeus, *Her.* 1.8.3). Hence Pearson's conclusion that "the Valentinians themselves probably forgot the ultimate source of their terminology" (ibid. 80–81).

psychikos status to the *pneumatikos* one was impossible since the *pneumatikoi* had their status as a natural-born, divine gift.[42]

The Valentinian views about the spiritual nature were much more complex than the picture derived from Irenaeus suggests. The tripartite division of humankind into "material," "soul-endowed" and "spiritual" persons was only one Valentinian theory about soul-related issues. Irenaeus himself bears witness that some Valentinians regarded the soul as the location where the choice between matter and spirit is made: there are good souls that can receive the spiritual seed, and bad souls that cannot.[43] In addition, the division was not always between two categories of Christians. Other people were also placed into the basket of "soul-endowed persons," such as the Jews.[44] The *Interpretation of Knowledge* reserves public speaking only for those with the spiritual gift,[45] but nowhere does it claim that promotion to this group is impossible. When Ptolemaeus provides the female addressee of his introductory treatise (*Letter to Flora*) with appetizers of what the spiritual sense of scriptures entails, all his examples are very practical and related to a Christian lifestyle, and one of the crucial concerns in the Valentinian teaching recorded in the *Excerpts of Theodotus* is how the spiritual and soul-endowed natures can be joined to each other. In what follows, I first briefly discuss Ptolemaeus' examples of the spiritual interpretation, and then explore the *Excerpts* more fully; for the *Interpretation of Knowledge* I refer to my analysis offered elsewhere.[46]

4. Ptolemaeus: Spiritual Sense is Practical

In his *Letter to Flora*, Ptolemaeus argued that the cultic laws in the Hebrew Bible should be understood as "images and symbols." They are no longer to be followed "bodily," or taken literally, but should be understood in "the spiritual sense" (κατὰ … τὸ πνευματικόν). What is striking in Ptolemaeus' spiritual interpretation of these laws is that no great mystery is involved. He provides Flora with a set of very concrete and conventional examples of the spiritual sense: the sacrifices understood in a spiritual way comprise praise, thanksgiving, and good deeds towards one's neighbors; the spiritual circumcision is that of one's

[42] Irenaeus, *Her.* 1.6.2–4.

[43] Irenaeus, *Her.* 1.7.5.

[44] For the ethnic interpretation of the theory of three classes of humankind in Heracleon and the *Tripartite Tractate,* see Dunderberg, "Valentinian Theories," 118–23. As regards Heracleon's take on the Pauline categories of spiritual and soul-endowed, I seek to argue (like some other scholars) that these categories were less strictly fixed in his interpretation than is often assumed.

[45] *Int. Knowl.* 16.

[46] Cf. n. 20 above.

heart, and the true meaning of keeping the sabbath, fasting, and Passover and Unleavened Bread is abstinence from evil deeds.[47]

Ptolemaeus acknowledges Paul's own exegesis as the source for this approach to scripture, just as Origen did.[48] This usage of Paul as the precursor (and thus justification) of allegorical interpretation can be seen in Ptolemaeus' quotations from 1 Corinthians 5:7: "Paul the apostle demonstrates that both Passover and Unleavened Bread were images in saying that 'our paschal lamb, Christ, was sacrificed' and, he says, 'so that you may be unleavened, not taking part in leaven' – he calls evil 'leaven' – 'but you may be a new batch.'[49]

The picture emerging here of Ptolemaeus' understanding of what is "spiritual" is radically different from that painted by Irenaeus: the spiritual teaching is no secret knowledge about suspect mysteries, only divulged to those fully initiated, but it is the way of bestowing ethical value on Jewish ritual practices that Christians – at least those addressed by Prolemaeus – no longer observe.

5. Paul, Myth, and Ethics in the *Excerpts from Theodotus* 43–65

In my subsequent comments on the *Excerpts from Theodotus*, I focus solely on the passage usually designated as Section C (chapters 43–65). This section provides us with a lengthy cosmogonic account that runs parallel to that in Irenaeus. One striking difference between the two sources is that in the *Excerpts* scriptural testimonies are attached to each individual step of Valentinian myth, whereas Irenaeus collected examples of such testimonies into one place (*Her.* 1.8). The version in the *Excerpts* probably offers a more authentic picture of how Valentinian teachers constantly supported their mythmaking with references to Paul (and other scriptures).

[47] Ptolemaeus, *Flora* 33.5.8–14.

[48] For this aspect in Origen, see Elizabeth Ann Dively Lauro, *The Soul and Spirit of Scripture within Origen's Exegesis* (The Bible in Ancient Christianity 3; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2005), 70–76.

[49] Ptolemaeus, *Flor.* 33.5.15. The garbled form of the citation suggests that Ptolemaeus quoted Paul from memory:

Ptolemy, *Flor.*	1. Cor. 5:7
καὶ τὸ πάσχα δὲ ὁμοίως καὶ τὰ ἄζυμα, ὅτι εἰκόνες ἦσαν,	ἐκκαθάρατε τὴν παλαιὰν ζύμην ἵνα ἦτε νέον φύραμα, καθώς ἐστε ἄζυμοι.
δηλοῖ καὶ Παῦλος ὁ ἀπόστολος, τὸ δὲ πάσχα ἡμῶν, λέγων, ἐτύθη Χριστός, καί ἵνα ἦτε, φησίν, ἄζυμοι, μὴ μετέχοντες ζύμης – ζύμην δὲ νῦν τὴν κακίαν λέγει – ἀλλ' ἦτε νέον φύραμα	καὶ γὰρ τὸ πάσχα ἡμῶν ἐτύθη Χριστός:

The section begins in the middle of a Valentinian Wisdom myth. The way quotations from Paul are used can be seen right at the beginning of this story. The passage describing "the angel of counsel" is followed with a catena of three quotations from Paul's letters (Col. 1:16; Phil. 2:9–11; Eph. 4:8–10). None of the three quotations follows the original versions verbatim:

Fig. 1: Three Pauline quotations in *Exc. Theod.* 43.3–5:

a)	Col. 1:16
Πάντα γὰρ ἐν αὐτῷ ἐκτίσθη	ὅτι ἐν αὐτῷ ἐκτίσθη τὰ πάντα ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς καὶ ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς,
τὰ ὁρατὰ καὶ τὰ ἀόρατα,	τὰ ὁρατὰ καὶ τὰ ἀόρατα,
θρόνοι, κυριότητες,	εἴτε θρόνοι εἴτε κυριότητες
βασιλεῖαι,θεότητες, λειτουργίαι.	εἴτε ἀρχαὶ εἴτε ἐξουσίαι·
	τὰ πάντα δι' αὐτοῦ καὶ εἰς αὐτὸν ἔκτισται
b)	Phil. 2:9–11
διὸ καὶ ὁ θεὸς αὐτὸν ὑπερύψωσεν	διὸ καὶ ὁ θεὸς αὐτὸν ὑπερύψωσεν
καὶ ἔδωκεν αὐτῷ ὄνομα	καὶ ἐχαρίσατο αὐτῷ τὸ ὄνομα
τὸ ὑπὲρ πᾶν ὄνομα,	τὸ ὑπὲρ πᾶν ὄνομα,
ἵνα	ἵνα ἐν τῷ ὀνόματι Ἰησοῦ
πᾶν γόνυ κάμψῃ	πᾶν γόνυ κάμψῃ
	ἐπουρανίων καὶ καταχθονίων
καὶ πᾶσα γλῶσσα ἐξομολογήσηται	καὶ πᾶσα γλῶσσα ἐξομολογήσηται
ὅτι κύριος τῆς δόξης Ἰησοῦς Χριστὸς σωτήρ.	ὅτι κύριος Ἰησοῦς Χριστὸς εἰς δόξαν θεοῦ πατρός.
c)	Eph. 4:8–10
ἀναβὰς αὐτὸς καὶ καταβάς·	ἀναβὰς εἰς ὕψος ...
τὸ δὲ ἀνέβη τί ἐστιν, εἰ μὴ ὅτι καὶ κατέβη;	τὸ δὲ ἀνέβη τί ἐστιν εἰ μὴ ὅτι καὶ κατέβη
	εἰς τὰ κατώτερα [μέρη] τῆς γῆς;
ὁ καταβὰς αὐτός ἐστιν	ὁ καταβὰς αὐτός ἐστιν
εἰς τὰ κατώτατα τῆς γῆς	καὶ ὁ ἀναβὰς ὑπεράνω πάντων τῶν οὐρανῶν,
καὶ ἀναβὰς ὑπεράνω τῶν οὐρανῶν.	ἵνα πληρώσῃ τὰ πάντα.

The quotation from Colossians 1:16 is not only considerably abbreviated but the words "either rulers or powers" are replaced with "kingdoms, divinities, and services." The replacement shows that "rulers and powers," mentioned in Colossians, were understood as referring to other-worldly beings, including angels of lower ranks.[50] The quotations from Philippians 2 and Ephesians 4 are also presented in abbreviated forms, which may suggest that whoever originally wrote the Valentinian source available to Clement quoted these passages from memory instead of copying them directly from a manuscript.

[50] This is how I understand the meaning of the word λειτουργία in this connection; cf. *LPGL* s. v. λειτουργία 3, λειτουργικός 3, λειτουργός 3.

These quotations are used in the context of a story of how the heavenly Christ (called here "the angel of counsel") came down to visit Wisdom, when she, after having been banished from the divine realm, was in the state of desperation. Both here and in Irenaeus' version, Christ comes down to offer Wisdom a cure for her emotions.[51] While the idea of Christ as the soul's doctor can be found in other kinds of Christian texts as well, the distinctly Valentinian idea was that he healed Wisdom's emotions by turning them into substances out of which the inferior creator-God then created our world. The Savior "becomes the first universal creator"[52] in the sense that he put the whole process of creation into motion; hence the link to Colossians 1:16, quoted prior to this section. Christ's descent "to the lowest regions of the earth" and his ascent "above all the heavens," mentioned in Ephesians 4:9–10, were, in the Valentinian interpretation, linked with the mythic past, that is, Christ's rendezvous with Wisdom outside the divine realm and, by implication, his rapid return to that realm after accomplishing his mission.

In this part of the *Excerpts*, Pauline texts are not only prooftexts but they also inspired new innovations in Valentinian mythmaking. One example of this latter tendency is the account of how Wisdom, standing in awe of the male angels accompanying Christ, covered her head with a veil (κάλυμμα). This detail is linked with Paul's teaching in 1 Corinthians 11:10: "It was because of this mystery that Paul commanded the women to wear 'a sign of authority on their heads because of the angels.'"[53]This detail does not occur in other versions of the Valentinian myth, and it seems that the inspiration for it came from Paul's instructions to women.

The account of Wisdom's emotions and their therapy is amplified with other quotations from Paul's letters. The cosmic rulers created from Wisdom's distress (λύπη) are identified with those mentioned in Ephesians 6:12: "the spiritual forces of evil against whom our struggle is."[54] After this follows another verbatim

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[51] Clement, *Exc. Theod.* 44–46. For a fuller analysis of this aspect in different versions of the Valentinian Wisdom myth, see Dunderberg, *Beyond Gnosticism*, 95–118.

[52] Clement, *Exc. Theod.* 47.1.

[53] Clement, *Exc. Theod.* 44.

[54] Clement, *Exc. Theod.* 48.2. Ephesians 6:12 is more fully quoted at the beginning of the Sethian treatise *The Nature of the Rulers* (NHC II, 4), 86. To take this quotation as a sign of a secondary Christianization of the *Nature* would betray a very narrow view about the issues occupying learned Christians in the first three centuries CE . The Christian element in the *Nature* seems less superficial if one takes into account the fact that it belongs to a codex where there is also a collection of Jesus' sayings (*The Gospel of Thomas*), a collection of Christian teachings with constant references to the NT gospels and Paul (*The Gospel of Philip*), and a dialogue revelation taking place between Jesus and the apostle John (*The Secret Book of John*). Placed in this context, it is of real importance that *The Nature of the Rulers* begins with two quotations from disputed Paulines (in addition to Eph 6:12, there is also a quotation from Col 1:13). I am hesitant to accept that the purpose of these quotations was to dupe the readers into believing that this text was a Christian one although it really was not. But if the author's purpose was

quotation from Ephesians 4:30: "Therefore, the apostle says, 'Do not grieve (μὴ λυπεῖτε) the Holy Spirit of God, with which you were marked with a seal.'" The prooftext is based upon a keyword association between the grief of Wisdom and grieving the Holy Spirit, but there is also a deeper moral teaching involved. The point is unmistakable: the same cure of emotions that Wisdom experienced is available to believers since Christ came down not only to liberate Wisdom from her emotions, but "on her account the Lord came down to drag *us* from passion and adopt *us* to himself."[55]

One crucial point where the moral orientation of Valentinian mythmaking and exegesis of Paul becomes visible in Section C of the *Excerpts* is the discussion about the soul. The distinction is here drawn between "the divine soul" and "the material soul."[56] This looks in essence similar to the view Irenaeus mentioned in passing (see above). The division into two different kinds of souls is supported with an allegorical interpretation of Adam's words about Eve in Genesis 2:23. The words "bone of my bone" refer to the "divine soul hidden in the flesh," whereas the "flesh of my flesh" stands for "the material (ὑλική) soul which is the body of the divine soul." This explanation is followed by a lengthy moral reflection warning against yielding to the material soul, which clings to the divine soul as "a seed of the devil."

The main scriptural support comes here from the book of Genesis, but the Valentinian teaching is amplified with a number of short quotations from the gospels and Paul. The material soul of flesh is identified with the "adversary" of whom "the Savior spoke" (cf. Matt 5:25/Luke 12:58),[57] with a "tare" (ζιζάνιον, Matt 13:25), and with Paul's "law warring against the law of my reason" (Rom 7:23). While Paul's "I" in Romans 7 seems powerless in the struggle against the wrong law, the Valentinian interpretation takes a more positive note: one should

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indeed to deceive the audience in this way, his strategy was successful: there were obviously still some people reading this text as a Christian one in Upper Egypt in the fourth century.

[55] Clement, *Exc. Theod.* 67.2–3. This is one of the points where the Valentinian teachings collected in Section C coincide with those in other parts of the *Excerpts*. In *Excerpts* 41, it was already stated that the enlightened person has put away emotions and is therefore in full control of himself: "The human being came into the world after being illuminated. That is, putting away the passions, which darkened him and were mixed with him, he began to rule himself." (*Exc. Theod.* 41.4.)

[56] Clement, *Exc. Theod.* 51–53.

[57] Although the bottom line of the interpretation recorded in *Exc. Theod.* 52 is that one should fight against the material soul, an attempt is also made to take into account Jesus' advice to seek reconciliation with one's adversary. The result may seem somewhat confusing, especially if one follows Casey's translation, urging one "to be kind" towards the material soul. My reading of this passage is that it deliberately plays with less obvious ways of understanding the verbs used in the gospels. The expression used in Luke 12:58 for making reconciliation (ἀπηλλάχθαι ἀπ' αὐτοῦ) should probably be understood here "to be set free from him," and the verb εὐνοεῖν, which in Matthew 5:25 means "to be well-inclined, at peace with," was taken in the more literal meaning of "to reason well, show prudence" (cf. εὔνοητος in the sense of "intelligent," *LSJ* s. v. [II]).

no longer strengthen the material soul by "the power of sins," but one should put it to death "already now" and "demonstrate its fading away by abstaining from wickedness."[58] In other words, one can struggle with and conquer the material soul. Nothing in this text indicates that these moral guidelines – which coincide with Ptolemaeus' spiritual interpretations of the cultic laws – would be intended only for non-Valentinian Christians.

The tripartite division into matter, soul and spirit, represented by Cain, Abel, and Seth respectively, is discussed in *Excerpts* 50–57. The contention that Adam was an earthy man is supported with Paul's calling him "the first man of dust, made of earth" (1. Cor. 15:47). Adam's earthy quality became visible in his eagerness for procreation ("seed and generation"). This explains why the material nature looms large among humankind (as Adam's offspring): "While material ones are many, there are not many ones with soul and there are only a few spiritual ones." (*Exc. Theod.* 56.2.)

The description of Seth merits special attention in this connection: he is portrayed as the forefather of the *pneumatikoi* since "he neither tends flocks nor tills soil but he only brings forth children like the spiritual things" (54.3). Seth is also described in terms borrowed from Paul's letter to the Philippians: Seth looks above and has his "citizenship in heaven" (τὸ πολίτευμα ἐν οὐρανῷ, cf. Phil. 3:20: ἡμῶν γὰρ τὸ πολίτευμα ἐν οὐρανοῖς ὑπάρχει). The portrayal of Seth, who neither tends flocks nor tills soil, recalls the more traditional image of the Stoic sage, who always intuitively chooses the right course of action, without having to reflect and then choose between different options.[59]

Although humankind seems to be divided into three distinct groups here, Clement's Valentinian source consistently speaks of essences rather than persons in discussing the distinction between "spiritual" and "ensouled." It is the spiritual essence (τὸ πνευματικόν) that it described as "saved by nature" (φύσει σῳζόμενον), whereas the soul-essence (τὸ ψυχικόν) is characterized by its "free will" (αὐτεξούσιον), that is, by its ability to choose between "faith and incorruptibility" on the one hand and "unbelief and corruption" on the other.[60] Since what is doomed to corruption is matter, the choice the soul must make is, again, that between spirit and matter.

A central issue in the Valentinian teaching recorded in Section C of Clement's *Excerpts* is the coming together of the spirit and soul. This idea is also supported with references to Paul, this time to his description of how pagans can become part of Israel in Romans 11. The pagans "grafted … into a cultivated olive tree" (Rom. 11:24) are explained as referring to the soul essence (τὰ ψυχικά) in the *Ex-*

[58] Clement, *Exc. Theod.* 52.

[59] For an incisive summary of the Stoic view on the sage, see Troels Engberg-Pedersen, "The Concept of Paraenesis," in *Early Christian Paraenesis in Context* (ed. James M. Starr and Troels Engberg-Pedersen; BZNW 125; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2004), 47–72.

[60] Clement, *Exc. Theod.* 56.3.

cerpts. The ultimate goal of humans is the vision of God, and it becomes possible only when the spirit and the soul are joined to each other.

The path leading from what Paul says about Israel to this teaching is not a straight one. It requires an additional symbolic interpretation stemming from another source: the Valentinian teaching referred to here leans on the (erroneous) explanation that the name "Israel" means "man sees God."[61] Hence the interpretation in the *Excerpts* that "Israel … is an allegory for the spiritual person (ὁ πνευματικός), one who sees God …" It merits attention here that the spiritual person cannot experience the vision of God without the soul-element. This person becomes "all Israel" (thus Paul in Rom. 11:26) only when the "things pertaining to the soul" (denoted by "the pagans") have "come in."[62] In other words, the spiritual person will experience the salvation – the vision of God – only when things pertaining to the soul (τὰ ψυχικά) play along. The text does not speak here of the coming together of two groups of people but of the integration of the soul-essence ("things pertaining to the soul") in the spiritual person. In my view, this can be understood as a description of the ideal state of mind in which the soul has made the right choice – it has chosen the spirit instead of matter – and the spirit and the soul now reside together in perfect harmony.[63]

Though the different parts of the *Excerpts* are often strictly separated from each other, the relationships between the spirit and the soul are described in strikingly similar terms here and in other parts of the *Excerpts*. The final section ('D') of the *Excerpts* contains the famous description of an eschatological wedding banquet, where the spiritual ones and the "faithful souls" will be summoned. After this feast, which is "common to all," "the spiritual elements" (τὰ πνευματικά) leave behind the souls, enter the divine realm, and are granted the vision of God (*Exc. Theod.* 63–64).[64]

The account of the wedding feast, where the spiritual and soul-endowed people are joined to each other, is often considered evidence for a more or less inclusive Valentinian eschatology.[65] In light of the previous passage in the *Excerpts*,

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[61] E. g., *The Prayer of Joseph* (apud Origen, *Commentary on John*, 2.31: Ἰσραήλ, ἀνὴρ ὁρῶν θεόν); *On the Origin of the World* (NHC II, 5) 105:24–25 (ⲉⲩⲛⲟⲩⲧⲉ ⲉⲣⲟⲩ ϫⲉ ⲡⲓⲥⲣⲁⲏⲗ ⲉⲧⲉ ⲡⲁⲉⲓ ⲡⲉ ⲡⲣⲱⲙⲉ ⲉⲧⲛⲁⲩ ⲉⲡⲛⲟⲩⲧⲉ); cf. also Philo, *Conf.* 146.

[62] This point is expressed in a very condensed manner: "When the gentiles come in, in this way the whole Israel" (καὶ ὅταν εἰσέλθῃ τὰ ἔθνη, οὕτω πᾶς Ἰσραήλ).

[63] One should note the constant changes between the forms referring to groups of people (οἱ ὑλικοί, οἱ ψυχικοί, οἱ πνευματικοί) and to things (τὸ πνευματικόν, τὸ ψυχικόν, τὸ ὑλικόν) in the *Excerpts* 56–57 (and elsewhere). What makes the interpretation difficult is the fact that the inflected forms of the words in both groups are identical.

[64] "God" is based upon Stählin's emendation; the text reads "Spirit," which would make little sense in this context.

[65] Cf., e. g., Elaine Pagels, "Conflicting Versions of Valentinian Eschatology: Irenaeus' Treatise vs. the Excerpts from Theodotus," *HTR* 67 (1974): 35–53, and the rejoinder in James F. McCue, "Conflicting Versions of Valentinianism? Irenaeus and the *Excerpta ex Theodoto*," in *The Rediscovery of Gnosticism* (2 vols; ed. Bentley Layton; SHR 41; Leiden: Brill, 1980), 1.404–16;

however, I would argue that the account of the great banquet is an eschatological myth that should be understood as an allegory for the ideal condition of the inner human being.[66] As in *Excerpts* 56–57, it is emphasized here that the soul and the spirit must be joined together in order to achieve full salvation.[67] In this latter passage, the coming together of the spiritual beings with right kinds of soul ("the faithful souls") is a prerequisite for one's ascent to, and the resulting vision of, God. I find it possible that the real point was to illustrate with myth that one's inner self will prosper and be able to see God only if the spirit and the soul are harmoniously united.[68]

The Valentinian teaching *Excerpts* is focused on the harmonious union of the spirit and the soul but its teaching about the spirit has a social dimension as well. This teaching is very egalitarian in its emphasis that "the Spirit … was poured upon *all members* of the church. For this reason the signs of the Spirit, healings and prophecies, are completed through the church."[69] This teaching is dramatically different from the picture one gains from Irenaeus that the Valentinians regarded themselves alone as the spiritual Christians.

Conclusion

I see in the cases discussed above a demonstration that Valentinians were not only quoting Paul for strategic reasons, that is, in an attempt to persuade non-Valentian Christians by referring to the latter's source of authority but without sincerely committing themselves to this authority. A more serious attitude to Paul can be seen in the development of legendary aspects in his figure, in numerous quotations from and allusions to his letters, and in finding, as Ptolemaus did, in these letters models of how Christians should interpret the Hebrew Bible after they no longer observe the cultic laws.

It is clear that Valentinian theology does not solely stem from exegetical work on Paul; it would seem very difficult to take the whole cosmic myth in its dif-

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see also Einar Thomassen, *The Spiritual Seed: The Church of the ª Valentinians º* (NHMS 60; Leiden: Brill, 2006), 396.

[66] Cf. Dunderberg, "Valentinian Theories," 126–27.

[67] This passage is one more indication that the myth related in the *Excerpts* 43–65 is not an entirely isolated unit in this collection but represents a form of Valentinian theology similar to that found in the parts ascribed to Theodotus.

[68] This reading may seem to involve too much of *Entmythologisierung*, but it finds support in Valentinus' own teaching. He argued that one's heart must be cleansed from evil spirits and demons. It is only when the Father finds the heart in this purified condition that this heart "will see God" (Valentinus, Fragment 2 = Clement, *Strom.* 2.114.3–6.). The fragment shows that the vision of God was not only expected to take place at the end of time but it could already take place during one's lifetime.

[69] *Exc. Theod.* 24.1.

ferent Valentinian incarnations only as a result of their Pauline exegesis. On the other hand, there is no need to downplay the Pauline element in the teachings of Valentinians. The Valentinians did not develop variant views about spiritual, soul-endowed and earthy humans because this was part of some preexisting "gnostic" tradition but because they took over this tripartite distinction from Paul, and then offered different views as to how these categories should be understood. The great divide often posited between Paul and the Valentinian "gnostics" in scholarly literature seems less dramatic when one focuses on first-hand sources instead of polemical accounts by hostile witnesses. Moreover, the Valentinian allegorical interpretations seem less idiosyncratic when compared to other early Christian allegorizers; the Alexandrian theologians Clement and Origen often cast interpretations similar to those held by Valentinians.

I have proposed above that the Valentinian distinctions between the "spiritual" and the "soul-endowed" should not always be understood as social categories, that is, as denoting different groups of Christians. The Valentinians were at least as much concerned with what takes places in one's soul: is it inclined towards the spirit or to the material world? I have proposed above that some accounts where groups of spiritual and soul-endowed persons are mentioned could be understood in the light, and as illustrations, of this concern for the soul. One ramification of this proposal is that the assumption of Valentinian (or "gnostic") elitism should be critically revisited. All references to the spiritual race in the Valentinian evidence cannot be equally read as pointing to Valentinian Christians; some parts of this evidence may be understood as reflections on one's mental furniture rather than on social structures.[70]

[70] Social distinctions are clearly present in *some* Valentinian texts, such as the *Interpretation of Knowledge*. Yet even the more elitist Valentinians, for whose cause the *Interpretation* speaks, saw themselves as belonging to the same community as other Christians, and they thought that other members of that community could benefit from the spiritual gift bestowed upon those belonging to the spiritual upper class.

Chapter 9

New Testament Theology and the Challenge of Practice

In the 1980's, the students of theology in Helsinki were exposed to a bewildering variety of views about biblical theology. I still recall how inspired, and completely persuaded, I was by Timo Veijola's essay on Old Testament theology, published in *Teologinen Aikakauskirja* in 1982, when I was a first-year student. What Veijola proposed in that article was that a main thread pervading the entire Old Testament, upon which Old Testament theology can be built, is the notion of a dialogue between God and human beings.[1]

I soon learned, however, that there were dissenting voices and fervent discussions about biblical theology in the faculty. The introductory course I took on Old Testament theology began with Risto Lauha's startling claim (derived from Rafael Gyllenberg) that there is no such thing as Old Testament theology, whereas one could adequately speak of New Testament theology. Accordingly, Lauha said he is going to teach us, not Old Testament theology, but history of Israelite religion.

There were more shocks to come. Only a few years later, Heikki Räisänen published in *Teologinen Aikakauskirja* a series of articles in which he bid farewell to New Testament theology. These articles laid the basis to the programme formulated in his *Beyond New Testament Theology*, and now carried through in his new book, *The Rise of Christian Beliefs.*[2] Räisänen's proposal was that New

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[1] Timo Veijola, "Onko Vanhan Testamentin teologiaa olemassa? [Is there Old Testament Theology?]," *TAik* 87 (1982): 498–529. An important source of inspiration in Veijola's article was Martin Buber's model of dialogue as a personal relationship between "I" and "you." For a similar approach, also based upon Buber's model, in New Testament theology, see now Philip F. Esler, *New Testament Theology: Communion and Community* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2006), esp. 43–47. – I thank the editors of the original publication for the opportunity to present this essay in honor of Kari Syreeni, whose exegetical and hermeneutical work has inspired me in numerous ways over years. I also wish to thank Robert Morgan, Heikki Räisänen, and Christopher Rowland for their comments on earlier drafts of this essay. All translations of quotations from texts originally published in Finnish are mine.

[2] Heikki Räisänen, *Beyond New Testament Theology* (2nd ed.; London: SCM Press, 2000); idem, *The Rise of Christan Beliefs: The Thought World of Early Christians* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2010); for a brief summary of his programme, see, e.g., idem, "Towards an Alternative to New Testament Theology: 'Individual Eschatology' as an Example," in *The Nature of New Testament Theology* (FS Robert Morgan; ed. Christopher Rowland and Christopher Tuckett; Oxford: Blackwell, 2006), 167–85, esp. 168–69.

Testament theology "be replaced with … two different projects: first, 'the history of early Christian thought'…; second, critical philosophical, ethical and/or theological 'reflection on the New Testament', as well as on its influence on our history and its significance for contemporary life."[3]

Kari Syreeni also claimed a place in the Finnish debate about biblical theology early on. Veijola published in 1985 a sequel to his earlier article, now preferring "encounter" to "dialogue" since verbal dialogue is only one form of the interaction between God and humans described in the Old Testament.[4] A doctoral student at that time, Syreeni wrote a thoughtful rejoinder boldly challenging Veijola's views. Syreeni maintained that Veijola's concept of "encounter" was too general a description for the center of the Old Testament since an encounter between God and humans is self-evidently included in any notion of revelation: "Some sort of 'encounter' is of course necessary for the transmission of revelation."[5] What, in Syreeni's view, matters more than the general idea of encounter is the specific contents of revelation. In addition, Syreeni was concerned that the concept of "encounter" easily leads to a selective reading of the Old Testament: "encounter" can be used as "a magical key," by which unsuitable elements of the Old Testament "are eliminated whereas the suitable ones are accepted." Selective usage is not a problem in itself but it becomes one, unless it is based upon "critical reflection that belongs to historical hermeneutics."[6] In short, Syreeni insisted that Veijola's proposal did not seriously address the great hermeneutical challenges the Old Testament texts pose to the modern reader, and underlined the need for historical hermeneutics – a topic to which Syreeni himself then turned in his subsequent publications.[7]

Having these conflicting views about biblical theology in mind, it is with hesitation that I venture to say anything at all about New Testament theology. My own scholarly activity has been largely (if not entirely) focused on apocryphal gospels and second-century Christianity. As an academic teacher, however, I have been now and then assigned to teach courses on New Testament theology to undergraduate students. My interest in this topic thus emerges from my own

[3] Räisänen, *Beyond New Testament Theology*, 8.

[4] Timo Veijola, "Ilmoitus kohtaamisena: Vanhan testamentin teologinen perusstruktuuri [Revelation as Encounter: The Basic Theological Structure of the Old Testament]," *TAik* 90 (1985): 381–90, esp. 384–85.

[5] Kari Syreeni, "'Kohtaaminen' hermeneuttisena avaimena ['Encounter' as a Hermeneutical Key]," *TAik* 91 (1986): 112–18, esp. 113. For Veijola's response, see Timo Veijola, "Vanhan testamentin teologia ja 'historiallinen hermeneutiikka' [Old Testament Theology and 'Historical Hermeneutics']," *TAik* 91 (1986): 118–21.

[6] Syreeni, "'Kohtaaminen,'" 116.

[7] Cf. Kari Syreeni, *Uusi Testamentti ja hermeneutiikka: Tulkinnan fragmentteja* [The New Testament and Hermeneutics: Fragments of Interpretation] (PFES 61; Helsinki: Finnish Exegetical Society, 1995), in which he lays out his three-worlds model of interpretation in full length; see also, e.g., idem, "Separation and Identity: Aspects of the Symbolic World of Matth 6:1–18," *NTS* 40 (1994): 522–41.

experience of duality between research and teaching. I should add that I have also been sometimes challenged to take more actively part in the hermeneutical discussion. One of those challenges comes from Kari Syreeni himself: he is on record of gently chiding me for having adopted "the role of an onlooker" in matters pertaining to hermeneutics.[8] One essay on New Testament theology certainly does not instantly alleviate that problem once and for all, but it at least takes one step in the direction Kari Syreeni pointed to long ago.

In what follows, I will pay special attention to the relationship between theology and practice, arguing that they should not be isolated from each other, as often happens in New Testament scholarship, but there should be constant awareness of their interaction. Theologians tend to subordinate practice to theology: practical decisions are often seen and treated as ramifications of theological positions. This, however, is only one aspect – which I by no means want to deny – in the relationship between theology and practice. Another aspect is that theology often evolves from, and in dialogue with, practice.

In the first main part of this essay, I will describe some developments in the study of ancient philosophy, theology, and sociology that urge us to take the aspect of practice more seriously than before. For the middle part, I have chosen to discuss a selection of examples of how "theology" is understood in New Testament theologies.[9] In the final two parts, the focus will be on Pauline theology; I will use Paul's theology of weakness as an illustration of what a more pragmatic approach to theology could entail, and what difference it could make.

1. The Challenge of Practice: Three Perspectives

The challenge of practice to the study of primitive Christian theology[10] comes from three angles. First, the ancient historian Pierre Hadot has pointed out that the philosophical schools in Greco-Roman antiquity were much more concerned with practice than our usual image of philosophy would admit. Hadot

[8] The comment was part of the assessment Kari Syreeni wrote of the academic merits of the candidates for a professorship in biblical studies at the University of Joensuu (now part of the University of Eastern Finland), January 11, 2002.

[9] It is neither possible nor advisable to seek to cover here all New Testament theologies and related works published in recent years; for a comprehensive (and yet concise) survey of the most important publications after Bultmann's, see now Robert Morgan, "New Testament Theology since Bultmann," *ExpTim* 119 (2008): 472–80.

[10] I use in this article the term "primitive Christianity" as denoting Christianity of the first two centuries CE. For a more detailed discussion of terminology, see Gerd Lüdemann, *Primitive Christianity: A Survey of Recent Studies and Some New Proposals* (trans. John Bowden; London: T & T Clark, 2003), 3, 168–69. Lüdemann shows that the distinction between *Urchristentum* ("primitive Christianity") and *Frühchristentum* ("early Christianity") is an artificial construction often used for apologetic purposes.

shows that ancient philosophy was neither merely a matter of developing clever ideas, nor was its primary setting a classroom where professors of philosophy entered to deliver lectures, and disappeared as soon as their teaching was over. Instead, the ancient schools of philosophy supplied their adherents with a way of life and expected a full-blown commitment to it.[11] Philosophical discourse was in these schools only one part of *philosophizein*; Hadot translates this term as "doing philosophy" because practice went hand in hand with philosophical instruction. Teachers of philosophy prescribed their students "spiritual exercises" (as Hadot calls them), kept a keen eye on their moral progress, and offered pastoral counselling to them.

The second challenge comes from liberation theology and other forms of contextual theology. What they have in common is the belief that theology cannot be separated from the social situation in which people live, and that theology needs to be formulated in a politically conscious way so that it supports empowerment of the powerless. Contextual theologies, thus, presuppose a no less intrinsic connection between theology and practice than there was in antiquity between philosophy and practice.

In fact, just like Hadot speaks of "doing philosophy" in the context of ancient philosophy, contextual theologians often speak of "doing theology":

> Liberation theology is above all a new way of *doing* theology rather than being itself a new theology … The key thing is that one first of all *does* liberation theology rather than learns about it.[12]

> [B]iblical the*logy has the task of exploring critically all human speaking about G*d in its particular socio-political contexts. 'Doing the*logy', as the early feminist movement in religion has called it, calls for critical deliberation and accountability.[13]

While there are, thus, different articulations of what "doing theology" entails, the aspect of practice itself is commonly identified as a crucial point where contextual theologies differ from more "academic" forms of theology.[14]

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[11] Pierre Hadot, *What is Ancient Philosophy?* (trans. Michael Chase; Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002).

[12] Christopher Rowland, "Introduction: The theology of liberation," in *The Cambridge Companion to Liberation Theology* (ed. Christopher Rowland; 2d ed.; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 1–16, here 3–4. Cf. also Christopher Rowland and Zoë Bennett, "Action is the Life of All: New Testament Theology and Practical Theology," in Rowland and Tuckett (ed.), *The Nature of New Testament Theology*, 186–206, here 188: "One can only learn about theology by embarking on practice."

[13] Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *The Power of the Word: Scripture and the Rhetoric of Empire* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2007), 55. For a lucid account of the challenges feminist theologies pose to New Testament theology, see Margaret Y. MacDonald, "Women in Early Christianity: the Challenge to a New Testament Theology," in Rowland and Tuckett (ed.), *The Nature of New Testament Theology*, 135–57.

[14] The book that first drew my attention to the importance of the idea of "doing theology" in contextual theologies was Kari Latvus, *Arjen teologia: Johdatus kontekstuaaliseen*

The third challenge is that posed by the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu's theory of practice. It is based upon the observation that everything people do is, to a great degree, determined by the social-historical conditions in which they live.[15] On the one hand, there are a number of personal conditions: each person has a *habitus*, a set of conditions she or he has acquired in childhood, through education, etc. On the other hand, there are conditions set by the surrounding world. There are different "fields," such as economics, politics, religion, science, literature, and arts. Each of them has certain, mostly unwritten, sets of rules, according to which people in these fields are expected to play. What is required of those entering any of these fields is a practical sense to recognize what is appropriate behaviour in a particular field. This practical sense, "the feel for the game," is dependent on *habitus*, which "provides the individuals with a sense of how to act and respond in the course of their daily lives."[16]

Discouraging as it can be, the fact is that the game is not always won by those who follow the rules slavishly; a recognition of how and where the rules can be broken or changed also belongs to "the feel for the game." In addition, the fields are subject to continuous change and tensions. There are always those who want to maintain the *status quo* in a field and those who want to change it. Moreover, in spite of the increasing specialization characteristic of our time, the fields are never completely isolated from each other. There are always overlapping areas and points of shared interest, which lead to tensions between different fields and persons operating in them.

2. What is Theology in New Testament Theology?

I will in the final parts of this essay develop a "Bourdieuan" interpretation of one aspect in Paul's theological discourse. Bourdieu's theory, however, raises more general and substantial questions related to New Testament theology as well. One of the big issues is to which "field" New Testament theology belongs:

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raamatuntulkintaan [Everyday Theology: Introduction to Contextual Theology] (Helsinki: Kirjapaja, 2002).

[15] Cf. Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (trans. Richard Nice; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977); idem, *Language and Symbolic Power* (ed. John B. Thompson; trans. Gino Raymond and Matthew Adamson; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991). For a concise introduction to Bourdieu's theory, see John B. Thompson, "Editor's Introduction," in Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power*, 1–31. The relevance of Bourdieu's theory in the study of primitive Christianity has been demonstrated by a number of scholars; see, e. g., James A. Kelhoffer, *Persecution, Persuasion and Power: Readiness to Withstand Hardship as a Corroboration of Legitimacy in the New Testament* (WUNT 270; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010); Karen L. King, *What is Gnosticism?* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of the Harvard University Press, 2003) 239–47.

[16] Thompson, "Editor's Introduction," 13.

does it belong to the field of religion, or to that of academics, or somewhere between the two?

Another immediate consequence of Bourdieu's theory is that our attention should be directed not only to social-historical conditions of early Christians but also to those of academic theology.[17] Scholarship in this particular field is conditioned by the statutes of institutes offering higher education in theology, and, in many countries, also by legislation. These conditions create frameworks for academic theology which are not identical everywhere, but vary from one country to another, and from one type of school to another. The rules in the field of academic theology are significantly different in the Nordic countries, Germany, Britain, and in Northern America, and these rules are bound to steer theology in different directions.[18]

If we look at New Testament theology in particular, another, less implicit socio-historical condition can be gleaned from the form and contents of works produced in this discipline. From this perspective, the field seems more academic than ecclesial, as Luke Timothy Johnson comments: "Scholars may say that they are writing for the church, but the level of their prose, the character of their imagined readers, and the weight of their footnotes, argue that they are writing primarily for academic colleagues."[19]

What is more, to enter "this odd subdiscipline" (Johnson) requires an experienced scholar who is able to put together a large synthesis on the basis of his or her life-long engagement in the texts of the New Testament. This practical condition probably explains the spirit of retroflexion characteristic of the genre.[20] Especially in German New Testament theologies, the traditional historical-critical method is still the norm. In fact, authors of these works often seek to demonstrate with their syntheses the broader relevance of a particular historical method they have always used, such as tradition history (Klaus Berger, Peter

[17] For perceptive remarks on the intellectual setting presupposed in most New Testament Theologies, see Morgan, "New Testament Theology since Bultmann," 472–73.

[18] For example, in Germany, the protestant and Roman Catholic churches have veto power when it comes to selecting university professors of theology, and the churches can take away a professor's right to give ecclesial exams. This system certainly encourages loyalty to ecclesial theology to a greater extent than the more independent status of academic theology in Nordic state universities. It would certainly be wrong to claim that this socio-historical condition entirely determines the results of individual scholars in the field; yet, it would also be wishful thinking that it would have no impact at all.

[19] Luke Timothy Johnson, "Does a Theology of the Canonical Gospels Make Sense," in Rowland and Tuckett (ed.), *The Nature of New Testament Theology*, 92–108, esp. 95.

[20] For a notable exception, see now Peter Lampe, *New Testament Theology in a Secular World: A Constructivist Work in Philosophical Epistemology and Christian Apologetics* (trans. Robert L. Brawley; London: T & T Clark, 2012).

Stuhlmacher),[21] or redaction history (George Strecker).[22] At the same time, several issues brought to fore in more progressive scholarship on primitive Christianity, such as those related to gender, race, violence, social identity and group formation, not to speak of the utterly complicated relationship between texts and their author's thoughts versus the more pragmatic goals of these texts, are largely absent in many New Testament theologies.[23] Their agenda is still astonishingly similar to that outlined in Rudolf Bultmann's classical *Theologie des Neuen Testaments*.[24]

Perhaps the most alarming issue is the absence of gender issues in some theologies of the New Testament. To mention only one example, in the index to Strecker's *Theologie* of almost 800 pages there is only one single reference to women ("Frau"), and this reference is to a brief description of the analogy drawn in Ephesians between the relationship of Christ and the church and that of husband and wife.

The exclusion of issues pertaining to gender from New Testament theologies may stem from the traditional distinction between ethics and theology proper, but this distinction is far from self-evident.[25] For example, gender and theology are combined in Paul's slogan that "there is no longer male and female" among those baptized into Christ (Gal 3:28); here an issue related to gender is doubtless also *theologically* relevant since the idea that the distinction between the sexes is obliterated in Christ goes back to theological reflection based upon the original state of humankind, described in the first chapters of Genesis.[26]

There is no agreement in major syntheses of New Testament theology and primitive Christian religion what "theology" itself is. One way is to define theology in purely historical terms. Thus Gerd Lüdemann:

> Theology is a scholarly discipline when it observes the scholarly norms of the modern university and bids farewell to epistemological principles of any kind – including the

[21] Klaus Berger, *Theologiegeschichte des Urchristentums: Theologie des Neuen Testaments* (Tübingen: Francke, 1994); Peter Stuhlmacher, *Biblische Theologie des Neuen Testaments* (2 vols.; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1992–1999).

[22] Georg Strecker, *Theologie des Neuen Testaments* (ed. Friedrich Wilhelm Horn; Berlin: de Gruyter, 1996).

[23] There are exceptions, such as Esler, *New Testament Theology*; see also Räisänen, *Beyond New Testament Theology*, 188–202.

[24] Rudolf Bultmann, *Theologie des Neuen Testaments* (9th ed.; UTB 630; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1984).

[25] As Morgan ("New Testament Theology since Bultmann," 472) shrewdly remarks, "The constraints of a one-semester lecture course and the disciplinary subdivision that separates dogmatics and ethics in modern theology have often led to 'the ethics of the New Testament' being treated separately, but they are part of (New Testament Theology)."

[26] Cf. Wayne A. Meeks, "The Image of Androgyne: Some Uses of a Symbol in Earliest Christianity," in idem, *In Search of the Early Christians* (ed. Allen R. Hilton and H. Gregory Snyder; New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), 3–54, esp. 11–15 [Original publication: *History of Religions* 13 (1974): 165–208.]

privilege of knowing God. Theology is a historical discipline in so far as it investigates Christianity with the help of the historical-critical method. And the historical method has three presuppositions: causality, a consideration of analogies, and a recognition of the reciprocal relationship between historical phenomena.[27]

Strecker offered another historical definition, based upon the view that in classical Greek sources *theologia* often means explanation of myth. Hence, the "original" task of "theology" is "to reveal the deeper meaning of the stories of gods …. The goal of theology is, therefore, to discover the underlying structures of myths."[28]

The other end of the spectrum is represented by the New Testament scholars arguing for "Biblical Theology." These scholars regard New Testament theology as a special field, which requires a scholar's personal commitment to the truth revealed in the Bible. According to Peter Stuhlmacher, a New Testament theologian must be, "if possible, willing to come to an agreement with the central kerygmatic statements" of the New Testament texts, and be "open towards the gospel's claim to revelation."[29] What is in practice required is a scholar's *obedience* to the ecclesial tradition. "Faith is essentially obedience," says Ulrich Wilckens, another representative of Biblical Theology.[30]

In Stuhlmacher's Biblical Theology, methodological and theological retroflexion go hand in hand. His analysis of the formation of traditions (*Traditionsbildung*) in the New Testament is largely confined to those flowing from the Hebrew Bible and early Jewish sources. There is little room in his theology for a mutual interaction between Christianity and the Greco-Roman culture. The Greco-Roman world is only the *addressee* of the Christian revelation: "The message of the New Testament should be historically understood primarily as a Christian testimony to the Greco-Roman world of the first and second centuries CE."[31]

The same understanding of revelation becomes visible in Stuhlmacher's summary of the core of Biblical Theology, which is essentially a recapitulation of

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[27] Lüdemann, *Primitive Christianity*, 176; cf. Morna Hooker, "The Nature of New Testament Theology," in Rowland and Tuckett (ed.), *The Nature of New Testament Theology*, 75–92, esp. 75: "To the New Testament scholar … New Testament theology is primarily an historical discipline."

[28] Strecker, *Theologie*, 1.

[29] Stuhlmacher, *Biblische Theologie* 1.11.

[30] Ulrich Wilckens, *Theologie des Neuen Testaments* (6 vols; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 2002–9), 1.1.vi. For a strikingly different definition of what it means to be a theologian, see Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology* (3 vols; Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1951–63), 1.10: "Every theologian is committed *and* alienated; he is always in faith *and* in doubt; he is inside *and* outside the theological circle. Sometimes the one side prevails, sometimes the other; and he is never certain which side really prevails."

[31] Stuhlmacher, *Biblische Theologie* 1.10.

what is said about God and Christ in the Bible.[32] Syreeni's critical remarks mentioned above would also apply here: difficult questions pertaining to cultural distance, which would lay bare dramatic changes in worldview and values that have taken place in the aftermath of the Enlightenment, are not raised at all. What is required is one's consent to the truth revealed in the Bible. This stance comes close to the position Paul Tillich once aptly designated (and dismissed) as "supranaturalistic" one:

> … it takes the Christian message to be a sum of revealed truths which have fallen into the human situation like strange bodies from a strange world. No mediation to the human situation is possible. These truths themselves create a new situation before they can be received. Man must become something else than human in order to receive divinity.[33]

Heikki Räisänen's programme of the history of early Christian thought, to which I referred above, is squarely opposed to "Biblical Theology." Räisänen argues in favour of a history-of-religions approach instead of the theological one, and outlines the differences between them as follows:[34] (1) The addressee of a history of early Christian thought is not the church, like in Biblical Theology, but the wider society. (2) The purpose of this history is information instead of proclamation. (3) A history of early Christian thought is not confined to the New Testament canon. (4) Instead of seeking the unifying main thread in the New Testament texts, a history of early Christian thought introduces early Christian views in their entire variety. (5) The task of this history is historical rather than normative. (6) While biblical theology requires from a scholar faith in, and obedience to, the ecclesial tradition, a history of early Christian thought requires that a scholar reads texts with empathy, but she or he does not have to agree with their claim to truth.

This comparison shows the polarized opposition between "Biblical Theology" and "the history of early Christian thought." It should be added, however, that there are New Testament theologies which are closer in spirit to the latter than the former. For example, Strecker explicitly abstained from trying to find a unifying core behind the New Testament texts. He confined himself to the canonical texts of the New Testament not for programmatical reasons, but for the sake of convenience.[35] Like Räisänen, Berger also places himself in Wrede's footsteps in laying out "the history of primitive Christian theology" (Theologiegeschichte des Urchristentums), and takes early Christian texts not included in the New Testament (as it now stands), including the *Gospel of Thomas*, *Didache*, *Barna-*

[32] Stuhlmacher, *Biblische Theologie* 1.38: "Die Biblische Theologie des (Alten und) Neuen Testaments wird konstituiert durch das kerygmatische Zeugnis von dem einen Gott, der die Welt geschaffen, Israel zu seinem Eigentumsvolk erwählt und in der Sendung Jesu als Christus für das Heil von Juden und Heiden genug getan hat."

[33] Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, 1.64–5.

[34] Räisänen, *Beyond New Testament Theology*, 151–61.

[35] Cf. Strecker, *Theologie*, 2–3.

bas, *1* and *2 Clement*, and the epistles of Ignatius, as seriously as those inside our New Testament.[36] It is above all the non-normative attitude towards the New Testament canon that makes this approach unacceptable for representatives of Biblical Theology.[37]

A history-of-religions approach is also characteristic of Gerd Theissen's synthesis of primitive Christianity, in which practice is much more dominantly present than in more traditional New Testament theologies.[38] Aiming at a comprehensive picture of the primitive Christian religion, Theissen pays special attention to three dimensions of religion – myth, rites, and ethics – and their interaction in primitive Christian discourse. The inclusion of rites and ethics emphasizes the significance of practice side by side with theology, and not subordinated to it.

Theissen's approach complements the theological/intellectual one (focused on thoughts) in important ways. Only one example should suffice here. Stuhlmacher, Wilckens and Theissen all emphasize the importance of the expiatory death of Jesus in the New Testament. I believe this view is basically justified, although this interpretation is less dominantly present in the Synoptic gospels than it is in the Pauline and some other epistles of the New Testament.[39] It is also true that this interpretation distinguishes the texts included in the New Testament from some other collections of early Christian texts: we do not find a similar emphasis on the death of Jesus as a sacrifice offered for the forgiveness of sins in the texts of the Nag Hammadi Library.

Seeking to establish an ideological continuity between Jesus and primitive Christians, Stuhlmacher and Wilckens are at pains to show that Jesus himself not only anticipated his death, but also already understood it as a sacrifice.[40] The whole case, thus, stands or falls with how convincing their exegesis is on this single point.[41] The issue of Jesus' self-understanding is controversial and will most likely continue to be debated; it does not seem probable that Stuhlmacher's and Wilckens's arguments have settled it for good.[42]

Theissen finds a more solid ground in pointing out that the belief in the expiatory death of Jesus was not only an important idea, but its significance is shown by its intrinsic connection to primitive Christian rituals and ethics: both baptism and the Eucharist are connected with the sacrificial interpretation of the death

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[36] Cf. esp. Berger, *Theologiegeschichte*, 685–93.

[37] Cf. Wilckens, *Theologie*, 1.1.48–49.

[38] Gerd Theissen, *A Theory of Primitive Christian Religion* (trans. John Bowden; London: SCM Press, 1999).

[39] For the references to the sacrificial death of Jesus in the New Testament, see Stuhlmacher, *Theologie* 1.33; 2.310.

[40] Stuhlmacher, *Biblische Theologie* 2.309–10; cf. Wilckens, *Theologie* 1.1.33.

[41] Cf. Stuhlmacher, *Biblische Theologie* 1.125–43; Wilckens, *Theologie* 1.2.1–23.

[42] Cf. the caveat made by Wilckens, *Theologie*, 1.2.22: "Of course, this is no more than a cautious working hypothesis."

of Jesus in the New Testament, and with early Christian ethics based upon the renunciation of status.[43] Christian practice connected with the expiatory death of Jesus, thus, shows the importance of this idea for primitive Christians more forcefully than the attempts to trace this interpretation back to Jesus.

Neither Stuhlmacher nor Theissen engage themselves in a discussion about why it was the texts emphasizing the sacrificial interpretation of the death of Jesus that made their way into the Christian canon. Stuhlmacher and Theissen describe the canon as if it were a self-generative entity that established its position by its own weight.[44] However, there must have been real people who at certain points of history made choices that gradually led to the collection which we now call the New Testament, even though we know very little about the earliest stages leading to it.[45]

It is not possible to go here into a very detailed discussion of the social-historical conditions behind the formation of the New Testament canon.[46] Nevertheless, one reason that at least partially may explain the prominence of the sacrificial death of Jesus in the New Testament texts is the fact that the canon took its form during the time of early Christian martyrs. It would stand to reason that one factor explaining the success of the New Testament selection of Christian texts was that the sacrificial interpretation of the death of Jesus present in these texts helped primitive Christians to cope with the fact that some of them were being martyred in the Roman Empire. To express doubts about, or critique of,

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[43] Cf. Theissen, *Theory*, 71–99; 125–126.

[44] Stuhlmacher, *Biblische Theologie*, 2.302–3: "… die Hauptschriften des Neuen Testaments … sind *kraft ihres Eigengewichtes* in den Kanon gelangt und haben *durch ihr Eigengewicht* den kanonischen Ausleseprozeß entscheidend mitbestimmt"; Theissen, *Theory*, 283: "It was not external means of power but *the inner normativeness* of primitive Christian faith which led to the exclusion of the Gnostics. Thus the grammar of primitive Christian faith forms the inner canon within the canon. The writings merely established themselves because they corresponded to this inner canon" (emphasis added).

[45] I realize, again, that I say little new here: similar views about the canon were already expressed in the debate between Veijola and Syreeni I have referred to above. Syreeni ("'Encounter,'" 114) found problematic that a New Testament scholar accepts "without critical reflection the canon defined by the church and ignores the early Christian literature that remained outside the canon." In his response to this point, Veijola ("Old Testament Theology," 120) simply maintained that "the Hebrew canon of the Old Testament is a collection of those books which won the day *by their own inner weight* and found an authoritative position in the synagogue (and later in the church)" (emphasis orig.); cf. Syreeni, "'Encounter,'" 114; Veijola, "Old Testament Theology," 120.

[46] One fact that has not received as much attention as it merits is that early Christians did not have a unified view about "canon," but had very different stances to it. For an incisive recent analysis, outlining three different approaches to scriptures among early Christians, see David Brakke, "Scriptural Practices in Early Christianity: Towards a New History of the New Testament Canon," in *Invention, Rewriting, Usurpation: Discursive Fights over Religious Traditions in Antiquity* (ed. Jörg Ulrich, Anders-Christian Jacobsen and David Brakke; Early Christianity in the Context of Antiquity 11; Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2012), 263–80 [for a summary of Brakke's model, see chapter 5.1 above in this book].

the martyrs and their motifs indicated the lack of a feel for the game.[47] It was probably not out of theological controversies (with Marcion and Tatian) alone from which the New Testament canon evolved, but there were also more pragmatic conditions that were operative in this process.

The New Testament canon poses problems of a different sort in Philip Esler's prolegomena to New Testament theology.[48] Esler takes "the twenty-seven books of the New Testament" as a given throughout his book.[49] His notion that, in reading the New Testament, we enter into communion with "our first ancestors in faith" is a beautiful image. It also admits of critical distance. Esler emphatically states that we don't have to agree about everything with our ancestors in faith:

> They may also manifest beliefs or attitudes or engage in behavior that we feel impelled to criticize. To this extent, when faced with such differences, we may well wish to learn from our ancestors in some areas, while maintaining a critical distance in others. … [A]greement is not a necessary condition for communion between persons.[50]

The image Esler paints is not without problems, however. He finds in the communion between persons justification to his insistence that we "take seriously the historicity of the New Testament texts."[51] However, given that Esler underlines the importance of the historical interpretation of the New Testament texts for establishing the communion between present-day and early Christians,[52] his stance towards the New Testament canon is oddly unhistorical. For example, he summarily claims that "all the texts we now refer to as the Apostolic Fathers were excluded."[53] This claim ignores the simple fact that some texts

[47] One illustration of this sentiment is the uproar of protests the Alexandrian Christian teacher Basilides (second century CE) aroused with his suggestion that martyrs suffered because of their own, albeit hidden sins (Clement, *Misc.* 4.81.1–83.1); for Basilides' argument, see Winrich A. Löhr, *Basilides und seine Schule* (WUNT 83. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck 1996), 122–33; Birger Pearson, "Basilides the Gnostic," in *A Companion to Second-Century Christian "Heretics"* (ed. Antti Marjanen and Petri Luomanen; VigChrSup 76; Leiden: Brill, 2005) 1–31, esp. 26; Ismo Dunderberg, "Early Christian Critics of Martyrdom," in *The Rise and Expansion of Christianity in the First Three Centuries Common Era* (ed. Clare K. Rothschild and Jens Schröter; WUNT 301; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2013), 419–40 [= chapter 3 in this book].

[48] Esler, *New Testament Theology*; for a shorter summary of his position, see idem, "New Testament Interpretation as Interpersonal Communion: the Case for a Socio-Theological Hermeneutics," in Rowland and Tuckett (ed.), *The Nature of New Testament Theology*, 51–74.

[49] Cf., e. g., Esler, *New Testament Theology*, 88.

[50] Esler, *New Testament Theology*, 68; cf. also ibid., 42: "the existence of cultural distance reminds us that at times we will need to be *critical* of what our biblical ancestors are saying."

[51] Esler, *New Testament Theology*, 65.

[52] For the most prominent example, see Esler, *New Testament Theology*, 68–87.

[53] Esler, *New Testament Theology*, 256. For an even more explicit affirmation of the sense of superiority linked with one's own normative tradition, see Ferdinand Hahn, *Theologie des Neuen Testaments* (2 vols; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2002), 2.25: "no other document can claim to being treated as equal" to those included in the New Testament, neither the Apostolic Fathers, nor the *Gospel of Thomas*. Hahn admits that the latter is "valuable in terms of tradition history" but dismisses it because of its "gnostic" proclivities. For a brief summary of reasons why *Thomas* is no longer unanimously considered a "gnostic" gospel, see Ismo Dunderberg,

now referred to as belonging to "the Apostolic Fathers" were included in early manuscripts of the *New Testament*.[54] The collection of "the twenty-seven books of the New Testament," that Esler takes for granted, was only one option in the history of Christianity.

This leads to another, in my view more foundational problem in Esler's proposal. It is in one way very inclusive (in its emphasis on the experience of communion between "us" and past generations of Christians), but in actual fact it is more exclusive than it may appear at first. For Esler programmatically identifies "our first ancestors in faith" with the Christians behind the texts in the New Testament (as it now stands). Does this mean that the voices of "our first ancestors in faith" cannot be heard outside the New Testament? Esler seems to think so: "*all that remains of them* are the written documents of the New Testament."[55] If this statement is intended as a *historical* fact (and not as a creedal statement), it is utterly problematic. Where could the line be drawn between "our first ancestors in faith" and other early Christians, including those who composed "apocryphal" gospels (of Thomas, Mary etc.)?[56] Does the mere fact that these

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The Beloved Disciple in Conflict?: Revisiting the Gospels of John and Thomas (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 16–18 (with references to other studies making the same point). Strikingly, Hahn is far more generous as regards those New Testament texts whose acceptance in the canon took long (James; Jude; 2 Peter; 2–3 John; Hebrews; Revelation): their inclusion is "of importance since they, each in its own way, cling to traditions that are characteristic of the primitive Christian era (die urchristliche Zeit)" (26). If this view can be sustained for some texts in the New Testament, it remains unclear why it does not with equal force apply to the *Gospel of Thomas* or to the texts now designated as the "Apostolic Fathers." In other words, it seems that the decisive argument is inclusion in the canon: the texts in the New Testament, no matter when and how they found their way to that canon, are valuable and command respect, while those not included our New Testament are of lesser value and merit little attention, if at all.

[54] *Barnabas* and the *Shepherd of Hermas*: Codex Sinaiticus, Codex Claromontanus (D); *1±2 Clement*: Codex Alexandrinus. For a convenient synopsis of early New Testament lists, including early New Testament manuscripts and lists gleaned from early Christian authors, see Lee Martin McDonald, "Appendix D: Lists and Catalogues of New Testament Collections," in *The Canon Debate* (ed. Lee Martin McDonald and James A. Sanders; Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2002), 591–97.

[55] Ibid., emphasis added.

[56] The "apocryphal" gospels tend to invite bad press in works on New Testament theology. James D. G. Dunn, *New Testament Theology: An Introduction* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2009) 6, affirms the potentiality of the *Gospel of Thomas* for New Testament theology but is quick to downplay it: like Q, *Thomas* "reveals a source and development that was discounted and set aside within the mainstream that became Christianity." History is indeed written by the victors! What is more, Dunn only pays lip service to *Thomas* here. The proof: his entire book contains no references to any passage from this gospel. Luke Timothy Johnson's analysis ("A Theology of the Canonical Gospels," 103–5) is essentializing: the apocryphal gospels compare unfavourably to those in the New Testament in every possible way. This comparison fails for a number of reasons; I mention only a few: (1) Johnson compares apples to oranges in including the *Gospel of Philip* and the *Gospel of Truth*: they are neither stories about Jesus nor collections of his sayings. (2) Johnson speaks of "the Gnostic Gospels" in a generalizing manner; an idea expressed in one of them is considered representative of the whole group. (3) Many specialists would disagree with Johnson's inclusion of the gospels of Thomas and Mary in "the Gnostic

other gospels were circulated outside early Christian "New Testaments" mean that the authors of these gospels do not belong to "our first ancestors in faith"?[57] Or to take another example: is there any profound reason to think that the Book of Revelation (which was excluded from some early Christian New Testaments!) represents "our first ancestors in faith," while the *Shepherd of Hermas* (which was included in some early Christian New Testaments!) does not? What I want to demonstrate with these questions is how deeply Esler's model is embedded in *our* articulation of normative Christianity, and in *our* culture, in which the notion of "the twenty-seven books of the New Testament" has become so self-evident that it no longer needs explanation.[58]

3. The "Field" of New Testament Theology: Academic or Ecclesial?

The way Stuhlmacher defines Biblical Theology raises the question of whether it belongs to the field of faith communities rather than that of academic theology. Few of us would accept restrictions similar to those required by Stuhlmacher concerning the scholar's convictions and lifestyle in any other academic discipline. (How many of us would agree if someone claims that only an avowed Marxist is able to understand and write syntheses about Marxist sociology?)

The emphasis on a scholar's faith is problematic also because it brings into play an element that is very difficult to define exactly, or to control by other scholars.

Gospels". (4) Johnson is selective: he says, "The Gnostic Gospels … emphasize Jesus as divine revealer", but "forgets" to mention that so does John's gospel. (5) Some of Johnson's claims are misleading: *pace* his claim that "loving service to humans" is not part the character of Jesus, see, e. g., *Gos. Tru.*, 30–33; *pace* his claim, "Nor do we find an understanding of discipleship as following in the path of suffering obedience and service exemplified by Jesus," see, e. g., *Gos. Mary* 8–9, 18; *Secret James* 12. Johnson admits that the latter idea is present in the *Gospel of Philip* – but not in a form that would meet the criteria he sets: "the emphasis on the uses of power and possessions as modes of service to others is absent" (and even this idea is not in my view entirely absent in this gospel; cf., e. g., *Gos. Phil.* §§ 110, 118, 119, 123 [I follow here Schenke's reference system]).

[57] Feminist hermeneutics of the scripture has moved to a more inclusive stance towards non-canonical early Christian texts; cf. MacDonald, "Women in Early Christianity," 145–6, 153: there is among feminist biblical scholars both "broad consensus on the inadequacy of the canon as a theological norm" and "the openness to extra-canonical sources as a wellspring of women's experience and potential empowerment" (145); hence one challenge feminist interpretation poses to New Testament theology is "to recover female and other marginalized voices within the biblical text *and in extra-canonical sources*" (153, my emphasis).

[58] Although Esler (*New Testament Theology*, 79–84) is very critical of Gadamer's notion of the fusion of horizons, this fusion is exactly what takes place in Esler's view about the New Testament: an understanding of "the New Testament" that is prevalent in the present time dictates the way "the New Testament" is conceived of in history. This looks like a text-book example of how "two different perspectives (the past-mediated-through-history and the present) merge, or rather, the former is subjugated to the latter" (80, explaining Gadamer's view).

What is more, the claim of Biblical Theology to being *normative* not only seems alien in an academic setting but it also raises the tricky question of whether it is the agenda of Biblical Theology that is normative, or whether we should think that the *individual projects* following this agenda (such as those of Stuhlmacher and Wilckens) are normative as well.

With Räisänen's programme, one is not faced with these problems. Having spent much of my time researching non-canonical literature and groups that "used to be called Gnostic," I agree wholeheartedly with Räisänen's idea that the study of primitive Christianity should not be restricted to what became the New Testament canon and that non-canonical texts and groups deserve as serious engagement as those in the canon.

As a teacher, however, I am faced with a problem of more pragmatic nature. Räisänen's programme is unmistakably academic: it solves the tension between the fields of scholarship and religion clearly in favour of the former. Yet, as was pointed out above, different fields of life are never entirely independent of each other.[59] I have found myself wondering how much I can resort to the programme of the history of early Christian thought in teaching students of theology. Unlike me, many of them cannot entirely commit themselves to the academic field but are bound at some point to enter the field of religion, and need to have "the feel for the game" there.[60] If we as scholars do not try to develop models that decrease the tension between academic education and everyday life in the field of religion, then the whole burden of this task is put on individual students without providing them with sufficient tools to cope with this dilemma. In other words, the problem with a purely academic model is that it presupposes a completely independent academic setting, while for most people the academic field is not as independent of other fields of life as it is for the specialists "playing" only in this field.

4. What is "Theology" in Pauline Theology?

It is now time to move from the more general issue of New Testament theology to Paul's theology. Given that scholars writing New Testament theologies have

[59] Räisänen does not deny the interaction between the fields of the church and academic scholarship either; cf. Räisänen, *Beyond New Testament Theology*, 154–55.

[60] For this pragmatic condition, see also Räisänen, *Beyond New Testament Theology*, 153. To clarify the context from which my reflections arise: The University of Helsinki, where I teach, is a state university and its Faculty of Theology is officially not affiliated with the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland. The most popular of the three degree programmes in the faculty, however, is tailored for students aiming at ordination in that church. At present, c. 50 % of the faculty's graduates come from this programme. (Added comment: The percentage in 2014 is c. 40 %.)

not been able to reach consensus on what "theology" is, it is hardly surprising to see specialists on Paul's theology struggling with the same problem.

This difficulty vitiated the work of The Pauline Theology Group, which was established by a number of renowned experts on Paul more than twenty years ago. Although the group produced four volumes focused on Pauline theology,[61] its members could not agree on a common definition of "theology." I take up three examples of how theology is defined by the members of this group, and what kind of relationship between theology and practice their definitions imply.

(1) N. T. Wright defines Pauline theology as "that integrated set of beliefs which may be supposed to inform and undergird Paul's life, mission, and writing, coming to expression in varied ways throughout all three." In studying Paul's theology one is thus in search of "the underlying structure of his belief system." For Wright, there is a one-way street from theology to practice: it is theology that "leads Paul into action in relation to his communities."[62] This presupposes a very static understanding of the relationship between theology and practice: Paul's utterances in pragmatic situations are simply ramifications of his theology.[63]

In this understanding of "theology," it is also vital to trace *the* core belief to which other beliefs are subservient. For Wright, the key to Paul's theology is "the Pauline doctrine of justification by faith."[64] This view, however, seems to based upon selective usage of Paul's letters. Justification by faith is a prominent issue in two epistles of Paul, which are often considered to be his latest works (Galatians, Romans). There are theological topics of equal, or greater, importance in Paul's other, and probably earlier, letters, such as God's election in 1 Thessalonians or the theology of the cross in 1 and 2 Corinthians.[65] An attempt to identify one and single center in Paul's theology easily leads to a view that is one-sided historically and theologically.

(2) Jouette Bassler suggests a more dynamic model of Pauline theology than Wright. Bassler distinguishes among three components which are: (a) the raw material of Paul's theology, including the kerygmatic story, scripture, and tradi-

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[61] I had access to three of them in writing this article: *Pauline Theology*, vol. 1: *Thessalonians, Philippians, Galatians, Philemon* (ed. Jouette M. Bassler; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991); *Pauline Theology*, vol. 2: *1 & 2 Corinthians* (ed. David M. Hay. Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993); *Pauline Theology*, vol. 3: *Romans* (ed. David M. Hay and E. Elizabeth Johnson; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995).

[62] N. T. Wright, "Putting Paul Together Again: Toward a Synthesis of Pauline Theology (1 and 2 Thessalonians, Philippians, and Philemon)," in *Pauline Theology* 1.183–211, here 185–86.

[63] Wright's position stands close to what James Dunn aptly designates as "theologicism": Paul's letters approached as "windows into a neatly rounded and complete theology of Paul"; Dunn, *New Testament Theology*, 16.

[64] For the relationship between coherence and contigency in Paul's letters, see J. Christiaan Beker, "Recasting Paul's theology: The Coherence-Contingency Scheme as Interpretive Model," in Bassler (ed.), *Pauline Theology* 1.15–24.

[65] Cf. Jürgen Becker, *Paulus: Der Apostel der Völker* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1989) 33, 138, 209–29.

tions; (b) Paul's experience, consisting of "his common Christian experience as well as his unique experience as one 'set apart by God for the gospel,'" and (c) Paul's perception of the situations in the various communities.

Bassler uses an optical metaphor to illustrate her view about the relationship of these components: "*The raw material* … passed through the lens of *Paul's experience* … and generated *a coherent (and characteristic) set of convictions*." Paul's perception of the situation is compared to a prism through which his convictions were refracted and "resolved into specific words on target for those communities."[66]

Although Bassler maintained that her model "acknowledges 'theology' as an activity rather than a set of theological propositions or presuppositions," this model ultimately also presupposes a one-way street from theology (Paul's convictions) to practice (Paul's utterances in contingent situations). Steven Kraftchick is justified in complaining that Bassler does not take into account the possibility that "sometimes Paul discovered where he wanted to go during the act of composition rather than prior to it." Moreover, Kraftchick shows that Bassler's model does not address the question of "how 'the set of convictions'… undergoes modification in the process of Paul's writing."[67] These are, in my view, noteworthy points. It cannot be assumed that Paul in his letters simply wrote down statements reflecting the convictions he already had. Building an argument in a practical situation is an innovative process, in which completely new ideas often emerge, and they, in turn, can lead to a transformation of one's "coherent set of convictions."[68]

(3) The model proposed by Paul Sampley is far more dynamic than the previous two. Instead of trying to establish the unifying center of Paul's thought world, Sampley argues that Paul attempted "to hold important matters in equilibrium."[69] When Paul sees "delicate balances" between two poles threatened, "he usually responds not by reaffirming the balance but by stressing the neglected pole," and it may even happen that Paul "*over*emphasizes the neglected pole." What Paul writes is, thus, not always identical with what he really thinks.

This model takes the social-historical conditions of Paul's theological utterances much more seriously than Wright and Bassler. It stands to reason, as Sampley argues, that Paul's comments are often reactions to the opinions of his opponents, and that Paul's theology can be properly understood only if we take

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[66] Jouette M. Bassler, "Paul's Theology: Whence and Whither?" in Hay (ed.), *Pauline Theology* 2.3–17, esp. 11.

[67] Steven J. Kraftchick, "Seeking a More Fluid Model: A Response to Jouette M. Bassler," in Hay (ed.), *Pauline Theology* 2.18–34, esp. 24.

[68] For a similar emphasis, see Dunn, *New Testament Theology*, 16: "in the letters [of Paul] we see and are privileged to overhear *theology in the making*, theology coming to expression, Paul theologizing."

[69] J. Paul Sampley, "From Text to Thought World: The Route to Paul's Ways," in Bassler (ed.), *Pauline Theology* 1.3–14, esp. 6.

these opinions into account. Theology is here understood as something that constantly evolves in a dialogue with an opposing party.

The big problem with this view, however, is that we only have access to Paul's version of the situation, not that of his opponents. It is very difficult and often impossible to draw a reliable picture of his opponents. It is even possible that Paul did not always know very well the situation he addressed in his letters.[70] Granted that Paul often exaggerated to bring home his point, it is all the more difficult to reconstruct the exact situation and the positions of his opponents on the basis of his letters. Paul may even have *invented* opponents, who had no counterparts of flesh and blood in the real world, in order to make a point.[71] The reconstruction of Paul's opponents remains, thus, too insecure for being made a prerequisite for understanding his theology.

5. Paul's Theology of Weakness

There is, of course, no easy solution to the vexatious relationship between academic and ecclesial theology. It seems unavoidable that there will always be some tension between them since they cannot be completely separated from each other. In addressing this problem, it would perhaps be helpful, if we could move from asking "what theology is" to "what theology does." From this perspective, the formation of tradition in, or redaction history of, the New Testament texts is of lesser importance than the question of how and for what purpose theology is done in a given social-historical setting. Instead of leaning backwards (to the history of traditions, ideas, composition), the pragmatic perspective leans forward, focusing on what the author of a text wanted to achieve by means of theology.

The purposes connected with such argumentation are not always necessarily, perhaps not even primarily, theological. People often resort to theological discourse to resolve problems of a different sort, such as social conflicts within a community (as Paul does in 1 Corinthians, and, as I believe, the author of 1 John does with his conflicting statements of sin),[72] or doubts raised concerning one's

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[70] For instance, it has been argued that Paul did not know what the Judaist teachers speaking in favour of circumcision in Galatian Christian communities exactly taught; cf. Becker, *Paulus*, 174 (cf. also 277–78, 307).

[71] Cf. Lauri Thurén, "Paul had no Antagonists," in *Lux Humana, Lux Aeterna: Essays on Biblical and Related Themes in Honour of Lars Aejmelaeus* (ed. Antti Mustakallio; PFES 89; Helsinki: The Finnish Exegetical Society, 2005), 268–86.

[72] Stuhlmacher approaches the contradictory statements on sin in 1 John – that we are all sinners (1:7–10) and that those born of God do not and cannot sin (3:4–10; 5:16) – from a purely intellectual/theological perspective. What is at stake here, according to him, are right and wrong *opinions* about sin: The author of 1 John is on a crusade against "heretics" who have de-

authority; the way Paul seeks to justify his apostolic authority in 2 Corinthians is a case in point, which I want to address in this final part of my essay.

In her model, Bassler mentioned "experience" as one building block of Paul's theology. Yet, she understands "experience" quite theologically here: it refers to Paul's "unique experience as one 'set apart by God for the gospel.'"[73] For me, this description seems to be that of a self-definition rather than that of an experience. What I have in mind is "experience" in a more concrete sense, as denoting Paul's pragmatic wisdom acquired through his interaction with Christian communities. Like people usually do, he probably learned from experience what kinds of slogans and arguments were persuasive and which ones were less successful. If it is true that Paul failed to claim authority with his "extremist" position against Judaists in his letter to Galatians, as has been suggested,[74] it is no wonder that he ended up offering a less polarized discussion about Jews and Jewish traditions in Romans 9–11. Experience in this sense refined Paul's "feel for the game." In this way, it can be argued that practice informed his theology.

In fact, both "practical sense" and *habitus*, from which this practical sense arises, are no insignificant issues in Paul's letters. One important aspect in Bourdieu's theory of practice is that most of the dispositions which habitus consists of have been acquired in early childhood and therefore are inscribed into one's body. The "feel for the game" can, thus, be seen in how people carry their body and behave in certain situations.[75] What makes Paul an especially interesting case in this regard is that he obviously experienced difficulties related to his habitus. His opponents derided his weak performance in front of the Christian community in Corinth (2 Cor 10:10), an accusation to which Paul responds with a long apology (2 Cor 10–13) containing praise of weakness (11:29–12:10), re-affirmation of power and authority (10:4–5; 11:4–5; 11:21–28), condemnation of the opposite party (11:12–15), and threats of punishment (10:6). Paradoxically, Paul's power-

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nied Christ's incarnation and "the salvific truth of faith." It is the wrong *doctrine* of the heretics that is the sin leading to death (5:16–17) (Stuhlmacher, *Biblische Theologie*, 2.272–4). In this context, I can only briefly refer to an alternative solution (which I sought to argue for in my paper "Sin and Sinlessness in 1 John: Theory and Practice," presented in the Johannine Group at the SBL Annual Meeting 2008): the author of 1 John employs two different discourses of sin for one purpose, which is to strengthen the boundary between his own group and others. On the one hand, the author resorts to the usage in which "sin", "sinning" and "sinners" are used to divide people into two groups, insiders ("us") and outsiders ("sinners"). On the other, the more inclusive affirmation that we are all sinners, an idea also derived from the Hebrew Bible (as denoting the essential difference between God and humans) holds true *within the community*. The author can expect that the latter, more therapeutic stance will enhance the mutual compassion felt among the group members. The point of "theologizing" is practical rather than doctrinal: the purpose is to prevent more people from drifting away from the author's group.

[73] Bassler, "Paul's Theology," 11.

[74] Cf. Becker, *Paulus*, 288, 320–21; Esler, *New Testament Theology*, 280, agrees.

[75] Thompson, "Editor's Introduction," 13.

ful apology only confirms what his opponents said about his literary skills ("his letters are weighty and strong," 10:10).

Despite all these self-professed defects in Paul's habitus, it is usually assumed that he managed to turn the game in the Corinthian community to his advantage. How could this happen?

My suggestion is that Paul was able to compensate for the weakness related to his physical presence with other skills, such as that of literary composition, and, more importantly for the purposes of this essay, his competence in theology. An especially innovative move is the way Paul turns the opponents' claim of his weak performance in Corinth to his advantage. This move would have hardly been possible without Paul's knowledge of Jewish theology. His argument in 2 Corinthians involves reversal of the values connected with strength and weakness, for which the Jewish theology of the humiliation and vindication of Israel by God offered a model: "It is above all in Israel … that (the) exchange of loftiness and lowliness becomes an image of hope."[76] If the Corinthian audience accepted his position, as it seems to have done, [77] it can be assumed that they were familiar with the traditional Jewish theology Paul builds upon and/or that the new vision of weakness Paul created on the basis of that tradition was rhetorically so surprising and powerful that it convinced the audience. Either way, Paul's knowledge of theology, combined with his rhetorical skill, were his "cultural capital," which made it possible for him to successfully re-claim authority among Christians in Corinth.

Conclusion

The tension between academic theology and the needs of communities of faith is certainly not confined to biblical studies. Church history and history of doctrine no doubt can raise similar problems. Nevertheless, this tension has been addressed in biblical studies with greater intensity than in other theological disciplines. This may be so because most of us, due to our cultural heritage, are obsessed with origins. In our Western cultures, the discussion of origins goes

[76] Theissen, *Theory*, 73. It should be added, as Judith Perkins amply demonstrates, that while portrayals of the suffering self were rare in classical Greek literature, they became increasingly popular in the early Roman empire; cf. Judith Perkins, *The Suffering Self: Pain and Narrative Representation in the Early Christian Era* (London: Routledge, 1995). It is thus possible that the emphasis Paul pays to his sufferings in his self-portrayal does not come from Jewish theology alone but also reflects an emerging trend in the Greco-Roman period.

[77] This view is based upon a theory that 2 Corinthians 10–13 is "the letter of tears" mentioned in 2 Corinthians 2:4; cf. Becker, *Paulus*, 234–35.

usually hand in hand with the quest for the truth. Whatever is said about the origins of Christianity, thus, seems to be intrinsically connected with that quest.[78]

My own experience, based upon interviews I and my colleagues gave a few years ago, first on Dan Brown's *The Da Vinci Code*, and then on the *Gospel of Judas*, has taught me that the greater society is first and foremost interested to know, in an old-fashioned way, how much truth there is in the New Testament. As a scholar commenting on the *Gospel of Judas* and other apocryphal texts, I would prefer to talk about the rich diversity of primitive Christianity they bear witness to, regardless of what they reveal about the historical Jesus. However, I have learned that the society – in the form of the media in this case – cares little about those things; what is wanted are statements whether the "classical" Christian tradition is true or false.

This is yet another indication that the fields of academic theology, religion, and the greater society are not completely independent from each other. I wonder, therefore, whether there would be room for a third way between the strictly academic definition of theology and a mere recapitulation of the Christian faith to the present society. To find such a way may be possible if we do not merely explain Christian tradition in terms of history of ideas ("what theology is?"), but also take into account what purposes these ideas served and in what ways they can be responsibly used ("what theology does?").

Seeking a model which I could responsibly offer to my students in light of the examples discussed above, I would like to understand "theology" as an activity that not only involves an intellectual dialogue (or struggle) with the great traditions of the past but also entails a pragmatic dialogue (or struggle) with contingent situations.[79] This model could also encourage new ideas instead of simply repeating the old ones, a theology full of surprises – as Paul's was. Even if we would be able to exactly trace all "raw materials" of his theology (kerygma, traditions, self-understanding, etc.), and the situation he addressed, we hardly could *predict* his conclusions on the basis of that knowledge. Reflection on what kinds of arguments are needed in certain situations is an innovative and unpredictable process, from which totally new ideas emerge. In this sense, theology can at its best be greater than the sum of its parts.

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[78] Cf. Meeks, *In Search of the Early Christians*, xii.

[79] The necessity of a dialogue with contigent situations is what I consider to be one of the most valuable and enduring insights of Paul Tillich's theology and the ensuing "method of correlation": "Theology moves back and forth between two poles, the eternal truth of its foundation and the temporal situation in which the eternal truth must be received" (Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, 1.3).

Chapter 10

How Far Can You Go? Jesus, John, the Synoptics and Other Texts

Elaine Pagels has been over the years an exceptional colleague in showing appreciation of, and being constantly curious about, what new people entering the field might have to offer. Her most important contribution to early Christian studies, in my view, is the recognition that non-canonical gospels, as well as other early Christian texts often designated as "apocryphal" or "heretical," should not be too easily dismissed as nonsensical forgeries. As important witnesses to early Christian thought and history, they deserve as serious attention as those in the canon.

It is also no secret, even to those of us coming from distant countries, that Elaine Pagels has become an icon of liberal Christianity in the United States. She has the unusual knack of turning early Christian studies into best-sellers. The success is no doubt due to her ability of combining results of her academic work with personal, and therefore engaging, reflections on experience, faith and doubt in our present world.

The other side of being an icon is the opposition against, and scorn heaped on, Pagels by more conservative scholars. It is certainly no coincidence that, when Rodney Stark, for reasons he does not bother to explain, speaks of "the Ivy League gnostics," Pagels is the only one he mentions by name.[1] This is no doubt due to the fact that, more than anyone else in the United States, Pagels has made less known forms of early Christianity accessible to a wider audience.

Academic work on apocryphal gospels conducted by Pagels and others is not only ridiculed, it is, in some quarters, also considered a dangerous, and even demonic, business. In his book *The Gospel Code*, Ben Witherington pays lip service to the importance of studying all early Christian evidence on an equal footing: "the same critical scrutiny that is applied to sources like the Gnostic Gospels should be applied to the canonical material as well. Fair is fair." Fairness, however, is a very thin veneer that hides Witherington's faith-based sentiments. For he also accuses scholars in Gnostic studies for "attempting to revive ancient Gnosticism," and describes them as those who "have fallen in love with the study of Gnosticism and have made the terrible mistake of selling their birthright (the canonical gospels) for a mess of pottage (the Gnostic Gospels)." Witherington's

[1] Rodney Stark, *Cities of God* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2006), 154.

final blow is demonization, a well-established strategy in Christian polemics throughout the centuries: the scholars he is opposed to "are not merely wrong; they are misled. They are oblivious to the fact that they are being led down this path by the powers of darkness."[2] Elaine Pagels is no doubt one of the scholars Witherington has in mind here, along with Karen King, Marvin Meyer, and Bart Ehrman.[3]

Witherington's vilification of scholars engaged in Gnostic studies is indicative of a new kind of polarity emerging in American (and also British) Biblical studies between "liberal" and "conservative" fronts. As Tony Burke details, some evangelical scholars are no longer content with conducting traditional academic debate. They have become more outspoken in their "heresy-hunting," which often involves *ad hominem* arguments, such as portraying scholars engaged in Gnostic studies as being "Gnostics" themselves, thus "confusing scholarly interest in a body of literature with religious belief," as Burke correctly observes.[4] Another strategy is to reflect in a condescending, quasi-therapeutical tone whether the scholars interested in forgotten Christianities might "have been burned in one way or another by orthodox Christianity."[5]

Reactions to Burke's article demonstrate that there is no unified conservative evangelical front in Biblical studies. Some scholars placed in that group, while being self-confessed evangelicals, are unhappy with being grouped together with

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[2] Ben Witherington, *The Gospel Code: Novel Claims about Jesus, Mary Magdalene and Da Vinci* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2004), 171–74; for these and other dubious aspects of Witherington's writings on apocryphal gospels, see Tony Burke, "Heresy Hunting in the New Millennium," *Studies in Religion/Sciences Religieuses* 39 (2010): 405–20, esp. 416. For a shorter version of his eye-opening report, see Tony Burke, "Heresy Hunting in the New Millennium," *SBL Forum*, August 2008 [http://sbl-site.org/Article.aspx?ArticleID=787] (last visited September 24, 2014).

[3] This becomes clear in Witherington's blog, where he presents his concerns as those of "a historian" [http://benwitherington.blogspot.fi/2006/04/gospel-of-judas-et-al-part-one.html] (last visited September 24, 2014). Referring to Pagels, King, Meyer and Ehrman, he says: "Such scholars indeed represent a small minority of NT scholarship, and in fact, like the early Gnostics, are busily creating a new myth of origins that suggests that Christianity was dramatically pluriform from the beginning. Unfortunately, as a historian I have to say that this is argument without first century evidence." It is not customary, though, among present-day historians to vilify their opponents as being duped by the powers of darkness. For a similar listing of present-day American "arch-heretics," starting with Pagels, but also including Meyer, King, and Ehrman, see the introduction to Darrell L. Bock's *The Missing Gospels: Unearthing the Truth behind Alternative Christianities* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2008), where he introduces his opponents to his readers with quotations derived from book covers and a catalog announcement! The same gang of four (Pagels, Meyer, King, and Ehrman) also appears in Edwin M. Yamauchi's foreword to Bock, *The Missing Gospels*. Pagels and Ehrman are named as the two examples of the promotion of Walter Bauer's thesis "in the popular arena" in Andreas J. Köstenberger and Michael Kruger, *The Heresy of Orthodoxy: How Contemporary Culture's Fascination with Diversity Has Reshaped Our Understanding of Early Christianity* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 31.

[4] Burke, "Heresy Hunting," 416.

[5] Witherington, *The Gospel Code*, 94; cf. Burke, "Heresy Hunting," 415.

the most zealous heresy-hunters.[6] Nevertheless, there are signs that Biblical studies is in danger of splitting into two camps, one of which is more outspokenly faith-based than before, while the other is seeking to remain within the usual (or "secular," if you like) confines of academic research.

One indication of this split is the formation of new research groups at the Annual Meetings of the Society of Biblical Literature. The agenda of such groups comes close to those of already existing ones, but usually with a new – or sometimes very old – twist, colored by theological concerns characteristic of evangelical Christianity (such as Jesus' self-understanding as the Son of God and the historical accuracy of the books in the Bible).

One of the areas where the impact of this development can be felt is Johannine studies, where a new group focused on the historical reliability of John's gospel has established itself.[7] The point I seek to make that, while much of the research produced in this group is clearly academic and merits serious attention, some claims and arguments made in the course of its work seriously pose the question of how far you can go. Most critical questions arise concerning the use of faith-based arguments. The obvious risk with them is that, once you start arguing supernaturally, there is no limit to, or control of, it. Anything is arguable in this case. This is not only a disconcerting scenario of where the renewed interest in John's gospel as a potential source for the historical Jesus may lead us; some scholars already tap into the potentialities inherent in supernatural argumentation without constraints.

Another problem I see in some of the more conservative scholarship on Johannine literature, and seek to demonstrate with a discussion on views about the Beloved Disciple, is the tendency to turn a blind eye to apparent textual difficulties, such as those posed by the differences between John and the Synoptics. I would hope this tendency is due to obliviousness rather than reflection, yet the reluctance to address such basic problems seems so systematic that it is difficult to believe that professional scholars leave such problems unmentioned without a purpose.[8]

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[6] For example, in his response to Burke, Bock expressly distances himself from some of Witherington's claims: "I generally do not like the motive kind of argument Witherington makes. It comes across as condescending and judgmental." See Bock, "Vetting the Claims about Heresy Hunting," *SBL Forum*, August 2008 [http://sbl-site.org/Article.aspx?ArticleID=791] (last visited September 24, 2014).

[7] This essay is based upon a paper I presented at the SBL 2010 Annual Meeting (Atlanta, November 19–23, 2010) in a joint session of the John, Jesus and History Group and the Historical Jesus Section. I wish to thank Paul Anderson and Gregory Sterling for the kind invitation to participate in that session, and Raimo Hakola and Heikki Räisänen for their useful comments.

[8] On the basis of some arguments (or rather the lack thereof!), which I will counter in the latter part of this essay, I am afraid I must concur with Burke's shrewd remark ("Heresy Hunting," 410): "But apologetic writers do not seem to be aiming for intellectual honesty – they seek to defend Christianity, not the historical method."

1. Two Johns Behind John's Gospel?

"In New Testament scholarship what is true is not new and what is new is not true." Martin Hengel quoted this saying with approval in the expanded German version of his book *The Johannine Question*.[9] At the time when scholarly energies were largely devoted to issues pertaining to the Johannine community, Hengel boldly maintained that the *real* Johannine question is that of the author's identity. Accordingly, he took a leap back to early Christian testimonies of, and references to, John's gospel, and he preferred the scholarly work of the nineteenth century to more contemporary studies.

Hengel must have been aware of the irony involved in the fact that he suggested a brand *new* theory of the Beloved Disciple's identity. He settled the old dispute whether this disciple was John the apostle or John the Elder by suggesting that *both Johns* were conflated in the Johannine figure of "the disciple whom Jesus loved." This particular theory is not attested as such in any early source.[10] Hence Hengel's apologetic tone, when he says: "This hypothesis may sound fantastic. But the Fourth Gospel as a whole is a 'fantastic' book."[11] The clever ploy barely hides the fact that Hengel was no less creative than the "contemporary research" against which he had raved at the beginning of his book: "The more critical it makes itself out to be, the more 'creative' it becomes: what is said by the texts which have come down to us is all too often replaced by more or less free conjecture in the face of text and 'context.'"[12] Hengel had no qualms about free conjecture as part of his own theory: not only did he assume that John the Elder knew and revered John the apostle, but he also vividly depicted John the Elder as "a member of priestly aristocracy," who "as a young lad" found "the revival movement of John the Baptist" and "the activity of Jesus" appealing.[13] Such views find very little direct support in John's gospel.

Hengel's solution to what he designated as the Johannine question had its issues, and, as far as I can see, no one has accepted it as it stands. Nevertheless, his study no doubt played a pivotal role in paving the way for new kinds of inquiries into this gospel. Here was an established New Testament scholar claiming that John's gospel goes back to an eyewitness (or two). If this theory is true, it would

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[9] Martin Hengel, *Die johanneische Frage* (WUNT 67; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1993), 3 n. 4. For the earlier and briefer English version, see Martin Hengel, *The Johannine Question* (transl. John Bowden; London: SCM, 1989).

[10] Cf. Randar Tasmuth, "The Disciple with Many Faces: Martin Hengel's and James H. Charlesworth's Theories concerning the Beloved Disciple" (ThD diss., University of Helsinki, 2004).

[11] Hengel, *The Johannine Question*, 130.

[12] Hengel, *The Johannine Question*, xi.

[13] Hengel, *The Johannine Question*, 133.

follow that John's gospel should be taken more seriously as a potential source for the life of Jesus than had been done in the previous quests for the historical Jesus.

2. John, Jesus and History

One of the most prominent signs of the new trend seeking to confirm the historical reliability of John's gospel is the John, Jesus and History Group, convening at the SBL Annual Meetings since 2002. The group grew out of dissatisfaction with the fact that John's gospel was largely ignored in all twentieth-century quests for the historical Jesus. Paul Anderson, one of the driving forces of this group, has energetically argued for what he designates as a "bi-optic" approach, which means that the different picture of Jesus painted in John's gospel should be taken as seriously in our studies of the historical Jesus as the synoptic gospels. This not only applies to narrative details in John's gospel, but also to the teachings attributed to Jesus in this gospel:

> we should exercise caution before assuming that John's extensive differences from the teachings of Jesus in the Synoptics baldly implies [sic] ahistoricity. They could imply a set of alternative perspectives on the teachings of Jesus, reflecting alternative aspects of historical memory – especially as refracted through the teaching ministry of the Beloved Disciple.[14]

The group has now published two volumes of collected essays, hereafter referred to as *JJH 1* and *JJH 2*.[15] *JJH 1* is primarily devoted to shaking the old assumptions underlying what is now called the "Synoptic tyranny" in the study of the historical Jesus, though there are also some essays raising serious doubts concerning the new enterprise.[16] *JJH* 2 contains a number of case studies, which point in the direction where a more serious consideration of John's gospel as a historical source may lead us. Here are a few examples. The discovery of a new miqveh pool in the temple area in Jerusalem lends added credibility to John's reference to the Pool of Siloam (John 9:7).[17] The way Jewish feasts are described

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[14] Paul N. Anderson, *The Riddles of the Fourth Gospel: An Introduction to John* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2011), 214.

[15] *John, Jesus, and History*, vol. 1: *Critical Appraisals of Critical Views* (ed. Paul N. Anderson, Felix Just and Tom Thatcher; SBLSymS 44; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2007); *John, Jesus, and History*, vol. 2: *Aspects of Historicity in the Fourth Gospel* (ed. Paul N. Anderson, Felix Just, and Tom Thatcher; SBLECL; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2009).

[16] Cf. Robert Kysar, "The Dehistoricizing of the Gospel of John," *JJH* 1.75–101.

[17] Urban C. von Wahlde, "The Pool of Siloam: The Importance of the New Discoveries for Our Understanding of Ritual Immersion in Late Second Temple Judaism and the Gospel of John," *JJH* 2.155–73. For the possibility that John's gospel also reflects specific knowledge of circumstances in pre-70 Galilee, see Jonathan L. Reed, "Stone Vessels and Gospel Texts:

in John "suggests that they are recollections from before 70 C.E."[18] One study "supports the historical plausibility that Jesus met a Samaritan woman at Jacob's well,"[19] and it is maintained in another one that "it is entirely plausible to suggest that Jesus washed the feet of his disciples at some point and time,"[20] although this story is only recorded in John's gospel.

The greater reliability of John's distinct three-year chronology of Jesus' public activity is affirmed in several articles included in *JJH* 1 and 2. Most prominently, Paula Fredriksen suggests that Jesus' repeated visits to Jerusalem explain why he alone was crucified, while his disciples were not. If Jesus had visited Jerusalem and preached there more than once, as related only in John, Pilate knew that Jesus and his disciples were harmless. Nevertheless, Pilate had to crucify Jesus because the pilgrim crowds mistook Jesus for "a Davidic sort of messiah on his last trip to Jerusalem."[21]

Little is left of *John's* chronology in Fredriksen's analysis, however. In contrast to the story told in John 2:13–22, she maintains that the historical Jesus caused no disruption in the temple at all: "I do not think that Jesus predicted the temple's destruction, and I doubt the authenticity of the action attributed to him in the temple."[22] This assessment clearly separates Fredriksen from those scholars in the evangelical league who insist that Jesus's action in the temple took place *twice*, at the beginning of his public career (as told in John 2), and at the end of it (as told in the Synoptics).[23] Fredriksen also readily admits that she has "little reason to

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Purity and Socio-Economics in John 2," in *Zeichen aus Text und Stein: Studien auf dem Weg zu einer Archäologie des Neuen Testaments* (ed. Stefan Alkier and Jürgen Zangenberg; TANZ; Tübingen: Francke, 2003), 381–401. Reed argues that the stone vessels needed for purification (John 2:6) were popular in Jewish Palestine until the destruction of the temple in 70 CE but disappeared after that. Hence his conclusion (399): "The author of John was here well aware of the realia of Second Temple Judaism in Palestine."

[18] Brian D. Johnson, "The Jewish Feasts and Questions of Historicity," *JJH* 2.117–29, esp. 129.

[19] Susan Miller, "The Woman at the Well: John's Portrayal of the Samaritan Mission," *JJH* 2.73–81, esp. 80.

[20] Jaime Clark-Soles, "John 13: Of Footwashing and History," *JJH* 2.255–69, esp. 267.

[21] Paula Fredriksen, "The Historical Jesus, the Scene in the Temple, and the Gospel of John," *JJH* 1.249–76, esp. 272. One may wonder if, as Fredriksen's proposal presupposes, Pilate really had the time and energy to keep close track of what politically harmless itinerant preachers proclaimed on their occasional visits to Jerusalem.

[22] Fredriksen finds points in John's story that betray lesser theological tendencies than the synoptic ones. Some of her assessments to that effect are poorly justified. In the light of John 6, she seems to go too far in claiming that "the Fourth Gospel hardly presents a Galilean mission at all" ("The Historical Jesus," 250). It is also a startling claim that "John's Gospel demonstrates the irrelevance, even the unnecessity, of Christology as a factor in accounting, in a historically credible manner, for the priests' involvement in Jesus' death" (269). In John's gospel, the people believing in Jesus are described as the main motivation for the priests' involvement in his death (John 11:48; cf. 12:9–11).

[23] E.g., Graig L. Blomberg, *The Historical Reliability of John's Gospel: Issues and Commentary* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001), 90: "it does seem odd how reluctant

think that John's chronology in its details is any more historically accurate than Mark's."[24] The only thing that might seem more "historical" in John than in the Synoptics is the idea that Jesus visited Jerusalem more than once.[25] Whether we need John to prove that, or whether the distinct itinerary in John makes this possibility any more credible than it would be on more general grounds is not discussed.[26] In light of all the caveats she makes, Fredriksen's final conclusion seems overblown: "historians can and should see in John's Gospel as a peculiar sort of *rosh pinah:* too long rejected, but a firm and true cornerstone of our work."[27]

While there are critical assessments of John's historical reliability in both volumes, there are also many contributions, especially in *JJH* 2, that show greater than usual confidence that even the most extraordinary miracles of Jesus really took place.[28] The raising of Lazarus, related only in John 11:1–46, proves an especially intriguing case. At this point, one seriously begins to wonder whether some New Testament scholars are either inventing their own special rules for historiographical inquiry or, at least, testing the boundaries of the customary ones.

Richard Bauckham not only believes that Jesus raised Lazarus, but he also maintains that John's story, in which the authorities' ultimate decision to kill Jesus follows from this miracle (John 11:47–54), makes more sense as a historical scenario than the synoptic version. The reason why you do not find this extraordinary miracle in the synoptic gospels, although it really explains why Jesus was killed, was the attempt to protect Lazarus from hostile actions that may have resulted from going public with this story.[29] The problem with this cute explanation is that, if we *really* follow John's gospel, keeping silent about what happened

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some are today to consider the possibility of two separate events." For other supporters and a sweeping critique of this explanation, see Maurice Casey, *Is John's Gospel True?* (London: Routledge, 1996), 8–14.

[24] Fredriksen, "The Historical Jesus," 268.

[25] For a similar estimation, see now D. Moody Smith, "Jesus Tradition in the Gospel of John," in *Handbook for the Study of the Historical Jesus* (4 vols.; ed. Tom Holmén and Stanley E. Porter; Leiden: Brill, 2011), 3.1997–2039, esp. 2036: John is "probably historically preferable" in "spreading Jesus' ministry or a period of public activity over a period of more than one year rather than less," and in "maintaining that he made more Jerusalem visits (for Passover or other festivals) than the one Passover visit reported in the synoptics." However, neither Fredriksen nor Smith claims that John presents the *correct* number of Jesus' visits to Jerusalem.

[26] If the notion that Jesus visited Jerusalem more than once is the only thing that matters, as it seems, this would make Luke a more reliable source than Matthew and Mark since Luke relates one additional visit of Jesus to Jerusalem (as a child, Luke 2:41–52).

[27] Fredriksen, "The Historical Jesus," 276.

[28] In addition to examples discussed below, see, Craig A. Evans "Feeding the Five Thousand and the Eucharist," *JJH* 2.131–38. Evans, without further ado, assumes that the feeding miracles took place since the point he wants to make is that "Jesus himself interpreted the multiplied loaves in terms of the manna," as stated only in John 6.

[29] Richard Bauckham, "The Bethany Family in John 11–12: History or Fiction?" *JJH* 2.185–201. This is not a novel proposal; it goes back to Hugo Grotius (d. 1645); cf. Jacob Kremer, *Lazarus: Die Geschichte einer Auferstehung: Text, Wirkungsgeschichte und Botschaft von Joh 11,1±46* (Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1985), 189.

to Lazarus would not have saved him from trouble since Pharisees and the chief priests were quickly informed about his revivification (John 11:46–53), so they sought to kill Lazarus already before Jesus was crucified (John 12:9–11).

Derek Tovey also argues "for the historicity of the Lazarus story as an event in the life of Jesus," adding that "we need to find a form of history that encompasses the possibility of events such as the return to life of a deceased man."[30] Tovey is quite right, but his conclusion also raises questions: is he speaking of admitting this kind of a new form of history in general, or would he grant this form an exception as regards stories related in New Testament gospels? In other words, would Tovey also be willing to accept the alternative form of history he advocates when discussing miracles described in non-canonical early Christian gospels, or in non-Christian sources?

Ben Witherington takes the boldest step outside the usual confines of academic interpretation in his inquiry into John's story of Lazarus. He not only agrees with Bauckham and Tovey that Jesus raised Lazarus but he also identifies Lazarus with the Beloved Disciple.[31] Putting these two claims together, Witherington finds an extraordinary rationale for the profound differences between the Synoptics and John's gospel:

> If our author, the Beloved Disciple, had been raised by Jesus … this was bound to change his worldview! It became quite impossible for our author to draw up a veiled-Messiah portrait of Jesus, as we find in Mark. No, our author wanted and needed to shout from the mountain tops that Jesus was "the resurrection," not merely that he performed resuscitations.[32]

It is astonishing how closely Witherington's account of Lazarus reflects what I think are modern evangelical sentiments on the effects of faith on people. Mark Stibbe, who also identifies Lazarus as the Beloved Disciple, offers another illustration of evangelical idealism projected onto John's story. In his view, Lazarus (as the Beloved Disciple) "outruns Peter in [John] verse 20.4 because he has experienced the resurrection power of God himself."[33] Being raised from death obviously makes one both a creative author and a great runner. What else? Even a brief look at the reception history of this story shows how culturally contingent evangelical imagination is at this point: a quite popular view in the Middle

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[30] Derek M. H. Tovey, "On not Unbinding the Lazarus Story: The Nexus of History and Theology in John 11:1–44," *JJH* 2.213–23.

[31] The textual basis for this proposal is that Lazarus is one of the people whom Jesus is said to have loved (John 11:5, 35).

[32] Ben Witherington, "What Is in a Name? The Historical Figure of the Beloved Disciple in the Fourth Gospel," *JJH* 2.203–12, esp. 211.

[33] Mark W. G. Stibbe, *John as Storyteller: Narrative Criticism and the Fourth Gospel* (SNTSMS 73: Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 80. (This reference is one of the points I owe to Raimo Hakola.) In comparison to Stibbe's explanation of why the Beloved Disciple outran Peter, Witherington's is disappointingly mundane: "Perhaps he knows the locale" ("What Is in a Name?" 209).

Ages was that, after being raised from death, Lazarus was unhappy and never laughed, either because he had to return to earthly misery,[34] or because he had seen those tormented in hell, or because he was afraid of having to die again.[35]

Witherington has no qualms about harmonizing the information gleaned from different New Testament gospels. Based upon the stories of Jesus' anointing in other canonical gospels, he speculates that Simon the Leper (mentioned in Mark 14:3 and Matt 26:6) could have been the father of Lazarus, Mary and Martha, that this family "was plagued by a dreadful disease that made them unclean on a continual or regular basis," and that Lazarus had contracted and succumbed to this highly infectious disease in the family.[36] Although Witherington does not say this, his theory certainly explains why Jesus loitered on his way to raise Lazarus (John 11:6). Another less happy consequence of Witherington's speculation that there was leprosy in Lazarus' home:[37] the mother of Jesus was certainly not too happy to hear at his cross that, of all people, it was Lazarus whom Jesus appointed her guardian and who then took her to his home (John 19:25–27). But perhaps the new picture emerging here confirms the suspicion, raised in the synoptic gospels (cf. Mark 3:31–34), that Jesus was not on particularly good terms with his mother.[38]

3. Westcott Revisited

The John, Jesus, and History Group is not the first attempt at affirming John's historical value against critical voices. One notable precursor was Brooke Foss Westcott, the famous text critic, Regius Professor of Divinity at Cambridge, and Bishop of Durham. In 1892, he published an erudite scholarly commentary

[34] Kremer, *Lazarus*, 197, with reference to Ludolf of Sachsen.

[35] Kremer, *Lazarus*, 213–14.

[36] Witherington, "What's in a Name?," 209.

[37] This theory is based upon a rampant harmonization of different gospel accounts. In addition, Witherington probably carries too far the horrors connected with leprosy. What is clear is that those obedient to the Torah regarded *lepra* sufferers as unclean, but it usually remains unclear what kind of skin disease *lepra* denotes in different contexts. In the New Testament period, the term denoted all sorts of exfoliative skin diseases, possibly but not certainly including leprosy (Hansen's disease); see David P. Wright and Richard N. Jones, "Leprosy," in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary* (6 vols; ed. David Noel Freedman; New York: Doubleday, 1992), 4.277–82. Two additional points: 1) It cannot be summarily claimed that *lepra* was "highly infectious" (even leprosy was not); and 2) the image Witherington evokes that this disease was lethal is misleading; many skin diseases, including leprosy, are not lethal. (I wish to thank my colleague Antti Marjanen, former Head of The Leprosy Mission Finland, for elucidation on *lepra* and leprosy.)

[38] It is disappointing that Witherington does not go into this aspect emerging from his argument, though it is one of the points where his imaginative reading could be supported with information gleaned from other New Testament gospels.

defending the traditional view that the author of John's gospel was John the apostle. Among other things, Westcott referred to the author's knowledge of Jewish opinions and customs, topographical details, "minute details of persons, time and number, and place and manner." Most importantly, according to Westcott, the gospel leaves the impression that its author stood near the Lord and was "very conscious of his emotions."[39]

Like Anderson and now others, Westcott already maintained that profound differences between John and the Synoptics do not suffice as an argument against John: "a general difference in the contents of two narratives relating to a complex history, which are both avowedly incomplete, cannot be used to prejudice the accuracy of either."[40] Westcott also endorsed the argument that John's distinct theology is no reason to dismiss his gospel as a historical document since all gospels are theological:

> All the Gospels are alike in this: they contain in different shapes what was necessary to convey the message of redemption to the first age and to all ages in the unchangeable record of facts. Their completeness is moral and spiritual and not historical.[41]

To maintain that all cats are grey in the dark, however, does not really resolve the special problems John's gospel poses. One of them, as all parties agree, is that in John's gospel the author, Jesus, and some other characters – most prominently John the Baptist (John 3:27–30) – all speak in the same way, and the same also goes for the author of 1 John. It is, thus, universally accepted that John's gospel is in some sense more theological than the synoptic ones after all.

Westcott already conceded that the author of John's gospel took great liberties in composing this work: "the discourses of the Lord … cannot be regarded otherwise than as free compositions of the Evangelist."[42] Westcott prepared the way for this conclusion with remarks in which one could hear a prophetic anticipation of the attitude that became characteristic of the "linguistic turn":

> the historian, like the poet, cannot but interpret the facts which he records. … What is called pure "objective" history is a mere phantom. No one could specify, and no one would be willing to specify, all the separate details which man's most imperfect observation can distinguish as elements in any one "fact;" and the least reflection shews that there are other elements not less numerous or less important than those open to our observation, which cannot be observed by us, and which yet go towards the fulness of the "fact." The subjectivity of history is consequently a mere question of degree. … the "subjectivity" of

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[39] B. F. Westcott, *The Gospel According to St. John: The Authorised Version, with Introduction and Notes* (London: Murray, 1892), xii, xviii, xxi.

[40] Westcott, *The Gospel According to St. John*, liv.

[41] Westcott, *The Gospel According to St. John*, lxxviii; cf., e. g., Paul N. Anderson, "Getting a 'Sense of the Meeting': Assessments and Convergences," *JJH* 1.285–89, esp. 289: "Yet all four canonical gospels are also highly theological …"

[42] Westcott, *The Gospel According to St. John*, lvi.

the fourth Evangelist affords in itself no presumption against his historical accuracy. Every historian is necessarily subjective.[43]

Here the picture of historicity itself becomes fuzzy. It is extremely difficult to conceive what exactly Westcott meant by "historical accuracy" after being so critical of "objective" history and emphasizing "the subjectivity of history." Richard Bauckham's reflections are at this point strikingly similar to Westcott's. Like Westcott, Bauckham insists that John's author was an eyewitness (though not the apostle John, as Westcott thought), and yet he also grants that the author's work involved "a high degree of highly reflective interpretation."[44]

4. Dismissal of Non-Canonical Gospels

Westcott's arguments for the historical reliability of John's gospel and of the ecclesiastical tradition of its author are continuously quoted with approval by more conservative scholars.[45] The obvious question now is: What has changed in New Testament studies after Westcott, and are these changes of any relevance to our topic? To begin with, there are new sources, like the *Gospel of Thomas*. This gospel is rarely mentioned by those seeking John's historical reliability, and when it is, it is only employed as a negative foil. The usual complaint can be summarized like this: Some people in our guild, especially those in the Jesus Seminar, are preposterous enough to prefer *Thomas* to John as a source for the historical Jesus, although *Thomas* is a Gnostic gospel from the middle of the second century.[46]

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[43] Westcott, *The Gospel According to St. John*, liv–lvi.

[44] Richard Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses: The Gospels as Eyewitness Testimony* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2006), 410–11.

[45] For reliance on Westcott among present-day conservative scholars (including Leon Morris and Donald Carson), see the critical discussion in Casey, *Is John's Gospel True?*, 171–75. Little has changed in more recent evangelical scholarship after Casey's survey, published in 1996. Both Keener and Blomberg refer to Westcott's arguments as standing proofs for the historical reliability of John's gospel. Blomberg (*The Historical Reliability of John's Gospel*, 31) maintains that "It would appear, then, that all five parts of Westcott's argument remain plausible, when appropiately nuanced, even today." For a similar stance, see Keener, *The Gospel of John*, 1.89–82.

[46] See, e. g., Paul N. Anderson, "Why This Study is Needed, and Why It Is Needed Now," *JJH* 1.13–70, esp. 30 (cf. 16): "Given the prolific inclusion of aphoristic sayings in John, it is extremely difficult to imagine *why* these sayings go unnoticed by Jesus scholars preferring instead the mid-second-century Gospel of Thomas with its gnostic proclivities over the Gospel of John in terms of historicity." Craig S. Keener, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary* (2 vols.; Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2003): 1.36: "Most scholars today agree that even the *Gospel of Thomas* in its present form … is gnostic." Köstenberger and Kruger, *The Heresy of Orthodoxy*, 165, claim that "the broad consensus is that *Thomas* was written in the middle of the second century," and that it "has a strong Gnostic flavor throughout." No such consensus on the date has ever

What is ignored here is that most specialists of the *Gospel of Thomas* no longer consider it a Gnostic gospel, and its dating toward the end of the first century has become increasingly popular. It is also not true that the Jesus Seminar prefers *Thomas*.[47] In *The Five Gospels*, *Thomas* contains more sayings printed in red and pink than John's gospel simply because there are more close parallels to the synoptic saying tradition in *Thomas* than there are in John. One is hard-pressed to find sayings found only in *Thomas* that are printed either in red or pink in this book.[48]

I have argued elsewhere that the evidence from non-canonical Christian texts should have an impact on our assessments of the Beloved Disciple in John's gospel.[49] Nevertheless, the discussion on this issue continues as if these other texts did not exist at all. Bauckham is of course right in stating that John's gospel "is the only one of the canonical gospels that claims eyewitness authorship." What he leaves unmentioned is that similar claims to apostolic authorship are often made in non-canonical gospels. There is no escaping from the fact that early Christian stories of Jesus display an escalating tendency towards increasingly detailed accounts of how these were produced by the inner circle of his followers.[50] While we find no such accounts in Mark and Matthew, Luke begins and John ends with an account of what guarantees the reliability of their respective gospels (Luke 1:1–4; John 21:24–25). The *Gospel of Thomas* presents itself, like John, as a gospel written down by an apostle. In the *Book of Thomas* we find a more elaborate account of how Matthias heard a discussion between Jesus and Thomas and wrote it down. In *Pistis Sophia*, we see the other end of the spectrum: on a number of occasions, Jesus instructs his favorite disciples to sit down, take a pen and

existed. What constitutes the "Gnostic flavor" seems to be a matter of taste; for Köstenberger and Kruger this flavor means "advocating a Jesus less concerned with showing that he is divine and more concerned with teaching us to find the divine spark within ourselves." Some may be happy with this very loose definition, tailored to make *Thomas* look "Gnostic." On the other hand, it has been repeatedly pointed out by specialists that what is lacking in *Thomas* are references to the figure of an inferior creator-God and elaborate cosmogonical myths, which are usually considered part and parcel of the "gnostic" flavor.

[47] Thus, e.g., N.T. Wright, "Five Gospels but no Gospel: Jesus and the Seminar," in *Authenticating the Activities of Jesus* (ed. Bruce Chilton and Craig A. Evans; NTTS; Leiden: Brill, 1999), 83–120, esp. 85: "the Seminar takes kindly to *Thomas*."

[48] I have been able to detect only one such saying in the whole book: *Gos. Thom.* 98 (pink, no parallels): Robert W. Funk and Roy W. Hoover, eds., *The Five Gospels: What Did Jesus Really Say? The Search for Authentic Words of Jesus* (San Francisco: Harper, 1993). For a judicious account of *Thomas*' potential value as a source of the sayings of the historical Jesus, including a compelling argument for (non-synoptic) *Gos. Thom.* 82 being an authentic saying of Jesus, see Edwin K. Broadhead, "The Thomas-Jesus Connection," in Holmén et alii (ed.), *Handbook for the Study of the Historical Jesus*, 3.2059–80.

[49] Ismo Dunderberg, *The Beloved Disciple in Conflict?: Revisiting the Gospels of John and Thomas* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

[50] Dunderberg, *The Beloved Disciple in Conflict?* 163–98.

write down his words.[51] At the same time, we meet an ever increasing number of the followers of Jesus portrayed as his special favorites, including Thomas, Mary of Magdala, James the brother of Jesus, Bartholomew, and as we all now know, Judas the betrayer of Jesus.[52] The portrayal of the Beloved Disciple as the author of John's gospel fits well in an emerging trend in early Christian gospel literature.

5. Missing Parallels in Other New Testament Gospels

What is even more perplexing in the renewed quest for the Beloved Disciple's identity is that it has been undertaken as if the other gospels in the New Testament did not exist at all. Let me therefore briefly recapitulate the basic exegetical problem here: "the disciple whom Jesus loved," who appears at a number of key points in John 13–21,[53] is absent in the synoptic gospels, including the passages where they offer close parallels to the stories in which he appears according to John. There is no Beloved Disciple in their accounts of the last supper, the crucifixion of Jesus, the empty tomb and Jesus' appearances after the resurrection.

What is more, there are points where Luke's gospel offers a less elaborated version of a story in which John has the Beloved Disciple appear. While Matt 26:56 and Mark 14:50 relate that the disciples of Jesus fled from Gethsemane, Luke does not. Instead, he mentions that "all acquaintances" of Jesus were present when he was crucified (Luke 23:49). It would seem natural to read John's story of the Beloved Disciple and the mother of Jesus standing near the cross (John 19:25–27) as a narrative expansion of this little remark we find only in Luke.

In the same manner, there is in Luke a brief account of how Peter ran to the tomb of Jesus, found "the linen cloths by themselves," and then left (Luke 24:12). Again, the story in John's gospel of Peter and the Beloved Disciple running together to inspect the tomb (John 20:2–10) looks like an expanded version of a little narrative detail in Luke.[54] It would be much more difficult to imagine that Luke knew John's version of the story here.[55] Luke claimed to rely on eyewit-

[51] *Book of Thomas* (NHC II,7) 138; *Pistis Sophia* 71:18–72; 75:1–6.

[52] I do not want to discuss here the debate over whether Judas is a hero or villain in the *Gospel of Judas*. At the beginning of the text, he is unmistakably singled out as the only disciple who had an inkling of who Jesus truly is, but it is also true that he is denied access to ultimate salvation, and that at the end of this gospel he betrays Jesus.

[53] John 13:21–30; 19:25–27, 35–36 (probably); 20:2–10; 21:7, 20–25.

[54] Such points, where details in John's narrative seem to be based on editorial creations in Luke's gospel, have been pointed out and meticulously analyzed by Frans Neirynck, in a series of studies collected in idem, *Evangelica: Gospel Studies ± Études d'Évangile: Collected Essays* (BETL 60; Leuven: Peeters, 1982), esp. 365–440; idem, *Evangelica II: Collected Essays 1982±1991* (BETL 99; Leuven: Peeters, 1991), 571–600.

[55] For a recent study proposing that Luke's author knew John's gospel, see Mogens Müller, "Luke – The Fourth Gospel: The 'Rewritten Bible' Concept as a Way to Understand the

nesses' testimony at the beginning of his gospel (Luke 1:2). This makes it infeasible that, had he known John's gospel, he would have systematically censored everything that was said about the most important eyewitness in that gospel.

In consequence, as Alan Culpepper concludes, each reference to the Beloved Disciple in John's gospel "seems to be a secondary addition to earlier tradition."[56] This applies both in comparison to other New Testament gospels and within John's gospel, in which the Beloved Disciple is a strangely elusive figure: his presence is affirmed in some key episodes but he is oddly ignored in everything that lies between those episodes. He comes out of nowhere in John 13, and disappears as soon as he has played his role in the story.[57]

It is problems like these that have led to more critical theories of the Beloved Disciple: since it seems that he played no role in early gospel traditions, it is proposed that he was the revered leader of the Johannine community secondarily projected into John's story of Jesus,[58] or his figure is regarded as a literary device, created to lend authenticity to John's gospel.[59]

Let me now summarize how scholars maintaining that the Beloved Disciple was an eyewitness tackle with the basic exegetical problem that this disciple is not mentioned in the synoptic parallels.

Hengel: As far as I can see, he does not mention at all the absence of the Beloved Disciple in the synoptic parallels. The only point where he mentions the Synoptics at all is his puzzling reference to Hans Windisch's good old study on

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Nature of the Later Gospels," in *Voces Clamantium in Deserto* (FS Kari Syreeni; ed. Sven-Olav Back and Matti Kankaanniemi; Studier i exegetik och judaistik utgivna av Teologiska fakulteten vid Åbo Akademi; Åbo: Teologiska fakulteten, 2012), 231–42.

[56] R. Alan Culpepper, *John, the Son of Zebedee: The Life of a Legend* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1994), 72; and Anderson, "Why This Study," 47.

[57] There is speculation whether the Beloved Disciple already enters the stage in John 1:35–42, where one of the first two disciples remains unidentified. If this anonymous disciple is intended to be the Beloved Disciple, this is unusually and weakly indicated in comparison to all other passages that mention him. In addition, the Beloved Disciple is introduced as a new character in John 13:23, which suggests that he is not previously mentioned in the story. Though I think this is the most natural way of understanding John 13:23, it is true that Judas is introduced in the same way in John 12:4, though he was already mentioned in John 6:71.

[58] Thus, e.g., Culpepper, *John, the Son of Zebedee*, 84–85.

[59] The most thorough study in favor of this theory is that by Joachim Kügler, *Der Jünger, den Jesus liebte: Literarische, theologische und historische Untersuchungen zu einer Schlüsselgestalt johanneischer Theologie und Geschichte, mit einem Exkurs über die Brotrede in Joh 6* (SBB 16; Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1988); cf. also Casey, *Is John's Gospel True?*, 176; Dunderberg, *The Beloved Disciple in Conflict?* 147–48; Andrew T. Lincoln, "'We Know That His Testimony Is True': Johannine Truth Claims and Historicity," *JJH* 1.179–97, esp. 181, 196; Hartwig Thyen, *Studien zum Corpus Johanneum* (WUNT 214; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2007), 262–63, 269–73, 278. For the suggestion that the Beloved Disciple was Thomas, see James H. Charlesworth, *The Beloved Disciple: Whose Witness Validates the Gospel of John?* (Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press International, 1995); for a brief rejoinder, see Dunderberg, *The Beloved Disciple in Conflict?* 149–64.

John and the Synoptics, applauded as being "still the best."[60] This is an enigmatic remark since Windisch's point was that John's gospel was written to suppress the synoptic gospels, and Hengel did not agree: he said that the editors of John's gospel only wanted "to correct them and 'surpass'" other New Testament gospels.[61]

Bauckham: runs a discussion of more than one hundred pages on the Beloved Disciple's identity and narrative function in John's gospel without once mentioning the absence of this disciple in the synoptic gospels.[62]

Witherington: does not mention the absence of the Beloved Disciple in the synoptic parallels.

Craig Blomberg: does not mention the absence of the Beloved Disciple in the parallel accounts.[63]

Craig Keener: does not mention the problem in his discussion of the "internal evidence" related to the authorship of John's gospel.[64]

In brief, the basic textual dilemma posed by the differences between John and the Synoptics in these stories simply does not exist for these scholars – or they deliberately ignore it.

6. Fisherman's Friends

As was already pointed out, the neo-conservative Johannine scholarship is not a unified front. This can also be seen in divergent views about whose eyewitness John's gospel attests to. Bauckham, Blomberg and Keener are not happy with Hengel's view about two Johns behind John's gospel, and Blomberg and Keener are critical of Bauckham's view that the author was John the Elder since they think that John's gospel goes back to John the son of Zebedee.[65]

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[60] Hans Windisch, *Johannes und die Synoptiker: Wollte der vierte Evangelist die älteren Evangelien ergänzen oder ersetzen?* (UNT 12; Leipzig: J.C. Hinrichs, 1926).

[61] Hengel, *The Johannine Question*, 194 n. 8.

[62] Leaving this issue out cannot be justified by referring to constraints of space. Bauckham indulges in counting the syllables of John's prologue (496) and the words used in the epilogue (also 496!). He also counts the words in each of the two conclusions to John's gospel (20:30–31 and 21:24–25, both consisting of 43 words!); Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses*, 364–65. Bauckham takes these remarkable (?) statistics as signs of the author's careful literary composition.

[63] Blomberg, *The Historical Reliability of John's Gospel*, 22–41 ("Authorship"); 192–95 (John 13); 252 (on John 19; he mentions that "verses 26–27 are unique to John's Gospel," but no critical conclusions are drawn); 261 ("Only John included the episode of Peter and the beloved disciple running off to the tomb," but there is no explanation as to why the Beloved Disciple is not mentioned in Luke 24:12, except the possibility that the latter verse is a later gloss).

[64] Keener, *The Gospel of John*, 1.84–91.

[65] Köstenberger criticizes Bauckham for not taking seriously enough the possibility that John's gospel was written by John the son of Zebedee; see Köstenberger "Jesus and the Eyewitnesses," April 30, 2007 [http://www.bib-licalfoundations.org/jesus-and-the-eyewitnesses/]

In consequence, what one finds in Blomberg's and Keener's work, instead of necessary synoptic comparisons, is a great deal of speculation about the socio-economic situation of fishermen in Galilee. Both Blomberg and Keener maintain that the social status of fishermen was higher than we might assume, and that levels of literacy were higher in Jewish Palestine than elsewhere in the Greco-Roman world; hence the possibility that John's gospel could have been written by a Galilean fisherman.[66]

Literacy, however, can mean several things. The question that should be addressed is not only that about literacy in general, but that of *how high a level* of Greek literacy and learning is required to produce a gospel like John's.[67] The ability to read passages from Torah in synagogue gatherings – if that's what Blomberg and Keener have in mind (they do not tell) – does not mean that one is able write a story of Jesus in Greek, and with philosophical (or at least Jewish sapiental) flavor. Knowledge of some colloquial Greek might be assumed for Jews living in proximity to Greek-speaking inhabitants of Palestine,[68] but this level of language competency would not suffice for producing a new gospel like John's either.

Blomberg's estimation, that "it is entirely credible that John the apostle could have learned considerable Greek, with or without formal education,"[69] proves far too optimistic in light of Catherine Heszer's study of Greek literacy among Jews in Palestine. Heszer compellingly argues that in Jewish Palestine, proficiency in Greek was an option only for upper-class Jews: "a few rabbis from wealthy and 'hellenized' families may have received instruction in Greek when they were children."[70] As Heszer notes, the only known examples of Palestinian

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(last visited September 24, 2014). One of the ironic points in Köstenberger's rebuttal is his critical stance to patristic evidence: "the question arises how legitimate it is to put a large amount of weight on one's reading of patristic evidence over against the internal evidence of the Gospels themselves." It may be legitimate to question Bauckham's use of patristic evidence (and especially parts of it that have not survived) to support his position. It is, however, unlikely that anybody would ever have come up with the idea that John's gospel was written by John the son of Zebedee only on the basis of *internal* evidence. Patristic evidence certainly plays a decisive role in the making of a connection between John the son of Zebedee and the author of John's gospel.

[66] Blomberg, *The Historical Reliability of John's Gospel*, 33–34; Keener, *The Gospel of John*, 1.101–4.

[67] Both Keener and Blomberg draw upon Alan Millard's findings to support the claim of widespread literacy in Palestine. For a thorough critique of Millard's views, see now Catherine Heszer, *Jewish Literacy in Roman Palestine* (TSAJ 81; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2001), 28ff. In her estimation, the literacy rate in Palestine during the Roman period was no higher than 1–5 percent (35).

[68] Heszer, *Jewish Literacy*, 94.

[69] Blomberg, *The Historical Reliability of John's Gospel*, 34.

[70] Heszer, *Jewish Literacy*, 90–94, esp. 94. As Heszer notes, this is also Hengel's view: "even from the Ptolemaean period *the sons of the Jewish aristocracy in Jerusalem* had the possibility of learning Greek language and customs"; see Martin Hengel, *Judaism and Hellenism: Studies in Their Encounter in Palestine During the Early Hellenistic Period* (2 vols.; London: SCM Press,

Jews writing literary works in Greek are Josephus and his opponent Justus of Tiberias, both of whom "had received a Greek education and were influenced by Graeco-Roman writing."[71] John the son of Zebedee can hardly be put on the same social level as Josephus and Justus, even if he, as Blomberg and others are eager to remind us, came from a family wealthy enough to recruit "hired men."[72]

To establish a link between the sons of Zebedee and a priestly family, Blomberg resorts to a complicated argument, based upon bits and pieces of evidence gleaned from different gospels. He first identifies the sister of Jesus' mother (mentioned in John 19:25) with the mother of the sons of Zebedee (mentioned in Matt 26:56), whom Blomberg in turn identifies with Salome (mentioned in Mark 15:41, but not identified as the mother of the sons of Zebedee). Then Blomberg uses Luke 1:36 to demonstrate that Mary mother of Jesus was a relative of Elizabeth, a priest's wife in Jerusalem. *Voilà!* The mother of the sons of Zebedee was a relative of Mary mother of Jesus, and Mary mother of Jesus was relative of members of a priestly family in Jerusalem: "The upshot is that the sons of Zebedee were relatives to at least one priestly family in Judea."[73] This unabashedly harmonizing reading leads to the strange conclusion (which Blomberg does not spell out) that the sons of Zebedee were Jesus' cousins. If they were such close relatives of his, why is this kinship nowhere mentioned in the New Testament gospels (or in other early Christian traditions)?

Conclusion

Valuable as some parts of its work have been, the John, Jesus, and History group would benefit from greater methodological rigor. A crucial problem is that the new "bi-optic" approach not only invites serious rethinking of John's gospel as a potential historical source but also leaves room for rampant speculations inspired by new confidence in John's reliability. A case in point is Witherington's *deus-ex-machina* explanation that the differences between John and the Synoptics are due to Lazarus' transformed mindset after Jesus raised him. I find it an embarrassment that results of this variety of biblical interpretation are now promoted as scholarly contributions within the covers of books published by well-established academic presses.

1974), 1.76 (my emphasis). This may be one reason why Hengel, unlike his more conservative adherents, insisted that the author of John's gospel must come not from Galilee but from an aristocratic family in Jerusalem.

[71] Heszer, *Jewish Literacy*, 425–26.

[72] Mark 1:20; Blomberg, *The Historical Reliability of John's Gospel*, 34.

[73] Blomberg, *The Historical Reliability of John's Gospel*, 35.

Moreover, the group's orientation has been very canonical thus far. The gospels seriously discussed are always the canonical ones; any potentiality of non-canonical ones are quickly and programmatically dismissed. There has been little effort to discuss the big picture: if John, with all its distinctiveness, is as important as the Synoptics as a source for the historical Jesus (a view I do not share), why is the same benefit of doubt not given in the John, Jesus, and History group to other "different" gospels, such as those of *Peter*, *Thomas*, *Mary*, and *Judas*?

This question should not be misunderstood as reflecting the conviction that these other gospels contain a great deal of evidence for the historical Jesus. More often than not, it is probable that they do not. My point is rather to lay bare that those trying to maximize the value of John's gospel in the search for the historical Jesus probably do so because this gospel is in the canon of modern Christians, and that they do not take other different gospels very seriously because these gospels are not in this, that is, "our," Christian canon.

From Westcott to Bauckham, scholars claiming that John's gospel was written by an eyewitness admit that this author produced a highly reflective text. The obvious problem with this stance is that you cannot have your cake and eat it, too. The simple truth is that the more the author's interpretive freedom is emphasized, the less useful John's gospel becomes for the study of the historical Jesus. It is symptomatic that, in order to maintain the historical accuracy of John's gospel, "history" itself must be defined in a new manner. This is also what apologetic Johannine scholars have been saying since Westcott.

I have been trained to think that biblical scholars can claim no privileges in the world of scholarship; now I see that this notion is no longer self-evident in the field of New Testament studies. The most pertinent problem raised by, and the great paradox created by, the neo-historicizing approach to John's gospel is that the proponents of this approach have great difficulties keeping themselves within the confines of academic historiography. If this distinct variety of "new historicism," which conveniently accepts expectations for chosen sacred texts, becomes more popular in Biblical studies, I am seriously concerned that our field – or at least one segment of it – is in real danger of separating itself from other branches of historical inquiry.

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Index of Ancient Sources

1. Hebrew Bible and Septuagint

2. Other Jewish Literature

3. New Testament (Present)

4. Nag Hammadi and other Coptic Texts

5. Other Early Christian Literature

6. Greco-Roman Literature

Index of Modern Authors